Forms and Functions of Second-Person Narration in Contemporary Short Stories in English

Masterarbeit

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades

Master of Arts (MA)

vorgelegt von

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Graz, 2020
Acknowledgements

I want to thank you all who have made this possible, speaking both generally to you and specifically to you:

you who agreed to supervise my thesis, offered academic support in any way possible and from whom I had the joy to learn a great deal of my literary knowledge
you who are the best teachers a student could ask for and who have taught me great things about my studies and life
you who have given me the possibility of studying what I’ve wanted (and free from financial issues)
you who have (proof-)read my thesis
and you who have read anything or everything else I have written.
you who have made studying for exams together more fun than anyone could imagine
you who spent hours in the library with me and made ‘library dates’ something to look forward to
you who gave me a celebratory ‘Müsli-Weckerl’ to celebrate the end of our Bachelor paper
library dates
and you who reminded me to pick up my ‘Bachelorbescheid’ a year later.
to you who I have met on campus but have now been meeting for years outside class, and to you who have already been my friends before that and still are.
thank you for keeping me sane, supplying me with ‘Palatschinken’ once a week and being there for me far beyond university related struggles.

you who have believed in me from the beginning to the end. but there is no end: you still do.
you know who you are.
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1. Introduction

When telling friends and acquaintances outside the literary studies department that I am working on second-person narration, people usually pause. As soon as they understand the concept, they are astonished. A story with ‘you’? How does that work? And those people who have already encountered second-person narration usually remember it: For example, a friend of mine who has read Adichie’s The Thing Around Your Neck, said, after I told her the topic of my thesis: “Oh yeah, I noticed that. It was interesting.” And not only did she remember the title story I had given her as an example, she also pointed out that there was another story written in second-person narration in the book, one I had not thought of. She remembered it so easily because she thought it was unusual. Considering that non-scholarly readers usually remember literature by its content, it is indeed remarkable that second-person narration is often remembered because of its form.

Second-person narration is not only an unusual phenomenon to non-literary-scholarly readers, it is still also a field that has not received as much scholarly attention as other narrative situations. Can this be explained by the fact that it is often perceived as a rather new – sometimes even exclusively postmodern – phenomenon and is often simply viewed as experimental writing and nothing more? Although most second-person narratives have indeed been written after the 1950s, the form can actually be traced throughout literary history back to the 17th century and has been existing in various (proto-)forms for centuries. In addition, although second-person narration definitely has its affiliations with postmodern experimental literature, it is not exclusively tied to this genre.

In the present Master’s thesis, I aim to provide a comprehensive outline of second-person narration, a narrative situation that so far has received rather little attention in narratology. The thesis is split into a theoretical part that focusses on various narratological issues and provides a basis for the second part, namely the in-depth analyses of five different second-person short stories. In my theoretical part, I will look at how second-person narration has been dealt with so far and bring together the various positions that have been compiled by different narratologists in order to come to a workable definition. This will include the discussion of issues related to the narrator, the narratee, the (implied) reader and the protagonist. Furthermore, I want to address the question of whether second-person narration is an unnatural narrative and how this influences the interpretation of second-person texts. In
order to provide a basis for my interpretations, I will also outline different types of second-person narratives.

The main reason why the structural outlines of second-person narration needs to be investigated is to illustrate the wide range of possible functions the narrative situation can have. A unique property of second-person narration is the question of whether the reader will also feel addressed by the ‘you’ and what this might lead to. One aspect of the second-person pronoun’s address function is the possibility of involving readers in ways in which it cannot be done in other narrative situations. As a result, several reader-centred functions of second-person narration can be an increased immersive as well as an increased empathy effect. However, immersion and empathy are not the only reader-response related functions second-person narration can have, as the narrative situation also has a certain metafictional potential due to the (often) implausible communicative situation. This tension between immersion and distance also gives way to the fact that second-person narratives allow for various possible readings, including a metafictional and a naturalizing approach. This already points to the potential complexity of second-person narratives. Next to reader-response related functions, second-person narration can also portray important issues on the story-level in unique ways. For instance, the narrative situation can be used to foreground fragmented mental states and relationships, thus providing a special way for literature to portray subjectivity. Second-person narratives also frequently foreground political aspects in regard to for instance issues of race, class and gender. This can happen for instance through reader address (and the question of who the ‘you’ can and cannot address) or through the way the oppressive quality of second-person narration can be used to foreground oppressive systems and power relationships on the story-level. The political function of second-person narrative is furthermore underscored through the narrative situation’s empathy function.

In my interpretative part, I will analyse five second-person short stories that illustrate everything I discussed on a theoretical level in a practical manner. The stories I analysed include Rumer Godden’s “You Need to Go Upstairs” (1944), Joyce Carol Oates’ “You” (1970), Lorrie Moore’s “How to Be an Other Woman” (1985), Junot Díaz’ “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009). I chose to analyse short stories for two reasons; firstly, in comparison to novels, the genre of short stories is often neglected in narratology. Secondly, I aim to show the richness and variety second-person narration can have and thus aim to provide a corpus that includes as many different types of second-person narratives as possible.
The short stories have therefore been chosen from a greater corpus in order to provide the best examples of the various forms and functions the second-person narrative situation can have. In the interpretations, the focus will firstly lie on the various forms in which second-person narration can occur. Moreover, it will be closely looked at what functions the narrative situation fulfils, and thus it will be shown how the narrative situation is especially well-suited to foreground themes such as fragmented subjects, diasporic experiences, interpersonal relationships, failed communication, oppression and the border between reality and fiction.

2. Second-Person Narration: Definition and Narratological Points of Interest

2.1. Categorization of Second-Person Narration in Previous Models

The categorization of second-person narration in previous narratological models has indeed been problematic and confusing. This chapter is dedicated to give an exemplary survey of how second-person narration has been dealt with in narratology so far. I will firstly focus on older narratological models that have somehow laid the groundwork for contemporary literary studies, discussing both Genette and Stanzel, which also Fludernik uses as the basis of her typology (cf. 2011: 106). Real interest in second-person narration in narratology only flourished around the 1980s after the publication of Butor’s novel *La modification* (1957), probably peaking in the 1990s with Fludernik’s issue of *Style* (1994, 28.3), an issue dedicated to second-person narration only. It is scholars from this decade and the resulting work that I will discuss later in order to show how more recent scholars deal with categorizing second-person narratives. Continuing from this, the aim is to discuss some specific aspects of second-person narration that are treated differently in various categorizations, in order to come to a definition at the end of chapter 2 that builds up on the amount of work already done and provides a workable possibility for the future.

As Genette and Stanzel both designed their typologies before second-person narration became a major concern for narratologists, it is hard to place the narrative situation within their propositions (cf. Fludernik 2011: 106), as both models “fail to integrate second-person texts in a convincing manner” (Fludernik 1994a: 291). However, as Fludernik has shown, it is still fruitful to look at their classifications in order to build up on their work to find a usable typology for second-person narratives. The two models will now be discussed respectively,
with a special focus on how second-person narration has been placed within them. In addition, it will also be addressed how the models have been modified in order to provide more useful groundwork for defining second-person narration.

Genette, who differentiates between hetero-/homodiegetic narrators who can be extra- or intradiegetic (cf. 1980: 243), calls second-person narrative a rare but simple case and subsumes it under heterodiegesis (cf. 1983: 92). This is an oversimplified statement in regard to the complex issue of the narrator and the narratee in second-person texts. Furthermore, it does not account for second-person narratives in which the narrator is part of the story-world and thus homodiegetic (e.g. as in ‘I-and-you’ narratives or self-address narratives). DelConte points out that the issue with Genette’s model when defining second-person narration is that the model is “defined along the axis of narrator”, whereas “second-person narration is defined along the axis of narratee” (2003: 204). For defining second-person narratives, Genette’s binary opposition between homo- and heterodiegetic narrators is therefore insufficient, as second-person narration can have a variety of different narrators that can be both homo- and heterodiegetic, something that will be discussed thoroughly in chapter 2.2.1. In order to build up on Genette’s work, Fludernik extends Genette’s concept of homo-/heterodiegetic narration to homocommunicative and heterocommunicative fiction (cf. 2011: 106). Therefore, Fludernik does not only distinguish between narrators, but between communicative levels. Homocommunicative narratives are narratives in which the narrator and/or the narratee are protagonists on the story-level, whereas in heterocommunicative narratives both are only present on the extradiegetic level. Thus, this extension of Genette’s categorization is a more useful way to differentiate between various kinds of second-person narratives, which will be important in chapter 2.4.

Stanzel’s typological circle combines person (first or third), perspective (internal or external) and mode (reflector or teller) (cf. 1978: 249) as the three main aspects to differentiate between narrative situations. As a result, he comes up with three main narrative situations: figural, first-person and authorial narration, which therefore seems to give no space for second-person narration (cf. 1978: 253). Stanzel does mention second-person narration in his revised article on the typological circle in a passer-by comment on “innovative novelists” (1978: 255), insisting on the importance of the category of person as also significant in order to understand such ‘innovative’ narratives such as second-person narratives. However, in the typological circle itself there is no space for second-person narratives, since Stanzel “moves from the first-person realm to the third-person and back to the first person” (Fludernik 2011: 106). As a
result, although Stanzel acknowledges the existence of second-person narratives, he does not seem to feel the need to include them in his typology. This does not only mark them as less frequent and therefore less important, but also leads to the fact that Stanzel’s model does not provide a narratological definition for second-person narration. Although Mildorf suggests that Stanzel’s typological circle has been modified by Richardson (cf. Mildorf 2012: 78), in fact Richardson only borrows the form of the circle to place second-person narration right alongside first- and third-person narration, showing the fluidity between the various categories (e.g. ‘we’-narratives in between first- and second-person narratives) as well as accounting for multi-personed narratives (situated as an extra ring around the circle) and impossible narration (situated in the middle of the circle) (cf. Richardson 1994: 324). However, except for the form Richardson’s circle can in no way be compared to Stanzel’s typology, as Richardson mainly uses the category of person to differentiate between narrative situations, although he also provides a fourth slot called ‘free indirect speech’, which would account for Stanzel’s reflector-mode. Richardson’s circle has been criticised by DelConte, as it suggests that “second-person is distinct and parallel to first and third-person” (2003: 208). This is according to DelConte insofar problematic because first-person and third-person narratives are defined along the axis of the narrator, whereas second-person narratives are defined along the axis of the narratee. As a result, according to DelConte second-person narratives can also be either first- or third person narrations (cf. DelConte 2003: 208). However, this question of narrator in second-person narratives will be discussed in depth in chapter 2.2.1. All in all, one can sum up that Richardson’s typological circle might borrow from Stanzel in terms of form and the usage of person to differentiate narrative situations; however, one cannot speak of a modification of the original typological circle that now includes second-person narration. Fludernik builds up on Stanzel’s work in a different way: Although she does not use the form of the circle, she does build up on Stanzel’s work content-wise by extending his concept of “narrating and experiencing self” (2011: 106) to the you-protagonist in second-person narration, thus creating the distinction between “an addressee-you and an experiencing-you” in a similar way to Stanzel’s narrating and experiencing self in first-person narrative. As a result, she also follows DelConte’s argument to define second-person narratives along the axis of the narratee. The concept of ‘addressee-you’ vs. ‘experiencing-you’ already foreshadows the question of identity between narratee and protagonist, which will be dealt with in depth in chapter 2.2.2. Fludernik also uses Stanzel’s terminology reflector and teller mode in order to differentiate between texts with a predominant ‘experiencing-you’ and a covert narrator (although Fludernik also argues for the
lack of a narrator in such texts, an issue that will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.2.1.) and texts with a predominant ‘addressee-you’ in which the narrator is more overt.

Also besides Genette and Stanzel, academic narratological interest in second-person narration has been rather liminal, as many narrative models fail to integrate the narrative situation in a convincing manner. Although second-person narratives had been existent before, its discussion in literary studies had been basically non-existing before the late 1980s. This has been lamented by Richardson, as therefore the subject was “left largely unexamined in the great works of narrative theory published during the eighties by Mieke Bal, Susan S.Lanser, Franz Stanzel, Gerald Prince, Gérard Genette, Shlomith Rimmon Kennan, and Wallace Martin” (Richardson 1991: 309), as “all these authors dismiss second person narrative in a few sentences, relegate it to a footnote or fail to note its existence” (1991: 310). Usually, these narrative theories, such as the ones proposed by Génette, Stanzel, Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan, Prince and others, “rely on narrative parameters that reflect typically realist assumptions about narrative” (Fludernik 1994b: 457). They touch on “prototypical ways of story telling” (Fludernik 1994b: 457), which is insofar not a point of criticism, as “a majority of texts do operate on realistic grounds” (Fludernik 1994b: 457). However, although these theories are able to deal with narratives that depart from the realist mode by categorizing them as infractions, the problem lies in the fact that as a result, less canonical types of narration such as second-person narration (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 457) might not receive enough attention to fully understand their form and potential. Also Richardson criticises that this strong inclination towards realist assumptions about narratives has left little or no theoretical room for ‘unnatural’ narratives such as second-person narration, and that “this situation has resulted in partial, incomplete narrative theory” (2016: 388). The goal of unnatural narratologists like Richardson is therefore “to expand the conceptual apparatus of narrative theory so it could encompass antimimetic practices, and thereby be more inclusive, more comprehensive, and more accurate” (2016: 388). Unnatural narratives have been existing throughout literary history, as “whenever there is a fixed convention, invariant practice, or venerated order, irreverent authors will come along and violate these norms” (Richardson 2016: 396). As a result, “narrative theory needs to be able to discount for distinctively […] fictional play, especially as such play is often not without its own patterns” (Richardson 2016: 396). However, the classification of second-person narration as an unnatural narrative situation has also been the reason why it has not been thoroughly discussed since it often

1 The question of whether second-person narration is an unnatural narrative will be addressed thoroughly in chapter 2.3.
leads to second-person narration merely being discussed in light of its unnaturalness or its unusual character (cf. Wiest 1999: 88). Of course, this is an important aspect of second-person narration and one can definitely argue that in comparison to other narrative situations, it is indeed an unusual one. However, by constantly linking second-person narration to the unusual and the unnatural, narratological theories have failed to discuss this narrative situation in depth, therefore neglecting other important aspects of second-person narration. To sum up, the reason why second-person narration has been usually brushed over or even overlooked in narrative theories does not necessarily point to the fact that second-person narratives are unusual and rare, and therefore do not merit further literary attention. Instead, the fact that they might be difficult to integrate in existing narrative theories might point of flaws in these theories in the first place.

That is not to say that second-person narration has been neglected by all scholars, as interest in second-person narration in the scholarly field flourished from the 1980s onwards, producing a variety of articles on this narrative situation. It probably peaked with Fludernik’s issue of Style (1994, 28.3), dedicated entirely to the subject matter, which included contributions from Richardson, Kacandes, Herman and others who have been working in the field. In the final pages of the issue, Fludernik even expresses hope that this will “trigger a lively debate that will unearth many more texts and lead to a deeper and more refined understanding” (1994b: 472) of second-person narration. 17 years later, Fludernik writes that since then, “research, particularly in English studies, continued to flourish and has resulted in several models and typologies” (2011: 105). However, Reitan claims the opposite: he laments that after the issue of Style “productive interest disappeared again” (2011: 148) and criticises that the discussion on second-person narration “had only just started when it lost its impetus” (2011: 148). Reitan’s main point of criticism is that authors simply continue to pursue their own propositions, but the different propositions have never been “brought to a real confrontation with one another” (2011: 148). It is true that most of the discussion of second-person narration stems from the 1990s, and that usually these various positions are not discussed and confronted in depth with each other. This paper thus aims to continue what Reitan had already started by comparing Kacandes, Fludernik and Richardson; namely to bring together what scholars have been saying about second-person narration and bring together the various positions in order to find a clearer perspective on the field.

After now having addressed at length the place of second-person narration in narratology, I would like to quickly outline what second-person narration actually is and whether it can be
seen as a narrative situation. Prince defines a narrative situation as “the mediating process through which the narrated is presented” (1988: 63). The concept of narrative situation is primarily associated with Stanzel, although “all theories of narrative situations are closely related to earlier ‘point of view’ models” (Jahn 2005: 364). Stanzel breaks down the mediating process, thus the narrative situation, into the categories person, perspective and mode (cf. 1986: 47). Narrative situations therefore compromise issues such as the grammatical form of narration, the format of the narrative communication, focalization, view of the narrated world and mode of narration. As a result, narrative situations deal with questions such as “where the narrator is located, how overtly or covertly the narrator makes its presence felt, and what relationship the narrator has to the characters, in one or more of whom perspective may be invested” (Keen 2003: 33).

Indeed, many scholars seem to be hesitant to call second-person narration a narrative situation: Instead, it has been called “a new […] technique […] involving narrative mode” (Morrissette 1965: 1), “a narrative strategy” (Richardson 1991: 309), “a discreet point of view” (Schofield 1997: 96) or a mode of narration (cf. DelConte 2003: 204). Other definitions simply equate second-person narration with second-person narratives (cf. Herman, Jahn, Ryan 2005: 522). Such a muddle of different terminology is not only confusing, but possibly also misleading. The lack of defining second-person narration as a narrative situation is unclear: Could it be that scholars are hesitant to put second-person narration on par with other more well-known and more common narrative situations such as first-person narration or figural narration? Is it difficult to do so because second-person narration cannot be defined along the axis of the narrator, which is one key aspect when defining narrative situations? Or do they in fact mean to classify it as a separate narrative situation, just using different (and misleading) terminology? Fludernik argues that second-person fiction “does not correlate with a specific ‘narrative situation’” (1994b: 445), probably because second-person narration can occur in various different combinations of narrators and narratees (something that Fludernik also illustrates in the same essay). Nevertheless, alongside Wolf (cf. 1993:409), Wiest (cf. 1993:76) and Keen (cf. 2003: 33) I would strongly argue for calling second-person narration a narrative situation, as this term serves as an umbrella term that synthesises various aspects about the narrative mediating process. Although, as has been repeatedly mentioned, it is impossible to define second-person narration along the axis of the narrator, this is not the only aspect which defines a narrative situation. It is possible to describe second-person narration along the axis of grammatical form of narration (second-person), focalization (the you-protagonist as the focalizer), view of the narrated world (inside view into the you-protagonist)
and to a certain degree also the format of the narrative communication (the you-protagonist as the narratee\(^2\)). Just as first-person narratives can differ in for instance into what degree they employ ‘show’ or ‘telling’ mode of narration, second-person narratives can differ in what way the narrative communication level is formatted (e.g. how overt or covert the narrator is). In addition, defining second-person narration as a narrative situation also enables one to separate second-person narration from other narrative situations. Since it would be impossible to subsume second-person narration under any other type of narrative situation proposed by Stanzel, this can also be seen as a reason why it merits to be called a narrative situation on its own.

As Fludernik points out, there is no single definition for second-person narrative yet (1994a: 284). However, what most definitions have in common is that not any narrative using the second-person pronoun ‘you’ should be subsumed under the category second-person narration (cf. Fludernik 1994a: 284), as this would lead to the risk to dilute “the very specificity and originality of the phenomenon” (Fludernik 1994a: 284). Also Richardson states that it is necessary to “distinguish second person narrative from other types of fiction that frequently employ the second person pronoun” (1991: 310). At the same time, however, too narrow definitions might also be problematic, as they might exclude works that lie at the brink of second-person narration. Such narratives can provide fruitful insights into the specificity of second-person narration by highlighting the very characteristics that are important for second-person narration to still be classified as such. Another issue pose narratives that employ second-person narration in parts, but might overall not be classified as second-person narratives as a whole. Overall, I am in favour of using a definition that is not entirely exclusive, but allows one to classify texts on a scalar level as more or less second-person narratives. There is common consensus that second-person narration is a type of narration in which the pronoun ‘you\(^3\)’ refers primarily to the story’s protagonist (e.g. cf. Prince 1988: 84; Margolin 1990: 430; Richardson 1991: 311; Wiest 1993: 75; Fludernik 1994a: 288). Nevertheless, definitions vary in regard to the “relationship among narrator, narratee, and story-world” (DelConte 2003: 207) and these categories will be broken down respectively in the next chapter.

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\(^2\) Whether the you-protagonist can always be equated with the narratee will be discussed in chapter 2.2.2.

\(^3\) As Fludernik points out, “although most second-person fiction is indeed written in the second-person pronoun form, the choice of pronoun is that of an address pronoun […] rather than, specifically, of you” (286), meaning that in other languages the address pronoun can differ (e.g. being third person or plural) depending on the language’s morphological system. As this paper only deals with short stories written in English, I will continue to refer to the pronoun ‘you’.
2.2. Problems

2.2.1. Location of the Narrator

Narrators in second-person narratives frequently tend to be elusive and difficult to grasp. This is why the basic question underlying narrator/narratee-level in the narrative communication model (cf. Chatman 1978: 151) of who narrates to whom (and why) is often difficult to answer for second-person narratives. Also Schofield has noted that second-person narratives usually evade being placed in this communication model (cf. 1997: 108). In second-person narratives, the narrator’s elusiveness can often lead to various possible interpretations concerning the narrator’s configuration, which overall already indicates the complexity of second-person texts (cf. Schofield 1997: 108). Narrators in second-person narratives are not only difficult to grasp, but they can exist in a variety of forms as well as on different levels, as the following chapter will illustrate. Unlike other narrative situations, this makes it therefore impossible to mainly define second-person narratives by the location and the formation of the narrator.

The question of who narrates in second-person narration has already been explored by Morrissette in his early essay on second-person narratives in 1965. Although Morrissette mostly analyses self-address second-person narratives (or narratives with passages of second-person self-address), he is, despite DelConte’s later claim that Morrissette “aligns the you of second-person narrative with the narrator” (2003: 208), aware that the narrator and the you-protagonist do not need to be the same (cf. 1965: 15). Both DelConte (cf. 2003: 208) and Richardson (cf. 1991: 322) warn against aligning you-protagonist and narrator, and also I would definitely sustain from simply characterizing the ‘you’ as the narrator. As DelConte points out, this would only account for texts in which the use of ‘you’ is a form of self-address (cf. 2003: 208), but not for any other type of second-person narration, for instance texts in which an I-narrator addresses the you-protagonist⁴ (e.g. Oates’ “You” (1970), a story about a complex mother-daughter relationship) or texts with external covert narrators (e.g. Godden’s “You Need To Go Upstairs” (1944), a story which renders the thoughts and impressions of the protagonist who is a blind girl).

⁴ The question of whether such ‘I-and-you’ texts can or should be classified as second-person narratives will be discussed in chapter 2.4 on types of second-person narration. Although in my opinion not every ‘I-and-you’ text should be classified as second-person narration, I am in favour of including some, as I will show in that chapter, which is why I will continue to refer to homodiegetic first-person narrators in second-person narratives in this chapter.
DelConte’s argument that second-person narration is inevitably also first- or third-person narration can also be linked to the issue of the narrator (cf. 2003: 208). DelConte argues that second-person narratives with the presence of an ‘I’ like Oates’ “You” are also examples of first-person narration, whereas the absence of an I such as in Godden’s “You Need to Go Upstairs” make them examples of third-person narration (cf. DelConte 2003: 210). Indeed, as also McHale remarks (cf. 1987: 223), there are certain features some second-person narratives share with first-person and others with third-person narratives. However, as Richardson points out, it is important to note that second-person narration cannot be reduced to one or the other, as second-person narratives often oscillate between the two without settling for one or the other (cf. 2006: 22) and also due to the fact that person in narratives is a crucial category to differentiate different kinds of narration (cf. Richardson 1994: 318). Resulting from this, one could conclude that narrators in second-person narration can occur as first-person narrators as well as third-person narrators, although I think it makes more sense to use Genette’s terminology of homo- and heterodiegetic (cf. 1980: 243) as well as Chatman’s terminology of overt and covert narrators (cf. Chatman 1978: 196) which allows one to differentiate between the narrator’s involvement in the story and the narrator’s overall presence on a scale. As there are some second-person stories in which the first-person narrator’s ‘I’ only occurs very marginally or is not developed at all and the first-person narrator only is implied, the mere differentiation between first- and third-person narrators would not be sufficient to explain these cases. Nevertheless, it still makes sense to note whether a second-person text employs the usage of an ‘I’ as a first-person narrator and in what way this narrator relates to the ‘you’, whereas the absence of such on ‘I’ also needs to be considered and discussed.

The narrator’s presence in second-person narration is underscored through the communicative situation. McHale states the second-person pronoun is “par excellence the sign of relation” (1987: 223), as it “announces the presence of a communicative circuit linking addressor and addressee” (1978: 223) “even more strongly than the first person” (1987: 223). For the same reasons Wiest argues that due to the use of the narrative ‘you’, inevitably a narrator figure is also manifested in the text (cf. Wiest 1993: 86). Wiest explains this by saying that when talking to a ‘you’, the existence of a speaking subject is mandatory even though this speaking self does not exist as a definite ‘I’ (cf. Wiest 1993: 86). Fludernik also states that “if there is an address, there must be an addressor, an I (implicit or explicit), and hence a narrator, and this narrator can be a mere enunciator or also a protagonist sharing the you’s fictional existence on the story-level” (1993: 219). It is important to stress that Fludernik argues for a narrator in the case of address, as it is not a given that address happens in every second-
person narrative, a point that I will touch upon in the following chapter. Although both Wiest’s and Fludernik’s statements might be confusing insofar as the word ‘I’ seems to presuppose a first-person narrator (and even homodiegetic narrators do not necessarily have to be visible through the pronoun), I agree that the act of address creates more awareness for the presence of a narrator in second-person narration. Even in second-person narratives with covert narrators, the presence of a voice is usually more distinguishable than for instance in third-person narratives with covert narrators due to the narrative situation’s form.

Another issue that sometimes is raised in respect to some second-person narratives is the question of whether they have a narrator at all, building on the so-called ‘no-narrator’ theory (cf. Banfield 2005: 396). Although Fludernik in her early essay argues for the manifestation of the narrator’s presence through the communicative situation if there is an address, in later works she questions the narrator’s presence (and related to this issue, also the act of the address, and thus the narratee) in some second-person narratives altogether: She states that “you texts moreover, can, but need not, have a narrator [her emphasis]” (2011: 107), which thus contradicts Margolin’s definition that in every second-person narrative there must be “a singular global narrator on the highest level of textual embedding” (1990: 430), a notion about narratives that is central to many narrative theories (e.g. cf. Prince 1988: 65). The notion that every literary narrative has a narrator is also underscored by Chatman who states that even though narrators can range from being “a fully characterized individual to ‘no one’” (1978: 151), even such ‘absent’ narrators are never fully absent, as “in some sense, every tale implies a listener or reader, just as it implies a teller” (1978: 151). The possibility of narratorless texts has been, according to Fludernik, “advocated, primarily or most vociferously, by Ann Banfield” (1994a: 292), who uses linguistic methodology to illustrate that there is neither syntactic nor semantic evidence (cf. 1982/2014: 214) for the narrator’s presence in certain passages of fiction, giving the examples of parenthesis and representations of consciousness. She argues that free indirect discourse with a third-person point of view “cannot contain a covert narrator because if a first-person is added, a third-person point of view becomes impossible” (Banfield: 2005: 396). Also continuing from Banfield, the concept of narratorless texts has been endorsed and continued by scholars rooted in unnatural narratology such as Richardson, Reitan or Fludernik who apply it to second-person narratives. For instance, Richardson’s definition of second-person narration (cf. 1991: 311) allows for second-person fiction without a narrator’s ‘I’, which Fludernik endorses (cf. Fludernik 1994a: 287). Also Reitan argues for the possibility of narrator-less second-person narratives (cf. 2011: 166) and postulates the idea of a voice that is not a narrational voice (cf. 2011: 171). Fludernik gives
Godden’s “You Need To Go Upstairs”, a story that can be seen as a prime example of a reflectoral second-person narrative analogous to Stanzel’s reflector mode (cf. Fludernik 1994a: 287), as an example of a text that has “neither a narrator nor a narratee” (1994a: 287). Fludernik argues that in this text, “there is no traceable narrator’s I or narrative ‘voice’ (no evaluations, predictions, etc.)” (1994a: 287) just as the ‘you’ is not the listener and thus also not the narratee in the story, a point that will be discussed in the next chapter. The issue of whether one wants to adopt this perspective is twofold: Firstly, it is a question of whether one adapts the notion that every narrative has at least one narrator (cf. Prince 1988: 65), and accepts that even if they are maximally covert or ‘absent’, they are still implied, or whether one is willing to discard the narrator’s presence in such cases. Secondly, this then inevitably leads to the question of how the concept of a narrator is viewed in the first place. An issue I take with Banfield’s theory is that her concept of the narrator is rather anthropomorphized in a sense that she does not view the narrator as an abstract literary concept, namely “the agency or ‘instance’ that transmits everything” (Booth/Phelan 2005: 388), possibly even a construction (cf. Chambers 1989: 37) in the head of the reader (cf. Schofield 1997: 107) but instead understands the term “to denote a first person, either covert or overt” (Banfield 2005: 396). Ryan also states that although the narrator can appear as “a human-like, pseudonatural” narrator” (2001: 152), this is only one amongst many possibilities, and the narrator remains “a theoretical fiction” (2001: 152). Ryan proposes three narratorial functions - the creative, the transmissive and the testimonial - in order to view narrator-hood on a scale (cf. 2001: 147). Her three functions and to what degree they are fulfilled shape “the presence, visibility and psychic density of the narrator” (2001: 147) and thus provide a solution that allows one not to discard the narrator completely, but view their presence on a scale. The type of texts under scrutiny by Banfield would according to Ryan still fulfil the testimonial function, as the text can be seen “as a recording of the fictional-world by a camera-like device that automatically translates life into language” (2001: 150). Ryan underscores the scalability of narrator-hood by emphasising that in fictional narratives her proposed narratorial functions are properties “inferred by the reader, and they remain to some extent a matter of personal interpretation” (2001: 150), as well as by stating that narrators “are potentially fluid and renegotiable” (2001: 150), meaning that one narrator does not have to have a stable category but can change within and throughout the narrative. Concerning second-person narration, although I understand where Richardson, Fludernik and Reitan are coming from, just like Ryan I prefer to view

5 In my thesis, I will use ‘they’ also to refer to the third-person singular for a smooth gender-neutral writing style.
narrator- hood on scale over discarding the narrator altogether, not only because it allows one to build up on previous narratological models, but also because especially in second-person narration narrators are extremely elusive, shifting and difficult to grasp. Chatman’s terminology of overt and covert are thus useful concepts to analyse second-person narratives, as they provide the possibility of comparing second-person narratives in which the narrator’s presence can range from being extremely overt to hardly graspable and thus extremely covert. Regarding Fludernik’s example text, although I highly agree with her analogies to Stanzel, I think for texts like “You Need to Go Upstairs” it makes more sense to speak of a covert narrator instead of discarding the narrator’s presence. Also DelConte argues for the presence of a narrator in “You Need to Go Upstairs” by stating that the narrator is external but maintains the focalization of the narratee-protagonist (2003: 214). In regard to Ryan’s narratorial functions, narrators in such reflectoral second-person narratives definitely still fulfil the testimonial function, although one could even argue that the creative and the assertive function are not entirely negated simply by the use of ‘you’ which due to its unusual character can be both seen as a stylistic choice (creative function) as well as an underscoring of the communicative situation (assertive function), even if then the communicative situation turns out to be empty.

