

# COGNITIVE PROCESSES AND PARALEPSIS

## Case Studies in Two Short Stories by Michele Mari

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**ABSTRACT** • This paper has the dual purpose of outlining the case history related to paralepsis in literary texts, highlighting the different possibilities of application and the narrative effects that derive in any case towards a transgressive fantastic alteration, and of trying to update the referential system drawn by Genette in 1972. For that, we will draw on some postulates and principles of linguistics and cognitive narratology, applying them to two specific stories by Michele Mari, *Josef K.* and *Lamento del guerriero*, when we will show how unexpected information offered by a particular character (bottom-up vertical paralepsis and internal horizontal paralepsis) produce metaleptic shifts that dislocate and re-locate the reading around different attractors that transgress the fictional logic (Remorini 2023).

**KEYWORDS** • Fantastic Literature; Cognitive Narratology; Paralepsis; Metalepsis; Michele Mari.

### 1. Introduction

Among the many suggestions that Gérard Genette made in 1972 with the publication of *Figures III*, we find two mechanisms of narrative alteration that the author includes in the same referential system and that have had very different critical fortunes: metalepsis and paralepsis. While the former has since received extensive attention, with multiple investigations that have been expanding its function and scope, the latter has been relegated to brief descriptions and minor attempts at theoretical development.

On the one hand, Genette uses the term *metalepsis* to indicate a textual transgression of the hierarchical diegetic universes that reveals the internal structure of the text with the insertion of the extradiegetic narrator into the diegetic universe and produces a particular effect of estrangement (Genette 1972: 293-294). It is thus configured as a paradoxical narrative element that entails a displacement of the spatio-temporal references of the diegetic construction, and as such has been the subject of in-depth studies and research (among others, those of Nelles 1992, Malina 2002, Fludernik 2003, Ryan 2004, Lang 2006, Meyer-Minnemann 2006, Prince 2006, Cohn 2012, Gobyn 2014, Hanebeck 2017, Möllendorff 2018, and Jahn 2021) that have expanded the concept to differentiate two major areas on which it acts: that of discourse and that of story. Within each area, different subcategories are configured. For example, Fludernik, following Genette's first intuitions, distinguishes between *authorial metalepsis*, *ontological metalepsis 1 (narratorial metalepsis)*, *ontological metalepsis 2 (lectorial metalepsis)*, and *rhetorical metalepsis* or *discourse metalepsis* (2003: 389). Or Hanebeck, between *ontological metalepsis* with the subcategories *recursive metalepsis* and *immersive metalepsis*, and *figurative metalepsis* with the subcategories *epistemological metalepsis* and *rhetorical metalepsis* (2017: 83). Beyond the different nuances that we can find, we note the recursivity of a binomial nomenclature proposed for these two basic types of metalep-

sis: *ontological metalepsis / rhetorical metalepsis* (Ryan 2004: 441, which returns to Genette and Fludernik's terminology); *metalepsis of theme / metalepsis of technique* (Möllendorff 2018); *extradiegetic metalepsis / diegetic metalepsis* (Gobyn 2014: 121); *story metalepsis / discourse metalepsis* (Jahn 2021); *ontological metalepsis / figurative metalepsis* (Hanebeck 2017: 25); *in corpore / in verbis* (Meyer-Minnemann 2006: 61).

On the other hand, Genette derives the term *paralepsis* from rhetoric in consonance with *paralipsis* (from gr. *παράλειψις* *paráleipsis* "preterition"), to allude to discordances with the focal state as the narrator exceeds his own degree of knowledge of the facts (1972: 253). Niederhoff points out that alterations regarding focus can only be accommodated within the internal construction of the narrative text: there are no *a priori* alterations, there are only those with respect to narrative structure (2013). Jahn, for his part, has the great merit of relating *paralepsis* to cognitive processes. Bearing in mind that narrative situations are standard models of structure, one must recognize the alteration as such and find strategies for dealing with it, which Jahn attempts to enumerate: "(a) 'naturalize' them so that they become acceptable data consistent (after all) with the current interpretive framework; (b) adapt the framework to allow the alteration as an 'exception'; (c) treat it as a stylistic 'mistake'; (d) seek a replacement framework" (2021).

In this article we will try to update the definition of *paralepsis* as a *metaleptic* tool due to an unexpected information that can concern not just an alteration of the focalization of the narrative discourse but also an ontological transgression of the narrative levels, while demarcating the scope of two potential categories with two subtypes (bottom-up and top-down vertical *paralepsis*; internal and external horizontal *paralepsis*).

