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Transmission through pronominal displacement in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Tomorrow is too Far" (2009)

Sandrine Sorlin

Introduction

- 1 "Tomorrow is too far" is one of the two short stories written in the second person in Adichie's collection of short stories entitled *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The other story with the eponymous title "The Thing Around Your Neck" relates the story of Akunna, a young Nigerian woman who has won the American visa lottery and emigrated to the States. I have shown elsewhere (Sorlin 2022), that the use of *you* referring specifically to Akunna in this story was a compelling way to have the reader align with this *you* through the 'effect of address' it generates. In comparison with the other two traditional pronouns, *you* has also a coercive effect in "The Thing Around Your Neck" in that it makes it impossible for the reader to escape the *you* perspective. Like a rope around their necks, the second-person pronoun forces readers to put their heads inside the loop and have a feel of what it is like to feel invisible in an unfamiliar country, inviting the (white Western) reader to have a look at western norms and habits from outside.
- 2 In "Tomorrow is too far" that will be the topic of this article, the scene does not take place in the United States but in Nigeria where the protagonist, also referred to as *you*, spends her summers with her cousin Nozie who lives there. She is unnamed throughout the story unlike her brother, named Nonso, who is the preferred son of the family, and who dies one of those summers because of something she did. Usually in self-addressed trauma narratives, the second person is used to distance the narrators-protagonists from their own pain. In "Tomorrow Is Too Far", I will show that the second-person

pronoun has the effect of preventing readers from easy moral condemnation of the character while communicating a sense of why she was brought to this tragic outcome. There is an indirectness in the transmission of the circumstances of the death itself – the secret is very progressively revealed – but also in the way it is brought to the reader. My contention is that the second-person pronoun, along with other linguistic and stylistic devices, contributes to this filtering both of emotions and guilt/reproach in a way that is unique to this pronoun.

- 3 I will first highlight the linguistic environment of the pronoun, in terms of processes that it collocates with, paying particular attention to the indirectness of reported speech. Second I will further delve into this pronominal indirectness by offering a comparison with the first and third-person pronouns before showing to what extent *you* destabilises traditional places and relations in the author-narrator-character-reader channel. The last part will focus on the effects of *you* in a story that keeps displacing feelings, time, or revelation, and prevents the traumatic event that has been repressed for 18 years from finding a soothing resolution. *You* performs the character's hatred of the preferred brother rather than describes it or verbalizes it, indirectly bringing the reader to another level of comprehension.

