



ADDRESSING READERS

The Pragmatics of Communication
from the First Printed Novels
in English to 20th and 21st
Century Digital Fiction



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“You know, are you you?": Being Versus Playing the Second-Person in Digital Fiction

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In my talk, I explore reader responses to ‘you’ in digital fiction. Digital fiction is specifically written for and read on a computer of some kind (e.g. desktop, smartphone, tablet) rather than print fiction converted to digital. It includes hypertext fiction, Interactive-Fictions (IF), web-based fiction, narratively-driven videogames, app-fiction, and fiction produced in Virtual Reality. I begin by showing ways in which the second-person has been used in digital fiction. I then present findings from my empirical research into Blast Theory’s app-fiction *Karen* by showing the various ways in which reader-players accept and reject the second-person address in that text. I argue that current typologies of ‘you’ need to be expanded to accommodate the varied reader responses to ‘you’ and argue for a reception-orientated approach to the second-person in fiction.

**“Now, normally, I wouldn’t be telling you this and you, I’m sure, would be happier if I wasn’t.”
The modern-day storyteller in Roddy Doyle’s *Charlie Savage* (2019)**

**Léa Boichard
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Irish literature developed from a strong oral tradition of storytelling. That tradition, which goes back to the pre-Christian era, is echoed in the structure of the short-story, a vibrant genre in Irish literature, and in the many rewritings of traditional tales, formerly told by *seanchaithe* (storytellers), by writers of the *Literary Revival* such as W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, and Lady Augusta Gregory. In the Doyleian novel, the heritage of the Irish oral tradition is found on many levels, but mostly in linguistic and stylistic content rather than in terms of global structure, through the incredible predominance of an oral mode of communication, in a style that can be referred to as *orature* (a term coined by Hagège, 1985). But in the thirty years that separate his first novel, *The Commitments* (1989), from his latest one, *Charlie Savage* (2019), Doyle’s reappropriation of the oral tradition has evolved considerably. From a theatrical, almost cinematographic, novel with arguably no identifiable narrator, Doyle’s *orature* has shifted to narratorial modes that create clearly identifiable attempts at communicating with the reader. The shift to online publication, be it on Facebook or on the online version of *The Irish*

Independent, arguably accelerated this evolution. Indeed, the process reaches a new stage in *Charlie Savage*, with the first occurrences of direct addresses to the reader. This serial novel, published in weekly columns in *The Irish Independent*, reads as the journal of a middle-aged man engaging a conversation with the reader in a very 19th-century like manner. After an overview of the evolution of Doyle's narratorial style, this paper intends to show that, by addressing the reader directly, *Charlie Savage* might very well be the modern-day *seanchaithe* that Doyle's previous novels lacked and who finishes to anchor the author in a 21st century reappropriation of that ancient Irish tradition.

(Im)politeness strategies in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*

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Flannery O'Connor's novels and short stories provide a fertile and mostly unploughed terrain for a study of politeness and impoliteness phenomena in modern fiction informed by the pragmatic perspective. Of particular interest for the literary pragmatist is the rich interactional potential of these phenomena at the level of communication between authors and readers. I propose to focus on a specific instance, namely the protagonist Hazel Motes' conspicuous and repeated acts of conversational impoliteness in the opening chapter of O'Connor's novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), because it provides an interesting opportunity to explore the vexed question of the relationship between "the [im]politeness *in*" and "the [im]politeness of literary texts" (Sell, *Literary Pragmatics* 1991: 217). The interactions portrayed in the first chapter of *Wise Blood*, O'Connor's first novel, do not merely serve to present Hazel Motes to readers, but also to negotiate O'Connor's public emergence as a novelist. I will show how Motes' repeated infringements of the norms of polite conversation mirror or refract the narrative stance with respect to readers' expectations regarding the conventions of modern realist novels (including the convention of the *in medias res* beginning), thereby providing a

model of the relationship being constructed with readers in the textual opening.

