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# SECOND-PERSON NARRATION AND DYSTOPIA IN KEITH ROBERTS' *MOLLY ZERO*

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences

Bachelor's Thesis

May 2021

# ABSTRACT

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Bachelor's Thesis  
Tampere University  
Degree Programme in English Language, Literature and Translation  
May 2021

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This thesis examines second-person narration and dystopia in Keith Roberts' young adult science fiction novel *Molly Zero* (1980). The story takes place in a speculative yet believable future of post-nuclear England. The novel's protagonist is approximately 15-year-old Molly, who is struggling to navigate this world of mass surveillance and government propaganda. Molly's story is closely bound in the central themes of the novel, the loss of individualism and identity. The purpose of this thesis is to study second-person narration's abilities to produce dystopia and the loss of identity in *Molly Zero*'s inner world.

The theory section of this thesis concentrates on the problematic nature of the second-person narrative and while acknowledging the achievements of earlier narratologists, it strives to examine second-person storytelling through new perspectives. In addition, a brief introduction of the protagonists of dystopian fiction in different eras is presented in order to position *Molly Zero* in its contextual time frame. The analysis section is divided in two parts, and the first section concentrates on second-person narration's usefulness in producing dystopia through its immediateness and limited perspective. The second section investigates Molly's character's indefiniteness, passiveness and need for attention.

The second-person narration of *Molly Zero* determines the manner the reader relates to the dystopian aspects of the novel. It enhances the experiencing of dystopia and losing one's identity by forcing the reader in shared actions with the narrator. However, even if the second-person narration distances the reader from the narrator, it might add to the strangeness of the dystopian world and its atmosphere.

**Keywords:** second-person narration, young adult literature, dystopia, science fiction, shared action, identity

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# TIIVISTELMÄ

Iina-Maria Talvinen: Second-Person Narration and Dystopia in Keith Roberts' *Molly Zero*  
Kandidaatintutkinto  
Tampereen yliopisto  
Englannin kielen, kirjallisuuden ja kääntämisen tutkinto-ohjelma  
Toukokuu 2021

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Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan Keith Robertsin nuorten aikuisten tieteiskirjallisuusromaanin *Molly Zeron* (1980) toisen persoonan kerrontaa ja dystopiaa. Tarina sijoittuu spekulatiiviseen, mutta silti uskottavaan tulevaisuuskuvaan siitä, millainen ydinsodan jälkeinen Englanti saattaisi olla. Romaanin päähenkilö on noin 15-vuotias Molly, joka elää tässä totalitaristisessa joukkovalvonnan ja hallituksen propagandan täyttämässä maailmassa. Stereotyyppiseksi, kiltiksi tytöksi kuvatun Mollyn tarina liittyy läheisesti romaanin keskeisiin teemoihin: individualismin ja yksilön identiteetin menetykseen. Tutkielman tavoitteena on kartoittaa toisen persoonan kerronnan kykyä tuottaa dystopiaa ja identiteetin menetyksen kokemuksia Molly Zeron henkilöihahmon sisäisessä maailmassa.

Tutkielman teoriaosassa keskitytään toisen persoonan kerronnan ongelmallisuuteen ja huomioidaan aikaisempien narratologioiden saavutuksia. Teoriaosassa pyritään myös tarkastelemaan toisen persoonan tarinankerrontaa uusien näkökulmien avulla. Lisäksi tutkielma sisältää lyhyen esittelyn dystooppisen kaunokirjallisuuden tyypillisistä päähenkilöistä eri aikakausilta, jotta tarkasteltavana oleva *Molly Zero* voidaan sijoittaa sille ominaiseen kontekstuaaliseen aikakehykseen. Romaanin analyysi on jaettu kahteen osaan, jonka ensimmäisessä osassa tehdään huomioita toisen persoonan kerronnan hyödyllisyydestä dystopian luomisessa sen välittömyyden ja rajallisen näkökulman vuoksi. Toisessa osassa tutkitaan Mollyn hahmon määrittelemättömyyttä, passiivisuutta ja huomion tarvetta.

*Molly Zeron* toisen persoonan kerronta määrittää huomattavasti lukijan kokemusta romaanin dystopiasta. Kerronta voimistaa tekstin dystooppisia elementtejä ja identiteetin menettämisen kokemusta, koska lukija on pakotettu yhteiseen toimijuuteen kertojan kanssa. Siinäkin tapauksessa, että lukija kokee toisen persoonan kerronnan etäännyttävänä tai outona, se voi olla omiaan korostamaan dystooppisen maailman ilmapiiriä.

