

# John Barth's "Menelaiad" and Quantum Mechanics: The Sacrifice of Common Sense

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## Abstract

In the annals of the Greek myth, there has been a lacuna surrounding Menelaus and Helen's relationship following the sack of Troy. What distinguishes Barth's retelling of the Greek myth is filling this void through constructing a posthistory to the relationship the couple bear to each other and his giving voice to the concerns of Menelaus, a character who has always been in the recess of the canon. While a large body of research has approached Barth's "Menelaiad" in light of literature of the absurd, this study, through adopting the stance of quantum mechanics on the nature of reality, will demonstrate that Barth's work is anything but absurd. Establishing the framework of the article based on the uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics, the present study argues how the adoption of the subatomic reality, implied in Proteus' advice, allows Menelaus to jettison his festering obsession with the causality behind Helen's choice and re-embrace her.

## Keywords

Gestalt approach; Menelaus; quantum mechanics; the Copenhagen Interpretation; the uncertainty principle.

## 1. Introduction

The ramifications and appropriation of scientific concepts in the realm of literature saw its emergence as early as the seventeenth century, the era associated with scientific breakthroughs. In the narrative, causality and temporal unfolding of events succeeding one after another were to be revered and religiously practiced as a result of the Newtonian clockwork universe. This harmonious universe, having the originating God as its cause, was followed by Einstein's *Weltbild*, the world image. Einstein had no qualms about relegating Godly causation right next to a hydrogen cloud, thus "driving away the phantoms of metaphysics" (Richard 86). The twentieth century witnessed the scientists' probe into the heart of matter, whereby arbitrariness reigns supreme. Similarly, the causal links in fiction receded into the margin and became less and less conspicuous:

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"The microscopic world had freed the fictionist from the fetters of causality" (88). However, the debate over causality or dearth of it found its impetus way back into the ancient Greece; Aristotle in *Poetics* extolled the necessity of telos, finality, which he believed was to be achieved through causality (84). Nevertheless, as Richard points out, not all the thinkers contemporary with Aristotle would concur. Among the chief agonistic voices was that of Epicurus, who believed in arbitrariness and chance. He was one of the proponents of atomistic metaphysics of Leucippus and Democritus. Epicurus believed in an infinite number of atoms and worlds and repudiated the intervention of gods in the life of man or associating them with any first cause (Blackburn 117). That narrative should defy unravelling toward telos has been regarded as one of the distinguishing features of postmodern literature. In a similar vein, quantum mechanics (QM) has taught us that, until further scientific notice, pinning down one single description as the ultimate reality is not feasible. The picture of reality QM paints is redolent of Epicurus' vision; it resuscitates a voice which has been drowned out for over twenty centuries.

## **2. Literature Review**

Of Henry Fielding, Robert Alter has remarked that he is an author who "theorizes about what he writes as he writes it" (30). The same can be said of Barth who uses "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment" to reflect upon innovations in the works of Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Gabriel García Márquez, and his own. Barth asserts that imitating the tradition, per se, is not fruitful: "Beethoven's Sixth Symphony or the Chartres cathedral, if executed today, might be simply embarrassing" (*Friday* 66); by no means is he suggesting that we should repudiate the tradition altogether, rather he is calling for a "postmodern synthesis." To Barth, such premodern techniques as "linearity, rationality, consciousness, cause and effect, naïve illusionism, transparent language, innocent anecdote, and middle-class moral conventions are not the whole story;" neither are their modernist counter-equivalents: "Disjunction, simultaneity, irrationalism, anti-illusionism, self-reflexiveness, medium-as-message, political olympianism, and a moral pluralism approaching moral entropy – these are not the whole story either" (203). "A worthy program for postmodernist fiction," Barth asserts, "is the synthesis or transcension of these antitheses, which may be summed up as premodernist and modernist modes of writing. My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth-century modernist parents or his nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents" (203). What generates "new and lively work," Barth contends, is approaching the traditional artistic wellspring with "ironic intent" (69). Safer views Barth a true practitioner of what he preaches in his essays: his labyrinthine amusement park (funhouse) is bereft of any cause-and-effect clues which used to help readers make head or tail of the state of affairs in

traditional fiction (113). Instead, what his labyrinth intends to achieve is to get both the character and the reader to lose their way in the funhouse, because for Barth, the process of seeking the treasure is just as worthwhile: “The key to the treasure is the treasure” (*Chimera* 64).

