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# The role of second person narration in representing mental states in Sylvia Plath's *Smith Journal*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This paper looks at instances of second person narration in the first journal published in The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath (Kukil, 2000) in order to determine the potential that second person narration can have for the linguistic representation of mental states. The contributions of different disciplines (narratology, linguistics, psychology) to the study of second person narration are considered and their findings are re-applied to a non-fictional text. In a corpus-informed comparative analysis, the paper takes into consideration both perspectives from narratology and developments in the understanding of language use in the field of psychology to provide an interdisciplinary, but cognitively inclined perspective on the phenomenon.*

*Appearances of second person narration are chronologically tracked through the data and compared to biographical developments in Sylvia Plath's life; entries written in the first- and second person are compared to each other to determine linguistic differences using corpus methods; the results of the two analyses are then interpreted in the light of traditional functions attributed to second person narration in narratology, and in the light of research in narrative psychology. The paper aims to demonstrate that second person narration can project a sense of emotional depth and inner conflict as well as of emotional balance. However, the temporal orientation of a given text will influence which of these effects predominates.*

## 1. Background

Second person narration “offers new possibilities of creative representation, particularly for revealing a mind in flux” (Richardson, 2006: 35).

Second person narration (SPN) is a complicated phenomenon. Narratologists (most notably, Margolin, 1990; Fludernik, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Herman,

2004 and Richardson, 2006) have gone to great lengths to describe and categorize its various textual manifestations based on linguistic form and/or effect. Various definitions have attempted to capture the essential characteristics of the phenomenon and for the purposes of the present argument I will broadly adopt a relatively open definition of second person narration as proposed by Richardson (1991 and 2006):

any narration other than an apostrophe that designates its protagonist by a second person pronoun. The protagonist will usually be the sole focalizer, and is often (but not always) the work's principle narratee as well (2006: 19).

According to the above, the one essential characteristic of second person narration is the designation of its protagonist by *you*, provided that the text concerned is not an apostrophe (i.e. a direct address of the reader, absent character, unreal being etc. outside of the narration). This paper examines the role of second person narration (based on the definition above) in the first published journal of Sylvia Plath (henceforth referred to as *Smith Journal*) in terms of its potential implications for the linguistic representation of mental states.

Sylvia Plath was an American-born poet, writing in the 1950s to early 1960s. She wrote extensive journals throughout most of her life, recording events, conversations, descriptions of people and places, introspections, worries and joys. Those journals that have survived have been published under *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* (Kukil 2000). My focus, for the purposes of this paper, will be on the first journal published in this collection, the so-called Smith Journal.

The Smith Journal begins in 1950, just before Plath leaves home to attend college and ends on 14th July 1953, just over a month before her first suicide attempt after her second year at college. During this time, she goes through a number of more or less important relationships (including first sexual experiences), works for the first time, has several successful publications, and in June 1953 wins a guest editorship at *Mademoiselle* in New York City. The journal ends abruptly after her return from New York.

The Smith Journal consists of 181 entries, the majority of which are numbered and occasionally also dated. Exceptions to this are the final two entries, which are only dated but not numbered and entries numbered 171–179, which are missing. The data considered for analysis excludes those entries that are obviously work in progress<sup>2</sup> and/or sections of letters to other people, as these significantly differ formally and functionally from the rest of the entries.

It is the nature of the data I am examining that makes the adoption of an open definition of SPN necessary<sup>3</sup>. While the majority of texts normally considered

for analysis in terms of narrative person are fictional narratives, the data here is non-fictional. This means that some of the categories and distinctions that normally apply to fictional narratives – and that contribute to the difficulties in pinning down a definition for second person texts – cannot easily be applied. More specifically, I am here referring to the various levels of discourse and uncertainty over the identities of discourse participants (narrator, narratee, protagonist) that can be present in fictional texts.

In the case of the Smith Journal, there is no doubt about the identity of the narrator, or the protagonist – they are both Plath. The narratee can also be assumed to be Plath for two reasons. Firstly, one can tentatively assume that, as a private journal, the Smith Journal was not written for any audience other than the self<sup>4</sup> – a later self perhaps. Secondly, as both Margolin (1990) and Fludernik (1994a) point out, the mere presence of *you* invokes an addressee and makes this addressee co-referential with the protagonist (when *you* refers to the protagonist). This is not to say that the presence of *you* automatically addresses the protagonist in the same way as a question or an order using *you* would. The former should be understood as a more subtle form of address, while the latter is an immediate and direct form of address.

As such, the Smith Journal can be compared to Margolin's (1990) *displaced* or *transferred* SPN where "a speaker could thus speak to and of him or herself in the second person, thereby creating a situation of internal dialogue or self-communication" (1990: 428). It can also be compared, though to a lesser extent, to self address second person texts in Fludernik's (1995) terms. Margolin (1990) suggests that the transferred SPN that can be indicative of inner-split or self-alienation however, what I am attempting to demonstrate is that not all transferred SPNs project a strong sense of inner-split.

Once again, I stress the distinction between my data and common examples of second person narration because in common examples (such as Calvino's (1979) *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*) ambiguities over the identities of various discourse participants have also been used to explain the different effects/functions of SPN. What I hope to show in this paper is that differences in effect can exist even when all the participants (protagonist, narrator, narratee) are identifiable with relative certainty. Additionally, with the help of narrative psychology, I hope to show that differences in the effects/functions of SPN can also be explained by the linguistic composition of second person texts – in particular, their temporal orientation.

