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Cultivating Intimacy: the use of the second person in lyric poetry

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Abstract: Philosophers discussing lyric poetry often focus on first personal expression as a mark of the 'lyric', which has resulted in a narrow characterisation of the nature of intimacy in lyric poetry that focuses on the individual poet, poetic voice or reader. In this article, I highlight a valuable way in which some works of lyric poetry can engage us in a kind of intimate relationship that connects the reader with the voice of the poem through the use of the second person. In illustrating my claims, I will focus on Claudia Rankine's collection of poems *Citizen* (2014).

I.

Lyric poetry is often associated with expression of the personal. For instance, the work of the so-called 'confessional' poets, such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, is often thought to reveal inmost thoughts and feelings of the poetic voice through first personal expression. The lyric poem, with its use of personal pronouns and singularity of voice, appears to invite the reader to experience the unfolding of the words as the intimate expression of another.

Intimacy itself is associated with attention to another and is thought to play a role in feeling sympathy and empathy. As John Gibson comments: "empathy makes possible an especially intimate and powerful form of *identification*. It underwrites our capacity... to feel not just *for* another but *as* another. To this extent, empathy has as its goal the overstepping, in emotion, of the space that runs between oneself and another."¹ The intimate relationship, therefore, enabling one to feel deep care and concern for another person. On this view, we might understand the intimate relationship as involving another person in such 'overstepping' of feeling between two individuals.

In this article, I discuss how we might engage with poetry with a sense of intimacy and point to another, so far unrecognised, way in which poetry can be thought of as involving an intimate connection. By focusing on the use of the second person in lyric poetry, I argue that we can understand intimacy in poetry as a form of sharing of perspective, that is, sharing a set of

values, commitments and beliefs that shape our experience of the world. I argue that by establishing an intimate connection between the reader and poetic voice, poetry has the potential to reveal something morally significant through an attempt to form a shared perspective that the experience of reading facilitates. In illustrating my claims, I will focus on Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (2014)² to highlight how the use of the second person shapes the reading experience to produce an emotional connectedness of the reader with the perspective expressed in the work.

II.

In this section, I consider three possible forms of intimacy and how it maps onto our experience of reading some works of poetry: first, intimacy as a sympathetic relationship involving hearing and responding to the innermost thoughts and expression of another (either as the one addressed or overhearing a private address), which I take to be the weakest form of intimacy; second, intimacy as an empathic relationship involving taking up the perspective of the poem (i.e. taking up the innermost thoughts and expression as if one's own); and third, intimacy as sharing a perspective that unites the reader and the perspective of the poem in terms of what they have in common – this I take to be the strongest form of intimacy since this results in a collaborative project which reflects the overlapping concerns and values of both individuals.³ Instead of viewing these as separate models, I will argue that there is a relationship between them, and so we can view them as possible *stages* of reading: we naturally begin reading in the first mode, where we take ourselves to be listening to another before shifting to internalising those words and hearing in our own voice. This 'internalising' provides the foundations for developing a sense of sharing in the perspective of the poem. Consequently, cultivating intimacy should be thought of as a mark of success in the work since not all poems can facilitate this move across these three modes of reading.

Intimacy through listening

For literary critic, Helen Vendler, the lyric poem can facilitate an intimate connection in the sense that the reader is engaged in either overhearing or being the recipient of an *intimate address*. Drawing on examples of poems by Herbert, Whitman and Ashbery, Vendler argues that what is created in such works is an “intimate address to an unknown human other.” This sense of intimacy is supported through the affective tonalities of the address: “What all lyrics ... offer us are tones of voice through which they represent, by analogy, various relations resembling those that we know in life. Lyrics can replicate the tenderness of a parent, the jealousy of a lover, the solicitude of a friend, the humility of a sinner.”⁴ For Vendler, it is in expressing such attitudes of tenderness, jealousy and solicitude through the affective features of the work that enables the reader to not only recognise the voice of the poem as human but as connected to others (including the reader) and therefore as an object of emotional response. According to such a model of intimacy, the reader is attending to the voice of the poem and listening with care in recognition of the voice disclosing their innermost thoughts and feelings. This represents a passive role for the reader because the reader is a mere recipient and so does not contribute anything to the meaning of the work. We can think of this as establishing a relationship of sympathy, where the reader responds to the perspective of the poem from their own perspective.