Tony Tanner argues that in order to help themselves out of the quagmire of necessity, American heroes and authors have rejected to approach reality as a fixed pattern. If left unchecked, however, this sense of possibility may efface the self outright. Kierkegaard in *The Sickness unto Death* warns, “Now if possibility outruns necessity, the self runs away from itself, so that it has no necessity whereto it is bound to return – then this is the despair of possibility” (qtd. in Tanner 293). Tanner views Barth’s heroes to be inflicted by such despair and even has reasons to believe that Barth himself, having failed to secure a sense of actuality, has gone “stray in possibility.” Barth’s disparaging the quotidian reality has been a well-documented fact: “One ought to know a lot about Reality before one writes realistic novels. Since I don't know much about Reality, it will have to be abolished. What the hell, reality is a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there, and literature never did, very long. . . . Reality is a drag” (qtd. in Enck 11). Unattainable as reality for Barth is, whatever he touches changes into fiction, estranged from the reality out there. Then what has motivated him to go on writing? Tanner finds the key to Barth’s unabated interest in writing in the coexistence and convergence of identity and articulation:

The “I” is only ascertainable as that which speaks: self is voice, but voice speaking unnecessary and arbitrary and untrue words. The torment of this book [*Lost in the Funhouse*] is that of a man who cannot really find any sanction for writing either in world or self, yet feels that it is his one distinguishing ability, the one activity which gives him any sense of self. (Tanner 294)

Leaving the reader in the complex maze of allusion and verbal play or what Nabokov calls “lexical playfields” makes reading both challenging and rapturous. However, the fact that no stories are told and that the text ultimately becomes a self-reflexive lexical field has led Tanner and like-minded critics to associate Barth’s fiction with narrative and linguistic nihilism. Tanner views *Lost in the Funhouse* as “nonprogressive muttering” which takes the reader nowhere (297).

Another train of criticism has traced existential absurdity in Barth’s fiction: Harold Farwell has studied the treatment of love in Barth’s fiction which is, he argues, in stark contrast to the literary mainstream. What places Barth outside the mainstream, Farwell notes, is his absurd treatment of love unlike the contemporaneous depiction of love as “personally redemptive, if not a universal spiritual panacea” (291). During the time when Barth was penning his juvenilia, love was supposed to retain something of value, “some

refuge against the otherwise universal chaos" (291). Farwell sees Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" felicitous in capturing the atmosphere of the second half of the twentieth century: with the philosophical uncertainties and scientific advances unfurling "The Sea of Faith," love could kindle some solace, "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another! for the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new, / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain." The protagonists in Barth's first two novels, Todd Andrews in *The Floating Opera* and Jacob Horner in *The End of the Road*, involve in a ménage à trois which results in egregious consequences: the child in the first novel might have been born out of wedlock while in the second novel the child is aborted. In either case, the relationship cannot recover the character from nihilism: "The characters' attempts to find justification for or meaning in their actions and emotions inevitably lead nowhere" (Farwell 293). However, Farwell notes, earlier contemplating suicide notwithstanding, Todd settles for a compromise by the end of the novel, affirming love no matter how absurd it might be: "In the real absence of absolutes, values less than absolute mightn't be regarded as in no way inferior and even be lived by" (Barth, *Opera* 246-47).

