

Narrative Perspective in Tamsyn Muir's Science Fantasy Fiction Series *The Locked Tomb*

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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat narativní perspektivu v knižní sérii Zapečetěná hrobka od Tamsyn Muir, zaměřující se především na nevšední vyprávění v druhé osobě a na škálu nespolehlivých vypravěčů. Teoretická část práce shrnuje klíčové naratologické pojmy, a rovněž rozvádí vyprávění v druhé osobě. Po představení autorky a stručném shrnutí knih je zbytek práce věnován jejich analýze. Cílem této práce je prozkoumat, co vedlo autorku k použití druhé osoby, jak je propojena s příběhem, a jak tato metoda ovlivňuje čtenáře a přispívá k nejasnostem.

Klíčová slova: Tamsyn Muir, Zapečetěná hrobka, Gideon devátá, Harrow devátá, Nona devátá, vyprávění v druhé osobě, naratologie, narativní perspektiva, vypravěč, nespolehlivý vypravěč, úhel pohledu

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis aims to analyse narrative perspective in Tamsyn Muir's *The Locked Tomb* book series, particularly focusing on the use of the uncommon second-person narration and a range of unreliable narrators. The theoretical part of the thesis summarizes key narratological terms as well as expands on second-person narration. After introducing the author and briefly summarizing the books, the rest of the thesis is devoted to their analysis. The aim of this thesis is to explore what led the author to use second-person, how is it connected to the story level, and how this technique affects the reader and contributes to ambiguity.

Keywords: Tamsyn Muir, The Locked Tomb, Gideon the Ninth, Harrow the Ninth, Nona the Ninth, second-person narration, narratology, narrative perspective, narrator, unreliable narrator, point of view

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INTRODUCTION

Narrative perspective, often called point of view, is a crucial part of storytelling, as it influences the way readers absorb information and interpret the story. While the widely used first- and third- person narratives have been vastly explored and readers are very familiar with them, second-person narratives are rather rare in comparison, and they offer a unique experience because the reader is inherently more connected to the story through the usage of the pronoun “you.” Second-person narration can serve as a tool to blur the line between the reader and the protagonist, as well as deepen the reader’s connection to the protagonist. Moreover, the usage of unreliable narrators in second-person narratives further complicates the reader’s understanding of the story. This thesis aims to analyse the narrative perspective in Tamsyn Muir’s *The Locked Tomb* series which utilizes a wide range of unreliable narrators, each unique in their own way, and uses second-person narration in the second book, *Harrow the Ninth*. By exploring the context of second-person narration and unreliable narrators in relation to the story itself, I aim to illuminate how these techniques contribute to the thematic depth as well as the psychological complexities of the characters and how they shape the reader’s experience.

1 NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Narrative perspective, also referred to as “point of view” and “focalization,”¹ is generally defined as one of the key elements of a narrative situation, along with the levels “narrator” and “narrative” itself.² It is important to distinguish between point of view and narrative voice. Point of view refers to the perspective from which a story is told, which can be that of a narrator, a character (not necessarily also a narrator), or a so-called camera-eye, i.e., an uninvolved neutral observer.³ On the other hand, narrative voice is how this perspective is expressed to readers in the communication of events, dialogue, and commentary.⁴ Seymour Chatman, an important narratologist and a structuralist, describes how “point of view is in the story [...], but voice is always outside, in the discourse.”⁵ For example, in “For a happy moment, Nona thought she was home. But the floor underneath Nona was scrubby carpet, not tile, and the walls were unfamiliar,”⁶ both the point of view and the narrative voice are the protagonist’s, Nona’s.

A number of literary theorists are sceptical of the term point of view as a synonym to narrative perspective. According to literary scholar Suzanne Keen, point of view suggests that the description is of what the character sees with their own eyes, thus the term does not sufficiently encompass thoughts and feelings. Keen notes that the term perspective, however, basically indicates the same type of description,⁷ thus this expression is just as ambiguous as point of view. Some theorists have suggested different terms for the phenomenon, such as narrative transmission, narrative situation and focus of narration, although none of these have become widely used.⁸

Let us begin with defining key narratological concepts and terms which will be used in this thesis as well as outlining a brief summary of current views on the history of narrative and narratology.

¹ Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, trans. Patricia Häusler-Greenfield and Monika Fludernik (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6.

² Suzanne Keen, *Narrative Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 30.

³ Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 36.

⁴ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 151–154.

⁵ Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 154.

⁶ Tamsyn Muir, *Nona the Ninth* (New York: Tor Books, 2022), 253.

⁷ Keen, *Narrative Form*, 44–45.

⁸ Susan Sniader Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 17.

1.1 Key concepts of narratology

We may start by defining what a *narrative* is. Professors Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires describe how “a narrative recounts a story, a series of events in a temporal sequence.”⁹ Literary theorist Gerald Prince defines narrative as “the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other.”¹⁰ Thus, a narrative (or more precisely, the narrator) tells a story comprised of at least two events. There is a narratee present who the story is being told to¹¹ and there are characters, human or otherwise. Narration refers to the narrator’s act of narrating.¹² In a narrative, the distinction must be made between story and discourse. Story refers to the events that happen, the contents of a text, whereas discourse is the means by which the narrator delivers story to us readers.¹³ Simply put, story is what is told while discourse is how it is told.

The narrator can be interruptive, permeating or enhancing the text with their own comments as well as showing various levels of self-consciousness (do they realize they are narrating?). Reliability, which can be sensed or detected at various levels, is also a key issue. Narrators can also be more or less distanced from the story, with this distance being temporal, physical, emotional, moral or intellectual. The narrator can also be a character participating in the story.¹⁴ Overt and covert narrators can be distinguished. The identity of the covert narrator is unknown to the reader, this entity merely tells a story while remaining invisible, i.e., their voice cannot be assigned to any character.¹⁵ On the other hand, it is easy to identify an overt narrator as one who is explicitly telling the story and adding their views and commentary.¹⁶ Another fundamental term in this context is unreliable narrator, one who does not (seem to) narrate the story accurately or as it actually happens. The motivations of the unreliable narrator towards readers have been a central feature of many works of fiction through the ages. It is important to note that reliability of the narrator is not based on whether the reader agrees with the narrator and their values or not.¹⁷

⁹ Steven Cohan, and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 1.

¹⁰ Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), 4.

¹¹ Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 57.

¹² Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, 7.

¹³ Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 19.

¹⁴ Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, 12–13.

¹⁵ Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 197.

¹⁶ Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 219.

¹⁷ Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, 12.

Furthermore, there should be a distinction between a real author, an implied author, a real reader and an implied reader. Obviously, real author and real reader refer to real human individuals (or technologies) that are not present in the narrative. The implied author and implied reader can be considered parts of the narrative. The opinions of an implied author can significantly differ from the author who actually wrote the text, which is the ideal author often imagined by readers.¹⁸ An implied (ideal) reader, as coined by Wolfgang Iser, is a set of traits the text invites the reader to adopt in order to fully interpret the work. The concept of an implied reader is important in the study of how meaning is constructed and how readers interact with texts,¹⁹ which closely ties with second-person narration as well.

The very existence of a narrator implies the existence of a narratee. This narratee, which can be addressed with “you” (more on this in the second chapter), may be familiar with the narrator or not know them at all. The narratee is not necessarily an individual, as group narratees exist as well.²⁰

Moving to point of view, three types may be distinguished: unrestricted, internal and external point of view. With unrestricted point of view, as the name implies, the narrator is not restricted in any way and they always know more than the characters. An example would be “She did not see him hiding in the bushes and laughing.” Despite the popular use of the term omniscient narrator, it is not accurate, as this storyteller does not necessarily have to know everything. In internal point of view, the narrator only knows what one or more characters know, and the story is told from a particular character’s mind (their knowledge, thoughts and feelings). In external point of view, the narrator does not “see” into the characters (does not know their feelings and such) and describes the story from an outside perspective.²¹

In terms of person, first-person and third-person narratives can be distinguished. Despite popular belief, this does not simply refer to in which person the text is written. Instead, as narratologist Monika Fludernik notes, person refers to “the relationship of narrators to the figures they tell about.”²² In addition to first- and third-person, second-person narratives or *we*-narratives²³ have been theorized, but they seem to have little in common

¹⁸ Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 147–151.

¹⁹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), xii–xiii.

²⁰ Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, 16.

²¹ Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, 51–52.

²² Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 30.

²³ Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 31.

with the categories mentioned above. Second-person narratives will be introduced in detail in chapter 2.

1.2 History and development of narratology

Although the modern study of narrative did not exist until the first decades of the 20th century, the roots of narrative theory can be dated all the way back to ancient Greece, specifically Plato and Aristotle, who introduced terms still relevant today – telling, or diegesis, and showing, or mimesis. Diegesis refers to what the narrator says, while mimesis reflects character discourse.²⁴

The 20th century brought many new literary theorists and groups and therefore the theory of narrative developed significantly as well.²⁵ One tradition started in Russia with the formalists, some of whom moved to Prague in 1920s and helped found the Prague Linguistic Circle. The formalists were mostly concerned with poetry and simple texts such as folk tales and myths. They established a so-called formal method, focusing on the study of the form of texts, looking at how literature works.²⁶

When the formalists moved to Prague, they started developing a more structuralist approach in which the text was seen as a structure in which nothing can be studied separately, since everything in the text is related.²⁷ Another group were French structuralists, who based their thinking on Ferdinand de Saussure and on the fundamental question of how language itself works.²⁸ One of the most influential formalists was Mikhail Bakhtin.²⁹ Prominent theorists in the American tradition include Henry James, E. M. Forster and Percy Lubbock.³⁰

The term narratology was coined in 1969 by Tzvetan Todorov. In its beginnings, this discipline focused on “what is narrated and how is it narrated.”³¹ Narratology is a subset of narrative theory, focusing on the structural and formal aspects of narrative,³² such as plot, characters, point of view, narrative time, and the relationship between story and discourse. The theorist often considered most prominent narratologist is Gérard Genette, whose

²⁴ Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*, 19–20.

²⁵ Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, 4.

²⁶ Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2024), 28–29.

²⁷ Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 38–39.

²⁸ Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 44–46.

²⁹ Keen, *Narrative Form*, 9.

³⁰ Keen, *Narrative Form*, 8.

³¹ Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 57.

³² Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 9.

typology I will present in 1.3, along with the typology by Franz Karl Stanzel, another important narratologist.

