In the Name of God

Vali-E-Asr University of Rafsanjan

Faculty of Humanities and Literature

Department of English Language and Literature

Polyphony in Selected Poems of Simon Armitage: A Study of the Relationship between Style Variation and Voice Variation Based On Bakhtin's Views

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Art (MA) in English Language and Literature

Supervisor

Dr. Esmaeil Zohdi

Advisor

Dr.Farzan Sojudi

By

Saeed Hoseini

February 2012

دانشگاه ولی عصر (عج) رفسنجان

دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی

گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی

پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد رشته‌ی زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی

پلی فونی(چند صدایی) درگزیده ا شعار سایمون آرمیتاج:
مطالعه‌ی رابطه‌ی گوناگونی سبک و صدا بر اساس نظریات باختین

استاد راهنما

دکتر اسماعیل زهدی

استاد مشاور

دکتر فرزان سجودی

دانشجو

سعید حسینی

اسفند ۱۳۹۰

Acknowledgments

For many constructive comments and much worthwhile assistance, I would like to thank my indefatigably supportive advisor, Dr. Zohdi. I also express my gratitude towards my reader, Dr. Sojudi, for the gift of his time and his second opinions on this research. Secondly much sincere thankfulness goes to Dr. Short and Dr. Semino who offered valuable help and support through email. And at last, grateful acknowledgement is made to all friends and family members who heard what was in my head and read what I wrote and due to a priceless friendship.

Abstract

The present thesis attempts a reading of a selection of Simon Armitage's poems under the light of Bakhtin's theories of voice and aims at figuring out the relation of style to voice in the selected poems. One prominent Bakhtinian theory which mainly concerns the concept of voice is polyphony. Bakhtin held the notion that only artistic prose can measure up to polyphonic standards and the poetic genre is, by nature, incapable of qualifying to polyphony. Throughout the study, first, a set of criteria is introduced as prerequisites for polyphony. For that purpose Bakhtin's conceptualizations and theories on Heteroglossia, Dialogism and Polyphony are centered. As the next step the concept of style variation is zeroed in on and a unified set of criteria is also posited for recognition of shift of style in the poems. For doing so it will be necessary to focus on the tenets and tools that the discipline of Modern Stylistics introduces for the analysis of style and its variation. Another feature which this study finds inevitable to examine in the selected poems is the concept of voice variation. Voice variation generally refers to the shift of voice in a single literary work and is held by many critics to be equivalent to polyphony. Throughout the study, however, it is proved that variation of voice is not equal to polyphony. As the main step of the research process the poems will be analyzed in terms of all three features of style, voice and polyphony. The focus is specifically on the variation of style and voice and their relation to polyphony. Lastly based on the results obtained, patterns are introduced for shift of style and voice in terms of their relation to each other and to polyphony. During the proceedings of the study it is implicitly suggested, against Bakhtin's treatises, that poetic genre also can have polyphonic features.

Key Words: Voice, Style, Bakhtin, Polyphony, Double-Voicedness, Poetry

DEDICATED TO:

THOSE WHO BY GENEROUSLY OFFERING LOVE AND KINDNESS MADE MY HEART STRONGER,

AND TO THOSE WHO BY WITHHOLDING LOVE FROM ME MADE MY WILL STRONGER

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 General Overview

The very basic idea which prompted this study was a personal and long-held obsession with the nature and type of communication which takes place in literature. More precisely, this obsession was with finding an answer to the fundamental question of who really, in a work of literature, is talking to whom and in what way. Regarding literature as a highly complicated means of communication, the study of the mechanisms at work in this mode of communication stands out as a crucial task.Moving a little further with the investigation made the point clear that not a single pattern of communication takes place in all literary genres.In a sixteenth century sonnet it is,simply, the poet directly addressing his reader, but in a novel of the same epoch there are characters talking to each other and one can hardly find a direct address, by the author, toward the reader. Furthermore, there are varieties in communication patterns even in a single literary work, so it is obvious that although the question is a rudimentary one, its answer is a lot complicated and in dire need of

reflection and research. One principal factor responsible for the shift in the mode of communication in literary works is the shift in the vantage point or what commonly is known as the concept of voice. In fact, almost all studies concerning the communicative principles of literature deal with the concept of voice and it should be noted also that much of the research done for the purpose of exploring the diversity and complexities of these patterns is subsumed under the category of the study of "voice" in literary parlance.Regarding the idea of voice, what has been mainly under scrutiny has been the idea of "multiplicity of voices" in a literary work. However multiplicity of voices is not the only area which needs reflection; one other critical area of study in this field is the organization or in better terms, orchestration of these multiple voices at the service of the overall meaning of the literary work.

