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Your Choice and Negative Affect in Alejandro Zambra's *Multiple Choice* (2014) and Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* (2019)

Abstract

This essay builds upon David Herman's idea of double deixis to explore the 'choose-your-own-adventure' (CYOA) form as a popular subtype of *you*-narration that foregrounds reader involvement, co-creation, and agency. The central conceit from such instances of hypertext fiction to self-help writing seems to be that *you* — the reader/consumer — have a choice. However, in my reading of Alejandro Zambra's *Multiple Choice* (2014) and Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* (2019), the false equivalence between choice and non-choice becomes particularly palpable when considering the affect of the second-person mode. While the former exemplifies what Irene Kacandes has called 'proto-' or 'paper hypertext' (2001: 200), the latter is also a memoir. I look at the underexamined intersection of hypertext fiction and autobiographical writing in the history of second-person narratives to restore the significance of negative affect to critical discussion. The agency to choose in *you*-narratives not only involves the anticipation of guilt, fault and/or shame, but autodiegetic instances of *you*-narration like Machado's memoir formalise Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological description of shame and Denise Riley's concept of malignant inner speech, or malediction.

second-person narration, hypertext fiction, shame, choice, Alejandro Zambra, Carmen Maria Machado

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I. Hypertext Fiction and The Paradox of Choice

From inception, second-person critical discourse has been almost invariably bound up with notions of reader involvement, co-creation, and agency, which is in turn thematised by writers employing the second-person mode. From hypertexts to self-help writing, the central conceit and area of intrigue seems to be that *you* — the reader/consumer — have a choice. This essay explores how choice in *you*-narratives is intimately bound up with the anticipation of negative affects such as guilt and shame in such a way that implicates its readers in a reflexive reading practice. The case studies selected are two contemporary *you*-narratives which use the ‘choose-your-own-adventure’ (CYOA) form to highlight the poetics of irony inherent in narrative choice. While Alejandro Zambra’s *Multiple Choice* (2014) explores the relationship between agency and culpability by playfully inhabiting an exam format which exposes choice as ‘non-choice’, the autodiegetic *you*-narration in Carmen Machado’s memoir *In the Dream House* (2019) formalises what the British poet and philosopher Denise Riley calls ‘malediction’, or malignant inner speech.

In the context of narratology, the Genettean sense of ‘hypertext’ differs from the hypertext narratives of interactive video and computer games. He explains in *Palimpsests* that the hypertext is a later text upon which an earlier one, the *hypotext*, ‘is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary’ (Genette 1982 [1997]: 5). The hypertexts studied by postclassical narratologists, by contrast, refers to what H. Porter Abbott succinctly describes as ‘that subset of electronic narrative that makes use of the hypertext linking function to allow readers to shift instantaneously to other virtual spaces’ (2010: 33). Similarly, the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* reiterates hyperlinks as a defining feature, transposed from the organisational structure of Internet sites to literary narrative (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 2005: 228). Without the use of digital hyperlinks, Zambra’s *Multiple Choice* exemplifies what Irene Kacandes calls ‘proto-’ or ‘paper hypertext’ (2001: 200) rather than hypertext proper or the type of digital fiction found in Astrid Ensslin’s and Alice Bell’s corpus. ‘Proto-’ or ‘paper hypertexts’ subsumes an extraordinary range of complex forms; there are CYOA stories like Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* (1963), Kim Newman’s *Life’s Lottery* (1999) and Nanni Balestrini’s *Tristano* (2009); ‘book-in-a-box’ type experiments such as Edward Powys Mathers’ murder mystery *Cain’s Jawbone* (1934), Marc Sapporta’s *Composition No. 1* (1963), and B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* (1969); interactive narratives in

app-fictions like *Karen* (2015) and films like *Bandersnatch* (2018). Following Ensslin, Bell and Sandrine Sorlin this essay advocates for the productive inclusion of hypertext fiction in second-person narrative studies (Ensslin & Bell 2021: 151–77; Sorlin 2022: 197–220).

