POETICS OF THE LOVE LETTER

narration, dialogue and apostrophe

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Introduction

> "Sie schwebt dahin in den flüchtigen Klängen des Ich. Kaum ist ein Ton aufgehallt, so ist er auch schon wieder im nächsten verklungen, und rätselhaft und grundlos unerwartet klingt er bald wieder, um wieder zu verhallen. Die Sprache der Liebe ist lauter Gegenwart; Traum und Wirklichkeit, Schlaf der Glieder und Wachen des Herzens, weben sich ununterscheidbar ineinander, alles ist gleich gegenwärtig, gleich flüchtig und gleich lebendig"
>
> –Franz Rosenzweig, *Stern der Erlösung* (1988, p.226).

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Opposed to all the possible sources open for interpretation concerning the topic of love letters, for instance famous correspondences like those of Abelard and Heloise, Kafka and Bauer or Rilke and Salome, *Weathering love* (2013) by Janis Klimanov's is rather special. Technically it is not a correspondence in the classical sense. It is a documentary film about Klimanovs' grandparents, in which a grand secret is revealed. Like an invaluable treasure, Klimanovs' grandmother kept the correspondence she and her husband wrote when he was conscripted by the Russian army some sixty years ago and shipped off to far away, to herself. None of the other family members knew about their writing, until she pulled them out in front of her grandson's camera and started reading. Moments of reading a love letter 'for the first time' are usually highly personal and rarely shared. They are, one could say, invisible. By my knowledge only Vermeer's *Brieflezend meisje bij het raam* comes close to capturing such hidden events, until Klimanovs caught it on his camera. The documentary's highpoint is therefore, in my view, her unfolding of the letters and reading them. Because in that moment grandmother Klimanovs seems to be transported back some sixty years ago, when she was a young lover who read the love letters from her beloved. In other words, just like Vermeer, the film caught a glimpse of that invisible moment.

This moment in the film and the conversations I had thereafter with its maker helped this thesis' aim come into full view. What I saw happening in the film was something I recognised as a fellow love letter writer. Therefore, it struck me that what the film depicts is something that might not be solely personal; it might be a shared experience every love letter writer has – by him- or herself. *Although the letter is the evidence that your beloved is not with you, it simultaneously brings the other extremely close to you*. A closeness that can only

be described as '*the lover in the letter, through the words and letter itself, is present.*' This positioned me on the track of my main research question: 'how can the love letter convey the presence of the lover-writer?' In my search for the answer I did not only use my own experiences and Klimanovs' film as my guideline, but during my research I came across the letters of Marina Tsvetajeva. In her letters the elements of love letter writing come together in such a condensed and intense way, it allows me to use her letters as the benchmark, the body of this study, on which I can test my intuitions.

> "Droomt U? De straffeloosheid, de vrijblijvendheid, de grenzeloosheid van de droom. U bent een vreemde, maar ik heb U in mijn leven opgenomen, ik loop met U over de stoffige lanen van het dorp en in de rokerige straten van Praag, ik vertel U (vertel U veel), ik wil U geen kwaad, ik doe U geen kwaad, ik wens dat U groeit, groot en wonderbaarlijk, en, nadat U *mij* vergeten bent, nooit afscheid neemt van die - die andere - *mijn* wereld!
>
> (…) Als U mij antwoordt: ik ben niet groot en wonderbaarlijk en ik zal nooit groot en wonderbaarlijk zijn - zal ik U geloven.
>
> … Ik wil een wonder van U. Een wonder van vertrouwen, van begrip, van ontheffing. Ik wil, dat U met Uw twintig jaren een zeventig jaar oude man - en tegelijkertijd een zevenjarig jongetje bent, ik wil geen leeftijd, geen rekensom, geen strijd, geen hindernissen.
>
> Ik weet niet wie U bent, ik weet niets van Uw leven, ik ben volkomen vrij met U, ik praat met een geest.
>
> Vriend, het is de grootste verleiding, er zijn weinigen die hem weerstaan. In staat zijn niet op *je eigen* conto te schrijven wat voor jouw rekening komt - de eeuwige" (Tsvetajeva, 1990, p.13).

The above cited text is an excerpt from a longer letter from Tsvetajeva addressed to the young Russian critic Alexander Bachrach. She is a Russian poet and at the time of writing resident of Prague. The letter is part of a longer correspondence that lasted for several months in 1923. The correspondence started off after Bachrach reviewed a book of poems (*Ambacht*) by Tsvetajeva on the 9th of April in the social-revolutionary magazine *Dni* (*Days*) in Berlin, whereupon she wrote Bachrach a personal letter responding to his review and asking him if he could find a publisher for a different book she had written. Bachrach replied and from there onwards a passionate correspondence took place, although they never met each other during

their correspondence, nor would they ever meet each other during the remainder of their lives. Sadly, just Tsvetajeva's side of the conversation is known to public because years later Bachrach only published her side of the correspondence. Other than that he kept his peace about the matter. Consequentially, little is known about Bachrach, but one could assume from Tsvetajeva's letters that he was not wholly indifferent towards Tsvetajeva (Couvée, Timmer, 1990, p.84).

What is striking in the above cited text, and one can find different examples throughout the correspondence, is the amount of invested passion coming from Tsvetajeva. It is as if the persona Tsvetajeva is barely contained on paper, as if she, only moments from now, could step through the words off the page and into the room. How does she manage this? How is it possible that this letter animates Tsvetajeva's presence in such a strong manner? Is it because she is so highly inquisitive, asking Bachrach personally motivated questions? Is it because she casts her deep felt passions in the form of a desire; a desire for an answer, a desire for a miracle to be trusted and understood, a desire to be desired by the stranger Bachrach? Is it because she exposes herself and through this exhibitionistic outcry hopes Bachrach will never forget her - *die ander*e, *mijn wereld*? For now these are all preliminary assumptions, and they remain as of yet unfounded and unguided.

In this thesis I will scrutinise the phenomenon of the love letter, with Tsvetajeva's letters as the main object of study, in the search for presence. I propose that one can find a certain structure at work within her love letters. As the research moves on, it will become clear that to a greater or lesser extent this structure applies not only to her love letter writing, but to a whole range of love letter correspondences. In other words, *I propose to sketch out a poetics of the love letter*. For this 'love letter structure' to become visible and distinct, I will look at structural moments in the writing itself. I will call these moments the 'modes of address,' of which I propose there are three types, one embedded in the other, and of which the order of embedding can differ. The first mode I will look into is the *narratologic mode of address.* With help of Mieke Bal's *Narratology* (2009) I will analyse how a lover-writer uses narratological devices with which a dramatic presence is conveyed. The second mode is the *apostrophic mode of address*. By analysis of the most recent academic discourse on apostrophe, I will show that there are generally speaking three ways or positions of thinking about the apostrophe. Each of these ways harbour certain aspects which are useful in grasping what happens in the love letter's mode of apostrophic address. Think here of the typical question 'who is the one addressed in the apostrophe?' Furthermore, think of the issue that the apostrophic addressee is usually some absent abstract entity but the writing seems to be a

dialogue ‘in the moment.’ In the final chapter I deal with the *dialogic mode of address*. I will do so by analysing Mikhail Bakhtin’s *dialogism* on the notion of dialogue and it is through dialogue all three modes will fall together, giving way to an explanation why the lover is present in the love letter.

Chapter 1 - On narrative

1.1 Preliminary remarks

Someone who has received love letters from a beloved, or read some love letters from famous correspondences, might have noticed that sometimes love letters function like artefacts. They carry not only the typical '*I love you*' and practical information across from lover to beloved, but the letter seems to articulate a certain 'presence' of the lover. In such moments, the love letter is more than just mere communication (articulating a message from X to Y; e.g., '*PS: I'll arrive at nine o'clock, can you pick me up? Hundred kisses*'). It is the lover who usually wants to make him or herself be genuinely 'felt' through the letter. The reader recognises the love letter therefore as a very intimate form of presentation by the lover on top of the exchange of practical information. In some cases love letters might even be lacking 'clear' messages all together, functioning only as artefacts wherein "people incalculably distant, (…) may appear immediately present, (…) [where the] word can stir, reach and call" (Waters, 2000, p.212).[1] I would argue it is this presence that makes the love letter such a strong object of consolation and hope in times when lovers are separated.

To make tangible why the love letter is more than 'just communication,' but quintessentially a textual artefact of presence reaching, stirring and calling, I propose, as mentioned in the introduction, to analyse the love letter via a division of *three modes of address*. This division's guiding question is: 'how does the lover appear to be immediately present in the love letter?' However, note that the love letter is a finite textual unit within a longer correspondence. Within the single love letter one can find that the three modes alternate with each other constantly; over the course of a correspondence one finds that in some periods some modes are more represented than in other periods. By focusing on single love letters (not whole correspondences) and separating those texts into several analytical layers I firstly aim to research the dominant features of each individual mode of address. More importantly, once the modes of address are singled out, I can attempt at gaining insight into the complex process how the interaction between the modes cause the lover to be present in the love letter.

[1] This contention comes from William Waters' intriguing paper on poetic address. The *poetics of the love letter* approximates his view on poetry, summarised by Water's as the capability of the written word to 'stir, reach and call.' Waters argues that the poem is a "chronic hesitation, a faltering between monologue and dialogue, between 'talking about' and 'talking to,' third and second person" (2000., p.191). Moreover, through analyses of Celan and Rilke, he posits that "[h]uman beings are not human in and of themselves, but become what they are by saying 'you,' which is to say by way of the second-person claims they make and acknowledge. I am, in the end, completely myself only in and because of my relation to you" (ibid., p.205). Two bodies meet, which brings with it a matter of *presence* (Celan), where in the territory of the printed word it transforms into the uncanny reach, and stir, and call of someone incalculably distant (ibid., p.212).

Before I start the in-depth analyses of each individual mode of address, I would like to adduce a few examples of each type. These will function as a preliminary overview or guiding map of the various modes of address one can encounter in the love letter. Consider the following three groups of excerpts, each group exemplifying one mode of address:

A: "… Ik, die met poëzie leef sinds - nou, sinds de dag dat ik geboren ben! - hoorde eerst deze zomer van mijn uitgever 'Helikon' wat een trochee en een dactylus was . . . " (Tsvetajeva, 1990, p.5).

"Ik schrijf U laat in de nacht, net terug van het station, waar ik een gast op de laatste trein gezet heb. U kent dit leven immers niet.

Een piepklein bergdorpje, we wonen in het laatste huis, in een eenvoudig stulpje. De dramatis personae van mijn leven: een waterput-kapelletje, waar ik meestal 's nachts of 's morgensvroeg heen hol om water (bergafwaarts) - een kettinghond - een piepend hekje. Achter ons meteen bos. Rechts - een hoge rotskam. Het dorp zit vol beekjes. Twee winkels. Een katholieke kerk met een begraafplaats als een bloementuin. Een school. (…) Het dorp is niet dorps, maar burgerlijk: de oude vrouwen in jurken, de jonge met hoeden op. Met hun veertigste zijn het heksen.

En kijk - bij nacht in elk huisje gegarandeerd een lichtend venster: een Russische student! Ze gaan net niet dood van de honger" (ibid., pp.17-8).

"Wat verder nog? Ah, het belangrijkste, gisteren vergeten: na Uw brief - een uitzinnig geblaf. Ik kijk: een bedelaarster: met een bult: met een zak over haar schouders: het Lot. Ik begreep het meteen: een opkoopster. Ik graaide bijeen wat voorhanden was (…), schoeisel, brood, lompen. (…) De miezerige zak zwol op als een wurgslang: nog een bult op haar bult! Zij die niet wist dat ze het Lot was, was dol van vreugde.

Om kort te gaan, ik kocht me vrij. (…) Bij het weggaan kuste ze uitzinnig mijn handen (NB! Een democratische staat). Ik kon me nauwelijks redden.

Het Lot heeft trouwens drie kinderen en een man - ook met bult. Het beweert dat ze met z'n allen nog niet één hemd hebben" (ibid., pp.33-4).

"Ik schrijf U vanuit een klein stadje in Moravië (…) bij het tikken van acht klokken, - allemaal in mijn kamer, ik woon bij de weduwe van een klokkenmaker" (ibid., p.48).

B: “Uw stem is jeugdig, dat hoorde ik direct. Onverschillig en vaak vijandig gezind jegens jeugdigheid van gelaat als ik ben, houd ik van jeugdigheid in stemmen” (ibid., p.8).

