FROM HYPOTYPOISIS TO METALEPSIS: NARRATIVE DEVICES IN CONTEMPORARY FANTASTIC FICTION

ABSTRACT
Post-Todorovian fantastic discourse extends Todorov’s argument concerning the significance of taking figurative meanings literally. His assumption that the supernatural is born of language is extended to mean “language creates reality” or language refers to “another possible reality” thanks to the animated hypotyposis and metalepsis. The extreme representation of hypotyposis often brings forth metalepsis, which underlies Gérard Genette’s treatise on metalepsis: from figure to fiction. Metalepsis can be employed to effect transgression on three different levels: that of the author and his/her product, that of the diegetic story and the hypodiegetic story, and, finally, that of the reader and the work. Contemporary fantastic fiction, revolving as it often does around the theme of books and stories, takes the figure of hypotyposis literally in order to transgress diegetic frames. The represented reader, who exists on the diegetic level, thus interferes on a hypodiegetic level in the work he/she is reading, or the hypodiegetic characters come out of the work read by diegetic characters to interfere in the diegetic fictional world. This article attempts to examine the functioning of these three different modes in a variety of literary texts. Firstly, in subscribing to the fantastic tradition of hesitation, the narrative Möbius strip of ambiguity emerges on the threshold between hypotyposis and metalepsis. Secondly, as the diegetic fantastic story intrudes into the intradiegetic narration, the mise en abyme becomes metaleptic. And finally, the magic metalepsis of words that spins a fantastic diegetic world is intruded into by existences on a hypodiegetic level.

Keywords: fantastic narrative; metalepsis; hypotyposis; Genette, Gérard; mise en abyme; Möbius strip; imaginary book; figure; fiction

If French scholars of the fantastic (more precisely the imaginary), following Todorov’s theory, consent to preserve the right of “le fantastique” to exist as an exclusive genre, they nonetheless extend the narrative mode beyond the hesitation or ambiguity between the “marvellous” and the “uncanny”. Denis Mellier, in defining the fantastic as “the writing of excess”, supplements Todorov’s notion of hesitation with the concept of a narrative of “monstration”. Complementing Todorov’s and Mellier’s poetics of the fantastic, Roger Bozetto proposes a third type of narrative: “sideration”. He further postulates the character of the fantastic as “the unthinkable and yet there” (“l’impensable et pourtant là”). It is curious that French scholars are so attracted to horror that they treat “le fantastique” as a
quasi-synonym for horror fiction. For instance, the majority of the texts con-
considered by Mellier and Bozzetto are authored by Stephen King, H. P. Lovecraft
and Edgar Allan Poe. Whether we are talking about the “uncanny” or the “mar-
vellous”, what is brought into play is the ambiguity of figurative and literal
language in the discourse of the fantastic. As Todorov puts it:

If the fantastic constantly makes use of rhetorical figures, it is because it originates in
them. The supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not
only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to con-
ceive what is always absent: the supernatural. The supernatural thereby becomes a
symbol of language, just as the figures of rhetoric do, and the figure is [...] the purest
form of literality.

However, when reading contemporary stories of the fantastic, which are fre-
quently built around the trope of metalepsis (to be read literally), Todorov’s
assumption that the supernatural only exists on the signifying level with
reference to a signified void demands further consideration.

In postmodern fiction, Calvino makes readers “fictitious” in his If on a
Winter’s Night a Traveller (1979), where his use of second-person narration blurs
conventional ontological boundaries. On the other hand, contemporary fantas-
tic fiction, revolving as it often does around the theme of books and stories,
takes the figure of hypotyposis7 literally in order to transgress diegetic frames.
The represented reader, who exists on the diegetic level, thus interferes on a
hypodiegetic level in the work he is reading, or the hypodiegetic characters
come out of the work read by diegetic characters to interfere in their diegetic
fictional world. Examples of works which employ such hypotyposis include
Alfred Noyes’s “Midnight Express” (1935), Julio Cortázar’s “Continuity of
Parks” (1967), Michael Ende’s The Neverending Story (1979), Francis Berthelot’s
“La nouvelle Alice ou les bonheurs de l’impertinence” (2004), Cornelia Funke’s
Inkheart (2003) and Gudule’s La Bibliothécaire (1995). In such fantastic discourses,
this idiosyncratic rhetorical device can manifest itself in three different modes.
Firstly, in subscribing to the fantastic tradition of hesitation, the narrative
Möbius strip9 of ambiguity emerges on the threshold between hypotyposis and
metalepsis. Secondly, as the diegetic fantastic story intrudes into the intradiegetic
narration, the rhetorical device of fantastic mise en abyme10 becomes metaleptic.
And finally, the magic metalepsis of words that spins a fantastic diegetic world is
intruded into by existences on a hypodiegetic level. In what follows, this article
tries to examine the functioning of these three different modes in a variety
of literary texts.

On the threshold between hypotyposis and metalepsis: the Möbius strip of ambiguity

In the French fantastique, where the narrative is grounded in the effect of ambi-
guity/hesitation, monstration or sideration (according to Bozzetto’s typology),
the unlikely or scandalous intrusion is often caused by the unnameable being or
thing. Figurative language encountered in the narrative discourse is likely to be

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taken literally in order to facilitate the intrusion of the supernatural into the
diegesis. As highlighted by Todorov, modal expressions function at both
the uttered (l’énoncé) and uttering (l’énonciation) levels to render the narrative
ambiguous, thus arousing hesitation. Just as Brooke-Rose extends Todorov’s
notion of hesitation with two modes of rhetoric (the unreal as real, and the real
as unreal), the effects of monstration and sideration are not content with
figurative language on the brink of being taken literally. When the supernatural
is present, modal expressions are not the only type of figurative language
encountered; hypotyposis also plays a significant role.

If the supernatural is indeed “born of language”, hypotyposis serves to
further “put on the stage” the uttered words (l’énoncé) referring to the super-
natural, despite their being absent on the level of expression. In many
contemporary fantastic narratives, the metamorphosis of the reading
subject vis-à-vis space and time results from the metalepsis of discourse
enhanced by hypotyposis. The literal animation of the figurative hypotyposis
results in a transgression of narrative levels, whereby characters, in particular,
shift between worlds.