The present paper should be understood as primarily exploratory in nature – it aims to invite further interdisciplinary research into understanding how language can be used to express various aspects of mental functioning. In particular, it hopes to highlight the importance of looking at second person narration in more detail, specifying potential subcategories, in order to reconcile potentially conflicting functions and effects.

## 2. The role of second person narration in the Smith Journal

The language of the Smith Journal displays a number of interesting characteristics that invite detailed investigation. However, one of the most salient characteristics is its violation of genre conventions in its type of narration.

While an overwhelming majority (approx. 90%) of entries in the journal are narrated in the first person (see Example 1), the Smith Journal also contains entries in second person narration (such as Example 2) that make up about 10% of the text. The style of these entries runs contrary to the genre conventions of private journals – albeit the conventions for this particular genre are relatively flexible (Rainer 1978). Let me begin by illustrating the difference. Example 1 below reads as one might expect a typical journal to read. It is written using the first person pronoun to designate its protagonist, who is also the writer/narrator and the narrative (in a looser sense) is also focalized through that protagonist. In the Smith Journal, as in Example 1, Plath often writes in an introspective manner about seemingly insignificant events (such as a fire drill), describing these and her reactions to them in detail.

### Example 1

Last night we had our first fire drill. [ . . . ] I leapt to my feet, grabbed coat & towel and burst out of my room, padding downstairs with the rest of the girls. We stood huddled in the hall, every-one in a sleepy, unreal stupor. I smiled shakily at someone. I went upstairs and fell into bed after they called roll. My nerves pained keenly. My fever made me restless, uneasy. So this is what we have to learn to be part of a community: to respond blindly, unconsciously to electric sirens shrilling in the middle of night. I hate it. But someday I have to learn – someday – (from Entry 30)

Example 2 on the other hand, is not what one would expect to find in a journal – the second person pronoun is used to designate the same protagonist as before. Entries narrated in the second person are not necessarily different in terms of subject matter (although they tend to be less about events, and more about preoccupations, or mental events), but they are sometimes very different in terms of style.

### Example 2

There comes a time when you walk downstairs to pick up a letter you forgot, and the low confidential voices of the little group of girls in the living room suddenly ravel into an incoherent mumble and their eyes slide slimily through you, around you, away from you in a snaky effort not to meet the tentative half-fear quivering in your own eyes. And you remember a lot of

nasty little tag ends of conversation directed at you and around you, meant for you, to strangle you on the invisible noose of insinuation. You know it was meant for you; so do they who stab you. But the game is for both of you to pretend you don't know, you don't really mean, you don't understand. Sometimes you can get a shot back in the same way, and you and your antagonist rival each other with brave smiles while the poison darts quiver, maliciously, in your mutual wounds. (from Entry 41)

One is left to wonder why *I* has become *you*. It is natural to assume that such changes do not occur at random, so one will try to interpret the psychological significance – for the protagonist/writer/narrator – of writing about oneself in the second person in a journal. Is it an attempt to look at oneself through the eyes of others? Is it an attempt at distancing and retrospection? Or could *you* meaning *I* be indicative of an inner struggle and upheaval? All of these functions have, in various cases, been attributed to second person narration.

### 2.1. *Functions of second person narration – Narratology*

Different functions/effects of second person narration have been discussed in the narratology literature: Fludernik among others notes that:

... second person narrative can, and frequently does, correlate with great emotional depth since the dialogic relationship it puts at its very centre allows for an in-depth treatment of human relationships, especially of relationships fraught with intense emotional rifts and tensions (1994b: 466).

Second person narration is suited for such passages or texts because of the inherent ambiguity in the second person pronoun and the potential to evoke readers' empathy (Phelan 1994). The ambiguity partly stems from the variety of functions the second person pronoun serves in the English language – its precise referent depends on context, and is not necessarily specific (Quirk et al. 1985). Second person narratives play with precisely this multifunctionality (Margolin 1990; Fludernik 1994b; Richardson, 2006)<sup>5</sup>. Empathy is evoked by the function of direct address, with the reader in the position of assumed addressee. In this sense, reader empathy is evoked by all second person narratives so long as the descriptions, actions and attitudes of the *you* protagonist do not clash dramatically with those of the reader (Margolin, 1990; Phelan, 1994).

More concrete functions for different types of SPN have been noted in reference to character representation. As Fludernik (1994a) notes, it can represent reflection and emotional distancing from events, especially when there are hints of interpretation and evaluation on the part of the narrator. In other cases, second person narration conveys a sense of inner split (Margolin, 1990) or self-alienation (DelConte, 2003) on the part of the protagonist.

This happens most often in self-narratives and can be seen most vividly in instances of self-address, where the protagonist, delineated by *you*, is the narratee and also the narrator. The narrative effectively mimics the existence of two entities within one. Fludernik (1994b) suggests that in passages of self-address this sense of split arises because *you* can only denote both narrator and addressee if “an *I* splits into two voices that interact dialogically” (450). Bal (1993) highlights that some instances of this inner split are cases where “. . . the *you* is called upon as a witness who is thereby authorized as an expert” (312–13) and is “dissociated from the first person narrator to gain more authority” (313).

