## Observations Regarding the Second Part

The second part of the thesis involved the close reading and analysis of four key second-person texts. The texts presented in this part were organised according to their complexity and the way the narrative technique is employed rather than chronologically or thematically. The first text discussed is also the most recent. Published in 1976, Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* offered grounds for exploring the impact of the second person in comparison with other narrative perspectives.

Wolf presents the story of a narrator in the process of writing her childhood autobiography. The fact that the narrator's childhood memories contain experiences of a guilty past (the Nazi period in Germany, witnessed from the perspective of the survivors) and evoke feelings of uneasiness, shame and discomfort, lead to her extreme estrangement from her own past. She therefore tries to write her childhood autobiography from a third-person perspective, thus making a narrated persona out of her past self. Using the second person, she performs a cross-examination while reflecting on the writing process and therefore on the narrated past. She also uses the first-person plural to express experiences and thoughts in which she identifies with her contemporaries.

Through the agency of cross-examination, Wolf uses the second person to add the perspective of the outsider (the Other) to her personal reflections thereby attempting to authenticate the memories of the insider: the alienated *I* who experienced the narrated events. Accepting the fact that there is neither reliability nor absolute truth in the process of remembering and reviewing one's own past, Wolf employs the technique to strengthen the reliability and authenticity of the discourse. Along with other means employed (such as the reference to authentic material and the trip the narrator takes to her birthplace), it is a control mechanism presented within the novel. In the second-person narrative, Wolf reveals aspects of the narrative's process of generation, emphasising its self-reflective character and commenting on the writing process.

In *Kindheitsmuster*, we witness the employment of the second person to reflect a sort of middle-distance. Calling to mind Grimsley's thoughts and explanations from the first part of this thesis, *Kindheitsmuster* by drawing on all narrative perspectives, presents various distances from the narrated. For the estranged past and absolute distance where Nelly is located (*prosopopoeia)*, the third-person narrative perspective is employed; for the closer distance of the narrator to the writing process she selects the second person, a mode that enables the cross-examination of memory and that emphasises self-reflexivity and the notion of re-creation. What is interesting in Wolf's narrative is that the use of the first-person plural equals the impersonal.

Unable to employ the first person due to her relationship to the past, we see a first-person-plural narrative perspective in *Kindheitsmuster*. The closeness and subjectivity of the personal aspects of her childhood past are not rejected as such when narrated in the first-person plural, but *depersonalised* and made part of a collective identity that is reflected in the narrative *wir*. The use of the impersonal *man* that appears at the same narrative level has a similarly depersonalising effect. It echoes ideas and assumptions more generically articulated and functions in the same way as the first-person plural.

A similar yet quite different situation is found in Butor's double narrative in which the difficulty of saying *I* dominates the narrative and encourages the employment of another narrative perspective. This time, however, there is no reference to trauma and therefore no necessity to employ the third-person perspective also. Butor published *La Modification* in 1957, representing a mind in flux. His novel, set on a train from Paris to Rome, describes the development of a decision by a middle-aged man to change his life.

Emerging during the *nouveau roman* period, the novel blends features of the movement with formal innovations and the less common second-person technique, which Butor explained was appropriate to a narrative told to someone who is not fully aware of his own story. *La Modification* tells the tale of Léon Delmont *to* himself, starting the moment he boards the train and ending with

his arrival in Rome. Butor presents a novel starting *in medias res,* and he uses the second person almost exclusively (with some rare exceptions in the first person.) He shows excessive attention to detail (formal realism), which strengthens a sense of contemporaneity and the notion of concurrence that the narrative evokes. Another unique characteristic of this novel is that the narrator uses the second-person plural (polite) form *vous* to address Léon, reflecting the social coding of France as well as the distance necessary to realise the process of self-knowing.

What Butor adds to the study is primarily the extent to which the technique is used in the text and the coexistence of two narrative levels within it. Whereas in Wolf we observed the second person occupying a narrative level that improved textual coherence, in Butor we witness two parallel narrative levels, that of happening (Léon's adventure) and that of writing (the book), told from the same narrative perspective, thereby emphasising the rhetoric of *apostrophe* inherent in the technique and revealing some additional properties of the second-person perspective.

