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Exploring the Boundaries of Second-Person Narrative: The Use of "You" in Maria Gerhardt's *Transfer Window*

Abstract
In Maria Gerhardt's autobiographical novel, *Transfer Window* (orig. *Transfervindue*, 2017), which is set in a fictionalized hospice universe and revolves around Gerhardt's experience of being a terminal patient, the first-person protagonist, Maria, consistently refers to her partner as "you" without addressing her. This odd pronominal use is typically associated with second-person narrative. Yet, according to most definitions, *Transfer Window* is not a second-person narrative because of its 1) autobiographical content and 2) first-person protagonist. In this article, I argue that second-person narrative is *any* narrative in which a "you" is designated, but not addressed, and present a new typology consisting of four different types of second-person narrative: 1) fictional second-person narrative without a marked instance of enunciation, 2) fictional second-person narrative with a marked instance of enunciation, 3) nonfictional second-person narrative without a marked instance of enunciation and 4) nonfictional second-person narrative with a marked instance of enunciation. My approach to second-person narrative is rooted in rhetorical fictionality theory, which provides a framework that allows me to view second-person narration as a narrative technique that, because of its odd pronominal use, signals fictionality, but can occur in both generic fiction and nonfiction. In my analysis of *Transfer Window*, I dive into Gerhardt's use of fictionality, both in relation to the setting and the narrative situation of the book.

second-person narrative, fictionality, narratology, autobiography, Maria Gerhardt

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Introduction

In 2013, Maria Gerhardt — one of the most popular Danish DJs in the 2000s — was diagnosed with breast cancer. During the following year, Gerhardt had to go through several procedures, including breast removal surgery and chemotherapy, before being declared cancer free. In 2014, Gerhardt debuted as an author with the autobiographical novel *Hollywood Stars Live on this Street*[1] (orig. *Der bor Hollywoodstjerner på vejen*), which revolves around two storylines: her relationship with her partner, Rosa, and her struggle against cancer. Sadly, the cancer returned, and in 2017, at the time of the publication of her second autobiographical novel, *Transfer Window* (orig. *Transfervindue*), Gerhardt had terminal breast cancer with metastasis throughout her body.[2] In *Transfer Window*, which I will focus on in this article, Gerhardt describes her experience of being a terminal patient, but in contrast to its predecessor, the book is set in a fictionalized universe: a luxurious hospice that covers most of North Zealand.

From a narratological perspective, one of the most striking features of *Transfer Window* is its narrative situation: the first-person protagonist, Maria, consistently refers to her partner as "you", but without addressing her:[3] "I remember what you said in the early years. «I'm still banking on you getting well again.» And I smiled and kissed you, whenever you said it. And we made plans. For we were agreed. We should keep making plans" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 44). The passage clearly illustrates how the "you" outside the quotation marks is not being addressed; she can neither hear nor respond to Maria's telling. This odd pronominal use is typically associated with second-person narrative. Yet, according to most definitions, *Transfer Window* is not a second-person narrative because of its 1) autobiographical content and 2) first-person protagonist.

My aim with this article is to develop and challenge the conception of what is considered a second-person narrative proper. In the first part of the article, I will argue that second-person narrative is *any* narrative in which a "you" is designated, but not addressed, and present a new typology consisting of four different types of second-person narrative.[4]

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1 My translation. The book has not been translated into English.

2 Gerhardt died 16 March 2017, shortly after the publication of *Transfer Window*.

3 From now on, I will refer to the author as Gerhardt and the protagonist as Maria.

4 For a previous version of my argument and typology, see Christensen (2020).

My approach to second-person narrative is rooted in rhetorical fictionality theory, which provides a framework that allows me to view second-person narration as a narrative technique that, because of its odd pronominal use, signals fictionality, but can occur in both generic fiction and nonfiction. In the second part of the article, I will return to *Transfer Window* and Gerhardt's use of fictionality, focussing specifically on the setting and the narrative situation of the book.

Second-person narrative or not?

