UNVEILING THE FABULATIVE ART: EXPLORING ENGLISH METAPHYSICAL DETECTIVE FICTION IN ROBERT IRWIN'S *THE ARABIAN NIGHTMARE* AND LAWRENCE NORFOLK'S *LEMPRIÈRE'S DICTIONARY*

Pamukkale University
The Institute of Social Sciences
Doctoral Thesis
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June 2023
DENİZLİ

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şeyda SİVRİOĞLU, for her invaluable guidance and unwavering support throughout my undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies. Her expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping my research and academic growth from the early stages of my undergraduate thesis to the completion of my final doctoral dissertation. I am truly thankful for her continuous belief in my abilities and unwavering patience as a supervisor.

I am profoundly grateful to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cumhur Yılmaz MADRAN for his unwavering guidance and support. Throughout my academic journey, he has been a source of inspiration, offering valuable mentorship and playing a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of my academic works. His teachings have consistently served as a guiding light on my path and will undoubtedly continue to illuminate my future pursuits.

I am also grateful to my thesis committee members for their positive attitude and valuable, constructive comments, detailed reviews and helpful suggestions, which significantly contributed to this dissertation. I would like to sincerely extend my heartfelt thanks and profound gratitude to Prof. Dr. Meryem AYAN for her continuous support and enlightening academic guidance throughout my higher education journey. Her contributions have been a constant source of encouragement and have played a significant role in shaping my academic growth and accomplishments. Additionally, I am deeply indebted to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fırat KARADAŞ, whose patience, understanding, and wisdom accompanied me during the process of writing my doctoral dissertation. Furthermore, I express my heartfelt appreciation to Assist Prof. Dr. Meltem UZUNOĞLU ERTEN for her positive attitude, encouragement and constructive suggestions.

I would like to express my gratitude to the esteemed Head of The Department of English Language Teaching, Prof. Dr. Turan PAKER, for showing the presence of a harmonious work environment, empathy, and assistance within the realm of academia.

His understanding and encouragement have been invaluable and motivated me to strive for excellence in my work.

I am also deeply grateful to my dear professor, Lecturer Nevin USUL and Dr Cengiz GÜNEŞ for standing by me during the most challenging times, providing encouragement, and offering unwavering support. Their presence and guidance have been invaluable in helping me navigate through difficult moments.

I express my hearty thanks to my friends Dr. Yeliz ŞEKERCİ and Lecturer Banu ALFAR, and Havva UZUNER for their support, motivation and encouragement.

I am also deeply grateful to my friends Emirhan ORHAN and Dr. Kadriye BOZKURT, whose never-ending support, everlasting encouragement, and invaluable friendship are beyond all praise. Their constant motivation and positive attitudes have illuminated my path throughout this challenging journey. Their presence has been a source of strength and inspiration, and I am truly thankful for their unwavering friendship.

I would like to sincerely extend my thanks to Hasip KOÇ, who has consistently supported me throughout this challenging journey. His unwavering encouragement and assistance have been invaluable.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my mother. Throughout my life, she has been an unwavering pillar of support, encouraging and assisting me in every endeavour. Writing this dissertation would have been impossible without her constant support, encouragement, patience, and the limitless and unconditional love she has always shown me. Her presence and guidance have been the foundation of my success, and I am forever indebted to her for her love and care.

ABSTRACT

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The Department of English Language and Literature
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June, 2023, ix+156 Pages

In this dissertation, the role of fabulation, and more specifically the manifestation and influence of fabulation in metaphysical detective fiction, is intended to be explored and discussed meticulously within the selected novels of Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983), and Lawrence Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary* (1991). Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk, with their innovative writing style and various themes that touch upon the reality of life and existence, take a special place in postmodern English literature. Irwin and Norfolk's works not only "explore the possibilities of fiction, the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it" (Federman, 1975: 7)[1] but also make great contributions to fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction with their mythical, magical, metafictional, and historical subjects. Their novels deconstruct and subvert what is assumed to be real and meaningful, drawing the characters and readers towards ontological inquiries, and, through the use of symbolic and allegorical language, they manifest an atmosphere of eerie and uncanny nihilism.

Chapter One presents a detailed elucidation of fabulation theory and metaphysical detective fiction. The discussion is further developed by emphasizing the analogies between fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction. A thematic analysis is carried out in the second and third chapters, and the question of how one perceives and constructs reality within the books is attempted to be answered. Structural analysis has been conducted in the following subchapters of the second and third chapters to demonstrate Irwin and Norfolk's artistic abilities as fabulators. In light of these analyses, this dissertation suggests that Irwin and Norfolk, with their innovative and complex narration techniques, not only destabilize what is assumed to be real and meaningful to renovate our understanding of the world but also endeavour to make philosophical claims about the nature of existence and being.

Key Words: Fabulation, Metaphysical Detective Fiction, Robert Irwin, Lawrence Norfolk, *The Arabian Nightmare*, *Lemprière's Dictionary.*

[1] Federman, Richard (1975). "Introduction", in Federman (ed.), *Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow*. Swallow Press, Chicago.

ÖZET

FABÜLATİF SANATI ORTAYA ÇIKARMAK: ROBERT IRWIN'İN *THE ARABIAN NIGHTMARE* VE LAWRENCE NORFOLK'UN *LEMPRIÈRE'S DICTIONARY* ADLI ESERLERİNDE İNGİLİZ METAFİZİK DEDEKTİF KURGUSUNUN ÇÖZÜMLENMESİ

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Haziran, 2023, ix +156 Sayfa

Bu tezde Robert Irwin'in *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983), ve Lawrence Norfolk'un *Lemprière's Dictionary* (1991) adlı romanlarında, masallaştırmanın rolü ve özellikle, masallaştırmanın metafizik dedektif yazınına etkisi ve bu yazında nasıl kullanıldığı titizlikle incelenmeye çalışılmıştır. Robert Irwin ve Lawrence Norfolk, yenilikçi yazım tarzları ve hayatın ve varoluşun gerçekliğine değinen çeşitli temalarıyla postmodern İngiliz edebiyatında özel bir yer tutmaktadır. Irwin ve Norfolk'un eserleri sadece "onu yöneten geleneğe meydan okuyan yazının olanaklarını keşfetmekle" (Federman, 1975: 7)[2] kalmaz aynı zamanda, mitik, büyülü, metinlerarası ve tarihsel konularıyla masallaştırma ve metafizik dedektif yazınına büyük katkılar da sunar. Romanları, gerçek ve anlamlı olduğu varsayılanı yapı söküme uğratıp alt üst ederek, karakterleri ve okurları ontolojik sorgulamalara çeker ve simgesel ve alegorik bir dil kullanarak, ürkütücü ve tekinsiz bir nihilizm atmosferi sergiler.

Birinci bölüm, masallaştırma teorisi ve metafizik dedektif yazınının ayrıntılı bir incelesini sunmaktadır. Tartışmaya, masallaştırma ve metafizik dedektif yazını arasındaki benzerlikleri vurgulayarak devam edilmiştir. İkinci ve üçüncü bölümlerde tematik bir analiz yapılarak, kitaplarda gerçekliğin nasıl algılandığı ve kurgulandığı sorusuna yanıt aranmaya çalışılmıştır. İkinci ve üçüncü bölümleri takip eden alt bölümlerde ise, Robert Irwin ve Lawrence Norfolk'un fabülatör olarak yeteneklerini göstermek için yapısal bir analiz yapılmıştır. Tüm bu analizler ışığında, tezde, Irwin'in ve Norfolk'un, yenilikçi ve karmaşık anlatı teknikleriyle, dünyayı kavrayışımızı yenilemek adına sadece gerçek ve anlamlı olduğu varsayılanı yerinden etmekle kalmayıp, aynı zamanda var oluşun ve varlığın doğasına dair iddialarda bulunmaya çalıştıkları öne sürülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Masallaştırma, Metafizik Dedektif Yazını, Robert Irwin, Lawrence Norfolk, *The Arabian Nightmare*, *Lemprière's Dictionary.*

[2] Federman, Richard (1975). "Introduction", in Federman (ed.), *Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow.* Swallow Press, Chicago.

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MDF Metaphysical Detective Fiction

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, by using the fabulation theory as a base, it will be discussed how fabulation has come together with metaphysical detective fiction and how the combination of these two approaches has been illustrated, and with which purpose it has been illustrated within the selected novels of Robert Irwin – *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983), and Lawrence Norfolk – *Lemprière's Dictionary* (1991). In the postmodern epoch, people found themselves in a monologic false reality that was created by ideologic official institutions such as politics, media, urbanisation, and capitalism. In this oppressive illusion of reality, the postmodern man, who was condemned to live repetitive, repressed, and monologic lives within the boundaries of the so-called normal, yearned for a new, free, magical, and dialogic world. The longing for a new reality beyond the limits of the imposed normal has led people to seek a different reality in both science and art. As theories seeking different universes and reality beyond the visible emerged in science, changes began to occur in the concepts that defined reality until the modern age. In the previous eras, pursuing reality meant presenting all visible and tangible evidence in an attempt to capture the essence of life. Nevertheless, during the modern era, the literary landscape began to be swept by the tides of change. Gradually, the belief that this traditional approach was inherently futile gained acceptance, resulting in an intellectual revolt against the perceived limitations of reality's depiction. This revolt continued to gain momentum in the postmodern era, birthing a profound transformation in the literary landscape. Postmodernist authors critically examined the notion of reality as a subjective entity, recognising it instead as an abstract, intricate, and multifaceted construction. They fearlessly explore the boundaries between reality and fantasy in their literary works, embracing the idea that alternative realities could exist, thereby disrupting the ordinary nature of everyday existence and providing readers with literary experiences that challenge the limits of established norms and conventions. By placing emphasis on the unreliable and variable nature of reality, the authors expanded the intellectual horizons of their readers and directed them towards a multitude of perspectives. Postmodern literary figures, embracing the idea of altering reality, started to produce more deconstructive, innovative, and surreal works. In these works, writers built an alternative carnivalesque reality in which they abandoned centripetal forces' official and monologic routine and turned all conventionally accepted realities, ideological institutions, and novelistic styles

upside down. The American literary critic Robert Scholes labelled the style adopted by these authors as fabulation, believing that “a movement of great importance in contemporary fiction was being ignored, misinterpreted, or critically abused because it lacked a name” (1979:1).

Fabulation, described as an "ethically controlled fantasy" (1979: 35) creates new and alternate realities that juxtapose the nihilistic postmodern world with nostalgic elements of the past. The theory defends the idea that “in life, we do not attain the real. What we reach is a notion of real which contends us” (Ibid). For this reason, fabulation acknowledges its fallibilism, or, in other words, “its inability to reach all the way to the real” (Ibid). However, in Scholes’ words, “it continues to look toward reality” (Ibid) in an attempt to “find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and fiction which is reality” (Ibid). Thus, the classical perception of reality is deconstructed in the novels that adopt the fabulation theory, and reality is depicted with incongruity, surreality, as well as overt fantasy.

Fabulation also presents an instance of anti-novel and experimental fiction, thereby subverting conventional narrative structures, stylistic norms, temporal sequences, and spatial patterns. Fabulators derive immense pleasure from creating exceptional works in the field of design, wherein they wholeheartedly embrace various literary techniques, including satire, parody, irony, black humour, jokes, grotesque elements, metafiction, historical references, philosophical reflections, and existential investigations. This multidimensional approach accentuates the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of artistic expression, often incorporating elements of comic vision, dark humour, satire, irony, parody, and the grotesque to convey deeper insights. Moreover, fabulation supports the usage of sublime language because colloquial language is insufficient to capture the colours of imagination. In addition to these features, fabulation exalts interwoven, elliptical, and open-ended stories in order to represent the depths of the human psyche.

Notably, these distinctive characteristics of fabulation are also evident in metaphysical detective fiction, a genre that has gained significant recognition since the 1960s and started to be used as a literary term after the 1995s. Metaphysical detective fiction is defined by Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney as “a genre of 20th-century experimental fiction that includes features of the detective story and modernist

and postmodernist fictions" (1999: 10). Metaphysical detective fiction focuses on the existential frustration and unstable psychological condition of individuals rather than a traditional mystery or thrill. This genre unsettles the reader, forces them to seek their own reality, and uses symbolic, oddly abstract images and fabulous symbols. The genre delves into profound existential concerns and philosophical investigations, intentionally avoiding direct solutions in order to cultivate a feeling of complete engagement with the mysterious storyline. The distinguishing features of this work include enigmatic occurrences, profound explorations of the nature of reality, depictions of flawed and defeated detectives, intricately constructed environments reminiscent of mazes, and themes that fluctuate between eerie meaningfulness or sheer meaninglessness. Moreover, the inclusion of doppelgängers, instances of lost or stolen identities, and the exchange of personalities endow the genre with a captivating sense of intrigue.

Metaphysical detective fiction masterfully emphasises the ineffable nature of reality by juxtaposing the invisible and abstract with the visible and concrete, thereby challenging the conventional boundaries of physicalism. It further amplifies its narrative dexterity by artfully contrasting the irrational and eerie elements against rationality and meaningfulness, thereby subverting traditional notions of rationalism. Moreover, the genre adeptly examines the dynamic relationship between the mysterious and magical juxtaposed with the realistic and definitive understanding often associated with idealism. The blend of fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction enables both genres to collectively engage in the deconstruction of established definitions of reality that have persisted throughout the course of literary history.

Fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction contend with the fact that, in order to understand the intrinsic, ambivalent, and variable nature of reality, the focus should be turned to indirect and contradictory descriptions rather than familiar and comfortable realism. The use of indirect and contradictory descriptions in both fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction is marked by the skilful incorporation of allegory, symbols, satire, irony, black humour, surrealism, fantasy, magic, and mystery. This artistic choice arises from the acknowledgement that the nature of reality is characterised by a subtle complexity that cannot be accurately depicted through a straightforward approach to realism. Hence, defamiliarisation, subversion, and deconstruction are employed as effective means to portray the ever-changing and elusive nature of reality.

Additionally, both genres frequently employ self-reflexivity within their narratives. This technique not only prompts readers to recognise the fictional nature of the stories but also actively involves them in the writing and detection processes, creating a unique and immersive reading experience. Furthermore, these texts adeptly illustrate the inherent fallibility of human knowledge by skillfully utilising unexpected and illogical juxtapositions, intricate spatial and temporal mazes, suspense, and mystery. The deliberate use of fragmentation, ambiguity, ambivalence, references to mythology, and superstitions further contributes to the achievement of the artistic objectives of these texts.

In the dissertation, the main discussion is weaved around how Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983) and Lawrence Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary* (1991) display the features of metaphysical detective fiction and how these texts, both thematically and structurally, effectively elucidate the notion of reality and the existential anguish of postmodern people, employing the narrative techniques derived from fabulation theory. Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk, in their selected novels, offer numerous examples of fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction, which are presented through postmodern narrative structures that emphasize the elusive nature of reality. Their works discuss the question of how individuals perceive and construct reality in a world where the boundaries between the real and the replicated have become blurred. Through the use of metanarratives, parody, satire, irony, and black humour, these authors create alternative and multiple spaces, along with simultaneous and multi-layered time sequences. They delve into ontological concerns, questioning the nature of being and existence while also deconstructing literary genres, works, and grand narratives. Irwin and Norfolk seek to infuse life with a fresh sense of meaning and purpose through these literary devices and themes.

Robert Irwin, a renowned figure in the world of literature, is an accomplished English novelist, historian, critic, academic and Arabic scholar who is widely known for his studies on the famous *One Thousand and One Nights*.[3] Ever since the publication of

[3] Also known as *Alf Layla*, *The Thousand Nights* or *Arabian Nights*. *Arabian Nights* is a collection of anonymous Middle Eastern folk tales that were collected in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age. It has sustained great influence on Western Literature since its publication in English in the 18th century. Magic, influence of fortune, supernatural beings, and interwoven narrative style of *Arabian Nights* became highly

his first novel, *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983), Irwin has become one of the most powerful and successful voices of postmodern English fiction. In *The Arabian Nightmare,* Irwin competently intertwines fantasy, surrealism, metafiction, erotica, myths, politics, and orientalism. The novel, while presented as an entertaining fantasy, delves deep into Arab culture and storytelling traditions, offering a profound and implicit analysis. The title itself hints at the novel's self-aware and ironic meditation on *The Arabian Nights,* a collection of stories admired in Europe after its publication in English in the 18th century. Employing Arabian storytelling techniques, Irwin constructs a multi-layered and intricate narrative that blurs the lines between reality and dream, consciousness and the unconscious. The story revolves around English spy Balian, who visits Cairo on a mission to observe Mamluke soldiers. However, what starts as a simple duty soon turns into a nightmarish journey of metaphysical detective fiction when the people travelling with him get kidnapped, and Balian is affected by the mysterious disease: The Arabian nightmare. To further complicate matters, mysterious figures emerge to assist Balian, while rumours of a merciless female killer and her murderous acts circulate throughout Cairo. The situation becomes even more bewildering as the Knights of Lazarus become entangled in conspiracy theories, and new tales from a mysterious storyteller add to the intrigue. Feeling frightened and mesmerized by these perplexing occurrences, Balian endeavours to escape the city. Yet, all his attempts are hindered, guiding him deeper into the labyrinthine underworld of Cairo, a realm populated by prostitutes, laughing dervishes, talking apes, storytellers, and dream watchers.

Lawrence Norfolk, a highly praised author and recipient of numerous prestigious literary awards, including the Somerset Maugham, Budapest Festival Prize for Literature, James Tait Black Memorial Award, and Wingate/Jewish Quarterly Prize, gained widespread recognition after his debut novel *Lemprière's Dictionary.* Norfolk's novel *Lemprière's Dictionary* possesses a remarkable ability to deconstruct and subvert assumed realities, drawing readers into ontological inquiries while constructing an eerie and uncanny atmosphere of nihilism through symbolic and sublime language. The novel's extraordinarily intricate and enigmatic structure demonstrates how the classical

popular among the Western writers. It is also said contain some of the earliest examples of crime and detective fiction, according to numerous literary critics.

perception of reality is transformed into a postmodern mythological story. Norfolk's work also stands out as a prime example of postmodern literature due to its eclectic approach, blending different historical events on the same narrative level, incorporating time travel, and featuring an array of characters that include ghosts, mythological beings, and even cyborgs, while integrating elements from various literary genres like fantasy, science fiction, and historiographic metafiction. Norfolk's innovative narrative style demonstrates the essence of fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction, effectively immersing both readers and characters in a 200-year detection process. Lawrence Norfolk's Lemprière's Dictionary turns into a metaphysical detective fiction story when protagonist John Lemprière witnesses the murder of his father. After his father's death, John travels to London to receive his father's will but finds himself in the middle of a meticulously planned web of intrigue, conspiracy and revenge plots. A mysterious group of cyborgs, a vengeful ghost, mythological hallucinations and romantic promises complicate John's life further and put him on a necessary detection process. Norfolk expertly spins a web of mystery around John Lemprière's dictionary, purloined documents, and mythical and historical subtexts. As the plot unfolds, a series of fantastical events and a sequence of perplexing murders propel John Lemprière into a labyrinthine journey of investigation, where the revelation of new clues, characters, and historical events complicate the detection process.

The present study includes two parts: the theoretical and the analytical. In the theoretical part, background information about fabulation theory and metaphysical detective fiction is given in detail, which is then employed in the analytical part. The analytical part is constituted of two main chapters in which Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk's novels are analysed thematically and structurally. The thematic analysis signifies the physical and psychological perception and representation of reality in the novels. The structural analysis sheds light on Irwin and Norfolk's pleasurable artistic styles as fabulators. The structural analysis also shows how novels manifest the features of metaphysical detective fiction and fabulation through their complex narration and allegorical usage of language.

In the first part of the theory chapter, the conceptualisation of fabulation theory and Robert Scholes's ideas are elucidated in detail. In the second part of the theory chapter, the detailed background of metaphysical detective fiction is given by referring to

prominent literary critics such as Howard Haycraft, Michael Holquist, William V. Spanos, Dennis Porter, Stefano Tani, Patrick Bratlinger, William J. Scheick, Kevin Dettmar, Michel Sirvent, John T. Irwin, Elena Gomel, Patricia Merivale, and Elizabeth Sweeney. The discussion is further developed by presenting the contradictions between classical and metaphysical detective fiction. The analogies of metaphysical detective fiction and fabulation are examined in the final section to provide specifications for the dissertation.

In the analytical part of the dissertation, the physical and psychological representation of reality is examined since the concept of reality covers the main part of the fabulation and Metaphysical detective fiction. The first chapter of the analytical part is devoted to Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare*, and the second part is devoted to Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary*. Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* presents the main character Balian's dreams, hallucinations, and real-life events together with the tales of the fabulator, Yoll. Lawrence Norfolk, by contrast, splices time and space to create a new, heightened conception of reality. In *Lemprière's Dictionary*, the fictional dictionary created by the character Lemprière becomes central to the story, with words and mythical characters from it influencing the course of events and showcasing the transformative power of language. In the novels, reality completely transforms into something surreal and uncanny. As readers start to believe they have unravelled the mysteries, they are met with challenging and bewildering twists in the plot, as reality is deconstructed through parody, metafiction, and intertextuality. Irwin and Norfolk skillfully draw upon myths within their narratives to reinforce the surreal atmosphere of their works, adding layers of depth and complexity to the stories.

The structural analysis of the novels is presented in the subchapters of the second and third chapters since the structure bears great importance in creating the fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction. The intertwined plot structure, the deconstruction and subversion of the classical literary forms, and the artistic ability of the fabulator are examined in these chapters. In *The Arabian Nightmare*, Irwin masterfully weaves a complicated structure influenced by art, science, legends, magic, and mystery, blurring the lines between the real and the metaphysical. The character Yoll, who claims to be writing *A Thousand and One Nights*, narrates a series of discrete yet interconnected stories, adding layers of depth to the narrative. Similarly, Norfolk's *Lemprière's*

Dictionary holds a prominent place in fabulative and postmodern literature, primarily due to its extremely intricate and enigmatic plot. Norfolk's artistic brilliance shines through as he presents and maintains intertwined, multi-layered, and multi-faceted plots that challenge readers and demand their full concentration to navigate the complexity.

In conclusion, in the novels crafted by Irwin and Norfolk epitomize the essence of fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction, distinguished by their aesthetically pleasing styles, exceptional fabulating abilities, and adept use of aesthetic and symbolic language. The incorporation of references to earlier literary works, discussions on the artificiality of the world, and dialogic relationships with readers and authors enrich their narratives. Irwin and Norfolk showcase their talent as skilled fabulators, leaving a profound impression on readers through the harmonious combination of form, design, and content. Their works are imbued with satire and parody, enabling readers and writers to critique socio-cultural upheavals. The comic narrative style prevalent in both novels aligns with their grotesque and humourist themes, further emphasizing their similarities. Norfolk showcases his fabulating prowess by skilfully weaving characters from Greek mythology, historical figures, fairy tales, legends, and fables into his narratives. He deconstructs genres and cleverly subverts historical facts, creating embedded stories that unfold simultaneously within his works. Irwin, on the other hand, demonstrates his talent as a fabulator through the incorporation of orientalist elements from exotic Arabian tales and cultures, imbuing his narratives with a sense of mystique and enchantment and enhancing the depth and complexity of his stories through the exploration of diverse perspectives and themes. The synthesis of these elements solidifies Irwin and Norfolk's positions as remarkable fabulators, offering readers a rich and immersive experience that intertwines reality and fiction in thought-provoking and captivating ways.

CHAPTER ONE

FABULATION AND METAPHYSICAL DETECTIVE FICTION

1.1 Historical Background

1.1.2 Fabulation

Prior to the development of modern science and technology and the distinction of various branches of knowledge, people used to see everything in the world as a part of a huge mystery. The rapid advancement of science and technology has dramatically enhanced people's comprehension of the world but has also confronted people with rough, harsh, and abrasive realities. The twentieth century, in particular, witnessed dramatic political, economic, and social crises of a scale far greater than those of the preceding centuries. World wars, devastating nuclear weapons, and people's dependence upon the erratic global economy have led to negative emotions such as depression, isolation, alienation, fragmentation, and despair being felt more greatly and deeply. Furthermore, the progress of scientific disciplines such as psychology and physics (in particular quantum physics) articulated answers about the ongoing mysteries related to the invisible side of human beings and the universe. In fact, people who had hitherto sought answers were not amused by the reality behind the veil of mystery. It is in response to this; many began to search for new ways to liberate themselves from the harsh realities of the world. This search for liberation had a repercussion in literature, and thus metaphysical, fantastic, gothic, magical, and mythical narrations, in brief, everything that reminds people of their previous mysterious and hopeful days, gained popularity. Specifically, in the second half of the 20th century, literary works that included theories of psychology and quantum physics, metaphysical and metafictional elements, allegorical, satiric, and ironic narrations, grotesque and comic features began to increase in number. Hence, in the 1970s, Robert Scholes, a literary critic and theoretician, proposed a literature that signified alternative realities, parallel universes, different chronologies, metaphysical aspects, allegorical narratives, comic elements (such as satire, irony and black humour), and the employment of metafiction, all grouped under the name

of fabulation. Although fabulation might appear to be a single narrative style, aspects of it are readily perceptible in many other genres of literature. In this dissertation, the role of fabulation, and more specifically, the manifestation and influence of fabulation in Metaphysical Detective fiction, is intended to be explored and discussed within the selected novels of Robert Irwin – *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983) and Lawrence Norfolk – *The Lemprière's Dictionary* (1991).

Three important figures are fundamental to the development of fabulation: Henry Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, and Robert Scholes. Henry Bergson's theory of fabulation[4] is mostly concerned with moral issues and how morality is perceived in religion. Additionally, Bergson claims that people who view moral events from a religious angle often suffer from "voluntary hallucinations" (Bergson, 1935: 195) and develop images or impressions of gods. Deleuze's theory of fabulation mostly deals with the problematic relationship between history and story-telling and three passive syntheses of time.[5] On the other hand, Robert Scholes's theory of fabulation concerns literature written after the 1960s and the multi-layered construction of these texts. Although Bergson and Deleuze's theories are useful in the field of religion and philosophy, in this dissertation, since the focus will be on literary texts, Scholes's theory of fabulation will be taken as the main theory to analyse Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk's novels.

In his fabulative novels, Robert Irwin creates a unique world where magic, fantasy, surrealism, metafiction, erotica, myths, politics, and orientalism combine to construct a new entity. Lawrence Norfolk creates works of fabulation with his mythical, magical, metafictional and historical subjects. Irwin and Norfolk's novels deconstruct and subvert what is assumed to be real and meaningful, drawing the readers towards ontological questions and creating an atmosphere of eerie and uncanny nihilism through symbolic and sublime language. They are outstanding examples of both fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the essence of

[4] Henri Bergson clarifies his ideas about fabulation in his work *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (1932).*

[5] Deleuze's theory of time is elucidated in his work *Difference and Repetition* (1968). In this work, Deleuze talks about the complex structure of three different syntheses of time – the passive synthesis of the living present, the passive synthesis of the pure past and the static synthesis of the future. Deleuze touching upon philosophy, Greek drama and mathematics, endeavours to mention his ideas about the perception of time in the modern and postmodern world.

fabulation in the novels of Irwin and Norfolk, a detailed exploration of Scholes's theory of fabulation becomes indispensable. This discussion shall shed light on how this theory aligns with the postmodern inclination towards seeking alternative realities and meanings in literary works.

Fabulation,[6] as a term and literary theory, was first coined and elucidated by Robert Scholes in his work *The Fabulators* (1967). The term was further developed by Scholes in his later work *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979), which is also an extended version of *The Fabulators*. Fabulation is generally associated with storytelling, the production of fables, and the dissimulation of reality. Although Scholes's theory includes storytelling, fables, myths, fairy tales, magic realism, allegory, grotesque and fantastic, it transcends these genres and renders a new mode of literary taste. To fully grasp the unique significance of fabulation within the realm of popular fiction, it becomes essential to elucidate the distinguishing characteristics of various literary forms, such as fables, myths, fairy tales, magic realism, allegory, grotesque, and the fantastic.

Fable, as one of the oldest forms of literature, denotes brief, direct, and simple stories with clear moral lessons and personified animals. Myths, by contrast, are purely fictitious narratives that deal with gods, semi-gods, or godlike figures and tell stories about the creation of the universe, natural phenomena, or historical events. Similar to fables, myths may have a didactic purpose and universal appeal. Fairy tales are best described as stories with magical elements which may use some features of fables and folklore and are almost inevitably set in the past. Similarly to fables, fairy tales are populated purely by good or evil characters and rely on clearly defined problems that achieve a favourable resolution. Fantasy is a genre that uses magic and supernatural elements and is defined by Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975) as literature caught between the marvellous and the uncanny. Whilst the

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[6] The first use of the word fabulation is said to be taken from Balzac's 1839 *Cure De Village* according to Robert's *Dictionnaire* as signified in Ronald Bogues' work *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transverse Ethics and Aesthetics*. The word means "imaginary representation, fanciful [romanesque, that is novel like] version of a set of facts" (Bogue, 2016: 91). By 1905, the term fabulation is used in the field of psychology as producing imaginary and false stories. The term is also used in parallel with mythomania which means pathological lying in psychology (Ibid).

uncanny refers to apparently supernatural events which occur in a realistic world, the marvellous is a world in which the supernatural is the norm. Thus, fantastic occurs when the reader cannot decide whether the events are uncanny or marvellous. On the other hand, magic realism describes fantastical events in a realist style or a realist novel with magical elements. Marvellous and magic appear in the real world as if they were always a part of reality. Magic and fantasy in magical realism are used as hyperbole in order to underline and reinforce the subject matter of the fictional work.

Fabulation, influenced by and takes many elements from magic realism, attempts to create something unreal. It neither presents pure fantasy nor magical realism but combines both elements and mingles them with different metafictional elements. It is characterized by the frequent use of allegory, a literary device that delivers complex ideas and concepts through striking metaphors. A character, a place, or an event is used as a representative to convey an idea, a moral teaching, or a message about life. The striking symbolism of allegory perfectly suits the tendencies of fabulation; it plays a prominent role in fabulative texts, as will be seen in the progressive chapters of the dissertation. As for grotesque, it is very difficult to fit the definition into one sentence since grotesque is a very broad term. However, in the interest of brevity, one might refer to it as the exploration of what is mysterious, magnificent, fantastic, strange, hideous, ugly, incongruous, unpleasant, or even disgusting. It deconstructs the very nature of things and invokes the uncomfortable bizarreness and empathetic pity in readers' minds.

All these features bring fabulation and grotesque closer. Fabulation feeds on all these sources and represents a more developed conception of time, place, narration, characterization, and structure. It deals with the fantastic, the mythical, and the metaphysical. Furthermore, it twists fairy tales and fables, subverts the traditional novelistic forms, and represents drastic forms and styles. Like fables, it can be didactic but does not have to convey a moral lesson. In addition, characters do not represent pure evil or good, but they embody both of these features. The complex and intertwined plot structures common to fabulative literature firmly distinguish it from the simplistic storylines of fables and fairy tales. Scholes defines fabulation as an umbrella term that includes romance, allegory, metafiction, comedy, grotesquerie, and history. In other words, Scholes' definition of fabulation groups the various aspects of postmodern fiction are impossible to be understood through traditional literary techniques.

Scholes simply describes fabulation as "ethically controlled fantasy" (Scholes, 1979: 35). This fantasy creates a new and alternate reality juxtaposing postmodernity with longings for the past. It uses nearly all literary devices and techniques and thereby creates a new entity that veers from fable, fairy tale, and myth to historical, and real events. Furthermore, since fabulation contains metafictional elements and refers to the very nature of fables,[7] it is not possible to identify any clear or certain conclusion. Fabulation violates the classical forms of fiction and explores what is beyond normal human perception. For this reason, metaphysical, fantastic, surrealist, and allegorical references may frequently be detected in fabulation. Fabulation also emphasizes the aesthetical and ethical elements of literature besides defying didacticism. Satire, allegory, irony, black humour, joke, grotesque, metafiction, archetypes, historical references, philosophical and psychological ideas, and existential questionings are also among the frequently used tools of fabulation. Roberts Scholes classifies the factors that create and affect the fabulation in a literary work into six main titles: fabulation and reality, fabulation and romance, fabulation and allegory, fabulation and metafiction, fabulation and comedy and grotesquerie, and fabulation and history. However, in this chapter, the relationship between fabulation and romance, fabulation and history will be discarded since it is irrelevant to the main focus of the dissertation.

The concept of real and the notion of reality, which has become one of the discussed topics during several eras of history, cover the main part of the fabulation theory. Even other elements of fabulation are focused on the reality concept and are shaped accordingly. The concept of reality that is defined by Scholes in his fabulation theory bears many differences when it is compared to the common era's, middle age's, or enlightenment age's definition of reality. It is also a revolt against the 19th century's realism which dominated literature for more than two centuries. Realism, endeavouring to reflect life with its all yields and its struggling details, is thought to reflect and catch the real face of life. However, in the postmodern world, especially after the technological, industrial, and social developments as well as cultural alterations reflecting life with all details and long descriptions, do not create reality; on the contrary, these same

[7] Scholes defines fables as "the little brother of the full scale fabulation" (Scholes, 1979: 101). He also stated the fact that fables generally have moral and didactic aims, but it is possible to see fables which do not attain these aims. Furthermore, moral fable through its closeness to larger satire and amoral fable through its relation with picaresque tale may appear in postmodern fiction as black humour (Ibid).

developments often drive people away from reality. Reality cannot be represented through verisimilitude of fact and language alone. Scholes supports this observation through his argument that realism has seen its best days and has become something trivial, even mechanical, describing the bare events of everyday life without an emotional and psychological context (Scholes, 1979: 01). The other reason that influenced Scholes's ideas on reflecting reality is the widespread belief that there is a reality beyond the visible after the revelation of Einstein's relativity, Heisenberg's uncertainty theories, and Bergson's theory of time and Stephen Hawking's works about time and being. Another reason for this is the rising popularity of Jean François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard's ideas about reality in the postmodern periods.

Lyotard claimed that people, losing their ties with the concept of reality, perform their lives under the influence of grand narratives, such as religion, politics, and media, since grand narratives promote unity, sameness, and totalitarianism over plurality and difference. Thus, postmodern people found themselves in the constructed and imposed reality and therefore, any effort to reflect reality through realism will necessarily be meaningless, as reality cannot be represented.[8] Following Lyotard, Baudrillard[9] defended the idea that there is no original or attainable reality. According to him in the postmodern world:

> The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control - and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere (Baudrillard, 1994: 02).

In other words, the world we are living in is a mere illusion, and the worse is that it is not possible to talk about artificiality since there is no notion of real to take as a basis. To put

[8] For further information please see Lyotard, Jeans- François (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*. (trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Masumi), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
[9] For further information please see Baudrillard, Jean (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. (trans. Sheila Faria Glaser), The University of Michigan Press, USA.

it differently, Baudrillard claimed that people lost the distinction between reality and representation and started to live in simulacras. For this reason, any effort to reflect reality through realism will again be meaningless since there is no original reality that can be represented.

In the light of the abovementioned theories, Robert Scholes stated that fabulation constructs its approach to reality on the concept of fallibilism. Fallibilism, first coined by 19th century philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, briefly is the doctrine that the certainty of knowledge is impossible. Peirce clarifies this doctrine in these words: "On the whole, then, we cannot in any way reach perfect certitude nor exactitude. We never can be absolutely sure of anything, nor can we with any probability ascertain the exact value of any measure or general ration" (Peirce, 1955: 58). To make it clear, in the world, just observing the process of life it is not possible to reach a certain truth since there can be different truths behind the visible and existence beyond the known. For this reason, one can reach a clear notion of real "by considering the points of difference between reality and its opposite, fiction" (Peirce, 1955: 36). In other words, fiction finds a way to reach reality through negation. Scholes improves the idea of fallibilism in these words: "In life, we do not attain the real. What we reach is a notion of real which contends us" (Scholes, 1979: 7), so "the appropriate intellectual position for a human being" (Scholes, 1979: 35) and as well as literature, is to accept their fallibilism, namely "inability to reach all the way to the real" (Ibid). Despite all these opinions, fabulation does not completely give up looking for reality. On the contrary, it seeks new ways to reach reality to come as close to it as human creativity may come.

When it comes to literature, Scholes considered John Barth, Robert Coover, John Gardner, and Thomas Pynchon to be the pioneers of fabulation. The genre hinges, however, on the works of two other authors, Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Louis Borges. Their names are also frequently heard in discussions about metaphysical detective fiction, and Scholes indicated that fabulation also owes much to them for its evolution into a distinct genre. Whilst Nabokov and Borges contributed much in flourishing and drawing strength, in the first place, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow,* Doctorow's *Ragtime*, and Coover's *The Public Burning* put the last touches on the movement with their metafictional and historiographic styles (Scholes, 1979: 04). Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk similarly subvert and deconstruct the notion of reality in their works. While Irwin

frequently resorts to orientalist themes, the oriental tradition of story-telling, and oriental myths, Norfolk directs his attention to Western myths and history to create a fabulative atmosphere. Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* presents the main character Balian's dreams, hallucinations, and real-life events together with the tales of the fabulator, Yoll. As the novel gradually progresses from one tale or dream to another, the reader cannot decide whether the characters really experience the events or if they are merely products of the imagination. Lawrence Norfolk, by contrast, splices time and space to create a new, heightened conception of reality. This is best illustrated in his novel, *Lemprière's Dictionary*. In *Lemprière's Dictionary*, three separate historical events occurring over three separate eras (the foundation of the East India Company in 1600, the massacre of Huguenots during the siege of La Rochelle (1628), and the compilation of Lemprière's Dictionary during the French Revolution) all fuel a single narrative of conspiracy and intrigue. Norfolk is not content to focus on a single moment in time or a single geographical location but, like Irwin, flits between several and even presents them simultaneously. This not only creates a complex and intertwined plot structure but also emphasises the art of producing fiction. This combination of mythical and postmodern subjects, together with his narrative style, opens the concept of reality into debate.