The fact that Butor uses the same narrative voice for both levels and also for communicating the theme of modification leads to a combination of form and content which gives the impression that changes happen within the writing itself, traced up to the final modification. This helps the hero to understand himself and his choices, and he is therefore able to transmit his experience in the form of a book after the journey of self-awareness is completed. His story of self-discovery and self-awareness is emphatically self-reflexive, leading to a written representation of the actual experience. In other words, the modification in Butor's example suggests not only a modification of content but also of form, both of which happen simultaneously, reflecting on one another, coinciding and coexisting in the narrative *vous*.

Without direct characterisation though presenting an indirect understanding of Léon through his thoughts and his memories of life incidents (*ethopoeia*), Butor's *Modification* expands the theme of self-discovery, chronicling the route towards certainty. As for the

narrators, we experienced an *Erzählfigur* in the discourse in Wolf, a narrator who narrates her own actions within the story and who is the key protagonist in the narrative. In Butor, we encounter a voice-over narrator who is leading Léon towards a solid sense of self-awareness and certainty as he develops authority over his own choices.

In his case, similarly to Wolf's, the particulars of the central narrative figure (name, gender, situation) do not allow for a strong feeling of identification between the narrative *you* and the reader, at least in a traditional sense. However, just as Wolf opens up her narrative to having a more general meaning, presenting a childhood pattern and depersonalising a personal story, the fact that Léon's story is transformed from an actual experience to a version of it, namely the version we read, also suggests a certain depersonalisation and invites further elaborations and representations (writings) of the story. It opens the narrative *vous* towards a more generic notion of person, a collective entity that Léon could reflect in each of the versions. Hence *La Modification* presents throughout the novel a manifestation of the rhetoric of apostrophe in the second person as it enables the shifting between the two narrative streams that continually coexist in the novel.

After considering the two novels by Christa Wolf and Michel Butor, this study moved on to more symbolic second-person narratives in which the technique draws attention to rhetoric. These latter narratives provided the study with examples rich in metatextual properties, and they show the ability of the second person to designate the narrative figure per se in a text where no person has such consistency. Beginning with Georges Perec's *Un homme qui dort,* the study entered the territory of liminal and experimental second-person narratives. Written in 1966, in the later period of the *nouveau roman,* Perec's text is characterised by striking intertextuality, involving so many allusions and references to other texts and authors that it might be read as a narrative jigsaw puzzle. *Un homme qui dort* is a minimalist story that shows a student performing an experiment in social detachment. Starting *in medias res* and covering the time from the beginning of

the experiment to its end, the narrative involves no other information or details either about the student or any other person.

The story is narrated in the singular form *tu* and may well have autobiographical origins in Perec's own student life. Within the pages of the narrative, Perec, like Butor, introduces a voice-over narrator who guides a student through the various stages of an experiment in social detachment, which appears to be a solution to the indifference that the student experiences and a way in which the student can find his identity and place in the world. This novel also offers an interesting contrast to Butor since it emphasises the personal and intimate tone of the *tu* and expands on the theme of self-discovery by introducing a character who is playing out the possibilities of living as several other narrative heroes until he acquires an identity of his own.

Perec contributes an example of narrative collage to this study of second-person narratives, adding a ludic character to the text and revealing intertextuality as a vital element in writing and a key quality of second-person storytelling. Perec's second-person narrative reflects both varieties of the technique (that of shifting and that of taking a middle-distance, expressed rhetorically through *apostrophe* and *prosopopoeia*) and presents a narrative artefact of intertextuality. As we have seen in the corresponding chapter, the narrative *tu* in *Un homme qui dort* shifts continuously between different heroes and narratives that echo aspects of its theme and form while addressing the developing student, until at the very end he has established his own character.

*Un homme qui dort* chronicles the making of a persona, neither as a narrative within the narrative as in Wolf, nor as a representation of such a process, as we have seen in *La Modification*, but rather as a choice among possible *you-s,* those addressed throughout the narrative that belong to Perec's literary ancestors. The process of self-discovery related to the experiment shows the making of that persona in actual concurrence with the discourse and also through pieces from and traces of other narrative personae from world literature. Therefore, the narrative *tu* reflects all potential (and rejected)

identities the student might adopt, until at the end of the text he finds his own after the experiment has failed. As a text that develops at the level of the narrative itself, chronicling the evolution of the experiment but doing so by reflecting sentences, behaviours and parts of other narratives, we may argue that *Un homme qui dort* not only reflects the development of a hero and his experiment in social detachment but also suggests a narrative that reflects the reading of other narratives on that topic.

