

Preface

This thesis is the result of a critical investigation that began in April 2011. It started as a study of interactive fiction that aspired to contribute to the topic by exploring the reader's active participation and involvement in the text. Necessitating constant modification over the years, the research has generated in me an abiding interest in second-person storytelling that evolved to become the actual theme of this thesis. This research aims to improve our understanding of the phenomenon within the literary paradigm.

Because of You: Understanding Second-Person Storytelling had its origins in open text formats and experimental narratives along the lines of “choose your own adventure” stories such as Italo Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* and extended to cyber texts. This wide range of narrative typologies offered grounds for exploring interactivity in a multidisciplinary manner, afforded by the dialogic dimension of the second person in other media as well as in non-fiction employments. Once the research centred on fiction and second-person narratives, the question regarding the grade and nature of the reader's interaction with the text proved to be indicative of the richness of second-person storytelling.

Italo Calvino's novel marked a transition in my research. Thematising reading and the reader-author relationship in a unique and emphatic way, his novel immersed me in the concept of address-dominated narratives. It introduced me to the richness and dynamics of the second-person narrative technique by revealing some of its main characteristics such as its ludic character, self-reflexivity and intertextuality. Though *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* was not

selected for the close-reading part of this thesis, it still needs to be mentioned as a benchmark and catalyst for my research and the formulation of key ideas and assumptions.

One major challenge that I faced in defining the actual focus of my research was the angle and perspective I should most profitably employ. Since neither theory nor criticism were offering satisfactory answers or ideas, neglecting as they were the rich history of second-person examples in literature and the adaptation of the technique in lyrics and drama, I often reached dead ends having embarked on misleading cognitive routes. Once I had decided to follow a more inductive method towards drawing my conclusions by focussing on the fundamentals of person, pronoun, grammar and rhetoric, the texts themselves provided the answer. One key observation I made was that though second-person texts have been continually present and diverse in the history of literature, they also reflected an intriguing uniqueness as they always appeared only once in the oeuvre of their authors.

This observation generated questions about the kind of stories that authors prefer to tell in the second person. Exploring their methods and reasons for doing so, as well as studying the implications of the technique, helped to define the aims of my study. Instead of ambitiously seeking homogeneity and common characteristics that would enable me gradually to model a *theory* of second-person fiction, I was fascinated to notice some affinities between prayers and postmodern texts, texts from medieval times and the *nouveau roman*, epic poems and recent prose: it seemed as if second-person texts belonged to a literary history that involves an eternal dialogue between texts and authors. My focus then moved to intertextuality but only so as to establish a dialogue as I was reluctant to impose any generalisations or groupings. Examples such as Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, Michel Butor's *La Modification*, Georges Perec's *Un homme qui dort*, Ilse Aichinger's *Spiegelgeschichte*, Günter Grass's *Katz und Maus*, Frederick Barthelme's stories in *Moon Deluxe* and Paul Auster's *Winter Journal*, though all written in the second

person, are different enough from each other to require examination as individual case studies.

Choosing autobiographical and pseudo-autobiographical examples written in the second person, I have strengthened my focus on the *I-you* relationship and orientated my research onto the possible reasons why the first person is missing, is disguised, silenced or implied in these second-person novels. Reflecting on my readings, observations and my selection of texts and trying to transform these reflections into writing, I encountered elements that were decisive for my study even at a later stage of my doctorate: the alternating power of every process of representation; the dynamics of language and self-reflexivity; the constant transformations and modifications of the narrative; the idea of multiple versions of a life, of a self, of an *I*, one that could be better expressed by a *you* as, for example, in Butor's *La Modification*, revealing the close though important distance between the evolving poles of the *I-you* constellation.

On completing my readings and having articulated all my thoughts and speculations, I managed to explain the second-person enigma as a liminal technique that reflects liminal narrative circumstances while always engaging the reader in a role that's not merely passive. I found that I had reached my aim of understanding second-person storytelling better. This is reflected in the understanding of the textual examples and in the analysis of the four texts of the second part, in revisiting the fundamentals of grammar and rhetoric and in listing the origins, implications and rich elaborations of the phenomenon. It was further proved by my writing of the first and final chapters of this thesis only when I had finished the part on the texts themselves, treating them not only as the object but also as the source of my research.

In undertaking this research and writing this thesis I benefited from the advice and encouragement of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Thomas Fries and Prof. Dr. Sandro Zanetti for supervising my work. Their example, teaching

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to that person