As stated above, works of fabulation avoid the direct representation of reality and consequently defy traditional novelistic techniques commonplace until the postmodern age. Language, structural form, narrative style, and subject matter differ in works of fabulation. In the subject of language, fabulation strongly protests the ordinary, familiar, colloquial, and detailed language of realism. Fabulation supports the idea that "reality is too subtle for realism to catch it. It (realism)[10] cannot be transcribed directly" (Scholes, 1979: 51). For this reason, the direct and detailed descriptions of the visible and long passages alone are not sufficient to convey the reality of the world. In other words, developments in psychology, technology, industrialism, political and cultural affairs, and other disciplines have all been used by postmodern authors to demonstrate the existence of a reality beyond the visible. Thus, the language used in such a text should be different and unusual in order to defamiliarize the reader with the world it describes, thereby revealing the complexity of the human psyche and altering world dynamics. Therefore, Scholes appreciates the use of allegory, parody, satire, and black humour in a fictional

[10] Explanation is mine.

work since he believes in the fact that this kind of symbolic, indirect, and deconstructive representation can fill the unbridgeable gap between language and the world.

In order to clarify his ideas about the use of allegory in fabulative works, Scholes refers to J.L. Borges and G.K. Chesterton since these figures are estimated among the masters who play on reality in a purely verbal universe. According to Borges, artful writing and sublime language have the potential to open doors of different realities, a view that he developed from Chesterton, whose beliefs he summarises as "reality is interminably rich and that the language of men does not exhaust the vertiginous treasure" (Borges, 1964: 50). Therefore, allegory may serve as one of the vehicles to close the gap between words and the world because, according to Chesterton, allegories are "capable of somehow corresponding to ungraspable reality" (Ibid.), and they are "made up of words but not a language of language, a sign of other signs" (Borges, 1964: 155). To put it differently, allegories, representing various symbols, signs, and images, try to signify different aspects of reality. Scholes clarifies the importance of allegories in fabulation through map and mirror images. The mirror represents a reflection of the world, reduced from three dimensions to two, and its distance doubled, and right and left reversed. Maps, by contrast, represent reality through signs and symbols but reduce its size dramatically. When looking at either the mirror or the map, one can grasp the artificiality of each "because they are visible and comparable with the reality they image" (Scholes, 1979: 12). In the same way, fiction, through allegories, puts reality and its opponent side by side; namely, fiction turns to mirrors and maps "that point accurately to things that are there in reality" (Scholes, 1979: 13). Thus, fiction and ideation interpenetrate one another and sustain their existences in an intertwined way. Actually, Scholes's following statement makes it more explicit why symbols, signs, and allegories are needed in a work of art:

> Reality is too subtle for realism to catch it. It cannot be transcribed directly. But by invention, by fabulation, we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come. We rely on maps and mirrors precisely because we know their limitations and know how to allow for them. But fiction functions as both map and mirror at the same time. Its images are fixed, as the configurations of a map are fixed, and perpetually various, like the features reflected by a mirror, which never

> gives the same image to the same person (Scholes, 1979: 13-14).

As the quotation shows, reality cannot be reached through the mere representation of the visible. A work of art should "reach beyond reality to truth, beyond the immediate and contemporary to those aspects of the real which will endure and recur" (Scholes, 1979: 15). To put it differently, when one first looks at a map, she/he perceives only a single and limited reality, but once signs and symbols on the map are analysed and interpreted, multiple meanings and information become apparent. This same interpretation is also valid for the mirror metaphor. The mirror reveals something different depending on whoever looks into it. Even if the mirror reflects the same object, each individual will interpret the reflection in a different way, and each interpretation is contingent upon the viewer's psychological state. For this reason, Scholes contends, authors should adjust their focus from familiar, comfortable realism to allegory and indirect description to better understand reality's intrinsic, ambivalent, and variable nature.

In both Robert Irwin's and Lawrence Norfolk's works, the importance of verbal expression and allegory in constructing fabulation is highlighted through the fabulator's art of telling stories. In the abovementioned works, not only Irwin and Norfolk, but certain characters also reprise the role of fabulator. Thus, both writers represent stories within stories and demonstrate their creative talents. Furthermore, in these writers' works, language bears an ambivalent nature that incorporates mythical or historical implications and characters' unconscious feelings at the same time. For instance, in *Lemprière's Dictionary*, nearly the whole story revolves around the character Lemprière's fictional dictionary. In the novel, the words and mythical characters in the dictionary determine the process of the events, and language has the power to change the whole process. Irwin displays the breadth of his cultural and surreal scholarship in *The Arabian Nightmare* through the artistry of language and felicity of expression. Irwin's symbolic, and aesthetic use of language contributes to the novel's mysterious yet humorous atmosphere, providing artistic delight in its literary festival.

Though Scholes spills too much ink on allegory, he prefers to discuss parody, satire, and black humour as a part of the fabulator's comic and grotesque vision rather

than clarify each individually. Before discussing the use of parody, satire, black humour, comedy, and the grotesque in fabulation, it might be beneficial to illustrate further how fabulation transgresses traditional literary style. Aside from its mirrorlike qualities, fabulative writers also emphasise complex, elliptical, and interwoven plots. Only the imagination of the fabulator and reader puts a limit on the story. The story may continue in different shapes, with different characters, and with various plot twists indefinitely. Stories within stories and their relations among each other at the same time represent the artistry of the fabulator. Robert Scholes, in order to tell the cyclical nature of the fabulation, makes a reference to the eight fables of Alfonso. At the end of this pleasant instance, the following diagram appears:

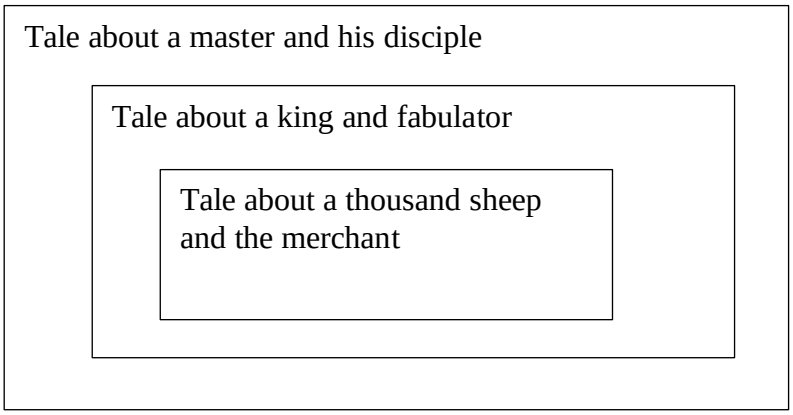

Figure-1 Scholes' instance on the structure of fabulation[11]

As the diagram shows, a frame tale intersects with the larger tale and contains other tales within it. Each tale comments on the others, and their relationship contributes to the main story. In fabulative literature, no conclusion is definite or determined, and they are invariably open-ended. The motivation for this emanates from the fabulator's desire to engage with the reader, whose reading process is not linear but interspersed with her/his own contributions or thoughts.

Furthermore, the cyclical structure of fabulation is heavily reliant upon repetition. By its conclusion, the novel might have returned to the particular setting or moment in

[11] Figure belongs to me.

time with which it began. Repetition serves as a means of underlining the principal themes of the novel and commenting on the necessarily repetitive, Sisyphean conditions of postmodern life and indicates the fact that the tradition of story-telling will continue. In this way, fabulation structurally mirrors *A Thousand and One Nights*, with its intricate interplay of stories within stories, sustaining a continuous narrative flow. Thus, fabulation, in Scholes's words, "reveals an extraordinary delight in design. With its wheels within wheels, rhythms and, counterpoints." (Scholes, 1979: 2). The ultimate goal of fabulation is to appeal to its readers' aesthetic and artistic sensibilities through the revelation of a determining, carefully wrought structure. The "Interlude" part in the Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* is a great example of repetition. In this narrative, the stories unfold in succession and come full circle as the narration returns to its initial starting point. The character who starts the first story concludes the final one, creating interconnectedness among all the tales. On the other hand, in Norfolk's Lemprière's Dictionary, the curse continues to afflict the Lemprière family across successive generations. During the siege of La Rochelle, the curse initiated by François Lemprière persists until François's ultimate death.

The complex structure of fabulation needs a shaper, namely a good fabulator. The authority of the fabulator over her/his fable is not only related to the ingenuity of the fabulation, but it is also related to the fabulator's talent in representing the relations among the characters in the interwoven stories. Through this, the fabulator produces both a structure of exquisite and intricate design and content appealing to the reader. As Scholes writes, "the fabulator is important to the extent that he can rejoice and refresh us. And his ability to produce joy and peace depends on the skill with which he fabulates" (Scholes, 1979: 3). Thus, delight in design and the fabulator's talent in the presentation of that design "distinguish the art of the fabulator from the work of the novelist or the satirist. Of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy." (Scholes, 1979: 3). As Scholes asserts above, the fabulator assumes both the roles of novelist and satirist, combining many literary forms and devices, thereby producing a new construction that pleases the reader for both its content and aesthetics. Irwin and Norfolk are very talented and competent fabulators. The complicated structure of Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* is a great example of the fabulator's talent. The story of the novel is affected by art, legends, magic, and mystery, occupying an intersection of the actual and the metaphysical. *Lemprière's Dictionary* similarly occupies a prominent place in fabulation as a result of

its extremely intricate and enigmatic plot. Norfolk approaches the zenith of his artistic powers through his presentation and maintenance of intertwined, multi-layered and multi-faceted plots, which can appear impossibly byzantine without the full concentration of the reader. Thus, Irwin and Norfolk as talented fabulators leave a tremendous impression on the reader through form, design, and content. Satire and parody pervade the works of both and enable the reader and writer to criticise socio-cultural upheavals.

Scholes notes that many modern fabulators are apt to adopt black humour and satire and describes fabulative satire as "less certain ethically but more certain aesthetically than traditional satire" (Scholes, 1979: 100). The effect of satire on fabulation cannot be understated. Through satire, the fabulator can communicate social criticism, irony, sarcasm, and humour, but unlike traditional satirists, he can do so without the aim of effecting change or reform. Satire in fabulation becomes the tool for conveying aesthetics and artistry rather than making moral or didactic criticisms. Furthermore, modern fabulators tend to value the humanising effect of laughter instead of the harsh, sanctimonious tones of classical satire. Modern fabulators also discard the classical vice and folly descriptions in contradiction to traditional satires.

Furthermore, in fabulation, black humour and parody are used to generate new meanings. Scholes notes that black humour originally arose from satiric, picaresque European reactions to realism and that it perfectly fits the desire of fabulators to expose the moral ambiguities, ironies, absurdities, and complexities of the post-war era (Scholes, 1979: 99). This black humour – "the whimsical treatment of serious subjects" (Scholes, 1979: 100)—fundamentally links satire and fabulation. Black humour does not only surprise or shock, but it forces the reader to reinterpret easy assumptions about both the text and the world it reflects. Furthermore, black humour employs two devices intrinsic to fabulation: the postmodern narrative, which establishes a relationship between writer and reader and interrupts the flow of the story through authorial intrusion, and the use of symbols, and poetic language to reinforce its effect. Literary parody similarly helps to deconstruct (and reconstruct) literary traditions and canons, changing dramatically (and indeed, infinitely) the potential of a single text through varying its events and intentions. The fabulator weaves fiction around an idea, centering the niceties of the text around an overarching philosophical or moral concept, demonstrating his or her control over time, place, and reality.

Through satire, black humour, and parody, the fabulator reinforces his or her grotesque and comic vision. As mentioned earlier, modern fabulators embark with an inevitably comic vision because, as Scholes writes, the fabulator is aware "of the limits of fabulation. He knows too much – that is the modern writer's predicament, and that is precisely what prevents his perspective from being seriously mythic" (Scholes, 1979: 100). To put it differently, the modern fabulator is aware of the fact that in the postmodern era, there is no definite and attainable reality. Earnest solemnity denies satire, humour and irony necessary to fabulist literature. Furthermore, the agonies the world has suffered in the last two world wars (and many since) are impossible, in a well-informed age, to reflect through verisimilitude. Therefore, fabulators direct their perspective to comedy and grotesquerie since laughter is "as universal as seriousness... directed at the whole world, at history, at all societies, at ideology" (Bakhtin, 1984: 84). In other words, going beyond all dogmas, ideologies, and restrictions, laughter shows life together with its serious and comic aspects, official and unofficial faces, and destroyed and renewed cycles. It destroys class consciousness, limitations, and authority. This is not to say that fabulators entirely eschew seriousness or solemnity; rather, they choose to convey truth and reality through the more potent, visceral device of humour. Irwin and Norfolk's narrative styles are invariably comic, and their works resemble one another for their grotesque and humourist styles. The authors exhibit a high level of proficiency in employing the comic narrative technique, highlighting their shared focus on portraying the absurd and humorous elements in their narratives. Irwin attempts to show life together with its serious and comic, illusionary, and real aspects. Norfolk exhibits his skills in deconstructing genres and subverting historical facts, seamlessly incorporating embedded stories that unfold simultaneously within his narratives. Both writers demonstrate the dual nature of life, creating inconsistency and utilizing the Bakhtinian grotesque to add humour to their works.

Metafiction, one of the features upon which fabulation depends, is similarly common in the novels discussed within the dissertation. Metafiction is described by Patricia Waugh in her work *Metafiction the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* in these words: "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 1984: 02). This reflects the postmodern claim that, in a postmodern world, reality is not objective; rather,

it is subjectively constructed through the individual and distinct perceptions of individuals. By examining the essential structures of narrative fiction, metafiction aims to demonstrate the artificiality and fictionality of the world outside the text. Contemporary philosophical and linguistic literary theory often juxtaposes the traditional metaphor of the world as a book by asking how people perceive the world and construct their experience of the world. Thus, the continual attempts by metafiction to attract the reader's attention to the fictitiousness of the work reflect fabulation's criticism of a single, visible reality. However, metafiction does not ignore or abandon the concept of reality completely but instead "explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism" (Waugh, 1984:18).

Metafiction, like fabulation, uses different techniques to achieve a semblance of reality instead of struggling to represent it directly and, in fabulative literature, benefits from the language and literary devices used therein to reveal the unattainable nature of reality. As Waugh observes, the proponents of metafiction claim that language in the postmodern world does not represent a coherent, meaningful, or objective world but instead represents its own reality in an independent and self-contained system. Waugh describes this representation through Heisenbergian uncertainty theory and writes, "it is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer always changes the observed" (Waugh, 1984: 3). Therefore, it is possible to say that language generates different meanings according to different people. The representation of these various and different meanings in the postmodern world is the task of fabulation, as demonstrated above.

Furthermore, the deconstruction of conventional novelistic techniques through metafiction constructs a new, distinct entity which is the other aim of fabulative literature. Metafiction also creates alternative linguistic structures through which it endeavours to encourage the reader "to draw on his or her knowledge of traditional literary conventions when struggling to construct a meaning for the new text" (Waugh, 1984: 5). Interactions between fabulative literature and the reader are invariably dialogic and dynamic, just as with metafiction. Adherents of the two schools frequently employ intertextual references and allusions through the analysis of fictional systems, integrating aspects of theory and criticism, inspiring discussion of the text itself through authorial intrusion, textual commentary, direct addresses to the reader, and questioning how narrative conventions

convey reality or unreality. It is because of this that Scholes titled his work *Fabulation and Metafiction.* Besides all these features, metafiction generally articulates discussions about the arbitrary nature of beginnings and endings, or, as Waugh puts it, "a story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead" (Waugh, 1984:29). Fabulative literature, like metafiction, frequently has no discernible beginnings or ending, and readers are directly drawn into the story. In the process of the story, the reader is encouraged to produce her/his own meanings and, by the end of the story, is given an option to choose between alternative endings or to draw their own conclusions.

In a nutshell, it is possible to associate the corresponding features of metafiction and fabulation, such as stories within stories, Chinese box structures, confusion of ontological levels through the questioning of reality, the parody of traditional literary forms, the aesthetic usage of language, opposition to a monologic authorial voice, a dialogic relationship with the reader, and the construction of interrelating and multiple realities. The principal aim of metafiction and fabulation is, "to demonstrate the artificiality of the real and the reality of the artificial" (Scholes, 1979: 31).

Irwin and Norfolk's novels display the features of fabulation and metafiction very well due to their highly pleasurable artistic styles, their outstanding abilities as fabulators, their aesthetic, and symbolic usage of language, references to earlier literary works, discussions about the artificiality of the world, dialogic relationships with the reader and the author, and dialogic texts. As metafictional and fabulative works, Irwin and Norfolk's novels often appear to lack a readily discernible beginning or end. In the novels, events begin and accelerate in a mysterious and surreal way, owing to which the reader is always forced to determine whether they are reading about events actually happening or the imagination of a character. One can also perceive authorial intrusions and interpretations. The author occasionally directly addresses the reader, occasionally for the purposes of exposition, and at other points to ask questions of the reader. Irwin and Norfolk frequently question the role of fiction and the position of the author as well as the reader, whether through parody, irony, satire, black humour, or fantasy.

Scholes's *Fabulation and Metafiction* provides a literary overview of the field of fabulation and its relationship to postmodern literature. Although fabulation is a feature

of many literary works, it has not hitherto been clearly identified and defined. Robert Scholes, with his work *Fabulation and Metafiction*, presents a methodology for comprehending all the scientific and artistic methods used in the production of fabulative literature. Scholes defines fabulation as a complex form of experimental literature that "springs from the collision between the philosophical and mythic perspectives on the meaning and value of existence with their opposed dogmas of struggle and acquiescence" (1979: 101). The main aim of fabulation is to violate and subvert the classical forms of literature in order to represent the new emotional state of the postmodern world. In order to achieve its aim, fabulation employs metafiction, black humour, satire, different time sequences, and heterotopias. Furthermore, fabulation serves as the mediator between the verbal cosmos and greater reality and endeavours to create premium joy and delight with its complex structure. This new narration style in literature does not only deconstruct the old types, but it also brings the economic, political, and psychological questioning of the postmodern period to the forefront by reconstructing them. Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk's selected novels abound in examples of fabulation, which are presented through postmodern structure, which affirms the inaccessible nature of reality. Both Irwin and Norfolk's novels attempt to answer the question of how one perceives and constructs reality in an era when the lines between reality and replication have been destroyed. Irwin and Norfolk also, in their works through metanarratives, parody, satire, irony, and black humour, the creation of alternative, multiple spaces, simultaneous, multi-layered time sequences, the hermeneutics of ontological concerns, and the deconstruction of literary genres, works, and grand narratives, try to instill a life with a new sense of meaning and purpose. In other words, the aims of these two writers and fabulation as a literary genre intersect. The common point can be summarised in Frederic Jameson's words:

> Fabulation is no doubt the symptom of social and historical impotence, of the blocking of possibilities that leaves little option but the imaginary. Yet its very invention and inventiveness endorses a creative freedom with respect to events it cannot control, by the sheer act of multiplying them; agency here steps out of the historical record itself into the process of devising it; and new multiple or alternate strings of events rattle the bars of the national tradition and the history manuals whose very constraints and necessities their parodic form indicts (1991: 369).

To put it differently, fabulation endows man with encouragement to overcome nihilism and barrenness, which are created by the socio-cultural and political upheavals after the second world war. Furthermore, fabulation provides centrifugal opportunities to oppose imposed and dogmatic ideologies of the postmodern world. Through the novels discussed, Irwin and Norfolk not only represent the fragmented nature of postmodernity but also attempt to derive meaning from it.

In conclusion, the selected novels of Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk not only provide an opportunity to study the theory of fabulation from all aspects but also enable us to follow the traces of metaphysical detective fiction in English Literature. What closes metaphysical detective fiction and fabulation up is their keen interest in restoring and reconstructing the mystery that has been destroyed by the dim reality of the postmodern age. The purpose of fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction can be argued to involve the creation of binary oppositions in order to destabilize what is assumed to be real and meaningful. They not only use negation and deconstruction to renovate our understanding of the world around us but endeavour to make philosophical claims about the nature of existence and being. Moreover, they provide catharsis for people whose mind has been corrupted by the postmodern realities of centripetal forces, such as grand narratives, media, huge industrial companies, government etc. Lawrence Norfolk and Robert Irwin embrace the potential of fabulation to produce eminent instances of metaphysical detective fiction. They search for rejuvenation and meaning beyond the physical in the postmodern era. Their satirical, comic, fantastic, metaphysical or surrealist works reveal and conceal the mysteries which are at the centre of both fabulation and metaphysical detective fiction. The following chapter will present a more detailed analysis of the features of metaphysical detective fiction and its relationship with fabulation.

1.1.3. Metaphysical Detective Fiction

Detective fiction began as a genre in the mid-19th century in reaction to the social circumstances of the period. The increasing industrialization and urbanization brought up new types of crime and societal difficulties, pushing writers to examine and make sense of these complexities. As contemporary police forces emerged, there was a rising

curiosity about criminal investigation and forensic skills, which found expression in detective fiction. The genre provides a chance to demonstrate the methods and accomplishments of detectives but also delves into human nature, morality, and the obscure regions between good and evil. Detective fiction rapidly gained popularity among readers due to its capacity to provide entertainment, intellectual stimulation, and escapism, resulting in the emergence of long-lasting characters and series.

In the postmodern era, detective fiction experienced significant changes and gained new directions. Postmodernist writers questioned the conventional patterns of traditional detective stories and came up with Metaphysical detective fiction. With this fresh approach, detective stories no longer solely concentrate on resolving crimes but also delve into philosophical inquiries concerning the nature of narration, reality, and existence. Metaphysical detective fiction is generally used to signify 20th century experimental fiction, which deliberately subverts the features of classical detective fiction. The term was first coined by Howard Haycraft in 1941 "to describe the paradoxical plots and philosophico-theological intentions of Chesterton's Father Brown tales" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 04) and later redefined and improved by Patricia Merivale in 1967 in her essay "The Flaunting of Artifice" and Michael Holquist in 1971-1972. (Ibid). Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, in their book *Detecting Texts the Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (1999), define metaphysical detective fiction as follows:

> A Metaphysical Detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective story conventions – such as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader – with the invention, or at least the effect of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot (1999: 02).

As the quotation makes clear, the works of Metaphysical detective fiction are not the same as the conventional detective stories that readers are accustomed to. Instead, it is a different kind of writing that employs unique narrative techniques, distinguishing it from the conventional detective stories that are already popular in readers' cultures.

Metaphysical detective fiction[12] deals with stories that naturally have a tendency to parody or mock the traditional way of narrating detective stories. The narrative closure in this genre is completely different, and the detective does not play the character of a surrogate that he conventionally does. MDF concentrates instead on the process of transcendence and frequently becomes self-reflexive. In other words, MDF places more importance on the creation process and the purpose of the story rather than the mystery (and solution) itself.

This genre reflects a good sense of illustration, and the portrayal of self-reflexiveness helps in the construction of the storyline and characters. It has obvious similarities with short stories, which do not really conclude in a desirable manner. The answers that the readers look for in the story might not be attained at the end of the story. The answers with which the stories conclude might not always be answers. They often look like answers but are rather questions in disguise. Michael Holquist emphasises this feature of MDF in these words: "The metaphysical detective story … is not concerned to have a neat ending in which all the questions are answered" (Holquist, 1971: 170). For this reason, MDF frequently develops questions rather than providing answers.

The detectives in this genre frequently contribute to the mystery with their inability to solve it. Their scattered minds come up with new philosophical and psychological questions about their identities, beings, perceptions and meaning of the universe, and so, by the end, both the reader as well as the detective find themselves in a greater mystery than in the beginning. The detective in MDF has many different aspects in comparison with the classical detective figure. Metaphysical detectives make mistakes and falter in identifying the culprit. They may even prove to be the culprits they pursue. Therefore, the detective in this genre no longer remains a hero-worshipped by the readers; rather, he is relatable, and his emotions and vicissitudes are felt by the readers. These situations cumulatively generate the feeling of doubt in the readers' minds about their perception of the story. It is as through the readers have to replace the detective, knowing, of course, that they are warned not to go for it like a detective.

[12] Hereinafter referred to as MDF.

The genre of MDF, as described by Merivale and Sweeney in their work Detecting *Texts the Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (1999), undergoes various stages and processes. Merivale and Sweeney stated that MDF may even be seen as an "anti-detective story", a term coined by William V. Spanos, Dennis Porter and Stefano Tani. While William V. Spanos in 1972 coined the term "anti-detective story" to identify the fiction which refuses to solve the crime, Dennis Porter improved the definition in 1981 in his work *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction.* [13] Stefano Tani, on the other hand, published the first source of metaphysical detective fiction in 1984 – *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction*[14] - and categorized such narratives under the roof of "anti-detective fiction". However anti-detective fiction is often considered as a bewildering and misleading term to define works that is called now as MDF as anti-detective fiction relies upon their focus on the detection process whereas MDF presents a complete negation of classical detective fiction.[15]

In 1987, Patrick Bratlinger came up with the term "deconstructive mysteries"[16]. The way in which the detectives in this genre work is remarkably different from one another. The game of deconstruction is located and relocated frequently in the genre. However, the term deconstruction was considered as a narrow term when it is compared to the capacious term "metaphysics". In the following years, William J. Scheick suggested the term "ethical romance"[17] to signify how detective stories encourage readers to test their epistemological notions. However, this term was seen as an extension of

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[13] For further information please see - Spanos, William V (1972). "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination." *Boundary* 21, 1 147-60. Reprinted in *Repetitions: The Postmodern Occasion in Literature and Culture.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987. 13-50.
Porter, Dennis (1981). *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction.* Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn.

[14] For further information please see Tani, Stefano (1984). *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction.* Southern Illinois UP, Carbondale.

[15] For the details about the explanations of the MDF process in this paragraph and the following paragraphs please see Merivale, Patricia and Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth (eds.), (1999). *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story From Poe to Postmodernism*. University of Michigan Press, USA.

[16]For further information please see Bratlinger, Patrick (1987). "Missing Corpses: The Deconstructive Mysteries of James Purdy and Franz Kafka." *Novel: A Forum On Fiction.* Duke University Press: USA. 20, 1: 24-40.

[17]For further information please see Scheick, William J. (1990). "Ethical Romance and the Detecting Reader: The Example of Chesterton's *The Club of Queer Trades."* In *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory.* Walker, Ronald G. and June M. Frazer, (eds.), Western Illinois University Press, Macomb.

traditional detective fiction. Kevin Dettmar, in 1990, coined another term: "postmodern mystery". However, this description was not accepted since postmodernism itself has deeper and polyvalent meanings as well as discussions. Furthermore, critics found it ironic to call any metaphysical work written before World War I as postmodern mystery. Following Dettmar, Michel Sirvent came up with a new notion called "post-nouveau roman detective novel" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 03) which was also found as a narrow term since it was only applicable to French novels written within the last twenty years.

John T. Irwin in 1994 suggested another category called "analytic detective fiction" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 03) to distinguish Edgar Allan Poe and Jorge Luis Borges's stories from the ones focusing on a detective's adventures. However, in the style of Irwin, there is a subtle touch of self-reflexive appeal where the character is involved in the eternal quest of finding himself and meets his inner self. There are different popular theories and concepts regarding the MDF which includes another term namely "ontological detective"[18] narrative. This term was coined by Elena Gomel which means the amalgamation of both the metaphysics and the incorporation of science fiction in it, which has the involvement of epistemology.

Ultimately, "Metaphysical Detective Fiction" is accepted as the most recent and capacious term to identify modernist, and post-modernist, works that subvert and violate the features of classical detective fiction. Modern and postmodern writers have changed the perception of writing detective stories by implementing the ratiocinative process, first popularized by Edgar Allan Poe. The text is replete with questions regarding the existence of the being, and whether anything that is perceived is real, whether anything that is built on a different reality can be trusted on. It is loaded with many elements taken from metaphysical poets and surrealist painters' works such as metaphors extracted from life, juxtaposition, self-reflexive pastiche, fabulous symbols, and abstract conceits. The ineffable nature of reality is repeatedly emphasized. In this part, before going on with the historical background of the MDF, it will be quite useful to spare a place to indicate similarities between Metaphysical English Poetry and Metaphysical English Detective

[18] For further information please see Gomel, Elana (1995). "Mystery, Apocalypse, and Utopia: The Case of the Ontological Detective Story." *Science Fiction Studies* 22, 3, 343-56.

Fiction since these similar features will help us to develop a deeper analysis for the MDF and the selected novels of Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk.

Metaphysical poetry was put forward by the critic Samuel Johnson to identify English poets whose works were characterized by highly intellectual subjects, creative conceits, strange imagery, and paradoxes. "Meta" means after, and a literal translation of metaphysical means "after the physical". Thus, it is possible to say that metaphysical poets question the reality behind the visible, existence beyond the known, and meaning beyond the common beliefs. MDF, in the same way, attempts to raise questions about the nature of reality in a philosophical manner, and tries to find answers about the difference between how things appear to people and how they really are. Furthermore, Metaphysical Poetry and MDF share common characteristics in their elaborate style. They frequently resort to conceits, paradoxes, allegories, satire, and irony. These two genres aspired to question the unquestionable, deconstruct the grand narratives and shock the reader with intentional plot twists and unpredictable ends. For this reason, literary critics considering both the narrative style and capacious reference field, chose the term metaphysical instead of "anti-detective", "deconstructive mysteries", "ethical romance" "postmodern mystery", "analytic detective fiction", "post-nouveau roman detective novel" and "ontological detective".[19]

To sum up, MDF has undergone various stages and processes, and multiple terms have been suggested to define and classify it. While terms such as "anti-detective fiction" and "deconstructive mysteries" have been utilized, they are often regarded as limited or not entirely grasping the core of MDF. Eventually, "Metaphysical Detective Fiction" emerged as the most recent and capacious term embracing works that challenge and subvert the conventions of classical detective fiction. MDF explores the philosophical questions surrounding the nature of reality, challenging assumptions and examining the difference between outward appearance and the underlying essence. Notably, MDF exhibits certain resemblances to Metaphysical English Poetry, as both genres involve intellectual inquiry, original conceits, and the use of paradoxes. They challenge prevailing beliefs, aim to unveil hidden realities and employ elaborate styles employing conceits, allegories, satire, and irony. Both genres question the unquestionable, deconstruct grand

[19] For further information about the similarities between Metaphysical Poetry and Metaphysical Detective Fiction please see Table 1 at the end of the chapter.

narratives and captivate readers with unexpected plot twists and conclusions. MDF, through its deconstruction of the classical detective genre and inversion of its conventional characteristics, presents unique and fresh perspectives on literature. The philosophical inquiries, intricate narratives, and interplay between appearance and reality within MDF captivate readers, making it a distinctive genre that seamlessly bridges literature and metaphysics. It challenges readers to question their perceptions and delve into a deeper understanding of the complexities of existence, ultimately solidifying its place as a thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating work of literature.

1.1.3.1 History of the Metaphysical Detective Fiction

Three important names are accepted as the source of classical and metaphysical detective fiction by most of the literary critics: Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Gilbert Keith Chesterton. Although it is said that there are many literary works that have characteristics of detective fiction[20], in the English-speaking world, the first instance of the genre is accepted as Poe's story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) since in this story, Poe identified many stylistic approaches that have been repeatedly used in this genre. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), Poe integrated the detective with the process of detection for the first time, and he created a peculiar interaction between the all-knowing detective and the admiring narrator. Furthermore, he put a rivalry between the amateur detective and the police, he showed a falsely accused suspect and the most importantly he put a classical end in which the least likely suspect discovered as the true culprit. Doyle, on the other hand, gave many materials to contemporary and future writers to question and parody the authoritarian attitude of the detectives. Especially his detective Sherlock Holmes, and Holmes' friend Dr. Watson gained a fame that transcends borders and centuries. Chesterton's early 20th-century stories, in which earthly crimes are solved but divine mysteries are represented as impenetrable, constituted another source for MDF writers.

[20] Story of Susanna and the Elders in the Old Testament, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles and some stories in the *One Thousand and One Nights* are claimed to be first instances of detective fiction. However, these instances are also argued to be just puzzles which are lack of many elements of detective fiction. (Knight, 2010: 25)

During the period between World War I, and World War II, multiple works were produced in the detective genre. Even this period became popular as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh are among the Golden Age Detective Fiction[21] writers. Their works again manifested Poe's ratiocinative process and also produced a new subgenre: whodunit fiction. Golden Age's contribution to the MDF is to provide many tools that can be parodied by the future writers. Moreover, during this age, readers and writers who were familiar with the detective stories and the recurring elements of these stories, found a possibility to have a better understanding of what is subverted and deconstructed in MDF.

In the 1950s, MDF gained popularity. G.K. Chesterton had already produced works that have some characteristics of MDF; however, it is possible to say that MDF took its last shape after the era of Chesterton (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 04). This time, Alain Robbe Grillet took on the responsibility of changing the dimension of the detective stories. The early 1960s witnessed another remarkable transformation in this genre when the original texts of Jorge Luis Borges were translated from Spanish to English. Jorge Luis Borges, to the utter benefit of contemporary and anticipating writers, not only introduced the new genre but also presented them with what the ideal style and method should be in order to achieve perfection in creating MDF. Writers like Thomas Pynchon, Donald Barthelme, and Robert Coover were extremely inspired by the style of Borges and chose to produce works in this particular genre of literature.

Authors from countries like France, Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Britain, the North American States, Poland, Russia, and Germany have participated in huge numbers to completely change the perspective of this newly found and open-to-experiment genre. The East was also not left behind. Japanese writers have also incorporated this genre into their vast corpus of literature. Max Frisch, Ariel Dorfman, Paul Auster, Thomas Berger, Carlos Fuentes, Allen Kurzweil, Leonardo Sciascia, Joyce Carol Oates, Ishmael Reed, Martin Amis, Timothy Findley, Don DeLillo, Ernesto Sabato Antonio Tabucchi, Patrick Modiano, Robert Piglia, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Jean Lahougue, Graham Swift are just some of the many popular authors who have promoted this genre and spread it throughout the

[21] In this age metaphysical elements were totally ignored by the writers and detectives.

world. MDF, with its fresh point of view, influenced many different authors from different cultural backgrounds. (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 05)

Furthermore, the cultural impact of these works through the mediums of television and cinema (in addition to the actual literature) has hugely contributed to the formation of the MDF genre. Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986) and Stephen King's *Umney's Last Case* (1993) were leading miniseries on TV that put colour and imagination into the MDF (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 05). Furthermore, films such as *Angel Heart* (1987) and *Face/Off* (1997), based on William Hjortsberg's *Falling Angel* (1978), contributed to the MDF. (Ibid) These films are instances of the combination of the horror generated by the gothic, the eternal quest of identity to reach the self, and a hard-boiled story of detection. Moreover, these movies popularised an extremely catchy slogan fit for the metaphysical genre: "In order to catch him, he had to become him" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 05).

In conclusion, Edgar Allan Poe's central role in establishing and gaining recognition for the detective genre allows him to be rightfully hailed as the genre's "inventor," as his Dupin tales essentially paved the way for subsequent works in the genre. Many stylistic approaches in Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie's works, such as the spurious style in the text, the concept of the gumshoe, the inclusion of the armchair detective, the letter that is purloined, and ideas of adding the missing person in the stories, have been repeatedly used in MDF. However, the style that classical detective fiction writers have introduced is deconstructed, improvised, and parodied. Writers of MDF use traditional detective fiction as a subject for parody, subversion, and deconstruction because "the sheer predictability of the detective-story formula makes its violation necessary" (Sweeney, 1989: 89). In other words, classical detective fiction, with its clear-cut rules such as the inclusion of ratiocinative process, the belief in order and epistemological certainty, the trust on knowledge, offers such a definitive structure that "it lends itself generously to innovation and parody," as stated by T. M. Holzapfel (1979:56). Thus, postmodernist writers preferred to deconstruct this familiar framework in order to challenge traditional notions of reality, truth, order, and the detective figure. By doing this, the writer endeavoured to create thought-provoking, stimulating, and engaging works that mostly focus on the postmodern world perception

and ontological anxieties of postmodern man. Hence, MDF introduced a kind of self-reflexive, intertextual, metaphysical, and mysterious style.

1.1.3.2. Themes and Structure

Research and evidence show that the genre of MDF is clearly distinct from traditional detective fiction and has a discrete and individual identity. The originality of MDF corresponds with the originality of both Metaphysical poetry and fabulation. According to Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, six prominent themes are evident in MDF. These themes signify a deconstruction of the fundamental elements found in classical detective fiction, initially introduced by Edgar Allan Poe in his works and subsequently expanded upon by writers of the Golden Age of detective fiction. As stated in the previous chapters, classical detective fiction often centres around a meticulously planned crime that appears flawless, necessitating the expertise and ingenuity of a highly capable detective to unravel. As the investigation progresses, a wide range of clues and evidence is presented to both the detective and the readers, necessitating interpretation and analysis. The provided clues are frequently deliberately crafted to mislead and falsely indicate an individual as a suspect. Nevertheless, by employing a ratiocinative process, the detective successfully provides a comprehensive explanation of all the clues and the solution to the crime. In the end, justice is served, and the case is resolved. Nevertheless, MDF challenges and surpasses the established norms of detective fiction, presenting a unique blend of metaphysical exploration, originality, and narrative ingenuity.