The potentially different levels of authority are also recognized by Margolin (1990). In fact, he maintains that “the superiority of the speaker to his or her addressee/character in terms of knowledge and/or understanding and/or judgement as regards the actions or the psychological nature of the *you*” (Margolin 1990: 444) is common to all second person narratives<sup>6</sup>. A possible explanation for this may stem from the unconventional use of a pronoun other than *I* to refer to the self. As Katie Wales puts it: “when non-first person singular forms are used for [+ego], the *distancing*<sup>7</sup> that results is a social one of *power*, confirming the speaker’s authority” (1996: 70).

These (potentially contradictory) function/effects of SPN are attributed to different types of the phenomenon (as distinguished by the presence/absence of evaluation, self-address, etc.). However, in order to account for these in greater detail and to understand how these effects come about, one should approach the issue from a number of perspectives.

First of all, it is worth looking at the distribution of the second person narrative entries in the Smith Journal, and how this distribution correlates with significant events in the writer’s life. Secondly, the linguistic make-up of first- and second person narrative entries needs to be compared to gain a better understanding of how various effects and functions of second person narration are created and/or activated.

## 2.2. *The distribution of second person narrative entries*

One way of trying to establish the function of second person narration in the Smith Journal is by looking at its distribution over time and its correlation with biographical events in Plath’s life. While the distribution of second person narration does not follow a clear and strict pattern, there are loose *clusters* that can be identified. Figure 1 shows the occurrence of these clusters (the numbers in the small boxes correspond to the number of the entries) in relation to the year the entries were written in and the events described in those and the surrounding entries.

The majority of the second person narrative entries occur in the first half of 1951. This period is a sort of ‘era of firsts’ as Plath approaches the end of her

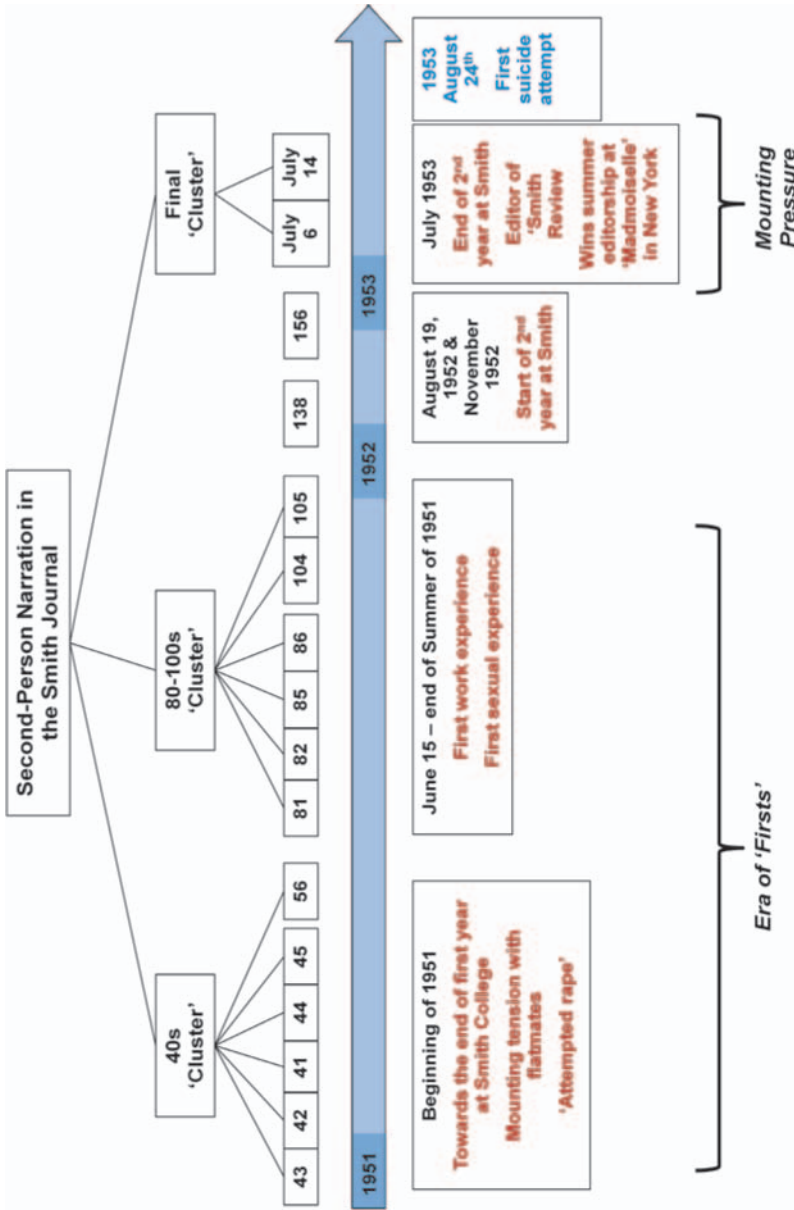


Figure 1. Distribution of second person narration in the Smith Journal



first year away from home at college, returns home for her first summer vacation and takes on her first full-time job as a mother's helper (i.e. au pair) in a household. The 40s cluster additionally coincides with tensions with her flatmates at college (Example 2 and Example 3) and a description of an unwelcome experience of a sexual nature with a blind date. The 80s cluster additionally includes references to Plath's first consensual sexual experience. First sexual experiences in people's lives can be 'emotional affairs' in the same way that encountering other new situations for the first time can.