1.3 Key typologies

1.3.1 Gérard Genette

Genette found the terms first-person narration and third-person narration lacking. Therefore, he introduced the terms heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration which are based on the relationship between narrator and character. In homodiegesis, the narrator is a character in the story, therefore the narrator is always in the same story world (= on the same diegetic plane). In heterodiegesis the narrator and character are distinct, and the narrator is not part of the story world. In relation to homodiegesis, Genette mentions autodiegesis as well. In this case, the narrator is a character who tells the story.³³

Genette also coined the term focalization as a synonym to point of view, which he divided into internal and external.³⁴ In internal focalization, story is narrated through a character (the reader knows their thoughts, feelings etc.). On the contrary in external focalization the narrator does not “see” into the minds of the characters.³⁵ Genette also distinguished a concept called zero focalization, in which the narrator is not limited in any way.³⁶ When the story is narrated through the perspective of a particular character, Genette calls this personage the focalizer.³⁷

Another of Genette’s contributions is that of narrative levels, intradiegetic and extradiegetic. As the names suggests, the extradiegetic level is outside the story, thus an extradiegetic narrator is not in the story and narrates from the outside. On the other hand, the intradiegetic level is within the story, so an intradiegetic narrator is participating in events within the story.³⁸

1.3.2 Franz Karl Stanzel

Stanzel’s most influential model is that of three narrative situations. He distinguishes first-person narrative, authorial narrative situation and figural narrative situation. As the name

³³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 243–245.

³⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 189–190.

³⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 10–11.

³⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 189.

³⁷ Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, 61.

³⁸ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 228–229.

suggests, in first-person narrative, the story is told in first-person. The narrator is the character who tells the story. In an authorial narrative situation, the narrator is outside the story world. In these two narrative situations, Stanzel calls the narrator the *teller*. Instead of that, in a figural narrative situation Stanzel uses the term reflector, who he describes as “a character in the novel who thinks, feels and perceives, but does not speak to the reader like a narrator. The reader looks at the other characters of the narrative through the eyes of this reflector-character.”³⁹

³⁹ Franz Karl Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4–5.

2 SECOND-PERSON NARRATION

Second-person narration is a complicated matter. Over the years, research into the theme has increased, particularly from scholars such as Monika Fludernik, Brian Richardson, Irene Kacandes, Matt DelConte and others. Initially, second-person narration in fiction was not a common technique at all, and more importantly, it did not fit into any theoretical models at the time, i.e., before 1990s. It was believed by Genette that the author must choose between having a character tell a story or have a narrator outside the story tell it,⁴⁰ but with second-person narrative this is not exactly true, as second-person narration is very ambiguous.⁴¹ It is regarded as an unnatural technique, as in real life people would not speak in second person in past or present.⁴² Still, since 1990s, second-person narration is now often regarded as a major breakthrough in fiction⁴³ as a unique phenomenon for which new typologies of narration must be formulated.

2.1 History of narrative “you”

Despite only being widely acknowledged by theorists in the 1960s,⁴⁴ second-person narration had appeared in literature way sooner. As early as in the 17th century, “you” had been used to generalize, used in the same way as “one.” This was prominent particularly in English translations of French works⁴⁵ from authors such as Michel de Montaigne⁴⁶ or Blaise Pascal.⁴⁷ “You” is also frequently used in guidebooks and self-help books. In these cases, the reader is meant to assume the writer’s perspective, therefore seeing and doing the same things as the writer.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 244.

⁴¹ Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 6.

⁴² Monika Fludernik, “Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues,” *Style* 28, no. 3 (1994): 290.

⁴³ Joanna Jeziorska-Haładaj, and Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik, “Second Person in Different Genres and Cultural Practices,” *The Problems of Literary Genres* 65, no. 4 (2022): 9. doi:10.26485/ZRL/2022/65.4/1.

⁴⁴ Jeziorska-Haładaj, and Rembowska-Pluciennik, “Second Person in Different Genres and Cultural Practices,” 9.

⁴⁵ Bruce Morrisette, “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 2, no. 1 (1965): 2.

⁴⁶ Michel de Montaigne, *Shakespeare’s Montaigne: The Florio Translation of the Essays*, trans. John Florio, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Peter G. Platt (New York: New York Review Books, 2014).

⁴⁷ Blaise Pascal, *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ Morrisette, “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” 2.

Before “you” began to be used in narratives, it had been used by lyrical poets such as Robert Browning in the 19th century. Although the “you” is used in a somewhat narrative context, it is not a real narrative. As Bruce Morrisette, one of the first scholars who commented on second-person narration, says, “the true narrative action must necessarily be a single, unique past or present action.”⁴⁹ Here is a passage from Browning.

I only knew one poet in my life:
And this, or something like it, was his way.
You saw go up and down Valladolid,
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.⁵⁰

Of course, in prose, “you” was used in written speeches meant to be presented to a live audience, but similarly to with generalized “you,” that is not what this thesis focuses on. Editorial “you” may be encountered as well, with the intention to include the reader.⁵¹ “You” also appears in epistolary novels and dramatic monologues, but again, those are not “real” second-person narratives⁵² and most theorists try to limit the definition to exclude such texts.⁵³

There have been instances where narrative “you” is occasionally used in some passages for stylistic effect, but the whole novel is not written in second person. This can be noticed in works of Ernest Hemingway for example,⁵⁴ such as in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*:

He lay on his side turned away from the girl and he felt her long body against his back and the touch of it now was just an irony. You, you, he raged at himself. Yes, you. You told yourself the first time you saw him that when he would be friendly would be when the treachery would come. You damned fool. You utter blasted damned fool. Chuck all that. That’s not what you have to do now.⁵⁵

Morrisette says that supposedly the first novel written solely in second person was *How like a God* by Rex Stout,⁵⁶ published in 1929.⁵⁷ However, it was Michel Butor’s *A Change of Heart*,⁵⁸ published in 1957, that first became widely analysed and discussed.

⁴⁹ Morrisette, “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” 4.

⁵⁰ Robert Browning, “How It Strikes a Contemporary,” in *The Complete works of Robert Browning* (n.p.: Delphi Classics, 2012), 556.

⁵¹ Morrisette, “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” 6.

⁵² Fludernik, “Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues,” 293.

⁵³ Keen, *Narrative Form*, 46.

⁵⁴ Morrisette, “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” 8.

⁵⁵ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Scribner, 1940), 367.

⁵⁶ Rex Stout, *How Like a God* (London: Titan, 2024).

⁵⁷ Morrisette, “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” 12.

⁵⁸ Michel Butor, *A Change of Heart*, trans. Jean Stewart (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959).

Other important fictional works written in second person include the innovative novels *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) by Italo Calvino,⁵⁹ and *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) by Jay McInerney.⁶⁰

As already mentioned, second-person narration was not given much attention by theorists at the beginning before and during 1960s, with some even shunning it. As Morrisette wittily summarized about some significant literary critics and authors in mid-20th century: “Percy Lubbock, the pioneer of point-of-view studies, neglects it; Joseph Warren Beach devotes a paragraph to it; Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren write as if only first- and third-person modes existed; E. M. Forster says nothing about it.”⁶¹ In 1965, Butor commented on his own work (*A Change of Heart*), which was one of the initial efforts to recognize second-person narration, along with Morrisette’s study published in the same year. Until the 1990s, as mentioned, theorists were not overly concerned with the phenomenon, and even undervalued it. They saw it as a “disguised first or third person.”⁶²

2.2 Definition of second-person narration

In its basis, second-person narration uses a pronoun (usually “you”) to address the protagonist.⁶³ Using “you” inherently suggests that at least two parties are involved.⁶⁴ However, the consensus definition is tricky, as distinction should be made between actual second person texts and those that simply employ the usage of “you” in interesting ways.⁶⁵ There have been multiple efforts to find the most accurate definition.

Prince, theorizing second-person in his works from 1982 and 1987, defines second-person narrative as a narrative in which the narratee is at the same time the protagonist of the story they are told.⁶⁶ Prince notes that the reader does not learn anything about the narratee, who partakes in the events being told, but whose thoughts or attitudes remain generally unknown.⁶⁷ In 1994, Fludernik on the other hand notes that the notion that narratee =

⁵⁹ Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

⁶⁰ Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (New York: Vintage, 1984).

⁶¹ Morrisette, “Narrative ‘You’ in Contemporary Literature,” 6.

⁶² Jeziorska-Haładaj, and Rembowska-Pluciennik, “Second Person in Different Genres and Cultural Practices,” 9.

⁶³ Monika Fludernik, “Second Person Fiction: Narrative “You” As Addressee And/Or Protagonist,” *AAA: Arbeiten Aus Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 18, no. 2 (1993): 217.

⁶⁴ Irene Kacandes, *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 32.

⁶⁵ Fludernik, “Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues,” 284.

⁶⁶ Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, 86.

⁶⁷ Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, 17.

protagonist is not always true as there in fact does not have to be neither a narratee, nor a narrator present at all in second-person texts.⁶⁸

Richardson's definition from 1991 differs in that that he recognizes the protagonist does not necessarily have to be the narratee. He also stresses the protagonist more, rather than the narratee.⁶⁹ Richardson defines second-person narrative as "any narration that designates its protagonist by a second person pronoun."⁷⁰

In 1994, Fludernik responds to Richardson's definition by noting that the address pronoun does not always have to be second-person pronoun (although it is most common for it to be "you"). Certain languages allow the address pronoun to be a third-person pronoun.⁷¹ An address must always be delivered by someone, the "I" – the narrator.⁷² Fludernik proposes her own definition, which I think is the most fitting so far, albeit very detailed:

"I will propose a preliminary definition of second-person narrative as narrative whose (main) protagonist is referred to by means of an address pronoun (usually you) and add that second-person texts frequently also have an explicit communicative level on which a narrator (speaker) tells the story of the "you" to (sometimes) the "you" protagonist's present-day absent or dead, wiser, self."⁷³

In 2003, DelConte comments on all definitions mentioned above. His issue with them is that they all consider a definable protagonist, which is not always the case, as some narratives do not have a protagonist per se but are rather aimed at a hypothetical agent. This theorist therefore describes his definition of second-person narration as "a narrative mode in which a narrator tells a story to a (sometimes undefined, shifting, and/or hypothetical) narratee — delineated by *you* — who is also the (sometimes undefined, shifting, and/or hypothetical) principal actant in that story."⁷⁴

2.3 Features of second-person narration

Let us now look at major characteristics of second-person narration. In second-person narratives, the line between story and discourse becomes blurred, as they engage the reader with the textual world. The narrator tells the story through addressing the reader, which

⁶⁸ Fludernik, "Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues," 287.

⁶⁹ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, 19.

⁷⁰ Brian Richardson, "Poetics and the Politics of Second Person," *Genre* 24 (1991): 311.

⁷¹ Fludernik, "Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues," 287.

⁷² Fludernik, "Second Person Fiction: Narrative "You" As Addressee And/Or Protagonist," 219.

⁷³ Fludernik, "Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues," 288.

