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Introduction: Addressing Readers: New Theoretical Perspectives

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“I tell you what, you give me a couple of hours to get sorted and then we’ll get started. Pretty excited about it actually. I mean, how often do you get to open up to a one-hundred-percent stranger?” asks fictional life-coach Karen to the people who have downloaded *Karen*, the 2015 app for smartphones developed by British artists’ group Blast Theory. App-users have the metaleptic experience of being directly addressed by “Karen,” the protagonist of the app, and asked to answer questions about their life choices and purposes (along with other less appropriate questions; see Bell Chapter 10 of this book). Some app-users may then have the eerie impression of interacting with the fictional character Karen, all the more so since “Karen” uses the information app-users give her, gradually starts sharing details of her own “life” with them and even seems to ask for their help in making decisions about her own “life.” This more and more intrusive behavior on “Karen”’s part gives full meaning to the question asked in the first video call which we have quoted at the beginning of the introduction: “How often do you get to open up to a one-hundred-percent stranger?” While the “you” in “I tell you what” is unambiguously doubly deictic (Herman) in the sense that it presupposes a superimposition of the (virtual) narratee and the (real) app-user, the “you” in “How often do you get to open up to a one-hundred-percent stranger?” requires closer investigation. Though it can be interpreted as similarly doubly deictic as the question occurs right after other occurrences of doubly deictic “you”, it may also seem to superimpose an impersonal and generalized “you” and a self-addressing (virtual) narrator—thereby leading to questioning the communicative stance of the app. Is “Karen” metaleptically communicating with app-users? Is *Karen* (the app) communicating with them via “Karen” (the character)? Or is the protagonist merely talking to herself, or even just making general statements about the way people generally behave? Could this be interpreted as a form of indirect communication, or no communication at all? But what if the “you” in “how often do you get to open up to a one-hundred-percent stranger?” is doubly deictic? Is “Karen” forcing the real addressees to adopt the pre-planned role of the narratee or can they resist the role they are assigned to play?

Digital fiction with its immersive qualities may blur the reality/fiction divide even more than print fiction, but as will be evident in all the chapters of this book, all fiction, from classical English novels to contemporary print and digital fiction, can be stimulatingly analyzed through the lens of the rhetoric and pragmatics of author-reader communication in order to probe the following questions: are direct addresses to readers a way to (sometimes forcefully) direct their interpretations and shape their perspectives? Or do they merely reveal a keen sense of the buying public and the necessity to be tactful with readers? Are readers of fiction which does not feature any direct address to readers free to form their own interpretations, or are they still guided in indirect but most potent ways? Finally, do novels, gamebooks and digital fiction use (in)direct addresses in radically different ways?

1. Theorizing Author-Reader Interactions in Fiction

1.1 ReOpening the Author-Reader Channel

While New Critics and Formalists have argued against intentional fallacy and biographical criticism, therefore rendering all reference to the author’s communicative intent dubious or naïve, reader-response critics, speech-act philosophers and pragmaticists have renewed the perspectives on the author-reader channel in literature. As Jucker and Locher put it, it has taken quite some time for pragmaticists “to reconcile themselves with fictional texts” (4) and only “in recent years” have pragmaticists included fiction in their corpora “without apologetic justifications” in order to

investigate it “on its own terms” (5). While Austin has famously described fictional language as “parasitic” (22) and Searle has labeled speech acts in literature as “pretended speech acts” (74), later critics have shown how speech act theory and pragmatics can fruitfully shed light on what literature can do—and does. Pleading for what she calls “a speech act theory of literary discourse,” Pratt argues that writers rely on and exploit Grice’s Cooperative Principle (which, according to Pratt, is hyperprotected at the writer-reader level but which she insists can be jeopardized by the fictional speaker, 215) and the four maxims of conversation Grice has identified to have the readers calculate implicatures when reading literary works (see Section 2.2 for more on the pragmatics of negotiation between authors and readers). For Pratt, readers willingly relinquish their right to take their turn in the interactional exchange on the understanding that the author’s contribution will be “worth it” (103-7) and that they will be able to “pass judgment” when the speaker’s turn is over (113) and even “throw [a bad book] across the room” (114) if they feel like it.

However, this emphasis on readers’ “nonspeaking” participation in the literary speech situation (Pratt 105) can hardly draw attention to “literature’s sheer interactive force” (Sell, *Literature as Communication* 60). If one believes, as Sell does, that literature is “a deed with interpersonal valency” (107) between differently positioned real authors and readers, i.e., between individuals who are partially socially determined but who are also capable of empathetic self-projection and partial distancing from their own situationality, one should call attention to the “major hermeneutic, affective and ethical consequences” of authors’ and readers’ mental alternation “between their own and other contexts” (254), including “self-reassessment” or even “social change,” but also “strong antagonism” (75). Readers may indeed partially or completely accept the worldview suggested by writers as they reconstruct it from what they read, but “having provisionally assented, they may also, partly or wholly, reject what is on offer” (175)—though communicational criticism such as Sell’s favors both literary works that support and enhance their readers’ (relative) autonomy and literary criticism that helps readers relate to (and sometimes empathize with) writers.