To sum up, narrators in second-person narration can occur as heterodiegetic or homodiegetic narrators. They can be overt or covert as well as first-person or third-person narrators. The next important question to consider now is who these narrators, in whatever form they might occur, can address, and how the relationship between implied reader, narratee and protagonist manifests itself in second-person narration.

2.2.2. Relationship between Protagonist,Narratee and the Implied Reader
As already foreshadowed in the previous chapter, another important point to consider when dealing with second-person narration is the question of who the ‘you’ can address next to the protagonist (and whether this ‘you’-protagonist is addressed, or simply designated by the pronoun). David Herman has identified five different functions a narrative ‘you’ can have, differentiating between a ‘you’ referring to a specified protagonist and an impersonal generalized ‘you’ (cf. 2002: 340) as well as between fictionalized (‘vertical’) address on the story-level and actualized (‘horizontal’) address on to the level of reality (cf. 2002: 341). Herman’s fifth double deictic function which illustrates how ‘you’ in second-person narration can fulfil more than one of the previous mentioned categories (cf. 2002: 343) already shows
how the relationship between the protagonist, the narratee and the implied reader poses a complex subject to consider when discussing second-person narration.

I will start off with the question of where the narratee is located in second-person narration and whether the narratee can be equated with the ‘you’-protagonist. Again, the main problem concerning this question stems from the fact that second-person narration does not easily fit into a standard literary communication model in which narratees are the audience addressed by the narrator, usually by the second-person pronoun (cf. Phelan 1994: 357). When Goetsch describes his concept of the ‘fictitious reader’ (in original language “fiktiver Leser” Goetsch 1983: 201) who can be equated with the narratee, he only describes the narratee in terms of the communicative situation on the level of narrator and narratee (cf. 1983: 203). As a result, Goetsch only discusses the functions the narratee can have in relation to the communicative situation (cf. 1983: 203-206), which again underscores that the narratee is always seen as a reader or a listener of the narrator telling the story. Although the narratee can also be a character on the level of the diegesis, the narratee usually is not an intradiegetic character (cf. Prince 1988: 57). However, in second-person narration the ‘you’ goes far beyond this communicative situation and is primarily situated on the intradiegetic level on which the you-protagonist’s thoughts, feelings and actions are told. Margolin differentiates between a “communicative and narrative ‘you’” (1990: 427), with the former fulfilling the ‘you’s’ receiver function, meaning in literary communication the narratee function, and the latter referring to the possibility of the ‘you’ being “a participant in the narrated event” (Margolin 1990: 427), thus in second-person narration the protagonist. As a result, the ‘you’ in second-person narration is primarily not the listener, but the agent of the story, a point that also Margolin uses to define second-person narration as such (cf. 1990: 430).

Although many scholars still equate the you-protagonist with the narratee (e.g. cf. Prince 1988: 84; Wiest 1993: 82; Wiest 1999:73; Phelan 1994: 350; Keen 2003: 47; DelConte 2003: 204,) or use the terms interchangeably, sometimes referring to a ‘narratee-protagonist’, Richardson points out that those two instances do not necessarily have to be the same (cf. 2006: 19). An example he gives for his claim is that if there is no evident reason for telling the you-protagonist something that they must already know, one may conclude that in such cases the ‘you’ is not the narratee (cf. Richardson 2006: 22), but simply a grammatical form of ‘you’ uncoupled from its deictic functions, referring to the second-person protagonist through
deictic transfer (cf. Herman 2002: 340). The problem that arises with Richardson’s explanation lies in the fact that often the reason why one would tell the you-protagonist their own story is far from evident and can only be found with a deeper interpretation of the text, where it, if it exists, then validates to merge the you-protagonist with the narratee. Fludernik also states that the you-protagonist “may, but need not, also be an addressee on the discourse level” (2011: 107). More radical than Richardson, Herman and Fludernik are Reitan and Nielsen, who both strongly insist that in second-person narration, the protagonist is not addressed but designated by ‘you’, which thus would clearly separate the protagonist from the narratee. Nielsen explains this by saying that “nothing except the very use of the second person pronoun suggests that he [the protagonist] is being addressed” (2011: 66) since “he is not hearing voices, does not feel he is being spoken to, and he does not respond to the narrative” (2011: 66). The question at the core of Nielsen’s statement is whether the second-person pronoun ‘you’ is inevitably linked to address, even if no further ‘address markers’ can be found, or whether one can speak of a grammatical form uncoupled from its deictic functions, as Herman does (cf. 2002: 340). Another problem of Nielsen’s argument is the fact that one can be addressed (for instance in another person’s mind) without showing any signals of responding to it. Still, what Nielsen raises awareness for is that in second-person narration, address does not happen first and foremost, and thus to automatically assume narratee and protagonist are the same would oversimplify a more complex matter. This stands in line with what Reitan states, namely that in second-person narration, “‘you’ – a pronoun of address – is used to refer to and perhaps to address a protagonist who obviously does not know he is being referred to and does not hear, if he is being addressed” (2011: 147). I agree with Reiter’s point insofar that although address is possible, one should be cautious to simply assume every second-person narrative addresses the protagonist and thus equate the protagonist with the narratee. For interpreting stories one should at least at first treat those two entities as separate, as also Herman has done by differentiating between a ‘you’ that simply refers to a protagonist and a ‘you’ that addresses the protagonist on the story level (cf. 2002: 340), and only within deeper interpretation discern whether and in what way address happens and to which degree the protagonist also fulfils a narratee function. Similar to the issue of the narrator before, the question arises whether one would now speak of a covert narratee or discard the narratee’s presence altogether; again I am in favour of keeping the category of the narratee in order to measure address on a scale. Resulting from this, I would argue that in second-person narration

6 Although Herman then states that the protagonist in his example text A Pagan Place (1970) by O’Brien “is also […] her own intradiegetic narratee” (2002: 340).
the ‘you’ primarily denotes the protagonist and only secondarily the narratee, meaning that the narratee-function of the ‘you’ is mitigated, but usually not entirely erased. The question of address usually also poses an interesting subject for the interpretation of second-person narratives, as the reasons why one would tell somebody their own story often adds another layer of meaning to the narratives, which is why the narratee-aspect is also important to consider for the interpretation of second-person texts.

The relationship between the you-protagonist and the narratee already foreshadows the relationship between the you-protagonist and the (implied) reader, specifically the ability of the ‘you’ to address the latter. Goetsch points out that although two different entities, the exact transition from narratee to implied reader can be difficult to determine (cf. 1983: 201), as both entities are somewhat related by being recipients of the text, although on different levels. Margolin also underscores the possibility of a transition from the narratee to the (implied) reader (cf. 1990: 440). The address function of the second-person pronoun can thus not only designate the narratee, but also address the textexternal reader.

However, just as the second-person pronoun’s narratee function is overshadowed by its function of telling the protagonist’s story, also the address of the implied reader is not the primary function of the pronoun. As Fludernik points out, the address pronoun ‘you’ “serves primarily to invent a ‘you’ and its story, and it only secondarily deflects the reader’s interest onto the speaker’s position” (1994a: 289). While as a reader one might be tempted to identify at first, according to Fludernik this quality of presumed address usually vanishes as soon as the protagonist becomes too specific a fictional character and the situation of the implied reader does not overlap with the protagonist’s anymore (cf. Fludernik 1994a: 287). When the ‘you’ is fairly unspecified, readers may “occupy more of an addressee position” (Mildorf 2016: 151) whereas “as soon as more information […] is provided, readers may begin to feel more distanced as the details given may not coincide with their own life experiences” (Mildorf 2016: 151). As a result, the more the ‘you’ is characterized, “the more aware actual readers will be of their differences from that ‘you’, and thus, the more fully they will move into the observer role” (Phelan 1994: 351). Phelan calls this observer role the narrative audience and defines it as “the actual audience’s projection of itself into the observer role within the fiction” (1994: 363). In this observer role, readers occupy “the position from which we watch characters think, move talk, act” (Phelan 1994: 351), thus the same position one usually occupies while reading other types of narrations.
Nevertheless, the question remains whether as soon as the reader realizes that the second-person pronoun ‘you’ refers to the story’s protagonist, it then loses its function to address the reader entirely or whether the function, although mitigated, remains. Most scholars argue that the reader address function remains somewhat. Phelan says that most writers employing second-person narration “move readers between the positions of observer and addressee” (1994: 351) and that second-person narratives “almost always retain[…] the potential to pull the actual reader back into the addressee role” (1994: 351), especially if “the general trajectory of the ‘you’s’ experience is widely recognizable” (1994: 351). Richardson also states that “it is almost impossible to entirely ignore, bracket, or erase the deictic function of the word ‘you’ as it occurs in virtually every other discursive situation, where it refers invariably and exclusively to the addressee” (2006: 21). In addition, Herman’s concept of double deixis “as a cue for superimposing two or more deictic roles, one internal to the storyworld represented in or through the diegesis and the other(s) external to that storyworld” (2002: 343) allows second-person pronouns to designate the protagonist as well as vertically address the implied reader.

However, Mildorf counterbalances Richardson’s argument by stating that the pragmatic preconditions of literature differ from pragmatic preconditions of other situations in which ‘you’ is used. Therefore she argues that the vertical address function of the ‘you’ to the reader “is very difficult to postulate […] for the second-person pronoun in literary texts because the communicative situation is not one between interlocutors who are present in the same spatiotemporal context” (Mildorf 2016: 250). Giving the example of the self-help book, Mildorf explains that in literature “we definitely cannot feel addressed in the same way that real readers of self-help literature may feel addressed” (2016: 151). Manual-style how-to narrations such as Díaz’ “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996) thus can be seen “for what it is, namely an imitation” (Mildorf 2016: 151). She further on says that she disagrees “with Richardson’s assessment that a residue of the real-life function of you-address remains even in literary text” (2016: 151). However, Kacandes challenges Mildorf’s claim by stating that “the conventions of reading may diminish, but cannot entirely extinguish, the appellative power of the second-person pronoun” (1994: 332). Still, Mildorf is not the only one sceptical of the ability to address the reader in second-person narration. Also Margolin who analyses in what kinds of literature the ‘you’s’ address function is strongest, concludes that in second-person narration “the distance from the real reader is maximal” (1990: 440) as “speaker, addressee, and discourse referent are all nonactual” (1990: 440). He argues that as a result, readers can “not really” (1990: 440) feel addressed, although he then
follows up by stating that “several ingenious approximations have been constructed by modern authors” (1990: 440). This can be interpreted as that many writers play with the possibility of reader address, usually through playing with the general and the specific. Mildorf also ends her call for differentiating between literature and non-literature and thus not simply assigning an address function to the ‘you’ by stating that the feeling of address and the degree to which “readers succumb to the illusion of an address is probably reader-specific” (2016: 151). Although I agree with the previous scholars that in second-person narratives the reader-address function somewhat remains and that often such texts play with the general and the specific, pulling reader in and out of the addressee role, I still think Mildorf’s point (and also the Margolin’s earlier point) is not to be neglected, as it raises awareness of the fact that in second-person narration, the question of whether readers will feel addressed by the ‘you’ is more complex to answer than perceived at first glance, and also that different readers will respond differently, a point that also Phelan makes (cf. 1994: 361).

Concluding from this, I would argue that even though in literature the address function of ‘you’ to address the implied reader differs from other pragmatic situations, it has still not entirely vanished. Richardson states that in second person narration “a dialectic is established in which the reader alternates between identification and distancing” (2006: 28), and although I agree that usually readers discern more at the beginning of a story that it is not them who are addressed, I do not think that the function of the ‘you’ to address the implied reader entirely vanishes throughout the rest of the text, which is why I think it makes sense to consider Herman’s double deictic function. Especially in parts that feel familiar to the reader and thus are usually more general than specific readers might succumb to the power of address that the ‘you’ has over them. This is particularly visible in manual-style ‘how-to’ second-person short stories (which will be discussed in more depth in chapter 2.4) which usually oscillate between parts that can be viewed as general addresses the implied reader might identify with and passages in which the ‘you’ exclusively refers to the experiences of the protagonist.

2.2.3. Definability of the Protagonist

Another particular aspect of second-person narratives is that they often involve protagonists whose definability should be viewed on a scale. DelConte criticises that Fludernik’s, Prince’s and Richardson’s definitions “suggest a definable and singular narratee-protagonist” (2003: 207) and argues that this is not sufficient to account adequately for “hypothetic and conditional second-person narration” (2003: 207), in which we do not “encounter a protagonist (or a story) in the traditional sense because these narratives are directed toward
hypothetical actants in hypothetical (and sometimes shifting) scenarios (2003: 207)”. This type of second-person narration will be discussed more deeply in chapter 2.4.

However, not only in hypothetical second-person narration the protagonist’s degree of specificity should be viewed on a scale, as there are second-person narratives with very specific and second-person narratives with more vague protagonists. Richardson even states that some of the characteristic features of second-person narration is its “ambiguity over the identity and the status of the ‘you’” (1991: 312), as the pronoun per se is epistemologically more dubious than ‘I’ or ‘s/he’ (cf. Richardson 1991: 312). In second-person narratives with vague protagonists, the protagonist’s experiences can sometimes be interpreted as a group’s communal experience, thus also not only drawing on the ‘you’’s’ vagueness, but also on the possibility of ‘you’ to be a generalizing ‘you’. Texts that include such protagonists are Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009) or Díaz’ “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996), which will both be analysed in depth later. In both stories, the ‘you’ oscillates between designating a specific protagonist and a more communal ‘you’ that stands for the shared experiences of a certain group, in these cases of a certain ethnic group, which is underscored by the pronoun’s grammatical ability to address single persons as well as multiple people. As in both stories the experiences of a minority group are represented, the ability of ‘you’ to represent a certain group of people has an obvious political dimension that should not be ignored. The political function of second-person narratives will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.5.3.

2.3. Second-Person Narration as an Unnatural Type of Narrative?

Before I will touch upon the question of whether second-person narration is an unnatural narrative, I will briefly outline the distinction between natural and unnatural narratives in order to lay a basis for this chapter. ‘Natural’ narratives are narratives in which “our assumptions about time, space, and other human beings in the actual world” (Alber and Hansen 2014: 2) are represented. Such narratives are thus based on realistic and mimetic concepts, and in them “fictional characters, events, and settings are analysed in the same terms of perspective that are normally used for actual persons, events and settings” (Richardson 2016: 386). If now narratives “violate our real-world frames and scripts by representing storytelling scenarios, narrators, characters, temporalities, and settings that would

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7 I put natural in inverted commas because it is debatable how natural such narratives actually are.
be impossible in the real world” (Alber and Hansen 2014: 2), they can be classified as unnatural narratives. It is noteworthy that in literary fiction we can almost always observe a process of dialectical mediation between ‘natural’ components that reproduce the world as we know it and unnatural components that move beyond our real-world knowledge. (Alber, Nielsen and Richardson 2012: 352)

The main difference between natural and unnatural narratives thus is that the former “tries to eliminate or disguise its unnatural elements” (Alber, Nielsen and Richardson 2012: 352), while the other flouts them. However, a too firm distinction would be a dangerous reduction of the “dynamic exchange and continuity” (Alber, Nielsen and Richardson 2012: 352) between the two. Many narrative techniques that are in fact highly divergent from real-life parameters have become highly conventionalised (such as the third-person omniscient narrator) or are about to become so (such as first-person present tense use) (cf. Alber, Nielsen and Richardson 2012: 352). Even though there is therefore a strong link between the experimental and the unnatural, one also has to note that experimental texts do not necessarily have to be unnatural; rather, it makes sense to speak of the unnatural as a subcategory of the experimental (cf. Alber, Nielsen and Richardson 2012: 352).

The differentiation between the unnatural and the supernatural has not clearly been made by Alber who evokes the notion of the supernatural often being nothing but a conventionalized form of unnaturalness (cf. 2014: 274); however, Richardson argues strongly for a distinction between the two (cf. 2016: 398). Also called non-mimetic or non-natural narratives by Richardson, such non-natural stories such as fairy tales or ghost stories still “employ consistent story-worlds and obey established generic conventions or, in some cases, merely add a single supernatural component to an otherwise naturalistic world” (Richardson 2016: 386). Readers of texts that employ the supernatural might therefore simply accept the supernatural as part of the genre. One also has to be aware that the historical epistemological frame plays a significant role in what is seen as supernatural or not. For example, some elements that would be classified as supernatural today might be classified as ‘natural’ in another time period, for instance in the Middle Ages. Richardson argues that in contrast to such non-natural narratives, unnatural narratives “do not attempt to extend the boundaries of the mimetic, but rather play with the very conventions of mimesis” (2016: 286). Although I see the affiliation between the supernatural and the unnatural, I agree with Richardson to separate these two, as unnatural narratives usually have an illusion-breaking function that supernatural narratives do not.
In view of natural and unnatural narratives, second-person narration can usually be seen as an unnatural type of narrative, as unless there is a plausible reason for why one would tell somebody their own story, it “undermined[s] realist narrative parameters and frames” (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 455). For most part of this chapter, I will now continue from this viewpoint in order to discuss why second-person narratives can be perceived as unnatural and in what ways this unnaturalness can be naturalized or dealt with. As Fludernik states, the very infraction of the traditional narrative mode that keeps up “the establishment of an illusion of reality” (1994a: 292) helps “to explain the ‘meaning’ or ‘point’ of the text” (1994a: 292). This is why usually numerous functions can be attributed to second-person narration’s unnatural form. As it has already been discussed in the beginning of chapter 2, most narrative theories “rely on parameters that reflect typically realist assumptions about narrative” (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 457), which is why at the end of the chapter I will touch upon what this discussion might generally mean for the realist reading strategies and the narrative theories that postulated them.

As Fludernik points out, second-person narration is “one of the most ‘nonnatural’ or contrived types of narrative” (1994a: 290) because under normal circumstances real-world speakers would not narrate to the addressee the addressee’s experiences of past and present. In Alber’s and Hansen’s way of speaking, second-person narratives would thus violate our real-world frame by representing a storytelling scenario that would be impossible in the real world (cf. 2014: 2). Fludernik names a “courtroom telling or […] eliciting an amnesiac’s recollection of his past self” (1994a: 290) as two examples in which second-person narration would be a ‘realistic’ narrative situation, however, both constitute “a fairly marginal story-telling context among second-person narrative” (1994a: 290). In their Dictionary of Unnatural Narratology, a website compiled and edited by Alber, Nielsen, Richardson and Iversen (https://projects.au.dk/en/narrativeresearchlab/unnaturalnarratology/dictionaryofunnaturalnarratology/), second-person narration is described as an unnatural storytelling scenario if the second-person pronoun is not used in address situations such as apostrophes, speaking to oneself or addressing the audience. However, this criterion to differentiate between natural and unnatural second-person narration can be highly problematic as such types of second-person narratives may overlap with other types that are considered unnatural. For instance, concerning self-address narratives, many second-person narratives can only be interpreted as such with a deeper reading. Thus, such narratives can appear to be on the surface what

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8 The illusion-breaking function of second-person narratives which is inextricably linked to their status as an unnatural narrative will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.5.2. on reader-response-related functions.
Richardson calls standard or hypothetical second-person narratives, which on the website are mentioned as instances of unnatural narratives. Nevertheless, what this still highlights is that second-person narratives are not all unnatural in the same way and some instances can be viewed as more natural than others. This is a point that also Fludernik makes, as she differentiates between three types “viewed from the perspective of their relation to a realist reading of the text” (cf. 1994a: 290). Fludernik’s types are firstly “‘I’ and ‘you’ narratives […] in which the narrator shares a fictional past with the narratee and can therefore be ‘in the know’ about it” (1994: 290), secondly “the entirely non-realistic case of a pure rendering of a second-person’s consciousness” and thirdly “the playful metafictional case of a deliberate manipulation of the irreality and ambiguity factors of the second-person pronoun” (1994a: 290). In addition, she states that “many texts will shift among these modes” (1994a: 290), which hence highlights that many second-person narratives deliberately play with the distinction between unnatural and natural, which is why it can be difficult to fully classify one as the one or the other.

Richardson’s notion of the unnatural “is based on a significant distinction between fiction and non-fiction” (2016: 395), as he views unnatural narratives as narratives “that defy the presuppositions of nonfictional narratives, the practices of realism or other poetics that model themselves on nonfictional narratives” (2016: 389). He therefore calls second-person narration “an artificial mode that does not normally occur in natural narrative” (2006: 19). According to Richardson, unlike first- and third-person narration that have their “obvious nonfictional counterparts in autobiography and biography, […] second-person narrative is an exclusively and distinctively literary phenomenon” (2006: 35). However, it also has its nonfictional analogues in “pseudo-narrative forms of the cookbook, the travel guide, and the self-help manual” (Richardson: 2006: 35). Overall, this means that second-person narration usually cannot depend on the naturalization of a “narrational schema […] relying on the core experience of a narrator addressing an audience and telling a story, her own or somebody else’s” (Fludernik 1993: 221), as there seems to be no equivalent of the form in oral or non-fictional storytelling.

However, despite the overall consensus that second-person narration is usually limited to literature, already Margolin points out that in conversations the second-person pronoun ‘you’ does not only fulfil the receiver role, but can also be the topic of current speech events, meaning that “the second-person can also be the one spoken of, thereby turning him or her into a participant in the narrated event as well” (1990: 427). According to Margolin, “the
properties of ‘you’ as topic of the discourse are unrestricted and encompass all possible additional attributes and activities” (1990: 427). Mildorf, who looks at you-narration in conversational and literary storytelling, states that you-narratives in conversational storytelling usually exist as “stories of shared experience” (2012: 80) or stories in which the speaker “is relating events about which he has possible or conceivable knowledge” (2012: 89). In such cases, the speaker temporally has “the power to speak as the other person as well as in propria persona” (2012: 80). Although conversational storytelling therefore shares similarities with literary you-narratives, as both tell someone else’s story in the second-person, Mildorf also pinpoints a couple of crucial differences: In contrast to literary storytelling, conversational you-narratives are usually present in smaller fragments, they are always homocommunicative and always linked to first-person perspective. In addition, in conversational you-narratives the narrator and the narratee need to share past events or the narrator needs to have first-hand knowledge of the events. Also the address function in conversational you-narratives is always given (cf. Mildorf 2012: 91). Nevertheless, even though literary you-narratives can have features which are not possible in natural conversational storytelling, this still shows that this narrative situation might not be as unnatural as it is perceived at first glance.

One possibly way of dealing with unnatural narratives like second-person narratives is the attempt at naturalizing them. However, not all unnatural narratologists argue for this approach. For instance, Alber states that he refrains from simply naturalizing unnatural narratives (cf. 2014: 265). Even though he also includes the possibility of naturalization as one of his possible reading strategies for unnatural narratives (cf. 2014: 247), which will also be discussed in this chapter, he states that unlike the other strategies, this one is not an explanatory tool or sense-making mechanism, as it simply unveils the unnatural narrative as natural after all. Also Richardson states that he is content to view unnatural narratives on their own term without trying to naturalize them (cf. 2016: 400), although he is conscious of the fact that other unnatural narratologists have a different perspective on the subject. The reason why Richardson tends “to avoid debates over ‘naturalization’ is that they are not that helpful for [him] in articulating and clarifying [his] own position” (2016: 393). The attempt at naturalization has also been warned against by Fludernik, who in general is in favour of a naturalizing approach, as she lists various possible ways in which second-person narratives can be naturalized (cf. 1993: 230), which will be discussed later on. In regard to Contre-jour, a multi-perspectival novel by Gabriel Josipovici about family relations that features certain chapters in second-person narration, Fludernik criticises “the reader’s need to create sense at
all costs even at the expense of irresponsibly reducing the complexity of the text” (1994b: 465). This might also be a reason why Richardson sustains from naturalizing unnatural narratives and instead is “content to appreciate unnatural elements on their own terms, simply as violations of mimetic conventions” (2016: 401). Also Nielsen “argues that unnatural narratives are of a different kind than other literary narratives and hence call for a different interpretive approach” (Alber and Hansen 2014: 5). However, for Fludernik this does not mean that she is against naturalizations per se. Instead, I would interpret it rather as a warning against one definite naturalization which erases all other possibilities of interpretation and thus reduces the multifaceted-ness of second-person narratives. This is also the approach I will take when interpreting second-person narratives.

So even though many scholars in the field of unnatural narratology such as Richardson, Nielsen and to a certain extent also Alber refrain from simply naturalizing unnatural narratives, I believe that the attempt at naturalizing second-person narratives usually highlights important aspects of the story and can thus be very useful for the overall interpretation. I think why the above-mentioned scholars refrain from naturalizing unnatural narratives is because they are afraid of reducing the complexity of such texts. However, if one applies this to second-person narration, I would argue that the attempt at naturalization simply adds one layer of interpretation to the text instead of unveiling the whole text as natural and not meriting it any further discussion under the scope of its ‘unnaturalness’. In the second part of this thesis I aim to give rich interpretations of second-person short stories that illustrate what I have been discussing theoretically so far, and the attempt at naturalizing is one important aspect of my interpretations. Fludernik even states that “quasi-realistic interpretations can survive the most resolutely non-realistic fiction” (1994b: 465). She also insists that second-person narratives do not offer solely an exclusively metafictional reading; instead, “in each and every case the break with a realist frame relates to serious issues portrayed in the story” (1994b: 456). This underscores that second-person narration usually has at least one specific function, and often this function can be found with the attempt to naturalize the narrative situation. Wiest also emphasises that in second-person narration, the reason why the story is told to the protagonist must be somehow given on the story-level, as otherwise this form of narration would be completely absurd (cf. Wiest 1993: 81). As readers, we usually search for this special reason and thus often for a naturalization of the narrative situation in order to make sense of the text and the unusual narrative situation used, and can usually come up with possible naturalizations that highlight important meanings of the text.
The possibilities for naturalizing second-person narratives are numerous. Usually, the question at stake on the story-level is why the protagonist is unable or unwilling to narrate their story themselves. As Fludernik states, this can for instance be explained by the protagonist suffering from amnesia or other losses of memory, by the narratee being dead or absent as well as by the narrator’s “rhetorical urge to relive events […]” (1993: 221). Also, the unwillingness of the protagonist to tell their own story (or tell their own story in first person) can point to psychological instabilities and fragmented mental states as possible naturalizations. As the portrayal of (fragmented) mental states can also be seen as a possible function of second-person narration, it will be addressed in chapter 2.5.1. in more detail.

Furthermore, as it has been suggested by Fludernik, other possible ways to deal with second-person narration can stem from other models of fiction and non-fiction using the second-person pronoun that might be more familiar to the reader (cf. 1993: 239) These “routes of naturalization” (Fludernik 1993: 239) are not naturalizations per se, but more “familiar fictional and nonfictional models” (Fludernik 1993: 239) that “facilitate one’s access to their experiment” (Fludernik 1993: 239), that also frequently “parody, extend and subvert these models” (Fludernik 1993: 239). The fictional modes Fludernik mentions are conversational storytelling in which the reader is addressed, skaz narratives, letter writing and dramatic monologue (cf. 1993: 231-234) as well as two forms in which the ‘you’s’ addressee function is not foregrounded, namely a generalized ‘you’ and a self-address ‘you’ (cf. 1993: 235). The generalized ‘you’ in combination with an instructional register like it is used in hypothetical second-person narratives can have the effect of stories “at least superficially pretend[ing] to a general validity or applicability for […] readers” (Fludernik 1994b: 462), which therefore does not naturalize texts as ‘stories’, “but as self-help literature” (Fludernik 1994b: 462). This also ties in with Fludernik’s mentioning of instruction and guide book (as well as the courthouse) ‘you’ as non-literary forms using second-person (cf. 1993: 235-6). Second-person narratives playing with analogies to self-help literature and the generalized ‘you’ do not only superficially pretend to be generally applicable to the reader, but also often highlight further aspects thematised on the story-level. For instance, Moore’s Self-Help, a short story collection including various second-person stories often dealing with feminist and romantic issues, can also be read as an ironic comment on certain rules, guidelines and expectations society imposes on women (but also men) in heterosexual relationships As all the above mentioned models might be more familiar to the reader and thus provide a point of reference, “authors can allude to a combination of such familiar fictional and nonfictional models in an attempt to
facilitate one’s access to their experiment” (Fludernik 1993: 239) and do thus provide “possible routes of naturalization on the part of the reader” (Fludernik 1993: 239).

Next to naturalizing second-person narratives, Alber proposes a couple of reading strategies to make sense of unnatural narration that can also be used for second-person narratives. Alber’s reading strategies are based on the so-called cognitive approach which examines how readers can respond to the representation of impossibilities on the basis of pre-existing frames and scripts (cf. Alber and Hansen 2014: 5). Alber “attempts to comprehend and explain unnatural features, typically by placing them within an existing explanatory framework such as cognitive psychology, allegory, and the like” (Richardson 2016: 400). Despite being content to view unnatural narratives simply in view of their unnatural character, even Richardson acknowledges that unnatural narratives “may well have psychological, ideological, aesthetic or thematic functions” (Richardson 2016: 400). Through speculating on the functions of the unnatural and “the cognitive mechanisms that readers may resort to when they are confronted with the unnatural” (Alber 2014: 265), Alber comes up with a variety of reading strategies in order to attribute functions to the unnatural (cf. 2014: 273-4). For instance, second-person narratives can “foreground the thematic” (Alber 2014: 274), which means that this narrative situation can be used to exemplify “particular themes that the narrative addresses” (Alber 2014: 274). For example, in second-person narratives with feminist concerns, the oppressive quality of second-person narration can be used to mimic the oppressive men and patriarchy portrayed on the story-level, an aspect that will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 2.5.3, which deals with the political function of second-person narratives. Another reading strategy proposed by Alber that is definitely applicable to second-person narratives is satirization and parody (cf. 2014: 275). This function therefore also has metafictional potential, as through indirectly referring to other texts parodies can be seen as a form of indirect metareference. As it has already been illustrated, Fludernik’s list of various models that readers of second-person narratives can draw on gives way to possible parodies of such models, especially common with hypothetical narratives that parody self-help literature such as in Moore’s collection *Self-Help*. Alber’s reading strategies are not meant to be used exclusively, but rather to provide various options that readers of unnatural narratives can use to make sense of the text, also applying several to the same text (cf. 2014: 275). Therefore I conclude that in order to make sense of second-person narratives it is fruitful to look both at naturalizing and metafictional aspects as well as other possible routes to make sense of the text to get a multi-faceted interpretation that is able to make sense of the complexity of the texts.
The preceding section examined second-person narration from the point of view of a narratological model that endorses realistic reading strategies, which now inversely leads to the question of what the discussion of second-person narratives as an unnatural narrative says about natural narratology in the first place. Second-person narration per se radically questions the realist reading strategy and thus also the narrative theories that postulated this realist reading strategy in the first place (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 456). The question at stake is whether natural narratology is adequate to interpret unnatural texts. Ryan’s principle of minimal departure convincingly posits the ‘realist’ point of view as the default option when reading literature, as she argues that “we reconstrue the world of a fiction […] as being closest possible to the reality we know” which means that we will project “everything we know about the real world, and that we will make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid” (1980: 406). Still, I will briefly outline why certain scholars still retain a certain scepticism towards natural narratology based on such beliefs, and what this might mean for second-person narration. As already alluded to, Fludernik also does not want to discard realist reading models altogether; instead, she argues for a reading model that allows the realistic standard as well as non- and anti-mimetic discourses with equal weight instead of simply viewing them as infractions (cf. 1994b: 465), as this might lead to second-person narratives being solely reduced to their unusual status and their metafictional affiliations. As also ‘natural’ narratives frequently employ unnatural, although conventionalized, elements, it would thus seem odd to simply brand second-person narratives as unnatural narratives with denying them any further discussion. Another point against reducing unnatural narratives to their unusual status is the fact that they are not exclusive to postmodernism but rather have been existent throughout literary history, as Richardson illustrates (cf. 2016: 396). Of course, the realist standard might be more common than its counterparts and therefore one can argue that it makes sense to view it as a backdrop against which more unusual types of narratives should be measured; however, if then as a result unusual narratives are merely subsumed as postmodern in the sense of playful or transgressive, I agree with Fludernik that this can be problematic. There is usually a reason for the use of the second-person that might be overlooked if one interprets it as solely being transgressive. Also Richardson criticises that in most models of narrative theory “the model or default type of narrative was and still is a more or less mimetic one” (2016: 368) and argues for an unnatural narratology that is complementary to the existing narratologies (cf. 2016: 394). Although I am in favour just like Fludernik and Alber to use existing approaches to make sense of unnatural narratives like second-person narration, I still wanted to include the points against natural narratologies in order to warn against solely viewing second-person
narratives as unnatural. Although second-person narratives can and definitely should be viewed as unnatural against a ‘realistic’ background (and this can only be measured by the presupposition of such a background in the first place), it makes sense to not solely view them as such and achieve a more neutral stance that allows for various interpretations. Therefore, I am aiming at rich interpretations that do not exclude, but rather combine a metafictional as well as a naturalizing approach (or any other cognitive approach as proposed by Alber) without giving a definite weight to either instance in order to leave room for other possible readings to fully grasp the complexity of second-person texts.

