3 POSTMODERN LITERATURE AND ITS BACKGROUND

Like modernist literature, postmodern literature is part of socio-cultural and historical development and can be seen as a specific way of a depiction of the postmodern life and culture. It shows a crisis of identity of human being (ethnic, sexual, social and cultural) and its struggle for legitimization in a hypocritical society. This theme was treated by other authors before (example), but it started to be treated much more systematically after the Civil Right Movement in the USA in the 1960’s (Martin Luther King, ethnic and sexual/homosexual and lesbian minority rights), the Vietnam and student protests in Europe and the USA. While this movement led to democratization of the public life, more prerogatives, education and publishing opportunities for minorities in the Western countries, the East and Central European countries became much more authoritarian under the influence and control of the USSR, especially between the 1950’s – 1980’s. With a more employment, educational and public opportunities to find a place in the society, new authors representing minority ethnic (in addition to quite well-established Jewish and Black-American authors, especially Native-American, Asian-American and Hispanic-American authors), gender (female), sexual (gay, lesbian) started to gain a prominent position in American literature, for example. Later similar development could be observed in British, Australian and Canadian literature in which the authors coming from different cultural background, usually former British colonies, started to appear (Ben Okri, Kasugio Ishiguro, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, for example, in British fiction; or the representatives of formerly oppressed original inhabitants such as Collin Johnson, Kath Walker, Sam Watson and Kim Scott in Australian literature). In literary theory and criticism, it was especially the emergence of feminist and post-colonial theories which was a result of this development. At the same time, literatures in English, especially American literature, depicted a growing awareness of the negative effects of industrialization and commercialization of public life leading to the ecological crisis and consumerism (the Beatnick authors such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughgs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Snyder, Gregory Corso and others). These authors expressed negative attitudes to the Western civilization and emphasized oriental vision and understanding of the world (Zen-Buddhism, Buddhism, Hinduism), pacifistic and peaceful way of life along with
the appreciation of drugs, alcohol and spontaneity as a liberating alternative to the Western ethical norms, hypocrisy, and civilization. In literature, it manifested itself not only on

1) the thematic level (thematization of ecological crisis, criticism of consumerism, appreciation of freedom and spontaneity, oriental vision of the world), but also in

2) the changing nature and understanding of art and its form. Thus art started to be seen not as separated, but a part of reality and experience, art became closer to the public and was often presented in the form of show, happening or performance. **The Beats,** for example, often wrote poems not for intimate reading at home, but they were often recited on public places (sport stadiums, concert halls) and accompanied by the pop, jazz, or rock bands and music (Bob Dylan, Rolling Stones). Also their poetry and fiction used irregular and open, often fragmented form as well as the rhythms of popular music such as blues, jazz and rock. Painters and sculptors presented their artistic works outside traditional galleries directly in the urban environment or in nature, sometimes not only un-artistic objects, but also living or dead animals or human beings became the artistic objects (see photography, visual arts, dead corps...). It does not, however, mean that the ethnic or other formerly marginalized authors (female, gay, lesbian) became postmodern only because of the thematization of this difference or because of their ethnic or sexual identity, or ecological crisis and consumerism. Civil right movement has enabled these authors to gain an access to education, science and publishing opportunities, but their work became postmodern because of their use of postmodern narrative techniques and the vision of the world, although some critics emphasize political and ideological aspects of their works.

3) In postmodern literary text, the idea of **originality and authenticity is undermined** and parodied. Postmodern literary work does not pretend to be new and original, but uses the old literary forms, genres, and kinds of literature and art, kitsch, quotation, allusion and other means to recontextualize their meaning in a different linguistic and cultural contexts to show a difference between the past and present as well as between the past and present forms of representation as was mentioned in famous John Barth’s essay **The Literature of Exhaustion** in which he points out „an exhaustion” of the old forms of art and suggests a creative potential of the use of the old forms, genres and styles. Postmodern authors intentionally build the meaning on the use not only of the old forms and genres, but also
by a deliberate use of plagiarism, kitsch, false or pretended quotations from well-known literary and other texts (by false or pretended I mean the authors’ close imitation of the ideas or style of famous authors, works or philosophers without giving a bibliographical note). Plagiarism is not meant to “steal” the authors’ ideas, but to evoke a parody effect and an ironic distance from these texts. Some critics speak not about plagiarism, but pla(y)giarism in a postmodern literary work, that is a creative use and recontextualization of already existing texts through the use of techniques reminiscent of plagiarism (unjustified use of these texts) and their further modification by the use of linguistic and textual play (Broich 252).

4) Postmodern literature is closely connected with the development of advanced, information and communication technologies and media such as television, film, video, DVD, computers, internet, cell phones and others that have not only sped up communication among people in the world, have contributed to the globalization of the capital, consumerism, and popular culture, but have also significantly influenced and manipulated the people’s vision of the world. Especially in popular, non artistic films the reality is presented as clear, uncomplicated, explicable, understandable and often idealized which is in contrast with the complicated and unpredictable reality. Not only television, but especially video, DVD, computers and internet has significantly contributed to the massive spreading and globalization of this kind of films, popular programs, soap operas, sitcoms, popular music and other forms of popular culture. Television still plays an important role in the manipulation of public opinion and the vision of the world. For example, TV news based on the presentation of facts evokes the illusion of truthfulness and convincingness. In Stanley Grenz’s view,

A typical evening newscast, for example, will bombard the viewer with a series or unrelated images in quick succession—a war in a remote country, a murder closer to home, a sound bite from a political speech, the latest on a sex scandal, a new scientific discovery, highlights from a sporting event. This collage is interspersed with advertisements for better batteries, better soap, better cereal, and better vacations. By giving all these varied images—news stories and commercials alike—roughly equal treatment, the broadcast leaves the impression that they are all of roughly equal importance [...] The evening sitcoms and dramas seem to be invested with the same weight as the earlier news stories. In this manner, television blurs the line between
truth and fiction, between truly earth-shattering and the trivial (Grenz 1996:34).

But the mass audience does not realize that these facts are interpreted by the TV moderators and commentators, the dialogues may be interrupted or unfinished, that the events which are marginal because of flattering to the audience may evoke the illusion of extreme importance (like an information of a new lover or sexual partner or divorce of any pop star that is juxtaposed to the military coup in an African or Asian country, for example). These facts can be taken out of the context and manipulated by not allowing an alternative view on the same event. This leads to a significant aspect of postmodern culture and the vision of the world postmodern literature often formally expresses and thematizes, that is a manipulation through the overlapping of the fact and fiction, reality and fantasy.