The first of the characteristics and themes of MDF is “the defeated sleuth, whether he be an armchair detective or a private eye” (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08). The armchair detective believes in a great degree of research and studies all the time in order to reach the heart of the mystery. Whereas the gumshoe detective, different from the armchair detective, tries to find out the self through the dark and gloomy streets of the hardboiled metaphysical stories, the armchair detective, in the whole process, cannot really overcome the text into which he is engulfed, and he slowly gets absorbed into it, while the private eye dwindles between setting up the identity between anybody in his

world or himself. While John Lemprière in Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary* performs as an armchair detective who engages in the process of delving into the labyrinth of the text, thoroughly exploring the intricate network of hints, storylines, and covert meanings, Balian in Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* performs as the gumshoe detective who keeps a cautious eye from above, surveying the narrative's landscape, and examining every detail for possible significance.

The second theme is the construction of "the world, the city or the text as labyrinth" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08). Merivale and Sweeney assert that the core of MDF appears to exist within a labyrinth which the story does not build upon but is instead trapped, forcing it to be designed within the paradigm of the labyrinth. Since the labyrinth itself is already confined within the labyrinth, it is impossible for the sleuth to come up with a conclusion in the confusing, perplexed and abyssal text. In both Irwin and Norfolk's novels, the setting is described as a labyrinth at the very beginning of the stories. Tunnels, maze-like houses, caves opening to secret places and intricate streets all play an important role in these novels. More so, the novels present textual labyrinths that entrap and challenge readers. The lines between truth and illusion are blurred within these elaborate mazes of words and narratives, which compels readers to find their way through a complicated network of twists and turns.

The maze of the story is not only temporal but also spatial. Novels of MDF are representative of the collectiveness of an interlaced network; they are complicated and multifaceted rather than binary like the bifurcation of a tree. There is a temporal loop in the MDF, consisting of the amalgamation of time and space into the style of the novel's production. In Irwin and Norfolk's novels, it is observed that the characters not only lose their temporal senses but also their spatial senses. This loss, at the same time, signifies the knots and complications in the characters' inner psyches and their search for ontological meaning.

Merivale and Sweeney present the third theme of the MDF as "the purloined letter, embedded text, mise en abyme, textual constraint, or text as object" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08). Works of MDF do not always represent the letters, documents, and implemented words that the reader assumes they will (the intriguing nature of documents is deeply explored in *Lemprière's Dictionary*). Therefore, there is always a difference

between the apparent and actual reality in these stories. The stories represent something that does not actually exist, but the difference is not always visible to the naked eye. The reader has to constantly make an effort not to mix up both phenomena, which are essentially diametrically opposed. For instance, in *The Arabian Nightmar*e and *Lemprière's Dictionary*, readers frequently struggle to perceive the point where fantasy and dreams end and reality begins, and indeed, in some texts, the whole story can ultimately prove to have been a dream. In Irwin's novel, the fabulator's identity or the events that Balian has lived through are never satisfactorily explained and remain an inexplicable mystery at the novel's conclusion. The characters of *Lemprière's Dictionary* somehow exist on three distinct diegetic levels and are connected to numerous historical events far beyond the span of a normal lifetime. The lack of resolution of mysteries within these texts is often due to the detective's own failure to solve them. He struggles, or indeed fails, to reach his goal; as a detective, he is inferior, but as a novelistic character, he is undeniably superior.

"The ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08) indicates the fourth theme of MDF. Metaphysical detective novels revolve around the excruciating effort of touching the surface while living and dwelling among the chaos, attempting to drag it into orderliness and organisation despite its obvious futility. Irwin and Norfolk's novels often start in a state of order, but gradually this state changes, leading to a shift towards chaos. Moreover, ambiguity and ubiquity further complicate the events and the chaos branches out and intertwines. Furthermore, the presented clues are either eerie or meaningless, and they do not lead to the desired conclusion.

This element of ambiguity is crucial because if the case or mystery can be easily explained, it is no longer a struggle for the detective to solve, and the reader feels less sympathy for him. The writer must devise a complex plot so that the reader becomes invested in the story and also struggles to reach its solution. Therefore, the probability of not being able to crack the mystery will remain intact till the end. Therein lies the excitement of MDF, for the readers see the mystery remain unsolved till the novel's culmination and witness the detective fail to reach the truth. Readers are given the freedom to interpret the issue in their own way and can therefore proceed with unravelling the mystery in a manner unique to them.

Furthermore, in most of the MDF texts, letters, words, and documents are not reliable objects with which to unravel the mystery since the authors have structured their stories in such a way as to dislocate and blend together the reader's perception of the real and the imaginary. This is very obvious in Irwin and Norfolk's novels, throughout which the reader is left bewildered and unable to distinguish the real from the surreal. This deliberate blending of reality and imagination in the novels of Irwin and Norfolk challenges the reader's perception of truth, making it difficult to rely on letters, words, and documents as reliable tools for unravelling the mysteries.

The fifth theme of MDF is "the missing person, the "man of the crowd," the double, and the lost, stolen, or exchanged identity" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08). The problem of identity is ubiquitous to this genre because the postmodern world is filled with forgery, falseness and duplicity, which ultimately prevent the detective from finding the criminal or even the sense of self for which he searches. Works of MDF are not only about solving the mystery of a murder or a crime that threatens the city; rather, it is about stolen identity, the forged dignity of an individual. The objective of MDF is to find the lost self, somehow lost under the extreme burden of either society or convention. The eternal quest of finding the self is the ultimate objective of these kinds of stories. In order to catch the criminal, it is beholden for the detective to perceive himself to be the criminal and to visualize the crime from his point of view, but this is not necessarily an easy task. The detective, therefore, must be very careful while planning to uncover the criminal. In this process, the detective often leaves behind his own sense of self, something which, indeed, the reader must also do in order to accompany him. The intricacy of the structure can often make the reader struggle to comprehend this process, complicating further the relationship between the author, narrator or detective and other characters present within the novel (Sweeney, 1999: 11).

"The absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08) is the last theme of MDF. The primary concern of metaphysical narration of detective fiction is the failure of the detective to find out the real cause or the root of the issue and solve it like a professional. The detective fails to reach at the core of the mystery and is hence unable to solve it, which gives him the reader's sympathy. The genre therefore generates a new way of

looking at the detectives; the reader realizes that the detective is not infallible, and that they must not be treated like a superhero. Instead, they begin to resemble more closely the reader, and their circumstances more like that of reality, where events do not necessarily proceed in a straightforward and simple manner but might instead lack closure. When the mystery remains unsolved and no solutions can be reached from it, the story becomes incomplete. There lies the competence of a successful metaphysical detective fiction because of the absence of closure usually desirable in a novel.

1.1.3.3. Classical Detective Story vs the Metaphysical Detective Fiction

The traditional detective stories, as mentioned previously, must contain some elements which are considered to be essential; otherwise, they do not fit the category of a detective story. The story must have an instigating crime that would necessarily involve too many characters that would lead the detective to the wrong way to suspect a victim instead of the real culprit. Often the evidence will initially hint at the wrongly accused person so that the detective gets ample time to scrutinize the case in detail, which would eventually help him to reach the depth of the mystery to find out the real criminal. The police exist passively, often just as a helper to the detective to solve the crime and assist him in moving gradually towards his goal. The detective necessarily has to be invincible. Even though he would be starting to follow the wrong person at the beginning, during the process, with his extraordinary observation skill and brilliant power of detecting anything, the detective surely reaches the real answer. The denouement comes at the end with the revelation of how the detective, without really giving much hint at the narration, finally unravels the way he has reached the criminal.

The logic with which the conclusion is reached can often seem unfair or inexplicable. Detective stories frequently employ scattered logic in order to reunite disparate threads of the tale and might, therefore, not appear convincing, truthful and real. The timing of hints and clues within the story can also appear strange, and the writer of traditional detective fiction wants to provide information with which the reader can retrospectively recreate the crime but make them obscure enough that they are only

noticed following the detective's explanation and recollection of these facts in the novel's denouement. However, the detective is efficient in deducing the mystery with the help of the very logic, whereas the readers are still baffled and start worshipping the detective for reaching a conclusion with no falsity.

MDF, being inherently different from classical detective stories, has its own rules and conventions, which led various literary figures to incorporate them into their stories and theories. There are six pioneering themes in MDF. The overpowered armchair or private detective, who generally fails to solve the mystery, is the first theme among the other six themes of the genre. A second common theme is the representation of the text, setting, and city as a labyrinth, entrenched text, or letter that is purloined; the third theme is the textual restriction and representation of the text as an object. The fourth theme is the ambiguity of the tale and the apparent meaninglessness of clues (or, occasionally, their more menacing implications). The fifth primary theme of MDF is the presentation of identity, which is inevitably in some way lost, defeated, confused, exchanged, or stolen. Finally, the sixth theme is the exploration of absence and falsity in nature and how the detective's quest eventually proves self-defeating. These themes prove the fact that there are differences between classical detective fiction and MDF in the aspects of mystery/crime, sleuths, setting, narration style, conclusion, and approach to the reader.

First of all, in classical detective novels, a heinous crime acts as a fixed point around which the novel is based, but in the case of MDF, the novel does not describe a real, legal crime *per se*. The problem might instead exist inside the psyche of a particular character or within the text. In MDF, when the narrative involves a real crime, it doesn't take centre stage like it does in traditional detective fiction. Instead, the crime functions as a catalyst for the detective's introspective journey. Thus, the main focus of the novel is directed to the existential concerns inherent in the individual. This difference in the intensity of the crime distinguishes the two genres.

The detective worshipped as an infallible hero or a god is usually present in traditional detective stories, but in MDF, the detective is often more human. The detective cries if he fails, he can lose his temper, and he is not perfect. He can be scared of the opposition or his enemies. He can fear losing his dignity and ultimately is a normal human being, faulty and by no means flawless. His intelligence and intellect might be equal to

that of the readers, but that does not stop him from investigating. He goes ahead with his effort and observation to close the case but, just as in reality, he might not reach his desired conclusion and fail to find the culprit or solve the mystery.

The defeat in detection is the ultimate goal that has to be achieved in the story of MDF. The detective has to be defeated in front of the criminal and must go through the pain of failure to solve the case. He has to bear the agony of being a normal person who leads a regular life like any other person in his city. His struggle against the labyrinth is constantly portrayed through his inability to reach the level of invincibility. He can quiver in fear of getting killed. He might become desperate but, in the end, is left with the disappointment of failure and cannot reach the core of the mystery. He is stuck with his inner psyche, which gives him trouble for not being able to find out who he really is. He is a person who gets lost in solving the mystery and starts thinking of himself to be either the criminal or the victim; hence he forgets to find and locate himself. The eternal journey of finding the self is the essential quality of metaphysical detective fiction, which is absent in classical detective fiction. The detective and the story, therefore, attain greater reality than they do in traditional detective fiction, which might be more attractive to read about but does not reflect reality. A metaphysical style of writing concentrates instead on how to make the detective story look more real and not completely implausible. The reader at the end of the novel can relate with the detective for not being able to solve the mystery because he is also a human being afflicted with faults and failings. The other differences between classical and metaphysical detective stories are the deep probing into the inner psyche of the protagonist and the other characters.

The reader of classical detective fiction is never presented with a situation where he has the same experience as the criminal, but vitally, MDF explores the paranoid condition of the detective and scrutinizes the mental state of the novel's characters. Classical detective stories are a kind of fantasy, a suspension of belief that portrays the world in an entertaining but inaccurate manner. MDF deals instead with more realistic problems rather than those embellished to achieve greater spectacle. The line between reality and illusion is necessarily an uneasy one.[22]

[22] For further information please see Table 2 at the end of the chapter.

In conclusion, MDF, as distinct from the traditional detective narrative, directs its attention to the futility and disappointment of the postmodern era. Existential frustration and unstable psychological condition of people became the pioneering themes of the genre. MDF, through its narrative style, themes, structure and mysterious construction and its constant effort to find the self (and getting lost through the effort of not being able to reach it), not only distinguishes itself from the classical detective genres but also presents a distinct genre representative of postmodern literature.

To summarize the differences between MDF and classical detective fiction that are mentioned above: in classical detective fiction, there is usually a seemingly perfect crime, but in MDF, the existence of crime remains complicated. In this genre, there can be a real crime and mystery, or there might just be an imaginary crime created in the mind of one of the characters. In classical detective fiction, the sleuth's focus always remains on crime and mystery, while in MDF, the detective represents someone on a quest to locate his sense of self and who suffers from some form of existential anxiety. On the other hand, in classical detective fiction, the detective usually appears to have no ontological concerns. While the detective in the classical genre solves the crime, the detective in the metaphysical genre only deepens the mystery at the end of the story. Philosophical inquiry, the questioning of reality, and curiosity for that which exists beyond the visible stand out in MDF.

Furthermore, while classical detective fiction reflects the conflicts of its era and centers around satisfying people's sense of justice, MDF takes a distinct approach. MDF goes beyond the objectives of restoring justice and order but instead dives deep into the intricacies of the human mind and the universe; thereby, it explores the blurred line between reality and illusion. Thus, MDF examines the human condition within the context of the era's conflicts.

Moreover, in classical detective stories, the detective ultimately triumphs by correctly solving the mystery with her/his superior intellect, which earns the reader's admiration. Though in the beginning, the sleuth might find that evidence indicates the wrong person is the culprit, by the denouement, the detective solves the mystery correctly through his brilliant powers of deduction and observation. At the end of the story, the reader feels great admiration for the detective's ratiocinative talents and therefore

glorifies him. However, in MDF, the detective does not show any superior power or wit but acts like a normal human being who has emotions and flaws. The sleuth in this genre may fail to solve the crime and may feel scared, may cry, may feel depressed, and angry. Therefore, readers consider the detective to exist on an equal level to themselves and might feel sympathy for him.

Additionally, labyrinth-like settings and deeply intertwined plot structures constitute the main elements of MDF, while in classical detective fiction, there is not always a complex structure or setting. Events may take place in a room, library or on a train. Moreover, while readers keep their positions as an audience in classical detective fiction, readers play an active role in MDF.

1.1.4. Bridging Worlds: Analogies Between Fabulation and Metaphysical Detective Fiction

Fabulation and MDF, in literature, started to gain popularity in the second half of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century. Fabulation and MDF, as two of the important, however frequently ignored, elements of the postmodern literature spill too much ink on the shattered beliefs, questioned truths, the boundaries of reality, ontological anxieties and yearning for a mysterious and magical power in the monotone and depressive world. These two literary tendencies, professionally reflect the chaotic and intertwined structure of the postmodern world both thematically and structurally.

Thematically, Fabulation and MDF agree on the fact that there is no attainable reality in the postmodern world because studies on psychoanalysis, physics, philosophy and technology revealed some new aspects about the universe and existence. According to Scholes, the pivotal theoretician of fabulation, reality, is not only constituted of solid, concrete and vital things that are visible to the human eye, but it is a whole set of structures, emotions and formations that exist far beyond the visible. MDF, as it is obvious in its name, always seeks beyond the physical and visible. Metaphysics in brief is defined as seeking "the reality behind all appearances" (Inwagen and Zimmerman, 2013: 02). MDF, as fabulation, questions the accessibility of a complete and capacious knowledge

of reality and maintains its attention on ontological concerns of being rather than knowing. In fact, fabulation and MDF reflecting everything that is surreal, fantastic or magical, endeavour to reach reality. The motivation that lies behind this is the belief that reality can be achieved by showing everything that is not real or is not considered as real. In other words, if everything that is assumed to be unreal is extracted, only reality itself is left behind. The works of fabulation and MDF reflect and question the concept of reality through self-reflexive texts, non-linear time sequences, multidimensional spaces, intertextuality, irony, black humour and grotesque. Moreover, these works show the unreliability of knowledge, employ the mystery and the imagination instead of rationality, reconcile the dream and the reality, and focus on the feelings and unconscious besides the visible world.

Irwin and Norfolk's novels which comply with the principles of the two above-mentioned tendencies, mix the real and surreal elements in such a way that readers frequently feel as if they were in a dream where images move in. For instance, in *The Arabian Nightmare*, Irwin presents a multidimensional narrative that is constituted by the protagonist's nightmares, hallucinations, and mystic traditions of the East. In the novel, the reality is replaced by phantoms and dreams, the linear time sequence is replaced by ambiguity, and the neat city is replaced by labyrinths. Norfolk also creates the same puzzling atmosphere in his novel *Lemprière's Dictionary*. In the novel, the protagonist's web of dreams and imaginings is revealed through references to mythical stories and this revelation frequently puts the reality in an unattainable position. Norfolk, in the novel, writes new biographies to real historical characters and subverts the history by providing false details. In example, John Lemprière, Charles Lemprière and Sir John Fielding are real historical figures who lived at the exact time as stated in the novel. John Lemprière really wrote a dictionary and Charles Lemprière is his father. However, the events that take place in the novel are purely fictional. Using historical metafiction and surreal elements, Norfolk both questions the reliability of knowledge and underlines the impossibility of reaching exact reality. In brief, while Irwin resorts to the oriental myths and stories, Norfolk resorts to the Greek myths and western stories, but these writers in the end create great instances of fabulation and MDF which push the limits of reality.

Moreover, both fabulation and MDF use satire, allegory, irony, black humour, joke, grotesque, and archetypes to articulate social criticism and to vary acts, thoughts

and appearances to advocate the infinite possibilities for violations of logical order. Additionally, these literary devices provide Irwin and Norfolk a space to manifest their comic vision in the novels. As stated in the previous chapters, fabulation and MDF embrace a humorous, point of view, because according to the precursors of these two tendencies, life is too serious to be reflected through seriousness. In other words, the traumatic and chaotic burden of life and the absurdity of the world can only be defeated and criticized through humour. Furthermore, since both fabulation and MDF focus on the diversities, disintegrations, inconsistencies and multiplicity of meanings, inevitably a comic vision arises among these elements. In the novels, Irwin and Norfolk manifest their comic vision by subverting the classical literary forms, inverting the whole structure of society, and showing characters acting out of the expected behaviour patterns and through absurdity. Robert Irwin, for instance, contributes to the fabulator's comic vision by introducing grotesque elements such as dervishes spontaneously bursting into laughter during Friday prayer, administrators obsessed with masculine beauty and skincare, and even the way their hair looks during the war, characters with incomplete physical forms and devoid of spiritual essence. On the other hand, Lawrence Norfolk portrays upper-class characters engaging in marginalized behaviours, including the worship of pork, the substitution of decaying organs with golden replacements, the excessive indulgence in food and drink, and participation in public acts of sexuality. In doing so, he transforms the holy angel Septimus into a carnival fool, brings tears to the eyes of the powerful characters who govern a significant portion of the world's wealth, manipulate historical events, and carry out gruesome murders, all while worshipping pork.

Ontological anxiety and quest for self is the other significant thematic analogy between fabulation and MDF. While endeavouring - to find and identify the culprit or the missing person - characters in the works of fabulation and MDF soon realize that they actually search for their own selves. Mysteries that characters try to unravel are actually nothing but the search for meaning of life and meaning of existing in the universe. According to Merivale and Sweeney, for these reasons in MDF "we come across the lost and exchanged identity and the double self of one person" (1999: 12). Furthermore, in fabulation and MDF the theme of subjectivity is highlighted since the postmodern world is filled with forgery, fakeness and duplicity. The eternal quest of finding self continues throughout the stories. Moreover, supernatural beings such as genies, sorcerers, fairies etc. are also a part of ontological questionings, because they both symbolize human's

wish to metamorphose and dreams of power. In the novels, supernatural beings can transform themselves and others to different beings and objects, for instance: into a butterfly, frog, monkey, lion, sword etc. All these transformations symbolize the features that human beings wish to have. Besides, supernatural beings can transport objects or humans in space, and they can travel in time, space or among different universes. These transportations or travels offer fresh point of views that satisfy people's curiosity about the source of the universe and existence. Thus, people feel as if they got closer to solve the mystery behind all appearances.

Fabulation and MDF, not only thematically but also structurally share common features. Intertwined plot structure, open–ended, maze like text, multidimensional time sequences, and obscure meanings are among the common structural features of fabulation and MDF. As stated in the previous chapters, a good fabulator shows her/his authority over the text through relations among the different tales, themes, and characters. Scholes explained the importance of a good fabulator in these words: "Delight in design, and its concurrent emphasis on the art of the designer, will serve in part to distinguish the art of the fabulator from the work of the novelist or the satirist. Of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy" (1979: 3). In other words, a good fabulator should weave the intertwined tales in such a way that, readers must both lose the logical track of what is happening and also be amused by the connections established by the fabulator. The reflection of Irwin and Norfolk's art in structure is seen through the representation of multidimensional narratives, maze-like settings, and open-ended stories. Irwin uses certain images at different stages in his novels to hold the entangled plotlines together and plays with the readers' understanding of the text and characters. In *The Arabian Nightmare,* even the titles of the chapters show the proofs of Irwin's perplexing technique of storytelling.: "The Tale of the Talking Ape" chapter gets complicated with the successive chapters titled as: "The Interlude Concluded", "The Interlude Concluded Continued", and "The Conclusion of the Continuation of the Interlude's Conclusion". Norfolk, on the other hand, shows his skill as a fabulator through presenting a mixture of various deconstructed genres and subverted historical facts as embedded stories that happen simultaneously. Although Norfolk does not embrace oriental exoticism, in his novels, it is obvious that he mastered the oriental tradition of story-telling. Lawrence Norfolk, as Robert Irwin, imitates the methods of the famous *Arabian Nights.* His novels include many characters from Greek mythology, history, fairy tales, legends and fables.

Moreover, works of fabulation and MDF distinguish themselves by the lack of closure. The final resolution in which every mystery is clarified, cannot, generally, be seen in fabulation and MDF. Instead of explanations, these works abound with mysteries, puzzles, and philosophical questions about the nature of being and the relation between existence and the universe. Suspense and ambiguity are kept till the end of the story, and they even continue after the story ends. The open-ended and incomplete text, also, symbolizes the impossibility of knowing everything in all aspects. Additionally, open-ended stories leave space for the participation of readers, because, the main purpose is to make the reader experience the story instead of presenting them an atmosphere for mere reading. Besides, rendering spiralling, maze-like stories put the reader into the role of a detective and the fabulator at the same time.

In fabulation and MDF, not only the narrative but also the setting renders a labyrinth from which characters fail to escape. Labyrinths in the works of fabulation and MDF symbolize the emotional mazes that characters are entangled with, the chaos of the postmodern world, readers' struggle to comprehend the web of events, and the fabulator's talent in constructing the embedded texts. Cairo and London are the urban labyrinths that Irwin and Norfolk have chosen. In the selected novels, cities have two faces: one the visible, and the other behind the visible. The bivious representations of the cities also make reference to the metaphysical aim of the novels. Every attempt, the characters make to leave the city fails, because supernatural creatures (as in *The Arabian Nightmare*), mysterious ensembles (as in *The Lemprière's Dictionary*) or characters' hallucinations lead them into a bewildering labyrinth within the city's underworld.

In conclusion, when the nature of fabulation and MDF are taken into consideration, it is possible to observe multiple thematic and structural similarities between them. First of all, both Fabulation and MDF avoid the direct representation of reality, since the representators of both theories believe in the fact that reality is just a fantasy that alters according to the perception of each individual. Scholes reinforces this idea indicating that in life, one can only reach a notion of real not the reality's itself and therefore, literature should find subtle correspondences between "the reality which is fiction and fiction which is reality" (Scholes, 1979: 35). Therefore, the conventional

literary elements such as technique, language, structural form, narrative style and subject matter should be subverted and deconstructed.

The other important similarity between fabulation and MDF is their keen interest in ontological anxieties, philosophical and psychological facts. Throughout the stories, various questions, such as "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? "How do people find their own selves?", "How an individual gives meaning to her/his existence and being?", are brought forward. Since fabulation and MDF assert that reality cannot be transcribed straight onto the page, nor can detailed descriptions and verbose passages translate confusing reality, laud the use of allegory, parody, satire, irony, and black humour in works of fiction because such symbolic, indirect, and deconstructive representation can help to bridge the gap between the apparent and non-apparent reality. Additionally, these literary devices articulate social criticism and to vary acts, thoughts, and appearances to advocate the infinite possibilities for violations of logical order.

Structurally, instances of fabulation and MDF display unmistakably the features of metafiction due to their artistic styles, multi-layered diegetic levels, and self-referential texts. The metafictional and intertextual structure of fabulation and MDF serves as the mediator between a verbal cosmos and a greater reality and attempt to induce aesthetic pleasure through the artistry and intricacy of its structure. The professionality of the multi-layered structure is provided by the fabulator's art. A competent and talented fabulator shows her/his mastery in weaving several separate plots at once in addition to the relationships between them. Thus, the intricacy of structure, and the fabulator's competence at presenting the intricacy of that structure, distinguishes his art from that of other novelists or satirists. Additionally, in the works of fabulation and MDF, the setting is particularly constructed as a labyrinth. By doing this, the fabulator creates extraordinary delight in design and content which also addresses to the imagination of readers and also objectifies the complex structure of the text. Besides the embedded texts and good fabulators, works of fabulation and MDF strive for the active participation of the reader into the stories. They intend to prevent stagnancy in the mind of the reader and promote the open and questioning mind instead. Furthermore, fabulation and MDF bear similarities in their use of humour and comedy. Humour and comedy become tools of attacking the prevailing orthodoxies and negating the burden of the traumatic world.

METAPHYSICAL POETRY	METAPHYSICAL DETECTIVE FICTION
Highly intellectualized and tries to find behind the visible.	Its motto is nothing can be known with any certainty.
Contains extremely complicated thought and questions the nature of reality in a philosophical way. These questions can be aligned as Is there a difference between the things which appear to us and the way they really are? What is the difference between reality and perception? Is consciousness limited to the brain? Is everything predetermined? etc	Concerned with metaphysics and impossibility of reaching the reality. For this reason, asks questions as follows: How much can we know about something if it exists? If there is something that can be accepted as reality, what is it? How can we trust anything other than our own constructions of reality, if such a thing is possible?
Uses rather strange imagery	It reflects the ontological anxieties and philosophical questionings.
Frequently uses paradox and conceits	uses allegorical, oddly abstract images as well as fabulous symbols, parody and paradox. Incongruous juxtapositions and ironies are also employed.
Shocks the reader in order to question the unquestionable.	unsettles the reader, forces them to seek their own reality.
Creates mysterious atmosphere	it offers to be lost in the mystery instead of solving it.
Ponders serious questions with humour.	Uses black humour, satire and grotesque frequently.
Originality of the subject and narration is very important.	It is self- reflexive
Conveys fresh meanings about life, love, religion and existence.	eerie meaningfulness or sheer meaninglessness.

Table – 1 Similarities between Metaphysical Poetry and Metaphysical Detective Fiction[23]

[23] Table belongs to me.

	CLASSICAL DETECTIVE FICTION	METAPHYSICAL DETECTIVE FICTION
SLEUTHS	Has ultimate power, superior wit, brilliant power of detection and observation talent. He seems so superior that at the end of the story readers glorifies the detective as a hero.	His intellect is equal to the reader, he has flaws, he can be scared, depressed or angry. In other words, acts like normal human beings. For this reason, readers feel sympathy to him at the end.
	Detective keeps his focus only on the mystery.	Detective frequently questions his existence and tries to soothe his own ontological anxiety.
	Absolutely unravels the mystery.	May fail to solve the mystery and even sometimes does not really try to unravel a difficult mystery but tries to find himself throughout the story.
MYSTERY/CRIME	There is seemingly perfect crime.	there can be a real crime and mystery or there may be just an imaginary crime created in the mind of one of the characters.
	A lot of characters involve in the mystery and this may lead the sleuth in a wrong way to suspect a victim. However, at the end, the detective manages to find real culprit.	The detective may fail to solve the mystery and find the real culprit. However, the important thing is to find answers about his own existence.
	All kind of proofs such as documents, letters etc are scattered throughout the story and contributes to the solution.	letters, documents, do not always have a meaning or contribution to the solution.
SETTING	It may have maze like setting or simple one.	Definitely takes place in labyrinthical places.

CONCLUSION	Mystery is definitely solved at the end.	Mystery generally remains unresolved.
	The detective follows the ratiocinatively process to solve the crime and produces answers for the per of the question.	The detective ponders philosophical questions and produces more questions instead of answers.
	Startling and unexpected denouement.	Sometimes there is no denouement.
	Ambiguity totally ends at the end. Close ended.	Ambiguity continues. Open ended.
STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE STYLE	It generally has simple and chronological plot structure.	It has very complex structure, intertwined plot.
	In the classical detective fiction, besides reflecting the conflicts of the era, the main aim is constructed on the satisfaction of people's feeling of justice.	The conflict of the era is correctly portrayed through the presentation of the metaphysical genre of creating detective fiction. Questions the concept of reality.
POSITION OF THE READER	readers keep their positions as an audience in the classical detective fiction,	readers play an active role in the metaphysical detective fiction.

Table 2 Differences between the Classical Detective Fiction and The Metaphysical Detective Fiction[24]

[24] Table belongs to me.

CHAPTER TWO

THE METAPHYSICS OF A NIGHTMARE

2.1 On the Verge of Real: *The Arabian Nightmare*

Imitating reality has always been accepted as the leading role of art, from Aristotle's *Poetics* up until the contemporary era. However, throughout the ages, the concept of reality and methods of reflecting it have taken various forms. When the modern and postmodern ages came, it was realized that "'reality' is one of the few words that mean nothing without quotes" (Nabokov, 1991: 314). This belief is further developed by Scholes in these words:

> Modern fabulators are post-realistic and post-romantic as well. They lack that Coleridgean belief in the ultimate order of the world. For the post-World War II fabulators, any order they impose on the world amounts not to a symbol of the divine order that God imposed on the cosmos, but to an allegory of the mind of man with its rage for an order superior to that of nature (Scholes, 1979: 56).

Scholes highlights the fact that post-World War II fabulators, mentioned in the quotation, do not regard the order they impose on the universe as a representation of divine order. Instead, their imposition of order is interpreted as an allegory or symbol of the human mind's desire for a higher order than that of nature. This implies that these fabulators mark a change away from the romantic idealization of nature and toward a focus on the nuanced workings of human awareness and its interaction with the environment. Robert Irwin is one of these fabulators, who in his work challenges the traditional perception of reality and order.

With his broad knowledge of Arabic culture and literature, Robert Irwin, one of the most famous representatives of postmodern fabulators, provided a unique and

revitalizing viewpoint to Western literature with his novel *The Arabian Nightmare (1983)*. Irwin, in his experimental novel, reinforces the postmodern perception of reality by weaving together multiple layers of reality, employing an unreliable narrator, and blurring the lines between the book and the outer world. Irwin also turns his novel into a mystery story by using the traditional Arabian storytelling technique. According to this technique, the storyteller goes further in telling his story in a way that causes his listeners to lose logical track of what is happening to the point of confusion. Hence, while Irwin leads the reader through a detection process in the mazes of the story, he also provides a successful illustration of MDF. Irwin, in *The Arabian Nightmare,* not only portrays the characteristics of MDF but also employs fabulation in order to highlight these characteristics. Thus, in *The Arabian Nightmare,* the manifestation of physical and psychological reality will be analysed within the context of MDF and fabulation.

Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* as the title suggests structurally and thematically, has a deep connection with the famous *Arabian Nights,* which has sustained great influence on Western literature since its publication in English in the 18th century. The setting of the novel is fifteenth-century Cairo, a city with rich oriental sleaze. The hero of the book is an English spy, Balian, who is disguised as an English pilgrim from Norwich. Balian's duty is to "use pilgrim guise to travel through the Mamluke lands as a spy, observing the numbers of the Mamluke soldiery, the strength of their fortifications and other features of interest" (Irwin, 1983: 15). Since the Mamluke government in Cairo was thought to be preparing for war in Syria, Christian kings ordered Balian to clarify the rumours of a great conspiracy. Balian's fellow travellers were constituted of a dozen of Venetian merchants, a painter called Giancristoforo Doria who is sent by the Senate of the Serene republic to paint Sultan's concubines, a German engineer, a mysterious Englishman called Michael Vane, a couple of Armenian merchants, a delegation of Anatolian Turks, a Syrian priest, and a score of French and Italians who are also pilgrims as Balian. The group goes to a caravanserai in order to spend the night, but they find themselves stuck in the city since "Dawadar's office is closed and there is a three-day holiday to celebrate the circumcision of Sultan's grandson" (Irwin, 1983: 15). Balian is pleased with this delay because he thinks that it will give him extra days to get information about the city. However, this situation turns into a nightmare and a story of MDF when the people traveling with him get kidnapped and Balian is affected by the mysterious disease: The Arabian nightmare. More so, mysterious figures appear to assist Balian, and

events become even more perplexing when rumours about a female brutal killer and her murders of men begin to circulate throughout Cairo. Events get even more complicated when the Knights of Lazarus get involved in the conspiracy theories and with the new tales of the mysterious storyteller Yoll. Scared and mesmerized by all these incidents, Balian makes attempts to leave the city. However, his every attempt fails, and he is directed into the extensive maze of Cairo's underworld, which is inhabited by whores, laughing dervishes, speaking apes, storytellers, and dream watchers. Irwin, from the very beginning of the novel, competently builds the web of intricate stories in the light of MDF's six main themes. MDF's six main themes are defined by Merivale and Sweeney in their book *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism:*

> (1) the defeated sleuth, whether he be an armchair detective or a private eye; (2) the world, city, or text as labyrinth; (3) the purloined letter, embedded text, *mise en abyme*, textual constraint, or text as object; (4) the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence; (5) the missing person, the "man of the crowd," the double, and the lost, stolen, or exchanged identity; and (6) the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation (1999: 8).

The novel's defeated and confused sleuth is English spy Balian, whose duty is initially presented as watching Mamluke army; however, in the process, Balian forgets his duty and tries to save himself from the mysterious disease: the Arabian nightmare, and he tries to find his way in the web of surreal events. Readers as the co-detectives of the story get more and more confused with the new stories and fake clues. Thus, till the end of the story and even at the end of the story mysteries are never solved neither by Balian nor by the readers. Balian's mind and in the same way readers' minds are always preoccupied with these questions: What is the Arabian Nightmare? Who has the Arabian Nightmare? Who spreads the disease? Who is the Fatima the Deathly? What is the main purpose of the Father of Cats? Why are Leper Knights of Lazarus involved in the conspiracy theories? Who is telling and building the webs of stories? What are talking apes doing in the stories? What is the reality? What is the meaning of existing in the world? As the novel progressed, these questions, instead of being answered, give birth to

new questions. Producing new questions prevents characters and readers to reach a notion of reality.

The second and most important feature of MDF is to portray the setting and the text itself as a maze. Cairo, with its labyrinthine streets and mystic ambiance, perfectly fulfils its role as an unsolvable maze. Throughout the novel, the city serves as a literal and mental labyrinth that keeps the whole mystery hidden. Even at some point, Balian thinks that "To be leaving Cairo! It seemed like a dream" (Irwin, 1983: 118). Cairo is a mysterious city that promises its visitors nightmares without awakening and flights without escape. Indeed, throughout the novel, Cairo keeps its promise, frequently puts new obstacles in Balian's path, and brings forth new characters with new puzzles.

The embedded text of the novel is presented by Giancristoforo as a mysterious book in Arabic. This book gives hints about the mysterious disease known as the Arabian Nightmare but never clarifies the disease or provides useful evidence to solve the mystery. Furthermore, storyteller Yoll's stories make the mystery more confusing, and all clues again become useless. This is signified by Merivale and Sweeney: "In many metaphysical detective stories, letters, words, and documents no longer reliably denote the objects that they are meant to represent; instead, these texts become impenetrable objects in their own right" (1999: 9). Actually, the main purpose of using documents that will not serve as evidence to solve the mystery is to degrade and negate the important role attributed to the documents in classical detective fiction.

The "ambiguity, ubiquity, and eerie meaningfulness or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08). are provided by Balian's dreams, hallucinations, paranoias, and Yoll's stories, as well as elements of oriental mysticism. Ambiguity is always kept at the highest level, and suspense never ends. For instance, the uncertainty of the storyteller's identity prevents characters and readers from reaching or constructing a sense of reality. The novel starts with a storyteller whose identity is revealed in the middle of the novel. For this reason, readers may think that the storyteller is Irwin, but in the fifth chapter, it is revealed to be a man called Dirty Yoll. Dirty Yoll aims to build well-structured stories and write a new storybook called *One Thousand and One Nights*. However, at the end of the book, it is revealed that Yoll is a fake storyteller,

and all stories are dictated by the talking ape. This is surprising because previous stories have implied that the talking ape could be Iblis himself. Thus, Irwin leaves readers and characters in the blurred line between real and surreal and draws attention to the self-reflexivity of the text.

The missing person in the novel is Balian himself. Balian was already going through an existential crisis at the novel's start, even before the fantastic events began. He is an English pilgrim who works as a spy for the French court because Christian Kings want to learn more about the Mamluk army and the Mamluk-Ottoman Turk relationship. Balian's main goal and dual identity, which combined the unknown darkness of the East with fantastic rumours about the East, created existential angst in him. Thus, Balian's "perception of self" breaks down as his paranoia deepens. Irwin defines Balian's state of mind in these words:

> Daydreams of hunts through underground sewers, hidden gateways, poisoned candle fumes and mysterious signals with scented handkerchiefs filled his mind; in his mind's eye he stood at the centre of a web of intrigue, plot and counter-plot (Irwin, 1983: 15).

It is obvious in the quotation that Balian is afflicted by a kind of insomnia that seems to lead him to nightmarish narcoleptic episodes, and these episodes cause him to lose his ability to discriminate between the real and the dream. More so, he begins to create perceptual distortions and emotional conflicts in his psyche, and he begins to evaluate the world from a new perspective. He does not know anything about the city or the plots but lives in his paranoia and fears. He tries to define his identity as a spy, as an English pilgrim, as a victim of supernatural intrigues, and as a character in Yoll's stories.