To sum up, usually second-person narratives can be seen as unnatural since they often propose a storytelling scenario that would be seen as impossible in the real world. Unless there is a plausible reason for why one would narrate someone their own story, such a storytelling scenario violates our real-world frames and scripts. This is also the reason why second-person narration has no counterpart in nonfictional narratives and can be seen as an artificial mode that has no real counterpart outside of literature. However, as shown, second-person narration can actually also exist in conversational storytelling. This would then point into the direction that second-person narration must not be solely viewed as unnatural. Indeed, not all second-person narratives are unnatural to the same degree, and therefore the unnatural quality of second-person narration should be viewed on a scale. The attempt to naturalize second-person narration does not only give information to what degree the narrative situation can be seen as unnatural, but can also highlight important topics and themes of the stories. This is why the attempt at naturalization is an important aspect when analysing second-person narratives. In addition, next to a metafictional and a naturalizing reading, also other functions can be attributed to the narrative situation. Thus, in addition to searching for such functions, I would argue for both a metafictional and a naturalizing reading of second-person narratives in order to grasp the full potential and complexity of the text.

2.4. Types of Second-Person Narration

Second-person narration exists in various forms, which is why it makes sense to differentiate between different types of second-person narration in order to provide a clearer navigation of the field. However, an important issue to consider is the question according to which criteria one chooses these different types. Fludernik and Richardson, who have both come up with various types of second-person narration, approach this question from a different angle: Whereas Fludernik differentiates second-person narratives along different constellations of
narrators and narratees, Richardson takes a more generic approach that divides second-person narration in three main different subtypes. In the following, three proposals of second-person narration types by Fludernik and Richardson will be explained and discussed, starting with Fludernik’s narrative model that aims to encompass all types of narratives (in which she then subcategorizes various types of second-person narration), a more recent approach by Fludernik that differentiates between types of second-person narration only and finally Richardson’s differentiation between standard, hypothetical and autotelic second-person narration.

As already said, Fludernik’s first model that I will discuss is an attempt to build a narratological model in which second-person narratives are integrated in all their possible forms next to forms of first-person and third-person narration. Before I will get to these various second-person narration types, I will briefly outline the overall model. Generally speaking, Fludernik’s model is an attempt to “revise and mediate between the Genettean and Stanzelian models” (Fludernik 1994b: 445). Fludernik tries to categorize narratives along the concepts of Stanzel’s teller vs. reflector mode and Genette’s concepts of homo- and heterodiegesis, placing the use of person within those categories. All the separate categories are to be viewed on a scale in order to allow “for easy moves from first to third, first to second, second to third, or third to first- or second-person narrative” (Fludernik 1994b: 448).

In her model, Fludernik first differentiates between narratives with communicative level and narratives without (in which she includes reflector and neutral narratives) which she sees as an analogy to Stanzel’s differentiation between teller and reflector mode texts (cf. 1994b: 446). The term ‘communicative’ refers to “the communicative circuit between a narrator […] and the immediate addressee or narratee” (Fludernik 1994b: 446). Within the area of communicative narratives, Fludernik expands Genette’s terminology to make further distinctions, primarily between homo- and heterocommunicative narratives. Homocommunicative narratives are narratives in which “either the narrator or the narratee or both are also characters in the fiction” (Fludernik 1994b: 446), whereas in heterocommunicative narratives the narrator and the narratee are both extradiegetic. This terminology already points to a certain problem with Fludernik’s model, as it illustrates that the model suggests that reflector mode narratives have no communicative circuit. Thus, the whole model is built on the assumption of the possibility of narrator/narratee-less texts. This again leads back to the previous discussed question whether it makes sense to discard the narrator/narratee in such cases or whether one wants to insist that there is a communicative level on the basis of every narrative, even if the narrator and the narratee only occur as
exceedingly covert instances in the narration. Since this has already been discussed in detail in chapter 2.2.1., I will now continue with the discussion of Fludernik’s model, and only at the end of the discussion adapt her model and her proposed categories for a narratological perspective that presupposes a communicative circuit.

In Fludernik’s early model, second-person narration can occur as homocommunicative narratives, either as ‘I and you’ narratives in which we have an intradiegetic narrator and narratee or as narratives in which the narratee is intradiegetic, but the narrator is not, termed ‘homoconative narrative’ by Fludernik (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 446). When second-person narratives are homocommunicative, the narratee and the protagonist can thus be conflated. Although Fludernik poses two slots for ‘I-and-you’ narratives within the homocommunicative realm, differentiating between “peripheral homo-diegetic narrative with you protagonist” (1994b: 447) and a narrative in which “both narrator and addressee share realms of existence with the story world” (1994b: 447), Reitan argues that these two categories can easily be reduced to one, calling both “1st person narratives with scattered […] apostrophes to the protagonists” (2011: 155). Reitan also reduces the two slots for homoconative you-narratives (in which Fludernik differentiates between texts with a character-addressee and an explicit or implicit narrator that has solely an address function and texts that possibly employ an authorial-figural continuum (cf. Fludernik 1994: 447) to one, stating that essential aspect of those narratives is “to ‘make’ the initially addressed reader be the addressed protagonist” (2011: 156) meaning that in Reitan’s interpretation of Fludernik, in such texts a reader-figure is the protagonist addressed by the ‘you’, which also is the main criterion for Richardson’s autotelic function, which will be discussed a bit later.

In Fludernik’s model, second-person narration can also occur as heterocommunicative narratives in which both narrator and narratee are extradiegetic, and the ‘you’ is only used to designate the protagonist, but is not the narratee (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 447). Although the complex issue of the distinction between protagonist and narratee is therefore theoretically clearly distinguished in Fludernik’s model, the reality of the literary text however often eschews such a clear distinction, which thus makes it difficult to differentiate between the suggested heterocommunicative second-person texts and homoconative second-person texts, which in my opinion are not solely texts that address a reader-figure, as Reitan implies (cf. 2011: 155), since also other protagonists might somewhat be addressed by the narrator-voice.

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9 The question of whether one should include ‘I-and-you’ narratives under the scope of second-person narration will be discussed more thoroughly a bit later.
Again, the issue with both Fludernik and Reitan here lies with the question of narratee-hood and whether it should be discarded or viewed as covert, which hence makes it difficult to make a perspective that argues against discarding the narratee completely compatible with a model that lies on the very basis of that narratees can be discarded. As already stated, I will provide a solution for that after discussing Fludernik’s model.

Also in Fludernik’s realm of narratives with ‘no communicative level’ second-person narratives can be found: namely as second-person reflector narratives, in which the second-person pronoun “operates in an unmarked (adeictic) fashion” (Fludernik 1994b: 446), meaning that in such narratives the “pronominal distinctions come to be of minor importance and lose their deictic significance” (Fludernik 1993: 227), as “references to the protagonist cover up for the subjectivity of the underlying deictic centre” (Fludernik 1993: 227). Reflector-mode narratives usually immediately establish this deictic centre at the very beginning, and all deictic expressions that follow relate to this centre, usually leading to an “immediate descent in the protagonist’s psyche” (Fludernik 1994b: 452). Thus, Fludernik does not postulate a separate slot for second-person reflector narrative, but puts it on par with reflector narratives that employ other pronouns, which leads to the question whether the use of a different pronoun really is as insignificant for such narratives, as Fludernik argues. Another issue besides the terminology ‘non-communicative’ is that Fludernik visually postulates such reflector narratives below the more scalar diagram of teller narratives which visually suggests that those can be viewed as separate entities. However, narratives can also fluctuate between teller and reflector mode, leaning more towards one or the other. Therefore, second-person reflector mode narratives might also share properties with Fludernik’s second person heterocommunicative narratives, depending on how overt the narrating instance is.

Fludernik revisits the attempt to outline types of second-person narration in a later essay from 2011 which leads to a remodelling of her proposed types. In this essay, she does not provide a general model for placing all types of narratives, but rather outlines “the large range of possible combinations of addressee (or speaker) reference on the narrational level with the protagonists on the level of the story” (2011: 101), thus suggesting “a number of set-ups for second-person narrative” (2011: 107). However, the issue remains that Fludernik builds on the idea of narratives without a communicative extradiegetic level, which, as already stated before, makes it difficult to combine her proposed types with a narratological perspective that builds up on the notion that such a level is always present. Nevertheless, before I provide a solution for this issue, I briefly want to outline Fludernik’s types of second-person narratives
in this newer essay and in what way they build up and differ from the previous mentioned model.

In general, Fludernik’s types are built on the assumption that the only necessary category for a second-person narrative is that there needs to be a you-protagonist on the story-level. Whether this you-protagonist also is an addressee on the discourse level and whether there is a narrator (and whether this narrator is heterodiegetic or homodiegetic) is optional (cf. 2011: 107). With these various categories that can be fulfilled or not Fludernik comes up with various combinations that lead to six different types. The only type that remains exactly the same in her early and late model is the category of reflectoral you-narratives, according to Fludernik narratives without a narrator or narratee and no ‘I’ on the story-level (cf. 2011: 108).

The category of homodiegetic you-narratives (narratives in which the ‘you’ is being addressed on the extradiegetic level with a possible narrator) can be seen as somewhat similar to Fludernik’s second-person homoconative narratives; however, the main difference is that it seems as if this category is more open, as it seems to be suggested that now Fludernik is more generous in respect to whether one can argue that the protagonist is addressed on the extradiegetic level and thus can be equated with the narratee (cf. 2011: 110). Therefore, Fludernik’s earlier category of heterodiegetic second-person narratives is now somewhat split up into reflectoral and homodiegetic narratives, depending on whether the protagonist also fulfils a narratee function.

Another new type proposed by Fludernik is the self-address second-person narrative, in which ‘you’ is the narratee and ultimately also exposed as the speaker. In order to differentiate such narratives from interior monologue, Fludernik insists that “there must be narrative clauses referring to the story world and depicting the protagonist as part of that world” (2011: 112), however, this distinction may “become difficult to make in practice” (2011: 112).

Within ‘I-and-you’ narratives, Fludernik now differentiates between three different kinds: non-communicative ‘I-and-you’ narrative (first- and second-person protagonist on story-level, but no narrator/narratee), first-person narrative with you-protagonist (first-person narrating and experiencing self which addresses a ‘you’ on the story-level but no extradiegetic narrate) and communicational ‘I-and-you’ narratives (homodiegetic narrator and homoconative narrate) (cf. 2011: 109-113). However, the question arises whether it makes sense to differentiate between these three types: according to Fludernik, non-communicative ‘I-and-you’ narratives are very rare, and she fails to make a clear distinction between the two latter
types as she states for both that frequently in these cases the you-protagonist is absent and dead and also gives Alice Munro’s “Tell Me Yes Or No” (1974) as an example for both (cf. 2011: 110-113). Thus, the only criteria left to differentiate would be the question of whether the ‘you’ also has a narratee function, which in my opinion is one that often eschews a definite answer. In addition, I think Fludernik’s lack of clarity also stems from the fact that this narratee function is difficult to postulate. Thus, I think it makes sense to view ‘I-and-you’ narratives as one category, and only in that category look at to what degree narrator- and narratee-functions are fulfilled.

Overall, there are positive and negative aspects about Fludernik’s early model and her proposed types. Since Fludernik addresses many important aspects and shows the broad spectrum of different second-person narratives, she somewhat provides a ground work for the field. In addition, Fludernik’s model enables one to place second-person narration amongst other types of narration and provides a scalable way to differentiate between those types. However, I also agree with Reitan that Fludernik’s early approach “opens a vast and complex area of ‘fuzzy’, sliding and overlapping phenomena” (2011: 159). Although the vastness of Fludernik’s differentiation might not be very applicable to work with for a general overview, it might still be used within the interpretations of second-person narratives to differentiate between further subtypes and to interpret the complex issue of narrator and narratee in second-person narration.

Still, as it has already been repeatedly mentioned, despite the scalability an issue with the model is that it is based on the notion of narratives without a narrative circuit, and thus can only fully be used by narratologists who share this perspective. Since I am not in favour of discarding the communicative circuit of narrator and narratee, I have somewhat remodelled Fludernik’s proposed types so they fit into my theoretical groundwork. I would thus propose to differentiate between four main types of second-person narratives: reflectoral second-person narratives in which narratee and narrator are maximally covert, homoconative\(^{10}\) second-person narratives with an extradiegetic narrator and a homodiegetic narratee (for which the narratee function is to be viewed on a scalar level), self-address narratives in which the homodiegetic narrator, the narratee and the protagonist are all the same and I-and-you narratives in which there is a homodiegetic narrator and a homodiegetic narratee that are not the same entity. In all of the proposed types, the narratee- and the narrator-function are to be

\(^{10}\) I prefer using the term homoconative for what Fludernik has termed homodiegetic second-person narratives (cf. 2011: 110) as in such narratives, the narrator is situated outside the diegesis and thus heterodiegetic, and therefore the term homodiegetic might be misleading.
viewed on a scale, which means that certain second-person narratives will fall in between two slots (e.g. between reflectoral and homoconative second-person narratives, depending on how covert the narrator is), but also that for some types of narratives within one category the overtness of the narrator or narratee will differ (e.g. very open self-address narratives vs. covert self-address narratives).

In contrast to Fludernik’s linguistic interpretation, Richardson’s differentiation between standard, hypothetical and autotelic second-person narration is a more ‘generic’ interpretation” (Reitan 2011: 159) and thus a more general way of differentiating between three major second-person text types by giving typical features for a certain category. Richardson’s categorization has also been praised by Reitan who calls Richardson’s differentiation an “astonishingly fresh and very simple map of the area” (2011: 159) states that in contrast to Fludernik’s earlier approach from 1994, which Reitan also discusses, Richardson’s categorization “as a first step [cuts out] a smaller, and ‘cleaner’ area, and one more accessible for investigation” (2011: 159). Nevertheless, also this categorization poses some issues, as will be discussed after giving an outline of Richardson’s proposed three major types.

The first form Richardson discusses is the standard form, according to him “the most common type of second person narrative” (2006: 19), Richardson also states that this is “also the closest to more traditional forms of narration” (2006: 19). He defines it as a story told “usually in the present tense, about a single protagonist who is referred to in the second person” (2006: 20). Furthermore, Richardson also notes that it usually oscillates “between first and third person narration” (2006: 22), however, it “cannot be reduced to any of these other perspectives” (2006: 20). Although Richardson states in that standard form often the ‘you’ “designates the narrator and the narratee as well” (2006: 20), I find it questionable how often this precisely is the case, as the ‘you’ can only designate the narrator in case of self-address, which in addition is not solely linked to the standard form. To argue that most standard second-person narratives are narratives of self-address is insofar problematic, as it will lead to some rather far-fetched interpretations aiming to prove something that might be only marginally true. The conflation between protagonist and narratee has already been touched upon in chapter 2.2.2. and does not need to be discussed any further here. In Reitan’s interpretation of Richardson, he points out that this standard form excludes “homodiegetic narratives” (cf. 2011: 160). Such narratives with a homodiegetic first-person narrator that is not the protagonist are indeed often at the border between first- and second-person narratives,
which is why a separate paragraph will be dedicated entirely to the subject matter after Richardson’s other two types of second-person narrative have been discussed.

Richardson calls his second type of second-person narration the hypothetical form, which has been mentioned by other scholars as well (e.g. cf. DelConte 2003: 207 or Mildorf 2016: 150) and has also been called ‘how-to narration’, ‘subjunctive form’ or ‘recipe form’, although Margolin argues that the subjunctive form is a subvariety of hypothetical second-person narration (cf. Margolin 1990: 431). Hypothetical second-person narratives are texts that “are written in the style of the user’s manual or self-help guide” (Richardson 2006: 29). DelConte highlights that sometimes these stories can be “directed toward hypothetical actants in hypothetical (and sometimes shifting) scenarios” (2003: 207). Typical features of hypothetical second-person narratives are “the consistent use of the imperative, the frequent employment of the future tense, and the unambiguous distinction between the narrator and the narratee” (Richardson 2006: 29). Again, Richardson’s claim in regard to narrator and narratee is problematic as it suggests that in hypothetical narration, narrator and narratee must be two distinct entities, whereas there are also hypothetical second-person narratives of self-address such as Lorrie Moore’s “How to Be an Other Woman”, although one could argue that in such narratives the ‘you-the-narrator’ narrates from a different standpoint (possibly a future standpoint of more wisdom) than the ‘you-as-experinker-and-narratee’, which would allow one to perceive narrator and narratee as two distinct entities. Nevertheless, I think the wording is confusing, especially because it suggests that hypothetical second-person narratives differ from the standard form in that respect. What one could argue for is that the presence of the narrator-voice is more prominent in hypothetical second-person narration due to the frequent employment of the imperative that suggests someone addressing somebody else. Richardson also notes that the “‘hypothetical you’ is also a protean one, perhaps even more so than the ‘you’ of standard second person texts, which can occasion some ontological slippage” (2006: 30), meaning that the address function of the ‘you’ oscillates even more between protagonist, narratee and implied reader than in standard second-person narration. This is also underscored by the proximity of this form to self-help manuals. However, even if hypothetical second-person narrations play with the form of the manual and might appear as such on the surface, in the end they often narrate specific stories that although they are shifting between the realm of reality and the realm of hypothetical reality, they are first and foremost stories and not guidebooks to the narratee or the reader. Additionally, Richardson states that even though hypothetical second-person narratives typically start as a set of instructions or a manual, “this discourse is transformed into a representation of events that are assumed to have already
occurred” (Richardson 2016: 390). The form is also a parody of self-help literature as the “very wealth of possibility gradually gives way to a strange kind of necessity” (Richardson 1991: 320), which means that the many possibilities and shifting scenarios inevitably lead to the same ending, thus foregrounding this inevitability whereas ‘real’ self-help literature is supposed to motivate the reader to change something about their situation. Often, second-person short stories already give way to their hypothetical form in their title, usually employing the ‘how-to’ phrase (such as in Moore’s “How to Be an Other Woman”, “How to Become a Writer”; Diaz’ “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996), Updike’s “How to Love America and Leave it at the Same Time” (1979), Houston’s “How To Talk to A Hunter” (1990) etc.) or other words in the semantic field of manuals, like for instance ‘guide’ (such as in Díaz’ “The Cheater’s Guide to Love” (2012), Moore’s “Amahl and the Night Visitors: A Guide to the Tenor of Love” or “The Kid’s Guide to Divorce”).

Richardson’s third form, the autotelic form, is defined by “the direct address to a ‘you’ that is at times the actual reader of the text and whose story is juxtaposed to and can merge with the character of the fiction” (2006: 30). According to Richardson, ‘pure’ instances of this form only occur in extremely short texts (such as Merwin’s “The Second Person” (1970)), whereas in longer works it alternates with third or first person narration (cf. 2006: 30). The question that arises is how this form of second-person narration can be differentiated from other narratives that employ ‘you’ to address the implied reader, and maybe the criterion of frequency is useful for that kind of differentiation, as also Richardson’s definition for second-person narration includes the necessity for the second-person pronoun to designate the protagonist (cf. 2006: 19). Therefore, what differentiates autotelic second-person narration from other narratives in which occasionally a fictional narratee is addressed is that in this form we almost have ‘the reader’ as a character within the world who exists as “a fictional character designated by ‘you’ that tends to be treated from an external perspective as if in the third person” (Richardson 2016: 33). As a result, one could argue that although in this type the second-person pronoun does not designate a typical fictional protagonist as we know them, the reader-character/narratee can almost be considered a fictional character belonging to the story-world and thus a narratee-protagonist. Richardson states that the “unique and most compelling feature” of the autotelic form is “the ever-shifting referent of the ‘you’ of the reader interacting with the book” (2006: 31). He quotes from the beginning passage of Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* (1979), stating that throughout the text “the ‘you’ continues to move, shift, double back, and change again, addressing alternately the real reader and the narratee” (2006: 32).
Whereas I am in favour of using Richardson’s model in order to firstly divide second-person narratives in the three types proposed by him (and only to use my adaptation of Fludernik’s model to further specify the mechanics of the narrative situation), there are also issues with his model. For instance, even though the three proposed types provide a very good general classification, some second-person narratives might lie in between the types. Also within Richardson’s categories, second-person narratives can vary to which degree they fulfil his description. For example, some hypothetical narratives do not use the future or the conditional tense, and could therefore be viewed as less prototypical examples of the type. Moreover, if in such narratives also the imperative is not that frequently used, the question arises whether they now should be viewed as hypothetical or standard second-person narratives or if they should simply be viewed as in between the two types proposed by Richardson.

Another issue with Richardson’s model is some types of second-person narratives are entirely neglected in this model. As it was already repeatedly mentioned, Richardson’s typology leaves no space for ‘I-and-you’ narratives, which have been included by Fludernik. In an earlier essay, Richardson calls Oates’ “You” (1970) a “pseudo second-person narrative” (1994: 316), as even though the story begins in what Richardson calls standard second-person narration, “a little more than a third of the way into the story, however, a first-person narrator emerges” (1994: 316) and it turns out that “‘you’” refers entirely to the daughter’s imaginative construction of the probable events, physical and mental, of her mother” (1994: 316).

Interestingly, Richardson refers in a footnote to Fludernik’s interpretation of the story, which he calls excellent (cf. 1994: 325) despite Fludernik classifying the story as second-person narration proper. Although I see the issues with such narratives being classified as second-person narratives, as this raises the question of why they are not classified as first-person narratives (and definitely not every ‘I-and-you’ narrative should be classified as second-person narration, just as how not every narrative using the pronoun ‘you’ should be subsumed under this narrative situation), again this can be viewed on a scale, since some ‘I-and-you’ narratives share more properties with ‘proper’ second-person narratives than others (usually, the more covert the ‘I’ is, the more focus will lie on the ‘you’ and thus will link it closer to second-person narration in which ‘you’ is the protagonist) and might therefore be viewed on the brink of the narrative situation, which I think is more fruitful than discarding them altogether, as it provides possibilities for comparison which highlight the specificity of second-person narration as a narrative situation. For instance, Oates’ “You” (1970) and Patai’s “On Your Fifty-Fifth Birthday” (1974), which both appear on Fludernik’s bibliography of second person texts (cf. 1994c: 535-536), are both ‘I-and-you’ narratives that
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portray a complicated mother-daughter relationship, but differ in significant aspects, which renders Oates’ story closer to what is prototypically viewed as second-person narration than the latter (a more detailed interpretation of the short story will be given in the analysis part). In “On Your Fifty-Fifth Birthday”, the focus of the story is the ‘I’-protagonist, and the ‘you’ (her mother) only matters in relation to her and how it has shaped her. As a result, one never gets the mother’s internal perspective, she is solely addressed and questioned by the first-person protagonist who remains the centre of the story. In contrast, in Oates’ “You”, the narrative does not lie exclusively with the “I”; instead, the reader also receives the mother’s internal perspective (although this internal perspective might simply be imagined by the “I”). Nevertheless, Oates’ story is thus more closely to prototypical second-person narration, as the ‘you’ does not merely function as an addressed character, but one gets insights into the actions and the thoughts of the ‘you’, which is not the case for “On Your Fifty-Fifth Birthday”.

To sum up, the advantage of Richardson’s model being more clear-cut and less scalar than Fludernik’s then also becomes its disadvantage, which is why I will use it as a first point of orientation, only to then go deeper and state why certain texts may be prototypical examples of a certain type whereas others lie more on the margin. I would thus suggest that one takes Richardson’s differentiation as an overview, and my adaptation of Fludernik’s differentiation only after second-person narratives have been classified as standard, hypothetical or autotelic to get a deeper understanding of how the relation between narrator and narratee works in that particular story.

2.5. Possible Functions

As usual when dealing with functions, this list of possible functions of second-person narration is by no means extensive. Rather, it provides an overview of various important functions that second-person narration can have. I divided this chapter into three sub-chapters, namely story-related functions, reader-response oriented functions and further functions. Story-related functions of second-person narration are usually built up on the idea that there is a reason on the story-level why the story is told in second-person, and this is often linked to the question of how one can naturalize the narrative situation. For example, the representation of (fragmented) mental states is an important function that is central to many second-person texts. Another important story-related function is the portrayal of relationships and failed connections. As second-person narration is highly intertwined with the question of reader
address, it is no wonder that it can have multiple reader-oriented functions. In this subchapter, I begin with the metafictional function, probably the most prototypical function, as second-person narration is frequently subsumed under postmodern experimental literature. However, an exclusively metafictional reading of second-person narratives would by no means do justice to the plurality of their meanings. Even though at first glance attributing both metafictional and the immersive function to second-person narration seems paradoxical, I will also illustrate how second-person narratives might be especially immersive. The immersive function can also be seen as a prerequisite for the creation of empathy, which will also be addressed in this subchapter. The final subchapter “Further Functions” is somewhat a combination of the previous two, as reader-response-related functions such as empathy or story-related functions often culminate in something I call the political function of second-person narratives, which deals with issues of gender, race and class in various ways.

2.5.1. Story-Related Functions
As it has been mentioned, the form of second-person narration can foreground important aspects on the story-level in various ways. Two prominent functions of second-person narration in regard to the story-level are the portrayal of fragmented mental states and the portrayal of failed relationships. Especially the former can posit the unusual narrative situation not as illusion-breaking, but as illusion-enhancing, as it foregrounds a type of (fragmented) subjectivity which could not be foregrounded in the same way in any other types of narrations (this point will be picked up again in the next chapter on reader-response related functions). As the foregrounding of failed relationships occurs in a more implicit way, it has a lower illusionist potential than the former, especially in stories that are not ‘I-and-you’-narratives; however, it still remains an important function to discuss since the narrative situation has the potential to underscore such failed relationships in a specific manner, which might be the reason for the plethora of second-person short stories that deal with this topic.

Second-person narratives “enhance[…] the representation of mental states” (Richardson 2006: 27) especially in times when the protagonist is in a state of feeling split, fragmented or distanced from oneself due to various reasons. Usually, such second-person narratives can be naturalized as narratives of self-address in which a covert first-person narrator is talking to oneself by addressing oneself by ‘you’, which means that the protagonist is split into a (possibly) covert ‘I’ and ‘you’. As a result, the experience of the protagonist being distanced from oneself is engraved and represented in the narrative situation and thus enhanced in a way
in which no other narrative situation would be suitable to portray the same conflict as it is done in second-person narration. When naturalizing second-person narratives as narratives of self-address, such naturalizations thus also entail a somewhat psychological analysis of the protagonist, as the reader searches for a reason why the protagonist feels this distance from the self.

Of course, one also needs to mention that the naturalization of second-person narratives as self-address narratives does not necessarily have to point at fragmented personas feeling distanced from their selves. In some cases, one could argue that the represented mental state is simply an imitation of one talking to oneself in one’s hand (telling yourself to stay calm, etc.) and thus view it as a representation of thought processes uncoupled from psychological preconditions that point to fragmented mental states. However, the imitation of such thought processes would feel more natural in shorter passages and not throughout an entire narrative, especially if it covers a longer time span of story time, and not one mere incident. Therefore, the self-address in second-person narratives usually points to something that goes far beyond this imitation of simple thought processes, with deeper reasons for why one addresses oneself by ‘you’ instead of using an ‘I’.

The reasons for the split of a subject into a (covert) ‘I’ and a ‘you’ can be various. Such possible fragmented mental states can come into being by relations of dependence, identity crises, loss of personality, personality changes, existential borderline situations but also maturation processes (cf. Wiest 1999: 35), basically anything that involves the self in a situation of change. Usually, they can be explained psychologically, for instance through trauma or any other kind of dissociative experiences, ranging from protagonists’ transnational diasporic struggles of belonging neither here nor there (such as in Diaz’ “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996) and “The Cheaters Guide to Love” (2012) or in Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009)), protagonists struggles with their sexuality or gender identity (Oates’ three short fiction pieces “The Seduction” (1975), “Sunlight/Twilight” (1975), “The Secret Mirror”(1975)) to protagonists not recognizing themselves because of what they have done (as in Moore’s “How to Be an Other Woman” (1985) or Adichie’s “Tomorrow Is Too Far” (2009)) or what has happened to them (as in Schwartz’ “So You're Going to Have a New Body!” (1986)). In addition, one can relate this internal struggle to the notions of time, with the addressing voice being the older, mature version of the earlier ‘you’ (cf. Margolin 1990: 445), which definitely also plays a role in Adichie’s “Tomorrow is Too Far”. Richardson also concretely mentions “the mental battles of
an individual struggling against the internalized discourse of an oppressive authority” (Richardson 2006: 36) as a reason for fragmented selves. Also Margolin states that one reason why someone would address themselves with the second-person pronoun is if they had “adopted the point of view of a specific or generalized other toward him/herself” (1990: 432). Such a mental struggle against the outside is exemplified by Richardson by O’Brien’s *Pagan Place*, in which second-person narration is used to display the protagonist’s “distance from her self” (Richardson: 2006: 26) as writing in first person and thus referring to herself as ‘I’ “would take more temerity than she possesses” (Richardson: 2006: 26). The protagonist “views herself as a peripheral figure” (2006: 26) as (and now comes the oppressive authority) “virtually everyone she encounters […] erodes her selfhood and suppresses her speech” (2006: 26). As a result, “her subjectivity is muted, diffused, collapsed” (2006: 26) and she can solely refer to herself in second-person, as she is not possible to call herself ‘I’. Thus, the distance from the self occurs because of the outside oppressive powers that eliminate the protagonist’s ‘I’ (and therefore their state of a sovereign being), which thus forces her to use a different pronoun to speak of herself in an environment in which she is not allowed to exist as an ‘I’. Other second-person narratives with ‘muted’ protagonists and their resulting struggles are Janowitz’ two stories “You and The Boss” (1986) and “Sun Poisoning” (1986), Cortázar’s “Graffiti” (1979) and Oates short fiction pieces “The Seduction”, “The Secret Mirror” and “Sunglight/Twilight”. In Janowitz’ feminist short stories, it is the oppressive authority of patriarchy, which is also symbolized by their boyfriends/Bruce, that the female protagonists struggle against, whereas in Cortázar’s “Graffiti” it is the authority of the state, symbolized by the police, that forces the graffiti writers to mute their voices, which is also symbolized by their muted drawings. In Oates’ short fiction pieces it is a trans-/homophobic society that oppresses the protagonist’s sexuality (“The Seduction”, “Sunlight/Twilight”) or gender identity (“The Secret Mirror”). Another reason why one would use the second-person to refer to oneself is “the unstable nature and intersubjective constitution of the self” (Richardson 2006: 36), which Margolin calls one’s “inner duality (1990: 436), which corresponds to the view of the self as ‘unwholesome’ and made up of various pieces instead of being a unified whole. Wiest takes this notion even further by arguing that the pronoun ‘you’ generally has the power to overwrite the name and thus the individuality of the protagonist (cf. Wiest 1999: 41), which does only fragment, but also possibly eliminate the self. Even in second-person narratives in which the protagonist’s name is revealed, it usually only happens at a later moment in the story (often in rather covert and nonchalant way), at a time when the reader has already become acquainted with the protagonist being designated by ‘you’ and thus might be
rather surprised to find out that they have an actual name that stands in tension with their
designation by ‘you’ Thus, the pronoun alone that marks the protagonist as someone without a
name (cf. Wiest 1999: 42) points to fundamental insecurities in identity, leading to a loss or a
collapse of the self (cf. Wiest 1999: 43). This therefore means that the unstable nature of the
self is ingrained in the personal pronoun ‘you’ already. As it has been discussed above, the
reasons for this instability can be manifold.