5) Because of the democratization of the highly advanced societies, spreading of international capitalism leading to globalization but also to consumerism, as well as because of the rapid development of technology, postmodern culture is closely connected with the massive spread and popularity of the popular culture including popular music, films, TV programs, soap operas, sport that is connected to commercialism rendered through the celebrity and brand names iconizations and commercialization. TV-soup operas and serials such as X-Files, Star Trek, Baywatch, Friends, and others have become televised all over the world, the soccer players (David Beckham), pop singers (Marilyn Manson, Eminem, Madonna, Michael Jackson, Courtney Love), sportsmen become not only celebrities, but also commercial products promoting a distribution and sale of clothes, perfumes, and even hair and life styles which leads to a worshipping of the cult of the brand names highly commercially advertised and thus evoking the illusion of their value. Thus the costumers can buy Christina Aquillera, Victoria Beckham or Gabriela Sabatini perfume, the sport icon’s dresses and the dresses of the club or national teams become a casual wear, and the names not only of cars, dresses, or shoes, but also of the players, singers, and sport clubs become a brand name for commercial use. This causes the eradication of a former difference between the so-called “high” and “low” literature and culture. It is connected with the emerging field of the so-called “cultural studies” within which literature is seen only as a broader cultural product expressing various kinds
of identities (national, sexual, ethnic, regional) and differences (national, ethnic, sexual, gender, etc.). The aesthetic and artistic criteria for interpretation of literary works and their value are thus reduced and suppressed and are often replaced by political and ideological criteria that suppress their artistic and aesthetic value. In Anton Pokrivčák’s view, such interpretation is based on “an implicit belief that the role of the artwork is to serve the idea” (Pokrivčák 1998:38) which is clearly an ideological and political interpretation and position (see also Kušnír, J., 2005). All the above characteristics find its formal and aesthetic expression in the literary and artistic works. In difference from modernist literature, postmodern literature does not focus on subjectivity and the belief in the possibility of the mind and consciousness to perceive the outer experience subjectively. In difference from this vision of the world, postmodern literature emphasizes:

a) **radical plurality** and **relativism** which is associated with a distrust to the possibility of reason to understand and explain the world either objectively or subjectively, to any unified visions of the world, to any eternal truths, any unifying concepts of truth. What is only possible is a reflection or a creative and **intuitive** rather than rational response to reality and experience. This reflection is never finished, unified, stable or eternal, but only provisional, open and can always be changed, transformed, modified or even undermined by different versions or reality. In Stanley Grenz’s view,

The postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth. There are other valid paths to knowledge besides reason[...]including the emotions and the intuition[...]the postmodern mind no longer accepts the Enlightenment belief that knowledge is objective. Knowledge cannot be merely objective[...]because the universe is not mechanistic and dualistic but rather historical, relational and personal. The world is not simply an objective given that is ‘out there’, waiting to be discovered and known; reality is relative, indeterminate, and participatory[...]The postmodern worldview operates with a community-based understanding of truth. It affirms that whatever we accept as truth and even the way we envision truth are dependent on the community in which we participate[...]the postmodern worldview affirms that this relativity extends beyond our perceptions of truth to its essence: there is no absolute truth; rather, truth is relative to the community in which we participate[...]On the basis of this assumption, postmodern thinkers have given up Enlightenment quest for any one universal, supracultural, timeless truth. They focus instead on what is held to be true within a specific community (Grenz 1996: 7 – 8).
On the level of a text, radical plurality often manifests itself not only in a depiction of formerly marginalized and outcast characters (different ethnic groups, but also various kinds of losers, junkies, prostitutes, lesbians, homosexuals and deviants) depicted as rather positive characters, but also in the use of multiple, often alternative or overlapping narrative voices offering the version of reality and the vision of the world which is equal to the other voice’s interpretation; in the use of different genres and styles typical of other kinds of literature and genres (detective story, pornography, love story, essay, diary, cookery book, receipt, letter, newspaper clip) but each of which contributes to the stylistic hybridity and mixing of genres in the literary texts. The mixing of genres is not a new narrative technique, but postmodern literary works use it deliberately as part of their systematic building of the postmodern meaning. Silvia Pokrivčáková comments on the mixture of literary genres in her chapter on Literary Kinds and Genres which is a part of her joint book with Anton Pokrivčák entitled Understanding Literature (Brno: MSD, 2006, pp.77-99). In her view,

Although generic ‘mixtures’ are typical especially for the contemporary artistic scene, in fact it has never been simple to strictly define features typical for individual genres, for great literary works have always been complex and resistant to systematising efforts (Pokrivčáková 2006:78).

Pokrivčáková further associates a deliberate breaking the rules of generic conventions with the literary works’ evocation of the shocking and it seems also a metafictional effect. In her view,

Unlike the phenomenon of readers’ expectations and its facilitation of the process of perception and interpretation, the breaking of generic conventions can have a shocking effect on readers […] bringing them to a closer reflection of the work (Pokrivčáková 2006: 78 – 79).

It can be said that all postmodern literary texts which use and initially imitate the genres of popular literature (thriller, detective, love story, horror, pornography, historical romance, sci-fiction and others), myths, classical literary texts, or important religious texts as their pretexts (for pretexts see Žilka, 1995) which are further modified, transformed and parodied and thus acquire a different meaning can be understood as pastiche (in British author Julian Barnes’ novel, The History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters, for example, the Old Testament is narrated from the perspective of a cockroach; parodies of popular literary genres can be found in the works of British authors such as John Fowles, Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt, John Banville, Toby Litt, Patrick Mc Cabe, American authors Donald Barthelme, Robert
Coover, Richard Brautigan, Kurt Vonnegut, Paul Auster and many others, Australian authors Murray Bail, Michael Wilding, Peter Carey, Canadian authors Timothy Findley and Margaret Atwood and many others).