The contemporary narrative of the fantastic brings hypotyposis and
metalepsis into play by telling stories within stories which feature transgression(s)
of the narrated worlds at different diegetic levels. Because the represented
worlds existing on different diegetic levels can penetrate one another, inter-
textuality is no longer merely stable or figurative allusion. It has become
flesh-and-blood intertextuality. Todorov’s assertion that “the supernatural is
born of language” is thus extended to mean “language creates reality” or
language refers to “another possible reality”. Accordingly, the boundary
between the natural and the supernatural seems to be blurred again. The mise
en abyme in narrative does not remain as a simply concentric, contained circle,
but twists into the uncanny and ambiguous Möbius strip.

At first sight, the narrative device of the Möbius strip appears to play an
unassuming role in creating a metaleptic effect, for the fantastic aesthetic of
ambiguity is essential as the signature discourse. By and large the narrative
syntax complies with Peter Penzoldt’s theory of the syntax of the fantastic as a
linear process of storytelling ascending to a culminating point, and with
Todorov’s syntax of irreversibility. It is at the close of the narrative that readers
become speechless in front of the (quasi-)transgression of narrative levels. Two
stories, Noyes’s “Midnight Express” and Cortázar’s “Continuities of Parks”,
exemplify this ambiguous mode of metalepsis. In both stories, the overlapping
or transgression of narrative levels is to be found in the identical coincidence
of the settings in the opening and concluding passages, the protagonists’
fascination with books, and their reading act as a vicarious immersion in
the intradiegetic narration. This narrative structure can be characterised as a
linguistic incarnation of mise en abyme into the Möbius strip.

Like most fantastic stories which employ the device of metalepsis, the title of
“Midnight Express” is also precisely the title of the book read by the
represented reader on the diegetic level. The “story within a story” is a terrifying work permeated with Gothic atmosphere. From the outset, it presents an old book as an uncanny object:

It was a battered old book, bound in red buckram. He found it, when he was twelve years old, on an upper shelf in his father’s library; and against all the rules, he took it to his bedroom to read by candlelight, when the rest of the rambling old Elizabethan house was flooded with darkness.

The hero’s name, Mortimer, can be seen to function as an onomastic symbol: “Mort” to signify “dead”, combined with “timer”. The young Mortimer is fascinated with this old book:

The battered old book had the strangest fascination for him, though he never quite grasped the thread of the story. It was called *The Midnight Express*, and there was one illustration, on the fiftieth page, at which he could never bear to look. It frightened him. (ME p. 92)

These feelings of fascination and fear remain intertwined in Mortimer throughout his childhood.

As the narrator says, just as Dante straddles reality and the dream world, Mortimer is trapped between his real world and the fictional world of the embedded story. Readers cannot discern whether the “long glimmering platform” is diegetic or intradiegetic. And “the dark figure under the lamp” terrifyingly turns out to be himself: “It was himself – staring back at himself – as in some mocking mirror, his own eyes alive in his own white face, looking into his own eyes, alive” (ME p. 96; my italics). This virtual mise en scène of the hypodiegetic story is derived from the figure of hypotyposis. At an earlier stage, the hypotyposis has been taken figuratively as the boy is beguiled by the engrossing book and tempted to read it again and again because the description of the story is so vivid as to seemingly appear before his very eyes; however this effect also scared him. Nonetheless, he still believed that it was only a book. However, at a later stage, the figure of hypotyposis engenders the effect of sideration or speechlessness – both in the hero and the reader(s) – and extends to the point of uncanny metalepsis. Towards the denouement of Noyes’s work, the initial diegetic setting is mirrored by the decor in the wayside cottage where Mortimer takes shelter from the dark figure:

The smell of the guttering wax brought back the little room in the old Elizabethan house. He picked up the book with trembling fingers. He recognised it at once, [...] he came on the fiftieth page, which he had pinned down in childhood. (ME p. 100)

Mortimer turns back to the beginning and reads the book, *The Midnight Express*. As the first paragraph unfolds, it begins to dawn upon us readers as well as upon the hero himself that the narrative is a story within a story:

*It was the story of a man, who in childhood, long ago, had chanced upon a book, in which there was a picture that frightened him. He had grown up and forgotten it and one night, upon a lonely railway platform, he had found himself in the remembered scene of the picture; he had confronted the solitary figure*
under the lamp [...]. He had taken shelter in a wayside cottage; [...] and this book, too, was called The Midnight Express. And it was the story of a man who, in childhood — It would go on thus, forever and forever, and forever. There was no escape. (ME p. 102)

This strange circle, the fearful wheel, seems to be an ineluctable imprisoned metaleptic transgression which persists in spite of the hero’s confrontation with the dark figure or the strange host: “As Mortimer plunged forward and seized the tormentor by the throat, his own throat was gripped with the same brutal force. The echoes of their strangled cry were indistinguishable” (ME p. 104).

With the echoes of the strangled cry, the extradiegetic narrator brings readers back to the beginning of the story: “the ticking of the old grandfather clock, and the long-drawn rhythmical ‘ah’ of the sea, on a distant coast, thirty-eight years ago”. The conclusion harks back to the introduction of the story: “It was a battered old book, bound in red buckram . . .” (ibid.). It is precisely this metaleptic device that creates the effect of sideration.

Influenced by Chinese fantastic stories, in particular Zhuang Zi’s tale “Zhuang Zhou dreams of a butterfly” (c. 369–286 BC), Julio Cortázar’s work is distinguished by its use of the narrative mode of the Möbius strip, especially in terms of the mysterious gliding from one space to another. His narrative revolves around the blurring of the dialectic of the perceiver and perceived. “Continuity of Parks” illustrates a narrative transgression between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic discourses. Moreover, Genette also considers “Continuity of Parks” to exemplify his theoretical insight that the “fantastic regime characterises the majority of metaleptic fictions”. In this story, a represented reader is almost murdered (the narrative ends just at this climactic point) by a character in the novel being read by the diegetic reader. Given this diegetic transgression, the story becomes fantastic, a fantastic that brings into play two diegetic levels. To step across the boundary between the two, the narrative discourse requires the mimetic figure of hypotyposis to be made literal.