Similarly, to Farwell, the desecration of love can be traced in Barth's later fiction, of which *Lost in the Funhouse* is a quintessence. To the spermatozoon of "Night-Sea Journey," love is anything but sublime: "Oh, to be sure, 'Love!' I translate: we don't know *what* drives and sustains us, only that we are most miserably driven and, imperfectly, sustained. *Love* is how we call our ignorance of what whips us" (*Funhouse* 4). However, Ambrose and the anonymous minstrel would rather recourse to art, "the fearsomeness of the facts of life. Merope's love, Helen's whoring, Menelaus's noise, Agamemnon's slicing up his daughter for the weatherman – all the large and deadly passions of men and women . . . must've scared the daylights out of me from the first. While the other fellows played with their spears, I learned to play the lyre" (166). Confronted with Menelaus' persistence in knowing her inclination for choosing him over her other suitors, "Love," is all Helen utters. More perplexed than assuaged by the reply, Menelaus' quest for the absolute proof of why Helen chose him takes him to the Oracle in Delphi, who replies, "*No other can as well espouse her*" (153), and Proteus, who instructs him thus: "Beg Love's pardon for your want of faith. Helen chose you without reason because she loves you without cause; embrace her without question and watch your weather change" (156). Subsequently, Menelaus no longer questions Helen's love and fidelity. To Farwell, these instances show Menelaus' affirmation of love, however tenuous it might be. He concludes that in contrast to Arnold's redemptive notion of love in a world already fallen apart, Barth's absurd treatment of love works in tandem with the world in which nothing else makes sense.



to approach Barth's fiction in light of literature of the absurd, nihilism and black humor. What most researchers have overlooked, however, is that the same era witnessed groundbreaking discoveries in modern physics, namely quantum mechanics, whose implications one can pick up in "Menelaiad." Rather than aligning its methodology with such exhausted frameworks as absurdity and nihilism, the present study, through deploying an unprecedented framework, attempts at replenishing the scholarship on Barth's work, particularly by examining what Proteus' advice and quantum mechanics can disclose to us about the nature of reality.

### **3. Quantum Mechanics**

Although it is formally associated with Erwin Schrödinger and Werner Heisenberg who wrote down its equations, quantum mechanics (QM) has its roots in the works of Max Planck, Albert Einstein, and Niels Bohr, among others, in the late 19th and the early 20th century. Reality at the subatomic level is a wavefunction. Unlike the Newtonian particle which has an exact position and velocity at a given time, in QM a particle propagates and cannot be associated with a definite value. In order to get some insight into different aspects of a particle, it is necessary that we send light over it. The photons which exist in a ray of light, however, are robust enough to change the particle's momentum. Shuddered by the photons in the light, according to the Copenhagen Interpretation of QM, the wavefunction of the particle collapses into a definite state and it is brought into an abrupt halt. Although measurement can provide us with a rough idea about different aspects of the particle under scrutiny, we can never speak with certainty about the results, because any interception of the particle, through observation/measurement, messes with its wavefunction irrevocably.

#### **3.1. The Uncertainty Principle**

Enunciated in 1927 by Werner Heisenberg, according to the uncertainty principle, determining precisely a particle's position eliminates the possibility of determining its velocity (the speed and direction of an object's motion) with precision. The same way that a strong gust of wind affects our speed, interacting with a particle necessitates striking it with beams of light. Subsequently, as the light bounces off the tiny particle, it can change its speed (Greene 96-97). Locating the electron's position with precision means that the light beam it receives must be more energetic which in turn can affect the electron's motion:

[Measurement] changes the particle's momentum by recoil, giving it a new momentum that is uncertain because we do not know all the details of its initial momentum or of the Compton scattering collision. And the shorter the wavelength of the probing photon, that larger the momentum disturbance of the particle that is struck, so the more imprecisely we can know its momentum. Position precision in the experiment is achieved only at the expense of momentum imprecision. (Cramer 22)

However, it is deceptive to deduce that the data get contaminated due to the involvement of a human subject/measurement with the subatomic realm: “Uncertainty is built into the wave structure of quantum mechanics and exists whether or not we carry out some clumsy measurement” (Greene 97-98).