Also linked to the representation of fragmented mental states in second-person narratives is
Wiest’s argument that second-person narration is ideally suited to represent liminal personas.
Wiest takes the concept of liminality from the social and cultural anthropologist Victor Turner
(cf. Turner 1987). According to how Wiest reads Turner, liminality refers to a threshold
experience in which one stands in between a former and a latter structure, usually marked by
disorientation, ambiguity and loss (cf. Wiest 1999: 38) and is therefore highly related to crises
of identity in a period of change. This crisis of identity is one in which one is neither here nor
there and therefore also split between the old and the new. Again, one can argue that second
person-narration is particularly successful in portraying such liminal experiences, as the
aspect of being split is engraved and represented in the narrative situation. Wiest even argues
that the ‘unnormality’ of second-person narration can be linked to the fact that it relates to
situations outside the normal and its coherence and logic, a world marked by confusion,

To sum up, second-person narration is ideally suited to represent fragmented mental states
and thus portray a variety of aspects that may lead to such a fragmentation, such as oppressive
authorities, trauma, diasporic experiences or periods of change. In such second-person
narratives of self-address there is therefore a high correlation between form and content since
the protagonist’s fragmented self is engraved in the narrative situation. In the second part of
this thesis, namely the analyses of second-person short stories, it will be exemplified in more
detail in what way second-person narratives can be naturalized as narratives of self-address,
how fragmented mental states are represented as well as what reasons are given on the story-
level to make such a reading plausible.

In addition to representing fragmented mental states, second-person narration is also
frequently used to portray and foreground (usually troubled) relationships. As Kacandes
states, “the second person pronoun is the pronoun of relationship” (1994: 330), and even in
stories without a homodiegetic first-person narrator, a voice that addresses or designates the
you-protagonist remains, thus engraving some kind of relationship on the discourse level,
although this relationship might be an elusive one, possibly solely formal. Second-person usage in fiction can range from being dialogical, with speakers as reversible, to an apostrophic pole, in which communication can only flow in one direction, and except for self-address narratives (and also ‘I-and-you’ narratives), Kacandes posits most second-person narratives more towards the apostrophic pole (cf. 1994: 335-36), in which “the addressee not only does not, but seemingly cannot answer back” (Kacandes 1994: 337). In a way, also in ‘I-and-you’ narrative in which speakers logically should be reversible, it is in fact also solely the voice of the ‘I’ that renders the thoughts and actions of the ‘you’, possibly only imagining them. Therefore, the ‘I’s’ voice is also privileged over the ‘you’s’, and the protagonist’s inability to answer back thus foregrounds the failure of connection and the lack of communication in the represented relationships that is at core of such second-person stories. The form of Kacandes’ radical narrative apostrophes thus can mimic the represented relationships on the story-level. Also Wiest (1999: 65) and Fludernik (1994b: 469) state that there are various second-person narratives that thematise troubled relationships and failed connections, as second-person narration’s “apostrophic quality correlates with the enactment of emotional tensions between the partners, foregrounding the see-saw of mutual attraction and repulsion, outgoing affection, and inhibiting domination in such relationships” (Fludernik 1994b: 469).

Indeed, failed communications and the resulting inability to understand each other are at the core of many relationships portrayed in standard and hypothetical second-person short stories. For instance, failed romantic relationships are a prominent subject, as in Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009), Moore’s three stories “How” (1985), “How to Be an Other Woman” (1985), “Amahl and the Night Visitors: A Guide to the Tenor of Love” (1985), Houston’s “How to Talk to a Hunter” (1990) or Bank’s “You Could Be Anyone” (1999).

Feminist second-person short stories foreground the ‘voiceless-ness’ of their female protagonist in regard to their male partners (e.g. Tamowitz “You and The Boss” or “Sun Poisoning” or again Houston’s “How To Talk to A Hunter” as well as Moore’s “How To Be Another Woman”) or in regard to other men in their life that possibly stand for patriarchal society as is it is done in Schwartz’ “So You’re Going To Have A New Body!” (1986), in which a gynaecologist dictates the female protagonist medical choices. Also ‘I-and-you’ short stories often portray relationships that are flawed, such as the complicated mother-and-daughter-relationships in Oates’ “You” (1970) or Patai’s “On Your Fifthy-Fifth Birthday” (1974) or relationships hindered by state control such as in Cortázar’s “Graffiti” (1979). Such troubled relationships and failed connections/communication will again be analysed in more
depth in the second part of this thesis, as they are a significant theme of most of the analysed short stories.

2.5.2. Reader-Response-Related Functions

One possible reader-response related function of second-person narration is its metafictional function. Second-person narratives are often subsumed under postmodernist and experimental writing which is commonly known for its affiliation with breaking aesthetic illusion and eliciting meta-awareness in the reader. The metafictional quality of second-person narratives is also discussed by Richardson, who states that second-person narration is per se “a playful form, original, transgressive, and illuminating [...] and always conscious of its own unusual own status” (Richardson 2006: 23). Second-person narratives can be metafictional in two significant ways: firstly, by foregrounding the discourse-level, which is highly intertwined with the second way, namely the undermining of the story-discourse dichotomy (which then inevitably also leads to the foregrounding of the discourse-level). Also second-person narration’s classification as an unnatural narrative, as it has been discussed in chapter 2.3., plays a significant role when discussing its metafictional function. Unnatural narratives “play with the very conventions of mimesis” (Richardson 2016: 386), which ultimately leads to the fact that they often break or enter into breaking “the mimetic illusion” (Richardson 2016: 385). As unnatural narratives deal with unnatural story worlds and “many unnatural story worlds [...] do not allow themselves to be taken as real” (Richardson 2016: 393), it “follows that the experience of immersion in a story world is compromised” (Richardson 2016: 393).

As has been said, one way in which second-person narratives can be metafictional is through foregrounding the discourse-level. The foregrounding of the discourse-level can be a device to break aesthetic illusion and achieved in two main ways: either through using unconventional ways of discourse, which might not be hindering easy access to the story-level, but still will draw focus on them (and thus away from the story-level) until they become conventionalized, or through using ways of discourse that make it difficult to even get access to the story-level (which can differ highly in degrees) (cf. Wolf 1993: 374)\(^\text{11}\). The foregrounding of discourse in second-person narration usually happens in the former way, as normally, second-person

\(^{11}\) One has to keep in mind that the foregrounding of discourse has a lower potential of breaking aesthetic illusion than illusion-breaking elements on the story-level (cf. Wolf 1993: 377) as well as that the foregrounding of discourse does not necessarily have to be illusion-breaking (cf. Wolf 1993: 415). The latter will be especially important when it comes to the immersive function of second-person narration, which will be discussed after the metafictional function.
narratives provide easy access to the represented world. According to Wolf, the main reason why nevertheless the discourse is foregrounded is because of its implausibility, as it only makes sense to address a ‘you’ if it is to remind the ‘you’ of something they have forgotten or kept secret intentionally (cf. Wolf 1993: 374). Otherwise, there would be no reason why one would narrate something to the ‘you’ they must already know. Also autotelic texts like Calvino’s If On a Winter’s Night a Traveller (1979) are mentioned by Wolf: Here, it is the impossibility of merging the real reader and the implied reader/reader-character which leads to an implausible discourse situation and thus can lead to a distancing from the part of the real reader, as they are unable to follow the suggestion to merge with the reader-character presented on story-level (cf. Wolf 1993: 420). Of course, one has to take into consideration that this was written slightly before Fludernik’s issue of Style on second-person narration was published, and thus also before various positions have continued from there to investigate the narrative situation further. Since then, other ways of naturalizing such a discourse as plausible have been discussed (e.g. self-address and representation of fragmented selves). When second-person narratives are naturalized, the metafictional quality of second-person narration might be mitigated, as the unusual discourse situation regains plausibility and serves an important function related to issues on the story-level, and thus could even be called illusion-enhancing. However, this necessity for the search for such naturalizations already points to the fact that unless given a reason for, the communicative situation on the discourse-level in second-person narration would remain absurd and thus has a metafictional potential. In addition, the attempt at naturalizing second-person narratives provides by no means an absolute naturalization, which is why even when naturalizations for the narrative situation can be found, a certain metafictional distance might remain.

As it has been repeatedly mentioned by Wolf that certain foregrounding discourse elements have become conventionalized and thus are not necessarily illusion-breaking despite their illusion-breaking potential (cf. 1993: 373), one could raise the question of whether this can also be applied to second-person narration. Now, over 25 years after the dissertation was published, the narrative situation has probably become more well-known, as multiple scholars have dealt with the narrative situation and many second-person narratives have been (re-)discovered. One attempt to generate a bibliography of second-person narration was

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12 This can be compared to what Wolf says about the Benji’s first-person ‘difficult’ discourse in Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury (1929) which can be naturalized due to his mental disposition and thus foregrounds Benji’s subjectivity (cf. Wolf 1993: 415).

13 For instance, certain aspects of the authorial narrative situation have illusion-breaking potential but are accepted as conventions of the narrative situation (cf. Wolf 1993: 411).
undergone by Fludernik: Her early bibliography compromises over 150 texts (cf. 1994c: 526-539) and her updated list adds over another 50 texts (cf. 2011: 129-132) (although, depending on what definition of second-person narration one uses, not all of these might be classified as second-person narration proper). Of course, when comparing this to other narrative situations this seems like a tiny amount of texts; however, one needs to consider that firstly, the narrative situation is rather ‘young’ and secondly, this list of second-person narratives is by no means extensive.\footnote{The impossibility of such a task is evident; I just wanted to point out that alone in my interpretations I cover one story which has not been listed by Fludernik, namely Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009), and by preparing my corpus, I have also stumbled upon other texts that have not been mentioned by Fludernik, such as texts by Weir, Adichie, Wells or Díaz, that can all be found in the bibliography (some of them of course appeared after Fludernik’s list was published).} In addition, from what I can gather Fludernik’s list is geared more towards high-brow and experimental literature, whereas second-person narration also exists in more popular genres, for instance ‘build-your-own-adventure-stories’, which are found in children’s literature or podcasts like Imagined Life (a podcast that narrates the story of someone famous in second-person in order to let the listener guess who ‘they’ are), which means that it has possibly reached already a great scope of recipients. Thus, it might not be too far-fetched to argue that over time, some readers might become familiarized with the narrative situation (and some already are), an effect of habituation that can also occur during the reading process of one and the same work, as also Wolf mentions (although he also warns against seeing this a sign of illusion-compatibility, but moreover sees it as a sign of tension between second-person narration and aesthetic illusion) (cf. 1993: 421). However, to argue that this familiarization with second-person narration has already taken place would completely be out of proportion, and thus I think it is safe to conclude that second-person narration up to this point has not become conventionalized insofar that it has completely lost its metafictional potential.

Furthermore, the discourse in second-person narration is not only foregrounded through its implausibility, but also through other means. As second-person texts are frequently regarded as instances of postmodern writing, this builds on postmodernist fiction’s playful tradition to undermine the ‘realist’ story-discourse dichotomy (cf. Fludernik 1994a: 292). Such crossings of the boundary are usually viewed as infractions of realist expectations and thus can be metafictional, as the story-discourse dichotomy is “a device linked to the establishment of an illusion of ‘reality’” (Fludernik 1994a: 292).\footnote{In her article, Fludernik stresses that such infractions are only infractions in the view of a realist story model (cf. 1994a: 292), but the issue of natural vs. non-natural readings has already been discussed in chapter 2.3.} There are various ways in which the undermining of the story-discourse dichotomy in second-person narration can be achieved. One aspect in which this undermining occurs is the attempt to naturalize second-person
narratives, as then the focus is shifted from the story- to the discourse-level, since one wants to make sense of why one would narrate someone their own story in the first place (cf. Fludernik 1993: 221). As a result, the attempt at naturalizing second-person narratives “undermine[s] the story/discourse dichotomy because they consist in a re-evaluation of the story as […] a subsidiary aid for the narrator/narratee level which comes to absorb all narrative interest” (1993: 221). Therefore, even if second-person narratives can be naturalized, the process of naturalization alone shifts the focus from the story to the discourse and thus foregrounds the latter (which might or might not elicit meta-awareness). Another way in which the separation between story and discourse is dissolved in second-person narratives is by the fact that the experiences of the ‘you’ are “explicitly projected from the discourse and attributed to the ‘you’” on the story-level (Fludernik 1994b: 458). As a result, certain linguistic factors such as the imperative mode foreground “enunciation over story, highlighting the constructedness and processual engendering of a story on the make” (Fludernik 1994b: 460). Furthermore, second-person narratives can disclose themselves as nothing but discourse imaginations; the story as we get it might be simply imagined by the narrating voice (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 459), as it is suggested in Cortázar’s “Graffiti” (1979) and Oates’ “You” (1970). To sum up, by dissolving the opposition story and discourse through the above mentioned means, the discourse is usually foregrounded and meta-awareness might be elicited in the reader.

Moreover, it is not only the boundary between story- and discourse-level that is blurred in second-person narration, but also the boundary between reality and fiction, as second-person narratives seemingly involve the reader in the textual world (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 457). Thus, second-person narratives “threaten[…] the ontological stability of the fictional world insofar as it seems it could be addressing the reader as well as the central character” (Richardson 2006: 20). Although in second-person narration (unlike other second-person usages in literature), the implied reader is usually quite distinct from the protagonist, there can be instances in which this distinction at least partially collapses, as already discussed in chapter 2.2.2. Richardson states that “most authors employing this mode play with this boundary” (2006: 20). As a result, one can almost speak of a metalepsis since the boundaries between the story-world and the outer world might be blurred. As this type of metalepsis raises awareness for the ontological boundary between reality and fiction, it can also be seen as metafictional. The effect of this metafictional metalepsis can be attributed to “one of the more unsettling features” (Richardson 2006: 20) of second-person narration.
Also the non-natural aspect of second person narration contributes to its metafictional function. As literary second-person narration also includes a variety of forms that cannot occur in conversational and ‘natural’ storytelling, one can argue that second-person narration is a rather artificial narrative situation which thus foregrounds literature simply due to its artificiality. In second-person narration, we encounter narratives that cannot be told in this way in ‘reality’ and conversational storytelling and thus they foreground their fictional status as literary texts, and readers will know “we are reading fiction” (Richardson: 2016: 396). In addition, as readers are used to natural narratives, second-person narration is a narrative situation that “continuously defamiliarizes the narrative act” (Richardson 2006: 28) and thus can also be metafictional in that way.

To sum up, second-person narratives can be (and are) metafictional in a variety of ways. The breaking of aesthetic illusion can be achieved through the foregrounding of discourse, which can either be achieved through the implausibility of the communicative situation or through the undermining of the story-discourse dichotomy, through the questioning of the boundary between reality and fiction, and also through the unnatural status as narratives that can only exist in fiction and provide an unnatural narrative communication that defamiliarizes the natural narrative communication model readers are used to.

Interestingly, next to the metafictional function another prominent and often mentioned function of second-person narration is its “involving quality” (Fludernik 1994a: 286), as literary second-person narration “is said to involve readers in a special way [my emphasis] by at least temporarily implicating them in the fictional story-world” (Mildorf 2016: 145). Moreover, Wiest states that second-person narration provides possibilities for ‘involvement’ in the world of a text that are not there for first- or third-person narration (cf. Wiest 1993: 76).

Before I will address the issue of in what ways second-person narratives can be ‘involving’, I want to briefly entangle the theoretical terms ‘involvement’, ‘immersion’ and ‘aesthetic illusion’. The term ‘involvement’, as it has been mentioned by Fludernik and Mildorf, is, as Mildorf points out, problematic: “One general problem underlying discussions of ‘involvement’ in you-narration […] is a lack of clarity concerning precisely what is meant by the term” (2016: 147). This is why Mildorf differentiates between two different kinds of involvement, namely aesthetic-reflexive involvement, “a more intellectual response to, and pleasure taken from, the (often postmodern) playfulness of you-narration” (2016: 148), and affective-emotional involvement, often close to what is “labelled as ‘empathy’” (2016: 148). According to Mildorf, the first type of involvement deals with the question of communication
and thus the reader’s feeling of being ‘addressed’ whereas the second type deals with “readers’ emotional engagement and potential ‘identification’ with characters, […] a question of immersion” (2016: 156). Although Mildorf differentiates between the address and the immersive function, I would argue that both of them are also somewhat linked as the address function can also contribute to the immersive function, which I will later explain in more detail. Another issue that comes up with Mildorf’s discussion of involvement is the lack of precision in differentiating between immersion and empathy, which, although related, should be treated as two different reactions to a literary text, as one is able to immerse in a storyworld without feeling empathy for the characters in it. In fact, this is even pointed out by Mildorf herself, who states that “reader’s immersion in a storyworld […] may or may not lead to their ‘identification’ with characters and their predicaments” (2016: 146), which is why the creation of empathy will be discussed as a separate function. The type of involvement under discussion now will be called the ‘immersive function’ and is related to the state of aesthetic illusion, which is achieved by “travel[ing] in imagination to an alternative, or virtual world, and make herself at home within this world” (Ryan 2013: 142) which is a “quasi-experience of, and immersion in, represented worlds” (Wolf 2013: 11). Although Wolf warns against using the term ‘immersion’ interchangeably with aesthetic illusion, as the former does not imply the distance necessary for aesthetic illusion (we as recipients can neither interact with the represented world nor are ‘fully’ immersed in the sense that we still know that we are actually located in a different location) (cf. 2013: 14), since in this chapter only the immersive side of aesthetic illusion is at stake, the term immersive function should suffice. Reader-response related issues such as aesthetic illusion can be incredibly difficult to investigate, as they depend on context, reader and intratextual-related issues, with context and reader as two especially elusive subjects. Therefore, a focus on the work itself and intracompositional features seems to be the most fruitful approach (cf. Wolf 2013: 31), keeping in mind that the issues discussed relate to the illusionist potential of second-person narratives, which means that to what extent this potential is realized is also reader- and context-specific (cf. Wolf 2004: 334).

Usually, second-person narratives tick all the boxes necessary for a text invoking aesthetic illusion (for instance, the representation of a consistent and accessible world as we know it (cf. Wolf 2013: 37-51)) except for the narrative situation which foregrounds the discourse in the above mentioned ways. However, the issue remains why one could argue that second-person narratives are especially immersive. Of course, there is a certain tendency to accept formal complications (cf. Wolf 2013: 41), especially if “they are explained, have become and
object of habituation within the given work or are linked to, e.g., generic conventions” (Wolf 2013: 41). In regard to second-person narration, this then depends on how or whether the narrative situation is naturalized (or ‘quasi’-naturalized, as discussed above), how familiar the reader is with the narrative situation as well as the length of the text that may familiarize a reader with the narrative situation even though they have never encountered it before. Similar to the metareferential turn which lead to an increased metatolerance that “reduces the formerly disconcerting or startling effect of some if not all metareferential devices” (Wolf 2011: 28), one could argue that readers are also getting used to second-person narration and thus its initial illusion-breaking potential is mitigated. However, the issue I aim to discuss is not only how second-person narration might be immersive despite the narrative situation, but because of it. Even though it might seem contradictory at first to attribute both immersive and metafictional functions to second-person narration, also Schofield confirms that readers experience second-person narratives as both “forcefully compelling and alienating” (1997: 96). Richardson states as well that in second-person narratives “a dialectic is established in which the reader alternates between identification and distancing” (2006: 28). It is also the generally elusive nature of second-person narration that makes it difficult to pinpoint an either metafictional or an immersive reading to texts that usually play with this opposition. In fact, both functions do not necessarily have to erase each other since they can co-exist to provide a richer interpretation of second-person texts. Such a co-existence of immersive and metafictional reading has been explained by Ryan in regard to Jonathan Safran Foer’s short story “Here We Aren’t So Quickly”: She states that readers of such texts that allow for a metatextual reading as well as an illusionist reading need the ability “to shift back-and-forth between the two stances, so as to appreciate the text both as a representation of life experience and as a virtuoso verbal performance that pushes back the limits of the textually possible” (2013: 147). Thus, if one applies this to second-person narration, one can argue that in fact, an immersive and a metafictional reading do not exclude, but complement each other in order to grasp the full complexity and potential of the text.

As stated before, one aspect why second-person narrative can be considered especially immersive is that when second-person narratives are naturalized, the narrative situation might have an increasing illusionist effect, not only because it underscores important story elements but also because it might foreground a character’s subjectivity and thus enhance real-life perspectivity in a significant manner. However, the need for such a naturalization (and the question of how plausible such a naturalization is) already implies the unnatural quality of
second-person narration and thus overall leaves it in a field of tension between immersion and distance.

As already foreshadowed, despite Mildorf’s separation of address and immersive function, another reason why second-person narratives can be considered especially immersive is because of the you’s address function. As Phelan states, the ‘you’ address […] invites us to project ourselves […] into the narratee’s subject position” (1994: 361). Margolin states that through the possibility of reader address, the reader’s wish to identify with the protagonist “can render the narrated events more vivid and immediate” (1990: 444). Also Schofield says that a more general ‘you’ at the beginning of second-person narratives is “a strategy for drawing the reader into the tale before the pronoun is particularized” (1997: 98). The immersive quality of aesthetic illusion is usually enhanced if “there are imaginable intradiegetic agencies which invite us to take their points of view” (Wolf 2013: 47) as such intradiegetic focalizers provide the best imitation of our subjective limited point-of-view in real life (cf. Wolf 1993: 159). In second-person narratives, it is not only that the you-protagonist is an intradiegetic entity with such a limited point-of-view that has immersive potential, but also that the invite to take on their points of view is underscored through the address function. As a result, readers are invited to adopt the protagonist’s perspective, thus are literally put into their shoes and are able to experience the story-world right along the protagonist, which therefore has the potential to be highly immersive. Interestingly, this immersion through address is also what is at stake in the previously mentioned podcast Imaged Life, a podcast that narrates the lives of famous people before their fame in second-person, promising the listener to take them “on an immersive journey through the surprising moments and challenges that shaped someone’s life before they were famous” (Daymond and Madsen, online). The usage of the second-person in this format is not random, but indeed to enhance immersion, and an important prerequisite for the “deeply immersive story” (Daymond and Madsen, online) the podcast promises by making the listener “feel like walking in the shoes of someone famous” (Daymond and Madsen, online), and telling them they will experience “the challenges, the heartbreaks, the losses and the triumphs” (Daymond and Madsen, online) of the person. In such cases, the reader-address becomes a game: similar

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16 Of course, this is also dependant on historical context and whether certain techniques of narratives have already become accepted and conventionalized. For instance, the figural narrative situation which is suited extremely well to imitate such limited point-of-views in real life has not become a convention before Modernism. However, the historical move from authorial/first-person narration to figural narration to best achieve such a perspectivity is not random, but precisely because of the underlying illusion principle of perspective (cf. Wolf 1993: 159-60)
to how aesthetic illusion works, the recipient will remain aware of the fact that it is not them who are actually performing the acts attributed to the ‘you’ (just as recipients are aware that they are not actually placed within the work), but they are willing to succumb to the address in order to immerse themselves in the narrated story. Once again, this points to the fact that reader-address in second-person narratives can have a highly immersive function, as it allows for readers to immerse themselves in the represented world by bringing the reader close to the protagonist in a way that almost melts them together into one, a way in which it cannot be done in other types of narrations. Another example of this playful reader-address that can have a highly immersing quality is mentioned by Schofield in regard to ‘choose-your-own-adventure’ stories such as his example text *The Brain of Katherine Mansfield* (1988) by Manhire, in which the reader is allowed to find their own pathway from the alternatives offered at the end of the chapter (e.g. if you want do A, go to chapter 2, if you want to do B, go to chapter 3). Schofield states that once one gets used to the playful quality, one is willing to overlook the improbabilities given by the pronoun, and thus come to engage in a game which is highly immersive because readers are put very close to the you-protagonist in the story, experiencing the world through their eyes (cf. 1997: 98). However, one has to point out that what both the podcast and the ‘choose-your-own-adventure’-stories share (and what usually is not an aspect of other types of second-person narratives) is that their invitation to the recipient to participate in that sort of game often happens very overt through an unambiguous recipient address at the beginning. In standard second-person narration, this reader-address is usually far more ambiguous, and thus this immersion through address may be compromised. In addition, it has been argued that readers will feel more addressed in vague or general passages; however, “greater experientiality […] seems to demand specificity as a prerequisite” (Mildorf 2016: 153), meaning that the more specific a second-person protagonist’s story is, the less likely it is that the reader will feel addressed (and hence immersed through the address). However, as has been repeatedly mentioned, second-person narratives play with pulling the reader in and out of the addressee-role. Also Phelan states that some readers will feel more immersed in the stories whereas others may even “turn away from this involvement” (Phelan 1994: 361) and develop a higher meta-awareness, observing the metafictional aspects of this narrative situation. Thus it remains that the reader-address has illusionist potential, and to what extent this will be realized is – like all illusion-enhancing devices - reader-specific.

In addition, one also has to note that readers of second-person narration can feel immersed without feeling addressed by the ‘you’: Similar to how one reads first-person narratives with
the knowledge that the ‘I’ does not refer to them, readers can feel immersed from the point of the observer, termed narrative audience by Phelan (cf. 1994: 356). In this role, readers “become believers in the reality of the fictional word [and] consequently much of our emotional response to narrative derives from our participation in this role” (Phelan 1994: 357), which means that readers do not exclusively immerse themselves in second-person narration by feeling addressed by the ‘you’, but also from their observer position just like in other types of narratives. As second-person narratives usually play with oscillating between general and specific passages in which the force of reader-address varies, readers of second-person narratives will also sway between the role of the observer and the projection of themselves into the narratee’s subject position (cf. Phelan 1994: 361). Therefore second-person narratives give readers both the ability to immerse themselves through the feeling of address as well as through the general experiencing of a specific story-world.

Fludernik argues that in second-person narration, immersion is strongest in the so-called reflectoral mode “where the internal focalization, the perspective through the protagonist’s consciousness” (2011: 119) is an especially successful immersive strategy. This can be compared to what Wolf states about figural narrative situation, namely that it is possibly the most illusion-enhancing narrative situation (cf. 1993: 418), as it is suited best at imitating real-life perspectivity (cf. 1993: 415). This holds also true for reflectoral second-person narration which employs extremely covert narrators and usually a point of view that is solely restricted to that of the you-protagonist, which leads to a seemingly unmediated experience of the represented world. Of course, one could argue that in reflectoral second-person narratives, alone through the use of the ‘you’ the presence of the narrator is more visible than in figural narrative situation (this has been discussed in chapter 2.2.1.), however, it is evident that such reflectoral second-person narratives might have a high-illusionist potential.

Concerning the question of whether second-person narration is capable of eliciting greater immersion than other narrative situations, as Mildorf points out, “it is difficult to validate precisely how and to which extent readers may or may not identify with fictional characters” (2016: 153). Again, Mildorf’s phrasing is problematic insofar as she does not clearly differentiate between immersion and empathy. A possible argument for the capability of greater immersion could be that unlike in other narrations, in second-person narration, on top of the observer role the reader is also invited to occupy an addressee role and thus is literally put in the diegetic story world. Furthermore, second-person narration provides new possibilities for foregrounding subjectivity (e.g. fragmented mental states). In addition,
Mildorf states that psychological tests have shown that the pronoun ‘you’ is matched more often with internal perspective than third- and first-person pronouns (cf. 2016: 154) and, as already stated, internal perspective through intradiegetic focalizers can be highly illusion-enhancing. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to argue that the kind of psychological tests mentioned are representative “of the complexity and diversity of narrative texts” (Mildorf 2016: 154). So even though no psychological tests have really confirmed the correlation of the second-person pronoun and immersion over other narrative situations, one could argue that this still points into the direction of the claim that second-person narration has new possibilities for immersion.

All in all, there are certain aspects of second-person narration that contribute to a potentially immersive function, such as the use of internal perspective paired with inside view which imitates a real life point of view, the foregrounding of subjectivity, the reader address which might pull the reader into the subject position as well as general illusion-enhancing mechanisms such as the portrayal of the world as we know it enhanced by descriptions. Also, reflectoral second-person narratives should be considered when discussing the illusionist potential of second-person narratives as they have the tendency to be especially immersive. Although of course such questions of immersion and distance are reader-specific, the immersive function is still an important aspect to consider when analysing second-person narratives, especially in respect to another possible function, namely the creation of empathy.

Although the creation of empathy and the immersive function are often equated, as I already stated, it makes sense to distinguish them from each other since one is able to immerse oneself in a text without feeling empathy for the characters. Whereas immersion is the state of “travel[ing] in imagination to an alternative, or virtual world, and make herself at home within this world” (Ryan 2013: 140)), empathy is closely linked to characters, character identification and the opportunity to share feelings. Nevertheless, one could say that even though the creation of empathy is treated as a separate function, immersion can still be seen as a prerequisite for the following, as it is usually the deep immersion in a story-world that causes readers to have strong feelings about characters. Aesthetic illusion “has an affinity with emotional involvement” (Wolf 2004: 337), and reader reactions that indicate “a deep emotional involvement […], usually an empathy with central characters” (Wolf 2004: 325) presuppose aesthetic illusion. Another reason why immersion and empathy are often linked in second-person narration is because in second-person narration the address function of the ‘you’ literally puts the reader into the shoes of the protagonist. Therefore, the address function
invites readers not only to immerse themselves in the story-world through the protagonists’ eyes, but also to empathise with them.

The creation of empathy through second-person narration has been mentioned by a variety of scholars (cf. Fludernik 1993: 227; cf. Fludernik 1994a: 286; cf. Keen 2003: 48; cf. Mildorf 2016: 148). Keen calls it a narration that “can function as a device inviting identification with a main character labelled and addressed as ‘you’” (Keen 2003: 48). Fludernik states that the involving quality of second-person narration can even “provoke[…] much greater initial empathy with second-person protagonists than with first- or third-person characters” (Fludernik 1994a: 286). Before I will get to the issue of why second-person narration is said to have an empathy-creating function, I want to briefly outline how empathy can be analysed in literary studies in the first place.

