

THE GUERILLERO: A DIALOGICAL ANALYSIS

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The following provides an account of my analysis of 'The Guerillero' by Albalucia Angel. The aim is to provide an analysis that can be compared to other analyses of the same text. First I provide some background to my approach to the text. Second, I detail my methodological process. Third, I provide a step-by-step account of the analysis.

Approaching The Text

Although the text is filled with vivid images and actions, at the level of plot, nothing substantially happens. No guerillero needs to be healed, no guerillero is concealed, no act of love occurs, and nobody arrives at the door with the intent to find out what happened. All these are mentioned, but they only occur within the thoughts of Felicidad Mosquera, the main and only character. These thoughts occur in the space of a couple of minutes while Felicidad is busy blocking the door from the assailants she assumes are after her. The text is a snapshot of her thought at this particular moment. The text comprises a stream of memories, thoughts, self-reprochments, and future fears, and as such, I suggest that it can be analysed as a stream of thought.

The Stream Of Thought

I read this text as a stream of thought, in the sense described by William James (1890). James describes the stream of thought, which is meant to refer to the stream of images and meanings that pass before the mind's eye, in terms of the following characteristics. First, it is always changing and yet it always has continuity, with each new meaning growing out of the previous one. Second, the stream deals with objects independent of itself. This is even true when the stream reflects upon itself, because in order to do so it must distance itself from itself and consider itself as an object. Third, the stream of thought has selective attention – there is a focus and a choosing of what to attend to within the stream. Finally, the stream is private. Let us consider the text in terms of these five characteristics.

(1) The stream of thought in the text is certainly changing. One thought and image leads into the next, and the same thought never appears twice. While the stream returns to the same themes, it is always in a new way. Yet, the stream also has continuity. In the text we can see each meaning complex emerging out of former meanings and images.

(2) The text has as its main object Felicidad herself. Felicidad is both the thinker and that which is thought about, she is knower and known, subject and object. James called the thinker the “I” and the self as an object of thought the “Me.” Felicidad is clearly an object to herself. She thinks about her self as “Felicidad” and “you.” Specifically, we can see the narrative I reflecting upon the “Me” in the past, present and future.

(3) Thinkers are not simply subjected to the stream of thought, when awake and in control of their faculties, people are able to direct the stream of thought to some degree. In short, there are acts of volition. In the text we see the narrative “I” trying to make choices, trying to make Felicidad throw her fear overboard, and to face her tormenters with courage and dignity.

(4) The text does not conform to the fourth characteristic because the text is not private. This is an important discrepancy, because it reminds us that we are dealing here with a tightly written, and elaborately worked, fictive text and not an actual stream of consciousness.

This points to the main methodological complication when analysing the text as a stream of thought. William James’ concept of the stream of thought not only influenced psychologists, it also influenced writers, such as James Joyce. It is most evident in his work ‘Ulysses’. And since then it has spawned a genre of writing, and arguably ‘The Guerillero’ is part of that genre. Accordingly, it would be a mistake to take anything in this text as direct evidence for James’ theorisation of the stream of thought.

So what status and utility does the text have? The text can be useful not as an instance of the stream of consciousness, but rather as an attempt to imagine what the stream of consciousness is like. It is then up to the reader to decide whether it is believable – whether that is what it is like to be a human. This is the mode in which Sartre made use of his fiction writing, namely, as a means to illustrate his philosophy, not by presenting reality, but by telling stories that were phenomenologically convincing.