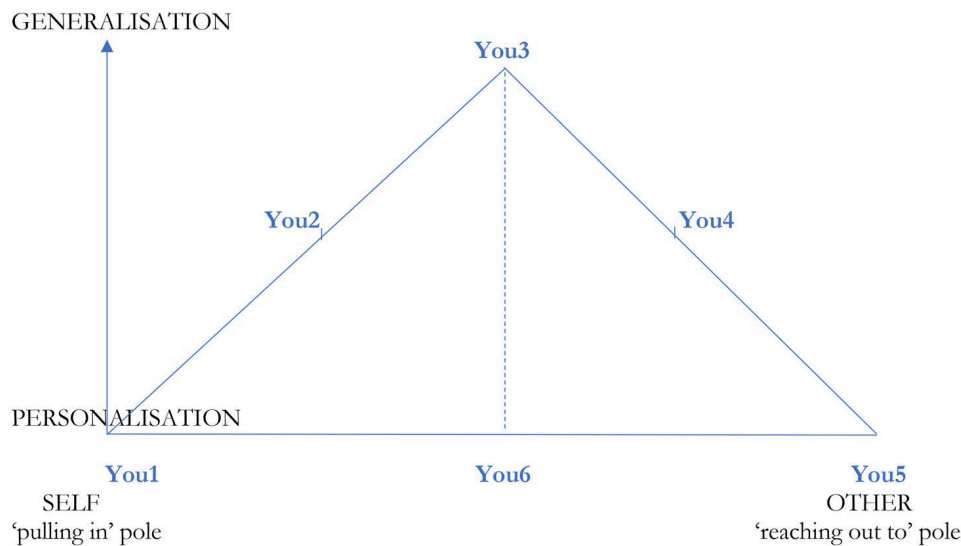
A literature-specific *you*

An undecidable situation of enunciation

- 4 The pragma-linguistic model of *you* references I designed (Sorlin 2022) is based on Kluge's analyses of the second-person singular in a Spanish and French corpus. Kluge maps out five potential kinds of *you* with specific references that can be used in face-to-face interactions in English:
 - You1: 'you meaning I,'
 - You2: 'you meaning I as representative of a larger entity,'
 - You3: 'anyone,'
 - You4: 'you in front of me as representative of a larger entity,' and
 - You5: 'you meaning the person in front of me.' (From Kluge 2016, 504)
- 5 I have adapted these five types to written communication. If the person saying 'you meaning I' can be a narrator/protagonist in fiction, You 5 cannot be the reader as the latter can hardly be said to be 'the person in front of me'. In a narrative, You5 becomes a narratee (as in the epistolary mode for instance). The authorial audience¹ can be directly addressed of course in a text. I consider direct addresses to the reader as part of the You4 category that refers to *you* the reader as part of a larger 'entity' of readers that the author may have an idea of. As shown in Figure 1, I have also added a vertical axis to Kluge's continuum in order to register the potential (in)definiteness of the pronoun, as *you* can foster (sometimes ambiguously) definite or indefinite readings. The second person in the form of You3, meaning anyone, is the most absolute in its indefiniteness (see Hyman 2004), and the furthest away, from both a definite Self or Other.
- 6 Lastly, to Kluge's five referential points, a sixth one must be added that can be said to be specific to 'you narratives'². You6 indeed accounts for the existence of a you-protagonist in the diegesis. As Figure 1 shows, it is vertically aligned with You3 and sits

on the personalization bottom line, which means that it falls right in the middle, in between the Self and the Other poles.

Fig. 1. The six points of reference in 'you narratives'



- 7 Just as fully generic You3 includes both Self and Other or neither of them, You6 is a more nuanced category in between You1 (where you really means *I* in a self-referential/autodiegetic use) and You5 (by which a narrator addresses the protagonist-narratee, speaking to her, so to speak), sometimes oscillating between the two. In this precarious balance between the two poles, You6 both fuses or transcends the referential and address functions of the second-person pronoun. With You6, the protagonist seems both talked about and talked to, without being an addressee in the strict sense of the term.
- 8 In Adichie's short story, *you* is characteristically of a You6 type. Although no precise linguistic cues can make us clearly establish the channel of communication between a narrator and the protagonist – there is no imperative, no apostrophes, no linguistic markers of address – there is however what I call an 'effect of address' performed by *you*. Although You6 mutes both poles (the self-referring one and the other-addressed pole), an indirect form of communication is created in the internal dialogue the 'you narration' creates. In "Tomorrow Is Too Far", the female character could be addressing her divided self with the second person (a You1 form) but the pronoun's effect of detachment creates the illusion of a situation of communication. I would in fact contend that Adichie's short story is inconclusive as to the narratorial framework it constructs. As Herman (2002, 350) puts it, the referential function of *you* and the function of address are often blended as *you* "resists being assigned an exact or determinate position". We will further analyse the aim of this purposeful ambiguity that assigns the reader a specific position. But first I will show that the impression that *you* creates an illusion of a communicative channel in this short story is due to the linguistic environment of the pronoun. The way the feelings and reactions of the character are related emphasizes the hold of the narrator as the protagonist seems to disown her *I* position.

You's linguistic environment in "Tomorrow is Too Far"

- 9 Were the second-person pronoun a self-addressed pronoun (meaning *I*), we could have expected a more fully-fledged rendering of the protagonist's feelings, for by definition she has an intimate knowledge of them. When *you* is the subject of a sentence, for about one third of the 132 processes spotted in the short story, it collocates with processes of doing – that is material processes³ along with a subcategory referring to physical or psychological behaviour. As shown in Table 1, processes of being (or relational processes) are the least represented with only 21 tokens. The category the most represented pertains to the processes of sensing that make up more than half of the total processes in the text. Processes of sensing comprise verbs of cognition/perception and expression of feelings but they also encompass a subcategory gathering processes of saying (verbal processes). Table 1 gives a precise picture of the type of process that *you* mostly appear with, as the subject of these processes.

Table 1: raw and relative frequencies of types of processes collocating with *you* as subject

	Sub-categories	Raw tokens	Relative frequencies
Processes of doing	Material processes	37	28,03%
	Behavioural processes	3	2,27%
Processes of sensing	Mental processes	46	34,85%
	Verbal processes	25	18,94%
Processes of being		21	15,91%
Total number		132	100%

- 10 One could infer from Table 1 that the character's emotions and cognitive processes are abundantly described in "Tomorrow is too far". However, on closer analysis, the objects of the verbs of perception taking the character as deictic center do not deliver subjective feelings or intimate reflections: they tend to be simple registration of perceptions or events. Indeed, the verbs of perception (smell, see/stare/look, hear) and cognition (think, remember, understand, imagine) or feeling (feel, want, wish, need, like, hate) pervade the text, installing the reader in the deictic centre of the protagonist, and yet the factuality of the remembrance and objects of perception seem to record objective data. Here are a few examples with perception verbs:
- (1) You smell the citrus on [Nozie] (197)
 - (2) You stared at his face for a long time (191)
 - (3) You hear fruit fall from a tree nearby (196)
 - (4) You heard her shouting on the phone (194)
 - (5) You saw the blueness of everything⁴ (196)
- 11 Verbs of cognition and imagination do not seem to bring us very far into the character's reactions and state of mind as well. Memories of the summer of Nonso's death return under the form of bodily sensations:

(6) You remember eating the avocados (192)

(7) You remember the heat of the summer clearly even now (187)

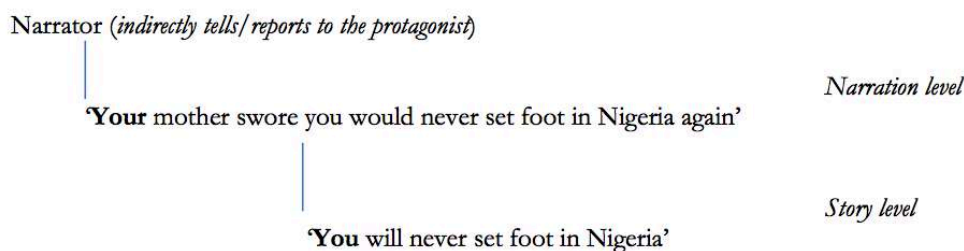
- 12 After Nonso's death, the reaction of the little girl is that of sideration: "You don't remember now how long you stayed looking at Nonso before you went in to call Grandmama" (196). Likewise, eighteen years later, meeting Nozie at the airport, nothing is said about the feelings brought about by the staring into Nozie's face: "At the airport, he had hugged you cautiously, said welcome and what a surprise that you came back, and you stared at his face for a long time in the busy, shuffling lounge until he looked away, his eyes brown and sad like those of your friend's poodle" (191). Nothing has been shared between the cousins about the tragedy of Nonso's death surrounded by complete silence for 18 years: "You never knew what was beneath his quiet smile" (192).
- 13 Nonso's death has indeed been repressed and the truth about the circumstances of his death kept a secret. The relative low frequency of relational processes is congruent with the muted emotional reactions. The character registers what she (bodily) feels, remembers, or sees/hears/smells but does not go as far as describing states or reactions in an attributive mode – of the type 'you were scared, dumbfounded, regretful' or 'you felt jealous, guilty, etc' for instance. The only emotion mentioned in the relative neutrality of the narration is the word 'hate' that stands out but it is also communicated through bodily effects rather than conceptualized justification: "Your hate for your brother grew so much you felt it squeezing your nostrils" (188).
- 14 Transmission is never direct in "Tomorrow is Too Far".

Address-within-address: a stifling framework

- 15 In indirect speech, the second-person pronoun has a unique feature: the person is not backshifted as is usually the case in reported speech. Take the sentence, I told her: "you shouldn't complain" which, in indirect speech, would trigger a deictic transfer from *you* to *she* in order to make *you* co-referential with the person addressed and referred to: I told **her** that **she** shouldn't complain. No such thing occurs with the second person in indirect speech as in the following instance from the beginning of the short story:
- (8) [It was ... the summer before] your mother swore **you would never again set foot in Nigeria** (187, bold added)
- 16 In (8) the direct speech featuring *you* as personal pronoun "you will never again set foot in Nigeria" is maintained in the *you* narration, transferred as it is from a pronoun of address in the original interaction to its referential use in the narration. In this transfer, the voice of the original speech is rendered both more vivid and more subdued as it only gives the illusion of direct speech.
- 17 Likewise in (9), the directness of the original dialogue seems to come across more forcefully with the maintenance of the same pronoun,
- (9) Grandmama always clucked and said **you did not know what was good** when you said the unsalted avocado nauseated you. (192, my emphasis)
- 18 We can almost hear Grandma's direct admonition "you don't know what is good" in response to the character's preference for salty avocados. However the exchange is indirectly rendered and rather than giving us a feel of the original speech it further illustrates the stifling of the girl's voice and the subjection she undergoes.

- 19 To the 25 verbal processes mentioned in Table 1 must be added the 12 tokens when you is the object of a verbal process (as in 'talked to you', 'told you') which brings the total number of processes introducing reported speech to 37 (28%). In the general communicative framework of the short story 'addressed' to the protagonist, indirect discourse forms another embedded layer. In (8) for instance, "your mother swore you would never again set foot in Nigeria to see your father's family, especially Grandmama", there are two levels of address, one at the level of the character-character exchange (you would never again set foot in Nigeria), and another, on the narration level, between the narrator and the protagonist-recipient of the narrative ('your mother swore'). Figure 2 captures the embeddedness of reported speech to the protagonist.

Figure 2: double reporting in "Tomorrow is Too Far"



- 20 The narrator addresses the protagonist with "your mother told you/swore" in an indirect way as the character is never clearly assigned an addressee position (and there is no interaction possible). But the narrator also reports the words of the mother to the protagonist. This double-level of (indirect) reports further stifles the voice of the female character and emphasizes her 'object' position. Direct address is thus doubly muffled by a double layer of reporting. In both layers, the address and referential functions of the pronoun obtain. In the general framework of the narrative, you is and is not the addressee. In the indirect speech, the original you of interaction "you will never set foot..." is made co-referential to the you protagonist of the narration and is thus translated into a referential you (while preserving something of its deictic function of address). For reasons that will now need to be explained, transmission and interaction are both enabled and hampered through you.

