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A Cure for the conventional novel: The second person in Peter Kocan's Incarceration duology

Abstract:

The year 2013 marks thirty years since Australia hailed an unlikely literary prize winner: Peter Kocan. In 1966 the 19-year-old had launched a failed assassination attempt on Australian Labor Party federal leader Arthur Calwell and was declared criminally insane. In 1980 he released his first prose book, a semi-autobiographical novella entitled *The Treatment*. Despite its challenging backdrop (a mental asylum) and unusual narration (second person, present tense), it was praised in some major publications. Its sequel, *The Cure*, won the major fiction prize in the 1983 NSW Premier's Awards. This paper takes a fresh look at Kocan's incarceration duology, concentrating on the ambitious second person narrative mode. It argues that Kocan uses the second person voice to capture what Morrissette and others have identified as unique literary effects that are unobtainable by other modes or persons. In Kocan's case, these include sections of split subjectivity (replicating the mentally deranged mind), ontological instability, and passages where the 'you' voice heightens the sense of paranoia and lack of agency.

Biographical note:

After many years working as a journalist and author, Tony Davis completed an M.Phil with Macquarie University's Media Department in 2010 and is now a PhD candidate there. Davis has written widely for the mainstream press and is the author of fiction and non-fiction books for adults and younger readers. His most recent publication is *The Big Dry* (HarperCollins, 2013), a dystopian novel for children.

Keywords

Peter Kocan – Incarceration novel – Second person narrative – Present tense narration

Introduction

You can see he's dead. He's hanging very still by a strip of blanket tied to the top of the window. His tongue and eyes are bulging out. Nobody looks like that unless they're dead.

The Treatment and The Cure, page 88.

It is 30 years since Peter Kocan's duology, made up of the novellas *The Treatment* (1980) and *The Cure* (1983), was completed. Soon afterwards the two books were published together in one volume, with a joined title. This paper considers *The Treatment and The Cure* as one entity, taking a fresh look at an important though now largely overlooked work (comments and page references herein relate to a joined edition from 1984).

In narratological terms, *The Treatment and The Cure* is notable for its use of sustained second person, and - as will be shown in this paper - by using this mode Kocan achieves unique literary effects. Furthermore, Kocan's technique will be shown to be complex, nuanced and richly layered, and not merely a disguised form of first or third person (as McHale, Bal, Bryson and others have described second person). It also provides a way of intensifying feelings of alienation, separation, claustrophobia and the weight of the 'panoptic repressive system' (Vernay 2012: 62).

This paper aims to show how the 'you' is a constantly shifting entity within the text (in keeping with theories by Richardson, Ryan and others) and why, to address the conundrum proposed by Bonheim (1983: 76), a narrator would plausibly relay a series of events to 'you', when 'you' are the one experiencing them. It will include a close reading of Kocan's text, comparisons with another incarceration memoir, plus earlier and later Kocan texts, and will draw on theoretical work by narratologists and literary critics.

Background on Kocan and the texts

Peter Kocan was born in Newcastle NSW in 1947 and was raised in a broken and sometimes violent home. On June 21 1966 he aimed a sawn-off rifle at the head of Australian Labor Party federal leader Arthur Calwell and pulled the trigger. Calwell was only slightly wounded; at 19 years of age, Kocan was arrested and imprisoned at Sydney's Long Bay. He was later moved to the Ward for the Criminally Insane at Morisset Mental Hospital (NSW) on an indeterminate sentence. He discovered poetry, began to write it, and published two collections of verse while incarcerated. He was released in 1976 with a literary grant.

Kocan's first book of prose, *The Treatment* (1980), was generally well received, despite its confronting subject matter and unusual narrative mode. Tony Stephens in *The Sun-Herald* called it 'a little gem of a novel, touched with humour and pathos and understanding ... There's love and compassion, low-key love and compassion. Peter Kocan has found beauty in despair' (1980: 13). Perhaps with the first book preparing the way for greater acceptance of the style, it was the follow-up, *The Cure*, which won

the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction in the 1983 New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards.