Elaborating The Stream Of Thought

G. H. Mead (1934) later added two important additional characteristics of the stream of thought. First, he pointed out that streams of thought were a phase of action usually stimulated by a rupture. Once action is blocked or problematic, then the stream of thought is the attempt to re-organise meanings such that action can continue. More recently this has been theorised by Zittoun (2006) in relation to developmental transitions and Valsiner (2003) in relation to semiotic mediation overcoming an action block. The second point about the stream of thought which Mead brings is that the problem-solving stream of thought is characterised by shifts of perspective. These shifts of perspective, he suggested, were derivative of social interaction. Internalised significant and general others provide points from which reflection can occur. This basic idea is

closely connected to the theory of the Dialogical Self. Now let us apply both of these insights to the text:

1) The text begins with a rupture: the expectation of hostile people with machetes arriving at the door. This is the rupture of everyday life, of normality and safety. The conviction of that imminent event is what mobilises the stream of thought. It is the centre of gravity, around which the whole stream of thought orients. Each movement of thought elucidating a new aspect of the rupture, and working to re-configure meanings in the past, present and future such that action is possible.

The entire stream of thought takes place in the here-and-now setting of that expectation. The only thing which Felicidad does during the course of the text is cry, moan, curse and move furniture up against the door.

The stream of thought is oriented to the rupture throughout, and, it does succeed in re-configuring the problematic situation. The stream of thought moves from a state of panic, fear about torture, and a belief that she will be led to confess, toward a calmer, more confident position, in which she prepares to open the door herself and look her assailants in the eyes. The question we need to address is: how does this transition occur?

2) The text is a monologue: it is the stream of thought of one person. Yet the text is replete with significant others, and dialogical relations between these significant others and the thinker. There is not just the play between the narrating "I" and the various "me" images (i.e., me in the past, present and future). There are also the images of significant others. There is the image of Felicidad's assailants, her lover and various victims.

Accordingly, on the basis of the above six considerations it seems reasonable to treat the text as a stream of thought. In the following analysis of the text, I will be building upon all the points mentioned thus far, but especially upon this last point about the voices and images of others. I aim to examine each of these others within Felicidad, and I aim to analyse the role of these others in that unfolding stream of thought.

Method Of Analysis

The first step in the method of analysis is to code the data identifying all the active characters and I-positions. As mentioned above, this yields eight distinct I-positions.

Second, each of these I positions is then described and analysed on its own terms. These I-positions are categorised in terms of the "I", "Me", and "other" scheme (Table 1). Particular attention is paid to I-positions which change during the course of the narrative, and to the I-positions which are in dialogical tension with one another. The analysis also questions the nature of these relations.

Third, on the basis of the map of these I-positions the temporal movement of the stream of thought is plotted (Tables 2-6). Within this temporal movement, the aim is to identify the role of these internalised others in leading the stream of thought from its panicked starting point to its more confident conclusion.

Components Of The Self

First, let us look at the self positions that Felicidad herself occupies. These correspond to the classic Jamesian distinction between the self as subject and object, or what Mead called the “I” and the “Me”. Throughout the text there is the narrating I – this is the I that speaks or thinks. This is the I which is doing the reflecting, the criticising and the encouraging. This I is addressed to four different “me” images: Felicidad in the past, in the present, in the future, and in an imaginative counterfactual space of lost possibility. Let us consider each of these in turn:

1) The Narrating “I”

Although the text is very dialogical, it is spoken by one person throughout, namely, Felicidad in the moment when she expects people with machetes to come to the door. The narrating I changes during the course of the text. At the outset the I is annoyed, fearful and panic stricken. Thinking of the horrors of torture and rape that might await her, she is critical of her past self – who is blamed for getting her into this situation. She dis-identifies with her former Me: “What happened, damn you. I can’t understand. Felicidad Mosquera, I don’t recognise you any longer.”

The blame is unstable. It oscillates between blaming the former self (“damn you”) and calling the situation “bad luck”. Then, towards the end of the text the narrating I thinks that judging her former self is unfair. The narrating I then resolves not to confess, and to confront her assailants, by opening the door and looking them in the eyes.

The main change in the text is in the attitude of the narrating I, from panic and fear to determined confidence, from feeling she will betray her lover, to vowing not to say a word regardless of the horrors she experiences.