Communicative Indirectness

How does you differ from I and she?

- 21 A comparison with the first and third-person pronouns will give a sense of the specificity of the participant framework designed by you. Pronouns are responsible for negotiating distance in narratives. As Genette made it clear, if a protagonist says I, it unambiguously creates or imposes a homodiegetic relation whereby the protagonist is inescapably also the narrator (Genette 1990, 106). The protagonist saying I presents their narration as if they owned it so to speak, the pronoun implying some ownership or authority over the experience. In "Tomorrow is Too Far", the protagonist relinquishes the position of full, immediate owner of her narrative, by refusing to inhabit the I position for reasons I'll expose in the last section. In this you short story,

the ownership of the story seems to be in the hand of an implicit *I* presence, but the very nature of the second-person pronoun and its original “strong interpersonal base” (Wales 1996, 95) imposes a situation of elocution that places a speaker and a co-speaker in a situation of (virtual) interaction, thus creating both an intimacy and a small distance between the two entities that we don't find in third-person narratives. In a third-person narrative, the narrator can enter the character's mind through internal focalisation. Indeed in a third-person narrative where the conscience of a third-person character is explored – especially in ‘consonant’ psycho-narration⁵ as described by Cohn (1978, 26) – the narratorial voice staging the character's conscience merges with the character to such an extent that the third-person narratorial voice can be said to fade away. Such total immersion in the thoughts of a character is rendered impossible by the use of a second-person pronoun that always inevitably maintains some kind of dissociation between narrator and protagonist. This does not mean that the narrator cannot be privy to the character's thoughts and feelings, on the contrary the same form of interiority can be observed in such utterances as “you still wonder how those words tumbled out of your mouth” (193), but it means that there is no possible fading away of the narratorial voice. In fact while favouring the reader's immersion in an intimate interpersonal interaction, *you* also negotiates some distance which, in “Tomorrow Is Too Far”, is accentuated by the cold-record-of-factness noted in the previous section.

- 22 What *you* makes uniquely possible is to paradoxically render the interiority of the protagonist's conscience from its exteriority, as if the narrator were simultaneously in and out of this conscience. Transferred to *I*, the short story would give the artificial feeling that the character does not know much or refuses to deliver more about how she reacted to the death of her brother. The second person makes this acceptable and is part of an authorial strategy that I'll further develop in the last section.
- 23 *You* has a dramatization power (Lejeune 1980, 37) as it stages the illusion of someone telling the protagonist what she experiences, producing a form of re-telling/re-enacting effect that positions both narrator and reader in unusual places.

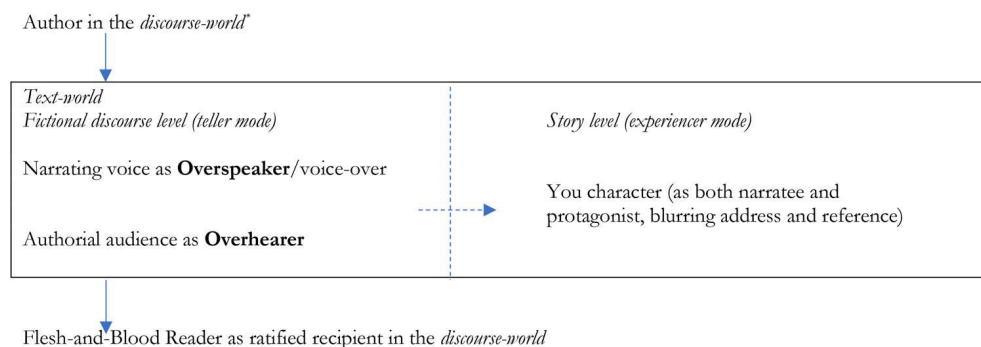
An ‘overspeaker’/overhearer relationship

- 24 *You*-narratives destabilise traditional narratorial positioning. The first works by specialists of ‘*you* narratives’ until the most recent ones have shown that the traditional labels had to be adapted (see Sorlin 2022 for an overview) as what is needed is a switch from ‘who speaks’ to ‘who listens’ (DelConte 2003, 205). For Fludernik (1994, 457), the conventional distance between the reader and the textual world is flouted as second-person texts tend to “break the frame of narration [...] and violate the boundaries of narrative levels [...] but they additionally foreground the processual and creative nature of story telling”. In doing so, *you* can ambiguously refer to an intradiegetic entity but also an outside one – the reader for instance – which brings Herman to speak in these cases of a ‘doubly deictic’ *you*, where there is a superimposition of references, “one internal to the storyworld” and “the other(s) external to that storyworld” (Herman 2002, 342). A doubly deictic *you* seems to be working equally and simultaneously on different spatio-temporal frames (inside and outside the text).
- 25 The traditional places usually assigned to the narrator, the character and even the reader are reshuffled through *you* in “Tomorrow is too far”. Surprisingly, there is no