### Example 3

You toss off a thumbnail sketch of the guy whom you had a blind date with, noticing that when you say he's good-looking she shuts her ears to the rest. There might be something nice about him. She couldn't stand to hear that. You go on about Bob from Rensselaer. You don't give a damn about him, so you pretend. She's really deaf now. Finally she goes. Maybe she knows she's made you jealous. Maybe she just wants to have you make her feel good the way you used to before you got sick of her. (from Entry 44)

The final cluster (e.g. Example 4), written in the summer of 1953 after Plath's second year at college, is written at a time of mounting tensions as Plath begins to make her mark professionally. During the academic year, she becomes editor of the Smith College newspaper the *Smith Review* – a position of great honor, but involving additional work and responsibilities. Towards the end of the academic year, she also wins a guest editorship at *Mademoiselle*, a women's magazine based in New York City, which fills her with anxiety about not being good enough to do the job (Kukil 2000). In general, Plath agonizes over her successes: *the one time in your life you'll have a chance to prove your own discipline* (entry July 6); *Fear; big & ugly & sniveling. Fear of not succeeding intellectually and academically* (entry July 14); *Fear of failing to live up to the fast & furious prize-winning pace of these last years – and any kind of creative life* (entry July 14).

### Example 4

Now is the time to conjure up words and ideas on your own. You are frozen mentally – scared to get going, eager to crawl back to the womb. First think: here is your room – here is your life, your mind: don't panic. Begin writing, even if it is only rough & ununified. (from Entry July 6)

In addition to the three relatively tangible clusters already mentioned, there are also two somewhat isolated second person narrative entries in the Smith Journal, entries 138 and 156. Both of these are relatively short, but 138 in particular can be linked to the *mounting tensions* group by topic. In it, Plath ex-

plicitly describes the professional angst mentioned above. Entry 156, seems to describe a more general frustration with the writer's self; more specifically, her general indecision (see Example 5).

#### **Example 5**

You have had chances; you have not taken them. You are wallowing in original sin; your limitations. You cannot even decide to take a walk in the country: you are not sure whether it is an escape or a refreshing cure from cooping yourself in your room all day. You have lost all delight in life. Ahead is a large array of blind alleys. You are half-deliberately, half-desperately, cutting off your grip on creative life. You are becoming a neuter machine. You cannot love, even if you knew how to begin to love. Every thought is a devil, a hell . . . (from Entry 156)

Overall, the biographical link between the distribution of second person narrative entries in the journal and events in Plath's life seems to broadly corroborate what narratologists have suggested about the functions of the phenomenon: second person narration has a tendency to correlate with emotional depth. However, the correlation with significant events cannot be seen as definite evidence that entries written in the second person are more 'emotional' in nature than those written in the first person. For more concrete evidence, one needs to turn to quantitative methods and psychology research on language use.

### *2.3. Linguistic comparison of first- versus second person narrative entries*

This paper will now consider a corpus linguistics comparison of the first-versus second person narrative entries in the Smith Journal in order to ascertain whether there are any significant linguistic differences between them (aside from a change in pronoun use). Due to limitations of space however, much of the discussion on the methodological and procedural details and issues will be omitted, allowing for a detailed focus on the results of the study.

The corpus analysis involved a statistical comparison of the linguistic characteristics of second person narrative entries with first person narrative entries. The two sets of texts were fed into the online software Wmatrix (Rayson 2009) which automatically tags individual words for part-of-speech (POS) using CLAWS and for semantic category using USAS<sup>8</sup>. Wmatrix can then perform an electronic comparison between the two texts and calculate the key linguistic differences between them. The mathematical tool used by the software is the Log-likelihood (LL) statistic, where an LL value of 3.84 provides 95% certainty that the results are not due to chance ( $p < 0.05$ ); an LL value of 6.63 increases this certainty to 99% ( $p < 0.01$ ); and when  $LL = 10.83$  the certainty is 99.9% ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Rayson 2009).

Table 1 below shows the results of such a comparison between the first- and second person narrative entries. The first column contains those parts-of-speech that were found to be overused in second person narrative entries when compared to first person narration in descending order of significance. The second column contains the respective log-likelihood values – the cut-off point for this comparison was  $LL = 3.84$  ( $p < 0.05$ ).

As the table illustrates, the second person pronoun (and associated verb forms *are*, *were* and the base forms) are significantly overused in second person narration. This is not surprising given that what was previously in the first person is now in the second. However, it is noteworthy that second person narration contains more references to third parties (3rd person sing. subjective personal pronoun), and negation than first person narration. It is also worth noting that a semantic comparison of the two texts revealed that references to past time are overused in second person narration while references to future time are underused in comparison to first person narration in the Smith Journal.