“U hebt mijn brief niet begrepen, U hebt hem onzorgvuldig gelezen. U hebt niet mijn genegenheid, noch mijn bezorgdheid, noch mijn menselijke pijn om U gelezen, U hebt mij zelfs niet begrepen in mijn: ‘ja, is het dan zo belangrijk *wie* er pijn heeft?!’” (ibid., p.54).

“U zegt: vrouw. Ja, ook dat zit in me. Weinig - zwak - bij vlagen - als afspiegeling - als weerkaatsing. Eerder verlangen naar - *dan*!” (ibid., p.58).

C: “Een onbekend iemand - dat is: alle mogelijkheden, hem, van wie je alles verwacht. Hij *is* nog niet, hij is pas morgen. (…) De zijnde mens stel ik allen ter beschikking, dat wat zijn zal, is het mijne. (NB: U bestaat natuurlijk, maar voor mij, een vreemde, bestaat U natuurlijk nog niet)” (ibid., p. 8).

“U bent een vreemde, maar ik heb U in mijn leven opgenomen, ik loop met U over de stoffige lanen van het dorp en in de rokerige straten van Praag (…).

Ik weet niet wie U bent, ik weet niets van Uw leven, ik ben volkomen vrij met U, ik praat met een geest” (ibid., p.13).

“De pijn heet *jij*, het zoet is naamloos (…). Vandaar dat wij het met iedereen ‘goed’ kunnen hebben, pijn willen we slechts van een enkeling. Pijn is *jij* in de liefde, ons individuele kenmerk daarin. (…) Daarom: ‘Doe pijn,’ dwz. zeg dat jij het bent. Noem je naam” (ibid., p. 36).

To define the differences between the three groups I ask again: ‘how does the lover appear to be present in A, B and C?’ A first provisional categorisation could be that the excerpts from A deal with Tsvetajeva’s ‘past’ (living with poetry since the day she was born) or ‘just recent past’ (sitting in a room with eight clocks on 9 September 1923). Tsvetajeva *describes* everyday situations, her biographical self, and things she has experienced which have nothing to do with Bachrach (directly). In the B citations Tsvetajeva *responds* to some of Bachrach’s remarks as if they were in dialogue with each other at a coffee table. This generates a different

dynamic and different form of presence, namely, a presence of someone in direct dialogue with an interlocutor. In C Tsvetajeva seems to respond to Bachrach just like she does in B, but something *uncanny* is at work here. When scrutinised, these responses to Bachrach are of a different kind than the simple question- and answer-replies to his letters. In the C excerpts Tsvetajeva seems to reach a different, or one could say, more intense form of presence, going beyond mere conversing through a written medium or telling stories about oneself. The sub-questions are: what are these modes of address exactly? How do these various modes relate to one another, leading to what is known as a love letter?

1.2 Bal's narratology, an overview

Starting with the most straightforward mode, I turn firstly to the A group excerpts. What might strike a reader upfront is the casualness with which Tsvetajeva is depicting herself. It is as if she is telling Bachrach little stories about herself. Stories in which she is the main protagonist around which the places, situations and other people revolve. For example, she describes her daily surroundings (*een kettinghond, een piepend hekje, Russische studenten*), where and how she writes (*bij het tikken van acht klokken*), and how she ended up in a situation with an old rag-and-bone woman who she names *Lot* or Fate. To put it differently, in these sections of the letter Tsvetajeva adopts the position of narrator. Thus, the question 'how does the lover appear to be present,' can be restated as: 'what happens textually when she narrates?' To aid the analysis of Tsvetajeva as a narrator of her mini-stories I turn to Bal's *Narratology* (2009). Her work provides this thesis with an analytical framework with which the structures of these narrative sections can come to the fore. Once the narrative structure is laid bare, it can be compared to the other two mode of address.

Bal discerns within the narrative text three possible layers of analysis. Each layer offers a distinct way of looking at the text. These are *text*, *story* and *fabula*. First and foremost, Bal states that this three-part division is a theoretical interference in the text (ibid., pp.5, 18). It is a supposition in order to be able to analyse what structures a text as a narrative and perceive how such a text produces meaning. Moreover, when a narrative text is simply read this division is usually not noticeable. The three layers collapse into each other, causing a seamless reading experience which might capture, move, or otherwise affect a reader (ibid., p.7). Before I present the general features of her theory, Bal's general definition for a narrative text (meticulously developed in stages throughout her book) reads as follows: in a narrative text a subject conveys a story to an addressee in a particular medium (ibid., pp.5, 15). More specifically, the narrator presents (*text layer*) a certain ordering (*story layer*) of a

series of logically and chronologically related events (*fabula layer*). An event marks a transition or change from one state to another, caused or experienced by actors[2] (ibid., pp.189, 194).

Shortly, the three layers can be summarised as follows. The textual layer deals with *how* a story can be told by a narrator. I.e., if the narrator is present within the text as a character and refers to itself (becoming a 'character bound narrator'), or if the narrator is an 'external narrator' who is never present as an actor in the events. Furthermore, this layer distinguishes between two types of narration, namely, narrative text in which the narrator presents the course of action or descriptions of elements within the events. In non-narrative text, there are no events presented or described by the narrator, but the reader is confronted with either a form of ideological argumentation[3] or dialogue between characters (ibid., pp.31-3). Dialogue is the most common form of non-narrative text.[4] It is text in which "the actors themselves, and not the primary narrator, utter language," and it is embedded in the encompassing narrative layer (ibid., p.64).

The story layer deals mostly with the *ordering* of the things that happen in the fabula. As stated, the fabula is a series of interrelated chronological events in which change occurs. For instance, a man and woman run into each other by chance at the beach and fall in love. They eventually get married, have a son, after which the marriage starts to deteriorate up to the point that they file for divorce (*5x2*, Ozon, 2004). In the film's depiction of these events, however, the chronology is reversed: the film opens with the couple sitting in a lawyer's office discussing their divorce, then moving backwards into their marriage, to the son's birth and up to the point where they meet each other at the beach. Telling the story in a reversed chronology is a form of ordering the fabula's events in the story layer. Additionally, the story layer deals with the pacing and rhythm of the story; how characters, objects, and spaces are presented, and how the reader 'perceives' the story by means of focalisation. I.e., through whose eyes do we see and come to understand the events, objects, spaces and actors? (either from a character's view partaking in the fabula, or an external focalisor's view).

In Bal's last chapter she poses the question 'how a narrative text should be defined,' departing from Barthes' structuralist assumption that each narrative has a basic narrative structure. For Bal, the 'motor' of the narrative is to be found within the fabula (2009., p.206).

[2] Actors are the entities partaking in events within the fabula. In the story layer an actor might be called 'character;' i.e. 'paper people' resembling a human being (actors not necessarily do so) (Bal, 2009, p.112).
[3] Cf. Bal: statements referring to a general topic not specifically related to the fabula (2009, pp.31-3).
[4] Note that dialogue often presents an intermediate situation between narrative and non-narrative text, switching from *direct speech* (non-narrative) to *indirect- / free indirect speech* (Bal, 2009, p.51).

The motor logically resides with the fabula because otherwise there would be no material to give an ordering to (story layer), nor would there be material to be narrated (textual layer). What constitutes the motor are the transitions or changes within an event. Bal offers various ways to detect the most important and meaningful events determining a fabula. The general principle to note is that of 'subject – object – intention.' Usually, a subject (e.g., an actor who falls in love with a girl) wants an object: someone (the girl) or something (eternal love) (ibid., p. 203). The relation of appropriation between subject and object defines the fabula's general direction (change of events and characters). Moreover, the subject has the will, knowledge, power, and skill to act accordingly, determining the fabula. Such basic forms of change within the fabula, presented in a certain story order and narrated in a certain textual form, have an effect on the reader. Depending on the skill with which the story is told, we might even experience happiness, aggravation, wonder, shock and so forth. In other words, the story starts to convey meaning to us, compelling us to read on. We are curious to the changes in the story, to the places visited by characters, what events they experience, and which other actors they meet. When narrative strategies (on all layers) are truly effectively deployed, the characters 'come to life' and start to appeal to us (or we dislike them tremendously but they still entice us to read on). Sometimes we like them so much that we forget that they are fictitious paper people. For we respond to them; "[a]s readers we 'see' characters, we feel with them and like or dislike them" (ibid., pp.112-3). This is called the *character effect*, occurring "when the resemblance between human beings and fabricated figures is so great that we forget the fundamental difference: we even go so far as to identify with the character, to cry, to laugh, and to search for or with it, or even against it" (ibid., p.113). Differently stated, Bal means that stories, places, and characters gain 'probability' or become 'plausible' to the reader (ibid., p.41).

Switching back to this thesis' object of study, how does the above expounded theory relate to love letters, specifically those of Tsvetajeva? Sidestepping for a moment the problematic point of defining letters as non-fictional and non-narrative autobiographical utterances, I still propose to read the letters as if they were a narrative as described above. Tsvetajeva's correspondence might even be an ideal case for such an experiment because Bachrach does not know Tsvetajeva. In fact, they have never met during their lives. This means that Tsvetajeva must 'present herself' in such a way that she becomes 'plausible' to the stranger Bachrach –just like an author of novels would have to make his characters plausible. Of course, I take into account that Tsvetajeva is a 'real' person, and the letters are not fictitious nor intended as a narration, nevertheless, I want to emphasise that Bachrach only

gets acquainted with her through writing. And if this narratological view of construing plausibility through narrative strategies is kept in mind, Bal's theory points out several strategies with which plausibility or a certain form of presence is generated.

For the moment, the point to note is that plausibility is something which is conveyed through the use of literary strategies; it is something else than a naturalistic truth. Thus, plausibility does not concern the fabula's 'realism' because we somehow easily 'believe' that the fool acquires a flying ship in order to marry the Tsar's daughter in *The fool of the world and his flying ship*. For what it is worth, Tsvetajeva could in this sense be thought of as a 'fictitious paper person.' Truth in the naturalistic sense is not the sole narratological motivation to make a story or character plausible (ibid.). Plausibility is an effect of narration, and there are numerous strategies at hand divided over the three narrative layers. I will begin by highlighting some story layer strategies in relation to the love letter's aim at plausibility. It will follow that these strategies are closely related to the projection of time and space in writing.

1.3 Autobiographical presence – *narratologic was*

Based on the assumptions above, I ask: 'how does Tsvetajeva make herself believable in writing to a man she has never met?' Keeping Bal's story layer in mind, several strategies come to the aid of the author- lover. In the story layer Bal analyses how time and space are put forth through story telling, and how these are connected to the believability of the character. To begin with, a character is not a 'floating mind having thoughts in a big timeless nothingness.' Characters, like real human beings, find themselves in a space and events take time, influencing a character and the events. Time and space become a *frame* for characters. Bal argues that *description* is of central importance to story telling because it posits the frame, and the frame helps posit the character (ibid., p.37 ff.). For just like human beings, paper people sensually experience something and gain awareness of their surroundings affecting them. Descriptive sections in narratives are points in the story where this awareness is conveyed. Secondly, like real people, their 'looking' also takes time, suggesting that time is passing in an event. In the following part I focus only on space and its relation to time as a frame for characters; afterwards I move on to character descriptions.

First and foremost, space is inherently connected to the characters. It is the place in which they act and in which the events take place. The description of space can come about in two basic ways. Either, the external narrator describes the space, or the reader looks with a character through its eyes and perceives what it perceives. The description is a reproduction of

what the character perceives (ibid., pp.42, 136); e.g., "I crossed the staircase landing, and entered the room she indicated. From that room, too, the daylight was completely excluded, and it had an airless smell that was oppressive" (Dickens, cited by Bal, 2009, p.144). Secondly, the character describes the space in the event as dialogue (implying a listening interlocutor). Finally, the character deals with the space through an action (ibid., p.144).

When a character perceives space, it can gain information through all its senses. For instance, in Tsvetajeva's letters through sight: *En kijk - bij nacht in elk huisje gegarandeerd een lichtend venster: een Russische student!*, through hearing: *Ik schrijf 's avonds laat, onder de klanken van restaurantmuziek, die door het raam naar binnen komt*, or through touch: *Ik schrijf U in het mos* (…). *Het korte mos prikt in mijn armen* (1990, p.23). Such a space in which the character is situated is regarded as the frame. This frame can affect the character's mood; e.g., a character feels safe or unsafe in the space (Bal, 2009, p.144.), or can literally shape a characters actions and determine the event: *Ik was uw brief aan het lezen en voelde plotseling de aanwezigheid van iets, van iemand anders in de buurt. Ik keek op – de wolk!* (Tsvetajeva, 1990, p.23).

