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Communicative responsibility in non-native speech. Overcoming foreign accent in English in religious discourse

Abstract. Apart from evoking accent-based stereotypes, non-native speech has been found to pose threat to intelligibility and overburden listeners with additional cognitive load which may evoke their irritation (Johansson 1975; Kelly 2000; Munro 2003; Lippi-Green 2012; Moyer 2013). The paper discusses the notion of communicative responsibility defined as speaker's effort to overcome the undesirable consequences of foreign accent for the sake of efficient conveyance of relevant message. Five religious lectures (amounting to 5hrs of audio-visual material) delivered in Polish-accented English are discussed with respect to the speaker's non-native pronunciation and his morally motivated effort to convey the message precisely despite phonetically deviant speech. The shortcomings of non-native pronunciation are anticipated and targeted by preventive strategies, such as disambiguation, frequent repetition and use of emphatic stress to highlight the most relevant information, eliciting direct feedback from the listeners, monitoring their non-verbal responses, as well as the employment of enhancing devices, such as gestures.

Key words: communicative responsibility, foreign-accented speech, preventive strategies, intelligibility, religious discourse.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of foreign accent as well as its implications for communication and functioning in society have attracted considerable attention from researchers working within different fields of study. This interdisciplinary interest is caused by the fact that (non-native) accent is not only an indicator of one's origin but also has been shown to evoke various racial, ethnic and religious stereotypes. The reason for this is that speakers in all communities "associate types of speech with types of people" (Williams 1970: 381) and "rely on language traits to judge others" (Lippi-Green 2004: 291). There is ample empirical evidence which proves that due to its non-standardness foreign-accented speech tends to be stigmatized and its users downgraded on a wide array

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of non-linguistic factors, e.g. competence, socio-economic status, personality traits (friendliness, kindness, reliability, overall intelligence) or even physical attractiveness (Lambert et al. 1960; Williams 1976; Lippi-Green 2012). This leads to “linguistic profiling”, an auditory equivalent to racial profiling (Baugh 2003), manifesting itself in discriminatory practices in employment or educational areas as well as media portrayals (Lippi-Green 1997; Munro 2003).

Due to expanding awareness regarding the undesirable implications of sounding non-native, many immigrants enroll in accent reduction classes to increase their chances in e.g., a job interview and enhance assimilation in the target society. Similarly, many politicians strive to improve their pronunciation and enunciation in English (be it their L1 or L2) in order to deliver their political message in the most persuasive way and avoid accent-based stigmatization. In both cases overcoming foreign accent is propelled by personal gain (prestige, image, social and financial benefits) so it can be viewed as speaker-oriented.

The present paper provides a preliminary insight into a so far practically unexplored interface of non-native speech and communicative responsibility. There are some spheres of human activity (aviation, the army) where accented speech may have particularly grave consequences for successful communication affecting not only an individual’s image and career opportunities, but having impact on the lives of a large group of people (Strother 1999; Woods 2006; Erwin 2005). It is due to the fact that even though intelligibility depends on multiple factors related to the speaker, the listener and the context (Brown 1991; Wright 2003), pronunciation has been shown to play a pivotal role in how effectively meaning is conveyed (Jenkins 2000; Field 2005).

Despite a vast body of theoretical and empirical studies on the nature and perception of foreign-accented speech, none of them has focused on the notion of responsibility. In this paper, communicative responsibility refers to attempts of overcoming foreign accent which are not speaker-oriented but addressee-oriented. Religious discourse in foreign-accented English has received no attention from phoneticians and it is also in this area that the links between pronunciation and listener-oriented responsibility can be observed. In what follows five religious lectures delivered in Polish-accented English will be discussed with respect to the speaker’s non-native pronunciation and his morally motivated effort to convey the message precisely despite phonetically deviant speech. It will be argued that the speaker feels responsible for the listeners’ comprehension because firstly, he deems the transmitted content vitally important, and secondly, he recognizes that his foreign accent may impair intelligibility. Just like in aviation or the army, being understood properly can be a matter of life and death, in this case in its spiritual dimension (at least from the speaker’s perspective).

2. Communicative responsibility: content – form interface

Responsibility is a concept that is recurrent in everyday life and, similarly to foreign accent, has been explored by researchers of various disciplines (philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, theologians and lawyers). While most language users intuitively know what the term implies and are able to enumerate responsibility-related notions (e.g. liability, accountability, duty, obligation,

blame, punishment), no exact, comprehensive and universally accepted definition of the construct itself exists (Auhagen & Bierhoff 2001). This is because it is a complex social phenomenon which is inherently multi-faceted. Researchers tend to emphasize different aspects of responsibility depending on their particular topic and the adopted approach. One of the most positive connotations of the term is “ethical and moral values, or caring” (Auhagen & Bierhoff 2001: 3).

Communicative responsibility is viewed in this paper as the speaker’s morally motivated concern for his listeners’ comprehension, which manifests itself in the speaker’s attempts to overcome the negative consequences of his foreign-accented English. Nowadays it is often argued that since communication is a two way process, responsibility for effective interaction between non-native and native speakers should encompass not only the former as skilled speakers but also the latter as “active, responsive and unprejudiced listeners” (Derwing et al. 2014: 76). It is even positioned that placing the whole burden of communication on non-native speakers is unethical and monolingual speakers of English should be trained to understand accented speech and be encouraged to change their attitudes, i.e. become more empathetic and less anxious to interact with non-native speakers (Derwing et al. 2014). This stands in contrast with what Bansal (1969: 15) advised almost five decades ago in his classic research on the intelligibility of Indian English, namely “to be intelligible the speaker must articulate his sounds clearly, so that the hearer does not have to stop and think what word was meant.”

3. Method

The corpus for qualitative observations and discussion is constituted by five religious lectures providing approximately 5 hours of audio-visual diagnostic material delivered by Father Piotr Glas in Polish-accented English. They were recorded live and posted on a YouTube channel *RCS TV International*, which is one of countless examples of the religious appropriation of the new media technology for spreading faith. With the advancement of the internet and new ways of communication, the potential of seemingly secular practices to serve a religious role in everyday life has been recognized quickly and dominant media technologies have been embraced as a means of both preaching and practising beliefs (Campbell 2013). As a result, “religion of every kind, big and small, old and new, mainstream and more exotic is present online, and in great abundance” (Dawson 2005: 15).

The analysis was carried out auditorily and its multimodal character is reflected in the fact that apart from sound also the speaker’s body language was taken into consideration.

3.1 The speaker’s perception of the content of his preaching

The speaker discussed in what follows, Fr. Peter Glas, is a Catholic priest and exorcist of Polish origin who has resided and worked in England (Manchester, Lancaster, Southampton Bournemouth, Jersey, Portsmouth and Reading) since 1991. He uses English on a daily basis to communicate with English native speakers in England and occasionally in the USA and Australia. It is this language that is his main tool in the service. His English is marked with Polish accent,

which is to be expected as he learnt it in his adulthood far beyond a sensitive age deemed necessary for acquiring native-like pronunciation. He does not conceal the fact that he arrived in England with very basic command of English (in one of his lectures he refers to his English at that time as “was very limited,” “school English”), which not only was insufficient for effective daily communication, but also generated embarrassment due to serious misunderstandings.

The speaker shows higher than average awareness of his foreign accent, which becomes apparent in his comments “Can you understand me? Cause my accent is not your accent,” “This will be on the video also. Hopefully people can understand my accent.” Rather than expecting his English native listeners to accommodate to him, he exerts effort to reduce the load generated by his accented speech. He is convinced of the relevance of the message he sets out to convey, on the one hand, and recognizes that his accented speech may pose a hindrance to carrying out this task satisfactorily, on the other.

Certainly, it can be positioned that other public speakers (e.g. politicians or activists) also strongly believe in their message and will try to make themselves properly understood when delivering it. Yet, preaching is distinct from any other form of public speaking because of its content which is perceived as a message from God. Lischner (2002: 47) goes as far as to conclude that “(n)o other modern public speaker does what the preacher tries to do” and thus sets religious discourse apart from the rest of public speech acts, with preaching viewed as primarily “an act of faith” (2002: 49). According to Stott (2017), a sermon typically begins with the announcement of one’s text, which declares that the Christian preacher accepts his “responsibility to expound God’s Word,” rather than express his own opinions (2017: 190). In the Augustinian spirit upon the preacher rests the primordial duty to be “the defender of right faith and the enemy of error” (Resner 1999: 40). In other words, the preacher’s primary service is yielded not to earthly institutions, political movements or ideologies, but he is called to be a servant of the divine truth and his mission is to proclaim the gospel and save people’s lives from spiritual death. Importantly, the preacher’s authority does not derive from his education, professional experience, rank or power but from his encounter with God while engaging with the Scripture (Johnson 2015). This transforms the preacher into a witness and he “shapes the words and patterns of the sermon to correspond to the truth the preacher has heard and seen” (Johnson 2015: 38).

Father Glas frequently refers to himself as a witness and views his preaching as a testimony, e.g. “I want to witness to you,” “I want to give you an idea, a picture,” “I want to open your eyes,” “I do my best to open people’s hearts,” “I’m speaking to you freely. The truth. And you share this truth with other people.” He experiences a particularly strong sense of mission attached to his priesthood and repeatedly stresses the fact that he “feels responsible for people’s souls,” and “saving people” and wants to bear testimony of what he has witnessed: “I’d like to be with you, not as a preacher, but share with you my testimony, my knowledge, my experience.” This identity has ramifications for the preacher’s communication on semantic, phonetic and non-verbal levels, which is in line with the conviction that “a witness is a translator who is required to find the right words, images and form” (Johnson 2014: 117).

The speaker views his preaching activity as a battle with evil forces and uses a war / battle metaphor to frame everyday spiritual experiences of human beings. This is apparent both in the titles of his lectures as well as the imagery he employs to explain the basic mechanisms of demonic activity, e.g. spiritual warfare, spiritual defense, strategy, attack, weapon, armour, fight, combat, war, battlefield, fortress, stronghold, headquarters, castle, perpetrator, enemy, general, marshall, missile, grenade, victory, taking the land, occupying etc. Against this backdrop, his own role and moral obligation is to prepare people for the battle, in other words to raise their awareness of spiritual reality where demonic activity manifests itself, e.g. “I was ordained as well to fight with the powers of darkness that do exist, that are real, that are powerful, not more powerful than God, but they are powerful because we are ignorant.” In his view, this is an unpopular and neglected issue even within the Church and nowadays the existence of embodied evil is completely denied not only by lay people but, more alarmingly, even by some of the clergy (“How many of us do fight? How many of us are ready, prepared, trained? We are not ready for the battle.”).

It can be concluded that the speaker perceives the content of his preaching as very important and not just to himself but to every single person listening to him at the moment of speaking and also to all those who can familiarize themselves with his message indirectly.

3.2 The speaker’s perception of his accented speech

According to Flege (1988: 229), “foreign accent is a phenomenological experience of listeners that is derived from detectable acoustic (and perhaps visual) differences between native and non-native speakers in the pronunciation of sounds and other speech units”. As a result, on detecting a foreign accent listeners are able to recognize that the interlocutor is not “a fellow native speaker” (Flege & Southwood 1999: 336). By making references to his foreign accent Fr. Glas acknowledges his position of an outsider. Yet, he identifies with the listeners by showing genuine concern to be understood as well as involvement and solidarity (he refers to them as “friends”). This is congruent with what is advocated by Roembke (2000: 84), namely, that “the goal of the missionary is to become as much an insider as is necessary to be credible” and this does not have to amount to “imitation or the sentimental attempt to ‘go native’”. Imitation can be counterproductive and result in contempt, which is the most significant obstacle to mutual understanding (Roembke 2000: 84).

Fr. Glas displays a high level of awareness that his speech is marked with a foreign accent and recognizes its potential threat to communication. Indeed, obstructed intelligibility is often the first shortcoming of foreign accent and “foreign-accented speakers tend to be evaluated more negatively than native-accented speakers simply because they are harder to understand” (Dragojevic & Giles 2016: 16). While semantic, grammatical and pragmatic context can facilitate comprehension and eliminate ambiguities (Brown 1991), it should not be assumed that it can always compensate for phonetic inaccuracies. Context itself depends on how much of the previous input has been properly decoded by the listener (Field 2005). Moreover, sometimes context may allow for two or more phonetically similar words or phrases. Anecdotal evidence of intelligibility breakdown because of foreign-accented English can be observed in one of Dalai Lama’s spiritual talks. When

referring to differences in religion and race he said “I think we should forget it.” People burst into enthusiastic laughter, some of them started whistling or applauding and others had vague expressions on their faces. The Tibetan monk was confused because he repeated the same idea a few times and the listeners’ reaction felt inadequate. Because of inappropriately placed word-stress and segmental distortions “forget it” was understood as “fuck it” (both f-words matched the context but, needless to say, only one was suitable in terms of register).

Incorrect pronunciation may be “funny” or “cute” at the outset but will become tiresome with the passing of time and may even undermine credibility of the mission / church in the long run (Roembke 2000: 73). According to Johansson (1975), one of the by-products of foreign accent is diverting the listener’s attention from the message towards the form. In the literature it has been labeled “irritation” (Ludwig 1982: 275) and can range from unobtrusive awareness of the speaker’s erroneous pronunciation to constant focus on the code which overwhelms the conveyed message and impedes successful discernment of the meaning. Learners are not always cognizant of the fact that “the way they speak is resulting in difficulty, irritation or misunderstanding for the listener” (Kenworthy 1987: 8) and, consequently, do not pay proper attention to their pronunciation. Fr. Glas, however, is aware of additional load placed upon his listeners due to his foreign accent, which is apparent when he asks “Should I finish now? Are you tired?”

Summing up, the speaker displays a particularly strong belief in his service to the congregation and is genuinely concerned about being properly understood despite his foreign accent. As a result, he assumes responsibility for transmitting the message and employs strategies which are meant to safeguard intelligibility and reduce the listeners’ effort invested in processing his speech.

3.3 Overcoming fallouts of accented speech

McRoy and Hirst (1995) argue that even though interlocutors may not always recognize intelligibility breakdown when it occurs, they are aware that a misunderstanding can occur. When a problem in comprehension is anticipated, the speaker can resort to a strategy of prevention (Clark 1994), in other words, a mechanism to restrain misunderstanding or non-understanding. In the analysed data, the shortcomings of foreign-accented speech are anticipated and targeted by preventive strategies, such as disambiguation, frequent repetition and use of contrastive stress to highlight the most relevant information, eliciting feedback from the listeners, observing their non-verbal responses as well as enhancing devices, such as gestures (hand gestures, mimicry), whole body movements and extra-linguistic sounds. All these are employed to aid comprehension and in the case of gestures to “enhance the communicative signal” (De Ruiter 2017: 72).

Fr. Glas is alert to lexical factors (or “neighbourhood density” as termed by Luce & Pisoni 1998) which may diminish the probability of a word being accurately identified. Word recognition is better for words from sparse neighbourhoods due to smaller competition between phonetically similar words (Walley 2007). Fr. Glas anticipates a potential confusion of the intended word *soul* /səʊl/ with a phonetically similar one *salt* /sɔ:lt/ and, therefore, deploys a preventive strategy of

disambiguation by means of contrasting the target item with a possibly disruptive one: “soul, not salt, you know, soul”. This is accompanied with clear enunciation and slowed down rate of speech.

He correctly uses prominence (increased intensity, pitch and duration) in order to highlight the most relevant information within a thought unit. Examples of emphatic stress include the following: “Facebook, twitter. You have TWO THOUSAND friends. You have two thousand FRIENDS?”, “People ARE gifted with discernment, but very often you have to be careful,” “What’s the DEEDS?” “Five MILLION websites your children can access.”

Similarly, repetitions serve the purpose of drawing the listeners’ attention to the key part(s) of the sentence. Enumerating is always performed with the use of fingers and raised hand, usually repeated, e.g.

“What is the unholy trinity? Big three guys: rejection, abandonment and fear.”

“They attack your emotions, memories, feelings, traumas.”

“What really kept me to do this ministry, there were three things, my friends. First was the faith, the second is the fighting spirit, and the third one was the joy in the Holy Spirit.”

“We need to pray for three things: knowledge, prudence and discernment.”

Even though Fr. Glas’s preaching lectures are expository in nature, he often interrupts his discourse to make sure that the message is accessible to the listeners. To this end he addresses his listeners directly, e.g.

- “Are you following me?”
- “Can you understand me clearly?”
- “Are you OK?”
- “Is it all right?”
- “Is that helpful what I’m saying?”
- “Do you agree with me?”

On such occasions he often mentions his foreign accent as a potential obstacle to effective communication, e.g. “Do you understand me? I think I speak so fast with this foreign accent,” “Can you understand me? Cause my accent is not your accent.”

Apart from explicit ways of checking understanding, he maintains eye contact and monitors the addressees’ verbal and non-verbal responses. He seems to be aware of the fact that competent speakers should “read” their audience and that “good powers of observation are helpful to detect whether a misunderstanding has been created” (Roembke 2000: 125).

Substantial evidence from a range of studies points to the fact that speakers use gestures as an element of their effort to communicate (Kendon 2004). As argued by McNeill (2016), speech and gesture are manifestations of thought and “the greater the felt departure of thought from the immediate context, the more likely its materialization in a gesture”. Consequently, the extent to which gestures are elaborated depends on the relevance of materialization of the existence of the thought (McNeill 2016: 15).

Fr. Glas employs a very wide range of speech-related hand gestures (deictic and imagistic) as well as mimicry, head movements and gaze shifts. Apparently, the motivation beyond this

practice is to render the complex and abstract ideas more concrete. In the analysed lectures many gestures are repetitive. They constitute a certain system (code) and reflect the speaker's mind in the same way as words; they are "an imagistic version of what is being spoken" (Church et al. 2017). Imagistic gestures can be divided into iconic, i.e. representing a concrete action or object and metaphoric, i.e. standing for some abstract concept (Kendon 2004). The discourse is produced by words and gestures and, thus, just like Fr. Glas's speech abounds in battle-related terminology, his gestures that reflect the same notions and body movements which denote punching, boxing, hitting, attacking, occupying are recurrent. Even though they display an image which is concrete in the real world, their essence is metaphorical because the image of fight is used metaphorically in the discourse. Below, some examples are provided:

"I cannot just fight blindly, you know" – extended arms with clenched fists move forward and backward as in boxing.

"I was a fighter, you know. And I'm still a fighter." – the clenched fist makes a punching gesture.

"Demons' priority is to bombard us non-stop" / "I received lots of hits, you know" – the clenched fist hits against the spread palm repeatedly.

"And the devil knows that and attacks" – the clenched fist moves forward as in a punch.

"That's the same that demons do. They take the land and occupy it." – both hands make a plunging gesture.

"That's why some people give up" – both arms held upwards in an open-handed posture as in surrender.

Sometimes the speaker uses metaphoric gestures to explain some notions or make them more vivid,

e.g. "It's easy, really, to be re-diverted" – makes a winding gesture with one arm.

"They create soul ties. Take a string and there is a hook on one side and on the other side" – raises his arms above his head and draws an invisible line in the air and marks each end of it.

Iconic gestures are also ubiquitous. They reflect a concrete idea from the discourse, e.g. "a big smile on his face" – the index finger draws an invisible smile in the air close to the mouth,

"you know, computers" – fingers imitate typing movements.

In addition to the above mentioned imagistic gestures, deictic gestures also appear frequently. These pointing gestures refer to either concrete entities and locations or abstract spaces relating to an idea or concept (McNeill 1992),

e.g. "Where is the battlefield? The battlefield's in my mind" / "This is my mind. This is the biggest battlefield." – puts his spread palm on the top of the head.

