
Strange Genre-related Loops in a Novel-Short Story: The Tension between the Genres and their Cultural Context

Orna Levin
Achva acadmic college

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Orna Levin,

**"Strange Genre-related Loops in a Novel-Short Story:
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Abstract: Orna Levin discusses in her "Strange Genre-related Loops in a Novel-Short Story: The Tension between the Genres and their Cultural Context" the strange genre-related loops in Maya Arad's novel (2009), through the tension between the two genres represented in the text and their cultural contexts. The text hints to the reader that the central conflict on the plot is genre-related, and thus the entire work is a manifestation of self-conscious literature. The focus of the discussion is on the concept of strange loops coined by Hofstadter (1979, 2007). The strange genre-related loops in the narrative are represented in three different spheres: the textual construct, the array of characters, and the perception of creative writing. Reviewing the strange genre-related loops in this work highlights the unique nature of this text, which attempts to establish itself as a short story – novel, while demonstrating an awareness of its artistic and cultural contexts.

Orna LEVIN

Strange Genre-related Loops in a Novel-Short Story: The Tension between the Genres and their Cultural Context

The plot of the novel *The Short Story Master*, by Maya Arad, tells of the professional and personal crisis of the master of the short story, who failed in his mission to write a novel. The text hints to the reader that the central conflict that moves the plot along is neither romantic nor existential, but rather genre-related, and thus the entire work is a manifestation of self-conscious literature. The focus of the discussion is on the concept of strange loops coined by Hofstadter. The strange genre-related loops in the narrative are represented in three different spheres: the textual construct, the array of characters, and the perception of creative writing.

Strange Loops and the Literary Text

The concept of strange loops originates from the realm of computer science and hierarchical systems, yet at the same time it also serves as a concept in the realm of culture in general. In fact, Hofstadter, coined the concept while analyzing the music of Bach and the visual art of Escher (Gödel, Escher, Bach 10-15). A strange loop forms when an upward or downward motion within a hierarchical system is iterated, in other words, there is a return to the initial point of departure. The structure of the endless loop undermines the hierarchy and creates a sense of strangeness. In his book *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, Hofstadter explains the structural – mathematical links between the works of these three artists. In his next book, *I Am a Strange Loop*, Hofstadter continued the discussion on an existential–philosophical level, focusing on the individual's awareness of his or her own consciousness. Human beings, according to Hofstadter not only exist, but also create their own existence: "In the end, we are self-perceiving, self-inventing, locked-in mirages that are little miracles of self-reference" (363).

The last quotation might equally describe the workings of a literary text. In other words, following the plot of a literary text nearly always involves some loop movements. This is particularly noticeable in stories with associative structures that generate multiple movements. In fact, the existence of textual loops, even if they are not always strange loops, is part of the definition of the literary text. After all, the text is linear and has a starting point, but the concepts of narratology reveal that the plot's literary unfolding rarely follows the chronology of events. Rather, the textual reconstruction, called the *fabula* (as opposed to the *sjuzet*), involves a variety of different and opposing movements: backwards (analepsis), forwards (prolepsis), upwards (climax) or in an unexpected direction (turning point). These movements take the *sjuzet's* straight and flat quality and give the story a "life of its own."

Given this this interpretation of Hofstadter's notion of *strange loop*, I borrowed the term and applied it in the current study to the realm of poetic genres, and particularly to the 'struggle' between the short story and the novel, as presented in the text of Maya Arad, an author, who lives in the US and writes in Hebrew. I intend to examine this 'struggle' not only in the context of Arad's previous works but also as part of her entire poetics, including the later works. An examination of the creative act is a prominent theme in the books of this author, who is a linguist by profession, a fact which early on attracted the attention of literary critics (Livne 32). Like many contemporary British and US-American novelists—such as Toby Litt (e.g. *Finding Myself*, 2003), or Tricia Sullivan (e.g. *Occupy Me*, 2017), as well as the late John Berger (in his nonlinear novel *G.*, 1972), Michael Cunningham (e.g. *The Hours*, 1998) and A. S. Byatt (e.g. *Possession*, 1990)—Arad also devoted her artistic efforts to imagining the "potential" of the narrative text more than to the "act" of creating a particular narrative (Ceia 4).