Address is the paramount feature in second-person narratives, but it is curiously overlooked by the classification itself.¹ As Monika Fludernik observes, second-person fiction is ‘a misnomer of major proportions’ because

What is called second person fiction does not in any way have to employ a second person pronoun in reference to the protagonist. What it needs to employ is a *pronoun of address*, and in some languages, such a pronoun can be in the third person (e.g., the German ‘polite’ *Sie*, a third person plural form, or the Italian *Lei*, a third person singular). This fact seems to have escaped the notice of most researchers since they were analyzing French and English texts with a preponderance of *you* and *tu* forms and very rare instances of *vous* [...]. (Fludernik 1993: 219)

The third-person pronoun in certain languages can take on an address function, but this is generally not the case in English and is particularly disorientating when used in narratives that somehow encompass the reader. If we sidestep the apparent Franco- or Anglocentrism of second-person narrative studies for now, Fludernik’s assertion that second-person fiction does not, in fact, require the use of *you* so much as it requires ‘a *pronoun of address*’ raises the possibility of broadening the scope of analysis even further. In transmedial *you*-narratives — that is, visual and digital narratives — the prerequisite of a *pronoun of address* represents a grammatical limitation. But what are the affordances of revising the framework to encompass all aspects of a text that produce a doubly deictic effect of *address* instead?

The concept of double deixis in *you*-narratives originates from David Herman’s five-tier typology of textual *you* in *Story Logic*. He defines doubly deictic *you* as

[...] a mode of pronoun usage that draws attention to and so de-automatizes processes of contextual anchoring [...] on some occasions *you* functions 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. (Herman 2004: 342–43)

In other words, doubly deictic *you* instigates a more self-reflexive reading practice by inconclusively referring to a fictional *you*-protagonist at the same time as it retains the possibility of extradiegetic reader address. Doubly deictic *you* must be metaleptic to the extent that it necessitates the superimposition of at least two deictic roles, one diegetic and the other(s) extradiegetic (Genette 1980 [1972]: 234–37). While doubly deictic *you* is its own category in Herman’s model, Sorlin contends ‘the doubly deictic effect cuts across the different uses of “you”’ in her own framework (2022: 21), thereby suggesting that the *you* in fiction might always involve a degree of metalepsis.

Although the existence of a *you*-protagonist is commonly regarded as the defining criterion of second-person narratives, I follow Herman and Sorlin by considering the *you* at the level of the utterance and take doubly deictic *address* to be critical for the temporal and affective import of *you*-narratives. There are a number of ways for a text to address its reader without using the second-person pronoun. As I argue in my reading of Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s BBC Three television series *Fleabag* (2016–18), the doubly deictic effect

¹ Fludernik describes address as ‘the central irreplaceable characteristic constituent of so-called second-person fiction’ (1993: 219).

Often, the five-option exam format draws attention to the illusory choice conditions in which one may in fact not have choice. For example, in Section I ‘Excluded Term’, the reader-cum-test taker is instructed to ‘mark the answer that corresponds to the word whose meaning has no relation to either the heading or the other words listed’ (2017: 1). However, in examples like question 24, the result is the same whether the reader chooses or not, and any choice is rendered meaningless:

24. SILENCE

- A) silence
- B) silence
- C) silence
- D) silence
- E) silence

(Zambra 2017: 10)

Similarly, Exercise 35 from the second section, ‘Sentence Order’ provides five options that are identical (‘1-2-3-4-5’ [2017: 23]) and Exercise 58 of Section IV on ‘Sentence Elimination’, which instructs the reader to ‘mark the answer that corresponds to the sentences or paragraphs that can be eliminated because they either do not add information or are unrelated to the rest of the text’ (2017: 35). Each of the five options ineluctably leads to ‘A) None’:

58.

- (1) I didn’t want to talk about you, but it’s inevitable.
- (2) I’m talking about you right now. And you’re reading this, and you know it’s about you.
- (3) Now I am words that you read and wish did not exist.
- (4) I hate you.
- (5) You would like to have the power of a censor.
- (6) So no one else would ever read these words.
- (7) I hate you.
- (8) You ruined my life.
- (9) Now I am words you cannot erase.

