

## I Love Annie Dillard's Mother: Linguistic Empathy in "Terwilliger Bunts One"

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### Abstract

An analysis of linguistic empathy (Kuno, 1987) in "Terwilliger Bunts One" reveals Annie Dillard's methods for conveying her mother's quirky personality while communicating her own feelings for her mother and ultimately inducing readers to empathize, not with Dillard as author/narrator, but with Mother. Skillful use of parenthetical constructions as well as an interplay between direct and (quasi-) free indirect representations, cause a switch from Dillard's point of view to her mother's, creating linguistic empathy with Mother. Also, conversational implicatures raised within the scope of indirect representations of Mother, reinforce and heighten the reader's empathy with Mother. Shifts between the Linguistic Worlds (Palacas, 1989) prompted by shifts in discourse style and deft use of literary pragmatics move readers beyond understanding Dillard's love of Mother into an empathetic relationship with Mother parallel to Dillard's own.

Keywords: Pragmatics; Parentheticals; Linguistic Worlds; Empathy; Indirect Discourse; Implicature

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## 1. Introduction

In her memoir, *An American Childhood*, essayist Annie Dillard includes an untitled, short essay, typically referred to as “Terwilliger Bunts One,” in which she recounts her mother’s antics and idiosyncrasies in a way that induces reader empathy for her mother. Including snippets from her childhood, Dillard portrays her mother as an “unstoppable force,” (p. 191) a quirky, audacious woman with a love for language and intellect: “She didn’t like the taste of stamps, so she didn’t lick the stamps; she licked the corner of the envelope instead” (p. 192). While reading this essay years ago, I instantly felt a connection with Dillard’s mother—partly because she reminded me of my pragmatic, yet eccentric father—and it was that feeling that inspired me to investigate what exactly produced the empathy I felt with “Mother.”

Drawing readers into empathy with her mother, Dillard’s sentences pragmatically prompt shifts between *Linguistic Worlds* (Palacas, 1989), changing camera angles (Kuno, 1987), so to speak, to the mother’s point of view. Kuno (1987) defines empathy as “the speaker’s identification, which may vary in degree, with a person/thing that participates in the event or state that [is described] in a sentence” (p. 206). Even though it is most common for readers to empathize with the author/narrator of a text, Dillard’s style of incorporating Mother’s direct and indirect speech further contributes to reader empathy with Mother. Specifically, Dillard’s use of parentheticals—phrases, comma interjections, parentheses, and dashes—and direct and indirect quotations cause a switch between points of view from her own to that of her mother. Parentheticals are known to “project a reflective voice” (Palacas, 1989, p. 512), which allows Dillard to move from her own present voice to the past, represented voice of her mother. This shifting between voices or linguistic worlds creates linguistic empathy with Mother, confirming the intimate insight that Dillard loves her mother, while not just inviting but inducing readers to

feel the same. In the sections that follow, I will first establish the voice of “Mother” before analyzing how, within the scope of indirect representations of her, Dillard manipulates language through violations of conversational maxims, which both produce and reinforce reader empathy with Mother.

## 2. Empathy, Linguistic Worlds, and Parentheticals

Beginning her essay “One Sunday afternoon, Mother wandered through our kitchen” (p. 187), Dillard immediately induces familiarity between readers and her mother by introducing her as “Mother” instead of “my mother.” Employing the kinship term “Mother” establishes empathy with Mother. If Dillard had chosen to write “my mother,” empathy would continue to lie with her as the author/narrator; however, referring to her mother as “Mother” not only creates familiarity among readers but empathy with Mother, according to Kuno’s *Descriptor Empathy Hierarchy*:

Given descriptor  $x$  (e.g., John) and another descriptor  $f(x)$  that is dependent upon  $x$  (e.g., John’s brother), the speaker’s empathy with  $x$  is greater than with  $f(x)$ .

Choosing to write “Mother” instead of “my mother,” Dillard leaves herself out of the equation, and readers more easily empathize with Mother, who is the topic, rather than Dillard as a descriptor. In other words, the point of view lies with Mother in such a way that we, as readers, feel, pragmatically so, that we are at least a friend of the family and can easily refer to Dillard’s mother as Mother (sans quotation marks). This “feeling” is explained further by Kuno’s *Topic Empathy Hierarchy*:

Given an event or state that involves A and B such that A is coreferential with the topic of the present discourse and B is not, it is easier for the speaker to empathize with A than with B.

This principle suggests that readers empathize with an established topic. Kuno’s *Topic Empathy Hierarchy* serves well to explain empathy in terms of conditions obviously related to the topic,

but does little to explain empathy when the topic is more ambiguous or less obvious. Furthering Kuno's idea, I want to suggest the *Topic Dominance Principle*:

The subject (A) of a text is also the topic of that text. The first usage of A in the text establishes A as the topic. Therefore, when A is the current discourse topic, the probability increases that the content of sentences and parenthetical interjections will be attributed to A.

Here it is appropriate to point out that, although Dillard refers to her father on occasion and calls him "Father," empathy continues to lie with Mother, given that she remains the topic of both the text as a whole and the sentences in which Father is mentioned.

