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Aldo Leopold and us: Person deixis as a rhetorical strategy in Barbara Kingsolver's introduction to *A Sand County almanac*

Abstract. This paper focuses on the use of person deixis in the framing of a new edition of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County almanac: And sketches here and there* (1949). This celebrated non-fiction work, considered one of the most important books on ecology and environmentalism ever written, has been published in many editions in 15 languages, with more than two million copies printed. The recent 2020 OUP edition is particularly interesting from a pragmatic point of view, for the way it is targeted to a new generation of readers thanks to an introduction by the author Barbara Kingsolver. Here, deixis is effectively employed to overcome what Kingsolver calls the "full-metal culture war" between conservationists and conservatives. Her ecumenical use of several varieties of the "inclusive we" (Yule, 1996, p. 11) may be considered part of a strategic manoeuvring aimed to create "communion" (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999, p. 485) between the two opposing parties, while at the same time averting a risk of cancellation that Kingsolver perceives in "the heat of modern culture wars".

Keywords: person deixis, Aldo Leopold, ecological discourse, strategic manoeuvring, cancel culture

1. Introduction

The idea that discourse on the environment is subject to particular framings is hardly new. Alexander adopts a critical discourse approach to investigate this research area, inspired by the "current 'preoccupation' with talking about 'global warming' (Stern, 2007)", which "appears to have foregrounded an ecological issue at least for a brief span of media attention" (Alexander, 2009, p. 1). So much so that Stibbe refers to a change arising from "a general ecological turn with the humanities and social science, which has seen the rise of ecopsychology, ecofeminism, ecosociology, ecocriticism, environmental communication and ecolinguistics" (Stibbe, 2018, p. 497). This now topical issue came to the fore thanks to a small number of trailblazing books

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quoted in most ecology and environmental studies (Walter, 2011; Thomas, 2018; Viridis, 2022, p. 30; Brennan & Lo, 2024) which triggered the development of environmental ethics originating from the American Naturalist Tradition of H.D. Thoreau: Rachel Carson's *Silent spring* (1962), Paul Ralph Ehrlich's *The population bomb* (1968), but also, more than a decade before these, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County almanac* (1949).

These books were republished and reprinted numerous times in shifting historical and political circumstances, reintroduced into public discourse to mark anniversaries and other celebrations with the aid of new paratextual materials, in particular fresh introductions, penned by influential intellectuals of the day. These paratexts (Genette, 1987) contributed to creating a particular framing for the reading of these works, often fulfilling different and sometimes overlapping functions: persuasive, apologetic, didactic, argumentative and expressive, to name just a few.

This paper aims to investigate the rhetorical use of person deixis in the introduction by the American writer Barbara Kingsolver to a recent edition of a classic of the environmental movement, *A Sand County almanac* by Aldo Leopold (1949, 2020). Drawing on the pragma-dialectical model of argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) to explain the rationale of the various moves made in her introductory discourse and the strategic patterns behind them, the paper will consider both the author's rhetorical and dialectical goals. More specifically, the three components of strategic manoeuvring (van Eemeren, 2010) – the choice of the most effective arguments, the adaptation to the audience and the linguistic form given to topics – will be analysed from a particular observation point, that of person deixis as a presentational device fostering agreement in argumentation².

After providing an overview of the pragmatic category of person deixis, with a focus on the first-person plural, the second section of the article introduces Aldo Leopold and *A Sand County almanac*, tracing the history of its publication. The third section will explore the peculiar use of person deixis made by Barbara Kingsolver in her introduction to the book, analysing selected passages where the author's attempt to create empathy in the readers is sustained by the foregrounding of the conceptual metaphor of war. The fourth and last section will provide some final remarks on how, in the paratext analysed, deixis becomes an argumentative device which contributes to making Kingsolver's rhetorical strategy successful.

2. Person deixis: Definitions and new insights

Deixis, as Renkema argues, is “the phenomenon in which the dependency of discourse on the situation is most striking” (2004, p. 121). It belongs to the linguistic field of pragmatics, which has been defined by Levinson as “the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language” (Levinson, 1983, p. 9), and by Yule as “the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those

2 Cf. Santulli & Degano (2022) for a thorough examination of the construction of agreement in the argumentative process.

forms” (Yule, 1996, p. 4). Context and users are indeed central to the concept of deixis, a term from Greek meaning “pointing” via language (Yule, 1996, p. 9). As for the object of such pointing, Lyons adds that by deixis we mean “the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatio-temporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee” (Lyons, 1977, p. 377).