## 2. Methodology and materials

The cognitive approach applied to literary studies focuses on the mental structures and mechanisms underlying the narrative experience, which makes it possible to analyze the shaping and narrative relations of literary texts based on fundamental cognitive parameters and frameworks (Fludernik 2005: 48). Research in Artificial Intelligence on the cognitive bases for the creation and understanding of stories, and the subsequent concepts of *schemata*, *frames* and *scripts* as categories and cognitive processes involved in the interpretation of texts, have drawn parallels between changes in narrative models and paradigmatic models of understanding reality, whose cognitive structures have to be dynamic, flexible and adaptable, as they have to be confirmed at all times or deconstructed and reconstructed to accommodate changes (Grishakova 2009: 188).

*Schemata* are cognitive structures that represent generic knowledge and that, when reading a text, provide us with predefined prior information to make sense of the events and descriptions we encounter. Therefore, they represent the semantic and paradigmatic level of comprehension and interpretation of narrative texts. The relationship between texts and *schemata* is bidirectional, since while *schemata* tend to establish the basic rules for the interpretation of a discourse, the discourses themselves can lead readers to modify existing *schemata* and create new ones. In narrative studies, *schemata* theory has been important not only for its role in explaining gap-filling in reading, but also in relation to a reader's knowledge of the overall structure of stories, knowledge called *story schemata*, which contains a set of expectations about how the narratives we read might proceed (Emmott and Alexander 2019). A clear expression of their effect and influence is the *paratext*, in its broadest sense (*peritext* and *epitext*), which helps to mediate in important ways aesthetic and hermeneutic expectations and perceptions about the text (Remorini 2022: 77). *Schemata* ultimately provide us with experiential maps of our expectations. Schneider moves in this perspective, for example, applying cognitive postulates to the study of characters (2001: 608).

Within a context of paradigmatic, but also narrative and linguistic expectations, the notion of apperception is of decisive importance, conveying assumptions about how the narrated story and narrative discourse may proceed (Remorini 2023: 29). Apperception is the cognitive link with which we deal with the world and also with narrative texts. Our past mental constructs directly influence the cognitive, hermeneutic and aesthetic processes of narrative experience. The apperceptive connections that are established during reading can either be organized around an already known and recognized attractor, without modifying the initial *schemata*, or they can be ordered according to different attractors, thus establishing fantastic links that change these *schemata* (Remorini 2023: 28).

The theory of frames, like the apperceptions theory, assumes that each new experience we have is elaborated from a comparison with a stereotyped schema derived from similar experiences recorded in memory, so that each new information is understood from a comparison with data already stored in long-term memory, a kind of experiential database. If *schemata* considered above are superior cognitive structures and represent general knowledge, the *frame* represents specific knowledge, passing from the general to the particular, from the abstract to the concrete (Jahn 1999: 6), while the parallel structure, the *script*, is the concrete textual form in which it materializes. Thus, *frames* symbolize, within the cognitive processes and relationships, the narrative and syntactic level of comprehension and interpretation of narrative texts, while *scripts* correspond to the morphological and linguistic level. At the narratological level we can identify a correspondence between *scripts* and linguistic elements, between *frame* and narrative structure, between *schemata* and logical paradigm. *Scripts* are the variable concretion of narrative sequences in predetermined relations (*frames*) that contribute to the emergence of the narrative (*schemata*). A schema provides the semantic paradigm of an event, its meaning, while the frame constitutes its syntactic articulation, i.e. the order of succession of events, and the script its linguistic articulation. Without the first, nothing would be understood, without the other two, nothing would happen.

We find the same differentiation in the three cognitive schemas operative in literary contexts proposed by Stockwell - “*world schemas, text schemas, and language schemas*” (2002: 80)-, from which Shen then clearly derives the distinction between story, the area of content staged by world schemas, and discourse, the two areas of presentation symbolized by text and language schemas (2005: 142). We draw then in figure 1 a model that gathers all the theoretical contributions on the cognitive and hermeneutic processes operative in the interpretation of literary texts:

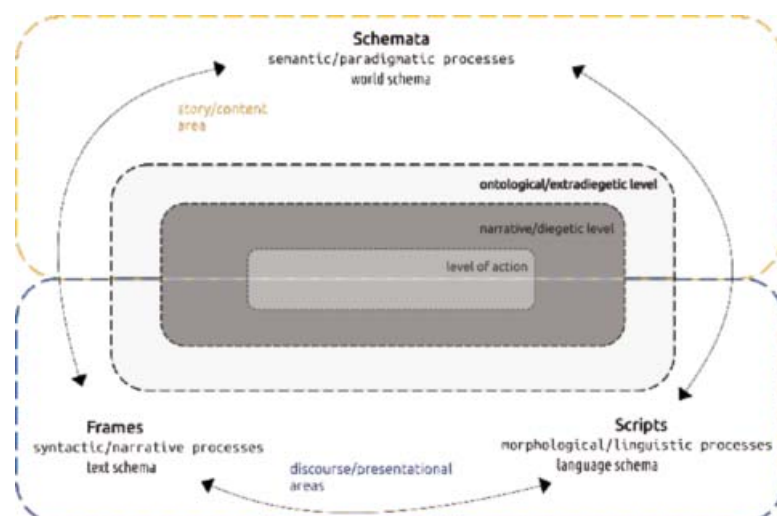


Figure 1. Cognitive and hermeneutic processes operative in the interpretation of literary texts.

The three processes and the two areas operate simultaneously and interact with each other at every moment. The story area comprises the semantic/paradigmatic level, while the discourse area corresponds to the organizational/narrative and linguistic/stylistic levels. Within this model and these relationships, anomalies, alterations and transgressions may arise at all levels (Lang 2006: 32) that require the updating or transformation of the apperceptions involved (Remorini 2023: 28), and which in Figure 2 we place in the proposed model:

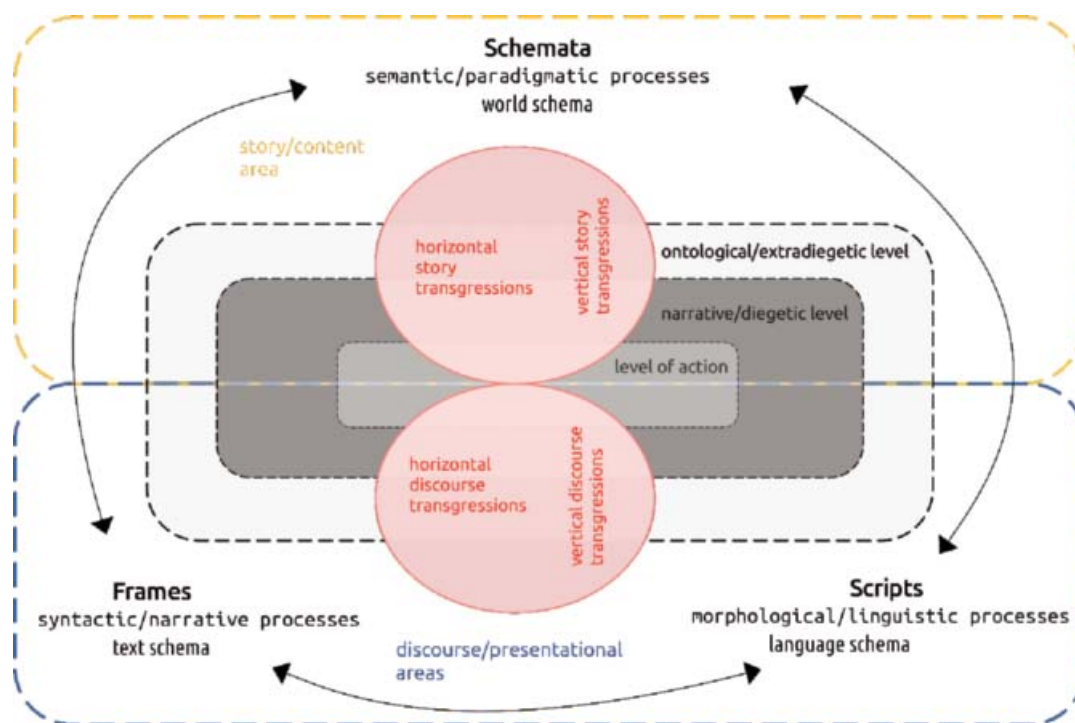


Figure 2. Vertical and horizontal transgressions.

We thus appreciate how the different transgressions can remain within their respective levels (horizontal transgressions) or break the boundaries between communicative levels (vertical transgressions), both in the direction of the story area, represented by the *schemata* of cognitive processes, the hermeneutic semantic/paradigmatic levels and the world schema, as well as in the discourse area, represented by the *frames* and *scripts* of cognitive processes and the respective hermeneutic syntactic/narrative and morphological/linguistic levels and the text schema and language schema.

### 3. Results

We then move on to the analysis of the two short stories indicated above to outline the possible case history related to *paralepsis* and the alterations of apperceptive connections that it can produce.