For the moment, the additional point to note is that each time when such a description is put forth in narration, narrative time 'passes' (ibid., p.142). Just like in the real world, *looking at the clouds* takes time, and through looking one might discover new possibilities, thus pushing the events forward. Tsvetajeva: *Stap met mijn brief naar buiten, dat de wind U mijn blaadjes net zo uit de handen rukt, als zojuist de Uwe uit de mijne. (O, de wind is jaloers!)* (1990, p.23). Combining the descriptions of space implying the passing of time, a reader is offered a mental landscape in which it finds the character. Bal proposes that when these descriptions resemble the actual world in some way, "the events situated within it also become plausible" (Bal, 2009, p.142). Formulated strongly, space gives the character 'body' in a literal sense. The character is no longer a 'free floating timeless mind,' but thought of as a body in space, experiencing events through time. The character gains corporality and hence plausibility. Similar to us, it is bound to time-spatial rules determining it, and each 'descriptive' moment (either uttered by a narrator or the character itself) adds to the plausibility of the character by highlighting its finite physicality. Although it is obvious that a body is implied, description is an effective tool to support general plausibility (ibid, p.35). I propose to define this type of presentation as a '*spatial here*' –a character becomes manifest and plausible by focusing on its corporality via spatial description.

Turning to Tsvetajeva's case, she regularly makes use of this literary strategy. On numerous occasions she opens the letter by depicting where, and at what time she is writing:

Ik schijf U laat in de nacht, net terug van het station / Ik schrijf U in het mos / Ik schrijf U vanuit een klein stadje in Moravië (...) bij het tikken van acht klokken,- allemaal in mijn kamer / Ik schrijf 's avonds laat, onder de klanken van restaurantmuziek. In miniature form she deploys the narrative strategy of 'evoking' a space in which *she* is present. By evoking this spatiality (by doing so implicitly referring to the time passing, or even in the case of *tikken van acht klokken* explicitly referring to time) she gives herself a time-spatial frame.

To this, Bal appends that spaces also function in a symbolical way. How spaces are perceived by a character can 'tell' something about the character, colouring the character. For instance, "Emma Bovary's idealisation of the city, projected on Paris, becomes her measure of her involvement, then disappointment" (ibid.). Or in Tsvetajeva's case: *Het dorp is niet dorps, maar burgerlijk: de oude vrouwen in jurken, de jonge met hoeden op. Met hun veertigste zijn het heksen*. The latter example brings the analysis to the description of the actors and characters.

When we switch from space and time descriptions to character descriptions, a similar way of construing plausibility takes place. When looked at the letters as forms of narration, Tsvetajeva as a narrator does not only describe the acting space, but also describes the events and actors of a fabula taking place in those space-timeframes. Typical for the letters is that these events are 'her' fabula; she is the acting character. Additionally, on the textual level she is the 'character bound narrator.' For example:

> "Wat verder nog? Ah, het belangrijkste, gisteren vergeten: na Uw brief - een uitzinnig geblaf. Ik kijk: een bedelaarster: met een bult: met een zak over haar schouders: het Lot. Ik begreep het meteen: een opkoopster. Ik graaide bijeen wat voorhanden was (…), schoeisel, brood, lompen. (…) De miezerige zak zwol op als een wurgslang: nog een bult op haar bult! Zij die niet wist dat ze het Lot was, was dol van vreugde.
>
> Om kort te gaan, ik kocht me vrij. (…) Bij het weggaan kuste ze uitzinnig mijn handen (NB! Een democratische staat). Ik kon me nauwelijks redden.
>
> Het Lot heeft trouwens drie kinderen en een man - ook met bult. Het beweert dat ze met z'n allen nog niet één hemd hebben. Ik zal ook de zoon van het Lot moeten kleden, en de twee dochters van het Lot, en de man van het Lot. Als ik niet weg ging zou ik een huis voor ze moeten kopen en een plaats op het kerkhof.
>
> – Vriendje, U richt me te gronde!" (1990, pp.33-4).

By definition this is a mini-narrative where several events are chronologically connected and where change occurs. The fabula can be summarised as follows: Tsvetajeva is at home; a dog suddenly barks; a rag-and-bone woman knocks on the door and begs for aid; Tsvetajeva gives her whatever she can find; the woman is utterly thankful, kissing the hands of Tsvetajeva; Tsvetajeva can barely free herself from her.

Accordingly, when looked at the text layer, suddenly extra information or interpretation is added by the character bound narrator –Tsvetajeva. She describes the woman quite precisely as a woman with a hump and a bag. Eventually, the bag even 'strangles her like a snake.' Then she conveys that this woman is *Lot* or Fate, adding a symbolical meaning to the (mere) appearance of the actor begging for clothes. Additionally, Tsvetajeva suggests that she redeems herself by giving aid. In other words, the bare fabula is overlaid with meaning during the story telling by the narrator who partook in the events. From this the reader not only gains information about the fabula but also about Tsvetajeva. Something urges her to redeem herself. With the final sentence she suggests that the situation of redemption is connected to *U*, –Bachrach.

This type of mini-narrative can be found throughout the complete correspondence, for instance in the first letter she mentions an event about her publisher explaining to her what a trochee and dactyl is (ibid., p.5); how she has been involved with other men (pp.23-4); hiking with her daughter (p.34); ruining the coffeepot (p.51), etc. With this, I want to point out that through an accumulation of narratives in which the character Tsvetajeva acts she gains narrative shape. In conclusion, narration has a threefold effect in conveying plausibility: *descriptions* give Tsvetajeva corporality in space and time; secondly, the events posit her as an *acting character* (Bal, 2009, p.131); thirdly, in her function as narrator she *colours* the fabula through narration, colouring the character Tsvetajeva, ipso facto colouring herself as the autobiographical narrator. In Bal's terms, Tsvetajeva enforces the *character effect* through narration: "[a]s readers we 'see' characters, we feel with them and like or dislike them" (ibid., pp.112-3). This is what I want to define as one of three structural modes of address in the love letter. Herein, the lover Tsvetajeva speaks to or addresses the beloved Bachrach as narrator; i.e. this is the *narrative mode of address* with the temporal characteristic *was* or *past*. 'Past' because, strictly speaking, the narration uses material from past events. She establishes herself as a believable dramatic character with historical presence through narration: 'I *have* existed, for I tell you that I once encountered clouds, my publisher, a village flanked by a crest, a rag-and-bone woman.'

Here however, a problem of interpretation arises. It seems that although most narrative strategies are deployed for past events, some narrative strategies do not 'stay' in the *past*:

> "Ik schrijf U in het mos (ik had het in een schriftje geschreven en nu schrijf ik het over [3]) er komt nu een enorme donderwolk aan - een lichtende [2]. Ik was uw brief aan het lezen en voelde plotseling de aanwezigheid van iets, van iemand anders in de buurt. Ik keek op - de wolk! Ik glimlachte zo tegen hem als ik op dat ogenblik tegen U geglimlacht zou hebben [1]" (Tsvetajeva, 1990, p.23).

When analysed, three fabula moments can be discerned in this excerpt. Chronologically: she reads Bachrach's letter in the forest and feels the presence of a cloud [1]; she writes in the forest about 'reading Bachrach's letter and the cloud's arrival.' Also, a thundercloud arrives [2]; she copies the text from her notebook onto the letter [3]. Note here that not all three moments fall into the same tense. When the *act of writing* is taken into account, the narrative past does not completely cover all three fabula moments. Effectively, only one moment lies in the *past* as a narrated event (letter reading and the cloud interrupting). The two other moments are instances of writing: writing in the notebook, and writing the letter by copying from that notebook. In both those instances she speaks in the *present* tense, even adding the word '*now*.' I propose that the self-oriented or self-referential intervention *I write here now* –as a change in tense (in all variations: I write in a room filled with eight clocks; in the moss, etc.), differs structurally from narrative sections (events concerning herself as a character, acting upon clouds or rag-and-bone women, which she narrates). It differs because through the self-oriented intervention her 'writing presence' stands apart from the 'presence as a character,' and I propose that it even stands apart from her 'function (or presence) as a narrator.' What seems to happen here is that the *past* is pried open; the narration is pried open. In other words, we find next to Tsvetajeva the character and Tsvetajeva the speaking narrator, also Tsvetajeva the writer. The question is: can the *I am writing here and now* (which is still a narrative strategy of 'creating a spatial frame') be understood non-narratological and if so, how? In addition, how does it 'intervene' with her appearance as a character and her appearance as a character bound narrator?

Chapter 2 - On apostrophe

2.1 A different kind of presence?

In chapter one I have shown that lovers in the love letter quite naturally evoke a sense of presence by adopting strategies which are common to the narrative. This presence through the story telling is what I have called the *narrative mode of address as past*, aiming at the plausibility or believability of the character's existence in time and space. But we encountered something that escapes the narrative past; i.e., *I write here now*. To start tackling the former, I repeat partially the opening citation of this thesis:

> "U bent een vreemde, maar ik heb U in mijn leven opgenomen, ik loop met U over de stoffige lanen van het dorp en in de rokerige straten van Praag, ik vertel U (vertel U veel), ik wil U geen kwaad, ik doe U geen kwaad, ik wens dat U groeit, groot en wonderbaarlijk, en, nadat U *mij* vergeten bent, nooit afscheid neemt van die - die andere - *mijn* wereld!
>
> (…) Als U mij antwoordt: ik ben niet groot en wonderbaarlijk en ik zal nooit groot en wonderbaarlijk zijn - zal ik U geloven.
>
> (…)
>
> Ik weet niet wie U bent, ik weet niets van Uw leven, ik ben volkomen vrij met U, ik praat met een geest" (Tsvetajeva, 1990, p.13).

What immediately catches our attention in comparison to the excerpts where a 'narrative past' prevails, is the force with which Tsvetajeva has put herself into words. She enters, what William Waters calls, the poetic territory of the uncanny: "where people incalculably distant, even dead, may appear immediately present; where the fixity of the printed word can stir, and reach, and call" (2000, p.212). Put strongly, one can notice that in such parts Tsvetajeva's presence is of a completely different kind opposed to her narrative presence. She calls, stirs and reaches us more intensely than she does when she falls back on the mode of narrative address. It is here that in order to answer the question 'what makes the letter a love letter,' an additional component is needed to account for this different kind of presence.

As mentioned in the introduction, the second component of the analytical instrument is the *apostrophe*. Why the apostrophe is vital to the current theoretical framework will become clear by applying the theory of apostrophe to the love letter excerpts. Presently, the formally indicated justification reads as follows: one of the most characteristic features of the apostrophe is considered to be the address to some absent human, non-human, or abstract

entity. In the case of the above quoted excerpt one can easily perceive that something similar takes effect. Although the lover (Tsvetajeva) writes to the factually existing beloved (Bachrach), the beloved is not present at the time of writing the lover letter. Nonetheless, as one can observe (*U bent een vreemde*, etc.), the lover speaks in a direct manner as if the beloved is present right then and there. The beloved is apostrophised as the 'absent' addressee, where in moments of intense passion the lover switches from a narrative mode of address to apostrophic address.

Although this preliminary description of the apostrophe seems to suffice, this classification is not agreed upon by scholars. One finds a strong lack of consensus within the academic field, wherein single facets of the apostrophe are interpreted differently, leading to divergent implementations of the apostrophe. Despite this lack, I will expound and critically assess the main academic positions and investigate how they relate to the love letter. With this scheme the idiosyncratic way how the lover evokes this secondary, intensified form of presence comes into view. To help structure the debate's overview, I refer to these different positions via Jonathan Culler, Douglas Kneale and Alan Richardson and mention, only in passing when necessary, other scholars stating similar or re-stating arguments of the latter three. Take note that each of the main scholars mentioned represent a certain way of interpreting the apostrophe. E.g., Culler's reading is very close to Northrop Frye's reading. Moreover, each position seems to have different 'supporters;' e.g., Barbara Johnson explicitly adopts Culler's interpretation for her work.