- A) None
- B) A
- C) B
- D) C
- E) D

(Zambra 2017: 40)

The equivalence between choosing and not choosing here is significant in the context of the narrative as the narrating-*I* declares '(3) Now I am words that you read and wish did not exist', adding that the *you*-addressee '(5) [...] would like to have the power of a censor. / (6) So no one else would ever read these words'. Therefore, the only way the narrating-*I* can regain a sense of agency is by becoming 'words you cannot erase' and, despite its ironic placement in the 'Sentence Elimination' section, Zambra employs the narrative form to enact resistance by presenting five options that refuse erasure. The *you*-reader may feel deprived of choice, but it is by taking choice away from its *you*-reader and addressee that Zambra restores agency to the narrating-*I*. When we consider the question of choice and censorship raised in the text alongside its wider sociohistorical context, the stakes acquire a further political significance. *Multiple Choice*, like much of the author's work, grapples with the aftermath of Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship of Chile from 11 September 1973 until 11 March 1990. Born in 1975, Zambra was raised under the authoritarian regime and fifteen when democracy returned. It is not until the 'Sentence Elimination' section that Zambra addresses this history more explicitly in Exercises 57, 64 and 65. Here, as Ben East observes, 'the subtext of life under Pinochet's censorship becomes clear' and elimination, like erasure, reflects the way over a thousand Chileans were systematically made to 'disappear'.

In order for meaningful choice to be ascribed to the *you*-reader, the narrative structure must allow for contingency. But to what extent is this precluded by the structure of narrative itself? Here, I borrow a line of argumentation from Paul Ricoeur on the event, defined in relation to what he calls *emplotment*, or narrative configuration. In Ricoeur's thinking, the narrative event is the result of a character's choice rather than the reader's choice in hypertext fiction, but the two are homologous insofar as *emplotment* transforms contingency into necessity. Ricoeur explains:

The paradox of *emplotment* is that it inverts the effect of contingency, in the sense of that which could have happened differently or which might not have happened at all, by incorporating it in some way into the effect of necessity or probability exerted by the configuring act. The inversion of the effect of contingency into an effect of necessity is produced at the very core of the event [...]. (1992: 142)

The event 'as a mere occurrence' comes to be perceived as unexpected or surprising only as a result of the expectations cultivated by its narrative proceedings. It is understood as significant in retrospect, or from the perspective of temporal unity. For Ricoeur, the sense of

necessity produced is ‘a *narrative* necessity whose meaning effect comes from the configuring act as such’ (1992: 142). Put differently, the configuring act renders the event necessary to the narrative because if it is configured, then it is essential to narrative hermeneutics and cannot be contingent. Contingency thus resembles necessity and this resemblance is critical for the success of mimesis in prose narrative as the effect of realism relies on this impression of contingency. However, if there cannot be meaningful narrative choice without contingency, then what are the stakes of misapprehending necessity as contingency — or, non-choice as choice — in the ironic logic that underpins hypertext fictions like *Multiple Choice*? Meritocracy is the prevailing ideology in the contemporary world, and it places enormous weight on an individual’s responsibility over their own successes and failures. But if the subject misrecognises non-choice as choice (because it is disguised as such despite the socioeconomic macrostructures that negate that choice), then what remains is the perpetual anticipation of culpability without agency.