Pronouns in literature are, as Allison Gibbons and Andrea Macrae point out, "an area which has, historically and canonically, been less well attended to and explored" (Gibbons and Macrae 2018: 1). Accordingly, the focus on second-person narrative has been quite limited within narrative theory. Wayne Booth briefly mentions the narrative technique in a footnote (Booth [1961] 1983: 150),[5] while Gérard Genette characterizes it as a "rare but very simple case" (Genette [1983] 1988: 133). Towards the end of the 1980's, theorists began to show an increasing interest in second-person narrative, culminating, as Rolf Reitan explains, in 1994 with the publication of a special issue of *Style* titled "Second-Person Narrative" (Reitan 2011: 147). Despite its contributions from several prominent theorists, such as Monika Fludernik, who was also the editor, James Phelan, David Herman, Irene Kacandes and Brian Richardson, "discussions froze, development halted" (Reitan 2011: 148). In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in second-person narrative, resulting in a number of publications that shed (new) light on the narrative technique in relation to a wide range of fields: digital fiction (Bell & Ensslin 2011), reader involvement (Mildorf 2016), enactment (Rembowska-Pluciennik 2018; Rembowska-Pluciennik 2022), interpellation (Newman 2018; Meyer forthcoming) and autobiography (Lehnert 2012; Schönberger 2017; Mildorf 2019).

But what is a second-person narrative? This seemingly simple question has haunted the study of second-person narrative since its early years, and it is still, I would argue, highly relevant to this day. In the 1994 special issue of *Style*, Fludernik stresses that "[o]ne of the major handicaps to an adequate treatment of second-person narrative has been the lack of an unequivocal definition of what exactly is a second-person text" (Fludernik 1994: 284). According to Fludernik, it is crucial to distinguish between "«real» second-person texts and other texts using the second-person pronoun in interesting and potentially significant ways" (Fludernik 1994: 284). Throughout the years, a variety of different definitions have been proposed,[6] but today most theorists agree that a second-person narrative is a — typically fictional — "story in which the protagonist is referred to by the pronoun *you*" (Jahn 2005: 522). This definition from *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005), however, is not as specific as it might appear. For instance, what exactly does the phrase "referred to" mean in this context? Is the "you" being addressed or not? And is that even important?

[5] "Efforts to use the second person have never been very successful, but it is astonishing how little real difference even this choice makes" (Booth [1961] 1983: 150), Booth writes in the footnote and continues: "the radical unnaturalness [of the use of second-person narration in Michel Butor's famous novel *A Change of Heart* (orig. *La Modification*, 1957)] is, it is true, distracting for a time. But [...] it is surprising how quickly one is absorbed into the illusory present of the story, identifying one's vision with the «vous» almost as fully as with the «I» and «he» in other stories" (Booth [1961] 1983: 150).

[6] See e.g., Genette ([1983] 1988); Bonheim (1983); Prince (1987); Fludernik (1993); DelConte (2003); Richardson (2006).

The answer to the last question is yes. In fact, whether the "you" is being addressed or not should, in my opinion, constitute the defining line between "real" second-person narratives and other narratives employing the second-person pronoun in "interesting and potentially significant ways", to borrow Fludernik's words. It is, as Helmut Bonheim notes, "difficult to find a believable motive for supplying him [the «you»] with information which would be familiar to him" (Bonheim 1983: 77), and thus, the most reasonable conclusion seems to be that the "you" is "referred to and designated, but *not* addressed by the second person pronoun" (Nielsen 2011: 66, my emphasis). Henrik Skov Nielsen writes:

> [...] the curious thing about most fictional, second person narratives [...] is that although the protagonist is designated by «you» throughout the narratives, nothing at all suggests that he/she feels in any way addressed. He is not hearing voices, does not feel spoken to, let alone responds to the narrative. In short: nothing except the very use of the second person pronoun suggests that he is being addressed. (Nielsen 2011: 66)

In second-person narrative, then, the use of the second-person pronoun differs fundamentally from its use in everyday communication; the second-person pronoun does not designate the one who is being spoken *to*, but rather the one who is being spoken *about*.[7] However, if we accept this — the "you" not being addressed — as the criterion that determines whether a text qualifies as a second-person narrative or not, it turns out that the empirical field covers a much wider range of texts than previously presumed. First, it becomes clear that a second-person narrative is not necessarily fictional, and second, that the second-person pronoun does not necessarily refer to the protagonist.