In spite of this empathy with Mother, an issue of attribution arises in this text since much of the text is the indirect speech of Mother, albeit in represented, (quasi-) free indirect style (Banfield, 1982, p. 19). According to Banfield (1982), it is impossible for indirect speech to express the opinions of a "designated" person: "Such words [specifically evaluative expressions] might have been pronounced by the quoted speaker, but their appearance in indirect speech (without quotation marks) must mean that the quoting speaker so assented to the quoted speaker's opinions that he 'expressed' similar ones" (p. 56). Banfield's assertions here are limiting, because, as Fludernik (1993) writes, "Not all designations in indirect discourse, however, necessarily derive from the speaker's perspective" (p. 107). In revision of Banfield's assertion, it is possible for certain instances of indirect speech to express the opinions of a designated person, in this case the topic of the sentence or paragraph or essay. Given Palacas's (1993) argument that main clauses can be representational, it is possible for indirect discourse to represent the opinions of a specific person without representing those of the quoter. Main clauses in non-fiction can represent the discourse of a designated person, whereas, consistent with Banfield, subordinate clauses are reportive and not representational.

Take, for instance, the following portion (a) from Dillard's text and contrast the

attribution of the final sentence, italics added, with a revision in (b), also italicized, where the main clause structure in the (a) sentence is replaced by a subordinate clause structure:

- (a) The drama of the words “Tamiami Trail” stirred her, we learned on the same Florida trip. People built Tampa on one coast, and they built Miami on another. *Then—the height of visionary ambition and folly—they piled a slow, tremendous road through the terrible Everglades to connect them.* (p. 188)
- (b) The drama of the words “Tamiami Trail” stirred her, we learned on the same Florida trip. People built Tampa on one coast, and they built Miami on another. *She told us that they then piled a slow, tremendous road through the terrible Everglades to connect them and that this was the height of visionary ambition and folly.*

The italicized sentence in (a) clearly represents Mother’s words and thoughts, and the evaluations expressed are attributed to Mother, whereas in (b) the italicized sentence is, as Banfield predicts, purely Dillard’s report of what Mother thought and said, and its evaluative expressions are to be attributed to Dillard, or equally to Dillard and her mother. More than Dillard’s indirect report of Mother’s discourse, the sentence in (a) is understood as Dillard’s representation of Mother’s discourse (hence, (quasi-) free indirect style). If Dillard’s sentences had been subordinate clauses, Banfield’s prediction would have been borne out. However, because the sentences are main clauses, they can be understood as representations of Mother’s discourse, with which Dillard may or may not assent. Thus, Palacas’s assertion is more accurate.

Mother’s opinions are represented through Dillard’s “(quasi-) free indirect style” or the style of representation of third person reporting using first person style narration (e.g., main clauses). Here, it is important to employ, yet extend Banfield’s concept of free indirect style to (quasi-) free indirect style, because Banfield’s attention is to fiction, and in a nonfiction setting, the free indirect speech is not as easily the point of view of a character as it is the narrator’s view of the character’s view. For instance, Mother is clearly the topic of this sentence: “She repeatedly

reminded us of P.T. Barnum’s dictum: You could sell anything to anybody if you marketed it right” (p. 192). The *Topic Dominance Principle* allows for the sentences following, in which Mother is not the sentence-level topic, to be attributed to Mother—in this case as Mother’s (quasi-) free indirect style:

She repeatedly reminded us of P.T. Barnum’s dictum: You could sell anything to anybody if you marketed it right. The adman who thought of making Americans believe they needed underarm deodorant was a visionary. So, too, was the hero who made a success of a new product, Ivory soap.

Because Mother is the topic of the essay, and this paragraph is introduced with a sentence in which Mother is the topic, the sentences following are interpreted easily as Mother’s ideas as represented by Dillard. Therefore, because Mother believed P.T. Barnum’s dictum, she, not Dillard necessarily, felt that a person who marketed products cleverly was worthy of admiration, a true “visionary” and “hero.”

In her essay, Dillard uses the word “Mother” 23 times in an essay that is 8 pages in length. “Mother” is included 6 times on the first page, which immediately induces and reinforces empathy. Further emphasizing the *Topic Dominance Principle*, the essay is comprised of 172 sentences, in more than half of which Mother is the topic or speaker (roughly 97). Mother is the direct or indirect object of at least 14 more sentences. This prominence allows for many, if not all, of the sentences in which Mother is not explicitly the direct or indirect speaker to be inferred as representing the speech of Mother.

Parentheticals are another avenue for creating empathy. Dillard inserts parentheticals—comma interjections, parentheses, and dashes—throughout her essay, and, through a complicated series of pragmatic steps, the reader perceives the voice of Mother, split between factive and reflective worlds. Although Mey (1999) explains voice in terms of fiction, the same “voicing” is necessary in nonfiction, because the characters, although real, must still become real (or realistic

and definitely believable) to the readers. This believability is achieved through *voice* or “a distinctive way of expressing [characters’] relations to [their] universe and their relationships with one another” (1999, p. 189). In fiction and nonfiction alike, different voices can exist within a single statement. This phenomenon is better understood as what Mey (1999) calls a *voice clash*: “A voice clash occurs whenever voices don’t match: either the character and a voice that is attributed to that character are out of sync, or two or more of the voices heard in the story are perceived as disharmonious” (p. 189). Consequently, “hero” in the sentence “So, too, was the hero who made a success of a new product, Ivory soap” can be attributed as the opinion of Mother, because it adheres to Mother’s already established voice—peculiar and opinionated—rather than Dillard’s more distant and narrative tone.