Analyzing the author-reader channel then requires examining narrative in a new light, positing that narrative is “*ultimately not a structure but an action*” (Phelan, “Authors” 2, original emphasis) carried out by a storyteller “to achieve a purpose in relation to an audience” (2) and that the audience and “its unfolding responses” to the narrative are “integral to its shape” (2). This conception of narrative as rhetoric reveals not only that narratives exert their force on their readers and involve them cognitively, affect them emotionally and challenge them ethically (*Narrative* 14, 142), but also that the communicational exchanges that narratives contain the traces of are bidirectional. In other words, as Phelan puts it, “audiences have agency as well” (“Authors” 14). “Readerly dynamics” i.e., “local and global interpretive, ethical, affective, and aesthetic responses to textual dynamics” (“Authors” 13) influence “textual dynamics” i.e., plot dynamics and narratorial dynamics—authors relying on their authorial audience’s (projected) unfolding responses to the narrative progression to build new parts of the text (*Somebody* 33). Authors can then be said to be influenced by their readers just like readers are influenced by the unfolding of the narrative, both authorial and readerly agencies having direct impact on the shape of narrative texts (*Somebody* 34).

1.2 Directly vs. Indirectly Addressing Readers

Interactions between authors and readers come to the forefront in the context of fiction featuring intrusive narrators directly addressing their narratees or second-person narrations. Readers can feel pulled in the fiction in the most potent ways when directly addressed by the figure of the author and/or the narrator. In second-person narratives, the situation of address is indeed made more explicit than in traditional first and third-person novels. To use Fludernik’s words, “Morphologically explicit address [...] seems to require the explication of the circumstances of a pretended speech act in much more insistent a fashion” (“Second-Person Fiction” 223). The “you” pronoun invites readers to reconstruct the explicitly stated “situation of address.” As demonstrated by many “you narrative” specialists (Morrisette, Prince, Margolin, Kacandes, Herman, B. Richardson, Bell & Ensslin, Macrea, Iliopoulou), the reference of “you” goes beyond a mere

reference to the authorial audience in its ability to ambiguously refer to the narrator, the protagonist and/or the extradiegetic reader as well – see also Sorlin’s *Stylistics of ‘You’*, detailing six potential references in her adaptation of Kluge’s model to the written text. For Phelan, readers of second-person narration are invited to adopt multiple positionings, not only that of the narratee but also that of the “narrative audience,” which he defines (after Rabinowitz) as “the actual audience’s projection into the observer role within the fiction” (*Narrative* 145), and whose observer role guarantees some form of emotional response to the fictional world. When the narratee is not defined in the vaguest terms but is given specific characteristics, the degree of overlap between the narratee and the narrative audience is more limited, leading actual readers to differentiate themselves from the authorial construction that is the narratee. Taking the example of Lorrie Moore’s second-person short story “How,” Phelan explains how readers “both occupy the [narratee’s] position and know what the position is like in a way that the narratee herself does not”—which complicates the ethical and emotional responses of flesh-and-blood readers (*Narrative* 151).

Author-reader communication is not limited to cases of “you narratives” when “you” refers to an undefined narratee though. As Lindgren shows, some misalignment between the narrative voice and the implied author’s stance can be indirectly (yet purposely) conveyed to readers. As she demonstrates it in her analysis of Kipling’s “On the City Wall,” Kipling’s portraying his narrator as being “superior in his smug knowingness” (103) and even potentially mistaken reveals his “addressing his readers *behind the narrator’s back*” (103, original emphasis). Kipling’s readers of “On the City Wall” are brought in close contact with the narrator, which “exposes [them] to alternative interpretations” (103)—thereby fostering a far more dialogical relationship between the author and his readers than in his autobiography and the other fiction he wrote. This points to the existence of “communicational indirectness,” which is most salient in fiction involving unreliable or not completely reliable narrators, but which characterizes most fiction (see Sell, Borch and Lindgren 13). Indirection in fiction can be pointed out at different levels indeed, whether in diegetic communicational exchanges between characters, or in interactions between the heterodiegetic narrator and the narratee. But, as Phelan compellingly puts it, this “art of indirection” (*Somebody* 20) characterizes character narration (Phelan’s user-friendly version of Genette’s technical term of “homodiegetic narration,” *Living* xi) and character-character dialogue too, as “in each case, we have a single text with at least two tellers, at least two occasions, multiple occasions, multiple audiences, and multiple purposes” (*Somebody* 20). In other words, there are several channels of communication alongside the expected author-narrator-audience channel, notably the author-character-audience track and the author-character-character-audience track, and these various intermingling communicational channels resonate with one another. For instance, the reader’s response(s) to Stevens’ conversation with Miss Kenton in Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* are impacted by what s/he infers from Stevens’s treatment of his narratee as well as by what s/he infers from the type of relationship constructed between the implied author and the authorial audience (Phelan, *Living* 53-65), defined as a hybrid of what the author knows about actual readers and what s/he imagines about the readers for whom s/he constructs the text (*Somebody* 7).

1.3 Communication vs. Ascription of Places?

As is recognized by Phelan (*Living* 56-60), the ethical questions raised by the various author-audience communicational channels have no unique answer, since different flesh-and-blood readers will invoke their individual ethical principles to respond to what they read. Readers’ situationality and cognitive environment will partly determine how they read fiction—as Sell puts it, “different sitings do have an interpretative and evaluative bearing” (*Literature as Communication* 133). Additionally, while a fair number of actual readers will do their utmost to become what Phelan calls “rhetorical readers,” i.e. will strive to join the “authorial audience” (*Somebody* 7-8), not all readers, arguably, will “seek to discern the authorial design behind a narrative’s way of

communicating”—which Phelan himself accepts and sees as another form of potentially productive engagement with the narrative (“Voice” 52).

