

***Ondřej Sládek***  
***From Metalepsis***  
***to Performance***

## ***About the author***

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## ***Abstract***

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This study deals with the issue of metalepsis, which is explored from the point of view of literary performance. The focus is on the narrative figure of addressing the addressee (i.e., a specific type of metalepsis) and its performative effect. In the study, the author demonstrates that addressing the addressee as part of a textual strategy does not only instruct the reader on how to read, understand and interpret a certain narrative text but can also motivate the reader to begin specific activities and performances. The author distinguishes three types of addressing the addressee in a narrative text: addressing in the introduction of the book or in the narrative; addressing as part of the narrative and the game of fiction; addressing as a call to action/performance. These different types of addressing are illustrated with examples and characterised regarding their performative effect.

## ***Keywords***

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metalepsis, literary performance, narrative theory, Czech literature, interpretation

## 1 Literature and Performance

The concepts of performance and performativity became familiar in literary studies many years ago. However, they have experienced a great boom in recent decades, when they have acquired several new meanings and contexts thanks to the development of performance art and performance studies, e.g. [1], [6]. Using the basic model of literary communication, we can consider the existence of specific performative activities of the individual agents of literary communication: the author, the text itself and the reader. With regard to their different positions and functions in the course of literary communication, we can differentiate between three types of performance: author's performance, textual performance and reader's performance [7].

literary text to the audience but also the one to whom the text is primarily addressed.

The key term *literary performance* can be seen in this context as a general, umbrella term for all such performative activities (author's, textual, reader's) that have to do with literary texts. However, separate they are, they are also complementary. We usually use the term performance primarily in the sense of to create, to imagine, to perform, to realise, to use. In this paper, I want to pay more attention to the notion of performance as such, as a specific activity, as an action performed by the reader – and not only in the sense of reading texts.

The initial reflection is as follows: Using the basic model of literary communication (author – text – reader), it is clear that the space where

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Defining an author's performance is not difficult, although it takes many different forms. It is always the activity of a particular author (performer, poet, writer) who creates and presents his work to an audience, i.e., to viewers, to readers, to listeners.

The work itself (precisely the work of art) takes the form of a textual performance. By means of language, the author constructs a text, namely literary statements that do something: they create specific (fictional) worlds, things, events, ideas, characters, stories, etc.

The reader is then the one who, in the course of the act of reading, mentally processes the text, reacts to it, 'animates' it and 'completes' it. The reader's activity (in other words, the reader's performance) is as important as the author's activity. Thus, the *performer* is not only the author who creates and presents the

author and reader 'meet' and where their performances are also 'performed' is literary texts themselves. And it is in these literary texts that we can find ample proof that authors count on the audience, on the readers of their texts. They not only assume them but even address them. In a certain way, they manipulate them, project them and guide them in how to proceed in their reading, understanding and interpretation of a literary work. They therefore fix certain instructions and clues in the text, to which they expect specific reactions from the readers.

In models of literary communication, the empirical author and the empirical reader do not usually figure; instead, they are 'represented' by surrogate abstract entities. Among the best known of these are the concepts of the implied reader (Wayne C. Booth), the implicit reader (Wolfgang Iser), the model reader (Umberto Eco), and the abstract reader (Wolf Schmid) on the part of the

recipient [8], [9]. Although they have much in common, they differ in certain aspects [10]. I do not want to analyse the differences between the concepts in detail here and now.

Let us work with the concepts of the ‘ideal’ author and ‘ideal’ reader who responds (in the actual world) to the literary texts. One piece of evidence of the poet’s or writer’s concern for the reader that we can find in literary texts across the centuries is the rhetorical figure of addressing. The author addresses the addressee of his speech, just as we usually do in ordinary speech.

The classical form of this figure is addressing the addressee as “dear reader”, “gentle reader”, or simply “reader”. In one of the earliest surviving late antique novels, Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* (2004) from the 2nd century AD, one can read the following address in the introduction: “Give me your ear, reader: you will enjoy yourself” [11, p. 1]. The intention to arouse interest, to give the impression of mutual closeness between narrator and reader, has lost none of its effect even after eighteen centuries. Apuleius used the word ‘reader’ in his text, while of course, he could have had no idea of the number, opinions or experience of the readers of his text. He directed his address to the addressee, which was part of his specific textual strategy [12],[14].

## 2 Metalepsis

The situation in which the author is addressing the addressee of his narrative, in which he communicates with him and deliberately makes contact with him, is described by Gérard Genette as a specific type of so-called metalepsis. Gérard Genette first discussed the notion of metalepsis in his book *Discours du récit* (Narrative Discourse) (1980 [1972]), and in detail in a book entitled *Métalepsis. De la figure à la fiction* (Metalepsis. From Figure to Fiction) from 2004 [15], [16].