There are five related categories of deixis: person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, discourse or text deixis, and social deixis. For our purposes we will concentrate on person deixis, which concerns “the encoding of the role of the participants in the speech event in which the utterance is delivered” (Levinson, 1983, p. 62). It operates on a basic three-part division, exemplified by the pronouns of the first, second and third person, corresponding to the deictic categories of speaker, addressee, and other(s) (Yule, 1996, p. 10). These forms are apparently simple, but their simplicity “disguises the complexity of their use”, Yule explains, concluding that, given their small size and extremely wide range of possible uses, “deictic expressions always communicate much more than is said” (Yule, 1996, pp. 10, 16).

This claim has since been substantiated by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research into the use of pronouns as discourse structures deployed to express and manipulate social groups and their relations, as well as the status and power of actors within a text. “Pronouns”, in Fairclough’s view, “are usually worth attending to in texts” (2003, p. 149), and among them the first-person plural pronoun, ‘we’, is important in terms of “Identificational meanings”, how texts represent and construct groups and communities. The link between pronouns and ideology has been further explored by van Dijk, who argues that “pronouns are perhaps the best known grammatical category of the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power, and hence of underlying ideologies” (1998, p. 203). Indeed, Van Dijk goes so far as to say that “there are few words in the language that may be as socially and ideologically ‘loaded’ as a simple *we*” (Ibid.), whose particular function can be explained by the close relationship between group identity, identification and ideology.

It is evident that the first-person plural pronoun “we”, denoting in its prototypical meaning the speaker and a variable, is open to ambiguity. In English and other European languages there is an exclusive “we”, referring to the speaker plus other(s), excluding the addressee, and an inclusive “we”, where the speaker and the addressee are included (Yule, 1996, p. 11). Unlike some other languages, English does not make any formal distinction between inclusive and exclusive reference (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 341), as illustrated with reflexive pronouns in the table below, where *s* stands for the originator(s) of the message, whether speaker or writer, and whether singular or plural; *h* stands for the addressee(s) of the message, whether hearer or reader, and whether singular or plural; *o* stands for any other referent(s) excluded from the definitions of *s* and *h*.

Table 1. First-person plural pronouns

s	h	O	Person	Examples with reflexive pronouns
+	-	-	1 st	We, the undersigned, pledge <i>ourselves</i> to...
+	+	-	1 st	We complemented <i>ourselves</i> too soon, John. [“inclusive <i>we</i> ”]
+	-	+	1 st	The children and I can look after <i>ourselves</i> . [“exclusive <i>we</i> ”]
+	+	+	1 st	You, Ann, and I are working <i>ourselves</i> to death.

(Adapted from Quirk et al., 1985, p. 341)

This ambiguity provides a subtle opportunity for a hearer to decide what was communicated, that is who is included in the reference of the pronoun (Biber et al., 1999). Either the hearer decides that he or she is a member of the group to whom the rule applies (i.e. an addressee) or an outsider to whom the rule does not apply (i.e. not an addressee) (Yule, 1996, p. 12).

Recent contributions on person deixis have identified an array of subcategories that help delineate theclusivity of the first-person pronoun further. Íñigo-Mora, in the context of her research on politeness strategies in English and Spanish parliamentary settings (Íñigo-Mora, 2004, 2008), offers an articulated interpretation of the categories discussed above that goes beyond the simple inclusive/exclusive distinction. She elaborates on Quirk et al.’s close examination of the special uses of “we” (Quirk et al., 1985, pp. 350–351) to distinguish eight different uses of “we”:

- Generic: it is an “enlarged” inclusive “we” which may include the whole human race.
- Inclusive authorial: it is used in serious writing and seeks to involve the reader in a joint enterprise.
- Editorial: it is used by a single individual in scientific writing in order to avoid an egoistical “I”.
- Rhetorical: it is used in the collective sense of “the nation”, “the party”. It may be viewed as a special type of generic “we”.
- To refer to the hearer (= you): it is normally used by doctors when talking to a patient and by teachers when giving instructions to students. It is an inclusive “we” used to sound condescending in the case of doctors and non-authoritative in the case of teachers.
- To refer to a third person (= s/he): For example, one secretary might say to another with reference to their boss: “We’re in a bad mood today”.
- Royal: it is virtually obsolete and is used by a monarch.
- Nonstandard: plural “us” used for the singular “me”: “lend us a fiver”.

(Íñigo-Mora, 2004, pp. 34–35, also quoted in Wilson, 2019, pp. 38–39)

Further on in her essay, though, Íñigo-Mora adds a ninth use of “we”, which she calls “patriotic ‘we’”, a pronoun that, in the context of her analysis of Question Time Sessions at the House of Commons (British Parliament), “embraces all British people”, in contrast with

the “parliamentary ‘we’” (Íñigo-Mora, 2004, p. 43), which restricts the reference to the parliamentary community, chosen as the object of her study.