Before returning to these observations, I will dive into the assumed relation between second-person narrative and generic fiction, thus moving towards a new understanding of second-person narrative that includes *any* narrative in which a "you" is designated, but not addressed.

Towards a new understanding of second-person narrative

As mentioned above, the use of the second-person pronoun in second-person narrative differs fundamentally from its use in everyday communication. This deviation from everyday communication is, I believe, the reason why second-person narrative has, almost exclusively, been associated with generic fiction. Until now, the terms "second-person narrative" and "second-person fiction" have been used more or less interchangeably (Kacandes 1994; Fludernik 1994; Richardson 2006), and in Fludernik's often cited definition, second-person narrative is even presented as "*fiction* that employs a pronoun of address in reference to a *fictional* protagonist" (Fludernik 1993: 217, my emphasis). Moreover, Richardson describes second-person narrative as "an exclusively and distinctively literary phenomenon" (Richardson 1991: 113), thereby contrasting it with "first and third person novels [that] have obvious nonfictional counterparts in autobiography and biography" (Richardson 1991: 113).

It does, as Herman objects, seem "empirically inaccurate to say that second-person narrative is «an exclusively and distinctively literary phenomenon»" (Herman 1994: 403). Autobiographical second-person narratives might be a "rarity" (Abbott 2021: 87), as Porter

[7] For a discussion of second-person narration in literary and conversational storytelling and its "unnaturalness", see Mildorf (2013).

Abbott puts it, but they definitely do exist.[8] Yet, it is understandable why Richardson describes second-person narrative the way he does; second-person narrative is usually fictional — some of the most canonized examples being Michel Butor's novel *A Change of Heart* (orig. *La Modification*, 1957), George Perec's novel *A Man Asleep* (orig. *Un homme qui dort*, 1967) and Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (orig. *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, 1979) — and it is indeed difficult to imagine a real-life communicative situation where it would make sense to tell another person everything he or she is doing. Thus, I would argue, second-person narration signals fictionality, but, as shown above, this does not imply that second-person narrative is necessarily fictional.

This claim raises a central question: how do we explain the occurrence of fictionality — here in the form of second-person narration — in generic nonfiction? In the attempt to answer this question, I turn to Richard Walsh and his rhetorical approach to fictionality. In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* (2007), Walsh distinguishes between "fictionality as a rhetorical resource" (Walsh 2007: 38) and "fiction as a generic category" (Walsh 2007: 38). According to Walsh, fictionality functions "directly as part of serious communication" (Walsh 2007: 1), which, among other things, means that it can be used for different purposes in different communicative contexts. Fictionality, thus, is not bound to fictional narratives, but "apparent on some scale within many nonfictional narratives" (Walsh 2007: 7).[9] The relation between "fictionality as a rhetorical resource" and "fiction as a generic category" is elaborated by Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh who introduce the concepts of "global fiction" and "local fictionality", "global nonfiction" and "local nonfictionality":

> We can analyze the interplay of fiction and nonfiction [...] by distinguishing between global and local fictionality. Global fictions can contain passages of nonfictionality, and global nonfictions can contain passages of fictionality. Thus, nonfictionality can be subordinate to fictive purposes, and fictionality can be subordinate to nonfictive purposes. (Nielsen, Phelan & Walsh 2015: 67)

As for second-person narrative, a rhetorical approach to fictionality provides a theoretical framework that allows me to view second-person narration as a rhetorical resource that, often in connection with other paratextual and textual markers, can signal local fictionality in both global fiction and nonfiction.[10] Moreover, a rhetorical approach to fictionality foregrounds the important question of function or effect. What difference(s) does it make that the author has chosen to use second-person narration instead of first- or third-person

8 See e.g., Cecil Bødker's travelogue *The Salt Trader's House* (my translation, orig. *Salthandlerskens hus*, 1972) and Paul Auster's memoirs *Winter Journal* (2012) and *Report from the Interior* (2013).

9 Since the publication of *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Walsh's rhetorical approach to fictionality has been developed and challenged by several theorists. See e.g., Phelan (2016); Maagaard, Schäbler and Wolff (2019); Walsh, Knapp and Hoover (2020); Gammelgaard, Iversen, Jacobsen, Phelan, Walsh, Zetterberg-Nielsen and Zetterberg-Nielsen (forthcoming); Björninen, Meyer, Mäkelä and Zetterberg-Nielsen (forthcoming).