doubly deictic *you* or even generic *you* (You3) that would raise the narrative to a higher level of perspectivation which could include *any* reader. The second-person pronoun brings readers to join the narrating voice in its re-experiencing of the protagonist's traumatic event with her. Indeed they are invited to align themselves with the narratorial perspective in the (pseudo) address to the protagonist. It brings the readers closer to *you* whose perspective they adopt, while remaining at the narratorial distance set up by the narrator.

- 26 In "Tomorrow is Too Far", the narrator is not a traditional narrator but some kind of 'overspeaker'. This position must not be mistaken for that of the omniscient narrator. It is closer, in cinematic terms, to a "voice-over" narrator (Iliopoulou 2019, 79). An omniscient narrator would be situated "one level above a narrative's character" or in a "buffer" zone between the world of readers and the world of the characters (James 2022, 151) whilst the overspeaker, in its metaleptic (pseudo) address to the character, must be situated on the same (horizontal) level as the protagonist, as Figure 3 illustrates.

Figure 3. The participation framework in "Tomorrow is Too Far"



*. The discourse world corresponds to the 'real world' in which participants are in an (oral or written) communicative mode whereas the text-world corresponds to the world as constructed by the text. Textual worlds are the mental representations readers construct from the text they read (Gavins 2007, 9).

- 27 At the level of the discourse-world, the flesh-and-blood reader is the ratified recipient of Adichie's short story. But the text assigns the reader the specific position of the unaddressed overhearer in Goffman terms⁶, as the *you* interaction primarily concerns the narrator and the character. In the narratorial structure of the short story, at the fictional discourse level, the overhearers are invited to align with the unknown ghostly overspeaking voice's perspective, joining it in its intimate (re)enacting of the character's acts and feelings on her behalf. The overhearer/speaker and the character do not occupy the same diegetic space since the interaction is only illusory but cannot be separated completely from it altogether as *you* violates boundaries between discourse and story levels, hence the use of the dotted lines on Figure 3.

Transmission through metaleptic displacement

Pragmatic markers of exclusion and invisibilisation

- 28 It is my contention that Adichie's deliberate choice of the *you* pronoun de-centering the protagonist's experience is meant to both reflect and produce other forms of

displacement. This short story is about the denial for 18 years of a traumatic event the protagonist had not spoken and could not speak to anyone about. Her mother had severed all contact with her native land: "Year after year as she moved you from state to state, lighting red candles in her bedroom, banning all talk of Nigeria or of Grandmama, refusing to let you see your father" (196). As in any trauma narrative, the revelation of trauma is postponed. The repetition "it was the summer" (five times) attests to the difficulty of naming and confessing to the traumatic event. Trauma itself is characteristically grasped around but never totally identified as something of the past, as a circumvented memory (see Ganteau & Onega 2018, Ganteau 2017). Nonso's death resurfaces with another death, which is also typical of traumatic events that arise under new displaced forms: Nozie calls her for the first time in 18 years to tell her about the death of her grandmother, which brings her back to Nigeria for the first time since Nonso's death.

- 29 The narration of the traumatic event takes the form of what Laplanche (89) calls "spiral-time" rather than chronological order. We keep being brought back to that summer via indirect routes, the grandmother's funeral being one of them as it then leads back to Nonso's own funeral bringing us then back to Nonso's death where the character eventually confesses. The circumstances of the death are at last described: At the top of the tree she challenges Nonso to climb, she pretends to see a deadly snake next to where he was, called *echi eteka* meaning "Tomorrow is Too Far", which scares him off the tree and brings him to a lethal fall on the ground. Until then, the one to blame for the tragic event has been muted. Even the revelation of the death itself has been delayed in the narrative. The first mention comes in two words in a matter-of-fact way that contrasts with the deflagration that precedes it:

(10) It was the summer you watched a mango tree crack into two near-perfect halves during a thunderstorm, when the lightning cut fiery lines through the sky. It was the summer Nonso died. (188-189)

- 30 The second mention (11) presents the death as an event of equal importance with the weather, under the form of a headline with zero article, camouflaging it as if it were a non-event, while laying prominent emphasis on the word 'death' in its end-focus position.