These authors often use a **palimpsestic technique** of rewriting of the old texts by putting them in different linguistic and cultural contexts. Palimpsest was originally “A paper or parchment on which the original text has been partly erased or effaced to allow a new text to be written, leaving fragments of the original still visible” (Macey 2000: 288). A French theorist Gerard Genette uses the term to refer to Marcel Proust’s modernist novel *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* as a form of intertextuality (Macey 2000:289). As in the postmodern authors’ works mentioned above, palimpsestic technique of writing means the writing of a new text on the layers of the old, traditional (pre)text by the operation of which it acquires a new meaning. In his chapter on *Literary Text in Context* from his book written jointly with Silvia Pokrivčáková *Understanding Literature* (Brno: MSD, 2006), Anton Pokrivčák gives a fine survey of the use of the term palimpsest and different kinds of textuality (20).

**Relativism** manifests mostly itself in the **text’s rejection of a close and clear ending** in favour of the **open ending in which a reader has a space to participate in the creation of the meaning of a text; in offering multiple and relative rather and clear and unifying perspectives; in a constant evocation of doubt and self-evaluation of characters** who are often unable to identify and offer a generalizing, truthful, and objective version of reality.

b) Postmodern literary work often questions its own fictional status thus becoming **metafictional**. Metafictional means that a literary work refers to itself and the principles of its construction by using various techniques and narrative devices. Simplistic understanding of metafiction is that “metafiction is a fiction about fiction”, but postmodern fictional work is far more and about more issues than only about fiction. The term was coined by an American author and critic William Gass, but it can have various meanings (R. Scholes, P. Waugh). I argue **metafiction, metafictional elements, and metafictionality** is a dominant feature of a postmodern literary work. I think perhaps Patricia Waugh’s definition of metafiction is the most suitable to understanding its working in literature. In her view, metafiction is
...a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictitiousness of the world outside the literary/fictional text (Waugh 1984: 2).

By using metafictional elements, the postmodern authors point out a difference between reality and its linguistic representation and they emphasize the fact that a language works on different principles than reality. At the same, the use of metafictional elements point out the fictionality of fiction, involve a reader in a creation of meaning of the literary (artistic) text, and shows a difference between the past and contemporary forms of art, between the past and present sensibility and the vision of the world. For example, the first chapters of British author John Fowles’ novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) begins as a traditional Victorian realistic novel, but later a narrator suddenly breaks a narrative and directly addresses a reader by commenting on the previous plot, possible development of the story and on the writing techniques. Later, as the reader learns, the characters from this novel overlap with the characters in a film based on this book and a story of a Victorian love is left unfinished (in both the book and a film) and left to the reader’s interpretation, at least of ending in both media. Thus direct addressing a reader and the comments on the fictionality of fiction become metafictional elements through which Fowles emphasizes a fictionality of his fiction, draws a reader to participate in the construction of meaning, and a difference between the past and present forms of arts and sensibility- a traditional Victorian novel, its metafictional transformation into a postmodern novel and its further representation in modern media (film). At the same time, by using a realistic form, Victorian characters, setting and sensibility based on rationality (Darwinism, Marxism, Realism in literature) and their transformation into postmodern characters through the use of contrast, irony and parody, he shows a difference between the past and present sensibility (and forms of art). The past sensibility is based on rationality and a belief in objective truth which is contrasted with the present sensibility based on plurality, openness, radical doubt and skepticism towards any unifying visions of reality.

**Metafiction** can be expressed not only through a direct addressing a reader, but also through other means such as a quotation, allusion, false, fake quotation, paraphrasing, parody, pastiche, irony, intertextuality and many others. According to Anton Pokrivčák,
“The most obvious techniques to build intertextual networks of literary texts include direct reference, allusion, quotation, echo, plagiarism, collage, mosaics, palimpsest, and others” (Pokrivčák 2006: 20). In Pokrivčák’s view, “Intertextual networks are also generated by cultural discourses and the media” (20). All these devices point out a certain connection between the literary text a reader reads and other works of art, documents, historical records or theories. This connection with these texts is not mechanical or random like in traditional literature, but by a transformation of the meaning of alluded or parodied texts, by their putting in a different (often contemporary) context, postmodern authors transform and create a new meaning that is often based on the allegorical principle within which this meaning is created. In other words, in addition to primary meaning, there is another meaning disseminated throughout the text. Within this allegory, the author often deals with broader theoretical issues related to the relationship between the author, literary work and a reader which is a theme treated by post-structuralist theories. It is a postmodernist allegory in Brian Mc Hale’s understanding, i.e. a kind of a metaphor creating

…a text-length trope which preserves the two-level ontological structure of metaphor (literal frame of reference, metaphorical frame of reference), but in which, instead of being announced explicitly, the two-level structure remains implicit, disseminated through the text […] The fictional world of an allegorical narrative is a tropological world, a world within a trope […] allegory offers itself as a tool for exploring ontological structure and foregrounding ontological themes…” (Mc Hale 1987:140)

For example, in American author Paul Auster’s The New York Trilogy (1986), a private-eye detective watching and following a mysterious man turns out to be also a person searching his identity and, in a broader and allegorical context a reader of a mysterious book as represented by the followed object. What I mean by allegorical principle is similar to what Silvia Pokrivčáková calls “allegorical mechanism of representation” (Pokrivčáková 2006:69) that is different from understanding of allegory as either a genre or simplistic didactic mode of representation. In her chapter on Language of Literature from the book Understanding Literature (Pokrivčák, A., Pokrivčáková, S. Brno, MSD, 2006), Silvia Pokrivčáková further comments on other meanings of the word allegory in the context of contemporary and deconstruction theories (Pokrivčáková, 2006, s. 69).
c) One of the most important aspects of a postmodern literary work closely connected to metafiction is, however, **intertextuality**. Broadly speaking, intertextuality, a term coined by a Bulgarian/French theorist Julia Kristeva, expresses a connection between the texts through various devices and techniques discussed above. It is not, however, a single mechanical connection, but rather a creative transformation of the the referred texts in different linguistic and cultural contexts. In Julia Kristeva’s understanding, literary text is not only a product of a single author, “but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself” (Pokrivčák 2006:18). In her view, “[A]ny text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 1980:66). The meaning of intertextuality has later been transformed as Silvia Pokrivčáková and Anton Pokrivčák comment on it more in detail in their *Understanding Literature* (Brno: MSD, 2006). Julia Kristeva derives her theory of intertextuality from Michael Bachtin’s idea of a “polyphonic novel” open to various voices and interpretations and understands a literary text as part of other literary texts in the history of the literary tradition. Thus, what stems from it is the undermining of the idea of **authorship** – the text is not a product of an author, but exists within specific literary and cultural contexts and thus is open to various understandings and interpretations. In this sense, the role of an author is diminished as is the study of his biography as in traditional criticism.