In this book [16], Genette focused on how the author’s narratives transcend their own boundaries. He analysed specific types of transgression and its forms in the context of literature and other fields of art: in film, television, theatre, and painting. Genette distinguished between several types of metalepsis: rhetorical, narrative,

authorial, and reader’s. In this book, Genette shifts his understanding of metalepsis towards fiction. He presents the figure metalepsis itself as a special kind of fiction. He argues that the same is true of all the other tropes (i.e., metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole). In his own words, “the figure [metalepsis] is inception or, if you like, a sketch of fiction” [16, p. 17].

After the publication of Genette’s book, a discussion was initiated that continues to this day. Many literary theorists have accepted Genette’s notion of metalepsis as a concept that captures the phenomenon of the intersection of narrative levels. In its occurrence and application, this phenomenon is not limited to the sphere of literary narrative but can also be found in many other fields: linguistics, semiotics, cognitive psychology, or logic, e.g. [17], [20].

Of the many different types and forms of metalepsis, let us limit ourselves to the type that uses the rhetorical figure of addressing the addressee. This is a rhetorical figure (it can also take the form of an apostrophe) that has activated the reader since the earliest times in literature.

## 3 Types of addressing the addressee (the reader)

Let us now try to look at the issue of metalepsis using the terminology and approach of literary performance. Let us assume that a mental comparison of metalepsis and performance can give us some information about the addressee’s position, activity, and further performance in relation to the narrative text addressed to him. The figure of addressing the addressee has a long and rich history in Czech and international literature. Its use is not an end in itself. Every addressing of the addressee of a narrative presupposes a result – its concrete (*re*)action. From a functional point of view, three types of addressing the addressee in a narrative text can be distinguished.

### 3.1 Addressing in the introduction of the book or in the narrative

Addressing the addressee in introducing a literary work is one of its most common uses. However, it is also often used in the conclusion

or afterword. It thus forms a kind of framework for the literary work: the ‘entrance’ and the ‘exit’. Introductions provide readers with background information about the work, encouragement and a seemingly personal invitation to read, which has a metaleptic effect: the distance between the author/authorial voice and the addressee is minimised. Apuleius offers an example of such an address [11], [14]. In this context, it should be noted that addressing the reader (in prose or even in poetry) on the book’s title page or before the narrative proper began was a common publishing practice until the 17th century. Addressing the addressee thus had an important promotional (PR) function for a long time.

But let us turn our attention to the addressee of these addresses, to the readers. The question is, what is the author of the text actually asking of the reader? What kind of activity, what kind of performance does he expect from him? I have mentioned the reasons and functions of

[16]. The author’s metaleptic communication with the addressee can be a dialogue in which the addressee acquires the status of one of the narrative characters. The narrator involves him/her in the plot, playing a game of fiction that they create together. Laurence Sterne was the master of this involvement of the addressee in the narrative. In his *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760) [21], Sterne used a full range of narrative devices to disrupt established ideas about the novel and the forms of novel-writing that had been used up to that point. He developed techniques that did not become widespread in literature until much later (e.g., the stream-of-consciousness method), and he also innovated the use of the rhetorical figure of addressing addressees.

He calls the addressees of his narrative in various ways: “reader”, “gentle reader”, “yours truly”, “folks”, “dear sir”, etc. At the same time, he provokes them, invites them to collaborate, thus revealing his way of writing and possible

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the addressing. Primarily it is about communication. It is certainly possible to also consider the psychological aspects of addressing: activating the reader, increasing his attention and motivation to read. The aim of addressing him is clear: to encourage him to read, or in other words, to encourage him to perform the act of reading. No other performance is required of him in the introduction. In terms of the reader’s activity, this is the basic manifestation of the reader’s performance.

### **3.2 Addressing as part of the narrative and the game of fiction**

There are a number of narrative texts in which addressing the addressee takes the form of a textual strategy that is part of the narrative and the game of fiction, i.e. metalepsis as such

perception of the text: “[...] anyone is welcome to take my pen, and go on with the story for me that will – I see the difficulties of the descriptions I’m going to give – and feel my want of powers” [21, p. 443].

The above-mentioned addresses to the reader (in Genette’s words: intradiegetic and extradiegetic fictive addressees) are part of the narrative. They participate in the overall structure of the narrative text and the creation of a particular fictional world.