2) Me In The Past

There are two versions of Felicidad’s past self. First, there is the self that fell in love with the guerillero, and thus the person who got her into her predicament. This past self is described as too helpful, too concerned, too sympathetic to the guerillero and his plight. This past self is represented as naïve; as unaware of what she was getting herself into; and “stammering like a little girl”. But, the love experienced by this former self is described in authentic terms.

Second there is the past self that is described as “cool-headed” and having a “watchful heart”. This more cautious past self would “never let” herself become “trapped” in such a predicament. Arguably this “cool-headed” self prevails within the text and becomes the narrating I at the end of the text, determined to open the door herself and confront her assailants.

3) *Me In The Present*

The self in the present refers not to the narrating I, but to the self in the present as described by the narrating I. This self is described as crying, fearful, moaning, cursing, and moving furniture to block the door. Toward the end of the text, the narrating I encourages the self in the present to stop crying and moaning, and to throw her fear overboard, and stand upright facing her assailants.

4) *Me In The Future*

The future self is a space of imaginative possibility that remains unfixed, because the narrative never moves into the future. This space of possibility shifts from initially being tortured and raped and thus confessing the whereabouts of her lover, to a more defiant stance, in which despite being tortured, she does not confess. The final emergent future self is cool-headed, confident and unflustered.

5) *Counterfactual Me*

Running along side the past, present and future “me” images that Felicidad has of her self there is also an imaginative counterfactual space of an alternative present, in which the rupture has been avoided. Motivated by fear the narrating I goes through the various choice points which led to the predicament, and laments that at each point, a different choice would have averted the crisis: (a) She could have gone with him when he left, (b) she could have made him say good bye on the night they met, (c) she could have said good bye to him once he had healed, (d), she could have noticed that she was falling in love, (e), she could have chosen not to go with him on the fateful walk.

Each of these choice points leads to the same alternative but unrealised self, namely, a self which did not get involved with the guerillero, and thus a self that escaped the current predicament. Within the context of fear, one can see this as the attempt to escape the situation manifesting as a wish rather than actuality.

Significant Others

Now let us look at the components of Felicidad’s dialogical self beyond her own self images. Here we find the characters who are not Felicidad, but who are important within her stream of thought. There are three “others” to consider: “him” – her lover, “they” – who are after her with machetes, and past victims of her assailants.

1) *“Him”*

The representation of “him” is quite constant. He was in a predicament when she found him in her house. She helped him, because he was in need and/or because she sympathised with his cause. She found him to be handsome. He helped her with the fire wood and the water pump. She healed him, and he helped her. They fell in love. Their relationship is passionate and authentic.

He is not only in the past, he is also in the future, and in the future he moves from originally being betrayed by her, to not being betrayed and thus being able to fight on.

Table 1: The various positions in the text

Felicidad's Dialogical Self – The positions		
Self		Other
"I"	"Me"	"other"
Narrating-I	Past Me	"Him"
	Counterfactual Me	
	Present Me	"They"
	Future Me	Victims

2) "They"

"They" will "arrive with their machetes". They will potentially burn her hands, slice her open and/or rape her. They are ready to kill. The belief that "they're coming" provides the rupture which motivates the whole stream of thought

The representation of the people with machete as violent is constant. That does not change. However, the knowledge of these people regarding Felicidad's activities changes.

Initially it is assumed that they know what has happened: that is why they will be "asking you where in hell he has hidden himself". It is assumed that they know that she knows, and because of their violent means, "they'll force you to betray him". "They'll come shouting that they know."

But as Felicidad's stream of thought works through her predicament, she realises that there is no way they could know. The reason they will be saying that they know is to try and scare her into telling. "But only God" is a witness. Thus: "they can search your very innards, cut you in two with their machetes, drill into your sense, pierce your heart" but "they will find nothing."

It is this realisation that they cannot know when they arrive at the house, and that they cannot find out from her unless she tells them that gives her courage, and marks a turning point in the stream of thought.