d) Another important aspect of a postmodern literary work is the use of postmodern **parody**, **pastiche and radical irony**. Postmodern parody was theorized especially by Linda Hutcheon (A Theory of Parody, 1985), Margaret A. Rose, and partly Frederic Jameson. As it was mentioned above, in difference from traditional parody, the main aim of **postmodern parody** is not to mock the parodied author or style for its own sake, but this parody lacks this mocking, ridiculing aspect and by using irony it emphasizes a difference between the past forms of art and sensibilities, a distance between the past and present. This critical aspect, in Hutcheon’s view, manifests itself especially in the use of irony. It seems Hutcheon often uses a term modern parody to actually refer what could be labeled as postmodern parody. It is often difficult to identify irony within parody in postmodern literary texts since they are often closely connected and even inseparable. Hutcheon later emphasized the political and ideological aspects of parody because of
their subversive impulse, but this impulse and emphasis is not quite acceptable, in my view, since any parody can be understood as including the political and ideological impulse which is not always the most important aspect of this literary device. In Linda Hutcheon’s view, “Postmodern parody is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation—in any medium” (Hutcheon 1991:228). Hutcheon, however, further adds that “As a form of ironic representation, parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimates and subverts that which it parodies...Parody can be used as self-reflexive technique that points to art as art, but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past” (Hutcheon 1991:231). What Hutcheon means here is that by referring to the older forms of art (traditional and popular literary genres and styles such as detective, love stories, pornography, western, sci-fiction and others, traditional forms of writing such as realistic literature and works, traditional myths (ancient myths, religious books) and by their re-writing and putting in mostly contemporary or unexpected contexts, postmodern parody does not simply refer to these works of art, authors and styles, or simply gives a critique of them and this kind of linguistic representation, but it also creatively reconstructs them to show (often ironic) a difference between the past (traditional) and contemporary forms of art and sensibility. Postmodern parody thus becomes self-reflexive because it draws our attention not only to the parodied works of art, but implicitly also to the whole process of depiction of reality through the literary works, that is a process of linguistic representation. By re-writing, transforming and changing the motifs and styles from the parodied literary works, postmodern parody gives an alternative vision of reality, history and a position of different social, ethnic and other minority groups which forms a playful and creative alternative to the official version of history or reality as depicted in traditional literary works or through traditional narrative techniques and styles. This alternative is not aimed to be an official alternative to real history, but a playful and artistic reconsideration and relativization of it. That is also the reason why postmodern authors often parody histories, religious books, biographies of authors, myths, works of traditional and popular literature (historical novels, love and detective novels, thrillers, spy and crime fiction, pornography, horrors, etc.). In addition to offering an alternative and creative reconsideration of history and reality, creation an awareness of the process of representation, the postmodern parody also shows a difference between the past and present sensibility and can give
a critique of various aspects of what is believed to be a typical aspect of some national identity. For example, in his novel *Willard and His Bowling Trophies* (1975), the life of brothers living in a peaceful provincial city in the USA becomes turns out to a violent crime story after somebody steals their bowling trophies, a symbol of their school sport success and, symbolically, a provincial mentality. The brothers’ search for trophies becomes a path to their violence stimulated by media and popculture (comic books) and they become a murderous and cruel gang looking not only for the bowling trophies, but now, symbolically, for their stolen, but dull and unimportant identities of provincial dwellers. Richard Brautigan uses a genre of pornographic, detective story and horror not only to parody these genres, their one-dimensionality and dullness, but to show their negative and distorting impact on the people’s vision of reality. He also gives a critique of a dullness and boredom of the life and values in a provincial American city, a marriage life and family relationships influenced by media, popular culture and consumerism. Like a married couple imitating sadomasochistic practices from pornographic literature and film as a way out of boredom, also, in their search for the lost trophies and especially the violence, the brothers are inspired by popular TV serials and comic books. The novel thus becomes also a postmodern parody of one aspect of American cultural identity— a glorification of success and an American dream which is represented by the brothers’ success in bowling. Stealing their bowling trophies may symbolically imply stealing their “American Dream.”

In a postmodern literary work, postmodern parody is closely connected with pastiche. Pastiche comes from the Italian word pasticcio which means “*A medley of various ingredients: a hotchpotch, a farrago, jumble*” (OED in Sim 2001: 125). This implies a similarity with a postmodern literary work consisting of different styles, genres, narrative voices and devices each of which has its important role in the composition of the book. But the *original meaning of this word as used in arts was rather derogatory*. The artists referred to as *pasticheurs* were understood as the authors uncreatively and mechanically imitating other works of art, styles, or ways of writing. In postmodern literature and its interpretation, however, this term has rather *positive* meaning since the older works of art, styles and authors are first imitated but, at the same time, through the use of parody and irony further transformed, re-written and put in a different linguistic context and thus pastiche can be loosely called a blank parody as Frederic Jameson suggests (see above), although
Jameson’s understanding of pastiche is close to Linda Hutcheon’s understanding of postmodern parody and he himself defines pastiche as a kind of parody (see above). Postmodernism rejects strict definitions and especially in a postmodern but also other works of art it is difficult to delineate strictly parody and pastiche since they often overlap and are rather inseparable.

e) Parody, pastiche, imitation and intertextuality are closely connected with **radical irony**. Radical irony does not necessarily manifest itself on the verbal level, but also on the level of a text as a whole, in the juxtaposition of different styles creating an ironic effect, or in the use of **travesty** or **burlesque** (burlesque meant not as a genre, but as a trope or an approach to a depiction of character) as part of the parodic mode. Tibor Žilka comments on different kinds of irony in his *Text a posttext* (Nitra: UKF, 1995, p. 31). He further comments on the use of **plagiarism, kitsch, falsification and travesty** in a postmodern literary work (Žilka 1995:27-28)

f) Postmodern authors often use a technique of a **collage** for the narrative and compositional construction of their works. The collage **breaks the linearity of narration, enables the stylistic and generic hybridity and offers a multiple, pluralistic and often relativistic vision of the world**. In difference from traditional modernist collage in which its parts, or the elements of the collage (different styles, characters, narrative voices, etc.) can be understood only in their relation to other parts (chapters, styles, characters from other parts of the book), the elements or parts creating a postmodern collage in a literary work are mostly self-sufficient and can themselves create meaning of their own, although, of course, the full understanding of such a work requires reading of all parts, elements or segments of the text. In Theo d’Haen’s view,

A Modernist collage, although it is composed of originally perhaps disparate images, is unified by its overall uniformity of technique: by being painted in the same style and with the same kind of paint, and by being arranged according to a balanced and pre-determined structure. To the spectator, a Modernist collage gives an impression of simultaneity: he sees one thing from various angles at the same time. With a postmodernist collage, the
various fragments assembled on the canvas are left unchanged, untransformed. Each retains its own materiality (D’haen 220).