In the first text by Michele Mari we are going to analyze, *Lamento del guerriero*, which belongs to the collection *Fantasmagonia* (2012), the protagonist-narrator is Achilles, who on the beach beneath the Trojan walls indulges in a long monologue in which he laments –hence the title– about his past, present and future fate. The particularity of the narrative –the fantastic con-

nection it establishes— lies in the knowledge Achilles demonstrates of the literary texts that sing of his heroics. The text consists of five sequences that are worth briefly analyzing.

In the first, he is surprised that the poets depicted him as blond, and complains about his mother Thetis' forgetfulness to dip his heel in as well. He also reveals his admiration for Hector and the knowledge he had always had (he had seen it) of the countless deaths in the Greek camp that his absence from the fighting would cause. He did not know, however, that Patroclus, "l'amore mio" would die (2012: 105). We are thus after the end of the Iliad. Hector is already dead; Achilles has recently returned his body to Priam. Note how the heel episode does not appear in the texts of the Epic Cycle, but in the *Achilleid* (original title *Achilleis*), a Latin epic poem by the writer Publius Papinius Statius from the 1st century AD.

In the second, he continues the lament thinking that Hector will be mourned, unlike him, and recalling the attempted slaughter during ten days on his body protected by the gods, and the pity that led him to return his corpse to Priam. He reveals a detail that does not appear in the Iliad: Achilles says that at the moment of the return of Hector's body, he saw, "solo io – non i guerrieri e non i poeti" (2012: 106), the ghost of Patroclus staring at his heel.

In the third, he carries on his lament to his mother and regrets having chosen his own fate of death in order to "aver gloria eterna" (2012: 106), knowing full well that it is "inutile tutto..." (2012: 106). He knows that he will die at the hands of Paris Alexander. He laments that he could not yet enjoy Patroclus. He laments that he has to watch out for all the Achaean leaders, unlike Hector who fought together with family and friends. He laments the distortions of the Epic Cycle poems, "quante incongruenze, nella mia storia! Dovevo esser nero, e son biondo; dovevo essere il maggiore di età, e tu un giovinetto perché era bello così, era giusto così, e invece il più vecchio eri tu, una specie di zio, oh poeti, pietà!" (2012: 108). It should be noted how the episode of Achilles' death is sung in the *Aethiopsis*, a lost ancient Greek epic poem from the seventh century B.C. attributed to Arctinus of Miletus and part of the Epic Cycle: *Cypria*, *Iliad*, *Aethiopsis*, *Little Iliad*, *Iliupersis*, *Nostoi*, *Odyssey*, *Telegony*. The episode is also narrated by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (Book XII, 580-628).

In the fourth, the lament is over the memory of the unequal fight against Hector who, despite realizing that Athena was helping Achilles, went to meet his fate of death. He laments that after the fight, the other Achaeans turned their attentions to Hector's body, and that just the killing of Hector represents the point of no return to his own fate.

In the fifth and last, the lament arises from the comparison between her own inner moral misery and the beauty of Ilion, "il luogo perfetto dove abitare" (2012: 108). She laments the burning that will destroy her. She laments the dreams she has. In one, she once saw "un vecchio cieco che brancolava vicino alle rovine fumanti di Ilio, e farfugliava degli estremi onori resi al domatore di cavalli Ettore" (2012: 109). In another "vidi un uomo dalla chioma rossastra, vestito in modo strano, che diceva 'E tu onore di pianti, Ettore, avrai finché il sole risplenderà su le sciagure umane'" (2012: 109). He thus sees Homer and Ugo Foscolo in the dreams (the last are in fact verses 292-295 of *Dei sepolcri*).

We are thus dealing with a literary protagonist (Achilles) who knows all the works about him (*Achilleis*, the Trojan Cycle, the *Metamorphoses*) and also others (Foscolo's *Dei sepolcri*). Therefore, it becomes clear how throughout the entire narrative a repeated ascending vertical paralepsis takes shape, materializing a vertical metalepsis of the character, as we can see in figure 3:



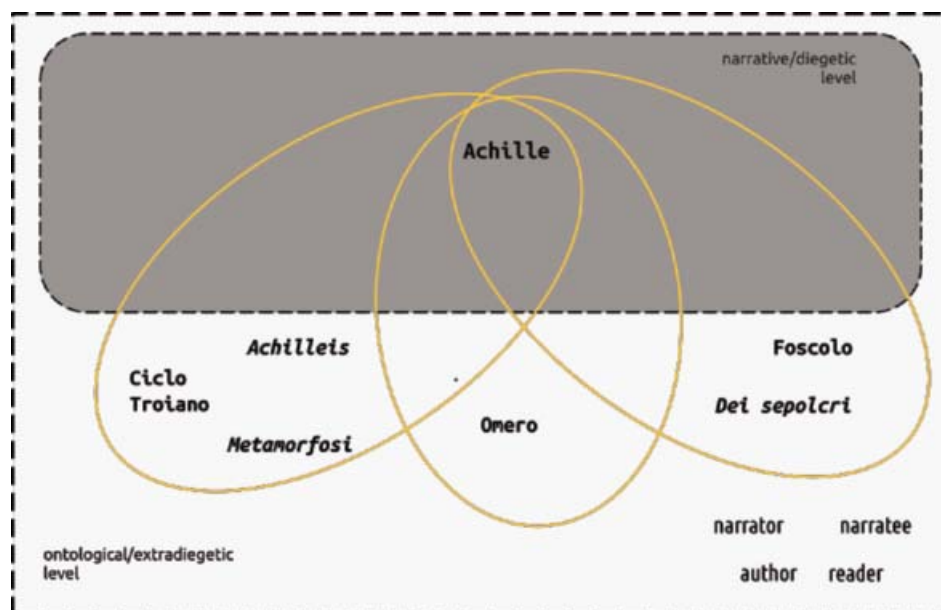


Figure 3. Vertical paralepsis in *Lamento del guerriero*.

Achilles knows the texts that make up the Trojan Cycle, and more generally all the books in which his exploits are sung, and points out their inconsistencies. He also knew what would happen and knows what will happen (his death, the end of Troy). In a dream he even sees an “vecchio cieco” (2012: 109) –Homer– and “un uomo dalla chioma rossastra” (2012: 109) –Foscolo– in his dreams.

Mari’s second short story, *Josef K.* (also from the 2012 book *Fantasmagonia*) is the narration of the protagonist’s childhood and subsequent search for his father. The story, in general, is built on a few pairs of characters and authors (Josef K./Kafka, Scardanelli/Hölderlin, Pinocchio/Colodi), but what makes it fantastic are the final transgressions of a determined character who could not/should not have had some relevant information.

The main character, Josef K., does not know who his parents are. The only information he has is that his father was a carpenter. For this reason, and because he is a little sluggish in his movements, his classmates at school call him “Scardanelli” (the teacher had told the class that the German poet Hölderlin signed his poems with this name during the years he lived in a carpenter’s house). After being teased by the football coach and his first and only girlfriend, Lena, he decides to go in search of his father. He asks for information from a rabbi, a Lutheran priest and an Orthodox priest, who are unable to tell him anything. A Catholic priest instead directs him to Italy (from Prague, where we understand he was living). Already on his way, a cobbler told him to go to Pescia, near Pistoia, in Tuscany. Here, an old beggar woman immediately recognizes him by his movements as the son of the town’s old carpenter, and finally takes him to his first home, revealing his true double identity: Josef K. is Pinocchio (called Pino), son of Geppetto but also of Carlo Collodi.

Let us take a moment to consider the different informative contributions that the other characters bring to the protagonist throughout the development of the action.

- Diegetic information between characters n.1: Hölderlin, Scardanelli.

The teacher tells Josef K. and his classmates about Hölderlin and how, when the German poet lived in a carpenter’s house, he signed his poems with the pseudonym Scardanelli. Since Josef K. was also the son of a carpenter, his classmates by association began to call him by the same pseudonym: Scardanelli.

- Diegetic information between characters n.2:  $\emptyset$ .

After failure in his social life, where the football coach throws him out because of his “wooden” movements, and failure in his private life, where in his only sexual experience, Lena rejects him because of the same ‘wooden’ movements, he decides to start his “anamnestic investigation” in search of his father. He then asks a rabbi, a Lutheran priest and an Orthodox priest for possible information, to no avail.

- Diegetic information between characters n.3: Italia.

A Catholic priest finally advised him to go to Italy.

- Diegetic information between characters n.4: Pescia

When he arrived in Italy, a shoemaker told him he had to go to a village in Pescia, near Pistoia, in Tuscany.

- Diegetic information between characters n.5: Pino, Geppetto, Carlo Collodi, Kafka (vertical paralepsis).

Once he arrives in the village, an “old beggar woman” immediately recognizes him as the son of the old carpenter and finally reveals to him his true double identity: Josef K. is Pino (from Pinocchio), son of Geppetto, from whom he has inherited the “wooden” movements, but he is also the son of Carlo Lorenzini aka “Collodi”, the writer and author of *Le avventure di Pinocchio. Storia di un burattino*, from whom he has inherited the anguish (as Kafka accused his father of having transmitted it to him, hence the comparison with Josef K., the protagonist of Kafka’s novel *Der Process*).