“Which battle is the worst? Within us.” – points with index fingers to his chest.

“You must forgive not from your mind, brain. Forgive from the place where the wound is” – the index finger points to the top of the head first and then to the chest

“What is underneath?” – the index finger goes down.

“It doesn’t matter if you wear a collar” – points to his own collar.

Body movements and mimicry are sometimes accompanied with extralinguistic sounds,

e.g. “I feel sometimes like a dentist, you know the nerve, I touch the nerve” – puts his hand close to the jaw and imitates the sound of a dental drill and shakes his head

“And then he jumps and starts screaming aaaaaa!” – moves his whole body up as in a small jump and shakes his head slightly.

It should be noted that even though Fr. Glas uses gestures in similar talks delivered in his native language, they are much more elaborate and frequent when his means of communication is English. This is in line with observations reported in the literature, namely that learners produce more gestures when they express themselves in their L2 than when they speak their L1 (Gullberg 2008: 195). Fr. Glas goes to more effort when conveying his message in English and sometimes uses gestures in an intentional attempt to prevent undesirable homophony, e.g. in the above mentioned example of *soul* – *salt* he makes sure also by non-verbal means that the target item is properly decoded, i.e. he points to his chest simultaneously saying “soul”. It could be thus argued that not only do gestures constitute an aid to comprehension, but also in a way compensate for self-perceived imperfections of foreign-accented speech. This happens because unlike learners’ speech, gestures are not ambiguous and their “physical and spatial properties make them ideally suited for disambiguation” (Gullberg 2008: 198).

According to previous research, gestures are used by non-native speakers as a communicative device to compensate for lexical, grammar or fluency problems and also as a means to elicit help from interlocutors (Gullberg 1998). It must be noted that Fr. Glas has a very good command of English in terms of grammar, vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. Therefore, his use of gestures as a compensatory strategy would be limited to disambiguating what, in his own view, he cannot distinguish clearly enough in speech.

The phrase “in his own view” in the previous sentence deserves some comment. As explained at the beginning of section 2., communicative responsibility is about the speaker’s awareness of his phonetic deficiencies and his effort to overcome them because the message is of vital importance and communication breakdown has grave consequences. Interestingly, Fr. Glas pronounces both words from the above example (*soul* – *salt*) properly; he does not monophthongize the vowel in *soul*, which is a typical error made by Polish speakers (*/sol/). If he had done so, then both words would have been pronounced with a monophthong and the probability of confusion would have risen dramatically. In this case, however, disambiguation seems not that necessary

and the fact that Fr. Glas remains careful intensifies his responsibility even more. At this point it is worthwhile to discuss the speaker's foreign accent to determine if his own intuitive evaluation and actual phonetic properties of his speech overlap in terms of the extent to which they may impair intelligibility.

3.4 Phonetic properties of the speaker's non-native pronunciation

It should be noted that the following characterization of the speaker's non-native pronunciation is by no means exhaustive. Its main aim is to determine the presence / absence of those phonetic features of Polish English which English native speakers evaluated most harshly in empirical studies in terms of accentedness, irritation and intelligibility. The analysis was performed auditorily.

Perceptual studies on Polish-accented English point to spelling-induced mispronunciations (rather than single segmental substitutions) as one of the main obstacles to intelligibility in communication with English native speakers (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2013; Bryła-Cruz 2016). Such errors tend to distort significantly the whole word, more often than not, rendering it virtually unrecognizable, e.g. *purpose* /pur'pous/, *lettuce* /'letjus/. Shifted word-stress has also been found to interfere with comprehension (Field 2005) and many researchers argue that "the stress pattern of the word is an important part of its identity for the native speaker" (Kenworthy 1996: 112). The speech samples which constitute the focus of the present study are, on the whole, correct with respect to word-stress placement even in those items which Polish learners distort on a regular basis, e.g. *COMputer, *Exam, *DEvelopment. Similarly, only single instances of spelling-based errors have been spotted in the analysed data, i.e. *possession* /pə'seʃn/, *focus* /'fokus/, *authority* /au'tɔritɪ/, *trauma* /'traumə/, *frustration* /frus'treɪʃn/, *discover* /dɪs'kɒvə/, *gluttony* /'glutɒni/. Interestingly, Fr. Glas properly articulates words which are listed among 600 words commonly (and notoriously) mispronounced by Polish (even advanced) learners of English (Sobkowiak 1996), e.g. *area*, *determined*, *bullet*, *colonel*, *worship*, *biscuit*.

Another area of English phonology problematic for Polish learners is vowel inventory. Due to a considerable discrepancy both in vowel quality and quantity, Poles tend to neutralize many contrasts and produce off-target vocalic sounds. This can hamper intelligibility, particularly where there is a possibility of a minimal pair, e.g. *live* vs. *leave*. Fr. Glas realizes proper distinctions between /ɪ/ vs. /i:/ (feel vs. fill); /æ/ vs. /ʌ/ (cat vs. cut), /o/ vs. /əʊ/ (rob vs. robe). He does not maintain a proper contrast in length or quality in /Q/ vs. /O:/ and /U/ vs. /u:/. It can be concluded (even though with due caution) that in this respect his English is unlikely to pose comprehension problems as perceptual studies on Polish-accented English have not determined back high and back medium vowels as indispensable for intelligibility (Bryła-Cruz 2016).

Phonetic priorities for Polish speakers encompass properly articulated velar angma, i.e. without the accompanying plosive in words like *singer* */sɪŋgə/ or *bring* */brɪŋk/ and the interdental fricatives, i.e. not substituted with plosives or fricatives in words like *three* */fri:/ or *this* */vɪs/. These mispronunciations may be disruptive to comprehension, but the main reason for their inclusion in error gravity lists is strengthening the impression of foreign accent (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2013;

Bryła-Cruz 2016). Fr. Glas inserts /k, g/ after /ŋ/, e.g. *healing* /hi:lɪŋk/, *strong* /strɔŋk/, *singers* /sɪŋgəs/ and substitutes /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/ and /v/, respectively, e.g. *thousand* /taʊzənt/, *mother* /mʌvə/. These distortions are consistent throughout his speech and intensify the impression of non-nativeness and may trigger the native listeners' annoyance (Bryła-Cruz 2016). On the other hand, the context (lexical, grammatical and pragmatic) is usually helpful and prevents ambiguity, e.g. "he was strong (/strɔŋk/) enough to defeat (...)", "how many young /jʌŋk/ people, youths, teenagers (...)".

As discussed in section 2.2., Fr. Glas is well aware of speaking English with a foreign-accent. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to investigate to what extent he is also aware of the fact that his speech exhibits many properties of English native pronunciation. Interestingly, these phonetic features are not acquired easily in guided instruction even by advanced Polish learners of English, which the present author can observe during her pronunciation courses conducted with the students of the English department at a Polish university.

One of the most challenging aspects of English phonetics for Polish speakers is aspiration (a delay in the onset of voicing, VOT) of stressed fortis plosives. This feature is an important cue for English native speakers who would ascribe the main difference between the initial stops in *pet* and *bet* to the force of articulation rather than the action of the vocal folds (the lack of aspiration would lead to interpreting /p/ as its lenis counterpart /b/). P. Glas employs aspiration correctly whenever /p, t, k/ are initial in stressed syllables, e.g. p^hastor, pret^hend, c^honflict. Moreover, his speech in Polish also exhibits longer VOT values for voiceless plosives, which shows that with respect to aspiration, his native language has become English-accented and not the opposite.

Other native-like features, problematic to Polish learners and present in Fr. Glas's English, include syllabicity of sonorants e.g. *problem* /'prɒblm/, *satan* /'seɪtn/, *mission* /'mɪʃn/, *religion* /rɪ'lɪdʒn/. The dark /ɫ/ is not substituted by clear /l/ (as is commonly done by Polish learners), e.g. *devil* /'devɪɫ/, *scandal* /'skændɫ/, *miserable* /'mɪzərbɫ/, *battle* /'bæɫ/, *hell* /heɫ/. It should be added that improper realizations of these consonantal features intensify the impression of foreign accent and can hamper intelligibility (Bryła-Cruz 2016). Still, Fr. Glas uses them correctly, even if sometimes inconsistently.

Another property of Fr. Glas's accent is non-rhoticity, i.e. pronouncing /r/ only before a vowel. Generally, Polish speakers prefer a rhotic version of English because of greater spelling-sound correspondence. The omnipresence of American English in the media (music, film, advertising) also contributes to this heavy tendency. The fact that Fr. Glas suppresses /r/ word-finally and before a consonant shows that his speech is clearly modeled on British English, and this variety is more difficult for Poles as far as the distribution of rhotic is concerned.

Two other features that pose a considerable challenge to Polish speakers of English but still occur in Fr. Glas's speech are reducing vowels to schwa in an unstressed syllable, e.g. *important* /ɪm'pɔ:tənt/, *darkness* /'da:knis/, *desperate* /'desprɪt/ and no audible release in stop clusters (releasing the first plosive together with the following one), e.g. *chapter*, *kept*, *protected*. Last but not least, it should be mentioned that Fr. Glas employs consistently selected phenomena of connected

speech in native-like fashion, i.e. linking “r” e.g. *unaware of it* /ʌnə'weər əv ɪt/, *pick her up* /'pɪk hər' ʌp/ and yod-coalescence, e.g. *put you* /'pʊtʃʊ/, *cares about you* /keəz ə'baʊtʃʊ/, as you know /əʒʊ 'nəʊ/.

It could be concluded that Fr. Glas is rather critical with the evaluation of his own non-native speech. Even though it cannot be denied that his English is foreign-accented (particularly in terms of prosody, i.e. intonation and rhythm) and he definitely would not pass for a native speaker, his phonetic competence is, on the whole, better than that of average Polish learners of English. It lacks typical hallmarks of Polish accent in English, e.g. spelling-induced errors, which impinge most upon intelligibility, and are the most annoying to English native speakers (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2013; Bryła-Cruz 2016). Moreover, his speech has distinct traces of standard British accent. The fact that Fr. Glas is alert and employs a wide range of preventive strategies to overcome phonetic imperfections demonstrates further his communicative responsibility. He does not rely on such strategies to compensate for insufficient time or effort invested in improving his foreign accent. Quite to the contrary, as the above analysis reveals, he must have taken charge of his accent during language learning. As Moyer (2013: 58) ascertains, “not everyone wants or tries to sound native, but without that drive it is difficult to overcome the features that mark one as a non-native speaker”.

One could argue that Fr. Glas has acquired some properties of British English effortlessly over his long immigrant experience (27 years). Yet, as reported in previous studies, length of residence (LoR) as such is not a reliable predictor of phonetic success as it does not necessarily equal ample exposure to the target language or meaningful interaction with its speakers (Asher & García 1969; Oyama 1976; Thompson 1991). In other words, it is definitely not the amount of time spent in the host country that matters for adult language learners, but “whether they have sufficient opportunity and inclination to acquire native-like mastery” (Moyer 2013: 73).

Fr. Glas represents an individual who has recognized the fact that his extended residence confers benefits to his phonetic attainment and has taken responsibility for improving his interlanguage accent. This last statement is corroborated by an interview the present author conducted with the preacher in which he admits: “One cannot change one’s own accent but it’s necessary to work on it to speak with the possibly best pronunciation”. Fr. Glas highlights the fact that upon his arrival in England he took private lessons and his aim was not just to achieve mere communicativeness and be able to get his message across in whatever way, but to have clear enunciation. As a result, he expected and appreciated explicit correction of phonetic mistakes from his teachers.

4. Concluding remarks

Apart from evoking accent-based stereotypes, non-native speech has been found to pose threat to intelligibility and overburden listeners with an additional cognitive load which may evoke their irritation. The paper discussed the notion of communicative responsibility defined as speaker’s effort to overcome the undesirable consequences of foreign accent for the sake of the efficient conveyance of the relevant message.

The analysis of five religious lectures delivered in Polish-accented English revealed that the speaker is aware of his phonetically imperfect means of communication and assumes responsibility for potential difficulties it may trigger. His concern for diminishing phonetic deficiencies is addressee-oriented, unlike in most accent reduction courses whose primary focus is on removing the traces of non-native speech in order to enhance one's image, avoid stigmatization and pursue personal or professional goals. The speaker in this study anticipates problems which may arise due to his accent and employs strategies to prevent misunderstanding or non-understanding. Disambiguation is used to counteract undesirable homophony of two phonetically similar words which the speaker is afraid to mispronounce. Frequent repetition and prominence (increased intensity, pitch and duration) highlights the most relevant information. The speaker also resorts to direct and indirect interaction with the listeners in order to check whether he is supposed to repeat, clarify or reformulate what has just been said. Last but not least, he enhances his discourse with ample gesticulation which renders abstract ideas more concrete and, thereby, the broader context, which plays an indispensable role in comprehension, becomes more accessible.

Communicative responsibility of the speaker is apparent not only in what he does to overcome his foreign accent at the moment of delivering his discourse, but also is manifested in time and effort invested in pronunciation training prior to the speech act. Phonetic properties of his English provide further evidence of linguistically responsible behaviour, since his foreign accent is devoid of many Polish English features evaluated harshly by English native speakers in perceptual studies. Moreover, his speech is not an outcome of random attempts to sound correct, but displays distinct properties of native-like British accent, which cannot be attributed to effortless and unintentional acquisition.

It is thought-provoking that this type of profound phonetic concern is showed by a person whose profession is not linked to L2 instruction. A great many English teachers in different countries around the world seem unaware of the undesirable effects of foreign accent on communication and fail to encourage their learners to consciously practise pronunciation in and out of the classroom. Actually, phonetic training has been neglected so lamentably that labels like “the orphan” (Gilbert 2010) or “Cinderella” (Kelly 1969; Celce-Murcia et al. 1996) of English language teaching have been ascribed to it. Communicative responsibility is not a local phenomenon (restricted to individuals as exemplified here), but also can be viewed more globally and further research should focus on how to foster responsibility for pronunciation teaching and learning, particularly among those language educators who deal with children and train future teachers. The present paper demonstrated that intelligible and not heavily accented speech is relevant for and appreciated by people involved in jobs unrelated to pedagogical contexts, e.g. religious service.

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links to the talks:

Fr. P. Glas

“The Strategy of the Devil in our lives” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3Z4CNERkfw>

“Spiritual warfare” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jI4CqFAymDw&t=1619s>

“Opening doorways to the demonic activity” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n61ZfLE_XyQ&t=774s

“The evil spirits in action” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVIIbVawzXM>

“The distraction power of the Jezebel spirit” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxaEn7X1-Ec&t=2132s>

Dalai Lama <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbC-TXNGK1M>

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An exploration of the lineage of female utopian literature

Abstract. My paper assesses the effects of periodization on feminist representations of utopias. The first text acknowledged is Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, followed by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, and concluding with Angela Carter's collection of short stories entitled *The Bloody Chamber*. The paper demonstrates how one can mark the different movements within feminism throughout history as the nature of the utopian genre is that it reflects the desires of individuals within contemporary society. The utopia as a genre is becoming an increasingly diverse literary segment and one which can be described as under construction. We are moving towards new terms such as 'ustopia' which acknowledges that one's utopia can be another's dystopia. The utopian genre fuels and supports critical and satirical writing and so the method of periodization and assessing its lineage leads to illuminating details on historical movements which in this case is feminism.

Key words: feminism, utopia, periodization, dystopia, gender politics.

1. Introduction

Female writers tend to turn to the utopian or science fiction genre due to the freedom it affords them from the constrictions of realism which enables them to envisage a world wholly of their own design. The subversive nature of the genre allows writers to critique and hold a mirror up to society, exposing its flaws and injustices by writing of a world they desire. The term 'utopia' was coined by Sir Thomas More in his novel *Utopia*, published in 1516. The word derives from the Greek term ou-topos meaning 'no place', punning on the similar Greek term 'eu-topos' meaning 'a good place.' A utopia is the presentation of an ideal society which often satirizes aspects of both the idealized society that the text portrays and indirectly, the society known to the author and intended reader. The function of a utopia is to incite "speculation, offer alternative vicarious experience, spur us as readers to re-evaluate and act upon our own world" (Kessler 1995: xvii). This paper will explore the changing presentation of female utopias in connection with the gender politics and social context of each work and how they each mark or pre-empt different movements of feminism. "Utopias and science fiction by women – women's 'literature's of estrangement' – constitute a continuous literary tradition in the west from the seventeenth century until the present day"

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(Donawerth & Kolmerten 1994: 1). Therefore, the first text to consider is Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* first published in 1666, after the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, in a period when gender roles and female sexuality were extremely rigid. The work presents the reader with a fantastical utopia exploring natural science, philosophy, and astrology through the powerful and dominant Empress. Cavendish's bold and pioneering text engages with topics and a literary genre which was seen as strictly masculine. Francis Bacon's utopia *New Atlantis* (1627) can partially be seen as a foundation which Cavendish aims to write against by pushing women and female perspectives into these male spheres. The same applies to the second text to be considered. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* was written in 1915 at a time when the first movements of feminism were emerging in America and parts of Europe. At this time gender roles were slowly changing causing many discrepancies between notions of tradition and progression. In an almost opposite portrayal of a female utopia to Cavendish's, Gilman writes of an entirely female society in which motherhood is seen as the epitome of womanhood. Three men explore and attempt to be socialised into this world and interestingly the feminist story is unexpectedly focalized through the male perspective. In 1912 Arthur Conan Doyle had published *The Lost World*, which follows a similar premise in that it depicts a discovery and exploration of a forgotten land also peopled by fantastic creatures. His novel is an example of a classic masculinity fantasy of imperial conquest and domination of virgin territory.

Both Cavendish and Gilman feminize utopian fiction and push against the male creations within this genre. Contrastingly, Angela Carter's collection of fairy-tales, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), has its roots in the feminine as the European fairy-tale traditionally figures the woman as the storyteller. However it is a literary tradition which male writers such as Brothers Grimm and Andrew Lang tried to mark as their own in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through their collection, publication, and commercialisation of fairy-tales. Writing at the time of the second wave of feminism, she adopts and revitalizes an archaic feminine genre to enforce her feminist message. The fairy-tale enables Carter to have an unrestricted setting for her tales, allowing her to re-write traditional gender roles. She sexualises her females, they desire men, take control and can be violent. This is an alternative type of utopia to the previous texts. A utopia is a subjective creation as each person has a different view on what a utopia should entail. The utopia as a genre is becoming an increasingly diverse literary segment and one which can be described as 'under construction'. The term 'gynotopia' is increasingly applied to a fictive world rid of males such as *Herland* which also depicts both utopian and dystopian features. Similarly, Margaret Atwood created the term 'ustopia' "by combining utopia and dystopia — the imagined perfect society and its opposite – because in [her] view, each contains a latent version of each other" (Atwood 2011 online). Given the historical context of each of these texts and the individual feminist ideas which each author held, there are dystopian aspects to each work. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the texts within the time in which they were created and to consider how the authors and their publications contribute to or pre-empt the different movements of feminism. Female utopias depict "how women are profoundly alienated and limited by patriarchal society; they then go on

to acquaint the reader with an alternative society in which women could feel at home and manifest their potential” (Pearson 1977: 50). This potential is expressed in the specific areas of female liberation such as: education, motherhood and the removal of patriarchal ideals, and embraced female sexuality.