#### 4. Modern Physics and Fiction: Parallels and Influences

Employing modern physics theories in fiction can be traced to Vladimir Nabokov, who used the term “physics fiction” in his *Ada, or Ador: A Family Chronicle* (1969) and, more recently, Vanna Bonta, an American Novelist, who coined the term “quantum fiction” with the publication of her 1995 book *Flight: A Quantum Fiction Novel* (Front 28-29). Gregorio Morales, a Spanish author, in his essay “El cadaver de Balzac” (“Balzac’s Corpse” 1998), has enumerated the features of quantum aesthetics, among which are: “Both observer and observed are tied together” and “a primary concern for freedom and diversity” (29). The 1980s marks the utilization of QM as an analytical framework in the realm of literary criticism (Burwell 125). Jennifer Burwell asserts that such fundamental tenets of poststructuralism as the dismissal of subject/object duality, the decentering of author(ity), and undermining the relationship between signifier and signified could gain further “credence” following the recognition of quantum theory. She goes on to aver that in the present century, applying the QM to literary analysis can hinder the growing recession of the humanities (125). Burwell views the relationship between literature and quantum physics fitting into one of these two main categories: hypodermic model and the gestalt approach. The direct influence, based on the hypodermic model, presupposes that the artist has been “injected” with scientific ideas. In other words, this model assumes that the writer has become acquainted with the science through the mass media and popularizers (127). Such conscious deployment of QM notions in fiction has been quite fertile. Samuel C. Coale, for instance, in “Quantum Flux and Narrative Flow: Don DeLillo’s Entanglements with Quantum Theory” reveals DeLillo’s concern with deploying QM concepts. However, the arguments advanced based on the direct influence, Burwell notes, are stagnated by the “burden of proof.” She goes on to maintain that “the critic must provide specific evidence of a causal connection, and often the causal connection feels like mere conjecture” (127). Katherine Hayles takes a similar position when she undermines linking science and other modes of expression through gathering evidence of any direct influence: “To suppose that such parallels require direct lines of influence is to be wedded to the very notions of causality that a [quantum] field model renders obsolete” (22).

In addition to the influence as such, connections can emerge from “a shared epochal gestalt that traverses all forms of expression – literature, science, architecture, medicine, law, and so on” (Burwell 128). That “a shared intellectual climate” can steer all forms of expression has also been emphasized by Dennis Bohnenkamp who notes that “there is at least a semblance of cultural continuity in any given age; the thinkers in any time share certain assumptions about the laws that govern their particular reality” (19). Hayles views “a field notion of culture, a societal matrix” as a more appropriate model, which allows the practitioners of all disciplines to study a diffuse gestalt in a given epoch. Similarly, Burwell regards the gestalt approach beneficial, for it eliminates the need to prove that a writer encountered specific scientific concepts: “One can argue instead that there exist parallel logics, epistemological concerns, and metaphysical assumptions between science and literature that result from their shared historical moment” (129). It is the gestalt approach, rather than the direct influence, which defines the relation between Barth’s “Menelaiad” and QM.

### **5. Barth’s “Menelaiad:” A Requiem for Classical Causality and the Baptism of Quantum Reality**

That the Greek literature has cast a disparaging glance at Menelaus, Helen’s *insignificant* other, arises from not only his disproportionate attributes in stark contrast with those of Helen, but also his confrontation with Helen following the sack of Troy, which is reminiscent of yielding to the emasculating power of the female, whose beauty, to borrow Shakespeare’s wording, makes men effeminate and softens their valor’s steel: “I was mad with shame and passion for my salvaged wife; though curses Greek and Trojan showered on us like spears . . . I fetched her to my ship unstuck, stowed her below, made straight for home” (Barth, *Funhouse* 141). The fictional world in which Barth situates Helen and Menelaus and the story he conceives of the couple have enriched these classic tales in innovative ways. To be better able to appreciate Barth’s “Menelaiad,” it is necessary to review briefly the trajectory of decisive events which initiated the sack of Troy and beyond.