One problem with empathy and literary texts is that the effect of reading is a subject which is hard to measure and evaluate, which has already been touched upon when discussing immersion. Moreover, the affective involvement of readers rests even more on extratextual factors than other illusionist principles might, as whether readers will feel empathy with characters or not will depend highly on their own dispositions and other contextual factors (cf. Wolf 2005: 342). Often, such effects of reading are not studied from a mere literary perspective, but linked to social-psychological methods (e.g. questionnaires and self-reports) to provide an empirical approach to reading (cf. Keen 2007: 85). In this field, scholars employ a wide range of methods, from surveys to questionnaires, controlled reading-speed experiments, asking readers to write responses after reading, recording comments made aloud while reading and more (cf. Keen 2007: 84). Usually, each method poses its own problems: For instance, some prioritize verbal responses over reading itself, some lead to the fact that the reading experience will change if it is constantly interrupted and some put greater emphasis on the completed experience than over the dynamic process (cf. Keen 2007: 84). As this chapter on reader-response related functions is merely a sub-chapter of the possible functions of second-person narration, unfortunately an empirical approach to measuring empathy is far beyond the scope of this thesis, and I will exclusively focus on narrative techniques that elicit empathy, also called empathetic narrative techniques, and how those techniques play a special role in second-person narration.

Keen mentions character identification and narrative situation as the most commonly mentioned empathetic narrative techniques, although she immediately states that character identification “is not a narrative technique, but a consequence of reading that may be
precipitated by the use of particular techniques of characterization” (2007: 93). Other elements of fiction that have supposedly contributed to empathy are “repetitions of works in series, […] length […] , genre expectations, vivid use of settings, metanarrative commentary and aspects of the discourse that slow readers’ pace” (Keen 2007: 93). However, the confirmation of whether these narrative techniques actually are empathy facilitators “has yet to be undertaken in most cases” (Keen 2007: 93). The attempt to confirm these empathetic narrative techniques “as often fails fully to support the commonplaces of narratology as it authenticates them” (Keen 2007:93), although it is not clear whether the experimental design or the actual narrative technique is faulty (cf. Keen 2007: 93). Still, even though empathic narrative techniques still remain a somewhat unsure field of investigation, I will now continue to discuss how narrative situation can be used as an empathetic narrative technique.

In regard to the relation between narrative situations and empathy, Keen states that “a commonplace of narrative theory suggests that an internal perspective best promotes character identification and readers’ empathy” (2007: 96). As it has already been alluded to, Keen points out that the link between empathy and internal perspective has so far not been verified by experimental results and thus remains speculation (cf. 2007: 97). She names first-person self-narration, figural narration and authorial narration that moves omnisciently inside many character’s minds as examples of narrative situations that are best suited to achieve internal perspective (cf. 2007: 96). The lack of mention of second-person narration in this passage is probably due to the fact that it is usually not considered as a typical narrative situation and thus forgotten. Also Keen herself states in a different work that second-person narration is a narrative situation that can employ internal perspective (cf. 2003: 48), therefore it can be added to the list of narrative situations that achieve internal perspective. Furthermore, as Keen states that the figural narrative situation is a prime narrative situation that achieves internal perspective, this also qualifies the above discussed reflectoral second-person narratives as having a high potential for generating such an internal perspective as well. Moreover, Mildorf states that psychological tests have shown that the pronoun ‘you’ is matched more often with internal perspective than third- and first-person pronouns (cf. 2016: 154), which could therefore explain the special link between empathy and second-person narration that has been claimed by various narratologists. However, as Mildorf herself points out, it is still difficult to argue that the kind of psychological tests mentioned by her are representative “of the complexity and diversity of narrative texts” (Mildorf 2016: 154).
The “even greater empathy” (Fludernik 1993: 239) with second-person protagonists than first- or third-person variants can again be explained by the second-person pronoun’s potential reader address function, which has also been discussed as an aspect that leads to immersion. As already argued before, through the address function of the pronoun ‘you’, the reader is directly put into the shoes of the protagonist and thus immersed in their story, which means that the closeness achieved through the address pronoun might also lead to empathy. This means that due to the address function, readers might not only become more immersed, but also be lead to identify and empathize more easily with second-person protagonists than with any other characters in different narrative situations.

An important point to make is that empathy does not necessarily need to be created through shared experiences of readers and protagonists. As Keen states, people can identify and empathise with literary characters “even when the character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways” (2007: 70), as “the opportunity to share feelings underwrites character identification that transcends difference” (2007: 70). This means that universal feelings in a sense can overpower different experiences and enable readers to empathise with characters that have completely different experiences from their own. The ability to feel with characters who differ from the reader stands in a curious relation to the argument that in second-person narration, readers will feel empathy through the reader-address. On the one hand, one could argue that, as readers of second-person narratives will feel most addressed in general passages, in such passages it is the description of universal feelings that renders them general and thus applicable to the reader. Therefore, it is not only the address which is the strongest in such general passages, but possibly also the ability to feel empathy with the character. On the other hand, through the ability to feel with characters different from oneself, readers can also empathise in very specific passages, in which however it is the most clear that it is not them who are addressed. One could argue that the general passages serve as the easiest gateways in eliciting empathy through the means of reader-address, and that this overall leads to an increased empathy effect throughout the rest of the text. This is also employed in second-person narratives in which the reader is tricked into feeling empathy with a character that is throughout the story unveiled to be rather different from themselves. However, whether the reader will then feel alienated from the protagonist or whether the strong empathy-effect remains is hard to determine and reader-specific. This question of distance is also what is at stake when Fludernik talks about the “much greater initial empathy” (1994a: 286) with second person protagonists, as this already points to the issue of whether after the initial closeness readers will feel distanced by the pronoun,
something that already has been discussed in chapter 2.2.2. The tension of second-person narration shifting between closeness (and thus enhancing the intimacy of the reading experience) and distance (as it will become clear that the reader cannot be included in the ‘you’) has also been pointed out by Keen (cf. Keen 2007: 98).17

To sum up, the use of the second-person pronoun in second-person narration and its potential reader address function, the immersive function as well as the heightened internal perspective can be seen as narrative empathetic strategies that facilitate empathy in second-person narration. As the issue of what happens when readers of second-person narratives are confronted with protagonists very different from themselves has also been touched upon slightly, this already foreshadows the next chapter in which I will discuss the political function of second-person narratives which compromises all possible function such texts can have in regards to cultural and societal issues related to class, race and gender. Thus, the empathy function of second-person narratives can have a decidedly political concern.

2.5.3. Further Functions

In this chapter, all types of functions that contribute to what I have termed second-person narration’s ‘political’ function are subsumed, which are different functions second-person narratives can have in regard to significant cultural and societal aspects, usually related to issues of race, class or gender. As the political function draws from reader-response-related functions (e.g. empathy) as well as important aspects on story- and discourse-level, there is therefore a strong connection to the previous chapters; however, since the political function transcends the issues discussed above by combining various aspects of story-, discourse- and reader-response related functions, it merits a separate chapter. In addition, second-person narration’s political function has also been mentioned by various scholars. For instance, Fludernik states in her introductory article that second-person texts can have “decidedly political concerns” (1994a: 305) and “the connection between an innovative use of pronominal reference and a particular interest in ideology and politics cannot be ignored” (1994a: 305). Richardson also states that “the ideological possibilities of second person narration are […] rich” (2006: 36). In general, according to Richardson, “a strong relationship between radical politics and radical narrative forms” (2016: 397) can be observed. He states that “many creative writers who struggled against oppressive political institutions, social

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17 Actually, Keen had asked: “Does the use of second-person ‘you’ narration enhance the intimacy of the reading experience by drawing the reader and narrator [my emphasis] close, or does it emphasize dissonance as it becomes clear that ‘you’ can’t include the reader?” (2007: 98), which is insofar problematic as Keen might confuse the narrator with the protagonist/narratee. What her question still highlights though is the tension field of heightened empathy versus heightened distance in second-person narratives.
regulations, and official discourse tried to invent original, alternative literary forms within which to create their own independent literary realms” (2016: 397), although it is of course clear that “there is no inherent political implication of any narrative form” (2016: 398), and that also narratives that are not original can be highly political. Despite the impossibility to argue that second-person narration is inherently political, there are many ways in which second-person narratives can foreground political aspects, which will be now discussed respectively throughout the chapter.

Many ways in which second-person narration can be political are linked to second-person narration’s address function and resulting issues of who can be addressed, who is addressed and the creation of empathy. Also Fludernik states that the “political uses of the second-person pronoun” can “rely on the tension between (sometimes provocative) address and the empathetic or involving use of the generic you” (1994b: 470). I will start off by discussing the political aspect of second-person narration’s empathy-creating function. Readers of texts with ‘you’-protagonists from minority groups marked by gender, race or class can be lead to empathise with them. Therefore, such narratives may raise awareness of the issues that come with race, class or gender. As Richardson says, second-person narration allows “minority writers to foreground a subjectivity typically excluded from common, unexamined notions of ‘you’ and ‘us’” (2006: 36). Through the specific experiences a protagonist makes simply by being from this minority, the protagonist becomes an emblem for a whole community of people with the same background who face similar issues simply due to their background. For instance, racism on a daily basis is experienced by people of colour simply due to them being part of an ethnic minority. In this case, the political dimension of such narratives allows readers of each ethnic background to empathise with experiences that are outside of their everyday lives by putting them right into the shoes of someone of a different ethnic, racial or cultural background. As a result, readers can be challenged to see such differences as well as brought closer to understanding and empathise with such struggles. This is for instance the case for stories by minority writers such as Adichie and Díaz in which protagonists struggle with racism and social injustice, thus raising awareness for such issues related to ethnicity.

Of course, it is not only the identification with the protagonist leading to empathy which can be political about the reader-address function, but also the impossibility of readers to take the protagonist’s position. As Richardson points out, it is important to note that “not everyone is equally able to merge with the second person” (Richardson 2006: 33) and thus second-person narratives can be used to challenge a ‘you’ that can seemingly address anyone. Although the
‘you’ as in the generalized ‘you’ might seem to be universal, it is not, and it can be marked by categories like gender, class or race, which can therefore be used to foreground significant cultural and political issues. As a result, the “monolithic ‘you’ that implies a universal, deracinated, ideal construct” is challenged (Richardson 2006: 33), which enables second-person narration not only to generate empathy by putting privileged readers into the shoes of less privileged protagonists, but also to raise awareness of how their life experiences differ from others. Thus, by seeing what they are not, questions of gender, race or class privileges can be foregrounded in second-person narratives through the address function.

In addition, through seeing what one is not, this also exposes and foregrounds “the assumptions that white middle and upper class audiences bring to the act of reading” (Richardson 2006: 33), which then also sheds light to the “insidious assumption that they are, ‘naturally’, the universal you addressed by the text” (Richardson 2006: 33). The interplay between the general and the specific of second-person narration often deliberately plays with the definability of the protagonist, and white heterosexual middle and upper class readers might be inclined to view the protagonist ‘just like them’ until they are exposed as ‘the other’, which then in return exposes their assumptions in the first place. This might also be applicable to non-white and non-hetero readers, as one is not only influenced by the fact that one will naturally assume a vague protagonist to be close to the self, but also that reading experiences are shaped by previous reading experiences, and there is a strong tendency for overrepresentation of white heterosexual characters instead of other minority groups. As a result, second-person narration may raise questions of privilege and generally overrepresentation of white heterosexual humans in language as well as in literature.

Second-person narratives can foreground issues related to gender and sexuality in various ways (cf. Fludernik 1993: 283; Fludernik 1994b: 471; Wiest 1999: 49), and again it is the narrative situation’s address function (although not only) that can be used to foreground these topics. One particularly interesting aspect of second-person narration is that it allows protagonists not to be marked by gender, Fludernik notes a tendency of gay and lesbian texts “to employ nonstandard pronouns” (1994b: 471)18, and also Schofield confirms that the “fluidity and undecidability is central to the value of second-person modality for much feminist and other oppositional and alternative writing” (1997: 105). The possibility of not marking protagonists through gender can also lead to situations in which the reader does not

18 Some writers take this even a step further by “inventing nongendered options such as June Arnold’s na, Monique Wittig’s on (in L’Opéopopnax) or j/e (in Le corps lesbien)” (Fludernik 1994b: 471).
know whether the depicted love relationships are homo- or heterosexual. Of course, this can also be the case for first-person protagonists; nevertheless, you-protagonists usually tend to be vaguer than the former, as the ‘you’ is “epistemologically a more dubious pronoun than the traditional ‘I’ or ‘she’” (Richardson 1991: 312). As already mentioned, the pronoun’s address function invites the reader to project their own disposition onto the protagonist, which can be challenging when it turns out they do not align. It is now not only that reader of privileged groups can feel like what it is to be a minority, as it has been previously discussed with relation to ethnicity, but also that such readers can be ‘tricked’ into feeling themselves in such a situation. For instance, if the gender of a protagonist is revealed rather late, a heterosexual reader (or any reader with a heteronormative worldview) will probably assume the protagonist also to be heterosexual and thus have assumptions of their gender as either male or female, depending on the plot. When a protagonist turns out to be gay or lesbian, “this belated specification of sexual orientation” (Fludernik 1993: 238) has “manipulate[d] readers into an empathetic identification with the protagonist from which it then proves difficult to withdraw when that character’s sexual orientation is finally revealed” (Fludernik 1993: 238). Thus the political functions operates two-fold: it ‘tricks’ readers into empathising with characters different from themselves, and by revealing the difference, it makes them aware of the assumptions they bring to reading. Fludernik mentions White’s Nocturnes for the King of Naples (1978) as a text that works with this principle (cf. 1993: 238), and also Oates’ short prose piece “The Secret Mirror” (1975), which revolves around a man secretly dressing up as a woman in front of a mirror, plays with this function on a minor scale (due to the brevity of the text) by revealing the protagonist’s gender only towards the end. In addition to the address function and the vagueness of the you-protagonist, also the above discussed portrayal of fragmented states plays an important role in second-person narratives that with queer protagonists, as their status of being ‘outside the norm’ might lead to inner conflict (e.g. of not admitting to themselves who they really are). Such conflicts are also enforced by outer norms and standards. Such inner conflicts of queer protagonists are thematised in Oates’ second-person short fiction pieces “The Seduction” (1975), “The Secret Mirror” (1975) as well as “Sunlight/Twilight” (1975). The issue of power and an oppressive society which can also lead to the queer protagonists’ struggles will be discussed in the next paragraph, as it more generally deals with the question of power, only then to give examples of how this can be done in second-person narration.

In addition to the issue of who the ‘you’ can and cannot address, also the issue of the addressing voice and the power it seems to hold over the protagonist can contribute to a
political function. As power struggles are usually of decidedly political concerns, second-person narration can thus also be used to mirror cultural and political issues in the gender, class and race conflict on the story-level and thus enforce and highlight this power struggle. The protagonist’s struggle against oppressive authorities has already been mentioned in chapter 2.5.2. as one factor that can lead to fragmentation of the self. The question at stake now is in what way second-person narration’s form can be considered oppressive and thus mirrors oppressive systems on the story-level. As already mentioned in the chapter on the narrator (chapter 2.2.1.), the voice in second-person narration becomes usually more distinguishable as a voice through the use of the pronoun ‘you’, which reminds one of a communicative situation with an ‘I’ and ‘you’. If taken a step further, one could argue that in a sense the voice holds power over the second-person protagonist, telling them what they do and think without them being able to react and change something about the situation. Margolin refers to this as “the superiority of the speaker to his or her addressee/character in terms of knowledge and/or understanding and/or judgment” (1990: 444) in regard to “the actions and the psychological nature of the ‘you’” (1994: 444) As a result, a power struggle becomes discernible: The protagonist ‘loses’ their power over their own situation to an (usually) anonymous voice who holds power over them and therefore takes their autonomy. The question of power integrated into the narrative situation is also addressed by Kacandes who analyses second person narratives by drawing on apostrophes and communicative situations: She states that in second-person narratives the speaker holds power over someone who cannot talk back (cf. 1994: 334). This is also pointed out by Wiest, who states that the narrator-figure and the addressed you-protagonist stand in a relation coined by the polarity of power and powerlessness, strength and weakness, dominance and dependence (cf. 1999: 55), with the protagonist being in the position of the one lacking independence, basically surrendering themselves to the narrator-voice and being dependant on it (cf. Wiest 1999: 56). Wiest takes it a step further by describing the you-protagonist as a figure at the mercy of the narrator (whom she compares to a master of puppets reigning over the protagonist) as the you-protagonist is seemingly dependant on external explanation of their own thinking and acting and thus unable to master the textual reality on their own and is in need of the help of this external voice (cf. Wiest 1999: 58). Also the use of the pronoun ‘you’ instead of a name underscores the power of the voice to even eradicate the name and therefore the identity of the person (cf. Wiest 1999: 41). Such relationships of power and powerless-ness on the discourse-level can thus foreground relations of power on the story-level, which are usually represented by protagonists that are at the mercy of existing systems and struggle against the
oppression that comes into being through power relations, foregrounding issues of race, gender, sexuality and class, which will now be discussed respectively.

Second-person narration’s potential to portray power struggles has been frequently employed in second-person feminist short stories. In regard to O’Brien’s *A Pagan Place* (1970) Richardson explicitly states that the second-person form manages to represent “issues of language, gender and silence” (1993: 317) in a way that first-person form could not do it, linking the “masculine appropriation of the first-person pronoun” (Richardson 1991:317), as suggested by Virginia Woolf to the “tyranny of an all-encompassing ‘I’ that for many resonates with patriarchal values” (cf. Richardson 1991:317). As a result, the “female subject position that has historically been suppressed and denied” (cf. Richardson 1991:317) can be ideally represented in second-person narratives, as a number of second-person short stories with feminist concerns (e.g. Schwartz’ “So You’re Going to Have a New Body!” (1986), Janowitz’ “You and the Boss” (1986) as well as “Sun Poisoning” (1986), and more implicitly in the stories by Moore (1985)) have shown. Also in these stories, the narrative situation mimics how the female protagonists feel oppressed by specific men (e.g. the gynaecologist in “So You’re Going to Have a New Body!” or Bruce in “You and the Boss”) and the patriarchy in general. The way in which the anonymous voice of the second-person narrative situation dominates and dictates the lives of the you-protagonist and takes away their autonomy thus mimics how the female you-protagonist are dominated and silenced by men and the patriarchy.

Additionally, in second-person narratives with queer protagonists the narrative situation can mimic how the protagonists are at the mercy of a homophobic society that makes it difficult for them not only to be accepted from the outside, but also to find acceptance within themselves, which can therefore lead to the inner fragmentation discussed above. For instance, the secretly gay protagonist in Oates’ “The Seduction” (1975) does not allow himself to accept his sexuality because “it is a mistake” (1975: 73), as one “must sleep here, in this woman’s arms, and nowhere else” (1975: 73), which therefore shows how he is dominated by a heteronormative society that does not allow for other types of sexualities. Also the cross-dressing man in Oates’ “The Secret Mirror” (1975) imagines being beat-up when going outside dressed as a woman, concluding it is better to “not go down to the street after all” (1975: 91). The narrative situation here does not only mimic how the protagonists feel distanced from themselves, but also how their lives are dictated by outside norms, highlighting the oppressive quality of such societal standards they are trying to live up to.
However, the depiction of struggles against authority is not solely linked to feminist and queer issues, but can also foreground other aspects, for instance state control and issues marked by class and race. For instance, in O’Brien’s *A Pagan Place* (1970), discussed by Richardson, the you-protagonist comes from a family living “in poverty” (Richardson 1991: 317), and thus it is not only her gender but also her low social class that render her at the mercy of her surroundings. In Cortázar’s “Graffiti” (1979), an ‘I-and-you’ short story about an imagined encounter between two anonymous graffiti artists, it is the oppression of the police and the state on the story-level that the form of second-person narration foregrounds. In Adichie’s and Díaz’ work, it is often the question of race and struggle of non-white protagonists in a world of racism that are mirrored in the narrative situation. In addition, in Adichie’s and Díaz’ stories there is also an intersectional link between race and class, which thus multiplies the powers and authorities the protagonists struggle against.

It is not only the struggles against oppressive authorities that are foregrounded in second-person narration, but also a certain inevitability of fate. Through the powerful narrator-voice, the you-protagonist does not only lose their autonomy, but the happenings in a sense also seem predestined and change seems unobtainable. To continue along these lines, the oppressive quality of the voice then also marks the inevitability of the ‘you’s’ fate. This inevitability highlights how strongly knit certain systems in our world are, as it seems to suggest that certain situations cannot be changed because that is how life goes in our world. Thus, it is on the one hand reinforced how strongly ingrained certain social injustices are into everyday life, but on the other hand also questioned, at least in the text itself, whether it is possible to change something about the way the world goes, which may be an implicit call to action on behalf of the reader in the actual world.

To sum up, second-person narratives’ form is ideally suited to foreground political aspects in a manner in which it cannot be done in other types of narrations. It is not only the innovative use of pronoun which can be political, but also the address aspect which may lead to empathy as well as showing reader ‘the other’ and challenging the assumption of a universal ‘you’. The potentially ambiguous gender of you-protagonists can trick readers into feeling with characters that are different from themselves. The function of portraying fragmented mental states can stem from issues related to sexuality and race, and it can also be reinforced by the portrayal of oppressive surroundings, as the narrative situation is particularly apt to do. The numerous ways in which second-person narration can be political also produced a great variety of political second-person short stories that deal with issues of race, sexuality, gender
and class. Whether the foregrounding of political topics may actually have an effect on the reader and thus the actual world is of course, just like all theories that regard what impact literature has on the world, debatable – however, the possibility cannot be entirely negated.

2.6. Attempt at Definition

Concluding from this, I would argue that second person narration is primarily defined by the designation of the protagonist through an address pronoun like the English second person pronoun ‘you’. Although the protagonist and their story might remain vague, it is the central focus of the narration to be fully defined as such. The narrator of this narrative situation can occur as a hetero- as well as a homodiegetic narrator and might even be present as a first-person narrator as long as the main focus of the narration remains the ‘you’-protagonist and the narration of their ‘story’. Even though the narratee in second person narration might be congruent with the ‘you’-protagonist, it does not necessarily have to be. The power of the second-person pronoun to oscillate between protagonist, narratee and implied reader leads to certain functions such as immersion and empathy whereas the unusual, playful and potentially transgressive nature of second-person narration creates a metafictional function. The use of second-person narration usually transgresses traditional modes of narration for a reason, which is why next to the metafictional function also certain other functions that attempt to naturalize this narrative situation or that foreground important themes of the stories emerge.

3. Forms and Functions of a Selected Corpus of Contemporary Second-Person Short Stories in English

In the following, the above discussed form and functions of second-person narration are exemplified through the in depth literary analysis of five second-person narration short stories. The stories have been selected from a larger corpus19 in order to show the great range of various forms second-person narration can have as well as to give insight into the various functions the narrative situation can have.

19 This corpus from which the short stories were selected can be seen in the bibliography, in which not only the selected texts are referenced, but also the texts out of which this selection was chosen. This is also an attempt to provide an overview of second-person short stories and short fiction. For further second-person narratives (including some short stories which unfortunately could not be located), see Fludernik 1994c and Fludernik 2011.
There are multiple reasons why I decided to focus exclusively on short stories in my interpretations. Firstly, scholars have so far mostly focused on second-person novels, including Butor’s *La Modification* (1957), Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller* (1979) and McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984), which have been repeatedly mentioned and used to exemplify second-person narration. Although also second-person short stories have received scholarly attention, in contrast to those novels they have been treated rather marginally, a common phenomenon that is not restricted to this particular narrative situation. Thus, one reason for the choice of short stories over novels is to bring texts into focus that usually do not receive as much attention despite them being worthy of such. A second reason to choose short stories over novels for discussion is that it might not be by coincidence that there exists a bulk of second-person short stories in the first place. Overall, one could argue that short stories are a more experimental genre than novels, as due to their brevity they are usually less focused on plot and more on discourse and language, which brings them in a sense also closer to poetry in regard to how fewer words are loaded with meaning. As second-person narration is an unusual narrative situation, its affiliation with (postmodern) experimentalism is definitely valid. Therefore, one can argue that second-person narration as an experimental narrative situation will also be found frequently in the more experimental genre of the short story. This is also indirectly pointed out by Richardson, who states that Butor with his novel *La Modification* “is often credited with having invented the technique” (1991: 311), even though there were “at least two earlier short stories […] which are written entirely in the second person” (1991: 311), namely Ilse Aichinger’s “Spiegelgeschichte” (1954) and Mary McCarthy’s “The Genial Host” (1941) (cf. Richardson 1991: 311). Furthermore, Rumer Godden’s “You Need To Go Upstairs”, which will be analysed in depth in chapter 3.2., in fact was first published in 1944. *La Modification* has not only been wrongly accredited as being the first second-person narrative (in addition, it is highly debatable whether there exists such a phenomenon), but it has also received decidedly more scholarly attention than the three earlier short stories. This again attests that when it comes to scholarly attention, fiction is the privileged genre of the two. In addition, it shows how the genre of the short story with its innovative character might actually be the more fruitful when discussing this narrative situation. Furthermore, one could also argue that the genre of short stories is able to foresee certain tendencies in literature that sometimes only rise to recognition once they also arise in novels. The final reason for the choice of short stories is that it enables this paper to show a variety of types of second-person narration, therefore giving a greater
overview of the forms in which this narrative situation can occur and what possible functions it can have.

The following short stories have been selected from a larger corpus in order to provide a variety of second-person texts. They are not confined to the nationality of their authors, however, they all have been written in the English language. I also made the attempt to choose contemporary stories over older stories as well as include a variety of authors. Overall, drawing on Richardson’s model, the stories can be divided into standard second-person narratives and hypothetical second-person narratives. Unfortunately, no example of autotelic second-person narrative is included, as firstly, this category of Richardson only occurs partially in narratives which therefore does not allow one to classify such narratives as second-person proper, and secondly, the texts which could be classified as autotelic second-person narratives were too short to be categorized as short stories. I also use my adaption of Fludernik’s model to provide examples of the further subtypes homoconative, reflectoral and self-address narrative within the realm of standard and hypothetical second-person narration as well as provide an example of an ‘I-and-you’ narrative (which has been neglected by Richardson). The order of the analysis is chosen according to the different types, beginning with the seemingly most common standard narrative to hypothetical narratives and ending with the least prototypical second-person narrative, namely the ‘I-and-you’ narrative. The reason why this order was chosen over a chronological order is because firstly, it facilitates the comparison between the different types, and secondly, a chronological order might suggest that one type of second-person narration was increasingly common in a certain time period, which is not the case. Within standard second-person narration, I decided to include a prototypical example of the category (Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009) as well as a reflectoral second-person narrative (Godden’s “You Need to Go Upstairs” (1944)). The reason for disregarding my criterion of choosing more contemporary short stories for “You Need to Go Upstairs” is because this story is the most prototypical reflectoral second-person narrative I have found. Although it does quite stretch the ‘contemporary’ in my title, I am willing to prioritize my criterion of showing in what varieties second-person narration can occur (and thus choosing the best prototypical example for each form) over the aspect of choosing more contemporary stories. The first hypothetical second-person narrative (“How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996)) is a prototypical hypothetical second-person narrative that encompasses shifting scenarios and shifting actants. The second hypothetical second-person narrative (Moore’s “How to Be an Other Woman”) is far less prototypical, but insofar interesting because it is the most overt second-person self-address
narrative within this selection. The last story, Oates’ “You” is an example of an ‘I-and-you’ story which can be situated in between first- and second-person narration. As I have already discussed, opinions whether one can classify such stories as second-person narration differ; however, I think this is precisely why including such an ‘I-and-you’ story highlights the specificity of second-person narration, as I aim to show in what way Oates’ “You” is similar and in what way it differs from second-person narration, thus highlighting the specificity of the narrative situation.


Adichie’s story “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009), published in a short story collection with the same title, is about a young Nigerian woman called Akenna who goes to America after winning the visa lottery. She first lives with her uncle and his family but moves out after he attempts to rape her. Her ongoing stay in America is shaped by financial struggles and isolation, until she meets an American man with whom she starts a romantic relationship. However, their relationship is burdened by racial differences, which ultimately leads to their difficulties in communicating and fully understanding each other. When Akenna learns that her father has died, she decides to go back to Nigeria, refusing her boyfriend’s offer to come with her. It remains open whether she intends to return to America or not.

Using Richardson’s terminology, “The Thing Around Your Neck” can be classified as standard second-person narration, as it is a story about a single protagonist referred to in the second-person. However, unlike Richardson’s prototypical standard narration, it is not told in the present, but in the past tense. If one takes my adaption of Fludernik’s typology into account, one could further classify it as a homoconative second-person narrative, as the rather covert narrator is situated outside the diegesis, and also the protagonist, except for the second-person pronoun, does not occupy an overt addressee role. The main reason why it cannot be classified as a reflectoral second-person narrative is because the discourse is strongly shaped by explicit speech markers such as “you thought” (Adichie. “The Thing Around Your Neck”: 115), “you wondered” (117) or “you remembered” (117).

However, there is the possibility of naturalizing the story as a story of self-address, arguing that the protagonist narrates to herself what happened to her in the past. Like all self-address second-person narratives, the story’s narrator and narratee would then be the same person, namely the protagonist. The use of the past tense would corroborate such an interpretation as
one could argue that with the story being set in the past, the narrator reminisces about her old self and how she has changed during her time in America. The use of the second-person pronoun instead of the first-person pronoun can be naturalized through her complicated relationship to herself, marked by isolation, power struggles and diasporic experiences, and the fact that she now is a different person than she was in the past. However, except for the use of the past tense there is no further evidence on the discourse level that this is in fact a story of self-address, which thus leaves this interpretation a possible, yet not infallible one.

The use of ‘you’ to address herself can be naturalized by the diasporic experiences Akenna makes in America and her dwindling recognition of herself in a foreign country where she feels deracinated. When Akenna first arrives in America, she stays with her uncle and her family, where she still feels at home because she is surrounded by family and therefore also her culture, thus things that are familiar to her:

You laughed with your uncle and you felt at home in his house; his wife called you nwanne, sister, and his two school-age children called you Aunty. They spoke Igbo and ate garri for lunch and it was like home. (116)

However, after her uncle attempts to rape her, she sees herself forced to leave his home. From this point on, Akenna feels isolated. Her isolation does not only come from living in a country so different from her own, but also from not being in touch with her family, a symbol for her culture and her roots. Not only is she unable to connect with the new culture around her, by moving out of her uncle’s home and by not being in touch with her family in Nigeria she also loses touch with her old culture. Thus, she faces typical diasporic struggles many immigrants face and moreover is completely deracinated. This deracination leads to her struggling to keep an awareness of her self, as with the loss of her culture she also seems to lose her identity. As she feels invisible, she tries “to walk through your wall, it left bruises on your arm” (119). Her selfhood is thus eradicated through her deracination to a point where she feels as if she no longer has a physical shape. Only the bruises serve to her as a reminder of her physical existence. Thus, as mentioned before, one could argue that “The Thing Around Your Neck” is a story of self-address in which the protagonist addresses herself with the second-person pronoun because in the story told, she did not feel like herself. As the story is told in the past tense, one can imagine that this was a moment in the past, and that the current protagonist feels like a completely different person. However, as the present Akenna never becomes graspable, there is no further evidence on the story- as well as the discourse level for such a reading.
As has been pointed out, to naturalize the story as a story of self-address might be one possible reading; however, this reading is by no means an exclusive one, especially because there is hardly any evidence for such a reading on the discourse level. Thus, a certain metafictional potential remains, as despite the various functions the narrative situation can have (as will be illustrated in the rest of this chapter), it is still not entirely clear who the narrator of the story is. Thus, the narrator’s elusive quality can also lead to the possibility of reading the story as “the entirely non-realistic case of a pure rendering of a second-person’s consciousness” (Fludernik: 1994a: 290), which would therefore foreground the discourse situation as highly artificial and implausible, and thus has a strong metafictional potential.