Notwithstanding the fact that the cooperative principle is “hyperprotected” at the level of author/reader interaction” in the literary context (Pratt, *Toward A Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*: 215), using impoliteness to mediate that interaction represents a relatively high-risk “interactive gamble” (Sell, *ibid*: 220), especially for a young, unknown novelist. The tenor of O’Connor’s “Author’s Note” to the second edition of *Wise Blood* (1962)—for all intents and purposes an “ulterior authorial preface” (Genette, *Seuils*: 242)—suggests that the author’s communicative intent was not recognized by many contemporary readers. The Author’s Note involves a re-negotiation of the reading contract designed to ensure a more ‘appropriate’ response to or recognition of *Wise Blood*. Although O’Connor deploys politeness strategies implicitly acknowledging readers’ negative and positive “face wants” to achieve her goal, the “note” also represents a rather risky interactive gamble. Whether we can say today that it has paid off or not is a moot point, attested by *Wise Blood*’s still uncertain status in the literary canon.

**Writing the Reader and/or Character
in Ryan North's *To Be or Not to Be* and *Romeo and/or
Juliette***

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Readers in second person fiction reside on the threshold of the fictional world. They may maintain their distance with the fabricated world of fiction (*The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowls) or step inside the fiction as a character (*If on A Winter Night A Traveler* by Italo Calvino). The first group may consist of readers of any age, gender, and cultural background. Casting the reader as the protagonist, however, entails a convincing portrayal of the character, and consequently the reader. The unspecified "you" has to be translated into a series of attributes and character traits for the reader to be transformed into a character. The age and the gender of the character addressed as "you" may impact the story significantly and exclude certain groups of readers. The aforementioned restrictions are in contrast with the all-inclusive nature of second person fiction. Ryan North's *To Be or Not to Be* (2013) and *Romeo and/or Juliette* (2016) respond to the challenges of writing the reader as a character by recycling the "choose your adventure" format and drawing on the readers' familiarity with video games and hypertexts. Inspired by "avatars" in video games, North's books invite the readers to choose a character, follow her/his (mis)adventures, and even

switch characters if they wish. Similar to hypertexts, the fragmentary structure of the text linked by numbers and images in both books gives the readers the freedom to either follow the familiar storyline of Hamlet and Romeo and Juliette, or the quite unconventional one(s) that the books offer. Revisiting the second person fiction in the digital era, Ryan North's books explore the limitations of writing the reader as the character and expand the boundaries of second person fiction, the study and evolution of which are the main objectives of this paper.

J.M. Coetzee and the ethics of textual transitivity

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J.M. Coetzee's 1991 masterpiece, *Age of Iron*, explores a question which is still underanalyzed in his work: the pragmatic aspects of literary address. In particular, he tackles one of the great paradoxes faced by the postcolonial storyteller, the exercise of authority - not over the text itself, but over its reader.

The text is a single long letter to the distant daughter of the narrator, Elizabeth Curren; thanks to its highly metapoetic trio of writer-text-reader, the letter inevitably stands in for fictional creation. (The protagonist's successor quoted above is Coetzee's own alter ego, Elizabeth Costello.) The letter-form reminds us of the novel's role as a speech act with an impact on its you; in doing so, it invites an analysis of literature in which a focus on intention, or even on textuality, is replaced by an interest in impact. It's a subtle but telling paradigm shift, reconciling reception theory with postcolonial assumptions of the responsibility of those in power.

Coetzee raises ethical questions associated with that responsibility: How to speak to others? How to speak to others from a position of authority? How to speak to others who are obliged to silence by the very context of the speech act itself? Epistolary tactics on several different scales contribute to the possibility of an ethics of alterity in fiction's linguistic structures themselves. Firstly, linguistic frameworks of

politeness and face; a form of sincerity, refusing irony or the literary wink ; the epistolary structure, which puts the text at one ambiguity-preserving remove.

Finally, the constant reminder of the letter-writer's presence reminds the reader that the pact evoked by Elizabeth's own name ("My God is an oath") is not only a Genettian categorization device, but an ethical engagement taken by the author towards the reader. Coetzee thus suggests that while the address seems inescapable - along with its illocutory and perlocutory functions, its capacity for authoritarianism or for underhand seduction or manipulation - it is the responsibility of turn-of-the-century literature to both acknowledge and obviate those potential abuses of authority.