*Un homme qui dort* is a text that evokes a sense of being in progress and highlights a feeling of the present tense. Most importantly, Perec's novel suggests an example of using the second person as a narrative figure per se. The fact that the student acquires an identity only when the experiment, the narrative and also this implicit reading reach their final point, proves that through the student's changing of personae and developing of a personality, the narrative *tu* is the only narrative figure through which all this potential could be gathered and addressed. The way in which Perec employs the second person to articulate emphatically his literary version of indifference convinces us of the association of intertextuality with second-person storytelling.

We witness the same liminality with the use of the second person as part of a narrative characterised by an *ordo inversus*. Ilse Aichinger's *Spiegelgeschichte* is again a highly symbolic text that in 1952 won the prize of the Group 47. Written in 1948/49, Aichinger's *Spiegelgeschichte* is the oldest text studied here, and it is the most obscure and challenging of the narratives. This difficulty is due not only to the way the second-person narrative technique is employed but also to the uncommon theme and structure of the novel and the reversal it brings to all aspects and conditions of the narrative transforming one life event of a woman into another.

*Spiegelgeschichte* tells the story of a (distorted) mirror mostly from the perspective of that mirror. The mirror reflects episodes from the life of a woman dying from a botched abortion; the episodes in reversed order as reflected in the mirror are narrated by an enigmatic voice and interrupted by the comments of the hospital

staff announcing the woman's progression towards death, that is the second narrative level of *Spiegelgeschichte*. The two levels that compose Aichinger's text, though parallel, have different functions and informative character, one presenting the life events narrated by the voice to the woman as seen in the distorted mirror until her birth, the other in total contrast showing the progression of the woman towards her end.

Aichinger's *du*-narrative covers the period after the death of the woman back to her birth. *Spiegelgeschichte* expands on the structure of multiple narrative levels coexisting in the same story. The narrative involves two levels: that of the voice and that of the *Others*, enriched with imperatives and a single first-person passage at the crucial moment of the abortion when the narrating voice takes on the woman's voice. Aichinger's story mirrors a process of reconciliation with one's past but in the extreme paradigm of a woman dying and dissolving her life rather than in an autobiographical frame, as encountered in Wolf where the pieces of the past are brought back together. In her text we witness an emphatic use of *prosopopoeia,* which lends the novel an esoteric tone and describes details about feelings and intimate moments that no external narrator could. The narrative *du* that the enigmatic voice addresses remains a mystery until the end of the story, intriguing like the mirror itself, thus enabling the story in reverse.

The emphatic symbolism and enigmatic character of the text don't affect its reception and quality negatively but, realised poetically within the second-person narrative mode, rather make it feasible and even attractive. *Spiegelgeschichte* reveals the potential of the technique to enable the reversal and transformation of reality at least at the level of language. Linguistically Aichinger's text achieves the reversal of all meanings and connotations and even challenges the notions of life and death themselves by adding to them expansions and implications. The *ordo inversus* witnessed in the text is made possible by the employment of the second-person technique which offers the grounds for performing a transition of time and for constructing levels of ambiguity needed in order to generate the narrative.

"Es ist zu Ende –" sagen die hinter dir, "sie ist tot!"
Still! Laß sie reden![330]

Aichinger presents a radical expansion of the second-person technique related to the notion of autobiography in this liminal text, reversing the concepts of beginning and ending, and setting forgetting as the condition for the generation of her story, contrary to Wolf. Also, the concept of the representation and the narration of a life are transformed. While this reminds us of Butor's text and the implication to see the world anew instead of changing its conditions, it emphasises even more the concept of representation and contributes to the self-reflexive character of the second-person stories as it further introduces the rhetoric of metamorphosis, revealing the dynamics of language.

Among the texts discussed, Aichinger's is the richest in terms of rhetoric and symbolic values: it involves an interaction between two non-compatible stages (life and death) and centres the story round a *blind* mirror and the notion of reversal, and a *du* that has a specified referent but comes from an enigmatic, thus unspecified, voice. It also makes possible the personification of a liminal addressee, designated by the dying woman (*prosopopoeia*), and applies the entire concept of transformation, enabled by the mirror and spoken by the *du* at all levels of the text, content and grammar alike. Here again we see an emphasis on the time frame and the notion of episode. *Spiegelgeschichte* elaborates on the concept of time by exceeding all temporal levels, even that of the present, expressing a sense of contemporaneity in a form of eternity, refusing to accept death as an ending and birth as a starting point. The text, following a pattern of constructing and recreating a life parallel to and triggered by the deconstruction and dissolution of the same life, implies that nothing is over yet, especially at the level of language and representation where the potential is richer and the grounds to explore and create are infinite.