Despite the fact that Helen provides the impetus for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, she is conspicuously absent from the narrative she has inspired (Maguire xi). We hear her first hand in only three episodes in The *Iliad* and the Book IV of the *Odyssey*. That in the *Iliad* Helen weaves a tapestry which depicts the sufferings imposed on the Greeks and Trojans in the aftermath of her misconduct as well as her narrating function in the *Odyssey* when she reveals her intimate encounter with Odysseus to his son, bear witness to her capacity as a poet/creator (Holmberg 27). Yet Holmberg admits that Homer’s narrative frustrates Helen’s poetic ability to be realized in its full potential. In fact, had it not been embedded in the Homeric narrative, Helen’s mythos would not have endured (27). It is precisely



thanks to her fugitive sojourns in the fabric of the myth that alternate worlds revolving around Helen have come into being. Following Homer's, Euripides' *Helen* occupies pride of place in the tradition. Although in most of his plays Euripides has adopted a reproachful stance on Helen, his alternate tale, initially referred to in Hesiod or the Stesichorean palinode in Plato's *Phaedrus*, gives rise to a Helen of another kind, both in substance and manners. Euripides' *Helen* pivots around a fantasy world in which the real Helen is whisked to Egypt and it is her eidolon, phantom, that Paris takes to Troy.

In Homer's epic, Helen has not only been chided and vilified, but also deprecates herself for her deeds: ". . . 'I grieved for the madness that Aphrodite / bestowed when she led me there away from my own dear country, / forsaking my own daughter, my bedchamber, and my husband, / a man who lacked no endowment either of brains or beauty'" (4. 261-64). However, Wolff views Euripides' *Helen* an attempt to purge Helen of the blemish unjustly attached to her: "Nothing is worse than to experience, in all helplessness, a discrepancy between the world's opinion and one's own knowledge of oneself" (80). Indeed, it is during one of these self-justifying moments when we gain some insight into Helen's thought: "I'm soiled with a false shame / that's mine only in name, only in name / . . . for which I blame my beauty as much as Hera" (Euripides 269-276). Euripides' contribution to Helen's narrative lies, moreover, in the construction of a positive female character who expresses her subjectivity and successfully executes her plans (Holmberg 21). It is the rhetoric she deploys, rather than the menace employed by Menelaus, which coaxes Theonoe into complicity in their escape stratagem, thus thwarting Theoclymenus' amorous advances (Wolff 83).

What distinguishes Barth's retelling of the Greek myth is his giving voice to the concerns of a character who has always been under the shadow, both on the grand scale of the mythoi and among Helen's more qualified suitors: "Less clever than Odysseus, fierce than Achilles, muscled than either Ajax, Menelaus excelled in no particular unless the doggedness with which he clung to the dream of embracing despite all Helen" (Barth, *Funhouse* 148). Moreover, there has been a lacuna in the ancient Greek literature regarding the relationship between Menelaus and Helen following her repossession at the sack of Troy (Maguire 9). Filling this void through constructing a posthistory to the couple is one of Barth's contribution to the myth.

Menelaus' passion for Helen kindles when he first sees her in Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's wedding. Against all the odds, Helen chooses him and, before long, his "doggedness" to hold Helen is superseded by his tenacity to know Helen's rationale behind her choice: ". . . 'Speak!' Menelaus cried to Helen on the bridal bed, 'I reminded Helen in her Trojan Bedroom, 'I confessed to Eidothea on the beach, 'I declared to Proteus in the cavemouth, 'I vouchsafed to Helen on the ship, ' . . . I say to whoever and