Intimacy through identification

A further way in which we might experience intimacy in our engagement with literature is identified by Kendall Walton, who argues that it is also possible to think of poets as ‘thoughtwriters’ who produce “texts for others to use in expressing their thoughts,”⁵ thus making an analogy with speechwriters. When engaging with poetry in this way, it is not that there is any kind of communication between poet and reader but an offering of thoughts and

ideas for the reader or listener to take up as if their own. The poem therefore offers an intimate connection between the reader and the words of the poem in the sense that a reader can appropriate the language and thoughts of the poem as if they expressed ideas and attitudes of the reader (which, of course, may involve some element of pretence on behalf of the reader). What we are doing in our engagement with the poem is “imagining uttering the words ‘seriously’ to see what it feels like to express such thoughts or attitudes – and probably what it feels like to endorse or accept or adopt them” (p. 65). So instead of experiencing the voice of another intimately in terms of its affective tonality, which invites a sense of sympathetic connection with another, we come to experience *the words and thoughts* intimately, which we might use in our own self-expression. This can be seen as facilitating an empathetic relationship in that we try on the perspective of the poem; we respond to the poem as if they were our own thoughts and attitudes, and in this sense, we overstep the space between oneself and the poetic voice.

A similar view is held by Anna Christina Soy Ribeiro, although, interestingly, she points to how one mode of intimacy can modulate to another:

When listening to or reading a poem, we begin by hearing someone else’s voice, by attending to what the poetic persona might have to share with us. Without presuming to account for all poetry reading experiences, I submit that, typically, by the end of the poem we have come to identify with that voice. I do not mean by this that we suddenly come to think that we are the poet, or that we are the writers of the poem. I mean an identification in the sense that we feel that we could have written those words (if only we had the talent to express ourselves as well), because they express something that we, too, feel or have felt, think or have thought, and sometimes even thoughts and feelings we never realized we had but that now, seeing them expressed, we find resonating with something within ourselves. Our

experience of lyric poems is therefore peculiarly personal: we either assume the role of the speaker in the poem, or of the one who is spoken to.⁶

We might think of the poem as speaking for us – it captures something we want to express and so by appropriating the words of the poem, we can use it to speak for us. In such cases we're not having to do much work to accommodate the perspective on offer in the poem; it fits neatly with our own evaluative perspective.

Both Walton and Ribeiro capture something important in their account; part of what goes on in our experience of some works of poetry is an awareness of these words being articulated by the reader (since hearing the poem – even if only 'in one's head' – will involve, usually, hearing it in one's own voice). However, on both accounts, what's missing is the potential for our engagement with poetry to result in a stronger intimate feeling between the reader and the poetic voice, with full acknowledgement of the experience of another as distinct from the reader. Rather than merely overhearing a moment of intimacy or using words to express our own private thoughts and feelings, there is in fact a third form of engagement which involves actively forging a connection with a perspective one recognises as distinct from one's own.

Intimacy through sharing

There is something necessarily reciprocal in our engagement with some works of poetry. By using the second person, this sense of reciprocity between poet and reader is heightened, and, a kind of mutual awareness unfolds that "I am aware of her awareness of me, aware of her awareness of my awareness of her, aware of her awareness of my awareness of her awareness of me, and so on" (Darwell p. 43). Here, we can draw on Ribeiro's point that we attend to the voice of the poem and take up the attitude of looking for what might be shared. But such attending to doesn't always result in one adopting that voice as if it is one's own but instead

creating a shared perspective with that voice. This is now an example of two differing perspectives coming together.