Avainsanat: toisen persoonan kerronta, nuorten aikuisten kirjallisuus, dystopia, tieteiskirjallisuus, jaettu toimijuus, identiteetti

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

*Molly Zero* (1980) is a rather obscure dystopian coming-of-age novel written by Keith Roberts. The second-person narration is an integral part of the book both thematically and structurally – as well as responsible for most of its charm. This thesis strives to study the second-person narration as something more than a mere experiment on style. In addition to the unfamiliar second-person point of view, *Molly Zero* is mostly written in the present tense, giving it a feel of immediateness whereas the peculiar mesh of the narrator, narratee and reader constitute a challenging task for the author as well as the reader. Based on its themes and character development, *Molly Zero* is examined as a representative of dystopian Young Adult (YA) literature.

I shall examine the impact of the second-person narration in *Molly Zero*, studying the second-person point of view as a significant tool in creating a narrative, specifically in a dystopian coming-of-age tale. The aim of this study is to examine the second-person narrative's fluctuating nature and its abilities to create dystopia mentally and spatially in the reader's mind. First, the theory section will establish the problematic nature of the second-person narrative. Next, I will briefly introduce the second-person narration types by Brian Richardson. In the last theory subsection, I will discuss Magdalena Rembowska-Plucienni views on shared experience and second-person storytelling as joint action. In addition, I will introduce a cognitive research by Brunyé et al. since its results are vital in understanding second-person narration in a new, interdisciplinary manner.

Second, I will examine modern and post-modern dystopian fiction and its characteristics, especially its protagonists. Finally, the analysis section offers a study on second-person narration as a tool for constructing dystopia; the world of *Molly Zero* with its tireless surveillance, propaganda and government control. In addition, the loss of individualism and the self, major themes in Roberts' novel, shall be investigated through Molly's character in its own subsection.

## 2 YOU IN THEORY

The following subsections will concentrate on the problematic nature of the second-person narration and narratologists' inability to fully explain it. The first subsection will begin with an excerpt of the first lines of *Molly Zero* and continues to investigate the problematic essence of the second-person narration. After this, a few of the key concepts regarding the second-person narration and the unpredictable relationship of narrator/reader shall be investigated. Finally, the last subsection will examine second-person narration through new perspectives.

### 2.1 The Problematic Case of You

You're shivering inside your coat. It's a nice coat; brand new, an olive green mac. Belt cinched tight and collar turned up, very military. It makes you look good, but it can't stop the shakes. You drive your fists deeper into the pockets and hunch your shoulders. You tell yourself there's nothing to worry about, it's only Decentralization, it happens to everybody. But that doesn't help much either. You're Molly Zero, and you're scared to death. (Roberts 7)

Second-person narration has divided literary theorists' opinions for decades on whether it is an applicable form of narration or not – whether significant or just an author's gimmick. According to Brian Richardson second-person narration has been problematic, because unlike the first and third person narrations, it cannot bend to describe nonfiction (I will address this notion subsequently) and therefore is a “distinctively literary phenomenon”, resulting the theorists striving towards a “universal narratology” to ignore it (35). Nevertheless, Richardson finds the second-person narration a technique that provides new ways of looking at the fixed truths in writing – much like, in its time, did the stream of consciousness (35).

Richardson states that the 1960's was a fruitful decade with novels such as Carlos Fuentes' *Aura* (1962) and John McGahern's *The Dark* (1969) yet the second-person narration did not elicit

comprehensive theoretical research before the early 1990 (“Unnatural” 17-18). Evgenia Iliopoulou concludes that Monika Fludernik and Brian Richardson are among the most important theorists that have particularly contributed to the theory of second-person narratives since its popularity from the 1950’s onward. (25) She claims that they missed “vital parts of its rhetorical and poetic sense” (25) by treating the technique as an experiment (25). However, this thesis concentrates solely on Richardson’s theory, as Fludernik’s model of second-person texts did not seem to add to the understanding of *Molly Zero*’s narration.