Research in the area of psychology has found that changes in the use of function words (grammatical words/particles) can reveal social/personality processes and can be indicative of various mental states (e.g. Pennebaker and King 1999; Stirman and Pennebaker 2001; Fekete 2002; Pennebaker and Lay 2002; Chung and Pennebaker 2007; Rude et al. 2004; Hargitai et al. 2007). These authors have linked neuroticism, for example, with an increased use of negative emotion words and the first person singular; anger with an increased use of negatives, rhetorical questions, direct references to others; and emotional upheaval, depression and suicidality with increased references to the self and increased use of negation. On the other hand, emotional upheaval has also been linked to an increase in the use of present and future times and a decrease in the use of the past tenses, while the inverse pattern may suggest emotional balance through psychological distancing from the events. Additionally an increased use of negation may also be indicative of the self-defense mechanism of denial,

Table 1. *Second person vs. first person narration*

Part-of-Speech	LL
2nd person personal pronoun (you)	939.22
Are	44.56
base form of lexical verb (e.g. give, work)	30.01
Were	6.93
do, base form (finite)	5.86
possessive pronoun, pre-nominal (e.g. my, your, our)	5.67
3rd person sing. subjective personal pronoun (he, she)	5.58
for (as preposition)	5.57
not, n't	4.64
singular reflexive personal pronoun (e.g. yourself, itself)	4.08

Table 2. Changes made to the manipulated text

Original Pronoun / Verb	Changed to . . .
You (2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular subject)	I
You (2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular object)	Me
You (2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural subject) when contextually the I was included	We
You (2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural object) when contextually the I was included	Us
Your / yourself (2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular possessive / reflexive)	My / myself
Yours (2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular possessive demonstrative)	Mine
Are / 're / aren't (where it referred to the 'you' subject)	Am / 'm / am not
Were / weren't (where it referred to the 'you' subject and it wasn't hypothetical)	Was / wasn't
You (2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular subject)	I
You (2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular object)	Me

and references to others after a collective trauma may indicate a healing sense of community.

The psychology research outlined above repeatedly indicates that an increased use of self-references is significant in many ways. However, whether such a change exists between first- and second person narration in the Smith Journal is impossible to determine automatically as self-references in the two have a different linguistic token (*I* in the former, *you* in the latter). Therefore, in order to test whether there is a difference in this sense, a manipulated version of the second person narrative entries was uploaded to Wmatrix and compared to first person entries. The manipulation consisted of manually changing all second person pronouns (and their connected verbs) referring to Plath to first person equivalents.

Table 2 shows the precise changes that were made to the manipulated second person narrative entries.

The comparison with the manipulated second person narrative entries revealed that there is indeed an increase in the use of self-references in second person narration when compared to first person narration. In fact, the increase is statistically highly significant, with the first person singular subjective personal pronoun (*I*) at LL = 15.3; and the first person singular objective personal pronoun (*me*) at LL = 9.49; both of which fit into the certainty group of  $p < 0.01$ .

Based on the linguistic changes from first- to second person narration as suggested by the corpus comparison, one could then say that second person narration in the Smith Journal potentially represents emotional upheaval, depression, suicidality, emotional balance, psychological distancing and/or denial. In particular, the changes in language seem to support interpretations of emotional upheaval, depression and suicidality (self-references and negation), emotional balance through psychological distancing (time references) and denial (negation).

These mental states correspond to the functions/effects of SPN as outlined in the narratology literature. They also match the mental states that were implied by events in Plath's life. However, they still seem to represent two ends of a spectrum from emotionally balanced to suicidal. It seems then, that considering second person narration as a broad concept is not sufficient and the key to reconciling potentially contradictory functions may lie in looking at the broad concept in more detail.

#### 2.4. *Reconciling contradictions*

At this point it is necessary look only at SPN entries in more detail. Some of these seem to imply a calmer state of mind, while others suggest psychological crises. Example 3 (and Example 5) and Example 4 already indicate this difference to some extent. The key issue is pinpointing what linguistic differences between these two types of examples lead to the potentially different effects.

Sentence types and verb tenses have been highlighted as important in differentiating between different types of second person narration. Richardson (2006) bases much of his typology on whether a text is written in the present tense (the standard and autotelic forms), or whether it includes conditional sentences, imperatives and future tenses [sic] (hypothetical form). Fludernik (1995) notes that the self-address form of SPN is necessarily in the present tense and can include imperatives and exclamations. Margolin (1990) describes the transferred SPN similarly, but also includes question forms. Self-address SPN is also characterized by an absence of a description of surroundings and action narration, as one does not need to narrate these to oneself (Fludernik, 1995). Encouraged by these types of distinctions, my own approach is also based on what I will call temporal orientation. I will propose three temporal orientations, based on a combination of a linguistic analysis of the SPN entries and narrative psychological research.

In narrative psychology, narrative perspective as described by Pólya et al. (2007) refers to the point of view from which a narrative is recounted. One can distinguish between the relative spatiotemporal locations of the narrated event and the narration itself using linguistic indicators in the text, leading to three types of narrative perspective: retrospective, experiencing, and metanarrative.

“In the case of a *retrospective form*, the narrative content is located in the narrated events while the position [of the narrator] is located in the narration. In the case of an *experiencing form*, both the narrative content and the position are located in the narrated events. Finally, in the case of a *metanarrative form*, both the narrative content and the position are located in the narration” (Pólya et al., 2007: 51).