D’haen argues that postmodern collage, in difference from Modernist collage, evokes the effect of multiplicity rather than simultaneity (220). Thus postmodern collage is closely connected with other postmodern narrative and compositional techniques and aesthetic principles such as fragmentation, plurality, and relativization. For example, in many postmodern literary works, the recipes, letters, extracts from a famous work are inserted in a literary work and remain unchanged and create meaning by its relation to the previous and following parts of a chapter (Richard Brautigan’s Trout Fishing in America); and, for example, many chapters from Native American author Louise Erdrich’s novel Love Medicine can be read as autonomous short stories and are also often anthologized as short stories (Lulu’s Boys).

g) In postmodern literary work, a mimetic, realistic representation of reality often overlaps with fiction, fantasy, dreams and sometimes hallucinations and, in difference from modernist literary works, it is difficult to distinguish between these spheres and ontological levels. In these works, often real historical characters meet with fictional characters, or the characters from different historical periods meet in the fictional present, or real historical figure is depicted in the fictional situation which causes “an ontological scandal” in Brian Mc Hale’s view (1987:85) as in Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow (1973), Robert Coover’s The Public Burning (1977), or in Donald Barthelme’s novel The King (1989) in which a former Polish dissident and President Lech Walesa meets with King Arthur and medieval characters. These characters and worlds often merge and express the uncertainty, relativity and confusion about the world and its perception by an individual, like in the above mentioned texts and, for example, in William Burrough’s novel Naked Lunch (1962) in which it is difficult to distinguish between reality, dreams, fantasies and hallucinations of a drug addict. In this novel, drug addicts’ fantasies stand as a metaphor for the general human condition of the postmodern period-the world is understood not as clear, identifiable as in a realistic novel, or as subjectively perceived and reflected in human mind (as in modernist writing), but as chaotic, entropic, paranoic and difficult not only to comprehend, but also to at least respond to.
h) The world is thus presented as paranoic and unstable in these works. In Stuart Sim’s view, postmodern literature reflects paranoic states in various ways, especially through “the distrust of fixity, of being circumscribed to any one particular place or identity, the conviction that society is conspiring against the individual, and the multiplication of self-made plots to scheming of others” (Sim 2001:130). Such paranoias in which an individual is entrapped in his/her vision of the conspiracy of the system (society) against him can be seen, for example, in American author Ken Kesey’s novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962) in which a mental hospital and the Nurse Ratched represent a repressive and threatening machinery of the system which McMurphy, a protagonist of the novel, must fight against. Individual beliefs in the plot, or conspiracy of the unknown forces, system, or structures against the individual can be found in many postmodern works, for example in Thomas Pynchon’s works such as *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), and many others in which the individual is influenced by her/his vision of conspiracy of the unknown, indefinite forces against her/him, or in American author Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) in which Billy Pilgrim, a protagonist of the novel, meditates on the conspiracy of the extra-terrestrial forces against him.

i) In postmodern literary works, instability, uncertainty, relativization, entropy, chaos and paranoia manifest themselves on the linguistic level as well. **The relationship between the linguistic sign (the word) and the referred object is often undermined** and the word do not express the expected meaning, or the metaphors are often literalized (for example, the expression „kiss my back“ would be presented, in a literary work, as one of the characters then really kissed somebody else’s back). A radical example of this is, for example, Richard Brautigan’s novel *Troutfishing in America* (1967) in which *Troutfishing* does not express only trout fishing in nature, but also a picture, a hotel room, a writer, and many other meanings. Such narrative strategy has several implications. It points out the relativity and uncertainty of human condition in a postmodern world; it shows a manipulative power of language able to evoke unexpected meanings and thus manipulate people’s vision of the world; at the same time, it shows creative possibilities
of language as used in literary works; it draws reader’s attention to the working of the language and thus a difference between reality and its linguistic representation, a difference between two different systems which is then close to the post-structuralist theories of meaning (Roland Barthes, Jacque Derrida, Paul de Man and others); thus it also evokes a metafictional effect implying the idea that the literary work is also a work on the working of language in a literary work; the idea that the language is not a self-enclosed system but a system dependent on the context and its use in particular situations; and the language is thus presented as unstable, relative and manipulating.

j) In postmodern literary works, chaos, paranoia, and relativity often manifest themselves in the use of the motifs such as **labyrinth, mask, mirror, or the library** (Žilka 1995:31). The motif of a labyrinth and a mirror can be seen in John Barth’s short story *Lost in the Funhouse* in which a young boy protagonist, Ambrose, goes with for a trip with his parents and gets lost in the labyrinth of a funhouse full mirrors from which it is difficult to find any way out. The metaphor of a labyrinth and the mirrors reflecting his situation (quite paradoxically, the mirrors are supposed to give a clear picture of reality but here they represent only the reflection itself and chaos in which the protagonist is entrapped. When a boy is entrapped in the labyrinth, the narrator starts to comment not only on his situation, but also on the development of the plot and this short story itself and thus it becomes metafictional. The labyrinth thus also becomes a metaphorical expression standing for the process of writing and a status of a literary work which becomes always unfinished, provisional and waiting for the completion by a reader. Library is one of the central motifs in Italian author Umberto Eco’s novel A Name of the Rose. In this novel, library is not only a setting in which mystery and detective investigation is taking place, but also a metaphor expressing the relativity of history and writing as expressed in books stored in the library. In his *Text and Posttext*, Tibor Žilka gives a more detailed analysis of both above works (Žilka 1995: 29-34).

k) In postmodern literary works, the motifs which emphasize their metafictional nature are the characters of **writers** writing a book or **detectives** investigating the crime. These characters’ search, however, often becomes a symbolic search for meaning,
objectivity and truth which can never be achieved and which manifests itself within the allegorical framework of a work. The symbolic quest and meaning is disseminated throughout the text and, finally, passes into postmodern allegory within which the following issues are often treated: the relationship between the author, a literary work and a reader, between life and art, a difference between a real experience and its artistic (linguistic representation), the nature of reality and fiction, that is ontological issues that are also dealt with by post-structuralist theorists (Roland Barthes’ later works, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and others). A writer as a character in postmodern literary work (Paul Auster’s novels, for example, especially his New York Trilogy, or his latest work Travels in the Scriptorium, 2006), or a narrator from such a book often becomes almost a literary critic or theorist commenting on the process of writing but also on a difference between the old and new forms of arts including literature. In addition, another theme comes to the light in these works, i.e. the nature and the process of creative writing.