Another useful distinction can be found in De Cock (2011), who focuses on the phenomenon of first-person plural forms being used with hearer reference. Since the “physical persons involved in interaction (speaker and hearer) are distinguished from the discursive roles (addresser and addressee)”, in particular cases both in English and in Spanish, De Cock argues, a non-prototypical use of first-person plural forms is possible, where “the interpretation of the 1st person plural forms shifts towards the addressee, thus triggering a hearer-dominant reading” (De Cock, 2011, p. 2762). In these cases, although the person reference device is formally a first-person plural, pragmatically speaking, the hearer is targeted, rather than the speaker.

In politeness studies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 118), the hearer-dominant reading is seen as a positive politeness strategy, an expression of solidarity with the hearer. On the other hand, through the deviating hearer-dominant reading, “the speaker assimilates addresser (with whom he identifies) and addressee (identified with the hearer) as part of one group, thus taking the right to speak for the addressee” (De Cock, 2011, p. 2767). This shift towards hearer dominance can be triggered by contextual devices bringing the hearer to the fore. Some of these hearer-foregrounding linguistic clues will be identified in the analysis conducted in section 3.

As emerges from most accounts (cf. Haverkate, 1984, p. 87; Iglesias Recuero, 2001, p. 266), an important condition for making this strategy effective is the existence of a power relationship between speaker and hearer, where persuasive argumentation is a key (Weigand, 2008). De Cock remarks that “the HD [hearer-dominant]-reading may create an asymmetry, even when the extralinguistic relationship between the interlocutors is not typically defined as an asymmetric one” (De Cock, 2011, p. 2766). Half of the examples in her Spanish and English datasets were uttered “in a context where we would describe the sociological relationship between the interlocutors as a relationship among equals” (De Cock, 2011, p. 2766).

Wilson (2019) reaches the same conclusion in his analysis of the way in which the choice of the pseudo-inclusive first-person plural pronoun impacts upon the social dynamics of leadership discourse. He demonstrates how by including themselves with the addressees of an interaction, leaders can attenuate the illocutionary force of speech acts such as directives and criticism, thus mitigating potential face-threat.

All these studies offer new insights into what Kryk, in her seminal study, called “the problem of deixis in argumentation” (Kryk, 1987), namely how a line of argumentation can be shaped by the “deictic anchoring” of discourse participants. She demonstrates that manipulating the deictic anchoring of particular discourse participants can exert considerable impact upon the possible inferences drawn from an ongoing argument which become, in turn, subject to a range of different interpretations. One of the strategies she considers is “empathetic deixis” (Lyons, 1977, p. 677). Normally, in a discourse situation, as the roles of the speaker and the addressee switch back and forth, so does the pronoun assignment to the discourse participants, i.e. the speaker and the addressee (cf. Lyons, 1977, p. 638). Empathetic deixis involves, on the contrary,

“the lack of predicted switch due to empathy with the interlocutor’s point of view” (Kryk, 1987, p. 33). This can happen, for example, when the members of certain social groups talk to their dependents/clients (e.g. doctors to patients), or when a teacher addresses a student. In sum, empathetic deixis involves, in the presence of “empathetic attachment” (Kryk, 1987, p. 33), the identification of the speaker with the interlocutor’s perspective, something that can exert considerable impact upon the argumentation process.

3. *A Sand County almanac* by Aldo Leopold: from 1949 to the 2024 edition

Before exploring the case of a particular pragmatic use of the pronoun “we” in a recent introduction to *A Sand County almanac* by Aldo Leopold, this section will offer a short overview of the book and its author.

Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) was a visionary American conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer, and outdoor enthusiast who is widely considered the father of wildlife ecology and modern conservation, whose best-known idea, the “land ethic”, an ethical, caring relationship between people and nature³, was introduced in *A Sand County almanac: And sketches here and there*, first published by Oxford University Press, New York, in 1949 with illustrations by Charles W. Schwartz.

Born in Iowa, he graduated from the Yale Forest School and pursued a career with the newly established U.S. Forest Service in Arizona and New Mexico, then in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1933, after publishing the first textbook in the field of wildlife management, he accepted a new chair in Game Management, and then became chair of a new Department of Wildlife Management at the University of Wisconsin. *A Sand County almanac*, examining humanity’s relationship to the natural world, was conceived as a book for general audiences. Unfortunately, just one week after his manuscript was accepted for publication, while fighting a neighbour’s grass fire, he experienced a heart attack and died on April 21, 1948. Edited by his son Luna, Leopold’s collection was published a little more than a year after his death under its original title “Great Possessions”. With over two million copies sold, the book would become a classic of environmental literature, granting Leopold a name as the most influential conservation thinker of the twentieth century.

The essays are grouped in three parts. Part I, “Sand County almanac”, is a poignant chronical of a whole year, January to December, at Leopold’s weekend refuge on a Wisconsin farm (the “Shack”) where he lived with his family. Part II, “Sketches here and there”, recounts some of the episodes, scattered across the United States through forty years of time, which contribute to the awakening of a conservation ethic in his life and work. Finally Part III, “The Upshot”, draws some conclusions on the ideas of an aesthetic of conservation, wildlife in American culture, wilderness and the land ethic.