Deciphering the Joycean Address: Elusive Authority and Reader Agency in *Ulysses*

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The novels of James Joyce echo with the voices of authority. From Father Arnall's sermon overwhelming the narration in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to the exhaustive catechism in the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*, rhetoric and narrative devices direct the reader's attention, framing scenes and questions which they seem to answer unflinchingly. This has led some critics to construe a Joycean author-figure, like Lee Oser's "mature Stephen", directly interpellating the reader. However, upon closer inspection, this model reveals its permeability. Though they seem omniscient, the narrative voices leave parts of the world of *Ulysses* outside of their ken: for instance, when they depict Bloom standing in front of his door, having forgotten his key, he uses a "subterfuge" to enter, passing through a hitherto unmentioned window. Likewise, intertexts, wordplays and untold emotions teem at the margins, multiplying the possibilities for new interpretations, and highlighting the limits of explicit narrative directions. Within the Daedalian maze of *Ulysses*, authorial figures reveal the ambivalence of their interpellations. In the turmoil of Dublin's night-town, Elijah's prophecies dissolve in the laughter of a casino-croupier calling "*faites vos jeux*", which resounds as an invitation to play with summons and

authorities. Rather than accepting the addresses, I will argue that Joycean narratives, through laughter, ambivalence and undecidability, invite us to “counter-interpellate” them, in the words of Jean-Jacques Lecercle: to adopt other roles than that of addressee, and reshape their meaning. Following Jean-Michel Rabaté, I will focus on one such potential role for the readers: that of post-boys, deciphering addresses as we roam through the text. Instead of being caught in the web of authoritative discourses, we can re-contextualize them, uncover their origins and subvert their trajectory. As such, though the rhetoric of the novel may be already written, we may choose how – and where! – to take it.

Phatic, Polemical, and Metaleptic Addresses to Readers in William Gerhardie's *The Polyglots*

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William Gerhardie's second novel, *The Polyglots* (1925), offers an example – albeit an eccentric one – of the survival of direct addresses to readers in a novel written and published in the heyday of English literary modernism. The autodiegetic narrator repeatedly addresses the reader in a text which turns out to be a novel he is writing in the hope of improving the financial situation of its cast of characters, his polyglottic relatives and acquaintances. Ranging from short phatic expressions to polemical pre-emptive strikes against potential readerly objections and, in a final display of communicative exuberance, to a metaleptic exhortation to alter the fate of the characters by buying the book – still unpublished in the diegetic world – the addresses have a cumulative effect. Besides contributing to the overall humorous and ironic effects of the novel, they form an on-going one-sided conversation and produce a sense of increasing intimacy with the narrator-author. In their most emphatic form, they interrupt the flow of the narrative and deflect the reader's interest from plot progression. Instead, they foreground the relationship between the narrator-author, the text, and the reader, this last participant in the communication triangle being probably best

accounted for by Phelan's rhetorical model. If the term "reader" raises questions of definitions and ontological status, so does the expression "narrator-author" in the case of *The Polyglots*, since the temporal and functional demarcation line between the narrated-I and the narrating-I is a shifting and uncertain one. Thus, the intimacy generated by the addresses to readers on the part of the character-narrator performing the diegetic action of writing the novel and also calling attention to his physical presence increases immersion in the story world rather than jeopardizing it. Finally, it will be suggested that the novel's playful disregard for the principle of non-contradiction, evidenced most strikingly in the final metaleptic address, reflects the fact that the narrator is addressing future fictive readers of his yet unpublished book, therefore shifting attention from the writing process to the finished product and its reception. Since his novel is available to us through the reading of a real book, his references to "the book" are felt to concern not only his fictive forthcoming novel but also Gerhardie's novel published in 1925. At this extrafictional level, the exhortations to buy the book read like a humorous form of self-advertisement and a reminder of the economic dimension of the relationship between writers and readers.