As mentioned earlier, Richardson takes the view that second-person narratives are incapable of describing nonfiction, but in reality (no pun intended) many authors use the technique for writing their autobiographies. Furthermore, in his *Connotations* article (2012) Joshua Parker claims that authors choose second-person point of view mainly to separate and protect themselves from the painful or embarrassing memories of their experiences (170-1). He then continues to quote several authors who seem to support his theory of “safe distance”; how the second-person narrative is a veiled first-person narrative for the author to hide behind (170-2). In addition, Parker mentions that the second-person pronoun use sometimes spurs from an author’s “desire to give an effect of spoken word... to the text” (169) and explains that by doing this, the author seeks to be in the position of a teller of the story instead of the experiencer (172).

Not only does Matt DelConte point out some fundamental flaws in Parker’s reasoning in his response (2014), referring to the preliminary narrative theory of Wayne Booth by reminding Parker that there are “at least three different [existing] layers of ontology: that of the narrator, the implied author, and the flesh-and-blood author” but also claims that Parker’s article has more to do with psychology than narratology (56). While I wholeheartedly agree with DelConte, the deeply psychological nature of the second-person narrative which has become evident during the process of writing this thesis might explain why Parker has felt the need to dismiss the author/implied au-

thor/narrator distinction. Nevertheless, DelConte also addresses the tenses in second person to settle Parker's question of distance "between the teller and the tale" (56) and suggests that readers might particularly object the present tense because of its tendency to conflict with their state of being while past tense, describing something that has already happened, does not induce the same kind of resistance (57).

Richardson's response paper (2014) to Parker's article calls attention to the fact that Parker chose to ignore the inability of former theorists' attempts to determine whether the second-person narrative is a masked first or third-person narrative. ("Keeping" 52) This, according to Richardson, is not to be ignored because "the conclusion the debate discloses may be revealing." ("Keeping" 52) What he means is this: the difficulty stems from second-person narrative's unconventional disposition, its tendency of "[oscillating] irregularly from one side to the other", "[i]ts nature . . . to elude a fixed nature" ("Keeping" 53). Overall, theorising second-person narration seems to have been an elusive task throughout history, so much so that Iliopoulou still describes the technique as an "enigma" (17).

## **2.2 Second-Person Narration Types and Reader Identification**

Concerning the reader's involvement in second-person narration, several narratological terms must first be addressed. Plato's terms *mimesis* and *diegesis*, showing and telling, are essential when discussing narrative. According to Vervaeck and Herman, *mimesis* "evokes reality by staging it" (14) while *diegesis* "summarizes events and conversations" (14) – a narrative prose is always a combination of these two (15). Similarly important is to distinguish the *author* of a novel from its narrator (Vervaeck and Herman 16). In addition, as *implied author* will not be found in the pages of a novel (and is not the actual author, either) but constitutes the ideologies behind the written characters (Vervaeck and Herman 16-17), the *implied reader* is not the actual reader, but someone the author



has imagined while writing their text (Vervaeck and Herman 20). Narratee, in its simplest form, is “the concrete individual reading the text” (Vervaeck and Herman 21). Furthermore, Vervaeck and Herman state that *focalisation* refers to the “center of perception” (71) and that the *focaliser* is “the agent who perceives and who therefore determines what is presented to the reader.” (70)

The three types of second-person narration that Richardson recognizes are the *standard*, *hypothetical* and the *autotelic* forms (“Unnatural” 18). First, in the standard form the protagonist is addressed as “you”, referring to the narrator and the narratee (Richardson, “Unnatural”, 18-20). This form may easily be replaced by first-person pronouns. Jay McInerney’s novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984) is written in this standard form: “You don’t want to be talking to this bald girl, or even listening to her, which is all you are doing, but just now you do not want to test the powers of speech or locomotion” (1). Second, the hypothetical form is a form in which the narrative guides the reader by using conditional and future tenses; Richardson quotes Lorrie Moore’s story “How” as an example: “Begin by meeting him in a class” (“Unnatural” 18-19). Finally, in the autotelic form, the direct address is used, as in Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler*: “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel.” (Richardson, “Unnatural” 18) From these, the standard form is the most popular choice (Richardson, “Unnatural” 18). The standard form is also utilized in *Molly Zero*.