3) *Previous Victims*

Felicidad refers to three specific victims: Celta lost her parents; Calixta had her hands put in a fire, and; Prospero's wife who was found dead in a well sliced open. She also refers to the others in general who have been raped and who have had their houses burnt down.

These victims are properly part of the past, but within the stream of thought, they gain their relevancy, and thus become part of the stream, because they are possible future selves for Felicidad. These are the images which fill her with panic for her immediate future, and which motivate her to blockade the door, and which lead her to chastise herself for the situation she has gotten herself into. Through these images Felicidad is "becoming other" (Gillespie, 2006), and as such, these images of victims actually cross the border of self and other.

Having mapped out all the "I", "Me" and "other" positions within the text, the next section turns to analysing the interaction between these positions.

Analysing The Transition

At the heart of the text is a shift in the narrative I-position. The narrative "I" moves from being fearful of the future, to being critical of past actions, and finally being to confident or at least defiant in the face of the future. This is the main change which needs to be explained: What causes this shift in the narrative "I" from disorganised fear to composure?

In the first step (Table 2), the thought is engrossed in the future "me". Images of what has happened to other victims blends with the future "me." The belief is that "they" are coming, and that "they" know what has happened. This fear of the future leads to fear. Fear in the torture and rape, and fear in confessing and betraying her guerillero.

The second step (Table 3) is a lament for the actions which led to this unfortunate situation. It grows out of the fear of the future, for it is a lament on the cause of the future sorrow, namely, the actions which led to the relationship with the guerillero. At several junctures in this relationship, Felicidad could have taken an alternative course of action, and each of these junctures leads to a "me" inhabiting a parallel universe in which no one is expected to come to her door with machetes.

The third step (Table 3) grows out of dwelling on the memories of her lover. Reliving these memories leads to a realisation. In working through the memories of being with her lover, Felicidad realises that nobody could actually know what happened in the fields. That their relationship is a secret, and will only become public if she confesses. Moreover, only Felicidad knows where the guerillero is, and that information also can be kept secret.