The linguistic indicators of the different narrative perspectives are summarized in Table 3 below. Any analysis needs to be done clause-by-clause and the

Table 3. *Linguistic Markers of the narrative perspectives (Adapted from Pólya et al., 2007)*

Linguistic markers	Retrospective form	Experiencing form	Metanarrative form
Temporal deixis			
Tense	Past	Present	Present
Temporal adverbs	<i>e.g. Then</i>	<i>e.g. Now</i>	<i>e.g. Now</i>
Spatial deixis			
Spatial adverbs	<i>There</i>	<i>Here</i>	<i>Here</i>
Demonstrative pronouns	<i>That</i>	<i>This</i>	<i>This</i>
Specific terms	Date and space terms <i>e.g. yesterday, January, Budapest, at the beach</i>	Interjections <i>e.g. Oops, well, so</i>	Mental process verbs and modal adjectives <i>e.g. I remember, Probably</i>
Sentence types	Only statements	No constraint	No constraint

overall narrative perspective of a text can be seen as a matter of degree, rather than a discrete categorization.

The usefulness of these narrative perspectives for the present endeavor hinges on their psychological effects. Pólya et al. (2007) found that the use of the retrospective narrative perspective when recounting negative/traumatic experiences suggests emotional balance and “that the story-teller managed to elaborate the negative experience and restore the integrity of their identity” (10). The use of the experiencing perspective on the other hand, “reflects the instability of emotion regulation” (Pólya et al., 2007: 60). In the terms of the present paper, one would then expect SPN entries written in an experiencing narrative perspective to imply emotional upheaval/crisis and inner split. On the other hand, entries written in the retrospective perspective, should imply emotional balance and distancing from the story events. It should be noted that the identification of the metanarrative perspective based on its stated linguistic characteristics was found to be statistically unreliable and will therefore not be discussed further in this paper.

Despite some issues with the operationalization<sup>9</sup> of Pólya et al.’s (2007) narrative perspectives, the distinction between the retrospective and experiencing narrative perspectives, as they propose, can be observed in some of the second person entries in Plath’s journal. In fact, entries written in the retrospective perspective, suggested a sense of emotional balance and distance (Example 6 is a good example of this type). The features and potential effects of the experiencing perspective on the other hand, are best observed in Example 3 and Example 5. However, there is also a group of entries that do not seem to fit in to either of these categories. Excerpts such as Example 4, display linguistic characteristics that do not fall into the retrospective or the experiencing

perspective. These include highly elliptical clauses, imperatives, progressive aspect, and direct self-address. These features seem to go beyond the experiencing form and also orient towards the future (by the use of imperatives and progressive aspect). As these features correspond to some extent to Fludernik's (1995) description of self-address SPN, self-address SPN was taken as a model for a third category of temporal orientation.

In order to differentiate my distinctions slightly from Pólya et al. (2007), I propose the categories of past, present and present-future temporal orientation. I find temporal orientation a useful term in capturing the overall difference in potential effects created by the different linguistic features.

The past temporal orientation is characterized by the use of (primarily) the past tense, names of locations, time references and the distal deictic expressions of then, there, and that. The typical sentence type is the statement and there may be substantial amounts of description and action narration. The present temporal orientation is characterized by the overwhelming use of the present tense, the presence of questions, exclamations, interjections (i.e. there is no restriction on sentence types), and the proximal deictic terms now, here, and this. Additionally, it can also include the reporting of actions, descriptions of surroundings and some evaluative/interpretative elements like mental process verbs, modal adverbs. It can also include quasi-universal truths through the use of relational process types (Thompson, 2002). These two temporal orientations broadly match Pólya et al's (2007) past and experiencing narrative perspectives.

In addition, I propose the present-future temporal orientation. It overlaps to some extent with the present orientation and has some of its features (it also employs the present tense, and uses questions, exclamations, interjections, now, here, and this). However, it also includes imperatives, direct address, progressive aspect, and there is an absence of reporting of actions and description of surroundings. In addition, highly elliptical clauses, often without finite verbs also fall into this category. In this sense, while the present temporal orientation is mainly present oriented, the present-future also refers to the future. The following discussion of the examples already presented (and some additional ones) aims to clarify the differences between the various temporal orientations.

The difference between Example 3 (and 5) and Example 4 are illustrative of the differences between the present and the present-future temporal orientation in SPN. Example 3 and Example 5 display the linguistic features of the present temporal orientation: they are written mainly in the present tense (with some perfect aspect), report on actions (*toss off a sketch, go on*) and mental processes (*are not sure, pretend*); and they imply some evaluation (*maybe*). Although in Example 3 the contextual details ensure that *you* clearly refers to the protagonist, the sentiment expressed in emphatic language (*don't give a damn, got sick of*) is quite ubiquitous. The universal applicability is intensified however, by the use of *you*, which can also have general reference, leading to reader

empathy. This enhances the sense of tension, but evaluations of probability (*maybe*) and commentary on attitude (*pretend*) suggest some reflection on the story. In this sense one has a slight sense of distance, but mainly in the form of evaluations.

In Example 4 however, there is little sense of calm or reflection. Rather, there is a strong sense of emotional upheaval and potentially a sense of inner split. The excerpt includes some of the same features as the present orientation, but additionally uses imperatives (*think, don't panic*) sometimes combined with the progressive aspect (*begin writing*). Imperatives emphasize the direct address function of *you* and set up a dialogic situation within the self where there is a definite speaker, implying a definite addressee. Given that both are in fact Plath, one can sense an inner split. In addition, similarly to the progressive aspect, the imperative presupposes a future in which the command can be carried out. In this way the temporal orientation becomes that of present-future.