The Treatment and The Cure begins with a declaration (on the unnumbered indents page): 'All characters in this book are entirely fictitious, and no reference is intended to any living person.' However, part of the book's appeal and authority is the fact that characters are *not* entirely fictitious and that the references *are* to living people, particularly Kocan himself. We do not know how closely *The Treatment and The Cure* follows actual events, irrespective of the author's intentions on the matter. It is presented as fiction, with all the additional licence that gives the author. We know a little of the origins of the duology because in 1977, only a short time after Kocan's release, the journal *Quadrant* published 'After I Shot Arthur Calwell', described as 'two chapters from Peter Kocan's forthcoming book, *The Wire and the Wall*' (1977a: 13; italics are from original). The *Quadrant* extract deals with some of the incidents covered in the duology, in addition to events during and immediately after the shooting. The most notable difference from the duology is that it relates the events in first person, past tense. At the time, Kocan referred to *The Wire and the Wall* as 'a recently completed book about my 10-year experience in custody' and a 'sober and truthful account' (1977b: 7), which seems to affirm that he originally set out to relay his incarceration experience as a fairly conventional memoir/autobiography.

For whatever reason, *The Wire and the Wall* was never published, and gave way to a more complex, more literary work of fiction. Whereas the change from first person to second person (or non-fiction to fiction) does not alone make the work more literary, the published books have nuances and complexities that were not apparent in Kocan's more straightforward 1977 account. Furthermore, Kocan's prose writing skills – on the evidence provided by the two chapters in *Quadrant* – had improved in the intervening three years.

Second person effects

The second person narrative, or SPN, is a slippery, unstable mode where in its singular form the main character/protagonist is addressed not as 'I' (first person) or 'he/she' (third person) but 'you'. In fiction this 'you' can be confronting, imprecise, and remarkably complex, but if used skilfully it can fulfil Morrissette's description of 'producing effects in the fictional field that are unobtainable by other modes or persons' (1965: 2), and provide authors with what Darlene Hantzis calls a 'distinct device [that] produces distinct effects and constructs a unique textual world.' (1988: 1).

Exact agreement on what constitutes second person remains hard to find. Terms such as 'Protean shape-shifter' (Bonheim 1983: 79) and 'devious' (Richardson 2006: 14) have been applied to the way the pronoun 'you' in an SPN can apparently change its referent from paragraph to paragraph, even within a single sentence. Richardson maintains that second person is a new and exciting development in literature, perhaps the most important since the introduction of the stream of consciousness (2006: 35). Others have derided it as a gimmick or a sly form of something else (discussed below). Threasa Meads, who in 2007 wrote the SPN novella *Nobody* (*An*

Autobiographical Fiction), says in an accompanying exegesis ‘that readers of *Nobody* inhabit ‘you’ in a state of constant ontological flux’ and are ‘shifting unpredictably in and out of identification and immersion on both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic planes of the fictional world’ (2007: 21). However:

... considering that the protagonist also inhabits ‘you’ – a further question [...] remains. This narrative is based on my childhood memories. Regardless of the degree of identification a reader may have with the narrative, I can’t help but identify with it. I lived it [...] Don’t I inhabit ‘you’, too? (Meads 2007: 21)

Here Meads has noted at least three possible iterations of ‘you’, none of them stable. It is reasonable to see at least as many in Kocan’s work. It will be argued that the SPN’s ‘ontological slippage’ (Richardson, 2006: 30) is something Kocan manages well. But is second person really what it seems, or merely a disguised version of something else? Some theorists (McHale 1987: 224, Ryan 2001: 138) have said the SPN can be displaced third person. Writing about *The Treatment*, Patrick Bryson theorises that a second person narrative (when it works) appears to be a default first person voice, one Bryson claims ‘is handy when the subject in question has little or no real self-knowledge, and almost needs to be told how he or she feels’ such as with Kocan’s Tarbutt (2009: 257). Alternatively, says Bryson, the character needs to be told because he or she is severely traumatised, as with Jay McInerney’s protagonist in the second person novel *Bright Lights, Big City* (2009: 257). Narratologist Mieke Bal appears even more insistent that second person is a tricky form of first. Writing about Michel Butor’s ground-breaking second person novel *La Modification*, she suggests:

The narrative nature of this novel seems to be dependent on the fact that the second person cannot be sustained; without much effort, the reader ‘translates’ it into first-person format, which enables her to read on and process the text into a story. The ‘you’ cannot be subsumed by the reader’s position, nor can it be construed as the addressee of apostrophe [...] The ‘you’ is simply an ‘I’ in disguise, a ‘first-person’ narrator talking to himself. (Bal 1993: 181)

Even if that were so, as Kacandes has noted the second-person pronoun has the power to move readers, ‘causing them to feel themselves addressed and to experience the force of an unusual relationship created between the narrator and narratee’ (1994). Marie-Laure Ryan argues for the additional complexity of the SPN. She says that depending on the text the second person voice can be ‘a boundary crossing address from the narrator in the textual world to the reader in the real world’ or a wide range of other possibilities (2001: 137-138). Ryan writes these uses play on our ‘instinctive reaction to think *me* when we hear *you*, and to feel personally concerned by the textual utterance’ (2001: 138). Readers of Kocan, it will be shown, are likely to do just that.

Textual Analysis

The Treatment and The Cure uses the second person to tell the story of Len Tarbutt, who at nineteen years of age commits a shooting offence and is transferred from jail to a mental hospital. The text begins with his arrival at the (unnamed) hospital,

immediately revealing Kocan's distinctive writing style and unusual choice of narrative mode and tense. The first paragraph begins:

Down a long road, all sun and shadowy with trees overhead and a slow look from cows across a fence and you're there. You see buildings with barred windows and a few people in old grey clothes. There's the Main Kitchen. There are trucks outside being loaded with steel dixies for the wards and a reek tells you that today must be stew or cabbage. Then you see a nurse in a blue dress leading a little flock of inmates beside the road. They're all small, like little boys or shrivelled old men [...] (Kocan 1984: 3)

Soon the threat of electric shock therapy is introduced, along with the doctor known by prisoners as Electric Ned (1984: 9). It becomes obvious that 'the treatment' that most likely gives the book its name is even more frightening than violence, because it is not 'wrong', and can be ordered in plain sight. Over several pages the reader is introduced to a long passage of internal dialogue ('You imagine what they might be saying'), a second person stream of consciousness in which Tarbutt tries to explain to the guards why he (*you*) is not insane (1984: 22-24). It is a *Catch 22*-style exchange in which every answer 'you' give is the wrong one. Although this dialogue is on one level comic, it displays stark paranoia. As Tarbutt struggles to find a safe place in this alien, dangerous world, his fear and confusion is intensified in the telling by the second person mode, which is claustrophobic (and can also be repellent, as Hodgins 1993: 183-184, and others have noted). This mode leads the reader along, suggesting a lack of agency. Yet Kocan has also produced a voice that has first person intimacy without, to quote Hopkins and Perkins 'the presumptuous quality of the I-narrator' (1981: 132).

Exactly who is the 'you' in the work considered in this paper? Is it Kocan, or his stand-in, Tarbutt? Is it the reader, a narratee (ideal or otherwise), or some other entity, forever shifting? There is no clear answer and Kocan plays with this ambiguity. He extends it by sometimes using collective pronouns too, an aspect that will be discussed shortly. The ontological slippage is particularly evident in the sections where Len Tarbutt's mind is working its way through the real and imagined dangers. The reader is inside his head but definitely outside as well, observing him, and in possession of a bigger picture, or at least a broader awareness of circumstances than the author grants the character. But at other times the reader seems to be almost entirely within his shoes, with all the restrictions that brings. On this point, if an author such as Kocan really has been through difficulties well outside the reader's experience, a reader is more likely to accept this placement inside those shoes via the SPN. This potentially mitigates the repelling nature of the mode.