At this moment, the bottom-up vertical paralepsis materializes (figure 4): the old beggar possesses information that does not belong to the diegetic level, but to the extradiegetic one, as we can see on this figure.

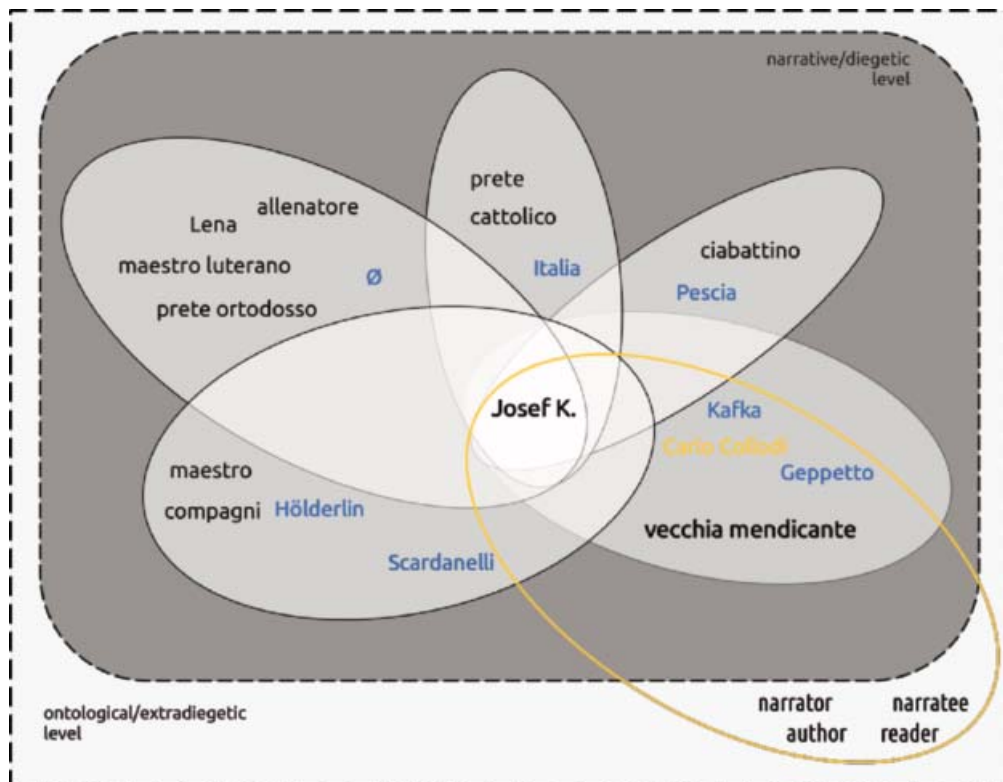


Figure 4. Vertical paralepsis in *Josef K.*.

- Diegetic information between characters n.6: Scardanelli (horizontal paralepsis).

After leaving Josef K. alone in his father's carpenter's house, the "old beggar woman" greets him by calling him "Scardanelli", as his schoolmates used to call him.

Here, at the end of the story, internal horizontal paralepsis takes place (figure 5). The character of the old beggar woman says more than could have been expected, since, according to the internal structure of the story, she could not have this diegetic information, which was only available in the place from which the protagonist set out on his quest.

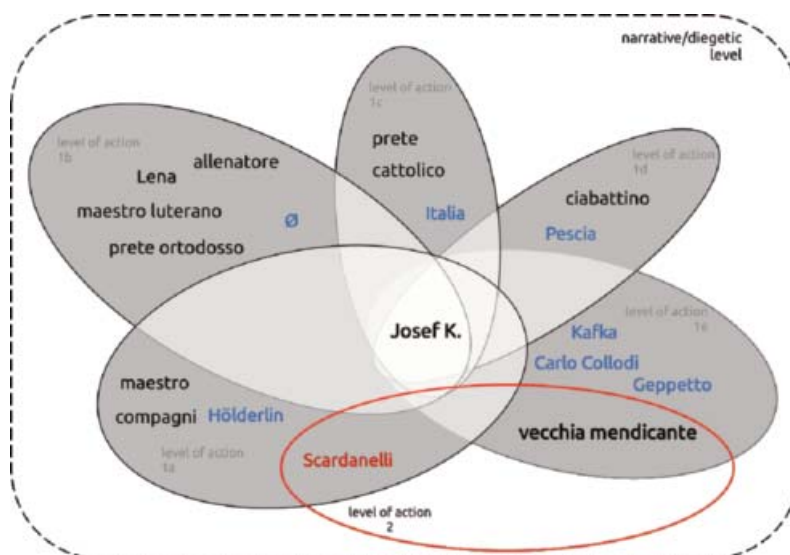


Figure 5. Horizontal paralepsis in *Josef K.*

We summarize the different informative contributions and the appearance of the two paralepsis, vertical and horizontal, in figure 6:

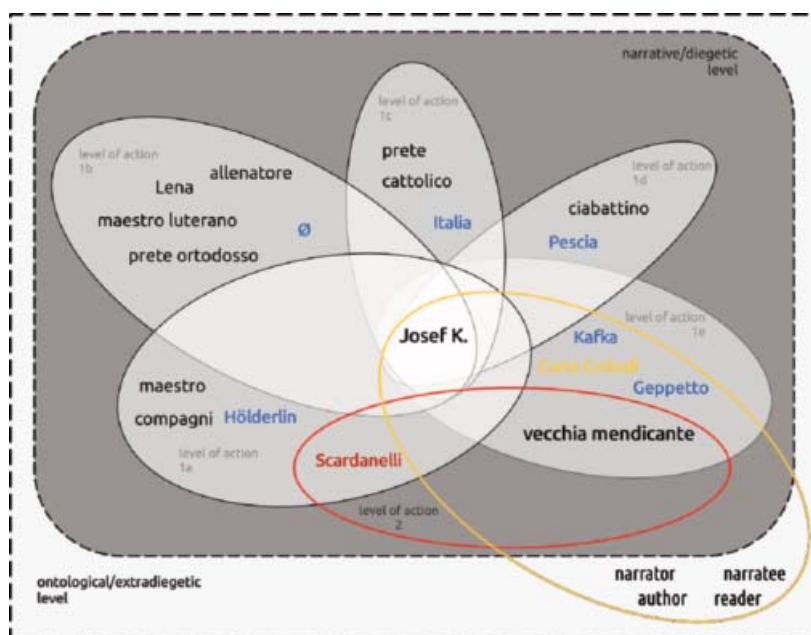


Figure 6. Vertical and horizontal paralepsis in *Josef K.*



In red the diegetic information “Scardanelli”, by which Josef K. was called by his schoolmates, which the old beggar says at the end of the story. In yellow the ontological information “Carlo Collodi”, the writer who gave life to Josef K./Pinocchio, who relates the old beggar with the extradiegetic level of the story.

We see how narrative paralepsis as unexpected informational inputs produce narrative alterations with metaleptic effects. The main character, Josef K., shares the same level of action as the other characters, including the teacher and classmates, as we can see in figure 7.

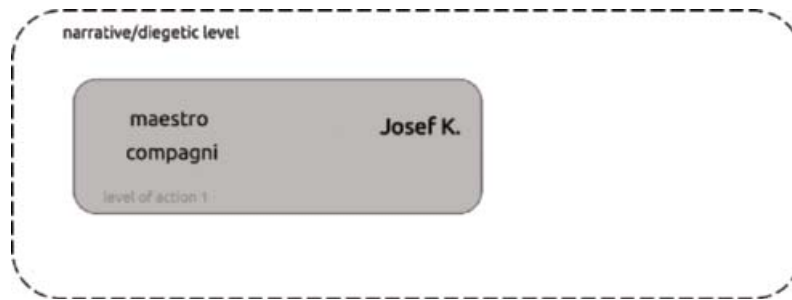


Figure 7. Level of action 1 in *Josef K.*.

The level of action shared by the character of the old beggar with the protagonist Josef K. incorporates the level of action of the other characters. The information “Scardanelli” transgresses the statute of active focalization at that moment of the story, entailing the displacement of the internal narrative space-time references: a horizontal diegetic metalepsis of the character (figure 8).



Figure 8. Horizontal metalepsis in *Josef K.*.

The old beggar, however, possesses not only the information “Scardanelli” that belongs to another diegetic level of action, but also information that belongs to a different communicative, non-narrative, real, ontological, paradigmatic level, recognizing Josef K./Pinocchio as a literary creation of Carlo Lorenzini aka Collodi.