At this stage I would like to introduce three new examples, to illustrate the differences between the past temporal orientation and (once more) the present-future orientation, since Example 4 is rather brief. Example 6 was written at the beginning of July 1951, on a visit home from Plath's summer job as a mother's helper. The setting is in a car where Plath is together with her mother and grandmother. She muses about her family background.

### **Example 6**

Somehow, sitting there in the light blue Plymouth, your Grandmother beside you, your mother in back, you cried with love for them because they were your own people, your own kind. Yet not all your own kind, but you were of their blood and bone, and no barriers were between. You talked, and cried a little, as you sat, for the beauty of the wild, lanky yellow flowers, and the rain, trickling down the blurred and wavy windows, rushing in streams down the windows. This hour was yours, to steer through the narrow crooked streets, to sit and talk and watch the rain, to absorb the love of kin, of rain, of the masts of sloops and schooners. (from Entry 85)

Example 6 is an example of the past temporal orientation, as indicated by the use of the past tense, some distal deixis (*there*), and the mention of a location (*in the blue Plymouth*). There is also a relatively detailed description of the environment (e.g. *the rain, trickling down the blurred and wavy windows, rushing in streams down the windows*). As suggested by Fludernik (1994b), second person narration in general tends to correlate with great emotional depth and this can be applied to this entry as well to some extent. One can assume that thinking about her family background, in particular after having been away for the first time for university and work, has emotional depth for Plath. However, there is no sense of an emotional crisis/upheaval, nor a sense



of inner split. Rather, the entry seems to reflect a calm retrospection from a certain distance. I suggest that this distancing effect results from the past temporal orientation of the entry and is connected to the grammatical function of the past tense.

The past tense suggests two things about the action: it took place in the past and there is a temporal gap between the present time and the completion of the action; and the temporality of the action is definite (Quirk et al. 1985). The tense places the protagonist in an earlier temporal (and potentially different spatial) location to the narrator's NOW. The additional indicators of the past temporal orientation also serve to mark this distance between the narrated and the narration. As a result of the temporal distance between the protagonist and the narrator, the narrator will presumably have the advantage of hindsight, making them more knowledgeable, possibly wiser. This accounts for the emotional distancing function of SPN.

Example 7 and Example 8 are excerpts from the penultimate and final entries in the Smith Journal. They were written almost exactly two years after Example 6 but have a very different effect. There is not so much a description of an external scene, but more of a representation of mental processing. Plath is chastising herself for being scared and ill.

#### **Example 7**

You fool – you are afraid of being alone with your own mind. You just better learn to know yourself, to make sure decisions before it is too late. 3 months, you think, scared to death. You want to call that man – You earned enough money to go. Why don't you go? Stop thinking selfishly of razors & self-wounds & going out and ending it all. (from Entry July 6)

#### **Example 8**

New York: pain, parties, work. And Gary and ptomaine – and Jose the cruel Peruvian and Carol vomiting outside the door all over the floor – and interviews for TV shows, & competition, and beautiful models and Miss Abels: (capable, and heaven knows what else.) And now this: shock. Utter nihilistic shock.

Read a story: Think. You can. You must, moreover, not continually run away while asleep – forget details – ignore problems – shut walls up between you & the world & all the gay bright girls – please, think – snap out of this. Believe in some beneficent force beyond your own limited self. (from Entry 14 July)

These are once again examples of the present-future temporal orientation (present tense, imperatives, lack of action narration, lack of finite verbs etc.), but there are additional features to consider. Example 7 begins with direct self-address (*you fool*) and proceeds not only to use imperatives, but also to threaten

its addressee (*you just better*). This makes emotional conflict almost explicit and creates a strong sense of split. The use of self-questioning (*why don't you go?*) could also suggest a bigger divide between the two selves as one part of the self does not seem to have the answer. In addition, the presence of questions and imperatives coupled with the present tense creates a potential for the outcome of the story to be influenced by the answer to the questions and the reaction to (or perlocutionary effect of) the imperatives (Margolin, 1990). In this way, they suggest a focus on the future.

In Example 8 the highly elliptical phrases (*pain, parties, work; and now this: shock*) without verbs, combined with the fragmentary structure (that is emphasized by the use of dashes) suggest panic. In addition, an imperative is softened by the use of *please*. This could be interpreted as somewhat desperate pleading which increases the perceived gravity of the mental state.

The topic and lexical choices, of course, do also contribute to this effect. They are so extreme in fact, that they could be interpreted as suggesting depression and suicidal feelings. Although Fludernik (1995), among others, clearly states that the content of a second person narrative contributes to its effect, I would argue that it is not *just* the lexical choices and the topic that differentiate these examples from some of the previous ones – it is also the temporal orientation.

### **3. Conclusions and limitations**

A number of functions and effects have traditionally been associated with various types of second person narration: it can suggest emotional depth, emotional distancing, inner split and self-alienation. The various effects tend to be associated more or less with certain types of second person narration. However, what I hope to have demonstrated is that even within one type of SPN all of these effects can be present. Therefore, one needs an alternative method of accounting for the potentially contradictory list of effects.