The present tense works well with the second person. With it, the author is creating the impression – and it is of course only an impression (though a strong one) – that the protagonist is experiencing everything at the same time as the reader, and indeed the writer. It is worth comparing the *Quadrant* extract from *The Wire and the Wall*. It begins (1977: 13):

I arrived at Lakeside Mental Hospital on the first day of 1967, accompanied by four guards, and after a two-hour drive from the goal. My guards did not seem awed by the knowledge that they were all that stood between society and a dangerous psychopath.

On the contrary, we had stopped on the outskirts of Sydney so that three of them could window-shop for new cars. I was left to sit with the fourth who, presumably, was not a car fancier.

The maximum security section of the hospital, to which I was being delivered, stood in thick bushland...

Compared with the duology, we have a more worldly, reflective and cynical voice. Much of the immediacy and tension of the duology's opening is lost. In this alternate telling, the story is not unfolding in 'real time' but is apparently being relayed years after the event by a writer who seems in good control of the narrative. The first person renders the reader more an observer than an integral part of the action.

In *The Treatment and The Cure* the first signs of Tarbutt's literary awakening, and by implication Kocan's own literary awakening, are revealed when he finds strength in some remembered words (1984: 25-26). They are from Psalm 23, though he does not recognise them as that. It is not the religion; it is the words themselves: 'They give you a feeling you can face whatever might happen [...] it's as though they're meant for you, yourself, right now.' The present tense is also effective in helping avoid what David Lodge describes as the reader's immediate consciousness of 'the actual process of recall' (2002: 35) with its suggestion of bias/distortion in the retelling and the perception that the writer/narrator is in possession of all the facts at the start (as per *The Wire and The Wall*). The range of things that could happen next appears greater in the duology; tension is created by the reader's perception that the narrator is not sitting somewhere, safe and warm, relaying an incident in the distant past. The story is 'for you, yourself, right now.'

DelConte has noted the SPN's effectiveness in describing 'an existence dictated from the outside' (2003: 205), and so it seems particularly suited to the incarceration narrative. Peter Doyle speculated (in discussions with this researcher in October 2011) that it could relate to the second person's register of command, instruction, compulsion, and dictation. It is the judicial voice: 'you will be taken from this place... etc'. It is hard to disagree; it is the voice where apparent control is taken away from the reader, where the reader is being led along, giving the impression that 'your' movement and action have been restricted. It is noteworthy that Morrisette, when writing about Butor's *La Modification*, said that for many the 'narrative *vous* holds a strong implication of judgment, of moral or didactic address' (1965: 16).

A contemporaneous Australian incarceration memoir, *Just Us* by Gabrielle Carey (1984), differs from Kocan's work in that it is written by an outsider rather than a prisoner. Categorised by the publisher as autobiography, it is primarily told from the point of view of Carey, who falls in love with and marries Terence Haley, a man the back cover blurb calls a 'notorious long-term inmate of Parramatta Gaol'. However, the narration slips regularly into long sections in the voice of Haley, presented in Italics as if directly quoting the prisoner. This is conversational and slang filled, and puts the reader very much 'in the head' of Haley. Some parts detail his background, others his personality or inner thoughts, for example: 'I can handle screws having goes at me. I can handle it for days and years and then once in a while I can't' (1984: 136). Interspersed is Carey's voice as observer and commentator: '...although it is a

Catch 22 situation, when with such an attitude he may never see the outside of a prison wall, at least he will know that he hasn't betrayed anyone' (1984: 126). What is interesting here is that much of the mood and coverage of *Just Us*'s two voices is contracted into the one narrative voice in Kocan's second person, along with other complexities. Therefore it is hard to accept that this SPN is a disguised version of first or third person. As Hantzis says of second person, multiple voices within it simultaneously construct the experience in the text (1988: 138).