Arad's first novel, *Another Place, a Foreign City*, which was written in verse, transferred the plot and structural framework of Pushkin's famous poem "Eugene Onegin" to the site of a well-known military base in Israel. The author's preoccupation with genre combinations is noticeable also in her play titled *The Righteous Forsaken*, which was inspired by a comedy in verse written by Alexander Sergeevich Griboyedov. The subtitle "a comedy in verse" is only partially manifested in Arad's text, as the rhyme scheme is not maintained throughout the text, which in turn contributes to the sense of poetic farce.

Defining literary works by genres and creating a hierarchy among them is an issue with which Arad is concerned in her essays as well. In the book of essays, written by the couple Reviel Netz and Arad, and dedicated primarily to poetry, there is a single essay about Israeli prose in the final chapter of the book (Netz and Arad 243-399). Based on the construct of the book and particularly the final essay, it appears that the two authors consider poetry to be a genre superior to prose, while at the same time, they appear to favor a blurring of the boundaries between the two genres (Netz and Arad 250).

Her book, *The Hebrew Teacher* (2018), seems to be a hybrid between the short story and the novel. This book is not a novel but a collection of three long stories. The first story, after which the book is

named, is structured as a tribute to the memoir genre, while the second story, titled "Visit (Pictures)," is organized as a collection of tiny chapters, or *Rashomon*-type scenes. Despite the difference in genre and their presentation as seemingly unrelated stories, it seems that the thread connecting the three stories in the book lies in the heroes that stand in their center. Finally, in her last book *All about Abigail* (2021), Arad deals with the tension between writing prose and writing poetry through an identity confusion experienced by the protagonist, who while being considered a poet is already a reputed writer.

The plot of the novel *The Short Story Master* deals with the professional and personal crisis experienced by the protagonist, Adam Tahar-Zehav (in Hebrew: "pure gold"), who is the Short Story Master. He has published five collections of short stories, but has failed in his mission to write a novel. In the world of the novel, he represents the status of the short story in contemporary Israeli literature. Unable to produce what his audience desires most—a novel—Adam Tahar-Zehav is immensely frustrated. He is still a famous author, thanks to his earlier works; however, his readership is dwindling, he has been experiencing protracted writer's block, his love life is at an impasse, and worst of all, the short story is no longer fashionable—even he now finds it unsatisfying.

The protagonist's crisis as a writer and his personal middle-age crisis become melded, and this agonizing problem is accompanied by a doubled romantic crisis: on the one hand his girlfriend, Galit Golan, has left him, and on the other hand, Meital Einav is not emotionally available to commit to a relationship, because she is waiting to rekindle a relationship with an ex-lover. Ironically, each of the women in the life of Tahar-Zehav only intensifies his distress: Galit is a pulp-fiction writer and Meital is a young literary researcher who teaches at the University and among other things, lashes out against the short story form, claiming that it is no longer relevant. Thus, introspection, along with the theme of crisis, are the motifs that propel the plot development in the novel.

At the same time, the text hints to the reader that the central conflict of the novel is neither the romantic nor the existential one, but rather the conflict of genres, which renders the entire work a manifestation of self-conscious literature, in line with Alter's claim that the novel is indeed a fitting arena for a self-conscious examination of the work's poetics. In this novel, the tension between the short story and the novel is the pivotal point from which other conflicts emerge and develop. Therefore, I wish to focus this investigation on the existence of strange genre-related loops, and to examine their representation in three different spheres of the novel: the textual construct, the array of characters, and the perception of creative writing.

"Segments That Do Not Add up to a Whole"—Strange Genre-related Loops in the Textual Construct

The reader experiences the first strange genre-related loop even before the reading has begun. The title of this lengthy novel constitutes a reductive definition, given that the novel as a genre is essentially recognized by its length. Yet beneath the title, *The Short Story Master*, there is a subtitle presented in small print, which reads "a novel." In this manner, the reductive cycle is broken and the work regains its proper proportions. Also in the table of contents, the reader encounters the power play between the two genres: nine chapters which are short stories appear in highlighted font, whereas the 'regular' chapters of the novel are presented in regular font. Thus, the graphic representation of the text echoes the iterative dialogue between the novel and the short story even before the reading has begun.