This brings us to the third way, and strongest way, in which poetry can create a sense of intimacy: our engagement with some works of lyric poetry is intimate in the sense of being collaborative and necessarily involving some kind of joint project that involves a sense of shared values and shared membership of some community. In some cases of reading poetry, we are invited to *respond* to the poem in that form (therefore respecting the perspective of the poetic persona) as well as *offering* potential meaning in order to make sense of the work (by drawing on our own perspectives in doing this).

Why think of this as intimacy in a strong sense? In its simplest form, intimacy involves a relationship that has a certain kind of personal closeness, which can be characterised as a form of sharing of another's perspective that shapes their orientation to the world. We can relate this understanding of intimacy to one developed by Bennett Helm, who emphasises the importance of reciprocity and sharing in establishing and maintaining an intimate relationship. For Helm, intimacy involves "sharing an evaluative perspective, at least within a certain domain, where this shared evaluative perspective enables each to have the sort of dynamic, rational influence on the other's life that [the relationship] demands."⁷ By evaluative perspective, Helm refers to our set of personal values and commitments to import that organise our thoughts and experience, bringing to the fore those things we take as having significance for us, in other words, what we care about.

On Helm's view, to share an evaluative perspective is to develop a shared pattern of emotions and desires that reflect a commitment to the import of certain things as tied to an inter-subjective understanding of self that is established by that relationship. The use of the second person can help facilitate such sharing and inter-subjective understanding of the self. As noted by Eilan, second person relations might enable us to see how "we in fact bridge what is

often supposed to be an unbridgeable gap between our first person awareness of ourselves and our third person awareness of others.”⁸

The perspectives we can share with others can differ in specificity: we can share a perspective in virtue of being the parents of our children, with other mothers and fathers, and at a greater level of generality, with other human beings. In other words, we can share those aspects of the self that we can understand not only in terms of the first person singular but also first-person plural or collective (from *I* am a parent to *we* are parents). The differing levels of specificity correspond to the degree of overlap of concern between those individuals that are taken to share that perspective.

Based on the commonality of the relationship, we can deliberate with one another about values we share to form a shared pattern of emotions and desires. Our shared perspective, therefore, brings to the fore those things that we *jointly* take to be significant in virtue of an aspect of our lives we have in common – in other words, where we take our sense of import to overlap, with other aspects of our individual perspective at a distance. Of course, we don't know whether we do share those concerns, but crucially, we at least take ourselves as sharing a set of values and concerns; we feel we *ought* to share them. We recognise others as sharing some aspect of who we are with us, and therefore expect others to hold this set of values and concerns. We can hold each other to account on that basis. For instance, if two people are said to share a perspective perhaps as parents thinking about their children, then they should be able to view a situation with the same set of concerns and pick out what is of value to both with reference to their shared identity, i.e. what is good for them as parents and what they ought to care about as parents of some particular child.

In making the case for this other way in which poetry supports intimacy, I will now turn to Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*, which tackles everyday racism in American society through reflections on a number of events including watching Serena Williams at the 2009 US open final and the murder of James Craig Anderson. This is a complex and experimental work in which, as

readers, we move between an internal and external point of view (shifting between different specificities of perspective); from the idiosyncratic perspective tied to a particular individual to one which is shared by any citizen. The collection of poems is also notable in its use of the second person, which is an important feature in cultivating joint attention and shared feeling. What the reader can achieve in their engagement with the poem is the creation of a shared perspective based on membership to a community that the poem forges.

III.

There are two ways in which a poem, such as those in *Citizen*, can facilitate the creation of a shared perspective that results in this third form of intimacy: firstly, by connecting the reader and poetic voice via shared embodied action (shared activity of reading the words on the page) and secondly, by creating a shared frame of reference in the reading experience (shared understanding or appreciation).

Embodied sharing

The white space on the page acts as a guide to reading and is connected to the breath, making the experience physical for the reader, and intruding on their own body as they read. As Charles Olson writes in his influential essay 'Projective Verse': "if a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath, an equal length of time. If he suspends a word or syllable at the end of a line ... he means [for the] time to pass that it takes for the eye – that hair of time suspended – to pick up the next line."⁹ By presenting the words on the page in a particular way, the poet is able to control how her poem is read, and consequently how it sounds and is experienced, at least to some degree. As we read, we look carefully at the grammar of the poem to tell us when to take a breath, whether to pause, such as at the end of a stanza. Whether aloud or silently, in reading we are sharing the breath with the poet (or poetic voice). This represents an embodied form of sharing.