Humouring the English Reader: Readerly involvement in Alan Bennett's Prose Fiction

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Although Alan Bennett is better known as a dramatist, his prose has always been regarded as both concise and witty. He indeed manages to conjure up entire fictional worlds with short and striking sentences. To do so, he resorts to two major techniques: presupposition – mostly based on shared knowledge – and the juxtaposition of incongruous elements (see Jeffries, 2010).

Although these techniques can indeed elicit readerly involvement (when readers do indeed share the author's knowledge of the world or if they are piqued by his stylistic dexterity) they may also have opposite effects. Some readers may indeed feel distanced.

In either case, it seems that Alan Bennett keeps the reader hovering between familiarity and estrangement, and this, as will be defended in this presentation, accounts for his unwavering popularity.

Our presentation will be based on of *Talking Heads* and *The Uncommon Reader* with some incursions into some of the author's short-stories; especially *Smut*.

Interpellation and Counter-Interpellation in the Novel

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The paper will start with three incipits (two famous ones, the third not so). First, it will attempt to revive the old metaphor of the text as a journey along a path, and will then proceed to analyse them in terms of the dialectics of interpellation and counter-interpellation. The aim is to provide a criterion to contrast literature proper and para-literature.

“The rest is silence”: Readerly Wanderings in the Unsaid

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The title of this conference: “Addressing Readers” instantly brought to my mind Tristram Shandy’s and Sterne’s uninterrupted dialogue with their readers, humorously defending their most eccentric narrative choices in a playful quest for understanding and approval... Some contrary mode of thinking, and my work on the stories of a most discreet Irish author, William Trevor, then conjured up the very opposite end of the spectrum where the silent author/narrator stands, inviting readers to fill in narrative gaps and adopt necessarily unstable positions. Yet, this withdrawal into *narrauthorial* silence, even reticence, paradoxically often turns out to be a most formidable manipulative strategy to direct readers from the wings of fiction and force them into perspectives tailored to writers’ desires.

To make this point, I will try and ferret out the textual signs of these silent strategies (metaphors, telescoped voices and perspectives, free styles, metalepses...). Freely drawing inspiration from Lecercle’s analyses, I shall argue that narrative elements that defy or renounce expression might be analysed as constituting an irreducible ‘remainder’ that creates a unique form of ‘interpellation’. Consenting (?) readers are thereby displaced from

their points of expectation, their pre-established modes of perception. There, at the very heart of what could sometimes be analysed as *narrauthorial* impoliteness, it will be argued, paradoxically rests the e-motion and the wonder of reading. Examples will be mainly drawn from contemporary Irish fiction.

“If you really want to know about it”... Engaging the reader through direct address in contemporary American literature

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Much of contemporary American literature can be identified by the direct address that opens the narrative, in an often ambivalent form of engagement. Since Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the homodiegetic narrator has often addressed the reader from the liminary page, simultaneously bonding with, but also challenging him or her, while positing a reading contract that upsets realist literary tradition, either through deliberate intertextual irreverence or through other forms of overt transgression of established literary codes. This paper will analyze the dynamics of the threshold text that uses direct address within the rhetorical construction of an “authentic” voice, the technique often being combined with apparently unedited content (incorrect in its grammar, familiar in its turns of phrase, misspelled, etc..) to give one the impression of “hearing” rather than “reading” and of forms of call and (expected) response. It will focus on how the apparent indiscipline of the first person voice can be seen as an attempt to assert or reassert agency, the use of the imperative (either in a form of wooing or of antagonistic provocation), being almost systematic. Whether shy or in-your-face, rebellious or controlled, the intrusive narrative

voice that directly addresses us as readers, calling us out from our space outside the book in a form of metalepsis or positioning us as a specific character within the diegesis, also calls upon us to recognize our essential responsibility as readers, as co-writers and interpreters as well as recipients of the narrative – pointing to the ethical responsibility our role as reader entails.