The structure of the two genres is one of the issues that preoccupies the protagonist as he attempts to draw analogies between the short story and the novel. The protagonist's comparison between literary and architectural structures plays on the association between *building* and *structure*, emphasizing the gap between the two. Hence, it is not surprising that the protagonist perceives structure to be the most constraining aspect of the short story: "The short story is confined to a 2 x 4 dungeon with no windows and a broken key. There is no room to move... no air. It breathes only the exhaled carbon dioxide" (Arad *The Short Story Master* 110). A reductive motion is noticeable throughout this entire description, yet it ends by exceeding the boundaries of reality: on the one hand, there is the illogical loop of breathing exhaled carbon dioxide, which suggests that the short story is—like carbon dioxide to oxygen—inferior to the novel, while on the other hand, by imbuing the short story with an amazingly strange ability, this loop undermines the suggested hierarchy between the genres.

The structure of the novel raises several questions. Among the 453 pages of the novel are scattered nine short stories that the protagonist has written. This does not create a pleasant polyphony of genres; rather, it underscores the extent of the crisis experienced by the protagonist-author as well as by the real author. Such a *mask narration* (Phelan 197-204) express Arads' thoughts and beliefs. In an interview conducted following the novel's publication, Arad mentioned that this hybridization of genres came after she had initially planned to write a short story, but then rejected that in favor of a novel constructed of short stories (Sela). Thus, the novel's structure echoes back to the pivotal theme of the

plot, as well as to the author's unavoidable dilemma, which produces for the reader an unresolvable enigma: is this a novel constructed as a collection of short stories, or is it a collection of short stories with transitional segments that form an independent story? Indeed, the final short story bears the same title as that of the entire novel, thus creating an interminable paradoxical reflection of strange loops.

In addition to these loops, there is an interesting loop between one of the short stories that appears in the novel *The Short Story Master* and another novel by Arad. The story "Omsk" (Arad 382-367) describes Ronit's journey to a children's home in Omsk, Siberia, for the purpose of adopting a baby boy. The plot follows the anticipation and preparation until the tragic end: the protagonist's decision not to adopt because of the baby's apathetic appearance and her inner feeling that something was wrong. In 2015 the short story "Omsk" became a novel titled *Lady of Kazan*. This is an example of a loop that encompasses the two genres, the short-story and the novel, in the broad context of Arad's literary work. Although Arad elaborated the plot in the novel, and changed the names of the characters, the place, and even the gender of the baby (see especially Arad *Lady of Kazan* 322-242), one can hardly miss the connection between the texts.

An additional strange loop emerges as it becomes evident that some of the short story plots continue to unravel the plot of the novel's frame story. By placing the primary and secondary frames on the same level, the twisting structure undermines the work's hierarchical structure and emphasizes its instability. This undermining motion is noticeable, for example, in the transition between the chapter titled "Like Any Other Man" and the chapter titled "Avinoam." The former deals with the protagonist's occupation as a creative-writing instructor. In this context, Tahar-Zehav recalls the first time he encountered the short-short story by Shofman (a Jewish-Israeli author, 1888-1972), "Like Any Other Man," which he has been incorporating in his creative-writing workshops ever since. Then the chapter switches back to the protagonist's present time, when he—and the readers—are exposed to the written work of his students in the workshop, who were assigned to write a story "a la Shofman." The chapter ends by questioning the typical tendency to equate the author with the protagonist of a story. As he supports his argument against such a conflation, Tahar-Zehav refers to his own short stories, last among them is the story titled "Avinoam." This title is also the last printed word in the chapter, which is followed by an ellipsis, thus inviting the reader to continue to the next chapter in the novel, which is Tahar-Zehav's short story "Avinoam."

