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Literary Performatives in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* by José Saramago. A Study of Performatives in Contemporary Portuguese Fiction

Abstract

This article discusses literary performatives and their functions in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* by José Saramago through the prism of the definition of literary performatives presented by Irene Kacandes in her article “Are You in the Text? The ‘Literary Performative’ in Postmodernist Fiction”. In order to understand Saramago’s novel in the light of this concept, this work examines the novel in terms of features emblematic of second-person narratives. The point of departure is J. L. Austin’s Speech Act Theory from *How to Do Things with Words*. The article refers to the theoretical and methodological background regarding Speech Act Theory as proposed by Austin and developed by Searle, as well as further considerations on the application of the theory in literary studies. It demonstrates that literary performatives present in the novel being discussed are built by third-person singular imperatives, first-person plurals (imperative and indicative mode) and impersonal forms. Moreover, it argues that they serve the following functions—constituting the second-person narrative character of the novel, providing the narrative with oral and meta-fictional character, and pointing the reader to the moment of action they are involved in at the moment of reading.

Keywords: literary performatives, contemporary Portuguese literature, Speech Act Theory

Introduction

Speech Act Theory is where two areas of philological research meet—linguistics and literary theory¹. Sandy Petrey remarks that “[t]wentieth-century literary theory has consistently explored the implications

1 This idea is the foundation of Roman Jakobson’s rendering of language in poetry presented in his article “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics” (1960), Pratt’s analysis of language in literature explained in her book *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (1977) and many other works concerning the nature of literary language.

of the simple fact that literature consist of language” (Petrey 1990: 3). Indeed, what this study shares with Russian Formalism, New Criticism and especially Speech Act Theory is the recognition of the role of language in a work of fiction. What it shares with Reader-Response Criticism, though, is the focus on the reader². Language and the reader meet in performative utterances. In the literary context, they can be interpreted from two perspectives. Firstly, they can be regarded in terms of the illocutionary force imposed on their addressees; secondly, they might be understood in terms of functions they serve within the narrative. This paper seeks to answer the second rendering of the question focusing on a novel written by the winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Literature José Saramago. According to Helena Kaufman, contemporary Portuguese fiction can be interpreted as minor in many ways among European literatures and yet is no less significant (Kaufman 1997: 167)³. Moreover, it does demonstrate postmodernist features indicated by Linda Hutcheon in her work *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988).

Considering Saramago’s fiction, Maria Alzira Seixo enumerates postmodernist characteristics emblematic of his works—inclination to rewrite history, to change the past and adaptation to the point of view of those forgotten by the history (Seixo 1999: 126). They all can be found in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (*História do cerco de Lisboa*, 1989). In the novel, a story of a proof-reader Raimundo Silva engaged in correcting a book by the same title is intertwined with the history of the siege altered by Raimundo with the word *not* introduced to the story written from the perspective of the Moors. The novel requires a very attentive reader not only to differentiate between various characters’ dialogues not delimited graphically, but also between different perspectives since it does not represent a uniform point of view. While telling the story of Raimundo or Mogueime—one of the Moors—from a third-person point of view, the intrusive narrator turns to the reader using reader addresses that allow analysing the novel from the perspective of a second-person narrative. A number of utterances containing reader addresses are not only read but also actualized while reading. They can be called literary performatives and represent a narrative strategy.

The aim of this study is to discuss the nature and functions of literary performatives that can be encountered in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* by José Saramago in light of the definition of literary performatives presented by Irene Kacandes in her article “Are You in the Text? The ‘Literary Performative’ in Postmodernist Fiction” (1993). It is crucial to emphasize that while many scholars, mainly associated with Reader-Response Criticism, suggest regarding works of fiction as performative artefacts as a whole, this study proposes to interpret and discuss only selected phrases from the narrator-reader dynamics as literary performatives. The article demonstrates that literary performatives in the novel are built by third-person singular imperatives, first-person plural verb forms and impersonal forms and serve the following functions—constitute the second-person character of the novel, determine the narrative’s oral

2 Although Reader-Response Criticism encompasses many distinct approaches, schools and theories, they all recognize the crucial role of the reader and the impossibility of separating the reader from a literary work. It can be said that as the reading process cannot exist without the reader, since it is the reader who by reading contributes to the creation of a meaning of a literary work (Fish 1980: 3), literary performatives cannot exist without the reader, for it is the reader who actualizes them while reading (Kacandes 1993: 141).