⁷⁴ Matt DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," *Style* 37, no. 2 (2003): 207.

makes the story feel more present and interactive as opposed to simply recounting past events,⁷⁵ as illustrated on the example below. Hence, the existence and unnaturality of second-person narratives alone undermine the division of story and discourse.⁷⁶

Back at home, days later, feel cranky and tired. Sit on the couch and tell him he's stupid... He will try to kiss you. Turn your head. Feel suffocated.⁷⁷

Second-person narratives are at first glance full of ambiguity. "You" can indicate the protagonist, the narrator, the narratee or the reader.⁷⁸ Second-person narratives can refer directly to a protagonist who does not necessarily know they are being addressed. Moreover, even if the reader is not explicitly addressed, they may assume they are being addressed due to the usage of "you."⁷⁹ Thus, it is important to study the relation between the narratee and the implied (or real) reader.⁸⁰ The line is often blurred and the reader may feel addressed because of "you." And if not directly addressed, readers are usually invited to sympathize or put themselves in the protagonist's shoes. On the other hand, when the reader knows a lot about the narratee, they do not feel like it is "about them" and it is easier to detach from them. On the contrary, when the narratee is described minimally, the readers feel more inclined to identify with them.⁸¹ Often texts begin with a seemingly generic "you," but later flesh out the protagonist more.⁸² Ambiguity does not only have to occur at the beginning though. Typically, there is a surprising twist over the course of the text: readers may find out that the addressee is dead or does not exist and was made up by the narrator, they may learn who the addressee is, or the second-person narrative shifts into a different person and reveals who the narrator is. There are a lot of uses for the pronoun "you" and therefore second-person texts can be very distinct from each other; there can be generic "you" or using "you" as address or self-address.⁸³ When second-person texts are regarded as a form of self-address, such texts could be identified as either a narrative or an interior monologue.⁸⁴ Stout's *How Like a God* can be regarded as an interior monologue:

⁷⁵ Fludernik, "Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues," 288.

⁷⁶ Monika Fludernik, "Second-Person Narrative As a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism," *Style* 28, no. 3 (1994): 457–458.

⁷⁷ Lorrie Moore, *Self-Help* (New York: Plume, 1986), 57.

⁷⁸ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, 14.

⁷⁹ Rolf Reitan, "Theorizing Second-Person Narratives: A Backwater Project?," in *Strange Voices in Narrative Fiction*, ed. Per Krogh Hansen et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 147.

⁸⁰ Fludernik, "Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues," 292.

⁸¹ Keen, *Narrative Form*, 46.

⁸² Fludernik, "Second-Person Narrative As a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism," 452.

⁸³ Fludernik, "Second-Person Narrative As a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism," 455.

⁸⁴ Fludernik, "Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues," 289.

Good god, what does it matter what she said? You ought to know by this time. What she says! You knew it too, really you didn't give a damn, but you jumped on her, you began it all over again, tearing yourself to pieces...⁸⁵

Although present tense is most commonly used with second-person narration, past tense can also appear,⁸⁶ as illustrated on the passage below.

When you woke, you were already sitting up. Your chin was bowed on your chest so that you had an exciting view of your lap. You were no longer in your bed, and the lower walls and floor were blurring past you in scuffed washes of black stone, bones, and steel.⁸⁷

It is important to mention that Fludernik and many other theorists agree that the category of person per se should be revised. There are already narratives which use not only “you,” but also “one” or new invented ungended neopronouns.⁸⁸

A lot of similarities can be found in second-person narratives and postmodernist works; it can be difficult to determine who is speaking, and so the line between not only characters,⁸⁹ but also between first- and third- person is blurred.⁹⁰ Notable postmodernist works include Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925),⁹¹ William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)⁹² or John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969).⁹³

2.4 Clash in what is defined

As has been said, second-person narration does not fit into the widely known theoretical models presented in the first chapter. Nonetheless, it is not as simple as to simply incorporate second-person narration into them. Existing models cannot fully integrate second-person narration, because they focus solely on narrator and voice, which is not the main attribute of second-person narration.⁹⁴ Second-person in itself implies a separate category from first- and third-person, but they are also inherently interconnected, as second-person is always one of

⁸⁵ Stout, *How Like a God*, 245.

⁸⁶ Keen, *Narrative Form*, 47.

⁸⁷ Tamsyn Muir, *Harrow the Ninth* (New York: Tor Books, 2020). 68.

⁸⁸ Fludernik, “Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues,” 291.

⁸⁹ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2004), 9–10.

⁹⁰ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 15.

⁹¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Hogarth, 1925).

⁹² William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (London: Vintage Classics, 1995).

⁹³ John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (London: Vintage, 2010).

⁹⁴ DelConte, “Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative,” 210.

them as well.⁹⁵ At the same time, second-person narration creates a unique rhetorical impact that first- and third-person cannot.⁹⁶ Texts written in second-person would not be as impactful if they instead employed first- or third-person,⁹⁷ which make employing second-person a careful and self-conscious choice.⁹⁸ McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* illustrates well the rhetorical impact of second-person, as well as blurring of the line between the protagonist and the reader:

You are the stuff of which consumer profiles – the American Dream: Educated Middle-Class Model – are made. *When you're staying at the Plaza with your beautiful wife, doesn't it make sense to order the best Scotch that money can buy before you go to the theatre in you private limousine?* (emphasis in original)⁹⁹

Second-person narration is characterized by the narratee, while first-person, third-person, and Genette's models of homodiegesis and heterodiegesis are focused on the narrator. As a result, it does not fit into models focusing on the narrator and should have its own typology.¹⁰⁰ DelConte proposes to call second-person a point of reception rather than a point of view. It does make sense, as it is not a point where the narratee sees or speaks, but "receives" a narration. Moreover, DelConte finds the very term second-person misleading, firstly because it suggests that the second-person pronoun "you" is necessary, and secondly because it implies it is a completely separate category from first- and third-person narration.¹⁰¹ Richardson draws a clear line between all three persons, separating them and thus painting them all as different and stand-alone.¹⁰² DelConte counters this, because "second-person narration is also always already either first- or third-person," as he illustrates on the following passages, where in addition to second-person, "Graffiti" and "The Tilting Room" include first-person narration, and "How to Talk to a Hunter" and "You Need to Go Upstairs" include third-person narration.¹⁰³

⁹⁵ DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," 204.

⁹⁶ Morrisette, "Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature," 2.

⁹⁷ DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," 206.

⁹⁸ Fludernik, "Second-Person Narrative As a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism," 467.

⁹⁹ McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," 204.

¹⁰¹ DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," 208.

¹⁰² Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, 77–78.

¹⁰³ DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," 208.

And you're dead scared of time, of those gaps in eternity when we might talk to one another, aren't you? Perhaps you are sitting in the room that's neat and tidy now; you're listening to some Bach fugues, and you're trying to listen so hard, aren't you? Only nowadays you cannot listen to them, not even just one, all the way through without your mind starting to wander, trying to seek me out. And then you become more frightened, but terrified of the vast gap in eternity that may be just about to open up and leave you so very much alone, and with me only.¹⁰⁴

So many things begin and perhaps end as a game, I suppose that it amused you to find the sketch besides yours, you attributed it to chance or a whim and only the second time did you realize that I was intentional and then you looked at it slowly, you even came back later to look at it again, taking the usual precautions.¹⁰⁵

When he says, "Skins or blankets?" it will take you a moment to realize that he's asking which you want to sleep under. And in your hesitation he'll decide that he wants to see your skin wrapped in the big black moosehide.¹⁰⁶

Then Doreen, who comes in the afternoons to help, brings out a visitor; voice and footsteps; Mother has to get up but you hang your head and go on knitting. Voices creaking and rustling and a sigh. The visitor has sat down. Presently she whispers to Mother, "What is her name?"¹⁰⁷

So what of the existing theoretical models? In Genette's terms, second-person narration can be referred to as homodiegetic, as the narrator and narratee are usually both in the story world for direct interaction.¹⁰⁸ However, there are exceptions, and second-person narratives can be a case of heterodiegesis as well, as there can be an extradiegetic narrator.¹⁰⁹ So called choose-your-own-adventure stories, where the reader's decisions shape the plot, could be another exception, because the narrator also addresses an implied reader who exists outside the story, as illustrated on the example below.¹¹⁰

1

You are just an ordinary New Zealander. You have strength, intelligence and luck, though you are not particularly good at languages. Your family and friends like you, and there is one special friend who really thinks you're swell. Yours is a well-rounded personality; your horoscope is usually good;

¹⁰⁴ Ron Butlin, "The Tilting Room," *The Tilting Room* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1983), 61–62.

¹⁰⁵ Julio Cortazar, "Graffiti," *We Love Glenda and Other Tales*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Knopf, 1983), 33.

¹⁰⁶ Pam Houston, "How to Talk to a Hunter," *The Best American Short Stories 1990* (Boston, MA: Houghton, 1990), 98.

¹⁰⁷ Rumer Godden, "You Need to Go Upstairs," *Gone: A Thread of Stories* (New York: Viking, 1968), 144.

¹⁰⁸ DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," 210.

¹⁰⁹ Fludernik, "Second-Person Narrative As a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism," 448.

¹¹⁰ DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," 210.

your school report says 'satisfactory.' But somehow you are restless. Your life is missing challenge and excitement. You want to make things happen. Go to 2.¹¹¹

In 1993, Fludernik revised Genette's model of homo- and heterodiegesis and Stanzel's teller / reflector to fit second-person narration.¹¹² She employs the model of authorial, figural and reflectoral narratives to second-person fiction. Authorial narrative suggests an omniscient narrator. Figural narrative is a mix between an external and internal view on the protagonist. As she calls it, "a border zone between the pure teller type and the pure reflector type." In reflectoral narrative the readers see what the protagonist thinks and feels.¹¹³ A prominent form of reflectoral narrative is interior monologue.¹¹⁴

2.4.1 Newly proposed typologies

Monika Fludernik distinguishes three types of second-person narratives. The first are narratives using "I" and "you" where the narrator and the narratee have history together and the narrator therefore knows all about it. The second type is where a second-person's consciousness is authentically portrayed, perfectly depicted, which she calls an unrealistic scenario. The third type is on the border between a "real" second-person narration and a dramatic monologue. It is very experimental with the reality of the text and subverts it.¹¹⁵

Fludernik further discusses three possibilities in employing "you." In the first case, there is an address function of "you" but it does not refer to the protagonist. In the second case, "you" both addresses the protagonist and refers to them. Both the protagonist and the narrator exist on the same diegetic plane and they share a past. In the third case, "you" refers to the protagonist, but it does not address them. The narrator is not on the same diegetic plane.¹¹⁶

Richardson recognizes three types of second-person narrative: standard form, hypothetical form and autotelic form.¹¹⁷ As the name suggests, the standard form is the most frequent one. In it, the protagonist is presented as "you."¹¹⁸ The hypothetical form is found in guidebooks, manuals, self-help books and such. Characteristic features that distinguish it from the other two forms are the use of imperative and future tense. Moreover, the narrator

¹¹¹ Bill Manhire, "The Brain of Katherine Mansfield," *South Pacific* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), 177.

¹¹² Fludernik, "Second Person Fiction: Narrative "You" As Addressee And/Or Protagonist," 225.

¹¹³ Fludernik, "Second Person Fiction: Narrative "You" As Addressee And/Or Protagonist," 226–227.

¹¹⁴ Fludernik, "Second-Person Narrative As a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism," 453.

¹¹⁵ Fludernik, "Introduction: Second-Person Narrative and Related Issues," 290–291.