The reader in Cortázar’s story is depicted as being an avid one. His fascination with reading the embedded novel is further reinforced by the figurative expression of hypotyposis. In the beginning, the hero as represented reader “permitted himself a slowly growing interest in the plot, in the characterizations”. His immersion in reading is underlined by the expression “even the possibility of an intrusion would have irritated him” (CP p. 63). This “intrusion”, of course, foreshadows the eventual intrusion of the hypodiegetic hero into the diegetic world towards the end of the story. The statement that the hero “remembered effortlessly the names and his mental image of the characters” (CP p. 64) further implies the possibility that the reader knows in reality the characters in the novel he is reading. This mental image, at first taken as a figurative expression, will assume its literal meaning on the brink of metaleptic ambiguity:

Word by word, licked up by the sordid dilemma of the hero and heroine, letting himself be absorbed to the point where the images settled down and took on colour and movement, he was witness to the final encounter in the mountain cabin. (CP p. 64; my italics)
This vivid description of the represented reader’s reading experience is clearly indicative of hypotyposis, which paints things vividly. The figurative expression “before one’s eyes” in Fontanier’s definition of hypotyposis would appear to become almost literal as the ensuing description in the embedded novel corresponds to the represented reader’s real world. The literal realisation of hypotyposis is eventually enhanced by the convergence of the two diegetic spaces.

Both the hero’s dreadful fascination with the old book in “Midnight Express” and the hero’s perverse obsession with the novel in “Continuity of Parks” suggest a taking-literally of hypotyposis. The former story associates figurative expressions with modal expressions such as “it seems” or “as if” to achieve almost literal realisation. By contrast, in Cortázar’s story, Todorovian modal expressions and the literally-interpreted simile are absent. Cortázar’s narrator brings into play past and imperfect tenses to indicate direct and indirect speech. The voice is indicative but metaphorical, intended for literal reception, e.g. “he was witness to the final encounter” (CP p. 64). The narrator’s tone of certainty makes the end of the story all the more uncertain. As in Noyes’s story, readers are given a conclusion which, in terms of setting, recalls the opening: the estate, the salon, the great window, the armchair covered in green velvet. This spatial overlapping urges a metaleptic interpretation as the final narrative touch is added to close the story: “the head of the man in the chair reading a novel” (CP p. 65). The culminating point at the end of the story offsets the narrative trend of staging hypotyposis by means of metalepsis. If Cortázar’s touch of metalepsis gives us a glance of the mise en scène of hypotyposis by means of sketching, the writers who come after him paint an elaborate tableau of metalepsis, the essential narrative device of telling fantastic stories about imaginary books.

The fantastic “mise en abyme”: the diegetic enters the hypodiegetic

If we follow the preliminary definition of the term “metalepsis” from Antiquity, we find that the device is per se a mise en abyme of a chain of metonyms. Mise en abyme is not a technique particular to fantastic fiction; it is indeed a common mode of representation in postmodern fiction and art. What marks out fantastic narratives is that their use of mise en abyme frequently involves metalepsis in terms of storytelling – that is, transgression between different levels of narration. The metamorphosis of the mise en abyme thus becomes the uncanny or unlikely intrusion into the represented reality, which renders the narrative fantastic or marvellous. The mise en abyme functions conversely so as to offer a secondary setting to frame the plot. The diegetic hero becomes a hypodiegetic hero and interacts with the hypodiegetic characters within the embedded story. Here the hypodiegetic fictional, or even imaginary, world becomes flesh and blood before the eyes of the represented character. This is a virtual staging of the imaginary world within the frame of diegesis. Unlike in the first ambiguous mode of
metalepsis, the hero here is able to discern the difference between his reality and the fictional world in the work which is represented in the diegesis while entering the embedded world of the story within the story. Michael Ende’s *The Neverending Story* is an excellent example by means of which this narrative device can be illustrated.

In Ende’s novel, the protagonist again reads a work which has the same title as the one read by the extradiegetic reader. The unlikely and inescapable cycle of the narrative paradox perplexes both the readers and the hero. This magical transformation of space, both the diegetic and hypodiegetic textual worlds, is symbolised by the illustration on the embedded book: the Ouroboros (two snakes biting each other’s tail). The effect of metalepsis is generated on the story level, thus surpassing the culminating point of narrative transgression. And the telling of the story within the story will continue in the hypodiegetic world, Fantastica, where imaginative storytelling is highly esteemed. Its significance is stressed by the narrator’s repetitive utterance of the reiterated storytelling whenever the story is about to divert towards an episode which is related to the main plot or which might arouse interest in the future of an episode: “But that’s another story and shall be told another time.” The surface structure of the metaleptic narration still complies with the common model whereby the final spatial location links back to the initial one. However, the temporal lapse, which obliges readers to accept a supernatural explanation instead of a natural one, remains merely a dream. Moreover, Ende purposely distinguishes the extradiegetic narration from the intradiegetic narration through the use of italics for the former and Roman font for the latter.