One metafictional reading of the story would, for instance, be that of an American dream story gone wrong, thus a story that is implicitly critical of such success stories and one that foregrounds the opposition between reality and fiction. At the same time, however, through the internal perspective which gives access to Akenna’s thoughts, the readers also have the facilitated possibility of immersing themselves in the story, which then could also be an important prerequisite for empathy, as will be discussed later. This possibility of immersion might also be facilitated through the way in which the narrative situation foregrounds important themes of the story.

Although in “The Thing Around Your Neck” the second-person pronoun refers to a rather specific story of a protagonist who even gets a name, the experiences of Akenna in America can also be seen as representative of the experiences of many Nigerian women, or African women (or in general immigrants from less wealthy countries), in America, which thus plays with the function of the ‘you’ to not only address an individual, but a group of people. Already the beginning of the story points to a ‘you’ that does not designate an individual, but every young person from Nigeria with unrealistic expectations of America:

You thought everybody in America had a car and a gun; your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so too. Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house. But don’t buy a gun like those Americans. (115)

The ‘you’s’ family remains vague, which thus gives it a certain applicability to everyone with “uncles and aunts and cousins” (115), and the unrealistic prophecies and advice the ‘you’ gets from them seem like phrases that will be often said to people from poorer countries going to America. Although the following paragraphs expose the ‘you’ as a rather specific protagonist with “three siblings” (115) and an uncle in America living “in a small white town in Maine, in a thirty-year-old house by a lake” (115), the story still goes back and forth between specific information about the protagonist and general information that might not only be applicable to
young Nigerian women in America, but also immigrants in general. For instance, in the weeks after Akenna got her job as a waitress, she reflects upon the differences between Nigeria and America:

In later weeks, though, you wanted to write because you had stories to tell. You wanted to write about the surprising openness of people in America […] You wanted to write about the way people left so much food on their plates and crumpled a few dollar bills down […] You wanted to write about the rich people who wore shabby clothes and tattered sneakers […]. (118)

Although some aspects of this paragraph also relate to specific things Akenna witnessed, like a child “who started to cry and pull at her blond hair and push the menus off the table” (118), overall her experiences point to general differences between America and Nigeria, experiences that many immigrants from less wealthy countries will make. Thus, although at this point of the story the reader is aware of the fact that ‘you’ designates a specific protagonist, such paragraphs draw on the second-person pronoun’s power to address a group of people. Also by not giving her boyfriend a name the relationship Akenna has with him can be seen as symbolic for any other relationship between a black woman and a white man, as he literally could be anybody. Therefore, one function of the use of ‘you’ is to illustrate how Akenna’s experience in America is representative of a communal experience of maybe not only Nigerian women, but generally immigrants from less wealthy countries.

Another function of the use of second-person narration in “The Thing Around Your Neck” is to mimic the lack of communication and connection and the resulting isolation the protagonist feels, which are important themes on the story-level. This can be seen as an example of Alber’s possible function of “foregrounding the thematic” (Alber 2014: 274). As Kacandes points out with her analogy to apostrophes, second-person narratives can be seen as radical narrative apostrophes in which the addressed is unable to answer (cf. Kacandes 1994: 337). As a result, there is no possibility of dialogue between addressee and addressed in second-person narration, which is even more graspable in stories such as “The Thing Around Your Neck”, in which the narrator can be seen as an elusive voice situated outside the diegesis and thus is not even fully graspable. Also, if one reads the story as a self-address narrative, the temporal gap makes it impossible for Akenna the narrator to communicate with her younger self. The impossibility of communication foregrounded on the discourse-level is one of the main themes of the story-level. For instance, although Akenna sends checks to her family, she does not write them letters, although she wants to write to both her family and friends. The reason why she does not is because she cannot afford to send them the gifts they had asked for, so she decides not to write at all. One can interpret this as the fact that she wants to shield
them from reality and keep them believing in their fiction of a success story as she does not want them to know that she did not make it in America the way they wanted her to. However, the lack of communication leads to her isolation under which she suffers immensely and which also gives the story its title:

Nobody knew where you were, because you told no one. Sometimes you felt invisible and tried to walk through your room wall […] At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep. (119)

The invisible thing around her neck becomes a symbol for her suffering and the isolation she feels in America. However, after she meets her American boyfriend, “the thing […] started to loosen, to let go” (125), dragging her out of her isolation. Nevertheless, their relationship is still marked by their inability to communicate and connect, which ultimately also leads to the foregrounded end of their relationship. Already the blank “two strips of paper” (121) of the fortune cookie she gets at their first date foreshadow not only a flawed communication through the deletion of a message, but also the emptiness at core of their relationship per se. In addition, already early in their relationship when Akenna’s boyfriend shows sympathy and claims to understand her struggles and the way she is treated, she eschews his attempt at connection by saying “there was nothing to understand, it was just the way it was” (123). His failure to understand her life experience as a black woman facing racism and being treated as inferior to others culminates when a waiter at the restaurant asks him whether he has a girlfriend in Shanghai:

Later, you told him why you were upset, that even though you went to Chang’s so often together, even though you had kissed just before the menus came, the Chinese man had assumed you could not possibly be his girlfriend, and he had smiled and said nothing. Before he apologized, he gazed at you blankly and you knew that he did not understand. (124)

Although both of them attempt to communicate with each other, ultimately this communication fails, as the boyfriend seems to be unable to fully comprehend what life outside his privileged white mind-set is truly like. In the end, the protagonist does not even attempt to communicate her feelings to him anymore: “[…] and he asked what was wrong and you said nothing, although you thought a lot was wrong” (126). Also when he asks her whether she would come back from Nigeria, she remains silent. Thus, the narrative situation that foregrounds the impossibility to communicate dialogically mirrors the important theme of lack of communication in the story.

In addition to foregrounding the theme of failed communication, the narrative situation in “The Thing Around Your Neck” also foregrounds the theme of power and powerlessness. As it has been shown in chapter 2.5.3., second-person narration per se is a narrative situation that
foregrounds power struggles, as the narrator in a sense holds power over the ‘you’. This power struggle is also evident on the story-level as Akenna’s life is heavily dictated by those around her, resulting in a lack of agency. In addition to the narrator, there are also a plethora of other voices on the story-level that tell her what to do, such as her family or her boyfriend. These speech acts are not marked by punctuation marks and thus seemingly blend in with the narration. The voices that try to dictate Akenna’s life on the story-level are thus also a mise-en-abyme of the narrator on the discourse-level who does the same thing. Already at the beginning, she is seemingly at the mercy of the wishes of the family: Everybody wants her to bring them something from America. In addition, it was not herself but her uncle in America who put in her name in the visa lottery in the first place. As a result, it is not clear of whether she herself actually wants to go to America; moreover, it is not even debated on the story-level how she feels about it because it is evident that she must go. Her lack of agency in America is created through her financial situation which forces her to work as a waitress, getting paid below minimum wage. After she meets her boyfriend, she is stunned by the fact that instead of going to college, he travelled around Asia and Africa “to discover himself” (121):

You asked him where he ended up finding himself and he laughed. You did not laugh. You did not know that people could simply choose not to go to school, that people could dictate to life. You were used to accepting what life gave, writing down what life dictated. (121)

The last phrase thus is also an implicit metafictional comment on the narrative situation; just as the protagonist feels she is at the mercy of “what life dictated”, the narrative situation puts the ‘you’ at the mercy of the ungraspable voice that dictates their life for them, in a sense portraying their fate as inevitable. Akenna’s power struggles are not only visible through the narrative situation and her lack of agency, but also through two powerful characters in the story that are able to decide over her and her family’s fate: firstly, her uncle, who means to take advantage of her in her situation, and secondly, a wealthy anonymous man who appears in a short hypodiegetic story Akenna tells to her boyfriend, in which she tells him about the one time her father crashed into the wealthy man’s car and then degraded himself in order to not get into trouble. She describes to her boyfriend the disgust she felt when she watched her father crying and begging “even before he got out of the car and laid himself flat on the road” (122). The owner of the car described as “The Big Man” (122) does not even get out of the car and lets his driver manage the situation. Just like in second-person narration, the centre of power is ungraspable and eschews to be closely inspected. Those two instances also show that even though Akenna has little agency in the story, she does not entirely lack agency: not only
does she express disgust at the thought of her father surrendering to powerful men, she also actively resists powerful men herself by walking out voluntarily of her uncle’s home before he can harm her. In addition, it is also her who decides to go back to Nigeria and to refuse her boyfriend coming along with her. Therefore, even though she often finds herself in a power struggle, she does manage to resist and at least partially overcome the powerful instances of her life.

“The Thing Around Your Neck” is not only a decidedly political text in regard to the themes it addresses but also in the way the narrative situation can lead to empathy and the ability to empathise with characters less privileged than oneself. As it has been discussed in chapter 2.5.3., this is a text in which the ‘you’ cannot merge with everyone, as it designates a protagonist marked by gender, race and class. However, the immersive quality of the text still enables to pull white readers into the subject position of a black woman’s struggles in America, leaving them both with empathy for her situation and the awareness of their own privileged position. Through the character of Akenna’s boyfriend, these struggles of difference and empathy are highlighted. For instance, when she tells him the story of the car crash and the wealthy man, right along Akenna’s boyfriend the reader will feel empathy with Akenna, her father and the unfair social system in Nigeria. However, when she suddenly gets annoyed with her boyfriend because she feels as if his empathy is based on the belief that it ennobles him and that there is nothing to understand, also the reader’s ability to empathise with Akenna is questioned. Throughout the story, Akenna is confronted with ignorant white people that possibly make the reader aware of their own ignorance. Even more so, readers will probably find their position close to Akenna’s boyfriend, which can possibly also lead to the fact that white readers are led to empathise with him over Akenna, as not only their life experiences match, but also readers might similarly feel taken aback by Akenna’s behaviour than he is. Even though Akenna’s boyfriend is not as ignorant as other Americans who ask Akenna “if you had real houses in Africa” (116) such as the college girls or who ask her whether she is from Jamaica such as the restaurant guests who “thought that every black person with a foreign accent was Jamaican” (119), Akenna thinks that his attitude towards Africa still remains somewhat problematic. Although unlike the other white characters, he has some ‘real’ first-hand knowledge and understanding about Africa, the way he gathers that knowledge almost seems voyeuristic and condescending to Akenna:

You did not want him to go to Nigeria, to add it to the list of countries where he wanted to gawk at the lives of poor people who could never gawk back at his life. (124-5)
The issue that Akenna raises is that her boyfriend is seemingly not aware of his own privilege. In addition, the way he attempts to gather knowledge about Africa has a voyeuristic and romanticised feel to it, although he claims to be looking at reality, a point that is also criticised by Akenna:

You said he was wrong to call only the poor Indians in Bombay the real Indians. Did it mean he wasn’t a real American, since he was not like the poor fat people you and he had seen in Hartford? (125)

Although he is attempting to empathise with her, in the end he seems to be incapable of doing so, which thus also raises the question of whether a white reader is fully able to grasp the emotional struggles of the black protagonist and the everyday racism she faces. As a result, there rests the possibility that readers will also be led to feel distanced from Akenna, as their inability to understand what she cannot (and will not) explain might compromise the ability to feel empathy with her. As it has been said, empathy is highly reader-specific, and some readers will be led to empathize more with Akenna whereas others will empathise more with her boyfriend. However, the path to empathy with Akenna is facilitated through the use of the narrative situation and her internal perspective.

To sum up, in “The Thing Around Your Neck” the narrative situation fulfils multiple functions. On the story-level, it foregrounds important themes of diasporic struggles, self-recognition, lack of communication, power struggles and questions of agency. Although it can be read as a self-address narrative, a metafictional reading is equally possible and valid. Nevertheless, the immersive quality of the text can also lead to empathy. Next to other political topics foregrounded on the story-level and the possibility of the second-person pronoun to portray a communal experience, this renders “The Thing Around Your Neck” a possibly highly political text.

3.2. Standard Reflectoral Second-Person Narration: “You Need to Go Upstairs” (1944) by Rumer Godden

Rumer Godden’s short story “You Need to Go Upstairs” (1944) is a story about a blind girl called Alice, nicknamed Ally, who one afternoon, while sitting in the garden with her mother and a visitor, needs to go the bathroom which is located upstairs in the house. Despite the visitor’s overt concerns and her mother’s and her own more secret worries, she decides she will manage to do so alone. The story follows her as she manages (with the secret help of her mother and all her prior knowledge of moving in the home without being able to see) to navigate through the garden and go upstairs where the bathroom is located. This is –
considering that she is blind – quite a quest, as she needs to navigate her way through flowerbeds and other type of obstacles she might fall over. However, the story ends with her succeeding, answering her mother who calls out to her from the garden that she has managed everything “perfectly” (Godden. “You Need to Go Upstairs”: 148).

Using Richardson’s and my adaption of Fludernik’s classification, “You Need to Go Upstairs” can be classified as standard second-person narration (except for the rare use of imperatives; however, since they occur seldom and since the story does not show any properties of hypothetical second-person narration, it would be nonsensical to classify it as such), and more specifically as a reflectoral second-person narrative. Thus, in this story the narrator is maximally covert and also the address function of the ‘you’ is extremely mitigated except for in certain passages in which the imperative is used, which give the impression that the you-protagonist is talking to herself. The reading of the story as a self-address narrative will be discussed at the end of this interpretation. With the you-protagonist as the focalizer, the whole story is filtered through the lens of a blind girl, which is particularly interesting in regard to the plethora of sensory descriptions one gets right from the beginning. They are, for obvious reasons, not visual, but mainly tactile (“the feel of the grass is good” (143); “your back is against Mother’s chair and occasionally she puts her finger between your collar and your skin” (143)), olfactory and auditory (“the wind brings the garden scents and the sounds to you; sounds of birds and neighbors and the street” (143)). Despite the lack of the visual, the heavy focus on perceptions nevertheless creates a vivid ‘image’ of the scene. ‘Image’ here is in inverted commas because the reader (in addition to the general habit of creating an image in the mind) is strongly invited to feel, hear and smell the scene. This mimics not only how the protagonist perceives the world, but also how for her those senses are intensified. The lack of visual perceptions already foreshadows the girl’s blindness which is revealed on the second page of the story: “Mother is looking at your face- you cannot look yourself, yet you can always feel Mother’s look […]” (144). Besides the lack of visual perceptions, other instances foreground her blindness, for instance when she picks up her knitting “because you can knit” (143). The emphasis on her ability to knit can only be fully understood once one knows she is blind. Also when the visitor arrives and tells Alice to stay seated, this gets a more significant meaning once one finds out about her blindness, as now one can conclude that the visitor does not want to trouble Alice by getting up, fearing that it would be difficult for her to do so. The story is written in present tense, which renders the happenings more immediate and thus, despite the fact that usually past tense is seen as more illusion-enhancing, can have an illusionist effect, as the reader is not only incredibly close to Ally’s subjectivity, but also her
actions. The actions’ immediacy is even foregrounded on the discourse level (“Lift your feet – one – two.” (145) [my emphasis]; “Now you let go of the door – like this – and you go across the hall” (147) [my emphasis]). Thus, as a reader one gets the impression to be directly in Ally’s head, following her perceptions, thoughts and actions alongside her through a seemingly unmediated discourse, which, as discussed in chapter 2.5.2., can lead to an increased immersive effect.

One function of the narrative situation in “You Need to Go Upstairs” is the foregrounding of the question of agency. As it has been discussed in chapter 2.5.1. and 2.5.3., second-person narration can foreground relationships of power and powerlessness, which has also been the case in “The Thing Around Your Neck”. Similar to “The Thing Around Your Neck”, in “You Need to Go Upstairs”, the protagonist’s agency is threatened; however, for her it is not a racist system which oppresses her, but her blindness and how society treats her because of it. Alice’s blindness does not only render her a dependent on others, but also leads to her being treated as incapable of managing things on her own. The title itself can be interpreted in two ways: one can either read it as a statement or an order. If one reads it as an order, one could either see it as an order from an invisible covert narrator which mimics how Ally has lost agency over her life to others. However, one could also interpret it as Ally talking to herself, stating the she needs to go upstairs (alone) to reclaim her agency. Ally’s lack of agency and her wish to regain it is repeatedly foregrounded throughout the story. For instance, when the visitor arrives, she does not address Alice, but instead asks her Mother “What is her name?” (144). In addition to not asking Ally herself, the use of the third-person pronoun and the fact that visitor whispers illustrate how she is treating Ally as ‘the other’, and does not accredit Ally the possibility of answering the question herself. Moreover, the visitor can be seen as a symbol for ‘the outside’, illustrating how society treats Alice. The fact that the visitor becomes such a symbol for outer society is also underscored since they never get a name, but are solely referred to as ‘the visitor’. This can mean that they are interchangeable and could be anybody from the outer world. Alice’s mother functions as a bridge between Alice and the outer world, and thus also in the way in which she gives Ally agency. Not only is she always there to support her (and she also secretly helps Alice navigating her way through the garden and the house), she also aims at giving her agency by letting her try to accomplish things on her own. Although she is “doubtful” (144) that Ally will manage to find the way to the bathroom by herself, she is also “proud” (144) that she wants to and encourages her to do so. The main way in which Alice tries to regain her agency in the story is by telling her mother that when she needs to go to the bathroom, she “can go by myself” (144). Thus, the
subversive potential of second-person narration underscores Alice’s subversive attempt to regain agency by attempting to do something herself despite of the difficulty. The political potential of the action is reinforced because she does so in front of the eyes of the visitor, the one who is threatening do deny her this power and rendering her powerless. Immediately after Ally states that she will go herself, the visitor questions her ability, thus again threatening to take away her agency, which prompts Ally to forcefully insist that she can do it alone, thus reclaiming her agency: “‘Alone? Breathes the visitor, and prickles seem to rise up all over you. You have said you will do it alone, and you will” (144). Of course, the walk to the bathroom remains a challenge for Alice, but she is determined to manage on her own. This can been seen when Alice worries that the tortoise might be out in the garden and she might fall over:

Schiff! You stop. Schiff is so small that you might easily step on him, but Schiff is large enough for you to fall over. Mother … but you must not call, you must go on […] Mother! Schiff! Mother. But you have not called […]. (145-146)

Written in free indirect discourse, her thoughts in this passage are transmitted directly, and it becomes clear that despite her wish to call for her mother, her wish to regain her own agency transcends this wish and thus she forces herself not to call. This quest for agency is repeatedly foregrounded throughout the rest of the story, for instance when she gets to the door and “saves yourself” (146) or when once again she forbids herself to call out, despite being afraid:

Little stickers come out along your back and neck; the back of your neck is cold, your fingers are sticky too, holding the heart signal. Suddenly you can’t move away from the stairs. Mother. Mother, but you bite your lips. You must not call out. (147)

Her agency is also reclaimed through her heightened senses (“You know all these things better than anyone else” (146)) and her ability to improve her skills:

Of course you could have gone round by the wall to the stairs, feeling around the hat rack and chest, but you would not do that any more than you would go up the stairs on your hands and knees (147)

Also the ending once again emphasis how Ally’s walk to the bathroom was a quest for regaining her agency:

‘Is she all right? Is she?
‘Ally, are you managing?’ calls Mother.
‘Perfectly,’ you answer, and you shut the loo door. (148)

This ending foregrounds how the outside, symbolized by the visitor, doubts Ally’s abilities and thus threatens to take away her agency. As the story ends not only with Alice successfully reaching her goal but with the final action being completed by her (shutting the door), this
shows how not only her walk to the bathroom, but also her quest for regaining her agency was successful.

In addition to foregrounding the question of agency, the narrative situation in “You Need to Go Upstairs” also foregrounds the relationship between Ally and her mother in an interesting way. Again, at stake are questions of communication and the lack of communicating dialogically. In contrast to “The Thing Around Your Neck”, the lack of overt communication between Ally and her mother does not testify their distance from each other, but instead proves the strength of their bond. Ally understands her mother not only without seeing, but also without words:

Mother is looking at your face- you cannot look yourself, yet you can always feel Mother’s look; now she is doubtful, but she is proud, and after a moment she says, “Very well dear.” You understand what she does not say, ‘Be careful! Be careful!’ (144)

This understanding without overt communication is mutual: When Alice becomes afraid that she will stumble over Schiff and refuses to call out for her mother despite her wish to do so, her mother seems to sense her fear, thus helping her without Alice having to ask for help:

But you have not called and Mother is saying in what seems an ordinary voice to the visitor, but is her special loud voice for you. ‘How strange! With all this sun, our tortoise has not come out on the path today.’ (146)

Similar to how in “The Thing Around Your Neck” second-person narration’s quality of generating a communicative situation in which the communication between the speaker and the addressee is one-sided (and possibly flawed) mirrors such failures of connection through communication on the story-level, in “You Need to Go Upstairs” also a certain lack of dialogical communication is mirrored; however, in this case, it does not point to a distance between the interlocutors, but confirms their closeness, as they are not in need to talk to each other to understand each other. The phrase ‘I need to go upstairs’ also illustrates how even when Ally and her mother use language to communicate, there is no reason to be precise, as both immediately know what Ally means by this, whereas the reader only understands at a later point that this means that she needs to go to the bathroom. Their ability to connect even transcends lingual means. This is also exemplified by the signals Ally’s mother has put under the rail of the stairs “where no one can find them” (147), which help to “guide [her] all the way up” (147), which is why she is “not at all afraid of the stairs” (147). The strength of their emotional bond is underscored through the fact that it goes far deeper than the surface which everyone can see. Similarly to how Ally is capable of navigating through life without seeing, it is also possible for the reader to feel this bond alongside Ally without getting an overt
‘picture’ of it. Therefore, in “You Need to Go Upstairs” the lack of overt dialogical communication mirrored in the narrative situation is in contrast to most other second-person narratives entirely positively connotated because it does not testify to the distance of the characters, but to the strength of the bond that is able to exist without words.

Another function of the narrative situation in “You Need to Go Upstairs” is the othering of Ally. A possible reason why Ally is designated by the second-person pronoun instead of using more conventional pronouns such as the first- or third-person is because it mirrors her situation as ‘the other’, as also she herself is unconventional because she is blind and therefore is outside the norms of society. As it has been said, the visitor functions as a symbol for the outer world, and the way she treats Ally can be seen as emblematic of how society treats Ally, namely as an outsider with no agency. Ally’s mother serves as a bridge that enables Ally to connect with the outer world and regain agency. This can be seen for instance in the following paragraph:

That visitor there would be surprised if you picked the flowers, one by one, and took them to her and told her what they were. ‘I see no reason why you should not know your flowers,’ Mother has often told you. ‘Flowers have shapes and smells as well as colors’ […] (145)

The visitor’s imagined surprise foregrounds how Ally is aware of being perceived as the ‘other’, and therefore as being considered incapable of many things considered ‘normal’ in society. Ally’s mother, however, attempts to treat her as normal as possible, insisting on that there is more to life that just the visual perception, and that Ally can navigate through life by using the other canals available to her. However, this also implicitly sheds light on the need to be accepted by society and the pressure that rests on Ally to fit a certain norm despite her blindness. When she goes across the hall, it is evident that she has learnt to behave as ‘normal’ as possible, even though other forms of movement might be easier for her:

Of course you could have gone round by the wall to the stairs, feeling around the hat rack and chest, but you would not do that any more than you would go up the stairs on your hands and knees. No you across – like this- like this and the big round know at the bottom of the stair is in your hands […] (147)

Thus, this not only foregrounds how Ally is perceived as different by society, but also exposes her need to live up to these expectations, no matter how different she is.

If taken a step further, one could argue that not only does society perceive Ally as ‘the other’, but also she herself has internalised this concept, and thus the story could be naturalized as a second-person self-address narrative. One could additionally argue that Ally cannot refer to herself using the pronoun ‘I’ because a first-person pronoun would possess the kind of conventionality she does not. In addition, using the first-person pronoun would also give her
more agency than she possesses, and thus the second-person pronoun symbolizes her fight for agency. An element which would corroborate such an interpretation are the few imperatives used throughout the story which mimic how Ally is talking to herself in her mind: “Move your feet along the grass, don’t lift them […] You find the path. Lift your feet-one-two” (145). However, except for this, there is no further evidence on the story or the discourse level that would corroborate such an interpretation, which similar to in “The Thing Around Your Neck” makes such an interpretation a possible amongst others.

Another possible way of making sense of the narrative situation used is to read it as the story being narrated by Ally’s mother who imagines what life must be like for her blind daughter. The narrative situation would thus also mimic how Ally’s mother imagines talking to her daughter, thus again foregrounding their strong bond. The fact that she refers to herself using the third-person can on the one hand imitate how she sees herself solely as the role of the mother, and on the other hand also how through Ally’s eyes she only exists in her function as a mother, here to support her. However, except for the way in which this communicative situation would testify to the strong bond they are portrayed having on the story-level, there is no real evidence on the discourse-level that would corroborate with such a reading. As both mentioned routes to naturalization remain open, similar to “The Thing Around Your Neck”, there rests the possibility of reading the story in a metafictional way as “the entirely non-realistic case of a pure rendering of a second-person’s consciousness” (Fludernik: 1994a: 290).

For the reader, the story can be read as a curious defamiliarization of the world as we know it, as not only the narrative situation is unusual, but also the emphasis on auditory, olfactory and sensory perceptions over visual perception. However, as this emphasis is highly plausible in regards to the blindness of the focalizer/you-protagonist, one could also argue that this does not lead to a heightened distance on the part of the reader, but an increased immersive function. Also the above mentioned functions of foregrounding the themes of agency, Ally’s relationship with her mother as well as Ally’s othering can contribute to the immersive function. Together with the reflectoral narrative situation which foregrounds Ally’s subjectivity par excellence, one could argue that this is a second-person narrative with a potentially highly immersive function. This might then lead to the function of empathy and that readers will be lead to emphasize with what they are not. However, as it has been stated in chapter 2.5.2., the question as to how much actual readers will be immersed is reader-specific, and despite the attempt to naturalize and give meaning to the narrative situation, a certain gap remains, and the question of why an anonymous voice is rendering the perceptions
and actions of a you-protagonist cannot be fully answered. This is why one can also argue that the story still has metafictional potential because of the uncanny narrative situation, similarly to how this issue remains open in “The Thing Around Your Neck”.

3.3. Hypothetical Second-Person Narration “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996) by Junot Díaz

Junot Díaz “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” (1996), published in his short story collection Drown in 1996, is a hypothetical second-person short story about the Dominican teenager Yunior and his attempts at dating various girls from different ethnic backgrounds, eventually resulting in failure. Since most of the story is set in the hypothetical realm, most of the told scenarios indeed are hypothetical; however, the specific details given suggest that either the scenarios actually happened or that they are very likely to happen. In addition, the specific details are also what differentiates this story from an actual manual. Out of the selected short stories it is the most prototypical form of Richardson’s hypothetical second-person narration, as the discourse is not only shaped by the frequent use of the imperative, but also consistently employs hypothetical statements using if-clauses and the future tense. Like most hypothetical second-person narration, the manual style is already foregrounded in the title employing the ‘how-to’-formula.

In “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” the you-protagonist can be equated with the narratee since the frequent use of imperatives and future tense gives the impression that the narrator-voice is talking to the protagonist and giving him advice on what to do. These typical features of hypothetical second-person narration also clearly mark the narrator-voice as such since one gets the impression that the voice and the narratee are in a one-sided conversation with each other. However, it is difficult to pinpoint on what level this narrator-voice is located. Fludernik states that although “somebody is clearly addressing our protagonist” (2011: 111), “this person remains a voice that exhorts him and does not become foregrounded as a narrator persona or add any information that is beyond the ken of the protagonist” (Fludernik 2011: 111). One could argue that this narrator is a heterodiegetic narrator as no apparent evidence is given that the narrator is a character on the diegesis. In addition, the narrator possesses knowledge about things that a normal character on the diegesis would normally be unable to have, such as detailed imaginings of how scenarios will work out. This would then classify the story as a homoconative narrative in which the addressee is part of the story-level, but the narrator is heterodiegetic. However, it can also be
argued that the narrator-voice is in the know of Yunior’s thoughts and situations possibly because the narrator-voice also has had similar thoughts “The white ones are the ones you want the most, aren’t they [my emphasis] […]” (Díaz. “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”: 113) or has encountered similar situations and can now give advice looking back on them: “If she’s a halfie, don’t be surprised that her mother is white” (113), which thus suggests that it could be homodiegetic narrator. One could therefore read the imagined scenarios not solely as hypothetical, but as very likely to happen, as the narrator-voice has experienced similar events and thus is in the know that these are the ways in which the represented scenarios usually work out. However, who this homodiegetic narrator would be, rests entirely unclear. Since most of the story is written in present tense, it seems highly unlikely to interpret the narrator-voice as an older version of Yunior. The story can also be read with the ‘you’ being a general ‘you’, which would partially solve the problem of the unknown narrator being in the know about someone’s else’s (hypothetical) thoughts and actions. Even though the ‘you’-protagonist gets a name and specific details about his family and home, in the rest of the story, he still remains somewhat vague and shifting. Together with the instructional register, the protagonist’s vagueness leads to the story at least superficially pretending to be generally applicable for readers in similar dispositions (cf. Fludernik 1994b: 462). Therefore the story could be naturalized as a guide for any Dominican (or non-white) young men who struggles with dating girls due to his and their ethnicity. However, again this interpretation leaves open certain gaps, especially because Yunior’s characterization and the detailed renderings of certain scenes inhibit such a reading. Another possible interpretation of the narrative situation is to naturalize the story as a story of self-address that imitates the way Yunior talks to himself when getting ready for a date; however, there is no further evidence on the discourse found for this interpretation. As a result, one can argue that once again, the discourse situation leaves open many gaps; however, as will be shown now, each of these readings fulfils an important function and foregrounds important themes of the story.