II. Choose Your Own Malediction

The emergence of second-person fiction proper coincides with the advent of hypertext fiction, but it also overlaps with the development of the study of autobiography as a literary genre. This is evident in the multiple citations of second-person address in Genette’s seminal definition of ‘metalepsis’ in *Narrative Discourse* to his subsequent inclusion of the category ‘autobio-heterodiegetic narrative’ — or more simply, ‘second-person autobiography’ — in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1980 [1972]: 234–37; 1990 [1980]: 133n6). Genette writes that ‘every narrating that is not (that does not have — or pretends not to have — any occasion to be) in the first person is heterodiegetic’ and this, he adds, ‘obviously includes the case of “second-person autobiography” evoked by [Philippe] Lejeune (*Je est un autre*, p. 36) and admirably exemplified, albeit in verse, by Apollinaire’s *Zone*’ (1990: 133 and 133n6). This citation from Lejeune originates from his landmark essay, ‘Le Pacte autobiographique’ (1975), where he writes that just as Michel Butor’s *La modification* (1957) and Georges Perec’s *Un homme qui dort* (1967) had demonstrated in fiction, it is clearly ‘possible to write without using the first person. What would prevent me from writing my life’s story and calling myself “you”?’ (Lejeune 1980 [1989]: 7).⁴ Scholars in autofictional studies who turn to Lejeune’s seminal work tend to overlook the significance of this remark, and though Lejeune admits that he was not yet aware of autobiographical examples fully written in the second-person mode at the time of writing, his preliminary theorisation here anticipates the arrival of a burgeoning subspecies of second-person narration. Since Lejeune’s initial theorisation, a range of (semi-)autobiographical writing that employs *you*-narration has emerged, including Christa Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster* (1976), Jacques Derrida’s *The Post Card* (1980), Christine Angot’s *Sujet Angot* (1998), Paul Auster’s *Winter Journal* (2012) and *Report from the Interior* (2013), Sheila Heti’s *Motherhood* (2018), Patrick Flanery’s *The Ginger Child* (2019), Siri Hustvedt’s *Memories of the Future* (2019), and, the second case study in this essay, Carmen Maria Machado’s *In the Dream House* (2019). Regardless of whether *you*-narratives are overtly works of fiction or something confounding

⁴ Although Butor’s *La modification* (1957) is widely recognised as the first second-person fiction proper text featuring a *you*-protagonist, lesser-known instances such as Isle Aichinger’s *Spiegelgeschichte*, translated as *Mirror Story* (1954) and Mary McCarthy’s *The Genial Host* (1941) appeared earlier and have been documented by scholars like Fludernik and Ewegenia Iliopoulou.

the fiction/non-fiction binary, instances of autodiegetic *you*-narration wherein a future narrating-self recounts the narrative to a narratee-self situated in the present are ubiquitous in the contemporary.

Revisiting *you*-narration five years later in an essay on third-person autobiography from *Je est un autre* (1980), Lejeune adds that autobiographical discourse in the second person could be used for self-reflexive lecture, encouragement, and moral examinations (1980 [1989]: 248n4). Second-person narration 'is equally common,' Lejeune writes, 'in examinations of conscience or judgements: one prepares one's own trial, one speaks to oneself as if one were one's superego' (1980 [1989]: 248n4). Examples include Jean Cocteau's *La Difficulté d'être* (1947), Régis Debray's meditations in prison from *Journal d'un petit bourgeois entre deux feux et quatre murs* (1976), the journal of the Italian writer, Cesare Pavese, and Jorge Semprun's *L'Autobiographie de Federico Sanchez* (1978) (Lejeune 1980: 36n1; 1980 [1989]: 248n4). Lejeune's conceptualisation of second-person autobiography as interior dialogue ('speak[ing] to oneself as if one were one's superego') is pertinent to my argument for two reasons: firstly, because if, as Genette observes, 'the adoption of an *I* to designate one of the characters automatically and inescapably imposes the homodiegetic relationship — that is, the certainty that that character is the narrator,' then the narrator's refusal to inhabit the enunciating-*I* allows for the possibility of heterodiegetic categorisation. Second-person autobiography as 'autobio-heterodiegetic narrative,' then, represents an attempt to elide a homodiegetic relationship between narrator and protagonist in favour of a heterodiegetic relationship of increased distance (Genette 1980 [1983]: 106). Secondly, rather than completely dissociating the narrator from narratee the way third-person autobiography might, narrative *you* is uniquely able to place the two irreconcilable parts of selfhood in dialogue.