Just as a musical work needs a performer and listener (who could, of course, be the same person), the poem needs to be read by a reader and therefore, the reader is intimately involved in the performance of the poem. Robert Pinsky argues: “The reader is not merely the performer of the poem, but an actual, living medium for the poem ... In its intimacy and human presence, reading a poem may resemble a live performance, as distinct from a mass-produced image such as a movie (or, indeed, a video of someone reciting a poem). Insofar as its text is fixed, the poem, like a play in this respect, is distinctly less ephemeral than the live performance.”¹⁰ On the one hand, there is a live performance in the sense of it unfolding in that moment, which cannot be replayed in the same way; but on the other, the text that afforded this temporal experience remains, allowing for recreation of that type of experience and opportunity to re-live the sharing of breath. The reader actively participates in the reading by attending and responding to the text, which gives life to the poem. Given the reader is a ‘living medium for the poem,’ there’s something on reading that feels theirs (as if belonging to the reader); they share in the process of creating the poem, since they play a necessary part in bringing the poem to life. Although directed to some degree in how to read with that sense of ‘human presence,’ the reader still experiences the poem as if they have some choice in how to read and make sense of the work. The poem then takes on a duality; the reader enables the voice of the poem to come alive, whilst, simultaneously responding to and shaping that voice.

The experience of the shared breath provides an embodied form of sharing between the reader and the poetic voice that resonates in meaning: “Poetry as breath penetrates to where the body recognizes the stirring of meaning. Poetry mediates, on a particular and immensely valuable level, between the inner consciousness of the individual reader and the outer world of other people” (*D* pp. 45-46). In reading – the breathing in and out, as we hear the words of the poem unfold – we experience the simultaneous internalizing of the words on the page (as articulated and punctuated by our own breath, which gives the words form), whilst recognising them as those of another;¹¹ through this process we feel significance of the words even prior to

full understanding. It is through this articulation that we are engaging with the words on an aesthetic level with awareness of an interaction between reader and human voice.

The shared breath in Rankine's poems enables us to connect with the words on the page as a sharing of some experience with the poetic voice. We hear the use of the second person as the words of another directed at us whilst simultaneously hearing those words in our own voice but addressing another. Consider the experience of reading the following extract:

Yesterday called to say we were together and you were
bloodshot and again the day carried you across the field
of hours, deep into dawn, back to now, where you are
thankful for

what faces you, the storm, this day's sigh as the days shifts
its leaves, the wind, a prompt against the calm you can't
digest (p. 75)

The reading of the poem demands the reader gives voice to the words on the page. Not only do we give voice to the more comfortable parts of the poem but also to those that produce the uncomfortable moments – those moments of racism. And in doing so we allow them to be articulated.¹²

In reading the words on the page there are two important things that occur: firstly, by giving these words of the poem shape, we enable the articulation of some horrible and uncomfortable thoughts. Secondly, we are being given a warning not to take lightly the appropriation of another's perspective; we must read the words of another set in the appropriate context with awareness of those aspects which are distanced from our own idiosyncratic perspectives. This is made even more apparent by the way in which Rankine

includes 'scripts' in her collection, including one on Hurricane Katrina which is made up of quotes from CNN; a contrast between those parts of the work we are invited to inhabit (albeit ironically) as readers and those we must respect. By having us form these words, we are being confronted by the experience – we are having to 'live it' in some sense:

One of the things, in "Citizen," that I was trying to circle around is that sense that there is an odd reality where people feel that "that's not my problem." And, in fact, it *is* your problem, because you can see it, because we all live it. We experience it differently, but it's all of ours. The killing of Michael Brown is experienced differently in the body of a black man, and in the body of a black woman, and in the body of an Italian man, and in the body of a French woman. But we're all experiencing it, and we all, on some level, have to negotiate it.¹³

Shared frame of reference

Let's now turn to the second way in which *Citizen* creates and supports a feeling of intimacy between the reader and voice of the poem. Here, I will highlight how the poems support the development of a shared frame of reference between the voice of the poem and the reader primarily through the use of the second person.