Instances of SPN were mapped onto a timeline of biographical information to demonstrate a correlation between events of emotional depth and SPN. Then entries written in the first- and second person were compared using corpus methods to investigate any linguistic differences. The results were interpreted in light of research in psychology on the role of certain features of language in indicating various pathologies.

Both of these methods corroborated what narratologists have said about the functions of SPN. The corpus analysis in particular, revealed that the changes in language use indicate emotional upheaval, depression and suicidality (through overuse of self-references and negation), emotional balance through psychological distancing (through overuse of time references) and denial

(overuse of negation). However, these methods still did not allow for a reconciliation of potentially contradictory effects.

With the help of distinctions between types of narrative perspective in the field of narrative psychology, the second person entries in the Smith Journal were grouped according to their linguistic composition. The categories were modified and extended to take into account additional linguistic features. This resulted in three categories of temporal orientation: past, present and present-future.

Past temporal orientation is identified by the primary use of past tense, but also includes other distancing devices such as names of locations, time references and the distal deictic expressions of *then*, *there*, and *that*. The present temporal orientation is characterized by the use of the present tense, the presence of questions, exclamations, possibly interjections, and the proximal deictic terms *now*, *here*, and *this*. The present-future temporal orientation has most of the features of the present orientation, but it also includes imperatives, progressive aspect and direct address. In addition, there is an absence of reporting of actions and description of surroundings and potentially a lack of finite verbs (and therefore a lack of tense marking).

It was found that the features of the past temporal orientation emphasize the distance between the narrated event and the narration. The marked temporal distance between the protagonist and the narrator (even if they are the same person) allows for hindsight and accounts for the emotional distancing function of SPN.

The features of the present temporal orientation stylistically reduce the distance between narration and narrated events by the use of the present tense, and sentence types other than statements. However, its other linguistic indicators serve to maintain some of the distance (descriptions, narration of events, evaluations). This results in an intermediate form, where neither the emotional distancing effect nor the intense sense of inner conflict dominates.

The features of the present-future temporal orientation however, ensure that the sense of inner conflict or split dominates. The imperatives, lack of action narration and description, direct self-address, the use of self-questioning when coupled with the present tense creates a sense of immediacy and uncertainty. There is a potential for the future to be influenced by the answer to the questions and the reactions to the imperatives.

In this process of analysis the role of the topic in creating certain effects was never discounted, indeed it would be impossible to do so. However, I have attempted to argue that any effects of SPN are also dependent on the temporal orientation of the given text. I do not argue for temporal orientation as the only way of differentiating between functions of second person narration. Rather, I hoped to show that temporal orientation is an important contributing factor and could be a quasi objective way of distinguishing between various

types of second person narration – content will then have an equal effect on all types.

In general it would be very useful to conduct corpus comparisons of second person entries written with potentially different temporal orientations – for example, to see whether their linguistic composition indicates a similar sort of difference. In addition, conducting informant-based studies, to see whether the proposed ‘effects’ are experienced by readers would also be helpful in constructing a stronger case.

Overall, there still seems to be some way to go before a more precise understanding of the functions of second person narration is attained, but I hope to have demonstrated that further subdivisions of the phenomenon and a pooling of knowledge from various disciplines are the most fruitful ways to proceed.

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## Notes

1. I would like to thank Elena Semino and three anonymous JLS reviewers for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. These can be recognised by their genre (poetry), by their content (where Plath explicitly states that these are notes for future work) and/or by similarity to published works.
3. In addition to that, I would also like to stress that I am using the expression *second person narration* loosely (as a convenient shorthand) for describing journal entries where, minimally, the main protagonist is denoted by *you* rather than *I*.
4. Admittedly this is a somewhat controversial assumption and unfortunately, a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.
5. This is also noted by Richardson and is seen as characteristic of his *Standard Form* of second person narration where the story is “usually in the present tense about a single protagonist who is referred to in the second person; the ‘you’ often designates the narrator and the narratee as well” (2006: 20).
6. This notion is built on the idea that there is a sense in which all ‘you-narration’ also implies a removed *I* figure/narrator, who can be conceived of as quite separate from the *you* protagonist. However, in the case of the Smith Journal, this can be interpreted to merely mean that the *I* narrator is different from the protagonist in some way (e.g. spatiotemporal location), as they are in fact the same real person.
7. Here, Wales uses the term *distancing* somewhat differently from the way I use it in the rest of the text. My notion of distancing refers to the position from which narrative is portrayed i.e. as something that is happening in the here and now, or as something that is located firmly in the past and/or elsewhere. Wales’s notion of distancing is more akin to what I call splitting in this paper.
8. CLAWS, (the Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System), is a POS tagging software first developed in the 1980s by UCREL. USAS, (UCREL Semantic Analysis System) is a framework for automatically analysing the semantic composition of texts. (see <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/annotation.html#POS>).
9. From a linguistic perspective using the narrative perspective approach can be problematic. Firstly, the clause by clause analysis can be somewhat cumbersome and potentially inaccurate.

However, more serious issues arise when one encounters features in texts that do not currently fall into any of the perspectives (e.g. highly elliptical clauses, progressive aspect etc.). In addition, Polya et al. (2007) do not explicitly discuss how to distinguish between narrative situation and narration/story.

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