The concept of voice and its related issues, although of such a commensurable importance, have not received ample scholarship up to now. One critic whose philosophical standpoint and artistic tendencies led him toward a profound study of the concept of voice in literature was the Russian philosopher and literary critic, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin. Bakhtin's academic output is lauded for introducing some delicate complexities of the concept of voice in literature and shedding light on some unnoticed aspects, the consideration of which could undoubtedly enrich our perception and appreciation of literature.One fundamental task which Bakhtin undertook is that he, for the first time, considered the idea of voice and its different shapes as an evaluative criterion for recognizing high literature. Bakhtin offered the notion that the use of voice in a literary work could sway the extent to which that work of art could be impressive on the reader. In fact it could be claimed that a large portion of Bakhtin's work involves elucidating how special uses of the concept of voice in a literary work could affect the degree of its success in its existential ends

which is impressing the reader.In this direction Bakhtin came to introduce some new and key concepts almost all of which have names which never before had been used by critics of literature. Among them are the concepts of Heteroglossia, Double-voicedness, Dioligism, and polyphony. It should be noted from the outset that one fundamental concept based on which Bakhtin constructs most of his conceptualizations is the theory of "dialogism". Dialogic theory is chiefly based on philosophical speculations which assumed the necessity of a dialogic contact between subjects as the precondition for obtaining knowledge of oneself through the other (i.e. we need the other in order to know ourselves) (Lundquist et al 2001: 34-5).In other words Bakhtin, under the influence of Neo-Kantian Marburg School of philosophy held as a basic notion that the truth in life does not exist as a static isolated entity but it comes into being through the interaction of more than one agent. His term for this kind of interaction is "dialogue". He actually stressed the originality of the state of becoming as opposed to being. However the philosophical background of dialogism is not as much the concern of this study as the concepts which it has produced. It should be noted that the afore-mentioned terms most of which Bakhtin is the first one to use, are in many cases used interchangeably and that is due to the high complexity of Bakhtin's conceptualizations in some occasions and also to the fact that they are occasionally overlapping in meaning, but a thorough consideration of Bakhtin's body of work in this area reveals that each and every one of them designates a unique and clear concept. The subsequent chapter will thoroughly focus on clarifying and delineating these concepts and shedding light on the interrelationship between them. One concept which Bakhtin introduced in his book ,*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, and thoroughly deals with the idea of voice is Polyphony. The word polyphony literally means multi-voicedness but the literal meaning does not designate

the whole meaning which Bakhtin aimed by the term. Clark and Holquist introduced the term as"a new theory of authorial point of view" propounded by Bakhtin. (Clark and Holquist 3). But Polyphony as Bakhtin means by it is much more complicated. In chapter two there will be a comprehensive review of bakhtin's theories of voice and specifically Polyphony and how it is related to the other concepts which some recent critics are mistaking for Polyphony. As one side this study attempts a detailed analysis of the idea of voice in poems of the contemporary British poet, Simon Armitage in the light of Bakhtin's theory of polyphony.But this is not the whole story. Based on another personal obsession I had pre-occupations with the style of the poems under study. Moreover even a very cursory study of the literature on the subject of voice and multiplicity of voice reveals that almost in all cases of such studies there is at least a trace of the concept of style and how linguistic features may contribute to the polyphony of a work of literature. More interestingly it was observed that throughout Bakhtin's books which are primarily devoted to the idea of voice and polyphony in particular, there is a steady and continuous concern with style and the branch of linguistics which is responsible for study of style that is Stylistics. There are occasions which Bakhtin tries to demonstrate the inaccuracy and inadequacy of the discipline of stylistics in dealing with the concept of dialogism and consequently in recognizing polyphony. But this notion is not the one which this study is going to challenge or even substantiate. The present study is specifically aimed at figuring out the relation between the variations of style in the poems with polyphony in them. In fact this study will perform a thorough analysis of the style of the poems making use of the tools and techniques that modern stylistics provides with a special focus on style variation, and on the other hand it will also scrutinize the same poems through the framework of Bakhtinian Polyphony. Ultimately what is looked for is a