(11) The day Nonso died was mild; there was **drizzle in the morning, lukewarm sun in the afternoon, and, in the evening, Nonso's death.** (189, my emphasis)

- 31 In fact, if the circumstances of the death are delayed, what is presented instead through metalepsis are the reasons that led to the event. Metalepsis, Marcellin (2022, 24, 48, 84) shows, is one structural modality of trauma narratives, a narratorial equivalent of *nachträglichkeit*: The traumatic event is expressed by/through what precedes it or what follows it. Although the protagonist's feelings are never explicitly described, they are communicated through what I would call pragmatic markers of injustice and invisibilisation. They can take the form of the adverb 'only' used seven times in the short story, as a marker of exclusion singling out Nonso as the only son that matters to the detriment to all those who live around him:

(12) In the afternoons, yellow-bellied bees buzzed around your head and your brother Nonso's and cousin Doxie's heads and in the evenings Grandmama let **only** your brother Nonso climb the trees to shake a loaded branch, although you were a better climber than he was. Fruits would rain down, avocados and cashews and guavas, and you and your cousin Dozie would fill old buckets with them. (187)

- 32 Nonso only is granted agency while the others pick up the fruit he alone can 'get'. The focus on Nonso as the only worthy son is reflected grammatically in (13), through the end placement emphasizing his privileged status:

(13) Grandmama cracked the coconuts against a stone, carefully, so the watery milk stayed in the lower piece, a jagged cup. Everybody got a sip of the wind-cooled milk, even the children from down the street who came to play, and Grandmama presided over the sipping ritual **to make sure Nonso went first**. (188, my emphasis)

- 33 The hierarchy is clearly spelt out through the same use of the adverb 'only' as a marker of inclusion or exclusion in (14):

(14) It was the summer you asked Grandmama why Nonso sipped first even though Dozie was thirteen, a year older than Nonso, and Grandmama said Nonso was her son's **only** son, the one who would carry on the Nnabuisi name, while Dosie was **only** a *nwadiana*, her daughter's son. (188)

- 34 Another marker of invisibilisation is used in the short story. It takes the shape of the comparative subordinator 'as though' that in this context powerfully renders the character's invisibility and unimportance, as in (15) that comes as a reaction to her mother's telling her about her divorce with her father. Interestingly the use of this marker is combined with that of 'only':

(15) Maybe it was because of the way she said the divorce was not about Nonso – **as though** Nonso was the **only** one capable of being a reason, **as though** you were not in the running. (193-194, my emphasis)

- 35 In the middle of the description of Nonso's climbing the tree to his death in (16) is inserted a comment on the feeding of the preferred son, which has an impact on his ability to climb nimbly. The same 'as though' subordinator is used:

(16) The branches were weak, and Nonso was heavier than you. Heavy from all the food Grandmama made him eat. Eat a little more, she would say often. Who do you think I made it for? **As though** you were not there. (195)

- 36 'As though' is a marker of invisibilisation for it says that the victim has always already been excluded from taking a part in the conversation and even in the world. The comparison in (16) between the brother and sister ("heavier than you") is what is rendered impossible by the family idealizing the son to the point of placing him above all comparison possible. Extract (17) is evidence of the character's interiorized shortcomings in contrast with the prodigious son. Had she been offered anything that belonged to her brother after his death, she would have refused to keep anything as they would have reminded her of her implied inferiority:

(17) You did not want to have any of his books with his handwriting that your mother said was **neater than typewritten sentences**. You did not want his photographs of pigeons in the park that your father said showed **so much promise for a child**. (193)

- 37 Even the possibility of comparison is denied the protagonist, as powerfully rendered by the juxtaposition of sentences in (18), the second sentence expressing by contrast the force of gender habits:

(18) The coconut trees were hard to climb, so limb-free and tall, and Grandmama gave Nonso a long stick and showed him how to nudge the padded pods down. She didn't show you, because she said girls never plucked coconuts. (187-188)

- 38 The adverb 'never' performs a similar comparison through objective facts, leaving it to the reader to infer the painfulness of the unequal treatment in (19). The laugh with

which the mother 'always' came out of Nonso's bedroom after saying good night is denied to the girl.

(19) She never left your room with that laugh.

- 39 Grandmama even refuses to acknowledge the girl's specific tastes, the only standard being the preferences of the son. The constant belittling by the grandmother is rendered through a negative verb in (20), which expresses the harshness of the annihilation of her own food preferences relegated as mere ignorance:

(20) You remember eating the avocados; you liked yours with salt and Nonso didn't like his with salt and Grandmama always **clucked** and said you did not know what was good when you said the unsalted avocado nauseated you. (192, bold added)

- 40 This exclusive attitude towards the son leads the sister to do the irredeemable. She comes to the realization at the age of 10 that the space in which she could pretend to have an existence is suffocating:

(21) That summer, eighteen years ago, was the summer of your first self-realization. The summer you knew that something had to happen to Nonso, **so that you could survive**. (195, my emphasis)

- 41 Significantly, it is revealed she had no premeditated intention to kill him; what she wanted was to make him fall literally and figuratively from the idealized pedestal position of absolute power everyone placed him on, to put him back into a competition, where it could be possible to co-exist and even be compared with him. The use of the comparative of inferiority in (22) is telling of the need to have him share rather than take up all the space:

(22) The idea of scaring Nonso with the *echi eteka* was yours alone. But you explained it to Dozie, that you both needed Nonso to get hurt – maybe maim him, maybe twist his legs. You wanted to mar the perfection of his little body, to make him **less lovable, less able to do** all that he did. **Less able to take up your space**. (195, my emphasis)

- 42 As the last subsection will evidence, the metaleptic narration of the traumatic event through what led to it works to refrain the reader from quick moral condemnation and, through the *you* effect, brings the reader to another level of comprehension.

