

Speech System of the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's *Pullman Car Hiawatha*

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Abstract

This study is to consider both 'the mediating communication system' and what I find to be, a dual time scheme in *Pullman Car Hiawatha* (1931, henceforth *Pullman*).

By introducing Stage Manager into *Pullman*, Thornton Wilder succeeds in his aim of creating a kind of 'mediating communication system (Pfister 1988, 4)' which dramatic texts conventionally exclude. The Stage Manager in *Pullman* is given both pseudo-narrator-like and pseudo-director-like status on the stage, which indicates that he carries out not only a functional role in the mediating communication system but also has one in creating a dual time scheme in the play. Whereas in one time scheme, the characters within/around 'Hiawatha' convey the events on stage through their actions, in the other time scheme the Stage Manager directs the entire story through his explanations about the plot to the audience and also through his instructions to the other characters about such matters as entering/exiting and starting/stopping their performances. This study focuses on examining both the mediating communicating system and this dual time scheme by means of an analysis of the following three Sender-Receiver relationships found in the dialogue: (1) the Sender-Receiver relationship between the characters within/around 'Hiawatha'; (2) that between the Stage Manager and the other characters; (3) that between the Stage Manager and the audience, in other words, Stage Manager's addressing words toward the audience. Through the investigation of the play's speech system, I hope to reveal Wilder's strategic devices for projecting his mediating communication system and a dual time scheme onto the stage.

1. Introduction

By introducing Stage Manager into *Pullman Car Hiawatha* (1931), Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) succeeds in his aim of creating a kind of ‘mediating communication system (Pfister 1988, 4)’ which dramatic texts conventionally exclude. In terms of the stage techniques with which Wilder experiments in this one-act play, a number of arguments have been put forward. Some (e.g., Burbank 1961, 69; Konkle 2006, 111; and also cf. Goldstein 1965, 77) argue that the Stage Manager plays a role as the arranger and interpreter of the action, knowing all and conducting the universe as if he were God. Others (e.g., Burbank 1961, 70, Lifton 1995, 22-3; Castronovo 1996, 105; Konkle 2006, 109) are concerned with the personification of towns and a field. Still others (e.g., Burbank 1961, 71; Lifton 1996, 126; Konkle 2006, 109-110) give consideration to the musicality of the play which blends dissonant elements into harmonies.¹ Castronovo (1996, 105) suggests that ‘*Pullman Car Hiawatha* is a more elaborate theatrical undertaking—a play that employs the machinery and strategy of experimentalism to maximum effect’. Thus the stage techniques in this one-act play have evoked a number of arguments among scholars, but little attention has been paid to the mediating communication system and the dual time scheme, both of which might be projected onto the stage by the presence of the Stage Manager.

The Stage Manager in *Pullman Car Hiawatha* is given both pseudo-narrator-like and pseudo-director-like status on the stage, which indicates that he carries out not only a functional role in the mediating communication system but also has one in creating a dual time scheme in the play. Whereas in one time scheme, the characters inside/outside of ‘Hiawatha’ convey the events on stage through their actions, in the other time scheme the Stage Manager directs the entire story through his explanations about the plot to the audience and also through his instructions to the other characters about such matters as entering and exiting or starting and stopping their performances.

2. Aim and Methodology of the Study

This study focuses on examining both the mediating communicating system and this dual time scheme by means of an analysis of sender-receiver relationships seen in three different types of speeches:

Three Different Types of Speeches in *Pullman Car Hiawatha*

Speech Type (1)

Speeches exchanged between the characters inside of the car 'Hiawatha' (including speeches substituted by the Stage Manager)

Speech Type (2)

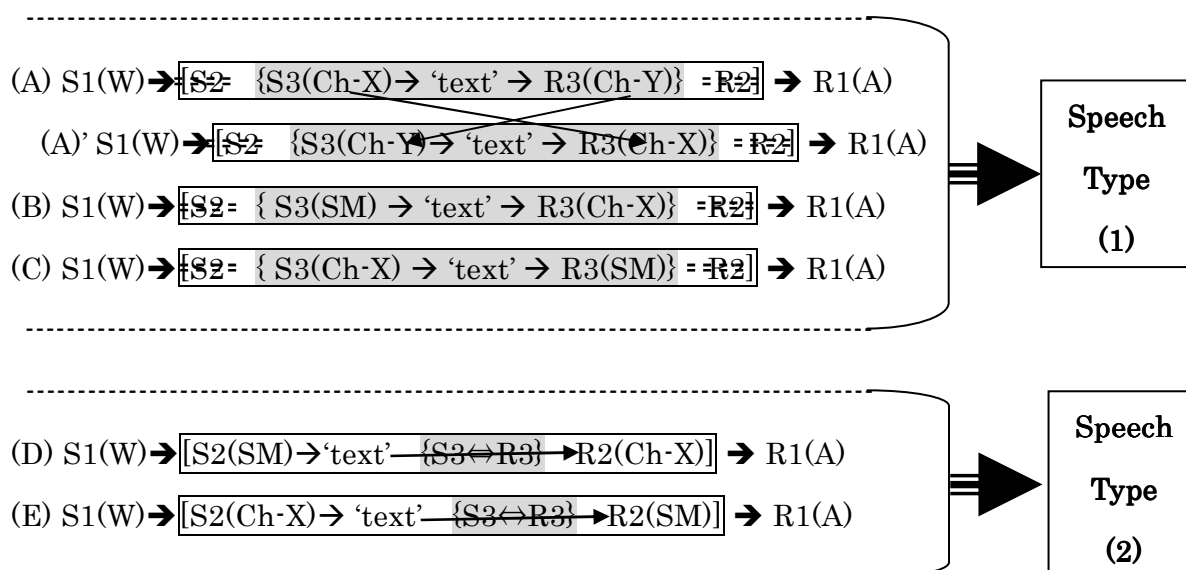
Speeches exchanged between the Stage Manager and the other characters standing outside of the car 'Hiawatha'