2.2 Debating the apostrophe – *apostrophic now*

A very influential and central set of articles concerning the apostrophe was written by Jonathan Culler. His work sparked a hot debate amongst literary scholars ranging from deconstructionists to linguists and psychoanalysists. They either fiercely refuted Culler's analysis or supported it; some even elaborated on certain aspects by applying Culler's work on a variety of case studies.[5] When scrutinised, this debate contains three basic positions or ways of thinking about the apostrophe. I open the discourse analysis with the central figure who is Culler.[6] Then, I will examine Alan Richardson's critique,[7] who partially agrees with Culler, but finds that Culler narrows down the scope of apostrophe too much by ignoring the

[5] E.g., Mary Jacobus on Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1985), Barbara Johnson on modern poetry concerning abortion (1986), or Ann Keniston on nineties poetry (2001).
[6] Representing a type of reading proposed by Frye (1990), Jacobus (1985), Johnson (1986), Keniston (2001) - mainly based on Mill.
[7] Partially analogues to Gavin Hopps' (2005), William Waters' (1996; 2000), Michael S. Macovski's reading of apostrophe (1994).

common usage of the figure in everyday discourse. Rather than giving a too strict or too broad classification of apostrophe, Richardson proposes to view the use of apostrophe in a continuum. Finally, I will look into the strongest opponent of Culler, Douglas Kneale.[8] Kneale contends that Culler misinterprets the apostrophe completely because Culler does not thoroughly take into account the history of the critical debate concerning the apostrophe. In doing so Culler fails to notice the crucial distinction between apostrophe and *prosopopoeia*.

Opening the debate with Culler's influential article *Apostrophe* first published in 1977,[9] Culler guides the reader though a selection of statements from classical rhetoricians, poets, and critics. From those he deduces a general theory of apostrophe. Most noteworthy, Culler refers to the classical rhetorician Quintilian, emphasising the etymological meaning of apostrophe as 'turning aside' –to someone other than the principal listener (judge). Culler merges this definition with Mill's[10] definition of the lyric as his guiding principle:

> "the lyric is not heard but overheard. The lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object . . . The poet so to speak, turns his back on his listeners" (2002, p.137).

This Quintilian–Mill tandem is then applied by Culler to some basic examples: '*O rose, thou art sick!*;' '*O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being!*;' '*Thou still unravished bride of quietness . . .* ' (ibid.). This defines Culler's apostrophe as: "such invocations, which turn away from the empirical listeners by addressing natural objects, artefacts, or abstractions, will doubtless prove central to any systematic account of apostrophe" (ibid., p.138). Subsequently, he continues to delve into the specific features of the apostrophe. His main assumptions are that the apostrophe is the sign of a poet *willing* something, and it marks a moment of intense *passion*. Namely, apostrophe 'invites' inanimate objects or absent persons to turn towards the poet and answer his passionate call. Vice versa the poet turns the otherwise silent universe into a responsive force. For Culler this potential responsiveness becomes the central problem concerning the apostrophe because the rose, the West Wind, the absent person *remain absent* and consequentially, silent after the call –disrupting the normal course of communicative

[8] Similar to Paul de Man's (1983; 1985) and L. M. Findlay's (1985) take on apostrophe. Note, although Waters deems de Man's definitions of prosopopoeia and apostrophe muddled (2000, p.199, n.19), Kneale argues that de Man is mainly concerned with prosopopoeia and (effectively) marks it off against the apostrophe (1991, 148-9).
[9] Re-published in his book *The pursuit of signs, semiotics, literature, deconstruction* (2001). Re-stating his 1977 view in: *Changes in the study of the lyric* (1985), *Reading lyric* (1985).
[10] Via Frye referring to Mill (1990, p.249-50).

events (ibid., p.139). For this problem to become thoroughly clear, Culler develops the notion of *event*. Be aware that Culler's definition of *event* deviates greatly from Bal's narratological *event*.

The use of apostrophe is a poetic approach towards an event, meaning that an immediate relation is established between two subjects in discourse; even if common sense denies such relations. E.g., the poet apostrophising a rose transforms the inanimate non-responsive object to a potentially responsive subject. This event might entail two motivations: firstly, the poet is genuinely oriented towards a 'you' (rose, abstraction, absent or even dead person) and by this orientation evokes the presence of that 'you.' Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* being Culler's prime example, where the poet can either "surrender to the wind (…), or call upon the wind to take up a stand in relation to him" (ibid., p.142).[11] Secondly, the poet, by orienting himself towards a you, constitutes himself as a 'present voice.' I.e., one who successfully invokes nature, might in turn be spoken to by nature. The addressee implies an addressor – the poet becomes a visionary. "If asking winds to blow (…) or mountains to hear one's cries is a ritualistic (…) action, that emphasises that [a poet's] voice calls in order to be calling (…) so as to establish its identity as a poetical and prophetic voice" (ibid., p.142). Here referring to Whitman's conviction that: "'strong poets – do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes. We convince by our presence'" (ibid.).

Culler keenly observes, however, that on average poems question the difficulty of a call and answer, ending in doubt or withdrawals concerning the success of the desired discourse. In other words, the apostrophe is a trope which disrupts the circuit of communication because the rose will not answer. Culler proposes that most poets play with this fictional quality of the apostrophe and are self-aware of the irony of their fictitious evocations.[12] Culler considers this to be the *embarrassing* feature within the apostrophe – it is pure poetic pretension (ibid., pp.135, 143). Regarded as such, every outcry becomes a solipsistic outcry, where the world is filled with fragments of the self (ibid., p.147). The poem internalises what is thought to be external; the external rose becomes a mere reference to *my* (internal) behaviour towards the rose. Each successive apostrophe marks a modification of that one single (poetic) mind. Referencing de Man's analysis of a Rilke poem,[13] Culler postulates that the apostrophes do not coincide with the objects, but with our activity towards those objects (ibid., p.148).

[11] For this interpretation Culler refers to Harold Bloom's reading.
[12] Culler's examples: *Ode to a Nightingale* (Keats), *Le Cygne* (Baudelaire), *Neunte Duineser Elegie* (Rilke).
[13] *Das Stunden-Buch - Das Buch vom Mönchischen Leben*: Stimme eines jungen Bruders.

This internalisation becomes Culler's key figure to develop the idea of event even further (ibid., p.148-9). Following Shelley, the difference between a story and a poem is that a story is "a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions" (Shelley, cited by Culler, ibid., .149). In a narrative (cf. chapter one) one thing leads to another, and each situation is spatial-temporally located. Conversely, in an apostrophic poem, by calling upon the objects by saying '*thou shepherd boy*,' '*ye blessed creatures*,' '*ye birds*' and demanding an answer by addressing (apostrophising) them as a subject, the objects are not represented through a temporal organisation (e.g., I saw a shepherd boy walk past, some blessed creatures stood in the grass, and a bird flew over). On the contrary, the various objects fall together in one mind and 'one moment of address' as if they are all right there capable of answering in that single moment of the call. Rather than describing things, all addressees stand in (an eventually disrupted) discourse with the poet. Compared to Bal's narratological event, we see that this apostrophic event is *one single event* in the now, and a narration a string of several events from the past. This 'single event' is what Culler names the *timeless present* or a temporality of writing.[14] In the light of this thesis it carries a special temporality, an '*apostrophic now*' different from the narrative temporality. It is

> "the set of all moments in which writing can say 'now'. This is a time of discourse rather than story. So located by apostrophes, birds, creatures, boys, etc. resist being organised into events that can be narrated, for they are inserted in the poem as elements of the event which the poem is attempting to be" (ibid.).

Firstly, this is the solution to the previous chapter's final problem: how to read the -*I write here now*? These self-oriented utterances are no components of the narrative sections, but they highlight, albeit not in the strict apostrophic sense of turning away, the writing of the letter. I.e., they introduce or frame the letter *as a writing-event*. Secondly, thought through to its utter consequences by Johnson and Keniston, the timeless present entails that to 'keep on apostrophising' or voicing one's thoughts, an answer should always fail to occur. Johnson articulates (via her analyses of poems dealing with abortion) that the poem is a desire for the other's voice (aborted baby), but the poem can only exists because the other (baby) is absent (1986, pp.30, 36). In psychoanalyst terms Keniston proposed that according to Lacan, "the

[14] Culler's view is a Derridian inspired reading based on the deconstructivist emphasis on writing.

infant begins to speak because the mother is absent: the removal of her breast or body impels the child to cry out to her" (2001, p.300). But all language is, for Lacan, an inadequate substitute for an original presence, and "without the absence, the apostrophe would not be necessary" (ibid.). It is what Keniston names the paradox of the apostrophe: the apostrophe articulates an unfulfilled desire. Eventually, the call will not be answered, the communication is disrupted and the wish for the other remains unfulfilled. Yet, at the other end of the paradox the lyric or poetic voice desires its own perpetuation; in consequence it demands the silence of the other (ibid., p.301).

When this analysis of the apostrophe is applied to Tsvetajeva's excerpt, some distinct features immediately attract attention. Tsvetajeva says: *U bent een vreemde, maar ik heb U in mijn leven opgenomen, ik loop met U over de stoffige lanen . . .* According to Culler this would count as an apostrophe only when we take into account that the addressor turns away from an intended listener (cf. Mill). Problematic in the case of the love letter though, is that the apostrophic addressee and the ultimate addressee of the letter are in fact both Bachrach – leading to the contention that the cited text is not apostrophic. However, when Culler's notion of event is seriously taken into consideration, one might argue that just like a poem, the letter *tries to be an event* or timeless present in the moment of writing. Despite Bachrach's factual absence at the moment of writing, Tsvetajeva still evokes him *as if* he were present and ready to answer: *ik loop met U over de stoffige lanen / ik praat met een geest.* Secondly, with her imagery she seems to stress this queer uncanny feeling of both being there and being absent: *Ik weet niet wie U bent, ik weet niets van Uw leven, ik ben volkomen vrij met U, ik praat met een geest*. On the one hand, when interpreted biographically, this is factually true. At the time of writing Tsvetajeva barely knew Bachrach. When read through a Cullerian guise, however, one might argue that this is the 'self-aware' poet evoking an image of Bachrach *for herself* to whom she addresses her outcries right then and there in writing. Eventually the factual Bachrach living in Berlin will overhear Tsvetajeva's conversation once he reads the letter. Tsvetajeva herself seems to underline this feeling quite clearly and fervently when she says:

> "… Een onbekend iemand – dat is: alle mogelijkheden, hem, van wie je alles verwacht. Hij *is* nog niet (…). De zijnde mens stel ik allen ter beschikking, dat wat zijn zal, is het mijne. (NB: U bestaat natuurlijk, maar voor mij, een vreemde, bestaat U natuurlijk nog niet)" (1990, p.8).

Concluding that letter with:

> "In Uw brief zie ik niet U versus mij, maar U – versus Uzelf. Ik ben een toevallige luisteraar, maar een dankbare (…). We doen het zo: U gaat door met hardop denken, ik ben – goede oren" (1990, p.10).

As can be seen above, she almost literally states Culler's definition in relation to her 'overhearing' of Bachrach's thoughts. It is clear that the reversal is equally true. They both overhear each other's apostrophic conversation once they read each other's letter. I argue therefore, that up until the moment of reading we are dealing with a timeless present in the temporality of writing (enforced by '*I write here now*'): Tsvetajeva addresses an absent Bachrach as if he would be present in the moment. By apostrophising as such she is able to demonstrate her behaviour towards Bachrach. She is walking with him over the streets of Prague, she is talking to him, and each successive apostrophe is a modification of her poetic mind attuning towards him. Strongly put, we read her solipsistic activity towards Bachrach or as she defines it: *U niet versus mij, maar U versus Uzelf*, and *Ik wil, dat U met Uw twintig jaren een zeventig jaar oude man - en tegelijkertijd een zevenjarig jongetje bent, ik wil geen leeftijd / Ik weet niet wie U bent / U bent een vreemde / ik ben niet groot en wonderbaarlijk en ik zal nooit groot en wonderbaarlijk zijn / mijn vriendje / geest*.