3 The brief biographical notes on Aldo Leopold are taken from the website <https://www.aldoleopold.org>.

The book was little noticed until the environmental awakening of the 1970s (Meadows, 1999), when the 1968 OUP paperback edition turned into a surprise bestseller. Leopold's land ethic, together with the historical analyses of White and Passmore, the pioneering work of Routley, Stone and Rolston, and the warnings of many scientists, had by the late 1970s focused the attention of philosophers and political theorists firmly on the environment (Brennan & Lo, 2024).

In 1987, a century after Leopold's birth, a special commemorative edition appeared, with the introduction "The delights and dilemmas of *A Sand County almanac*" by the American nature essayist Robert Finch⁴. He starts by recognising the book's persistent fortune ("No other single book of American nature writing – with the exception of *Walden* – has achieved such lasting stature as *A Sand County almanac*", Finch, 1987, p. xv), but at the same time the neglect it suffered as a *book* ("Yet its broad appeal and influence have never been fully accounted for", Finch, 1987, p. xv). Its major delights, in Finch's view, lie in the voice of the narrator as "a kind of ideal father figure", a "rural sage" with a "strong poetic sensibility"; its dilemmas are centred on "the theme of environmental loss", dominant in the second part, whereas the last part of the book includes "brave public statements" and calls for "a fundamental reform in our relationship with the land", stemming from "an educated and imaginative perception of nature" (Finch, 1987, pp. xvi, xvii, xviii, xxv, xxvi). The true strength of Leopold's masterpiece, Finch concludes, consists in the "reunification of poetry and science" which he sees as necessary, and adopts "for us" (Finch, 1987, p. xxviii) as the constitutive principle of his work. Basically, Finch frames the book as "a rich and enduring work of literature" (Finch, 1987, p. xxviii) and "us" readers as mere depositaries and recipients of his admirable prose.

In 2001, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, OUP launched a completely redesigned and lavishly illustrated gift edition, with over one hundred pictures by Michael Sewell, a renowned American nature photographer. The introduction by the American environmental writer Kenneth Brower starts off with a descriptive sequence on the "Shack" and the Wisconsin River, and defines the *Almanac* as "an epochal, seminal, ageless work", placing it in the past, at the time when it was written, and extolling it as one of the "sacred texts" of the environmental movement: "bible still for land managers; koran for those of us who work the soil where literature overlaps ecology; urtext for the ecological restoration movement" (Brower, 2001, p. 9). He then traces a long comparison between Thoreau's and Leopold's writing styles, before clarifying the circumstances of his own writing, at the Shack: "For a week Sewell and I followed after Aldo, wandering all over the Leopold farm. We found beaver-felled trees above the great marsh" (Brower, 2001, p. 10).

4 That same year J. Baird Callicott published *Companion to A Sand County almanac: Interpretive & critical essays*, followed, two years later, by *In defense of the land ethic: Essays in environmental philosophy* (1989), which collects into a single volume J. Baird Callicott's decade-long efforts to articulate, defend and extend Aldo Leopold's environmental philosophy.

In 2006 the ecological writer and activist Julianne Lutz Newton published the first and so far only intellectual biography of Aldo Leopold, *Aldo Leopold's odyssey*, with the American Island Press, republished ten years later (another anniversary edition!) with “a new introduction framing Aldo Leopold's contributions in terms of the hot topic of the Anthropocene”⁵ and a new preface and foreword by the environmentalist Bill McKibben.

So we arrive at the most recent edition, which will be the focus of this paper, the OUP 2020 edition, “reborn for Earth Day 50”, since Leopold's book “achieved prominence around the first Earth Day in 1970”⁶; it includes an introduction by the American author Barbara Kingsolver, reprinted in 2024 as the 75th Anniversary Edition. In 2020 the political climate in the USA had radically changed. The 2016 Presidential Election resulted in the first Trump Presidency: the Republican tycoon won the swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Florida, Ohio, and Iowa, that had been taken by Obama in 2008 and 2012. In traditionally Democrat-leaning Virginia, where Kingsolver lives with her family, the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, carried the state with 49.73% of the popular vote against Trump's 44.41%, a victory margin of 5.32%. Thus Trump became the first Republican since 1924 to win the presidency without taking Virginia. The country was deeply divided, with social conflict escalating.