The reflected sign “Carl Conrad Coreander, Old Books” seen from inside the bookstore foreshadows the mirror effect that will be activated in the ensuing plot. The hero, Bastian, borrows/steals an old book from the shop, which is an archaic and mysterious place. This represented reader and story lover is both a dedicated and imaginative reader, and an inventor of stories. The possession of such a personality forms a bridge between Bastian and the hypodiegetic world of Fantastica, which is in danger of being engulfed by the shadow of nothingness:

> Bastian liked books that were exciting or funny, or that made him dream. Books where made-up characters had marvellous adventures, books that made him imagine all sorts of things. (NS pp. 26–7; my emphasis) 22

The narrative metalepsis derived from dreaming and imagining incarnates the ideal of Bachelard’s phenomenological reading effected through sublimation between the author, the text and the reader. Bachelard defines the poetic image in the text as one that is able to “make readers dream” by its bridge of reverie between the author, the text and the reader. The metaleptic in the fantastic is neither an ontological metalepsis, nor a rhetorical metalepsis that offers to shift scene, but it is poetic and imaginative.
If the traditional discussion of metalepsis focuses on the abstract narrative voice, here the first sign of metalepsis emerges with Bastian’s voice as he reads about the she-spider Ygramul:

Her single eye [...] stared at Atreyu with inconceivable malignancy. / A cry of fear escaped Bastian. / A cry of terror passed through the ravine and echoed from side to side. [...] / Could she have heard my cry? Bastian wondered in alarm. But that’s not possible. (NS pp. 76–7)

Logically, of course, it is not possible; but the extradiegetic narrator interrogates this by means of his rhetorical questions:

But was it only a story? How did it happen that Ygramul, and probably Atreyu as well, had heard Bastian’s cry of terror? / Little by little, this book was beginning to give him a spooky feeling. (NS p. 80)

And indeed something incredible and spooky does happen. There is a further transgression between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrations, from the audible to the visual level. It happens when, as Atreyu and Falkor meet the Childlike Empress, Bastian as the reader literally sees the Empress. The extradiegetic narrator again meditates on the boundary between metaphorical and literal hypotyposis:

Thus far he had been able to visualize every incident of the Neverending Story. [...] These pictures, however, existed only in his imagination. But when he came to the Magnolia Pavilion, he saw the face of the Childlike Empress [...]. Not only in his thoughts, but with his eyes! (NS p. 169; my emphasis)

In following the quest of the hypodiegetic hero, Atreyu, Bastian learns about the danger of Fantastica’s disappearance and the Empress’s illness. The only remedy is to find a new name for her given by someone from the real world. Bastian is willing to help but lacks the right access to the imaginary world until he comes to the chapter “The Old Man of Wandering Mountain”. Here Bastian reads about another book: “an oval formed by two snakes biting each other’s tail. Inside this oval was printed the title: The Neverending Story” (NS p. 192). He is disturbed by this mise en abyme: “How could this book exist inside itself?” The synchronicity of the actions of the characters and the writing of the fiction happens before the eyes of the hypodiegetic Empress and the diegetic Bastian. Here the hypodiegetic Neverending Story contains itself and makes all the characters in Fantastica “enter the Circle of Eternal Return” (NS ibid.). However, Bastian will break through this deadlock of unending mise en abyme, or “a reflection of a reflection”, by gliding into the reflected writing. He realises that “The Circle of Eternal Return was an end without an end” (NS p. 198). Then he cries out: “Moon Child [the name he gives to the Empress], I’m coming! / In that moment several things happened at once” (NS p. 199).

When supernatural beings appear, Ende renders the fantastic image of metalepsis more elaborate. For example, the clock strikes twelve and the weather undergoes radical changes. In the hypodiegetic world of Fantastica, “[a]
rumbling of thunder was heard. And then the storm wind came roaring from afar.” The diegetic setting echoes this roaring wind:

*It blew from the pages of the book that Bastian was holding on his knees, and the pages began to flutter wildly. Bastian felt the wind in his hair and face. He could scarcely breathe. The candle flames in the seven-armed candelabrum danced, wavered, and lay flat. Then another, still more violent wind blew into the book, and the candles went out.* (NS p. 199)

Thus Bastian himself becomes a hypodiegetic character and gradually takes on Atreyu’s role in Fantastica as the hero. Bastian lives through his own story and exercises the magic of words by telling stories that are realised as the embodiment of hypotyposis. For example, he creates a dragon for the hero Hynreck to fight merely by telling a story about it. This is an example of a further transgression between the hypodiegetic and the hypo-hypodiegetic stories.

Towards the close of the novel, Bastian returns to his diegetic reality through the gate arched by two gigantic snakes (the archetypal Ouroboros) after he drinks the Water of Life. Bastian’s return from the hypodiegetic to the diegetic world appears to be both ambiguous and realistic. It seems that the extra-diegetic narration is eventually destined to receive a natural explanation: Bastian falls asleep in the schoolhouse attic without really reading the novel (the book has disappeared). Furthermore, after Bastian returns to the bookstore, Mr Coreander denies that he has ever had a book called “The Neverending Story”. Yet, their conversation reveals that Mr Coreander seems to have had a similar experience in Fantastica, and Bastian does spend two days in the schoolhouse attic reading the book. Therefore, the narrative device of metalepsis, achieved through an unending *mise en abyme* like a reflection of a reflection, creates a marvellous world nestled within an ambiguous extradiegetic discourse.

By the same token, the French writer Francis Berthelot creates “La Nouvelle Alice ou les bonheurs de l’impertinence” (“The New Alice or the Happiness of Impertinence”) as a kind of sequel to Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, imagining action after Alice returns from the other side of the mirror. The story begins thus:

Un beau dimanche de juin, peu après son retour d’outre-miroir, Alice fut invitée chez son oncle Donatien-Alphonse, marquis de S., qui venait d’acquérir dans le Cheshire un manoir entouré de sulfureux ombrages. 25

(One fine Sunday in June, shortly after her return from the other side of the mirror, Alice was invited to the house of her uncle Donatien-Alphonse, Marquis of S, who had just acquired a manor in Cheshire surrounded by sulphurous shadows.)

Attracted to the forbidden library, Alice picks up a novel written by her uncle: *La Nouvelle Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu, suivie de l’histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*, which mirrors the title of Berthelot’s Alice story. The *mise en abyme* as parody is all the more astonishing and shocking as the language employed by Berthelot is impertinent, on the level of both the story and the discourse. Thus Alice utters
impertinent expressions such as “Je brûle” or “Holy shit!” The language in the embedded novel of the uncle is even worse, full of coarse diction such as “Rodin [a primary school teacher in the embedded novel] encule, il sacre” (NA p. 31; “Rodin fucks, he curses”).