2. Margaret Cavendish, female rule and education

The Blazing World opens with a note to the reader which sets up the authoritative female voice governing the rest of the novel:

For I am not covetous, but as ambitious as ever any of my sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be *Henry* the Fifth, or *Charles* the Second, yet I endeavour to be *Margaret* the First. (124)

To be a woman in the seventeenth century however was to be domestic, obedient, and silent. A woman’s place was not in discussing the current debates within the sciences and philosophy. Fortunately, Cavendish was not an ordinary seventeenth-century woman. She was flamboyant, bold, and ambitious as shown through the various frontispieces to her works. *The Blazing World* was published alongside *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, her theories about natural science. This combination is highly evocative of *New Atlantis*, which was published with *Sylva Sylvarum*, Bacon’s text on natural history. While Marina Leslie (1996: 9) states that Cavendish is “clearly imitating Bacon”, I would argue that she is not so much ‘imitating’ but forcing herself into a male domain through publishing two different texts. Cavendish reacts against the notion that women must only discuss matters within the domestic sphere. To publish both a fantastical fiction and a thoughtful exploration of natural science, adds more validation to Cavendish’s project than fiction alone.

Cavendish was a force to be reckoned with. She became the first woman to attend a meeting at the Royal Society of London in 1667. Here she openly engaged with and critiqued the other members including Thomas Hobbes and René Descartes. A place where women could learn and join discussion was her utopian ideal. The Empress in the text therefore establishes a scientific academy where she can grapple with her questions about natural science with other members of the *Blazing World*. This creation “resembles and critiques both the Royal Society [...] and its utopian inspiration, Salomon’s House in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, an academy of male Elders” (Trubowitz 1992: 234-5). While Bacon portrays an academy of males which is evocative of the society in which he lived in, Cavendish promotes sisterhood in her novel. The Empress recognised that women were excluded from parts of religion in the *Blazing World* and so she endeavoured to convert them to her religion. In this section Cavendish not only promotes the feminist ideal of sisterhood, but also manages to fight against female stereotypes. The women are described as having “quick wits, subtle conceptions, clear understandings, and solid judgements” (162). This unity of women is reiterated when the Empress befriends the equally independent and empowered

Duchess, and both women are nearly inseparable. Throughout the novel, the Empress's power is shown to be natural and innate, and the prefatory note to the reader adds: "I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like" (124). This allows the reader to see that they too hold power. While Cavendish encourages sisterhood and empowerment, one cannot ignore the domineering matriarchal figure of the Empress who is given "absolute power to rule and govern all the world" (132). Cavendish was a devout Royalist throughout the turbulent seventeenth-century. It is therefore unsurprising that unlike Gilman's text where all the women are equal in status, Cavendish chooses the "figure of absolute sovereign [...] as a monarchical ideal of the independent woman" (Trubowitz 1992: 231). By instating a monarch, Cavendish "aligns the [utopian] form with her aristocratic nostalgia for what could be called a 'magical' past, for an idealized pre-Civil War England" (Trubowitz 1992: 231). Some may read this figure who holds absolute power as a rather dystopian character especially in the seventeenth century. However, the reminder from Cavendish that the world is of her own creation, gives the sense that the Empress can be an 'everywoman' figure of anyone's creation.

While Gilman emphasises the value of motherhood, Cavendish distances her Empress from the familial role and uses the Duchess to critique the restrictions on women. Cavendish allows one sentence to address the fact that the Empress had children: "nor durst anyone wear jewels but the Emperor, the Empress, and their eldest son" (133). To focus on the Empress adopting the role of the mother and wife would not be Utopian, in Cavendish's interpretation of the concept. The presentation to the reader that the Empress is simultaneously a mother, a ruler and engaged in current intellectual debates demonstrates Cavendish's view that there is more to women than domesticities. The voice of Cavendish is focalised through the Duchess who states: "I had rather die in the adventure of noble achievements, than live in obscure and sluggish security" (185). This powerful statement directly attacks the ideals of patriarchy which suffocated women in the seventeenth-century, who were forced to live in "sluggish security" leaving them "buried in oblivion" (185). In many respects, Cavendish writes against the male utopias of the time. Her utopia is set up as a direct opponent to these male creations, a work to be considered as wholly separate in what it represents. However, "she also seeks inclusion in male literary and philosophical canons" (Leslie 1996: 7) by demonstrating both in her life and her work that women deserve a place within them. Her utopia "challenges seventeenth-century concepts of identity and gender" (Pohl 2003: 51). Cavendish's proto-feminist stance led her to gain the reputation of the "crazy Duchess" (Woolf 1996: 57-8).

3. Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her Edenic fantasy

It is striking that after a distancing of the female from the domestic with Cavendish, that Gilman's utopia would draw the two closer together in *Herland*. In 1915, Gilman is writing during the first wave of feminism and the First World War which both challenged gender roles. There are aspects of the novel which are problematic for the modern-day reader which now places *Herland* within Atwood's category of the 'ustopia'. Nevertheless, considered in its historical context these

issues cannot cloud the powerful and still relevant feminist messages which Gilman's utopia offers. Three years prior to publishing *Herland*, Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* was published, and it could be said that Gilman used his text as a platform to give a gynocentric perspective of the exploration of a previously undiscovered land for her feminist utopia. "Choosing a utopian vehicle, five years before the passage of women's right to vote she produced [...] rare classic Edenic fantasy" (Snodgrass 2006: 261-2).

Gilman instantly reverses the traditional gender roles of society in *Herland* with males being inferior. The presentation of three distinctly different but stereotypical men is more evocative of male culture than if there were only one male in the novel. The focalisation of the female utopia through the male gaze and voice was an unexpected feature, but as the novel develops it is beneficial to Gilman's message. It creates a larger impact as the male voice suddenly aligns itself with the thoughts of the female reader. The strength of the patriarchal views held by men is evident as Terry not only sexualised the women with his "visions of a sort of sublimated summer resort" which "he had pleasant dreams" about (9). He also assumed that he would be "elected King in no time" (11) as from his chauvinist and unreflective perspective, a land is not functional without male dominance. The benefit of having Van as the narrator means that he acts almost as a mediator. He criticises Terry for his views and gives the reader the presentation of an empathetic male ally: "as I learned more and more to appreciate what these women had accomplished, the less proud I [became] of what we, with all our manhood, had done" (79).

Gilman removes the patriarchal expectations on women, and so their appearance is entirely based on practicality as they "dress to suit health and comfort" (Snodgrass 2006: 53). The men are baffled by the lack of vanity which they perceived as a feminine trait but realise is a product of the patriarchy. In the same way Van is enlightened when he finds intelligent and dependable women as these were supposedly masculine traits. Gilman revels in making the three men experience what women in the real-world were constantly experiencing. In chapter two, Van describes that they "were much in the position of the Suffragette trying to get to the Parliament buildings" (30). During their imprisonment Jeff notes that "they've given us a room – with no great possibility of escape – and personal liberty – heavily chaperoned" (38). For a female reader at this time this confined environment may have been rather familiar and is wittily evocative of the life of a married woman. The men realise that the women "needed neither protection nor service. ... [they] were their guests, their prisoners, absolutely dependent" (119). For women, this was life in a patriarchal society. For the male reader this novel is designed to force them to reflect on the natural justice of the first phase of the feminist movement.

Georgia Johnston notes that "Gilman shows how the men, in a way, go back to the mother's womb, in which they, like children, learn a new language, new customs, a new history" (Johnston 1991: 58-9). They enter a land which is feminised in its description, which problematically reiterates the supposed domestic nature of women: "everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all" (25). Aside from this, it is a land where "every woman values her maternity above everything else" (110). Motherhood is their religion, and so the men

are engulfed in a wholly female space driven by maternity. In some way, the men do re-enter the womb and this perhaps shows Gilman's desire for society to be re-born without its prejudices. This emphasis on motherhood is interesting as Gilman was writing when Marie Stopes embarked on her research into methods of contraception which changed the cultural approach to motherhood and female sexuality. The presentation of a sisterhood provides "a source of validation and spiritual nourishment and [is] a crucial element of female liberation" (Snodgrass 2006: 493). It empowers women and encourage unification over Cavendish's empowered individual, although in Gilman there is the loss of the individual which is also problematic.

It is challenging as a modern-day reader to find the feminist message in the absolute emphasis on motherhood and the retreat from female sexuality. For motherhood to be the entire focus of the Herlander's lives is an interesting position given the lives of women in the real world. When Gilman glorifies "female 'instincts' of love and service, her radical theory of feminism dissolved into a sometimes-sentimental worship of the status quo" (Hill 1980: 525). However, these ideas fit in with "a turn-of-the-century feminist perspective" (Miller 1983: 192-3) which came under the name of the 'Social Purity Movement' of which Gilman was a supporter. "The movement was driven by concepts of celibacy [...] abstaining from sex was a wholly feminist cause" (Kent 2018 online). Followers of this movement believed that abstinence was the only way to gain equality. Francis Swiney stated that sexual "desire was 'not natural' and was likely part of the unnatural patriarchy. [...] For Swiney, women were destined to lead the human race to an egalitarian and asexual state" (Kent 2018 online). This is a concept which in the light of *Herland* is rather familiar where "there was no sex-feeling to appeal to" (122). The feminist movement thought that instead of relieving women of the patriarchal expectations, they would raise men to be as pure as women. When considering Gilman's work in the period in which it was written, it is absolutely deserving of its status as a utopian feminist landmark as it skilfully reverses the gender roles to critique the society at the fin-de-siècle. However, from a modern-day perspective it is perhaps less deserving of this status.

4. Angela Carter and sexual liberation

In 2015, Lindy West wrote a new introduction to *Herland* and concluded: "my twenty-first-century Herland would be, I'd hope, a little less perfect than Gilman's original – because women are people" (West 2015: xiii). The third text to be considered fulfils this idea of an imperfect world where women are returned to their natural and in some cases deeply flawed selves. For Carter, allowing women to be true and imperfect was a utopian ideal. She fights against the social restraints on women which force them to become unnatural. The collection is a "catalyst of a million awakenings for readers (especially girls)" (Warner 2013 online). The reinstatement of eroticism into what is seen as a genre for children, was a shocking decision by Carter. Through the subversion of gender roles, the stories powerfully reveal how fairy-tales participate "in constructing the boundaries of masculinity and femininity by reinforcing traditional ideas about sex roles" (Seago 1999: 84).

“The Tiger’s Bride” instantly confronts the reader with the reality that women were viewed as mere possessions as it opens with: “My father lost me to The Beast at cards” (51). The heroine in the story is coming of age, as are the majority of Carter’s heroines, and therefore she is virginal which makes her more valuable. The girl finds affinity with the Beast as she realises that like the Beast with his mask, she is also an imitation of a human. The story is littered with references to her past where women would try to “scare [her] into good behaviour, for [she] was a wild wee thing” (56). She later adds: “I let out a raucous guffaw; no young lady laughs like that! [...] But I did. And do” (58). As she removes her clothes she removes social restrictions. Through her sexual exploration with the Beast she becomes her natural self: “each stroke of his tongue ripped of skin after successive skin, [...] and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs” (67). Similarly in the wolf-stories, the girls are shown as virginal but not overly naïve. Instead they display a natural curiosity about sex. The imagery within the stories is often of blood which is simultaneously connected to animalism, menstruation and the loss of virginity. In Carter’s collection, blood becomes a symbol of embraced womanhood and empowerment. The ‘strong-minded’ heroine in “The Company of Wolves” wears a red shawl which had the “brilliant look of blood on snow” (113). Further into this description it is revealed that “she has just started her woman’s bleeding” (113). Armed with a knife and her womanhood, she refuses to submit to the wolf. The story concludes with her laughing in his face knowing that “she was nobody’s meat” (118).

Carter empowers her heroines by depicting them as in control with the ability to make wolves ‘tender’ and yet she simultaneously aligns the girls with wolfishness. The unapologetic presentation of what is bestial in women is refreshing and puts her women in a new light in which “portray an ambiguous mixture where good and evil depend on perspective, denying the reader the reassuring certainty of approval and identification” (Seago 1999: 94). Carter’s females are human with desires and imperfections, she had “no interest in presenting a one-dimensional view of women” (Haase 2000: 22). In stories such as “The Bloody Chamber”, the heroine describes her mother with “her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped [her] father’s service revolver” (40). Not only do Carter’s women save themselves, but the strong mother-figures often missing from traditional fairy-tales are heroes. However, Carter is careful when depicting women truthfully and this is why a presentation of the perfect sisterhood is not seen in her collection. In other stories such as “The Snow Child” and “The Werewolf”, women can cause each other’s destruction. In “The Werewolf” the wolf is the grandmother. Not only does Carter sexualise her young women, but as seen with the above description of the mother from “The Bloody Chamber” and with the grandmother from “The Company of Wolves”, she sexualises the older women as well. It is shocking for the reader to read a salacious passage of the grandmother being approached by the wolf: “His genitals, huge. Ah! Huge. The last thing the old lady saw in all this world was a young man, [...] naked as stone, approaching her bed” (116). The uncomfortable nature of a passage like this forces the reader to acknowledge how society has taught us to view women of an older age as non-sexual beings.

Carter's writing in this collection is steeped in the feminine. As previously stated, the form of the fairy-tale is in itself inherently female. "Storytelling is 'semiotically a female art' [...] by pointing not only to women's traditional role as storytellers but also to the ways in which they have been represented as the spinners of tales in folklore" (Haase 2000: 29). The oral/aural origins of fairy-tales mean that unlike the other texts, there is no concrete male platform. It is key to note two other features of the fairy-tale genre. Firstly, due to the nature of how fairy-tales were told, they naturally adapt to the "socio-cultural context at each moment of mediation" (Seago 1999: 86). So, for Carter to write out patriarchal views from the classic tales during second wave feminism is a stage of natural progression for the genre. Secondly, Carter removes the usual omniscient, third-person narrator in some of her stories to use a first-person narrator to liberate the previously suppressed female voice. Although Carter's feminism is rather controversial, she demonstrates that the best an author can do is to depict the reality of being a woman. Instead of being a 'perfect' place, Carter's utopia is where people are themselves and this is a combination of the good and the bad which aligns itself with the concept of 'ustopia'.

5. The evolution of gender politics and female utopias

Although the three texts are part of the same literary genre and part of the feminist movement as a whole, they are distinctly different in the messages which they put across. This is largely due to the eras in which they were written. Nevertheless the critical and satirical nature of utopian fiction provided these female writers with a free space to critique the gender politics of their time. Each of the authors' adaption of an established male literary platform adds to their feminist messages and brings the female perspective and voice into the forefront of a male-dominated art form. By reflecting on the progression of this genre which criticises contemporary social issues, one is able to mark the evolution of political views. Or perhaps something more like culturally-conditioned obsessions – whereby the seventeenth century text seems preoccupied with female education, the early twentieth-century text with motherhood, and the late twentieth century text with sexuality. Ultimately these texts enable us to mark key sentiments and developments within the feminist movement. The benefit of using the utopian or science fiction genre is "that gender roles can be more easily revised when the reader is estranged from her ordinary world" (Donawerth & Kolmerten 1994: 2). As established throughout this article, the utopian genre is diverse and is still somewhat establishing itself as it gains new terms for possible sub-genres or new names for the genre itself (ustopia, gynotopia, etc.). Utopian fiction allows its authors to depict a land which is their personal idea of paradise. This element of subjectivity contributes to the emerging terms which are now being applied to these 'utopias'. There is no blueprint for an ideal world as naturally we all have different notions of paradise and perhaps for this reason the notion of a utopia is inevitably flawed. Some argue for the creation of a 'protopia' over a utopia which does not seek perfection but for the depiction of a society with improvements. Again, one person's improvement to society will be seen by another person as a negative step leading to the deterioration of a society. As our society becomes more self-aware of its prejudices and conscious of political correctness,

we may almost entirely abandon the notion of a utopia as we realise human nature does not go in hand with perfectibility. I believe that Atwood's term 'ustopia' is the most suitable term to adopt for utopian works.

The act of compiling research for this article required one to adopt the new historicist approach when analysing a line of descent, connectedness or thematic or intertextual linkage. New historicists place literary texts within their historical context in order to gain a deeper understanding of the work and the author's motivations for writing. They also force us to acknowledge that our access to the 'reality' of the past is itself conditioned textually, and in part constituted by our reading of fiction. Not only does new historicism give a broader understanding of the individual texts, but as demonstrated it enables us to connect multiple texts to multiple eras and identify connections and patterns. For example, each of the three works discussed, successfully mark the progression of the feminist movement through the critical and satirical nature of the utopian genre itself. Acknowledging the pattern/line of descent of the genre allows us to map the progression and possible future of the genre.

Similarly to the new historicist approach to literature, the act of periodization provides us with a framework to help us segment and understand the progression of cultural and political attitudes throughout history. A problem which arises with periodization is that the historical, political and social periods or categories into which we separate time are not so rigid in reality. Throughout history, cultural and political beliefs change and evolve over a stretch of time. It is not a sudden change from one period to another which is often how periodization presents history. The following quote is a comment on periodization by Jeanette Winterson, voiced through her character Sappho in her fiction *Art and Lies*: "All art belongs to the same period. The Grecian drinking horn sits beside Picasso's bulls, Giotto is a friend of Cezanne. Who calls whom? Sappho to Mrs Woolf – Mrs Woolf to Sappho. The Over-and-Out across time, the two-way radio on a secret frequency. Art defeats Time" (Winterson 1995: 67).

This is a key example of where Liberal Humanism (as perfectly captured by Winterson) conflicts with New Historicism: Art is seeking some kind of ideal form and immortality which History presses down on it and tries to enfold and limit it within a series of time capsules. Utopias are fascinating because their creation by writers in different eras are almost an admission that History is winning, as seen in these disparate creations of alternative realities where conditions for women are otherwise. The changes and developments within art are indicative of the changes within society as demonstrated through the historicist and feminist analysis of the texts of Cavendish, Gilman and Carter.

Periodization can be easily applied to specific movements within history. For example, in her own periodization of feminist literary history, Elaine Showalter identifies three phases of feminism and feminist literary theory. The *Feminine Phase* starts in 1840 until 1880 and in this period female writers imitated dominant male literary and artistic forms. This was followed by the *Feminist Phase* from 1880 until 1920 where female writers presented more radical positions. Showalter concludes with the *Female Phase* from 1920 onwards which encompasses a close analysis of the experiences

of women and their writing. These three phases allude to the issues of periodization as Showalter's divisions can be contradicted namely by the work of the female writers who make up the article. As this paper shows, in 1666 Margaret Cavendish was using dominant male forms to push her feminist ideals and desires into the public and male sphere. However, the term 'feminism' and the notion of what it stood for was non-existent in the seventeenth century. Therefore, Cavendish is proto-feminist and as such this means that she can be somewhat excluded from an analysis of the progression of literary feminism. Periodization often causes researchers and critics to look at the past and label people and works within it with modern terminology which may be argued as an incorrect action. Also, it must be acknowledged that for any labelled part of history, there will always be outliers and works to contradict the time setting as time and human nature are more fluid than periodization allows for. Nevertheless, Showalter's 'feminine phase' seems rather limiting as in the time after 1880, as I have demonstrated, female writers were continuing to use the male literary forms as platforms to their works. This was simultaneously through the imitation of the genre the subversion of its traditions. Her allusion to the radical feminist phase in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers another point of discrepancy. It is true that this was the time when feminism was emerging and was being acknowledged as a belief or movement. However, I argue that throughout each of the three eras and the texts I have written on, each author has put forward radical ideas both before, during and after the historical period Showalter outlines. Meanwhile, the third phase refers more to literary criticism than to female literature itself.

In conclusion, the act of periodization in many cases is a key way to provide order and a framework to our existence which without this structure would be near impossible to work with. Regardless of outliers and the blurred edges of the time periods and their associated ideologies and aesthetics, overall periodization enables us to chart developments within history as seen with the feminist movement and the utopian texts of the three female writers. Each text aptly marks key moments in the process of giving women a voice and a place within society. This correlation is made clear through the act of periodization and the utopian genre which was created for the purpose of critiquing and satirising society.