Richardson notes that “the protagonist/narratee is quite distinct from the actual or implied reader” (“Unnatural” 20) when he discusses the standard form of second-person narrative. He argues that while the narrative might have similarities with the reader, they cannot fully identify with the unpredictable second-person pronoun: “A continuous dialectic of identification and distancing ensues, as the reader is alternately drawn closer to and further away from the protagonist. This you is inherently unstable, constantly threatening to merge with the narratee, a character, the reader, or even with another grammatical person.” (“Unnatural” 21)

## 2.3 The New Understanding of Second-Person Narrative

Notably, the second-person narration includes the reader, the protagonist, narrator and narratee. Magdalena Rembowska-Pluciennik claims that other personal pronouns cannot create similar impact as the second person, because utilizing the second-person form of address involves 'you', 'I' and 'us' in a “dynamic process of interaction” (162). In her study of the second-person narration, she suggests that the narration should be comprehended as “an effective tool for representing the experience and process of co-acting and co-thinking” (171). Furthermore, she understands the second-person narrative as “we-mode-thinking” (162) and emphasises the meaning of “[t]he analysis of the multiplicity of identities involved in the second-person texts” (162).

Similarly, Iliopoulou proposes that Richardson “claims that the employment of the second person “defamiliarizes” the narrative whereas arguably the very opposite happens: second-person address evokes an oral, everyday, familiar tone in the discourse and therefore functions more likely as a hypnotising voice.” (32) To illustrate, a cognitive study by Brunyé et al. (2011) compared readers’ reactions to the first-person pronoun ‘I’ and the second-person pronoun ‘you’ by providing them four passages to read in both perspectives (662). The aim of the study was to determine whether changing the narration perspective influences the reader’s comprehension and emotional state differently (661). Two specific objectives were named: to investigate narration perspectives’ regulation of the reader’s mental representations of time, space, context and characters and the second-person narration’s possible superiority in assimilating the reader with the protagonist’s emotional states (660-1).

Brunyé et al. discovered that while the results of the mental representations of time, context and characters were not substantially different with the first and second-person perspectives, spatial information was recalled better with the second-person perspective (663-4). The second-person narration also succeeded in merging the protagonist and the reader in the extent that their

emotional states paralleled (664). This research verifies that the second-person point of view might be beneficial in reaching the reader emotionally and connecting them spatially into the fictional world. It might also explain why the narration may feel “hypnotic” to the reader.

According to Rembowska-Płucienni, the reason for the growing popularity of second-person address in literature (and especially in Polish literature, which is her expertise) could be connected to social media use (171). She believes that second-person narration has more to do with reader involvement and participation rather than reader immersion (159). In addition, second-person narration demands that the reader shares the actions and speech of the narrator, thus the narrator’s reported and imagined actions might also stimulate the reader’s motor functions (Rembowska-Płucienni 164). As Iliopoulou asserts, “[t]he second-person technique presupposes, or demands, *active* readers who continually accept or reject their involvement in the story.” (17) Furthermore, Rembowska-Płucienni suggests that “stressing the value of collaborative thinking” (167) might solve the theoretical puzzle of the second-person narrative.

### **3 THE PROTAGONISTS OF DYSTOPIAN FICTION**

Dystopian fiction (similarly as dystopian young adult fiction) generally introduces themes such as government control, environmental destruction, survival, mass surveillance and the loss of individualism. River Barton claims that “[t]he rise of fascism in Europe along with the industrialization of warfare left a shadow on the human conscience that could not be erased.” (7) Consequently, different times have had different fears, and the dystopias of the time have criticised the present through the pages of a book.

Particularly, dystopian literature reflects society’s fears for the future – a monstrous future that the civilisation itself has created, having invented technology that in some form eventually takes control of us all (Barton 5). Barton draws a distinction between the protagonists in modern

(1800-1950), post-modern (1965-1995) and contemporary (2000-present) dystopian fiction (7-14). Barton argues that modern protagonists were afraid of “not the loss of life, but the loss of individual identity.” (8) In contrast, the contemporary protagonists are typically young women on a journey to find their purpose until they become the embodiment of revolution (Barton 13-14). However, the post-modern protagonist was questioning their own realness as well as the world’s, as technological potential kept fascinating the writers of the era (10-11):

There were, throughout this time period, ethical and philosophical questions about the growth and potential of technology. Could it become more powerful than us? Could it become autonomous? When does a creation become something “other” of its own accord? In post-modern literature and discourse the sense of the “other” takes precedence. The protagonist of the post-modern dystopia is not just an outside observer evaluating society, but instead questions every aspect of what he previously considered his reality. The protagonist’s issue moves from the modern “Who am I?” to the post-modern “What am I and am I even real?” (Barton 11)