Some, notably Lecerle (after Bloom), have argued in favor of misreadings (Lecerle, “Misreading” 2) in order to preclude any vision of interpretation as a task whose purpose would be to retrieve the unique meaning of a text and in order to highlight the critical role of the reader’s intervention when reading any text. This vision of the author-reader channel is therefore distinctly different from Sell’s or even Phelan’s, in the sense that it does not rely on “irenic cooperation” between authors and readers (Lecerle, *Interpretation* 45). Though in all these cases narrative is defined as an action on somebody else, in Lecerle’s theory, the type of action involved does not so much imply to “achieve a purpose in relation to an audience,” to use Phelan’s terms (“Authors” 2) but to “interpellate” the other actant involved, and in particular the Reader, via the Text, filtered through the Encyclopaedia (a concept which Lecerle borrows from Eco’s *Lector in Fabula*, which refers to the heterogeneous loose structure of knowledge that is part of speakers’ cognitive environments) and Language (see Figure 1).

<Figure 1 – Lecerle’s ALTER model (*Interpretation as Pragmatics* 75)>

Lecerle borrows French Marxist philosopher Althusser’s concept of “interpellation” (sometimes translated as “hailing”) to show how the author and the reader of any text are interpellated, hailed, captured at a specific place—just like an individual can be interpellated, or hailed by the police officer (and the ideology behind his or her hailing) who calls out: “Hey, you there!” (Althusser 174)—and accordingly turned into “subjects.” Becoming a subject comes at a price as it simultaneously grants individuals their status of subjects, i.e., free subjectivities, centers of initiatives (Althusser 182), and subjects them “to a set of implicit and explicit norms” (Butler 133)—in Althusser’s terms, subjects submit “to a higher authority, and [are] therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting [their] submission” (182). Authors and readers, just like any individual interpellated at a specific place, are therefore both speakers endowed with agency and mere “effects of the text” (Lecerle, *Interpretation* 75). In particular, authors interpellate, hail, capture readers at a specific place, designed for them and which requires a certain type of response, by resorting to a certain grammar and pragmatics of interpellation—including but not limited to the use of the second-person pronoun (*De l’interpellation* 84-9).

Yet, as Butler (and Lecerle after her) contends, being interpellated, hailed and even name-called “both subordinates and enables” (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 163), as the “subject” can subversively resignify the position s/he has been assigned (in particular by exploiting the iterability and inherent recontextualization of each utterance). Similarly, even if readers are ascribed specific places by the Author and the Text, via the Encyclopaedia and Language, they can counter-interpellate the Author, “invert the flow of interpellation” (Lecerle, *Interpretation* 151). In other words, as is made clear by the direction of the arrows showing the circulation of interpellation point to in Figure 1, readers ascribe intention to the “Author,” retrospectively imposing “meaning on an author that, to all intents and purposes, it [the reader’s intention] creates” (126-7). This is a radically different paradigm from what communicational and rhetorical critics such as Sell and Phelan argue about readers’ reconstructing what authors hope to communicate directly or indirectly to their readers. Instead of striving to be “rhetorical readers” only (Phelan), actual readers, Lecerle claims, may also recognize the “place of capture,” (*Interpretation* 116) at which they are interpellated but still (or consequently) send back the force of interpellation, “counter-interpellate” the Author, i.e., critically distance themselves from the text they read. This does not mean, obviously, that readers can ignore the place they have been ascribed in the ALTER model. Readers, just like individuals in Althusser’s theory, are “always-already interpellated” (Althusser 175). However, they may exploit this “enabling constraint” (Butler 16) to use and misuse the text: “On the one hand, she is interpellated at her place by the text, she abides by the rules it imposes on her through an ALTER structure. On the other hand, through imposture, she also constructs those rules, with and against the text – for even the interpellators must be interpellated” (Lecerle, *Interpretation* 227).

Obviously, although reading “requires an active, and potentially violent, attitude of the reader towards the text” (Lecerle, “Misreading” 2), a distinction needs to be drawn between misreading leading to false interpretation and “the creative misreading [...] of a strong reading” (2). Strong (critical) readings “force the reader into thinking” (12). In Stockwell’s terms, they may not be the “preferred reading,” “what actual readers actually tend to do with any given text” (154), but they permit “the emergence of sense out of doxic meaning” (Lecerle, “Misreading” 14). Additionally, viewing reading as readerly intervention and ascription of intention need not be interpreted as arm-wrestling the other actor in the interpreting game. As posited by Lecerle (in *Interpretation* 60) and Stockwell, all types of communication, including face-to-face verbal conversation, actually involve “imputing” consciousness, perception, memory, experience, intention to the other participant (Stockwell 151). As Stockwell puts it indeed, “in both fictional and actual encounters, we assume intentionality and can then model a hypothetical intention on the basis of that presumption” (153)—meaning that readers always ascribe a place to the other participant in the language-game of literature, whether that is theorized as “the counter-interpellation of imposture” (Lecerle) or as “mind-modelling” (Stockwell).

2. Author-Reader Partnerships

2.1 (In)transitive Address to Readers

If one agrees with Phelan that all fiction is addressed by an author to an audience “for some purposes(s)” (“Rhetoric” 56), one has to add that these interactions place the actants involved in different power positions. These can be construed in grammatical terms as suggested by Sell. For him, transitive communication (the author “communicating his ideas,” with “his ideas” as direct object) indicates a non-dialogical mode where the writer’s agency is domineering and, correlatively, the autonomy of the reader to “think *something else* in response” is curtailed (“Two Opposed Modes” 384-7). Intransitive communication (the writer “communicating,” with the intransitive use of the verb) builds a community of participants in the communicational exchange and invites them to share their opinions and reach their own conclusions. To put it differently, transitive communication foregrounds a greater degree of coerciveness, the author strictly steering the audience’s response and readers yielding (more or less willingly or passively) to the author’s guidance.