Furthermore, there are also strange loops that create one endless loop and which feature a circular construct within the chapters. As noted, the chapter titled "Like Any Other Man" contains the entire short story by Shofman, which bears the same title. This creates a larger loop, as Tahar-Zehav refers explicitly to Shofman's story, which in turn is a version of the Biblical story of Samson ("Book of Judges" 16, 7). However, this intertextual structure continues to twist and evolve, returning the reader to the (fictional) chapter in the protagonist's novel, as the protagonist uses Shofman's story for his teaching purposes. All in all, there are four related fictional spheres: the biblical source, the short story by Shofman, the excerpts from the stories written by the students in the workshop, and finally, the chapter in Arad's novel. Furthermore, an excerpt read by one of the students contains obvious references to Shofman. Thus, within this chapter, the literary hierarchy is toppled, as the fictional levels become cogs in the mechanism that Tahar-Zehav uses to prompt the students in his workshop to exercise their burgeoning skills.

The most complex loop is created by the self-reference, in which all the other loops resonate. Beyond the technique of iteration that stems from the structure that places a story within a story within a story, the excerpt read by the student creates yet another loop, which emphasizes the power of the reiterative mechanism: the last printed words in this story are identical to its title, but placed between quotation marks. Thus, as the ending of the story is also its beginning, the loop is endless and eternal.

Another interesting loop found in the novel is used to describe the relationship between the segment and the whole. The short story is perceived as a fragment, whereas the novel represents the whole: "The short story is not merely 'short'; it is a fragment, a shard, a fraction of a tale that is all happenstance and arbitrariness. Which is why it is no longer relevant to our lives, which we *construct* for ourselves. More to the point, we tell it to ourselves, adding layer upon layer, like a plot-driven novel, based on cause and effect" (Arad *The Short Story Master* 116, my emphasis).

In one of the dialogues between Adam and Meital, they mention Cervantes as the "forefather" of the metanarrative form of using a fragment to tell a tale. *The Adventures of Don Quixote* is considered the prototype of the modern novel, despite being a series of linked short stories, each of which can stand on its own. In response to the protagonist's distress about writing a single whole story in the form of a novel, Meital proposes a solution, namely, connecting fragments and thus creating a whole. The protagonist immediately objects, claiming that the gaps will be even more prominent if he attempts to connect the fragments, which is—in fact—a description of the structure of Arad's novel. In light of his

adamant refusal, Meital suggests that he write about the impossibility of writing, or, in other words, the difficulty of constructing a whole, which only throws the fragments and gaps into high relief.

The essential self-referential quality of writing about the impossibility of writing is what places the novel in the realm of *self-conscious literature*. Throughout the novel this aspect unfolds at the same time as it is being discussed, as Arad writes about the protagonist who is unable to write and therefore writes about the impossibility of writing. The convolution of this coil of loops reaches the highpoint in the last chapter of the novel, which bears the same title as that of the entire novel. The chapter is constructed as a continuum of 15 fragments that represent pieces of the protagonist's life, presented through the prism of a creative-writing crisis. Some of the sentences in this chapter repeat verbatim sentences that appeared in previous parts of the novel. This copy-paste mechanism creates an aesthetic imbalance, while emphasizing the intertextuality between the novel as a whole and its last chapter. Due to this self-referentiality, the last chapter conveys the essence of the entire novel, which is why it also bears the same title.

"The Man Who Made the Short Story His Life's Masterpiece": Strange Genre Related Loops in the Formation of Characters

Adam Tahar-Zehav is a 43-year-old man whose future is behind him, so to speak, and his irrelevance follows him like a shadow everywhere he goes, both in his personal life and in his writing. Despite the feeling of stagnation that characterizes his writing block and his entire life, to the readers Adam emerges as an antihero who experiences change and who causes them to change their attitude towards the protagonist. At the beginning of the novel, Adam is described as embittered, arrogant, and opportunistic, a caricature of the stereotypical, nasty author. However, following the venomous article through which Meital launches a direct attack against him, the tables are turned, and fragments of his true and naive character are revealed. As a result, the reader can empathize with the character and with his state of mind as he faces this crisis.

