

DAVID MITCHELL BADIY ASARLARIDA METAMATN VA “MATN ICHIDAGI MATN” STRATEGIYASI: *THE BONE CLOCKS* VA *SLADE HOUSE* ASARLARI TAHLILI

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**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqolada zamonaviy britan adabiyotida metamatnlilik va “matn ichidagi matn” narrativ strategiyasining qo‘llanishi David Mitchellning *The Bone Clocks* (2014) va *Slade House* (2015) asarlari misolida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot postmodern narratologiya nazariyasiga asoslanib, qatlamli matn tuzilmalari chiziqli vaqt tasavvurini qanday izdan chiqarishi hamda ontologik jihatdan ko‘p qatlamli narrativ olamlarni qanday shakllantirishini o‘rganadi. Sifatli matn tahlili usuli yordamida Mitchell mualliflik, identiklik va epistemologik noaniqlik masalalarini yoritishda ichki hikoyalar, rekursiv tuzilmalar va metafiktional sharhlardan foydalanishi ko‘rsatib beriladi. Tadqiqot natijalari Mitchell metamatndan nafaqat strukturaviy, balki falsafiy vosita sifatida ham foydalanib, postmodern usullarni transmodern yondashuv darajasiga olib chiqishini ko‘rsatadi. Bu esa XXI asr adabiyotida narrativ murakkablik va o‘quvchi ishtiroki haqidagi ilmiy munozaralarga muhim hissa qo‘shadi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** metamatn, metafiktisiya, postmodernizm, narrativ strategiya, intertekstuallik, ontologik ko‘plik.

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматривается использование метатекстуальности и нарративной стратегии «текст в тексте» в современной британской литературе на примере романов Дэвида Митчелла *The Bone Clocks* (2014) и *Slade House* (2015). Исследование основано на принципах постмодернистской нарратологии и направлено на изучение того, каким образом многослойные текстовые структуры дестабилизируют линейную временную организацию повествования и формируют онтологически множественные нарративные миры. С помощью качественного текстуального анализа показано, что Митчелл использует встроенные повествования, рекурсивные структуры и метафикоциональные комментарии для осмысления проблем авторства, идентичности и эпистемологической неопределённости. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что писатель расширяет возможности постмодернистских художественных приёмов, переводя их в трансмодернистскую парадигму, где метатекст выступает одновременно структурным и философским инструментом. Это вносит существенный вклад в современные дискуссии о нарративной сложности и роли читателя в литературе XXI века.

**Ключевые слова:** метатекст, метафигция, постмодернизм, нарративная стратегия, интертекстуальность, онтологическая множественность.

**Annotation.** This article explores the deployment of metatextuality and the “text-within-text” narrative strategy in contemporary British fiction through a focused analysis of David Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks* (2014) and *Slade House* (2015). Grounded in postmodern narratology, the study investigates how layered textual structures destabilize linear temporality and construct ontologically plural narrative worlds. Using qualitative textual analysis, the research demonstrates that Mitchell employs embedded narratives, recursive structures, and metafictional commentary to interrogate authorship, identity, and epistemological uncertainty. The findings suggest that Mitchell extends postmodern techniques into a transmodern framework, where metatext functions as both a structural and philosophical device. This contributes to ongoing debates on narrative complexity and reader participation in 21st-century literature.

**Keywords:** metatext, metafiction, postmodernism, narrative strategy, intertextuality, ontological plurality.

**Introduction.** The evolution of contemporary British fiction has been marked by increasing experimentation with narrative form, particularly through the use of metatextual strategies. Metatext, broadly understood as a text's self-reflexive engagement with its own structure or with other texts, plays a crucial role in redefining narrative boundaries in postmodern literature. David Mitchell emerges as a significant figure in this context, whose works demonstrate intricate narrative layering and intertextual connectivity.

Mitchell's novels *The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House* exemplify the "text-within-text" strategy, where embedded narratives create a multiplicity of textual realities. This technique not only disrupts linear storytelling but also challenges the stability of meaning and interpretation. As Patricia Waugh argues, metafiction foregrounds the artificiality of narrative construction, encouraging readers to question the nature of fiction itself.[9]

Despite growing scholarly interest in Mitchell's narrative complexity, there remains a lack of focused analysis on his use of metatextuality in these two novels. This article addresses this gap by examining how the "text-within-text" strategy operates within Mitchell's narrative architecture and contributes to broader theoretical discussions.

**Research and Methods.** This study uses a qualitative approach based on close reading to examine how metatextual elements operate in *The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House*. Instead of relying on numerical data, it focuses on interpreting narrative structures, embedded stories, and self-reflexive moments. The analysis is guided by postmodern narratology, which helps explain how these novels challenge linear storytelling and produce layered meanings.

The study draws on several theoretical perspectives, including metafiction (Patricia Waugh), intertextuality (Julia Kristeva), transtextuality (G rard Genette), and ontological poetics (Brian McHale). In particular, McHale's idea that postmodern fiction emphasizes multiple realities rather than fixed knowledge is central here, as Mitchell's novels present overlapping narrative worlds. Together, these perspectives show how metatext and the "text-within-text" strategy function not only as stylistic devices but also as tools for exploring deeper questions of reality, identity, and narrative.

**Results and Discussion.** One of the most striking features of *The Bone Clocks* is its polyphonic and segmented narrative structure, which creates a dynamic system of embedded texts. Each chapter is focalized through a different narrator, effectively functioning as an independent narrative unit while simultaneously contributing to a larger metatextual whole. This layered construction exemplifies the "text-within-text" strategy not merely as a structural technique but as a mode of epistemological inquiry.