I would like to argue that *Molly Zero*, despite some of the post-modern elements in the novel, is still a product of the modern era dystopian literature. The tropes of children being born without parents, grown up in dormitories (Blocks, in Molly’s case) and taught to obey, and the fear of losing one’s identity are all realised in *Molly Zero*. In one of the most famous modern dystopian novels, Ayn Rand’s *Anthem*, “[t]he protagonist has been robbed of all individual distinctiveness: name, the choice of work, partner, home, or even the ability to be alone.” (Barton 8) What is more, similarly to *Molly Zero*, the protagonist of *Anthem* does not use the first-person but utilises the “we” (Barton 8). The reason behind Roberts’ choice of second-person narration could then be explained by the desire to emphasise the loss of identity and the fragmented image of Self.

## 4 ANALYSING MOLLY ZERO

In this chapter I will elaborate on the different aspects the second-person narration generates in *Molly Zero* by analysing extracts from the novel. The first subsection will concentrate exploring on how the second-person narration constructs the dystopian world in *Molly Zero*. In the second subsection I will study Molly’s character and its deconstruction.

## 4.1 Second-Person Narration as a Building Block for Dystopia

As stated earlier in the theory section of this thesis, *Molly Zero* uses the standard form of second-person narration, where ‘you’ refers to both: the protagonist and the reader, the narrator and the narratee. In addition, Roberts’ novel utilizes the present tense yet the protagonist, Molly, describes events in the past tense frequently. There are only a few short spells where a surveillance equipment is focalised. These short passages are found in the first chapters of the book, and arguably they are there to make the reader understand the world Molly is living in – a world of mass surveillance and conformism.

To illustrate, this focalisational shift first occurs when Molly is waiting a train at the platform with others, and the second time when she and the other girls have already gone to sleep at their bunks on the train. The monitors are everywhere, it seems, and this adds a sense of paranoia and a moderately claustrophobic element to the narration. The third (and last) time the surveillance system is focalised is when Molly has had a fit of temper in the Blocks, where she and the other girls live and study: *“There was a Monitor. And it enjoyed that titbit very much indeed. It swallowed it with the electronic equivalent of a gulp.”* (Roberts 27)

This surveillance equipment passage is written in third-person point of view and typed in italics to differentiate it from the other text. These structurally detached passages that are vastly different from the intense second-person narration have shock value. As in Orwell’s *1984*, the Big Brother likes to keep an eye out for Molly – only in this case, it is the Elite (the governing body) and you that are watching. The sudden change in perspective feels as if you, the reader, are cheating Molly by being presented with this information that she does not know – were we not supposed to be the one and the same with her?

Roberts creates dystopia with his novel's limited diegesis that is bound in the second-person narration. Many novels that are targeted to young adults use the first-person narrator or close third-person for evoking emotion and feelings of similarity with the reader, while the omnipotent narration helps describe the world and characters. The second-person narration technique emphasises, in its lack of omnipotent narrator and the shared 'we-psyche' with the reader, the environment's limited possibilities. For example, the feeling of being trapped in your life, not knowing what is happening and not being able to find out creates fear and anxiety – there are no reliable information channels, only propaganda and other people (who might lie). Thus, the choices Molly makes feel especially important. In addition, I would like to argue that the reader is forced to accept the protagonist's choices differently than in other narration modes. It would be easier to fight against Molly's choices if the novel used other narration techniques; but with 'you', you do not have a choice but the choice that is already made for you.

In contrast, if the reader resists the second-person narration – they find it irritating, or odd – the results may still be adding to the dystopian atmosphere. The unfamiliar technique might highlight the dystopian world and its strangeness. For example, Molly does not explain words that are either foreign (because she does not know them herself) or familiar concepts to her but not for the reader. In *Molly Zero*, there are no long passages explaining in detail how the world of Molly Zero operates (these would be typical to science fiction), yet there are many questions waiting to be answered.