Despite the fact that someone reading Kocan is likely to read the 'you' as 'he' or 'I' at certain times, the SPN pronoun in Kocan is a more elusive object than, say, Bal suggests with regard to *La Modification*. This would support the argument that it is not merely a gimmick but an effective literary tool for this particular story. At times the Kocan reader is hovering almost completely outside the main character and observing his misinterpretation of events from a more distant perspective. Sometimes the 'lens' moves closer and the reader is completely inside his skin, with him as one. At others the reader is lost in what is clearly 'his' (and not 'your') internal monologue, making the voice the character's alone and functioning like interior speech (an SPN peculiarity noted by Hopkins and Perkins, 1981: 126-127). Sometimes there is a split in the subjectivity (the SPN's capacity for split subjectivity has been mentioned by Smith, Bryson, Fisher and others); for example it is easy to believe there is an older 'you' re-explaining past events for a younger 'you' with the benefit of later experience and broader knowledge. At other times the narrator seems to be an external agent – perhaps fate or some other divine puppeteer – describing the inevitable, unchangeable path of the character's thoughts and actions. That each of these elements is plausible in different parts of Kocan's duology, supports that the 'you' is a constantly shifting entity. Bonheim used the term 'referential slither' for this ambiguity (1983: 76).

From early on, a further ambiguity seeps into Kocan's narrative voice: the occasional use of the collective pronoun: 'The talk has nothing to do with you. They seem to have forgotten you. We all step inside' (1984: 4). This tends to further cloud exactly who is telling the story and likely, as speculated by Bryson, demonstrates the duality of the mentally disturbed mind (2009: 256). Richardson says second person itself is an ideal tool for 'revealing a mind in flux' (2006: 35).

Irrespective of any advantages, writing in the second person introduces the conundrum referred to by Bonheim (1983: 76) and others: why would a narrator relay a series of events to 'you', when you had already experienced them, and knew them? One answer to this difficult question has been provided by Bryson - that the traumatised mind needs help with recall. Another is that conceit of the older 'you' passing on his experience to the younger 'you'. Yet another is proposed by Butor via Walker: that she (or he) is unable or unwilling to tell the story herself. 'She may lack the language, the self-awareness or the memories; or she may refuse to tell, perhaps because her story would incriminate her or because she doesn't trust the person who wants to hear it' (2000: 45). In Kocan's case it could relate to the pain of recall. John Wright has suggested (in discussions with this researcher, June 2012) that a narrator might plausibly relay to you something that you've already experienced to give a fresh perspective, or to reorder things (like members of a family might each with own

version of the truth), or to clarify what really happened in a traumatic time. Wright also suggests the SPN can add dignity to the retelling of an uncomfortable tale, perhaps by excusing the ‘you’ because the events seem to be ordained by fate, or because the pain/shame is being shared equally with the reader assuming the ‘you’ role.