Longworth (2014) argues that the use of the second person has a shareable quality that the first or third person does not, this is in part due to what's involved in understanding the use of the pronoun 'you.' Longworth points out that we understand propositions expressed in the second person from our own first-person perspective and so our first person interpretation is coordinated with the second person usage, in other words, we translate the second-person expression to a thought about oneself (and the two correspond). He argues that the second person makes available the shareability of first person thought in the sense

that only the individual hearer can interpret expression of 'you' in terms of 'I' but what the original expression allows is for anyone to interpret in the first person and entertain the corresponding first person thought: "'You' provides the only means for others to express such a thought,"¹⁴ what we are then able to share through such expression is an interpersonal you-I thought and so in this way the use of the second person facilitates a connection between two people.

Such shareability through use of the second person in poetry is important since it establishes the necessary relation for reciprocity to unfold and so for the emergence of a shared frame of reference. In my discussion of *Citizen*, I assume that something like the reader-response view is correct and I will focus on Rosenblatt's 'transactional' view (1983) in particular, which emphasises the joint project of poet and reader.¹⁵ Rosenblatt argues that there is a particular kind of meaning-making interaction between the reader and text: "the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings."¹⁶ Rosenblatt sees the role of the reader as 'creating' albeit with a sensitivity to the constraints imposed by the poem rather than 'uncovering' meaning in the work. She writes:

as [the reader reads the poem], he is intent on the pattern of sensations, emotions and concepts it evokes. Because the text is organized and self-contained, it concentrates the reader's attention and regulates what will enter into his consciousness. His business for the moment is to apprehend as fully as possible these images and concepts in relation to one another. Out of this arises a sense of an organized structure of perceptions and feelings which constitutes for him the aesthetic experience. (p. 33)

If we accept such a reader-response model of our engagement with poetry, we can see the reading experience as facilitating a kind of intellectual and emotional sharing because the poem depends on the reader in this way. We can therefore think of there being an intellectual and emotional interdependency: the reader cannot (neither cognitively nor affectively) respond without the work expressing something but for the work to succeed in expressing something, it requires effort on part of the reader; it is necessarily response-dependent.

When reading poetry goes well – i.e. when the reader properly attends to and appreciates the poem – what the reader does is try to create a ‘shared frame of reference’ or at least, an ‘*overlapping* frame of reference.’ A shared frame of reference is a set of beliefs, values, concerns etc. that provide a particular organisational framework to make sense of the words, concepts, feelings evoked by the poem both to the reader and in the context of the structure of the work (how the formal features of the poem work together), so that the reader appreciates their response as intertwined with the organisational framework of the poem.¹⁷

The poetic features are particularly apt at creating such shared frames of reference, which facilitates the sense of intimacy with another’s voice, and therefore with another’s perspective. Take as an example, the use of figurative language in poetry. Ted Cohen is well known for making the case for the relationship between metaphor and intimacy, he writes: “There is a unique way in which the maker and the appreciator of a metaphor are drawn closer to one another. Three aspects are involved: (1) the speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation; (2) the hearer expends a special effort to accept the invitation; and (3) this transaction constitutes the acknowledgment of a community.”¹⁸ Understanding the meaning of the metaphor involves the creation of a shared frame of reference (based around what the reader believes the poetic voice believes and values), that is not necessarily available to anyone (because of the effort required by the reader in understanding the work) and therefore is able to establish an intimate community (what I’m referring to as a shared perspective): metaphors (and poetry) have “the capacity to form or acknowledge a (progressively more select)

community and thereby to establish an intimacy between the teller and the hearer” (Cohen p. 11).¹⁹