10 I am here following Simona Zetterberg Gjerlevsen's and Nielsen's more textual oriented approach. In contrast to Walsh who describes fictionality as "the product of a narrative's frame of presentation, of the various possible elements of what Gérard Genette has described as the paratext" (Walsh 2007: 44), Gjerlevsen and Nielsen argue that "it is possible to look for, and find, textual signs that point to the fictional status of an utterance independent of contextual knowledge and paratextual markers" (Gjerlevsen & Nielsen 2020: 45).

narration? What does the author achieve by it? And in what way does it affect the reader? Such questions are explored in my analysis of Gerhardt's *Transfer Window*.

Now, however, I will return to my defining criteria of second-person narrative — the "you" not being addressed — and its implications. If we, as previously suggested, accept that second-person narrative is characterized by its odd pronominal use at least two overlooked groups of texts should be considered second-person narrative proper: 1) narratives with autobiographical content and 2) narratives with a first-person protagonist. In order to include such texts and, thus, embrace the expanded empirical field, I propose a new typology consisting of four different types of second-person narrative:

1. Fictional second-person narrative without a marked instance of enunciation
2. Fictional second-person narrative with a marked instance of enunciation
3. Nonfictional second-person narrative without a marked instance of enunciation
4. Nonfictional second-person narrative with a marked instance of enunciation.

The typology is with its two distinctions, fictional versus nonfictional and without a marked instance of enunciation versus with a marked instance of enunciation, designed to include *any* narrative in which a "you" is designated, but not addressed. The first distinction, fictional versus nonfictional, is generic and makes it possible to distinguish between second-person narrative with globally fictional content and second-person narrative with globally nonfictional content. The second distinction, without a marked instance of enunciation versus with a marked instance of enunciation, concerns the enunciatory act and makes it possible to distinguish between second-person narrative with a second-person protagonist and second-person narrative with a first-person protagonist.[11] While the first type corresponds with the classic notion of second-person narrative, the three other types challenge it, either because of their generic status as global nonfiction (the third and fourth type), their marked instance of enunciation (the second and fourth type) or both (the fourth type).

Second-person narration is, as Richardson stresses, an "extremely protean form" (Richardson 2006: 19), and the typology is by no means intended to be exhaustive of the various types of second-person narrative. Rather, it is an attempt to locate four main types of second-person narrative that can serve as point of departure for analysis and discussion. When it comes to exploring the boundaries of second-person narrative, Gerhardt's *Transfer Window* is a very interesting case: the book challenges the classic notion of second person narrative not only because of its autobiographical content, but also because of its first-person protagonist. In the second and final part of this article, I will turn my attention towards *Transfer Window*, elaborating on these two aspects: the generic status of the book and the "I"–"you" relation.

[11] In classic second-person narratives such as Butor's *A Change of Heart*, there is no marked instance of enunciation — no first-person narrator — which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether the text is homodiegetic or heterodiegetic. Thus, it has both been argued that Butor's "you" "is really a self-dramatization of the «I»" (Stanzel [1979] 1984: 225), and that it "stands in for the third person pronoun of the fictional character, functioning in a kind of displaced free indirect discourse" (McHale 1987: 223).

Between fiction and nonfiction

In *Transfer Window*, Maria is staying at a luxurious hospice that covers most of North Zealand:

> This enormous Hospice, unparalleled anywhere in the world, starts at the gateway on Strandvejen; here Saint Joseph's Institute meets the Tuborg bottle, re-painted white as a Ramlösa capped in gold, everything has been refashioned in white and blue tones. A big, white wall cuts through North Zealand. We have been granted the entire coastline from Tuborg Harbour to Bellevue Beach. (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 33)

At first glance, the hospice seems to have almost everything a cancer patient could dream of: healthy juice bars, sushi ad libitum, free yoga classes and mindfulness sessions, massive training facilities and beautiful greenhouses where nuns grow cannabis. Here, the exhausting bimonthly scans and weekly meetings at "The Big Hospital" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 57) are replaced by a status report once a year. Moreover, the residents can bathe in the ocean with their doctors, join the card club, get a coffee at the cosy book café and relive their happiest memories in the Virtual Reality Store.