Meanwhile, Leopold's reputation was under attack: as observed by Millstein (2018, 2024), Leopold's original concept of land ethic had often been misunderstood, but now detractors began to call him a callous misanthrope at best and racist at worst (Meine, 2021, with reference to Kashwan 2020, who in turn refers to Fabiani, 2016). This criticism was initiated by Miles A. Powell's book *Vanishing America. Species extinction, racial peril, and the origins of conservation* (2016), where Leopold and his colleagues are accused of feeling “sufficiently qualified, as ecologists, to pass judgment on immigration's ability to upset the nation's balance”, and consequently environmental conservation is stigmatized as “fraught with ecological ignorance and racism” (Fabiani, 2016). The “conceptualization of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in America history” is thus taken into question as “not strictly placed along color lines, but [...] strongly tied with ideas of fitness and value” (Fabiani, 2016). In short, Leopold was suddenly in danger of ‘cancellation’.

4. Person deixis in Barbara Kingsolver's introduction

The author of the 2020 introduction to *A Sand County almanac*, Barbara Kingsolver, is an American writer and political activist who grew up in rural Kentucky, earned degrees in biology, worked in Europe, Africa, Asia, Mexico, and South America, and after spending two decades in Tucson, Arizona, moved to southwestern Virginia, where she currently resides. Her books have

5 The quote comes from the overview of the book offered on Springer's website: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.5822/978-1-61091-754-4> (last access: 10/11/2024).

6 From the webpage dedicated to this edition on the Aldo Leopold Foundation website: <https://www.aldoleopold.org/products/a-sand-county-almanac?variant=46004015366457> (last access: 26/10/2024).

been translated into more than thirty languages, have won several prizes (the Women's Prize for Fiction twice and the Pulitzer Prize, among many others) and have been adopted into the core literature curriculum in high schools and colleges throughout the United States. Her husband, Steven Hopp, teaches environmental studies. So, not only is she a household name in America, but she shares some interests with Leopold: she has a scientific background in ecology and evolutionary biology, and has lived on a farm (in southern Appalachia), where, with her family, she raises an extensive vegetable garden and Icelandic sheep⁷.

As has been noted by a reviewer, in her introduction to *A Sand County almanac* she “deftly places the book within the frame of today's environmental movement and crisis” (Charles, 2020, p. 195). This is achieved through a rhetoric and argumentative use of person deictics, which will be illustrated in this section.

The introduction opens thus:

My life has been enlarged by a handful of books / reread at least once every decade. [...] So it has come to pass that Aldo Leopold, a man who died before *I* was born, is part of *my inner circle*. [...]

Our latest visit was unexpectedly emotional. These are portentous times. Leopold's book, at the grandfatherly age of 70, now stands as a seminal 20th-century work that shifted human understanding of *our environment*. (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xi, my emphasis)

In these first lines, she gradually broadens her proxemic space (Hall et al., 1968, p. 83), switching from the first-person singular adjective “My” to refer to her life, to the first-person singular pronoun “I” indicating her agentivity in (re)reading and her distance in time from Leopold, to include him, through another first-person singular adjective, in her “inner circle”, the intimate space embracing the small community of people with whom she enjoys the highest intimacy and trust.

In the next paragraph the author introduces two first-person plural adjectives (“our latest visit”, “our environment”) belonging to two different deictic subcategories. The first is an exclusive “we”, since the visit involves the “speaker” (Kingsolver) plus another person (Leopold), excluding the addressee; the second, on the other hand, is an inclusive “we”, and more specifically what Íñigo-Mora calls a “generic ‘we’”: “an ‘enlarged’, inclusive ‘we’ which may include the whole human race” (Íñigo-Mora, 2004, p. 35). This shift from exclusive to inclusive person reference is reinforced by temporal deixis. The speaker's deictic anchoring is grammaticalized through contextual elements such as a proximal demonstrative adjective (“These [...] times”), a verbal form in the present tense (“stands”) and an adverb of time (“now”), emphasizing the relevance of the book in our days, a topos chosen from the available “topical potential” for its

7 From Kingsolver's website: <http://barbarakingsolver.net/about/> (last access: 26/10/2024).

argumentative significance in order to restrict the “disagreement space” (van Eemeren, 2010, pp. 93, 100) that she will introduce further on in this same paragraph.

The debated word at the origin of this disagreement is identified in “*environmentalism*”:

Environmental news is mostly terrible, and the word *environmentalism* has become a civic hand grenade. Throw it into a crowd and watch everybody run to opposite sides of the room, arms crossed, glowering. (Kingsolver, 2020, pp. xi-xii, emphasis in the original)

Drawing on the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 4–6 and passim)⁸, environmentalism, not in itself but as a word, is defined as a civic bomb, which creates division among citizens. She depicts the scene with cinematic details, adding other expressions from the vocabulary of war in the next paragraphs.

In this metaphorical war field two parties oppose each other: “On one side are folks who see the world as a garden we’re entitled to reap to our best immediate advantage; on the other, those who see it as a living home in dire need of long-term protection” (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xii). The first group is framed with a simile of Biblical and Utilitarian ascendance, where “nature is depicted as a collection of active, modifiable, and economically valuable processes, often construed as ecosystems that produce marketable goods and services *gratis*” (DesRoches, 2015). The second hints at Gaia theory (Lovelock, 1979) and conservationism.