This view is echoed by David Constantine, who emphasises the creation of a shared space between the poet and audience:

a poem’s first line (whether or not it was the first composed) is the signal that something is beginning that concerns you. You are being asked to make, as the poem itself does, “a new effort of attention.” The opening line is your admission into the space, the pause, the silence of concentration that is the reading or listening to the poem. And for the poet it is in a kindred space, pause, and silence that the poem later to be read or listened to first materializes.²⁰

Such ‘admission’ into the space of the poem is important for cultivating a sense of intimacy, since it is a private space for the reader to encounter the voice of the poem and to be able to reflect privately on their own responses. The reader is invited to respond in a personal and deeply subjective way, drawing on their own understandings of words, associations and even their memories in order to meet the voice of the poem to form a common-ground between them; sharing in an expression of ‘private subjectivity.’ But it isn’t the *private* aspect of this experience that is important to feeling intimacy, this merely facilitates the intimate connection; what’s important is providing a space which enables sharing of concerns, values and commitments, i.e. *sharing* an evaluative perspective.

The opening of *Citizen* draws us towards a sense of commonality, a ‘kindred space’, which establishes a feeling of intimacy in part due to the use of the second person but also due to the appeal to the private yet common experience:

When you are alone and too tired even to turn on any of your devices, you let yourself linger in a past stacked among your pillows. (p. 5)

But there is resistance (a kind of imaginative resistance) to entering this space in her poems – we cannot completely share in the perspective of the poetic persona but through our engagement with the poem, we come to see what we have in common as well as the limitations of our shared frame of reference, that is, what I can and can't share with you. It's not that as a reader I don't want to share in *that* aspect of experience, value, commitment or belief, it is that I am limited by my own perspective and experience and I'm precluded from being able to fully share in that experience or valuing with *that* sense of significance for me. However, there is value in acknowledging what we do share with recognition that we are each more than what we can share with any one person.

Through the cognitive and affective aspects of the poems, the building of a shared evaluative perspective is facilitated (even if this is ultimately unsuccessful) through the cultivation of shared feeling, i.e. the affectively rich appreciation of another's perspective in relation to one's own perspective. We read the poem with our own evaluative perspectives in play but through such feeling together, we come to see where our own sense of value and concern overlaps that expressed in the poem, which is supported by the affective aspects of the poem.

IV.

As I have suggested, intimacy through sharing (as facilitated in the experience of reading) increases our capacity for fellow feeling with another perspective – a sense of feeling together as opposed to feeling *for* or feeling *as* – which enables the development of a shared evaluative perspective. Even if this is one that is not sustained beyond a particular context, it is helping us to see value as something potentially shared with others.

We might think of *Citizen* as offering a kind of intimate address but this isn't where the experience of the work ends. The 'you' at first appears to invite the reader into a deeply subjective but common experience (one that isn't tied to any particular individual), which achieves an intimate sense of connectedness with the voice of the poem, emphasising something we can share in (at the very least, entertaining the you-I thought). There is active interaction between the reader and voice, rather than the reader just being a passive recipient or observer.

In contrast to Vendler, I am emphasising the active interaction between the reader and voice, rather than the reader just being a passive recipient or observer. This happens by the reader giving voice to the poet (in hearing the words of the poem) and responding to that voice with an attitude of care and concern. Contra to the modes of reading identified by Walton and Ribeiro, we do not simply take up the words of *Citizen* as if they are one's own. There is something like this that goes on in reading these poems but we do this always with reference to and in collaboration with another; the meaning is modified by the interaction between the voice of the work and the reader. Instead, care and concern for another is established by the way the poem gets the reader to attend to the words with a sense of significance embodied in the form of the poem. This in turn leads to reflection on one's own perspective through one's effort to make sense of the perspective of the poem in establishing common ground between the two despite the resistance to adopting the perspective of the poem.

The use of the second person resists our attempts to appropriate these words as if our own, since understanding the 'you' preserves the sense of the relationship to another. Instead, it is an invitation to engage with but not adopt a particular evaluative perspective outright and appreciate how the perspective of the poem configures significance. Take for instance the following lines:

You are in the dark, in the car, watching the black-tarred street being swallowed by speed; he tells you his dean is making him hire a person of color when there are so many great writers out there.