comprehensive relationship between style variation and polyphony in Simon Armitage's poems. So it is obvious that the present thesis is not going to have the least concern with accusations Bakhtin makes against Stylistics although that point is worth serious consideration. However for the present purpose it is quite revealing to concentrate on the very notion that a major obsession with language and style is discernible all through Bakhtin's words on voice. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* where he first propounded the notion of polyphony the word style is repeated 161 times and the word stylistics, precisely as the name of a field of study, has been used 23 times. As an instance there is a bone of contention between Bakhtin and Grossman-a Dostoevsky critic – which arises from the fact that Grossman claims that throughout all Dostoevsky's novels there is "a deep imprint of his [Dostoevsky's] personal style and tone".(Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 15). Bakhtin severely opposes this statement because more than all he finds it in full contrast with his general thesis throughout the book attributing Dostoevsky's novels with polyphonic features. Bakhtin actually assumes the heterogeneity and diversity of styles and tones to be responsible for the polyphonic nature of Dostoevsky's novels. He believes that Dostoevsky's novels viewed from this perspective are" multi-styled or style-less" and "if viewed from a monologic understanding of tone, Dostoevsky's novel is multi-accented and contradictory in his values". (Bakhtin *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 15). This is one clear instance of Bakhtin's forging bonds between the notion of multiplicity or heterogeneity of voices and stylistic features in Dostoevsky. Such instancesof dealings with style and language are legion in Bakhtin and there will be a specific concentration on them in chapter 3.

One other crucial aspect of the study concerns a thorough analysis of the fact that Mikhail Bakhtin's theories and conceptualizations are based on the novel genre

and he directly and indirectly asserts that the poetic genre is, by nature, not capable of measuring up to the standards of polyphonic literature. This accusation of poetry has not been unanswered by the scholars of poetry and several critics of both Bakhtin and poetry have tried, by different means, to prove the contrary. This study, in this specific regard, is going to be sorted among those studies which challenge Bakhtin's viewpoints. By considering the poems of Simon Armitage through the parameters of Bakhtin's polyphonic literature and recognizing those poems which possess that quality, it is going to strengthen the notion that poetic genre like the novel has the generic potentiality and capability of being polyphonic. In chapter two the definitions and the semantic territory of each of Bakhtinian terms will be clarified.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Bakhtin believes that there is always the coexistence of different varieties of Language in the society which are always having a dialogue with each other. He also believes that we could discern a representation and incorporation of this social Heteroglossia (different languages) in literary works especially the novel, the genre which he focused his studies on and assumed as superior to other genres. According to him different languages of Heteroglossia are languages of different social groups which contain different ideologies. Each language of Heteroglossia responds to its own socio-ideological requirements (class, profession, gender, etc.), but at the same time also actively participates in the speech diversity that surrounds it.

Each word/utterance is thus imbued with different accents and intentions that stratify it from within (Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination* 272). Based on the concept of Heteroglossia, Bakhtin developed a further concept named Polyphony. To clarify, Bakhtin, based on how a given text responds to the Heteroglossia of its epoch,

distinguishes between two lines of stylistic development of literature: Monologic and Dialogic. (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 367). The Monologic literary texts are most prominently characterized by the singleness of authorial point of view. In other words in a Monologic work of literature, regardless of how many diverse voices speak, it is generally the authorial point of view and the authorial ideology which counts and the reader is allowed to see the world through this ideology. As opposed to this, there is the Dialogic, Heteroglot novel which welcomes Heteroglossia into the text and instead of subduing its'different-speechness' to one authorial accent, the author speaks through each of the incorporated languages and genres. In the Heteroglot novel the author does not speak in one language but through Heteroglossia of his/her epoch and the author's own voice and point of view is thus present to varying degrees in each of the represented languages. In this connection Bakhtin distinguishes between the author's own, direct discourse and the represented or double-voiceddiscourse type (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 185). Double-voiced discourse type means thus that there is a second (i.e. that of the author) voice present in the represented language (e.g. the language of acharacter or generic language).(this definition is slightly modified in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and will be elaborated on in chapter 2).Thus, in the Monologic text, that is the text that has only one fully valid point of view and has one standard language, the represented or double-voiced discourse is always either critically or polemically (or both) repudiated (i.e. the represented discourse's manner of speaking and thinking is denied any signifying power).(Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination* 36). On the other hand in the Heteroglot novel the author accents each of the represented languages and thereby allowing his own and the character's points of view to sound together. The author thus appears to converse or dialogise with the other's speech and not just

dominate it. Dostoyevsky, according to Bakhtin, was a master of talking to his characters and the Polyphonic form is the result of the author's respect to the characters' independent voices, ideas and consciousness. Polyphony, albeit very similar, is not the same as Heteroglossia, while the two concepts may converge in the case of many (poly) and different (hetero) voices and speeches that are present in the latter with the diversity of speech styles and genres (Morson and Emerson 232). So it is correct to say that every polyphonic novel is Heteroglot but not every Heteroglot novel polyphonic. In other terms, a Monologic work of literature may, by incorporating several character voices, be regarded as Heteroglot but since it still allows only one voice, that of the author, to sound as the only fully meaningful one in that work, it is not admitted as a polyphonic text. This is because the polyphonic novel is a special type of the Heteroglot novel, the novel that has been created,according to Bakhtin, by Dostoyevsky and therefore stands apart from other novels in the history of literature (Morson and Emerson 231).