"The absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08) is provided via different storytellers' various stories, plurality of the voices, and multi-layered structure of the narrative and reality. This is the core of the MDF, as clarified by Robert Rawdon Wilson: "metaphysical detective story itself is designed in the form of a textual labyrinth. Certainly, the genre is preoccupied with perplexing, purloined, missing, and abyssal texts" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 09). From the very beginning to the final chapter of the novel, neither the characters nor the readers can save themselves from the maze of

stories and reach reality. In the novel, there are three essential mysteries and three essential stories connected to these mysteries. The storyteller, on the other hand, tells many other stories and branches the mysteries. For instance, the storyteller tells the story of Balian and his adventures with the Arabian nightmare until the fourteenth chapter. However, in the fifteenth chapter, the storyteller expresses his exhaustion and desire for a break and proceeds to tell thirteen new stories that are interconnected. As proof, the titles of the chapters can be seen: "An Interlude- The Tale of the Talking Ape", "The Interlude Concluded", "The Interlude Concluded Continued" and "The Conclusion of the Continuation of the Interlude's Conclusion" As seen in the titles of the chapters, stories never end, and even the last sentence of the novel goes as follows "Wake up, I want to tell you another story" (Irwin, 1983: 266). The whole novel becomes a story of detection and nightmare, because, it is impossible to decide where the real ends and the imaginary begins. This successful construction of MDF in *The Arabian Nightmare* highlights the main question of the novel: what is reality?

As it is stated in the theory chapter, MDF stands out due to the profound questions that it raises about the nature of reality. MDF accepts the idea that, in this world, reality is unknowable and ineffable. For this reason, it turns its compass to philosophical questionings about the nature of existence and being and endeavours to reach a holistic perception of the concept of reality by looking beyond the tangible and visible. In its search for reality, MDF employs the tools of fabulation since the perception of reality that MDF and fabulation own fits perfectly. Fabulation, believing in fallibilism, manifests reality through defamiliarization, negation, deconstruction, the grotesque, spatial and temporal mazes, multiple usages of dream, and mystery.

Robert Irwin starts the defamiliarization process from the very beginning of the novel by presenting a carnivalesque group of men visiting the mystic city of Cairo. The physical reality that reflects observable and visible things dissolves in the city's exotic and mysterious streets because, with different characters, talismans, magical objects, odours, and strange houses, the streets appear to be fantasy lands rather than reality. Irwin describes Cairo as a place of illusions and evil at the very beginning of the novel. The city, in Balian's words, is

> The Great Whore, the many gated city, from out of which the armies of Mohamedanism ride out to bring pestilence

> and the sword to Christian lands… It is an evil city, in the Devil's power and powerful with the Devil's might, for many are gone down into Egypt and not come back (Irwin, 1983: 12).

Balian's first impression and definition of the city are quite negative, which hints at not only Balian's anxiety to be killed as a result of his double identity but also gives a glimpse that something hideous is about to happen. Irwin continues to portray the city as follows:

> As they passed into the city, they entered a world of stench and darkness. They rode slowly through the almost visible clouds of odour, compounded of urine, spices and rotting straw… Above the shopfronts the upper storeys of the houses swung out on great stone corbels… Below the ground squelched nastily under the hooves of their mules; above swung Turkish lanterns, dripping bags of muslin and great bronze talismans. Everywhere threaded or nailed onto or between buildings one saw the Hand of Fatima (a baleful eye staring from her palm), a magic square or the Seal of Solomon (Irwin, 1983: 13).

An exotic and mysterious atmosphere hits readers and Balian from the very beginning. It is emphasized that as the Western group arrives in the city, they enter a realm shrouded in darkness and uncertainty. Besides, Irwin's description of the city as a "world of stench and darkness" (Ibid). holds significant symbolic value, alluding to the city's inherent complexity and moral corruption. The cloud of odours, such as urine, spices, and rotting straw, creates a sense of decay and moral deterioration, which reinforces the notion that the city functions as a symbolic labyrinth. Within this labyrinth, Irwin not only illustrates the Western bias that presumes that Easterners are morally corrupted but also confronts his characters with their own fears, desires, and unresolved conflicts, akin to navigating through the complex corridors of their inner reality. The swinging upper storeys of houses on stone corbels and the squelching ground beneath the mules' hooves disrupt the conventional order and give a sense of unpredictability and unfamiliarity. Moreover, the metaphysical elements, such as talismans, the hand of Fatima, and the seal of Solomon, emphasize the metaphysical aspects embedded in the city and also capture the essence of fabulation by intertwining the real and mystical. Irwin's description of the city, in brief, sets the stage for a narrative filled with metaphysical possibilities. This is one of the most prominent characteristics of MDF, and it is also emphasized by Ewert as follows:

> The worlds created in metaphysical detective stories are strange, uncanny ... and dangerous. They are worlds without happy endings, where protagonists are lost in mazes without exits, destroyed by ruthless cabals, or simply doomed to impotence and incompetence. In them, neither brains nor brawn can save you if chance dictates otherwise- and chance has metastasized into malignant necessity (1999:192).

As stated in the quotation, Cairo turns into a dangerous place for Balian with its uncanny and insistent metaphysical monsters, magical characters, and murderers. In the progressing parts of the novel, the uncanny, dangerous, and unpredictable events that Balian encounters in Cairo trap him in a labyrinth without exit and challenge his perception of reality. All these confront him with deeper psychological or existential fears, which are also akin to being lost in a labyrinth. The lack of a clear path or solutions intensifies Balian's feelings of helplessness and vulnerability and consequently makes him think that he has lost his mind and self. This emphasizes the fact that neither intelligence nor physical strength can guarantee liberation or triumph over the forces of chance and malignant necessity in MDF.

Future metaphysical events are also hinted at by another character, Giantocristoforos' experience with Cairo. One day while talking with Balian, Giantocristoforo says that "I hate the Saracen lands, the land of illusion and illusionism, the kingdom of the greasy palm and shifty eye" (Irwin, 1983: 17) and tells another incident. This experience is significant to show how magic and fantasy are intertwined in Cairo. During one of his walks, Giantocristoforo encounters a man and a boy. The duo begs for money, but Giantocristoforo rejects it. However, the man goes on to express his desperation for money, even going as far as to say that he would be willing to sacrifice his son if only Giantocristoforo could give him two dinars. Naturally, Giantocristoforo remains sceptical of his claims, but the man forces him down on the sand and "brought out from his bundle of cloth a pot of ashes, a large coil of rope and a flute" (Irwin, 1983:18). Later on, the man smears his face and the boy's face with the ash and puts the rope before him. As the man plays the flute, the rope rises toward the sky. The events that follow begin to take a more mysterious and magical turn. This is told by Giantocristoforo:

> Then the man chased the boy round and round the coil of the rope until suddenly the boy seized the rope and started shinning up it as fast as he could. The man fished out a knife from his bundle. He stuck it between his teeth and followed the boy up until he too was lost in the clouds…A long time passed. Then I slowly became aware that my doublet was getting wet. I looked up, expecting rain. Indeed, it was raining, but the drops that were falling on my doublet were drops of blood. Then there were other things – first a hand, then a leg, one by one all the severed pieces of the boy's body hit the sand. Finally, I saw the father come climbing down the rope, bearing the boy's head in his hand. When he had descended, the rope flopped limply around him. I felt a mysterious sense of relief on seeing the Arab again and, when he asked for two dinars, I paid it to him without demur. He gathered his things and the fragments of his son's corpse together in a bundle and, when this was done, saluted me and walked off with his bundle towards Alexandria. Dumbstruck I watched him walk away. The following day, however, I saw both the man and his son sitting outside a pastry shop in Alexandria, stuffing themselves with food. It was all a fraud. He had only put me under an enchantment so that I thought I saw him go up the rope to kill his son (Irwin, 1983: 18).

Irwin here constitutes the first bridge between reality and fiction that shows the "subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality" (Scholes, 1979: 8). The story, weaving together supernatural elements, themes of perception and belief explores the blurred lines between reality and imagination. Irwin, with this story, presents Cairo as a land of illusion, and this foreshadows the upcoming illusionary and magical events in the novel. Additionally, the story also acts as a bridge, uniting the material and spiritual worlds while encouraging readers to think about the mysteries that lie beyond the physical world. As a result, the story creates a sense of otherworldliness and wonder, as well as intensifying the eerie and uncanny atmosphere of the novel.

Irwin deepens the atmosphere of mystery when Giantocristoforo is arrested suddenly. The reason for the arrest is not revealed at the beginning, but Giantocristoforo leaves a very important object behind him: a book written in Arabic. This part of the novel is vital since the nightmarish experiences of Balian begin precisely at this point. Baffled by the sudden arrest, Bailan becomes more concerned about his double identity. For the

first time, he starts to question the real identities of people around him, which triggers his first conspiracy theories. The book Giantocristoforo left behind perplexes him even more because it is written in Arabic but translated into Italian by Giantocristoforo, who once claimed not to know Arabic. The book is important because it is the embedded text of the novel, and it fulfils the role of a meaningless clue in MDF. On reading the book Balian for the first time meets the Arabian nightmare, and Alam – Al Mithal, but he is not aware of it yet. More so, Balian experiences his first nightmare the following day. The Arabian nightmare shows itself shortly after Balian's meeting and sexual involvement with the mysterious woman Zuleyka. Balian, leaving Zuleika's kiosk in the brothel area, finds himself aimlessly wandering in the Cairo streets with a mysterious guide. The guide shows him a book written in

> *There are some who hold that talking about it, even thinking about it, is enough to attract it and stimulate its attacks. For this reason, we do not name it. But even this may not be enough. Therefore, I advised that no one should read this book unless he is already aware of what it is and let those who know forget if they can (Irwin, 1983: 24).*[25]

The mysterious "it" referred to in the book evokes the feeling that something uncanny is about to happen as if there is an approaching presence or imminent threat lurking just beyond the realm of understanding. The cautionary tone of the author and the belief that even mentioning or thinking about "it" could provoke its attacks contribute to the sense of unease and suspense surrounding this mysterious subject. This creates a tense atmosphere that makes readers question what precisely "it" is and what kinds of frightening encounters or incidents would happen if one delved deeper into its nature. In the following paragraph, Balian is hit by the first of the many Arabian nightmares to come:

> A flash of teeth. Things seemed to shimmer a little in the limp air .... The silence intensified until, paradoxically, it became a buzzing in the ears .... The ground shook slightly. Then he [Balian] saw that it was life that pulsed in the earth, the bricks and the trees and forced its way upwards in great roaring flames of energy that lengthened into tongues of

[25] Italics are original.

> umber, black and green. The whole universe was burning up around him in ecstasy. The roaring was inside his head. And blood. He awoke and it came jetting out of his nostrils. His mouth was full of blood too, some of it overflowing in thin driblets down his chin. He was on the roof of the caravanserai, and a circle of Italians were squatting anxiously around him. He had been talking in his sleep, shouting rather, and clawing the air. Was he ill? Balian indeed did not feel well; his dreams more normally ran on the themes of flashing swords, noble and appealing ladies, 'a message for the duke' and so forth. He was ill, then, and needed a doctor (Irwin, 1983: 28).

Seeing Balian in blood, the people in the caravanserai summon the other Englishman: Vane. Vane questions Balian on the details of his dreams and concludes that it is not a physical illness but a disease of sleep, and he should immediately see a physician. It is not revealed how Vane knows this information or why he sees himself as an authority to diagnose the illness. Balian does not want to believe in Vane since he thinks that Vane is also a spy who works for the Mamlukes. Balian believes that Mamluke soldiers have arrested Italian painter Giantocristoforo because of Vane. Balian's suspense is proven to be true when Vane says:

> 'Oh, I know. I had him arrested.' He let this sink in. 'I thought I recognized him during the journey down from Alexandria. Then I knew where I had seen him before. It was at the late Sultan Mehmet's court at Constantinople, where he was employed to paint the Sultan's harem. But there were grounds for thinking that the Serene Republic had sent him to the Ottoman court to do more than paint obscene portraits. It was obvious that he had become very friendly with the then prince, now Sultan Bajazet. Now Venice wishes to consolidate its understanding with the Ottoman Sultan, and it hopes for a joint Turkish-Venetian expedition against Egypt. The time is right for them. Egypt is very vulnerable. Qaitbay is old and sick, whether in the head or body is not clear. Perhaps he would not even be able to lead his army into Syria to encounter the Ottomans. So, believing the painter to be a spy, I informed the Dawadar of my suspicions. My hope is that I have successfully foiled another Venetian plot against the Sultan. But don't tell the lad? Because if you do, you and I will both you, have cause to regret it' (Irwin, 1983: 30, 31).

Balian gets more confused and anxious when his suspense is proven to be true. He even thinks that Giancristoforo was arrested instead of himself. Balian, whose primary duty is to spy on Mamluke soldiers, forgets his duty and turns his attention to articulate new questions and mysteries:

> By now they were deep in a labyrinth of small streets. Balian was as much confused by Vane's speech as he was by the geography of the city. His head felt tight with unresolved questions. How was it that an English alchemist had become so involved in Levantine politics? How close were his connections with the Citadel and the Mamluke government? What had he been doing in Constantinople? Why was he taking such an interest in what might be no more than a nosebleed? But Balian asked none of these. Instead, 'What is the Arabian Nightmare?' (Irwin, 1983: 38).

The confused sleuth of the novel, articulating new mysteries, fulfils his role as a metaphysical detective. Readers, who are waiting to see more evidence and explanations about the mysteries that are offered at the very beginning of the novel, dive into more puzzles and questions waiting to be answered. The suspense and mystery that started in the eerie and uncanny atmosphere of the mystical city begin to transform from a physical to a psychological one. Thus, Irwin dives into the labyrinth of Balian's unconscious.

The psychological reality is the main mystery of the novel since it disguises itself in various and different shapes according to Balian's, readers', and the fabulator's perceptions. Irwin strolls around the limits of the real and surreal by presenting Balian's dreams, hallucinations, paranoias, implications of enchantment, and real-life events together with the tales of the fabulator. As the novel gradually progresses from one tale or dream to another, the reader cannot decide whether the events are really experienced by the characters or if they are merely products of the imagination, and this in-betweenness indicates the main motivation of MDF and fabulation. After Balian started to suffer from nightmares and was intimidated by Vane's secret identity, he found himself in a world of paranoia, anxiety, dreams, and hallucinations.

Balian's psychological reality is first shattered by his visit to Father of Cats. Apparently, people suffering from the sleep diseases go to the Father of Cats' house to be

cured. Father of Cats either visits these people in their dreams, organizes their dreams and nightmares, and cures them, or uses people as their slaves, as hinted at by Balian in the upcoming chapters. When Balian sees Father of Cat's house, he is overcome with fear and anxiety because the house, with its herbs, powders, evil eyes, plants, chemicals, and rooms within rooms, appears to be a prison and a nightmare for Balian. The mysterious job of Father of Cats is told as follows:

> They descended further to the cellars where, the old man explained, the dormitories for the patients were situated. The dormitories were a fantastic sight. From either side of the stairwell a long hall stretched into darkness, beyond the limits of the light shed by the candles set in great bronze candlesticks, the height of a man, which stood in the centre of the hall. It was still only midday, yet even so a few of the beds were occupied. The restless sleepers, arms akimbo or flopped over the side of the mattress, eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling or face flung down into the pillow, were attended by the father's assistants, young men mostly, who would move noiselessly from bed to bed, and, squatting on their haunches or reclining on their sides, would whisper through cupped hands into the ears of the sleepers, sending their dreams this way and that (Irwin, 1983: 40).

The Father of Cats introduces himself as the master of sleep and the key owner of the Alam-Al Mithal, which is defined by him as "world of images and similitudes" (Irwin, 1983: 55). Balian, who is already worried about being discovered because of his double identity and the fact that he believes he has an unknown disease, begins to feel uneasy when he comes to an uncanny and eerie house instead of a medical doctor. This has been commented on by Ibrahim and Simmons in their article titled "Between Orientalism and Post-Modernism: Robert Irwin's Fantastic Representations in 'The Arabian Nightmare'" as follows:

> Balian enters another Oriental yet illusive world from the Western one he has just come from, it is the suffering world of the "sleeping East" where the only figure that can presumably help him to escape is the Father of the Cats, but whether the Father can help him or not is still an enigmatic point in the novel (2014: 103).

As Balian immerses himself in the Oriental world, distinct from his Western background, he finds himself in a mysterious and elusive realm that combines both Oriental and metaphysical elements. This transition represents a departure from the familiarity of his previous environment into an unknown and enigmatic space. In this enigmatic realm, the Father of Cats' home emerges as a physical and microcosmic manifestation of the uncanny and mystical nature of the "sleeping east". Just as the East is an enigma and mystery waiting to be awakened and discovered for the Western gaze, so is the home of the Father of Cats, the skill of the father of cats as a doctor, and his own illness. Balian is also concerned that his secret identity may be revealed if he spends the night in this house and mistakenly disclose confidential information while asleep. Following Balian's refusal to stay, Vane endeavours to persuade him by saying that:

> This is the safest place in Cairo. It has the patronage of some of the most powerful emirs. In the caravanserai the Venetians may steal your money and the priests may steal your soul, but here you are safe. If you are to stay any length of time in the city, you will need the protection of someone like the Father of Cats and the refuge of a place like the House of Sleep. The city is not safe. There have been murders nightly; there has been talk of riot and revolt; but whatever happens, they will not touch the sleep teacher' (Irwin, 1983: 40-41).

Haunted by the uncanny and eerie insistence of Vane and Father of Cats and perceptual distortions and emotional conflicts, Balian finds himself stuck in an alien world where the line between the real and surreal is blurred. From this point on, the conflict of the novel is no longer between the detective (Balian) and others "but between the detective and reality or between the detective's mind and his sense of identity, which is falling apart" (Tani,1984:76). In the following part of the novel, Balian's encounter with Yoll contributes greatly to this conflict.

Balian flees the house, but on the way, in the middle of the marketplace, he is greeted by another surreal event. Balian sees a crowd around a dirty man and an ape. The dirty man is telling stories and calls himself Yoll. Yoll, directly addressing Balian, says that:

> ‘I am Yoll,’ The storyteller spoke Italian with a heavy accent. Stranger yet was his next sentence. ‘I have been telling these people your story.’ ‘My story?’ The crowd turned to regard Balian appreciatively and let him pass through them to stand before the throne of the storyteller. Yoll gestured impatiently. ‘Yes, your story. How you came to Cairo on your way to the holy monastery of Mount Sinai. How you saw the arrest of an Italian painter, were attacked by visions in the night of ill omen and fell into the clutches of the Father of Cats and an English alchemist’ (Irwin, 1983: 44).

Balian learns that he is one of the characters in Yoll’s fiction. Irwin, by revealing the relationship between the character and the narrator, endeavours to indicate the textuality of his novel. In addition to this, Irwin, through authorial intrusion, deliberately puts a distance between reality and the reader. Irwin’s self-reflexive narrative strategy also heightens Balian’s ontological anguish, and therefore, Balian’s identity becomes unstable. Furthermore, Yoll breaks the rules of conventional novel narration by talking directly to his characters and commenting on upcoming events. Through these intrusions, Irwin once more makes the reader revise what is supposed to be reality. Yoll, as the all-knowing author or storyteller of the novel, invites Balian to his house and starts to tell Balian his story. The insoluble and deepening veil of mystery is revealed slightly with storyteller Yoll’s fabulations. Yoll claimed himself to be the writer of *One Thousand Nights*, and therefore throughout the novel, he tells discrete but related stories.

In Yoll’s house, Balian asks about the Arabian nightmare, and Yoll tells the story of the disease. According to the story, there was a woman whose husband was impotent, and she went to a magician to take a magical aphrodisiac for her husband. The magician agreed to give this elixir to the woman but requested some time to make the necessary preparations. Meanwhile, he lets the woman stay in the house, there resided a remarkably attractive young man who, as the magician’s claim, is the fifth Messiah. The woman suffering from sexual frustration seduced the boy, and they slept together. Upon realizing that “the virtue of the chosen one had been deflowered” (Irwin, 1983: 78), the magician cunningly decided to punish the woman in return. He gave the woman a brown bottle of aphrodisiac gas, but in fact, the gas did nothing for the man’s virility but drove the woman

crazy with the infinite torments of the Arabian Nightmare. Thus, according to the rumours, the Arabian nightmare is

> transmitted from person to person by sleeping close together. It comes out of the mouth at night like smoke. They say that the person who was first to be afflicted with this disease has come to Cairo, all unawares of what he is bringing with him (Irwin, 1983: 76).

Balian, mesmerized by the disease and the anxieties of his nightmarish experiences, finds himself in a horrific state of mind. Haunted by odd creatures, two insistent men's (Vane and Father of Cats) rumours of the supernatural, Balian's psychological reality is broken into pieces. His unconscious and conscious are intertwined in such a way that Balian not only feels himself physically trapped in the labyrinth of Cairo but also feels himself trapped in the labyrinths of his own psychology.

Balian, the story's missing person and "man of the crowd" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08) gradually loses his sense of reality, this is best demonstrated in the chapters "On the Way to Cairo" and "Roda Island." These particular chapters hold significance in not only elucidating Balian's mental processes but also in comprehending the multi-layered structure of the novel and the integration of both dream and reality. As stated, after meeting Father of Cats and hearing that he wants Balian to sleep in his house, Balian rushes out to the streets because he feels a great sense of discomfort and oppression. In the street, he meets Yoll, and Yoll takes him to his house. Balian there, learns about the Arabian Nightmare and Fatima the Deathly. With the arrival of Father of Cats and Vane at Yoll's house, Yoll's sister Mary takes him to Bulbul's house, where Balian is haunted by many different wraithlike figures. In his sleep, Father of Cats and Vane come, blowing dust into his eyes, and they take Balian to a soothsayer. In Father of Cat's words, God cursed the soothsayer and turned his bones into jelly. Taking Balian from the reality of the soothsayer, Father of Cats and Vane wants to take him to Dawadar but Balian cries that he is going to put a "logical bar in the way of the capricious forces of the grotesque pair" (Irwin, 1983: 57) and attempts to escape. Meanwhile, Father of Cats and Vane "clung grimly to Balian's back" (Ibid), and they rolled and scrabbled down the path. The Father of Cats cries out, "You will have to carry me with you wherever you go" (Ibid). The abovementioned statements underline Balian's awareness of the immense

anxiety and fear that encompass his existence, as well as the irrationality surrounding him. This burden of anxiety and fear that Balian is experiencing is also indicative of the deep psychological turmoil he is enduring. The persistent presence of Father of Cats, clinging to his back, serves as a constant reminder of the inescapable and intertwined nature of his difficulties. The statement made by Father of Cats implies that Balian's fears and anxieties are inevitable companions, forever intertwined with his being.

Balian's awakening from the nightmare does not break the wall of mystery but builds another one because he wakes up in Zuleika's kiosk instead of Bulbul's house. Even more important, he sees a woman sitting on his chest and suffocating him. Balian's nightmarish condition is described in these words:

> Some great things, soft yet heavy, pressed upon his chest and arms, suffocating and paralysing him. Only one part of him was not paralysed: his penis. It rose and swelled painfully… They were knees that pressed upon his arms. A woman knelt upon his chest, her feet pressed into his crotch, her hair hanging over his face. She was bending over his face, crooning. Slowly, as Balian grew in consciousness, she mysteriously withdrew (Irwin, 1983: 50).

This mysterious woman disappears when Balian starts to pray, and when he finally opens his eyes, he sees Zuleika. Zuleika's utterance builds another mystery.

> He shook Zuleika awake. 'Zuleika, did you kneel upon my chest just now, or did I dream it?' She looked at him. Her eyes were wide with seriousness. 'Someone was probably following you, when you came back through the Roda Cemetery. You are a fool to enter a cemetery at night.' 'But who was following me and why?' 'I imagine that it was once a woman and that it was trying to collect your semen – not that I left her much.' Zuleika laughed lazily, and added, 'The numbers of the dead increase only slowly and they wish to procreate. Go back to sleep now.' 'But the walk through the cemetery was only part of my dream, wasn't it?' Yet as he said this, he realized something else (Irwin, 1983: 51).

Zuleika's answer does not unravel the mystery but builds another one. If Balian dreamt of going to the cemetery with Vane and the Father of Cats how Zuleika knows it? If Zuleika knows it, did Balian really go to the cemetery? Was he really kidnapped by the Father of Cats and Vane? Was the woman sitting on his chest the murderer, Fatima? Did she come to kill him? All these questions branch into Balian's and readers' minds and take various shapes of mystery. Balian feels himself surrendered by the sinister Father of Cats and Vane, Fatima the deathly, the seductive prostitute Zuleika, and the fabulator Yoll. Stuck in a maze of mysteries and dangers, Balian cannot find any way to flee. Further and further removed from conscious reality and lost in the mystery, Balian starts to question his own existence and being.

Balian, the defeated sleuth of the novel, finds himself in a greater mystery than at the beginning because his scattered and anxious mind comes up with new psychological and existential questions about his perception, mental state, identity, and being. Balian, as an instance of a metaphysical detective, fails to identify the culprit and feels great desperation, unlike classical detectives. Irwin complicates Balian's existential anxieties branching new stories within stories and more puzzles within the puzzles. Thus, while Balian runs after any kind of clue or epiphany, his detection process turns to the process of anti-epiphany, and as a metaphysical detective, he finds that his "inquiries have become 'epistemological' and his tangled case reports 'metafictional,' causing the inherent voyeurism of the detective . . . to boomerang into self-inspection" (Merivale,1999: 102). Balian's self-inspection begins when he fails to solve the mysteries. The mysteries seem to Balian like a maze without an exit, and the lack of solutions directs him to the questions of essence, knowledge, and meaning. Balian turns the detection process from the outer world to his inner world. Moreover, *The Arabian Nightmare* reflects the postmodern man's anguish of existence in a world full of absurdity and metaphysical events. Throughout the novel, the postmodern hero Balian tries to find a meaningful explanation for his identity crisis and existential problems. However, there are so many illusions around him that he loses his rationality and consciousness. Balian feels like an isolated individual who lives in an alien world and in this world to search for communication, meaning or purpose is nothing more than absurd endeavours.

Balian feels himself stuck between his conscious and unconscious. On the one side, there is the visible reality and his logic, but on the other side, there is the invisible and metaphysical reality and his unconscious. This ebb and flow imprison Balian in the subconscious. In other words, from the outside, he seems like a man who moves, eats, and speaks consciously, but his paranoia and anxieties draw him to hallucinations and cause him to lose logical track of his life. This ambivalent mental status of Balian is symbolized by Irwin through the dual portrayal of Cairo. On the visible side of Cairo there is an official city that is full "of buildings and monuments," and on the hidden side, there is a city of mystery full of joy, magic, and crime as well. This is told in the novel as follows:

> There was a Cairo of buildings and monuments and another Cairo which knew nothing of them. A second city moved in perpetual motion on bare, calloused feet: cooks, water vendors, axemen, letter writers, tinkers, porters and dairy maids took their trade with them from quarter to quarter and served their customers wherever it suited them. At night a different city came into being. Many streets and quarters shut themselves off behind strong gates, which barred the way against the riots of disorderly Mamlukes. Other parts of the city, particularly towards the west, along the Nile and in the Ezekias, were brilliantly lit all through till dawn by thousands of naphtha torche…By day larger families formed gipsy-like encampments at street corners and in abandoned ruins; by night they were eerie, hunched figures in shapeless huddles of cloth (Irwin, 1983: 80).

The city's dual and ambiguous nature deepens Balian's conspiracy theories and drags him into new paranoias. Balian was agitated, believing that "everybody, whomever he serves, seems to conspire to prevent [him] leaving Cairo. Everybody plays games with [him]" (Irwin, 1983: 161). Balian, feeling frustrated and desperate, begins to feel that he will never achieve his goal of escaping from Cairo since "there were no choices at all" (Irwin, 1983: 165). The hints of the metaphysical elements and gloomy portrayal of the city function on several scales from psychological disorientation of reality to the ontological questionings. The labyrinth of Cairo mirrors the labyrinth of Balian's own identity. Balian, during his wanderings in the city, goes further into the maze, which constitutes his own fears and anxieties. Balian's abstract confinement becomes tangible in the city's labyrinthine streets and mysticism. The more Balian stays in Cairo, the more his

nightmares become overwhelming, confusing, and traumatic. In his dreams, he is raped by a prostitute: "Zuleyka, in effect, raped him, teaching him in the process the Abyssinian nutcracker technique and the Dolorous Kiss" (Irwin, 1983: 79), he is chased by one-legged and one-eyed monsters, and he is tortured by a female murderer:

> He dreams that he dreams in this tortured body. He dreams of his body tossing and writhing on a little bed and his mind prey to horrible illusions. He suspects, no, he is horribly and totally convinced, that the figure tossing in the bed is dreaming of having his penis cut in half like a banana. If the pain were not so awful, if he were not asleep, he could do something about it. If he could only awaken the figure on the bed. If the figure on the bed could only awaken him (Irwin, 1983: 84).

These tortures become so unbearable that Balian no longer begins to believe that he has also experienced them in his conscious state. Balian's ontological questionings reach a point where self-quest becomes ineffable, as stated by Merivale and Sweeney "What the world 'really' is, or who 'I' really am, are questions not only unanswerable but essentially not even formulatable" (1999: 102). Therefore, Balian's perception of self and conscious reality in the same way become ineffable and eventually, he becomes suspicious about his own name too. Seeing everything as a part of a big conspiracy theory he asks two men on the street his own name. This is one of the most important parts of the novel because it emphasizes the grotesque nature of the narrative.

> Every street was something that had to be traversed, every door a mystery… he saw two men selling sweets, or was it that he made himself see them? I shall examine these men, he thought, and see how well they can ape reality. I shall ask them something, the answer to which I do not know… 'What is my name?' One of them smiled, gap-toothed. 'My name is Barfi and his is Ladoo.' 'No. What is my name?' 'I am sorry. I did not hear you correctly. Did I hear you ask me to tell you your name?' 'Yes.' Barfi scratched his head. 'Did you know our names before we told you them? 'No, I don't think so. I am not sure.'… 'It is a very strange question. 'It seemed the inevitable thing that he would say, and yet had he known that it was exactly this that Barfi would say? And was this the test of anything anyway? And after all he did not always know himself what he would say next, waking or sleeping. What was it that he hoped to verify? Perhaps Barfi or Ladoo would tell him…This time

> Ladoo spoke. 'Perhaps you are Yunis, the dealer in rags.' Barfi looked at Ladoo oddly. 'We have never met Yunis. Are you Yunis, and are you testing us, please?' Barfi and Ladoo moved closer together. They looked baffled and frightened. He, for his part, felt that fate was offering him some obscure sort of challenge. Something had been begun that had to be gone through (Irwin, 1983: 85, 86).

Balian's asking two dwarfs on the street for his own name by saying, "I shall ask them something, the answer to which I do not know" (Ibid) and then discussing his inner confusion about truth and reality not only contributes to grotesque atmosphere but also align with the ontological and epistemological objectives of MDF and fabulation. Balian, as the missing person of the novel "a person sought for, glimpsed, and shadowed, gumshoe style, through endless, labyrinthine city streets, but never really found, because he was never really there, because he was, and remains, missing" (Merivale, 1999: 105), within the narrative, personifies the search for meaning and truth amidst a labyrinthine cityscape. The persistent pursuit of Balian throughout the novel highlights the indefinable quality of identity and the fruitless endeavour to attain a conclusive resolution. More so, this existential theme of "never really there" creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and displacement, underlining the profound absence that pervades the narrative. In fact, Balian is a person who has never been there, since he is the protagonist of Yoll's story. For this reason, precise information about his existence cannot be obtained, which indicates the epistemological uncertainty of MDF.

Balian's self-quest and his detection process also result in the grotesque and comic scenes, which are another tool that fabulation uses to destroy and question reality. Following this chapter, readers begin to question reality along with Balian. Because subsequent to this part of the novel, the reader is introduced to a cast of characters that are not commonly encountered in the real world. These include Shikk al-Insaan, Fatima the deathly, laughing dervishes who announce the arrival of the fifth Messiah, the Christian Knights of Lazarus afflicted with leprosy, as well as Sultan and Dawadar, who behave in a manner contrary to their official status. Scholes accepts the comic vision of fabulation, indicating that

> Fabulation, then, seems to partake inevitably of the comic. It derives, I would suggest, from the fabulator's awareness

> of the limits of fabulation. He knows too much-that is the modern writer's predicament, and that is precisely what prevents his perspective from being seriously (Scholes, 1979: 100).

Scholes claims that the modern fabulator's sense of humour results from his awareness of the realities and limits of life. Knowing the true face of life, the modern fabulator turns to grotesque and black humour to manifest life in all its all yields. Irwin in *The Arabian Nightmare* embraces a Bakhtinian sense of grotesque realism that destroys the walls between official and unofficial, and he goes beyond all dogmas, ideologies, and restrictions. Irwin attempts to show life together with its serious and comic, illusionary, and real aspects. There are a lot of grotesque scenes in the novel, but the most peculiar one occurs in one of Balian's dreams. In his dream, Balian meets Shikk al-Insaan, and this is told as follows:

> A man lay quivering on the bed beside him. He appeared to be sinking in the mattress. As soon as he saw that Balian was awake, he began to cry in a thin voice, "Help me up, help me up," …The creature was up, though, and it hopped round the room continuing to squeak. It had to hop. It had one leg, one hand, one eye, half a head and half a torso. Its mad bounds took it round the mattress, always keeping its profile towards Balian, a glittering eye, bared teeth and an arm that it repeatedly raised to its forehead and dropped again in an uninterpretable gesture (Irwin, 1983: 70).

As Zuleyka, who usually interprets Balian's dreams, informs him, this mythical creature is "Shikk al-Insaan," meaning "the half part of a human" (Irwin,1983:70). This creature is described as cruel since it tries to capture people's souls in their dreams. Zuleyka explains the reason for this as follows:

> God gave every man a female soul and every woman a male soul, but Shikk denied his soul and is accursed. According to al-Idrisi, he comes from the China Sea or, it is said, from the woods of the Yemen. The latter opinion is more correct, for Yemen in our tongue signifies the right hand. When pilgrims and spice merchants, coming from the Indies, enter the Arab Sea, then the Yemen is on their right and Africa is on their left. Africa is where his other half lives. The Africans call her Barin Mutum, and she is of the left hand…

> Sheik is unhappy. His penis is too small and, while he may eat with the right hand, in the lands of the Arabs one may wipe the bum only with the left hand. The laws of etiquette so prescribe it, therefore Shikk is forever looking for men them in their dreams and make them perform this task for him (Irwin, 1983: 71).

As it is explained by Zuleyka, Balian is haunted by a half-human in order to serve him to clean his bum. Irwin depicts an incomplete, grotesque body to represent life's dual existence. The grotesque body, with its unfinished and cosmic nature, shows the twofold process of life because it brings upper and lower bodily stratums together. Shikk represents the one side of a complete human being. It is a soulless creature, and because of this, it attempts to acquire the souls of other men in their dreams. This fragmentation and deformation challenge the conventional understanding of the human form, producing a sense of the grotesque. Additionally, based on the quote, it can be inferred that Shikk represents the masculine aspect of an individual. Shikk resides in Yemen and lacks a soul, but the feminine half dwells in Africa and possesses one. Although it is emphasized that men do not possess souls in this context, it is also asserted that men and women can only be whole when they are together. Furthermore, the grotesque body with its incomplete form tries to trap a complete human body to clean himself, and this degrades the complete human and creates the absurdity that eventually provides the comedy. In this passage, Irwin deliberately uses fantasy to manipulate the reader's perception of reality.

The readers' perception of reality is also shattered when the identity of Fatima the Deathly is revealed because until this part of the novel, all the fantastic and metaphysical events are regarded as Balian's dreams or hallucinations. However, after this point, readers no longer believe this to be the case. Vane one day sees Fatima, and Fatima takes him to the house of the Leper Knights. Here it is revealed that Vane had been in love with Fatima, but they fell apart. In this part, a new mystery is constructed since Fatima indicates that she is the brainchild, in other words, the product of one's imagination. Irwin describes this as follows:

> Fatima stood pressed against the far wall as if her flesh had been caked on its ruptured stucco. Vane spoke. 'You

> wanted to see me?' 'No, the other way around.' Her mouth moved painfully. 'I am an image, not an imaginer. You know I cannot see, for I exist only in the eyes of others.' 'For God's sake then, Fatima, what is it that you want? Speak.' 'No. I want nothing. I cannot have desires. My sister, yes, nothing but desires, but not I. I am only a brainchild. If I were real, I would wish the death of the Father of Cats, but I am only a brainchild and how can a brainchild wish the death of its creator?' 'If you are a brainchild, then you are a child of a very beautiful thought,' said Vane, moving closer towards that pale and passionless face. 'Let me embrace you. 'No, you would not enjoy the experience.' Then she lowered her eyes and with her left hand she tugged at her right forefinger. 'But you may have this as a keepsake perhaps until I come again.' The finger came off and she pressed it into Vane's hand. He fainted and lay delirious under nasty dreams for what seemed a long time. When he recovered, he found himself outside again, staring at the Mooress with her jug of beer. His hand was empty (Irwin,1983:130).

It is unclear why Leper knights summoned Vane or why Vane and Fatima broke up. The only thing that becomes clear is the fact that Fatima exists in dreams and that she is the product of an idea. When Vane wants to embrace Fatima, she does not let him, but she breaks off her forefinger and gives it to Vane as a keepsake. Vane faints, and he wakes up with a jug of beer. Vane is so used to the uncanny and eerie events that he is not influenced by them in any way. What Irwin is doing here is branching things out by posing more riddles and mysteries. Thus, in keeping with the narrative style of fabulation, stories will never end, and, as MDF suggests, cases will never be closed.