**330** | Aichinger (1954/1979), 3.

The complexity of narrative and the concept of life being the material for different narratives, accompanying our existence to its physical end and, as presented in *Spiegelgeseschichte,* extending it, appears in the disguise of *we* instead of the ambiguous *du* of Peter Brooks' narrative theory:

> Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed.[331]

What Brooks describes and explains above is what we have examined as a lifelong interaction and interrelation between the *I* and the *you,* describing a type of lifelong narrated self-reflective autobiography, which is reversed in Aichinger. The narrative impulse in human nature that Brooks identifies, the desire, the need and the ability to narrate is what allows us to summarise and retransmit experiences and events in other words, forms and media. What Brooks describes as a continuous *I*-to-*I* interchange of narrative material that defines, affects and distils our life and *I,* is in the end what second-person stories elaborate on. By transferring the *I* to a *you* in the case of second-person storytelling, the concept of addressing and the notion of productivity in which our lives are re-created and revisited from the distance secured by the *you* are emphasised.

All the narrative heroes discussed in this thesis are addressed in Brooks' quote; when dealing with second-person storytelling we are confronted with narratives that emphasise their self-reflexivity and the narrative process. Brooks' *we* contains the *I-you* narrative pairing that follows the process of development and evolution in narrative

**331** | Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984) 3.

terms, linked with constructing characters and figures, especially in cases where our *I* is challenged (Butor), in doubt (Wolf), in progress (Perec) or unavailable (Aichinger).

The relationship between the pronouns and the narrative conditions as stated in Brooks' quote, is reflected in the writing/reading act as well. In the second person narrative examples, the author, the writer and/or the narrator of the text are all part of the *reading*. In the production of the texts but also in their reception, the interaction and interchange happens between an expressing and an expressed pole, in other words an addressing and an addressed. This possibility to revert and shift between the first person and the first that comes as a disguise of the second - in this reflecting process - is the key to understanding not just the reasons why the use of the second person is so associated with the use of the first, but justifies also the choice of the second person pronoun in cases where issues with identity occur. This is what we have been experiencing in all texts treated in this book.

In summary, the second-person technique is appropriate to stories in which the narrator cannot use the first person for various reasons, a narrative level that is missing from all the texts under discussion, with the exception of Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* where the narrator in a depersonalising manner eventually employs the first person plural and, at the very end, the first person singular due to convention and necessity. As it turns out, the use of the second person rather than a problematic first person comes with more complex ideas and patterns in terms of narrative and it requires a decidedly elevated style. This may be the reason why the authors seem to use the technique only once in their writing career. As for readers, the challenges of understanding such complex narratives and the continuous urge either to identify with the narrative *you,* or not, defines their reading preference and is connected to different levels of identification that they can enjoy each time. As unique texts, second-person narratives generate either enthusiasm or total rejection. The above considerations affect publishers as well,

causing them to adopt a decidedly cautious approach or one that is perhaps almost too supportive and enthusiastic.

It should be stated at this point that the observations contained in this thesis are based on examples from two German novels as well as two French novels, the German texts written by female authors and the French ones by male authors. Each presents characters of their own gender. The influence of the gender of the narrators on content and style is profound, as both German and French reflect gender in grammar and also syntax, an aspect that would be interesting to compare with its rendering in the English translations of these texts.

## Impact and Continuity

I would consider a key accomplishment of this study to be its focus on fundamental principles vital to an understanding of the second-person technique, for example the category of person and pronoun that are often neglected elsewhere. Moreover, my historic overview of the second-person texts showed that the technique should not be treated either as a formal novelty or as a postmodern feature but as a narrative mode that, albeit infrequently deployed, has always been trusted to reflect equivocal and special narrative situations involving multiple parallel narrative levels, emphatic self-reflexivity and ambiguity. Further research should be done on the notion of representation in second-person narratives, focussing especially on the concept of self in autobiographical texts and with storytelling per se as a representation of a life event, modified and altered at the level of language where possibilities are multiplied.

A more focused comparative study on the way the second-person technique is adjusted when translated from one language to another would be a further topic for discussion and investigation. Studying various translations of a second-person novel would shed light on additional areas more associated with linguistics and grammar, emphasising formal variations and the nature of the second person