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Sound design as narrative device in contemporary film: Subliminal soundscape of war and terror in *Sicario* (2015)

Abstract. The article provides an attempt to analyze selected characteristics of contemporary cinematic sound on the basis of the sound design in *Sicario* (2015, dir. Denis Villeneuve), which encompasses a digitally-processed orchestral score with originally texturized sound effects. I elaborate on the features of the sound design in *Sicario* in regard to production and composition. Moreover, I attempt to demonstrate the ways in which sound in *Sicario*, due to its characteristics, is outside any typical musical genre. Finally, the article focuses on sound effects which are used in an unusual way, for instance, so as to reflect characters' personalities. The analysis of *Sicario* demonstrates that a creatively and meticulously constructed sound design in film has the power to exceed its traditional, supporting role in the narrative.

Key words: film score, American cinema, sound design, soundtrack, *Sicario*, Denis Villeneuve.

1. Introduction

Many cinematic masterpieces come from the era of silent film: *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Nosferatu* (1922), *The Covered Wagon* (1923), *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925), and *City Lights* (1931) are but a few examples. Thus, one may claim that sound is not a necessary component in cinema as film is considered primarily a visual medium. In his seminal publication on film sound *Audiovision: Sound on Screen* (1994), Michael Chion emphasizes the fact that “a film without sound remains a film; a film with no image, or at least a visual frame for projection is not a film” (143). Yet, David Lynch claims that “films are 50 percent visual and 50 percent sound. Sometimes sound even overplays the visual” (Zager 2015: 259). Sound design is capable of influencing the story to a great extent and its power in film should not be

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underestimated. Sound design in film is a tool, or, to put it differently, a narrative device which can propel the action, create interpretations of the visuals that otherwise would not emerge, and, as a result, modulate the overtone of the whole film.

Most commonly, sound supports narrative delivered by means of visuals. It may have a direct narrative role in the storytelling, by means of dialogs and the voiceover, or subliminal, when it is employed as a means of creating the mood and guiding the audience's attention. For instance, the so-called background music unconsciously affects the mood of the viewers as it corresponds with the atmosphere of a given scene. According to Gorbman, music in film should be invisible² and inaudible, or rather heard unconsciously (73). Largely because of its invisibility, sound can evoke the aura of suspense or drama, especially when background music and sound effects are skillfully combined. Moreover, sound in film creates continuity, or links, between particular images as well as entire scenes.

According to Buhler et al. (2000), apart from the traditional functions of sound in film, sound is capable of achieving much more. Music's role is more complicated, or perhaps we should say more flexible. Music is sometimes very much involved with speech, as in a song performance or, less obviously, in dialogue underscoring (music that accompanies speech, playing "under" it). At other times, music interacts with sound effects, as in many science fiction and action-thrillers, where music and effects dovetail to create what often seems like a single continuous strand of sound. Music can also mimic sound effects (for example, percussion instruments were routinely used to generate sound effects during silent-film performances) (Buhler et al. 2000: 3).

In addition to interactions between music, dialogs, and sound effects mentioned by Buhler et al. (2000), sound may also correlate with images in a creative way – not only in order to support what is presented on screen or imply the emotional overtone of the scene, which is in line with traditional Hollywood practice mentioned above. It can propel action or supplement those elements of the narrative that are beyond the realms of cinematic possibility.³ In some ways, cinematic sound can also act independently from the film and "float in its own sphere, in effect outside the story and the physical world of the images" (Buhler et al. 2000: 3). One of the interesting examples of the unusual deployment of sound in relation to imagery can be found in the torture scene in Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). Traditionally, the music's mood "must be appropriate to the scene" (Gorbman 1987: 78) but in Tarantino's films this principle is often violated. For instance, a gruesome scene is accompanied by a happy-sounding song "Stuck in the Middle with You" by Stealers Wheel, creating the grotesque effect, which is not characteristic of neo-noir crime thrillers. Thus, as the application of incongruent music in certain passages can introduce traces of other genres and strongly affect the perception of the scene as well as the viewer's emotional

² The author refers to the "technical apparatus" of music that must not be shown on screen, unless the director wants the music to be "naturalized" as diegetic (Gorbman 1987: 73-75).

³ Sound can imply different temporal and spatial planes as well as represent what is impossible to be seen (for example, a deep, manly voice representing the voice of God).

reactions (Bordwell 2002: 279), skillfully modulated sound in film can often influence the interpretation of the whole feature.

Even though film industry evolved and developed due to various technological advances, principles concerning film sound seem to remain relatively unchanged as the traditional pattern of film sound design is used in most Hollywood productions. Steven Shaviro argues that even though digital technologies contribute to the process of transformation of contemporary cinema, as far as sound is concerned, it “still often functions as it used to, providing added value for the moving images” in both contemporary Hollywood films and independent, art films (Shaviro 2016: n.p). At the same time, however, there are numerous films which employ sound in a creative way, for instance, when it serves different functions than expected or violates the principles of composition, mixing, and editing mentioned above (such as inaudibility or continuity).

In this essay I intend to demonstrate how sound in film can be approached non-schematically and used as a narrative device. The article analyzes the soundscape in *Sicario* (2015, dir. Denis Villeneuve), which encompasses a digitally-processed orchestral score with originally texturized sound effects. I elaborate on the features of the sound design in *Sicario* in regard to production and composition. Moreover, I attempt to demonstrate the ways in which sound in *Sicario*, due to its characteristics, is outside any typical musical genre. Finally, I focus on sound effects which are used in an unusual way, for instance, so as to reflect characters’ personalities. The analysis of *Sicario* demonstrates that a creatively and meticulously constructed sound design in film has the power to exceed its traditional, supporting role in the narrative.

By many critics, *Sicario* (2015) is regarded as one of the best films of the year 2015, yet it did not receive any Academy Award. The film was nominated in three categories: Best Cinematography, Best Original Score, and Best Sound Editing. The director Denis Villeneuve is French-Canadian and his most popular feature films apart from *Sicario* include *Prisoners* (2013), *Enemy* (2013), and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). Interestingly, Villeneuve was not involved in the production of *Sicario*’s sequel titled *Sicario 2: Soldado* (2018), which was directed by Stefano Sollima. *Sicario*’s score was created by an Icelandic composer, Jóhann Jóhannsson (1969 – 2018). Apart from cinema, he composed for theater and was involved in his own music projects. His music can be characterized as neoclassical and electronic. Moreover, in his productions, Jóhannsson often employed dark drone sounds. He collaborated with Villeneuve in *Prisoners*, where the soundtrack was dark and minimalistic. He also created the Golden Globe-winning score to *The Theory of Everything*.

Sicario has been praised by film critics who not only value its sound design but also Roger Deakins’ cinematography and the performance of lead actors. The film was a commercial success with a box-office gross of 46,875,468 USD (IMDb). *Sicario* was released on Blu-ray with bonus content – *A Pulse From the Desert: The Score of Sicario*, *Stepping into Darkness: The Visual Design of Sicario*, *Blunt, Brolin, Benicio: Portraying the Characters of Sicario*, and *Battle Zone: The Origins of Sicario*. *Sicario* is an intense crime-thriller drama that is often compared to Steven Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000), an Academy Award-winning drug cartel movie but is, in fact, very different. For one, *Sicario* does not portray drug use. Moreover, *Traffic* features an all-star cast in contrast to

Sicario, in which there are only three leads. Villeneuve's film is suspenseful and tension-filled and "succeeds in evoking the menace, paranoia and ambiguity of the turf" (Rotella 2015: n.p.). The storyline involves an attempt to find one of the Mexican drug dealers but what audience experiences in terms of sound is neither traditional thriller or action film music, nor a typical Latino music-inspired score. *Sicario* features non-schematic, unconventional soundtrack which includes eighteen tracks the majority of which convey the atmosphere of sadness, terror and dismay.

2. Research objectives

In this article I am going to demonstrate how sound design in *Sicario* can be regarded as more autonomous than in a typical Hollywood movie. *Sicario*'s originality in terms of sound pertains to the fact that the score combined with originally texturized sound effects does not only emphasize or make more precise what is seen on the screen but also reflects upon these elements of the narrative that are not yet displayed or will not be shown directly in images or dialogs. To explain this, I will first describe the general characteristics of *Sicario*'s sound design – its composition, instruments employed, and sound production as well as the features of the score that, to an extent, are not in line with the conventional rules of the orchestral film sound. This inventiveness pertains, for instance, to the use of simple but at the same time multilayered ambient drone, achieved without synthesizers, which is unusual for this kind of sound. Secondly, I will focus on the originality of sound design in the film in reference to musical genres as the scoring in *Sicario* does not resemble a typical thriller or action movie music. Next, I will describe the ways in which the function of sound effects is extended in a creative way through skillful sound editing. Finally, I will analyze three selected scenes with interesting sound design: the opening sequence, the travel from Mexico to the cartel, and the underground tunnel scene.

Sicario's plot revolves around the escalating war on drugs on the Mexican-United States border. Kate Macer (Emily Blunt) is an idealistic FBI SWAT agent who volunteers to participate in a secret government mission about which she knows very little. Kate's personal objective is to find people responsible for the death of several of her colleagues. She is assisted by a senior officer Matt Graver (Josh Brolin) and a mysterious Mexican federal agent named Alejandro (Benicio del Toro), who is the eponymous *Sicario*⁴ They aim to catch the cartel leader, Manuel Diaz (Bernardo Saracino), his brother Guillermo (Edgar Arreola) as well as the drug lord Fausto Alarcón (Julio Cedillo). In El Paso, Kate soon learns that her role in the team is not to provide tactical knowledge, as she has been told in the recruitment interview, but to testify that every suspicious action Matt and Alejandro take is legal and done "by the book". Kate feels isolated and morally torn as she discovers certain facts about Alejandro's assassin past and witnesses numerous law infringements

4 "Sicario" is a Spanish term for a professional hitman. The word is used particularly often when referring to hired killers in Latin American drug cartels. Sicarios, however, provide their services across Americas as well as in the Caribbean.

during the mission. Unfortunately, in the end she is given no choice but to comply with the rules of people above her.

3. *Sicario*'s unconventional orchestral sonic palette

The first feature of *Sicario*'s score that can be regarded as non-traditional is that it utilizes a 65-piece orchestra, relying heavily on strings and percussion (tom-toms and military snare drums with the snare turned off) with occasional appearances of low brass and woodwind to create textural moods rather than melodic ones (Chagollan 2015). As mentioned by the composer in one of the interviews, there is also much of solo cello and multi-track cello and six-string bass guitar on the track which plays during closing credits entitled "Melancholia" (Grobar 2015). The instruments were used in an unusual way:

Like an aural Kraken, relentless gran casa, tuba, bass trombone and melting strings peel back the earth's surface and blanket the ears in menace. With a ritualistic, ancient-sounding beat, tracks like "The Border" and "Drywall" lock step to a seemingly inevitable demise, while "Target" puts Jóhannsson's deft string writing on display with the striking use of brutal col legno to disturb the pervasive bass drones (Armbrust 2015: n.p.).

Even though the soundtrack is dominated by classical instruments, it cannot be regarded as a conventional orchestral film score. Due to sound processing, the composer made the score appear more modern and experimental. He modified the quality of input sounds recorded for the purpose of the film in such a way that they sound almost like signals from the synthesizer. Orchestral music imitates the synthetic sound due to filters, plugins, and different effects layered over the recorded pieces. In one of the interviews, the composer explains how he achieved such non-standard sound:

The palette is very much based around percussion and it's based around orchestra, but the way I recorded the percussion and I recorded the orchestra was kind of unconventional. I recorded the orchestra in sections, and there's a lot of editing and processing of the orchestras. It's not like a live recording of the orchestra playing everything from bar one until the end. It was really a score that came together in the editing. So, there's a lot of processing. All of it is live recording, but they are all processed to different degrees – processed meaning edited and manipulated sonically. (Roberts 2005: n.p.)

Secondly, the sound in *Sicario* is percussive and pulsing. The director wanted Jóhannsson's score to feel like "a threat, coming from under your feet, deep under the surface of the scorched earth of the Chihuahua desert" (Chagollan 2015: n.p.). This threat can be called "The Beast" the name used in the score's track list. The sound resembles a heavy heartbeat in its repetitiveness. The score is intense, throbbing, and relentless – this tension is achieved exclusively by means of

orchestral instruments as there are no electric guitars or synthetic basslines. The throbbing vibe is present from the very beginning of the film – from a barely audible sound that the audience experiences unconsciously, it crescendos to a peak pulse in the form of the SWAT vehicle sound crashing through the wall.

3. Naturalistic ambient noise of the Mexican desert

Another interesting feature of *Sicario* is its naturalistic and raw vibe, both in terms of visuals and sound. Villeneuve employs the technique of “dynamic realism” (Desowitz 2016). In his review, the film critic asserts: “The best way to describe the score and sound design for *Sicario* is ‘dynamic realism’ because of the calculated way in which director Denis Villeneuve sucks the viewer in, then slightly unnerves us with subliminal low-end bass before assaulting us with percussive hits”. At the same time, there are numerous subtle sonic atmospheres reflecting the pulse of the desert, with a low-end bass in them. The score is raw because even when it is multilayered and digitally enhanced, it always reminds the audience of something real, organic which is an actual threat. Desowitz (2016: n.p.) claims that “it was over the top but was still in the realm of reality”.

Yet another feature that makes *Sicario* original in terms of sound design is that it employs dark ambient drone that is unpleasant to the human ear, a design technique usually avoided in Hollywood productions. Sounds in *Sicario* are either irritating or they encompass too many extremes, for instance, as between quieter and loud sounds. As film’s sound editor, Alan Robert Murray, said in one of the interviews, the soundtrack includes sounds that are annoying: from those comparable to sounds made by insects to a dentist’s drill (Desowitz 2016). The contrasts between quietness and extreme loudness are substantial. It is heard especially in the scene when the agents’ armored vehicle crashes through the walls. What precedes the sforzando-like impact is the relatively quiet pulse sound and almost complete silence in the house.⁵ Operating on substantial contrasts makes the sound design felt in the viewers’ bodies rather than only heard.

Sicario’s soundtrack cannot be regarded as a typical thriller or action film sonic design. In general, as “each genre represent[s] particular conventions for editing” (Dancynger 2018: 162), suspense and uncertainty are promoted in thriller films and are manifested by Hitchcock-like, high-tension scoring, whereas action films rely on fast-paced soundtrack and sonic intensified continuity. *Sicario* encompasses both genre conventions as it evokes excitement via the use of vibrating, subterranean score combined with the action film intensity of gunshots sounds.

4. Scoring outside the genre

In a typical thriller movie, tension and anxiety build gradually and culminate with tragic events. In *Sicario* the tension often crescendos but does not lead to any specific dramatic moment. It slows down for a second to reoccur with double strength. In other words, the action crescendos and

⁵ Sforzando indicates a forceful accent in music composition. For instance, it can take the form of a forte (loud) note after a sequence of quieter sounds.

suddenly stops as if to “give the audience a second to recover” but after a while “it all hits you over the head with the [final] crescendo of the scene” (James 2016: n.p.).

When regarded as an action film, *Sicario* does not follow the rules of sonic intensified continuity in a conventional form. Sound design is indeed intense but in a different way. There is no denying that *Sicario* is tense in terms of sound (as noted earlier) but it concerns the overtone it creates and the atmosphere rather than the pace of sounds. There are no abrupt changes in soundscape, except the contrast between the silence in the house and the SWAT vehicle crashing through the walls or the subsequent explosion in Phoenix. However, it seems that continuous dark drone tune can be as intense as rapid jumping on sounds. That is why, in some sense *Sicario*’s sound employs intensified continuity, which now is a norm in action films, but does it in a yet more unconventional way. In contemporary action films, intensified continuity is a standard and this pertains to sound as well. *Sicario*’s sound can be characterized as entirely different since the drone is unchangeable, persistent, and moves from one scene to another. Sound effects are multilayered but are still rather continuous, relatively stable, and serve predominantly atmospheric purposes.⁶

One may thus draw a conclusion that sound in *Sicario* is, to a great extent, outside the musical genre. The film’s sound design is in the borderland between thriller and action film. As mentioned by the composer, Villeneuve also wanted the score to be a “subtle war music” (Grobar 2015: n.p.). Even though the score is not an obvious thriller sound, it involves “sound textures that produce anxiety” (Desowitz 2016: n.p.).

Owing to the fact that Alejandro is the protagonist who wants to take revenge and fights violence with more violence, the film may be also viewed as a gangster movie which, to some extent, is reflected in the soundtrack since the emphasis is placed on the sound of the gunshot. Bordwell (2002) mentions the beat of the gunshot as one of the characteristics of gangster productions. He claims that “in a gangster film, a machine gun’s fire creates a regular, rapid beat, while the sporadic reports of pistols may come at irregular intervals” (281). *Sicario*’s sound design can be viewed as having certain gangster film-inspired elements.

5. Sound design as a narrative tool

Another feature that makes the sound of *Sicario* non-standard is the use of enhanced sound effects which reflect the characters’ personalities. Sound effects are texturized in such a way that they characterize Kate’s innocence and the mystery around Alejandro. In one of the interviews, Murray said that he wanted to keep scenes with Kate isolated in order to emphasize her loneliness. When it comes to Alejandro, along with revealing more facts about his background, his sound palette expands in time as there are “more undertones into his scenes in order to play to the uncertainty of his characters” (James 2016: n.p.). “Customized” sounds are here able to shape the narrative and contribute to the emotional side of the character’s personalities.

⁶ Films that employ intensified continuity, often called chaos cinema, are often multilayered when it comes to sound in order to achieve the effect of incomprehensibility and chaos.

As one of the most frequently occurring sound effects in *Sicario* gunshot sounds also play a significant role in portraying the protagonists as they match with the character of the shooter. The film's sound editor paid close attention to specific sound of the silencer:

Benicio (del Toro)'s character had a silencer, but we knew, once Benicio started on his secret mission, and the rage and the violence that was pouring out of him, we had to make a gunshot that would portray that even though it was a silencer. We ended up adding a lot of elements, like a synthesized bear trap to the mechanism of his gun. Things that would make the gun concussive, visceral, but still keep it in the silencer mode, so it was a lot of detail on the guns and painting them to match the specific characters in the movie (Blyth 2016).

Alejandro is a relatively silent, mysterious character and the tone of his silencer is in line with his personality. According to Murray, employing individualized sound design elements “can accent the mood or the subject in the scene without being obvious” (Blyth 2016: n.p.).

In addition, what distinguishes *Sicario* from the majority of traditional Hollywood films is its focus on sound editing and the way it exploits its narrative and atmospheric potential. Similarly to Terrence Malick's *Red Thin Line* (1998), where “every character's distinctive breathing sounds were recorded for use as ambient noise” (Bordwell 2002: 274), in *Sicario* some sound effects are used in unconventional ways. The most remarkable example of such originality in sound editing is the sound of the helicopter employed as part of the musicalized, ambient noise track. In contrast to the Beast's heartbeat-like pulse from underneath, the sound of the helicopter is the pulse from beyond. Distorted, science fiction-like, digitally processed helicopter sound becomes the element of the score. In other words, the sound effect “mimics” music in some way (Buhler et al. 2000: 3). *Sicario*'s sound design plays on spatial relations between sounds effects that are underground, on the surface – like gunshot sounds or armed car engines, and in the sky. Sound effects that are present on the surface can be spatially divided into those that appear inside and outside. This distinction is visible especially in the Mexico border crossing shootout sequence that will be discussed in greater detail later in the article. As Kermode (2015: n.p.) notes, “*Sicario* uses private planes, public roads, and clandestine tunnels to slip back and forth across borders both moral and geographical”. This vertical arrangement of narrative planes is enhanced by the use of sounds dedicated to a given spatial layer.