The character of Holly Sykes operates as a connective thread binding these narrative fragments. However, her perspective is constantly reframed by other narrators, thereby destabilizing any singular interpretation of events. This aligns with McHale's assertion that postmodern fiction foregrounds "a plurality of worlds rather than a single, unified reality". [6]

Crispin Hershey's section provides a clear example of metatextuality, as his role as a writer allows him to reflect on literature within the novel itself. His critique of the literary market, where stories become mere commodities, introduces a deeper commentary on authorship. This goes beyond character development, creating a secondary layer of meaning within the narrative. His anxiety about plagiarism and originality highlights the postmodern concern that true originality is difficult to achieve. This reflects the idea that all texts are influenced by others, a key concept in metafiction. By presenting these concerns through Hershey's inner thoughts, Mitchell turns abstract theory into lived narrative experience.

The novel's supernatural conflict between the Horologists and the Anchorites further intensifies its metatextual complexity. These groups inhabit distinct ontological planes, each governed by its own rules and logic. Their interactions create what can be described as overlapping narrative realities, where one "textual world" intrudes upon another. This is evident when Holly becomes aware of voices that exist beyond ordinary perception: "the voices weren't sounds, exactly, but presences pressing against her mind".[8] Such passages blur the boundary between internal consciousness and external reality, reinforcing the novel's layered ontology.

Importantly, these ontological disruptions are not presented as purely fantastical elements; rather, they function as metaphors for narrative permeability. The intrusion of one world into another parallels the way embedded texts intersect within the novel's structure. In this sense, the supernatural becomes a narrative device that materializes the abstract concept of metatextuality.

While *The Bone Clocks* expands outward through temporal fragmentation, *Slade House* achieves metatextual depth through spatial enclosure and narrative recursion. The house itself operates as a self-contained textual universe, within which multiple embedded narratives unfold. Each visitor's experience constitutes a distinct narrative layer, yet these layers are structurally interconnected.

The episodic design of the novel reinforces the "text-within-text" strategy. Each chapter introduces a new protagonist whose story appears autonomous at first but gradually reveals its dependence on the overarching structure. This creates a nested narrative system, where individual stories function as both independent texts and components of a larger metatext. A key feature of this structure is its cyclical repetition. Events recur with subtle variations, producing a sense of déjà vu that destabilizes linear temporality. For example, the description of the house often echoes across chapters, with slight modifications: "the narrow alley seemed to appear from nowhere, as though the city had briefly forgotten its own layout".[8] This repetition suggests that each narrative iteration is a rewriting of the previous one, aligning with Dillon's concept of the palimpsest, where "layers of text overwrite but never fully erase one another".[2]

The house itself can be interpreted as a metafictional construct, symbolizing the act of storytelling. It lures characters into a seemingly coherent reality, only to reveal its artificiality. This mirrors the reader's experience, as the narrative initially appears linear but gradually exposes its recursive structure. In this way, *Slade House* transforms the spatial setting into a metaphor for textuality.

The Grayer twins, who control the house, further complicate this metafictional framework. Their ability to manipulate reality within the house parallels the author's control over narrative. At one point, a character realizes that "nothing here obeyed the rules it should have",[7] highlighting the artificiality of the constructed world. This moment functions as a metatextual rupture, where the illusion of reality is momentarily suspended.

Additionally, the novel's second-person address in certain passages intensifies reader involvement, creating a sense of direct immersion. This narrative technique collapses the boundary between reader and text, reinforcing the idea that meaning is co-produced through interpretation. As Hutcheon suggests, postmodern texts often "enlist the reader as an active participant in the creation of meaning".[4]

In *The Bone Clocks*, the multiplicity of perspectives undermines the reliability of any single narrative voice. Each embedded text offers a partial and often contradictory account of events, compelling the reader to navigate between them. This reflects a broader epistemological uncertainty, where truth is fragmented and contingent.

Similarly, in *Slade House*, the recursive structure creates a sense of interpretive instability. Each narrative layer appears to provide clarity, only to be recontextualized by subsequent layers. This constant revision of meaning exemplifies the postmodern rejection of fixed interpretation.

What distinguishes Mitchell's approach is his ability to integrate these abstract concerns into emotionally resonant narratives. The metatextual complexity does not alienate the reader; instead, it enhances engagement by inviting active interpretation. The reader becomes, in effect, a participant in the construction of the text's meaning.

A comparative analysis reveals that while both novels employ the "text-within-text" strategy, they do so through different narrative mechanisms:

- *The Bone Clocks* emphasizes temporal expansion and perspectival multiplicity, creating a dispersed metatextual network.
- *Slade House* focuses on spatial containment and recursive repetition, producing a concentrated metatextual system.

Despite these differences, both texts converge in their use of metatext as a tool for ontological exploration. They challenge the boundaries between reality and fiction, author and character, text and reader.

This expanded analysis demonstrates that Mitchell's metatextual strategies go beyond conventional metafiction. Rather than merely exposing the artificiality of

narrative, his works simulate the experience of navigating multiple realities, thereby transforming readers into active interpreters. The “text-within-text” strategy, therefore, should be understood not only as a formal device but as an epistemological model—one that reflects the complexity of contemporary experience, where reality itself appears fragmented, mediated, and multilayered.

**Conclusion.** This study has demonstrated that metatextuality and the “text-within-text” strategy are central to David Mitchell’s narrative technique in *The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House*. Through fragmented structures, embedded narratives, and recursive patterns, Mitchell constructs complex textual worlds that challenge ontological stability and reader expectations.

The findings suggest that Mitchell’s work represents a continuation and transformation of postmodern literary practices. By integrating metafiction with philosophical inquiry, he contributes to the evolution of contemporary fiction in a transmodern context. Future research may explore the application of these strategies in Mitchell’s broader oeuvre or examine their relevance in global literary traditions.

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