where- I am" (Barth, *Funhouse* 150). Nevertheless, Helen's laconic answer, "Love," does little to convince him: "How could Helen love a man . . . she'd glimpsed but once prior to wedding and not spoken to till that hour? But she'd say no more; the harder he pressed the cooler she turned" (150). Neither does the promise of an eternal life in Elysium quench his insatiable curiosity: "She took his corse once more to Elysium, to fade forever among the fadeless asphodel; his curious fancy alone remained unlaid; when he came to himself it still asked softly: 'why?'" (150). During Paris's infamous visit, Menelaus discloses his obsession with causality behind Helen's choice, upon which Paris advises him to consult an oracle at Delphi. Following his grandfather's funeral, Menelaus leaves Crete for Delphi. "*No other can as well espouse her*" (153), the oracle utters equivocally. Having resolved to feign to understand Helen's motive, he leaves for Sparta only to find she has forsaken him. The passage of time cannot curb his obsession, either. He carries this unabated causality baggage with him into the Trojan War. When he confronts Paris in a duel, he pauses to ask, "But tell me, as I spear you: did Helen ever mention, while you clipped and tumbled, how she happened to choose me in the first place?" Paris grinned and whispered through his shivers: "Love" (153). Menelaus' postwar "want of faith" in Helen's fidelity and his scathing accusation of her misconduct as the *casus belli* augment an already troubled marriage and suppress her passion for him: for seven years, "Helen held fast the door of love" (143). Initially the champion of the Newtonian worldview, Menelaus censures Helen for her role in wreaking havoc:

"Helen," I say: "Helen's responsible for this. From the day we lovers sacrificed the horse in Argos, pastureland of horses, and swore on its bloody joints to be her champions forever, whichever of us she chose, to the night we huddled in the horse in Troy while she took the part of all our wives – everything's Helen's fault. Cities built and burnt, a thousand bottoms on the sea's, every captain corpsed or cuckold – her doing. (127)

Menelaus goes on to blame himself on numerous occasions for extenuating Helen's culpability: "Why didn't I do you in Deiphobus' house, put you to the sword with Troy?" (129); "Helen's epic heat had charcoaled Troy and sent ten thousand down to Hades; I ought to've spitted her like a heifer on her Trojan hearth. But I hadn't, and the hour was gone to poll horns with the vengeful sword" (141). Helen, "that faultless form" (149), epitomizes Menelaus' longing for neat categories the classical physics championed, yet what he finds instead is the protean reality. Adamant not to "accept mystery of love in a wordless embrace" (Tanner 297), Menelaus is bound to lose Helen. "That loss," Tanner remarks, "brought on by a compulsion to understand and verbalize, is also a loss of substantial reality" (297). This "Hellenic quest," as Tanner phrases it, is inexorably stagnated by the "Protean encounter;" it illustrates "Barth's own despair at ever reaching and holding any authentic formed reality through the multiplying layers of fiction in

which he feels entangled” (298). His festering obsession with the cause of Helen’s choosing him out of so many more qualified suitors takes him to the Old Man of the Sea, Proteus. Gifted with prophesy, Proteus is the embodiment of reality itself which proves too elusive to be grappled. That Proteus metamorphoses into the whole gamut from living things (beasts and plants) to substances (sea and air) attests to the polymorphous nature of reality.

In the double-slit experiment, tracking the path a particle takes and pursuing its trajectory instant by instant is not feasible: “We have to settle for a before-and-after view of the reaction. The physicist knows what is there before the reaction and can measure what is there afterward. The details in between are shielded from view” (Ford 155). Menelaus, steeped in the Newtonian causality, beseeches Proteus to reveal Helen’s rationale to him: “When will I reach my goal through its cloaks of story? How many veils to naked Helen?” (*Funhouse* 140). However, the same blind spot which precludes physicists from tracking the trajectory of a particle, confines Proteus’ prophesies: “We seers see fore and aft, but not amidships” (140). That explains why Proteus fails to come up with any causality behind Helen’s choice. Proteus advises Menelaus to jettison his bloated concern with the Newtonian causality: “You ask too many questions. Not Athena [the goddess of wisdom], but Aphrodite is your besetter” (156). He stipulates how Menelaus should appease Aphrodite through the ritual of sacrifice: “Make hecatombs to Aphrodite; beg Love’s pardon for your want of faith. Helen chose you without reason because she loves you without cause; embrace her without question and watch your weather change. Let go” (156). In effect, what Proteus counsels him to do converges with QM uncertainty principle.