Yet, life at the hospice is not as idyllic as it might appear. Music is prohibited — "[i]t wakes too many feelings" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 15) — visitors are only allowed on Sundays, and employees are seated at the dinner tables to ensure that the conversations do not "become too dark" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 16). Such initiatives, however, is not enough to make the residents forget that they are staying at a hospice; "[b]ar a miraculous recovery, once you check in, you can never leave" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 33), and thus, "doom is already here" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 9), as Maria states on the first page of the book. Beneath the luxurious surface, death is lurking everywhere: Maria's best friend, Mikkel, has "a loss of feeling" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 35) and "favours one leg" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 35), the members of the card club, which has already lost four members within the last couple of months, all suffer from "[a]n ever present fear that it [the cancer] has penetrated the brain" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 68), and there are biannual funeral and coffin trade fairs.

Despite its many fictional elements, it would be misleading to characterize *Transfer Window* as generic fiction: the book is situated between fiction and nonfiction, between the second and fourth type of second-person narrative in my typology. There are several parallels between the author and the protagonist: they share the same name, they suffer from terminal breast cancer, they have a partner and a little son, they used to work as DJs, they are authors. Furthermore, Gerhardt has not hesitated to emphasize the autobiographical dimension of the book. "I have dealt with a lot during the past year, which I have also written the book on" (Thorsen 2017, my translation), she explains in one of the few interviews she managed to give about the book, thereby underlining the autobiographical core of the book and its predecessor, *Hollywood Stars Live on this Street*: "I leave something my son can read about me when he gets older. He can read Rosa's and my story. This actually makes me happy. Instead of him just remembering me as the one who was lying here" (Thorsen 2017, my translation). The fine line between fiction and nonfiction is also addressed explicitly in the book:

> I'd made a promise to write fiction, not record yet another chaotic morning, when he [their little son] aped the sound of my gagging and smacked his hands to his forehead. I caught your eye with a signal, like a coach to a referee when he wants to bring in a substitute player. Now I had to throw up and now I didn't; now I had to throw up and now I didn't, and when I finally emerged from the bathroom, the flat was quiet. Your breakfast was stood on the table, just as you had served it, untouched. (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 21)

Maria is not able to keep her promise to write fiction, and instead, she does exactly the opposite of what she had decided to do: she describes yet another chaotic morning with her partner and their little son. Even though *Transfer Window*, in contrast to *Hollywood Stars Live on this Street*, is set in a universe very different from our own, it revolves around Gerhardt's personal struggle against cancer and can, thus, be read in direct continuation of her authorial, autobiographical debut.

But why has Gerhardt chosen to employ fictionality? What does she achieve by placing herself at a hospice that obviously does not exist? According to Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh, "[f]ictive discourse is not ultimately a means of constructing scenarios that are cut off from the actual world but rather a means of negotiating an engagement with that world" (Nielsen, Phelan & Walsh 2015: 63). It is, I would argue, possible to pinpoint at least two ways Gerhardt uses the fictionalized setting of the book to engage with the actual world.

First, the hospice with all its goods becomes a way of both escaping and bringing attention to the struggles of reality. As previously mentioned, there are no hospital visits — no fear of the next scan — and, most importantly, there are no loved ones to be strong for. A central theme of the book is the relation between the sick and the healthy; the residents inside the hospice and the loved ones outside the hospice. In the book, the two groups live separate lives, and they are only allowed to see each other on Sundays. This is, paradoxically, both a grief and a relief for Maria. On the one hand, she misses the people she has left, and on the other hand, it is much easier not having to worry about how she affects their wellbeing all the time. At the hospice, she is able to get away from "[t]hat constant shame of being the mum on the sofa, the girlfriend from hell" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 86):

> I don't have to do anything today, other than care for my body and soul, enjoy life, as they say. There is no one to disappoint, no one to burden. Everyone, who does anything for me, is paid one-hundred-and-fifty kroner an hour. No one has to call me up voluntarily, or come for a visit and get a bad conscience about all the things they cannot change. (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 43).