Recalling his pre-shooting state of mind, the Tarbutt character explains how he spent most of his money on tickets to films: ‘In a cinema you could float out of yourself into the bodyless world of feeling on the screen. To stop being yourself was lovely, it was happiness’ (1984: 35). Here is another potential clue as to Kocan’s reason for choosing the second person – to intensify this very unsettling, frustrating feeling of being trapped within the *you* (as evidenced by his wish to escape: ‘To stop being yourself was lovely’). Tarbutt was seeing *Dr Zhivago* for the seventh time and ‘...you’d gladly have died right there in the seat rather than return to yourself and face the street outside with its squalor of traffic and people’ (1984: 36). Jeremy Fisher (2008: 10) says the combination of Len having seen *Dr Zhivago* seven times and the phrase ‘return to yourself’ powerfully demonstrates his madness and dissociation: ‘It is almost palpable to the reader in second person. The reader is walking with Len on the precipice of insanity.’ The reader assuming the role of the protagonist ‘looking’ at his younger, wilder self underscores Morrisette’s claims for the SPN offering a ‘complex series of perspectives’ and ‘multiple angles’ (1965: 2), plus more than a hint of what he describes as the mode’s ‘moralizing tonality in a rhetoric of self-judgement’ (1965: 13). Those critics who have argued that when we read ‘you’ we merely substitute ‘I’ or ‘he/she’ may be correct with some texts, but it is difficult to argue such a case here. Chapter Two ends with a gullible inmate, Clarrie, being bowled out in cricket and another character explaining with a straight face that it was because the bat was made of English willow instead of the normal material, cement. Clarrie ‘doesn’t feel so bad now because everyone knows it’s the bat’s fault’ (1984: 39-40). Whose glib observation is this final sentence? It might be Kocan’s, or that of an unidentified narrator, or Tarbutt’s, or Clarrie’s, or yours. No other narrative mode gives so many possibilities.

In a postcolonial reading of *The Treatment* and *The Cure*, Jean-Francois Vernay argued that ‘these two second-person semi-fictions can also be interpreted as a national allegory of Australian penal settlement, which explicates the ruler-ruled relationship through the establishment of a panoptic repressive system.’ (2012: 62). Vernay’s paper concentrated heavily on paternalistic overseeing in ‘total institution’ life. The Panopticon cited by Vernay (a type of prison proposed in the late eighteenth century and designed so the prisoner can be viewed at any time, without the prisoner knowing whether or not such surveillance is taking place) was described by Foucault as a ‘machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.’ (1977: 202). Foucault argued it was an important mechanism for automatising and disindividualising power. Vernay concludes that in keeping with Foucault’s theory in *Discipline and Punish*, the inmates in Kocan’s books are ‘disempowered and thereby reassure their masters of their harmlessness’ (2012: 63).

Although Vernay does not examine the second person voice, it can be argued that the mode is a strong tool in relaying this disempowerment. Richardson (in *Unnatural Voices*) did not cite – nor was perhaps aware of – the Kocan books, but argued that second person can help dramatise the mental battles of an individual ‘struggling against the internalized discourse of an oppressive authority’ (2006: 35). Fisher too has written that second person works well in ‘developing a sense of alienation and separation, a sense of being watched and observed’ (2008: 9). Certainly, the still-incarcerated Kocan told journalist-turned-author Robert Drewe that:

... any sign of eccentric behaviour is frowned on in a place like this [...] It’s very hard to work out the lines and stanzas in your head. If they see your lips moving it makes them very nervous. It can have unpleasant results for the person concerned. It has been quite a problem for me. (Drewe 1976: 67)

As *The Cure* instalment continues Tarbutt’s story, the protagonist arrives in REFRACT, not quite an open ward, but with less security than the previous MAX (1984: 109). The text reveals that Tarbutt is now 25 years old (1984: 191). He enthuses about a book called *The Survivor*, ‘about a person called David Allison who has an unhappy childhood, then goes to the trenches in Flanders, and afterwards tries to become a writer so as to tell the truth of the war for the sake of the dead men’ (1984: 124). Tarbutt reveals a growing obsession with David Allison, ‘Your only friend.’ *The Survivor* is a fictitious text (likely modelled on *The Golden Virgin*, from Henry Williamson’s World War One novel sequence, ‘The Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight’) and the full significance of ‘David Allison’ became more apparent when *Fresh Fields* was released many years later (discussed below). In the meantime, ‘David Allison is with you. He’s always with you, it’s just that you forget sometimes.’ (1984: 163). When Tarbutt is conscious of Allison, the second person ‘you’ is broadened, and less feeble. The load is shared; claustrophobia and paranoia are lessened.