"I hope I shall please my readers": Negotiating the Author-Reader Relationship in Two Corpora of British Novels, 1778-1814

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University of Strasbourg

If all literary texts fundamentally involve acts of communication (Phelan, preface), it seems intuitive that communicativeness should be particularly relevant for novels noted for their didactic intent, where the authors aim to exert influence over others through fiction (Warhol 18). The eighteenth-century novel is known for playing with the boundaries of the author, editor, and narrator, regularly using direct addresses to the reader in ways that reinforce the communicative nature of the text (Stewart 27). Didactic novels of the turn of the nineteenth century in Great Britain used the novel genre to make an ideological point that could otherwise have been—and often was—made in conduct books (Havens 5), begging the question of what the novelistic form brings to the didactic agenda. This paper will explore the ways in which didactic novels of the turn of the nineteenth century use direct addresses to readers to establish a link with the narratee conducive to making a didactic point. In order to determine the specificities of the text-reader relationship that didactic novels build in the text and paratext, I will compare a corpus of 18 novels deemed didactic by critics upon their publication—including Lady Mary Hamilton's *Munster Village*

(1778), Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801) and *Patronage* (1814), and Sarah Green's *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* (1810)—to another corpus of equal size, representative of novels of similar narrative frameworks in the same time span (1778-1814), that were not defined as didactic in intent by critics at the time of publication. I will use computer-aided textual analysis as well as close reading of particular instances of narrator interventions in order to explore the kinds of relationship that this sort of overt authoriality (Lanser 16) establishes with narratees, building on and complicating Robyn Warhol's engaging/distancing framework through the asymmetrical relationship that overt didacticism often implies.

**Self-help, Sufi style:
Double Deixis in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy
Rich in Rising Asia* (2013)**

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Postcolonial writers have conducted fascinating narrative experiments by moving beyond traditional first- and third-person forms. Cases in point are texts written in the second person ('you texts'), in which the ambiguous address function of 'you' nudges readers into conflicting processes of identification and dis/identification with the 'you' of the text.

As Monika Fludernik has noted, in spite of renewed critical interest for second-person fiction since the 1990s, critics have tended to focus either on the address function of these texts, or on the use of the second-person pronoun in reference to a fictional protagonist. What has thus been overlooked is "the central issue of the combination of these two aspects". In other words, the fact that the referent of such a 'you' can shift throughout second-person texts – moving from protagonist through narratee to reader, or even collapsing and confusing some (or all) of these categories – gives second-person fiction a unique potential, not only for encouraging us to rethink the orthodoxies of narrative theory, but also for recasting the act of reading as an act of interpretative strife. In postcolonial literatures in particular, the "referential

indeterminacy" (Fludernik) or "double deixis" (David Herman) at play in 'you texts' is often used to expose and re-orient the presuppositions 'mainstream' readers might bring to the act of reading narratives about cultural 'otherness'.

My paper will look at Mohsin Hamid's 'how-to' text, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), with a view to showing how this text written in the second person strategically confuses 'apostrophic' and 'diegetic' forms of you-address. My contention is that Hamid's strategy of double deixis constitutes a compelling means of dislodging mainstream readers from a taken-for-granted position of competence. Specifically, I will contend that Hamid's use of double deixis participates in hijacking the (Western) genre of self-help in order to surreptitiously impose a Sufi alternative to today's capital-driven existence.

You, Me, and Dickens, Plus Lots of Others: The Communicational Intransitivity of Novels

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In my view literary activity is one form of communication among others. In this paper, I shall be discussing the extent to which communication in general, but more especially literary communication, and above all communication by way of novels, leaves human beings free and independent. We might perhaps wish that, in any kind of communication, addressers would fully respect the human autonomy of addressees, be they hearers or readers. As it happens, however, there is communication and communication. Sometimes the addresser-addressee relationship as textually modelled puts real hearers or readers under considerable coercive pressure. At other times their human autonomy is both recognized and positively enhanced. To use my own terminology for this, there is transitive communication and intransitive communication, a distinction observable in the communication of novelists no less than in that of other kinds of communicator. In order to explain what I have in mind here, I shall pay special attention to Dickens. I shall also link what I say to the growth of literary communities, and to our current condition of post-postmodernity.