Alice, as the represented reader of the embedded novel, wishes to be the heroine of one of the books in her uncle’s library. While reading the novel about Justine and Juliette, she makes a wish to encounter the hypodiegetic sisters. And as soon as she utters her wish, the metaleptic transgression occurs. This narration of metaleptic transition is reminiscent of the lines quoted above from the story of Bastian: “elle se sent un vent irresistible s’emparer d’elle, pour la projeter au milieu d’un torrent de lettres et de mots qui déferlent à grand fracas” (NA p. 29; “she feels an irresistible wind take hold of her and throw her into the middle of a torrent of letters and words which surge past with a roar”). The manner in which Berthelot’s Alice glides into the hypodiegetic story by passing through sentences, lines and paragraphs clearly echoes the scene where Carroll’s Alice falls into a hole and slides after the rabbit (NA p. 9). The metalepsis is described in a concrete manner in terms of travelling through real words, which become flesh and blood before Alice’s eyes as a secondary world.

Berthelot’s Alice first chooses to stop at a point which deals with the younger sister, Justine. After seeing her, Alice exclaims that her uncle knows how to wield his pen. The words written by her uncle now appear as a beautiful portrait. This virtual hypodiegetic world is a literal incarnation of hypotyposis. The diegetic Alice converses and interacts with the hypodiegetic Justine, whose virginity is later taken by her (Justine’s) uncle. Alice tries to help her to resist, but in vain; she then disappears uttering the words, “Rendez-vous à la fin du roman” (NA p. 32; “Rendez-vous at the end of the novel”).

Whenever Alice encounters trouble in the hypodiegetic world, she jumps to another section of the novel until, at one point, she meets two rascals, captain Borchamps and his lieutenant Carle-Son, who has killed his wife and four children. Alice thinks of interfering in the plot by getting along with these two brigands. She glides back to the middle of the story to meet them and proposes marriage to them if they come out of the novel with her. Berthelot offers a metaleptic return to the extradiegetic narration for both the diegetic and hypodiegetic characters:

Le moment venu, Alice donna la main droite à Borchamps, la gauche à Carle-Son, prit une grande inspiration et, les entraînant tous deux à sa suite, s’arracha d’un coup à l’immense carrousel des mots. (NA p. 38)

(When the time came, Alice gave her right hand to Borchamps, her left to Carle-Son, took a deep breath and, dragging both behind her, with a stroke, forced herself out of the huge merry-go-round of words.)

Berthelot’s story ends with these three characters encountering Alice’s uncle and them all having tea together. The uncle is not at all surprised to see his fictional
characters before his eyes. He even accepts their marrying his niece. As in *The Neverending Story*, the hypodiegetic story replaces the diegetic story as the principal plot; and its conclusion sees the readers’ curiosity about the existence of hypodiegetic brigands in the diegetic world remain. This situation will be explored in the final narrative mode of metalepsis, where a diegetic story, ornamented with the intrusion of hypodiegetic characters, creates a new frame.

*The magic metalepsis of words: the hypodiegetic intrudes into the diegetic*

In a similar manner to the narrative mode of the fantastic, the type of stories being discussed here feature the intrusion of the uncanny or the supernatural in the midst of realism. Unlike most conventional narratives, the intrusion in these present cases results from metaleptic transgression, i.e. the hypodiegetic characters leave their territory and enter the diegetic world. The main setting of the narrative discourse remains the diegetic fictional reality, although characters from different narrative levels are mixed together. The fantastic intrusion does not, then, have to be in the form of monstrous figures or nonhuman beings. They can be human beings familiar to readers and yet uncanny because they are fictional for the diegetic characters. This is precisely the sense of the uncanny experienced by the little girl Meggie when she first sees Dustfinger (a hypodiegetic character) in Cornelia Funke’s *Inkheart*.

The narration proceeds amidst an ambiguous and uncanny atmosphere until Chapter 15, throughout which time the hypodiegetic characters, Dustfinger, Capricorn and Basta, have been described as if they were simply diegetic. However, it dawns upon Meggie and her aunt Elinor in Chapter 16 that all these strange people are actually characters who were read out of the book *Inkheart* by the magic tongue of Mortimer (or Mo), Meggie’s father. Furthermore, they share a predisposition for encountering sinister and mysterious events which provoke metaleptic transgressions. In Funke’s novel, dedicated reading is not enough to make the figure of hypotyposis literal, thereby creating metalepsis. The gift of a magic tongue is also indispensable; it is the hypodiegetic characters who give Mo the nickname Silvertongue. Metalepsis in *Inkheart* is exploited in a more complicated manner than in *The Neverending Story*. Funke brings into play the author, the text, the reader and the reciter. Through the figure of the reciter, the metalepsis in this novel harks back to its narratological origin, as discussed by Genette in *Figures III*: the narrative voice. 26

Although the crucial role of the reciter’s voice makes this novel distinct, the premise of making immobile letters animate is no different from other stories featuring metalepsis. The hero is, once again, a book lover and an avid reader, immersed in the text or, to use a recurrent phrase in *Inkheart*, “the labyrinth of printed letters”. 27 Mo also indicates his philosophy of books on a metal plaque: “Some books should be tasted / some devoured, / but only a few / should be chewed and digested thoroughly” (I p. 8; original italics). Meggie is also a keen reader, whose passion for books is shown by the box containing her favourite books that she
carries with her all her life. She also often sleeps with books under her pillow. According to the narrator, this is a family of book-lovers since books are everywhere in the house. Later, Chapter 38 reveals that Meggie has also inherited her father’s magic tongue when she succeeds in reading the fairy out of *Peter Pan* (I pp. 364–5).

Though their tongues may be magic, both Mo and Meggie prove to be unable to read the hypodiegetic characters back into the embedded books. And what is worse, they accidentally read people out of their world into the embedded books. This is beyond their control. Meggie thereby later learns the real reason for her mother’s absence: she actually disappeared into the book world when Mo first read Capricorn and Dustfinger out into their world nine years previously. Capricorn is the principal antagonist in both *Inkheart* books—the actual and the embedded. His eventual annihilation requires the cooperation of the book’s author in writing it, and Meggie’s and Mo’s in reading it out loud. Thus the dimension of metalepsis extends to the authorship. This complexity arouses a reflection on the significance of each one of: the author, the narrative voice or the reciter, the reader and the character.