But what is the complexion of this dialogue between two irreconcilable selves? Lejeune notes that interior dialogue can be used for self-encouragement, however, the language of the trial, the superego and moral examinations expresses the anxiety of fault and many literary instances of autodiegetic *you*-narration suggest that the mode is often inextricably linked to self-derision. In fact, Katherine Leary's English translation of Lejeune observing that 'monologues [...] carried out in the second person in order to lecture or to encourage oneself' tempers Lejeune's original sentiment by translating 'se morigéner' as 'to lecture'. The original reflexive verb is itself a neologism. In French, the verb *morigéner* is transitive and typically followed by a direct object rather than used reflexively; it invokes a sense of self-flagellation and could also be translated as 'to chide oneself' or 'to rebuke oneself'. Furthermore, the archetypal second-person novel according to Prince, Lejeune, and Kacandes is Butor's *La modification*, a text which could be read as a shameful self-examination as it follows a man's internal conflict to abandon his wife and children or to conclude his affair over the course of a train journey (Kacandes 1994: 329–49; 2001: 157–62).

What this unremarked aspect in the history of *you*-narrative studies establishes is the significance of negative affect for the form. But how does the self learn the language of the chastising superego? In Denise Riley's description of inner speech, this culmination of past voices reiterated by the self, to the self, originates in the Other. To illustrate how autodiegetic *you*-narration expresses an aversion to or estrangement from the self in form, I will analyse Carmen Maria Machado's use of second-person narration, footnotes and the CYOA mode in her memoir.

In the Dream House is narrated by a latent-*I* about — and addressed to — her *you*-narratee self. The text documents the narrator's experience of verbal, psychological, and physical abuse within a queer relationship. The titular 'Dream House' acts as a metaphor that informs the architecture of the book; each chapter maintains '*Dream House as*' in its title and experiments with a different form and perspective. The 'Dream House' is literally the home shared between the *you*-narratee of the past and her vindictive ex-girlfriend and figuratively a relationship that began much like a dream. In Machado's own words, this is 'a book about a house that was not a house and a dream that was no dream at all' (2020: 183). The narrating-*I* that emerges is situated in the narrative future and these two selves is distinguished in the following passage from the section, '*Dream House as an Exercise in Point of View*':

You were not always just a You. I was whole — a symbiotic relationship between my best and worst parts — and then, in one sense of the definition, I was cleaved: a neat lop that took first person — that assured, confident woman, the girl detective, the adventurer — away from the second, who was always anxious and vibrating like a too-small breed of dog. (2020: 12)

The *you*-narratee of the past is resurrected here ('I thought you died, but writing this, I'm not sure you did') and contrasted with the post-Dream House narrating-*I* (2020: 12). The memoir and the past it recreates is, for Machado, an attempt to 'reconstruct dialogue' and make sense of two diametrically opposed selves.⁵ After the Dream House, the narrator believes she 'was cleaved: a neat lop' that severed the 'assured' first person from the 'always anxious' second. The verb 'cleave' with its paradoxical definitions of both to *cling* and to *cut* further reinforces the sense of self-estrangement. The convergence of the technical and the emotional in this description suggests that the affordance of affective expression is perhaps always formal in second-person discourse.

While the post-Dream House narrating-*I* 'left, and then lived: moved to the East Coast, wrote a book, moved in with a beautiful woman, got married [...] Learned things', the *you*-narratee represents a shameful past self:

But you. You took a job as a standardized-test-grader. You drove seven hours to Indiana every other week for a year. You churned out mostly garbage for the second half of your MFA. You cried in front of many people. You missed readings, parties, the supermoon. You tried to tell your story to people who didn't know how to listen. You made a fool of yourself, in more ways than one. (2020: 12)

In the aftermath of this relationship, Machado's narrator becomes forever estranged from her past self and many of the addresses to this *you* throughout the text echo the voice of her former partner, thereby synthesising the repudiation of the Other with the repudiation of the self: 'Who are you? You are nobody. You are nothing' (2020: 56). This sort of derisive interior dialogue is analogous to what Riley calls malediction, a subtype of inner speech