In terms of the performative effect of this type of address involved in fiction, it cannot be said to require any special performance on the part of the reader. Perhaps only attention while reading. The text establishes all the tasks and rules that the reader performs and observes

within the game of fiction. As far as his activity after being addressed is concerned, it is, therefore, as in the first point, a classic form of reader's performance [7, pp. 56–60].

### 3.3 Addressing as a call to action/ performance

Although this way of addressing the addressee has much in common with the previous type (it participates significantly in the game of fiction), with regard to its form and function, it can be defined as a separate type. Although the form of address is a textual element, its performative effect is often not limited to the narrative text. Readers are invited and motivated to take action that is not directly related to the narrative, or in

addresses his readers directly in his novels, e.g. [25]–[27]. He comments on the narrative and prepares various tasks for readers.

I'll give an example from Foglar's book *Hoši od Bobří řeky* (Boys from the Beaver River, 2019 [1937]) [28]. The book tells the story of a group of boys who form a community and spend the summer holidays together at a summer camp. The author comments on an event that happens in the story with these words:

“What would you do if you saw a fire or witnessed an accident? Would your legs go numb and your chin shake? Or would you be able to arrange help manfully? Think about it!” [28, p. 97]<sup>1</sup>

This note instructing the addressee does not

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some cases, rather distracts from it. This type of call to further action by the addressee (the reader) is not very common in world literature. In Czech literature, on the contrary, a number of suitable examples can be found as early as the first half of the 20th century, particularly in literature for children and youth.

I refer to, for example, a book by Czech writer Jaroslav Foglar (1907–1999). His literary work has a strong educational and pedagogical focus. He is known in the Czech environment as one of the promoters of scouting [22]–[24]. Although his stories and novels are not very complex in structure, and the literary characters are often schematic, they have always been very popular with readers (i.e. mainly children aged 10–15). The reason is that Foglar often

necessarily mean that the reader will stop reading. The game of fiction can continue completely uninterrupted.

However, the novel *Boys from the Beaver River* includes tasks that require the reader to do more than just cooperate in the normal reader's performance. On the contrary. They suggest interrupting this activity and engaging in a different activity altogether.

Another example:

“Do you have a strong will? Are you a master of yourself? Can you command yourself? You can't!! YOU CAN'T!!!

Just see for yourself!

Stop reading now – right at the most exciting part – and write your homework

#### 1

In Czech: “Co bys dělal, kdybys zpozoroval požár nebo kdybys byl svědkem nějakého úrazu? Zdřevěněly by Ti nohy a rozklepala by se Ti brada? Nebo bys dovedl mužně zjednatí pomoc? Přemýšlej o tom?” [28, p. 97].

#### 2

In Czech: “Máš pevnou vůli? Jsi pánem sama sebe? Dovedeš si poručit? Nedovedeš!! Nedovedeš!! NEDOVEDEŠ!!! Přesvědč se jen! Přestaň teď čísti – právě v nejnapínavějším místě – a jdi si napsati úkoly na zítřek do školy nebo vyčisti boty. Z toho nejlépe poznáš, jsi-li pánem své vůle” [28, p. 192].

for school tomorrow or clean your shoes. That is the best way to know if you are the master of your will.” [28, p. 192]<sup>2</sup>

What does the author think the ideal reader should do? Stop reading and start to do another activity.

This is exactly the moment that is very interesting. The moment when the author tells or literally commands the reader: stop reading, start doing something else. In doing so, this command is part of his textual strategy.

The performative effect of this type of addressing the reader is crucial. If the reader cooperates with the text, if he follows and fulfils the instructions given by the author, the game of fiction is not just a matter of the reader's performance. It is augmented or even (in the extreme case) replaced by an activity (performance) of another kind. The performance that the author demands of his reader is no small one. Nor is every reader willing to agree to the established rules of the game of fiction.

This is the conclusion of the issue and reflection on when addressing (as a particular form

of metalepsis) takes the form of specific action – a performance. If we follow the author's instructions, we should stop reading and start doing something else.

#### 4 Conclusion

These three types of addressing of readers are not exhaustive. They are only ideal-typical examples that we can see most often in narrative texts. Underlying the consideration of their performative effect is the assumption that we respond to each address in a certain way. And of course, it is also true that if we do nothing at all, if we do not follow the author's instruction, this is, of course, a form of response, too. But it is evident that there are narrative texts that directly require specific reader's performances.

In this context (in the case of the novels of Jaroslav Foglar mentioned above), the question that arises is whether the shift away 'from' the text 'outside' the text affects or does not affect its genre characteristics. Are they still children's novels? Aren't they more like manuals for scouts and guides on what to do in certain life situations? This question is certainly valid.<sup>3</sup>

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