¹¹⁶ Fludernik, "Second Person Fiction: Narrative "You" As Addressee And/Or Protagonist," 221–222.

¹¹⁷ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, 18.

¹¹⁸ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, 19–20.

and narratee are obviously distinct.¹¹⁹ Lastly, the autotelic form directly addresses the reader, who can identify with and even somehow “fuse” with the narratee.¹²⁰

Professor of English David Herman introduced yet another typology; he distinguishes generalized you (where “you” is used to generalize, similarly as the pronoun “one”), fictional reference (referring to a character), fictionalized (= horizontal) address (addressing the narratee), apostrophic (= vertical) address (addressing the reader) and doubly deictic you.¹²¹ Doubly deictic “you” lies in combining two of these forms, thus creating ambiguity.¹²²

DelConte proposes a model with five types of second-person narration: non-coincident narration, completely-coincident narration, partially-coincident narration (of narrator / protagonist), partially-coincident narration (of narrator / narrative) and partially-coincident narration (of narratee / protagonist). In non-coincident narration, all the actors (i.e., narrator, narratee, protagonist) are distinct; the narrator and the protagonist can be the same, but if they are, they belong to different diegetic planes. Completely-coincident narration deals with instances of self-address autodiegesis, where all actors are the same and on the same diegetic plane. Then he speaks of three subtypes of partially-coincident narration. In that of a narrator and a protagonist, the narrator is the protagonist (so they talk about themselves to someone else), but there is a distinct narratee. Most commonly, such texts are in present tense. In that of a narrator and a narrative, the narrator is the narratee, but the protagonist is distinct, someone else. Thus, the narrator tells a story about someone else to themselves. In that of a narratee and a protagonist, the narratee is the protagonist, but the narrator is distinct, someone else. So, there is a narrator that talks to a narratee who is simultaneously the protagonist. This model clearly differentiates between their own unique rhetorical effects.¹²³

Irene Kacandes has coined the term *talk fiction* to refer to second-person narratives that “talk” to readers, invoking a feeling that the reader is communicated with, yet it being fictional and made up.¹²⁴ She expands on the concept of narrative apostrophe, by which the

¹¹⁹ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, 28–29.

¹²⁰ Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, 30.

¹²¹ David Herman, “Textual ‘You’ and Double Deixis in Edna O’Brien’s ‘A Pagan Place,’” *Style* 28, no. 3 (1994): 381.

¹²² Jeziorska-Haladyj, and Rembowska-Pluciennik, “Second Person in Different Genres and Cultural Practices,” 11.

¹²³ DelConte, “Why You Can’t Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative,” 210–212.

¹²⁴ Kacandes, *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion*, x, 1.

speaker addresses someone who is not a part of the usual audience, for example “someone absent or dead, or even an abstract concept or inanimate object.”¹²⁵

For the purpose of analysis of second-person narration in chapter 4.2, this thesis will use a combination of these proposed models, namely from Fludernik, Richardson and Herman, as their models align well with the nature of second-person narration in *Harrow the Ninth* specifically.

¹²⁵ Kacandes, *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion*, 146.

3 INTRODUCTION TO TAMSYN MUIR'S SERIES *THE LOCKED TOMB*

This chapter will introduce Tamsyn Muir's acclaimed science fantasy series *The Locked Tomb*. Tamsyn Muir is a fantasy, sci-fi and horror author, who started off with writing short stories and *The Locked Tomb* is her first book series. She comes from New Zealand but now resides in Oxford in the United Kingdom.¹²⁶ Science fantasy is a subgenre mixing elements from both sci-fi and fantasy, most often fantasy elements blended into a science fiction world, which is the case for *The Locked Tomb* series as well. The common fantasy element of necromancy is incorporated, but the story is set in space in the future, which is an element often found in science fiction.

The Locked Tomb series comprises of three books so far: *Gideon the Ninth*,¹²⁷ *Harrow the Ninth*¹²⁸ and *Nona the Ninth*.¹²⁹ The last book *Alecto the Ninth* is projected for a 2025 release date but as of yet is to be published.¹³⁰ Muir initially planned the series to be a trilogy, but the last book would have been too long, thus she divided it into two books, with *Nona the Ninth* basically act one of *Alecto the Ninth*.¹³¹

3.1 Worldbuilding

Before delving into describing the plots of each book, it is a good idea to first briefly summarize the complex worldbuilding of *The Locked Tomb* universe. The books have often been marketed as “lesbian necromancers in space,” but they are so much more than that. The series is full of elaborate hidden lore to be uncovered bit by bit as well as complex political issues and even biblical references. Most notably, Muir's theurgical system is not traditional necromancy merely about raising the dead, but has a scientific explanation and roots.

The story is set in a distant future in space, in what once used to be the Solar System, now comprising of Nine Houses on nine planets, each of which practises a different kind of necromancy. The Houses are ruled by the Emperor who is also considered a God, and is

¹²⁶ “Press Kit,” Tamsyn Muir, accessed December 22, 2024, <http://tamsynmuir.com/press-kit>

¹²⁷ Tamsyn Muir, *Gideon the Ninth* (New York: Tor Books, 2019).

¹²⁸ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*.

¹²⁹ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*.

¹³⁰ “25 2025 book releases I can't wait to read,” *Books, Burgers and Backpacks* (blog), November 19, 2024, <https://www.booksburgersandbackpacks.com/blog/25-2025-book-releases-i-cant-wait-to-read>.

¹³¹ “Tamsyn Muir on Lyctorhood as Genderfuckery and Greasy Bible Study in *Nona the Ninth*,” interview by Natalie Zutter, *Reactor Magazine*, September 13, 2022, <https://reactormag.com/tamsyn-muir-on-lyctorhood-as-genderfuckery-and-greasy-bible-study-in-nona-the-ninth/>.

even called God throughout the series, but is actually named John Gaius. Each House differs not only by the form of necromancy, but also by culture and practises. Each House raises a necromancer, wielding magical power and their cavalier, their sword, their protector. The bond between a necromancer and their cavalier is very deep, as they must trust and depend on each other.

Muir's necromancy system is interesting in that while there must be genetical predispositions for one to be a necromancer, it is hard work that requires vigorous study of mathematical formulas in order to become a good necromancer. Depending on the necromancer, they can control skeletons, summon spirits and communicate with them, manipulate human flesh, practise blood magic, et cetera. Many necromancers aspire to ultimately become a lyctor, who directly serve the Emperor, possess tremendous power and are almost immortal.

Major themes in the series include the contrast between life and death, where immortality comes with a cost, struggle with identity and trauma, and deep emotional bonds between necromancers and their cavaliers. The series' eerie, dark and mysterious atmosphere connected to ancient practises and hidden secrets, along with beautiful language blends with modern technology and humorous moments.

3.2 Plot

3.2.1 *Gideon the Ninth*

The story revolves around Gideon Nav, a rebellious orphan who has spent her entire life in the Ninth House, in a never-ending rivalry with the only other child in the house, Harrowhark Nonagesimus, who is a necromancer and the heir to the Ninth House. Harrow appears as cold, intelligent and matches Gideon's sarcasm. The Ninth House specializes in bones; its necromancers can create bone constructs, raise skeletons and grow skeletons or their parts from a single bone.

As a necromancer, Harrow is invited to take part in a trial to become a lyctor and she is forced to take on Gideon as her cavalier. Together they travel to Canaan House, a dilapidated fortress in the First House, where the trial takes place. There they meet necromancer-cavalier pairs from the other Houses. There is no clear task or goal in the trial, and some start to investigate the intricate puzzles and mysteries surrounding Canaan House. Soon mysterious murders start to happen and the hostilities among the Houses escalate. Gideon and Harrow

reconcile in a pool of salt water, where Harrow reveals the truth about her birth and the fact that they are the only two Ninth House children. Her family gassed all the Ninth children in order to create enough energy to give birth to a necromancer, as they were desperate to conceive a powerful necromancer to save the Ninth House and protect the Locked Tomb. Gideon was among the sacrificed children as well, but somehow she survived the incident, and therefore was shunned and feared. In this scene readers first peek into Harrow's deeply wounded soul, the guilt she has been carrying her whole life. She also tells Gideon about the time she had entered the sacred Locked Tomb as a child, that no one could ever open, as it is destined to bring the death of the Emperor Undying. Harrow had peeked inside, where she saw a beautiful dead girl she had fallen in love with. Gideon in turn blames herself for the death of Harrow's parents, because she told them she saw Harrow breach the Locked Tomb and they committed suicide. Gideon and Harrow pledge their loyalty to each other and their bond significantly deepens.

Investigating continues and the plot quickly escalates. Ianthe, the necromancer of the Third House, discovers the secret to lyctorhood; the necromancer must devour their cavalier's soul, gaining extraordinary power. She kills her cavalier without second thought and becomes a lyctor. Moreover, Dulcinea, the Seventh House necromancer, reveals herself to be Cytherea the First, a lyctor, who killed the real Dulcinea and her cavalier, stole her identity, and infiltrated the Canaan House. She was the one behind the murders, which were an attempt to lure the Emperor in the Canaan House and kill him. The surviving necromancers and cavaliers fight Cytherea, but as a lyctor, she is too powerful. Harrow is nearly killed because of a lack of energy, and Gideon ends her own life to force Harrow to absorb her soul and become a lyctor. Utterly broken and devastated, Harrow kills Cytherea and passes out. In the epilogue, Harrow wakes up on the Emperor's spaceship to find out she and Ianthe were the only ones who made it out the Canaan House, and she begs the Emperor to bring Gideon back.

3.2.2 *Harrow the Ninth*

Harrow and Ianthe are on the Emperor's space station, the Mithraeum, where they meet other remaining lyctors. For millennia, the Emperor and his lyctors have been fighting creatures known as Resurrection Beasts, revenants created by the death of the planetary system and the following Resurrection, in which the star, the planets, and the people of Nine Houses were revived by the Emperor. Harrow and Ianthe train and prepare for battle with Resurrection Beasts. They learn how to enter the River, a place souls enter after death, which

allows them to travel between places very fast, but more importantly to defeat the Resurrection Beasts, as they need to fight both their physical bodies and their souls. Harrow's ascension to lyctorhood was somehow flawed and therefore she is weaker than the others and is expected to die in battle. Harrow's mind is all over the place; she has no memory of Gideon yet clings to her sword at all times, she appears to hallucinate the Body and Cytherea's corpse, she believes she has gone insane, and her memories are chaotic, as the readers learn from the alternating chapters, where Harrow experiences the Canaan House all over again, but with the plot greatly differing from the first book. In her memories, there is no Gideon either and instead her cavalier is Ortus, who was her cavalier before Gideon.