Fenoglio, the author of the diegetic *Inkheart*, is only able to create stories; he is incapable of reading out the characters he has created. From this perspective, the author does not exercise absolute power over his creation. Although Fenoglio explains, “‘Its title is *Inkheart* because it’s about a man whose wicked heart is as black as ink, filled with darkness and evil. I still like the title,’” his created character Capricorn replies, “‘After all, it’s my story you’re talking about.’” However, Fenoglio retorts, “‘No, no, it’s mine. You just appear in it’” (I p. 335). This dialectic of the creator’s authorship and the created character’s autonomy reaches its climax when the author is imprisoned by his creation, Capricorn. This villain even forces Mo and Meggie to read the Shadow, a monster consisting of Capricorn’s victims’ ashes, out of the book. Nonetheless, Fenoglio stealthily writes in jail to create a counterplot for Meggie to read out so as to defeat Capricorn and the Shadow. The magic of both literary creation and oral recitation eventually destroys the hypodiegetic villain who menaces the diegetic reality.28

Ironically, while Meggie is reading out the final part of the story, Fenoglio is read into the work of his creation. With the disappearance of the author and other characters (both diegetic and hypodiegetic), the extradiegetic narrator comments, “They were gone, as if the darkness had swallowed them up, as if they had never existed. And perhaps that was the truth of it” (I pp. 511–12; original italics). Just as Meggie expects, *Inkheart* (both ours and that of the characters) has a happy ending, for her family are reunited again, though with some hypodiegetic characters left wandering in the diegetic world, including 43 fairies, 4 trolls and Basta. For Dustfinger, the end is not so happy because he still desires a return to his own world. And so he continues his quest to access *Inkheart* after stealing the book from Mo. And Farid, a character read out by Mo from *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*, accompanies Dustfinger, since neither belongs to this diegetic world. The metalepsis is here interwoven with
intertextuality, for Dustfinger and Farid are from two different literary texts, though both are hypodiegetic. The boundaries become permanently blurred because *Inkheart* closes with the coexistence in the diegetic realm of both diegetic and hypodiegetic characters from various stories. Yet, this is by no means a fairy tale since, as Elinor indicates, the diegetic world stands in a mimetic relationship with twenty-first century extrafictionality.

Fenoglio’s disappearance seems to imply the death of the author. However, the written text of *Inkheart* remains. Maybe an imaginary world does exist behind the labyrinth of letters. Though their voices exercise magic power, oral reciters cannot read out of nothing. They still need a good writer’s text. A silver tongue may result from a perfect reading that involves the reader’s vicarious communion with the author and the text. Thus Darius, a substitute for Mo that Capricorn gets, often reads out deformed characters from books because both his reading and his voice still require improvement. What, then, is the right narrative voice? Funke imagines the scene at the moment of metalepsis as a kind of literal synaesthesia:

There was nothing but Mo’s voice and the pictures forming in their minds from the letters on the page, like the pattern of a carpet taking shape on a loom. [...] A voice that gave a different flavour to every word, made every sentence a melody! [...] There was not a sound to be heard but Mo’s voice bringing the letters and words on the page to life. (*I* p. 175).

Mo’s reading out loud makes creatures that originally exist merely as linguistic signs into flesh and blood before the eyes of the spectators, the represented characters. This is a literally concrete *mise en scène* of hypotyposis. And before the eyes of us readers, the metalepsis throughout *Inkheart* is a representation of hypotyposis, only we picture the text world in our mind’s eyes.

The controversial discussion on the dialectic between fiction and reality may never be resolved, yet literary imagination and words obviously remain vital to both reality and fiction. Thus the magic-tongued Meggie eventually decides that words will be her trade, for “writing stories is a kind of magic, too” (*I* p. 534). The special structure of Funke’s *Inkheart*, with rich intertextual writing in particular (each chapter features, as an epigraph, a quotation from a different story), resounds with the magical power of the labyrinth of letters. And in the metaleptic fiction of the French storyteller, Gudule, readers will witness how writing can both form and deform the created character.

Gudule’s story is entitled *La Bibliothécaire* (*The Librarian*). Though the embedded story is not given an explicit title as is done at the extradiegetic level, the story being written by the hero, Guillaume, is about the librarian, Ida. This therefore functions as an implicit *mise en abyme* of the librarian’s story within *The Librarian*, except for the fact that the hypodiegetic story is centred on the young Ida and the diegetic story starts with Ida as an old woman. This before/after temporality harks back to the formal definition of metalepsis as a variety of metonym that concerns the isotopic transfer on the relationship before/after.
One day, Guillaume sees the girl Ida come out of the apartment opposite his house and follows her. He befriends her and subsequently falls in love with her. Curiously all this happens at night. In reality, only a very old woman lives in the apartment. The young Ida later reveals to him that she comes out of the old Ida’s notebook, the manuscript of her biography. She is very sad because she cannot find “*Le grimoire qui donne accès à la littérature*” (“*The book of magic spells that opens the door to literature*”). The old Ida then dies and Guillaume never sees the young Ida again.