Voice clash is understood further through Palacas’s (1989) concept of Linguistic Worlds (LW). As Palacas (1989) explains, “every meaning expressed in a (spoken or written) text is assigned to a *linguistic world*—an abstract discourse unit comprised of a set of propositions identified with a particular propositional attitude of a particular person at a particular reference time” (p. 508). The LW model “is intended to capture intuitions about such discourse notions as someone’s dream world, hypothetical world, or past real world, as expressed in a text” and, in regard to parentheticals, intuitions distinguishing factive and reflective worlds (Palacas, 1989, p. 509).

Dillard’s parentheticals also serve the purpose of adding voice, particularly the voice of Mother. Palacas (1989) writes, “Voice can be better understood in terms of a linguistic theory that accounts for the syntactic, semantic, and lexical character of the actual linguistic material observed on the page, the stuff that causes the perception of voice” (p. 508). He proposes that, “[p]ersonal voice is the interacting product of two worlds—the speaker/author’s present time

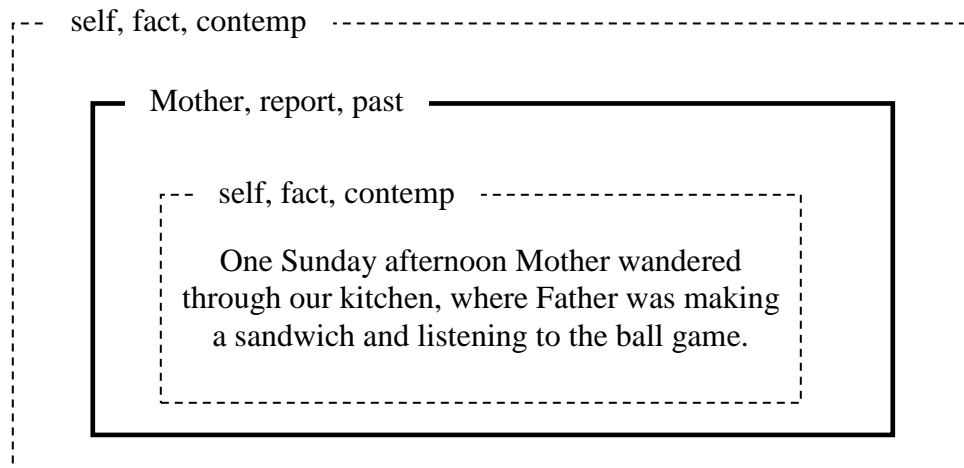
*factive* world and the speaker/author’s present time *reflective*, or evaluative, world” (p. 509). The primary world of a text is the speaker’s default present time *factive* world, to which meanings are attributed when there is no call to do otherwise. But, parentheticals allow for meaning to be attributed to other worlds. In this piece, parentheticals take the reader not simply into Dillard’s *reflective* world, but, because of pragmatic prompts within the parentheticals, into (quasi-) free-indirect representations of Mother’s past discourse, giving Mother’s point of view.

In Dillard’s essay, parentheticals trigger shifts between her present time, *factive* world as an adult and her past, *reflective* world when she was a child hearing her mother’s words. These shifts in worlds allow readers to experience—directly through quotes and indirectly through parentheticals—the words and opinions of Mother as Dillard remembers them. For example, the sentence “Just as Mother passed through [the kitchen], the radio announcer cried—with undue drama—‘Terwilliger bunts one!’” (p. 187) includes a parenthetical that allows meaning to be attributed to two LWs. The basic sentence “Just as Mother passed through, the radio announcer cried ‘Terwilliger bunts one!’” orients readers to the origin of Mother’s fascination with the phrase “Terwilliger bunts one,” but the parenthetical “with undue drama” further takes readers through Dillard’s past, *reflective* world, to the opinion of Mother. In other words, it was Mother, not Dillard, who believed that the radio announcer spoke the phrase with “undue drama.” And it was this belief that prompted Mother hereafter to use the phrase mockingly when testing a microphone, pen, typewriter, when “she pretended to whisper something,” and when responding to someone who used a French or Latin phrase.

In Dillard’s essay, the speaker/experiencer may be Dillard, but the essay moves away from a reportive style to a reconstruction of Mother’s point of view. The following figure represents the LW structure of Dillard’s text—the first sentence in this instance. Each LW



contains three parameters that define each world: source, mentality, and time (Palacas, 1993, p. 242). The default world is always deictic, with parameters self, factive, and contemporary, which are interpreted pragmatically (by default in the non-fictional context) as referring to the speaker's factive mentality in the present. Thus, the outermost LW box is Dillard's present, factive world. The shift to a different, embedded LW occurs in accordance with the *Topic Empathy Hierarchy* and the *Topic Dominance Principle*. Because Dillard begins her essay with "Mother" instead of "my mother," as discussed previously, empathy lies with Mother; thus, "Terwilliger Bunts One" can be most easily interpreted as Dillard's reconstruction of Mother's point of view.