Her memories and the current storyline clash when Harrow descends into the River to fight a Resurrection Beast attacking the Mithraeum, and loses consciousness after having been stabbed by Mercymorn, another lyctor. At this point Harrow returns once more to her memories of the Canaan House, realising that something is amiss, experiencing multiple false alternative universes until she finally remembers what happened and why she did not remember anything – Harrow lobotomized herself in order to forget Gideon and protect her soul from being consumed in the lyctor process. Harrow remembers that she wrote the letters addressed to herself before the lobotomy. In the River, she learns that the Canaan House she has been experiencing is a dimension within the River, and the people there are souls of people who died in the previous book. However, Harrow's physical body being stabbed and dying, she now cannot return from the River, and so instead she and the souls fight what they called the Sleeper until now – a hostile spirit threatening the River-dimension Canaan House. They defeat the Sleeper who turns out to be the soul of Commander Wake, the leader of Blood of Eden, an anti-necromancy organisation whose goal is to destroy the Emperor and the Nine Houses.

While Harrow's soul is trapped in the River, her body is dying, which makes Gideon's soul emerge and take control of Harrow's body. She helps fight the Resurrection Beast and then eavesdrops with Ianthe on drama happening between the lyctors. It turns out Harrow was not hallucinating Cytherea's corpse moving, instead a part of Wake's soul was controlling it. It is revealed that eighteen years ago, Wake gave birth to a child as part of a plot to open the Locked Tomb. It emerges that Mercymorn and Augustine were aiding Wake in the plot to kill "God" Gaius, and that they provided her with the Emperor's semen. The lyctor Harrow has called Ortus, in reality named Gideon, whose name she did not take in due to the lobotomy, was Wake's lover sent to stop her from reaching the Ninth House,

throwing her out of her shuttle. Gideon, watching this unfold, realizes that she is the orphaned child that landed with her dying mother on the Ninth, she is named after Wake's lyctor lover as those were Wake's last words, she is God's daughter.

The tension reaches its climax when the lyctors confront the Emperor about Harrow's body, now controlled by Gideon, having Alecto's eyes. Alecto was John's former companion. The lyctors deduce that Alecto was God's cavalier and that perfect lyctorhood was achievable with keeping the cavalier alive, yet John kept it secret. Upset and desperate to avenge their dead cavaliers, Mercymorn and Augustine try to kill the Emperor. The undying Emperor kills Mercymorn, and Augustine transfers the whole Mithraeum into the River but is killed too. In the River, Gideon finds out that the lyctor Gideon died fighting the Resurrection Beast in the river, and his body is now controlled by his cavalier, Pyrrha, whose soul was preserved like Gideon's. As they try to escape the River, Gideon with no necromantic powers struggles and narrates that she dies, but hears someone trying to save her. What happened to Harrow's body is uncertain.

As Harrow has learned throughout her stay on the Mithraeum, ages ago during the Resurrection, the Emperor was supposed to kill Alecto, but he lied to his lyctors about killing her and instead sealed her forever in the Locked Tomb. She, inhuman and instead bearing the soul of the destroyed Earth, was the only creature capable of destroying him.

Meanwhile Harrow's soul, still in the River, has chosen to accept the reality of Gideon being gone, and to return to her body becoming a full lyctor, making Gideon's soul finally die. However, the soul of the real Dulcinea, tells Harrow that she feels Harrow's body moving, and that she can tell it's not moved by a revenant. This soothes Harrow, as she knows that her plan worked, Gideon's soul is intact and that unless she returns to her body, Gideon can live. Harrow instead enters a vision of the Locked Tomb, which is empty apart from Gideon's sword and her magazine. Harrow climbs inside and loses consciousness again.

3.2.3 *Nona the Ninth*

After being rescued by Pyrrha, Camilla and Palamedes (who share Camilla's body), Harrow's body is now inhabited by an unknown soul they call Nona. Nona has a child's mentality, can speak any language, heals incredibly fast and frequently dreams about the pool scene from the first book. Blood of Eden is in control of the planet and publicly executes anyone suspected of being a necromancer. Moreover, the planet is slowly being approached

by a Resurrection Beast. Ianthe arrives on the planet and the team learns Ianthe has Gideon's body thanks to a public broadcast, and so they all go look for Gideon's body, which seems dead, but after a while Gideon wakes up. She is a corpse, yet her soul is manipulating the body and now calls herself Prince Kiriona Gaia. Meanwhile, the Resurrection Beast begins its attack on the planet, but Nona manages to talk to it and make it pull back. With Gideon now by their side, the team intends to go open the Locked Tomb. They need to travel through the River for that, which requires lyctorhood, and Cam and Palamedes manage to merge their souls into one, becoming a lyctor named Paul.

They arrive to the Ninth House to open the tomb, and Nona remembers that she had done this before, and it becomes clear that Nona is Alecto. When Harrow entered the Locked Tomb when she was ten and kissed the mysterious girl, Alecto's soul possessed her but remained subdued. However, after both Harrow's and Gideon's souls left Harrow's body, she took control of it. Now that Nona brought Harrow's body to the tomb, where Harrow's soul lies, and Alecto's soul is back to her body, they switch to their original bodies. Harrow confesses her love to Alecto and Alecto swears her loyalty to her, as Harrow is the heir to the Ninth House. The book ends with Alecto confronting John and stabbing him.

In the alternating chapters, Harrow was experiencing Alecto's memories in the form of a dream, as Harrow's soul was in Alecto's body in the Locked Tomb. In these memories of the events of 10 000 years ago, John tells Alecto how he obtained divine necromantic powers and ultimately destroyed the Earth. John reveals that the Earth served as an energy source from which he somehow developed necromantic powers. He was worshipped and feared, and as the Earth was dying from losing energy, John and his colleagues (who later became his lyctors) were planning on cryogenically freezing the population and moving it to a different planet. However, rich and influential people wanted to escape alone, leaving everyone else behind, and upon learning this John lost it and nuked the entire planet. John could not contain the Earth's powerful soul and so he created and shaped a body, Alecto, and put the soul inside her. Alecto became his cavalier and achieving perfect lyctorhood, John could use the Earth's immense power. Then the slow Resurrection of the Solar System followed, creating the Nine Houses and by extension the Resurrection Beasts, who are, similarly to Alecto, souls of the destroyed planets haunting John for infinity.

4 NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE IN *THE LOCKED TOMB* SERIES

This chapter will provide an analysis of narrative perspective in the books. *Gideon the Ninth* is written in third person in a figural narrative situation and apart from Gideon's unreliability as a narrator, it is not special in terms of narrative perspective. However, some aspects of the narrator and reflector character, Gideon, will still be commented on, as this will be relevant for the analysis of *Harrow the Ninth*. More interestingly, *Harrow the Ninth* is a mix of third- and second-person narrative, and therefore most of the analysis will be devoted to this book. Muir herself said that the change to second-person narration in *Harrow the Ninth* was planned: "No, I've been planning the voice changes in the novel for a while. I've always known the different perspectives for all three books, and although *Gideon* was close third, *Harrow* necessarily throws that to the wind. I really loved writing it: it was fun experimenting with the technicals."¹³² *Nona the Ninth* utilises third person, but alternates between the plotline and dream sequences. These dream sequences will also be commented on briefly, as they employ interesting narrative choices. An important tool Muir uses in each book are highly unreliable narrators, as will be explored in the following chapters.

4.1 Gideon as a narrator in *Gideon the Ninth*

Gideon is an unreliable narrator, although her unreliability may not be as noticeable as Harrow's in the second book. Unlike Harrow, whose unreliability is obvious and justified by her schizophrenia and brain damage, Gideon's unreliability lies in her personality and bias alone. She is a very biased and well-written character, with set beliefs and opinions that are reflected in her narration, as will be exemplified below. Moreover, Gideon does not care about necromancy, does not know how it works, and does not really pay close attention to the events in the Canaan House, which makes her perspective incomplete. She paints herself as sort of a passive bystander confused and annoyed by what is happening around her, and while there are clues for the readers in the dialogues of other characters about what is going on, Gideon is mostly preoccupied thinking about swords and girls and is quite oblivious to the mystery and ignorant of it. The third person narrative employed in *Gideon the Ninth* may lead to readers taking what is narrated at face value, but it is important to realize that Gideon is the reflector, and it is her biased views and opinions that are being presented.

¹³² "Q&A: Tamsyn Muir, Author of 'Harrow The Ninth,'" interview by Alexandra Nae, *The Nerd Daily*, August 1, 2020, <https://thenerddaily.com/tamsyn-muir-harrow-the-ninth-interview/>.

Gideon is a witty and sardonic character whose descriptions of other characters and events are highly subjective. This, together with her lack of knowledge on necromancy, render her easily relatable to the reader, who is very likely to share her convincing opinions as she reveals them. What further makes her more relatable is how compared to Harrow she acts like a normal teenager and her issues reflect that – she is lonely, craves attention and affection, wants to escape the oppressive and depressing Ninth House and learn about the world.

Gideon's prevalent humour in her narration often downplays or exaggerates the situations she finds herself in, as well as her own emotions. Gideon's bold exterior and constant sarcasm serve as a shield to hide her vulnerability, fear and anger, repressing her emotions even as she narrates, therefore it can be difficult for the audience to recognize whether she is narrating the truth or whether she is not acknowledging her true feelings.

Gideon's repressed emotions are most notably demonstrated on her relationship with Harrow. At the beginning of the book, as illustrated in the passage below from when readers encounter Harrow for the first time, they treat each other with contempt and disdain.

Then Harrow cocked her head to the side like a quizzical bird and smiled a tiny, contemptuous smile. "How coarse and ordinary," she said. "How effective, how crass. My parents should have smothered you."

"I'd like to see them try it now," said Gideon, unmoved.

"You'd do it even if there was no ultimate gain," the Lady said, and she even seemed to be marvelling at it. "Even though you know what you'd suffer. Even though you know what it means. And all because...?"

"All *because*," said Gideon, checking her clock again. "I completely fucking hate you, *because* you are a hideous witch from hell. No offence."

There was a pause.

"Oh, Griddle!" said Harrow pityingly, in the silence. "But I don't even remember about you most of the time."¹³³

Gideon strongly emphasizes her hate towards Harrow and portrays her childhood adversary in an antagonistic light, but as their relationship evolves throughout the book, it becomes clear that they are both repressing their emotions and attachment to each other. Gideon does not acknowledge her affection for Harrow in her narration, although her actions suggest otherwise, and so this dismissal of her feelings create a gap between what she tells

¹³³ Muir, *Gideon the Ninth*, 21–22.

the readers and what is happening. Moreover, Gideon's general opinion of Harrow is influenced by not knowing her rival's motivations and secrets, which explain Harrow's behaviour, and the two finally reach an understanding as their secrets fully surface in the pool scene, an excerpt from which is provided below.

"Harrow," said Gideon, and her voice caught. "Harrow, I'm so bloody sorry."

Harrow's eyes snapped wide open. The whites blazed like plasma. The black rings were blacker than the bottom of Drearburgh. She waded through the water, snatched Gideon's wet shirt in her fists, and shook her with more violence than Gideon had ever thought her muscularly capable of. Her face was livid in its hate: her loathing was a mortar, it was combustion.