[The first stylistic line's primary characteristic is the fact that it knows only a single language and a single style (which is more or less rigorously consistent); Heteroglossia remains outsidethe novel, although it does nevertheless have its effect on the novel as a dialogising backgroundin which the language and the world of the novel is polemically and forensically implicated.

The second line, to which belong the greatest representatives of the novel as a genre incorporates Heteroglossia into a novel's composition, exploiting it to orchestrate its own meaning and frequently resisting altogether any unmediated and pure authorial discourse] (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 375).

As noted above Bakhtin lauds and superiorizes Dialogic literary works over Monologic ones and this is exactly what he particularly acclaims Dostoevsky for in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

Here I should note how and to what extent exactly my study of voice in Armitage's poetry will concern Bakhtin's notions in this regard. Firstly we should note that Bakhtin did all the classifications and conceptualizations based on the novel genre and did further regard the novel as the sole literary genre that has the potential for achieving the Heteroglot criterion. In his book *The Dialogic Imagination* and specifically in the article "Epic and Novel" he directly opposes the novel to many Monoglot (Monologic) genres such as classical drama, epic, classical poetry, etc.

Bakhtin calls these genres dead and ossified, because they have already formed as genres, whereas the novel still continues to develop itself as a genre and as such has no particular canon. When incorporated into the novel, the classical (dead) genres are said to be novelized, that is, they coalesce into a generic and stylistic, in short, Heteroglot hybrid. (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 38). However a considerable number of critics have fundamentally rejected Bakhtin's views about poetic genre and attempted at proving the hypothesis that poetry can be a heteroglot and even polyphonic genre.

This study is going to apply Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and double-voicedness specifically to poetry and thus it will simultaneously be a contribution to the above-said campaign against Bakhtin's Underestimating the poetic genre and to restore poetry as a polyphonic genre and to provide considerable number of instances of poems which qualify to Bakhtin's standards of a polyphonic work of art.

As another major aspect of the study I will also have to focus on the findings of the theoreticians of the discipline of Stylistics concerning the idea of voice variation. Undoubtedly Bakhtin was concerned about what the discipline of stylistics is recently scrutinizing via linguistic tools and that is precisely the question of style and introducing a set of parameters and tools for the recognition of style variation. Stylistics theoreticians have developed a remarkable body of new findings in their studies through the last century concerning the concept of voice. Geoffrey Leech, possibly the pioneer in this field, insists that the variation of voice in poetry is the result of linguistic variation and linguistic variation in turn is the product of variation of dialect (variation according to user) and register   (variation according to use) (Leech *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* 12).

Nevertheless, Bakhtin clearly points out that "the use of different linguistic varieties in a text does not automatically result in "double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination* 156). Later critics like Mick Short and Elena Semino did ground-breaking stylistic research related to Bakhtinian perspectives. I assume as a further objective of my study to measure to what extent linguistic variation in Simon Armitage's poems coincide with the presence of polyphony in them. For this purpose, I need to apply both a stylistic and a Bakhtinian approach to Armitage'spoems and thus to find a point where the two converge. Regarding my choice of artist, as mentioned above, through and after the 20th century we see a considerable rise of linguistic and stylistic variation in poetry and thus the works of a contemporary poet would be most appropriate for a Bakhtinian study of voice.

Simon Armitage is a contemporary British poet who was born on 26 may 1963 in West Yorkshire in England. Armitage's poetry collections include *Book of Matches* (1993), *The Dead Sea Poems* (1995), *Kid* 1992, *Zoom* 1989 and etc.He has written the

novels, *Little Green Man* (2001) and *The White Stuff* (2004), as well as *All Points North* (1998), a collection of essays on the north of England. He produced a dramatized version of Homer's *Odyssey* and a collection of poetry entitled *Tyrannosaurus Rex Versus the Corduroy Kid* (which was shortlisted for the T.S Eliot prize), both of which were published in July 2006. Many of Armitage's poems appear in the A.O.A (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) GCSE syllabus for English Literature in the United Kingdom. Some of them include: "Homecoming", "November", "Kid", "Hitcher", and a selection of poems from *Book of Matches*, most notably of these "Mother any distance...".His writing is characterized by a dry, native Yorkshire wit combined with an accessible, realist style and critical seriousness. I will be focusing on a selection of poems from two most well-known collections of his poetry, *Book of Matches* and *The Dead Sea poems*.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the relation between style variation and voice variation in the selected poems and to what extent does style variation coincide with voice variation in the selected poems?

2. Does the variety of voice always lead to polyphonic texts (as defined byBakhtin)?

3. What is the relation between style variation and polyphony in the selected poems?

4. How could the results be generalized to the whole poetic genre about the relation of style variation to voice variation and polyphony?

5. Is it possible to consider poetry as a polyphonic genre?