As Sell shows (“Two Opposed Modes”), authors do not necessarily limit themselves to one mode. Dickens, for instance, can switch from one mode to the next within the same paragraph, thereby exploiting the communicational effects of each strategy on his readers. And as shown above, intervening authors tend to “negotiate” their relationship with the readers in a more or less controlling manner. Authors/narrators who signpost their presence in a very “overt” way (Rimmon-Kenan 97-100) and thus establish a certain type of relationship with their audience do not only guide the readers’ potential responses but also acknowledge their needs. Henry Fielding’s particularly audible and visible narrator comes to mind, who resorts to metadiscursive commentaries anticipating readers’ reactions or making sure they follow the plot in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) or *Tom Jones* (1749).

For Lanser (18), as women’s access to public discourse has been historically constrained, this “overt authoriality” has predominantly been the preserve of male writers (or women transgressing gendered roles). Warhol also dissociates narrative techniques along gender lines in her analysis of 19th-century novels, coming to the conclusion that male and female writers tendentially (but not exclusively) used different techniques of interventions in their texts. A typically masculine “distancing” technique is that of a teller making explicit comments on the constructedness of the story and usually using an ironical, playful tone (Warhol “Reader Can You Imagine” 59). By contrast, an “engaging narrator” is one that earnestly intends to bring the readers to sympathize with the cause of the characters being described. Warhol hypothesizes that these differing gendered strategies may result from the fact that novel writing was the only way to reach an audience for women deprived of the possibility to speak their mind in public. In the works of

Elizabeth Gaskell, Harriet Beecher Stowe or George Eliot, narrators aim at having the readers believe that the characters are “real” and the story is “true,” and thereby at having them occupy the “you” position drafted for them. These authors do want readers to sympathize for the cause of American slaves, working-class poor in Manchester, or middle-class rural folk in England (Warhol *Gendered Interventions* 29). Whereas the distancing narrators do not expect readers to identify with the narratee who is sometimes made fun of, engaging narrators sincerely do. Warhol compares the engaging narrator of the 19th century to an “evangelical preacher” (34) who vigorously encourages readers to put themselves in the narratee’s shoes.

This edifying tone can also be found in didactic novels such as the ones Misset focuses on in her period of study, i.e., 1778-1814 (see Misset Chapter 2 of this book). In these novels, authors and/or narrators sometimes construct the reader as a “respected figure of authority” the better to foster ideological assent. Authors of didactic novels not uncommonly adopt a vertical relationship with their audience, trying to teach moral precepts in an authoritative or infantilizing manner, but without seeming to do so—pleasing or even flattering the readers consequently becoming essential. In a similar way, adult authors of children’s literature have had to grapple with the way they interact with their young readers. The adult-child power imbalance at the core of children’s literature, which may result from the adults’ colonizing children (Nodelman) or the genre’s fundamental aetnormativity, i.e., normativity related to age (Nikolajeva), has undeniable pragmatic consequences on its readers. As Wall contends, much of 19th-century children’s literature was characterized by what she terms “double address” (35), with writers addressing in turn child and adult narratees and not infrequently making fun of children’s ignorance to entertain adult readers only. Victorian authors of children’s literature, Wall claims, often wrote down to children and created intrusive narrators, addressing their child narratees with the tone of the condescending and yet paradoxically beguiling adult (17). Similar power dynamics can be said to underpin Young Adult (YA) fiction addressing adolescents from the perspective of the informed adult author. Focusing on a corpus of adult-authored YA novels featuring teen protagonists with mental health issues and addressing various narratees potentially including the implied young reader, Sara Day (Chapter 3) shows that the peritextual materials of some of these novels enhancing the author-reader relationship reasserts the author’s authority on the subject by giving advice to potential young readers.

When more closely investigated however, authorial narration cannot be said to engender stabilized, uncontested positionings of readers. If what Gubar calls “the pervasive and potentially coercive power of adult influence” (5) can hardly be denied in children’s literature, many adult children’s authors actively sought to mitigate the asymmetrical relationship with their audience. Some 18th-century children’s books feature benevolent narrators, fostering horizontal relationships with their narratees (see Misset’s 2018 analysis of the figure of the pedagogue in Edgeworth’s novels, 17). Many 19th-century children’s authors represented children “as capable of reshaping stories” (Gubar 6) or acknowledged actual children’s agentic and sometimes even instrumental role in their creative process (Ford Smith). In other words, child readers were offered portraits of empowered children themselves calling for a more active participation on the part of the children being read to (see Iché “(Dis)empowering Child Readers”)—which calls for a more nuanced description of the nature of the adult-child relationship in children’s literature. The tension “between coercion and empowerment” at the heart of 19th century children’s literature complicates indeed the apparent “unilateral pressure.” In contemporary YA fiction, as detailed by Day (Chapter 6), the different constructions of the (dis)trusted reader as friend, voyeur and/or therapist in the “safe space” of fiction also has implications for the audience’s response to the intimate disclosure.