Moreover, Culler's line of thought can be further pursued when she writes: *Als U mij antwoordt: ik ben niet groot en wonderbaarlijk en ik zal nooit groot en wonderbaarlijk zijn - zal ik U geloven*. She says '*if* you answer me,' hinting simultaneously at her longing for an answer or discourse and at the uncertainty of a reply. In a biographical reading this might imply that she is not completely sure if Bachrach will reply to her letters. In a Cullerian interpretation, however, it hints at the fictitiousness of writing. Tsvetajeva knows that she, in her event of writing, wont get an *immediate* reply, although she 'acts' as if she can expect one. This is emphasised through the image: *ik ben volkomen vrij met U, ik praat met een geest*. Talking to a ghost implies she is completely free because in the moment of writing Bachrach is truly a fiction of the mind, a phantasm, a projection with which she is in discourse and can bend to her wishes. Additionally, she is free because the Bachrach-ghost will not and cannot reply to challenge her phantasm –it is Keniston's paradox at work.

Summarising, with help of Culler, one can perceive in the love letter a constant limbo between reality and fiction, presence and absence, writing in the moment and posting the letter to be read (overheard) by the beloved, an attempt at dialogue slipping off into a self-

aware apostrophe or soliloquy.[15] Tsvetajeva is both in discourse with Bachrach and herself. Also note that with help of Johnson, once Bachrach would reply in her moment of writing (her moment of desire), the need for the apostrophe would immediately disappear; the need for letter writing would disappear. Keniston's apostrophic paradox would disintegrate. Here the love letter gains its tragic dimension: separation is quintessential for the apostrophic voice. Concurring with Frye I propose here that 'we thus find our voice in the face of silence and frustration' (1985, pp.32, 36).[16] Because in writing the poet-lover hopes to invoke a voice of the other and concurrently realises the fictitiousness or poetic pretension of writing: the other lingers in silence. This results in a (self-aware) poet-lover voicing her thoughts to be heard in a tunnel echoing her voice. The lover is in dialogue with herself, wherein parts of the self are projected outward as the external phantasmal beloved subject, establishing her presence and identity thanks to the beloved's absence. Eventually, this is in Tsvetajeva's case the 'intense presence' we (and Bachrach) can 'overhear' when reading the love letter. Connected to Whitman's conviction, the poet convinces not by arguments, rhymes and similes, but by presence. For Tsvetajeva this is not a *narrative* (*was*) presence in the narrative mode of address; telling 'her' autobiographical story, but a presence evoked through an apostrophic mode of address in the now, expressing a want for direct discourse met with Bachrach's muteness. It is the *apostrophic mode of address in the now*.

2.3 Complementing Culler's apostrophe

In the introduction I have indicated that Culler's reading has been disputed by Richardson. The latter criticises Culler's stress on the disruptive element of the apostrophe in communication. Due to the idea that eventually all apostrophes are failed attempts at discourse or communication (as a lack of an answer), the poet automatically slides into irony. The poet realises that what he is evoking is a solipsistic phantasm and it is ultimately embarrassing. In Richardson's view, this explanation is too narrow and Culler is guilty of mystifying the apostrophe.[17] Culler ends up at this bleak description because he overlooks the everyday use of the apostrophe in familiar discourse. Richardson, by turning to linguists and cognitive psychologists (Richard Gerrig) dealing with everyday discourse, tries to do justice to the everyday lingual practice.

[15] Cf. Jacobus (1985), Herbert F. Tucker (1985).
[16] Note that Frye speaks of blockage, not frustration.
[17] Hopps challenges Culler similarly: Culler is too secular because the apostrophe in prayer is not at all an embarrassment, nor is the apostrophe directed at a fiction of the mind. It is genuinely directed at the believer's reality which is God (2005).

Richardson counters Culler with the following examples: Larry Kramer (AIDS activist) talking to his dog Molly whenever the New York mayor Ed Koch walks by: "Look, there's the man who murdered all of Daddy's friends;" or "'Don't worry honey, I'll get up and change your diaper again because Mommy is *just too busy* reading *The New Yorker*;'" "'Jesus, don't let these girls drive off a bridge;'" when we attend a funeral and say 'John, we will miss you;' or praying in a sermon in front of the congregation –the effect is everything but embarrassment (2002, p.367). In short, Richardson argues that the apostrophe is actually a common and natural conversational practice, and he proposes to place the apostrophe in a 'continuum' (ibid., p.370). At the one end we tend to use the apostrophe in an intimate, mostly human, small and everyday context (speaking to family, friends or pets); at the other end the apostrophe is deployed for distant, huge, abstract, lifeless entities (West Wind or stars). The addressees become more noticeable, and for Culler more embarrassing, when they incline towards the abstract side of the continuum. Note that for Richardson it is not a form of embarrassment at all; the more 'poetic' and bold the apostrophe becomes, the more it slows you down and makes you contemplate (ibid., p.378).

More importantly, however, the apostrophe is all but utterly solipsistic. Contrary to Culler's curtailing of the apostrophe to a solipsistic embarrassment, all the apostrophes mentioned as everyday discourse are meant to be overheard and are more often than not aimed at provoking a reply. Therefore Richardson slightly alters Culler's reading of Mill's 'intended overhearing:' a turning away from the listener *does not mean to ignore* the overhearing party (ibid., p.369). Richardson enforces his argument with a reference to Quintilian, who says that the apostrophe is a turning away from the judge, but is still meant to persuade him (ibid., p.373). Richardson, thus, reveals Culler's analysis as an attempt to support the de Man claim that all language is always private (ibid., p.369). I.e., Culler and de Man propose a *dyadic* relation: two interlocutors can discourse and if one falls silent, the other falls silent as well,[18] or he is being ironic. Richardson, through Quintilian and Gerrig, proposes a *triadic* relation, always positing an additional *listening* subject beyond the initial addressee, collapsing the stringent dyadic relation with the trapdoor to solipsism (ibid., p.373).

When this 'correction' is applied to the previous interpretation of Tsvetajeva a different nuance comes to light. I repeat, in Culler's reading Tsvetajeva would be voicing her utterances in order to be heard. Because of the lack of an answer she constitutes herself through her own apostrophic voice and turns the letter into a solipsistic outcry. With help of

[18] Cf. Johnson (1986): some poems about abortion perform the mother's 'falling silent' after abortion.

Richardson, Tsvetajeva's letter becomes less solipsistic. Not only might she be talking to her phantasm, the ghost Bachrach, but in her act of talking to her ghost, she intends her discourse to be overheard by the 'real' Bachrach when the letter is sent. Now we can see that, although the lover letter carries with it some highly solipsistic characteristics (*ik ben vrij, ik praat met een geest*, etc.), it is due to the intended overhearing of the 'real Bachrach' that Tsvetajeva is pulled out from her solipsism. With Richardson I contend that the apostrophe attempts at a discourse but is not considered to be an utter failure or disruption of communication. Generally speaking, the love letter operates within a unique structure where the addressed is both the apostrophised absent (phantasmal) entity and eventually the (real) overhearing party. In my view, Richardson's move to the 'everydayness' of the apostrophe does justice to the love letter in two ways. One, we can account for the obvious fact that a love letter is an inherent part of a larger correspondence or written discourse between two real people. Two, despite the love letter being a part of a correspondence, we can still take with us the solipsistic characteristics as a vital structural moment in love letter writing.

2.4 Refuting Culler's apostrophe

Although the reading of Culler with the correction of Richardson fits the lover letter like a glove, the definition of the apostrophe is not agreed upon by all scholars. One of the fiercest critics of Culler is Kneale, who methodically destructs Culler's design. Simply put, Kneale accuses Culler of historical and methodological sloppiness. Culler claims that due to the *embarrassment* caused by the apostrophe, critics have not taken up the apostrophe sincerely but always took the element of address for granted as a remnant of the past (Culler, 2002, p.136). Kneale quite convincingly disproves this characterisation. In his paper Kneale systematically sketches out a history of the apostrophe, providing a long list of scholars ranging from Quintilian to modern rhetoricians and scholars[19] who define and find consensus on the meaning of apostrophe.

Introducing his argument with Quintilian, Kneale agrees with Culler that the apostrophe is a 'turning away:' "The figure which the Greeks call *apostrophe*, by which is meant the diversion of our words to address some person other than the judge" (Quintilian, cited by Kneale, 1991, p.143). Kneale emphasises the turn or diversion from the original (proper) hearer (judge) to a second person as quintessential. For Kneale, this means that the defining feature lies not with the evocation of a rose as a subject by addressing it in favour of

[19] Most noteworthy, Kneale mentions Derrida and de Man, whom Kneale claims Culler has misunderstood concerning the apostrophe (pp.145, 151- n.31-2).

the empirical audience (cf. Mill's 'a poem is overheard'), but with the *movement of voice* to a second person (or entity) (ibid, p.147). Therefore, the apostrophe always depends on a *pre-text* where an original hearer is located and from which the voice can turn away. Conversely, what Culler deems to be the apostrophe (*O rose*, etc.) is rather *prosopopoeia* or personification: lending a voice to a voiceless entity (ibid., p.149). Or in de Man's terminology: "*prosopon-poiein* means to *give* a face and therefore implies that the original face can be missing or nonexistent;" e.g., *face* of a mountain, *eye* of a hurricane (1985, p.57).

A second correction concerns the apostrophic 'expression of passion or grief.' For Culler the apostrophe expresses grief, but this interpretation is based on a mistranslation of the Latin from Cicero. In Caplan's translation, "Apostrophe is the figure which expresses grief or indignation by means of an address to some man or city or place or object" (ibid., p.143, underscoring SS). While Cicero's definition intimates the closeness of apostrophe and prosopopoeia, Kneale points out that Cicero's text does not mention apostrophe but *exclamatio*, and rhetoricians throughout the years define a clear difference between the three figures (ibid.). One, the *exclamatio*, *ecphonesis* or outcry is an expression of grief; two, this might be done through a personification; third, these might both be combined in a 'turning from one addressee to another' as apostrophe. Thus, the exclamatio and prosopopoeia do not entail necessarily a diversion of voice from the original hearer. Hence, Blake's address to the rose; Shelley's ode to the West Wind; Keats' text addressed to a Grecian urn; Baudelaire's meditation on Sorrow are all prosopopoeiac, and due to a missing pre-text they do not contain a rhetorical diversion but are direct address[20] (ibid., p.148).

If this correction is applied to Tsvetajeva's letters, it follows that we are not dealing with an apostrophe and 'apostrophic now' at all. In the strict sense there is no diversion of voice from one person to another. Bachrach is and remains the sole addressee, whether he is present or absent. This leads to the conclusion that the letter is a mere form of direct address, be it with a timely postponement when the letter travels through the postal system. What then, are the consequences for the previous analyses of the love letter? Is there all of a sudden no play of presence and absence, no timeless present, no event? Does the continuum and triadic relation of Richardson fall apart? Are we simply dealing with commonplace conversation in written form? To face these concerns, I will look into Bakhtin's theory of dialogue and with it look back on the expounded three positions on apostrophe.

[20] Richardson's everyday examples might still count as apostrophes.

Chapter 3 - On dialogue

3.1 Preliminary remarks

In chapter one, I started this thesis' research with the search for the love letter's uncanny quality where the word can reach and stir and call, and people may appear immediately present (Waters, 2000, p.212). Chapter two concluded with Kneale's stringent definition of apostrophe, questioning the Cullerian explanation of that uncanny quality as a 'presence in the now through writing.' It is Culler's view that the poet (lover) turns away from the original empirical addressee (the person who will read the writing eventually) towards an apostrophised addressee who 'becomes present' in the moment of writing. When Tsvetajeva's letters are taken into consideration she seems to describe such a feeling when she states that she is talking to a ghost, or when she points out that she is a mere listener of a conversation Bachrach has with himself (*U versus Uzelf*). In colloquial terms one could say that the lover is speaking to an imaginary beloved in the moment of writing instead of speaking to the factual beloved who reads the letter in the future. In this thesis' terms: the lover adopts the apostrophic mode of address. I repeat that Kneale's objection amounts to the fact that the imagined addressee and real addressee are one and the same, causing no 'real' turn. In my view, when Kneale's strict characterisation is adopted and the *imagined* and *real* addressee fall together as one, the analysis of the love letter will lose a very distinct characteristic. 'Although the lover is alone, the lover finds him or herself in an immediate dialogue with the other 'in the now' via apostrophe.' I would not only name this a mere feature of the love letter, but propose to judge this a *structural moment* in love letter writing. In everyday words: speaking to an imagined beloved is part and parcel of the love letter.