"*You apologise to me?*" she bellowed. "You apologise to me now? You say that you're sorry when I have spent my life destroying you? You are my whipping girl! I hurt you because it was a relief! I exist because my parents killed everyone and relegated you to a life of abject misery, and they would have killed you too and not given it a second's goddamned thought! I have spent your life trying to make you regret that you weren't dead, all because – I regretted I wasn't! I ate you alive, and you have the temerity to tell me that *you're sorry?*"

There were flecks of spittle on Harrowhark's lips. She was retching for air.

"I have tried to dismantle you, Gideon Nav! The Ninth House poisoned you, we trod you underfoot – I took you to this killing field as my slave – you refuse to die, and you pity me! Strike me down. You've won. I've lived my whole wretched life at your mercy, yours alone, and God knows I deserve to die at your hand. You are my only friend. I am undone without you."¹³⁴

A great example of Gideon's bias which may ultimately deceive readers is how she perceives the Third House twins, Coronabeth and Ianthe, who themselves have been deceiving everyone since they were young – Coronabeth actually does not possess any necromantic abilities, while Ianthe does and covers up for her.

At the bottom of the stairs, deep in the shadows, Gideon got her first good glimpse of the speakers. The strange twin-scions of the Third House were looking around, attended to by their sulky, slightly bouffant cavalier. Up close, Gideon was more impressed than ever. The golden Third twin was probably the best-looking person she'd ever seen in her life. She was tall and regal, with some radiant, butterfly quality – her shirt was haphazardly tucked into her trousers, which were haphazardly tucked into her boots, but she was all topaz and shine and lustre. Necromancers affected robes in the same way cavaliers affected swords, but she hadn't tucked her arms into hers, and it was a gauzy, gold-shot, transparent thing floating out around her like wings. There were about five rings on each hand and her earrings would've put chandeliers to shame, but she had an air of wild and innocent overdecoration, of having put on the prettiest things in her jewellery box and then

¹³⁴ Muir, *Gideon the Ninth*, 319–320.

forgotten to take them off. Her buttery hair was stuck to her forehead with sweat, and she kept tangling a curl of it in one finger and artlessly letting it go.

The second twin was as though the first had been taken to pieces and put back together without any genius. She wore a robe of the same cloth and colour, but on her it was a beautiful shroud on a mummy. The cavalier had lots of hair, an aquiline face, and a self-satisfied little jacket.¹³⁵

It is evident that Gideon is infatuated by Coronabeth's beauty, and the title character dedicates more energy and space in her narration to describing how radiant she is, as opposed to Ianthe and their cavalier, who did not captivate Gideon at all. Gideon's bias towards the charismatic, golden-haired twin throughout the whole book makes the reader believe that Coronabeth is who they should focus on, that she is the dominant and more important one, only to be revealed later that Ianthe is the sole necromancer of the pair. This also illustrates Gideon's bias towards women she finds physically attractive, and why she is so easily manipulated by Cytherea (the lyctor posing as Dulcinea as mentioned in 3.2.1), as Gideon longs for attention and openly expresses her sexual frustration after being in the Ninth House for years.

4.2 Second-person narration in *Harrow the Ninth*

Harrow the Ninth uses second person to narrate the current events and in the alternating chapters the narrative perspective switches to third person while narrating Harrow's false memories of Canaan House. Right off the start, the reader is thrown off by usage of the second person and is left to guess what did this change mean. As the story unfolds and Harrow's trauma and instability becomes evident, one could assume that she is dissociating and therefore addressing herself in second person, while others may read it as a purely stylistic choice. But when it is revealed that Gideon's soul is alive within Harrow and Gideon emerges to save Harrow's body and starts narrating in first person, it finally makes sense that it was Gideon narrating from within Harrow through Harrow's eyes. The moment Gideon takes control of Harrow's body and the narrative switches to first person is provided in the excerpt below.

You'd been stabbed from behind, and you'd collapsed backward onto the rapier's hilt. Its foible pointed upward where it protruded from your torso.
And you'd gone and left me behind.

¹³⁵ Muir, *Gideon the Ninth*, 87–88.

I arched up on your hands, rested your weight on your feet – the blade stayed stuck – and I pushed up against the corridor wall, and I got you to stand.¹³⁶

Even before the definite reveal of Gideon being the narrator, there are numerous subtle hints scattered throughout the text that indicate that she is the narrator. All these little comments are easily overlooked but make much more sense on a reread. One example is the narrator constantly correcting Harrow on descriptions of swords, specifically her not knowing the word pommel, and considering Gideon's humorous nature and more importantly her interest in swords, the reader could guess it may be her narrating.

Her hand had twitched aside the nacreous folds of her robe to rest on the end of a simple and unpretentious rapier, the mesh nest that formed around the handle unadorned and uncomplicated, no decoration other than a white knob at the very end of the – you didn't know the exact technical word. It was a pommel though.¹³⁷

Some of the brackets were empty, and some held rapiers. One in particular always drew you back to it: a black rapier with a basket hilt formed of ebon wires. At the termination of each wire was a single canine tooth, and the end – pommel! – was a soft, worn knob of black-dyed bone.¹³⁸

He used the butt of his sword – it would be lying to say that you now regularly called it the *pommel* – to smash the first construct's skull to powder.¹³⁹

In many cases, due to second-person narration and the usage of “you”, using quotation marks in excerpts is ambiguous, as it can be confusing to distinguish whether the text is a part of a dialogue or not. It is not clear how an academic should cite works with second-person narration, I have chosen not to use quotation marks for better coherency.

In some scenes, Gideon's voice is very noticeable when she describes Harrow, as we can see in the example below. Calling Harrow “an idiot baby” when she is being flirted with by Ianthe is a thing Gideon would say.

You absolute idiot baby, you were mystified. You were tired, and you were embarrassed, and you were riding high from the satisfaction of doing one half-perfect thing – of having committed a low miracle of your own devising – of, for a handful of minutes, being Harrowhark Nonagesimus again, the greatest necromancer produced by your dark and sacred Drearburh.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 370.

¹³⁷ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 82.

¹³⁸ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 154.

¹³⁹ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 178.

¹⁴⁰ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 235.

Likewise, Gideon's voice is very obvious as early as at the end of the prologue, which is the moment Harrow gets stabbed, but readers do not know the context until much later.

You prepared to die with the Locked Tomb on your lips. But your idiot dying mouth rounded out three totally different syllables, and they were three syllables you did not even understand.¹⁴¹

Again, putting "idiot" in the text is something very characteristic of Gideon when referring to Harrow. Moreover, as is implied, Harrow's dying word was probably "Gideon," as it consists of three syllables, and she did not understand it because she tampered with her brain in order to forget it. The prologue ends with this paragraph, but as this moment is reached in the story later, this is the moment when Harrow in the River realizes Gideon's soul is preserved and Gideon emerges to save Harrow's dying body. It might be Harrow calling out to Gideon, it might be Harrow voicing her name in relief after remembering.

At the end of the chapter where Harrow investigates Palamedes' bones on Camilla's request and enters his bubble in the River, the narrator refers to themselves as "me," which indicates that it is someone other than Harrow narrating and a possible first person narration emerging later.

You were standing in a darkened corridor, and you could not turn around: and then a brief explosion of light revealed to you that it wasn't a corridor at all, and it had never been dark.
But you were always too quick to mourn your own ignorance. You never could have guessed that he had seen me.¹⁴²

Although one may argue that the "me" does not have to inherently signify another person narrating and there can be other interpretations; the narrator could be a part of Harrow, pre-lobotomy and with her memories intact, speaking to the other. Later knowing that Gideon is the narrator, however, it is clear that Palamedes sensed her soul somehow.

Let us now look at the very beginning of the prologue and illustrate the features of second-person narration throughout the book based on an excerpt using the proposed typological models introduced in 2.4.1:

Your room had long ago plunged into near-complete darkness, leaving no distraction from the great rocking *thump-thump-thump* of body after body flinging itself onto the great mass already coating the hull. There was nothing to see – the shutters were down – but you could feel the terrible vibration, hear the groan of chitin on metal, the cataclysmic rending of steel by fungous claw.

¹⁴¹ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 15.

¹⁴² Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 300.

It was very cold. A fine shimmer of frost now coated your cheeks, your hair, your eyelashes. In that smothering dark, your breath emerged as wisps of wet grey smoke. Sometimes you screamed a little, which no longer embarrassed you. You understood your body's reaction to the proximity. Screaming was the least of what might happen.

God's voice came very calmly over the comm:

"Ten minutes until breach. We've got half an hour of air-con left... after that, you'll be working in the oven. Doors down until the pressure equalizes. Conserve your temp, everyone. Harrow, I'm leaving yours closed as long as possible."

You staggered to your feet, limpid skirts gathered in both hands, and picked your way over to the comm button. Scanning for something damning and intellectual to say, you snapped: "I can take care of myself."¹⁴³

From the very beginning, it is clear that the "you" is referring to and addressing Harrow, that she is the narratee and is being narrated the story. This corresponds to one of Fludernik's possibilities of how "you" may be used, namely when the "you" both refers to and addresses the protagonist, in this case Harrow. However, whether the text addresses Harrow per se can be arguable due to the diegetic context. Harrow does not realize she is being addressed. Readers learn eventually that Gideon is narrating from within Harrow; she narrates what Harrow feels, sees, but also adds her own subtle commentary as illustrated on excerpts above. And Gideon's use of "you" makes sense as she is inside Harrow, talking to her, narrating to her, but Harrow has no idea that this narrating is happening. Can this be called addressing then, when the narratee does not know she is being addressed? Moreover, regarding this type of "you," Fludernik also mentions that in this case of employing "you," the protagonist and the narrator exist on the same diegetic plane and they share a past. Technically, Gideon and Harrow are on the same diegetic plane, they are both present in the story, but Gideon is forgotten, perhaps dead, Harrow does not know. Are they really on the same diegetic plane when Gideon is not literally present, at least until she enters the story and switches to first person, when her soul is simply suppressed and buried within Harrow? Is Gideon not something of a heterodiegetic narrator, or perhaps a mix of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic, until she emerges and actively participates in the events? Readers do not know until she emerges that it was her narrating the whole time. It makes sense if she was treated as heterodiegetic narrator until then. The second-person narrative in *Harrow the Ninth* corresponds to one of the types of second-person narratives that Fludernik distinguishes; a narrative that uses "I" and "you" and the narrator and the narratee have

¹⁴³ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 10–11.

history together. This aligns with *Harrow the Ninth*, because the second-person narrative turns into a first-person narrative, clearly distinguishing who “I” and “you” are – Gideon and Harrow, respectively.