Effects of the pronominal displacement

- 43 As part of the pronoun's potential effects, *you* tends to "mute possible melodrama" through the "slight sense of detachment" it triggers while mirroring "the sense of shock" (Burroway 2011, 304). As seen in the first part, the disaffected narratorial voice filters the events by avoiding any melodrama but transmits the sense of shock, mirroring the character's stupefaction after the fall. But this restraint of emotional reactions through the *you* objective filter also serves to alleviate guilt and thus protect the character. The question that remains is: what is the purpose of such pronominal filtering?

- 44 In many a 'you narrative', starting from one of the very first instances, with Michel Butor's *La Modification*⁷ as emblematic of the genre, the narrator serves as a sort of super-ego talking to the characters and questioning their conscience, positioning the readers as arbiters of their faults (see also Wong 2021 on 'you narratives' and the expression of shame). In "Tomorrow is Too Far", no such soul-searching takes place. The narrator vouches for what is said without ever condemning the character. Adichie

strategically exploits some of the potential effects of the second-person pronoun, that of diluting responsibility for the act performed as the pronoun tends to put the topic at a safe distance (for character and reader alike) while eliciting the readers' empathy by pulling them into the narrative. As O'Connor (1994) shows in her analysis of prisoners' accounts of their stabbing others or being the victims of stabbing, the use of *you* can be a way to get oneself off the hook⁸. Working on a very different corpus⁹, Stirling and Manderson (2011: 1600) come to the same conclusion: The second-person pronoun can be used to avoid a more direct confession by somehow "diffusing responsibility for accountability"¹⁰.

- 45 Likewise, the use of *you* emphasizes the female character's real qualities while filtering the possible impression of immodesty an *I* narrative would convey. The boasting effect is indeed toned down via the indirectness of *you* in (23):

(23) It was easy to get him to; you only had to remind him that you were the better climber. **And you really were the better climber**, you could scale a tree, any tree, in seconds – you were better at the things that did not need to be taught, the things that Grandmama could not teach him. (195)

Grandmama let only your brother Nonso climb the trees to shake a loaded branch, although **you were a better climber** than he was. (187, my emphases)

- 46 In fact, Adichie uses the indirection of 'you narratives' for another purpose than blame or atonement. It is a way for her to convey an oblique message: "Tomorrow is Too Far" shows the reader what oppression and denial of space can lead to. The short story ends on pain and on a stalemate, the boy's death only bringing about more silence and paralysis. Through the neutrality of *you*'s disaffected voice, the sense of oppression and its inevitable aftermath is even more powerfully expressed. Stifling of voices leads to more stifling and more pain in a still unresolved manner.
- 47 In a paradoxical way that only the second-person pronoun can bring into existence, through an eminently singular *you* that is never generic, the *you* narrative fosters feelings of injustice that are bound to universally resonate in the reader while reading. For, although not being addressed at all, the reader is the indirect recipient of the constant nagging at the character "as though you were not there". The flesh-and-blood reader is the ultimate arbiter of these unfair forces of patriarchal oppression that can suffocate people to the point of making them commit the worst for their own survival. The *you* perspective does not allow us to easily judge the author of the accidental death of her brother because it is telling us a displaced truth that the reader is brought to read in an oblique way.

Conclusion

- 48 Transmission is thus indirect in Adichie's short story as direct communication is impossible from beginning to end. Indirect reporting characterizes most character-to-character interactions and the object of the short story is transmitted to the reader through oblique means. The disaffected voice-over owning the narration reflects the impossibility for the character to have her own voice and forcefully transmits the oppression undergone by the unnamed character whose space is totally taken up by a preferred brother. The death of the brother she brought about does not signify the end of oppression. Quite the reverse, it can only be silenced in a context where expression is not allowed and it continues to gnaw at the character in the silence of the narration,

with the reader as the ultimate arbiter of the pain. The emotionless narrative mitigates possible condemnation from the reader while powerfully expressing the destructive force of denial, the repression of the female character's communicative space leading to her own repressing of her act. Through the indirectness of the *you* effect, a more collective meaning is transmitted: the choice of *you* in "Tomorrow is Too Far" is meant neither to clear the female character's name (she is not even given any) nor to search her guilty conscience. It makes it possible to resituate Nonso's death in a broader political and ideological context, positioning the reader as a witness to the tragic outcome of oppression.