Tables 2: Step 1 – the rupture

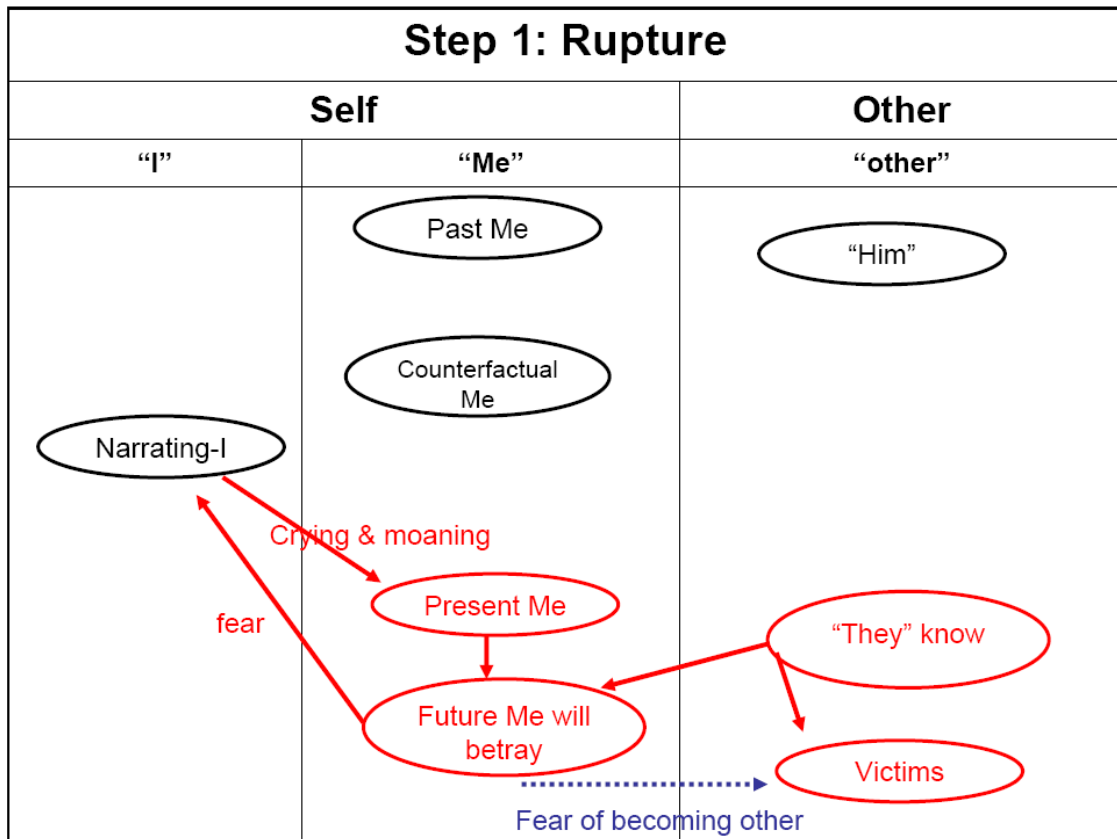


Table 3: Step 2 – the lament

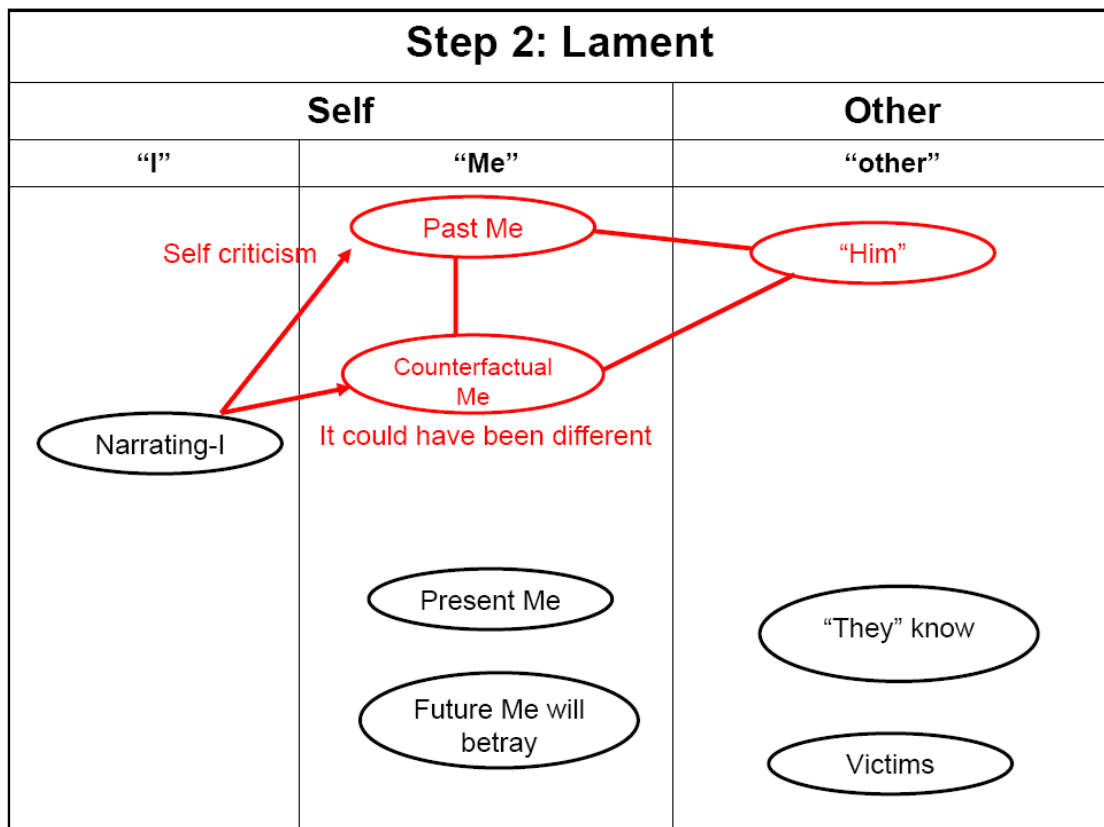
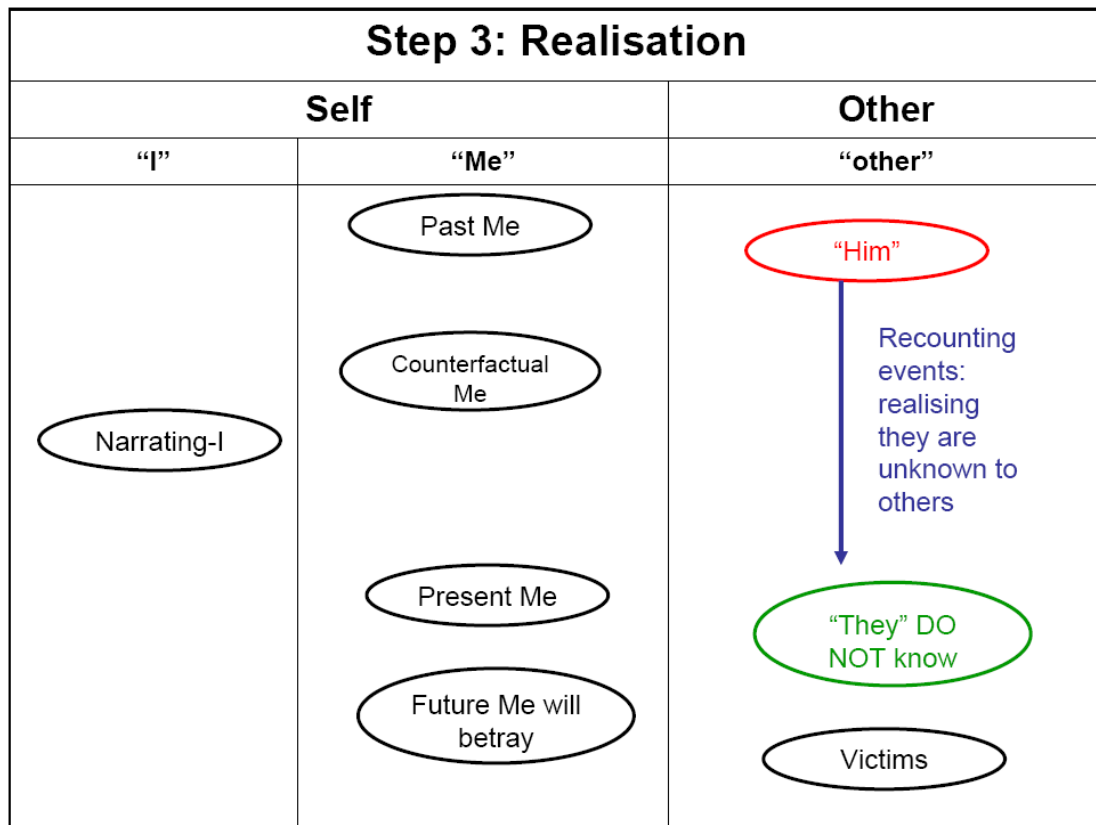


Table 4: Step 3 – the realisation



In the fourth step (Table 4), Felicidad’s resolve solidifies, as her thoughts work through the consequences of realising that her assailants do not actually know what happened, that they might only be calling her bluff, and that they do not know where the guerillero is. Felicidad is spurred by her love for the guerillero, her desire to protect him, her belief that her assailants might be calling her bluff, and the belief that regardless of what happens so long as she does not confess, that he, the guerillero, will fight on.