⁵ 'The memoir is', writes Machado in her prologue to the text, 'at its core, an act of resurrection. Memoirists re-create the past, reconstruct dialogue. They summon meaning from events that have long been dormant. They braid the clays of memory and essay and fact and perception together, smash them into a ball, roll them flat. They manipulate time; resuscitate the dead. They put themselves, and others, into necessary context' (2020: 4).

that refers to the ruthless staying power of hostile utterances buttressed by a dynamic of persecutory interpellation. Persecutory interpellation enables the shadow of these utterances to extend 'well beyond the instant of its articulation' and compels the self 'to slip toward self-scrutiny, because another's angry interpellation so readily slides into becoming my own self-interpellation, where a thousand inducements to self-description, self-subjectification, and self-diagnosis are anyway waiting eagerly at its service' (2005: 13–4; 22). The Other's 'angry interpellation' is able to slip 'readily' into 'self-interpellation' because there is always already what Riley calls 'an anxiety of interpellation' in the interpellated subject who 'ponders incessantly to herself "Am I that name; am I really one of those?"' (2005: 15).⁶ What is initially angry and persecutory interpellation (or, accusation) eventually becomes self-interpellation.

The dynamic of malediction also bears a striking resemblance to Jean-Paul Sartre's description of the phenomenological structure of shame. 'Shame,' writes Sartre, 'is by nature *recognition*. I recognize that I *am* as the Other sees me [...] Thus shame is shame *of oneself before the Other*; these two structures are inseparable' (1943 [2003]: 246). In other words, the Other is an indispensable mediator which renders the subject an object of shame. The phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is then dissolved at the moment the subject recognises itself as the Other's object. For Riley, this figure of the Other is always already internalised, leading to an inescapable self-aversion because for 'lacerating interpellation' to work, there must already be a prehistory lodged deeply within the affected subject before the utterance can become a *self*-lacerating voice (2005: 16). We see this illustrated in the relentless litany of '*Dream House as Inventory*':

She makes you tell her what is wrong with you. This is a favorite activity; even better than her telling you what is wrong with you. Years later, it's a habit that's hard to break.

You can be an incorrigible snob. You value intelligence and wit over other, more admirable qualities. You hate it when people say stupid things. You have an ego: you believe you are good at what you do. You're neurotic and anxious and self-centered. (2020: 126)

The initial persecutory interpellation is forcibly re-articulated by the subject and its shadows haunt the narrator even in the present ('Years later, it's a habit that's hard to break'). The very fact of their reproduction here on the page, long after its moment of articulation, is indicative of how readily malignant speech is recollected and how fully the Other's interpellation is internalised. The *you*-narratee's realisation of indeed being the abhorrent being that is accosted thus resonates with Emmanuel Lévinas' paradoxical description of escape:

The necessity of fleeing, in order to hide oneself, is put in check by the impossibility of fleeing oneself. What appears in shame is thus precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide from oneself, the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself [*du moi à soi-même*]. (1935 [2003]: 64)

⁶ The question, 'Am I that name?' comes from Desdemona in *Othello* and was previously used as the title of Riley's 1988 book-length essay, '*Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*'.

Shame, for Lévinas, depends ‘on the very being of our being, on the impulse to escape compounded by its incapacity to break with itself’ (1935 [2003]: 63). Similarly for Sartre, shame is inescapable because it is constitutive of being:

[...] a shameful apprehension *of* something and this something is *me*. I am ashamed of what I *am*. Shame therefore realizes an intimate relation of myself to myself. Through shame I have discovered an aspect *of my* being. (1943 [2003]: 301)

In this sense, second-person narration allows the narrating-*I* to confront and address a past self while also reflecting the impulse to flee from this self. Even more paradoxical is the way in which our identity as ‘subjects’ relies upon the existence of others, to whom we are conversely *subjected*, and corresponds to the psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin’s intersubjective theory of how the self, even when alone, sees itself in relation to the Other (1988: 20).