3 In her article “Is The Minor Essential?: Contemporary Portuguese Fiction and Questions of Identity”, the author discusses the concept of *minor* in Portuguese literature from linguistic, social, historical and political perspective, understanding it after Heidegger, Deleuze and Guattari “for whom ‘minor’ was connoted as hidden and de-centered and yet essential in its significance” (Kaufman 1997: 167).

character and introduce metafictional references, as well as they refer the reader to the moment of action they are involved in at the moment of reading.

The paper is divided into four sections preceded by the outline of the main idea of the work. The first one provides a theoretical and methodological background considering Speech Act Theory presented by J. L. Austin in his book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), John R. Searle's later contribution to the theory, its application in literary studies introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (1977), as well as its application in second-person narratives specifically discussed by Irene Kacandes in her article "Are You in the Text? The 'Literary Performative' in Post-modernist Fiction". The second section recognizes the novel's reader addresses as a feature emblematic of second-person narratives and interprets it as one, while the third section examines examples of literary performatives from *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* by confronting them with Kacandes' definition of a literary performative. The fourth section discusses the functions they have within the narrative and is followed by conclusions.

1. Speech Act Theory and Its Application in Literary Studies

There have been numerous attempts to apply Speech Act Theory in literary studies. It seems that the main concerns of literary theorists have been—whether Speech Act Theory can be applied in literary studies at all, if so, how, and how can literary studies benefit from such an approach. Emile Benveniste, Richard Ohmann, Mary Louise Pratt, Stanley Fish, Sandy Petrey, Jacques Derrida, to name only a few scholars, have already contributed to the development of this area of the philosophy of language in literature. The key theory is J. L. Austin's theory of performative utterances presented in his book *How to Do Things with Words* which initiated considerations regarding Speech Act Theory and literary theory, even though it originated as a linguistic concept. According to Austin himself, his theory cannot be applied in literary studies⁴. According to Pratt and Petrey as well as this study—it can. This section aims to discuss the linguistic basis of Speech Act Theory as presented by Austin and John R. Searle, its further application in literary studies by Pratt and Kacandes' contribution into the literary performatives studies.

In his book *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin attempts to distinguish between two types of utterances—constatives that assert things and performatives that perform things. According to Austin, performative utterances are supposed to execute the action they designate by mere virtue of being uttered, as he states that "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (Austin 1962: 6). In other words, Austin's definition of a performative utterance is: "to say something is to do something" (Austin 1962: 12). The main difference between these two categories is that performatives cannot be regarded in true or false categories, but they can be felicitous or infelicitous, depending on whether all the conditions for an utterance to be a performative are fulfilled or not. Austin develops his theory analysing

4 Austin argues that "a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances" (Austin 1962: 22).

different types of performative utterances as well as facing their many pitfalls. However, the more specific cases he considers, the more issues he encounters. It complicates the distinction between constatives and performatives instead of facilitating it. He concludes that in fact all utterances can be performative. After several attempts to find a clear dividing line between the two types of utterances, he decides to approach the problem from a different perspective and introduces three aspects of performative utterances by distinguishing between locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. He interprets locutionary acts as mere acts of saying something, illocutionary acts as acts in saying something and hence possessing illocutionary force to perform the action designated, and perlocutionary acts as acts causing certain, intended or not, effect in the addressee. These considerations led Searle to develop the theory of illocutionary acts further.

