OVERVIEW

Because of You: Understanding Second-Person Storytelling has explored a narrative technique through the analysis of four case studies. The novels selected for this thesis represent milestones in the history of literature not only because of their narrative perspective but also because of their decidedly elevated style, the way in which they elaborate on common themes and the richness of their poetic and rhetorical qualities. The aim of the thesis has been to further understanding of second-person storytelling as a technique though not as a genre, emphasising certain features that appear with great frequency and presenting key variations of second-person employment while avoiding any attempt at theorising or classifying texts that actually belong to different genres. This latter concern would have precluded consideration of the technique itself, one which shows rare resilience and versatility and offers authors narrative flexibility and potential.

The lack of a theoretical background to the second-person phenomenon throughout the history of literature not to mention its employment in poetry, drama and non-fictional narratives led me to pursue an inductive approach for the needs of my study. I decided to come back to the term itself and first of all attempt to clarify the categories of person and pronoun, tracing essential features of the technique in the fundamentals of grammar and rhetoric in order to enhance my case-by-case research of the texts themselves.

In the study of my primary sources I used the same approach, progressing and gradually deepening. Starting at the first level of understanding such as plot and structure, I moved on to a consideration of rhetoric and the impact of the technique on different aspects of each narrative in such a way as to reflect back on my initial study of grammar and rhetoric. This individualised approach, however, did not prevent me from drawing some more general conclusions useful for a broader view of the phenomenon. It actually revealed to me the intertextuality of second-person narratives, since their composition and rhetoric in various manners and to different degrees involved links and references to other narratives, emphasising the

notion of a literary dialogue and the ludic possibilities inherent in second-person storytelling.

As for the selection of the texts themselves, the novels discussed in the project centre on common themes such as the post-war experience, a love-triangle, human indifference and the issue of life and death, but they tell their stories in an uncommon way. Not only do they employ the unusual second-person technique but they use it in a way that affects the narrative with its ambiguity in content, structure and rhetoric. Due to the second-person technique these narratives make possible an additional space of ambiguity and openness within which plot, rhetoric and poetics can expand and develop.

The employment of the second person, for instance, enabled Butor to present a narrative that reflected the story narrated and its written representation simultaneously; it permitted Perec's hero to develop within the narrative and made it possible for Aichinger to apply the theme of reversal to all parameters of *Spiegelgeschichte*. Also important to mention here is that the technique associated with both intertextuality and a highly elevated rhetorical style frequently adds self-reflexivity to the discourse and a sense of present tense and contemporaneity which is, perhaps, its most striking quality. It is the factor that enables and strengthens *ambiguity* and thus the richness and depth of second-person storytelling.

Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster,* Michel Butor's *La Modification,* Georges Perec's *Un homme qui dort* and Ilse Aichinger's *Spiegelgeschichte* all employ the second-person narrative perspective either partly or throughout. They all show a lack of first-person singular perspective in the traditional sense, meaning that the first person is silenced, disguised or non-applicable for reasons explained in detail in the corresponding chapters. Also, although they share some thematic associations concerning self-discovery, self-awareness, reconciliation with the past and with writing, they do benefit in different ways from the rhetorical and poetic implications of the technique and reflect its primary qualities and thus contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

The uncommon elaborations on common themes can be summarised as follows: in Wolf, a narrator is writing her autobiography but, alienated from her past, chooses the third person to do so as well as the second for presenting the reflection inherent in the narrating; in Butor, a man on a train reflects on a decision he has made though ultimately reverses, so that his entire journey is actually in vain unless he announces his intention to transform this experience into book form, namely the one we readers have in our hand; in Perec, a student, following the examples of other narrative heroes confronted with the same problem of indifference, experiments with social detachment with the guidance of a voice-over narrator until he realises the uselessness of the experiment. In Aichinger, a mysterious voice narrates to a dying woman her life episodes in reverse. The narration covers, in this order, the moments from her burial until her birth, thus affecting their meaning and how they relate. The voice speaks that which is reflected in a distorted mirror, while the hospital staff interrupt the narrative by announcing the woman's progression towards death.

Second-person stories call for an active reading stimulated by the inviting, almost engaging, force of the narrative *you* and one that reflects on multiple meanings and patterns simultaneously. A study of this technique could variously expand on these. In this thesis I have tried to stay as close as possible to the text and to narratology, aiming to demonstrate a clear understanding of the narrative mode without any admixture of other interpretations or disciplines. In the chapter that follows I will explain the method I have employed to complete this study.

Methodology

The methodology I followed for this study was inductive and experimental: I developed it "from scratch", starting from the basics. As both theory and criticism on the topic were limited in volume and scope and sometimes misleading in being too technical or one-