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## THE EXPRESSIONIST TRANSFUSION: METALEPSIS IN GUSTAV MEYRINK'S NOVELS

**Summary.** The paper examines the phenomenon of narrative metalepsis in terms of its vivid implementation in Expressionist prose. It is argued that in Meyrink's works (*The White Dominican and The Angel of the West Window*), a special metaleptic type termed as "mental metalepsis" propels the dialectical relationship between the Ancestor and his Descendant whose interactions consistently demonstrate the convergence of uncompromising struggle and profound unity.

**Key words:** expressionism, metalepsis, narrator.

**Problem definition and its relationship with scientific and practical tasks.** Metalepsis is the "undermining of ontological axioms" [1, p. 100]; the "intentional paradoxical transgression of ontologically distinct worlds and/or levels" [2, p. 91]. Metaleptic disruption of narrative fabric provides the effacement of the seemingly impermeable frontiers between the levels of story (*histoire*) and narration (*récit*). The interfusion of narrative levels implies epistemological disorientation, "unsettling readers' sense of their own reality" [3, p. 17]. Hence, this narrative technique is endowed with the strong capacity to challenge and modify the reader's perception.

**Analysis of recent research and publications on the subject.** Metalepsis, as defined by Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse*, is "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe, or the inverse" [4, p. 234–235]. Since its first publication, Genette's original definition of metalepsis has been substantially elaborated, especially in terms of its vast variety of typologies. For instance, Marie-Laure Ryan [5] introduces rhetorical and ontological metaleptic types in order to draw a distinction between commentaries and physical transgression of the narrative thresholds correspondingly. William Nelles [6] suggests differentiating between intrametalepsis and extrametalepsis due to the vector of the transgressive movement. Alice Bell and Jan Alber [7] discriminate between three types of metalepsis: ascending and descending (depending on their directions), as well as horizontal metalepsis which is described by John Pier [8] as "transfictionality".

**The aim of the article.** The unceasing fluctuations of psychic energy within the narratives of Gustav Meyrink's novels suggest the existence of a special metaleptic type (hereinafter termed as "mental metalepsis"). I propose to consider the metaleptic oscillation of narrative consciousness as a separate category within the expanding typology of metalepses. The aim of this paper is therefore to disclose the purpose of mental metalepsis, as well as to demonstrate its unique features, potential narrative functions and effective performance in Expressionist texts. This article focuses upon

the metaleptic narratives of Gustav Meyrink's Expressionist novels, primarily because this narrative technique has not yet been examined particularly within the framework of Expressionist prose, as well as due to the fact that metalepsis is vividly manifested in the literary texts of this author.

**The principal data of the study.** Gustav Meyrink's novel *The White Dominican* demonstrates the adventurous experiments with extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels of narrative configuration. Christopher Dovecote is the intrahomodiegetic narrator who pursues his storyline in the "Diary of an Invisible Man". This embedded diary traces the neophyte's spiritual journey towards esoteric enlightenment. Meanwhile, the central figure of the frame story (the extraheterodiegetic narrator) is an explicit provider of the first-person narrative who is situated outside the chronotope and persistently mentions the literary profession as his regular occupation. From the first lines of the novel the extradiegetic narrator starts his direct reflections on the nature of the creative process. The narrator's metanarrative remarks thematise "the act of narrating or factors of it" [9, p. 132] and thereby activate the figure of the reader, generating the receptive illusion of a dialogue: "X or Y has written a novel. What does that mean?" [10, p. 15]. The extradiegetic narrator discloses his intention to write about the life of a fictional person named Christopher Dovecote. However, Dovecote steadily captivates the imagination of the frame narrator. The extradiegetic narrator starts to doubt that Dovecote is actually a fictional character: "he certainly did not spring from my imagination, of that I remain convinced... I say that openly" [10, p. 16].