The score consists of almost uncontainable waves of orchestral sounds and sound effects which merge into an atmospheric whole. Murray's sound editing makes the score and sound effects blend seamlessly. Interestingly, the sound in *Sicario* is present inconspicuously, yet it creates the feeling of constant threat and uneasiness which is not very common even in thriller films. While, to most viewers, the sound is often not heard consciously, undoubtedly, its connotative effects are felt distinctly (Gorbman 1987).

6. Opening scene as an atmospheric prelude to terror

The first passage in which sound evokes very strong emotions in an unusual manner is the opening sequence of the film. The film opens with a relatively fast but barely audible pulsating sound which appears as soon as the name of the studio and the production company is displayed. In time, the sound becomes louder and is accompanied by a digitally processed, high-frequency sound of cicadas as the viewers see the first shot. When the SWAT unit is moving towards the house, the sonic palette expands. Next, there is a quick shot from inside of the house with the sound coming from some television program. Then, in another shot, the viewers see another group of SWAT officers in a vehicle whose engine sound adds another layer to the sound track. It is the accelerating sound of the engine, alongside with the vibrating score, that creates the greatest tension which crescendos and reaches the highest point when the SWAT truck crashes through the walls. The final crescendo is preceded by a second of silence from the inside of the house which intensifies the effect of the crash, or, to put it differently, amplifies its volume. What is interesting, the tension is not completely released as the officers entering the house are loud enough to maintain it. When Kate enters the room and shoots at one of the Latino men, the sound of guns suddenly becomes the only sonic element in this scene. Then, there is a short period of silence. Isolating the gunshot sound from the rest of the soundtrack, again, is a way of intensifying the atmosphere. The pulsating vibe reoccurs when Kate's partner, Reggie Wayne (Daniel Kaluuya) notices what is behind the hole in the wall. After that, there is a shot outside the house, where the audience sees the characters vomiting which is caused by the smell of the corpses hidden in the wall. By means of sound effects and score, the tension in this fragment is consistently sustained. When the FBI officers come to the house, there is an atmospheric dark theme employed, which is audible along with the sound of the snapshots taken by the investigators who are photographing the corpses. Again, there is a shot from the outside of the house which is accompanied by Foley sound effects and a subtle percussive sound. After a short period of quietness, the tension rises, falls down for a short moment, and the unexpected loud sound of a bomb explosion appears. Kate exits the house and what she sees is a space full of dust. The score gets darker and overwhelming with every second. It accelerates, which may suggest another explosion, but the scene ends in an abrupt way and what follows is Kate's blood-stained and terrified face in the shower.

The pulse achieved by utilizing percussion appears from the very beginning of the film. Even though the sound is at first barely heard, it is felt subconsciously. The opening sequence has very strong dynamics as it plays on the distinction between loud and quiet volume as well as faster and slower pace. Thanks to sudden changes in volume and intensity of sounds, the quieter moments may be regarded as silent even if there is no complete silence at any point. The peak of crescendo is achieved by means of non-diegetic sound effects, rather than string section and percussion.

7. "The Beast" of the US-Mexico border

The second scene with interesting sound design is the travel from El Paso to Juarez. The characters go to Juarez to collect the brother of the cartel boss, Guillermo (Edgar Arreola). The passage,

which starts when Alejandro folds his jacket and places it in the bag, is accompanied by the theme piece, entitled “The Beast.” It is the sound that bridges a scene which takes place in the building and the following sequence of the journey. Before the visuals change, the sound already informs the audience about something which is not yet presented on the screen. What follows is the helicopter shot on the desert underscored by the subliminal low-end bass. “The Beast” expands and crescendos and, at some point, the focus from beyond switches to the road and the car convoy. In other words, the sonic point of view changes from beyond to the surface of the desert roads where “The Beast” is still clearly audible.⁷ In the exact moment when the cars cross the border, the sonic POV abruptly changes to the tense percussive score accompanied by musicalized helicopter sound and the viewers again see the road from beyond. When the convoy reaches Juarez, again, the audience hears the soundscape of the city: police horns, car engines, bumps on the road, some Mexican voices. When Alejandro says “Welcome to Juarez”, the sound of his voice is definitely inside the car, as opposed to the sounds of the city outside the vehicle. Those contrasts between inside vs. outside are reflected faithfully, which makes the soundtrack very convincing and attention-grabbing. When the characters in the cars stop for a second to hear the sound of the shots audible from the distance, the strong percussive loop reappears signaling another suspenseful scene. The cars accelerate, and so does the sound. The drivers communicate via CB radio which becomes another layer of sound. Moreover, in time the score is augmented with some Latino-sounding brass instruments. On its way, the convoy gets stuck in a gigantic traffic jam the size of which is visible to the audience thanks to another aerial shot accompanied by the helicopter sound. Inside the SUVs, the officers exchange information about the traffic jam at the border crossing. At some point, there is an order to get the weapons out as the Sonora Cartel members are in the traffic jam too. Outside, there is the sound of a barking dog and the non-diegetic, suspenseful theme piece. When the drug traffickers get out of the car, the convoy members engage in the same way. The shootout begins in which gunshot sounds and broken car windows are the only sound effects. When the intervention is over and the convoy can continue its journey, the score reappears for a while to fade out when the team reaches the prison.

The shootout sequence is regarded as a “master class in the production of tension” (Tallerico 2015). Instead of a car race that can be expected from an action film, the audience witnesses a monstrous and static traffic jam. Yet, due to seamless editing of shots by Deakins and intense sound editing by Murray, the seemingly static scene evokes “tortuous tension”, and, consequently, it is considered one of the most suspenseful scenes of the year 2015 (Olsen 2015). In this sequence, the tension rises in time but in the moment of shooting there is a pause in the score to make the gunshot sounds resonate harder. In Juarez, gunshots in a way carry the sound of the city (James

⁷ In film production, point of view sound reflects the perspective of a character. According to Buhler et al. (2000), the use of POV sounds increases viewers’ “identification with that particular character whose hearing the sound track mimics” (78). The term “sonic point of view” is also called “point of audition” and was discussed in detail in Chion’s *Audiovision* (89-91) and Altman’s *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (251).

2016). As mentioned by Murray, “they had to be realistic enough so they weren’t too close, but still sound hostile at the same time” (James 2016). Bullets cut through the silence but when the sound stops, the orchestral pulse reappears. Such sound editing technique can be compared to holding one’s breath, if one assumes that the score is in accordance to viewers’ heartbeat and breath. When the team reaches the destination, namely the prison in Mexico, the pulse stops as there are no non-diegetic sounds.

8. The unsettling pulse of the underground

The third scene that deserves attention as it employs sound in an original way is the underground tunnel sequence. While it was praised by critics for its use of thermo- and night vision, it is remarkably significant in terms of sound effects that are attached to each device and are layered over the throbbing score. The passage starts when the team approaches a drug tunnel located in New Mexico desert. The group receives tactical information via an audio device and prepares for entering the tunnel. What accompanies the fragment are the tense string section sounds that can be compared to those present in *Jaws* (Merry 2015). When the group comes closer to the tunnel, the scene is presented from the characters’ point of view as if through the night vision goggles. At this point, the sound changes – there are no non-diegetic sounds and what the audience hears are the characters’ breaths and footstep sounds and some night vision signal. When thermographic camera is on, the audience hears quite different sound palette as the sounds are more distorted and evidently lower. There are also occasional shots from above which are also presented via the POV of thermographic camera where the sounds of pilot’s voice, satellite footage, and helicopter engine are heard. The characters enter the tunnel. In time, the throbbing, subterranean sound is audible. It becomes another sound layer, apart from night and thermo-vision sound and dialogs. When the lights in the tunnel are on, the point of view changes – so does the sound as there are no sounds connected to night vision devices. The reverberant sound of gunshots becomes the most important element of the sound track. This sound moves the action forward since the drug traffickers hear the approaching threat before even seeing it. When Alejandro leaves the tunnel and shoots at the Latino man, non-diegetic sounds are not present anymore and from the atmospheric, unsettling underground vibe the scene changes to the sonic realism connected to the actual confrontation with the enemy.

The most powerful sound device employed in this passage is the characters’ sonic point of view, which switches depending whether night vision or thermal imaging camera is used. The sound connected to night vision can be compared to science fiction-like, distorted high-pitched signal, whereas infrared camera vision is the subliminal, low-frequency sound. The scene features a considerable amount of off-camera gunshots which reverberate through the tunnel walls. Despite the limited space of a tunnel, the gunshot sounds do not lose their dynamics. Murray explains how gunshots function in this passage: “[when] a shooter is off camera and then moves into view, each gunshot gets more concussive and more elements are added to the gunshot so by the time you’re close to the shooter the gun has totally changed, but you don’t perceive it as a totally

different gunshot” (James 2016: n.p.). The changeability of gunshot sounds in a relatively short underground tunnel sequence is what can be called “dynamic realism” in terms of sound (James 2016) which evokes “an increasing sense of concussive menace” (Desowitz 2016: n.p.).

9. Conclusion

To conclude, sound design in *Sicario* does not only provide the epistemic background as expected from a typical Hollywood production but is anchored to the narrative to such an extent that it propels the action rather than functions as its accompaniment. *Sicario* is an example of a contemporary movie where the soundscape functions as a character or narrator that adds new value to what is visible on screen. By means of raw percussive bass combined with well-chosen sound effects, the sound design in *Sicario* reflects the dry pulse of the Mexican border zone as well as personality traits of the characters immersed in the brutal reality of the drug war. The sound here interacts with visuals just as the score interacts with sound effects, which is rather unconventional for a Hollywood movie.

As the film presents the problem of drug trade on the borderlands from an unusual angle and attempts to present the complexities of the problem, the sound design functions in a similar way – it does not merely flow on the surface of the narrative. *Sicario*’s evocative sound design goes deeper and creates a permeating sound core where particular gunshots and string sections are the muscles that stretch and contract in the heartbeat-like rhythm of “The Beast”. This wild pulse alongside with the suppressed sound of panic and paranoia permeates the whole film, that is why it can be said that sound in *Sicario* “exceeds narrative motivation” (McQueen 2013).

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“I am a teacher cleaving a track through the undergrowth of method. I am a bird”: Teaching as a site of female subversion in Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s *Spinster*

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to scrutinise the influence of teaching on the female identity of Anna Vorontosov, the protagonist of Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s *Spinster*. Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic and the symbolic is referenced to argue that the work of a teacher enables the heroine to transcend the patriarchal model of experience, predicated on rationality, self-restraint and stability. Through teaching, Anna renews her bond with the semiotic, surpassing the bounds of a unitary and fixed self. After providing an overview of Ashton-Warner’s own career in education, the paper analyses the tensions inherent in the role of a female teacher as represented in the novel and explicates them in Kristevan terms. Subsequently, detailed attention is paid to how the peculiarities of Anna’s teaching method contribute to her enhanced experience of the semiotic and shape her female self.

Keywords: semiotic, symbolic, teaching, Ashton-Warner, female identity.

1. Introduction

With her idiosyncratic approach to teaching and vivid accounts of her own practice as a teacher, Sylvia Ashton-Warner exerted a lasting influence on educational theory. As quipped by Judith P. Robertson and Cathryn McConaghy, “[t]here are things that nobody would know about teaching unless Sylvia Ashton-Warner had written them” (2006: 1). Born in New Zealand in 1908, she

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joined the profession as early as in 1926, albeit without any strong sense of mission.² In 1938, Ashton-Warner and her husband moved to a far-flung part of the country to commence work in a local Māori school. As a result of maladaptation to the new environment, the writer-to-be suffered from a nervous breakdown, a harrowing experience, which in hindsight can yet be considered a blessing in disguise. It was during her treatment that she developed an interest in writing and became acquainted with the rudiments of Freudian psychoanalysis, which later came to underlie her original teaching method.

The turning point in her career came in the 1940s, when she was struggling with the inadequacy of the New Zealand's educational system to meet the needs of Māori children in a school in Pipiriki. Required to learn from textbooks that did not relate to the milieu in which they were raised, her pupils failed to make any noticeable learning progress. The teacher soon became convinced that what they lacked was a model of schooling that would be responsive to their individual experience and based on materials striking a chord with their emotions. While teaching her pupils to read and write, she "found that if a personal set of words was chosen collaboratively by teacher and child, one word at a time, these un-illustrated words that name the pictures in the child's heart would be learned easily and stay learned" (Gurewitz 2016: 780). The two words that proved to have a particularly powerful resonance for the children were 'kiss' and 'ghost'. These observations prompted Ashton-Warner to develop the Key Vocabulary method, whose core idea was that pupils should be stimulated to give vent to their experience of two Freudian drives: sex and fear. As explained by Nancy S. Thompson, "Key Vocabulary is a method of tapping into each child's personal, emotion-laden mental images, what she [Ashton-Warner] calls their 'native imagery', and using 'captions' of those images as the first words for teaching children to read" (2000: 92). Apart from its educational function, the learning scheme served also a significant psychological purpose; it was intended not only to facilitate the acquisition of literacy skills, but also to assist pupils in gaining mastery over their negative feelings, as clearly articulated in *Teacher*:

I see the mind of a five-year old as a volcano with two vents: destructiveness and creativeness. And I see that to the extent that we widen the creative channel we atrophy the destructive one. And it seems to me that since these words of the key vocabulary are no less than the captions of the dynamic life itself, they course out through the creative channel, making their contribution to the drying up of the destructive vent. (Ashton-Warner 1963: 29)

In her writings, Ashton-Warner dramatises the resistance of the male educational authorities to recognise her unconventional teaching method, let alone to incorporate it into the official policies.

² Lynley Hood notes with amazement that, as a matter of fact, Ashton-Warner was strongly averse to her work: "... how could anyone who claimed she never wanted to be a teacher, that she hated teaching and was never any good at it, make any worthwhile contribution to education at all!" (2008: 11).

It should be noted, however, that her account of a larger-than-life confrontation between the female pioneer and the representatives of ossified institutions does not tally with the all facts (Mercer 2016: 447). Sue Middleton challenges this version, demonstrating that, in point of fact, the writer's approach corresponded to the generally applicable recommendations for the schooling of Māori children (2012: 39-40). At the time when she was developing her scheme, the New Zealand educational authorities were "child-centred" and open to innovation (Middleton 2012: 37). Committed to adjusting the system to the situation of specific groups of pupils, they also supported teachers in fostering native Māori culture in their everyday practice. Their openness is best evidenced by the fact that the writer's insights into the Key Vocabulary were published by the New Zealand's Educational Institute in their official journal (Mercer 2016: 447).

Ashton-Warner achieved public esteem for her merits as an educational theorist in 1963, upon the publication of *Teacher*, a non-fictional account of her method and professional experience. With its vision of "a more creative and humane schooling" (Hood 2008: 176), it won her the applause of both fellow teachers and parents. By that time, she had already established a reputation for herself as the author of *Spinster*, her debut novel, which became an international bestseller in 1958. This semi-autobiography follows the story of Anna Vorontosov, an unmarried immigrant from Kazakhstan, who works as a teacher of Māori children and strives to apply her original literacy instruction method, one that mirrors Ashton-Warner's Key Vocabulary, against the reluctance of her male supervisors. Despite its international success, the novel did not receive either praise or adequate critical attention at home (Mercer 2016: 449). Mercer claims that the writer fell prey to the patriarchal prejudices of New Zealand critics, who held "extravagance of style and focus on female emotion" (2016: 449), which are the distinguishing features of her prose, in low regard. He also rejects the biased and reductionist interpretation of *Spinster* presented by H. Winston Rhodes. Whereas the latter places an exclusive emphasis on the realist representation of teaching, Mercer shifts focus to the "depiction of intense female emotion associated with the conflicting desires of being a spinster or a wife" (2016: 454).

The scholar is undoubtedly right in taking issue with Rhodes for his disregard of Anna's heightened sensitivity and craving for love. What his analysis overlooks, however, is the close link between the heroine's work and her identity as a woman. The present paper thus attempts to take middle ground between the two aforementioned approaches by reading the teaching plot from the perspective of the extensive glimpses into the intricacies of Anna's psyche that the novel provides. In what follows, Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and symbolic will be referenced to argue that teaching serves the heroine as a vehicle of resistance to the patriarchal paradigms of experience. It will be demonstrated that it enables Anna to reconnect with the semiotic and transcend the ideal of a unitary and fixed self. The next section probes the tensions built into the role of a female teacher, examines their representation in *Spinster* and explicates them in Kristevan terms. Subsequently, detailed attention is paid to how the peculiarities of Anna's teaching method contribute to her enhanced experience of the semiotic and shape her female self and identity.

2. The double bind of teaching

Historically the only or one of few professions accessible to women, teaching appears to be imbued with ambiguities when considered from the standpoint of the female struggle for self-determination. While it used to present women with the rare opportunity to gain a modicum of autonomy and self-fulfilment beyond the role of a mother and wife, it still restricted them to patriarchal conventions. Maria Tamboukou contends that teaching forms “a nexus of created paradoxical spaces” (2000: 463), which challenges women to assert their identity against the conflicting demands of their obligations at work and at home. It requires “oscillating between public and private, two spheres that remain separated at the same time that they interact and impinge upon each other, creating crises, conflicts and dilemmas in women’s lives” (Tamboukou 2000: 470). Tamboukou also signals the uneasy place of female teachers within “a wider network of power relations within schools” (2000: 470). Entrusted with authority over their pupils or students, they are still vulnerable in terms of power by dint of their gender. The scholar thus conceives of the identity of a female teacher as balancing between “unstable, ambivalent and contradictory subject positions” (Tamboukou 2000: 476).

In “The Politics of Tutoring: Feminism within Patriarchy,” Meg Woolbright discusses the inescapable clash between feminist values, such as “mutual respect, trust, and community; shared leadership; and action” (1992: 17), and the male-constructed norms of the academy, celebrating authority, objectivism and duty. Any female tutor dedicated to cherishing the feminist model of teaching, whereby students are offered an inspirational stimulation to intellectual work instead of being forced to accept ready-made ideas, is likely to face conflicting loyalties between her heart-felt vocation and the duty to comply with official requirements. The conflict is more often than not resolved in favour of the latter under the pressure of “the power that the patriarchy asserts over both her [the female teacher] and the student” (Woolbright 1992: 26). According to Woolbright, teaching is thus both empowering and restrictive for women; it locks them in a double bind between the urge to conform to the all-encompassing patriarchal system and the desire to undermine it.

Similarly, throughout *Spinster*, teaching assumes antithetical associations, being treated by the heroine interchangeably as a source of power or a severe limitation. On the one hand, Anna is wont to juxtapose her role as a teacher against her precarious position as a woman. The former offers her the sense of personal dignity and autonomy that she lacks as the spinster of the title, whose life revolves around a quest for a husband: “I am not thinking of men at all. I am thoroughly and severely teacher. Such a proud teacher too, in spite of my weariness” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 68). Most importantly, it frees her from dependence on romantic relationships as the essence of her identity. Wholeheartedly engaged in the performance of her professional duties, Anna proves that marriage does not constitute the ultimate end of her life, an awareness that boosts her self-confidence. Whereas as a woman she faces the unrelenting threat of being reduced to a mere object of romance and plaything of her own desires, as a teacher she retains control both over herself and over the man whom she loves: “I still mourn the kisses I have rejected, but it is the last stand of the woman against the teacher ... he [Paul] is no more than one of my Little Ones after all and

once more I am proudly teacher” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 69-71). On the other hand, the teacher is portrayed as a prisoner to a set of norms that form a yardstick of her value: “He [inspector] is satisfied that I am not a good teacher; if indeed he considers me a teacher at all. I don’t. I’m satisfied that I am no more than a vague incompetent artist” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 238). In this context, the profession is contrasted with motherhood, which allows the woman to give vent to her spontaneity and emotionality instead of urging her to uncreatively repeat calcified schemas: “I am for a while no longer the imperfect teacher but the perfect mother and all these children, brown, white and yellow, are my own” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 42).