To reconcile the two parties, in the following paragraphs Kingsolver offers an example of strategic manoeuvring (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999), as a way of realizing her rhetorical aims while developing a series of moves and presentational devices to exploit the opportunities afforded by the dialectical situation for steering the discourse rhetorically in the direction that serves her and Leopold’s interests best⁹. For this purpose, she exploits the ambiguity of the first-person plural pronoun “we”.

Her strategic use of the pronoun can be reconstructed starting from the analysis of a significant passage taken from the confrontation stage of the discussion, where she frames the two parties in this way:

[...] *Half of us* are worried sick about a warming planet, dying oceans, massive extinctions, and the refugees already displaced by floods and droughts on unprecedented scale. *We* listen to scientists’ predictions, grieve the living systems *we’re* losing, and try to change *our ways* as *we* grapple with catastrophes beyond comprehension. *We’ve* lionized a Swedish teenager named

8 A conceptual metaphor consists of “two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another” (Kövecses, 2010, p. 4).

9 It seems worth noting that in this case Kingsolver reverses the war metaphor in order to reconcile the two opposite sides, thus shedding the negative connotations of violence that justify unsustainable practices as discussed in Stibbe (2021, pp. 58–59).

Greta Thunberg who embodies the angst of a generation as she travels the globe (in zero-carbon conveyances) galvanizing young environmentalists and castigating world leaders for their failure to address the climate emergency.

Camped across the room, *the rest of us* think Greta should go home and watch movies with her friends. *We* don't care for being scolded by children. *We'd* rather believe the leaders who tell *us* the earth is basically sound. Into each life some rain must fall, the weather has its ups and downs, but it's ultimately up to God, who wouldn't let *us* down. *We* hunt and fish, burn fossil fuels, mine coal, and harvest crops from *our fields*, taking these things as *our birthright*. If *we* live close to the land, *we've* watched it heal itself time and again. Farmers are conservative by necessity, trusting what worked in the past. *We* may be wary of new ideas and higher education because of their heartbreaking tolls on *our traditions and families*. Sending kids away to college brings legitimate dread that they'll wind up looking down on *our lives of labor*, follow specialized jobs to distant cities, and raise children *we'll* rarely see. This is all to say, *we* don't take kindly to high-minded outsiders coming here to tell *us* what *we're* wrong about. (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xii, my emphasis)

Kingsolver astutely includes herself both in the “half of us” who are “worried sick about a warming planet” and in “the rest of us” who “think Greta should go home and watch movies with her friends”. In this sort of staged “trialogue” (Klein, 1991)¹⁰, we observe a shift from prototypical meaning of first-person plural forms towards hearer-dominance. The person reference device is formally a first-person plural. However, pragmatically speaking, the addressee is targeted, rather than the addresser. This is evidently one of those cases where the interpretation of the first-person plural forms shifts towards the addressee, thus triggering a hearer-dominant reading. In De Cock's terms, “the speaker assimilates the addresser [...] and the addressee [...] as part of one group, thus taking the right to speak for the addressee” (De Cock, 2011, p. 2767). To complicate the matter further, in this simulated triologue the assimilation involves the addresser and two different addressees, with the result that the speaker asserts the right to speak alternately for both.

Moreover, if we look closely at the contextual elements surrounding the first-person plural pronouns and adjectives in the two paragraphs quoted above, we notice, in both of them, a negative prosody. In the first group “we” are “worried sick”, we “grieve”, “[a]re losing”, “grapple with catastrophes” and leaders’ “failures”, but at the same time we are reasonable and proactive people: we “listen to scientists’ predictions”, we “try to change our ways”; and also people who

10 Quoted in Kock & Lantz, who expand on Klein's concept of “trialogical reasoning”: “Deliberative democrats [...] have too one-sidedly argued for deliberation among citizens who meet to debate with each other; this kind of deliberation, however, will never engage more than a fraction of the population, and more attention must be given to deliberation in the public sphere – that is, what we may call ‘trialogical’ deliberation, usually brought to citizens by the media, wherein no citizens, or only few, take an active part, but in which citizens are the third party: the audience” (Kock & Lantz, 2023, p. 134).

idealize: we have “lionized a Swedish teenager”, so we are possibly “young environmentalists” like those youngsters Greta Thunberg has been “galvanising”. The word “angst” encapsulates the extreme anxiety this group feels.