This first sentence is ambiguous and can be interpreted as Dillard's LW alone; however, because of the *Topic Empathy Hierarchy* and the *Topic Dominance Principle*, it is most likely that the information that follows regarding the ball game is a report of what Mother told Dillard directly or what Mother told others while Dillard was present.

Further testing the *Topic Dominance Principle* in regard to parentheticals, we can analyze the occasion when Dillard explains Mother's all-purpose phrase, "Terwilliger bunts one," which Mother heard a radio announcer say regarding the baseball player Wayne Terwilliger, an

infielder for the New York Giants, who made a specific play in baseball where a batter holds the baseball bat in front of the pitched baseball and taps the ball rather than swinging fully so that the baseball unexpectedly remains in the infield. Dillard's mother thought the combination of words was an odd, yet remarkable phrase worth repeating (and repeating).

If mother had had, like Andrew Carnegie, the opportunity to cook up a motto for a coat of arms, hers would have read simply and tellingly, "Terwilliger bunts one." (Carnegie's was "Death to Privilege.") (p. 187)

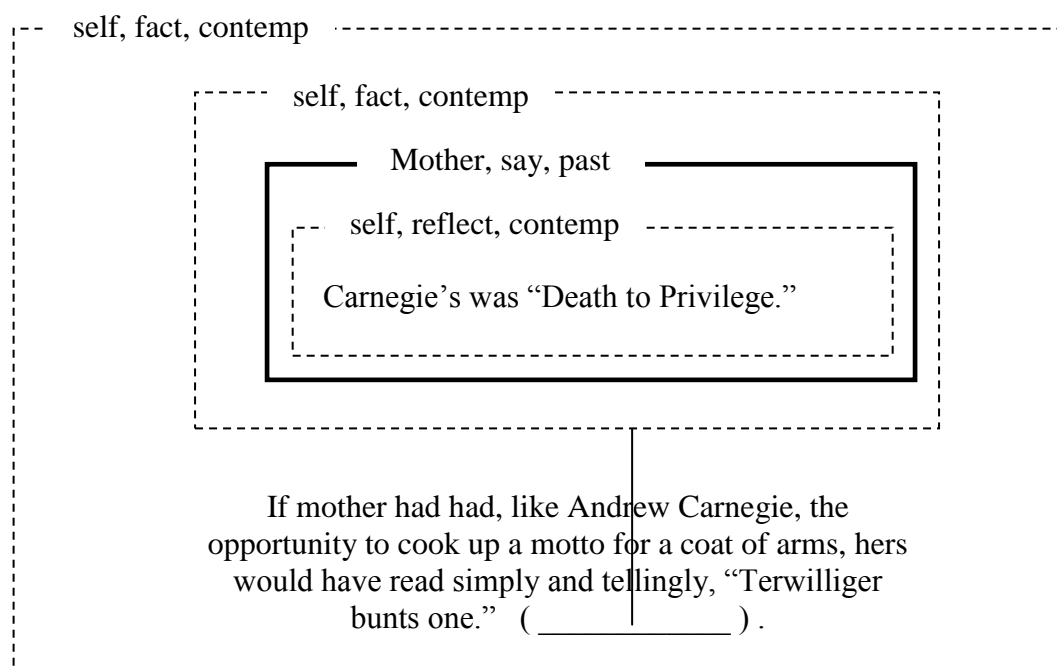
In order to understand the sentence, it is necessary to attribute it to two worlds, one contained within the other, and both constructed by the speaker. A useful concept in this connection is that of a 'paragrammar'. According to Palacas (1989), paragrammatic structures "include parentheticals (and possibly other constructions), words, phrases, or clauses grammatical in their own right and inserted into the basic sentence but not integral to the grammar of the basic sentence itself...Paragrammar is essentially the grammar of the reflective mentality" (p. 515).

The basic sentence—or the sentence of any degree of complexity that is devoid of parentheticals—takes place in Dillard's present time, factive world:

If mother had had the opportunity to cook up a motto for a coat of arms, hers would have read simply and tellingly, "Terwilliger bunts one."

The basic sentence is presently and simply relaying what Mother's motto would have been. The first parenthetical, "like Andrew Carnegie," however, shifts the text into Dillard's current reflection on a past statement of Mother's, taking us indirectly into Mother's speech world. The inclusion of Andrew Carnegie's motto seems random, a parenthetical voice clash, if you will, if seen strictly from Dillard's point of view, but becomes purposeful if it represents something Dillard's mother taught her, something Mother said to Dillard when she was young. The parenthetical is paragrammatic and causes a pragmatic shift from the narrative world through the reflective, parenthetical world of Dillard, to a time when Mother was discussing Carnegie. It is

unlikely that Dillard would include an irrelevant piece of information, and, again turning to the *Topic Dominance Principle*, it is more likely that the parenthetical is relevant because it is connected to Mother, who is represented in (quasi-) free indirect style. The following figure represents this sentence in terms of Dillard's overall deictic LW, which contains Mother's LW within Dillard's reflective parenthetical world; this sentence is shown as a paragrammatic "pop-up" construction, depicting where the phrase (i.e., Carnegie's was "Death to Privilege") occurs in Dillard's deictic and free-standing sentence and the shift to a different LW.