Nevertheless, by obtaining the old Ida’s notebook, he finds a way to resurrect the younger woman. The young Ida exists in the old Ida’s memory and thus escapes from the pages of the old woman’s manuscript. Though both the old Ida and her memory are dead, the notebook of her manuscript still exists; just as Gavroche and Cosette do not disappear with the death of Victor Hugo. Literary characters live in the memory of readers throughout time. Then it dawns on Guillaume to bring the young Ida back to life by writing. Unfortunately, Guillaume is far from being an excellent student at school and is particularly poor in orthography (Gudule’s story is in fact written for an adolescent readership to encourage students to improve their spelling and writing style). Throughout his writing, which is full of imagination and emotion surrounding Ida, Guillaume makes lots of mistakes which constantly deform Ida. Towards the end of the story, Guillaume manages to improve his French and his writing style (*B* p. 185). As Guillaume writes “Un tendre baiser les a unis” (*B* p. 186; “A tender kiss united them”), and Ida, though still asleep, smiles. Her smile is like “un accent circonflexe inverse” (“an inverted circumflex accent”). And encouragingly, the hole in the middle of her nose (caused by Guillaume’s earlier mistakes) has disappeared, though she is still deformed. Finally, though Ida opens her eyes, she squints seriously because Guillaume makes his last mistakes in the phrase: “C’était merveilleux, on était contents...” (Ibid; “It was wonderful, we were happy...”), where “merveilleux” should be “merveilleux” and “contents” should be “content”. Finally he gets it right and the hypodiegetic young Ida comes to life to join Guillaume in his diegetic reality (*B* p. 187).

The narration of *La Bibliothècaire* proceeds with a synchronicity of metalepsis that makes the past rejoin the present and thus creates a future. The key factor for metaleptic transgression here is the embodiment of Ida’s desire and fantasy for being a good writer. She misunderstands that there should be a book of magic spells (*un grimoire*) to make literature accessible. Eventually, Guillaume takes on the job of literary creation, correcting his writing and polishing his style. *Le grimoire* is not concretely represented in the novel; however, the hypotyposis of writing and the literal realisation of the figurative metalepsis shows where this *grimoire* lies.

**Conclusion**

In concluding his article on *Quixote*, Jorge Luis Borges meditates on the problem of metalepsis. He penetrates our phantasm of anxiety when we are confronted
with the scenario where the represented character is at the same time the reader or the spectator. This anxiety regarding metalepsis is given shape in many contemporary fantastic narratives. It involves subject, object and creation. In fantastic fiction, the narrative device of metalepsis brings to light the significance of imaginative storytelling, which calls for a reflection on the author’s creation, the reader’s participation, and the narrative voice’s animation of the text. The “labyrinth of words” has its own reality, woven with the threads of poetic creation. The type of metalepsis encountered in the fantastic surpasses ontological metalepsis and metaphorical metalepsis, for the diegesis seeks a genuine story, the ideal rhetorical medium with the unique feature of the invented story straddling both real history and the imaginary, as is emphasised by Aristotle.

The autonomy of the diegetic and hypodiegetic worlds which is achieved through metaleptic transgression in fantastic storytelling that renders the author, or even the narrator, invisible, reminds us of Théophile Gautier’s comment that the novelist “naturally wears the ring of Gyges, which makes him invisible”. Post-Todorovian fantastic discourse thus extends Todorov’s argument concerning the significance of taking figurative meanings literally, for the supernatural is often born in this manner. Hypotyposis taken literally produces metalepsis. Genette thus compares hypotyposis with metalepsis. In light of his assumption that “[une] fiction n’est en somme qu’une figure prise à la lettre et traitée comme un événement effectif, comme lorsque Gargantua aiguise ses dents d’un sabot ou se peigne d’un gobelet” (“all in all, [a] fiction is nothing but a figure taken literally and treated like a real event, as when Gargantua sharpens his teeth with a clog or combs his hair with a goblet”), metaleptic fantastic fiction expands Todorov’s discursive analysis from “from the figurative to the literal” to “from figure to fiction”. It further stages the Möbius strip as the fantastic mise en abyme and the magic metalepsis of words. With the narrators and characters represented on different levels meditating on the dialectic of reality and fiction, the author and the reader are also unable to avoid the issue. In harmony with the significance of stories narrated with the metaleptic device, the miraculous power of story adds a final touch to the present article:

one of the earliest roles of the shaman or sage was to tell stories which provide symbolic solutions to contradictions which could not be solved empirically. In the process, reality itself would find itself miraculously transformed.

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NOTES

1 It is generally accepted in French academia that the littérature de l’imaginaire is an uncontroversial and universal term that designates the genres of le fantastique, le merveilleux, la Fantasy, Science-Fiction, etc. For example, the complete French encyclopaedia on Fantasy, Horror, Science-Fiction (forthcoming in late 2008) is entitled: Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des Littératures de l’Imaginaire, ed. J. Goimard, N. Labrousse & S. Manfrédo (Paris: L’Atalante).

2 D. Mellier, L’Écriture de l’excès, fiction fantastique et poétique de la terreur (Paris, 1999), passim. The concept of “monstration” is proposed by Mellier throughout his work as an effect of “the writing of excess”.

3 R. Bozzetto, Passages des fantastiques (Marseille, 2005), p. 83. Bozzetto defines “sidération” thus: “Le mot ‘sidération’ est pris dans son sens moderne: faire en sorte que le lecteur soit sidéré, stupéfié. Mais le sens ancien, astrologique, portant sur l’influence des astres ne demeure pas totalement étranger ici. Pas plus que la connotation médicale qui renvoie à la mort apparente sous l’effet d’un choc émotionnel intense.” (“The word ‘sideration’ is taken in its modern sense: it is the process of making the reader ‘sidéré’ [paralysed by shock], stupefied. But the ancient, astrological sense, relating to the influence of the stars, is not completely inappropriate here. Nor, likewise, is the medical connotation that refers to apparent death as a result of an intense emotional shock.”)


6 The term “metalepsis” is understood in light of Gérard Genette’s modern interpretation; see G. Genette, Métalexie (Paris, 2004), pp. 13–27. The rhetorical device of metalepsis can be employed to effect transgression on three different levels: that of the author and his product, that of the diegetic story and the hypodiegetic story and, finally, that of the reader and the work. According to Genette’s narratology, the narrative voices are divided in terms of levels into extradiegetic narration and intradiegetic narration (l’énonciation). The narrated worlds (l’énoncé) are respectively called the diegetic world and hypodiegetic world.