In the second group, “we” are more disdainful and antagonistic (“we don’t care”, “we don’t take kindly to high-minded outsiders who tell us what we’re wrong about”), but not unthoughtful (“the rest of us think Greta should go home”); “we” are believers (“we’d rather believe” in our “leaders”, in “God”, in “our birthright”, in “our traditions and families”, “our lives of labor” and “children”); but also practical people and exploiters (“We hunt and fish, burn fossil fuels, mine coal, and harvest crops from our fields”) – in short, this second “we” refers to (American) farmers. If the others were worried, this group of citizens are “wary”; their main feeling is dread, “legitimate dread”. Most of all, the “we” in the farmers’ speech is anchored with place deixis “here”, while the others are “outsiders”, albeit “high-minded”.

We observe, in passing, the use of dialogism to simulate the jargon of environmentalists (“zero-carbon conveyances”, “climate emergency”) and the commonplace sayings and metaphors of farmers (“Into each life some rain must fall, the weather has its ups and downs”). Moreover, a narrator’s aside sounds like a gloss and an apology on behalf of the second group for being ontologically “conservative” (“Farmers are conservative by necessity, trusting what worked in the past”).

Tapping once more into the war metaphor, Kingsolver frames this environmentally divisive debate as a “full-metal cultural war”, where on one side are the “conservationists” (those who see the planet as a living home in need of long-term protection), on the other the “conservatives” (those who believe in God, family, tradition). At this point deixis is effectively employed to overcome this “culture war” and reconcile the two sides. Kingsolver adopts a comparison argument (Wagemans, 2011¹¹) to blur or eliminate completely that polarizing distinction between the two groups, including them in a broader form of “we”.

It wasn’t always like this. [...] Well into the 1990s many conservatives identified as environmentalists, and when climate change began showing up in the news, Americans of every political stripe were equally worried about it. Now we’ve lost all memory of that. (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xiii, my emphasis)

First the author tries to re-establish a community which existed in the past, attributing the label of environmentalists to members of what is today seen as the opposite faction, conservatives. Then she adopts another kind of “we”, a “patriotic ‘we’” (Íñigo-Mora, 2004, p. 43), a particular kind of “generic we” here used as a way of blurring the line between different categories of

11 In argumentation based on a comparison, the statement that something is similar to something else functions as an argument supporting the relevance of the original statement. In this quotation from Kingsolver’s introduction the common predicate is represented by American citizens, while the referents are the different attitudes taken over time by “Americans of every political stripe”.

American citizens. This person deictic is reminiscent of the “we” in “We the People of the United States”, the performative utterance (Austin, 1962¹²) which opens the preamble of the American Constitution, written by the “Framers” par excellence, who drafted the document in six weeks in the summer of 1787. This is possibly the most famous example of person deixis, a “Patriotic ‘we’” that embraces all American people in a bond based on trust.

This use of deixis by Kingsolver works as a form of adaptation to audience demand, in an attempt to create empathy or ‘communion’ (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999, p. 485). This instance makes clear how, as noted by Zupnik, “first person plural deictic pronouns may fulfil a powerful persuasive function since they have the potential to encode group memberships and identifications” (Zupnik, 1994, p. 340).

Having included the two conflicting groups under one all-encompassing patriotic “we”, Kingsolver introduces a new opposition, further enlarging the scope of the deictic “we”, in the object role:

Decades of calculated influence on public opinion, mostly underwritten by fossil-fuel industries, have stoked resentments and left *us all* blaming each other for our losses while the profiteers carry on raiding the larder (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xiii, my emphasis).

This inclusive “we” (“us all”) actually excludes another, more wicked counterpart: the “profiteers”, namely those who “carry on raiding the larder”, a colloquial metaphor which connects to the previous metaphorical references to war, since it has another war term (“raid”) embedded.

In this inflamed context Leopold’s book offers “a pathway to *détente*”. Kingsolver resorts to a French term from diplomacy, *détente*, meaning a relaxing of tension as by negotiations or agreements. Trust is the value on which all the individuals included in the “we” converge (“We listen and take our truths – *all* of us – from people we trust, who know us and have our interests at heart”, Kingsolver, 2020, p. xvi, emphasis in the original). This “we” includes the author, who, to conclude her discourse, goes back to the initial “I”, so reconciling the two opposite positions in her hybrid identity (“I’m unusually preoccupied with this deadlock, as an environmentalist who is also a country girl”, *Ibid.*). Again she addresses the farmer community with a “we”, this time charging that pronoun with an emotional overtone:

Out here in the heartlands *we’re* still raising kids and crops to feed a nation’s appetites for food and labor, but *we’re* feeling pretty lonely about it. And invisible. (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xvi, my emphasis)

12 Austin actually includes a reference to person deixis in his definition of “performative utterance”: “Any utterance which is in fact a performative should be reducible, or expandible, or analysable into a form, with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active (grammatical)” (Austin, 1962, p. 62). He then makes a few comments to clarify that this rule may admit some alternatives, explaining, however, that it is not essential to the performative utterance that it be in the first person singular, since the first person plural “we” may also be used (see López Álvarez, 2005).