Throughout Dillard's essay, pragmatics serves a dual purpose: allowing readers to attribute meaning and alleviating ambiguity. The above figure demonstrates the sometimes linguistic, sometimes pragmatic (sometimes both) uses of LW diagrams. Parentheticals are first attributed linguistically to the author/narrator, but in this instance that is not relevant. Here, relevance is found pragmatically by applying the *Topic Dominance Principle*.

When recounting a story of a family trip to the beach, Dillard shifts worlds, and readers

are taken from Dillard's reflective world indirectly to Mother's past speech world:

...[Mother] lay stretched out sunning with Father and friends, until the conversation gradually grew tedious, when without forethought she gave a little push with her heel and rolled away. (p. 190)

Explaining parenthetical shifts, Palacas (1989) writes, "physical pauses and intonation shifts—literal shifts of the voice—signal an associated mental shift to a reflective world, which we can equate with a reflective voice" (p. 514). This shift is evident in the parenthetical "until the conversation gradually grew tedious," which shifts to Dillard's past reflective world when she heard Mother say that the conversation became boring. Shifting first to her reflective world, which contains a pragmatically inferred world comprised of a representation of Mother's words, allows readers to experience Mother's personality as Dillard recalls, strengthening reader empathy and enabling readers to understand and feel Dillard's love for Mother. It is likely that the phrase "gradually grew tedious" is a representation of what Dillard heard her mother give as an explanation for her "rolling away". The parenthetical seems to convey the internal feeling of Dillard as the hearer, pragmatically implying Mother's indirect discourse (Kuno, 1987), or more appropriately, Mother's (quasi-) free indirect style.

When explaining her mother's interest in words such as "Tamiami," Dillard describes the making of the road as her mother explained it:

The drama of the words "Tamiami Trail" stirred her, we learned on the same Florida trip. People built Tampa on one coast, and they built Miami on another. Then—the height of visionary ambition and folly—they piled a slow, tremendous road through the terrible Everglades to connect them. (p. 188)

Although the information is indirectly the words of Mother, because of the *Topic Dominance Principle*, the parenthetical thought that the making of the Tamiami Trail was "the height of visionary ambition and folly" is closer to Mother and more empathic, revealing Mother's opinion that this act was, in fact, foolish. Similar to the above parenthetical, this seems to imply indirect

discourse, similar to what Kuno (1987) describes as “an indirect discourse complement of a passive saying verb” (p. 244). Although the “saying verb” is absent, the intonation shift, along with the *Topic Dominance Principle*, would allow for the addition of a phrase such as “as mother said.” Because such a parenthetical could be interpreted without any difficulty as the feeling of Dillard as the hearer, it seems likely that the entire passage about the road is the (quasi-) free indirect style of Mother (with the parenthetical nearer to Mother’s direct discourse).

Another complex shift in worlds occurs when Dillard mentions trivia games her mother used to play:

“Spell ‘poinsettia,’” Mother would throw out at me, smiling with pleasure. “Spell ‘sherbet.’” The idea was not to make us whizzes, but, quite the contrary, to remind us—and I, especially, needed reminding—that we didn’t know it all just yet. (p. 188)

An example of (quasi-) free indirect style, the double parentheticals “—and I, especially, needed reminding—” are the words of Mother reiterated as Dillard remembers them. Perhaps Mother told all of her daughters, but Dillard *especially*, that they needed to be reminded that they did not know it all just yet. The parenthetical as a whole seems to represent Mother’s indirect discourse, and the contained parenthetical word *especially* further embodies Mother’s emphatic insertion, as the following chart illustrates:

self, fact, contemp

Mother, say, past

self, fact, contemp

“Spell poinsettia,”

Mother would throw  
out at me, smiling  
with pleasure.

Mother, say, past

self, fact, contemp

“Spell sherbet.”

self, reflect, contemp

Mother, say, past

self, reflect, contemp

quite the contrary

The idea was not to make us  
whizzes, but, \_\_\_\_\_,

Mother, say, contemp

self, reflect, past

Mother, say, contemp

self, reflect, contemp

especially

self, fact, contemp

and I, \_\_\_\_\_, needed reminding

to remind us— \_\_\_\_\_—that we  
didn't know it all just yet.

Read from left to right and top to bottom, this particular LW diagram illustrates each of Dillard's methods for representing Mother: direct quotation, representation, and paraphrasing. The *Topic Dominance Principle* attributes the parentheticals of "and I, especially, needed reminding" to Mother. Again, normally the parentheticals would be attributed to the author/narrator, but Dillard would not reprimand herself; therefore, pragmatically it is more sensible to attribute the parentheticals to the dominant topic, Mother—"especially" being nearer to Mother's direct discourse. Whether or not she used the exact word "especially," Mother was able to get her point across and we, as readers, understand the criticism as Mother's sentiment.

Dillard continues to shift between worlds when describing her younger sister:

When Molly learned to crawl, Mother delighted in buying her gowns with drawstrings at the bottom, like Swee'pea's, because, as she explained energetically, you could easily step on the drawstring without the baby's noticing... (p. 189)

The idea that Dillard's baby sister looked like Swee'pea from the *Popeye* cartoon is an analogy of Mother's. Here, Dillard shifts worlds to a past time when she heard Mother say that Molly looked like Swee'pea. Readers continue to empathize with Mother, further confirming that the parentheticals indicate Mother's (quasi-) free indirect style. Apart from *topic dominance* which reinforces the pragmatic attribution of the parenthetical to Mother, this empathy is possible because Mother is the subject of the implied saying verb (Kuno, 1987, p. 244), which is absent in this case but can be included. For example, Dillard could have written, "...at the bottom, like Swee'pea's, so she [Mother] said, because, as she explained, energetically..." The exact words matter less than the fact that Mother did, in fact, say something about Molly resembling Swee'pea and that readers intuitively understand this and empathize with Mother.