“You're going to a town. You wonder what it will be like. You've never been in a town in your life.” (Robinson 68) Molly learns about the environmental destruction of England through the dialogue with other characters and by sitting in trucks and ACV's (air cushion vehicles) while watching the scenery. A truck driver explains to Molly a small amount of what is happening in other parts of the country: “He said there was a plague of beetles in North Lothia, the grubs were eating

the trees bare. He told you about something he called the Twenty Year Plan, and how the ACV's took logs down to Mercia for pulping. He didn't ask you anything about yourself and you were glad. You were just beginning to realise how little you knew." (Roberts 70) The more Molly sees of England on her adventure, the more she realises how little she knows about anything. She might have thought the decisions she has made before had been fine, but now she begins to realise she is not knowledgeable enough to even be making them. Indeed, the limited diegesis of the second-person narrative is practical in keeping the interest alive by revealing little portions of the dystopian world at a time.

The immediateness and intensity of the novel is constructed by the second-person pronoun use and by occupying the senses: "An hour later you're still clinging to the edge of the hatch. You thought you'd travelled fast before; but it was nothing. The noise of the propellers is deafening, immense; and everything's jumping and vibrating, you're sure the ACV will shake itself to bits." (Roberts 139) As Rembowska-Płucienni stated, the narrator's reported actions might evoke similar motor functions in the reader as well. In this quote, it is easy to imagine the sounds muffle as you put your hands to cover your ears: "Your skirt blows out; you clap hands to your ears, yell to Paul. You start to run, swept along by the crowd." (99) Indeed, the reader has no time for thinking themselves as most senses are frequently occupied.

## 4.2 The Unravelling of Molly Zero

"GREEN IS GOOD, the display said, RED IS BAD. And underneath, the choice. RED IS GOOD, GREEN IS BAD. And there were just two buttons, green and red. How old were you? Five, six? You squatted cross-legged as you'd been taught and smelled the shiny, dusty smell of the floor and puzzled. The problem was monstrous; but there was no help to be had." (Roberts, 12)

Molly spends her childhood in a dormitory called the Blocks while endless tests are presented at her. She does not know why she is being tested or how she has entered the Blocks in the

first place. However, occasionally a girl disappears without an explanation, thus failing a test is a constant fear for Molly. The reader is forced to participate in Molly's fear as the narration describes how "your mouth's dry" (7); "you jump" (7); and how "you're not going to flip. Not now." (7) as Molly and the reader are hurled in the middle of an unknown event right in the beginning of the novel.

One reason why stepping into Molly's shoes might be rather easy for the reader is that Molly Zero is an empty vision – Roberts does not offer an explicit description of Molly or her face. Indeed, Molly does not think much about her appearance, and the only external descriptions the reader obtains are about her hair and the occasional detailing of her clothes. This either proves that Molly is not a 'normal teenage girl' or emphasizes a society which is alien to us since she does not (need to) obsess about her appearance that much. To exemplify, despite being proud of her blonde hair, "honey-coloured and thick" (Roberts 114), Molly agrees (after Paul's persuasion) to dye it brown, to match the look of the *Romani*. Occasionally Molly might compare herself to others, but never in a self-deprecating manner prone to teenagers, and never particularly explicitly: "He looks at you with disdain. That's fine by you. You're taller than he is anyway; if you had heels on you'd top him by inches." (77)

More significantly, this gives Molly an aspect of transparency, a space that the reader can easily occupy – a blank slate. Were there more explicit descriptions of physical attributes the probability of them conflicting with the reader's attributes would grow, and with these incompatible details between the reader and the narrator, the reader might more readily reject their involvement in the story. On the contrary, in *Molly Zero*, the second-person narration does not force any superficial features to the reader, excluding hair colour and gender.

All the children of the Blocks are named after numbers; Molly Zero, Janet Nineteen, Mary Thirty Four, Elizabeth Six, et cetera. After escaping the Blocks with a boy named Paul, Molly is



given a new identity: “You remembered you have a name now. Maureen Seatallan. Strange to have a real name, even if it wasn’t your own.” (Roberts 70) Later, when Molly joins the *Romani*, she is again known with a different name. It seems as different names represent different phases as Molly is growing up, like sampling different roles, which is what she factually does in the novel.

Molly is quite passive throughout the novel, contrary to contemporary young adult dystopian literature’s heroines. Indeed, having lived in the Blocks all her life has made Molly obedient: “No reason, now, not to turn and snuggle; but you lie decently, as you’ve been taught, hands outside the blankets.” (Roberts 12) Molly has no right to her own body – and it seems not to her mind, either. She would not have escaped the Blocks if it were not for Paul, who she had developed a crush on, thus she followed him just that she could be with him. Of course, as Molly follows Paul, the reader must follow Molly.