You think maybe this is an experiment and you are being tested or retroactively insulted or you have done something that communicates this is an okay conversation to be having.

(p. 10)

This should not be thought of as inviting a sense of 'what is it like' for another since the poem acts as an offering to interpret the expression in terms of first person thought with awareness that this can be taken up by any reader. What the poem allows is an opportunity to see one perspective up against another and reveals a common responsibility through what is shared, that is, where the perspectives overlap (or ought to overlap). The use of the second person allows us to bring our own evaluative perspective to encounter another perspective, that of the poem and test it against common values, in this case, what it is to be a fellow citizen, with a shared sense of rights of a fellow human being.

Such cultivation of intimacy through the experience of seeing one's own perspective up against that of another enables an awareness of the dignity of another person, which brings with it a responsibility towards the other person. As Darwell argues "*dignity* of persons has an irreducibly second-personal element, which includes the authority to demand certain treatment of each other, like not stepping on one another's feet" (p. 13). Dignity, on Darwell's account, is understood not just in terms of a set of requirements but also in terms of authority in being able to hold others to account for their compliance with such requirements. The

second-person relation is one which is based in reciprocity and giving rise to authority to make a demand of the other: “If ... you address a demand that he move his foot, you initiate a reciprocally recognizing relation and presuppose the authority in which you take the reason you address to be grounded” (p. 58).

If we understand intimacy as fundamentally a matter of sharing an evaluative perspective with awareness of the demands that the you-I relationship entails, then both parties are accountable for that sense of significance – we are asked to consider what values we ought to share (even if we don't currently share them) in striving to form common ground. For instance, should we hold one another to the value of ‘letting it go’ or is there something damaging when we consider this as held by a whole group?

Another friend tells you you have to learn not to absorb the world. She says sometimes she can hear her own voice saying silently to whomever – you are saying this thing and I am not going to accept it. Your friend refuses to carry what doesn't belong to her.

You take in things you don't want all the time. The second you hear or see some ordinary moment, all its intended targets, all the meanings behind the retreating seconds, as far as you are able to see, come into focus. Hold up, did you just hear, did you just say, did you just see, did you just do that? Then the voice in your head silently tells you to take your foot off your throat because just getting along shouldn't be an ambition. (p. 55)

The use of the second person draws the reader to try to take up the perspective of the poem but ultimately fails. This is the point of *Citizen*; I cannot escape my own perspective. Instead, what's available is a shared perspective that recognises the limitations of our intimacy, i.e. our ability to share with others. In such a case, we are able to take up a shared perspective (in virtue of being human) but in doing so we are made aware of the limitations of this (that individuals have different experiences which we are precluded from sharing in). Although a shared evaluative perspective is limited in this way, it is still something we ought to strive towards in a true acknowledgement of a fellow human being, without denying the subjective experience of others, which is essential in overcoming such everyday racism. To connect this back to Darwell, without striving for a shared perspective, we run the risk of failing to see our second-personal relation to others and consequently meeting the demands that respecting their dignity places on us. It is only through such intimacy that we can come to see how we might be responsible for failing each other as people not merely in our failure to achieve the shared perspective we so desperately try to develop but in how this relates to our relationships outside the poetic context. This is of great moral significance in our striving to feel moral concern for our fellow humans.

V.

I have argued that lyric poetry – through the use of first person and second person expression – can help foster an intimate connection with the voice of the poem (or poetic persona), thereby increasing our capacity for sympathy and empathy for another, as well as enhancing our capacity for fellow feeling (or feeling together) with recognition of a 'potential' shared evaluative perspective. Such adoption of a shared perspective is never without reflection. The process of coming to share an evaluative perspective (even if we ultimately reject it) is valuable in helping us to appreciate values we *might* share with others, that is, in seeking to share with others; and where we feel responsibility, it triggers a process of self-reflection that

is important in our moral lives. We are reflecting not only on the shared evaluative perspective facilitated by the poem, but also on our own personal evaluative perspectives and whether we are meeting the demands of second person relations.