Dillard writes about her mother's insistence upon keeping her mailing address even when

the family moved across town:

[Mother] persuaded the U.S. Post Office to let her keep her old address—forever—because she'd had stationery printed. (p. 191)

The parenthetical “forever” is idiosyncratic and the voice of Mother as Dillard recalls her insistence on keeping her old address permanently. Only she would have the audacity and wit to believe that she could keep her “permanent address” literally *forever* (and actually make it happen). It is easy to imagine Mother proclaiming, “I will keep my address forever!” This audacity does not make Mother arrogant, which would result in distancing her from readers, but witty and glib, resulting in a fondness of her, the fondness Dillard feels.

## 2.1 Adjectives and Voice Clash

Aside from parentheticals, Palacas (1989) also includes other “elements of subjective language that can contribute to the perception of voice” (p. 510) to which adjectival modifiers belong. Although Palacas does not discuss adjectives as parentheticals, Mey’s (1999) concept of *voice clash* helps make clear Dillard’s use of adjectives to further induce empathy with Mother, because voice-clashing adjectives can be integrated within a basic sentence, signaling the voice of someone other than the narrator/speaker. Similarly, Banfield (1982) discusses *evaluative adjectives*, which “resemble nouns of quality in their possession of a figurative meaning expressive of the speaker’s point of view” (p. 55). Kenner (1978), too, discusses this concept in relation to a sentence in Joyce’s novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Calling his concept the “Uncle Charles Principle,” Kenner purports that “the narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s” (p. 18). In other words, idiomatic or quirky words and phrases can be attributed to someone other than the author or narrator. Because in this text, Mother is the topic and empathy continues to remain with her, Dillard’s expressive adjectives convey Mother’s point of view. Dillard includes several instances of adjectival modifiers (some that are also colloquial and



stylistic shifts) that serve the same purpose as her parentheticals—shifting from her present factive world to her past reflective world, again, pragmatically implying Mother’s past speech world. The remainder of this section includes several examples of this phenomenon.

Referring to the section about the Tamiami Trail, Dillard includes the adjectives *slow*, *tremendous*, and *terrible*:

...they piled a slow, tremendous road through the terrible Everglades to connect [Tampa and Miami].

The road being “slow, tremendous,” and “terrible” is the opinion of Mother, as Dillard remembers her feelings about the road. It seems as though most of the information Dillard gathered about the Tamiami Trail was from Mother’s bias. The specific adjectives are paragrammatic (Palacas, 1989, p. 515) in nature; if omitted, the sentence retains its basic structure, showing that these words are additional, seemingly parenthetical, and instances of Mother’s (quasi-) free indirect discourse, which allow for a shifting of worlds. Continuing to interject Mother’s speech world and opinions about the Tamiami Trail, Dillard writes:

Then, capping it all, some genius thought of the word Tamiami: they called the road from Tampa to Miami, this very road under our spinning wheels, the Tamiami Trail.

The word *genius* is stigmatic and correlates with Mother’s already established irritation with the Tamiami Trail. These evaluative adjectives also provide a shift in style, or a voice clash. In other words, Mother’s voice is attributed to specific expressions (e.g., *capping it all* and *genius* in the above example) that “clash” with the more academic and less colloquial voice attributed to Dillard.

Further demonstrating the concept of voice clash, Mother’s voice is perceived when Dillard writes about her mother’s eye surgery:

On the operating table, just before she conked out, she appealed feelingly to the

surgeon...

The parenthetical “just before she conked out” may seem odd at first, because the phrase *conked out* does not necessarily correspond with the style of the text. However, *conked out* is fitting as a colloquial phrase typifying Mother’s voice rather than Dillard’s. By using this phrase, Dillard depicts Mother’s voice. Instead of using a more euphemistic phrase—“went under,” for example—Dillard shifts into her past reflective world allowing readers to hear indirectly what Mother said when telling the story of her surgery.

When listing some of Mother’s innovations, Dillard, again, incorporates an adjective that is most likely something she heard Mother say:

She glued sandpaper to the sides of kitchen drawers, and under kitchen cabinets, so she always had a handy place to strike a match.

The adjective *handy* is more colloquial, and therefore more indicative of Mother’s voice.

Another instance of (quasi-) free indirect style, the word *handy* suggests a sentence much like “Mother said that it was so she’d always have a handy place to strike a match,” which further implies Mother’s direct discourse, such as, “Mother said, ‘It’s so I’ll always have a handy place to strike a match.’”