7 Pierre Fontanier characterises hypotyposis as “figures de style par imitation” and adds: “L’hypotypose peint les choses d’une manière si vive et si énergique, qu’elle les met en quelque sorte sous les yeux, et fait d’un récit ou d’une description, une image, un tableau, ou même une scène vivante” (“hypotyposis paints things in so lively and energetic a manner that it presents them right before one’s eyes, and turns a narrative or a description into an image, a painting or even a live scene”); see Les Figures du discours (Paris, 1977), p. 390.

8 “Gudule” is the pseudonym of Anne Dugel, born in 1945 in Brussels, who now lives in France.

9 “Möbius strip”, which literally and mathematically designates a surface with one side and one boundary, is employed in the present context to describe the narrative device that creates the effect of gliding into the other side of the mirror, or slipping into an alternative space. This is different from metalepsis, which is caused by the transgression between two narrative levels that function like concentric circles, just like the “one” surface of the Möbius strip, the character in the story can be regarded as staying on the same surface but effectively on the other side of that surface. Cortazar’s “Continuity of Parks” provides an excellent illustration of this device.

10 In this article, the significance of mise en abyme as regards metalepsis lies in the occurrence of transgression between different narrative levels. Literary texts may draw on the device of mise en abyme without necessarily being “fantastic” since no transgression emerges between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic narration.


13 Ibid., p. 89.

14 Noyes’s works recounts the story of Mortimer who, as a child, reads an old book, which is also called “Midnight Express”. Every time he read the book, he stopped at the horrible illustration on the fiftieth page. When he grows up he encounters in reality the platform scene and the dark figure which is depicted on this page. He is horrified by the figure which seems to be his doppelganger.
and takes refuge in a cottage. Once inside, he is invited by the owner to read an old book — the same one he had read as a child. Eventually Mortimer becomes (maybe he always has been) the hero of that old book, who himself read an old book when he was a boy. The story becomes a kind of vicious circle with no apparent way out.

15 A. Noyes, “Midnight Express”, in: English Ghost Stories, ed. L. Marielle (Paris, 1992), p. 92. This text will henceforth be referred to as ME.

16 This name also appears in Cornelia Funke’s Inkheart as the hero Silvertongue’s first name is Mortimer, or Mo.


18 Genette, Métalespe, p. 25.

19 J. Cortázar, “The Continuity of Parks”, in “Blow-up” and Other Stories (New York, 1985), p. 63. This text will henceforth be referred to as CP.

20 Ibid., p. 64.

21 M. Ende, The Neverending Story, trans. R. Manheim (New York, 2005); this phrase is encountered on pp. 30, 239, 339, 349. This text will henceforth be referred to as NS.

22 The author uses two different fonts in the novel to distinguish two levels of narration: the extradiegetic narration is in italics; the intradiegetic narration is in normal Roman font. In the present article, “my emphasis” is employed to indicate the highlighted part in normal Roman font against the original text in italics.


25 F. Berthelot, “La Nouvelle Alice ou les bonheurs de l’impertinence”, in: Mission Alice, ed. R. Combollot (Paris, 2004), p. 27. This text will henceforth be referred to as NA.

26 In his Figures III (Paris, 1972), Genette distinguishes “narrative voice” from “focalisation” to avoid the confusion caused by the employment of “point of view”. Narrative voice concerns “who speaks”, whereas “focalisation” concerns “who sees”. The former is further divided, according to the level and the narrator’s participation in the story, into homodiegetic (including autodiegetic) and heterodiegetic, on the level of extradiegetic or intradiegetic. The role of the reciter in Inkheart invites us to reconsider the significance of “voice” in narrative. Given that narrative voice plays an important role in rendering the effect of metalepsis through transgression between different voices, the reciter’s voice transgresses narrative levels in the novel between the diegetic and hypodiegetic stories.

27 C. Funke, Inkheart, trans. A. Bell (New York, 2005), p. 3. This text will henceforth be referred to as I.

28 The revised ending of the extradiegetic Inkheart reads: “Yet one night, a mild and starlit night, the Shadow heard not Capricorn’s voice when it was called forth, but the voice of a girl, and when she called his name he remembered; he remembered all those from whose ashes he was made, all the pain and all the grief — [...]. He remembered, [...] and he was determined to be avenged – avenged upon those who were the cause of all this misfortune, whose cruelty poisoned the whole world” (I p. 509); “So the Shadow went to his master and reached out to him with ashen hands [...] And Capricorn fell down on his face, and his black heart stopped beating, and all those who had gone burning and murdering with him disappeared — blown away like ashes in the wind” (I p. 510).


30 Gudule, La Bibliothèque (Paris, 2001), p. 30. This text will henceforth be referred to as B.

31 “C’est dans les Mémoires de la vieille dame que se trouve son amie, entre les pages manu- scripts où elle s’échappait chaque nuit! La chercher au cimetière, quelle sottise! Les fantasmes ne meurent pas, quoi qu’il ait pu en penser tout à l’heure! Ils survivent là où les a fixés l’écriture, éternellement! Gavroche et Cosette ont-ils disparu avec Victor Hugo? Les Trois Mousquetaires ont-ils suivi Dumas dans la tombe? [...] C’est dans l’imagination de milliers de lecteurs qu’ils mènent aujourd’hui leur existence propre, et même parfois sur les écrans de cinéma!” (“His friend was to be found in the memoirs of the old woman, between the handwritten pages from which she escaped every night! Look for her in the graveyard, how stupid! Fantasies do not die, whatever he might have thought a minute ago! They live on there where writing has placed them, forever! Did Gavroche and Cosette disappear with Victor Hugo? Did the Three Musketeers follow Dumas to the grave? [...] They now lead their own lives in the imagination of thousands of readers, and sometimes on the silver screen!”) (B p. 51).
32 J. L. Borges, *Labyrinths* (New York, 1964), p. 196. “Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map and the thousand and one nights in the book of the *Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious. In 1833, Carlyle observed that the history of the universe is an infinite sacred book that all men write and read and try to understand, and in which they are also written.”

33 Quoted in G. Genette’s *Métalepse*: “qui fait un roman porte naturellement au doigt l’anneau de Gygès, lequel rend invisible” (p. 38).