Searle's Speech Act Theory differs in numerous aspects from many of Austin's assumptions. In *Expression and Meaning. Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (1979), Searle, based on Austin's illocutionary acts definition, suggests regarding constatives as assertive utterances (e.g. "I state that") and dividing performative utterances into four groups: directives ("I order," "I command"), commissives ("I promise"), expressives ("I apologize," "I congratulate," "I thank") and declarations (in which the speaker in authority influences the reality by the words uttered). Although Austin's and Searle's contribution was much greater than what is demonstrated here, these are the main elements to which literary studies refer and they are instrumental in this paper.

There has been much discussion on whether literature should be analysed through the prism of Speech Act Theory in the first place. The doubts seem to arise from the Russian Formalists' distinction into poetic and nonpoetic language. According to them, the language of a literary work differs from that of ordinary speech (Pratt 1977: 3–4). Assuming it does, it is often argued that one cannot apply a theory that considers nonpoetic language in poetic language. However, it is also often indicated that "literature is an illocutionary act even if its illocutionary force is vastly different from that of ordinary language" (Petrey 1990: 55). Or that the distinction between poetic and nonpoetic language is erroneous in the first place (Pratt 1977: 5). Both of these approaches result in numerous and effective literary analysis. It seems that the key to applying Speech Act Theory in literary studies is the recognizing the ordinariness of a literary work and assuming its communicational character. In her work *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, Pratt refutes the doctrine of the uniqueness of the literary language which allows her to analyse literary works through Speech Act Theory. According to her, the literary speech situation is that of a speaker/audience and there is no reason to consider it unique to literature (Pratt 1977: 115). She also suggests that in order to recognize performative qualities of a literary text it needs to be interpreted in light of literary genres. In this way, the same utterance would have a different illocutionary force on readers and would cause a different effect on them (perlocutionary force) depending on what the reader can expect knowing only the generic conventions. It is crucial that even if this approach regards a book as a performative artefact, it recognizes the reader as its addressee.

What can be observed as a general tendency is that a considerable amount of what has been written regarding the application of Speech Act Theory in literature considers either third-person narratives or drama, in which case the dynamics between the characters is analysed (e.g. Stanley Fish), while these are second-person narratives that share the crucial feature with literary performatives—they both refer to the addressee of the communicate they convey.

In the 90s, Irene Kacandes published an article entitled “Are You in the Text? The ‘Literary Performative’ in Postmodernist Fiction” in which she discusses a few contemporary cases of performative utterances in second-person narratives. The author also provides the most accurate definition of literary performatives. It seems that the definition of a performative utterance suggested by Austin is not different from the definition of literary performatives, it is only more general. Austin proposes a very broad understanding of performative utterances, while literary studies narrow it down to serve one purpose only. Kacandes argues that:

Whereas Austin describes utterances in which to say something is in fact (at least in part) to do that something (e.g., “I promise”; “I bet”), reader address in some postmodernist fiction might be designated “literary performative,” that is, *to read* the address is to perform what one reads. Although Austin’s performatives can occasionally be performed without actually speaking..., literary performatives can be performed only by reading. (Kacandes 1993: 141)

Thus, while Austin refers to a broad term of *doing*, Kacandes narrows this category down to the action executed by the reader by *reading* only. It entails a significant limitation—since “literary performatives can be performed only by reading” (*ibidem*), it is the reader that performs them, as it is the reader that reads the book. It can be related to Austin’s rule that performative utterances are actualized by saying them (Austin 1962: 12). The one that says performative utterances executes them as much as the one that reads literary performatives actualizes the words read. *Imagine* becomes the act of ordering the moment the words are read the way *turn left* becomes the act of ordering the moment the words are uttered. Kacandes emphasizes one more crucial element—reader addresses that constitute literary performatives. It entails that, firstly, literary performatives can be found in the type of narration where such addresses appear, hence, second-person literature; secondly, that literary performatives require the presence of an interlocutor which means that they can be applied in a speech situation only. Thus, it seems that in order to apply Speech Act Theory in literature, one has to recognize it as a communication process that takes place between the narrator and the reader.