In the progressing parts of the novel, another layer is added to the mysteries of the novel: Fatima's real identity. Fatima's shocking family connection is revealed by herself. Vane and Fatima meet again, and Vane at first confuses her with Zuleyka. This is told in the novel:

> Zuleyka?' … 'No. A prostitute and a pearl are alike; both will deceive you in the dark. Will you walk with me?' Vane matched his pace to Fatima's teetering steps. 'Let me touch you.' 'No. I am falling apart.' 'It is leprosy? 'No. Would that it were …' 'What do you do here? Consort with your sister?' 'No. We separated after our escape.' 'But Cornu

> and his brethren look after you. They are your friends?' 'No. I thought so at first, but we are only temporary allies. I make my killings and they shelter me when I am pursued.' 'You kill at random?' 'No. I am surprised at you, Michael. I should have thought that you or your master would have made the connection by now. Emirs or beggars, openly or in secret, they were all my father's customers.' 'Grandfather, you mean.' 'No. His ideas and her body were my parents.' 'You were not always like this, so oracular.' 'No. Things are changing. My sister's mind continues to deteriorate and my body with it.' 'So will you kill the Father of Cats?' 'No. He is too strong for me. I dare not approach him. You must do it for me. If you ever loved me, kill him. Kill him and take over the House of Sleep. Kill him before worse befalls you all. If you ever loved me, do it. Ease the old man into his grave' (Irwin, 1983: 141).

In this chapter, Irwin turns everything upside down, destroys all conventional expectations, and presents a concoction of all conscious and unconscious desires of the characters. Fatima's true identity and existence remain shrouded in ambiguity throughout the conversation. Vane's claim that the Father of Cats is Fatima's grandfather introduces a new layer of uncertainty and challenges the understanding of her origins. This revelation adds further complexity to the discussion surrounding Fatima's real identity. The dialogue implies that Zuleyka, mentioned at the beginning, is Fatima's sister, while the Father of Cats is both Fatima's father and grandfather. This tangled web of familial connections serves to blur the lines of kinship and further confound the reader's understanding of Fatima's true nature. By introducing these unexpected relationships and questioning Fatima's lineage, Irwin destabilizes conventional expectations and deliberately creates an atmosphere of uncertainty. This ambiguity surrounding Fatima's real identity prompts the reader to question the reliability of the information presented and the motives behind the characters' actions. The ongoing discussion about Fatima's true identity underscores the theme of shifting truths within the novel. Irwin toys with the reader's perceptions and challenges them to navigate through a complex narrative where the boundaries between reality and illusion are blurred. This ambiguity surrounding Fatima's true self adds to the enigmatic and mysterious nature of the novel, captivating the reader's attention and encouraging them to engage with the text on a deeper level. Furthermore, Fatima wishes to murder her father, and we see that not only Balian but also the Father of Cats is being chased. Thus, the detection process gets more complicated for the reader. However, the

reader cannot be sure whether this alleged situation is true because the truth suddenly changes shape in the novel.

The other element in the novel that serves the grotesque and comedy is the destruction of official and respected institutions. Irwin's grotesque remains outside official ideologies, formal social relations, religious expectations, and state ceremonials. This is best evidenced by the Dawadar. Dawadar officially governs the city, but in his office, he makes sure to get his beauty sleep. He even writes a book titled *The Key of Embellishment and the Way of Adornment for the Slaves of the Sultan and the Swords of the Faith.* Contrary to expectations for a state administrator, the book's story focuses on male care rather than politics or wars, and this incongruity provides the main source of grotesque and comedy in the novel. Dawadar eagerly thinks about the content of his book:

> The range of the book was broad, its depth profound. How could the man in the saddle preserve his skin's natural oils while on campaign? Could tattooing ever be recommended? What sort of make-up should one wear to attract women and what sort to attract other men? The use of resin as a depilatory. Massage. Toupees. Codpieces. Kohl, henna and varnishes. Nor did he neglect the psychological aspects. For instance, in the struggle to look beautiful, just as in armed combat, it was crucially important to feel oneself to be young. It was important too to acquire the élite face, to look like money, for money rouses desire more surely than perfume … It was difficult. A pioneer thinker, he did not underestimate the problems of working with those heavy Turkish features, often battle-scarred and lined with the stress of affairs of state (Irwin, 1983: 91-92).

The discrepancy between what is expected of the Dawadar, and his actions creates the grotesque and comedy here. While officially Dawadar prefers to sustain serious life, which is "subjugated to a strict hierarchal order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence, and piety" (Bakhtin, 1984: 12), unofficially in the light of his desires he leads a carnivalistic life, which is "free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, debasing, and obscenities..." (Ibid). Therefore, it is possible to say that Irwin points out the gap between the characters' lives and their actions. The other important instance that shows this gap is also portrayed by a friar. Through the end of the novel Balian is found in the marketplace by other pilgrims and he is brought to the caravanserai. Balian states his wish

to confess and visits a friar. After a long speech on dreams and the Arabian nightmare, Balian claims that this confession session might also be a dream. Upon this friar convinces Balian as follows:

> The friar got down on his knees. Balian thought that he was going to kiss his feet, but the friar did no such thing. Instead, he began to beat his head rhythmically on the ground, crying as he did so, 'This is real! This is no dream! This is real!' When at length he raised his head thin trickles of blood were coming down from the crown. 'Yes, I see now,' said Balian, embarrassed and frightened. Balian left him sitting on the slope and climbed wearily down towards the town (Irwin, 1983: 163).

This is a shocking scene for Balian and readers. Through this grotesque portrayal, Irwin subverts the idealized image of the friar as a caring and loving representative of Christianity. The scene challenges the authority and sacredness attributed to religious figures, exposing their vulnerabilities and the potential for debasement. Besides, the friar's use of violence to prove reality once again underlines that logic is not the norm for this novel.

A different good instance of the existence of official and unofficial lives can be seen during the Friday prayer. During the prayer, a dervish starts to laugh in the middle of the congregation and the Sultan. This laughter spreads to the others, and everyone in the mosque begins to laugh. The religious ritual that is expected to be formal turns out to be a place of gaiety and unofficiality. One of the men arises among the laughing dervishes and announces the arrival of the fifth Messiah, but he is arrested by the Mamluke soldiers. This is told in the novel:

> Now, descended from the minbar, the Imam was leading them in the final rakats of the prayer, leading the congregation into the mysterious suras… Suddenly there was a giggle, at first almost lost in the massed intonation of the sura, but it would not stop, high-pitched and getting louder, despite audible attempts on the part of others to suppress the giggler…Then someone else was giggling. The Dawadar turned round to glare and so did the Imam, but the contagion was spreading. Some indeed were no

> longer able to muffle it but had broken into open laughter. Others were red-cheeked, shaking silently with the effort of controlling it. The laughter was getting wilder. Looking round again, the Dawadar understood and felt a faint twinge of nerves mingled with a dreadful yet delicious sense of anticipation. What he saw scattered here and there amid the congregation were the conical red and yellow caps of the Laughing Dervishes. With even greater impudence than they could usually muster, they were proposing to stage one of their celebrations here in the chief mosque in Cairo during the Friday prayer… Some hung, grimly shaking, to the columns at the edge of the cloister; most lay upon the ground and sobbed with laughter, their faces contorted with an almost hideous hilarity… Only the dervishes stood erect, laughing at, and in control of, their own joke (Irwin, 1983: 106, 107).

This scene is important to indicate the debasement of the holy from its high and spiritual position by turning it into the image of laughter. Through this debasement, Irwin turns tabooed and distant concepts inside out by showing the dervishes, the leading clerics of Islam, disrupting one of the most important religious rituals. Furthermore, in this part, Irwin destroys class consciousness and authority through laughter. Through the announcement of Messiah in this incongruous situation, Irwin continues to break down the wall between the official and unofficial lives:

> A middle-aged man, not a Dervish, raised his head from the ground and, speaking in a painfully husky voice, said, 'I have had my vision. I am chosen to tell you, citizens of Cairo, that the Messiah of the Fifth Seal, the last and final Messiah, is in your city today. He knows the Arabian Nightmare and he has been purified by infinite suffering. Wait for him, for he will lead you into the Citadel (Irwin,1983:107).

In such an environment, by announcing the coming of Christ, Irwin destructs all hierarchy and religious authority. Thus, he mocks the seriousness of officiality. However, mocking, parodying, or satirizing does not aim to hurl the serious and official face of the world into nonexistence but to recreate and renew it by mingling the humorous aspects of life. In Scholes's words, Irwin represents his "subtle faith in the humanizing value of laughter" (Scholes, 1979: 145).

Irwin, in light of Bakhtin's idea, represents a world where both the official and unofficial aspects of life are seen, the perception of traditional realism is negated, and classical detective fiction is subverted. Irwin's grotesque provides social criticism and empathizes with and opposes all kinds of traditional dogmas that offer order in a chaotic world. In the novel, all sacred and official institutions are destroyed. While the Sultan and Dawadar's behaviours destroy political officiality, the laughter of dervishes, who are religious representatives at Friday prayer, and the friar's self-beating who is a Christian representative, destroy religious officiality. Irwin, in Scholes' words, turns "the materials of satire and protest into comedy" (Scholes, 1979: 146).

Irwin's grotesque does not only contribute to the comic perspective of the postmodern fabulator, but it also constitutes new layers of mystery and thereby plays with the reader's perception of the characters and their roles in the intertwined plotlines of the novel. This bewildering technique is well known among Arab oral storytellers, who go so far as to have their listeners lose all sense of logic while they are listening to their stories. Thus, Irwin's deliberate withholding of the denouement—as well as the sense of closure and reassurance that it confers—suggests that reality cannot be fully captured, analysed, or comprehended. Irwin's position in the narrative fits perfectly with MDF's view that the conventional denouement, with all its loose ends neatly tied up, is a deception. However, on some occasions in the MDF, some mysteries might be solved if the narrator wishes. In the same way, Irwin reveals some of the mysteries. The following mysteries must be mentioned if we are going to list all the puzzles in the book: What is the Arabian nightmare and who suffers from it? As stated by Yoll, a person who suffers from the Arabian nightmare cannot remember the dreams in the conscious state. However, throughout the book, Balian remembers his dreams in detail, and therefore Balian cannot have the Arabian nightmare. The true nature of the Arabian nightmare is revealed by the friar, but the identity of the sufferer remains as a secret. The friar explains the true symbolism of the Arabian nightmare:

> According to some of these, it is the ordained punishment for the Unforgivable Sin against the Holy Ghost… 'What is Lazarus to the Arabian Nightmare?' 'Lazarus lay ten days and nights in the grave before our Lord Jesus Christ raised him from it…Understand, then, that when Lazarus rose

> from the grave and walked among men again, he carried with him an insect which had lain with him ten days and nights. This insect was one that haunted, for preference, graves and cemeteries. All dead men have their thoughts devoured by this creature; it eats through the brain and makes its home in the imaginative faculty, though the corpse, being dead, is not aware of its hungry appetite. Need I add that this insect is not to be understood literally? According to the blessed Niko, it is but a metaphor, signifying the fears of a Christian soul that it may stray into error through ignorance' (Irwin, 1983: 159, 160).

Based on the abovementioned religious interpretation, the Arabian nightmare symbolizes the psychological anguish that individuals experience upon realizing the potential consequences of their ignorance. Moreover, the Arabian Nightmare serves as a representation of the erosion of human rationality and the tendency of individuals to rely solely on their imaginative capabilities. A person who loses his logic is described as a "dead man". By employing the symbolism of Lazarus and the thought-devouring insect the quotation encourages readers to think on the value of knowledge, awareness, and the possible consequences of ignorance within the context of religion. The statement highlights the idea that the fear of straying into error can have a profound psychological impact on individuals and emphasizes the need to cultivate a well-informed and enlightened spiritual journey. Based on all these, it can be concluded that novel characters who have lost their ability to act rationally, may have the Arabian nightmare.

Irwin also clarifies another mystery of the novel. Irwin provides an explanation as to why the Father of Cats and Vane are pursuing Balian. Accordingly, they chase Balian to take Giancristoforo's book. This revelation is told by the Father of Cats in the novel:

> As a matter of fact, the book was stolen from Vane by an Italian spy, Giancristoforo Doria, on the way from Alexandria to Cairo. The book he stole contains within it the source of all stories and the revelation of the mystery of the Arabian Nightmare. Doubtless the Italian intended to sell it to the storyteller known as Dirty Yoll, or to Yoll's patrons, but he was arrested by the Mamlukes before he could do so. The book, however, fell into the hands of a young Englishman. The Englishman's baggage at the Ezbekiyya caravanserai has been thoroughly searched, but both he and the book have disappeared. Now, that book

> must not fall into the hands of my enemies. You must find it for me' (Irwin, 1983: 153).

The Father of Cats is not after Balian, but after the book, because the book was written to the Father of Cats by the spirits of Alam Al Mithal and contains a lot of information about the dream world. This book was given to the Father of Cats along with a Chinese box, which is quite symbolic. While the book symbolizes the secrets of the metaphysical world, namely a word beyond the visible, the Chinese box symbolizes the structure of the stories, which are intermingled with dream and reality. The loss of knowledge about the unseen world is symbolized by the book's disappearance, and the quest for the information it contains is a metaphor for postmodern man's quest for reality beyond the apparent.

The identity of Fatima the Deathly is revealed again by the narrator, and it is revealed that she is the mere product of Zuleyka, who is imprisoned in the house by her father, namely the Father of Cats. For this reason, Zuleyka knows too much about dreams. Fatima's birth and her escape with Zuleyka are two of the most interesting parts of the novel, and this happens as follows. The Father of Cats had a daughter, Zuleyka. After his wife's death, he imprisons Zuleyka in a secret room in the House of Sleep to protect her from dangerous enemies and never lets anyone see or talk to her. Zuleyka invented a dangerous way of entertaining herself by creating an eidolon, Fatima, which became her playmate and confidante in her solitude. Fatima gained in shape and tangibility, even the Father of Cats and his servant could see her, and she developed a personality of her own. "Even the Father of Cats and his servant could see her, and Fatima developed a personality of her own" (Irwin,1983:172). Fatima was "moody and stubbornly silent" (Ibid), in contrast to Zuleyka's haste and frivolity. "Often the eidolon refused to play with Zuleyka and just sat brooding and watching her speculatively. Now that she found herself sharing a room with a playmate who would not or could not communicate with her" (Ibid). Zuleyka's loneliness was redoubled, and she slowly goes to mad. Things remain so until Vane discovers the secret room and starts to visit the girls and events happen as follows:

> Zuleyka, who had despaired of meeting any men other than her father and his mute, began to look on that ruffian Vane with amorous eyes. 'Alas! Vane had eyes only for her quieter and more withdrawn "sister" and, as Zuleyka

> recognized this, the growth of madness within her accelerated. She longed to find other men to comfort her, and she begged Vane to find them a way out of the room. Fatima, who had been born in the room and could not even imagine what it was like outside, did likewise. Eventually Vane, who dreamt of surreptitious excursions with the two girls, or young ladies as they were fast becoming, taught them one evening how to climb the wind tower. The following night, without telling him, they were gone. Zuleyka fell into bad company and wandered around the town with marabouts and masturbated them for the blessings of their seed. Fatima was not seen again – until recently.' (Irwin, 1983: 172, 173).

As it is obvious in the quotation, Fatima is not the product of an incestuous relationship, as implied previously in the novel, but she is the product of Zuleyka's imagination. Fatima symbolizes Zuleyka's silent, wounded side, which is yet filled with rage and hatred. By creating an imaginary double of herself, Zuleyka attempts to escape from her oppressive reality by creating an alter ego, a separate identity that can act freely without any restrictions. Fatima symbolizes the darker and more repressed aspects of Zuleyka's personality that she is unable to express openly in her restricted life. When Zuleyka escapes from her home and becomes a prostitute, it could be interpreted as her rebellion against societal norms and expectations. Prostitution, often considered taboo and frowned upon in many societies, could represent Zuleyka's defiance and rejection of conventional norms as she seeks freedom and autonomy. On the other hand, Fatima's transformation into a murderer, specifically targeting men, stems from both her hatred for her father and the male hostility instilled in her by her father. The murders are extreme manifestations of Zuleyka's repressed anger, frustration, and desire for vengeance against the male-dominated society that has oppressed her. While she is sleeping with all the men as Zuleyka, she also "cuts men's penises in half like bananas" (Irwin, 1983: 87) as Fatima. The neurotic turmoil Zuleyka experiences in her mind also contribute to the book's mystical and enigmatic tone. Through this story, Irwin once more pushes the limits between fantasy and reality. Readers find themselves bewildered by these fantastic events.

In the novel, the reason why the leper knights choose to follow Balian is also revealed and explained. This is also one of the comic revelations of the novel since leper

knights follow Balian on only one assumption, which is clarified by the knights as follows:

> Balian waited until Cornu reached the end of the chapel and turned again. 'What do you want with me?' 'A good question! The answer is nothing. A better question would be, "What did we want with you?" and the answer to that would have been that we wished to examine you to determine if you were the expected Messiah or if you had the Arabian Nightmare or, if neither of these things was so, why the Father of Cats has taken such an interest in you (Irwin, 1983: 168).

Leper Knights confessed that they had thought Balian was the fifth Messiah. Moreover, Yoll, Bulbul, and the friar are also revealed to be members of the Leper Knights. So, up to this point, it seems that all mysteries have reached a revelation. However, this is deceptive. Irwin leaves his last but most deconstructive mystery at the end of the novel. In the end, Irwin writes the following dialogue, which changes the entire process of the novel:

> The friar turned to Balian. 'Now that your adventures are over, what will you do?'… He did not feel that the climax in his story had been reached… Someone was shaking him awake. The hand that was shaking him felt curiously insubstantial. 'Wake up,' said the Ape. 'I want to tell you another story. But first, give me a drink. I am exhausted' (Irwin, 1983: 266).

At the end of the novel, Balian is awakened by the ape, who states that he wants to tell another story. When the book comes to a close, the reader, who had assumed that all mysteries had been answered up until that point, realizes that nothing has truly been resolved. Has Balian lived through all the mysteries ever told, or is he just a story listener dreaming of them all? Or is Balian dreaming within a dream again? Who has the Arabian nightmare? All these questions remain unanswered. This is the forerunner feature of MDF and of course fabulation. Cases are never closed, according to MDF, because the detective can never successfully interpret the events. As can be seen, the endings of metaphysical detective stories do not reveal the mysteries. At the meta-diegetic level, the crime that

started the mystery remains unsolved, just like the mysterious secrets of the past that crime represents.

In conclusion, in *The Arabian Nightmare*, reality is manifested in many shapes but not as the one we are accustomed to. Irwin's perception of reality in the novel is highly based on the concept of fallibilism. Irwin proceeds from the idea that in a world there is no perfect certitude nor exactitude and one "never can be absolutely sure of anything, nor can we with any probability ascertain the exact value of any measure or general ration" (qtd in Scholes, 1979: 8), deconstructs and subverts everything that is used to define reality until the 20th century. Thus, in the novel, he reinforces Scholes's idea and represents the chaos both in the world and in the minds of the postmodern people. Moreover, by juxtaposing the metaphysical with the visible reality, he transforms the disenchanted and dehumanized world into a world of magic and mystery. In this way, the novel not only provides a glimpse at MDF but also manifests the features of fabulation.

Irwin's discussion of reality is based on two dimensions: physical and psychological. The physical reality is reflected in the MDF via maze-like streets to indicate the chaotic world order and to complicate the detection process. In the novel, the labyrinths in the characters' minds are symbolized by the physical labyrinths of Cairo. The labyrinth becomes the key spatial metaphor that characterizes MDF; its physical features frequently mirror both the structural elements of the novels and the missions that the protagonists undertake during their searches. However, the novel's protagonist, Balian, is different from the super-talented detectives of classical detective fiction, and therefore, he misinterprets the clues and events during his detection process and finds himself involved in the mystery he investigates. As a result, Balian is gradually forced out of his conscious state and enters a realm of dreams and illusions, where he gradually loses the ability to distinguish his dreaming state from his waking one. Hence, Irwin shatters the psychological reality which eventually creates the ontological questioning. Furthermore, Irwin knows how to handle the fabulator's fundamental tools: suspense and revelation, and thereby he keeps the mystery till the end of the novel through various puzzling stories. The novel's branching structure and its selection of diverse stories deepen the mystery and blur the line between imagination and reality for the reader. Therefore, readers lose the logical track in a never-ending game of contradictions with no apparent resolution, only multiple possibilities. Moreover, these multiple possibilities

create incongruity and the grotesque, and thus, enables Irwin to treat "these matters comically, even farcically at times" (Scholes, 1979: 178). At the end of the novel, Irwin unravels all the mysteries, but this revelation is shattered by the last words of the narrator. Consequently, the lack of closure in the novel allows the readers' detective quest to continue as they reread the novel in search of more clues. This search eventually serves to bring up new questions and new possibilities, abandoning the notion of final answers and a restoration of order that has defined traditional detective fiction.

2.1 Textual Labyrinths in *The Arabian Nightmare*

As one of the most famous representatives of contemporary fabulators, Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* (1983) successfully reinforces the postmodern perception of reality both thematically and structurally. In his experimental fiction, Irwin challenges the lines between reality and dream through the tools of fabulation. As clarified in the previous chapter, a city with labyrinthine streets, embedded texts with unreliable clues, uncanny and eerie characters, psychological turmoil in paranoia and hallucinations, sheer meaninglessness, ontological anguish, ebb and flows between the conscious and unconscious, grotesque and comic elements, and a multi-layered mystery structure reflect the perception of reality in the postmodern world thematically. However, *The Arabian Nightmare* bears not only the thematic traces of MDF and fabulation but also the structural traces. In this chapter, the analysis will be further developed by focusing on the narration, the narrator, and the text itself.

Fabulation and MDF, which grew and flourished in the postmodern age, endeavoured to "explore the possibilities of fiction, the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it" (Federman, 1975: 7). These two important, however frequently ignored, elements of postmodern literature, through intertwined narration, maze-like texts, and talented fabulators, structurally reflected the postmodern spirit of the age. Instead of imitating the notion of traditional reality, Robert Irwin in *The Arabian Nightmare* reflects the novel's creation process and vital human imagination, thus approving the fact that novelistic reality is always fictive, namely an illusion. In the novel,

novelistic conventions that have preserved their prominence until the postmodern era are deconstructed and reconstructed via the tools of fabulation.

The primary goal of fabulation is to violate and subvert the traditional literary structures in order to catch the new emotional state of the postmodern world. In order to achieve its aim, fabulation employs metafiction, allegory, black humour, parody, satire, the grotesque, and comedy. Robert Irwin reflects this aspect of fabulation by imitating the writing techniques of traditional literary genres and deconstructing the narrative features of classical detective fiction. Irwin departs from standard detective fiction throughout the book by gradually shifting the reader's attention from whodunit and what-will-happen inferences to a more abstract and philosophical level. This is best evidenced by Balian's psychological and ontological turmoil, which are triggered by his paranoias and anxieties. Furthermore, by representing Balian's inability to interpret the clues and events around him, Irwin turns the famous hermeneutic[26] code of classical detective fiction upside down. Unlike traditional detectives, who have the extreme cunning and intelligence to capture the true nature of events, Balian is both untalented and reluctantly forced to become a detective. Therefore, at the beginning of the novel, he forgets his main task and loses himself in extreme anxiety. Moreover, unlike in traditional detective fiction, clues in the novel are not guaranteed to be true. As a result of this, the suspicion and mystery that are solved at the end of the novel in classic detective literature are not resolved in this novel, and chaos instead of order rules the story.

The chaotic atmosphere of the novel is also provided by Robert Irwin's innovative writing style. Robert Irwin imitates the narrative strategy of the famous *Arabian Nights* in his novel. Following the conventional Arabian storytelling technique, Irwin delves deeper into the narrative in a manner that leads readers to lose their logical comprehension of the events to the extent of disorientation. Stories within stories, rich character definitions, and magical and surreal events contribute much to the Chinese box structure of the novel. The story of Balian, which is at the heart of the narrative, branches into different mystery stories such as the story of Vane, Fatima the Deathly, Father of Cats,

[26] Hermeneutic Code is elucidated by Barthes in her work *S/Z* (1970). This term refers to enigmas, puzzles and mysteries in a story. Writer intentionally leaves some elements unexplained in all diegetic truths to maintain the feeling of suspense and to create a striking end. Hermeneutic Code, in fact, constitutes the main skeleton of both traditional and metaphysical detective fiction.

Zuleyka, the porter Mansour, the talking ape, and the Arabian nightmare. The interwoven structure of the stories can be seen in the diagram below.

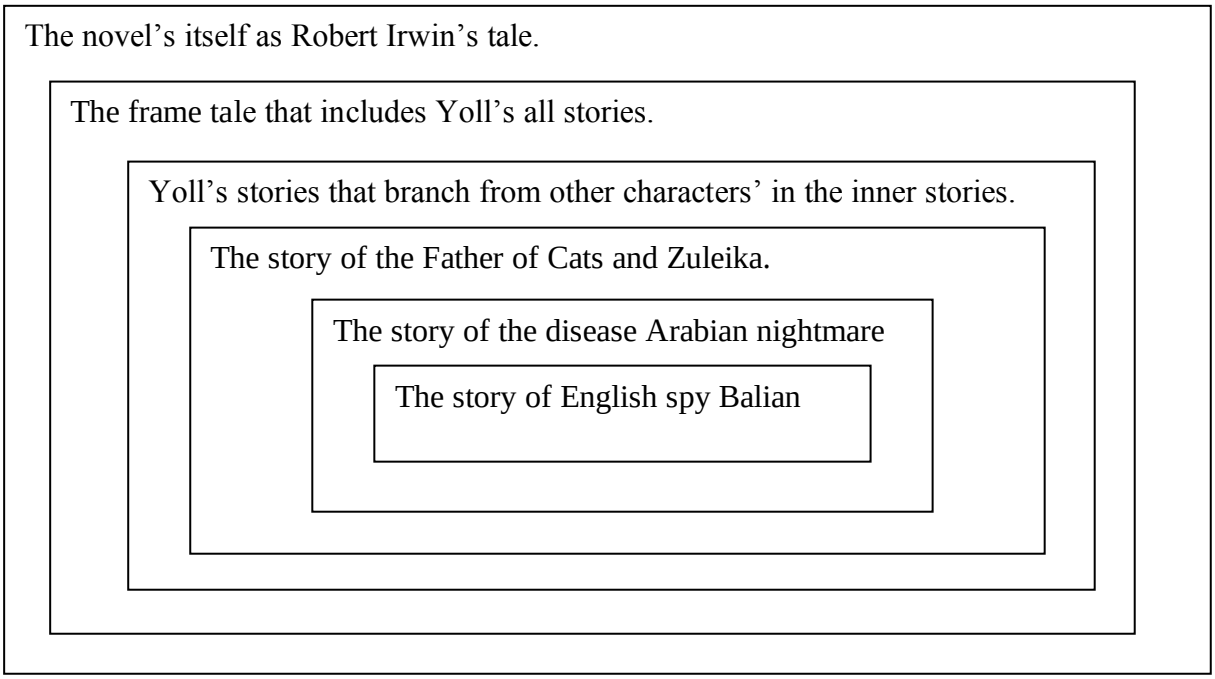

Figure 2: The stories in the main plot of *The Arabian Nightmare*[27]

As it is obvious in Figure 2, Irwin juxtaposes at least seven main tales. However, these tales are also divided into different branches within themselves, such as the disease Arabian nightmare's original story according to Islam and Christianity, Vane's story, Leper Knights' stories, Yoll and Bulbul's stories, Giantocristoforos' story, Zuleika and Fatima's stories. All these stories are initially constructed by Irwin, who makes the talking ape his narrator. The talking ape employs another narrator called Yoll to narrate his stories. Thus, the stories are told by Irwin, the talking ape, and Yoll. In the thirteenth chapter of the novel, Yoll, the storyteller, expresses his exhaustion and expresses a desire to tell additional stories, referred to as interludes, subsequent to the delivery of the primary narratives thus far. These chapters are titled "An Interlude: The Tale of the Talking Ape," "The Interlude Concluded," "The Interlude Concluded Continued," and "The Conclusion of the Continuation of the Interlude's Conclusion." These elliptical and intertwined stories can be seen in the diagram below.

[27] Figure belongs to me.

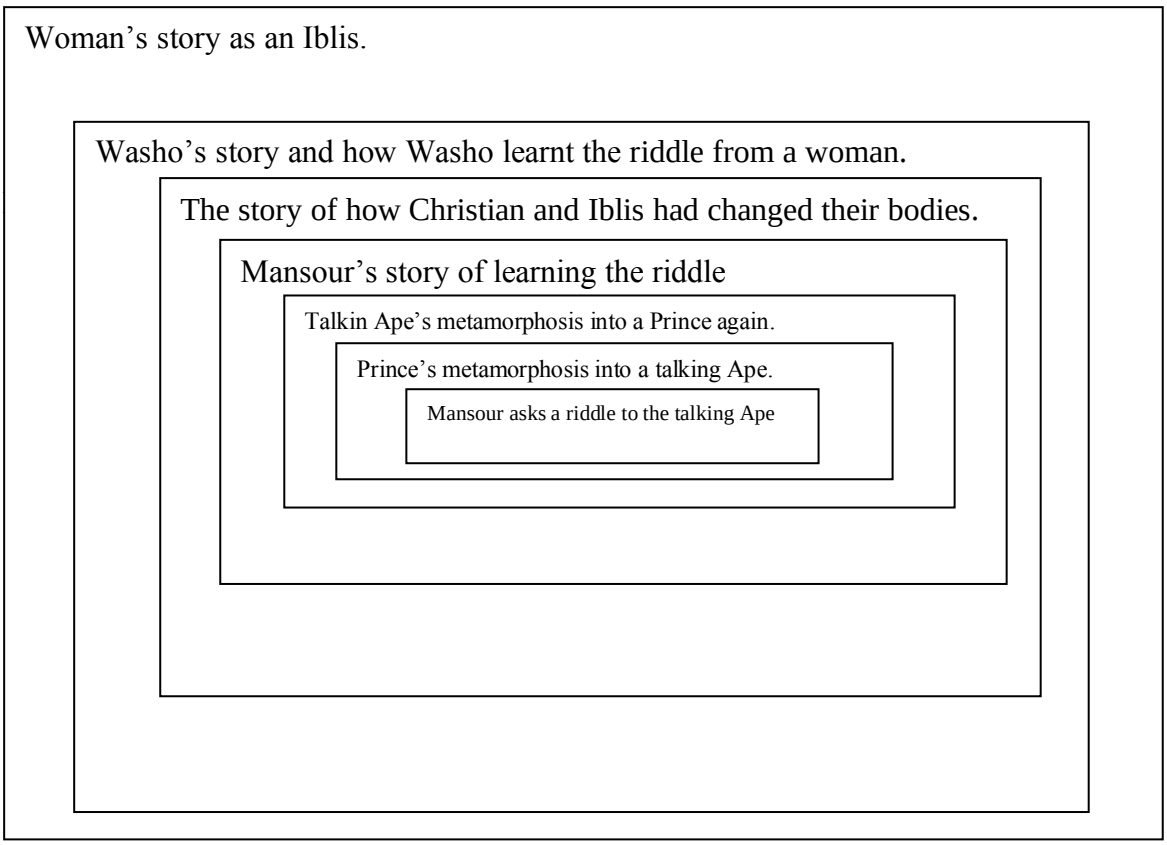

Figure 3 Yoll's stories that he told as Interlude [28]

As it is seen in the diagram, Yoll tells the story of an Iblis who disguised itself as a woman and taught a talking ape whose name is Washo[29] a riddle. This riddle is taught by Washo to a Christian, who then teaches the riddle to a porter. The porter Mansour teaches the tale to a talking ape who was once a prince, and the story goes on elliptically like this. Each story makes a comment on the others, and the way they are connected affects the overall plot. In fabulative fiction, no ending is predetermined or certain; it is always left open-ended. The urge to interact with the reader, whose reading experience is not linear but instead interspersed with her/his own contributions or thoughts, is the driving force behind this. Furthermore, repetition plays a crucial role in the cyclical pattern of fabulation. The setting or historical period from which the story began may have been returned by the time it was completed. Repetition highlights the novel's main themes,

[28] Figure belongs to me
[29] Washo is also a symbolic name since it is the name of the first non-human, a chimpanzee, who learnt American Sign Language and used the language to communicate with humans around her.

makes a remark on the inescapably repeating, Sisyphean nature of postmodern existence, and suggests that the tradition of storytelling will endure. Irwin uses these stories to play progressively with the reader's comprehension of the characters and their roles in the book's unravelling plotlines. Thus, Irwin aims to confuse readers and make them lose their way in the textual labyrinth. Irwin's narration style "reveals an extraordinary delight in design. With its wheels within wheels, rhythms, and counterpoints" (Scholes, 1979: 2) which is also one of the main aims of the fabulation. This multi-layered structure of the novel, by obstructing the reader's detection process, maintains the suspense and mystery until the end.

In *The Arabian Nightmare,* Irwin always questions the role of fiction and the position of the author. Irwin employs parody and irony in the novel to achieve his goal. Irony in the work provides both traditional mockery (criticism of the conventional literary forms) and self-mockery (criticism of the author's position in the text). Irwin's parodying of classical detective fiction and presenting it in a postmodern structure produces a structural marriage of styles, which once again highlights the fictionality of the work and alters the nature of aesthetic forms. Moreover, Irwin frequently uses authorial intrusions. Through these intrusions, the storyteller Yoll talks to his characters, and the characters learn about future events. The meeting of Yoll and Balian is told in the novel:

> 'I am Yoll,' The storyteller spoke Italian with a heavy accent. Stranger yet was his next sentence. 'I have been telling these people your story.' 'My story?'… 'Yes, your story. How you came to Cairo on your way to the holy monastery of Mount Sinai. How you saw the arrest of an Italian painter, were attacked by visions in the night of ill omen and fell into the clutches of the Father of Cats and an English alchemist.' He paused to see if Balian thought that he had got the story right and went on, 'We all know the places and the people. It is a good story. It is easy for somebody like myself, who estimates information at its true value, to reconstruct this tale from a hundred sources in the city. I am Yoll, the only storyteller in all Cairo who makes a living from telling true stories. Sometimes people pay me to tell their story in public places, perhaps in the hope that it may edify the crowds or that it may bring lustre on the family name. At other times I select an individual and honour him or ruin him by telling his story.' He paused. 'Sometimes I am paid not to tell the story.' 'What will happen next in this story?' Yoll paused again and a big grin

> spread over his face. 'You will meet a storyteller called Yoll, and he will give you some extremely valuable advice, if you will be good enough to wait a few moments. You will forgive my interest in you, but a good storyteller strives to give his stories some shape, even if they are true ones (Irwin, 1983: 44,45).

Through authorial intrusions and deliberate comments about forthcoming events, Irwin intentionally creates a sense of detachment between the reader and reality, thereby compelling readers to re-evaluate their perception of reality. In the upcoming chapters, Yoll provides commentary on the stylistic elements of his narratives, the development of his characters, and the environmental conditions of Cairo. For instance, Yoll defines the style of his tales as follows:

> In the beginning I described my tale as a romance, and it is in a sense, yet of course it is also a true tale. My audience may feel that an air of unreality is given to my narrative by the fact that the narrator features in the dreams of the sleeping Englishman. Yet you too may have featured in the dreams of those who know you. Have you given thought to how you may appear to them then …? (Irwin,1983:95).

Yoll characterizes his narrative as a romance while simultaneously asserting its authenticity as a true story. The synthesis of literary genres evident in the given passage is indicative of the fundamental principles of fabulation theory, which emphasize the dynamic relationship between fiction and reality. Yoll challenges readers (and his fictional listeners) to consider the lines separating the real from the imagined by referring to the story as both a romance and a true story. The inclusion of Yoll as a narrator in Balian's dreams serves to obscure these boundaries, thereby questioning the audience's perception of the reality within the storyline. Yoll also encourages readers as well as his fictional audience to reflect on their own existence as perceived by others in their dreams, thus prompting consideration on how subjective experiences and perceptions can influence reality. Through this exploration of genre-blending and self-awareness, Irwin focuses on the complexities of storytelling and how tales might defy conventional genre categories. Talking to his listeners Yoll continues his stories and at some point, he stops, and this time makes a comment about Cairo:

> I promised my audience that they should meet Fatima the Deathly and now they have. I at least have not cheated them. I am known throughout all Cairo as an honest craftsman and a sure guide to the wonders of the place. Of course, I have my failings – I must just stop for a moment to get an insect out of my ear. No, it's just wax. See! Where, I wonder, does the stuff come from? There is certainly some admixture of dust from the streets, but the waxy stuff itself never came from the streets. It must come from inside the head, possibly from the brain. Interesting if it were from the brain … But I am rambling. As I was saying, I have my failings (Irwin, 1983: 136).

The perception of reality, which has already been shattered by the authorial intrusion, breaks into pieces when the character who we think is the main narrator explains his own death in the middle of the story. The character who was thought to be the narrator should not die during the course of the novel under the rules of realism, and as a result, Yoll's death marks a departure from common-sense assumptions about the nature of the narrative. As a result, *The Arabian Nightmare* emphasizes the manipulation of narrative form.

This complex structure of fabulation "asserts the authority of the shaper, the fabulator behind the fable" (Scholes,1979:02). The fabulator weaves fiction around an idea, centering the niceties of the text around an overarching philosophical or moral concept, demonstrating her/his control over time, place, and reality. A skilled and capable fabulator demonstrates her/his competence in interweaving many distinct stories at once in addition to the links between them. Thus, the fabulator's work differs from that of other novelists or satirists due to the complexity of the structure and the fabulator's ability to show the complexity of the structure. Scholes explains the importance of a good fabulator in these words: "Delight in design, and its concurrent emphasis on the art of the designer, will serve in part to distinguish the art of the fabulator from the work of the novelist or the satirist. Of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy" (1979: 3). In other words, a good fabulator should weave the intertwined tales in such a way that readers must both lose logical track of what is happening and also be amused by the connections established by the fabulator. Irwin, as a postmodern fabulator, emphasizes complex, elliptical, and interwoven plots. In the novel, stories continue indefinitely in different shapes, with different characters, and with various plot twists.