Not only is Adam Tahar-Zehav "The Man Who Made the Short Story His Life's Masterpiece" (Arad *The Short Story Master* 112), but his entire life is comparable to a short story in its lack of relevance. Like the short story, the protagonist who writes short stories is "an outlier on the path of life" (351). This description echoes Meital's claim that the focal character in any short story is always a marginal character: "The meaninglessness and the nothingness draws [the short story] towards the margins. You'll rarely find a short story that is not about wretched and miserable characters who live in the social margins... When was the last time you read a short story about a CEO?" (110).

Hence, like the characters in his short stories, Adam is an author who has been relegated to the margins. The loop that melds the stories with their author gains an ironic and venomous tone when the characters begin using poetic concepts during their pillow-talk (enabled by the fact that in Hebrew the word for a *romantic relationship* and the word for a *literary novel* are homonyms, and the word *story* is also used to mean *affair*): "I was actually encouraging her to give it a chance. Not that it would lead to a *novel* or anything like that, but sometimes what you need is exactly some kind of *short story*" (Arad, *The Short Story Master* 362, my emphasis). Furthermore, the romantic triangle between Adam, Meital, and Paul is an accurate reflection of Adam's existential triangular relationship with the short story and the novel. Meital sees Paul as a man with whom she has a relationship, whereas she considers Adam to be more of a 'short story,' an affair.

Interestingly, the protagonist as author identifies not only with the text he writes, but also with its characters, and particularly that of the narrator. Although the text is not written in first person, it encourages an existential link between the character of the author (in the novel) and the characters of his short stories, which are presented throughout the novel. The association between author and literary characters is especially evident in the interim chapters that are strewn between the short stories. However, this is not the attitude of the author-protagonist, who repeatedly expresses a different approach.

No, it is absolutely forbidden to identify the author with his characters... No, by no means.... Let someone dare to try... [The author] has earned the right not to be compared to his characters. Yes, it is a privilege, one that is earned through hard work. You have to have some artistic ability in order to hold the reins of the short story tight enough, but not too close to the bosom; you need to remain close to the development of the story, but also maintain some kind of ironic distance. (Arad *The Short Story Master* 70)

To defend his view, Adam makes the claim that none of his readers ever thought he was writing about himself. Yet, what is the text that the reader holds if not the life story of the protagonist? Moreover, Meital states that the severance between the author and his characters is the cause of his crisis, the very factor that is impeding Adam's artistic development. Therefore, she tries to convince him to write

about himself, to let his writing take his life in a new direction, and even to write about the impossibility of writing (which is indeed the way the novel is cast).

The loop that develops around the character of Meital is particularly interesting. Meital is a literary critic who launches an attack against the short story and considers the novel to be the high point of literature. However, ironically, at the university she teaches a course on the principles of the short story. When her relationship with Adam begins to develop, she expresses an existential anxiety, which coincides with her genre preferences: "At the end I'll find myself in your story... The ultimate degradation—to be a character in a short story—not even a novel" (264). It is precisely at this point that another strange loop begins, because Meital is a character in a novel that consists of short stories. Her conspicuous role as a character in the short story is emphasized in the last fragment that seals the novel. In other words, Meital becomes a short-story character within a novel, while at the same time she is a character in a novel presented to the reader in the form of short stories.

"The Imprisoning Genre": Strange Genre-related Loops Shape the Perception of Creative Writing

The relationship between the novel and the short story is not characterized solely by differences in the length of text; in fact, it harkens back to the canonical view of literature from the beginning of time. The short story genre was at its most popular between the end of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century, and despite its positive reception, in terms of its significance, it remained secondary to the novel (Baxter 17-25; Matthews 73-80). The short story is perceived as a counter-genre in relation to the novel (Pratt 91-113). Despite its popularity during most of the nineteenth century, the short story remained a "vastly underrated art" (Friedman 117).