Similar to Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck”, the use of the second-person pronoun in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” can point to the protagonist’s identity struggles which are strongly related to his diasporic experiences. Although, as it has been said, the naturalization as self-address does not really corroborate with any evidence on the discourse-level, the theme of identity and identity struggles related to ethnicity is indeed an important one in the story. Yunior finds himself struggling between two cultures and unable to find a place in America due to his Dominican heritage. The phrase “the year the
United States invaded your island” (113) shows how the reason why the protagonist lives in the U.S. is not a voluntary, but a forced one. The wording “your island” (113) shows the strong ties Yunior still has to his culture, although it is possible that he was already born in the United States. This strong tie to his culture is also illustrated through the use of Spanish words (“to visit the tía” (111)). Yunior’s struggles do not only stem from the fact that his family had to leave their country, but also came into being through the way he is treated in America. He is struggling as a non-white person in a society in which white people are privileged. This privilege becomes visible in an imagined scenario of Yunior dating a white girl: “Tell her that you love her hair, that you love her skin, her lips, because in truth, you love them more than you love your own.” (115). The white skin and features as objects of Yunior’s desire which he loves even more than his own skin already point to an instable identity at the core. Much of the advice given on the story-level is focused on veiling Yunior’s cultural identity. Despite trying to act more ‘white’, he is unable to shake his ethnicity, which is visible when he tries to run “a hand through your hair like the whiteboys do even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa” (112). This therefore shows how Yunior aims to pretend to be somebody he is not and how he is struggling with his identity. Implicitly, it additionally illustrates how his identity is threatened by outer societal influences beyond his control governed by privilege and racism. Yunior is not only trying to act ‘more white’, but also tries to hide his lower class background, of which “the government cheese” (111) which he takes out of the fridge is a symbol. Thus, this also links the issues of race and class which often go hand in hand. All of this can also be seen as an argument for interpreting the story as a story of self-address, in which the protagonist does not address himself in the first-person because of his identity struggles. However, as it has already been mentioned, on the level of discourse there is no strong evidence for the story to be interpreted as a story of self-address, which is why this interpretation should not be viewed as definite, but merely one of the possibilities the text provides.

Another way in which “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” can be read is by reading the ‘you’ as a generalizing ‘you’, addressing a group of people. Similar to how Akenna’s experiences in “The Thing Around Your Neck” can be seen as communal experiences of any Nigerian woman coming to America, Yunior’s experiences can also be seen as representative of the experiences any Dominican (or non-white) male teenager makes. In addition to the generalizing ‘you’, the manual-structure highlights this function as on the surface, the story is portrayed as general dating advice (for non-white men). When one interprets the narrator as an anonymous homodiegetic narrator from the same culture who
gives advice on the basis of what he has experienced, this reading is also corroborated. In the story, the general issues of race and class are heavily foregrounded. The reading of ‘you’ as a generalizing ‘you’ that can address a group of people thus emphasises how the issues portrayed on the story-level transcend the individual’s fate and illustrate a more general problem. Again, this reading would also be underscored when one reads the narrator as being a homodiegetic narrator from the same culture. The story continuously shows how ethnicity highly influences one’s life experience and the way one is treated. The issues of race are already foregrounded by the title of the story. The shifting scenarios in the story constantly revolve around whether the girl is a “local” (112), “white” (113), “a halfie” (113), “Latina” (113) or “black” (113), advising the you-protagonist on how to act different with each one and predicting how she will act in return. For instance, “a local girl won’t need stories about the neighbourhood but the others might” (113). The narrator-voice even explicitly states “you have choices” (113), here referring to where the you-protagonist should take the girl to dinner. The fact that the skin colour is not only used as an adjective, but merged with the noun, already shows how skin colour is deeply ingrained in one’s identity and how one is treated because of it. It is not only the possible girls that are treated differently depending on their ethnic background, but also the protagonist who is treated in a specific way because he is Dominican. The first part of the story is focused on the many different advices the protagonist gets (or gives himself) to veil his Dominican identity and the resulting poverty he lives in:

Clear the government cheese from the refrigerator […] Take down any embarrassing photos of your family in the campo, especially the one with the half-naked kids dragging a goat on a rope leash […] Hide the pictures of yourself with an Afro. Make sure the bathroom is presentable. Put the basket with all the crapped-on toilet paper under sink […]. (111)

Also throughout the possible date scenario at the restaurant in which he is advised to tell a story “about the loco who’d been storing canisters of tear gas in the basement for years” (113) until one day they cracked, he veils the past of his cultural identity: “Don’t tell her that your moms knew right away what it was, that she recognized its smell from the year the United States invaded your island” (113). However, he still is unable to completely veil his identity, and the racism he faces due to that is very subtly represented in the story: “Her mom will say hi and you’ll see that you don’t scare her, not really” (113). Also the hypothetical girls are treated differently by society due to their ethnic backgrounds: the ‘halfie’ complains “black people […] treat me real bad” (114), “a local” is not “quick about letting you touch” because “she has to live in the same neighbourhood you do, has to deal with you being all up in her business” (114), whereas a “whitegirl might just give it up right then” (115) because she does not have the same problems of being judged.
The issue of race is not only foregrounded in the story by how people are being treated according to their ethnicity, but also through showing a certain unequal playing field, thus addressing questions of privilege. It is not only that the way in which dating girls from different ethnic backgrounds differs is thematized, but there is also a certain hierarchy among them: “The white ones are the ones you want the most” (113), and also the ones who are the most likely to actually engage sexually with the protagonist, as they are not going to be judged by the neighbourhood. Thus, their privilege lies not only in the fact that they are the ‘most-wanted’ but also that they are allowed to behave in the same way as others without being judged. However, “usually the out-of-towners are black” (113), which illustrates that this hierarchy of who the protagonist wants the most also translates to who wants to date him, and that he finds himself in the same hierarchy out of point of view of the girls. Although it is then imagined how a date with a white girl would end in sex, it is also immediately concluded “but usually it won’t work this way” (115), which illustrates how unlikely it is that the Dominican you-protagonist will be seen as ‘dateable’ by white girls. He even tries to ‘act white’ in order to raise his worth as a possible romantic partner, but ultimately he is unable to shed his cultural identity, foreshadowing how all the shifting dating scenarios end in failure. Being white is thus seen as desirable and superior, which is also highlighted in the segment in which the protagonist is advised on what to say to a white girl: “Tell her that you love her hair, that you love her skin, her lips, because in truth, you love them more than you love your own.” (115). White skin and white feature are thus portrayed as the highest goal, both for oneself but also for one’s romantic partner. Similarly, the shifting girls face the same issues while dating: The ‘halfie’ complains that “you’re the only kind of guy who asks me out […] you and the black boys” (115), which shows not only her struggles of being considered less worth than a white girl, but also implicitly raises awareness to how she herself considers non-white boys as less worthy than white ones. With the story being read as the ‘you’ addressing a communal group, the universality of such issues related to raise and privilege is therefore emphasised.

“How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” does not only borrow from the language of self-help manuals, it can also be read as a parody of them. Self-help manuals want to help the reader to success, and by providing suggestions and advice, they encourage them to take action that will benefit them. Therefore, this story is even more of a mockery of a success story than “The Thing Around Your Neck”. Unlike self-help manual readers, Yunior has little or no agency and is inevitably bound to failure. The consistent use of the future tense undermines the inevitability of his fate whereas the frequent use of the hypothetical tense and
the imperative mockingly suggest that the protagonist has “choices” (113), although in the end he actually has none. It is not only the form of the parody which mocks Yunior’s lack of agency, but also the oppressive quality of second-person narration which brands him as incapable of escaping his ethnic and lower social class background. In the end, Yunior seemingly ends up alone, suggesting that it does not matter what he will do, because it will always end the same way. Yunior’s lack of agency is also visible through his lower class social background, as already the “government cheese” (111) in the second paragraph exposes him. Although he tries to hide his background, the story ends with the advice to “put the government cheese back in its place before your mom kills you” (116), thus going full circle from the first lines of the story which advises the you-protagonist to hide the cheese from the fridge. Ending with the same image as in the beginning, this suggests that in fact nothing had happened and nothing had changed, and all the protagonist’s attempts were futile.

Yunior’s lack of agency is also visible in yet another theme that has already been discussed in respect to “The Thing Around Your Neck”, namely the lack of dialogical conversation that is present on the discourse- as well as the story-level. Yunior’s (possible) conversations with his dates often are described as one-sided, with him remaining silent:

She will appreciate your interest. She will tell you more. Black people, she will say, treat me real bad. That’s why I don’t like them. You’ll wonder how she feels about Dominicans. Don’t ask. (114)

She will act like somebody you don’t know. In school she is known for her attention-grabbing laugh, as high and far-ranging as a gull, but here she will worry you. You will not know what to say. (115)

These passages show Yunior’s inability to talk to his (imagined) dates, which does not only foreground his lack of agency, but also the failed attempts at connection in the story. This silence culminates in the final paragraph of the story, in which the girl has already left and the phone rings, strongly suggesting it is her who is calling, despite the failed date. However, despite being “tempted to pick it up” (116), the protagonist is advised against it, as “it won’t help” (116). As a result, these failed connections lead to Yunior remaining lonely. The loneliness he feels already becomes visible in an earlier passage in which one hypothetical scenario is the girl coming over with her friends:

Sometimes she’ll run into her other friends and a whole crowd will show up at your apartment and even though that means you ain’t getting shit it will be fun anyway and you’ll wish these people would come over more often. (112)

In this passage, it is evident that it is not solely a romantic or sexual relationship Yunior searches for, but that in fact he is searching for any kind of connection to other people.
Together with the multiple silences, similar to how it is done in “The Thing Around Your Neck” the narrative situation foregrounds this lack of connection.

Similar to Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck”, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” raises the question of who the ‘you’ can and who it cannot address. Despite the name of the protagonist and some details about his home, he remains rather vague and thus the ‘you’ can also be read as a general ‘you’. This reading is also enforced by the instructional register. However, not everybody is able to merge with the ‘you’, as the particular issues of race related to dating are only applicable to a non-white readership, which thus raises awareness for such issues. Through experiencing the worlds of those less privileged, issues are represented that are possibly not part of the implied readers’ lives; thus, the implied reader is invited to develop more empathy for people like Yunior who come from a non-white and lower class social background.

Although “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” strongly plays with the general and the specific, it still has a specific protagonist and his specific represented world at the core. The shifting scenarios might not actually happen in the represented world, but are rendered detailed enough for the reader to imagine that they could. Nevertheless, the text can also be read in a playful manner, implicitly drawing attention to the question of where the boundary between fiction and non-fiction such as manuals lies. As this realisation of hypothetical second-person narration heavily draws on self-help manuals, it is precisely the narrative situation itself that leads to such metafictional speculations. The fact that one finds no story in the traditional sense also implicitly raises the question of what a story in the traditional sense consists of. As this text can be read as a parody of the self-help genre, it also implicitly raises metafictional awareness of self-help literature per se. Another aspect that adds to the text’s metafictional potential is the before mentioned obscurity of where the narrator is actually located in the text. As none of the possible naturalizations are entirely valid, there rests a certain implausibility to the narrative situation which can lead to certain metafictional distance on part of the reader.

Even though the text can thus also be read in a playful and metafictional manner, interpreting all the represented scenarios as merely in the hypothetical realm, the various possible readings discussed in the paragraphs above attribute the narrative situation other functions that negate the possibility of only reading the text as playful. Just like it would not merit the story to simply read it as a story of self-address or as a parody of a manual, also a solely metafictional reading would not provide a satisfying interpretation. Once again, it is this oscillation between
various readings that attributes to the complexity and multiple meanings of the text in question.

3.4. Hypothetical Self-Address Second-Person Narration: “How to Be an Other Woman” (1985) by Lorrie Moore

“How to Be an Other Woman” (1985) by Lorrie Moore is the first story of her short story collection Self-Help, published in 1985. Out of the nine stories in the collection, six are written in second-person narration. As already the title of the collection suggests, Moore’s stories are mostly written in manual-style with frequent usage of imperatives and thus could be classified as hypothetical second-person narrations. The stories’ titles already point to the manual-style as they all either contain the ‘how-to’-formula or the word ‘guide’. The most common theme of Moore’s stories are relationships, and three of the second-person short stories are about failed romantic relationships between men and women. “How to Be an Other Woman” is the story of Charlene, a young woman who has an affair with a married man. The story follows this affair from when they meet until the eventual end of the affair, describing in detail how Charlene suffers emotionally under being ‘the other woman’.

Although just like Diaz’ “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”, “How to Be an Other Woman” can be classified as hypothetical second-person narration, there are some crucial differences. The main aspect that classifies the latter story as such is the frequent use of the imperative right from the beginning throughout the story. However, the story entirely lacks the use of future tense and conditionals. In contrast to “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”, there are therefore no shifting scenarios or vague characters in the narration. Instead, it narrates a very specific story. Also the quality of the imperatives is entirely different, as their consistent use diminishes their ostensibly advise-giving function, which means that they become normalized simply as a stylistic device. Overall, the frequent use of imperatives is the only aspect that differentiates the story from what Richardson calls standard second-person narration, which therefore sheds light on how Richardson’s categories are by no means clear-cut from each other. However, since the frequent use of the imperative is a stylistic device that highly shapes the narrative discourse and also has high relevance for the story-level, it is still valid to classify this story as hypothetical second-person narration. Sticking with Richardson’s categorization, one could argue that this is simply a less prototypical instance of hypothetical second-person narration. Nevertheless, this raises the question of whether for this story ‘manual-style’ or ‘how-to’
second-person narration would be a better term because the term hypothetical is insofar misleading since nothing about the represented story is hypothetical.

Unlike “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”, “How to be an Other Woman” already starts off very specifically, immediately making clear that the ‘you’ designates the protagonist of the story. Nevertheless, one can argue that still the address function has not entirely vanished, especially because imperatives foreground the appellatory function of the second-person pronoun. Thus the reader is left in a flux between the feeling of being addressed and the knowledge that one is not addressed. Unlike the “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” which play with specific and general elements, the represented story and the protagonist is very specific. However, the overall theme of relationships and heartbreak is so universal that despite being constantly reminded by the specificity of the details that it is not one who is addressed, the story might still resonate strongly with the reader. The appellatory function might increase this effect, especially in parts that are focused on Charlene’s emotions. The specificity of the descriptions and the ability of the pronoun ‘you’ to pull the reader right into the story thus can make it also a highly immersive story, with the reader possibly feeling great empathy for the protagonist, which therefore also points to a direction of sympathies. As one never gets an inside view into the married man’s head, it is definitely far more difficult to empathise with him instead of the protagonist. However, as Phelan has pointed out, in such a situation in which there is such a clear distinction between narratee-protagonist and implied reader, readers are both invited to empathise or distance themselves from the protagonist, with some tending to empathise more and others less, possibly growing impatient, indifferent or even condemnatory (cf. 1994: 361).

As “How to Be an Other Woman” is a story of self-address, the protagonist is both the homodiegetic narrator and the narratee. In contrast to “The Thing Around Your Neck”, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” and “You Need To Go Upsatirs, this reading is not only one possibility amongst many, but foregrounded through both the discourse and the story-level as the most plausible one. Next to frequently foreshadowing this reading throughout the story, it becomes explicit on the discourse-level in instances when the you-protagonist switches to the pronoun ‘I’ to refer to herself. The reason why the protagonist uses the second-person pronoun to refer to herself is because she no longer feels like herself after she learns that she has become the mistress of a married man:
You walk differently. In store windows you don’t recognize yourself; you are another woman, some crazy interior display lady […] murmuring into your bluing thighs: ‘Hello, I’m Charlene. I’m a mistress.’ (Moore. “How to Be an Other Woman”: 5)

The fact that she feels like another woman is multifaceted: Not only does she feel like another woman because she feels split from her past self who has never had an affair with a married man, she literally is the other woman of her lover. In addition, she excessively tries to be the kind of woman she imagines her lover desires, thus also creating further distance between her real self and the self she creates for him. When asking her co-worker Hilda whether “she’s ever had an affair with a married man” (7), and Hilda says yes, Charlene pretends to be shocked:

Say: ‘Oh my god,’ as if it were horrible and tragic, then try to mitigate that rudeness by clearing your throat and saying, ‘Well, actually, I guess it’s not that bad’ (7).

This passage can be interpreted in two ways: Either Charlene tries to pretend that having affairs is reprehensible, or she is already so distanced from herself that she even deliberately suppresses that she is having an affair herself. Both interpretations underscore her fragmented self. The question of identity is continuously foregrounded throughout the story, through Charlene’s thoughts (“Wonder who you are” (8)) as well as through the question who precisely the wife, the other woman, is. This is even taken a step further in the end when one finds out that the man is in fact separated from his wife, but living with a woman called Patricia, who the protagonist assumed to be his wife. As a result, the question of who the ‘other woman’ is gets even more complicated since like an infinity mirror, the series of other women possibly has no end.

The first time that the conflation of narrator and narratee-protagonist is explicitly marked on the discourse level is when Charlene uses both pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ to refer to herself: In one of her ‘mock-lists’ she continuously makes throughout the story (after learning that Patricia keeps lists), Charlene writes:

1. Fallen in love (?) Out of control. Who is this? Who am I? [my emphasis] And who is this wife with the skis and the nostrils and the Tylenol and does she have orgasms?
2. Reclaim yourself. Pieces have fluttered away. (13)

As these lists are portrayed as notes from Charlene, the changing pronoun and the fact that also in the lists she refers to herself using the second-person pronoun are indications that also the rest of the story is told by her. Thus, in contrast to the possible interpretations of self-address in the other discussed stories, this interpretation of self-address is not only strongly marked on the level of story, but also on the discourse. Interestingly, Charlene uses the
second-person pronoun to “reclaim” (13) herself. Although at first glance this might be paradoxical, it in fact sheds light on the multifaceted-ness of her fragmentation: Prior to her affair, Charlene would have referred to herself as ‘I’, only when she has become the mistress, she turns into ‘you’, as she no longer is able to be and recognize her former ‘I’. When she now reclaims herself, she reclaims her current persona as a mistress, the only one she can still recognize, as the ‘I’ is no longer there. Further instances of the first-person pronoun can be found when Charlene thinks about the absurdity of staying up for the man even when he is not coming (“Think: What has happened to me? Why am I lying like this on top of my covers [...] pretending casually that this is how I always go to bed [...]” (17)) and in another one of her lists. In these instances, Charlene seems to regain her former self; however, before she is able to quit her position as a mistress, she falls back into the ‘you’ persona. Although all these instances of the ‘I’ can be naturalized as the written speech and thoughts of the you-protagonist, with all the other evidence and also the fact that she uses ‘you’ and ‘I’ interchangeably in her lists the naturalization as self-address is the most plausible reading.

As the story is written in present tense, it is unclear from what point of time Charlene narrates. One can interpret the story as a simultaneous rendering of her thoughts, which is also foregrounded on the discourse level: “Philosophize: you are a mistress, part of a great hysterical you mean historical [my emphasis] tradition” (16). However, the frequent imperatives still seem rather artificial when one reads the text as a simultaneous rendering of thought. One could also argue that Charlene narrates from a point in the future. The frequent imperatives mock the fact that her future self cannot give real advice to her past self and thus point to the inevitability of the situation. However, the use of imperatives also shows how future Charlene wants to give advice to her past self, even though those attempts are futile. If one continues from this point of view, despite being a second-person narration of self-address, the discourse would thus also be highly artificial, as Charlene uses present tense to refer to past events and imperatives not to give advice, but to show the inevitability of actions and events. To sum up, the exact point of location of the narrator in time and space cannot be located, and either way, there remains an artificiality of the story that cannot be fully naturalized.

This artificiality also ties in with the story’s metafictional function. Even though the narrative situation in “How to Be an Other Woman” can be quite easily naturalized as self-address second-person narration, as it has been stated, the story still keeps some of its for second-person narration typical metafictional playfulness. Although the ways in which the discourse
deviates from standard narrative discourse (not only through second-person narration, but also for instance through the lists that Charlene keeps) is highly informed by the story-level and enhances many of the story’s themes and also aesthetic illusion, it can still be seen as a deviation from such and thus as metafictional. As already stated, the question from which standpoint Charlene narrates and the frequent use of imperatives that are not actual advices still have an unnatural touch to them that adds to the metafictional function. Also the heightened awareness for the fact that Charlene talks to herself in the second-person shifts the focus from the story to the discourse level and thus also can be seen as metafictional. Another metafictional aspect is the constant blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction: For instance, how Charlene and the married man meet at the beginning of the story is explicitly described “like a detective movie” (3). This movie-theme continues throughout their relationship, for example when Charlene does “a quick shuffle-ball-chain like you saw Barbra Streisand do in a movie once” (9) to say good-bye or when she “slam[s] the door like Bette Davis” (21) after they break up. Thus, their relationship gets the connotation of not being a ‘real’ relationship, but simply a relationship like in the movies, thus fictional. This reading is underscored through the continuous foregrounding of the differentiation between acting and being in the way they behave. The first line “Meet in expensive beige raincoats” (3) already points to the absurdity and artificiality of the situation, as the imperative here does not only ostensibly give advice on an event that happened by chance, but also explicitly voices very specifically what they are wearing. The expensive beige raincoats remain a symbol for the artificiality of their romantic relationship throughout the narrative. It is described in all kinds of situations that Charlene or the married man are wearing them, also in seemingly absurd situations, such as when after their dates they lie “sprawled on the living room floor with your expensive beige raincoats still on” (5). Also the theme of the mistress and the married man is explicitly mentioned as “part of a great hysterical you mean historical tradition” (16), which thus marks their relationship as just another one employing this theme, and therefore foregrounds its status as fiction. The fact that the man never gets a name and thus could be anybody underscores such a reading. Also Charlene herself can be viewed as quite empty, which is marked on the discourse-level through the fact that she can only refer to herself in the second-person, thus having no first-person identity. In addition, she is constantly playing a role; whether it is that of the happy mistress or that of an ‘other woman’, she never seems to act or feel like herself. Moreover, the way she writes points to a certain emptiness at the core: it is not only when she writes the lists that she imitates the writing style of the ostensible wife of her affair, but also the way she writes generally can be seen as artificial, constructed and
imitating self-help literature. The blurring of the border between reality and fiction is taken to the extreme when reality itself becomes absurd and empty. For instance, the lists that Charlene makes are no lists at all, but just lists she makes for the sake of making lists in order to be more like the apparent wife. They can therefore be read as empty signifiers. Ironically, just like Patricia, Charlene names them ‘clients to see’, despite not having any clients to see herself. Therefore, also the headings are empty signifiers. The constant veiling of the selves of Charlene and the married man also point to the question of what is at the core of themselves and their relationship. When it is unveiled that the married man actually has a wife and a girlfriend, the question of the other woman is taken into the abyss; not Charlene is the other woman, but the other woman of the other woman, opening the possibility of endless deferral. This poststructuralist reading is insofar important, as it sheds light on the fact that even though this is a story that can most easily be naturalized as a story of self-address, it still treats such metafictional and poststructuralist themes. As a result, the story can likewise be read under the light of its unnatural and metafictional status since the narrative situation ties in with the issues foregrounded on the story- and discourse-level.

As it has already been stated, “How to Be an Other Woman” with its frequent use of imperatives draws heavily from the style of manuals and self-help literature. However, just like “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” the story is a parody of the self-help genre (and thus also this parody-function reinforces the metafictional function) as the represented story is not a story of success and does neither lead the reader nor the protagonist “toward Self-Fulfillment and the Better Life” (Phelan 1994: 359). In addition, already the title implicates that the apparent outcome of the story is not a desirable goal that everyone wants to achieve, as usually nobody wants to be the ‘other woman’. Furthermore, the story does not even offer advice on how to best behave in such a situation, as the imperatives in “How to Be an Other Woman” seem less like suggestions, but inevitable and partially involuntary acts of the protagonist (“Giggle. Like an idiot” (9)). On top of that, it is evident that the protagonist suffers immensely under her situation and the way she deals with it. This parody of a manual not only ridicules the self-help genre in general, but also a specific type of self-help literature dedicated to dating addressed to a female readership. The societal guidelines and rules opposed on dating are even alluded to on the story-level: “After fours movies, three concerts, and two-and-a-half museums, you sleep with him. It seems the right number of cultural events” (4). Whereas this line is poking fun at what society considers
‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in dating, paradoxically, in some situations the protagonist also exactly behaves in clichéd ways:

‘You get more beautiful every day,’ he says to you, as you hold your wine glass over your nose, burgundy rushing down your throat. Put your glass down. Redden. Smile, Fiddle With your Phi Beta Kappa key. (9)

From a feminist perspective, one could argue that typical ‘female’ behaviour in dating situations is already so ingrained in the protagonist that she cannot help but to redden, fiddle and smile when being told she is beautiful. The imperative thus gives this passage not the quality of advice, but the pressing ‘voice’ of society telling one how to act, thus foregrounding second-person narration’s function of representing powerless protagonists at the mercy of others, in this case societal systems. The fact that the protagonist both ironically mocks society’s dating guidelines, as in the passage above, and still acts in a very stereotypical way illustrates how ingrained society is into everyone despite being conscious of it. Moreover, this also marks the text as a text which playfully engages with such questions, which is undermined by the generally playful nature of second-person narratives. As a result, next to a psychological reading of Charlene as being heavily influenced by society, one can also read the story from a more distanced perspective as not only a parody of the self-help genre, but also a parody of a love story, which once again underscores its metafictional functions.

The narrative situation in “How to Be an Other Woman” does not only foreground the fragmented self of the protagonist, but also the relationship between her lover and herself, which is a relationship marked by inequality. As it has been repeatedly mentioned, second-person narration can be used to foreground power struggles and one-sided relationships, as it has been done in both “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”; however, unequal relationships between men and women from a feminist perspective have so far not been thematised. The relationship between Charlene and the married man is imbalanced: Not only is he married, it is also him who decides the pace:

Wait freezing in the front of Florsheim’s until seven-twenty. He finally dashes up, gasping apologies[…] and takes you in tow quickly uptown toward the art museums […] he drawls, long and smiling, quickening his pace and yours. (10)

Not only does she have to wait for him, it is also him who decides the pace: When he quickens his step, inevitably she also must quicken hers, which highlights the power he has over her. Phelan describes the struggle as the narratee-protagonist desiring “a deeper, more
reliable relationship with the man she is involved with” (1994: 360) although she is only “of secondary importance to him” (1994: 360). Their relationship is also shown as unequal by the adjectives used to describe their outer features: After asking him seemingly jokingly whether he wants to come home with her to meet her parents, he smiles “fatherly” (14) and pats her “silly ridiculous little hand” (14), thus belittling and patronising her. In one of her lists, Charlene even explicitly calls the affair “demeaning” (20), violating “decency” (20) and complains about the lack of “emotional support” (20). She is aware of the fact that breaking free is an option, but that she herself is not able to do so (“And it hits you: maybe it all boils down to this: people will do anything, anything, for a really nice laugh” (20)). As it has been already mentioned, such power struggles in relationships between men and women, with men being portrayed as dominant, are a common theme in feminist second-person short stories, and are also thematised in Janowitz’ “You and the Boss” or “Sun Poisoning” or Houston’s “How to Talk to A Hunter” (1990).

The relationship between Charlene and the married man is not only marked by such power struggles, but also by the difference of appearance versus being, which is especially visible in their dialogues. They usually banter lightly, without addressing any real issues between them unable to tell each other how they really feel. Again, the narrative situation foregrounds this inability to communicate on the story-level similar to how it is done in “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”. When Charlene finally breaks down, she tells the man: “I don’t know why I joke. I hurt.” (20), resulting him to answer, “That is why” (21). Thus, their seemingly light conversation is not only meant to cover up the issues lying underneath, but it also suggested that it is a coping mechanism. However, the issue of appearance versus being does not stop at harmless banter; it is taken even a step further when Charlene finally finds out that the man is separated from his wife and living with another woman. When she expresses her anger about being “just another one of the fucking gang” (21), he looks puzzled and answers that what he had always admired about her was her “strength, your independence” (21). For the reader, this is highly paradoxical as up to this point of the story one has followed Charlene’s lack of strength and independence. The man is thus completely unaware of Charlene’s real self, either because it is convenient for him to view Charlene as independent in order to not to have to deal with the consequences, or because Charlene did a compelling job at covering up her real self in order to charm the man. Once again, this pinpoints how their relationship is one marked by deceptions. Also the
ending reinforces this notion, as whenever the man calls Charlene at the office to ask her how she is doing, she “always, always, say[s]: ‘Fine’” (22).

In “How to Be Another Woman” the narrative situation’s functions are thus numerous: It is a story of self-address that convincingly ingrains the protagonist’s mental struggles in the narrative situation, it is a metafictional story that parodies self-help literature and deals with the blurred boundary between reality and fiction, and it is also the story of an imbalanced relationship marked by deceptions. As the story can be read both metafictionally but also from a naturalizing perspective, the reader is in tension between immersion and feeling for the protagonist as well as empathising with her and a more distanced reading that foregrounds the irony and the story’s and their relationship’s artificiality. From a feminist perspective, it is an ironic comment on self-help books and guidelines society imposes on women how to date and how to act, and also an implicit critique of certain issues present in patriarchal societies.


Oates’ “You” (1970) is a story about the complicated mother-daughter relationship between Madeline, an actress and a minor celebrity, and her 17-year old twin daughters, Marion and Miranda. Their relationship is troubled because Marion and Miranda feel oppressed by their mother’s overwhelming presence. In addition, they also resent Madeline for neglecting her mother role. The story begins with Madeline arriving in Hollywood. Throughout the story, the reader finds out that the day before Madeline had a fight with her daughter Miranda who is possibly pregnant. The story alternates back and forth between Madeline’s day in Hollywood (imagined by Marion) and Marion’s day in New York, which she spends trying to find Miranda. As Miranda is psychologically fragile, Marion worries about her. Eventually, Marion finds out that Miranda has taken an overdose and is now at the hospital. After getting a call from Marion, Madeline comes home the next day and Marion awaits her at the airport.

The story is entirely narrated from Marion’s perspective in first-person with her addressing her mother continuously with the pronoun ‘you’. As a result, out of the discussed texts this story is the only one in which the narrator’s position is clear; however, the elusive quality of second-person narration still remains for the discourse focused on Madeline. Since Marion as a first-person narrator only emerges on the fifth page of the story, up to that point, Madeline’s life in Hollywood is entirely rendered in what seems to be standard second-person narration. From there on, the story frequently jumps between parts that are centred on Marion (her
trying to find her sister) and parts that are centred on Madeline (her day in Hollywood), both actions that happen simultaneously. However, after Marion emerges as a first-person narrator, it is clear that Madeline’s actions are (most likely) imagined by Marion. The use of first- and second-person is not limited to either part respectively as the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ repeatedly come up in both parts, with Marion addressing her mother in her mind while getting through her day as well as commenting on her mother’s actions when describing her mother’s day. When one reads the parts about Madeline as being solely imagined by Marion, it becomes clear that the you-narration in the beginning is also only imagined by Marion. However, what remains remarkable is the imagined story’s degree of specificity, rendering something as specific as dialogue as well as giving insight into her mother’s thoughts and emotions. Thus, the use of the second-person seems to transcend mere address as one, despite the possible assumption that this is all solely imagined by Marion, gets a vivid image of Madeline’s actions that day. The story plays with the possibility of Madeline’s actions not only being imagined, but also possibly true. What therefore renders the story close to standard second-person narration is that the ‘you’ transcends the role of the addressee and becomes an actant in a (possibly imagined) scenario. However, the address function still remains particularly important in the story. Especially in parts in which the discourse is focused on Marion’s first-perspective, the constant address to her mother foregrounds how Madeline is constantly present in Marion’s mind.