The subtitle of the book, "Tales of the Mistakes of the Healthy", points towards the frustration Maria experiences when she thinks about the way people close to her have handled her situation. Throughout the book, she recalls awkward conversations with friends who did not know what to say or how to act around her after her diagnosis. While she was struggling not to be too negative, not to be "a miscreant, leech-like insect that sucks every ounce of joy out of her surroundings" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 80), friends kept telling her that "anything can happen, right?" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 80). At the hospice, she does not have to engage in such awkward conversations. Instead, she and her best friend, Mikkel, can sit

and spy on the healthy through a pair of binoculars and enjoy watching "how busy they are" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 83). Constructing a *fictional* scenario, then, Gerhardt manages to illustrate how people act around terminal patients in the *actual* world.

Second, the hospice as an institution becomes a manifestation of how it feels to be a terminal patient:

> This really is a ghastly place to be. Half dead and half alive. It's not surprising that people duck; my thrashing wings, such a horrid flailing in and out of every world. You have one of two possibilities: to rise from the ashes, and run a marathon. The self-healing human being. Or, you can be a tragedy [...]. Do we look into or out of a transfer window? (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 69)

When diagnosed with a terminal illness, the person in question is transformed into a strange creature who, for a while, seems to be trapped between life and death. The terminal ill is, in other words, somewhere in between; like a football player waiting to shift from one club to another as soon as the transfer window closes. In religious terms, such a phase is often referred to as "liminal". The word "liminal" stems from the Latin word "limen", which means "threshold" (Turner [1969] 1974: 80). In Arnold van Gennep's ritual theory, the liminal phase marks the transition from one state to another.[12] "Liminal entities are neither here nor there" (Turner [1969] 1974: 81), Victor Turner, who develops van Gennep's ritual theory, writes and continues: "they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner [1969] 1974: 81). The hospice as an institution, thus, can be seen as a place of liminality; its residents are betwixt and between positions — both alive and dead — "flailing in and out of every world", as Maria expresses it.

In what follows, I will move on to Gerhardt's use of second-person narration — another, and perhaps more subtle, use of fictionality — thereby focussing on the central relationship in the book: that of Maria and her partner who is consistently referred to as "you".

I and you

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the most striking features of *Transfer Window* is its narrative situation. Because of its dominant first-person narrator, the book might come across as a classic first-person narrative. However, perceiving it as such would be to overlook the use of second-person narration and its interpretative implications, which is why I suggest broadening the scope of what is considered a second-person narrative proper to include texts with first-person protagonists (and thus, first-person narrators) as well. Throughout the book, Maria — the first-person protagonist — refers to her partner as "you", thereby creating a strange narrative situation that imitates traditional dialogue without actually being one. Unlike traditional dialogue, the partner can neither hear nor respond to the many statements put forth by the narrating "I":

> [...] you got mad, and told him [their little son] to hurry, you didn't have time for this, I hated that you said you didn't have time. You have so much time. You have nothing but time. «Do you want to go [to] kindergarten in your pyjamas?» you asked, hands on hips. And then he started to cry, so did I, and fled to the bathroom. (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 27)

[12] Van Gennep divides rites of passage into three phases: separation, liminality and incorporation (van Gennep [1909] 1960: 11).

> I have a bed and a desk, forty-five square metres with a view of trees. He [their little son] sat down and wanted to draw. Whenever I tried to catch your eye, you looked away and I was filled with a disproportionate rage, which rises when I think of your life, outside. It's easier, if you stay away. (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 42)

This deviation from traditional dialogue or everyday communication is, as I have argued above, why the use of second-person narration signals fictionality. Again, certain questions arise: Why has Gerhardt chosen to employ fictionality, here in the form of second-person narration? What does she achieve by creating this imitated dialogue?