The art of the fabulator is also represented by stories inside stories and how they relate to one another, and Irwin is unquestionably a skilled fabulator.

"Fabulation is a tricky business for both reader and writer—a matter of delicate control on the one hand and intelligent inference on the other" (Scholes,1979:76) says Scholes. It is possible to argue that Irwin performed admirably in his delicate role as a postmodern fabulator. In *The Arabian Nightmare*, he spins a complex web of stories that relate to one another successfully. Irwin's elliptical and interwoven plot structure "calls into question most of our expectations of what a narrative should be, in terms of plot, psychology, characters, and logical and chronological series of sequences" (Sirvent, 1999:158). Thus, he helps readers define life through indirection. Additionally, fabulation attempts to provide premium joy and delight through its intricate structure by acting as a mediator between the linguistic universe and wider reality. The postmodern period's economic, political, and psychological issues are brought to the forefront by this new narration style in literature, which not only deconstructs the pre-existing forms but also reconstructs them. To sum up, *The Arabian Nightmare* is a metaphysical and fabulative mosaic constructed from fragments of traditional novelistic variations that is intended to shock the readers into developing new and holistic perspectives on reality.

CHAPTER THREE

THE METAPHYSICS OF A FANTASY

3.1 On the Verge of Fantasy: *Lemprière's Dictionary*

"Reality itself is a thing that fades into mythology with the passage of time. Or rather, most of reality fades into obscurity, and what endures is transformed into mythology. Truth vanishes. Fiction endures if it partakes of that reality beyond reality, which enables it to survive as a myth. The real reality is that which has not yet happened but is to come." (Scholes,1979:16) says Scholes in his work *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979). Lawrence Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary* (1991), which is perhaps one of the most complex pieces of literature after James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), presents the essence of Scholes's statement with its all-narrative manipulations and stylistic variations. The novel's extremely intricate and enigmatic structure demonstrates how the classical perception of reality is transformed into a postmodern mythological story. Norfolk also presents the most eclectic example of postmodern literature by combining different historical events on the same diegetic level, travelling in time, presenting ghosts, mythological characters, and even cyborgs as the main characters, and using elements from different literary genres such as fantasy, science fiction, and historiographic metafiction.[30] With this eclectic style, Norfolk involves both the reader and the novel's characters in a 200-year detection process while at the same time presenting a successful instance of fabulation and MDF. Thus, in this chapter, it will be examined how the blending of various literary genres, the employment of mythological stories, and the usage of historical figures influence the construction of reality and shape epistemological and ontological inquiries.

Lawrence Norfolk's debut novel, *Lemprière's Dictionary*, was released in 1991 and was awarded with the Somerset Maugham Award in 1992. Norfolk's narrative style,

[30] Although the versatile themes in the novel are suitable for all kinds of critical approaches, such as political, feminist, psychoanalytical, historical and subversion of ancient myths, in this dissertation, these approaches have not been mentioned in detail in order not to go beyond the theories that form the main frame of the dissertation.

intricate plot development, and exhaustively researched historical detail were highly praised, but it has also received some critical feedback. Norfolk's literary style has been criticized for imitating different postmodern novels, ignoring character depth for the sake of suspense, and offering extremely detailed passages to present an intricate plot.[31] The publication of *Lemprière's Dictionary* occurred simultaneously in both the United Kingdom and the United States. However, US version underwent a textual modification, and fantastical as well as metaphysical details were excluded. Furthermore, the long and detailed passages were shortened for the US readers. However, exclusions in the novel left numerous important unanswered questions in the storyline. For this reason, in this dissertation, the 1991 British edition is used in order to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Lemprière's Dictionary, taking real historical figures English classical scholar, and lexicographer John Lemprière's[32] life as background tells of a mysterious Cabbala's manipulation of historical events such as the foundation of the East India Company in 1600, the massacre of Huguenots during the siege of La Rochelle in 1628, and the compilation of Lemprière's Dictionary during the French Revolution. The novel opens with the interior monologue of a mysterious character who vows revenge and thinks about the foundation of the East India Company and François Lemprière. The next chapter depicts the Lemprière family and the beginning of the mysteries. The protagonist of the novel, John Lemprière, lives in Jersey with his parents, Charles and Marianne Lemprière. John's eyesight was impaired by years of studying classical literature, which also stimulated his overactive imagination. The impaired vision and academic pursuits of John have contributed to his increasing isolation and eccentricity. As a result of his myopia, John "allowed his speculations, his daydreams, and his visions free rein" (Norfolk, 1991:18), which creates an alternative reality for John.

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[31] For more detail, please see Corn, Alfred (1992). "Review of Lemprière's Dictionary, by Lawrence Norfolk". *The New York Times*: Sec. 7, Pg. 6. (Accessed 02.06.2023) and please see

Dirda, Michael. (1992) "Review of Lemprière's Dictionary, by Lawrence Norfolk". *The Washington Post Book World* (20 September 1992): X1. (Accessed 29.11.2022)

[32] John Lemprière (1788) wrote *Bibliotheca Classica, or, A Classical Dictionary: Containing A Full Account of All The Proper Names Mentioned In Ancient Authors, To Which Are Subjoined Tables Of Coins, Weights, And Measures In Use Among The Greeks And Romans*.

The novel starts with John's mythological dreams and his father Charles's endeavours to unravel the mysterious deaths of Lemprière family members. As the story progresses, it transforms into a story of MDF when the protagonist, John Lemprière, witnesses his father's murder, reminiscent of the mythical figure Acteon who was torn apart by dogs. Upon his father's death, John goes to London for his father's will and finds himself in the middle of a meticulously planned web of intrigue, conspiracy, and revenge plots. A mysterious group of cyborgs, a vengeful ghost, mythological hallucinations, and romantic promises further complicate John's life and plunge him into a necessary detection process. At the novel's conclusion, it is revealed that all that has happened is a revenge plan, which is shaped by the fact that Cabbala caused a kind of curse due to the deaths of innocent people in the Siege of La Rochelle, and the ghosts of the deceased returned to the world as vengeful spirits. Since the curse was initiated by François Lemprière, a member of the Lemprière family is fated to break it. The sprite of La Rochelle, who was François' five-month-old son and who also perished in the fire perpetrated by Cabbala members in La Rochelle, appears in the character of Septimus Precaps to guide members of the Lemprière family in their quest for revenge.

Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary* occupies a prominent place in MDF with its intertwined and multi-layered plot, flawed detective, mythical and historical subtext, purloined texts, metaphysical characters, spatial and temporal mazes. The novel, like Robert Irwin's *Arabian Nightmare*, successfully depicts the six main themes of MDF. The defeated sleuth of the novel is John Lemprière. John is illustrated as a marginalized character who experiences isolation due to his myopia, scholarly interests, and gullibility. Unlike marginalized but sharp-minded and successful detectives of classical detective fiction, John lacks heroism, bravery, or success. When Septimus first saw John as a child, he thought that he saw demons in his eyes, "Something moved behind the boy's eyes. The boy might be the one... Tiny figures moved behind the boy's eyes, like souls but with their features all jumbled together" (Norfolk,1991:614). Later, Septimus admits that he had no idea John was merely short-sighted. John is presented as a weak character who lacks common sense and confidence. His quick acceptance of the fake illness put forward by Kalkbrenner and his belief that murders are the result of his mythological hallucinations show his gullibility. In the course of the novel, it is revealed that John is, in fact, an incompetent character who lives in a fantasy world. Other characters in the novel, manipulate or save John. Septimus was the one who directed him to compose the

dictionary, following the instructions of the Nine. Additionally, it was Septimus who led him to the western pasture to observe the murder of Rosalie. Septimus guided John through the maze of trails left by the Nine, including the voyage of the Vendragon, Asiaticus' pamphlets, and the agreement that tied the Lemprières to the De Veres. Septimus surrounded John with clues, yet he failed to comprehend them. Eventually, Septimus rescues John when Casterleigh tries to throw him from the roof of the opera house. Juliette then rescues Lemprière in the underground cavern by telling him that he needs to put out the candles and then shows him the way out. Septimus exonerates John from the accusations of homicide and reveals to Juliette the identity of her biological father. Thus, John solves nothing and fulfils his role as the defeated sleuth.

MDF is composed as a form of parody that mimics conventional detective literature to a certain extent, but ultimately subverts it in order to prompt the reader to reassess the world from a fresh perspective. This perspective includes a fresh underlying metaphor wherein the world is characterized by chaos instead of order. The chaos evident in the novels is reflected in the spatial metaphor that characterizes MDF: the labyrinth. London, Paris, and La Rochelle, with their underground tunnels, serve as a physical labyrinth in the novel that keeps the whole mystery hidden. For instance, the Cabbala escape from La Rochelle through the tunnels beneath the island, or they live in the caverns located beneath London:

> Once it was a mountain of flesh, red throbbing meat and muscle. Now it is dead stone with its veins sucked dry as dust and all its arteries blown out clean by time; an ignorant monument playing host to nine, then eight men who crawl through its passages like parasites and who differ in their understandings of its chambers, tunnels and lattices, not unnaturally – it can be accounted for in so many ways (Norfolk,1991:192).

De Vere's house similarly is presented as a labyrinth where it is nearly impossible to find the true path.

> An hour later, an hour made up of minutes which stretched like long, pointless corridors, returning Lemprière to places

> he had left only moments before, he had grown heartily sick of the sprawling pile the Veres called home. Passages: as fast as he eliminated them, the house seemed to grow new ones, with rows of suites leading to enfilades, which led to further suites and more possibilities and so on until he stood finally in a large empty room which might have been on any one of three floors as far as he knew and cursed Septimus for dragging him here against his will like this, damn him (Norfolk,1991:242).

The physical labyrinths in the novel serve as a metaphor for the characters' emotional and mental labyrinths, the chaos of the postmodern world, and readers' struggles to delve deeper into the intertwined layers of the narrative. Norfolk endeavours to symbolize the intricate nature of the human psyche and the enigmatic nature of reality by trapping his characters in physical labyrinths. By navigating these complicated paths, John attempts to unravel the hidden truths as a detective, just as readers delve deeper into the intricate layers of the narrative. Labyrinths also reflect the inherent uncertainty and ambiguity found within MDF. Using labyrinths allows the author to explore ontological questions, blurring the boundaries between the physical and metaphysical, knowledge and ignorance, and challenging conventional notions of truth and meaning. As a man of the crowd, John finds himself on an ontological journey.

Presenting a textual labyrinth is another important feature of MDF. Since the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," texts have played a prominent role in detective stories. Metaphysical detective novels in particular are replete with texts and characters who are preoccupied with reading, interpreting, or manipulating those writings. John Lemprière is one of those characters whose extreme fondness for reading actually constitutes one of the main themes of the novel. John's mind is so filled with what he reads that he is persuaded to write a mythological dictionary to purge his mind. The dictionary becomes a textual labyrinth for readers since this text influences and directs the events in the novel. Moreover, the dictionary reflects the narrative structure of the novel, characterized by its intricate and interconnected nodules and tendrils that lead to unexpected outcomes, cul-de-sacs, and convoluted pathways. Actually, through the description of John's dictionary, Norfolk summarizes the complicated narrative structure of the novel. This is told in the novel:

> ...for the work was to prove harder than he thought, more involved and in ways he had not imagined. What began, only a fortnight ago, as a simple list of persons, places, and events had since grown strangely, with odd nodules and tendrils sprouting in all directions and linking up with each other to form loops and lattices, the whole thing wriggling under his nib like a mess of worms on a pin. It looked in all directions, spoke scrambled languages and made wild faces at him, an Argus-eyed, Babel-tongued, Chimera-headed catalogue of all the true things that had turned to dreams and the men who had turned to their dreamers. All dead now. ... Even this early, the dictionary had become its own beast, with little twitchings of life carrying out their own commerce, quite apparent to him as he worked steadily, tediously through the entries. Reappearances by major and minor characters folded the story back on itself, places recurred, accruing and expending significance, events paralleled one another. It was a serpentine thing, hardly a list at all (Norfolk,1991:203).

As it is obvious in the quotation, the plots of the dictionary and the novel bear remarkable resemblances. Just as the dictionary organizes and categorizes the vast realm of mythology, the novel itself organizes and interweaves multiple narratives, thematic elements, and historical periods. Furthermore, John's dictionary of mythology fosters his existing mythological imagination. Thus, the "ambiguity, ubiquity, and eerie meaningfulness or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08) are provided by John's mythological dreams. Norfolk's novel deconstructs and subverts what is assumed to be real and meaningful through the protagonist's dreams and hallucinations. Thus, the clues lose their validity, and the search for truth dissolves in John's mythological hallucinations.

The missing person in the novel is John himself. Multiple conspiracy plots, social events, numerous clues, and mythological fantasies challenge John's understanding of self and blur the boundaries between his own existence and the outer world. As the mythological events begin to occur in the real world, John starts to believe in the illusion that the events he has written about in his dictionary are turning into real ones. Therefore, he totally ignores the truth that the events are not related to him but to a mysterious organization called Cabbala. Additionally, tainted by his anxiety, John tries to evaluate the events and reality through his intuition and imagination. Thus, "detection becomes a

quest for identity, which can be 'solved,' while the 'outside mystery,' reality, is never solved" (Tani,1984: 77). In other words, John loses his rationality and finds himself in a self-quest.

"The absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 08) is provided via the plurality of conspiracy plots, John's hallucinations and his inability to perceive and interpret the clues. There are seven intertwined conspiracy plots in the novel. These various plotlines not only influence one another but also serve to unite individuals from diverse societal backgrounds and global regions. When golden-plated malfunctioning robots and avenging ghosts get into the events, any kind of closure to the investigation becomes almost impossible. All these metaphysical elements raise profound questions about the nature of reality and existence.

As previously discussed in the theory chapter, MDF is a postmodern narrative style that surfaced in the first half of the twentieth century. This form utilizes and manipulates the conventions of the detective genre to challenge fundamental concepts such as truth, reality, and human cognition. MDF contends that reality never actually existed and that the universe did not function in an order as it was supposed to in the realist or romantic eras. Thus, MDF claims that "any idea of "order" is itself an 'invention'" (Black, 1989: 98). Based on this concept, MDF creates works that symbolize the polar antithesis of everything that was proposed as order till the postmodern era. The aim here is to depict an existence that is uncertain, unstable, and chaotic, and to capture the holistic reality of life by focusing beyond what is visible. Lawrence Norfolk, with his novel *Lemprière's Dictionary*, creates an unstable and chaotic work that is shaped by extreme details, a complex and interwoven plot, historical characters, mythological allusions, the protagonist's daydreams, and false beliefs. In the novel, the conventional concept of reality fades into the chaotic narrative of the work. Norfolk, in order to construct his highly intricate work resorts to tools of fabulation since both fabulation and MDF share a similar perspective on reality. Thus, it creates a carnivalistic and grotesque atmosphere by subverting mythology, history, and social norms.

Robert Scholes in his work *Fabulation and Metafiction* stated that

> just as the realistic novel was rooted in the conflict between the individual and society, fabulation springs from the collision between the philosophical and mythic perspectives on the meaning and value of existence, with their opposed dogmas of struggle and acquiescence. If existence is mythic, then man may accept his role with equanimity. If not, then he must struggle through part after part trying to create one uniquely his own (Scholes, 1979: 101).

As it is obvious in the quotation, Scholes suggests that fabulation emerges from the collision between philosophical and mythic perspectives on the meaning and value of existence. Scholes highlights that if existence is considered mythic, individuals can find contentment by accepting their predetermined roles in life. This aligns with the idea that fabulation involves creating narratives that embrace mythical elements and explore predetermined destinies or archetypal patterns which is also evident in *Lemprière's Dictionary.* On the other hand, if existence is not perceived as mythic and predetermined, individuals are compelled to engage in a process of struggle and self-creation. This resonates with the notion that fabulation can also involve challenging traditional narratives and exploring alternative possibilities, emphasizing the role of individual agency and the power to shape one's own destiny. These diverse perspectives on existence and reality create a tension and Lawrence Norfolk's novel perfectly captures the tension brought on by the clash of philosophical and mythical viewpoints. By doing this he explores the diverse narrative approaches that capture the complexities of reality, epistemology, and ontology.

From the very beginning of the novel, Norfolk defies the conventional reality by representing his protagonist as living in an alternate reality. John Lemprière separates himself from other people's realities as a result of his myopia. John feels that he is destined to be an outsider and an alienated person when the outer world dissolves in the mist However, after embracing his myopia, he begins to build an alternate reality for himself, formed by his knowledge of ancient mythology, since the only place he can see clearly is inside his mind. This is told in the novel in the words:

> His myopia dissolved the world in a mist of possibilities and its vague forms made a playground for his speculations... Only the faintest vestige of unease remained and he allowed his speculations, his daydreams and his visions free reign. The island itself could not compete with the routs of demi-gods and heroines, the noisy unions of nymphs and animals, with which the young scholar populated the fields of his imagination. His head had only to leave the pages of Tully, Terence, Pindar or Propertius to see their most delicate or lurid descriptions made flesh in the wavering dusk outside his window (Norfolk, 1991:10).

John Lemprière immerses himself mentally, and to some extent even physically, into the world of books, and therein discovers a believable and alluring alternate reality where he may abandon those concerns and expectations that are far more difficult to release in the actual world. John's hallucinations continue when he goes to the glazier to buy eyeglasses. This part is important in order to show how John's hallucinations break into his real world and influence his psyche.

Upon encountering Ichnabod Bonamy, the glazier, Lemprière observes that the man is holding a shovel in one hand and a stuffed owl in the other. This scene reminds John of the mythical king Erichthonius, who is the son of Athena and Hephaestus. According to the myth, Hephaestus attempted to rape Athena, and when she resisted, Hephaestus' seed fell to the ground. The Earth, or, in other words, Gaia, received the seed and gave birth to Erichtonous. While the shovel symbolized Athena's virtue, the owl is known as the sign of the goddess. This scene shows that any scene can easily stimulate his imagination. Thinking of Erichtonious, he sees the god in the stove:

> The lenses grasped the room and hurled it at the speed of light into the captive's face. He let loose a cry of fear. The lenses sucked his eyeballs through the frames, dashed them into the first elected object. The stove. He was in the flames. They were licking greedily at him. He wrestled with the wooden cage. The fire burned hot in his face, behind the flames two eyes caught his, a horrible, misshapen face, a twisted body, eyes black with ancient cruelties, the legs curling and unfurling at him, like serpents. I see you John Lemprière, hissed from each mouth. Erichthonius. Curling and unfurling, like snakes. Like flames, just flames. Flames in a stove in a room. A room between Minerva's shrine and

> Vulcan's forge. 'Welcome to the visible world, John Lemprière.'...The stove was but a stove, the room but a room. Anticarbon ...Ichnabod was a man with a limp, a genius for glass and too many owls. Lemprière could see (Norfolk,1991:23).

This hallucination is more realistic than John's earlier fantasies, and therefore it is important to signify John's shattered perception of reality. When John wears eyeglasses, the hallucination becomes more vivid, and he thinks that he is seen by Erichthonious. John's inability to distinguish the dream from reality makes him vulnerable to Cabbala's influence and manipulations. The glazier declares as if to announce the transition from one universe to the next, "Welcome to the visible world, John Lemprière" (Norfolk,1991:23). The vision of Erichtonious is highly metaphoric since it holds important foreshadows that hint at future events and themes in the novel. In Greek mythology, Erichthonius is a half-human, half-serpent figure who is associated with wisdom, cunning, and hidden knowledge. His presence in the novel symbolizes hidden truths and the revelation of secret knowledge that affects John's future physical and psychological journeys. Further, it implies the cunning of Cabbala and the importance of wisdom in order to overcome their plans of intrigue.

The next realistic mythological hallucination occurs when John reads Propertius' *Elegies 4.2*, which is an account of Vertumnus and the nymph Pomona:

> Opened, a monstrous, formless mouth, like the victim of a hideous burial, the face decayed and interlaced with roots which writhed and tore through its surface, falling away in clods.... Its aspects shifted second by second, each complete metamorphosis being the herald for the next. But through it all the bronze eyes remained fixed and focused on the young man who breathed in quick, shallow gasps, chest tight, limbs rigid on the bed. And the eyes too melted, after a fashion. For they cried. The shining drops gathered in the corners of the eyes and fell soundlessly to the earth below.... And through his rambling melancholy the tears fell, until the darkness thickened around him. His eyes fell back into the forgetful, sad centuries of which they spoke, narrowing to points, to pin-pricks until they vanished mutely into the

> dark. The tears of an abandoned god, a last appeal before dark (Norfolk,1991:34).

Again, as with the Erichthonius vision, Lemprière sees and is seen by the mythical figure, "the bronze eyes remained fixed and focused on the young man" (Norfolk,1991:34). Norfolk, in this part, illustrating the intrusion of the mythological characters into the real world, not only violates the traditional concept of reality but also shows how the protagonist's knowledge of classical mythology and extreme imagination transform reality into a mythological story. The mythological figure Vertumnus has two important implications for the events of the novel. First of all, Vertumnus is associated with the concepts of alteration, seasonal transitions, and metamorphosis. This myth involves disguises and shape-shifting which highlights the theme of transformation and the fluidity of identities. The inclusion of Vertumnus in the novel serves as a representation of the evolving nature of characters, the shifting dynamics of relationships, and the need for individual development and adaptation. That is to say, as the chapters proceed, the characters will go through a transformation and will be forced to adjust to an ever-shifting spiral of events, situations, and relationships. Furthermore, Vertumnus falls in love with the nymph Pomona and uses different disguises in an effort to win her affection. The myth, therefore, stands for the concept of personal development via romantic encounters, the transforming impact of love, and the willingness to alter oneself for the sake of a desired partnership. In the context of the novel, this myth symbolizes Juliette's disguise to draw John into Cabbala's traps and John's willingness to play several roles to attract Juliette, including those of scholar, writer, and detective. The romantic relationship between Juliette and John in the novel contributes to John's character development, rendering him more mature while simultaneously transforming Juliette into a more optimistic and naive character.

Finally, one night, upon seeing Diane and Acteon in his garden, John has come to the belief that he is the catalyst for bringing these myths to life.

> It is me.' He spoke the words aloud and would have chuckled at how simple and how terrifying a statement he had just made. Somewhere within me, he thought, is a god who tears his face out of the ground, who has not walked the earth for two millennia and who walks outside my

> window. Then he wondered, what else walks within me? (Norfolk,1991:35).

Struck by the simplicity and yet profound terror of this realization, John utters the words aloud. Within him, John feels the presence of a god, one who resurfaced from the depths of time and now walks just beyond his window. This introspective moment makes him wonder what other forces and beings might exist within his own being. This causes him to think more deeply about his inner complexities and the potential for mythical aspects to appear in this life. It is obvious that John's perception of self and the external world is distorted. John destroying the prevailing perception of reality creates for himself an alternative world in which the ordinary framework of life is turned upside down. In this alternative reality, John's mental stability is destroyed, and the external world is stuck on the blurred line between the real and the fantasy. John's unstable mental state inspires Cabbala for the future manipulations to which John will be subjected in the future. By presenting such a metaphysical atmosphere at the very beginning of the novel, Norfolk actually prepares the reader for the overtly fantastic events to come. At the same time, he lays the groundwork for the multi-layered structure of the novel by using classical mythology as a framework. Henceforth, Norfolk's novel pulls both John and readers into a difficult detection process, with the introduction of the first mystery and the first mythology-themed murder.

After emphasizing John's metaphysical relationship with reality, Norfolk reveals the novel's first mystery: the mysterious deaths of the members of the Lemprière family. As stated by Charles Lemprière, his family members died mysteriously, and this is a kind of plague for the family. Charles Lemprière tells of his ancestors' deaths:

> His grandfather clutching at his throat and crying out 'Rochelle!' before his tongue thickened and the poison turned it blue. His father who had left shore in an open boat and returned, face down, on the tide. Old anger, tempered hard with grief, had turned to revenge. And now it was alloyed with fear. The fight would continue a little while yet, just time enough to finish it. He would not see those he brought down, he did not even know their names, but the wheel only required a nudge now to bring them blinking into the light. The line of ancestral casualties arrayed itself

> at his back to urge him forward to the act. The long-kept secret had found them all (Norfolk,1991:25).

Charles Lemprière compares the fate of the Lemprière family, which has been shaped by inexplicable deaths, to the Atreus family's curse. This comparison is important to emphasize Norfolk's extreme attraction to classical mythology in the novel. More so, this comparison both foreshadows the forthcoming mythological events and highlights the fact that classical mythology is used in the novel as a subtext. Charles Lemprière depicts the curse on their family in his letter after his death.

> *"My son"*, began the letter, "*by the time you read this, my first and last letter to you, I shall be dead. If the mode of my passing follows the precedent set by our ancestors, then you will be left curious, besieged by doubts and unanswered questions. John, pursue them no further. Your curiosity will not be appeased, your vengeance never enacted. If the history of the Lemprières has resembled that of the house of Atreus it is because this advice has been too rarely offered, never taken. It is my thought that you will be reading this letter in London, or on your way to that city. Complete any business you must and leave. Of my papers*," at this, John looked across the room at the travelling chest which overflowed with these, "*burn them. Do not trouble to read them. I fear to say more, merely do as I say and I will be at peace*" (Norfolk,1991:85).[33]

Throughout the novel, it is possible to draw many parallels between the Lemprière family and the house of Atreus. First of all, members of the Lemprière family die mysteriously, and secondly, their fate is sealed by the curse of a crime committed two hundred years ago. According to the story, in the case of the Lemprière family, the curse originates from François' crime of sacrificing his family at La Rochelle. This curse perpetuates the mysterious deaths of subsequent generations and seals their fates, much like the curses that plagued the House of Atreus. The sacrificial acts committed by François mirror those of Tantalus, Atreus, and Agamemnon in the House of Atreus, where family members were sacrificed to serve personal ambitions or fulfil prophecies. François actually never cared about his family because he fled through tunnels beneath the city, leaving his wife

[33] Italics are original.

and his six children. His main purpose is to get England to intervene and break the siege, but when he sees that they are not going to, he sends a message to the other eight Cabbala members who are still in La Rochelle. When François informed them that England would not help, he made no mention of saving their families: "There is no expedition. No quarter will be given. Save yourselves" (Norfolk,1991:531). Jacques describes the indiscretion of Cabbala members toward innocent citizens and even their own families in these words:

> 'Our lives were there.' Jacques would look at him now. The shadows stirred in some kind of affirmation. 'Everything we had built and worked for was in Rochelle, its ship, walls, our houses... We knew we would lose all that. But the main hoard, the wealth from the Company, all of it cached and hidden over twenty-five years, that we thought might still be saved, until François's message. We had waited too long and now we had to run for our lives' (Norfolk,1991:531).

As it is obvious in the quotation, the members of the Cabbala, including François Lemprière, prioritize their own survival and wealth over the well-being of their families and the innocent inhabitants of La Rochelle. This alludes to the tragic stories of the House of Atreus, where family members make sacrifices or commit heinous acts for their own gain or survival, disregarding the consequences for their loved ones. The Cabbala worsened their atrocities by bringing citizens to the citadel and burning them there to cover their escape. François first reacts angrily, but after becoming the Cabbala leader, he eventually forgets about his family. On the other hand, François' wife encourages her five-month-old child to find and kill his father, which is one of the metaphysical parts of the novel. In the novel, the beginning of the curse that led to all the murders and the quest for vengeance is told from Septimus' point of view as follows:

> Black winged souls gather along his circuits and axes to form an image he recognises now, a face which is his mother's, but in reverse, light mapped onto dark and vice versa. The halo of flames about her head is pitch-black. Her eyes are twin fires… *Find him*. The souls scream louder, framing their own message about the first until the two are mixed like the vaporous clouds above. *Tell him*. He moves through the carnage, driven by the cacophony to the door. All his guises are gone and only his own face, only that of the disfigured infant is left. The souls

> wail again and he believes himself resolved. *Kill him* (Norfolk,1991:617).[34]

As previously discussed, MDF and fabulation seek ways to go beyond the limitations of rationality and explore metaphysical realms. Myths, with their fantastical elements and supernatural beings, provide a bridge between the ordinary and the extraordinary. They offer a narrative language that allows authors to explore mystic and transcendent experiences, distorting the lines between reality and imagination. Norfolk further blurs these lines by using the myth of Atreus as a frame tale. The inclusion of the myth in the book performs the function of a parallel narrative, and its interaction with the main detective storyline results in the creation of an air of ambiguity and mystery. The juxtaposition of myth and reality in the narrative introduces intricate layers of complexity, encouraging readers to explore reality beyond the visible. Furthermore, the mythic elements provide a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations, conflicts, and choices.

Norfolk further complicates the events by using the myth of Atreus and the notion of revenge as the frame tale, branching out new mythical stories within stories and thereby challenging John's sanity. As mythological figures intrude upon his world, John struggles with their meaning and the issue of whether they are manifestations of his own imagination or actual mythological beings brought to life. Eventually, he decides to seek guidance from Father Calveston to make sense of his haunting dreams, but Father dismisses John by giving him a religious book. John, who feels disappointed, encounters Juliette on his way home. Juliette is a long-time romantic interest of John's, and she is the one who made Father Calveston talk about John's visions and informed Casterleigh about them. Lord Casterleigh, one of the members of Cabbala, builds his plans on John's mythological hallucinations and invites John to his house the next day. John helps the Lord organize his library, and in thanks for his help, the Lord sends John a pristine edition of Ovid's Metamorphoses. The book is adorned with vivid illustrations for each tale, but the one accompanying the myth of Diana and Actaeon stands out for its remarkable detail. Acteon is shown being attacked by his dogs after seeing Diana naked. In fact, this gift is not an innocent one since it is the first catalyst that starts Cabbala's series of mythological

[34] Italics are original.

murders. With this series of mythological murders, Norfolk adds new layers to the narration and constructs new textual mazes both for the incompetent detective and for readers.

The Diane and Acteon myth turns into reality the next day. Marianne Lemprière sends Charles and John from home in order to clean the house. Charles Lemprière is forced off track by hedgerows that appear to be pointing him south rather than north and by his fear of Casterleigh's hunting dogs, which he hears along the route. The paths of father and son cross during the time they observe Juliette Casterleigh bathing in a waterfall from opposite sides of a stream. Juliette looks like the goddess Diana. Both father and son feel impressed by her beauty, but this impression comes at a cost. Charles Lemprière sees Juliette's birthmark and at that moment he realizes that he is going to be murdered like his ancestors. This is told in the novel:

> But the father recognised it and he knew it as a sign he dreaded above all others, burning into him as once it would have been burnt into her. A broken circle, the signature of all he had fought against. And he knew then that his patient, faceless adversaries had bested him, that all his efforts, and his father's, and his father's before him had again come to nothing. The account against him would be settled now and his life was forfeit to it. They had found him. For a moment he knelt as if entranced by the recognition of defeat, and then he rose, the protest welling in his throat, to scream mindlessly. 'No, no! Not now! Not here!' … The dogs broke cover forty yards downstream, moving fast and low over the ground. He told himself not to run, to face whatever might come. But run he did, flailing wildly at the ferns and bushes in his way, while on the other side of the pool, under cover of the overhanging trees, a pair of legs tried to run, and could not. A pair of hands tried to claw their way out of the emerging nightmare and could not. A voice tried to scream and heard only the screams of his father (Norfolk, 1991: 61).

The myth of Diana and Actaeon becomes eerily intertwined with reality when Charles and John encounter Juliette resembling the goddess Diana while bathing in a waterfall. Similar to the mythological figure Acteon, Charles Lemprière saw something he ought not to have. Just as Acteon saw Diana naked, Charles, while detecting the mysterious deaths of his ancestors, comes very close to the naked reality by reaching information

about Cabbala. For this reason, he is killed by dogs just like Acteon and thus the murder series in which the deaths of mythological characters are re-enacted begins. Furthermore, Actaeon's fate of being killed after his transformation into a stag symbolizes the loss of identity, vulnerability, and the lack of control over one's destiny. This parallels the experiences of the Lemprière family members, whose fates are determined by vengeful ghosts and the cruel Cabbala. In doing so, Norfolk subverts classical mythology for his own plot, dismantling the traditional understanding of order and creating a narrative where chaos becomes the norm. This deliberate deconstruction of the traditional perception of order according to David Lehmann, represents a highly subversive element within the MDF. Lehmann asserts that "the most subversive thing that can happen in a detective novel is the recognition that ... chaos is the norm and true detection impossible, and that the detective is therefore doomed to fail or die" (1989: xiii). This idea resonates with Norfolk's subversion of classical mythology, as he challenges the notion of order and presents a narrative where chaos prevails. By intertwining mythological elements and the complexities of detective fiction, Norfolk disrupts the traditional expectations of a detective's success and introduces a sense of impending failure. As chaos reigns and true detection proves subtle, the characters, including the cursed Lemprière family, are confronted with a harsh reality where their efforts to unravel mysteries are met with insoluble obstacles, and their ultimate outcomes are tainted by the inevitable presence of chaos.

Subsequently, the tragic loss of his father, John finds himself burdened with the belief that he bears culpability for the untimely loss, drawing a parallel to his prior conviction in having summoned Vertumnus into existence: "Had I not read the tale, invoked it..." (Norfolk, 1991: 86). Convinced that his reading the book that has been given by Lord Casterleigh and his vivid imagination of myth of Diana and Actaeon had set the chain of events into motion. In light of this belief, by ignoring the external factors in his father's death, John shifts his focus directly to his inner psyche and thus John, "possessing all of the marginality, but none of the self-confidence of the classic detective" steps "into roles suggested for him by others, acting a suspect before he is one, excusing his guilt before he becomes guilty" (Ewert, 1990: 166). This psychological state of John aligns with Stefano Tani's interpretation of metaphysical detectives, shedding light on the intricate interplay between personal perception and the unravelling of mysteries:

> The detective is no longer a logical mind in a positivistic world as he was in Poe's tales. His attempts to unravel the mystery often clash against his own impulses and against a "reality" which is no longer explained and constricted within the optimism and rationality of nineteenth-century positivism but rather has been reinterpreted in a questioning fashion by the then recent theories about relativism and the unconscious (Tani, 1984: 23).

Similar to what is indicated in the quotation, John, too, does not possess a rational mind. His endeavours to unravel the mysteries surrounding him dissolve in his metaphysical beliefs. Without having committed any crime, he willingly accepts his own guilt from the outset. Thus, John finds himself in an inner battle in which he asks if he is the killer, which gradually transforms into an ontological inquiry. According to Jeanne Ewert ontological concerns begin "whenever unfamiliar universes (zones) are encountered, and whenever the boundaries between universes are disturbed" (1999:189). This is exactly what happened in John's case. The fact that the world of mythology leaves the level of ideation and comes to the level of outside reality disrupts John's psychological integrity and makes him the murderer he has been seeking. John's ontological inquiries continue when he travels to London to receive his father's will, where he is met with novel mythological scenarios. Upon arriving in London, John's initial task is to schedule a meeting with his father's lawyer. Here, he learns that the De Vere and Lemprière families reached an agreement two centuries ago, and he also meets Septimus Pracaeps.

Norfolk, as a successful fabulator, introduces another layer of mystery into the Chinese box structure of his novel. This mystery takes a start when John goes to London to claim his father's will and becomes acquainted with Septimus Praceaps. Septimus introduces John to the members of Cabbala and Dere Vere family and puts John into carnivalistic environments. In London, John's hallucinations begin to increase. All these hallucinations block his happiness and serenity. At the end of the night, he spent at the Pork Club, John, who was overwhelmed and afraid of the hallucinations he saw, tells his problem to Septimus. Septimus takes him to psychologists Ernst Kalkbrenner and Elly Clementine, where John is diagnosed with a fake illness. Kalkbrenner and Septimus convince John to purge his neurosis by writing and ultimately John decides to write a dictionary of mythology. John seeks alleviation in mythology in the hope of telling his anxieties and to being understood but this dictionary turns into a weapon in the hands of

Cabbala. The members of Cabbala, apparently threatened by the existence of yet another questioning Lemprière, plant the idea of writing a classical dictionary in John's head, collect the signed pages of the manuscript, stage bloody murders in tableaux based on classical mythology, and eventually set Lemprière up to look like a perverted serial killer. Furthermore, with these murders, they try to make John believe that he has lost his mind.

Building upon the intricate web of deception devised by the members of Cabbala, the narrative takes a chilling turn with the second mythological murder, which unfolds on Christmas night at the De Vere family's house. The Cabbala orchestrates a calculated manipulation of John, with the aid of Septimus. Septimus meticulously observes John's actions and subtly guides him toward the task of writing the classical dictionary. The culmination of their schemes unfolds on Christmas night, as Septimus ensures that John is led to the myth of Danae, marking a pivotal moment in their carefully crafted plan.

> Two more entries then, no more than that for the present. I will collect and deliver them the evening of Edmund's ball. Do you have a costume?
> ...
> 'Very good,' Septimus had said when he had tried it on, and the same thing as he had leafed through the completed sheets of the dictionary. Their collection had been his main business. 'Danae?' He had been reading the final page. 'Not yet ...' Lemprière was ready to reprise Septimus' earlier instructions in explanation but was cut short. 'Good, good...' from Septimus. It had been very business-like (Norfolk,1991:207).