The self in Machado’s *Dream House* is constituted by the Other and the amorous relationship becomes the primary site of desubjectification and objectification where the ‘splinterlike’ accusations are more acutely felt because they originate from the beloved.⁷ As Roland Barthes writes in *A Lover’s Discourse*:

[...] madness has been thought to consist in Rimbaud’s “*Je est un autre*”: madness is an experience of depersonalization. For me as an amorous subject, it is quite the contrary: it is becoming a *subject*, being unable to keep myself from doing so, which drives me mad. *I am not someone else*: that is what I realize with horror. (2002 [1977]: 121)

Barthes’ reference to Rimbaud (*Je est un autre*) comes from a letter addressed to Paul Demeny in 1871 from which Lejeune also derives his title.⁸ Ricoeur’s own *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990) — or *Oneself as Another* (1992) in English — is possibly another derivation. Where for Rimbaud ‘madness is an experience of depersonalization’, for Barthes it is the *personalisation* of amorous entanglements which becomes distinctly disempowering: ‘being unable to keep myself from’ becoming an amorous subject. The lover who upon ‘becoming a *subject*’ becomes, also, estranged from the self. Love for the Other turns into self-loathing through the horrific realisation that the self is ‘*not someone else*’. This is echoed by an earlier section where Barthes observes how the subject in love is prone to guilt and fault, imagining ‘[i]n various contingencies of everyday life’ that ‘he has failed the loved being’ (2002 [1977]: 117). Fault, guilt, the sentiment of having ‘failed the loved being’ and, implicitly, shame, in Barthes’ formulation, are imagined, arising from a kind of paralysis and inactivity. The subject in love lacks agency, often acting at the behest — imagined or actual — of the beloved object so that regardless of whether or not they act, the subject is always already at fault. The beloved’s malediction in the *Dream House* is thus doubly insidious for the disempowered, self-estranged, and always already ashamed amorous subject. Machado’s beloved denouncer routinely asks the *you*-narratee to verbalise corrosive *self*-derisions instead, as

⁷ The fitting descriptor ‘splinterlike’ originates from Riley (2005: 9).

⁸ Rimbaud writes

Romanticism has never been properly judged. Who was there to judge it? The critics!! The Romantics? who prove so clearly that the song is very seldom the work, that is, the idea sung and understood by the singer. For, I is an other. (Rothenberg and Robinson 2009: 917)

if to synthesise their voices until the subject (*you*-protagonist and narratee) can no longer distinguish the beloved's voice from her own.⁹ It is no wonder that the present narrating-*I* describes the narratee-*you* of her past almost disdainfully still ('always anxious and vibrating like a too-small breed of dog'). The narrator's embodied repudiation of her past self is further amplified by the footnotes accompanying this extract: 'From now on, it will just be you and the woman in the Dream House. Just the two of you, together' (2020: 75). These two sentences cite Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, from which Machado extrapolates the following self-reflexive footnotes respectively: 'Girl mistakenly elopes with the wrong lover' and 'Poets and fools closely allied' (2020: 75n15 and 75n16). Machado draws repeated parallels to Thompson's comically thorough catalogue, effectively bringing to the fore the folklorish absurdities of reality, but here we see how the footnotes becomes an aspect of narrative form that mocks the deluded naivety of her past self.

Footnotes are not the only way malediction manifests in Machado's memoir. As a cruel cross between wish fulfilment and the acknowledgment of an unalterable past '*Dream House as Choose Your Own Adventure* ®' plays with ironic non-choice options just like Zambra's *Multiple Choice*. Machado's narrator ridicules the possibility of 'choice' in the following scenario:

You wake up [...] When you turn over, she is staring at you. The luminous innocence of the light curdles in your stomach. You don't remember ever going from awake to afraid so quickly.

"You were moving all night," she says. "Your arms and elbows touched me. You kept me awake."

If you apologize profusely, go to page 190.

If you tell her to wake you up next time your elbows touch her in your sleep, go to page 191.

If you tell her to calm down, go to page 193.