Tarbutt works his way through highs and lows, depression, unwanted medication, falling in love and mind-numbing labour. He begins to have poetry published. His confidence grows. One day a letter changes everything: ‘You have won the National Poetry Prize’ (1984: 243). He is released soon afterwards. Heseltine speculates that Kocan’s final weeks in Morisset were not characterised by quite the fall of events he sets out here (1988: 69). Nevertheless, Heseltine says that ‘in 1976 and while still in hospital, he was awarded second prize in a poetry competition organised by the Commonwealth Institute in London’ (1988: 56) and ‘in August 1976 he was released on licence from Morisset, nearly ten years after he first entered its gates’ (1988: 69). We may never know the exact link between Kocan’s literary success and his release from incarceration (from Drewe, 1976: 66, we know he was otherwise considered a model prisoner). But, as pointed out by Elizabeth Webby, ‘for Len [Tarbutt], as for Janet Frame some decades earlier, literary success provides the real cure, establishing his right to be treated as a person, rather than a thing.’ (2002/2003: 63). The boldness of the duology’s narrative techniques, when compared even with *The Wire and the Wall*, shows how quickly Kocan’s literary confidence grew when he was treated in that way.

Two other linked novels

Kocan followed his incarceration duology with an apparent prequel, *Fresh Fields* (2004), which was named a 'Book of the Year' by the *Times Literary Supplement*. Published more than two decades after the duology, *Fresh Fields* tells the story of an unnamed youth fleeing a violent home. As his fear, frustration and inability to fit in with those around him turns to madness, the youth identifies with a movie character, a stranded German soldier named Diestl who finds himself alone 'limping like a wolf or an outlaw along the roads of a ruined and hostile world.' (2004: 16). The Diestl story is hinted at in *The Treatment and The Cure* but never made explicit. Armed with this information from *Fresh Fields*, readers of the duology may conclude that when Tarbutt replaces Diestl, the 'blonde death bringer' (1984: 32), with the positive role model of David Allison – a writer rather than a fighter – his life starts to turn around. In the meantime, the youth in *Fresh Fields* moves through several jobs and lodgings; eventually hears voices, buys a gun and plans 'a certain dark thing' (2004: 287).

Fresh Fields is written in a more mature and lyrical style than the earlier works, and uses conventional third person, past tense narration. The same is true of *The Fable of All Our Lives* (2010), which can be read as the 'post incarceration' instalment of Kocan's autobiographical novels. Perhaps because they are both much larger works, it would have been too restricting to again use second person. Equally, because the protagonist of these novels was on the outside, not controlled – directly, at least – by 'The Apparatus' (1984: 227), the restrictive, claustrophobic power of second person was no longer appropriate.

Conclusion

Kocan's SPN intensifies the claustrophobic feeling of incarceration, and the lack of power that comes with it. Second person is unsettling for the reader, a perfect accompaniment to being taken inside strange and potentially dangerous places. In Kocan's hands, it enhances the feeling of alienation and disconnectedness from 'your' surroundings. There are, however, factors at work to make sure this claustrophobia does not overwhelm the reader. There is humour, there is brevity (the work is short, even if you count the two books together), there is dialogue, there are sections of almost conventional steam of consciousness where the 'you' comes close to disappearing.

With Kocan's second person, a reader negotiates his or her relationship with the main character in a quite different way than in first or third person and, as argued above, a simple substitution of 'I' or 'he' – or even both modes, as in *Just Us* – would deny the reader many of the properties that make reading this SPN such a distinctive experience, including the ontological instability and the sense of being closely observed. It would produce a different – and potentially less rich – reading experience. The use of sustained second person is not a viable approach for every work of fiction, but in Kocan's hands it proves an ideal way to tell a short, intense story about a lone and frightened man dealing with extreme mental problems, and the

threat of violence and debilitating medical ‘cures’, as he slowly finds his place in the world through the practice of art. In 2013 – the thirtieth anniversary year – Kocan’s duology remains of interest to readers and writers not just for the powerful story it tells, but the innovative and unusual techniques it uses for the telling.

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