Action is happening around Molly, but she does not really care about detonating shopping malls or ending the consumerism, which is all that her London friends care about. However, she does not stand up for herself, thus she finds herself in situations that she does not want to be in. Molly has been independent from a very young age, but she does not have had the opportunity to exercise that independency freely: Molly clings to anyone who offers her attention. She quickly absorbs the habits and customs the *Romani* are described to maintain; after having a fight with Paul, Molly contemplates on her actions thusly: “You’re sure it isn’t you that puts her hand on his shoulder. It’s a Romani woman, very proud and patient.” (Roberts, 150)

After learning about being manufactured in a laboratory and not having parents but donors, Molly is “[d]orm happy at last. You know what it feels like now. You screw your eyes tight shut and everything tilts and starts to go away.” (Roberts 205) In this case, ‘dorm happy’ is a synonym for depression. Richardson states that the second-person narration is ideal “for revealing a mind in flux” (“Unnatural” 35). In addition, he also writes that “it is admirably suited to express the unstable

nature and intersubjective constitution of the self” (“Unnatural” 36). Indeed, when Molly’s sense of Self begins to waver, it is difficult to not feel the pain Molly feels.

Molly does not know how to deal with the artificiality of her origins, so she tries to alleviate her pain with alcohol. The narration becomes almost incomprehensible: “The whisky’s nearly gone. But it doesn’t matter. There’s a lot of other bottles. You wonder what it’s like to have a man. If you can really feel it squirt. You’d better go down the Dials tomorrow, you’ve got a flat to keep up now. Stella looks upset. But that’s too bad.” (Roberts 205) This passage simulates a drunken mind with its fragmented nature – here Molly, who is a virgin, imagines how she will sell her body as she has seen others do in the Dials – while hallucinating disappointment from the one person (Stella) who she still desperately wants to please. However, Molly becomes depressed and apathetic after these events; the narration shifts to short, unembellished sentences. “It can’t do any harm; because you don’t have any lungs,” (Roberts 220) Molly thinks while smoking her first cigarette.

The people Molly and Paul meet on their journey are friendly enough, but the fear of being exposed to Militia (as they are on the run from their Blocks) is their constant worry. In the end, the Elite wants Molly (and the reader) to believe that it is a harmless group of people that have kept Molly safe throughout her adventure by monitoring her and sending individuals to help her. It is hard to assess the reality Molly lives in; in this perspective, *Molly Zero* is a post-modern novel. When at the end of the book Molly is invited to lead the country with the Elite, she is unsure who she can trust anymore or what is it that she even wants. She has been given choices, and apparently, she has made all the right ones. At the same time, she feels artificially made, non-human, separate from her peers and separate from the Elite. Molly might have been herself before, but now she is something made by others; physically and mentally constructed to serve the greater good.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The introduction suggested the second-person narration in *Molly Zero* to be essential both thematically and structurally. In *Molly Zero*, it also defines the structure and form of the novel; the story stays linear, and we only go back in time in Molly's thoughts. On one hand, the second-person narration in *Molly Zero* supports the character story arc and makes the various spatial environments feel real. On the other hand, the use of second-person narrative might distance the reader from the protagonist/narrator. In this case, the form of the narration supports the feeling of alienation and oddness in a dystopian world. However, not everyone enjoys the feeling of one's own thoughts invaded and thus it can be discouraging to continue reading in this narration mode.

The second-person narration constructs dystopia with its immediateness and reported sensory functions, focalisational shifts and limited diegesis. At the same time, the second-person narration adds to *Molly Zero*'s themes of the loss of individualism and identity. At the end of the novel, Molly does not think herself as real anymore and has completely lost her sense of Self. Consequently, according to Barton's division of dystopian protagonists, Molly is a modern and post-modern dystopian protagonist realised.

*Molly Zero*'s world is believable in a sense that it is a speculation on what would happen if a part of England had been annihilated by nuclear bombs. There would be attempts to fix what had been broken, to build a new, fairer society, and then again history repeating itself. Molly is a stereotypical 'good girl', who is manipulated by the dystopian society and politics – she does not care about rebellion, like the more contemporary heroes might in Molly's position. Yet Molly only wants to know where her parents are, get out of the Blocks, see the world, and maybe lose her virginity somewhere along the way. However, what she learns is that she does not have parents, the Blocks were not actually that bad compared to the real world, and that boys are overrated.

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