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NOTES

1. I'm using Phelan's term and definition of 'authorial audience': "The authorial audience is neither wholly hypothetical nor wholly actual, but instead a hybrid of readers an author knows or knows about – or at least an interpretation of such readers – and an audience the author imagines". (Phelan 2017, 7)
2. A 'you narrative' is defined by Fludernik (1993, 217) as "fiction that employs a pronoun of address in reference to a fictional protagonist".
3. I'm using Halliday (1985)'s classification here, knowing that it is a workable simplification of the processual complexity. All the processes have been first sorted out with the help of the AntConc toolkit concordancing and text analysis.
4. In (6) the objectivity of perception must be qualified as it is rendered through the protagonist's interpretative filter.
5. Consonant psycho-narration is to be opposed to dissonant psycho-narration. In the first one the narrator comes very close to the characters while the latter remains remote from them: "In psychological novels, where a fictional consciousness holds center stage, there is considerable variation in the manner of narrating this consciousness. These variations range between two principal types: one is dominated by a prominent narrator who, even as he focuses intently on an individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates; the other

is mediated by a narrator who remains effaced and who readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates." (Cohn 1978, 26).

6. For Goffman (1981), an audience may consist of 'hearers', that is, ratified recipients (that may be addressed or remain unaddressed) and unrated overhearers that are not participating in the interaction.

7. In Butor's text, the internal conflict of a man on his way to his mistress is dramatized through the *vous* address that allows for an examination of his shameful conscience as he deliberates over the possible abandoning of wife and children.

8. She analyses such instances as "You're killing someone in order to live respectably in prison" (O'Connor 1994, 53). But in this instance, the effect is produced by the use of a more generic *you*.

9. Their corpus is based on interviews with women who had undergone mastectomies after a diagnosis of breast cancer.

10. Similarly *you* has this filtering role in other 'you narratives' like *This Mournable Body* by Tsitsi Dangaremba whose faults are filtered by *you* and thus made more acceptable. Although it does not necessarily endear us to the character, the small distance created by the *you* framework makes it easier for the reader to play along with her shortcomings.

ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story, "Tomorrow is Too Far", one of the two short stories written in the second person in her 2009 *The Thing Around Your Neck* collection. It aims at showing to what extent the referential and address functions of *you* in this story are blended in a way very specific to Adichie's writing, as compared with other narratological and stylistic configurations designed by *you*-narratives that I have studied elsewhere (Sorlin 2022). I will explore the purposes of its use in this trauma story, by first showing that communication is marked by indirectness, either through indirect reporting of characters' exchanges or with the reader who is positioned as an 'overhearer' by a narratorial voice that could be referred to, in parallel, as the 'overspeaker' – that is the equivalent of a cinematic 'voice-over' – bringing readers to align with its perspective in the attention to be paid to the 'you-character'. Lastly I will bring to light the number of metaleptic displacements that accompany the pronominal displacement, through which another narrative is obliquely transmitted, behind the one at hand, and conveyed by grammatical and syntactic markers of exclusion and invisibilisation of the unnamed female *you* protagonist.

L'article étudie la nouvelle intitulée « Tomorrow is Too Far » qui est une des deux nouvelles écrites avec le pronom de deuxième personne dans la collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) par Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Il montre dans quelle mesure la fonction référentielle et déictique du pronom *you* dans cette histoire sont confondues d'une façon qui est propre à l'écriture d'Adichie si on la compare à d'autres configurations stylistiques et narratologiques dans les récits en *you* étudiés par l'auteure par ailleurs (Sorlin 2022). L'article explore les raisons de ce choix pronominal dans cette histoire, en montrant tout d'abord que la communication est marquée par l'indirection, à la fois à travers le discours indirect rapportant les échanges entre personnages mais aussi avec le lecteur/la lectrice qui se voit assignée par la voix narrative la position de celui/celle qui écoute par-dessus le dialogue interpersonnel qui se joue avec *you*. Cette structure narrative place la voix narrative elle-même en position de 'sur-locution' – c'est-à-

dire l'équivalent de la voix off cinématographique – invitant les lecteurs à s'aligner sur elle dans l'attention qu'elle porte au protagoniste de seconde personne. Enfin l'auteure met en lumière un certain nombre de déplacements métaeptiques qui accompagnent le déplacement pronominal, à travers lesquelles une autre histoire se dit obliquement, derrière celle transmise, et portée par des marqueurs grammaticaux et syntaxiques de l'exclusion et de l'invisibilisation du personnage féminin en *you* à laquelle l'histoire ne donne pas de nom.

INDEX

Mots-clés: pronom de deuxième personne, déplacement, trauma, métalepse, narratologie, indirection, invisibilisation, exclusion

Keywords: second-person pronoun, displacement, trauma, metalepsis, narratology, indirectness, invisibilisation, exclusion

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