1) As it was mentioned above, in difference from Modernist literary texts which emphasize depth, postmodern literature emphasizes depthlessness and surface. In Frederic Jameson’s view, “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense—perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms” (Jameson 1975:60 in Woods 36). Postmodern authors thus reject the possibility to find and reflect on a deeper meaning and emphasize the free play of signs and signifiers leading to the evocation of textuality – that is the language is not understood as expressing material objects or deep truths, but to other signs and thus it acquires a manipulating power by influencing people’s (characters’) vision of the world. This is connected with postmodern sensibility since the textuality points out a semiotic and manipulative nature of a sign creating reality as perceived by a postmodern man— in a postmodern world, a man is entrapped in various signs manipulating her/his vision of the world within which it is difficult to find an orientation, objectivity and truth and distinguish between the true and the false, between reality and its manipulation (as in TV news in which the truth is manipulated by a suppression or reduction of alternative, different views on the same (commented, interpreted) event, or by simply not providing a viewer with all the facts concerning it. In Anton Pokrivčák’s view, in postmodern
discourses “Meaning-production is supposed to lack any transcendal grounding and is
governed only by the play of ‘surface’ signifiers. The randomness of this
play[...]discloses the general concept-as-generalization” (Pokrivčák 1998:40). In
Pokrivčák’s view, this further leads to the creation of “‘citational’ [emphasis Pokrivčák]
quality of every sign” (40), textualization of the outside world and rhetorization of the
literary text (41). As Pokrivčák’s further observes, “The postmodern shift to textuality
has subversive effect not only for epistemology which has had to abandon the universal
claims of the traditional concept of truth but also for other discourses as well” (Pokrivčák

In postmodern literary works, depthlessness related to language can imply a critique
of language deprived of its referential function in a postmodern world as well of another
aspect of postmodern condition, that is consumerism and commercialism. This manifests
often itself in American postmodern authors’ works by John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Donald
Barthelme, Richard Brautigan and others. Stuart Sim adds to the inventory of motifs and
techniques which point out the language instability and disorder in postmodern fiction. In his
view, “Temporal disorder, involuntary impersonation of other voices (pastiche),
fragmentation, looseness of association, paranoia and the creation of vicious circles
[emphasis mine] are symptoms of the language disorders of schizophrenia as well as features
of postmodernist fiction” (Sim 2001:133).

m) Like Modernist literary texts, also postmodern literary texts use narrative devices and
aesthetic principles of other arts and media (the camera-eye technique, insertion of the
newsreels in the narrative, cuts, rapid sequence of images, impressionist depiction of
reality emphasizing visuality and subjective experience, ). But in difference from the
Modernist use and function of these narrative techniques emphasizing a depth or
psychology of experience, postmodern literary works use these and other devices to
emphasize depthlessness, superficiality and artificiality of experience as well as
dissociation of a man from both the nature, the world and language. In addition,
these techniques emphasize the textuality and semiotic nature of the perceived reality
as mediated through television, video, cinema, internet or virtual reality. n Brian Mc
Hale’s view,
“Postmodernist fiction at its most mimetic holds the mirror up to everyday life in advanced industrial societies, where reality is pervaded by the ‘miniature escape fantasies’ of television and the movies [...] Instead of serving as a repertoire of representational techniques, the movies and television appear in postmodern writing as an ontological level: a world-within-the-world, often one in competition with the primary diegetic world of the text... (Mc Hale 1987: 128).

It is not only the thematization of film and film making juxtaposed to the actual world (the term used by Benjamin Harshaw Hrushowski), but also such techniques as rapid sequence of images, seriality, juxtaposition of incompatible objects, images, and phenomena, and montage are often used in postmodern literary works.

Through the use of these techniques, the reality is often presented as simulacrum, that is a replacement of reality by its simulation rather than its representation. A difference between representation and simulation is discussed by Jean Baudrillard (1). In his works, William Burroughs uses various cinematic strategies (“Fadeout”, “Cut”) and he even constructs the whole episodes in a form of a screenplay or shooting-script. These techniques manifest themselves in his The Wild Boys (1971) and Exterminator! (1973) (Mc Hale 1987 128-129). Mc Hale argues that Burroughs uses these techniques to express a metaphor of control (television, film, images and signs controlling a human perception of the world, Mc Hale 1987:130). These techniques can also be seen in many postmodern literary works such as Robert Coover’s short story The Babysitter from his Pricksongs and Descants, 1969, also in his collection of short stories imitating various film techniques and genres (A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES Or, You Must Remember This, 1987).