Having thus moved her readers – be they farmers or otherwise – she conflates their identities with Leopold’s, here referred to as “a rural man”, while his book is presented as an “earnest, exultant accounting of his life in the country” (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xvii). A few lines below, Leopold’s inclusivity is restated and reframed as a “gift” and a “knack”, a special skill.

His gift was to wear his rural roots and humility on his sleeve, and respect the full range of his audience, wherever they lived – a knack that we modern environmentalists have largely lost. He knew how to talk to the good ol’ boys (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xix, my emphasis).

In this case, the pronoun “we” introduces a new distance between Leopold – with his rural roots and humility – and “modern environmentalists”, a group in which Kingsolver now includes herself, apostrophising their counterpart with a highly connoted nonstandard expression as “the good ol’ boys”, in the Merriam-Webster definition (in the singular) “a usually white Southerner who conforms to the values, culture, or behavior of his peers”.

Finally, the peroration, drawing on the initial war metaphor, reveals Kingsolver’s true pre-occupation, which situates her discourse in the context of contemporary (American) culture:

In the heat of modern culture wars, a voice like this could risk getting cancelled. Readers quick to judge might just see guns and camo (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xix).

From this statement it is possible to reconstruct Kingsolver’s standpoint: Leopold mustn’t be cancelled, because, and this is her main argument, “He managed to be more inclusive than the best of us”. Thus “inclusive” becomes the keyword to achieve the goal of a language which can secure communion and avert cancellation. This strategy is pursued through the rhetorical device of another comparison argument, in which Kingsolver addresses her composite audience, a “‘mixed’ audience consisting of individuals or subgroups having different starting points” (van Eemeren, 2010, p. 110), reuniting them in “the best of us”. If at the beginning “we” referred to “I” plus “Leopold”, now the first-person plural deictic is revealed for what it is in Kingsolver’s introduction: a “you”, every reader who doesn’t know him. This includes readers from the country (“If you live in the country, you’ll recognize this splitter of firewood as kin, and appreciate how hard he works to honor his little acreage”), but also “the urban reader”, in which case the author hopes “you will let down your guard with this man as he sits on his rock in the stream, waiting for his trout to rise” (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xx).

Kingsolver includes herself in this second “you” (“If you take him for a redneck, listen anyway, because he’s wiser than most any two of us put together”), referring once more to “the frustrating divides that plague the awfulest failure of our day”. She concludes her covert apology of Leopold with an ecumenical “we” that tries to reunite the human and the non-human world, “as we try to reconcile human subsistence with the needs of our damaged biological home” (Kingsolver, 2020, p. xx).

In a recent interview Kingsolver made this point clear, turning again to the pronoun “you”:

“I understand why rural people are so mad they want to blow up the system,” she says. “That contempt of urban culture for half the country. I feel like I’m an ambassador between these worlds, trying to explain that if you want to have a conversation you don’t start it with the words, ‘You idiot.’” (Allardice, 2023)

5. Concluding remarks: Person deixis as an argumentative device

Barbara Kingsolver’s introduction to the 2020 edition of Aldo Leopold *A Sand County almanac* offers a sophisticated example of how person deixis can be deployed as a framing device in argumentative discourse. More specifically, the discourse-analytic critical reconstruction of the argumentative moves made in her strategic manoeuvring (van Eemeren, 2010) to meet the demands of her mixed audience has shown how her line of argumentation was successfully shaped by the deictic anchoring of discourse participants.

The shift of her discourse towards hearer dominance made possible by her peculiar use of first-person personal pronouns and adjectives was triggered by contextual devices bringing the hearer to the fore. The polyphony (Bachtin, 1981) of her prose, switching from the jargon of urban environmentalists to the nonstandard American English of rural communities, creates an ambiguity as to Kingsolver’s stance, whose sympathies oscillate between the two parties involved in the dispute.

Elevating Leopold above “us” (writer and readers) as more inclusive, she simultaneously realises her dialectical and rhetorical aims in persuading her readers of the reasonableness and effectiveness of her argumentation. The war metaphor recurring throughout her text, which is likely to appeal to the audience, contributes to the success of her strategic manoeuvring.

If normally the use of *we* (versus *they*) tends to cut up the world along “artificial binaries” (Davies, 2013, p. 91), constructing oppositions along ideological lines that leave no possibility for a middle-ground opinion, this case has tried to demonstrate that a “we”, when employed with a “patriotic” aim, can unite, instead of dividing, reconciling two opposing audiences thorough an appeal to a shared sense of community, solidarity and belonging. Kingsolver’s introduction can thus be seen as a beneficial discourse (Stibbe, 2017) in that it activates a positive frame which can help bridge the gap between conservative and progressive moral systems – as invoked by Lakoff (2010) – in relation to the environment.

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