The renowned short story writer Anton Chekhov stated in 1889 that "Brevity is the sister of talent." Indeed, literature in general and particularly contemporary literature, as it is developing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, favors reduction and brevity as a vital artistic power (Nelles 94; Stewart 53). Minimalism is not seen as a poetic weakness, because the strength of the literary representation is measured by its compactness. By this criterion, the short story manages—almost paradoxically—to contain an entire world. It seems that in the current era, the existence of short stories and short-short stories is actually endangering the genre of the novel, and holds greater promise for the short story, as befits the digital age (Botha 201-220).

Although the tension between the short story and the novel is not resolved in literary research, Arad suggests that the answer is quite obvious. Well-grounded in the cultural milieu with which her texts interact, Arad views the novel as the primary genre and contends that the genre of the short story does not correspond existentially to humanity's current state of affairs: "So much has come to pass since the classical novel first flourished. The twentieth century happened. Huge things happened, horrible things, massacres on a scale humanity has never known before, destruction... . To handle such things, one needs large-sized tools—the largest there are" (Arad *The Short Story Master* 164).

The relationship between reality and the poetic form that suits it rejects the genre of the short story, finding it too small a tool to contain life. It is not surprising that the novel—rather than the short story—manages to provide an in-depth look at history, so much so, that occasionally there is confusion between viewing history as a novel and the novel as history (Irom). Moreover, the hierarchy between the two genres is reflected in the definition of the short story provided in the novel: "The essence of the short story is not its length, but rather in its being a 'non-novel'" (Arad *The Short Story Master* 247). This definition demonstrates the superior position of the novel in terms of the importance of the two genres; in other words, the short story is not a goal unto itself, but rather a stop on the way to the genre of the novel. Indeed, the short story genre has always suffered from a lack of an adequate definition, having been unfavorably compared to other genres (Van Achter 3). This image of the short story genre undermines both its vitality and its prestige. Cynical descriptions have compared the short story to a neophyte, an opening act, a wading pool, a training arena (Arad 163), and even to a forgery (115). All of these descriptions demonstrate that the short story is perceived as incomplete.

The most significant imagery that reflects the incompleteness of the short story genre appears in an article by Meital in *The Short Story Master*. The strangeness created by integrating an essay into the novel's plot seems to endow the essay with greater validity. Yet the manner in which the text oscillates between the essay and the protagonist's thoughts as he reads it, reveals the tension between the academic truth and the artistic truth. The essay is nothing less than a eulogy for the short story genre. Using violent, death-related imagery, such as *imprisonment* (Arad 111), *euthanasia*, *coma*, *dying* (109), and *in the throes of death* (117), the short story is presented as a dead genre. Yet, as in previous examples, here too, the recurring loop between the hierarchies of ruler and subject, good and evil, truth and lie becomes cyclical. In this instance, this effect is achieved by means of the liminal model: "The

contemporary short story – perhaps it isn't dead yet, but it certainly is not alive" (Arad 108). Not unlike the image of inhaling carbon dioxide, as mentioned earlier, the short story's liminal status, suspended between life and death, is another indication of the genre's wondrous existence and nearly inexplicable survival. Moreover, in this strange loop of "not dead and not alive," the prospect of the short story genre's non-existence can be seen as harkening back to its earlier emergence, thus creating an endless cycle of its potential existence.

The thirteenth fragment in the last chapter of the novel is dedicated to the question of the essence of creative writing, which echoes back to previous discussions presented in the novel, some of them between Adam and Meital, and some between Adam and himself. Addressing the question of the meaning of writing and its sources, Adam replies: "I write because I can't... because I can't do anything else" (Arad 452). Here, the loop is created in the fluctuating motion between the act of writing the novel and the non-writing around which the novel's entire plot revolves. This is a written text about an unwritten text. The artistic potency of this step is further strengthened as the boundaries of the text are transcended. The protagonist's words echo back to Franz Kafka's perception of art, as it is presented in the story, "A Hunger Artist." The focal point in this short story by Kafka presents art as a lack of choice. The analogy between Adam, the novel's protagonist, and Kafka's protagonist plucks the former from his insignificance and anonymity and marks him as a 'Prototype of the Artist.'