n) With the emergence of the most sophisticated forms of technology such as computers, world wide web (www), internet, CD-ROMs, electronic mail and cellular phones, the term hypertext has come to the forefront of critical thinking, understanding and creation of the artistic texts. The idea of a hypertext appeared as early as in the article published by Franklin D. Roosevelt’s advisor Vannevar Bush in 1945, in which its author has proposed the idea of mechanically interconnected machines for the storage and retrieval of information for scholars, researchers, and scientists which would simplify a scientific work and the work of the traditional libraries. He has called his device the Memex and the information would be, in his view, annotated on microfilm (Sim 2001:281). The term
hypertext, however, was coined by Theodore H. Nelson in 1965. Nelson explained his term in the following way: “By ‘hypertext,’ I mean non-sequential writing-text that branches out and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways”. He has invented a global publishing system which he called Xanadu. One of the first who has started to theorize a connection between hypertext and literary studies was George P. Landow in his book Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology (1992), and the following sequels to this book, but also Marie Louise Ryan, J. David Bolter, Michael Joyce and others. As can be seen from the above, hypertext is closely associated with the computers and influences the nature of a text generated by them. In George P. Landow’s understanding, hypertext “denotes text composed of blocks of texts […] and the electronic links that join them” (Landow 1992: 4). In Landow’s view, hypertext “links a passage of verbal discourse to images, maps, diagrams, and sound as easily as to another verbal passage, expands the notion of text beyond the solely verbal” (Landow 1992: 4). Landow thus suggests to use the term hypertext and hypermedia interchangeably since the hypertext can be connected not only with other texts, but also with images, sounds, diagrams, that is other media which are not primarily verbal (Landow 1992:4). Using the hypertext, its user can easily click on the reference link and read it the reference, the whole article, or see a picture immediately. At the same time, the reader thus is not imposed to read the text in a linear way, but can jump to any part of the text. Hypertext thus significantly influences literature, literary studies and especially the relationship between a writer, a literary text and a reader. A text using hypertextual strategies undermines linearity of the narrative and its user/reader can jump from any part of the text to another part or block of the text, she/he can re-arrange textual blocks, paragraphs, through hyperlink (a link taking her/him to another text, picture, article) she/he can get to another text, picture, sound, or article on the basis of which another meaning is generated; and some of the these texts are composed in a way that a reader is directly involved in a creation of her/his own meaning by being offered various possibilities how to continue with reading, and thus composing a story. A reader thus does become a passive receiver of aesthetic message, but rather its active creator. Of course, this strategy of active participation can be rather realized only on a computer screen, but hypertextual narrative strategies can be partly used with printed texts by imitating hypertext in a printed form. Robert Coover, a
contemporary postmodern author, started to experiment with hypertextual fiction and has
launched a project of hypertextual interactive fiction at Brown University, USA, in the
1970’s, and such American authors as **Neal Stephenson**, **Michael Joyce**, **J. Yellowlees Douglas** and others belong to some of the most significant authors using hypertext and
hypermedia strategies in their artistic works. These texts are often not only printed, but
rather multimedia (hypermedia in Landow’s understanding) “texts” which become rather
“events”, or “performances” or “shows” since they use different media (print text, pictures, internet, television) which can be not only read, but also seen and perceived in
other ways different from traditional reading. Zuzana Husárová speaks more about
different kinds of hypertextual strategies in her article on American hypertextual fiction
(Husárová in Kušnír, 2007).
INFLUENCES/BACKGROUND

As it was mentioned above, the philosophies and theories which have undermined rationality, Enlightenment ideas, and mimetic representation of reality have stimulated a development not only of Modernism, but have significantly inspired postmodernism as well. These theories have mostly contributed to the creation of such postmodern impulses and characteristics as relativization (of the unifying vision of the world, position of a man in the universe, etc.) and plurality (of view, interpretations, positions).

1) It was especially Freud’s understanding of a man as irrational being whose behavior is influenced by suppressed sexual, social desires, fantasies and dreams; Frederic Nietzsche’s nihilism and skepticism associated with the possibilities of a language to represent reality; and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of “language games” as expressed in his Philosophical Investigations in which he understood a language not as a logical system referring directly to the object or reality, but as a cluster of signs dependent on the context which produces meaning.

2) Similar ideas undermining stability, rationality and logics can be found in scientific theories such as Einstein’s theory of relativity, theory of chaos (Gleick), Mandelbrott’s fractal geometry, new discoveries in quantum physics, theory of complexity (Prigogi, Isabelle Stengers), uncertainty principle and other theories.

3) the influence of new technologies and media such as photography, television and film influencing the people’s perception and vision of the world. Mass reproduction of artistic works through photography, mass production and television has contributed to the diminishing of the role and the status of the author and authorship which is one of the central preoccupations of postmodern literary works. These media anticipated another postmodern idea—that is the idea of depthlessness discussed above. Last but not least, these media has enabled the formation of the mass society and stimulated a creation and the broad
distribution of popular culture forming an extremely important aspect of postmodern culture. On the formal level, such authors as John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway and others have used the “camera-eye technique”, “montage” and “the newsreels” in their literary works during the period of Modernism in the 1920's to emphasize a new sensibility and the vision of the world as generated by new media. During the postmodern period, other technologies and media such as computers, video, cellular phones, CD-ROMs, Internet have stimulated a creation of virtual reality and hypertext. 

4) a significant influence on the formation of postmodern literature and the source of the creation of postmodern narrative techniques was undermining of the mimetic principle and realistic depiction. Early manifestations of these tendencies, although they could hardly be understood as systematically and deliberately postmodern, can be found in Gargantua and Pantagruel, Michael Cervantes Don Quijote de La Mancha, British author Laurence Sterne’s novel Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy as early as in the 18th century, or in French author Denis Diderot’s novel Jacques La Fataliste. Later relativitization of a depiction of reality, uncertainty, overlapping of different narrative voices, fiction and reality, although used for different purposes than in postmodernist fiction (for creation of psychological, subjective vision of the world), nihilism and solipsism could be found in European and American Modernist tradition (Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and the Lost Generation authors in the USA).

A much more radical undermining of the rationality and mimetic principle which has significantly influenced postmodern authors could be found

a) in the work of avantgarde poets and movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism (emphasizing the fragmentation, chance, dream and playfulness rather than imitation and rationality offering a unified vision of the world), Expressionism, Imagism, Futurism, Constructivism (rejecting traditional and regular verse, rhythm and themes). These avantgarde movements were preceded by the French symbolist poetry, especially Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), Charles Baudlaire (1821-1867), and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) who tried to change traditional understanding of poetry and art by emphasizing free association of ideas, inner world of a poet rather than outside reality, and the syncretic nature of art, especially a connection between poetry and music. In painting, Impressionism and
represented by such painters as Claude Monet, Degas, Manet, Cezanne and others in the 19th century and later, also focused on **subjectivity and subjective perception of the world** as well as on feeling and emotions related to the perception of reality and time. Thus the contours of Impressionist paintings are often blurred, unclear, the colors not always pleasant which expresses a subjective perception of outer reality and a transitory moment of time rather than the artists’ attempt to give an “objective” picture of it. Dadaism which originated simultaneously in Germany, Switzerland, France and the USA emphasized **negativity, absurdity and chance** associated with human existence which was influenced by Einstein’s theory of relativity. Such Dadaists as its founder **Tristan Tzara** (1896-1963) and **Paul Valéry** (1871-1945) rejected both morality and coherence of art and emphasized untraditional and formerly taboed themes such as suppressed desires and sexuality, loose association of ideas, chance and fragmentation. Surrealism developed these ideas and such surrealist authors as **Louis Aragon** (1897-1982), **André Breton** (1896-1966) were inspired by Freudian ideas, especially by his understanding of a man as **irrational being**, by his **interpretation of dreams, suppressed desires and sexuality**. Thus the Surrealists were interested in the subconsciousness and the symbolic manifestation of Freudian ideas in it. These ideas found its artistic expression in such artistic techniques as **collage** and **montage** and in a depiction of **untraditional, unexpected and irrational associations** reflecting the chaotic world, its **irrationality and chance**. All these ideas and artistic principles, especially **irrationality, subjectivism, fragmentation, and eclecticism** were later developed and modified in the work of Spanish modernist (Cubist, Surrealist and Constructivist) painters such as **Pablo Picasso** (1881 – 1973) and **Salvator Dalí** (1904 – 1989) and could be found in the works of such Modernist writers as Franz Kafka, James Joyce and others.