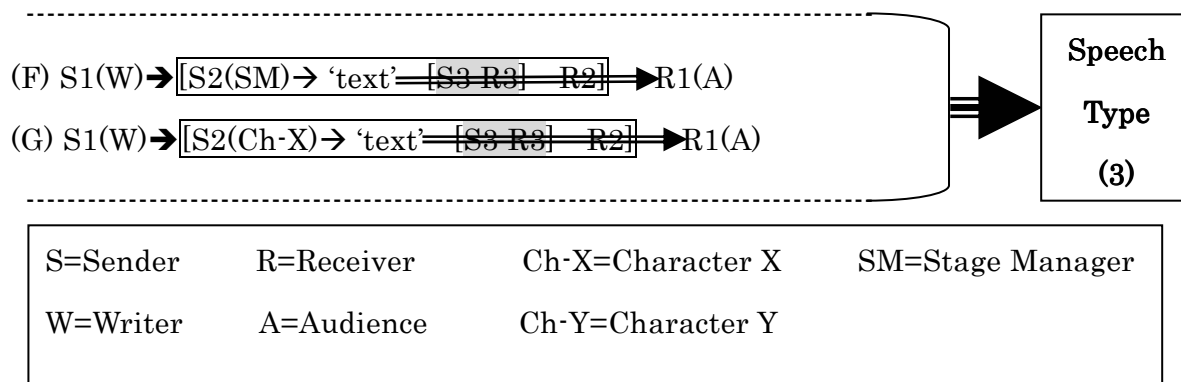
Speech Type (3)

Speeches from the Stage Manager and some other characters directly to the audience, (in other words, addressing words toward the audience)

These three types of speeches depend on the following 7 Sender-Receiver Relationship Models:

Seven Sender-Receiver Relationship Models in *Pullman Car Hiawatha*





In the models, S1 stands for the actual writer, as he creates a fictional dramatic world, which is represented as lying within the rectangular boxes. R1 stands for the real audience. In the fictional dramatic world, S2 stands for the Stage Manager as a pseudo-narrator/director, or for a character that utters his/her words without being involved in the events taking place inside of the car. R2 represents a receiver of S2. S2 and R2 can undertake a functional role in mediating the communication system. S3 and R3 in the shaded area stand for characters in the story world inside the car who communicate with each other through dialogues. Speech Type (1) depends on the Model (A), (B) and (C), and in this type of speech, a given character X as a speaker utters his/her words shown as 'text' in the model to a given character Y as a hearer, through which communication between character X and Y is conveyed to the real audience. Speech Type (2) depends on the Model (D) and (E). In Model (D), the Stage Manager utters his words to a character-X outside the events in the car, and conversely in Model (E) from a character X to the Stage Manager. Speech Type (3) depends on the Model (F) and (G), and in this case, the Stage Manager and some other characters as Sender 2 utter his/her words directly to the real audience.

Through an investigation of these Sender-Receiver Relationships, I hope to reveal Wilder's strategic devices for projecting his mediating communication and dual time systems onto the stage.

3. Opening Speech By the Character of the Stage Manager

At the beginning of the play, the Stage Manager gives a few words about its time and place of this one-act play, as in the quotation (1):

(1) THE STAGE MANAGER:

This is the plan of a Pullman car. Its name is Hiawatha and on December twenty-first it is on its way from New York to Chicago. Here at your left are three compartments. Here is the aisle and five lowers. The berths are all full, uppers and lowers, but for the purposes of this play we are limiting our interest to the people in the lower berths on the further side only. . . . (41)²

In this opening speech, the Stage Manager is addressing the audience, using ‘your’, ‘we’ and ‘our’: ‘Here at your left’, and ‘we are limiting our interest . . .’. These ‘your’ and ‘we’ suggest that the Stage Manager here intends not only to give an explanation to the audience but to take them into a dramatic world. This opening speech depends on the Sender-Receiver Relationship Model (F) below:

Model for Quotation (1)

(F) S1(W) → [S2(SM) → ‘text’ = ~~[S3 R3]~~ R2] → R1(A)

As is shown in the model, the Stage Manager gives his explanation about the setting of the play directly to the audience, through which he carries out his expository function as pseudo-narrator.