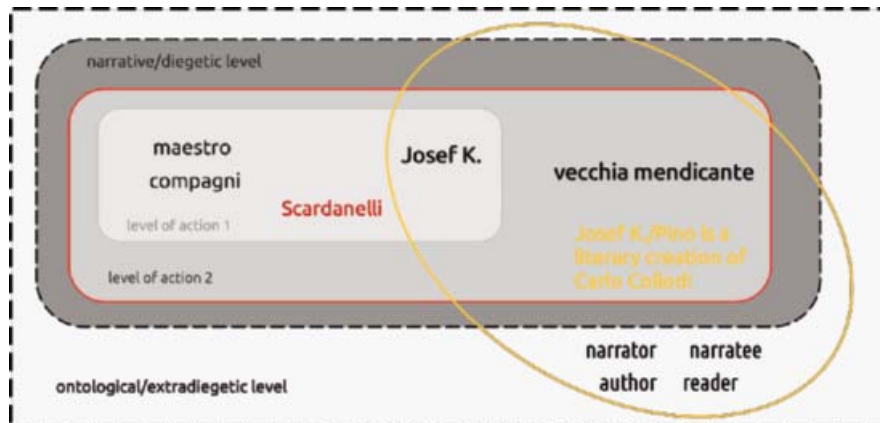


Figure 9. Vertical and horizontal metalepsis in *Josef K.*.

The passage from the statute of focalization to the metanarrative structure of the story, the vertical paralepsis, involves in this case the displacement of the ontological space-time references: a vertical metalepsis of the character (figure 9).

#### 4. Discussion

As a result of the analysis of the texts, we consider it clearly wrong to position the mechanisms of metalepsis and paralepsis within the same system of alteration of narrative discourse, as Genette does: “Métalepse fait ici système avec prolepse, analepse, syllepse et paralepse” (1972: 321). Metalepsis being a spatio-temporal referential displacement, that is, a transgressive relation between different narrative planes, and paralepsis an unexpected diegetic information, it seems to me more appropriate to consider paralepsis as one of the possible tools through which the referential displacement of metalepsis is manifested (as can be, for example, the presence of a mediating object), making manifest the fantastic linkage within the narrative through an alteration of the cognitive frames.

It is no less true, however, that for Genette and later scholars of the subject, paralepsis concerns only the focus of the narrative discourse, without considering the content of the information provided. I propose, therefore, to take into account also the type of content offered, and thus distinguish between vertical and horizontal paralepsis, defining them as follows:

— Horizontal paralepsis: when the additional information belongs to the same narrative/diegetic or ontological/extradiegetic level. We can distinguish between internal paralepsis, when information belongs to the same narrative/diegetic level (as analyzed in the case of the “Scardanelli” information in *Josef K.*), and external paralepsis, when information belongs to the same ontological/extradiegetic level (such as the continuous references and winks to the reader in *Roderick Duddle* by Michele Mari).

— Vertical paralepsis: when the additional information belongs to a different narrative/diegetic or ontological/extradiegetic level. We can distinguish between top-down paralepsis, when information crosses from the ontological/extradiegetic level to the narrative/diegetic level (when, for example, a character-narrator relates events that he or she could not have witnessed, possibly the most common type of paralepsis), and bottom-up paralepsis, when information crosses from the narrative/diegetic level to the ontological/extradiegetic level (as in *Lamento del guerriero* and in the case of the information “Carlo Collodi” in *Josef K.*).

## 5. Conclusions

Through an analysis of the cognitive and hermeneutic processes and relations that underlie every narrative experience and that emerge from studies in cognitive narratology (*schemata, frames, scripts, world schema, text schema, language schema*), we have identified the ontological and narrative areas and the communicative dynamics active in potential cases of paradoxical transgression of narration.

Expanding and modifying the category of paralepsis with respect to previous scholars, from Genette onwards, we consider proven the existence of two types of vertical paralepsis (top-down and bottom-up) and two types of horizontal paralepsis (internal and external), categories that has so far not been taken into account by critical studies and that involves not only an alteration of the focalization statute on which at a given moment the story is constructed, but also the spatio-temporal references of the narration.

On the basis of these new definitions, paralepsis becomes an instrument at the service of the metaleptic transgression essential to accommodate the emergence of the fantastic linkage, as we have highlighted in two chosen short story, *Josef K.* and *Lamento del guerrero* by Michele Mari, where precisely the metaleptic alterations of the story brought to the surface by the internal horizontal and bottom-up vertical paralepsis entail an anomaly in the relations between cognitive and hermeneutic processes, between frames of the same level, between frames and schemata, between diegetic and extradiegetic levels, between the area of the discourse and the area of the story, between syntactic/narrative level and semantic/paradigmatic level.

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