Likewise, the authority that the authorial narrators seem to embody in the 18th and 19th centuries conceals greater complexities and contradictions (Birke “Authorial Narration” 162). The numerous metafictional commentaries as well as addresses to various types of audiences testify to some authorial anxiety at a time when the novel was still trying to define itself and find its public. Authorial interventions for Birke do not assert authorial power so much as they question the

“extent and limits” of that power (“Authorial Narration” 172). The stabilizing effect of the omniscient authorial tone should not be mistaken for a sense of absolute and secure power on the writer’s part. Pleading with the readers, trying to please them in any way is also recognizing the power they exert on authorial choices. Misset (Chapter 2) expounds this anxiety that, in her findings, transcends the didactic/non-didactic novel distinction, revealing the increasing power of readers as “a collective consumer force” at the turn of the 19th century. These transactions between authors and readers bring to the fore the interdependence of the partners negotiating their places, expectations and designs in relation to one another. That readers become critics with a direct influence on authors’ careers is a permanent feature of the relationship. It is no less true in the mid 19th century when the mode of distribution through instalments brings novelists in more direct contact with their audience. If Richardson could still ignore the multiple letters asking him for a better ending to *Clarissa* (1748), a novelist like Thackeray could not turn a blind eye to the desires of the *vox populi* (Fromonot). At the beginning of the 20th century, as shown by Hoffmann (Chapter 8), William Gerhardie voices a similar authorial anxiety in *The Polyglots* (1925) enhancing the “economical dimension” of the relationship between authors and readers: “What writer is sure of his livelihood with so fickle a public as ours? You may, for example be reading this book – but it does not follow that you have bought it” (Gerhardie 164).

This partnership calls for a negotiation of places that can neither be too visibly authoritative or manipulative nor too politely cooperative. The search for the “right balance” calls for a pragmatics of negotiation.

2.2. A Pragmatics of Negotiation: Cooperation and (Im)politeness

If (im)politeness has been studied at the diegetic level (in dialogues between fictional characters), it has not sufficiently been brought to bear on the relationship between authors and readers. What Sell calls the (im)politeness *of* the literary work (rather than *in* it) has not received much attention from scholars specialized in literary pragmatics (see Kizelbach for a recent exception). Yet Sell has shown how politeness, understood as a “social lubricant” facilitating human interactions with a view to avoiding conflict, is “at the very heart of literary activity” just as it is of face-to-face interactions (*Literature as Communication* 216, 208). A pragmatics of literary communication drawing on the pragmatics of face-to-face interactions can thus help us theorize how the meaning of literary works is negotiated between authors and readers. Authors can be more or less cooperative and polite in their “treatments” of their readers, maintaining (or not) what Sell calls “selectional politeness” (and “observe all the taboos and conventions of social and moral decorum operative within [their] culture,” see “Politeness” 221), and/or “presentational politeness” (and respect the cooperative principle “at all cost” 222). They can perform different speech acts in Austin’s sense: inform, move, warn, seduce, tease or challenge readers. They can purposefully flout Gricean maxims or have more or less regard for their readers’ positive and negative face needs and wants (Brown and Levinson).

As seen in the previous section, conspicuous narrators in the 18th century do aim at facilitating the readers’ entry in the storyworld, providing them with clues along the path. Taking polite care of his readers, the narrator in *Joseph Andrews* invites them to rest between chapters that are assimilated to the inns in which the characters themselves halt: “Those little Spaces between our Chapters may be looked upon as an Inn or Resting Place, where he may stop and take a Glass, or any other Refreshment, as it pleases them” (76). In *Tom Jones*, the narrator displays a similar hospitality, presenting himself as an inn-keeper providing for guests and orchestrating human interactions for the readers. Other mid-18th century novels are built on the same READING IS TRAVELING and READING IS SOCIAL INTERACTION metaphors (see Birke “Authorial Narration” 171). Some 19th-century narrators still treat the readers as participants in the fictional world. George Eliot’s narrator in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) considers them as witnesses to the scenes just depicted, who may at all times decide to relinquish their status of observer: “Early in the following April, nearly a year after that dubious parting you have just witnessed, you may, if you like, again see

Maggie entering the Red Deeps through the group of Scotch firs” (331-2). Yet, in the 19th century, author-reader social interactions are predominantly constructed as mediated by the book medium, with authors frequently addressing their readers as “readers,” arguably to remind themselves of the textual nature of their relationships (Ong 100). But just like their 18th-century predecessors, many 19th-century authors wish to maintain an amicable relationship with their readers, whether by clarifying allusions for them (as Gaskell’s narrator does in *Mary Barton*) or by letting them have the final word (as in Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*).

If the polite acknowledgment of readers’ knowledge, presence and preference performed by the various 18th- and 19th-century authors discussed above (and others) can have face-flattering effects, the opposite effect can be produced. John Barth’s famous insulting address in *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) for instance is likely to be face-threatening for the reader:

The reader! You, dogged, unisultable, print-oriented bastard, it’s you I’m addressing, who else, from inside this monstrous fiction. You’ve read me this far then? Even this far? For what discreditable motive? How is it you don’t go to a movie, watch TV, stare at a wall, play tennis with a friend, make amorous advances to the person who comes to your mind when I speak of amorous advances? Can nothing surfeit, saturate you, turn you off? Where’s your shame? (127)

Barth does not seem to care about negotiating a good “rapport” with his audience. In Spencer-Oatey’s terms, he can be said to challenge “rapport management,” threatening the reader’s “quality face” that is “a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positively” (540). In bluntly interpellating them in Lecercle’s sense, Barth provokingly interrogates the readers’ presence. Whilst Fielding recognizes their right to be informed to better make their way through the text (see Sorlin, “Readerly Freedom”), Barth questions their very right of reading his book and suspects their motivations. These face-attacking lines jeopardize what the readers could claim to be entitled to in their interactions with an author’s work they have chosen to read. This entitlement is what Spencer-Oatey calls “equity rights”: “We have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to personal consideration from others, so that we are treated fairly: that we are not unduly imposed upon or unfairly ordered about” (540).