### 3. Implicature and Pragmatics

Dillard establishes Mother’s personality using conversational implicatures which, at first, seem to be violations of the Cooperative Principle. A conversational implicature, as defined by Mey (1993), “is something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in actual language use... The context determines both what one can say and what one cannot say: only the pragmatics of the situation can give meaning to one's words” (p. 45). Mey (1993) further refers to pragmatics as being “often given the task of trying to solve the numerous practical problems that are inherent in the exercise of our linguistic functions” (p. 11). These

practical problems in Dillard's essay occur in relation to what appear to be violations of the Cooperative Principle (CP). In this section, I will consider the violations of the CP's maxims, as described by Grice (1975) and repeated here for reference:

Quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality: Try to make your contribution on that is true.

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation: Be relevant.

Manner: Be perspicuous.

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

Empathy is induced beyond parentheticals and adjectives, through a reader's ability to understand that what appear to be maxim violations are, in fact, intentional and pragmatic. According to Mey (1993), "Pragmatics tells us it's all right to use language in various, unconventional ways, as long as we know, as language users, what we're doing" (p. 207)—and Mother does.

### 3.1 Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity requires that adequate information be given in a conversation, neither too much nor too little. Mother tends to violate this maxim intentionally, primarily through repetition. For example, she is introduced repeating, "Terwilliger bunts one" wherever possible; this phrase's repetition, even though it occurs not in one conversation but many, still seems to violate the maxim of quantity.

That's marvelous," Mother said. "'Terwilliger bunts one.' No wonder you listen to baseball. 'Terwilliger bunts one.'" For the next seven or eight years, Mother made this surprising string of syllables her own. Testing a microphone, she repeated, "Terwilliger bunts one"; testing a pen or typewriter, she wrote it. If, as

happened surprisingly often in the course of various improvised gags, she pretended to whisper something else in my ear, she actually whispered, “Terwilliger bunts one.” Whenever someone used a French phrase, or a Latin one, she answered solemnly, “Terwilliger bunts one.” (p. 187)

Repeating a catch phrase of sorts, which is not an inside joke among friends or family, but a phrase that amuses Mother alone, seems odd, but for Mother, this repetition is humorous, and readers, empathizing with Mother, find her amusing and understand her sense of humor. If she repeated the phrase but once, the incident—and the entire essay—would lose much of its humor.

Referring to the scenario when Molly looked like Swee’pea, Mother seemingly again violates the maxim of quantity, which suggests a shift to her past linguistic world (LW):

...she explained energetically, you could easily step on the drawstring without the baby’s noticing, so that she crawled and crawled and crawled and never got anywhere except into a small ball at the gown’s top. (p. 189)

The phrase “crawled and crawled and crawled,” is typical of Mother, who knowingly violates maxims. The use of repetition portrays Mother’s dramatic personality and provides the image of what Dillard heard as Mother excitedly described Molly. Pragmatically, repetition serves an emphatic purpose for Mother and omitting this repetition might lessen empathy with Mother. For example, changing the sentence so that it reads “so that she crawled and never got anywhere” does not elicit the same shift in style or voice.

Dillard continues to demonstrate Mother’s method of repeating certain catch phrases, which invites readers to feel closer to Mother in a short time (we only met her several pages ago, after all).

She respected the rare few who broke through to new ways. “Look,” she’d say, “here’s an intelligent apron.” She called upon us to admire intelligent control knobs and intelligent panhandles, intelligent andirons and picture frames and knife sharpeners. (p. 192)

By including Mother’s redundant use of the word *intelligent* (when she found something

innovative) along with the other examples of repetition, Dillard creates a pattern. This pattern allows readers to recognize Mother's idiosyncratic, yet pragmatic, use of language, which, again, induces empathy. Readers understand that Mother used and overused "intelligent" when describing something she considered novel, and, as before, this repetition is charming, allowing readers to identify Mother's quirky speech patterns.

Dillard includes Mother's intentional violation of quantity again through repetition when envisioning a verbal chastisement from her mother for making a general statement about the presidential election. This results in another shift in worlds to a time when young Dillard heard her mother's reprimand. As a child during the presidential election, Dillard flippantly stated, "Eisenhower's going to win." Dillard imagines that in saying, "Everyone says so," in response to her mother's question of, "How do you know?" she is doomed immediately:

We all knew well what happened. "Do you consult this Everyone before you make your decisions? What if Everyone decided to round up all the Jews?" (p. 194)

The pragmatic purpose of using repetition for emphasis is explicit in this instance. By personifying and repeating "Everyone," Mother reinvents the age-old cliché, "What if everyone jumped off a bridge?"

### **3.2 Maxims of Quality and Relation**

The maxims of quality and relation seem to correlate with Mother's violations. Grice includes "understatement, hyperbole, and sarcasm as being cases where the maxim of quality is apparently violated to implicate something true and relevant while avoiding blatancy" (Green, 1996, p. 103). When Mother states matter-of-factly that there is a deer in the hall, Dillard is confused, because she expects what her mother says to be true, relevant to the conversation, or obviously ironic, but it is not.

“There’s a deer standing in the front hall,” she told me one quiet evening in the country.

“Really?”

“No. I just wanted to tell you something once without your saying, ‘I know.’” (p. 189)

Mother seemingly violates the maxim of quality and relation because her statement is false and unrelated to anything said previously, but her violation is intentional. In her idiosyncratic way, Mother again points out sarcastically that young Dillard “doesn’t know it all just yet” (p. 188). This intentional violation conforms with Mother’s established idiosyncrasies and maintains reader empathy with her.