b) in addition to the literary works mentioned above, they were especially the following individual works which definitely used postmodern narrative techniques but which the critics mostly do not consider to be fully postmodern works as a whole and which can be understood as direct predecessors of postmodern literature: **James Joyce**’s novel **Finnegan’s Wake** (1933) because of its **linguistic play, overlapping of the fact and fiction, mixing of genres and relativization of reality**; French author **Andre Gide**’s **The Counterfeiters** using self-reflexive techniques and meta-commentaries creating a **metafictional effect**; later in the works of Polish author **Wittold Gombrowicz** **Feydydurke** and **Samuel Beckett**’s novels
c) sci-fiction works giving a utopian, dystopian or fantastic vision of the future and discussing negative effects related to the use of technology and science. The early inspiration could be Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, or Brian Stoker’s Dracula, Jules Verne’s fantastic novels, but later especially Russian author Evgenyi Zamyatin’s novel We (1920), Czech Karel Čapek’s novels, H.G. Wells, A. Huxley, K. Čapek, Arthur A. Clark, J.G. Ballard, S. Lem, later allegorical novels of George Orwell, all which developed in the postmodern cyberpunk novels of American writer William Gibson and others.

d) Latin American, the so-called magic realist fiction emphasizing the power of storytelling and relativizing a difference between fiction and reality, the real (actual) and fictional worlds (G.G. Marquéz, A. Carpentier, J. Cortazár, M. Vargas Llosa, M.A. Asturias), and especially a Columbian author Jose Louis Borghes’ works of the 1960’s and later parodying, transforming and deconstructing popular literary genres, other well-known literary works and using metafictional techniques

e) in drama, they were especially Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello’s plays (Six Characters in Search of an Author) in which the boundaries between the staging and the audience, characters and viewers, the play and its audience were eradicated and the audience was often directly involved in the creation of meaning of the play as involuntary or voluntary but unexpected participants; obscenity as theme and metaphor of cultural condition in a chaotic world as manifested in the plays of Alfred Jarry; and existential feelings, interest in and experiment with language implying an inability of language to communicate truth and to give an objective and clear picture of reality in the works of Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd.

5) the influence of popular culture especially music such as blues, jazz, and rock that has helped eradicate boundaries between the low and high culture, between formerly serious and popular literature and thus have emphasized the creative stimuli of the formerly low genres, forms and kinds of literature. Especially the poets of the American so-called Harlem Renaissance of the 1920’s used the themes and rhythms of blues and later jazz in
their poetry which inspired the Beat authors of the 1950’s and later. The Beat authors such as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Jack Kerouac, Kenneth Rexroth and others used blues, jazz and rock rhythms and their poetry was often recited at open spaces, sport stadiums often “sung” and accompanied by rock bands and singers (Bob Dylan) and thus became rather a performance, event and happening rather than poetry for personal and intimate reading.

6) In painting, sculpture and other arts they were especially the works of Marcel Duchamp of the early 20th century which have stimulated a change in understanding of the nature of art, have implied its parody potential, and have helped to eradicate boundaries between the low and high art. For example, Duchamp has exhibited an extremely banal and mass produced commercial product used for the satisfaction of the most common and lowest needs of people, that is a urinal which he has entitled ironically Fountain (1920s). This has implied several connotations: the primarily non-artistic, even banal material and object was promoted to the status of the artistic artifact that has implied highly parodic and ironic connotations related to both the status of art and social reality. Art was thus understood not separated from but a part of life; art need not be necessarily associated with the artistic work, artistic activity, but can become art by being put in inadequate contexts (mass-produced urinal in a gallery) and thus to understand art, the perceiver must understand a social and historical context; thus it becomes parodic and ironic in relation to the role of art and artist in a modern world: irony manifests itself in the artist’s promotion of the non-artistic, even banal material or object to the level of art which is closely connected to parody- of the former arts’ separation from life, artists’ distance from the audience which was common for Modernist art (art and artists as an alternative to a corrupted reality), and of the sublime and aesthetic feeling formerly associated with high art (only art which used to choose aesthetically pleasant and nice objects and themes was traditionally understood as art, or rather high art). Irony and parody thus also emphasized a critical distance of new forms of art from the past art forms. In connection with social reality, irony and parody pointed out a commercial and consumerist character of the modern age in which a commercial, banal, everyday and massively produced product for multiple use could become a work of art. This implies several connotations related to the postmodern ideas developed in arts especially in the USA in the 1950’s, 1960’s and later. Duchamp’s work implies two basic ideas postmodern authors were later preoccupied by, that is the idea of originality and authorship. The work such as Duchamp’s does not build its connotative potential on its originality, but on existing, even
low forms and materials and it deliberately rejects “the newness” and originality (as expressed in the above John Barth’s essay Literature of Exhaustion). Art seems to have exhausted the new forms and materials and thus it tries to find an inspiration in existing, old, and popular rather than high forms, materials and objects. In connection with this, the artistic work does not pretend to be authentic, but builds its meaning on the recombination and recontextualization of the existing forms, materials, and objects. Its author need not primarily be an artist creating the work (in Duchamp’s Fountain, the physical author of the artistic object is both mass and rather anonymous—a company producing urinals, and the artifact is a commercial product bought in a regular shop) and thus his role of a creator is reduced and even suppressed. Such techniques and understanding of art was later developed by Andy Warhol and his pop-art in the USA in the 1950’s, and later by Robert Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg, by op-art and other experimental artists in the USA in the 1960’s and later. These authors have used advertisements, popular pictures, comic strips and other kinds of commercial and popular culture as a source of their artistic inspiration.