Barth’s unduly imposition can be purposefully designed to produce some perlocutionary effect that does not accord with the performed illocutionary act. Challenging readers’ presence may be a trick to intrigue them further—or have them counter-interpellate the authorial actant. A similar example of this reverse strategy can be found in Mark Z. Danielewski’s opening of his book *House of Leaves*: “This book is not for you.” In her cognitive analysis of this dedication, Gibbons (2011) shows how the author uniquely creates both distance and desirability. In pragmatic terms, it could be argued that readers will counter-interpellate the author by reacting to this attempt at bypassing them (this book is not for you, move along) by turning the page and will start reading the novel (see Sorlin *Stylistics of ‘You’*). Authors’ overt uncooperativeness are likely to invite readers to actively look for other authorial communicative intentions—which may confirm Pratt’s intuition of the ultimately “hyperprotected” status of the Cooperative Principle in literary works (215). In his analysis of Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* (1952), Cronin (Chapter 7) demonstrates that the way the impoliteness of repulsive characters is foregrounded in the novel serves to mediate O’Connor’s own impolite “authorial posture” in relation to her readers. By not fulfilling expectations and remaining unapologetic about it, O’Connor projects specific reading stances and, simultaneously, establishes cultural authority for herself as a (female) writer. In Lecercle’s terms, in ascribing the readers a specific position, the author’s text assigns her in return a specific place as well.

Literary communication could be construed as the sum of balanced trade-off between “effectiveness” in the impact they have on readers and “efficiency” in the help provided to them to get through the work (see Sell *Literature as Communication* 224). Modernist texts seem to tilt on the “effective” side however, as the reader is not cajoled into following the plot but left to her own

devices in her own interpretations. In contrast to helpful narrators making interpretative choices for readers, modernist writers' authorial addresses purposefully baffle or mislead them. As Hercend (Chapter 5) shows, James Joyce's "authority" hinges on a paradoxical self-defeating posturing, creating a "space of indeterminacy" or a "maze-like structure" that enhances the reader's liberty to respond to the address—in both senses of interpellation and dwelling place—by "roaming" within the text. If this "rhetoric of difficulty" (Diepeveen 49) tends to undermine easy cooperation, it enhances what relevance theorists call cognitive effects as a reward for the cognitive efforts put into reading (Sperber and Wilson). Difficulty can take the form of silences, ellipses and enigmas as in contemporary works by Irish authors such as Colum McCann, Joseph O'Connor and William Trevor. Majola-Leblond (Chapter 6) shows that these works create multi-directional "wandering/wondering interpretative paths" which are likely to leave the reader "tossed" and "disturbed" rather than cajoled and pleased.

(Im)polite treatments/placements of the reader are thus key strategic aspects of literary communication. (Mis)management of rapport partake in the negotiation of meaning. While Sell speaks of the "interactive gamble" between communicative efficiency and effectiveness (Sell "Politeness" 220, *Literature as Communication* 224), Majola-Leblond (Chapter 6) ventures a "Principle of Equilibrium" between blatant uncooperativeness and naive cooperation that would still sustain pleasure of reading.

2.3 Storytelling in the Digital Age

As just intimated, the mode of authorial narration has been largely relinquished by modernist writers who privileged showing over telling and favored Free Indirect Style over authorial commentaries. Suspicious of grand narratives, (post)modernist novelists in the wake of "the death of the author" (Barthes) have perceived the technique as a "reactionary" and "outmoded" archaism (Birke, Dawson). Yet, for Dawson, contemporary fiction seems to have rekindled the omniscient mode. He interprets this revival as a "further development and refinement of some of the technical experiments of postmodern fiction" on the one hand and, on the other, which is of particular interest to us here, as "one way in which authors have responded to a perceived decline in the cultural authority of the novel over the last two decades" (144). In works written by contemporary British and American authors Dawson witnesses a return in different guise of the repressed omniscient narration that had been abandoned for more radical experiments (146), with "panoramic intrusive narrators" who assert the authority of the novelists as "public intellectuals in the new millennium" (150). For Dawson, this resurrected technique appears in the new context of fragmented public discourse across proliferating and competing media (cinema, television, new media, blogs and reality TV replete with "demotic" opinions), the "commercial orientation" of international publishing houses and the "increased sales for literary non-fiction such as memoirs and popular history" (150). The new competing context thus calls for a reassertion of the authority in and of the novel (156).

Dawson's analysis demonstrates how historically and socially situated novel writing (and reading) is (see Birke *Writing the Reader* as well). Interestingly, in the second half of the 20th century, literature has also taken a "you turn" with the emergence of novels written in the unusual second-person pronoun from the 1970s onward (with earlier instances identified in the two previous decades in Fludernik's "Second-Person Fiction"). Just as Dawson sees the re-emergence of authorial narration as a reaction to the decline of the significance of the novel in digital times, Rembowska-Pluciennik resituates the upsurge of "you narratives" against a background of social media that connect people more rapidly and directly than ever before (168-9). Storytellers have even used these new social networks and media to produce narratives in what is called Facebook literature or Twitterfiction for instance (Rustad), bringing writers and readers in contact like never before. Just as readers could warn a Dickens against killing a character like little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* in the 19th century, the new mode of diffusion influences authorial choices through direct messaging to the storyteller via the very same medium. In creating the illusion of face-to-

face conversation, these fictions share many characteristics with oral storytelling. It may then come as no surprise that printed fiction itself displays a revival of the oral storytelling mode seeking contact with readers. Roddy Doyle's 2019 novel *Charlie Savage*, as analyzed in Boichard (Chapter 12), reappropriates the oral Irish tradition of old in the conversation a middle-aged man engages with the reader. It seems to be one more instance of this need to reconnect with readers in the 21st century (see Sorlin *Stylistics of 'You'*). Our most oral age is reflected in what Kacandes calls "talk fiction" in works of art that perform different cultural tasks and converse with us rather than keeping to themselves as art for art's sake (*Talk Fiction*).