The question is why and how is this a structural moment in the love letter? How does the apostrophic dialogue differ from regular dialogue? Are both to be found in the love letter? And if 'talking to an imaginary other' is a structural moment, what consequences does it have for Kneale's strict apostrophe as 'turning away' and Culler's sensitivity for 'writing in the now?' Also, how does it relate to the narrative mode of address developed in chapter one? To face these problems I turn towards Bakhtin's *dialogism*.[21] Bakhtin's work is helpful because it discusses explicitly the workings of dialogue. Specifically, it discusses dialogue in a common sense as oral everyday talk (primary speech genre), and how dialogue finds it way into the written language (secondary or mediated speech genre) (Macovski, 1994, p.18). In a preliminary observation it seems that love letters are partway between something one could

[21] Not Bakhtin's own term, but an academic denominator for his work (Holquist, 2002, p. 14).

recognise as everyday dialogue and mediated dialogue. But before I delve into Bakhtin's theory it should be noted that his work is elaborate and unsystematic (Holquist, 2002, p.14). It ranges from philosophical expositions adopting Neo-Kantian thinking, to discussing Marxist theory, opposing Saussure's language philosophy and much more. In order to make dialogism effective for this thesis I confine myself to the following topics. I will discuss Bakhtin's philosophy on consciousness in relation to his basic views on language, concluding with Bakhtin's application of his theory on the novel in *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Thereafter I will return to the love letter and see how it is partway between Bakhtin's primary and secondary speech genre, and how this ambiguity will effect the love letter analysis.

3.2 Dialogism in theory

Dialogue in dialogism[22] is Bakhtin's central realm wherein the relations between self and other take shape by way of exchanged utterances (basic speech communication). Dialogue involves "two or more distinct speakers, each with a special voice, set of experiences, complex of attitudes and outlook on the world" (Morson, Emerson, 1997, p.265). An utterance for Bakhtin is not simply a string of words structured by grammatical rules, but is rather a dialogically contextualised word, sentence or series of sentences (Dentith, 2005, p.36). He divides these utterances into two groups. The first are the *primary speech genres*. They comprise of the usually non-mediated oral speech genres; e.g. oral dialogue wherein one person 'directly' talks to another. From those Bakhtin distinguishes *secondary speech genres*, which are "'novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary [that] arise in… comparatively highly developed and organised cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociapolitical…'"(Bakhtin, *The problem of speech genres,* cited by Macovski, 1994, p.18). Bakhtin "stipulates that secondary genres (including literature) 'absorb and digest' the primary, establishing a definitive link between spoken dialogue and primarily written forms" (Macovski, 1994, p.18). Such an interpretation of speech shows that not only all forms of communication penetrate one another, but also cause "a gradual transformation of communicative discourse" when one genre picks up utterances from another (ibid.). As we shall see, each genre shares the basic dialogical feature, but there are some distinct differences between the mediated and non-mediated forms. However, first it needs to become clear what *dialogue* actually intends.

[22] What is currently presented is a compromised overview of Bakhtin's philosophical intuition - 'consciousness is otherness.' This view opens up a host of philosophical problems which cannot be discussed presently. For an introduction to his philosophical thought cf. Holquist, chapter two (2002)

According to Holquist, Bakhtin takes up the Neo-Kantian challenge that when there is an unbridgeable gap between mind and world, how can we understand things? (2002, p.16). Bakhtin's fundamental intuition is that '(self-)consciousness is otherness.' It is through dialogue that the "'I' must be defined in relation to discrete others, (…) and if it is misguided to ignore the voices that externally surround the self, it is equally misguided to assume that the ego itself is internally univocal and autogenic" (Macovski, 1994, p.5). Holquist points out that a helpful way to explain why Bakhtin posits such hypotheses is to see his work as a version of Einstein's theory of relativity, by which Bakhtin was influenced (2002, p.19). In a thought experiment Einstein proposed that when a person stands in a train travelling at a certain velocity, and a second train travels parallel to the first train at the same velocity without acceleration relative to the first, the person in the train facing the opposite vehicle would not be able to (visually) detect movement. The observer's ability to detect motion depends on a body (train) *changing* its position vis-à-vis other bodies. Thus, Einstein says, motion has relative meaning (ibid.). "*Dialogism, like relativity, takes it for granted that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else*" (ibid., p.20, italics SS).

Holquist explains the above as follows. What is needed is a 'structure of self' (Einstein's man on the first train) which creates the horizon from which it sets itself apart (the second train moving at a different speed to perceive motion) and thus 'becomes' or defines itself (ibid., p. 20; Macovski, 1994, p.35). What causes the most primordial contrast "is the opposition between a time and a space that one consciousness uses to model its own limits (the I-for-myself) and the quite different temporal and spatial categories employed by the same consciousness to model the limits of other persons and things (the not-I-in-me)" (Holquist, 2002, p.20). In simple terms the self employs a division of categories that on the one hand fit the self and on the other hand fit the not-self: *I am <u>here</u> - you are <u>there</u>*. Categories like *here-there, same-different, now-then* help define the opposition and create a basic horizon from which the self can set itself apart and define its own limits.

Bakhtin adds to the latter thesis that by articulating my position in contrast to the other's position I do not only *discriminate* myself against the other, but even *absorb* the other's position to define my own. "For in order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of others. (…) [I]t is only the other's categories that will let me be an object for my own perception. I see myself as I conceive others might see it. In order to forge a self, I must do so from outside" (ibid., p.27). The reason for this need for the other's categories lies in the fact that one cannot attain a unified view of the self by oneself. Imagine for instance a boy and

a girl standing in a room opposite each other. The girl sees things the boy cannot see (for instance his forehead or the back of the room behind him), the boy sees things she cannot see, plus they share a field of vision. The aspect of seeing what the other cannot see is what Bakhtin calls the 'surplus of seeing.' "By adding the surplus that has been 'given' to you to the surplus that has been 'given' to me I can build up an image that includes the whole of me and the room" (ibid., p.35). In other words, I am only able to conceive myself in a more stable unified manner when both views are combined. In Einstein's judgement: we need *two* trains moving at *different* speeds to detect motion. This implies that each event or self needs others to provide stability to it in order for it not to be a random incident in a series of incidents. This is dialogism's basic trope: an event or self must be perceived against a stable figure or horizon for it to gain a relatively fixed meaning. The stable figure only arises from a discrimination between unique positions with the help of utterances in dialogue.

What is important to append is that the utterance, which the self uses to define its own position, *as such* is highly dialogical. Bakhtin says, the essential (constitutive) marker for the utterance "'is its quality of being directed to someone, [its addressivity],'" because from word to narration the reception is always taken into account (Bakhtin, *The problem of speech genres*, cited by Macovski, 1994, p.19). Thus, "[t]he entire utterance is constructed (…) in anticipation of encountering this response'" (ibid.). What is more, when the self appropriates the other person's view in his own replies (like the boy and the girl in the room) it means that "[e]ach utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances (…). Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances, [and] refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on others" (ibid.). Consequently, not only the self, but the whole of language the self uses down to the single word are structured dialogically. Therefore, "[d]ialogue has penetrated inside every word, provoking in it a battle and the interruption of the one voice by another" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.75). One can understand now that dialogue for Bakhtin does not merely refer to everyday discourse, but actually is an epistemological model in which dialogue as every day discourse is integrated.

3.3 Dialogism in action

Already in Dostoevsky's first novel *Poor folk* Bakhtin detects dialogue in what seems to be something that is utterly non-dialogical, the monologue. But as it turns out monologues have a completely different status and are, at worst, an illusion (Holquist, 2002, p.57). About the monologue Bakhtin says that it is merely an abstraction to understand what dialogue is. Secondly, the monologue always consist of verbal communicative elements and is therefore,

as we have seen above, a response to something and calculated to receive response (Holquist, 2002, p.57; Macovski, 1999, p.17). Moreover, Dostoevsky's *Poor folk* is in the current love letter analyses a very interesting work because of its epistolary form, about which Bakhtin notes the following:

> "A characteristic feature of the letter is an acute awareness of the interlocutor, the addressee to whom it is directed. The letter, like a rejoinder in dialogue, is addressed to a specific person, and it takes into account the other's possible reactions, the other's possible reply. This reckoning with an absent interlocutor can be more or less intensive. In Dostoevsky it is extremely intense" (1999, p.205).

Bakhtin says that from Dostoevsky's first novel onwards, Dostoevsky develops a style that is defined by anticipation of another's words of which the significance for the rest of his artistic work is enormous. "[Dostoevsky's] heroes' most confessional self-utterances are permeated with an intense sensitivity toward the anticipated words of others about them, and with other's reactions to their own words about themselves" (ibid.). When Bakhtin turns to one of the letters written by the main character Makar Devushkin in *Poor folk,* Bakhtin proposes that the self-consciousness of Devushkin unfolds against the backdrop of a consciousness with a different social background alien to Devushkin (Einstein's two trains). "His affirmation of self sounds like a continuous hidden polemic or hidden dialogue with some other person on the theme of himself" (ibid., p.207). Bakhtin goes on to state that not only "the tone, but even the internal semantic structure of these self-utterances are defined by an anticipation of another person's words" (ibid., p.205). The anticipation shows itself as a *sideward glance*, an eavesdropping on someone else's words which creates a "certain halting quality to the speech, and its interruption by reservations" (ibid.). Bakhtin finds the latter in the following quote from *Poor folk*:

> "A day or two ago, in private conversation, Yevstafy Ivanovich said that the most important virtue in a citizen was to earn money. He said in jest (I know it was in jest) that morality consists in not being a burden to anyone. Well, I'm not a burden to anyone. My crust of bread is my own; it is true it is a plain crust of bread, at times a dry one; but there it is, earned by my toil and put to lawful and irreproachable use. Why, what can one do? I know very well, of course, that I don't do much by copying;

but all the same I am proud of working and earning my bread in the sweat of my brow (…)" (Dostoevsky, cited by Bakhtin, 1999, p.207).

Bakhtin's analysis reads as follows: the other's voice wedges its way into Devushkin's speech, although this other is absent and Devushkin's letter is actually addressed to his friend Varvara Dobroselova. Still, the influence of the other's consciousness (or voice) restructures and influences the speech. The other's "shadow, its trace, falls on his speech, and that shadow, that trace is real" (ibid., p.206). The trace shows itself in the words which become 'double-voiced.' This means that the speaker uses words which encompass multiple points of view or two voices simultaneously: "as he himself understands them and wants others to understand them, and as others might actually understand them" (ibid.). Bakhtin's lingual point amounts to the hero's own words (the 'I for myself' or *first voice*) being 'intruded' by words of the other ('my I for another' or surrogate *second voice*). Additionally, Bakhtin's philosophical point comes down to the hero's self-awareness being shaped by someone else's awareness of him (ibid., pp.207, 209). Bakhtin then goes on to paraphrase and rewrite the letter to literally show Devushkin's hidden dialogue with the other:

"THE OTHER: One must know how to earn a lot of money. One shouldn't be a burden to anyone. But you are a burden to others.

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN: I'm not a burden to anyone. I've got my own piece of bread.

THE OTHER: But what a piece of bread it is! Today it's there, and tomorrow it's gone. And it's probably a dry one, at that!

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN: It is true it is a plain crust of bread, at times a dry one, but there it is, earned by my toil and put to lawful and irreproachable use.

THE OTHER: But what kind of toil! All you do is copy. You're not capable of anything else.

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN: Well, what can one do! I know very well, of course, that I don't do much by copying, but all the same I am proud of it. (…)" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.210).

With this exercise Bakhtin shows how the 'view of the other' has a detectible effect on the speech's structure, words and self-awareness of the main character.[23] One might say that in the numerous hesitations and interjections the shadow of the other is visible; which Bakhtin has filled out with the other's possible utterances. As such, the two views collide within the words themselves; e.g. how *copying* becomes a point of disagreement. Also, it is here that the basic dialogism premise shows itself. *Like relativity, it takes for granted that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else. This perspective is gained through dialogue.* "His consciousness of self is constantly perceived against the background of the other's consciousness of him - 'I for myself' against the background of 'I for another'" (Bakhtin, ibid., pp.207, 211). One can even propose that the other's 'silent voice' within Devushkin's own words provoke Devushkin to take a stand and utter his voice. "Selfhood is performed in terms of the complex of voices that sound within us and in terms of our way of orienting ourselves among these voices" (Morson, Emerson, 1997, p.268).