Using Richardson’s typology, the second-person narrative in *Harrow the Ninth* may be classified as the standard form: Harrow, the protagonist, is presented as “you.” As has been mentioned before in chapter 2, readers often identify with the “you,” and in what Richardson calls the autotelic form, it is the readers themselves who are directly addressed by the “you.” Although there is no ambiguity in the text that would suggest the reader should imagine themselves as the protagonist, it is very likely the reader is able to “feel,” empathize and connect with Harrow better due to the usage of “you.” Moreover, second person inherently makes the reader actively create meaning. Let us again look at the very start of the prologue, the first sentence, as an example. “Your room had long ago plunged into near-complete darkness [...]” The change to second person from the first book is surprising, but the reader can still guess that “you” is Harrow even before it is made clear in God’s remark. The reader knows that in the epilogue of *Gideon the Ninth*, Harrow woke up on the Emperor’s ship, and logically the second book would continue from there. Plus of course, the name of the book itself suggests that Harrow is the protagonist.

Using Herman’s model, *Harrow the Ninth* utilises fictional reference, since “you” refers to a character, Harrow, and also fictionalized address, because the narratee is being addressed, although as mentioned above that can be debatable. Since *Harrow the Ninth* utilises two of Herman’s forms, the “you” can be referred to as a doubly deictic you.

4.3 Harrow as an unreliable narrator in *Harrow the Ninth*

While second-person passages in *Harrow the Ninth* are narrated by Gideon, Harrow’s time in the alternative Canaan House is narrated by Harrow in third person. This alternative Canaan House seems like fake memories for a long time, but it is revealed that instead Harrow is going through these events in a River bubble, which she created subconsciously, trapping the spirits of people who died in the real Canaan House there and having them reenact what happened. It is a way Harrow’s brain is trying to make sense of not having any memory of Gideon. The fact that these events are “fake,” or rather not what actually happened in Canaan House, is addressed many times in the chapters, both subtly and obviously as will be now illustrated on examples that portray Harrow’s unreliability as a narrator as well.

“Lady, it is only to honour my father that I call myself a cavalier,” said Ortus. “It is for my mother’s pride and my House’s scarcity that I call myself a cavalier. I have none of cavalier’s virtues.”

[...]

“Lady,” ventured Ortus, voice deepening with timidity, “I would not venture it – but if a cavalier’s duty is to hold the sword – if a cavalier’s duty is to protect with the sword – if a cavalier’s duty is to die by the sword – have you never considered **ORTUS NIGENAD**?”

“What?” said Harrow.

“Lady, it is only to honour my father that I call myself a cavalier,” said Ortus. “It is for my mother’s pride and my House’s scarcity that I call myself a cavalier. I have none of cavalier’s virtues.”

“I feel as though we have had this conversation before,” said Harrowhark, pressing her thumbs together, testing with risky pleasure how malleable she might make her distal phalange.¹⁴⁴

In this excerpt from the first alternating chapter, Harrow’s confusion is highlighted by her conversation with Ortus, which seems rather artificial. As can be noticed and is emphasized by bold letters, Ortus suggests someone else for the position of the cavalier, but instead says his own name. Readers can deduce that he must have said Gideon’s name, but Harrow’s brain dismissed it and filled the hole by Ortus’ name. And after that Ortus simply repeats what he had already said before. This might suggest that he was actually saying something else, something about Gideon, but Harrow could not process it and filled it with a sentence he had already said instead. Harrow’s lobotomy is one reason why Harrow is unreliable; this can also be noticed in the second-person passages, where she calls the lyctor Gideon the First Ortus instead, because she cannot process the name being the same as Gideon’s.

There had been another girl who grew up alongside Harrow – but she had died before Harrow was born.¹⁴⁵

This sentence, from the second alternating chapter which instead of taking place in Canaan House tells of Harrow’s past, omitting Gideon completely again, simply does not make sense. It is nonsensical on purpose; it is yet another case of Harrow resisting the lobotomy in some way. Deep down, she is desperate to remember, she does not want to forget Gideon, and that reflects on the first part of the sentence. She remembers there had been another girl who grew up alongside her. But then disputes that by saying that the girl had died before Harrow was born.

“[...] For the love of God, Ortus, I need a cavalier with *backbone*.”

¹⁴⁴ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 17–18.

¹⁴⁵ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 50.

“You always did,” said Ortus. “And I am glad, I think, that I never became that cavalier.”

Hours after the fact, when she was lying in her bed, Harrow’s brain let the response roll up to the surface: *What the hell do you mean by that?*¹⁴⁶

In this excerpt Ortus, posing as her cavalier, says he is glad he never became her cavalier which is again nonsensical. And Harrow is trying to make sense of it, but she does not realize what is wrong. Readers do know that Ortus was not her cavalier in Canaan House though.

The skeleton construct gestured to them both as they made the initial step to follow, and Harrow was struck when it opened its yellow-molared mouth.

“Is this how it happens?” it said.¹⁴⁷

She was surprised to find Magnus looking at her, and not at Ortus; was unsettled by the press of his mouth, of his good-natured and rather foolish expression, of his curly well-brushed hair and slightly wanting chin. She was mostly unsettled by his eyes, which were of a colour suddenly hard to define, and whose focus was on her entire.

“Is this really how it happens?” he said.

“Pardon?” said Harrowhark.¹⁴⁸

Harrow gets asked often whether this is how it happens and is confused about it, but it is a big clue for the readers, that these events are indeed somehow fake. Similar formulations appear more frequently once Harrow starts experiencing alternate universes, to be told at the end of each that that is not how it happens, until she finally remembers Gideon.

Moreover, Harrow openly admits she is insane and frequently hallucinates the Body (the body of the girl she saw in the Locked Tomb, which is later revealed to be Alecto). What not only helps to hide Gideon’s voice in the second-person passages but also contributes to Harrow’s unreliability is that in *Gideon the Ninth*, readers do not learn much about Harrow’s inner self. When asked in an interview how she struck the balance between Harrow and Gideon, Muir answered:

“I think one thing that helped in my crazy attempt to do an Italo Calvino is that Harrow does not give that much of herself in book one. And in book two, you are hopefully slapped in the face first thing with just how ferociously Harrow hates herself, and the violence with which she does. And I think that actually helps mask some of the Gideon energy. Because Harrow when she’s thinking of herself is not how she talks. That Harrow was so measured. That Harrow is so careful. And in her

¹⁴⁶ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 126.

¹⁴⁷ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 106.

¹⁴⁸ Muir, *Harrow the Ninth*, 122.

head, she's just like, 'God, I hate you so much.' It's with that kind of energy that Gideon is able to slip beneath. So that helped a lot."¹⁴⁹

4.4 Dream sequences in *Nona the Ninth*

The entirety of *Nona the Ninth* employs third person yet manages to be interesting in narrative perspective. The alternating chapters, John's interludes, where he explains how necromancy came to be and how he became God, are portrayed as dreams in which he tells all these things to Harrow. That is very misleading though, and as the readers get more information, it becomes clearer that it is Alecto who he is telling the story to, and Harrow is simply experiencing the memories as dreams because her soul is in Alecto's body in the Locked Tomb. These interludes are interesting both in their narrative choices and obscurity.

The Locked Tomb series is full of biblical allusions and intertextuality, but this is abundant especially in *Nona the Ninth*. The chapter titles of the dream sequences are references to verses from the Bible, specifically from the Gospel of John. The citations are from John 20:8, John 5:20, John 15:23, John 5:18, John 8:1, John 19:18, John 5:1, John 3:20, John 9:22, John 1:20 and John 5:4 respectively. Not only is the intertextuality incredibly well thought through, since very often what happened in the biblical verse is linked in some way to what John did in the corresponding chapter, but the numbers also represent a cipher. When a simple code is applied, where the number 1 is the letter A et cetera, putting together all numbers from the chapter titles and converting them to letters gives us the message "the tower has reactivated," which is foreshadowing for *Alecto the Ninth*.

In chapter John 5:20, John's speech is not finished, and the chapter cuts off suddenly. It ends interrupted without punctuation or finished quotation marks, as illustrated below.

"Most of the bodies got the melt, like we thought they would," he said. "Damaged beyond repair. Their brains liquefied almost immediately. But, Harrow... all the ones I touched, all the ones I loved... they stayed incorrupti"¹⁵⁰

This cut off is justified on a story level, because the next chapter begins with Nona waking up suddenly and her dream ending abruptly. However, these interludes are not the dreams Nona is having, instead she dreams of the pool scene from book one. This

¹⁴⁹ "How Gideon the Ninth author Tamsyn Muir queers the space opera," interview by Constance Grady, *Vox*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/culture/22266652/tamsyn-muir-interview-locked-tomb-gideon-the-ninth-harrow-the-ninth-vox-book-club>.

¹⁵⁰ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 65.

interruption can be perceived as another case of intertextuality, although it is perhaps too abstract of a connection, where sometimes in the Gospel of John things are fragmented in the sense that things are left unsaid, not explained properly and left unresolved.

Let us illustrate some quirks in narrative in John's interludes in the two passages below.

They mocked it up to look like a freezing works. We all thought that was funny, he said.

He said: We just wanted to save you. You were so sick.

He said, It was me and A– and M– at the start. It wasn't that they didn't have the money for a bigger team; we were simply the only ones capable of what they were asking. M– for medical, A– because he was the glycerol-6 genius. He could've gone anywhere but he stuck with me... and thank God for that, because he handled all the shareholders. I was there for everything, but those meetings were like dying. I'll never love meetings. C– was brought on by the oversight execs for contracts, you know, checks and balances, but look where *that* ended up, she was on our side before the first year was over...¹⁵¹

He was quiet for a long time. The sea ate at the sand. The waves glowed a little even though there was no sunshine, only thick yellow cloud.

She prompted: So what did you do?

He said: A damned thing, didn't I.

She said: When is the part where you hurt me?

He said: Soon. It's coming up.

She said: I still love you.

And in the dream he rubbed his temple with his thumb and said: "You always say that, Harrowhark."¹⁵²

The prevalent use of "said" is quite conspicuous, and this is frequent in all the dream sequences. The simple dialogue tag "said" may be another reference to the Bible, which also uses "said" extensively. The most important thing in these interludes is the message, the story John is telling, and thus simple dialogue tags emphasize the focus on what is said rather than how it is said. There is no need for flowery language and instead the dream setting calls for clarity, simplicity and intimacy, which this simple "said" helps achieve.

Another interesting thing in John's interludes are the initials of John's colleagues, in this excerpt specifically M–, A– and C–. If it was not for the dash, one could assume these are indeed simply initials and nothing more. However, the use of the dash after each initial disrupts the flow of the narrative and the readability, so unless the dash has a purpose, it

¹⁵¹ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 9.

¹⁵² Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 10–11.

would be better to omit it. Readers can deduce that these letters stand for Lyctors that have been introduced in the story, M for Mercymorn, A for Augustine, C for Cassiopeia, as they had previously been John's colleagues before the Resurrection. The dashes imply that their full names are censored. They had lived on Earth, they must have had common names, just like John, and only after the Resurrection John must have given them all new names that look strange, unique and fancy to readers. The fact that the pre-Resurrection names are censored is supported by the following excerpt, where Pyrrha mentions Gideon, her necromancer, and in addition to "Gideon" she also says "G–," signifying that it stands for something else than "Gideon."