Implicating readers further in the storytelling process seems also at the heart of contemporary Digital Fiction whose meaning cannot be dissociated from the digital context that gives birth and support to it. For Bell et al. (2010), digital fiction is to be understood as "fiction that is written for and read on a computer screen, that pursues its verbal, discursive and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium, and that would lose something of its aesthetic function if it were removed from that medium" ("A [S]creed"). Digital fiction includes many different types of fiction, from hypertext fiction to 2D or 3D video games, from interactive fiction to even more immersive virtual reality installations (see Birke and Christ 73). Interestingly the first digital fiction was perceived as fulfilling Barthes's ideal of the writerly text in which readers are the real active agents (rather than mere consumers). Indeed, hypertext fiction, in asking for readers to make their own choices by clicking on links on screen, seems to dissolve the frontiers between authors and readers, the latter being conceived as "co-writers" of the piece.

The supposed freedom granted to the co-producing active reader has yet to be qualified in digital fiction. For one thing, the reader can only follow the pre-programmed paths orchestrated by the system. Besides, the reader can hardly refuse the address made to her, which brings Walker to speak of "forced participation." Despite being free to choose between different paths, in clicking the mouse to continue reading, the reader is made to accept the "you" role: "if you answer the question posed to 'you', you let the text force you into a role" (Walker 47). The actual audience is visually materialized on screen through what Bell calls the "reader-as-cursor" ("Media-specific metalepsis" 29). Through the mouse clicking on hyperlinks, readers are implicated in the storyworld, transgressing the virtual/actual divide via "interactional metalepsis" (Kukkonen 2) (see also Bell "Interactional Metalepsis" 29). More than in print fiction (where the reader is merely led to turn pages), digital fiction seems thus to require a higher physical implication from the person on the other side of the screen who is expressly required to press buttons or input text if they want the story to go on at all. However, despite the "forced" physical participation through the hardware, the reader of digital fiction is no more compelled to (cognitively) accept the address than in print fiction. Bell (Chapter 10) shows that the "you" address in the Blast Theory's app-fiction *Karen* (2015) with which we opened this introduction can be met with refusal to self-ascribe on the part of some readers refusing the programmed interpellation.

The "choose your own adventure" stories seem to be the print ancestors of digital fictions. If the affordances of the digital medium allow more complex "branchings" in the storytelling than the print medium, the navigation they propose between pages/screens creates imaginative immersion in the storyworld in a similar way. Darougari (Chapter 11) shows how contemporary print fiction can be inspired by hyperfiction and interactive fiction. The reference of the second-person pronoun hovers between reference to the reader-as-character or the readers as themselves, which testifies to the similarities in reader involvement strategies orchestrated by authors of all media.

3. Book Contents

The first part of the book is devoted to the issue of authorly ethical transactions with readers. In Chapter 1, Roger Sell's communicational paradigm sheds light on two opposing modes of communication between Dickens and his readers, one that is truly dialogical in spirit and the

other that is non-dialogical. While Dickens's non-dialogical mode—with which he exuberantly and sometimes tauntingly imposes his mischievous judgments to his readers—grants his readers' wish for hedonistic pleasure, his “unassertive” and respectful dialogical mode satisfies their ethical needs for autonomy. The modal disjunctions featured in Dickens's novels never being synthesized into one whole thus ultimately stimulate the readers' heuristic impulses.

In Chapter 2, Juliette Misset interrogates the role of direct addresses in a “didactic” corpus of 18th-century British novels (i.e., received as both instructive and entertaining), compared to a “non-didactic” corpus of 18th-century British novels (i.e., received as entertaining but not instructive). Her study reveals that, contrary to what may be thought, direct addresses are not as much linked to the didactic mode as they illustrate the prevailing anxiety over the author-reader relationship in the 18th century, at a time when novels were in the process of being legitimized as literature and when the commercial relationship between authors and readers had taken over patronage.

In Chapter 3, Sara Day discusses the impact of the use of direct address by first-person narrators with mental illnesses in 21st-century American Young Adult novels. She shows how these novels rely on the emotional bond between the narrator and the reader, who is sometimes constructed as a friend, to offer valuable insights into mental health disorders. Paradoxically though, these novels also occasionally limit their young readers' capacity to develop an ethical and empathetic response to fictional characters with mental health disorders, whether because too much disclosure leaves no gaps for empathetic readers to fill in, or because narrators turn out to be too unreliable to be fully trusted, or finally because the adult author's voice ultimately pierces through—thereby damaging the intimate teen-to-teen relationship the novel had previously created.

Authorial agency is revisited in the three following chapters (chapters 4-6) composing Part II. In Chapter 4, Jean-Jacques Lecercle compares three incipits (Jane Austen's *Emma*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and a Mills & Boon romance entitled *Forbidden Rapture* by Violet Winspear), each establishing a specific relationship with their readers. He accounts for them by using the metaphor of “the story is a journey along a path” as revisited by Ingold. Ingold distinguishes between “lines of transport” and “lines of wayfaring” which involve a different positioning of the reader. Winspear's Mills & Boons novel is undergirded by the metaphor of the “line of transport” bringing the reader-as-tourist from a point of departure to a programmed ending through pre-determined stages along the way. Literary works like Woolf's let the reader “stroll” through the text without imposing an interpretation, as what matters is less the destination than the “wayfaring” itself. Austen's text allows Lecercle to subtly distinguish between counter-interpellations prompted by the text and counter-interpellations that are not programmed by the structure.