In addition, we see in *Poor folk* the difference between oral and written dialogue performed. Dentith explains that in mediated dialogue (particularly the novel) the author can gain a fair amount of freedom (2005, p.52). Although the single word as such is dialogic, the words of others pass through the pen of the writer. Strongly formulated: the self can, up to some degree, control the other's voice, granting more freedom to itself. The quality of Dostoevsky's work lies in the fact that he depicts a true open dialogue. Dostoevsky is able to portray not who the hero is, "but *how* he is conscious of himself," which is a dynamic dialogic process because it anticipates another's reply (Bakhtin, 1999, pp.49, 229).

> "Thanks to this attitude toward the other's consciousness, a peculiar *perpetuum mobile* is achieved, made up of his internal polemic with another and with himself, an endless dialogue where one reply begets another, which begets a third, and so on to infinity, and all of this without any forward motion" (ibid., p.230).[24]

[23] Cf. Bakhtin's justification for this experiment: "Of course this imagined dialogue is extremely primitive, just as the content of Devushkin's consciousness is still primitive. (…) But then the formal structure of his self-consciousness and self-utterances is, because of its primitiveness and crudeness, extremely well-marked and clear. For this reason we are examining it in such detail. All the truly essential self-utterances of Dostoevsky's later heroes could also be turned into dialogues, since all of them arose, as it were, out of two merged rejoinders, but the interruption of voices in them goes so deep, into such subtle elements of thought and discourse, that to turn them into a visible and crude dialogue such as we have done with Devushkin's self-utterance is of course utterly impossible" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.210). This applies to the same degree for love letters, cf. below.

[24] Note that this comment is posited within the context of Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevky's hero 'man from the underground,' but Bakhtin points out that the basic structures are the same for every major Dostoevsky character (Bakhtin, 1999, pp.210-211).

In Bakhtin's view, therefore, Dostoevsky's heroes are more than simple fictional characters, but junctions of unique consciousnesses clashing into each other just like it would happen in real life (ibid.). Macovski emphasises that there is no question of a synthesis of voices, nor a psychological self-division, but an act of dialogic self-generation; i.e. dialogue is at work (1994, p.6).

This novelistic dialogical approach as practiced by Dostoevsky stands in contrast to the extra-artistic or daily form of dialogue. Although the same mechanism is at work (dialogue takes place), in everyday dialogue the mechanism is divided over two 'empirical' persons. It is a form of dialogue where the one cannot directly control the other's words and merely replies immediately. The *dialogue is external*. The novel, however, is ideally (like Dostoevsky's) a form of dialogue in the second degree, where dialogue nests itself internally in the writing of a single self (author). It is discourse from within; i.e. *dialogue is internalised* (Dentith, 2005, p.54). In *Poor folk* the internalised discourse is clearly performed on two levels. One, Dostoevsky himself is able to internalise discourse in his writing since he is able to create characters who are 'conscious of themselves' in a dialogical manner. Consequentially, within the novel itself we find such discourse. In *Poor folk*'s case it is Devushkin's letters that depict internalised discourse. It is obvious that for Bakhtin, within the secondary speech genre, the novel is the preferred medium concerning dialogue. For "dialogisation enter[s] internally into the novel's own discourse and act[s] from within. (…) [T]he novel activates the always already dialogised word and makes it an element of its own artistic life" (ibid.). At this stage we can turn to our main subject of investigation and cross-examine it with help of Bakhtin's theory.

3.4 Dialogism and the love letter – *dialogic future*

I repeat dialogism's basic premise as *it takes for granted that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else*, of which the primordial contrast is a time-spatial one. Already in chapter one we came across, what I have called, the *spatial here*. As said, it comes natural to a love letter writer to state where and at what time the writing is being done. Tsvetajeva: *Ik schijf U laat in de nacht, net terug van het station* / *Ik schrijf U in het mos* / *Ik schrijf U vanuit een klein stadje in Moravië (...) bij het tikken van acht klokken,- allemaal in mijn kamer* / *Ik schrijf 's avonds laat, onder de klanken van restaurantmuziek*. With Bakhtin's theory in mind, these utterances can now be understood as written versions of a primordial dialogical attempt to define one's place. Or, we see here a crossover between the most basic dialogical *primary speech* utterance (*I am here*) to the *secondary mediated speech genre*. The

oral *I am here* is transformed through the medium of the letter as *I write here*. Just to be clear, letter writing falls strictly speaking into the secondary category because it is mediated dialogue and part of a comparatively highly developed and organised cultural communication. Nonetheless, I will argue below that the letter holds a place between both genres.

Although the love letter falls clearly in the secondary speech genre, it has strong rooting in the primary speech genre. Stronger than for instance socio-political essays or scientific writing and even stronger than the novel. As Bakhtin says about the letter, the "characteristic feature of the letter is an acute awareness of the interlocutor, the addressee to whom it is directed" (1999, p.205). It is stronger rooted in the primary speech genre because the letter is a written form of an externalised dialogue between two factual persons, whereas the novel is always, at best, an internalised dialogue. This factum is literally retraceable in for instance Tsvetajeva's letters. In it we find immediate externalised dialogue that, although the interlocutors are separated in space and in consequence the answer is delayed, the dialogue is common for a primary speech genre. Consider for instance the two following excerpts:

> "U hebt mijn brief niet begrepen, U hebt hem onzorgvuldig gelezen. U hebt niet mijn genegenheid, noch mijn bezorgdheid, noch mijn menselijke pijn om U gelezen, U hebt mij zelfs niet begrepen in mijn: 'ja, is het dan zo belangrijk *wie* er pijn heeft?!'" (1990., p.54).

> "U zegt: vrouw. Ja, ook dat zit in me. Weinig - zwak - bij vlagen - als afspiegeling - als weerkaatsing. Eerder verlangen naar - *dan*!" (ibid., p.58).

These two excerpts show a basic externalised dialogue, in which Tsvetajeva immediately responds to things Bachrach has said. This can be interpreted as such because Tsvetajeva shortly restates things Bachrach has written in his previous letters addressed to her, upon which she responds herself. This restating of the other's voice is something what Bakhtin would name the genuinely other or *third voice*. We perceive the distinct voice of Bachrach through Tsvetajeva's voice (Macovski, 1994, p.6). I propose that the majority of a love letter correspondence is written in the mode of the externalised dialogue falling within the primary speech genre. Because the correspondence of Tsvetajeva is not complete, I point for a further illustration of the latter to the correspondence of Olga Knipper and Anton Chekhov. Their writing is highly dialogical in this external common sense. They fervently and in great number reply directly to one another's comments over a span of five years. Sometimes the

replies could be compared to Tsvetajeva's where both deal with qualms of the heart, but mostly they are marked by everyday practical life:

> CHEKHOV - November 28, 1901: "I adore your letters! Be boring, be monotonous, only please, do it more often and I'll send you a picture (…)" (2007, p.184)
>
> KNIPPER - December 1: "So, you read my letters with interest, dearest? Thank you. (…)" (p.187).
>
> CHEKHOV - December 4: "I'm going to see Gorki today. Perhaps I'll go and see Tolstoi as well" (p.188).
>
> KNIPPER - December 8: "I'm quite drunk, Anton! Forgive your dissolute wife! (…)" (p. 191).
>
> KNIPPER - December 9: "What news of Tolstoi and Gorki? Did you see them on the 4th or not? How's your health? (…)" (p.191).
>
> CHEKHOV - December 13: "You write you were tipsy on the evening of the 8th. Oh, sweetheart, if only you know how I envy you! (…)" (p.193).
>
> CHEKHOV - December 15: "Dear doggie, I'm alive, as much as a man on the mend can be. (…) Tolstoi's been ill and living in Yalta with his daughter. Gorki came to see me yesterday (…)" (p.194).

In the Chekhov-Knipper and Tsvetajeva-Bachrach correspondences, these replies going back and forth provide the basic structure of the correspondence. This is what I want to name the *dialogic mode of address*. These utterances are usually alternated or give ground to, what I have called in chapter one, the *narratological mode of address*. Sometimes the narratological stories are told just to keep the other informed without there being a direct occasion, but usually the dialogic exchange gives rise to the stories. Thus, the stories (narratologic mode) are embedded in the dialogic mode, and both are a part of an external and common (primary speech genre's) dialogue. One empirical interlocutor is speaking to another empirical interlocutor. Finally, it needs to be pointed out that the temporality of this mode is

characterised by the 'prospective' or '*future*.' It is conversation in temporal staccato. Although the replies concerning content respond to one another directly, the replies as answers completing the dialogue always come with a temporal delay.

3.5 Dialogism and the apostrophic mode of address

In chapter two I have looked closely at the apostrophic mode of address, wherein the conclusion was drawn that there is 'in the now of writing' a dialogue going on between lover and beloved. This dialogue was deemed by Culler, influenced by de Man, a failure because there is no 'direct reply' - the other is silent. Hence, the apostrophe is embarrassing: the lover is talking to himself. The correction of the latter came from Richardson, who proposed that on the basis of everyday discourse each of those apostrophes is aimed at a 'third' addressee. This triadic relation causes the apostrophe from the viewpoint of everyday discourse not to be embarrassing. We can understand now that Richardson's proposal approaches Bakhtin's theory; that both the self and the utterances as such are indeed aimed at another. However, Kneale's problem is not solved just yet. When Richardson's 'correction' is applied to the love letter, the question needs to be asked: who is that third? Kneale could answer that there is no third, since there is no pre-text defining a different addressee other than the beloved. The one and only addressee is the beloved, ending up with the whole of the love letter being a form of mediated external dialogue interspaced with mini-narratives.

The main loss of Kneale's position would be that it is impossible to argue for a dialogue with the other 'in the *now*.' Moreover, the Cullerian apostrophic emergence of voice is equally lost. I repeat from chapter two: the lover is in dialogue with herself, wherein parts of the self are projected outward as the external phantasmal beloved subject, establishing her presence and identity thanks to the beloved's absence. Eventually, this is in Tsvetajeva's case the 'intense presence' we (and Bachrach) can 'overhear' when reading the love letter. Those are the words that truly reach and stir and call. In Whitman's conviction, the poet convinces not by arguments, rhymes and similes, but by presence. A presence that is not based on a *narrative* (*was*) presence telling 'her' autobiographical history, nor is it a common *dialogical* presence waiting for an answer in a '*future*' letter, but it is a presence in the '*now*' as *apostrophic* discourse with the apostrophised beloved. At this point, with help of Bakhtin's theory, it is possible to combine Kneale view with Culler's description and save the apostrophic presence in the now. For this solution to become clear I propose to 'overlay' the three modes of address (narratologic, dialogic, apostrophic) with Bakthin's three-part division

of voices in a dialogical monologue (the 'I for myself' -first voice; the 'I for another' as a surrogate -second voice; the 'genuine other' -third voice).

The narratological mode organises the voice of the lover-writer mainly as an 'I for myself.' Of course we have to keep Bakhtin's basic thesis in mind that all utterances are directed at the other, meaning that also the narratological I for myself is directed as speech towards the other. Still, I propose that the emphasis lies with the voice as I for myself who constructs a narrative picture of the self based on past events with little or no dialogue going on. Presence is here, mostly, understood as an insinuation of dramatic plausibility through narratological stylistic devices. With Bal we can name this the character effect.

The dialogical mode of address organises the voice of the lover-writer as an 'I for myself,' but also takes the other more into account. The 'I for myself' responds directly, as if in everyday discourse (primary speech genre), to the other's utterances. There is more dialogue and it is external. Additionally, the other gets 'quoted' as the third voice or genuine other, mainly as a tool to keep the dialogue clear and going.

Finally, for the apostrophic mode of address a turn is needed as Kneale proposes. When we take Bakhtin's analysis of Devushkin seriously, Devushkin accounts for the other by way of his second voice or 'I for the other.' Although the other is not empirically present, his presence, shadow or trace is tangible. Why then, does this constitute an apostrophic turn in the classical sense? The answer lies in the difference between the first two modes of address and the third apostrophic mode. The first two modes of address are both *externally dialogical* in the everyday sense (*primary speech genre*). Two empirical subjects speak to one another, mediated through letter writing. Each utterance of the speakers is aimed and expects a direct reply from the empirical beloved although that reply might take a while to arrive. In contrast, once the lover adopts the apostrophic mode of address, the lover enters a mode where dialogue is internalised in the *act of writing* rather than *mediated speaking*. The direct answers from the empirical other (beloved) are 'taken over' by the lover's second voice in the now as surrogate voice - 'my I for another.' This is where the turn is to be found. Because the basic letter writing happens through the narratological and dialogic mode as external dialogue, the main addressee is the external factual beloved-other. This is Kneale's desired pre-text, for these primary modes embed the apostrophic mode of address.