"[...] You want Cyrus, Augustine, Cassiopeia... You want Gideon the First, and Gideon the First is dead. He's not coming back. Oh god, Gideon," said Pyrrha, suddenly. "Gideon... G–, you died for *nothing*."¹⁵³

Now returning to the two passages I provided above, Muir does not use quotation marks to mark the dialogue in the dream sequences chapters, although not always, as can be noticed in the second passage and will be addressed below. The reasons for the absence of quotation marks may be similar to a narrative strategy in *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy.¹⁵⁴ John is telling his story after he destroyed the Earth, and so society had collapsed, and the lack of quotation marks may signify the solemn tone of desolation. Moreover, there is only dialogue between two people, with John the speaker most of the time, so recognizing who speaks is clear even without quotation marks. Another possible interpretation is that since these chapters are parallel to Bible verses, which do not use quotation marks depending on the Bible, Muir chose to not use them for that reason to further create similarities with the Bible.

As mentioned above, there are instances where quotation marks are used, however. That can be noticed at the end of the second passage, as well as in the last interlude chapter, John 5:4, an excerpt from which is provided below.

She looked away from him, and she said: "I want to journey to find God. Maybe, at the end of that road, I will find God in you, Teacher... the God who became man and the man who became God. Or, perhaps, the child of the Nine Houses will recognise a different divine. But I am the Reverend Daughter – I am the Reverend Mother, the Reverend Father – I must find God, or some aspect of God, and understand it for myself... even if she lies, right now, within the Tomb."

¹⁵³ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 348–349.

¹⁵⁴ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

He stood. He was taller than she was. She was not afraid. He reached out a hand to her, and placed it upon her shoulder, and looked at her, wondering, with his ordinary face; if she had suspected his fear might manifest itself, yet again, as an act of murder, she could not see that in him now.

“God is a dream, Harrow,” he said very gently. “You all dream me together – and she’s dreaming me too. In a way, her dead dreams of God mean more than all your dreams put together, In this dream of yours, where will you seek out God? Where will you go?”

Harrow turned away from the hand, and crunched out, barefoot, over the wet sand – her feet slapped with each step – and she stood ankle-deep in the River, disbelieving.¹⁵⁵

Thanks to the last interlude chapter, it becomes much clearer why sometimes quotation marks are used and sometimes not. In this chapter, it is Harrow and John talking to each other, not Alecto. This is not Alecto’s memory she is experiencing anymore, and so God’s lines also use quotation marks, since he is speaking with Harrow and not with Alecto as a part of the memory. Thus, whenever there are not quotation marks in the interlude chapters, it signifies that Harrow says the lines of Alecto. Since it is known that Nona who is Alecto’s soul in Harrow’s body dreams of the pool scene and Gideon, while Harrow’s soul in Alecto’s body dreams of Alecto’s memories with John, it is likely they switched dreams. In the excerpt Harrow questions her worshipping God blindly after having learned what he has done and it is the start of her journey to heal and find something to believe in, which is something that might be expanded upon in *Alecto the Ninth*. Harrow’s dreams of Alecto’s memories take place in the River, a similar bubble to the fake Canaan House from book two, and after this conversation with God she starts walking towards a mysterious tower.

Last interesting thing worth mentioning about the dream sequences is John’s way of narrating direct speech, which is in italics, as illustrated in the example below. It is a good way to keep the text coherent given the lack of quotation marks.

He said, Eventually it was the nun who changed things. She knocked on my door and said very nicely, *John, how are you doing?* And I said, *Not great, honestly.* She said, *John, how close are you to finding the soul?*¹⁵⁶

John himself is another unreliable narrator, and not in the sense that he would lie about what had happened, but he does narrate the events in a way that paints him as the good one, the one who did the right thing, although it is clear that it was absolutely his own fault, and he is a horrible person. Nuking the Earth and destroying the entire solar system aside, as a

¹⁵⁵ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 391–392.

¹⁵⁶ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 361.

different example, in the excerpt below he tries to paint himself killing all law enforcers in a kilometre radius as an accident but then tells Harrow he never has accidents.

He said, I came to when P— started shaking me. Talk about police abuse. She asked what the fuck was I doing. She was angry, one of the only times I'd seen her angry, one of the only times I'd seen her scared. Because I'd stopped the hearts of all those guys, right, and I hadn't started them again. I said I forgot. She said you've never forgotten before. I said I swear to God, I didn't know what I was doing. A bunch of the guys were her old coworkers – guys she'd gone through training with in Porirua, beer buddies. I kept saying sorry, I'm sorry, I freaked out, it was an accident, I don't know what happened, when they opened fire I lost my head. I said I made a mistake. She let it go eventually because the others were telling her to lay off. Just said, *Guys as careful as you shouldn't have accidents.*

[...]

She said, "Did you ever find out what happened? With your accident?"

He turned to her and he smiled a funny little smile. It only used one half of his mouth. In the dream his new eyes did not show happiness or unhappiness.

And he said, "Come on, love. Guys as careful as me don't have accidents."¹⁵⁷

4.5 Nona as an unreliable narrator in *Nona the Ninth*

Interestingly in terms of narrative strategy, Nona is a protagonist who knows nothing; she has no memories, does not know who she is, does not really understand what is going on around her, and is not familiar with reappearing characters while the reader is. As is revealed later, Nona is the soul of Alecto, the soul of the Earth, in Harrowhark's body. Nona has the personality and intelligence of a child and focuses on rather irrelevant things that are not part of the main plot, like her group of friends at the school she works at or her life with Cam, Palamedes and Pyrrha. She mostly talks about loving people, her braids, her breakfast, and thus mostly gives information to the readers through dialogues, bedtime stories she gets told, or eavesdropping on Pyrrha and the others. Nona being happy, naïve and loving her surroundings despite the horrible circumstances all around her and the persisting threat of military violence is an important contrast.

"You'll join, Hot Sauce, won't you? Hot sauce will join."

"Join what?" said Nona, the ignorant one.

Which made the others do their usual chorus of –

"Nona doesn't know."

"Nona doesn't know *anything*."

¹⁵⁷ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 283–284.

“Tell Nona.”

And Honesty, who had been very nice since the cigarette arrangement, said: “When we leave school, we’re going to kill zombies, we’re gonna kill necromancers.”

“You shouldn’t say the *word*,” said Nona, forgetting in a panic that that was a Nona rule, not a school rule.

All Honesty did was drum his heels on the floor next to the wheelie chair that the stuffing was coming out of and exclaim: “Who cares? I’m not scared. This isn’t class, I can say what I want.”

Born in the Morning said with an air of old rehearsal, “I threw a rock at a necromancer and it died,” and Kevin crowed, “No, you didn’t! No, you didn’t!” and Beautiful Ruby said, “That’s such a bullshit story you tell,” and Honesty, easily and hypocritically, said, “You are *such* a liar, my man.”

Born in the Morning protested, “I *did* throw a rock and it *did* die,” and Nona said, “What, the rock?” at which the others paused in order to jeer at her. Then Beautiful Ruby explained that the rock had been thrown at one of the cages and the necromancer had been almost all the way on fire, and the question of whether or not the rock had even hit the necromancer or the bars was still a live one, but the rock could have helped. A rock hits you in the head you’re going to die, aren’t you.¹⁵⁸

This excerpt, where Nona spends time with her friends, children from school, shows the contrast of childlike behaviour and the terrible circumstances happening on the planet. The children are so desensitized to murder and executions, even conditioned to think of necromancers as something lesser than human beings, that they casually bring this topic up in their conversations. They were led to believe that killing necromancers is “cool” and something respectable, as necromancers are deemed dangerous enemies. The excerpt also illustrates the style in which *Nona the Ninth* is written; simple sentences that mirror the childlike nature of Nona.

Nona is a narrator who is not familiar with recurring characters, but the reader is. Many such characters use aliases or different names and are reintroduced through Nona’s descriptions or context clues, which make the reader realize who the character is, such as this description of Ianthe:

Seated at the desk, looking mildly annoyed but perhaps like that was their normal expression, a person came into focus.

Nona was charmed immediately by the clothing. The other boots and the other shirts and the other legs had looked dirty and shabby, from what she’d briefly seen, but not this person. *Their* coat was so spotlessly white that on the screen it looked blue; so was their neckerchief. The camera jumped a lot closer, focusing on this figure from the waist up now, and Nona could see that the neckerchief had a pretty gold pin sparkling in the folds. The person themselves was frighteningly pale of skin,

¹⁵⁸ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 40–41.

and their hair alarmingly perfect in shape and form. Nona had never seen hair like that before. It was as though it had been sculpted, not grown. It was a rich middling brown, thick and shiny even beneath the strong lights that had been aimed at it. Most people under such lights would have shown at least a little scalp. The expression was one of intense boredom; their body language betrayed more interest. And their lips were a little too pale to be lips, but shiny like the hair, as though someone had applied gloss.¹⁵⁹

Nona also understands all languages, and is particularly good at reading body language, which is because she is Alecto, the soul of the Earth. It is likely she innately understands because humans came from her, even if she does not realize the logic behind languages. This fact provides readers with additional information that other characters do not perceive:

Kiriona turned her body to look at them. Nona couldn't quite believe that they couldn't all see it; but they weren't watching, goggle-eyed, they hadn't even seemed to notice. It was in Kiriona's every movement – the bright, swift flexions of her arms, and the way she swung her legs, big and brash, and the weirdly easy, light grace with which she moved her dead body.

Nona had never seen anyone so sad in her whole short life. It made her nearly afraid to die.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 184.

¹⁶⁰ Muir, *Nona the Ninth*, 333–334.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to analyse the narrative perspective in *The Locked Tomb* series in order to determine and illustrate how second-person narratives and unreliable narrators contribute to the ambiguity and thematic depth of the story and psychological complexity of the characters, as well as how that influences the reader and shapes the reader's experience. A part of the objective was also to explore known features of second-person narration and its impact on the reader.

As mentioned, second-person narration also creates ambiguity in the way that it is not clear how to cite such works. If quotation marks are used, the text may seem like a dialogue, when it actually is not.

The analysis also examined the different protagonists as unreliable narrators: Gideon, who has a very characteristic voice, and is unreliable due to her biases and ignorance of the events around her; Harrowhark, who has been ridden with immense guilt, grief and self-hatred her whole life and whose brain damage and schizophrenia define her unreliability; and the amnesiac Nona, who is essentially a child with an entirely different worldview, focusing on happy things that do not develop the plot.

In *Harrow the Ninth*, second-person narration is combined with unreliable narration. The second-person narration inherently disorients the reader and provides an immersive experience, also due to the use of the direct address pronoun "you," while the combination with an unreliable narrator contributes to increasing the disorientation. The reader is not only taken aback by second-person, which is for the most part rather unfamiliar, but also needs to face uncertain facts presented by a narrator that may not be trusted. Thus, the unreliable narrator becomes a tool for second-person narration which adds to the ambiguity of the text and to the potential confusion of an inattentive reader. Second-person narration encourages the reader to actively create meaning, empowering the reader to participate more fully in the narrative.

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