"The second person is *par excellence* the sign of relation" (McHale 1987: 223), Brian McHale writes and continues: "[e]ven more strongly than the first person, it announces the presence of a communicative circuit linking addressor and addressee" (McHale 1987: 223).[13] Even though Maria does not directly address her partner, the presence of the personal pronouns "I" and "you" inevitably points towards communication. Thus, it is striking how little actual communication Maria and her partner have had since Maria left their common home outside the walls and moved into the hospice. Her partner and their little son have only visited her twice in the space of a year, and despite Maria's intention of writing to her partner when she moved into the hospice — "«I can write to you,» I said. «I can always write to you.»" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 12) — she almost never does:

> I have so many letters in my drawer that I haven't managed to send. They just lie there, with your name on. I simply disappeared to here, after all. I didn't run. I just vanished. You said so yourself. «You're slipping away from me.» I wanted to spare you from witnessing any further destruction. Of my body, of memories, of the person I used to be. The person I will never be again. (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 86)

During her illness, Maria has come to realize that it is easier for her to be on her own, both to spare her partner, as she explains in the passage above, but also to protect herself: "It's easier, if you stay away. It is easier, if he [their little son] gets used to me not being around. It is easier to think it's okay that you'll love someone else one day" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 42). There is, however, no doubt that Maria misses her partner deeply, and thus, the use of second-person narration becomes an important tool by which she, at least on a narrational level, succeeds in overcoming the distance between them. Through the use of second-person narration, Maria is able to continue the conversation with her partner despite the lack of actual communication, thereby keeping their relationship present.

The use of "you", however, does not only point towards communication; it can also be read as a declaration of love. When Maria reaches day five hundred at the hospice, she decides to leave:

> I can't face any more white. I don't want to ask for more whites. No more hospital shirts, size medium or large. No more clogs or sandals or Stan Smiths. No more light stripes or processed dry bread. I'm going to the other side. The place that scares you. Amid the mild, planetary melodies. I'm going to soar with eagles. I'm going to soar with Grandad. I'm moving on, I'll

[13] For a philosophical approach to the personal pronouns "I" and "you", see e.g., Benveniste (1971); Buber ([1923] 1937). In his famous work *I and Thou* (orig. *Ich und Du*, 1923), Martin Buber distinguishes between two primary words: "I–Thou" and "I–It". While the primary word "I–It" concerns the world as experience, the primary word "I–Thou" "establishes the world of relation" (Buber [1923] 1937: 6).

> meet new friends and there won't be a worry in the world. No walls. No wake up calls. There won't be an ego. The only thing I find frustrating about the next dimension is that you are not coming along. (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 90)

In a passage such as the one cited above, it becomes clear how the use of fictionality in the form of second-person narration, paradoxically, anchors the book to reality and reminds the reader of the seriousness of the situation. Maria might be living in a fictionalized hospice universe, but it is woven over a brutal reality: the author, Gerhardt, is dying and, thus, leaving her beloved partner, Rosa. The "you" does not refer to a *fictional* character, but to a *real* person; the person whom Gerhardt loves and intended to spend many years with. The use of second-person narration, then, becomes a way of approaching this person; like a love letter that makes it up for all the letters the first-person protagonist, Maria, never managed to send.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the boundaries of second-person narrative. Drawing on rhetorical fictionality theory, I have argued that second-person narrative is *any* narrative in which a "you" is designated, but not addressed, and presented a new typology consisting of four different types of second-person narrative, thereby expanding the empirical field of second-person narrative to include at least two overlooked groups of texts: 1) narratives with autobiographical content and 2) narratives with a first-person protagonist.

Thus, a direct consequence of the typology is that a text such as Gerhardt's *Transfer Window* can be read as a second-person narrative. My analysis has, I hope, shed light on two important aspects of the book, which are directly related to the typology and its two distinctions, fictional versus nonfictional and without a marked instance of enunciation versus with a marked instance of enunciation: the generic status of the book and the "I"–"you" relation. Despite its autobiographical content, Gerhardt employs fictionality in relation to both the setting and the narrative situation of the book. One central question follows: what does she achieve by employing this rhetorical strategy? While the hospice universe illustrates how it feels to be a terminal patient — "[h]alf dead and half alive" (Gerhardt [2017] 2019: 69) — the imitated dialogue becomes a way of continuing the conversation with the beloved partner despite the lack of actual communication as well as a reminder of the seriousness of the situation, anchoring the book to reality.

In broadening the scope of what is considered a second-person narrative proper, this article draws attention to a variety of texts that have not previously been read as second-person narratives, potentially resulting in new and surprising readings centred on the use of "you" and its connotations.

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