The two narrators engage in a kind of mental struggle for dominance over the narration. The frame narrator is overwhelmed with the act of artistic creativity which he cannot control any more: "Am I really the one who is "creating" this work or is my imagination merely some kind of receiver for supernatural communications? Something like what is called, in the sphere of wireless telegraphy, an aerial?" [10, p. 16]. Gradually, the intradiegetic narrator "breaks loose" from the embedded story: "What is one to say when one's hand, usually such a willing tool of the mind, suddenly refuses to write the name of the hero of the story one has thought up, and insists on choosing a different one instead?" [10, p. 15].

The frame narrator makes the conclusion which is fundamental in the context of the Expressionist philosophy: the intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrators must be bound with a kind of mysterious kinship: "I might have been this Christopher Dovecote in an earlier existence" [10, p. 18]. Dovecote embodies the unconscious creative impulse of the extradiegetic narrator, the "autonomous psychic complex" which lives an independent mental life. As Carl Gustav Jung asserts, the work of art is the product of infinite experience of

a “collective man”: “Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him” [11, p. 101]. Likewise, in Meyrink’s novel, the narrator is aware of his mission: he is actually the “tool” of creation, governed and guided by his literary product. The blurring of different ontological dimensions provides the paradoxical dynamics of Meyrink’s novel: the writer creates the book; however, the work of art in exactly the same way develops and configures the artist.

Eventually, the extradiegetic narrator admits the final victory of Dovecote and completely surrenders to his will. Christopher literally replaces the consciousness of the extradiegetic narrator and confidently launches his own narrative, starting with “Christopher Dovecote’s first revelation” [10, p. 19]. Thus, the intradiegetic narration imperceptibly “floods” the extradiegetic level. It is remarkable that the frame narrative is asymmetric: the extradiegetic narrator does not appear anymore; he is completely assimilated by his forefather. In this context, Meyrink incorporates into the discourse of the novel the words of John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30) which acquire special significance in the context of the author’s conception: “The one that must increase is our Founding Father, but I must decrease!” [10, p. 131]. The relationship between the Ancestor and his Descendant is antinomic and still interdependent: “the night of your winter solstice is the day of my resurrection” [10, p. 87]. The novel demonstrates the blurring of boundaries between the outer world and the inner world of a person: “Thou become me, and I become Thou” [10, p. 87]. In this context, it is relevant to refer to the observations of Richard Murphy as to the “deconstructive” moment of the Expressionist art: “it effaces the boundaries between the external and the internal, the real and the imaginary”, as well as “between subject and object” [12, p. 119]. The monistic mysticism of Gustav Meyrink results in the complete dissolution of the narrator within the universal “I”.

The intradiegetic narrator of *The Angel of the West Window* also entirely replaces the consciousness of the extradiegetic narrator. The novel focuses on the life of the Elizabethan magus John Dee, the alchemist’s spiritual transmutations on the way toward immortality. It is notable that the heroes of the novel manage to live in different temporal planes within the coherent narration. The narrator of the frame story easily “plunges” into the diegesis – the world of John Dee; the characters are mentally projected onto the plane of distant past by means of magic, as well as through imagination: “I found myself in the grip of a bizarre fancy: I have already experienced all this, right down to the last detail, so many – how many? – years ago...” [13, p. 164]. In this context, the author skillfully introduces a pun with the word “imagine” (German: “einbilden”). Meyrink splits the lexeme into the prefix “ein” which denotes the inward direction, and the root “Bild”, i.e. “image”. Based on these considerations, the writer endeavors to blur the boundaries of the conventional word perception: Meyrink reconsiders the verb “sich einbilden” through emphasizing its literal meaning: “to enter the image”. This is exactly the way the consciousness of the intradiegetic narrator is displayed: it seeks to “enter”, to “twist into” the image of the extradiegetic narrator, to replace his identity.