2. The Second-Person Character of *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*

Since literary performatives require the presence of an interlocutor, which is the reader, they are best represented in second-person narratives provided that it is the reader who is their addressee. There might be doubts, though, with regard to a second-person narration status of the novel that need to be dispelled in the first place. Firstly, because the third-person point of view prevails in the novel, secondly, because it contains neither direct second-person *tu/you* references to the addressee nor second-person verbs characteristic for second-person narratives. Nevertheless, it can be analysed from this perspective, as it employs a feature attributed to second-person narratives—reader addresses. They can be found in vocatives and two verbal forms—third-person singular imperatives and a collective first-person plural *we*. The criterion for the following examples is their representation of grammatical forms that determine the second-person character of the novel, not their performative aspect.

The vocatives appear a few times only, rarely in performative utterances, as in the following constative: “as diferenças, que as há, são culturais, sim senhor” (Saramago *História* 1989: 255) / “such differences as exist, are purely cultural, yes, Sir” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 227). It is noteworthy that in this exam-

ple the reader is addressed in the masculine form *senhor*. In her article, Kacandes ponders on the reader's gender in literary performatives and emphasises that they "rarely occur in a pure form, i.e., as a statement which absolutely any reader can actualize by reading" (Kacandes 1993: 148).

Although imperatives do not appear in second-person forms, they do appear in the function of second-person verb forms for they consider formal reader addresses expressed either by a formal address *senhor/a* or a semiformal *você* which is called *pronomes de tratamento* in Portuguese—a courtesy pronoun. Both—formal address *senhor/a* and a semiformal *você*—require the use of a pronoun, very often implicit, and a third-person verb form⁵ as in the following example: "aceite-se o neologismo" (Saramago *História* 1989: 22) / "if you'll pardon the neologism" (*The History* [1989] 1989: 14). Even though such phrases rarely contain explicit pronouns denoting the addressee of the communicate, verbal forms reveal them. Regarding imperatives, second-person verbs mean that one addresses a person as *tu* and third-person verb imply that one more formally addresses them as *senhor/a* or *você*. Thus, using third-person verbs does not mean referring to a third party, but addressing the addressee, the reader, in a more formal way.

Another way of addressing the reader is the first-person plural *we*. There are many types of *we* in the novel and not every *we* constitutes a reference to the reader. The first one is a general *we* that refers to all human beings: "atiramos para os deuses as culpas disto e daquilo" (*História* 1989: 162) / "we blame the gods for this and that" (*The History* [1989] 1989: 142). Such phrases are constatives that refer to a general human experience and are related to no particular character in the novel. The second *we* is the authorial *we* that refers to a collective narrator that relates the story⁶. This type of *we* is not often encountered but when it appears, it can be found in references regarding the process of telling the story, as in: "aqui se pudesse recordar, tornamos a dizer" (*História* 1989: 20) / "we might here record, *we repeat*"⁷ (*The History* [1989] 1989: 11). It could be argued that these forms constitute performative utterances as while reading *we repeat*, the action of repeating is being executed. Nonetheless, this article concerns literary performatives addressed to and performed by the reader, hence this type of utterances will not be considered.

The most relevant *we* for this study is the one that refers to all of us exposed to the story, its receivers, addressees, including the narrator and the readers, as in the phrase: "como sabemos" (*História* 1989: 21) / "as we know" (*The History* [1989] 1989: 14). The difference between this type of *we* and the authorial *we* is in the point of reference. As it is not the receiver who tells the story, *we repeat* cannot be referred to them. Hence, the utterance can be attributed to the authors only. However, *as we know* may refer to both groups—the collective narrator only, for it can be a comment on the state of knowledge of the storytellers, and to all those exposed to the story, if it is interpreted as a reference to an already stated fact by which the narrator reminds the readers what has already been said. It indicates that by using the form, the narrator addresses the readers, as in the following example: "[e] agora passemos um pouco ao longo desta fila de corpos sujos e sangrentos" (*História* 1989: 284) / "[a]nd now let us take a little stroll past this

5 All the information provided considers the European Portuguese language as this is the original language of the novel. Nowadays, though rarely used, the *você*-form is placed exactly in between the informal second-person *tu*-form and the formal third-person *Senhor/a*. It is noteworthy that in the Brazilian Portuguese the *você*-form is considered less formal than in the European Portuguese.