Upon attending the party at the De Vere estate, John was met with an intricate plan that had been prearranged for him. After his conversation with Lady de Vere, John becomes utterly disoriented while trying to find his way back to the party. The labyrinthine corridors of the house seem to entrap him. He hears the voice of Septimus and follows it outside, but he discovers that Septimus has vanished, leaving John locked out of the house. In an attempt to find the entrance, John decides to circle around the house towards the front. However, he unexpectedly finds himself in a field where a pit stands at the centre. As John approaches the pit, he witnesses another traumatic murder of his life. The horrific murder scene is told in the novel as follows:

> He saw the dull gleam of bronze, and in the pit, a woman. He felt hot. The blue satin dress was in shreds, remembered now from the Pork Club and the street outside the coffee shop. There were things holding her there in the pit, and something in her mouth. A metal ring holding her mouth open. Her eyes were worst, looking past him to something above. Then a roaring sound was in his ears and he looked up suddenly, following her gaze, to see the huge black shape swing over and down out of the black sky and open and the sky was not black but full of light. The heat was in his face, the yellow blur so bright it blinded him to everything else as it hissed past him, a cascade of molten metal down into the pit. Gold. His ears heard flesh crackle; his eyes saw her struggle, her limbs thrashed like a doll's as the scalding gold fell. Not his eyes. Not his ears. How could she scream like that? Her mouth was filled, her throat. How? His limbs flailed through the marsh before he realised the screams were his own and he could not stop them. Already, his fears were spreading and extending into the wider context. The jailers will come, lock you up. He heard her stomach burst? She was alive for a long time. Lock you up. Little drops of gold like torches moved in a cluster, miles away. He ran forward. The night was a black mouth huge enough for them all. The woman was already dead, burned miles and miles away (Norfolk, 1991: 249).

The vivid and brutal murder scene in the field underlines the novel's themes of violence, trauma, and the intricate interplay between the boundaries of reality and mythology. The use of gold, reminiscent of the Danaë myth, adds a mythical and symbolic layer to the violence. According to the myth, Danae was the daughter of King Acrisius of Argos. A prophecy foretold that Acrisius would be killed by his grandson, so he imprisoned Danaë in a bronze chamber to prevent her from having any children. However, Zeus desired Danaë and transformed himself into a shower of gold, entering her chamber and impregnating her. As a result of their union, Danaë became pregnant and gave birth to a son named Perseus. Originally, the myth symbolizes the creative power of gods and the ability to initiate a new life. Zeus, in the disguise of golden rain, intervenes in Danae's fate and provides her protection. However, in the novel, the traditional myth is turned upside down. Cabbala, in the role of Zeus, intervenes in people's lives, especially the lives of fragile women. The golden rain here does not endow the woman with a blessing or initiate a new life but takes her life away. Thus, by subverting the myth, Norfolk tries to violate and deconstruct the traditional narratives and systems of meaning. Besides, he

challenges the notion of fixed objective reality and highlights the role of subjective perception and ideology in shaping reality. Norfolk also presents an alternative reality and encourages his reader to actively participate in the detection process.

The last mythological murder happens when John decides to visit the Coade factory in order to find clues that will make a contribution to his detection process. John arrives at the factory to discover the enigma behind the mysterious statues. Upon hearing someone approaching, he hastily seeks a hiding spot. Suddenly, a voice distinct from his own, echoes in his mind, declaring, "it begins again, you know its outline, only your attendance is required now... Not his head. Where else?" (Norfolk,1991:365). In response, he hides beneath a large mold. As he lowers the mold, he witnesses several statues come to life. Through a hole at the top of the mold, he catches a glimpse of Juliette entering the building. A soft, sucking sound and the clatter of chains follow. Raising the mold, Lemprière is confronted by the sight of a goat's carcass, split open and suspended like a hammock. Within it lies the lifeless body of a girl, whom he assumes to be Juliette.

In this scene, the myth of Iphigenia is re-enacted in order to manipulate John. Mythological character Iphigenia is a member of the Atreus family, and she is sacrificed by her father Agamemnon. The myth of Iphigenia originally symbolizes the sacrifice of the innocent and the conflict between personal desires and societal expectations. Iphigenia, a gentle-hearted character, is sacrificed by her father to fulfil her father's desire to participate in the Trojan War. She is also a recompensation for the crime committed by Agamemnon against the goddess Artemis. Interestingly, in the novel, this myth is used to convey the inherent meaning it represents. The Cabbala, driven by their materialistic desires and insatiable ambitions, murder an innocent girl again. However, this time John experiences an epiphany. The abovementioned voice echoing in his mind reveals that everything is a fabrication, and he realizes that he has been somehow forced to participate in these staged murders. From this point on, John begins a more rational process of detection.

John's new rational point of view is further reinforced by the scene of the Trojan War in the opera house. After spending a night with Juliette, John awakens in the morning to discover her fleeing. As soon as he wakes up, he rushes after her, following her all the way to the opera house. A theatrical scene depicting the battle between Paris and

Menelaus is being staged there at the same time. John unexpectedly finds himself on stage, handed a wooden sword, and positioned opposite Vaucanson, who is performing the character of Menelaus. John, forced to play the part of Paris, discovers that his sword is made of wood whilst Vaucanson possesses a real one. The Cabbala now targets John for assault in an effort to kill him rather than other people. However, by a stroke of luck, John narrowly avoids the sword strike, escaping off the stage and adamantly refusing to be a part of yet another Cabbala plot. John's moment of epiphany is told in the novel as follows:

> 'Was I meant to believe all that? Was I meant to think I was Paris? I am not mad, do you understand?' ... 'It was all a sham, wasn't it? Tonight, at the theatre, and before ... His mind was racing back, his voice suddenly colder and more certain. 'Why were you late the night we were to go to Coade's?' he asked. "At the De Veres', who arranged for a pit to be dug and a crane to be placed in the middle of a bog? Come, come Septimus. A drainage projects?' (Norfolk, 1991: 493).

John's epiphany discloses that the "reality" is, in fact, itself a construction, a fiction, a fabrication, a fake, and an alternate reality and that it had been planned before he ever arrived on the scene. Thus, John reidentifies himself as a victim rather than a culprit.

Mythologic murders end with the Iphigenia myth, and Norfolk effectively captures an eerie and uncanny atmosphere in the novel. By intertwining myths with the detective narrative, Norfolk introduces a fresh perspective to traditional literary genres and challenges established notions of truth, reality, and storytelling. This not only adds depth to the narrative but also encourages readers to ponder the mysteries of existence and the complex relationship between the real and the surreal. Furthermore, by re-enacting myths, Norfolk provides readers with numerous clues that effectively keep them engaged in the process of detection. Besides, by using myths as a subtext, Norfolk creates an extremely intricate textual labyrinth that entraps readers, and thus he keeps suspense and ambiguity till the end of the novel. This endeavour of metaphysical detective writers is explained by Sweeney in these words: "By deliberately withholding the denouement, as well as the sense of closure and reassurance that it confers—suggest that the past cannot be recaptured, let alone analyzed and understood" (Sweeney, 1999: 241).

Moreover, the presence of myths introduces multiple and alternative realities, and this increases the interpretability of the text and prevents both the detective and the readers from reaching a single, definitive epistemological system. The detective's goal in conventional detective fiction is to look behind the things and unravel a rational pattern that leads to the capture of the criminal. In the context of a MDF, it is "the detective's failure to identify individuals, interpret texts, or even more to the point, solve mysteries" that transpires, and the text remains uninterpreted, the criminal uncaught" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 10). Although Norfolk provides various clues both for the detective and readers, such as the agreement between the De Vere and Lemprière families, Captain Neagle's documents, Charles' letter, and Asiaticus brochures, neither John nor readers reach a comprehensible solution. Thus, the detection process fails, and Norfolk emphasizes the impossibility of constructing a rational epistemological system. Unable to derive meaning and interpretation, the detective, "quits sizing up clues and admits the mystery: he discovers that in the meanwhile, even if he has not found an objective solution, he has at least grown and understood something about his own identity" (Tani, 1984: 76). As the detective embraces the enigma within himself, it becomes the first step towards unravelling the mystery, as Tani suggests, because "the mystery begins inside the detective" (Tani, 1984: 110). In this manner, Norfolk, as a competent fabulator adheres fresh meanings to the construction of reality, the certainty of epistemology, and the stability of ontology.

Norfolk's subversion of classical myths and leaving his protagonist as well as readers on the line between reality and fantasy also led to the grotesque and carnivalistic scenes. As discussed in the theory chapter, both fabulation and MDF employ satire, allegory, irony, black humour, jokes, grotesque elements, and archetypes to reflect the chaos and absurdity of postmodern life and to criticize social norms as well as the monologic perception of reality Norfolk, like Robert Irwin, in *Lemprière's Dictionary* embraces a Bakhtinian sense of grotesque realism that manifests a hybrid and metamorphosed universe in which the dual nature of life is reflected, death and birth, evil and good are intertwined, and all official as well as dogmatic notions are debased. The Bakhtinian grotesque, similar to fabulation and MDF destroys and distorts "the very contents of the truth" (Bakhtin, 1984: 94). It serves as a form of social criticism and challenges all forms of officiality that confine individuals within the restrictions of

traditional dogmas. This type of expression represents a means of liberation from the monologic and suppressive influence of traditions.

In *Lemprière's Dictionary*, Norfolk accomplishes to reflect the true essence of the Bakhtinian grotesque as well as fabulation by presenting a carnival scene in Pork Club that is replete with mythological allusions. In this part of the novel, presenting a distorted and modernized version of Anthesteria[35] rituals, Norfolk turns all conventional expectations upside down and portrays his characters, particularly the cruel Cabbala and the elites of high society, in their primitive states. This presentation also leads to comic scenes. The literary style employed by the author in question positions him as a contemporary fabulist since, as stated by Scholes, fabulators treat "matters comically, even farcically at times; and it is militantly fabulative, insisting on its fabulous dimension, its unreality" because "In our time any sacred book must be a work of fiction." (Scholes,1979:75). Norfolk, in the light of this idea creates a carnival atmosphere that turns everything sacred in ancient times upside down. In this carnival "life [come] out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom" (Bakhtin, 1984:89).

The carnival scene starts when John is invited to Craven Arms by Septimus to discuss the agreement between the Lemprière and De Vere families. Intended to meet Edmund De Vere and discuss serious matters, John finds himself in a completely different atmosphere. John's arrival in Craven Arms coincides with the gathering of the Pork Club, which is known for its extravagant behaviour, excessive alcohol consumption, and indulgence in pork. Septimus, as the carnival fool and master of ceremonies, drags John to the festival of the Pork Club.

> '*Wel*come to the *Pork Club!!'* Septimus, mountebank, impresario, is in full flood, jigging on the table. The place is heaving. Is this what he agreed to? Around and about, a herd

[35] Anthesteria is one of the several festivals held in Athens to commemorate Dionysus, the wine god, and celebrate the beginning of spring. The first day, known as "Pithoigia," or "Jar Opening," saw Dionysus being served beverages from the just opened barrels Wine-drinking competitions were held on the second day, referred to as Choes or "Wine Jugs," in which slaves and children also took part. Furthermore, on the second day, the state secretly married the royal archon's wife to a man acting as Dionysus at a temple dedicated to the god. Additionally, people had the belief that the spirits of the deceased rose from the ground and roamed the world. The third day, also known as "Pots" or "Chytroi," was a holiday dedicated to the dead. On this day, it appears that souls were released, and pots of seed or bran were handed to the deceased. (Hugh,1911: 93)

> of brocaded fops conduct intercourse of several sorts with sozzled and unbuttoned beauties. 'Oink!' They turn as one to acknowledge their heralding master of ceremonies… 'Bacon?' 'What …?' From the folds of his coat Septimus produces the longest, reddest, greasiest piece of bacon that Lemprière has ever seen. It has to be a yard in length. Is this the first of tonight's ceremonies? A pig the size of a horse died for this monster but Septimus doesn't actually expect anyone to eat it, does he? (Norfolk,1991: 134).

Shocked by what he sees, John finds himself in an environment full of pork. It is through these words that Norfolk gives John's perception of the club:

> His nose scans the olfactory scene until, there, he lights on the fireplace from which delicious porky fumes are lacing the air with memories of bacon-for-breakfast and sausage-for-supper, sizzling chops and glistening gammon steaks. Yum. Suspended over the fire, trotters touching one side of the chimney, snout grazing the other, a pig of obese proportions oozes fat into the flames below. This pig obviously holds some numinous significance for the assembly. The revellers nearest it are tending towards the racy-conversation-and-pipe smoking side of indecency leaving the far side of the room to the more gymnastically inclined while the crone giving it an occasional prod with her stick is treated with the greatest respect; nods and gentlemanly 'good evenings are coming her way thick and fast (Norfolk, 1991: 137).

The first introduction of the club keeps various metaphoric meanings in it. First of all, Norfolk illustrates a place where people from different social classes come together which reflects the true spirit of carnival. More so, this place is filled with acts of excessive drinking, eating, dancing, and all kinds of behaviours. Within the club setting, individuals of elevated social status are subjected to debasement, while individuals of lower social standing are promoted. The choice of pork as a central element in the club is also symbolic. Similar to how the Anthesteria festival employed wine to surpass the limits of awareness and encourage social interaction, pork is utilized here for a comparable objective. The Pork Club, in the novel, serves as a satirical depiction of the corrupting influence of money and power, shedding light on the extreme behaviour of the upper class. The depiction of excessive drinking, chaotic behaviour, and animalistic activities by the club emphasizes moral decline or depravity, revealing the hedonistic tendencies of

the privileged. The abundance of pork in the club's activities is a symbol of gluttony and excessive consumption.

Furthermore, pork is considered prohibited and forbidden in some religions and cultures, and in this context, club members defy social constraints and challenge societal conventions by consuming pork, implying that their unrestrained indulgence dismantles conventional boundaries. Beatifying pork debases tabooed concepts of religion and God from their higher and spiritual position by turning the act of worshipping into the image of laughter. As the story progresses, it becomes evident that the carnivalesque environment functions as a re-enactment of the historic Anestheria festival. As the story progresses, it becomes evident that the carnivalesque environment functions as a re-enactment of the historic Anestheria festival. As a result, the act of promoting pork to a holy position deliberately debases the significance of the god Dionysus and subverts established religious symbolism and cultural norms.

In carnival, not only all established realities and beliefs are turned upside down, but also all hierarchic distinctions and limitations between people and social norms are debased and destroyed. Thus, carnival turns out to be "the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal" (Bakhtin, 1984:10). Established reality and all hierarchic debasements continue when the old woman's husband is presented as King Archon. The title of Archon is accepted as the highest monarchic rank in ancient Rome. However, Pork Club's King Archon is "Sitting in a chair by the side of the fire at the foot of the stairs which run at diagonal up the far wall is King Archon. His once-majestic face falls in unmuscled folds, expressionless, his lips twitch and drool and the drool smears a trail down his shirt" (Norfolk,1991:148). This portrayal serves to further undermine the concepts of power, authority, and dignity that were conventionally linked with the title of King Archon. By doing this Norfolk creates a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (Bakhtin, 1984: 10) and he emphasizes "the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, 1984: 10).

Norfolk further branches his carnival with the game of cups. The Game of Cups is a reinterpretation of the events that occurred during a three-day period of Anestheria.

Similar to other carnivals, this particular carnival also has its own set of rules and rituals. The Game of Cups is announced by Septimus:

> 'And so, we have a game' '… it may not be the most athletic of games, it may not be for the scholars or even the *hoi polloi*, but it has two great qualities. First, it involves jeroboams, nay salmanazars of drink,' the Pork Club rumbles its collective appreciation, he's gingering them up, 'and second, it is at least *our* game.' Dying fall, aah…. Sentimental glances are exchanged, the strong and the dissolute gaze down at their feet. Tears might be welling in their eyes (Norfolk,1991: 145).

This is actually one of the comic scenes because the members get very emotional and even some of them cry after this announcement. Then people divide into pairs to play this game. The game consists of three parts. In the first part called Pythoigia, one of the partners drinks twenty-six different cocktails, and "the player by the beans picks one out and spits it in a controlled parabola into the empty cup which the drinker holds up while reaching for the next" (Norfolk,1991:146). In the second part, called Choes, one of the partners try to persuade "King Archon to marry the Crone, the other the same in reverse" (Norfolk,1991:147). In the last part of the game called Chytroi, players "improvise a dramatic entertainment along broadly tragic lines; the only hard and fast rule is that it must end with the death of King Archon" (Norfolk,1991:148). When it comes to Septimus and John, they achieve significant success in the first part. In the second part, Norfolk once again introduces a mythological intrusion. As John sits before King Archon, hoping to persuade him, he observes a captivating scene develop right before his eyes. The old woman starts to transform dramatically, gradually becoming the alluring figure of Circe. Parallel to this change, the members of the Pork Club also go through a horrifying metamorphosis, taking on the appearance of pigs.

> He continues with a conceit on the curve of her cheek, something about the sway of long violin notes as they ripple the air (a little florid? ponders the Pork Club) and looks over again. No, this cannot be right. Right before his eyes there is, faint but unmistakable, a definite modification of the crone going on. To be exact, there is a change in the shape of her cheek, no room for doubt. What is worse, or better, the shape has a visibly violinish quality about it... Observe her fulsome, red lips.' He is fired to this. 'The bloom of her dimples, the

> pools of her eyes.' That should do it and, yes it seems it does. All these things are actually beginning to happen (147-148).
> ...
> Most, if not all, of the spectating revelers are showing signs of piggish metamorphosis, noses thickening and flattening, bellies extending taut, rounded contours. Oinking and snuffles are general and not a few seem to be eating the table-cloths (148).

This scene has intertextual importance since it makes references to the famous epic Odyssey. Norfolk again presents a subverted version of the epic. Circe is originally a beautiful enchantress, and in Azra Erhat's words, she symbolizes "the concept of femininity, fertility, and fertility by subjugating the man, bewitching him, and turning him into any animal" (Erhat, 1972:178). However, in the novel, Circe is represented as old and ugly, and besides, she has power only during the carnival. More so, John has not the same cunning and wit as Odysseus, but he is on a kind of journey like Odysseus: the journey of detection. Septimus provides holy aid to John, just as the gods helped Odysseus. Through this subversion, Norfolk demonstrates the liberating and transformative qualities of the carnival, in which individuals can abandon their conventional identities and indulge their primal desires and inclinations.

In the third part of the game Septimus and John improvise two different mythological stories. John interprets Septimus' movements during the pantomime as a portrayal of the Gorgon Medusa rather than the Minotaur and plays the part of Perseus instead of Theseus, which annoys Septimus, who then clarifies the intended roles and actions. Septimus informs John, "We were doing Theseus. The finger-waggling was the Minotaur, and you were meant to be abandoning Ariadne, not marrying Andromeda. The last bit was your return to Athens in the black-sailed ship..." (Norfolk,1991:150). There may be multiple interpretations regarding John's preference for Perseus over Theseus.

To begin with, it is worth noting that Theseus bears responsibility for the death of his father. As a result, John may wish to avoid any association with the culpability surrounding his own father's death. Furthermore, the legend of Perseus serves to underscore the inherent dangers associated with observation and being observed, a theme that resonates with Lemprière's prior encounters. In the Actaeon scene, Lemprière is depicted as a "hidden, but permitted, onlooker" (Norfolk,1991:54) while he is seen by

Erichtonious and Vertumnus. These mythological stories highlight the dangers of witnessing, which are paralleled in several parts of the novel. Actaeon and Charles Lemprière both suffer consequences for observing something that is prohibited. On the other hand, Perseus is portrayed as a favourable role model, similar to Odysseus, due to his effective evasion of Medusa's petrifying gaze. Perseus successfully achieved victory by employing shrewd tactics, utilizing the reflective surface of his shield to indirectly confront the Gorgon. Likewise, Lemprière utilizes a figurative manifestation of visual impairment by extinguishing the candles as a means of navigating his exit from the tunnel.

Norfolk concludes his myth series in the novel with the Orestes myth. In the final part of the novel, the Cabbala leads John to the underground tunnel where they inhabit. Here, John meets all the members of the Cabbala. The leader of the Cabbala tells the story of the company's origin, the siege of La Rochelle, and the city's destruction. To Lemprière's surprise, the leader reveals himself to be François, Lemprière's own ancestor. Surprisingly, the leader reveals himself to be François, Lemprière's own ancestor. Francois and the other members of the Cabbala have also undergone some sort of mechanical modification and have sustained their lives for almost two centuries. Francois gives Lemprière an ultimatum while holding up Lemprière's dictionary: join the Cabbala as the ninth member or be charged with two murders based on the dictionary's evidence. François said:

> 'Join me, John. That is your choice. Become as I am.' 'Or hang.' 'The candles, John.' A slight movement of the head indicated the lamp in which they burned. 'Eight for the eight of us here and one unlit.' Lemprière saw Casterleigh glance away from him and make a tiny signal across the table to Jacques or Le Mara. 'The ninth is for you, John. Light it' (Norfolk, 1991: 540).

In numerous religious, spiritual, and mystical traditions, the number nine represents divine completion, perfection, oneness, equilibrium, and harmony. It symbolizes the attainment of a higher spiritual state, the ultimate realization, and oneness with the divine. Francois believes that by including a member of his own lineage, he will attain a state of divinity and wholeness. He guarantees John both spiritual strength and knowledge. John is reluctant and unsure about what to do, though. In the meantime, there are divisions within the group that lead to a brutal fight between Jacques and Boffe and

Le Mara and Vaucanson, who are on Casterleigh's side. Even though Francois is angry, he is too weak to do anything. At a very important time, Juliette tells Lemprière to blow out the candles. Lemprière blows out the candles when he gets her message and runs away with Juliette as Casterleigh and Le Mara chase after them. During the run, Le Mara is caught by the assassin Nazim, who was looking in the underground tunnel for where the Cabbala meets. The tunnels begin to flood, leading three ships carrying gunpowder-making supplies, Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaera, to be drawn in. The Sprite of La Rochelle goes into the underground room, sets the gunpowder on fire, and kills Francois. Casterleigh drowns when he gets stuck under a grate while trying to catch John and Juliette. Prior to his death, he discloses to Juliette that Charles Lemprière is her biological father, causing her to feel shocked and disoriented as she walks away. John searches for Juliette but fails to find her. Juliette arrives the next day as John leaves for home. Septimus informed her that Jacques is her father, not Charles, and the two lovers sailed. Septimus finally reveals that he is the Sprite of Rochelle, François' seventh child, sent by his mother to avenge the killings at La Rochelle. Upon the demise of François, Septimus is able to unite with the anguished spirits of La Rochelle in the afterlife, thereby fulfilling his intended role of guiding the Lemprière generations in their pursuit against the Company. The novel ends with the chorus of avenging ghosts and their curse on Cabbala.

Norfolk ends his maze-like novel with the revelation of events. The vengeance plot he chose as the framing storyline for his work reaches its conclusion in the myth of Orestes. Similar to Orestes putting an end to the curse of the House of Atreus, John, and Septimus likewise put an end to the curse of the Lemprière family. The three Erinyes finally bring an end to the Cabbala, much like in the story of Orestes. In the novel, the Erinyes manifest in the form of ships, and as mentioned before, their names are derived from the mythological goddesses of vengeance, the Erinyes: Alecto (unceasing in anger), Tisiphone (avenger of murder), and Megaera (jealous) (Erhat, 1972:104). The duty of Erinyes is to haunt the murderers, especially the ones who kill their father or mother, and endlessly chase criminals, they drive them crazy. In the novel, Erinyes causes the deaths of Cabbala members, and they help Septimus to take his revenge.

In conclusion, Lawrence Norfolk with his novel Lemprière's Dictionary presents a successful instance of MDF and fabulation. Scholes, as stated in the theory chapter, defines fabulation as an umbrella term that includes romance, allegory, metafiction,

comedy, grotesquerie, and history. In other words, Scholes's definition of fabulation groups the various aspects of postmodern fiction that are impossible to be understood through traditional literary techniques. Scholes further states that works of fabulation use nearly all literary devices and techniques which veer from fable, fairy tale, and myth to history. Norfolk, just like Scholes said, makes use of all literary genres and techniques, such as mythology, historiography, science fiction, fantasy, and detective fiction. He further develops his novel by violating all the mentioned genres and their techniques. Archetypes, historical references, and philosophical and existential questionings appear as prominent features of fabulation in Norfolk's novel. In the novel, he creates a metaphysical world that is "predicated on the unpredictability of evil in a world where the rules are obscure and failure is fatal" (Ewert, 1999:192) and by doing this, he defies the conventional perception of reality, order, and epistemology. In the novel, the author emphasizes the subjective nature of reality and reveals the distinction between appearance and reality. It blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction and shows the deceiving production of multiple and diverse realities, highlighting the intractability and fragility of reality. Additionally, it brings together the familiar and the unfamiliar spaces and thus creates alternative and grotesque realities where all rules, hierarchal order, and social norms are travestied. Moreover, Norfolk highlights the chaos contrary to order. Furthermore, the materialist and capitalist worldviews, the history of the world, and the exploitation and enrichment of Europe are emphasized in the novel, specifically through its portrayal of the East, such as India. As a result, Norfolk creates a multi-layered, excessively complex, and open-ended work that is open to multiple interpretations.

3.2. Spinning a Text: *Lemprière's Dictionary*

Lawrence Norfolk, as one of the notable authors of postmodern English literature, has distinguished himself as a consummate storyteller, wielding language with exquisite skill and conjuring worlds that blur the boundaries between history and fiction and real and fantasy. Among his remarkable literary achievements, *Lemprière's Dictionary* stands as a testament to Norfolk's narrative prowess, which takes its readers on an exploration of the intricacies of the human mind through a detailed mythological and historical story and linguistic enchantment. Norfolk's unique writing style makes him stand out as a

contemporary fabulator. Lawrence Norfolk, like Robert Irwin, pushes the boundaries of the prevailing reality. He entraps his readers in the novel by constructing Daedalus' labyrinth at the textual level and expanding it with mythological stories, historical realities, hallucinations, and conspiracy plots. Norfolk's novel overlaps with fabulation and MDF both thematically and structurally. Therefore, in this chapter, the analysis of *Lemprière's Dictionary* will be expanded by concentrating on the narration, the narrator, and the text itself.

Lemprière's Dictionary as an instance of MDF and fabulation subvert, deconstruct and defamiliarize the conventional novelistic techniques. The novel not only parodies and subverts the classical detective fiction, but also "offers a grotesque parody… whereby episodes from classical mythology are re-enacted in horrific and violent ways as part of a plot to drive the protagonist mad-re-enactment as damnation rather than redemption" (Walker,2006:324). Norfolk's enigmatic structural construction is defined by Alfred Corn as a "Gothic-historical-fantasy-tragedy" (Corn, 1992:6). The reason why the novel is defined in this way is that Norfolk offers a new perspective in his novel by taking certain features from all the above-mentioned genres.

Notably, revenge serves as the overarching theme shaping the novel's frame story, with the British version displaying the features of English revenge tragedies. The novel is composed of five parts, as is typical of revenge tragedies, and features ghosts as the supernatural embodiments of revenge. Besides, Septimus, the spirit who seeks retribution, is motivated by a desire for vengeance against a brutal enemy. The novel also includes metaphysical events and explores themes of madness similar to those found in revenge tragedies. Additionally, the novel features episodes of brutal violence that lead to bloody conclusions, using sublime and melodramatic language to heighten the effect, just as in revenge tragedies. The novel further incorporates science fiction elements by presenting Cabbala members as golden-plated robots. Additionally, the novel re-examines various mythological, epic, and historical events. In the novel, Norfolk writes new biographies of real historical characters and subverts the history by providing false details. For example, John Lemprière, Charles Lemprière, Sir John Fielding, and Jacques de Vaucanson are actual historical figures who lived at the exact time stated in the novel. John Lemprière[36]

[36] In one of his interviews Norfolk explains his main motivation to write the novel on John Lemprière in these words: "I picked up a copy in a second-hand bookstore in my first week of college because I needed

really wrote a dictionary, and Charles Lemprière is his father. Sir John Fielding also administrated Bow Street Runners, which was accepted as the first institution of the police force. Jacques de Vaucanson is also a historical character famous for inventing the first automata. These personalities, however, are portrayed throughout the novel in various contexts inside a parallel universe. Norfolk states his intention in one of his interviews in these words: "However, in a novel in which the French Revolution is financed by a group of golden-plated, malfunctioning robots who are carted over on a decommissioned pirate ship, it's obvious that I'm not really trying to "get at" the real John Lemprière" (Walker,2006:331). Furthermore, Norfolk presents a fictionalized account that diverges from historical accuracy regarding the siege of La Rochelle, the founding of the East India Company, and the compiling of Lemprière's dictionary. Furthermore, the novel incorporates several supernatural elements, including a five-month-old baby flying out of a burning citadel and circling the world multiple times before ascending to heaven as well as characters replacing their ageing organs with golden-plated mechanical parts and living for two hundred years. Using historical metafiction, metaphysical, and intertextual elements, Norfolk both questions the reliability of knowledge and underlines the impossibility of reaching exact reality.

Moreover, as previously mentioned in the dissertation, the primary objective of fabulation is to defy and undermine established literary conventions, thereby presenting novel interpretations to postmodern readers. To achieve this end, fabulators often employ various literary devices such as metafiction, allegory, black humour, parody, satire, the grotesque, and comedy. By imitating the writing styles of established literary genres and distorting the narrative elements of traditional detective fiction, Lawrence Norfolk exemplifies this aspect of fabulation. In the novel, Norfolk destroys the hermeneutic code of classical detective fiction by defying the ratiocinative process from the very beginning to the end of the novel. More so, he presents an incompetent and naïve detective who fails to interpret the clues and thereby subverts the traditional cunning detective character.

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a classical dictionary, and it was the cheapest one on offer. I realized quickly why it was the cheapest one, because as a technical work, it was more or less useless, but as a work of the imagination, it was extraordinary. And I became interested in not only the dictionary but also the story behind it. To put it briefly, Lemprière grew up in rural circumstances, wrote his dictionary, served as a schoolmaster for a time, and died of a heart attack. That was it. Now, the gap there is that there's no story. You can't write about it because there is nothing to say. So, what I wanted to do in my book was give him the sort of life that he should have had if he had been as interesting as his dictionary, which he was not." (Walker, 2006: 322, 323)

Additionally, due to his naivety and incompetence, the detective becomes easily manipulated by the Cabbala and Septimus. It is not John who finds the Cabbala or their tunnels, but rather the Cabbala takes him there. Thus, unlike traditional detective stories, the culprits serve the solution to the detective. Moreover, the detective not only fails to solve the mystery and crime but also cannot manage to provide punishment for the culprits. The punishment comes by chance when three ships sink and cause the Cabbala's end.

Normally, in traditional detective fiction's clues and every detail contribute to solution of mystery, but in the novel, this is not the case. Norfolk pays obsessive attention to details that could easily be omitted from the narrative, such as the flora and fauna of rainforests, Church law, transport issues involving large animals, monastic organizations, etc. These unnecessary details create confusion and exhaustion for both readers and the detective and thus "letters, words, and documents no longer reliably denote the objects that they are meant to represent; instead, these texts become impenetrable objects in their own right" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 09). By doing this Norfolk destroys the epistemological certainty which is very important for the classical detective fiction. In classical detective fiction, cases are closed, but in the novel, Norfolk does not reveal all mysteries. For instance, it is not revealed why the Cabbala selected John, why they assisted John in reaching them while obstructing the whole Lemprière family, or how the Cabbala members were able to survive for two centuries.

Another feature of fabulation is the use of deviations or diversions from the storyline and structure of classic realistic literature. The shapes that a fabulator's narrative can take are only limited by her/his own imagination. A narrative can serve as a framework for additional narratives, allowing for analysis and interpretation of the elements it encompasses. The overarching theme of the narrative is derived from the interconnection between these individual stories. *Lemprière's Dictionary* distinguishes itself with its highly intricate and detailed narrative. The plot of the novel includes extremely complex and numerous events. Norfolk, in the novel, creates various parallel structures that span two hundred years and in different countries. Mythology and history appear as the prevailing motifs in the novel. The novel's extremely intricate and enigmatic plot professionally illustrates how the protagonist's knowledge of classical mythology and extreme imagination transform history, mythology, and reality into a metaphysical

detective story. John's dictionary of mythology profoundly affects the main plot of the novel. The main plot is also fed by the themes of revenge. Each character in the novel highlights her/his own story and thus the novel reaches its Chinese-box structure. There are six main plots in the novel. These are shown in the diagram below.

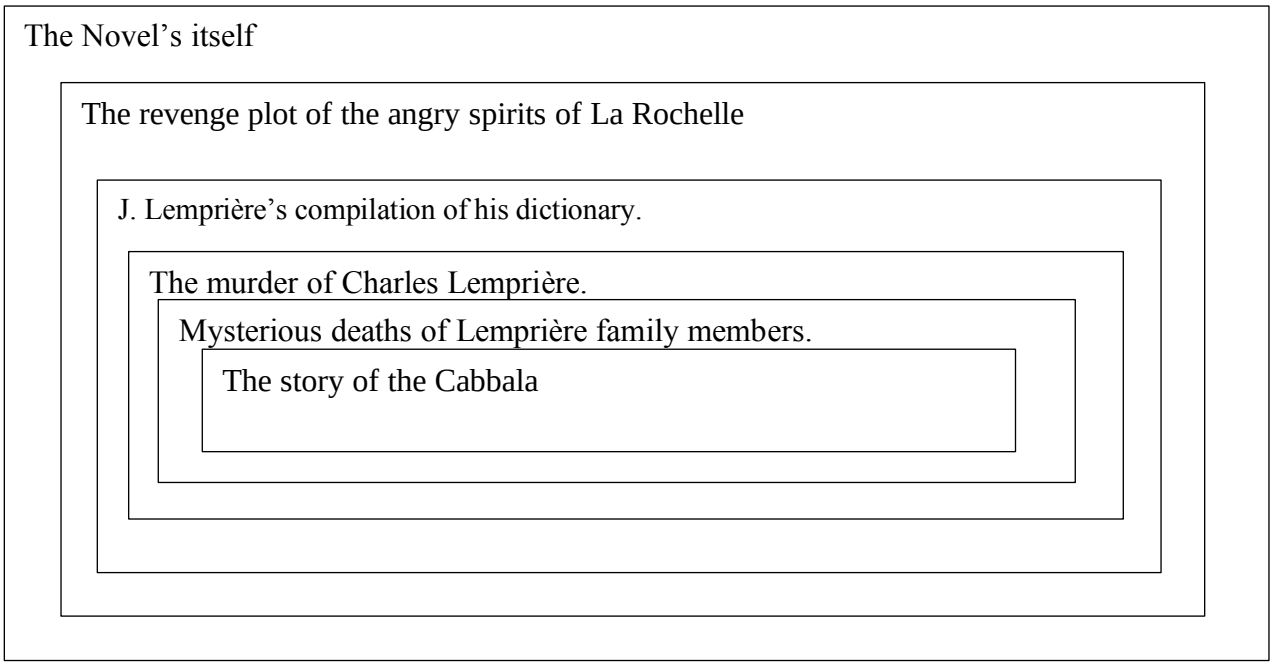

Figure 4 – Main stories of Lemprière's *Dictionary*[37]

The diagram portrays the six primary plots that are intricately interwoven throughout *Lemprière's Dictionary*, manifesting the complex network of narratives present in the work. Each of the abovementioned plots represents a unique narrative strand, replete with its own cast of characters, conflicts, and journeys. The novel's exceptional quality lies in the convergence and interaction of its plots, which create a Chinese-box structure that captivates readers with its intricate nature. Throughout the narrative, it becomes apparent that the concept of vengeance functions as a recurrent motif, guiding the behaviours and motivations of several characters. The novel gets further complicated with the detailed narration sub-plots. These are divided into four main branches such as the stories related to the Cabbala's foundation, actions, and their role in the occurrence of the historical events of the age, the stories of secondary characters, the conspiracy plots, and the mythological stories.

[37] Figure belongs to me.

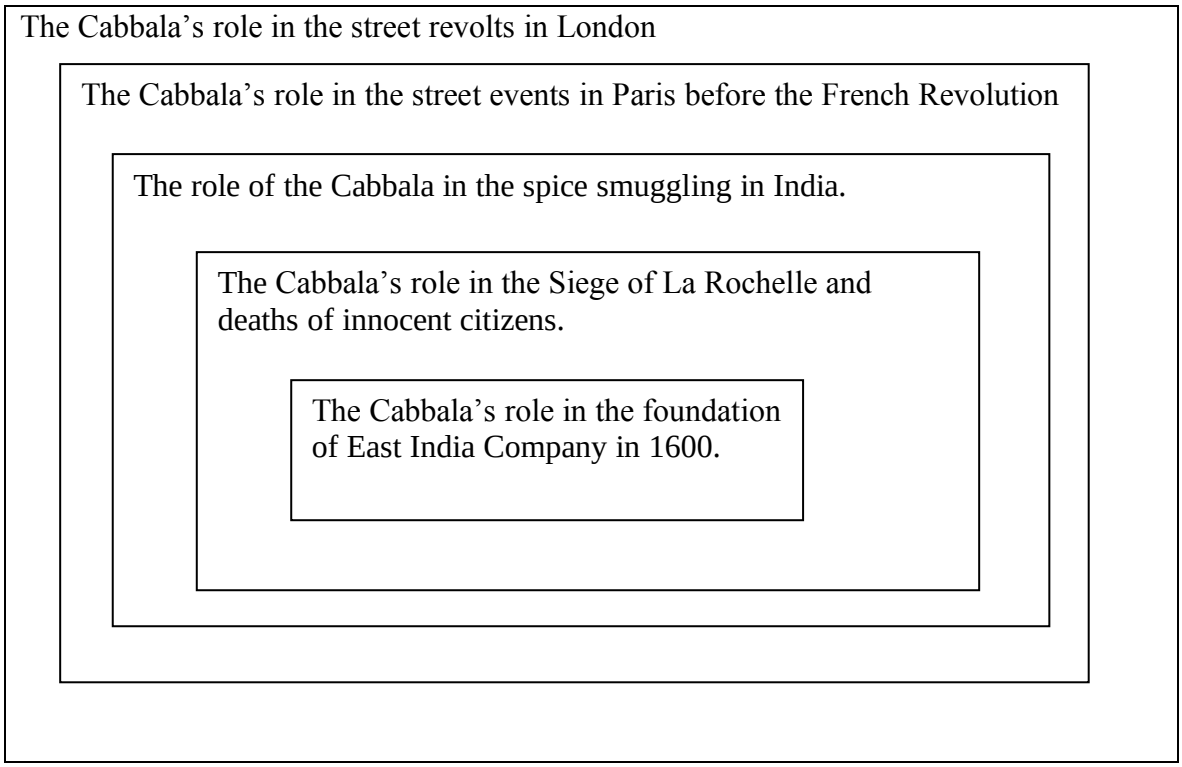

Figure 5 The Cabbala's role in the manipulation of historical events [38]

The complicated story of *Lemprière's Dictionary* goes even deeper into complexity as it reveals the vital role that the Cabbala played in historical events spanning two hundred years. Norfolk cleverly shows how the Cabbala was involved in the social and political life of England and France, using their power to start and shape street revolts and even change who was in charge of countries. As the subplot goes on, the reader learns about the Cabbala's complicated web of ties and their secret plan, which are interwoven with the primary plot. The Cabbala's position adds another layer of intrigue and complexity to the novel, which helps to move the story ahead while also increasing the discussion of topics such as power, manipulation, and the consequences of seeking revenge.