Thus, the intradiegetic narrative is a powerful energy field which becomes an active opponent in the process of reading. In *The Angel of the West Window*, Baron Müller (the extra-homodiegetic narrator) reads the manuscripts of his distant ancestor John Dee (the intra-homodiegetic narrator), and eventually merges with the image of his forefather. As Kurt Pinthus [14] observes, Expressionism was primarily the art of masses which sought to break any mental and social barriers between people. This art aspired to ultimate generalization and archetypization, to the reconstruction of the unifying element. Having dissolved in his ancestor, Baron Müller becomes the prolongation of John Dee and achieves the transcendent breakthrough to his primal essence. This is the way the hero manages to retrieve the divine component of his soul (which is actually the principal objective of Expressionism). The metaleptic transgression is indispensable and inevitable: the extradiegetic narrator needs the intradiegetic one in order to feel the global involvement, cherished by the Expressionists; the intradiegetic narrator, in his turn, needs the extradiegetic one in order to fulfill himself in the Descendant. The heroes embark on a paradoxical act of mutual constitution, launching each other into existence: the descendent is being formed by the ancestor and vice versa, exactly as the “drawing hands” at Maurits Cornelis Escher’s metaleptic lithograph of the same name.

Thus, the boundaries between the narrative universes in *The White Dominican* and *The Angel of the West Window* turn to the permeable membranes: the extradiegetic narrator can intervene into the diegesis, while diegesis “floods” the world of the discourse. This “transgressive” strategy seems to be consonant with the considerations of the Viennese Expressionist Paul Hatvani [15] who advocated the artistic “I” which sought to “flood” the external world. In both novels the intradiegetic levels are represented as mysterious texts which possess powerful magic properties and strive to capture their recipients in the process of reading. The Expressionist narrative deprives the reader of the possibility of relying on the inherited cosmology: instead, it seeks to “unfold”, to “break out” by means of metalepsis.

**Research findings and challenges in the examined area.** Mental metalepsis in Gustav Meyrink’s novels efficiently triggers the principal ideas of Expressionist literature: the effacement of frontiers between literary discourse and reality; erosion of the subject-object opposition; and finally, disintegration of consciousness. The infinite transgressions of narrative boundaries launch the paradoxical metamorphoses of the Artist and the Work of Art; the mystical transformations of the Ancestor and the Descendant. The extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrators get involved in an extraordinary process of mutual creation and fulfillment. The narrative levels are interdependent, interrelated and co-present; their interchangeable nature embodies the blurring of such oppositions as “external / internal”, “textual plane / non-textual world”. It has been demonstrated that mental metalepsis as one of the main narrative strategies in Gustav Meyrink’s novels undermines the conventions in a purely Expressionist way.

The ontological interpenetration of extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative levels eliminates the opposition between subject and object, facilitates the Expressionist erosion of boundaries between literary discourse and non-

textual reality. Therefore, it seems quite relevant to proceed investigating other literary works of Expressionism in terms of metalepsis and its specific features.

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### Лисанець Ю. В. Експресіоністичне взаємопроникнення: металепис у романах Густава Майрінка

**Анотація.** У статті розглядається нарративний металепис з точки зору його яскравого втілення в експресіоністичній прозі. У романах Густава Майрінка «Білий Домініканець» і «Ангел західного вікна» виокремлено специфічний для експресіонізму тип металепису, який визначається як «ментальний». Зазначений тип металепису відтворює діалектичний взаємозв'язок між Пращуром і Нащадком: поєднання безкомпромісної боротьби і глибинної єдності.

**Ключові слова:** експресіонізм, металепис, оповідач.

### Лисанець Ю. В. Экспрессионистическое взаимопроникновение: металепис в романах Густава Майринка

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается нарративный металепис с точки зрения его яркого воплощения в экспрессионистической прозе. В романах Густава Майринка «Белый Доминиканец» и «Ангел западного окна» выделен специфический для экспрессионизма тип металеписа, который определяется как «ментальный». Выделенный тип металеписа воспроизводит диалектическую взаимосвязь между Предком и Потомком: сочетание бескомпромиссной борьбы и глубинного единства.

**Ключевые слова:** экспрессионизм, металепис, рассказчик.