In contrast to the deterministic nature of classical physics which makes it possible for a physicist to exactly measure the momentum and position of objects, at the subatomic scale of QM, the wave-like nature of matter renders our knowledge of different properties of an electron opaque. As a corollary to wave-particle duality, Werner Heisenberg came up with the uncertainty principle in 1927. Based on this principle, determining a particle’s position precisely eliminates the possibility of determining its velocity (the speed and direction of an object’s motion) with precision, and vice versa. Heisenberg has asserted the ontological, rather than epistemological, status of this principle; in other words, there is an inherent uncertainty at the subatomic level. It is implied, both in the Proteus’ advice and the uncertainty principle, that comprehensive knowledge to all facets of reality is denied, hence the need for a compromise. Such is the nature of Proteus’ prophecy as he urges Menelaus to desist from wondering about Helen’s past trajectory (velocity), embedded in it her possible love affairs and her motive for espousing him, the knowledge of which is beyond grasp, and instead, rejoice in Helen’s current *position* by his side.

Even when he does hold Helen, Menelaus has his reservations about the concreteness of the Helen in his embrace: “. . . the entire holocaust at Troy, with its prior and subsequent fiascos, was but a dream of Zeus’s conjure, visited upon me to lead me to Pharos and the recollection of my wife – or her nimbus like. For for all I knew I roared what I now gripped was but a further fiction, maybe Proteus himself” (*Funhouse* 159). Helen’s disclosure of her flight to Egypt and her claim that all the war casualties were over a phantom Helen deal the coup de grâce to Menelaus’ tenuous hold on causality: “He continues to hold on, but can no longer take the world seriously. Place and time, doer, done – to have lost their senses” (160).

Menelaus, initially, the epitome of the Newtonian physics causality, cannot comprehend the plain fact that the fortuitous action of drawing straws catapulted him to Helen’s spousal. His wandering mind intent on plotting every course of Helen’s trajectory is assuaged when Proteus suggests that he should settle for Helen’s position by his side. In fact, the advice he offers him has a lot in common with the picture of reality painted by QM. In a fiction penned in the twentieth century, Barth’s Menelaus, ultimately, sacrifices “twin heifers, Curiosity, Common Sense” (*Funhouse* 156) and adapts himself with the counter-intuitive QM reality: “I no longer ask why you [Helen] choose me, . . . should you declare it was love for me fetched you to Paris and broke the world, I’d raise neither eyebrow. . . . Gudgeon my pintle, step my mast, vessel me where you will. I believe all. I understand nothing. I love you” (156).

## **6. Conclusion**

Unlike the traditional novel in which the reader readily takes part in the suspension of disbelief, thereby shunting the so-called reality without in favor of the fictional reality within the text, in Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse*, the reader is frequently reminded of the fictionality of the reality offered by the text and the metafictional interruptions in the text occlude the reader’s full absorption in the story world. As a corollary to poststructuralism, deconstruction, and the cultural climate of the 1960s, with the sense of revolt characterizing different aspects of life from politics to traditional values to sexuality, departing from the traditions in fiction should come as no surprise. The fact that indeterminacy of the text, the instability of the meaning, and explicit references to the techniques of writing fiction were the order of the day in the 1960s has inclined the scholars to lean toward poststructuralism, deconstruction and metafiction to analyze the fiction penned in these years. Given that Barth has set himself the task of replenishing fiction through novel ideas, retelling myths in modern ways for instance, it is more fitting if scholars replenish the framework to analyze Barth’s fiction in innovative ways, too.

By the advent of new historicism and Michel Foucault's emphasis on discourse and power, the context in which a work has been produced upstaged formalism which relied on the inherent properties of a text in analysis. The mathematical formalism, i.e., the Schrödinger equation, on which the prevalent interpretations of quantum mechanics pivot posits that the formalism by itself and without any dependence on external variables is capable of calculating the wavefunction distribution probabilistically. As modern physics has made the belief in absolute time and space null and void, a vindication for formalism should be made. Tracing the parallels and affinities between quantum mechanics and Barth's "Menelaiad" by relying on the text itself and without any reference to the spatiotemporal setting, the author's mental/emotional state, or the reader's response is indeed a way of replenishing the scholarship on Barth which most scholars have aligned with the 1960s discourse of poststructuralism and metafiction.

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