Once a shift occurs from the primary modes to the apostrophe, the external other is transformed in an 'imagined' or substituted other ('I for another,' surrogate voice). This is a turn of voice from one addressee to another: the lover turns from the empirical external beloved to an internalised imagined beloved. With it the temporality changes as well. It turns

from an anticipation for a future answer (temporal staccato) into a (fluent) dialogue in the now. Through Bakhtin's dialogism we understand that it is not the 'empirical external other' replying to the utterances of the lover in the moment of writing, but is the 'substitutive voice of the other from the self' who replies. This explains why it is hard to imagine how the empirical Bachrach would reply. He is, in Culler's view, a mere listener of a conversation that is already going on. Put strongly, the answers are already given, although they are 'hidden and implied' in the shadow of Tsvetajeva's own words.

In addition, where I said that the narratological and everyday dialogical modes of address have strong roots in Bakhtin's primary speech genre, I propose that the apostrophic mode of address has its roots in the secondary speech genre. Like Dostoevsky's poetics, it portrays the process of *how* someone is conscious of him or herself in an utterly internalised dialogical manner. Furthermore, like the novel, there is in the apostrophic mode of address more 'freedom,' since the words of the other go through the pen of the lover. As such, we can interpret and account for Tsvetajeva's feelings when she writes: *ik ben volkomen vrij met U, ik praat met een geest / In Uw brief zie ik niet U versus mij, maar U – versus Uzelf. Ik ben een toevallige luisteraar*. It is in these apostrophic moments that the self is in the most intense way trying to create a horizon through which it shows or even *becomes* itself. I want to point out that this Bakhtinian interpretation is very much in line with parts of Culler's interpretations, mainly when Culler says: through apostrophe the voice of the poet becomes truly present and it is the apostrophic voice that truly convinces. Also, Culler can be corrected by counter-proposing that this is not an ironic emergence of the voice because it is met with silence of the other, but that the voice 'I for myself' emerges only in a contrast with the other, created in an internalised dialogue via 'my I for another.' And this other is, following Bakhtin dialogism, a shadow, a trace, but is most definitely *real*.

Finally, I would want to take over Richardson's notion of *continuum* and combine it with what Bakhtin says about the letter: "This reckoning with an absent interlocutor can be more or less intensive. In Dostoevsky it is extremely intense" (1999, p.205). I propose to sketch out a continuum for the love letter. At the one end we find the reckoning with the interlocutor is the least internalised (Richardson's less daring and more everyday apostrophe's). Here dialogue and narration *are acts of speaking*, and the lover is present in the capacity of narrator, lyrical subject, external interlocutor or dramatic character. At the other end I posit that the reckoning with the interlocutor is highly internalised, so much so that the 'I for myself' and 'my I for another' take over the normally external dialogue in the letter (Richardson's more poetic apostrophes). It is there, at the latter end of the continuum, where I

place the love letter in its purest form. It is there where it reaches, stirs and calls and the lyrical subject falls together with the lover-writer -in the *act of writing*. In a Bakhtinian reasoning, it is there that the constituting or self-generation of the lover is most intense. That is, the love letter evokes at its most powerful moments a self-showing, which is actually a self-generating through an internal dialogue in writing; vice versa, when the lover shows him or herself intensely, the love letter's external dialogue will overturn into an internal apostrophic dialogue.

Conclusion

In the poetics of the love letter I have tried to reason how certain distinctive elements in the love letter come together and turn into a unified structure which creates the effect of presence of the lover-writer in the letter. I argue with help of Bakhtin that within the love letter one can encounter three voices of the *self*-lover which stand in a typical relation with the *other*-beloved. They are the primary voice 'I for myself;' the secondary or surrogate voice as 'my I for another;' and the third or 'genuine voice of the other' (mediated through the self). With Bakhtin's dialogism I also argued how a love letter not only mediates dialogue, but is itself dialogical. As I have found, dialogue occurs in two distinct ways. Firstly, as external dialogue (two factual people respond to one another as an -*act of speaking*) and secondly, as internal dialogue (a lover responds to the beloved, but the dialogue is internalised; i.e. the lover as the 'I for myself' is in dialogue with an imagined beloved as 'my I for another' as an -*act of writing*).

On the basis of case study analyses of letters from Tsvetajeva to Bachrach and the correspondence between Chekhov and Knipper, I have found three modes of address. Each mode of address organises and emphasis the three voices differently. Also, each mode falls into either the category of internal or external dialogue. Firstly, the main mode of address is the dialogical mode characterised by a *future* temporality. Herein the lover responds directly to utterances of the beloved. The dialogue is external and has its roots in Bakhtin's primary speech genre (even though it is a mediated dialogue). The emphasis lies on a (spoken) dialogue between the primary voice or 'I for myself' and the third voice or 'genuine other.' Secondly, the narratological mode of address highlights the 'I for myself' from the past with its characteristic temporality of *past*. Through Bal this is to be understood as a form of insinuating a plausible dramatic presence. Although it is a mode on its own, it is embedded in and inherently linked up with the dialogical mode because the dialogue gives ground to telling the stories. The stories become part of the external dialogue. Thus, the narratological addressing mode is as well categorised as external (spoken) dialogue. Thirdly, the apostrophic mode of address in contrast to the former two internalises the dialogue, characterised by the temporal *now*. The lover turns in his or her speech from the external, factual beloved to the imagined or surrogate beloved. In terms of voice the emphasis lies on the second voice where the lover lends her voice to the beloved as 'my I for another' then and there in writing.

The apostrophic mode of address is, through Culler, an intense moment of self-showing, or stated otherwise: in apostrophe it is the lover's voice that truly comes to the fore and the lover's appearance of presence is at its highest. With Bakhtin I showed that this

presence is not embarrassing nor solipsistic, but caused by the dialogical self-generative process as inner dialogue. Note that these processes of self-generation or positing oneself in dialogue are always present in each utterance of the self. And yet, these processes can be more or less intense. In the love letter the process is at its highest intensity in moments of apostrophic address. This enhances the appearance of presence beyond the suggestion of presence through narration or external dialogue in mediated letter form. In the apostrophic moment the letter becomes an artefact of presence and thus a *love letter*.

Afterword

With the poetics of love letters I came across certain problems that I have not been able to address in the main body of the thesis. My aim was first and foremost defining the structure in its most bare form with the clearest examples possible, which mainly turned out to be Tsvetajeva's letters to Bachrach. As a consequence, numerous other examples (e.g. famous correspondences like those between Rilke and Salome or Abelard and Heloise, etc.) to substantiate my claims and the poetics as a whole did not make into in the thesis. Above all I want to mention the documentary film *Weathering Love* from Janis Klimanovs. This work proved vital for thinking about the phenomenon love letters and although his name, film and our dialogues are not mentioned after this thesis' introduction, they reverberate throughout the whole thesis. Furthermore, I want to address in this afterword two problems the poetics poses with a short reply how these could be tackled, and want to sketch out an additional way to argue, through the poetics, how 'presence' comes about in the love letter.

The major problem of the love letter poetics is that it is a structuralist approach to letter writing. It does not mention the phenomenon of love per se. With this scheme it could be argued that the structure does not solely account for the love letter only. For instance, one could argue that a letter between two brothers, where stories and dialogue are transferred and at some point an apostrophic moment occurs wherein a type of 'self-generative' monologue is conveyed, is also deemed by the poetic's definition a love letter.

In reply I propose that the poetics of the love letter is a an empty body or shell without a beating heart. The beating heart would amount to defining more specifically when the poetics as a structure comes into existence. In what circumstances is it that the writing between two people adopts itself to the structure as I have expound above. In the thesis I have already hinted at these moments, for instance when I agree with Frye that 'we find our voice in the face of silence and frustration.'[25] Deep and intense moments of silence and frustration occur, usually, when two *lovers* are apart but desire for each other intensely. Hence, in moments like those they turn to the written medium of love letters and find their way into an apostrophic dialogue with their beloved in which a self-showing occurs. These moments of desire, self-showing and becoming (more) self-aware of the situation and your unique place in it, would need to be inquired into. What are these moments? How do these moments occur? What is the ground for these moments? In my philosophical master's thesis I plan to address this issue. I will do so by arguing that the relation between lovers defines itself as an intense

[25] Also cf. Johnson and Keniston (chapter two of this thesis).

form of *aandacht*, focus or attention. I will research via Heidegger's work and Rosenzweig's dialogical thinking on love in his *Stern der Erlösung*, how such moments are generated (in relation to love letters). In a preliminary answer based on Rosenzweig's *Stern*: love knows three structural moments. 1) *unicity*, in love one unique person is elected above everyone else; 2) *the now*, love is an imperative which can never turn into a past or a future. Only in the now a lover can ask 'love me,' leading to; 3) *dialogic performativity*, love as an imperative demands an answer from the beloved.

Note that, however, while the poetics might on the one hand be too broad, on the other hand the poetics is very stringent up to the point where correspondences between lovers without apostrophic moments in them would not be defined as love letters. Consider for instance the Knipper-Chekhov correspondence wherein roughly ninety percent (if not more) of the correspondence goes on without any apostrophic moments. As a consequence, ninety percent of their 'love correspondence' would not 'count' as a love letter on the basis of the love letter poetics. For this problem I have not yet found a solid answer, except to refer to the *continuum*. In love letters there is *always* a dialogue going on between two lovers, sometimes it is more intense, sometimes less intense. In order to validate this claim, the whole continuum needs to 'count as a love letter' for which the above mentioned thematic explication of love via Rosenzweig's thinking is needed. E.g. even in the basic form of love letters (externalised dialogue as narratology and dialogue without the apostrophe) are forms of attention; i.e. love. This 'lover's attention' is intensified in moments of crisis, frustration, fear, joy, etc. and in such moments the lover letter turns into an intensified form 'as apostrophe' (usually this openness and honesty is reserved for loved ones).

Finally, I want to point out that with the poetics of love letters on the basis of the interplay of the modes of address, one can argue differently why there is an intense form of writer-presence in the letter. I would argue that through a combination of the three modes of address, the *narrative past* (Tsvetajeva: 'I *have* existed, for I tell you that I once encountered clouds, my publisher, a village flanked by a crest, a rag-and-bone woman') gains a more urgent actuality because it is framed by the 'act of writing in the now.' The question is, why can the *I write now* utilise the narration and change its layout, actuality or urgency? Why is the narration being pulled away from the past?[26]

[26] This is in reply to Bal's "the narrator is not the autobiographical author" (2009, p.15).

I argue that a *different* mode 'besides the mode of the narrator' (so not as character and not as narrator) affirms a temporal now through writing. This can be argued for because there are three modes of address (narrative, dialogical, apostrophic) that converge in a unique blend as the love letter. This becomes clear in a contrast with the postmodern novel. Although the postmodern novel can factually point at its own narrative function as '*I write here now*,' it cannot be seen as a letter and 'gain' the now. The narrator in the postmodern novel who points at his own narration still remains a narrator pointing at himself within the domain of the novel. The novel lacks a different or additional mode besides the narrative one; it will always be a narration and nothing else. In the letter we find at least two other modes besides or going beyond 'the reach the narrative mode;' i.e., the one which is in an external dialogue (with the beloved) and the one which apostrophises (the beloved) in an internal dialogue. These modes can refer 'from outside the narrative' to the narrative, through utterances like: *I write here now . . .* [27] In conclusion: the utterance *I write her now* then becomes a midway or hybrid of all three modes. It is partially narrative, partially dialogical and partially apostrophic. Because it is none solely, it functions like a bridge between all modes. The mix of three modes alternating each other and (implicitly) referring to each other strengthen the (unique) appearance of presence of the lover in the letter - the lover is not solely fictitious. Or in this thesis' terms: *the love letter is an artefact of presence.*

[27] In Bakhtinian terms: the love letter as partially rooted in the *primary speech genre* and partially rooted in the *secondary speech genre*.

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