In addition to the aforementioned tensions, the novel draws yet another conspicuous line of divide. Carole Durix observes that Ashton-Warner shows a thematic interest in “[putting] matriarchal and patriarchal law into conflict” (2008: 106). Indeed, *Spinster* portrays a collision between teaching as an institution developed by patriarchal society and regulated by its rigid conventions, and teaching as the personal, often non-normative, experience of the female teacher³. The two dimensions of teaching, in turn, appear to fit neatly into the Kristevan distinction between the semiotic and symbolic, which should be briefly outlined at this point. According to Kristeva, the semiotic takes its roots in pre-Oedipal processes prior to the acquisition of language and the development of distinct selfhood borders, a phase when the split between object and subject has not yet emerged and a child experiences a pleasurable state of undisturbed plenitude and fusion with their mother’s body. As clarified by Keltner, “[t]he semiotic refers to the affective, material dimension of language that contributes to, but is not exhausted in or by, the social-symbolic meaning of signs” (2011: 12). It is formed by pre-verbal impulses, echolalia, rhythms, tones and biological drives to which a child succumbs before their socialisation into a world of prohibitions and limitations. Once a child commences to differentiate between self and other, thereby separating from their mother and forming a discrete identity, they enter the realm of the symbolic. Unlike the chaotic and fluid semiotic, permeated by “energies” with no “fixed aim, object or form” (Grosz 1989: 43), the symbolic is an organised and orderly “system of meaning agreed upon by a community of speakers” (Keltner 2011: 12). It is predominantly a realm of rules, be it linguistic, social or cultural.

As envisaged by Kristeva, both the semiotic and the symbolic are unmistakably gender-coded. The former has an “explicitly maternal and feminine” character (Grosz 1989: 49), as opposed to the latter, which is “paternal, bound up with the concepts of the symbolic father and the castrated mother” (Grosz 1989: 49). Although the notion of distinction could suggest that the two realms have no points of convergence, they are by no means isolated by a clear and impassable boundary. Quite the contrary: “The two trends ... designate two modalities of what is, for us, the same signifying process ... These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes

³ This is a reference to the distinction drawn by Adrienne Rich between motherhood as “institution” and “experience,” understood respectively as “the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children” and “the institution, which aims at ensuring that the potential - and all women - remain under male control” (1995: 13).

language” (Kristeva 1984: 23-24). But for the symbolic language would be a mere incomprehensible babble, unfit to convey any meaning, thus preventing effective communication. It is yet the semiotic that serves as a repository of energy that enlivens language. “Without semiotic force”, as put metaphorically by McAfee, “we would be like bad actors when we spoke, as if we were merely reading words off a page” (2004: 41). While the hold of the symbolic on a mature speaking subject is significantly more potent, the semiotic continues to resurge at various points, undermining the stability of the former. Consequently, Kristeva conceives of female identity as an inherently fluid and changeable construct, balancing between the two realms: “The speaking being is a subject in process because her identity is never fixed in place; her identity is continuously disrupted by semiotic language’s heterogeneity, polyphony, and polysemy” (McAfee 2004: 105).

As a teacher, Anna is firmly entrenched in the symbolic realm, where logic, law and male authority are supposed to prevail over feminine affectivity. Just as the symbolic, the educational system within which she operates is distinctly male constructed and male regulated, with women relegated to the position of obliging servants. The heroine is subject to the unrelenting pressure of expectations placed upon her by the male school authorities, who understand teaching primarily as a matter of discipline, drills and fixed rules, which leave hardly any space for creative freedom, irrespective of their practical viability: “A good teacher does not break out from the curriculum, even when it is deficient. A worthy teacher does not defy an order of a Director” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 187). The inspectors hold the heroine accountable for compliance with inflexible patriarchal norms, requiring that she should act as an unapproachable voice of authority and indiscriminately apply traditional methods and materials, which take little account of the background, personality or individual needs of her pupils, as symbolised by a workbook with schematic exercises that Anna uses on a daily basis. The underlying goal of teaching is thus to perpetuate the patriarchal order and uphold the principles upon which it is built: rationality, order and restraint.

The heroine is not a typical feminist heroine in the sense that she does not intend to declare an open and premeditated revolt against the obsolescent system despite her frustration with its cold inhumanity. Quite the contrary, she regrets failing to meet its standards, aware that conformity would secure her recognition: “If only I had been a good teacher, an obedient teacher and submissive!” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 4). She feels genuinely guilty for not fulfilling her dreary bureaucratic obligations (Ashton-Warner 1986: 21) and accepts unfavourable opinions about her professional performance: “There can be no doubt about it: I’m a very low-ability teacher. For the whole of my teaching life inspectors have agreed on that. It’s true that I have tried with everything. ... Plainly, I am mistaken in all I do. The inspectors are right” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 81).

Nevertheless, Anna’s self-reproach and timidity are accompanied by the acute awareness of the system’s ineffectiveness and the resulting need to reorient it on the preferences of her pupils: “Why must we? Why don’t I teach them something that does interest them? Then they might develop like the flowers that are interested in the rain and the sun; in their own time and way” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 176-177). Despite her propensity for obedience, the heroine is not able to follow a model of teaching that stifles her creativity and hinders the learning success of the children. After

having burnt the hated workbook, she delivers a passionate speech that casts an important light on the differences between the patriarchal approach to teaching and her personal experience as a teacher: “I can’t do what I say I’m going to do! And that’s what a workbook is. Saying what I’m going to do! I can’t stand the planning of it. The clockwork detail. I can’t bear the domination of it. I hate the interference of it between myself and the children, and I resent the compulsion. Sack me if you like!” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 101). The former promotes order, duty, and emotional distance between the teacher and her pupils; the latter, by contrast, celebrates lack of control, creativity, intuition, and a degree of intimacy between both parties. What Anna thus decides to do while operating within the patriarchal framework of education is to disrupt it, in the same way as the semiotic reasserts its presence in the symbolic, by challenging the traditional methods and making her work a site of enjoyment for all those involved, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

3. Encounter with the semiotic

If the acquisition of spoken language marks the entrance of a child into the symbolic, the mastery of literacy skills only reinforces their position within this order. As a result, while teaching to read and write, Anna must, perforce, act as an intermediary between her pupils and the world of patriarchal structures. Her strategy of subverting this role consists in releasing and exploiting the semiotic underside of language, as if in response to Kristeva’s appeal voiced in *About Chinese Women*: “summon this timeless ‘truth’ formless, neither true nor false, echo of our jouissance, of our madness, of our pregnancies into the order of speech and social symbolism” (1977: 38). Instead of imparting crude semantic or syntactical rules, the heroine destabilises the symbolic by inviting her pupils to distil the emotive potential of individual words, one that is ignored or even suppressed in the course of traditional teaching. She shows them that language may be used not only as a means of producing meaning, but also as an outlet of their desires and fears: “‘Miss Vorontosov’, complaints brown Matawhero, ‘I’m sicka writing.’ A little Maori boy of six can say my name. I kneel to his level. ‘Well, write, I’m sick of writing’” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 23). In contrast to the conventional male-constructed learning scheme, which is static and oriented on individual work, her method involves motion, spontaneity, discharge of sounds, and togetherness, all of which are associated with the semiotic: “And it’s a gay performance this finding of their own words, taking time and involving noise and personal relations and actual reading, and above all communication with each other” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 181).

Most importantly, apart from exerting a tremendously beneficial influence on the learning capacities of her Little Ones, such a model of teaching also empowers Anna to overcome the sense of inadequacy instilled in her by the patriarchal machine and rediscover her attachment to the semiotic as a source of joy and release of inner tension. The heroine treats her work as an art that marks her uniqueness and, as such, must be shielded against the tyranny of the male authorities: “What power has an inspector against the gift that God has put in my hands?” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 56-57). This fact should be accorded particular attention in the context of Kristeva’s theory, considering

that art is one of the most fertile grounds for the resurgence of the semiotic within the symbolic. Anne-Marie Smith claims that “[all] imaginative practice, such as art, poetry, love and psychoanalysis, represents the individual subject’s encounter with the law of the father, of the symbolic and society, with imposed form and structure, as well as representing the imaginative attempts to battle with this frame of reference in the name of desire, subjectivity and the energy and drives the bring into play” (1998: 17-18). In a similar vein, Anna’s gradual development of her method is portrayed as a creative fever, during which she goes through the ebbs and flows of inspiration, transforming from an overtly rational and self-restrained teacher into an artist surrendering to a stream of uncontrollable and oft-conflicting emotions and drives. The process proves to be demanding and painful, yet also liberating and empowering: “But a nervousness, a vague discomfort, accompanies the recognition of it. It makes me think that the solution to infant teaching is nearby; ... It both frightens and exhilarates me. It’s like, like ... the fear-and-joy of birth” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 154).

The birth metaphor used to conceptualise this experience has a special resonance. It should be reminded that the maternal body, from which a child must separate in order to enter the symbolic realm and acquire an independent subjectivity, constitutes the primary site of the semiotic. According to Kristeva, while giving birth, a woman reunites with her lost mother (1997: 303). Despite the excruciating pain, childbirth thus occasions the breakdown of the symbolic and gives rise to sensual pleasure. Being childless, Anna appears to use her teaching art as a substitute of maternity, so as to be able to gain a renewed access to its concomitant jouissance. When she finally overcomes all internal and external obstacles and devises the Key Vocabulary in its full-fledged version, or, to be consistent with the metaphor, gives birth, her invention is described in terms of a disruptive force that penetrates into the everyday world of routines, giving the heroine a surge of energy: “The whole system of infant room vocabulary flashes before the inner eye as though floodlit. As I walk alongside the Senior, engaged in conversation on the surface of my mind about the regimentation in many schools, I am realizing what this captioning of the inner world is. It’s the vocabulary I’ve been after. ... Such a tremendous impetus! I all but burst with inspiration” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 170).

The very process of teaching may be similarly viewed as a “semiotic [intervention] into the ordering of the symbolic” (Grosz 1989: 98). Determined to eradicate any sense of unease and guilt that would spoil the spontaneity of her art, the heroine is accustomed to drinking alcohol before work:

Yet I teach well enough on brandy. ... It supplies me with top layer to my mind so that I meet fifty Maori infants as people rather than as the origin of the Inspector’s displeasure; ... never is better creative work done. As the legs release my throat some magnificent freedom comes to us all and the day leads off like a party ... The encloistered soul may sally without risk. ... It can endure more of the feeling in the exhausting art. It is sheltered: it is buffered. ... Intoxicating ... (Ashton-Warner 1986: 7).

What merits particular attention in the quoted passage is the emphasis that the heroine places on her enhanced sensuality, lack of self-control and, most importantly, a feeling of liberation. Just as the semiotic is associated with the shelter of the mother's body, a space of hospitability and plenitude, the process evokes the predominant impression of protection, juxtaposed throughout the novel against the sense of vulnerability and loss triggered by the interference of the authorities with her work: "I am reminded, at the melancholy sight of an Inspector within my doorway, once and for all, that I am indeed without covering, either of the mind or in the profession. Without epidermis" (Ashton-Warner 1986: 99). The demands, prohibitions and obligations specific to the symbolic realm shade into insignificance, as the heroine plunges into a state of unrestrained elation and exhilaration. She becomes attuned to her body, its rhythms and movements.

Importantly, the clash between the traditional model of teaching and Anna's approach corresponds also to the dichotomy of stasis and activity inherent in the distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic. While the former assumes that pupils should be seated at their tables, completing repetitive exercises, even if they prove educationally ineffective and thus fail to produce any sense of progress, the latter makes room for joyful movement and dance, with the participation of the teacher, stimulating the creativity of all: "Up rises the other Twinnie and their movements merge... And here, all at once, we have a rending in the creative vent, widening it. Here we have another escape for the wild spirit within" (Ashton-Warner 1986: 54). Furthermore, as experienced by Anna, the teaching process appears to abolish linear time, which characterises the symbolic order in opposition to the semiotic realm, which exists "outside of time" (Oliver 1993: 106). The pace of Anna's work is determined not by clock time or any schedules, but by the subjective "rhythm on the blackboard" (Ashton-Warner 1986: 204). While outside the classroom Anna repeatedly complains about her morbid urge to cling to the past and yearns for "an obliteration of memory" (Ashton-Warner 1986: 18), teaching alleviates the sense of being torn between the present and the past, as the heroine immerses herself in the present moment: "I forget about the conflict within me and about how many worlds there are. I'm utterly lost in the present" (Ashton-Warner 1986: 10-11).

The quoted passages reveal yet another peculiarity of Anna's teaching style that restores her severed ties with the semiotic. It is the heroine's personal, even intimate, rapport with the pupils, which provides a positive counterbalance to her troubled relations with the inspectors and Paul, a young teacher in whom she falls in love. Once again, the two types of liaisons replay the oppositions ingrained in the symbolic/semiotic distinction. The symbolic is built upon the process of separation and differentiation and sustained by a hierarchical power system that supports male power and female submission. In a similar vein, Anna's relationships with men are characterised by distance and to a large extent operate within the logic of domination and subordination. Her flirt with Paul lacks any meaningful communication, for the heroine and her beloved alike are enclosed in their own worlds. Anna, in addition, appears to be restrained by the awareness of the social scripts to which she is expected to conform as a woman. Her professional dealings with the male educational

authorities, in turn, relegate her in a very distinct way to a position of inferiority. The inspectors strive to reduce the heroine to patriarchal stereotypes, thereby diminishing her self-esteem and inhibiting her self-development as a creative artist. More than that, their presence is experienced by the heroine as a violent intrusion and a major threat to her safety and well-being, as best illustrated by her comparison of one of the inspectors to a monster: “Here is the Inspector – ogre of the past again with its cloudy height, its red eyes and its black mouth” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 198).

Her relationship with pupils, by contrast, is based on closeness and togetherness, a nod to the semiotic, which “precedes all ... binary oppositional structures and hierarchical forms of organisation” (Grosz 1989: 43). It is of utmost significance that Anna displays consistent aversion to approaching the children from the position of power, being apparently unwilling to endorse the patriarchal patterns of interaction. When the pupils insist that she should act as an omniscient voice of authority, she is embarrassed and loath to meet their expectations: “So much asking! Who am I, the law of God?” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 9). In fact, she prefers to assume the role of a substitute mother, who protects her children and offers them guidance without asserting her domination, rather than that of an aloof supervisor who gives orders and instructions. Not only is this attitude supposed to help her pupils in the learning process but it also alleviates Anna’s own anxiety: “Ah, this secret that mothers have never told! Gradually the horror, expelled from the crater of me, smokes away to nothing, while with this boy in my arms, I forget I am a spinster and a teacher and am only woman” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 101). Her relationship with the pupils in many respects resembles the early fusion between mother and child, characterised by the blurring of the self-other boundaries and the accompanying pleasurable sense of plenitude: “All these differing personalities and faces and colours make me think that if ever I had borne children, I would have wanted it this way: offspring of many sires. I would be like the rain, uniting them all in my motherhood” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 58).

Consequently, teaching offers the heroine an avenue out of the pressure of maintaining a clearly-demarcated and discrete self in accordance with patriarchal ideals of “singularity, sameness and homogeneity” (Tallon Russel 2009: 2). She loses it in the personality of her pupils. This loss, however, does not elicit any disquietude, but rather joy and inebriation, a *jouissance*-like experience evoking clear associations with pre-Oedipal pleasure: “I’ve mislaid who I am. Sensuously and accurately I vibrate and respond to the multifold touch of my Little Ones ... I am made of their thoughts and their feelings. I am composed of sixty-odd different pieces of personality. ... It is a potent drunkenness, an exhilaration, and it is one that does not leave depression in its wake” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 22). Throughout the novel, Anna suffers from a sense of inner division, being unable to develop a unitary identity out of the multifarious roles that she performs: “I’m tired of being a cheap flirt to Paul, an eccentric to the Head, a refusal to Eugene, a failure to the inspector and an artist unto God. I long for one vast rain to encompass my all” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 59). She has the tendency to see the world in binary oppositions and feels an externally-induced compulsion to always situate herself firmly on one side of the divide: “What exactly am I? To what world do I really belong?” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 9). At the same time, however, Anna actually

refrains from defining herself as a subject with fixed identity, especially towards the inspectors: “I don’t want them to know what I really am” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 27). In teaching, she manages to “[embrace] a more fluid sense of identity, becoming a more kaleidoscopic personality,” as underlined by Ian Richards (n.d. online). Her work obliterates her stable and closed-off self along with all inner conflicts, giving her pleasure that arises from the experience of fluidity and multiplicity. Importantly, this “fusion” involving “a symbiotic merging” (Robertson & McConaghy 2006: 132) poses a stark contrast to her relationships with men, described ominously as devouring (Ashton-Warner 1986: 1946).

In this sense, the novel juxtaposes the role of a teacher against the role of a woman and spinster. Much as the former is limited by the demands of the patriarchal educational system and its agents, it is still open for the subversion of the existing norms. As a woman and spinster, Anna is subjected to male power with no possibility of transgressing the patriarchal gender scripts. A woman is destined to be a wife and mother obedient to the will of her husband. A spinster, in turn, is relegated to the fringes of society, lacking the power that a woman derives from the position of her husband. Without one, Anna is regarded as infertile and thus unable to make any significant contribution to society. The heroine bemoans this entrapment in the patriarchal schemas, which do not correspond to her personal experience:

If only he could learn that for me anyway there can be interests other than men; that there can be romance outside desire; that with me, in spite of the reputations of the unmarried, relations with the male come second to my relations with my work; that the need for the physical engagement, the ‘trivial ritual of love’, so featured in the talk of New Zealand men as being the driving factor in the life of a spinster, can at my age, in some women, and to a workable extent anyway, lift to the realm of the mind to be partially consummated there” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 47).

Through teaching, she manages to unlock and exploit her own intellectual and creative potential, thereby challenging, if only for a moment, the stereotypical definitions of female identity. She becomes an intrepid explorer, free to follow the path of self-determination outside the reach of patriarchal power: “I am a teacher cleaving a track through the undergrowth of method. I am a bird” (Ashton-Warner 1986: 171).

4. Conclusion

As already mentioned, Anna Vorontosov can hardly be considered a paragon of feminist ideals, considering her lack of perseverance in defying the patriarchal schemas. This is confirmed at the close of the novel, when she resolves to abandon her aspirations and ambitions. Dispirited by the crushing opinion of the Board of Education, she buries her Key Vocabulary scheme and decides to depart for Kazakhstan to reunite with her former fiancé, bound to follow the traditional path of wifehood and motherhood prescribed for women in patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the paper has demonstrated that Ashton-Warner privileges teaching as a site of subversion of the patriarchal model of female experience and identity. The role of a female teacher may be regulated by male-established rules, which promote rationality, stability and restraint, but Anna finds a way

to transform it to her advantage and render it the “bedrock of her personality” (Richards n.d. online). Her close rapport with the pupils, based on mutual communication rather than the bonds of domination and subordination, which invariably structure male-female relationships, and her innovative method, which opens space for untrammelled creativity, emotionality and spontaneity, allow her to re-establish her lost connection with the semiotic. Thanks to teaching, Anna finds empowerment in experiencing herself as a fluid and porous self, not constrained by any patriarchal conventions.