6 The fact that a collective narrator can be found in some parts of the novel does not mean that there is more than one author in general. Rather, using a collective narrator to relate the story seems to be a writing technique that adds to the essayistic character of narration.

7 Italics mine.

line-up of filthy, bloodstained corpses” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 253). It can be interpreted in terms of Searle’s Speech Act Theory as an invitation, suggestion, or even an order to perform the action referred to in an imaginary setting, in which case it should be classified as a directive. As *we* is a broad category that can include both *me* as the sender of the message and *you* as its addressee, it can be interpreted as containing an address to *you*, provided that it appears in a directive. Hence, it is possible to regard this form as containing an address to an addressee. It is also noteworthy that this *we* can already possess explicit vocatives as in the following literary performative: “e agora chegámos, isto diz o guia indispensável, senhoras e senhores, turistas, viajantes ou simples curiosos, ao Arco da Conceição” (*História* 1989: 72) / “and now we come, ladies and gentleman, tourists, travellers, or those of you who are merely curious, says the indispensable guide, to the Arco da Conceição” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 62–63). *Chegámos* is a first-person plural past tense indicative. Therefore, even if a second-person verb is absent, there are other grammatical forms that appear in the function of second-person verb forms and the reader addresses are maintained.

Since the second-person narrative character of the novel has been discussed, it has to be explained why this study considers the reader the addressee of the work’s addresses. The reader is mentioned in the context of the addressee of the story, although neither in a vocative nor a performative utterance—“não nos resta outra solução que escolher algo que o critério do leitor tenha por bem aceitar como essencial” (*História* 1989: 240) / “we have no other solution than to choose something that the reader might consider to be essential” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 214). Since the narrator ponders on what to say so that the reader is satisfied with it, it can be said that the narrator is aware of the presence of the reader and considers them the addressee of their words. For this reason, it is legitimate to call the readers the addressees of the work.

3. Literary Performatives in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*

This section discusses performative utterances that can be found in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* in light of Kacandes’ definition of literary performatives referred to earlier. Reader addresses play a central role in literary performatives as, according to Kacandes, these are the addresses that *are* literary performatives—“reader address in some postmodernist fiction might be designated “literary performative,” that is, *to read* the address is to perform what one reads” (Kacandes 1993: 141). Therefore, in order to find a literary performative, one needs to analyse grammatical forms that involve reader addresses. It may seem, though, that not all grammatical forms regarded as potentially performative possess the address to the reader. Some appear with vocatives already, but others do not, in which case the only indication of an implicit address is the verbal form. This study focuses on the following forms found in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*—third-person singular imperatives, first-person plural verb forms and impersonal forms. Austin claims that all of them can build performative utterances (Austin 1962: 57).

All imperatives address the reader as in the following example: “repare-se que não está nenhum dos mencionados na História do Cerco de Lisboa” (Saramago *História* 1989: 126) / “note that none of these men are mentioned in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 110). It can be interpreted as a literary performative since noting is accomplished by reading the sentence. The execution of the action is a mental process. An explicit *tu/you* pronoun is not required since the grammatical ending indicates the grammatical person concerned. *Repare-se* is a third-person singular imperative that the narrator uses to address the reader. Nevertheless, not all the first-person plural forms and impersonal forms employed in the novel consist of reader addresses, hence, not all of them can be perceived as literary performatives.