The novel intricately interweaves numerous subplots, which are primarily centred on the lives of secondary characters. Norfolk immerses readers in a vast sea of stories,

[38] Figure belongs to me.

each one meticulously detailed and numerous in quantity. One may become disoriented within the narrative's labyrinthine depths due to the overwhelming number of subplots. The novel covers a wide range of different narratives, from George Peppard's and Sir John Fielding's stories to Juliette's personal journey. Charles Lemprière's misguided belief in fathering a child with a Parisian prostitute, Nawab, Bahadur, and Nazim's distinct stories, the enthralling account of the Turkish-Australian war, and the gripping tale of pirates all contribute to the intricate narrative structure of the novel. Moreover, the love stories between George Pepard and Widow Neagle, as well as Juliette and John, provide a romantic dimension to the novel. Through skilful alignment and interweaving of these multiple plots, Norfolk elevates the novel's complexity, offering a successful instance of fabulation.

The complexity of the novel is heightened by the inclusion of conspiracy plots. The Cabbala plans a conspiracy against the Catholic French King, which leads to the Siege of La Rochelle. Subsequently, the Cabbala exploits the sources of India and manipulates the Nawab, and in return, Nawab sends assassins to kill the members of the Cabbala. Moreover, approximately two centuries after the siege of La Rochelle, the Cabbala initiates a further plot in collaboration with the French Cardinal to initiate the French Revolution. The other conspiracy is brought forth when John is persuaded to write a dictionary and mythology-themed murders are realized. When Captain Neagle learns the true purpose of the Cabbala's trade, he devises a new conspiracy and blackmails them in order to earn more money, but in the process, he ends up getting himself murdered. Captain Neagle's wife turns to George Peppard, her ex-lover, to uncover the mystery surrounding her husband's death, but the Cabbala creates new conspiracies to disgrace George, and George is finally murdered by the Cabbala.

Norfolk further branches his narrative with the inclusion of myths from ancient Greece and Rome. The novel introduces a range of mythical figures such as Erichtonious, Vertumnus, Acteon, Diana, Danae, Iphigenia, Odysseus, Circe, Theseus, Perseus, and Orestes. Thus, Norfolk constructs a novel that is exceedingly eclectic, intricate, and seemingly unsolvable. Norfolk by constructing a textual labyrinth, keeping the ambiguity and suspense till the end, and deferring the denouement provides the reader with an experience that challenges their perception of reality. The author adeptly combines

elements of distortion, deception, and concealed identities, captivating readers' mind as they strive to unravel the intricate puzzle that lies within this extraordinary universe.

According to Scholes, "fabulation" indicates "a return to a more verbal kind of fiction." In other words, fabulation represents a "less realistic and more artistic kind of narrative: more shapely, more evocative; more concerned with ideas and ideals, less concerned with things" (Scholes,1979:7). The concept of fabulation involves the examination of the apparent world, with a focus on the imaginative construction and portrayal of it by the artist. This approach encourages readers to extract implications from the fictional work and actively engage with the fundamental concepts and values that lie behind it. The fabulator achieves this goal of fabulation through the construction of intricate and multi-layered narratives, as mentioned above, and also through the usage of symbolic indirect, and allegorical language. Scholes believes in the fact that the language used in the works of fabulation should be different from the colloquial and familiar language of realism in order to disorient the reader from the environment it represents, revealing the intricacy of the human mind and changing world dynamics. In the novel, Norfolk exhibits his mastery of language by utilizing an elaborate and descriptive style that incorporates metaphors and symbolism to create a multi-layered narrative. This style immerses the reader in a world where reality and illusion are intertwined, and where profound philosophical inquiries are examined.

According to Scholes, the achievement of artistic delight holds significant value in the realm of fabulation, as it serves as a primary distinguishing characteristic that sets the art of the fabulator apart from that of the novelist and satirist. Scholes claims that "Of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy" (Scholes, 1979: 3) because the fabulator adeptly fulfills the dual roles of novelist and satirist, skilfully blending a variety of literary forms and devices to create a novel construction that is both intellectually stimulating and aesthetically pleasing to the reader. Norfolk successfully achieves this characteristic by skilfully blending different literary genres and employing elements of satire and black humour to provide social and political criticism.

Norfolk's satirical style is best illustrated in the Pork Club scene where Norfolk uses carnivalistic imagery to expose the malevolent inclinations of the elite class, highlighting their cruelty, greed, and violence that perpetuate global wealth inequality. In

this part of the novel, Norfolk destroys the wall between the visible and invisible through suspending all hierarchal privileges and social norms. The inclusion of the carnival scene holds significance as it encourages readers to transcend the physical realm and gain a holistic perspective on reality. This particular scene not only serves as a reflection of the concealed personalities of individuals who may present themselves as formal, polite, or powerful on the surface but also provides a critical analysis of the extravagances of the upper class and the social and political ideologies of the era.

The depicted ambivalence is not solely confined to the carnival scene. Norfolk presents a duality of life through the depiction of physical settings and character portrayals in his novel. The existence of hidden tunnels beneath the cities serves as the physical duality. Furthermore, the portrayal of the Cabbala and Septimus as both alive and dead, human and machine, and human and angel destroys the line between real and surreal. Norfolk further stresses the duality by bringing ancient myths to the 1700s England and presenting three different time spans together. By employing these techniques, Norfolk consistently maintains ambiguity and suspense in his novel. He challenges the established conceptions of reality by depicting the inherent chaos of life. Norfolk expertly interweaves several unique storylines while also examining the links between them, demonstrating his capacity to arouse artistic delight. This demonstrates his skill as a gifted and accomplished fabulator capable of weaving a complex and interwoven narrative.

In conclusion, Lawrence Norfolk constructs an alternative reality via his novel. In this novel he lets his character construct another alternative reality through his dictionary. Framing his work with elements from different literary genres, Norfolk also complicates his narration and introduces conflicting realities, both of which help to counteract a solipsistic view of the world. Additionally, illustrating his characters' mental instabilities questions the nature of truth, reality, and existence. Moreover, he questions the reliability of knowledge and deconstructs a monologic worldview. At the end of the novel, readers, just like the awkward detective in the novel, lose track of events. For this reason, neither the readers nor the detective can solve the events. Thus, Norfolk presents a great instance of MDF and fabulation.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation, using Robert Scholes' theory of fabulation as a base, is intended to expand a critical discussion on how fabulation and MDF have been combined in a literary work and how the combination of these two literary approaches has been manifested within Robert Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare (1983)* and Lawrence Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary (1991).* More specifically, this dissertation discussed how writers employ the literary devices of fabulation and MDF side by side in order to explore and articulate the metaphysics of reality, identity, and text. Furthermore, while focusing on fabulation and MDF, this study also attempted to shed light on whether it is possible to assert the existence of absolute truth, order, and objective reality or if these concepts are merely illusory constructs fostered by centripetal forces. Based on the theoretical background, the analysis of the novels revealed that Irwin and Norfolk, by making use of literary devices of fabulation and MDF in their novels, subvert and deconstruct the traditional beliefs about objective reality, absolute truth, and order and thereby show that reality is made up of a variety of structures, emotions, and formations that exist far beyond the visible. Furthermore, the authors, provide a fresh and inspiring viewpoint for postmodern people searching for an alternative to the abrasive harshness of life by presenting the physical and metaphysical realms side by side. Irwin and Norfolk also delve into the profound depths of the human psyche and explore the essence of existence and being in their relentless pursuit of truth, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, ultimately challenging readers to question their own perceptions and contemplate the intricate interplay of reality, identity, and text in a world governed by subjective interpretations. Additionally, Irwin and Norfolk deliberately dethrone and deconstruct traditional literary genres, resulting in highly intricate and innovative narrative styles that offer readers a unique and delightful artistic experience. As such, these authors distinguish themselves as postmodern fabulators, prioritising the pursuit of artistic pleasure and joy while emphasising their exceptional artistic abilities.

As stated in the theoretical chapter of this dissertation, fabulation and MDF rose to prominence in literature during the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Fabulation and MDF are literary tendencies that explore themes such as shattered beliefs, the limits of reality, ontological anxieties, and the human desire for

a sense of mystery and magic in a barren and depressing world. They share a theme that challenges the notion of achieving a comprehensive understanding of reality in the postmodern context, taking into consideration knowledge from disciplines such as psychoanalysis, physics, philosophy, and technology.

Fabulation was defined and extended by Robert Scholes and put forward as an autonomous literary theory in his work *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979). Scholes argued that realism had lost its relevance and was being employed in a superficial and uninspiring manner and proposed a new literary movement that "had much to teach us and many satisfactions to give us" (Scholes, 1979: 01). According to Scholes, fabulation moves away from the "direct representation of the surface of reality" and returns "toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (Scholes, 1979: 03). Fabulation's inclination to avoid the direct and meticulous portrayal of reality found in realism arises from its desire to transcend tangible and visible explanations of reality (Scholes, 1979: 4). As clarified by Scholes, fabulation does not suggest a complete detachment from reality; instead, it involves an endeavour to reveal the intricate ties between reality within fiction and fiction within reality. In fabulation, the acknowledgement of and emphasis on fallibility and the inability to fully grasp absolute truth and objective reality persist. Nonetheless, fabulation determinedly directs its gaze towards reality, motivated to convey truths that fiction can legitimately express through suitably fictional means (Scholes,1979: 04).

Similar to fabulation, MDF questions the nature of reality and knowledge to reveal the underlying essence of reality that exists beyond surface-level appearances. According to John Cawelti and Caroline Tisdall, MDF, borrowing the peculiar conceits of seventeenth-century Metaphysical English Poets and the eerie images of twentieth-century Italian Painters, employs "fabulous symbols, elaborate ironies, incongruous juxtapositions, and self-reflexive pastiche" (Cawelti, 1980:196; Tisdall, 1971: 07–09) to signify that reality is eventually incomprehensible and indefinable (Ibid). Instead of focusing on crime or mystery solving, MDF remains committed to exploring metaphysical, existential, and epistemological questions that challenge conventional notions of reality and knowledge. By blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, MDF prompts readers to contemplate the intricate connections between the two and seek a deeper understanding of the complexities of existence. Sharing a common perception

of the world, the works of MDF frequently employ the literary devices of fabulation. Irwin and Norfolk's novels, as instances of MDF and fabulation, challenge the conventional perception of reality by juxtaposing the physical and metaphysical worlds together, incorporating the appearance of real people and places in fictional universes, creating alternative histories, and exploring the intrusion of hallucinations, dreams, and paranoias on the outer world. Additionally, multidimensional and maze-like spaces, non-linear time sequences, intertextuality, parody, grotesque, self-reflexive texts, Chinese-box structure, open, multiple, or circular endings, and authorial intrusion all contribute to a thought-provoking exploration of reality while simultaneously challenging conventional narrative structures.

Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk, in the novels, explore the notion of reality in physical, psychological, and textual aspects. Through their works, the authors endeavour to convey the idea that the universe cannot be portrayed by a rigid reality notion that is exclusively dependent on outward appearances. Instead, they explore the notion that reality is malleable, taking shape according to individual perception and acquiring subjective meanings. In the novels, reality completely transforms into something surreal and uncanny. Through their works, they not only emphasised the idea that the notion of order, which is reflected in traditional literary genres, has lost its validity but also underlined the ambivalent nature of the human psyche.

From the very beginning of the novels, the authors demonstrate a unique perspective on the concept of reality, presenting a distinct departure from traditional writers. These two authors competently spin the web of their stories by resorting to various literary genres and tendencies and employing literary techniques that defy conventional narration. In *The Arabian Nightmare*, Robert Irwin employs Orientalist themes, myths, and the storytelling tradition of the Orient, resulting in a novel that conveys an air of exoticism and mystery. In contrast, Lawrence Norfolk takes a distinct approach, delving into Western myths, epic tales, and historical narratives. While Irwin leaves his character suspended between the conscious and unconscious states, dividing his perception of reality between day and night, Norfolk, on the other hand, places his protagonist, John, in a realm that spans the conscious and subconscious, establishing a dichotomy between his external and inner worlds. Irwin's portrayal of Balian's dreams, hallucinations, and intertwining of real-life events with the tales woven by the fabulator,

Yoll, in *The Arabian Nightmare* blurs the boundaries of experience and imagination. As the narrative progresses, readers are confronted with the ambiguity of whether the events are genuine experiences of the characters or mere inventions of their imagination.

On the other hand, in *Lemprière's Dictionary*, John's web of dreams and fantasies is revealed through references to mythical stories, and this revelation frequently puts reality in an unattainable position. Moreover, Norfolk employs historical metafiction and surreal elements, crafting new biographies for real historical figures such as John *Lemprière's*, Charles Lemprière, and Sir John Fielding, who lived during the same period as depicted in the novel. While these characters have historical roots, the events that unfold within the narrative are entirely fictional. Through this narrative style, Norfolk questions the reliability of knowledge and emphasises the impossibility of attaining a definitive reality. In a nutshell, through their use of historical metafiction, mythical allusions, and surreal elements, both authors not only question the reliability and objectivity of knowledge but also emphasise the inherent limitations and impossibility of attaining an exact and definitive reality. Their narratives invite readers to critically engage with the nature of perception, interpretation, and the subjective construction of truth.

Furthermore, the authors are not content to focus on a single moment in time or a single geographical location; they flit between multiple settings, even presenting them concurrently. In doing so, the authors adeptly intertwine the realms of the physical and the metaphysical within their novels. In *The Arabian Nightmare*, for instance, readers are presented with a world where the normal and the dream world—Alam, Al, and Mithal—harmoniously coexist. Characters from both realms interact and engage in a myriad of activities, participating in lively conversations and enjoyable interactions. Metaphysical entities such as Shikk-Al-Insaan, the soothsayer; Fatima the Deathly; riddle-asking apes; the fifth Messiah; the Iblis; the imaginary storyteller Yoll; and illusionists seamlessly blend with the other characters in the physical realm of the novel. The Father of Cats, for instance, operates within the metaphysical realm known as Alam-Al-Mithal, while Fatima the Deathly, a creation of Zuleyka's thoughts, collaborates with the Leper Knights of Lazarus in their quest to locate the fifth Messiah. Additionally, the character Vane engages in a romantic relationship with the metaphysical character Fatima. Irwin's masterful manipulation of reality not only challenges conventional perceptions but also

transports readers to a realm where the boundaries between the physical and metaphysical are blurred.

In a manner akin to Robert Irwin, Lawrence Norfolk disrupts the perception of traditional reality from the very beginning of his novel, *Lemprière's Dictionary*. Within the narrative, mythological gods and characters, including Erichtonious, Vertumnus, Diana, Acteon, Danae, Iphigenia, Circe, Telemachus, and Perseus, along with metaphysical entities such as vengeful ghosts and even half-robotic figures, seamlessly infiltrate the ordinary world, coexisting harmoniously with other characters in the physical realm portrayed within the novel. For instance, Septimus frequently ventures into the realm of the ordinary world to seek retribution for those who lost their lives in the Siege of La Rochelle, providing assistance to the members of the Lemprière family in their quest to overcome the wicked plans of the Cabbala. The members of the Cabbala, defying the limitations of a normal lifespan, have endured for two centuries, continuously replacing their failing organs with fragments of gold and perpetuating their existence alongside ordinary individuals. Additionally, mythological characters make abrupt appearances in the ordinary world, foreshadowing for upcoming events. In this way, both Irwin and Norfolk not only subvert traditional notions of reality but also transcend its boundaries, offering readers a fascinating narrative where metaphysical characters and events coexist and influence the narrative's structure.

The other notable aspect that challenges the traditional perception of reality in novels is the profound impact of characters' hallucinations, paranoias, and dreams on the external world. In *The Arabian Nightmare*, Balian's intense anxiety stemming from the revelation of his spy identity, coupled with his fears of contracting the mysterious illness known as the Arabian Nightmare, sends him spiralling into a prolonged state of vivid dreaming, hallucinations, and delusions. Balian expresses a high level of anxiety as he firmly believes that the Father of Cats and Vane are following him. However, as events unfold, it is revealed that these pursuits were imagined, and Balian had constructed a reality based on his perceptions. This intricate interplay between Balian's psyche and the external world not only traps him physically within the labyrinthine streets of Cairo but also entraps him within the labyrinth of his own psychology.

In Lawrence Norfolk's *Lemprière's Dictionary*, a similar exploration of the characters' relationship with reality unfolds. While Balian unintentionally loses his grasp on reality, driven by stress and the fear of his concealed identity being exposed, John deliberately rejects reality and creates an alternative world for himself. John's immersion in the metaphysical realm results from his visual impairment caused by myopia, which hinders his ability to perceive the external world accurately. His intense interest in classical mythology, compounded by his myopia, causes him to frequently see characters from the books he reads in the real world, a phenomenon that even wearing glasses cannot prevent. Within this alternate reality, John assumes dual roles as both culprit and victim in a series of murders. Throughout the novel, John is burdened by a sense of guilt and erroneously attributes the murders to his own imagination. However, as the narrative approaches its climax, it is revealed that the Cabbala exploits John's inclination towards fantasies and fascination with mythology in order to falsely accuse him and hinder his quest to unveil the secrets of the Cabbala. Thus, as the novels reach their conclusion, a pervasive theme emerges, highlighting the notion that reality encompasses multifaceted dimensions that are subjectively interpreted and shaped by individual experiences. Through their masterful storytelling, Irwin and Norfolk invite readers to question the boundaries of reality, blurring the line between what is tangible and what exists within the realm of imagination.

Irwin and Norfolk further challenge the traditional perception of reality by trapping their characters within the labyrinthine streets of cities, where the settings themselves possess ambivalent natures. These Cities become living entities, breathing with a sense of duality, blurring the boundaries between the real and the imagined. The characters navigate these enigmatic and multidimensional spaces, where the physical environment mirrors their internal struggles and existential dilemmas. The cities become manifestations of the characters' psyches, reflecting their fears, desires, and fragmented perceptions of reality. In this way, Irwin and Norfolk use the intricate cityscapes as a metaphorical landscape to explore the complex nature of human consciousness and the ever-elusive nature of truth.

Robert Irwin traps his protagonist in the maze-like streets of Cairo. Haunted by the hallucinations of metaphysical foes, Balian loses his way in the streets and desperately searches for a way out. Thereby, the ambiguous nature of Balian's psyche is mirrored in

the streets of Cairo, where the streets possess an ambivalent character, highlighting Balian's psychological impasse. Cairo itself, like Balian's psyche, exhibits a dual nature: one facet represents the daytime realm, characterised by formal institutions and conscious activities, while the other embodies the nocturnal realm, where the boundaries blur and hidden desires unfold under the veil of darkness. In this realm, concealed yearnings and unspoken truths come to daylight from the unconscious, inverting surface reality and providing a more holistic perspective. Balian, much like the multifaceted city, maintains a relatively normal life during the day, but his dreams transport him to otherworldly realms far beyond the physical plane at night. As Balian descends from conscious awareness to the depths of the unconscious, he encounters a divergent aspect of the city, ultimately losing his grip on reality in the subterranean realm beneath Cairo's surface. As Yoll reveals that Balian is merely a character in his stories, the idea of reality progressively loses its validity, causing profound philosophical questions concerning the nature of existence and being and prompting Balian to question his identity and purpose. This ontological inquiry disorients Balian, who initially enters the story as a spy, and his process of detection shifts from external to internal.

In parallel to Irwin, Norfolk symbolises the knots and ties in the minds of his characters with the duality of cities. The maze-like tunnels beneath the cities serve as metaphors for the labyrinths of the characters' psychology and simultaneously expose the interplay between the official and unofficial aspects of their lives. In *Lemprière's Dictionary*, Norfolk masterfully illustrates the historical events occurring on the surface in cities such as London, Paris, and La Rochelle while simultaneously delving into the secret societies that operate covertly underground, manipulating the course of history. For instance, while above-ground clashes between the Huguenots and the French royal forces were taking place, the Cabbala discreetly established its enigmatic presence beneath the city of La Rochelle, embarking on covert commercial endeavours that remained hidden from public view. Similarly, in London, the clash between the Bow Street Runners and the dissenting population unfolds on the surface, while beneath the flowing waters of the Thames River, Cabbala wields influence over a portion of the world's wealth and oversees secret trade. In Paris, where the visible facade of the city presents an illusion of stability and peace, a covert agreement between Cabbala and the Cardinal is forged in the hidden corners of the city, aiming to instigate chaos and upheaval within the country. Through his intricate and layered narrative, Norfolk adeptly concretizes the enigmatic

and ambivalent nature of life and history within the urban landscape, emphasising the difference between the surface and beneath it. In essence, these novels serve as powerful vehicles that disrupt conventional reality, highlighting the complex interplay between the seen and the unseen. Unveiling hidden layers of reality, Irwin and Norfolk, compellingly invite readers to question the very essence of truth and the reliability of their own perceptions. Through this exploration, the authors present a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of the intricate tapestry of existence, compelling readers to challenge their assumptions, broaden their perspectives, and confront the enigmatic nature of reality itself.

In the novels, it is obvious that the interpretive abilities of both Balian and John Lemprière are rather flawed compared to those of the classical detectives because their abilities are tainted by their unconscious anxieties, fears, and beliefs. This proves that in the novels, the traditional rationality and hermeneutic codes of classical detective fiction are turned upside down. This leads us to the concept of ontological anxiety, which is another focus of MDF and fabulation. Characters in the novels gradually realise that they are actually searching for themselves while trying to unravel the mystery. The defeated sleuths, among the knots and complications of the stories and carnivalesque scenes, try to reach their own selves.

Balian's self-quest begins when his nightmares become more frequent and he can no longer distinguish between the awake and unconscious states. As Balian navigates through Cairo's labyrinths and ventures from the city's official and visible areas to its unofficial and underground regions, he gradually moves away from physical reality. The magical and illusionary anecdotes told by Giantocristoforo about the city, the mysterious Arabic book left by Giancristoforo, Balian's dual identity as an agent, and the fear of exposure all hinder his logical reasoning. After experiencing disturbing nightmares, he visits the Father of Cats, who speaks of Alam Al Mithal as if it were a normal place, and the presentation of metaphysical realms alongside the visible world shakes Balian's perception of conventional reality. Learning that he is a character in Yoll's story and witnessing highly realistic nightmares in Bulbul's house brings Balian closer to the metaphysical realm. Zuleyka's mysterious behaviours, the deliberate difference between Balian's daytime and night-time experiences, and the intrusion of hallucinations from his dreams into the visible world, lead Balian to lose his constructed notions of reality and

identity. In this tumultuous state, he questions not only the authenticity of his experiences and the essence of reality but also his own existence, which serves as a central theme explored in MDF. Balian's ontological inquiries reach such a pinnacle that he finds himself seeking answers about his own name from the dwarfs he encounters on the streets, encapsulating the profound existential crisis that MDF seeks to unravel. Thus, it challenges the perception of a successful detective who possesses unwavering perception, intellect, and wit, knowing all the answers to make sense of the narrative, and replaces it with a gullible, naive, and easily manipulated failed detective who gets lost in the labyrinth of his own mind.

John embarks on a self-quest as the boundaries between his readings, imagination, and the external world become increasingly blurred. Similar to Balian, John is a gullible and easily manipulated character, willingly immersing himself in a realm of hallucinations and fantasies. This inclination, however, renders him vulnerable and susceptible to the machinations of the Cabbala. The Cabbala's execution of various mythologically themed murders, such as those resembling the tales of Actaeon and Diana, Danae, Iphigenia, and the Trojan War, causes John to lose his perception of reality completely. Witnessing his father's brutal murder by the hands of dogs, akin to the Diana and Actaeon myths, traumatises John to the extent that he firmly believes his own imagination is the cause behind these events. Consequently, he abandons rationality and disregards the truth that these events are not connected to him personally but rather to the wicked activities of the Cabbala. To purge his mind and alleviate his overwhelming guilt, John decides to write a dictionary of mythology, delving into the manipulations orchestrated by the Cabbala and Septimus. However, after two more murders echo the traces of the Danae and Iphigenia myths, John's ties to the outside world are severed completely, thrusting him into a self-quest. Lost amidst the intricately planned murders and a labyrinthine web of events, John begins to question his own identity and existence, finding himself trapped within the depths of his own psyche. Unable to discern whether he is a victim or a criminal, his grasp of reality and self-knowledge gradually dissipates.

As it is detailedly mentioned in the previous chapters of the dissertation, works of MDF are not only about solving the mystery of a murder or a crime, rather, they are about finding the lost self, somehow lost under the extreme burden of either society or convention. The eternal quest of finding the self is the ultimate objective of these kinds

of stories. For this reason, the detection process turns after a while from the outside world to the inner world of the characters. Balian and John find themselves in the middle of a labyrinth of mysteries while trying to regain their lost dignity and individuality. As their self-quests unravel, the boundaries of their own existence blur, and they become a symbol of the intricate complexities faced by individuals in their search for meaning and truth in a fragmented world.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it is evident that both MDF and fabulation engage in profound philosophical inquiries concerning the essence of reality, the meaning of existence, the reliability of knowledge, and the limitations of human perception. Acknowledging the inherent difficulties in attaining a comprehensive and absolute understanding of reality, both MDF and fabulation avoid "direct representation of the surface of reality" but return "toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (Scholes, 1979:03). In the context of ethically controlled fantasy, Scholes alludes to the deliberate portrayal of counterfactual concepts assumed to be real, which transcends the realm of the tangible and visible. To achieve this objective, writers of fabulation and MDF critically challenge established norms and stimulate profound introspection by deconstructing and dismantling conventional notions and beliefs commonly regarded as real from a traditional point of view. In the works of Irwin and Norfolk, this deconstructive process is manifested as skilful juxtaposition of physical and metaphysical realms, the simultaneous coexistence of fictional and real characters, the creation of alternative realities, and the deliberate juxtaposition of intuition and emotions against reason. Through these narrative techniques, Irwin and Norfolk challenge established norms and provoke critical reflection, but they also create ambivalent fabulations full of Bakhtinian grotesque realism. The Bakhtinian grotesque, similar to fabulation and MDF, destroys and distorts "the very contents of the truth" (Bakhtin, 1984: 94) and "present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life" (Bakhtin, 1984: 62). Irwin and Norfolk, as contemporary fabulators, try to portray "double-faced fullness of life" through manifesting a hybrid and metamorphosed universe in which the dual nature of life is reflected, death and birth, evil and good, ordinary and magical are intertwined, and all official as well as dogmatic notions are dethroned and inverted.

In *The Arabian Nightmare*, Irwin achieves to catch the true spirit of grotesque realism by introducing characters that are not commonly encountered in the real world,

such as Shikk al-Insaan (half-human), Fatima the Deathly (product of Zuleyka's imagination), a talking ape (the narrator of the stories within the novel), laughing dervishes, and leper knights of Lazarus. Through their marginalised behaviours, these characters disrupt the normality of the traditional world while concurrently dismantling the authority, dogmatism, and social restrictions of centripetal forces. Shikk al-Insaan's sole purpose, for instance, is to find someone to serve him and clean his bum. Fatima the Deathly, on the other hand, who originates in Zuleyka's imagination but later acquires physical form, seeks to kill or emasculate males. By bringing characters from the realms of dreams and thoughts into the physical world, Irwin blurs the distinction between reality and illusion. Moreover, Irwin further develops grotesque realism by portraying characters who behave in a manner that contradicts their official status. For instance, the Dawadar, who governs the city, is expected to be a stern and formal figure, yet Irwin presents him as someone obsessed with masculine beauty and lamenting the loss of his hair during the war. Similarly, the dervishes, renowned as esteemed religious figures in the Islamic world, are depicted by Irwin as characters who disrupt the solemnity of Friday prayers by laughing and undermining the seriousness of the ritual. Through these portrayals, the author demolishes the barriers between the official and the unofficial, transcending all dogmas, ideologies, and restrictions.

In *Lemprière's Dictionary*, Norfolk accomplishes to reflect the true essence of the Bakhtinian grotesque as well as fabulation by presenting a carnival scene in Pork Club that is replete with mythological allusions. In this part of the novel, by presenting a distorted and modernised version of Anthesteria rituals and making his characters worship pork, he turns all conventional expectations and tabooed and distant concepts inside out. Lawrence Norfolk puts forward social criticism by portraying his characters, particularly the cruel Cabbala and the elites of high society, in their primitive states, engaging in open sexuality, excessive drinking, and eating at the pork club. This portrayal shows the extravagance and vices of the wealthy class, serving as a reflection of the corrupting influence that wealth and power can have. Norfolk also debases and subverts ancient myths and heroic epics. For instance, during the games of cup, he subverts the heroic epic Odyssey by making John a gullible Odysseus, turning an old and ugly woman into Circe, and debasing the title of Archon by giving it to a man who is old, weak, and unaware of himself. Thus, Norfolk, like Irwin, challenges all forms of officiality, order,

and social norms and, as a result, reflects the chaos and absurdity of postmodern life as well as portrays multiple forms and interpretations of reality.

Irwin and Norfolk, in their novels, adeptly employ the technique of grotesque realism to portray the inherent duality of life and the diverse interpretations of reality. Furthermore, their novels serve as a thought-provoking critique of societal hypocrisy, official and respected institutions, and conventional social norms while simultaneously challenging hierarchical distinctions. Through deliberate juxtapositions of various binary oppositions, including the physical and metaphysical, the conscious and unconscious, the official and unofficial, restriction and freedom, reason and intuition, the past and present, life and death, day and night, the familiar and unfamiliar, humanity and machinery, the human and divine, as well as mortality and immortality, these authors create an intricately woven tapestry that evokes an ambivalent atmosphere. Within this nuanced ambiance, "both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis" (Bakhtin, 1984: 24) coexist harmoniously. This masterful interplay of contrasting elements serves to highlight the dynamic, ambiguous, and ever-evolving nature of reality, embracing the diverse facets of existence, including its disintegrations, inconsistencies, and multiplicity of meanings. Through such artful exploration, the authors convey the comic vision of fabulation, which reflects the diverse nature of the human experience.

Fabulation and MDF, while thematically focusing on the concepts of reality and identity, structurally reinforce their perspective by presenting multi-layered and multi-dimensional works of art. The multi-layered structure of these works not only reflects the intricate dimensions of reality but also captures the introspective journey of postmodern individuals. Irwin and Norfolk's novels are constructed at various diegetic levels, where distinct events unfold across different temporal and spatial realms. For instance, in *The Arabian Nightmare*, Irwin masterfully presents a multidimensional narrative woven from the protagonist's nightmares, hallucinations, and the mystical traditions of the East. In the novel, reality is replaced by phantoms and dreams, a linear time sequence is replaced by ambiguity, and a neat city is replaced by labyrinths. Similarly, *Lemprière's Dictionary* holds a significant position in both fabulative and postmodern literature due to its exceptionally intricate and enigmatic plot. Norfolk shows his artistic prowess by meticulously layering the narrative with the protagonist's fantasies, ancient mythological

tales, conspiracy theories, historical intricacies, and various subplots. These novels compel readers to navigate through elaborate mazes of words and narratives, negotiating a complex network of twists and turns.

Moreover, the novels are not only multi-layered but also constructed as a mixture of different literary genres. Both novels display the features of classical detective fiction, epic, romance, history, mythology, science fiction, and fantasy novels. Additionally, each chapter is written as a parody or imitation of various literary genres, with a notable emphasis on classical detective fiction. These narrative techniques turn the novels into labyrinths. The motif of the labyrinth holds significant symbolism and frequently recurs in the works of MDF and fabulation because it reflects temporal, spatial, textual, and psychological chaos. As discussed in the theory and analysis chapters, MDF and fabulation agree on the idea that order, certainty, and simplicity are elusive in the postmodern world. Instead, chaos and disorder reign supreme. As a result, MDF and fabulation writers construct maze-like narratives, trapping their characters within temporal and spatial labyrinths from which escape seems impossible. The characters, in turn, embark on introspective journeys, navigating the chaotic and ambiguous world surrounding them. For example, in *The Arabian Nightmare*, Cairo, in *Lemprière's Dictionary*, London, La Rochelle, and Paris represent spatial labyrinths with their tunnels, caves opening to secret places, and intricate streets. The temporal labyrinth is divided among Balian and John Lemprière's unconscious anxieties, paranoias, hallucinations, and visible events. In brief, labyrinths in the works of fabulation and MDF symbolise the emotional labyrinths that characters become entangled in, the chaos of the postmodern world, readers' struggles to comprehend the web of events, and the fabulator's talent in constructing the embedded texts.

Furthermore, works of fabulation and MDF distinguish themselves by their lack of closure. The final resolution, in which every mystery is clarified, cannot, generally, be seen in fabulation and MDF. Instead of explanations, these works are replete with mysteries, puzzles, and philosophical questions about the nature of being and the relationship between existence and the universe. Suspense and ambiguity are kept up until the end of the story, and they even continue after the story ends. The open-ended and incomplete text, as stated in the dissertation, symbolises the impossibility of knowing everything in all aspects. Irwin and Norfolk's novels often appear to lack a readily

discernible beginning or end. In the novels, events begin and accelerate in a mysterious and surreal way, owing to which the reader is constantly forced to determine whether they are reading about events actually happening or the imagination of a character. In *The Arabian Nightmar*e and *Lemprière's Dictionary,* readers frequently struggle to perceive the point where fantasy and dreams end, and reality begins, and indeed, in some texts, the whole story can ultimately prove to have been a dream. In Irwin's novel, the fabulator's identity or the events that Balian has lived on are never satisfactorily explained and remain an inexplicable mystery at the novel's conclusion. Lawrence Norfolk, on the other hand, does provide explanations for some of the mysteries in his novel; however, he intentionally leaves certain fundamental enigmas unresolved. For instance, in the case of the Cabbala's homicide of all the members of the Lemprière family, Norfolk offers some insights but leaves unanswered questions regarding why they assisted John and how they managed to live for two centuries.

The multi-layered and multi-temporal structure of fabulation and MDF demands the expertise of a talented fabulator. The proficiency of the fabulator brings about aesthetic and artistic delight for readers, which is the ultimate goal of fabulation. Irwin and Norfolk's novels display the features of fabulation very well due to their highly pleasurable artistic styles, their outstanding abilities as fabulators, their aesthetic, allegorical, and symbolic usage of language, references to earlier literary works, discussions about the artificiality of the world, dialogic relationships with the reader and the author, and dialogic texts. The complicated structure of Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare* is a great example of a fabulator's talent. The story of the novel is affected by art, science, alchemy, legends, magic, and mystery, occupying an intersection of the actual and the metaphysical. Indeed, Yoll, a character in Irwin's *The Arabian Nightmare,* claims that he is writing *A Thousand and One Nights,* and throughout the novel, he tells a series of discrete but related stories. Irwin skillfully demonstrates his mastery over these narratives by skillfully intertwining them, showcasing his authority as a fabulator. Lawrence Norfolk also displays his artistic prowess and aesthetic sensibilities as a fabulator in *Lemprière's Dictionary* through the artistry of language and felicity of expression. The novel's intricate narrative structure, intertwined with historical and mythical elements, demonstrates Norfolk's ability to craft a captivating and immersive reading experience. As readers delve into *Lemprière's Dictionary,* they are drawn into a

world where language becomes a gateway to unravelling hidden truths and the layers of meaning embedded within the text.

In conclusion, although the term metaphysical is perceived as the opposite of reality from the outside, it captures the essence of reality with its questions about the nature of existence and being. Fabulation, in the same way, reinforces the metaphysical perspective and endeavours to capture the reality behind the tangible and visible. Robert Irwin and Lawrence Norfolk manifest the features of MDF and fabulation in their authentic novels. In the novels, authors turn their focus towards defamiliarization, subversion, and deconstruction in order to provide a multi-dimensional description of reality. In order to rejuvenate the classical perception of reality, they use indirect and contradictory descriptions containing allegory, symbols, satires, magic, surrealism, fantasy, and mystery. In the novels, the ratiocinative process and hermeneutic codes lose their influence on characters and narration. Readers find themselves following the traces of lost and defeated sleuths through the streets of a labyrinth. Thus, Irwin and Norfolk keep the thrill at the end of the novel as well as symbolise the chaotic and complex nature of the universe and human beings. Furthermore, novels illustrate the unreliability of knowledge and always fill readers' minds with questions regarding reality, existence, being, dreams, hallucinations, fictionality, and the visible. The intrinsic and ambivalent nature of reality and knowledge and the mysterious and magical atmosphere of the novels produce aesthetic and artistic pleasure for readers, besides providing an alternative route to re-evaluate the oppressive realities of the postmodern world.

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