Although it seems that we cannot say that our engagement with a poem will always lead to a positive intimate connection, what it does do is provide the kind of self-reflection that is needed for individual moral progress; it helps us to reflect on our own personal values and commitments to import in relation to those considered from a more general, shareable and ultimately, human perspective.²¹

Notes

1. John Gibson, "Empathy," *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*, N. Carroll and J. Gibson (eds), 234–246 (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 234.
2. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014).
3. For a similar view, see Stephen Darwall *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006): "I prefer to use 'sympathy' for feelings of concern for others that are felt, not entirely as from their point of view, but as from a third-person perspective of one who cares for them, and to use 'empathy' for feelings that either imaginatively enter into the other's standpoint or result from his feelings by contagion. Second-personal interaction requires empathy in the sense of simulation or imaginative projection into the other's point of view (while, it should be noted, retaining a sense of one's own independent perspective)" (p. 45); hereafter abbreviated 'Darwell'
4. Helen Vendler, *Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 3
5. Kendall Walton, "Thoughtwriting – in poetry and music," in *In Other Shoes: Music, Metaphor, Empathy, Existence*. (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p. 54.
6. Anna Christina Ribeiro, "Toward a Philosophy of Poetry," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33 (2009): 61–77, p. 69–70.

7. Bennett Helm, *Love, Friendship and the Self: Intimacy, Identification and the Social Nature of Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 34. See also his *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation and the Nature of Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). I discuss his notion of the evaluative perspective in relation to poetry in my 'Beyond Narrative: Poetry, Emotion and the Perspectival View', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55 no. 4: 497–513.
8. Naomi Eilan, "The You Turn", *Philosophical Explorations* 17 no. 3 (2014): 265–278, p. 265.
9. Charles Olson, "Projective Verse" in *Collected Prose*, D. Allen and B. Friedlander (eds) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 245
10. Robert Pinsky, *Democracy, Culture and the Voice of Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 61–62; hereafter abbreviated *D*
11. See Eileen John, "Poetry and Directions for thought," *Philosophy and Literature* 3 (2011): 451–471 who makes the point that in reading poetry we might hear the words on the page articulated in one's mind, we are aware of these words as spoken in a voice other than our own.
12. A similar point is made by Tzachi Zamir in his "Unethical Acts" *Philosophical Quarterly* 63 no. 251 (2012):353–373 in relation to acting: in some cases "a performed act transcends the incarnated character and touches the identity of the actor in a manner that evokes ethical questions" (p. 354).
13. Alexandra Schwartz, *On Being Seen: An Interview with Claudia Rankine from Ferguson*. New York; published online August 2014 <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/seen-interview-claudia-rankine-ferguson>> Accessed 12 January 2016.
14. Guy Longworth, "You and me," *Philosophical Explorations* 17 no. 3 (2014): 289–303, p. 302
15. For instance, we can see this in contrast to the kind of reader-response view held by Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (London: Routledge, 1978). Support for this kind of position can be found in Peter Lamarque's "The Elusiveness of Poetic Meaning," *Ratio* 22 (2009): 398–420, who argues for the need to attend to the experience the poem affords, which suggests a move away from trying to uncover meaning to thinking about the poem as offering a meaningful experience.

16. Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, third edition (New York: MLA, 1983), p. 25.
17. For more on the idea of poetry as offering an organisational framework, see Elisabeth Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33 (2009):107–130; see also Troy Jollimore, "'Like a picture or a Bump on the head': Vision, cognition, and the language of poetry," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33 (2009):131–158.
18. Ted Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy", *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978): 3–12; hereafter abbreviated Cohen
19. For more on this see Elisabeth Camp, "Why Metaphors Make Good Insults: Perspectives, Presupposition, and Pragmatics," *Philosophical Studies* 174 (2017): 47–64, who discusses this passage from Cohen in relation to the notion of complicity.
20. David Constantine, *Poetry*. (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 77
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