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Argument for method: An application of Barthes' language codes in poetry

Abstract. This essay is a direct application of the five language codes described in Roland Barthes' essay "Style and its image". The language codes consist of the Actional (Proairetic) code; the literal action of subjects or characters within the dramatic plot of the poetry; the Referential, or the cultural worldview of the work's subject or theme; the Semantic, those suggestive details which describe characters or the setting of the work; the Hermeneutic, considering language units which conceal unknown aspects of the work or facts about character, setting or other qualities of the writing, though also those qualities traditionally considered literary conventions; and the Symbolic, or those aspects of language which suggest ideas beyond the literal text itself. The writer takes a fresh look at an earlier example of Contemporary American poetry using Structuralist discourse as a tool with which to explicate Donald Hall's poem "The Town of Hill", first published in 1975.

Keywords: critical theory, literary studies, comparative literature, interdisciplinary studies, post-structuralist theory.

1. Argument for method

In *Roland Barthes* Jonathan Culler states that the eminent literary theorist was fascinated by ideas to such an extent that each "...time Barthes urged the merits of some new, ambitious project—a science of literature, a semiology, a science of contemporary myths, a narratology, a history of literary signification, a science of divisions, a typology of textual pleasure—he swiftly passed into something else" (Culler 1983: 12). Posthumously, others have resumed Barthes' interests with great enthusiasm and vigor. His theories were taken up in linguistics, comparative literature, culture studies and many other academic disciplines. They were also applied to film study of such American classics as *The Wizard of Oz*. However, my interest here remains with the language codes Barthes describes in "Style and Its Image" (*The Rustle of Language*, Barthes 1989). To the best of my knowledge there exist very few applications of the language codes in the study of poetry. Existing studies tend toward semiotics, stylistics, rhetorical analysis or Jakobson's linguistic analysis of poetry (Culler 1976). Where studies of the language are found, they usually only

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focus on narrative. Structuralist poetics typically take a semiotic approach rather than an objective analysis described in “The Structuralist Activity” (*Critical Essays*, Barthes 1972). Regardless of the fact of the Post-Structuralist condition of literary history, these ideas can still find a meaningful application to the study of poetry. Barthes said that just “...as Einsteinian science compels us to include within the object studied the *relativity of reference points*, so combined action of ...” [any synthesis of reading approaches] “...compels us in literature, to relativize the relations of *scriptor*, reader and observer (critic)” (Barthes 1972: 57). Thus, there exist in any discourse a set of given parameters, though they are relative to each other and not fixed. Therefore, scholars could examine works in slightly different ways and remain within a developed theoretical framework. However, also because certain limits will appear in the application of such an approach which have been affected by the development of other critical disciplines, I have used the term “stereographic discourse” because this is the descriptive term used by the originator of the code system himself. Also, historically, since all postmodernity shares this condition of knowledge, the approach I use and the way I discuss certain aspects will seem more appropriate than others. Since there exists no single model and only a given set of generalized concepts, what this means is that any critical method can be combined and utilized with any other discourse. This position sounds like an advocacy of the multi-disciplinary zeitgeist of our age, although I believe such an endeavor is rewarding for those interested in the application of theoretical ideas to the study of literature. I believe in a balanced, close reading approach while also employing synchronous and diachronous modes of discourse. Reading strategies are no simpler today as a choice between merely two options. At this point in literary history we have seen good examples as to how to approach literary ideas as well as bad ones.

What would be the best argument for an application of this theoretical discourse if one were to make a claim of validity for Barthes’ language codes in this age? Structuralism being “post-“today, is obviously a time condition, being historically after Structuralism, and a method of discourse many feel was obliterated by Deconstructionist literary theory. One could call the discourse Post-Structuralist because this term is historically attributed to a few scholars whose ideas theoretically assumed a status of popular attention shortly *after* Structuralist discourse was translated for publication in the United States, roughly beginning in 1960 and culminated just after 1970 (Leitch 1988: 238-266). The fact that Barthes’ language codes were never applied to poetry validates my attempt, though in considering such an application of these ideas some modification of approach is necessary. As Dr. Calum Gardner suggested to me in a recent communication, many see “...the five codes as a limit case demonstrating what Structuralism can and can’t achieve and where it needs to become ‘post’” (personal communication, 2018). He also warned that perhaps a text of *jouissance* would be a most difficult challenge. Further, he said that “...most poems aren’t narrative...the codes are specifically designed for narrative texts. I think you’d need to adapt the five codes for poetic language in particular—you would need to replace or redefine the proairetic and hermeneutic codes...” (personal communication). I agree with the above concerns and have

taken them into consideration at various places in the following essay. I will mention these aspects where they become relevant in the reading of “The Town of Hill”.

Since Barthes’ language codes describe how aspects of language operate within the work of art to the effects and traits we attribute to literature, I feel to title the approach a Stereographic analysis of poetry seems appropriate. This type of literary analysis would have a different approach in comparison with pure Linguistics, Semiotics or even the Structuralist discourse of narratives Barthes illustrates in his *S/Z* (1975). Concern arises in the application of the language codes in one’s treatment of two types of poetry; formal and free-verse. Formalist poetry already illustrating a high degree of structure, would seem most logically the better material because the extent to which the rules of combination govern its form are pervasive. Free-verse, by its own nature seems devoid of them or at least exhibits fewer formal attributes. The structural analysis of formal poetry yields a most robust material for formal commentary because form in this sense is what it is because the rules which govern form make the work a structure more specific beyond language. In this sense there are essentially two layers of language we notice right away, the formal aspects and then what the poem communicates. In the explication of free-verse, the codes must be exploited to such a degree that one must ascertain what the writer is doing with material in the given literary context and then move from the rules of combination that can be detected to a discussion of the work as a literary work of art. At the level of close reading, I consider the symbolic (SYM) code as most relevant because this level also illustrates a layer exhibiting the rules of combination. As Perloff (2004) illustrates in her discussion of Language poets in *Differentials*, close reading is still valuable because it first identifies common elements among writers and can then be used for comparative analysis. I briefly outline my understanding of the five codes and their usage at the end of this introduction. Some may call this reading approach a discourse of Barthesian stylistics or a misunderstanding of the extent of the language codes themselves. In the application of my argument I have mapped the process of understanding how the codes operate in a single American text which I hope illustrates a new validity. This is not Semio-Linguistics, Semiotics or even the Linguistic Structuralism of Roman Jakobson. The most well-known, historical example of what this approach is not remains best illustrated in Michael Riffaterre’s essay, “Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire’s ‘Les Chats’” (1970: 188-230). The layered-ness, the free-play and the pleasure of the text are enough for valid applications of the critical Stereographic approach to the study of poetry.

One could logically ask if it is possible to say what I have said without reference to the language codes of Roland Barthes? Perhaps, but such a negative response limits and omits discussion of certain aspects of what was originally a Structuralist approach. As we know historically, other reading approaches developed in response to the need to address these aspects of language. This document serves to establish relevance in the justification of a literary analysis, a discourse that many abandoned, at least in its application to the study of poetry. Today we see many examples from contemporary scholars applying the codes to narrative or other areas of culture studies. Authors Sabah Zaib and Ghulam Mustafa Mashori (2014) examined the “Five Codes of Barthes

in Shahraz's Story S "A Pair of Jeans": a Post-Structural Analysis". Maria Asumta Reniminryu has written a thesis titled, "Analysis on Roland Barthes Codes in *The Wizard of Oz*: A Semiotic Approach" (2009). Bayu Dirgasari authored a 2008 study titled: "A Symbolism Analysis as Reflected in John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale". This retrospective reinvigoration of ideas indicates that literary discourse has moved beyond any single or common critical approach and that the norm of our time is a combination of approaches, a blend of or multiplicity or whatever ideas the scholar feels relevant for the text of consideration. Such an approach would benefit from a close reading applied to a stereography of poetry because the language codes exist for clearly mapping and contextualizing discourse. However, there are moments where aspects of textual analysis seem most appropriate in this regard. Rather than blending two known types into a third species of discourse, this method slows and places attention upon the fabric of text in illustration of its nature, character and inner-workings, how the parts relate to each other, though not as purely functional a definition as this may sound. Scholars who placed moral and ethical emphasis upon Structuralism were mistaken. A text such as Robert Scholes's *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974) distorts in this regard the role and meaning of such an approach. The method of discourse is as Barthes described in "The Structuralist Activity" (*Critical Essays*, Barthes 1972)—a means of dissection and articulation of the literary object, the text. Rather than destructive, I see this activity as productive and objective free-play. The aspect of being "post-" only implies the questioning of its own ground where limits exist. Merit lies in not creating universals in a discourse which is best treated as a science of the literary object than of didactic modes of meaning. Such discourse maps especially helpful problem in the examination of "difficult" literary works. Also, as with the age, such a contemporary approach would utilize comparative analysis so as to thoroughly ground the argument in various types of literary evidence over time. A single analysis will not validate the application of the code system nor prove its pervasive relevance across genres. However, for preliminary purposes, a single explication established a beginning point for future comparative analysis of the application of the five codes in the study of poetry.

To this end, I also turned to the Roland Barthes essay, "The Structuralist Activity" from the collection *Critical Essays* (Barthes 1972). My approach is direct: to use the Barthes essays, "The Structuralist Activity" and "Style and Its Image" (*The Rustle of Language*, Barthes 1989), as the basic framework and concepts for outlining the direct application of the language codes in reading contemporary American poetry. The framework described in the Roland Barthes essay, "The Structuralist Activity" (*Critical Essays*, Barthes 1972), provides a two-fold method as well as a goal for discourse. Dissection and articulation are the two, central activities which comprise the approach in just this order. In poetry which challenges the conventions of literature, it is expected that the sequence may be employed differently depending on the work in question. Barthes says, "...to dissect the first object...is to find in it certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning..." (1972: 216). In free-verse, images serve as fragments of meaning and operate differently compared with, for example, images in formal poetry. My method of dissection for this paper has attempted a discussion of the parts as they relate to the whole. Since

the “paradigm” is the poem itself, having its structure broken into separate phrases, words, images and syntactical units, articulation exists as the discussion of groups of lines and their significance. Barthes writes that articulation means “Once the units are posited” discourse “...must discover in them or establish for them certain rules of association...” (1972: 17). These rules of combination also ultimately present how the codes operate.

Articulation, for Barthes, exists as the goal of discourse and the means to an end. In discovering the “rules of combination” for the work of art, one relates a significance between signifier and signified, word and language, between thought and experience (1972: 217). Thus, articulation forms the rationale toward meaning in discourse or *is* discourse forming toward significance, though dissection and articulation together form the whole activity. Barthes writes that

the goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an “object” in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning, (the “functions”) of this object. Structure is therefore actually a *simulacrum* of the object but a directed, *interested* simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object. (Barthes 1972: 214-215)

Throughout this essay, I attempt to deploy these types of analysis in repeated fashion, often alternately, though in logical sequence. I move through the poem, examining sets of lines and often move back and forth through the work and the codes in the process of discourse.

In the study of poetry, the “rules of combination” among conventions have two essential layers. One could characterize the work in this sense as an archaeology of forms. The two layers consist of the English language itself and the conventions of the literary genre of poetry. Within the literary layer, however, one may notice other aspects, especially the concept of style which most adroitly confronts the reader with numerous qualities of difference. The sonnet remains a classic example. The more highly formalized the poetic work, the easily such “rules of combination” are located. In such cases the rules make them what they are. With the free-verse poem, one would have to examine other “rules of combination” where elements of formality are absent and the grammar of some other speech becomes most prevalent, in order to? decipher “rules of combination”, because in these cases one would say that the rules are slightly different or that attention must find another locus. In formal poetry, the rule is the measure. It is the essence of its being. In free-verse one must look for a different tissue of causality, though the rules one finds may still be those operating within formal poetry. Free-verse, in one sense, illustrates a degree of language where most of the poetic aspects have been stripped away or limited to a certain degree. Typically, free-verse illustrates less formal surface rules of textuality. This is the reason why one must look deeper into the text to find the associations that govern its being. In a poem such as Keats’s “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer”, the rules of combination are those of the sonnet; a fourteen lined poem written in iambic pentameter, having a rhyme scheme of ABBA ABBA CD CD CD with the standard octave and sestet division, complete with turn and volta. In this way, there exist three

prevalent sets of rules of combination or association; first, of total line length, second, of metrical pattern and last of rhyme scheme. However, other rules exist; choice of subject or theme, diction and the fact that even though writers understand the rules of form which make the sonnet what it is, there are deviations from patterns that are an accepted norm throughout various historical literary periods. One only need look to other scholars already having discussed such stylistic differences, such as Northrop Frye's (1963) chapter on the Age of Johnson poets in *Fables of Identity* or Frederick Nims (1985), who has also documented in his essay "The Sestina", the varied cultural evolution of that form. Even the more contemporaneous Annie Finch (2012) has given us a look at historical examples of such variance with her anthology *Villanelles*. Considering this, it is true of America today that a subversion of form is the collective, writerly cultural norm. Given also recent anthologies of "hybrid" poetry, regional poets, cultural ethnic poetry or even writers of otherness, we should not find it surprising that so wide and various motives exist in the publishing industry of our time.

Numerous sub-forms of variation govern any formal poem, not just sonnets, villanelles, sestinas, pantoums or the more unfamiliar forms; skinny, dorsimbra or the minute. Aside from these primary forms and rules of combination, there also exist that set of rules and expectations known as literary conventions; rhyme, diction, metaphor, simile, syntax, alliteration, symbol: that whole range of literary hand-book terminology that *could* apply to any given literary work. It is true that these ideas are more like tools than rules, though they still possess an operating principle through which one learns the correct way to execute their usage. This happens to be another area where rules of combination overlap or are subsumed within other rules of a larger framework. Rules, like the sonnet form itself, have been lifted from the epistemology of genre and culturally normalized as exalted forms—a special form above most others, thus the tradition of higher status in certain societies or literary periods. Even historically, as in Fuller's (1972) study, *The Sonnet*, a hierarchy has been established as what is most highly valued even though variations of the sonnet have been historically accepted as the norm. This essay examines one poem using the language codes which examine layers of language.

Another aspect this brings to light is the depth of structure and the unique features only code analysis evokes. All literary texts embody the symbolic, or (SYM) code aspect; a greater or generic form of symbolism. This deeper structure, which often provides context for the immediate, literal layer of text, is either an authorial, personal deliberation or a cultural aspect. Barthes says "...this is the place for multivalence and reversibility; the main task is always to demonstrate that this field can be entered from any number of points, thereby making depth and secrecy problematic" (Barthes 1975: 19). Sometimes it is a matter attributed to spirituality or other aspects of the text which determine and shape its symbolic value. My use of free-verse in this regard refers to poetry that is free of verse qualities; metrical feet, highly formal structures and even tendencies of selection of material. If the deeper level of the symbolic code is not evident, then only the generic scripting of text as symbolic of the speech act remains evident.

The cultural-referential code, (REF), serves as the living historical-cultural context from which the work originates and considers textual, qualitative statements made concerning the material. Barthes writes that "...the cultural codes are references to a science or body of knowledge; in drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the type of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.)" (Barthes 1975: 20). In Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", for example, the setting establishes this code as socio-economic. The speaker describes a rural landscape, though what determines the cultural-referential aspect is that focus of attention on environment and the facts we learn as we read about the speaker's observations of someone else's property and his social status in the community. In Percy-Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias", the cultural-referential code would concern architectural or religious monuments. In Walt Whitman's sonnet, "When I Heard the Learned Astronomer", the cultural-referential code could be stated as the scientific knowledge of astronomy. It is also important to note that just as Barthes placed each *lexia* under close scrutiny, such analysis of poetry should also consider individual or pairs of lines, unless otherwise dense, in the identification of the presence of the codes. Obviously, there exists the possibility for multiple citations of the same code within any given poem. One should begin analysis with titles, just as Barthes (1975) did.

If poetry can be discussed in terms of plot, the actional, (ACT), the proairetic concerns any literal actions which take place in the work. This code, though sometimes viewed in the context of an interrelationship among the other codes, remains essentially a structural analysis of the significance of action in relation to the structure of the work as a whole. Anywhere action predominates over narrative, the flow of a structural reading slows to disclose how this influences reading. Note that only plot-driven events constitute the proairetic. For poetry, the actions described will be less centered upon plot as the dramatic aspect of poetry is more centrally tied to the development of the ideas and emotions expressed in the work.

The hermeneutic, (HER), concerns the enigmas of the text that are not explained and therefore demand explication. Barthes describes this as a list of the "...various (formal) terms by which enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed..." (Barthes 1975: 19). The hermeneutic also refers to the sub-plot or any device meant to add emotional emphasis to a text, though also exhibits moments where the enigma manifests itself through language. It is not that the hermeneutic exists in any permanent, symbiotic relationship with any single code; moreover, it is as if the enigmas of text serve as a way to reveal insight or awareness through literal evocation of multiple codes through defamiliarization in the Russian Formalist sense of the term. This technique serves as a way to slow attention or awareness at particular moments in the text so as to create a breach of thought in the flow of any of the codes. This interruption typically facilitates a questioning or reflection, diversion of thought, subverts thought, or modify an explication toward a complex awareness or an un-foreseen conclusion. Barthes cautions that "...these terms will not always occur..." though "...they will often be repeated; they will not appear in any fixed order" (Barthes 1975: 19). This code would seemingly have greater emphasis in

discussions of the avantgarde small ‘a’ and ‘g’ here: avant-garde literature, Language poetry or any text engaging complex thoughts or human experience.

The semantic, (SEM) code, operates like theme in literary analysis. Barthes states that of these aspects “...we merely indicate them—without, in other words, trying either to link them to a character (or a place or an object) or to arrange them in some order so that they form a single thematic grouping...” (Barthes 1975: 19). I think of the (SEM) or, semantic code as “...a single thematic grouping...” or a literary theme (Barthes 1975: 19). In every example Barthes provides, this is evident. Barthes also writes that the semantic code “...points to...additional meaning by way of connotation,” though “...Barthes does not mean a free-association of ideas...but a correlation immanent in the text...an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system...” which he calls “...semantic connotations that have special meaning for the work at hand” (www.perdue.edu/english/theory). This would seem to have the grounding principle of a group of semes which bear the connotation of their form toward a given single impression or quality of character. The description of this character is most central in the exploitation of this code. In the strictest literary sense, the semantic denotes and modifies character and setting.

In the theoretical, stereographic reading approach that I advocate, only the language of the text and its arrangement on the page forms the attention of the critic in the activity of articulation. Sometimes this fails to produce an adequate explication and I draw upon the biography of the writer or his poetics. However, each of the codes are just as pliable and less finite as the one preceding. Instead of singular modes branching out from a single code, there exist instead innumerable modes that remain possible for one’s discourse and no single one of them, or no single group of them can be thought of as the only valid course of articulating structure. Perhaps this remains characteristic of all Postmodern texts, though should not be thought of as a limitation. Such multiplicity exists as a positive and not a negative trait. Multiplicity of text in this sense pertains not to the multiple ways text may become interpreted, but the numerous, valid, navigable routes the scholar pursues through discourse because of the stereographic nature of text. The only hindrance in this regard lies in the fact of limited application of the codes to the study of poetry. The following essay is a new attempt in literary scholarship which hopefully maps fruitful possibilities in the application of the codes to the genre of poetry.