(2020: 189)

The first two choices (pages 190 and 191) both aggravate her partner and end with the same sentence: "Fuck you," she says, and gets out of bed. You follow her all the way to the kitchen'. The third option, page 193, though it is the only option that might suggest self-defence, turns out not to be an option at all: 'Are you kidding? You'd never do this. Don't try to convince any of these people that you'd stand up for yourself for one second. Get out of here'. While the pretence of choice is exposed as non-choice in Zambra's novel, the added context of *In the Dream House* being Machado's personal narrative past negates choice further. Each of the three options listed takes the *you*-protagonist down a different route towards the same 'END' on page 204, but some pages are unaccounted for. The first of which is page 192 and exists only to reiterate self-reproach:

⁹ Riley compares '[t]he tendency of malignant speech' to an ingrown 'toenail, embedding itself in its hearer until it's no longer felt to come "from the outside"' (2005: 11).

Here you are; a page where you shouldn't be. It is impossible to find your way here naturally; you can only do so by cheating. Does that make you feel good, that you cheated to get here? What kind of a person are you? Are you a monster? You might be a monster.

Pages 194 and 197 are the same:

You shouldn't be on this page. There's no way to get here from the choices given to you. You flipped here because you got sick of the cycle. You wanted to get out. You're smarter than me.

You shouldn't be on this page. There's no way to get here from the choices given to you. Did you think that by flipping through this chapter linearly you'd find some kind of relief? Don't you get it? All of this shit already happened, and you can't make it not happen, no matter what you do.

The CYOA form here is mimetic of the *you*-narratee's entrapment as the tirade of non-options offer the pretence of an alternative. All lead ineluctably to the same end — but only after a series of reproachful repetitions that reconfigure the end as a release. The affect of the CYOA form is the result of its dual function as counterfactual and malediction. Counterfactuality is a device which ironically reaffirms factuality by providing a false alternative. The presentation of a counterfactual narrative ironically reinforces the actuality status of its opposite. As Hilary P. Dannenberg explains, counterfactuals

[...] can perform an important authenticating function in the realist tradition [...] to strengthen the impression that the narrative world is "real" by constructing a further, contrastive "less real" sequence of events that reinforces the apparent reality of the narrative world by *ontological default*. The articulation of a counterfactual thus encourages the reader to think of the actual events in the narrative world as "real" in contradistinction to the "less real" counterfactual sequence. (2008: 54)

In addition to formalising malediction, the CYOA form in *In the Dream House* performs this precise authenticating function: 'Don't you get it? All of this shit already happened, and you can't make it not happen, no matter what you do'. Through doubly deixis, Machado addresses both her past *you*-narratee self as well as the *you*-reader who, in the present, cannot change what has already happened for (and to) the narrating-*I*.

Hypertext fiction is a mode of *you*-narration which, like 'how-to' second-person fiction, ironises the narrative of personal agency. By thematising the *you*-reader's choice, *Multiple Choice* and *In the Dream House* makes legible the illusion of that choice as well as its negative affect in narrative form. What first appears to be choice and contingency is revealed to be non-choice and necessity in *Multiple Choice*, thereby leaving the anticipation of culpability without affording agency in the first place. The stakes are low in this playful text, but they are notably higher in more sophisticated forms of digital fiction where increased user participation corresponds to the degree of affective resonance experienced by the reader/player. Multiplayer role-playing games (RPG) and interactive app-fictions like *Karen* sometimes blur the boundary between fiction and reality in ways that cause the reader/user to report unsettling feelings of culpability (Bell 2021: 430–52; Ensslin and Bell 2021: 72–9). While

choice may provide an impression of control it can also imply culpability, engender guilt or fault and manifest shame. By contrast, *In the Dream House* illustrates how autodiegetic *you*-narration can represent both the subjective experience of shame as self-recognition and malignant inner speech in CYOA form. Considering the self-lacerating dimension of interior dialogue in Lejeune's account alongside inner speech's capacity for self-reproach in Riley's description of malediction opens up the political implications of *you*-narration's negative affect in critical ways.

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