Dillard’s mother blatantly violates the maxims of quality and relation when answering the phone. Dillard explains:

If [Mother] answered the phone on a wrong number, she told the caller, ‘Just a minute,’ and dragged the receiver to Amy or me, saying, “Here, take this, your name is Cecile,” or, worse, just, “It’s for you.” (p. 190)

The caller on the phone is expecting Mother to hand the phone to the person requested, not a stranger. Likewise, the caller also expects the person who answers to say if he or she called a wrong number. As Green (2000) writes, “Linguistic pragmatics irreducibly involves the speaker’s model of the addressee, and the hearer’s model of the speaker” (p. 408). Outright violating the maxims, Mother encourages her daughters to pretend to be someone they are not, or outright deceives Dillard or her sister telling her that she is the person requested by the caller. Again, this violation is interpreted as comical by readers who understand these antics as typical of Mother.

While at the Highland Park Zoo, Mother deliberately violates the maxim of quality and relation yet again.

[Mother] approached a young couple holding hands on a bench by the seals, and addressed the young man in dripping tones: “Where have you been? Still got

those baby-blue eyes; always did slay me. And this”—a swift nod at the dumbstruck young woman, who had removed her hand from the man’s—“must be the one you were telling me about. She’s not so bad, really, as you used to make her out. But listen, you know how I miss you, you know where to reach me, same old place. And there’s Ann over there—see how she’s grown? See the blue eyes?” (p. 190)

Mother outdoes herself in violating the maxims in this instance—nothing she says is factual. In speaking as though she knows the man and by insinuating that Dillard, a young girl then, is his daughter, the woman with him is sure to be outraged and confused. Including this occurrence, Dillard typifies Mother’s love of humor through violating the CP and ultimately shares her childhood and her mother with readers.

### 3.3 Maxims of Manner and Relation

When Mother purposefully violates the maxim of manner, her intelligence and love of language games shines through. While at the grocery store, Mother violates the maxim of manner and relation, interpreting the contextually apparent meaning of “stamps” as ambiguous and, therefore, irrelevant:

Supermarkets in the middle 1950s began luring, or bothering, customers by giving out Top Value Stamps or Green Stamps. When, shopping with Mother, we got to the head of the checkout line, the checker, always a young man, asked, “Save stamps?”  
 “No,” Mother replied genially, week after week, “I build model airplanes.” (p. 189)

The supermarket cashier expected an answer relevant to his question about the saving of Top Value Stamps or Green Stamps, not whether Mother collected stamps as a hobby. Mother understands precisely what the man is asking, yet she answers as though his question is ambiguous and that she understands the question in a different but relevant way.

Returning to the instance when Dillard’s mother was about to have eye surgery, Mother violates the maxim of manner once more:

She had surgery on one of her eyes. On the operating table, just before she conked out, she appealed feelingly to the surgeon, saying, as she had been planning to say for weeks, “Will I be able to play the piano?” ... It was, indeed, an old one. The surgeon was supposed to answer, “Yes, my dear, brave woman, you will be able to play the piano after this operation,” to which Mother intended to reply, “Oh, good, I’ve always wanted to play the piano.” (p. 189)

The surgeon is supposed to assume that Mother already knows how to play the piano and still will be able to after the eye surgery. However, she is ambiguous and the punch line implies that she has never been able to play the piano and wants to know if she will be able to play after an operation on her eye (which does not follow logically). Since the doctor assumes that she can already play the piano, he is supposed to answer, “Yes,” to her question, leading to the absurd conclusion that an eye operation will teach Dillard’s mother how to play the piano.

These violations, as with all of the maxim violations, allow readers to expect quirky, playful language from Mother, which further allows readers to empathize with Mother—a woman they have come to know, anticipate, and appreciate.

#### 4. Conclusion

Dillard likely did not have in mind all of the linguistic, literary, and pragmatic elements that induce reader empathy in her short essay; yet, because all of those elements are relevant and work together, discussing her essay is worthwhile. Linguistic and literary pragmatics (rhetoric, composition, literature, and linguistics alike) coexist. As Mey (1999) writes,

Literary pragmatics studies the kind of effects that authors, as text producers, set out to obtain, using the recourses of language in their efforts to establish a ‘working cooperation’ with their audiences, the consumers of the texts. Such efforts rely on a precise understanding of the conditions of use of those resources, when directed at a particular audience among the consumers of the literary work.

These pragmatic effects cannot rely on the linguistic elements involved alone...what is required beyond those linguistic techniques is a thorough exploitation of all the contextual factors determining the use of those linguistic items. (12)



Likewise, Sell (1991) writes, “[literary pragmatics] reinstates the ancient lineage between rhetoric and poetics, and in a way that could well be of lasting importance for language scholars and literary scholars alike” (xiv). Aspiring to be both literary and linguistic, literary pragmatics encompasses fields beyond literature, as found in Dillard’s essay and demonstrated here. The means of literary pragmatics are necessary for creating linguistic empathy—without the one, we could not have the other. Through their of shifting between linguistic worlds, direct and (quasi-) free indirect discourse, and the author’s manipulation of conversational expectations, readers understand Dillard’s love of Mother, which induces empathy, establishing a relationship between readers and Mother. We may only have met Mother eight short pages ago, but we love her just the same.

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