The activities in my essay have taken the sequence of first, dissection and then articulation. In poetry which challenges the conventions of literature, it is expected that the sequence may be employed differently depending on the work in question. In “The Town of Hill”, images serve as fragments of meaning and operate differently compared with, for example, formal poetry. My method of dissection for this paper has attempted a discussion of the parts as they relate to the whole. Since the “paradigm” is the poem itself, having its structure broken into separate phrases, words, images and syntactical units, articulation then, exists as the discussion of their internal and relational significance. Barthes writes that articulation means “Once the units are posited” structuralist discourse “must discover in them or establish for them certain rules of association...” (Barthes 1972: 217). I have refrained from discussion of any linguistics, semiotics, or the

explication of the text which would seem to be the province of another, more intricate discipline, no matter how justified or relevant.

2. Articulation and dissection: Explication of structuralist stereographic aspects of Donald Hall's "The Town of Hill"

Donald Hall's poem, "The Town of Hill", was titled such in reference to a town named Hill, in the history of New Hampshire which was flooded as a preservation project. The title operates in both semantic and cultural-referential codes, first because the title makes reference to the name of a place. Second, knowing the history of the name of the town and how it came to be named such, gives depth of cultural facts which are not disclosed to the reader during a reading of the work. However, the semantic connotation functions more explicitly in poetry as a suggestive device; a literary element which opens readings toward various levels of meaning. If a reader had no knowledge of this cultural-referential fact, that the town once existed and that it was located close to a place where the poet once lived, the poem would not take on the same quality or depth of meaning. "The Town of Hill" plainly states the object of the work—that the subject of the poem is the town itself. We are reading a poem about a town named Hill. Lack of clarity on behalf of the author only contributes to the mystery of its structure and meaning. Hall says:

It was a poem which went back to an earlier style. I don't think it looks much like other poems, but it is a poem that is greatly dependent on, and interested in, its own sound. It is Goatfoot and Milktongue—and probably more Milktongue than Goatfoot and in a way I think that is what it is secretly about. About life before birth even, or perhaps very early on after birth. But I am not *sure* what it is secretly about, not yet. That usually takes me a few years. I mean, a few years after the poem's finished (in: Turner 1977: 128).

The terms "Goatfoot" and "Milktongue" refer to concepts the author elaborates in a 1973 essay titled, "Goatfoot, Milktongue and Twinbird; The Psychic Origins of Poetic Form". "Goatfoot" in this sense pertains to rhythm of a line of poetry, whereas "Milktongue" refers to the pleasure of words. In "The Town of Hill", the semantic communicates through connotative language from a fixed point in time, literally the historical existence of a town named Hill. Right away there exist cultural connotations of the town: it was named after Isaac Hill, a New Hampshire Democrat, who also served as the state's governor in the early nineteenth century. It is a cultural fact that the town was established in a geographically poor position and thus, had to be flooded to protect other towns in the area. The town was then relocated to another geographic area.

Structurally, the poem has been arranged in twenty-four lines of free-verse, though in the appearance of twelve pairs of enjambed lines. The last line is the only end-stopped unit in the entire poem. I will comment on rhythm at a later point, which yields some interesting effects among line-break and idea. The poem opens as we read, "Back of the dam, under / a flat pad" (lines 1-2). "Back of the dam" is the literal location of the town of Hill, now submerged under

water. Line two provides a figural, visual image as to what the surface of the water resembles. Line one constitutes a cultural-referential point as a fixed place the reader can imagine as the setting where the action of the poem takes place. In its descriptive sense, “a flat pad” resembles some sort of utilitarian, depersonalized object; a pad of concrete, of glass or some similar, functional object. In front of this is positioned the industrial symbol of progress and capitalism—the dam, which here exists as a symbol of loss and destruction. Thus, the dam operates a primary symbol of industrialism in the beginning of the poem. When the reader reads, “flat pad”, there is no realization of what?, as even with background knowledge of the poet and his life, only after several readings was this reader able to grasp what this phrase represents. The phrase, “a flat pad”, functions as a hermeneutic in that its description is an enigma of universal language. We do not know until the additional lines are read what we are visualizing. The semantic connotation here hints toward a speaker in sympathy with the former citizens of Hill, who were forced to move in the face of the greater political machinery of legislative funding that created the dam. Thus, thematically, this established the idea of a conflict between technology and humanity.

The next two stanzas clarify the first enigma, though introduce another puzzle. The speaker says, “of water, church / bells ring // in the ears of lilies, / a child’s swing” (lines 3-6). Thus, the figurative language of “flat pad // of water” has been explained as the reader should make the connection to the title and realize that the speaker here refers to the submerged town of Hill. As the poem’s first, literal actional element, “church / bells ring” (lines 3-4). This signals however, another enigma because we know literally that churches do not exist under water, much less bells ring. The seemingly normal action, common in many small, American townships, then takes on a heightened, imaginative effect as the reader knows they cannot literally be sounding. Bells ring in the personified ‘ears of lilies’, serving as a further hermeneutic intended to draw the reader’s attention to the memory of it’s the bells? The lilies? presence and the day-to-day events that would typically occur. Hall says of the poem’s subject, “...perhaps it is part of a return to the past, and a re-examination of the past...” (in: Turner 1977: 129). Connotatively, the implications of this action could be more significant. Bells only ring in the New England cultural-referential sense on Sunday, Wednesday evening before prayer service or during special events, such as weddings. The cultural-referential meaning draws the reader’s eyes, connotatively, symbolically up to the cupola to contemplate what usually dwells at its peak—the Christian cross atop the spire. What is the reader to make of this gesture? The death knell of the township? Perhaps that it is just the passing of the town being memorialized in the poem. The lilies have been personified, for only their “ears” hear those sounds, though realistically this is only in memory. The lilies could be reference to flowers in a yard, though most likely they serve as a connotative re-grounding in the scene initially described of a body of water where a town once existed. The lilies are most likely the spatterdock on the pond surface common to most Eastern wetlands. This literal image alludes to another symbolic context in which the flowers were commonly grown in yards. Thus, the poem’s codes operate in two modes at once; past and present, figural and literal.

The next two stanzas illustrate scenes from the town that once existed, though also introduce further enigmas. The speaker says, “a child’s swing // curls in the current / of a yard, horned // pout sleep / in a green” (lines 6-10). With the dynamic of underwater environments established, enigmas of the hermeneutic here operate in a different way. When the reader reads that “a child’s swing // curls in the current / of a yard” we know these are again images of past life which are now submerged in water (lines 6-8). The next turn of phrase which signals a puzzle are the words, “horned // pout”, a type of catfish native to the Eastern United States. The image, however, of “horned // pout sleep / in a green // mailbox” remains another image of a reversal of environments (lines 8-11). Elements in the first four images of the poem evoke the setting of small-town America; the “church”, the “child’s swing” situated in “a yard” as well as the “mailbox”. They are all classic images of early, twentieth century American culture, even though the mailbox is green because it is now covered in algae. Thus, the cultural-referential aspect of these lines denotes a time gone to industrial progress. meaning a little unclear Resident Clifford Otto has posted actual photos of the original town of Hill at www.ghosttowns.com which show foundations, pipes and partial sidewalks. When the actual town was moved, the region only experienced periodic flooding caused by seasonal snow melt of the White Mountains. Throughout what remains of Hill, here and there one can see different markings people have made to show the water level at various stages of flooding. The area is now known as the Franklin Falls Dam Recreational Area. The physical actions such as “curls” and “sleep” suggest a relaxed or suspended state and also further connotative semiotics which reinforce the idea of the poem as a memory. The “horned // pout sleep” because they have made their nest in the “green // mailbox” (lines 8-11). The plot of the poem fits the observations of the speaker in describing the submerged town. Here it is important to note that Hall acknowledges “the mystery which exists in the plot” (in: Turner 1977: 128). The images in the poem take on the dual nature of actual, once living or functional aspects of a community that no longer exists in the same sense as other living cultural entities. This dualistic nature of imagery has been exploited through the hermeneutic of the work and gives the poem a dreamlike quality of memory.

The next eight lines establish what I will call the imagined action of the poem as the connotation of language suggests further actions and images the reader would see if the town existed. Hall writes, “a boy walks // from a screened / porch beneath // the man-shaped / leaves of an oak // down the street looking / at the town” (lines 12-18). In this sense, the action takes precedent in these lines. In terms of the semantic code, the image of a boy walking from a screened porch in a town yard where an oak tree grows, is an iconic American image. The theme of normalcy and sheer dailiness come to mind. The boy’s actions also shift the reader’s perspective as he walks down the street making his own observations of the town. These lines illustrate semantic and symbolic codes conjoined as the image itself has been loaded with purely American, symbolic meaning. Its cultural-referential meaning exists along similar lines of thought, as the image evokes any normal day in any small town in America. The above seven lines comprise another hermeneutic code in that the entire action constitutes heightened realism—literally an imagined action or series of actions as the town no longer exists. Within these lines, “the man-shaped / leaves of an oak”

connotate their literal symbolism of patriarchy (lines 15-16). The oak is positioned over the house and is associated with “man”, the man being in this historical context, the provider, protector, family leader, strong, sheltering and so forth. The boy walks from the house, the symbolic center of family life. Setting subsumes the reading at the conclusion of the poem as the two semantic elements are unified through action.

In the last six lines, imaginative and actual merge again as the poem achieves closure with the focus remaining on the door the boy opened. He has left the house and is walking down the street “looking / at the town // of Hill that water / covered forty // years ago / and the screen // door shuts / under dream water” (lines 17-24). After the actional code of the boy looking at the town, the reader learns cultural-referential facts concerning the flooding of the town. “The Town of Hill” was published in 1975. Forty years before this, the government bought properties in the area between 1935 and 1938. Construction of the dam did not begin until the latter. Severe flooding prior to 1935 prompted intervention of the Army Corp of Engineers. Literally, the poem provides the final action of the plot: “water / covered forty // years ago / and the screen // door shuts / under dream water” (lines 19-24). Since the boy cannot literally “look” at the town, one hermeneutic yields a final one as the reader sees that the “door shuts / under dream water” (lines 23-24). The actional code here blends with the hermeneutic in that this door, like all images of the town in the poem, remain imaginary. Thus as well, the poem ends. Further, the semantic aspects of connotative language such as “down”, “covered”, “shuts”, and “under” create the distance of memory and the present. It is almost as if the speaker places himself in the situation of the boy, walking literally through town, though recalling its past as well.

The actional and cultural-referential lines “the town // of Hill that water / covered forty // years ago” serve also as the antithesis of the literal/figural motif of the poem and ground the context back in the actual setting where the poem began. The last three lines however, reestablish the hermeneutic enigma of not knowing if the town is real or if the poem is just a memory as the reader is faced again with another submerged town image where “the screen // door shuts / under dream water” (lines 22-24). In another semantic and hermeneutic sense, the poet has chosen to repeat only a few words throughout the poem; “town”, “Hill”, “water”, “under”, and “screen”. This semantic cluster appears twice throughout the work, including the title. Usually, when a poet utilizes repetition, it is a sign that attention is being directed at some aspect of the given. The meaning of this cluster further connotates the factual content of the poem’s subject. Only one word appears three times throughout: “water” (lines 3, 19 and 24). Contextually it is associated by its literal position adjacent to words such as “church”, “Hill” and “dream” (lines 3, 19 and 24). Also of significance, each cluster appears in separate parts of the poem, once at the beginning and once at the end. The word “water” has been given as the last word in the last line. Connotatively, this cluster of words functions as an allusion to the actual facts of the cultural-referential event of the poem. Even though it is now a well-worn analogy, the speaker may feel as if the water exists as a great symbol of the unconscious or the memories that form this imagined landscape of a town that no longer exists. The last lines achieve closure in that the door the boy opens, is the door that

closes. This door, literally of home, represents connotatively, the center of all meaning and personal history, the heart of one's existence. When this "door shuts / under dream water", the memory no longer exists (lines 23-24). Donald Hall has provided a well-crafted poem, which appears on the surface as a very simple memory poem, though in fact possesses many complex aspects.

Hall's use of rhythm and line-break in "The Town of Hill" blend semantic, hermeneutic and symbolic codes. The natural spoken rhythm of mainstream free-verse of 1975 has been deliberately confused and enjambed in the poet's use of line-break. Hall says that in the process of writing this poem he "became aware that" he "was writing a single sentence, and became interested in the" poem's "syntax" (in: Turner 1977: 130). Here, unusual aspects exist as intentional complications of structure which have a logical function in understanding the dynamic of the way the poem operates. Reading the lines as if they were natural speech patterns, they do not flow or seem to flow naturally to logical pauses visually on the page. In terms of image, the poem takes a very carefully paced, though couplet-like structure. Syntactical units have been broken up as units in and of themselves from the beginning of the poem to the end. Hall employs commas, though there exists only one end-stopped line, the very last.

Reading "The Town of Hill", even in the first two lines, flow of rhythm is disrupted. The comma pauses before the word *under*, and the word would normally have position as the first word in the next syntactical unit if read as a flow reflective of natural speech rhythms. Clearly then, it is not because other things are happening. That kind of rhythm, whatever you choose to call it, has been disrupted. To further complicate rhythm, Hall has structured the shortened lines into stanzas. How is the reader to think of the white space between? In one sense, we begin to see after a few stanzas where the natural rhythms are and looking at the arrangement on the page, the mind sees this connected flow, though the reading utterly counters that unity. Here, material and the local contribute to the meaning of structure. Discord exists because the town of Hill was forever abandoned and submerged in water. In reading, the mind wants to place certain units together that have literally been separated on the page. During the reading process, one wants to place "under" at the beginning of the second line so that it reads with the natural rhythm of statement, like a sentence: "Back of the dam / under a flat pad" (lines 1-2). These are coherent ideas, separate though unified thoughts describing this underwater town. Although the reader does not sense this yet, the speaker describes the surface and only in reading the lines that follow do we then get the sense that something different is forming from other sensibilities.

This disruption of syntax creates a harmony of the dualities which remain central to the poem's structure. This type of structural complexity however, was not the original intention of the author. Hall says in writing the poem, "the various orders were not thought out ahead of time, but improvised, looked at, rejected and tried again", though not to "a conclusive ending intellectually" as "the poem began to make this spacey, skinny thing" (Turner 1977: 131). The imagistic expectations of images have been utilized as an enigma within the line structure conveying a sense of prolonged attention to image and the nature of memory. Every other line contains an image of submersion. Though these parts of the town environment no longer exist, the reader eventually senses

through additional readings what has taken place. The speaker says, “down the street looking / at the town // of Hill that water / covered forty // years ago” (lines 17-21). Attention shifts back and forth among two types of imagery— between what was once real and the reality of submersion. A real place has been characterized through images of every-day life and a flooded landscape which further recapitulates the tension or conflict of past and present. The speaker associates the submerged imagery of the town with dream conveying that memories of the actual may be just as elusive. This idea concludes the poem, figuratively and literally. As we read, “and the screen // door shuts / under dream water” (lines 22-24). Symbolically, the physical landscape as well as the remembered past only exist in the remote obscurity of memory like objects under water.

3. Conclusion

My conclusion concerning the structure of “The Town of Hill” involves a summary of the features of the poem as a sentence. This may prove helpful in understanding its enjambment as well as its hermeneutic enigmas. Although the poem appears to be constructed in sets of two lined stanzas, the structure of a single sentence underlies the whole. As a sentence, the subject, “the town // of Hill that water / covered forty // years ago” has been placed at the end of the sentence (lines 18-21). The poem begins with the setting of the dam, though adverbially, “Back of the dam”, and specifically, the preposition “under” denotes both the submerged town and the speaker’s placement in the present, thinking back on the history of the town (line 1). Within the apposition of the sentence have been provided four groups of images that describe the fact of submersion through common objects from every-day life. Here, unconventional use of enjambment creates an unnatural pause in the lines and this primarily serves the hermeneutic of blurring the distinction between past and present. This type of line structure exists throughout the poem. The images illustrate visually what is submerged, though also as in memory, what once existed as a normal town. These images are as follows; “church / bells ring // in the ears of lilies”, the second of “a child’s swing // which curls in the current / of a yard...,” here blending with the third, where “horned // pout sleep / in a green // mailbox...” and here again blending as if in a hermeneutic of the line-break with the fourth motif, “...and / a boy walks // from a screened / porch beneath // the man-shaped leaves of an oak // down the street looking / at the town” (lines 3-18). At this point, the reader sees these images as if with the speaker, thinking back or even peering under water ourselves at the remains. I said earlier that the subject of this sentence has been displaced, moved to the end of Hall’s sentence, something writers of prose often do to add emphasis to a thesis statement or when they try to draw attention to an idea. Here, the lines containing the subject function as a hermeneutic of the line in that this information dispels the enigma of all images which have come before in the series. This signals the epiphany, mild though it is, which clarifies all images between the setting in lines one through two as remaining part of the speaker’s remembered landscape. After this point of clarity in the poem, the fourth image continues: “and the screen // door shuts / under dream water” (lines 22-24). This fourth image remains most important in terms of structure for it contains the locus of conflict of the entire sentence. The speaker says, “...and / a boy walks // from a screened / porch beneath // the

man-shaped / leaves of an oak // down the street looking / at the town” (lines 1-18). The boy has no name and in this way becomes allied with the speaker, as if thinking back, trying to recall what the reader sees happening in the poem. The boy “walks from” the house, the center of family life, “from”, more specifically those “man-shaped / leaves of an oak”, the father symbol, though only to engage in the detached activity of “looking at the town” (lines 12-18). Since the fourth image has been disrupted by the more factual subject of the poem, also centrally denoted in the poem’s title, the central conflict remains one of memory. The apposition of the factual statement refers to the literal condition of water covering the town, though it places emphasis on the historical aspect, the fact that much time has passed and that this happened four decades ago from the imagined present of the speaker; only however, if one imagined the “present” of any work to be the year of first publication. This is established by the literal, cultural-referential facts of the history of the town of Hill. Thus, the poem creates a distance both within itself and between material and time.

Although one could interpret the symbolic import of “The Town of Hill” as a memory poem, I would not contribute to such a reading an atypical psychological structure of the whole. One could easily say the town’s being submerged represents human consciousness, or the unconscious due to their holding the power of memory, in fact, images which constitute memory. The poem carries symbolism of communal loss and patriarchy, through the hermeneutic codes it creates the distance and murkiness of memory. Evidence is lacking in the poem to argue that the conflict exists between father and son. Even arguments for the poem as some rite of passage yield no moment where this is ever confirmed in the actual code or any other aspect of the poem. I would not entirely argue much importance in the fact that the structure is, technically, a sentence because the structure remains visually and verbally poetic. Since we cannot examine the poem in sentence form in the same way we diagram sentences in the study of grammar, the more rewarding examination in this respect lies in the poem as a poem. Perhaps the most important parallel remains among the boy and the speaker, with no explicit conflict other than the fact of loss and the passage of time. Recall also, however, man’s engineering, one type of industrial science which creates structures and deploys them, is what creates the loss, though saves life and townships in turn. I would therefore, place the most meaningful emphasis on the poet’s role of creation, especially because of the facts we know about Hall’s poetic process in writing this poem. Hall says that he was interested in the idea of the single sentence as a poem, though he said he tested the combinations of line structure, kept re-arranging them throughout the poem’s development. Regarding lineation, Hall writes that he conceived of the line structure in such a way that “Alternative lineations are possible...” though also with “...the sound as reinforcing sense, or enforcing sense for the first time...” (in: Turner 1977: 130). This explains the poem’s odd enjambment. He further says, “I kept changing the organization of things...Certainly the various orders were not thought out ahead of time but improvised...” (in: Turner 1977: 131). This signals pleasure in the play of words and language in the conscious mind of the creator. As Barthes says in “From Work to Text”, “The Text...decants the work...from its consumption and recuperates it as play, task, production,

practice” (Barthes 1989: 62). I find this notion of play central to the structure employed in “The Town of Hill”, though it also has a central role in Hall’s poetic process.

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