As it has been said, as the ‘you’ does not solely fulfil an address function, the reader also gets Madeline’s (imagined) internal perspective and therefore access to her thoughts and emotions. As a result, a curious tension between two different points of views emerges: On the one hand, the reader feels as if they get Madeline’s internal perspective, on the other hand, it is questionable whether this is actually Madeline’s internal perspective, as it is just imagined by Marion who imagines various things that are impossible to know. However, through the length and the specificity of such passages the reader is inclined to partially forget that the second-person discourse is nothing but imagination and can therefore read these passages as possible inside views into Madeline’s head. Therefore, this both foregrounds the metafictional and the immersive function of second-person narration: Whereas ‘I-and-you’ stories similar to “You” foreground the implausibility of the discourse, they also provide a route to naturalization (with the happenings being merely imagined by the first-person narrator) as well as the possibility of immersing oneself in these passages due to their length and their

20 In contrast, in Patai’s “On Your Fifty-Fifth Birthday”, another ‘I-and-you’ story about a complicated mother-daughter relationship, the ‘you’ solely has an address function.
specificity. Especially in the beginning (before Marion as a first-person narrator emerges), this function is the strongest as Madeline’s thoughts and feelings are transmitted in an almost unmediated way:

Sunlight. A morning. Where the hell are your sunglasses? You hate mornings – anger rises in you, bubbling like something sour in your throat – but you grin into the morning because someone is approaching you, shouting a magic word. Your name. (Oates. “You”: 362)

The phrase “where the hell are your sunglasses” (362) seems to suggest that one is rightly in Madeline’s head since her thoughts are transmitted in a seemingly unmediated way, similar to as it is done in reflectoral second-person stories as “You Need To Go Upstairs”. Also the anger that Madeline feels gives inside view into her head. Thus, before Marion emerges as a narrator, the story could almost be classified as a reflectoral second-person narrative, which is also argued for by Fludernik (cf. 1993: 240). Also throughout the story one gets further inside view into Madeline’s thoughts in a seemingly unmediated way: “How you hate sunshine! How you hate mornings! How you hate this man who is embracing you, making a fuss over you, a bastard you only know too well!” (363). However, once Marion emerges as a first-person narrator, this ostensible immediacy is troubled, as it becomes clear that the discourse is imagined and thus also transmitted by Marion. What still remains curious about Marion’s imaginations is that they are not solely focused on outer appearances (which, considering the specificity of the descriptions, would also be remarkable by itself), but also on the inner life of Madeline, rendering not only her emotions, but also her thoughts. Thus, this takes the issue that Marion imagines something that she cannot possibly know to the extreme: Not only does she imagine her mother’s life in Hollywood, she also imagines her emotions and thoughts to the smallest detail. This could be interpreted in two ways: On the one hand, it could underscore the fact that the whole discourse focused on Madeline is solely imagined by Madeline, and thus not true. On the other hand, this must not only foreground the fact that the story is imagined, but also can be read as attesting to the bond between Marion and her mother. One could argue that because of that bond Marion is able to imagine her mother’s life to the fullest detail, even her emotions and thoughts, and as a result Madeline’s story might be true (or very close to the truth) overall. The story thus oscillates in a curious tension between being constructed (which can lead to a metafictional reading) and being real (which can lead to a psychological reading) without fully settling towards one pole or the other. Depending on the reading, certain evaluative passages also stand in a curious opposition to whose point of view one gets, for instance when Madeline arrives at the motel: “You, you, standing so that enormous, outrageous, crazy bosom of yours is outlined against something (what the hell is
it? a glass wall with palm trees behind it?) […]” (364). It is more likely that this is Marion’s point of view as it shows the way she views her mother as oppressive. The fact that Marion asks about the glass wall has a curious metafictional tinge to it. Although it highlights the limits of her point of view, it stands in a curious opposition to previous times when this limit was already crossed. Once again, this highlights the fact that overall, Marion’s point of view is impossible. Resulting from this, such evaluative passages foreshadow Marion as the narrator even before the first-person pronoun emerges; at the same time, however, such “intermittent hints of a non-figural evaluative stance […] can always be put down to Madeline’s critical self-awareness ” (Fludernik 1993: 240). Although the just discussed passage is more likely to be imagined by Marion, other evaluative passages might as well be written from Madeline’s (imagined) point of view. An example of this would be the following: “You are a woman of beauty and everyone else is ugly” (370). If one reads this as Marion’s point of view, it again foregrounds her feelings of inferiority towards her mother; if one reads this as Madeline’s (imagined) point of view, this highlights how Madeline herself thinks of herself as superior to others (or how Marion assumes her mother to feel superior over others). As a result, passages like this raise the issue of whether one gets access to the ‘real’ Madeline’s thoughts or whether everything one learns about her is entirely constructed by her daughter.

Out of the discussed second-person stories, “You” is the second-person narrative that can be seen as the most metafictional, as it foregrounds second-person narration’s implausible discourse situation in the most overt manner. As Fludernik states, the reader “can ultimately find no consistent, ‘realistic’ situation of utterance or narration” (1993: 242). Even though also the discourse in “How to Be an Other Woman” is laid bare as artificial, in “You” this is taken a step further, because now the life of the ‘you’ is not constructed by the self, but by another. As a result, the story’s truth value is not slightly challenged, but possibly totally discarded. In an entirely metafictional reading one could argue that everything Marion imagines about her mother is nothing but her imagination, and thus half of the story is nothing but a construct by Marion. This therefore foregrounds the opposition between reality and fiction and highlights the fictum-quality of the story, meaning that as a reader one knows that it is solely invented (which then can also raise awareness for the story’s overall fictionality). One aspect which underscores this reading is that Marion’s imaginations of her mother’s life are rendered like various scenes, similar to how in “How to Be an Other Woman” Charlene imagines her life like a movie. This gives the impression that the life she imagines Madeline
to have is nothing but a movie and therefore raises awareness for the boundary between reality and fiction. The switch between various scenes is explicitly mentioned (“There you sit now – a change of scene – a mirror, lights” (369)) and even addressed in an almost metaleptic way through the use of imperatives (“Now hurry, hurry into the next scene, the next room […]” (366)), with Marion giving her mother stage directions despite the impossibility to actually talk to her. Another aspect which corroborates a reading that views Madeline’s depiction as solely constructed are hyperbolic renderings of Madeline’s looks and actions. For instance, in one passage Madeline brags about her physical fitness, even getting praised for it:

‘I touch my toes one hundred times a day,’ you tell Jerry […] you […] continue with your proud recitation- Believe it or not, I exercise an hour a day! Wouldn’t miss it! […] You want to see me do twenty-five push-ups right now?’ […] You sink down on your firm muscular forty-year-old stomach and with your arms you push yourself up off the floor, one, twice, three times! […] ‘Madeline, my God, you’re so athletic, so beautiful and – and athletic – Isn’t she something?’ Jerry cries. (366)

In passages like this, the hyperbolic quality of the events already gives them an ‘unreal’ quality, as it seems rather unlikely that someone would actually behave this way. Thus this corroborates a reading in which this is nothing but Marion’s imagination. It also illustrates how Marion views her mother as being over-the-top. Another way in which the story’s construction is foregrounded is the way Madeline is described through Marion’s eyes. She is often linked to the colour white, which can be read as Madeline being the blank canvas that Marion is able to paint on whatever she wants. In addition, this whiteness again gives her a rather ‘unreal’ touch, which once again foregrounds how the rendering of Madeline’s day is not reality, but a construct by Marion. Linked to the colour white is also the theme of perfection:

Your fingernails are painted platinum. Your toenails are painted platinum. Your legs are smooth and shaved, perfect legs, you don’t even bother to look at them – you hardly bother, these years, to stare at your face, it seems immortal. (366)

The ‘perfect’ Madeline can therefore be seen as nothing but a construct of Marion’s mind. In addition to the discourse focused on Madeline, also Marion’s own narration is tinged by metafictional comments: While walking to her music lessons, Marion thinks of “a thought not be recorded” (379), yet decides that she will record it anyway because “she want[s] to tell you everything” (379), thus overtly commenting on her writing process. This can also be read as an implicit comment on the fact that also the discourse about her own life is nothing but a construction. The blurred opposition between reality and fiction is not only foregrounded through the narrative situation, but also through the fact that Madeline as an actress herself is seemingly no longer able to differentiate between what is real and what is not. When Marion
imagines Madeline worrying about Miranda, she also envisions her thinking of everything as a role she is playing.

It strikes you that this is an important scene, an emotional scene. People are watching you anxiously. You might be in a play. Not one of those crappy television plays like the kind you have flown out here to film (you’ll do five tapes and make thousands of dollars, thousands!) but a real play, like Chekhov, like … like Chekhov, where people do cry out at each other and hold up their shaking hands, pleading. Yes, this is a scene in an important life, your own. (365)

This passage blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction in various curious ways. Similar to how people are watching Madeline anxiously, also Marion is constantly watching and observing her mother. This underscores the fact that her renderings of Madeline’s day are nothing but her constructing her mother’s life like a movie. Through Marion’s eyes, also Madeline can no longer differentiate between what is real and what is not, as she has a highly aestheticizing look towards her own life. One can read this as Marion’s implicit criticism: As Madeline is always acting, she is never able to fully connect with her daughters. In addition, she is not able to be their mother, but only play the mother’s part. Furthermore, through the comparison to Chekhov it seems as if Madeline enjoys the ennoblement this real-life tragedy brings her. However, it is also unveiled that Madeline in fact does not know much about high art except for the name Chekhov. Madeline is thus depicted to use the issues of her daughters to aestheticize her life. This makes her seem to be lacking a certain emotional intelligence as she can no longer differentiate between what is real and what is not and thus cannot fully care for her daughters.

Even though “You” obviously has strong metafictional potential, there of course rests the possibility of naturalizing the second-person narrative as nothing but Marion’s imagination, thus representing her consciousness. This possible naturalization for second-person narration which then exposes the discourse as nothing but imagination is rather unique to ‘I-and-you’ narratives. However, as stated in chapter 2.5.2., such a re-evaluation of the discourse also foregrounds the discourse per se and thus also has metafictional potential. Also Fludernik states that despite the possibility of reading the story as “an extended representation of the daughter’s consciousness – including her visualization of her mother” (1993: 242), such a reading remains “highly dubious and smacks of a post factum naturalization on the reader’s part” (1993: 242). As Fludernik argues, texts such as “You” are playfully deliberately manipulating “the irreality and ambiguity factors of the second-person pronoun” (1994a: 290) by radically undermining realistic readings of the text through “first proposing a situation that appears to be readable in realistic terms […] only then to undermine that reading” (1994a:
As a result, the story remains in a curious tension between being read metafictionally and psychologically, without fully settling towards one pole or the other. This leaves the reader with even more ambiguities and epistemological uncertainties, and thus also adds to the complexity of the text.

Similarly to how ‘You’ foregrounds Madeline’s story as being a construction, also question of who Madeline is and whether she is nothing but a construct emerges. Such postmodern questions of constructions that show the emptiness at the core of things have already been a theme in “How to Be an Other Woman”. Madeline’s construction is underscored through the second-person pronoun’s shifting quality, its possibility of addressing more than one person and second-person narration’s ability to foreground how the discourse constructs a ‘you’ on the story-level. As it has been stated before, second-person narration can be used to foreground fragmented protagonists. In contrast to the other discussed texts such as “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Be an Other Woman”, in “You” the focus is not on the you-protagonist’s psyche’s fragmentation, but on the fact that Marion as a first-person narrator is not able to fully access her mother, thus piercing together the various fragmented bits she has. If one reads the story as Marion constructing her mother, the question arises of who Madeline really is. Since the reader is dependent on Marion’s point of view, this is a question which eschews a definite answer. Therefore the story also raises the question whether it is even possibly to fully know the other. Although Marion most of the time does not question whether she really is able to access her mother, despite the obvious knowledge on the reader’s part that it is impossible for her to know what her mother is doing in Hollywood, there are a few instances when Marion seems to show a certain uncertainty. For instance, when Marion visits Peter, Madeline’s ex-lover who later had a relationship with Miranda, she wonders whether Madeline knew about them:

For half a year he went out with her [Miranda], the two of them had a crude half-serious secret from you, Mother, though certainly you knew about them …? Didn’t you know about them, really…? It seems impossible that no one told you. And then one day you found out or pretended to find out, you expressed surprise or pretended to express it […]. (376)

Although Marion wants to attest that she is certain that Madeline knew about Miranda and Peter, she is unable to. In a similar manner, she cannot tell whether her mother is being truthful or whether she is pretending. As a result, this passage foregrounds a certain uncertainty in whether Marion is able to access her mother or not. Although this uncertainty remains covert for the most part of the story, the implausibility of second-person narration foregrounds this ambiguity as readers know that technically it is impossible for Marion to
know what Madeline is doing, thinking and feeling in Hollywood. However, at the end of the story this uncertainty is once again explicitly foregrounded: When Marion waits for her mother at the airport, she first mistakes another woman for her: “And then … then you appear. … Yes it is you. Madeline Randall. But you look so different, you are hardly yourself […]” (385). Although Marion seems to be aware of the difference, she explains it to herself that the pain of Miranda’s attempted suicide has changed her mother who is thus no longer her glamorous self. When she realizes that the woman she mistakes for her mother is in fact somebody else, she is “reluctant to give her up” (386). This reluctance can be explained when the real Madeline shows up:

There you are, in the doorway of the plane. It frames you perfectly. This time I see that it is you, exactly you, in a gray outfit suited for a not-quite-mourning mother […] Here is Madeline Randall. You don’t look the way I imagined you […]. (386)

This passage lays bare Marion’s wish to construct her mother as deeply affected by Miranda’s attempted suicide, in fact to be affected so much that she has lost her former overbearing presence. However, it becomes immediately evident that this is not reality. The fact that Marion at first confuses the other woman for her mother and then claims that Madeline does not “look the way I imagined you” (386) therefore once again underscores the uncertainty of Marion’s imagination. As a result, the reader will once more become aware that everything one has just read is possibly just a construct by Marion. As Marion is not even capable of recognizing her mother immediately in real life, it is thus also highly questionable whether she has the power to fully imagine what Madeline’s life is like in Hollywood.

Madeline’s construction also ties in with the theme appearance versus being which is also repeatedly foregrounded throughout the rest of the story. An example of this would be the description of the apartment they live in, which from the outside seems like “a marvellous building” (368), but in fact is deficient inside as it has leaky plumbing and is cold as “nothing can keep the winter wind out of these ungainly old-fashioned windows” (368). Whereas other people are “cooing” (368) to Madeline about the great apartment who “smiles eagerly” (368) at those compliments, Marion is able to look beneath the surface of a wrecked home in which she and Miranda “have been freezing all [their] lives” (368). The apartment can be read as a symbol of Madeline, whose appearance (according to Marion) overshadows her being for most people except Miranda and Marion. When the reader gets flashbacks of Miranda’s and Madeline’s fight, Marion states “The violence is in you, Mother, we saw it last night and we’ve been guessing at it for years” (372). This would be one of the indications in which Marion claims to be able to look beneath Madeline’s surface. Also Madeline’s profession as
an actress foregrounds the question of who the real her is, as she is constantly shifting between roles, possibly even viewing her real life as nothing but a role. As a result, she can be seen as incapable to fully occupy her mother role, as she constantly has to occupy different roles: “[…] but out in Hollywood you are no longer my mother but someone else – a lady doctor, is that what the script demands?” (374). It is suggested that Madeline does not only frequently shed her mother role in order to play other roles, but that in fact she is unable to actually behave like a mother, as she is only able to take it as a role. This can for instance be seen in a passage in which Marion compares her to other mothers:

The mothers of our friends were always urging food on us, not liking our flat chests and skinny legs. The mothers of our friends were always urging food upon them, their daughters. It is normal, evidently, for mothers to feed their daughters. But with you there were rarely meals at home […]. (382)

Madeline is also portrayed to be possibly empty at the core, not being able to exist except for in a role:

No, you are not Madeline now, you are someone else […] you audience gives you the power of complete nonbeing, nonexistence as yourself. You come alive in another personality. You are excited, overjoyed, you have forgotten about everything else […]. (374)

In conclusion, the construction of Madeline is not only foregrounded on the discourse level, but also through various aspects of the story-level. As a result, it is difficult for the reader to fully access her and many gaps are left open to be filled by the reader. Furthermore, this also foregrounds the complex relationship between Madeline and her daughters, which will now be discussed in more detail.

“You” is yet another second-person narrative in which the narrative situation foregrounds a relationship on the story-level. Similar to “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Be an Other Woman”, it is an intimate relationship marked by closeness and distance, similar to “You Need to Go Upstairs” it is a mother-daughter relationship, although the daughter is significantly older. However, the ‘I-and-you’-form provides possibilities that are not there for standard or hypothetical second-person narration. As Fludernik states, by oscillating between distance and closeness, the narrative situation “proves to be a fictional mode adaptable to detailing the jig-saw structure of the mother-daughter relationship” (1993: 235). By constantly addressing her mother with the second-person pronoun, a certain closeness between Marion and her mother is established. Such an act of address usually points “to an intimate relationship” (Fludernik 1993: 235) between addressee and addressee. However, at the same time, the narrative situation also foregrounds the distance between them, as the address situation also “foregrounds the non-identity of the I and the you” (Fludernik 1993: 235). This distance is even more visible in “You” due to the physical distance between Marion and
Madeline. Moreover, as one can read the parts in second-person narration as solely Marion’s imagination, this would then mean that Marion is unable to access her mother’s life except for imagining it. Similar to how in “The Thing Around Your Neck”, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” and “How to Be an Other Woman”, the narrative situation foregrounds the inability of two characters to converse dialogically with each other, the whole story is constantly tinged with Madeline’s absence and Marion’s failed attempts to reach her mother. As a result, everything that remains for Marion is to imagine Madeline’s life. In addition, the distance is also marked through the constant reproaches Marion makes; nevertheless, the fact that she constantly addresses her mother again points to a connection in the first place. This oscillation between closeness and distance is constantly foregrounded throughout the story. The way Madeline is portrayed by Marion shows that Marion both imagines her mother as indifferent towards her daughters as well as caring (such as when Marion imagines Madeleine wanting to go back to New York because of Miranda), which shows how also Marion herself is uncertain whether they have a distant or a close relationship. An aspect that renders them close are their names which all begin with ‘M’. In addition, Marion continuously describes her mother as thinking that men are weak, only to think herself after talking to Peter that “[m]en are weak, there is nothing to them” (376). Another instance which renders Madeline and her daughters close is that also in the daughters’ lives there is a focus on the arts, both having taken music, art, ballet and drama lessons. It is however hinted at that this has been forced upon the daughters by Madeline who wants her children to follow her path. Although this brings them close to their mother, it also inevitably leads to Marion comparing herself to Madeline:

What a professional you are! […] You make few mistakes. I struggle with this piece by Mozart […] A desire for failure must be deep in me; I am a permanent daughter. Miranda too is a failure. She took art lessons for years – no luck. I took violin lessons – no luck […] The notes of music are not like the words you can memorize so easily, Mother […]. (380)

Although this passage thus also renders them close, it inevitably leads to Marion resenting her mother as she feels like she cannot live up to her. Another way in which the daughter’s and mother’s distance and closeness are foregrounded is through the very discourse herself: With the discourse constantly switching back and forth between Madeline’s and Marion’s day, this shows both the physical distance as well as their temporal simultaneity. This culminates in the evening when both watch the news:

You turn on the television set – and here in our apartment I turn on our television set – and we wait for the news, a little nervous. The advertisement you are staring at is for a new automobile […] the advertisement I am staring at is for a hair shampoo […] We wait for the news to come on. (383)
Even though Marion and Madeline are spatially separated and both watch on different channels, which is highlighted by the different advertisements they see, they are still connected by the fact that they both watch television at the same time. Their union is symbolized through the pronoun ‘we’, as this is one of the few instances when Marion uses this pronoun to refer to both her and her mother instead of using first- and second-person pronoun, thus not foregrounding their distance, but their closeness. Of course, once again the question of whether one actually gets access to Madeline’s mind also questions the closeness Marion wants to attest. It is evident that to a certain extent, Marion wants to be close to her mother, such as when she wonders at the airport whether Madeline will kiss her and whether the other people will guess that she’s her daughter. At the same time however, there are other passages in which she entirely resents Madeline. As a result, the reader is not only left in limbo of whether Marion and Madeline are close, but also whether Marion wants this closeness.

Another function of the narrative situation in “You” is that the use of the second-person pronoun foregrounds the themes of dependency and oppression. Marion’s resentment of Madeline can be explained by the fact that Marion feels oppressed by her mother and struggles to find her own identity. However, in “You” this theme is established in a different way than in standard and hypothetical second-person narratives like the ones discussed. It is not the ‘you’ who is oppressed by an overpowering, anonymous voice, but the ‘I’. In “You”, the ‘you’ is so overpowering that it constantly occupies the ‘I’s thoughts, making it impossible for Marion to ever completely focus on herself. Fludernik also states that the dominant “mother’s Other […] cruelly seems to repress Marion’s Self” (1993: 241). Not only do major parts of her narration focus on her mother and what she is doing at the moment, also in passages in which she describes her own life she is unable to shed her mother, thus constantly addressing her. Marion’s first-person subjectivity therefore becomes overshadowed by her mother’s overwhelming presence. The need to constantly think about her mother is underscored through the second-person pronoun that suggests a bond between the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ that is almost impossible to break. The power Madeline holds over Marion becomes the most evident in the last lines of the story when Madeline returns to New York:

Before you stride over to me, in this last moment, I put my hands to my face and begin to cry. No, you are too strong for me! – your face is too bright!
You seize my wrist with your strong, gloveless hand. ‘Marion!’ you say. It is an absolute claim. You are back. (387)
This illustrates that once Madeline and Marion are physically close, Marion loses her complete agency. Thus, one could argue that during Madeline’s absence Marion was able to partly regain her agency, which is underscored through the pronouns used: Whenever Marion’s first-person voice is strongest, so is her agency; whenever the focus is on the ‘you’, Madeline, Marion’s self becomes overshadowed. The fact that Madeline addresses Marion with her name stands in contrast to Marion constantly addressing her mother by the second-person pronoun. As the second-person pronoun is more vague than a name, Madeline is able to claim Marion instantly, something that Marion has tried and failed to do so throughout the whole story. In addition, when Marion calls Madeline mother, mother is constantly spelt with a capital ‘M’, which therefore also signifies Madeline’s oppressive quality. Madeline is constantly described as the centre of everyone’s attention which mirrors how she is constantly the centre of Marion’s attention. Even her grief is “too bright” (386) for her and Miranda. From Marion’s point of view, Madeline is also described as wilfully taking up the space. This is why Marion describes her mother as furious when she found out about the affair between Peter and Miranda because those two people in her life “orbiting around [her] should defy [her]” (376). Whereas Madeline is able to shift in and out of her mother role, Marion remains “a permanent daughter” (380). Similar to this, Marion imagines her mother in Hollywood not caring about her daughters, while in New York Marion constantly thinks about her mother. Marion is unable to concentrate on herself in the constant light of her mother, as she constantly compares herself to Madeline and feels like a failure in the light of this comparison. The theme of Marion’s muted subjectivity is constantly foregrounded throughout the story. For instance, she also feels fragmented because she is “one half of a set of twins” (374), with their “bodies interchangeable” (380). It is thus not only Madeline who challenges her identity, but also Miranda. When Marion visits Peter, an ex-lover of Madeline and Miranda’s current lover, she feels like “a stand-in for [her] sister” (375), a thought that is underscored when the reader finds out that originally, Peter wanted to date Marion, and settled for her sister a week later. Thus, Marion’s subjectivity is also muted in the face of her twin sister who is seemingly interchangeable with her. However, one can argue that Marion’s narration of her mother’s story in second-person narration might also be read as an attempt to regain her agency. Marion is able to predict and read her mother’s actions, even her future ones: “When you open your smallest suitcases in five minutes, you will cry out in rage- a bottle of greenish-blue mouthwash has leaked!” (364). Marion possesses what Madeline lacks, namely the ability to read the other, and her superior knowledge over her mother might shift the power struggle in Marion’s direction. Also when Marion describes Madeline’s role
as a doctor, she seems to reclaim her agency by seeing right through what her mother is not: “[…] a lady doctor, is that what the script demands? Oh, what a laugh! A lady doctor, you!” (374). The struggle for agency thus remains a battle that Marion continuously fights throughout the story, although it is strongly hinted at that this is a battle she will inevitably lose.

To sum up, “You” is an ‘I-and-you’ narrative that highly plays with the ambiguities between reality and fiction. It is a story of a mother-daughter relationship that leaves the reader with various uncertainties. These uncertainties also mirror the mother-daughter relationship’s oscillation between distance and closeness. The story allows for both a metafictional and a psychological reading, without fully settling for one or the other. Although ‘I-and-you’ texts also possess traits that are not possible for other types of second-person narration, there are still some aspects which are similar. The properties they share with more prototypical forms of second-person narration is the fact that someone’s story is told in second-person and that this story goes far beyond mere address, but gives inside view in the actions, feelings and thoughts (even though only possibly imagined) of the protagonist. Therefore, by looking at ‘I-and-you’ stories under the scope of second-person narration one is able to see that this is a key aspect of the narrative situation, as ‘I-and-you’ narratives in which the ‘you’ only fulfils an address function lean more towards first-person narration. Due to the overt first-person narrator ‘I-and-you’ stories like “You” are even more explicit in showing the implausibility of the discourse situation, which therefore also sheds light on second-person narration’s overall metafictional function. At the same time, such ‘I-and-you’ narratives still provide a more overt route to naturalization, as one can read the story as nothing but Marion’s imagination, and the reasons given on the story-level why she would tell such a story in the second-person are numerous (e.g. to foreground their relationship and her dependency as well as the way she feels oppressed by her mother). Thus, just like other second-person narratives, “You” stands in a curious tension between metafictionality and immersion, only that it foregrounds these aspects in a more overt manner. Other themes (e.g. relationships, oppression) typical for more prototypical second-person narrations are also present in the story, although they might be realized in a slightly different way than in more prototypical second-person narration, as due to the first-person narrator the relationship between the ‘I’ and ‘you’ can be foregrounded in different ways, putting them into a curious co-dependency in which the ‘you’ might not only be the oppressed, but also the oppressor.
4. Conclusion

As it has been shown in this thesis, second-person narration is a narrative situation that can have a variety of forms. As long as the main criterion, namely that of a you-protagonist, is fulfilled, we can assume said the narrative situation. It can have very overt as well as very covert narrators, both homodiegetic and heterodiegetic. The narrator’s elusiveness is also important in interpreting second-person narratives and can possibly lead to different readings. Also the degree of specificity and the narratee-function of the you-protagonist can vary greatly. Second-person narration can occur as a standard second-person narrative with a rather covert heterodiegetic narrator such as in “The Thing Around Your Neck”, as a reflectoral second-person narrative with a maximally covert narrator and an experiencing ‘you’ as the protagonist as in “You Need to Go Upstairs”, as hypothetical narration with shifting actants and scenarios as in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” as well as as an overt self-address narrative such as “How to Be an Other Woman”. In addition, second-person narratives can also have a homodiegetic first-person narrator who is not the you-protagonist such as in Oates “You”, which therefore opens the possibility of foregrounding the curious relationship between this ‘I’ and ‘you’.

The various forms of second-person narration fulfil a plethora of different functions. The form of the self-address narrative can portray protagonists’ fragmented mental states, as it has been done in “How to Be an Other Woman” and possibly also “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”, in which the protagonists’ diasporic struggles are foregrounded. All of these second-person narratives therefore explore a protagonist’s psyche in a new and unique way. Second-person narratives are also excellently suited to foregrounding political issues. The oppressive quality of an anonymous voice addressing a you-protagonist can mirror unfair oppressive systems on the story-level, such as oppression through issues related to race and class as in “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”, oppression through exclusion of ‘normal’ society as in “You Need to Go Upstairs” or oppression through gender roles in “How to Be an Other Woman”. A different kind of oppression is foregrounded in Oates’ “You”, in which the first-person protagonist feels oppressed by the overwhelming quality of the ‘you’, her mother. The theme of oppression then also leads to the protagonists’ lack of agency, be it through a racist society, a subordinating relationship, an oppressive mother or one’s own blindness and how one is treated because of it. The narrative situation also foregrounds a certain inevitability which emphasis such power struggles. The impossibility of
communicating dialogically on the narrative communication level often mirrors relationships and interpersonal (flawed) communication on the story-level: Whereas in “The Thing Around Your Neck”, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” and “How to Be an Other Woman” it is romantic relationships that are marked by absence of communication, in “You” it is a mother-daughter relationship in which this impossibility of connecting is foregrounded. However, such an absent communication is not only rendered in a negative way; instead, in “You Need to Go Upstairs” it attests to the closeness of the bond of the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in the story.

Second-person narratives often deliberately play with the question of whether the ‘you’ can also address the reader or not. As a result, second-person narratives often oscillate between being general and being specific. Whereas specificity emphasises the distinction between a ‘you’-protagonist and the reader, generality can highlight the second-person pronoun’s function to be a general ‘you’ that can address a group of people. This is used in both “The Thing Around Your Neck” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” to portray general issues of race and class that not only an individual, but a whole community of people face. The ability of reader address also might be one reason why next to the representation of subjectivity through perceiving the world through the protagonist’s eyes second-person narration can have an increased immersive effect. Such an increased immersive effect might then also be the prerequisite for feeling empathy with the protagonists. With this, also the political potential of address plays an important role, as readers are not only led to feel with characters different to themselves, but are also challenged by encountering a ‘you’ that is able to address everybody only on the surface. Thus, issues of race, class and gender can be foregrounded and challenged.

However, this interplay between general and specific also leads to the reader feeling pulled in and out of the addressee-role, which might also have a distancing effect. As it has been shown, second-person narration can be metafictional in a variety of ways, most overtly through the foregrounding of an implausible discourse situation. Despite the possibility of naturalizing stories as self-address, as it can be done, more or less convincingly, with all of the discussed second-person texts (except “You” of course, in which the story is an obvious address to another), there always remains a certain implausibility to the narrative situation, which therefore has a powerful metafictional potential. This potential, then, can also be highlighted through other metafictional elements, such as when hypothetical second-person narratives like “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” and “How to Be an
Other Woman” can be read as parodies of self-help literature. Such parodies implicitly mock self-help literature that promise the reader agency and advice for a better life by portraying protagonists that are precisely lacking such agency and stories that are no success stories. Also through the foregrounding of the border between reality and fiction, as it is done in “You” and “How to Be an Other Woman”, second-person narration’s metafictional potential is increased. Overall, this shows how to some extent second-person narration will always keep its status as an unnatural narrative and thus its metafictional potential.

The unusual and elusive quality of second-person narration can lead to various possible readings of second-person narratives. Second-person narratives do not only allow for a metafictional reading, but also encourage the reader to search for a naturalization of the ‘strange’ narrative situation. Together with the multiple functions the narrative situation can have, this may then contribute to the overall complexity and richness of second-person texts. As a result, second-person narratives provide a great subject for literary analysis, as has hopefully been shown in the discussed stories. Moreover, not only the discussed sample stories, but every other second-person narrative in the bibliography would merit a detailed analysis that would not only take up important aspects and issues that have been illustrated in this thesis, but possibly also can lead to the discovery of new functions and forms. However, the interpretation of these texts would go beyond the framework of the present thesis.

In conclusion, it has been shown that second-person narration is a narrative situation that merits scholarly attention: To look at second-person narration from a narratological point of view does not only bridge certain gaps in narratology, but also leads to the unearthing of various second-person texts and the numerous functions these texts can have, which therefore enriches literary studies. To deal with second-person narration embodies what often is the essence of literary analysis: at first glance, second-person narratives are sometimes difficult to grasp, but with a deeper analysis one uncovers a plethora of different meanings and possible functions, which overall does not only show the richness and complexity of second-person narration, but of literary texts in general.
Bibliography

Primary Literature


Secondary Literature