It seems that in order for first-person plural forms and impersonal forms to refer to *and* contain the implicit address to the reader they have to appear in the function of a second-person verb form. In addition, they have to be replaceable by a second-person verb form with no change in meaning *for the reader*. It has to be emphasised that the change in meaning *for the narrator* is permissible, as this study considers performative utterances addressed to the reader, not the narrator, and it is the reader that in case of theoretical changes of any grammatical forms has to remain the addressee of the utterance. If any changes suggest excluding the narrator from the category to which they belonged beforehand, but do not affect the status of the reader as the addressee of the utterance, they are correct. Therefore, it is only the *we* that refers to all of those who are exposed to the story related by the narrator that appears in the function of a second-person verb form, since this is the only performative category that can refer to the reader, and for this reason the only that can form literary performatives. The general *we* can refer to the reader but is not a performative, and the collective narrator *we* does not refer to the reader in the first place. To use an example of a literary performative—given that in the passage “[e] agora passemos um pouco ao longo desta fila de corpos sujos e sangrentos” (*História* 1989: 284) / “[a]nd now let us take a little stroll past this line-up of filthy, bloodstained corpses” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 253), *passemos*, which is a first-person plural imperative, serves as a directive instructing the reader to pass to another scene, it can be said that it appears in the function of a second-person verb form. It could be replaced by a second-person singular imperative *passa* and the meaning of the utterance for the reader would not change; it still would be a directive instructing to pass to another scene. In this case, reading the sentence means passing in the imaginary setting to the scene indicated. Hence, it can be interpreted as a literary performative. The execution of the action is a mental process and the imaginary setting is where it takes place. Since literature is “virtual in character” (Iser 1995: 21), it refers to the virtual realm.

With regard to impersonal forms, they function in a similar way. Even though the literary performative “como acaba de ver-se” (Saramago *História* 1989: 217) / “as has just been seen” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 192) does not explicitly refer to the reader, thanks to the context which provides the reader with utterances addressed to them, it can be interpreted as such. To demonstrate this, one could replace it by *como tens visto/as you have just seen* and the meaning from the perspective of the reader would not change—it would still be a reference to the reader pointing to the action performed at the moment of reading. The example can be interpreted as a literary performative since reading it entails accomplishing the action of seeing. It can be rendered in two ways. It can mean imagining the scene indicated as well as it can refer to the physical action of perceiving the words on a page. In both cases it is the reader who reads and sees.

4. Literary Performatives’ Functions

This section aims to discuss literary performatives from the point of view of their possible narrative functions. First of all, the novel acquires the second-person narrative character by employing reader addresses. They can be found in vocatives, constative utterances as well embedded in literary performatives. The second section has already discussed this problem but from a different perspective—it has demonstrated that the novel manifests qualities of second-person narratives and hence can be interpreted as such, while this one focuses on the fact that performative utterances add to the novel’s second-person character since they employ reader addresses. The literary performative “repare-se que não está nenhum dos mencionados na História do Cerco de Lisboa” (*História* 1989: 126) / “note that none of these men are men-

tioned in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 110) possesses the implied reader address that can be found in the imperative *você*-form.

Since they employ implicit or explicit reader addresses, literary performatives seem to provide the work with features of oral production. It seems that the novel can be read as well as listened to. It can be read in the translator’s note (“Od tłumacza”) of the Polish edition of *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (*Rok śmierci Ricarda Reisa*) that according to Saramago, his novels are to be read aloud and listened just as stories told by storytellers were once listened to (Charchalis [1984] 2010: 11). Walter J. Ong in his work *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the World* discusses the elements pivotal for oral cultures to produce a lengthy oral communicate. According to him, “[a]n interlocutor is virtually essential: it is hard to talk to yourself for hours on end. Sustained thought in an oral culture is tied to communication” (Ong [1982] 2005: 34). Saramago’s interlocutor can be found in vocatives or verbal forms that serve the function of second-person verbs. Hence, it can be said that by employing numerous addresses to the receiver of the story, it acquires the character of oral communication. Nonetheless, literary performatives are only one of factors contributing to the work’s oral character and by no means the most relevant one⁸.