In the following chapter (Chapter 5), Olivier Hercend shows how, in *Ulysses*, James Joyce similarly leaves the text open to readers' free counter-interpellations. The interpellations of the narrative voices are indeed too ambivalent to be recognized as authoritative. The source of the address is never clear and the possibility to reconstruct some author-figure ultimately self-defeating, leaving the responsibility of meaning to the sole reader. The stage directions of the “Circe” episode in particular “diffract” address to the point of uncooperativeness, with the effect of leading the readers to “authorize” their own readings in the end.

In Chapter 6, Claire Majola-Leblond states that there is a “remainder” inherent in the author-reader interactions that she investigates in her study of Colum McCann's *Everything in this Country Must*, Joseph O'Connor's *Ghost Light*, and of William Trevor's last stories “Giotto's Angels.” Exploring the (im)polite effects of the silent or enigmatic addresses to the readers, Majola-Leblond highlights how the remainder that resists immediate meaning sets the readers wondering, inviting them to follow multiple interpretative paths among which they wander, bound as they are to renounce complete control.

The chapters included in the third part of this book (chapters 7-9) investigate how certain authors and narrators challenge their readers. In Chapter 7, Maurice Cronin takes up Roger Sell's

communicational paradigm in order to probe Flannery O'Connor's interactional gamble in *Wise Blood* (1952). He argues that O'Connor's (mis)management of rapport with her readers is a reflection or refraction of the conversational exchanges (or lack thereof) between the protagonist and the other characters of the incipit of the novel, i.e., that the pragmatics *in* O'Connor's fiction reveal the pragmatics *of* her fiction. Cronin contends that her "blatant ill-adjustment to readers" is an example of literary communication that is not so much efficient, that is helpful for readers, as it is effective, that is inducing effects on readers—O'Connor's somewhat impolite, but upright communicative strategy prompting them to admit the devastating effect of the War on America.

In Chapter 8, Catherine Hoffmann examines William Gerhardie's *The Polyglots*, a novel which features abundant direct addresses to its readers in spite of the fact that it was published in the modernist period, at a time when overt direct address was rare. Her close reading of the novel's many addresses to readers shows Gerhardie's building some form of intimacy with them, through phatic expressions, "polemical pre-emptive strikes" or even metaleptic appeals. These addresses paradoxically all enhance the readers' immersion in the novel, letting them see how tentative the writing process but also how fleeting human life can be.

In the last chapter of this part (Chapter 9), Vanina Jobert-Martini and Manuel Jobert study the first monologue of the *Talking Heads* BBC series to shed light on the "deceptively simple form of address" in "A Chip in the Sugar" which paradoxically enhances both proximity and distance with the audience. They argue that while the audience spontaneously empathizes with the narrator, whose use of orality markers primes them into viewing themselves as participants of the yet one-sided conversation, their gradual realization that he is very much unreliable (and somewhat unlikable) distances them from him. Some form of complicity with Alan Bennett remains though—in particular if the audience shares the (British) background presupposed by the author.

Part IV entitled "From oral to digital via print (and back)" opens with Alice Bell's chapter (Chapter 10) offering an empirical study of readers' responses to the app-fiction for smartphones called *Karen* (2015) and designed in such a way as to make the reader feel she is directly interacting with the fictional character. After showing the second-person pronoun as a "medium-specific linguistic convention" across digital fictions, she presents real readers discussing their reactions to the address made to them through the app. Her analyses of the reading group conversations lead Bell to make two new theoretical additions to the existing literature on "you" in (print) fiction, the notions of "authentic participation" and "voluntary performatives". She highlights how responses to the address can be polarized between those who feel the "you" perfectly represents them and those who resent the claims made about them as addressees.

In Chapter 11, Baharak Darougari focuses on the specificities of addressing readers in gamebooks, which constitute a hybridization of print and digital fiction. While the second-person pronoun in print fiction only rarely makes it possible to blur the ontological barrier between the fictional and real worlds, she argues that the use of "you" in gamebooks renders an ontological collision of these two worlds possible, with the reader's and the character's storyworld possible selves blending. Comparing hyperfiction, interactive fiction and gamebooks further reveals how gamebook readers can, to some extent, play a performative role, participate in the co-construction of the text and even reach alternative endings.

In the last chapter (Chapter 12), Léa Boichard analyzes the evolution of Roddy Doyle's writing techniques and conceptions of his readers along the years. The writer has relinquished the narrator-less theatrical novel of his beginnings or the sophisticated techniques of reported speech used in preceding works to more clearly assume a role of storyteller in *Charlie Savage* (2019). Doyle seems to write with the ghost of Dickens on his shoulder all the more so as *Charlie Savage* is itself a serial novel. The markers of orality that punctuate the novel indeed bring out a more direct communication with the readers. For Boichard, Doyle's reviving of the oral Irish tradition turns the writer into a 21st-century *seanchaí*. This new mode of writing seems to be in line with the author's active presence on social media, allowing his readers to have immediate access to his thoughts and

reactions via his Facebook page, thus emphasizing the new type of relationship between authors and readers engendered and facilitated by the new media.

This book ultimately shows how specialists in literary stylistics, narrative rhetoric and pragmatics can offer new ways of looking at the author-reader communicational exchanges in fiction from the 18th and 19th centuries to the modernist period, the later 20th century and the 21st century. The diachronic perspective of the edited book as a whole reveals how authors and readers of all time have variously negotiated their relative proximity or distance with one another, with authors at times trying to please their readers, or at least not alienate them, at others purposely distancing them so as to better convey their point or enhance their agency, and with readers willingly or reluctantly agreeing to respond to the direct or indirect addresses of the novels and digital fiction or deciding to creatively “counter-interpellate” the interpellating structure, begging the question: What will “you” do next?

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