In one of the chapters in the novel, Adam is invited to attend an academic conference on the subject of the hostility between the genres of the novel and the short story. It is interesting that Arad chooses to incorporate an academic discussion in a book of prose (which is characteristic also of her novels, *Seven Vices*, *Behind the Hill*, and *The Hebrew Teacher*), as this serves to extend the boundaries of the plot by highlighting her own dual status as an academic and a novelist. At this conference, the novel is presented as the pinnacle of a writer's artistic development. Nevertheless, in the context of the current era, the novel is presented as an antithesis to the marvel of reduction: "To write a short story is to capture the secret of reduction, and nowadays no one wants to make do with less; everyone seeks to take up as much space as possible, to fill more and more pages. In this day and age we have exchanged the wisdom of brevity and measure for too much of nothing" (161).

As mentioned in the novel, one of the factors that serves to differentiate between the genres of the short story and the novel is the distinction between story and description, between an event and a filler (Meital uses the terminology of Roland Barthes, *nuclei* and *catalysts*, see 174). In a conversation that takes up five pages of the novel, Meital explains to Adam that unlike the short story, the novel is replete with fillers that take up space and have no immediate significance in terms of moving the plot along. Presumably, this is yet another definition of the difference between the genres and underscores the superiority of the novel: "The prose of the novel is characterized by a high ratio of fillers to events. But when this type of prose is inserted into the short story form, this implies reducing the events to a bare minimum, which is what creates the feeling of imprisonment and constraint" (179).

Meital's argument that size does matter is very central to the power-play between the novel and the short story; however, an in-depth examination of this segment of their dialogue reveals an interesting loop, created by the characters and conveyed to the reader. The conversation is fragmented by divergent topics that have no immediate significance for the development of the argument. The repetition of the phrase "where were we?" (175) emphasizes the tangential nature of these interruptions. In other words, as Adam and Meital discuss the role of fillers in a novel, their discussion leads the reader to experience the effect of such fillers. This is a case of definition by way of example. An interesting question is to what degree is the conversation between Adam and Meital a filler in the novel? Or is it an event? The answer obviously depends on one's perspective at any given moment, whether on the text as a novel or on the novel as a meta-text examining literary genres.

Summary

The novel *The Short Story Master*, by Maya Arad, reveals the tension between the genres of the novel and the short story, and their cultural contexts. In my analysis I have demonstrated that the major conflict that moves the plot along is genre-based, which places the novel in the realm of self-conscious literature. Focusing the analysis on the issue of the literary genre contributes to the interpretation of the text and leads to a deeper understanding of the theoretical argument. To demonstrate this, I employed the term *strange loops* and developed it in the context of the tension between the genres. I revealed the existence of these strange genre-related loops in three spheres: the textual construct, the array of characters, and the perception of creative writing. In each of these spheres I analyze the manner in which the strange loops serve to undermine the purported hierarchy between the genres (as well as other hierarchies). Hence, these strange loops suggest that the text does not aim to weigh in on the battle between the genres, but rather to sustain it and thus call attention to it. In this sense, the

playful self-awareness that the strange loops create provide insight into the uniquely hybrid nature of the text, as it establishes a new cultural and artistic genre: the *short-story novel*.¹

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Author's profile: Orna Levin is a senior lecture of Hebrew Literature at Achva Academic College and serves as the head of the Be simulation and research center. Her studies focus on literature with an emphasis on cultural aspects of the literary text. Among her publications are the book *Contiruptance: Poetical fluctuations in Naomi Frankel's work* (2019); and the articles "Techno-poetics in micro-stories of the digital age: The case of Alex Epstein" (2020); and "Nano-poetics and a nano-representation of the Israeli milieu in Yossel Birstein's short-short bus-stories" (2021). Email: <orna_l@achva.ac.il>

¹ The term 'short-story novel,' which corresponds of course with the term known as a short story, describes not only the length of a text (something between the short story and the novel, roughly between 15,000 and 50,000 words), but mainly represents the attempt to combine the compression of the short story with the development of the novel. In fact, no satisfactory definition has ever been formulated for the short novel (Harmon, 2003).