Moreover, literary performatives can be part of metafictional references which add to the metafictional character of the narrative. Patricia Waugh refers to metafiction as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh 1984: 2). It can be observed that in *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* a few literary performatives refer the reader to *o relato*, that is, *the story*, as in the following example: “[d]eixemos pois tranquilo este homem ... e busquemos-lhe alguém que, não tanto por méritos próprios, aliás sempre discutíveis, como por uma espécie de predestinação adequada, possa tomar o seu lugar no relato naturalmente” (Saramago *História* 1989: 184–185) / “let us leave in peace this man ... and let us find him someone who, not so much for his own merits, ever questionable, as for some sort of fitting predestination, may take his place in the narrative quite naturally” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 163). In this passage, the narrator considers the focus change from Raimundo Silva to another character, in a directive inviting the reader to actualize this action with them. By referring to the story as *a story*, the narrator emphasises its fictional status. Hence, the utterance can be classified as an example of metafictional reference introduced by a literary performative.

It can be observed that literary performatives can indicate the moment of action the reader is involved in at the moment of reading. The narrator states: “e agora chegámos, isto diz o guia indispensável, senhoras e senhores, turistas, viajantes ou simples curiosos, ao Arco da Conceição” (*História* 1989: 72) / “and now we come, ladies and gentleman, tourists, travellers, or those of you who are merely curious, says the indispensable guide, to the Arco da Conceição” (*The History* [1989] 1989: 62–63). In this literary performative that consists of a first-person plural past tense indicative *chegámos* the precise stage of action referred to is indicated by adding the adverb of time *agora/now*. This example points to the moment of action that is taking place in the imaginary realm at the moment of reading.

8 There are more relevant factors, for example repetitions that can serve as a mnemotechnic device used to facilitate the recounting of a story.

9 The Portuguese original involves a past tense verb *chegámos/we came* while its translation indicates a present tense *come—chegamos*. It slightly affects the phrase as a literary performative since the Portuguese one indicates an action that finishes at the time of reading, while the English one illustrates an action that is still unfinished at the moment of reading. What is more, the English translation employs a second-person pronoun which does not appear in the Portuguese original.

Conclusions

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This article has discussed linguistic features and literary potential of literary performatives from *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*. It has been demonstrated that literary performatives in the novel may consist of the following grammatical forms that include reader addresses—third-person singular imperatives, first-person plural verb forms (imperative and indicative mode) and impersonal forms. The execution of literary performatives is mainly a mental process, but it can also point to the physical realm. The recognition of their linguistic nature has contributed to the identification of their functions. Literary performatives constitute the second-person character of the novel, provide the narration with features of oral production, introduce metafictional references and serve as indicators of the moment of action the reader is involved in at the moment of reading. The list of considered functions by no means aspires to be a definite one but rather has been an attempt to understand the role literary performatives have within the work of fiction.

Although there is no reason to consider literary performatives unique to contemporary literature, they correspond to postmodern ideas of experimentalism. They seem to be a narrative strategy that considers two worlds—the fictional one the real one. They are embedded in the narrative but they reach beyond realms to turn to the reader. *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* also seems to consider two worlds—the world of Raimundo and the one of Mogueime. The novel is rooted in the times of Raimundo and reaches through centuries to the Moors to tell their story. For this resemblance, literary performatives seem to be a corresponding strategy to tell the story.

It seems that literary performatives provide a fruitful ground for analysis even though the discussed work consists of a limited number of them. It has been observed that one literary performative can serve more than one function, as well as that there is no function that is emblematic of literary performatives exclusively. This study also indicated the possibility of interpreting utterances such as *we repeat* produced by the narrator but actualized by the reader while reading as performatives. As the paper considers performative utterances executed by the reader, they were not discussed, however, they may result to be an effective material to analyse through the lens of Speech Act Theory.

Finally, while searching for examples of literary utterances that maintain the performative aspect in both languages, the Portuguese original and the English translation, and thus constitute a good example to be discussed, it has been noticed that the performative aspect of the original is not always maintained or slightly differs in translation. It leads to a conclusion that the performative potential of literary performatives found in the original confronted with its translation deserves a separate comparative study.

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