“They’ll say they know so that you go for it. But only God and you are witnesses [...] They can search your very innards, cut you in two with their machetes, drill into your senses, pierce your heart, they will find nothing. Not a whisper.”

In the fifth and final step, the re-construction of the situation is complete. These new thoughts have filtered through the system. The “they” have been reconstructed. Initially they were thought to know what happened, then they are re-represented as not knowing. Initially her betrayal of the guerillero is seen as inevitable, then it becomes within her control. As these thoughts are integrated, they lead to a plan of action, and at least a temporary resolve. The narrative “I” takes control, and directs Felicidad in the present, encouraging her not to cry and moan, and not to block the door. Instead, the self-regulatory process encourages her to open the door and look her assailants in the eyes. “Don’t cry and moan any more. Open the door yourself. Stand upright in the doorway. Hold their eyes.”

Table 5: Step 3 – the resolve

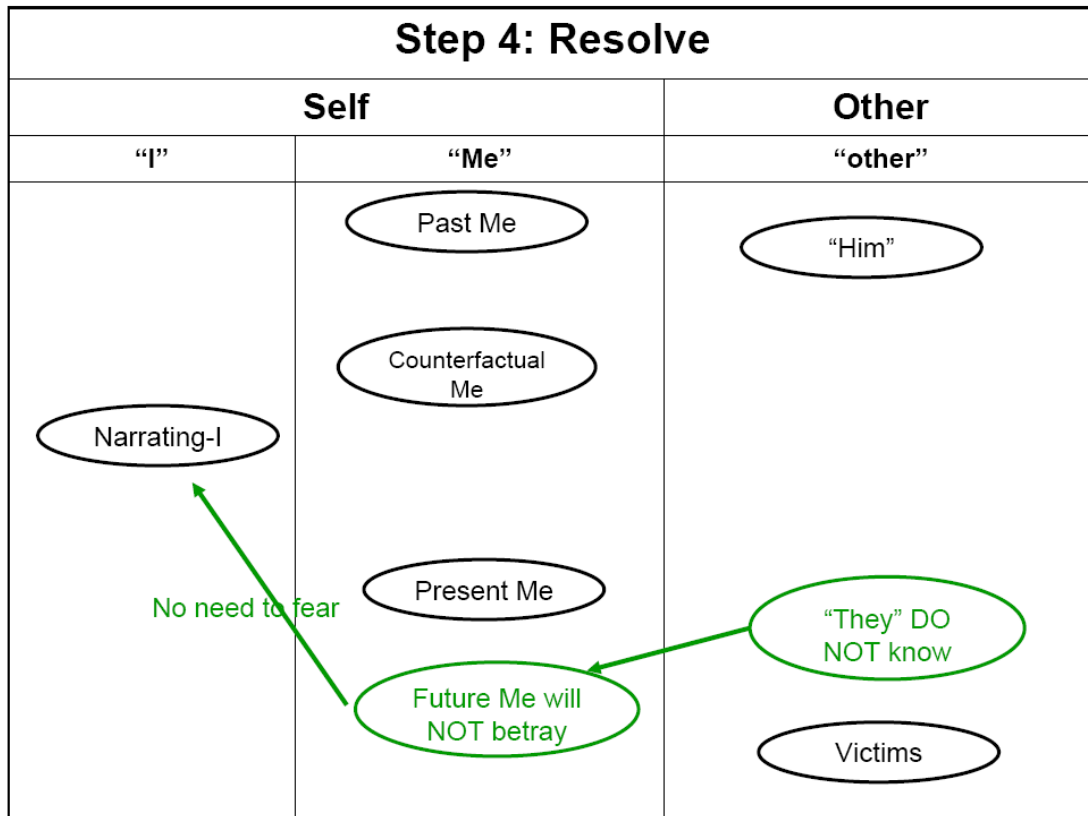
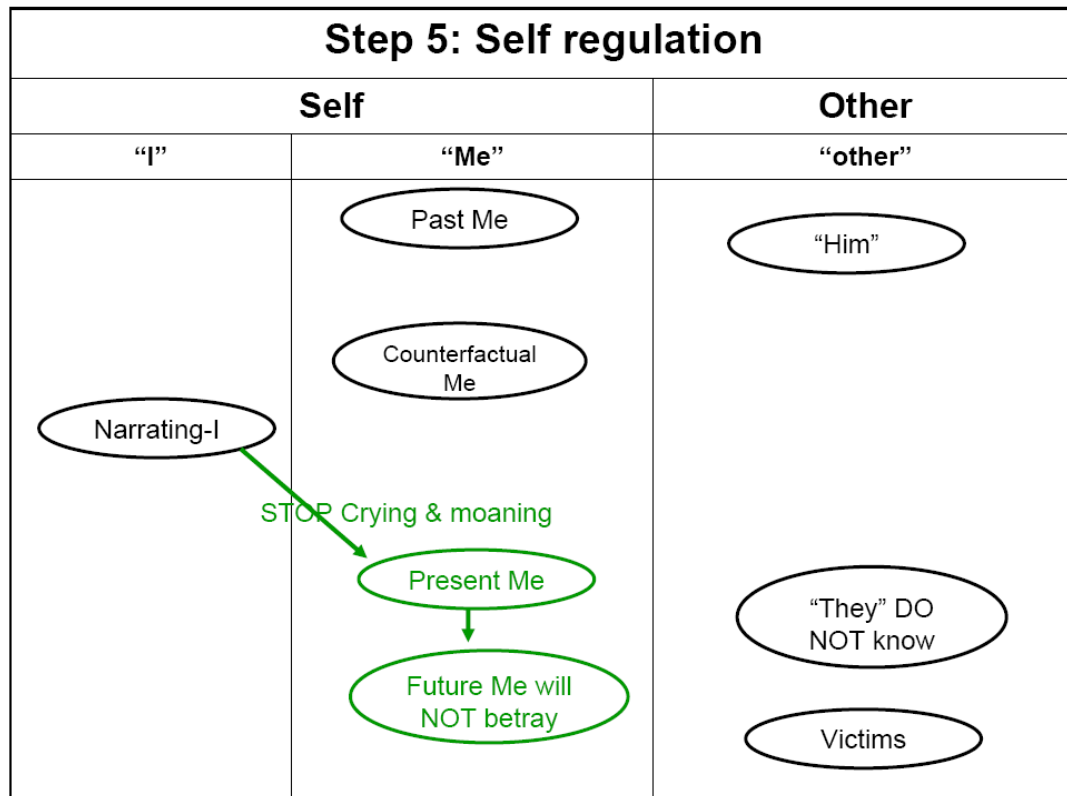


Table 6: Step 5 – self-regulation



Concluding Comment

The stream of thought that leads through the fear toward a confidence in the face of an uncertain future entails several dialogical moves of reflection and elaboration. We are not dealing with a logical elaboration on the basis of axioms, and associations based on similarity, contiguity and so on. Rather, what we have is a fundamentally dialogical sequence.

The whole rupture sequence begins with the thought that “they” know what happened. This thought has consequences for Felicidad, for what they will do to her, and calls to mind what they have done to others. She fears them and she fears she will confess. What they know is of consequence for her. The fear leads to lament, leads to imaginative escape in counterfactual me positions, and ultimately leads to the recollection of the meeting in the fields. That memory, however, leads to the realisation that they cannot know, which in turn is again of consequence for Felicidad. This realisation stimulates a new wave of thought, which is again elaborated through the meaning system, and the outcome is resolve and self-regulation.

The point I want to make is that not only are there I/Me dynamics which are essential to this dialogical stream, but that “others” (or more specifically others-within-self) are essential to that stream as well. The stream of thought begins with the thoughts attributed to others and reaches its major turning point in the thoughts attributed to others.

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