

## Book Review

### Joe Friggieri's postmodernist poetics

Joe Friggieri uses different methods in his writings on philosophy, literature and the theatre. His preferred method in philosophy is analytic, his short stories are modernist and his plays – at least some of them – reflect a postmodern style.

This postmodern style is particularly evident in his latest play, *L-Inkjesta*. If one accepts the argument presented by Brian McHale (1987) that postmodernism is concerned with an exploration of worlds, with an understanding of the way different ontological domains permeate each other, then this is surely evident in *L-Inkjesta*. Here, I want to briefly examine the way the interpenetration of worlds takes place.

In *L-Inkjesta*, there are a number of worlds that intersect: (a) the real (present) world of the audience and the real (past) world of Caravaggio; (b) the fictional world of the stage; and (c) the dream world of the notary who defends Caravaggio as a great artist. With the exception of the dream world scene, the play presents a constant shuffling of these worlds: the fictional world of the stage interacts with the real (past) world of Caravaggio.

The point is that such cross boundary infiltrations are usually considered startling, even in fictional worlds where a certain degree of poetic licence is permitted. In *L-Inkjesta*, the boundaries (between real-fictional worlds, past and present worlds) that are traditionally kept separate are dissolved, so that there seems to be no awareness by the characters that anything odd is taking place. The Minister and the detective interrogate the different characters from Caravaggio's world as though it was a normal everyday occurrence. And if one thinks that the cross boundary movements only take place in one direction, from the real (past) world to the fictional world, the fictional world returns the gesture: in one of the highlights of the play, the character from the real (past) world turns towards the real (present) world of the audience to instruct them in the way Caravaggio constructed his works of art.

True to the spirit of postmodernism that valorises textuality, it is through the text (the play itself) that the past can communicate with the present. Finally, in one of the hilarious highlights of the play, the lawyer who supports the construction of a monument to commemorate Caravaggio dreams that his hero is being made a saint. While this scene is presented as a dream, the play ends with the images of the canonisation: as the last 'word' in the play, it is as though the dream world has swamped the fictional world teasing the audience with the way the whole discourse on Caravaggio in Malta has been idealised.

In the process of world-building, *L-Inkjesta* undermines our conception of time as a linear sequence of events. In the real world it is impossible for the past and the present to exist at the same time; but in the play they do, generating an interesting alternative. If postmodernism explores the interpenetration between ontological domains, then Joe Friggieri's latest play is an exploration of the way worlds are constructed and deconstructed at the same time.

McHale B. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Routledge: London 1987.

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