At the end of this opening speech, the Stage Manager turns away and calls the other characters onto the stage, as in the quotation (2):

(2) THE STAGE MANAGER:

All right! Come on, everybody!

(The actors enter carrying chairs. Each improvises his berth by placing

two chairs “facing one another” in his chalk-marked space. . . . (41-2)

In this example, the Stage Manager, taking his role as a pseudo-director on the stage, gives his instructions to the other characters, and this speech depends on the Model (D), as follows:

Model for Quotation (2)

(D) S1(W) → [S2(SM) → 'text' — {S3 ↔ R3} → R2(other characters)] → R1(A)

As Model (D) shows, the Stage Manager's instructions are conveyed to the other characters who have not taken their place inside the car. This indicates that in this kind of speech the Stage Manager utters his instructions in the imaginary time and space of the pseudo-director on the stage which is away from the events taking place inside the car 'Hiawatha'.

4. Dialogue Exchanged By the Characters Inside 'Hiawatha'

After having the characters take their places on the car, the Stage Manager lets them begin their dialogues, as in quotation (3):

- (3) ① LOWER ONE (*In a shrill whisper*): Porter! Porter!
- ② THE PORTER: Yes, ma'am.
- ③ LOWER ONE: My hot water bag's leaking. I guess you'll have to take it away. I'll have to do without it tonight. How awful!
- ④ LOWER FIVE (*Sharply to the passenger above her*): Young man, you mind your own business, or I'll report you to the conductor.
- ⑤ THE STAGE MANAGER (*Substituting for Upper Five*): Sorry, ma'am, I didn't mean to upset you. My suspenders fell down and I was trying to catch them.
- ⑥ LOWER FIVE: Well, here they are. Now go to sleep. . . . (43)

In this dialogue, the characters on the car make routine of conversation with each other and the Stage Manager joins them by substituting for Upper Five, which the

following 6 sender-receiver models show:

Models for Quotation (3)

(3)-①:(A) S1(W) → $\boxed{\{S2 = \{S3(L-1) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow R3(\text{Porter})\} = R2\}} \rightarrow R1(A)$

(3)-②:(A)' S1(W) → $\boxed{\{S2 = \{S3(\text{Porter}) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow R3(L-1)\} = R2\}} \rightarrow R1(A)$

(3)-③:(A) S1(W) → $\boxed{\{S2 = \{S3(L-1) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow R3(\text{Porter})\} = R2\}} \rightarrow R1(A)$

(3)-④:(C) S1(W) → $\boxed{\{S2 = \{S3(L-5) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow R3(\text{SM as U-5})\} = R2\}} \rightarrow R1(A)$

(3)-⑤:(B) S1(W) → $\boxed{\{S2 = \{S3(\text{SM as U-5}) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow R3(L-5)\} = R2\}} \rightarrow R1(A)$

(3)-⑥:(C) S1(W) → $\boxed{\{S2 = \{S3(L-5) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow R3(\text{SM as U-5})\} = R2\}} \rightarrow R1(A)$

Looking at the models above, we may notice that at this moment, the play focuses on the action inside the car, and the Stage Manager ceases his function as narrator or director. That's why S2 and R2, the agents of the functioning mediating communication system, ceases their function in the models, unlike the previous two quotations.

5. Speeches Directly Addressed To the Audience

After the trivial exchanges between the characters on the berths, the Stage Manager shifts the play's focus to the compartment, saying 'Now the compartment please', and he lets the characters in the compartment start their dialogues. After a period of dialogue, Harriet suffers from a heart attack or failure and dies, at which the Stage Manager comes forward and stops all action inside the car, and announces the end of the first stage or movement of the play and turns to the next stage, as in quotation (4):

(4) THE STAGE MANAGER: All right. So much for the inside of the car.
That'll be enough of that for the present. Now for its position
geographically, meteorologically, astronomically, theologically considered.
(49)

Model for Quotation (4)

(F) S1(W) → $\boxed{[S2(SM) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow [S3 R3] \rightarrow R2]} \rightarrow R1(A)$

In quotation (4), as is shown in the Model (F) above, the Stage Manager as a pseudo-narrator announces to the audience that the play is progressing onto the next stage. After this announcement, the Stage Manager gets characters, representing Town and Field and Planets and Hours etc., to enter onto the stage one after another, and they talk about themselves directly to the audience. A few words by the Field give a good example:

(5) FIELD: I represent a field you are passing between Grover's Corners, Ohio, and Parkersburg, Ohio. In this field there are fifty-one gophers, two hundred and six field mice, six snakes and millions of bugs, insects, ants and spiders. All in their winter sleep. . . . (50)

As is shown in the following Model, Field utters his words directly to the audience:

Model for Quotation (5)

(G) S1(W) → $\boxed{[S2(Field) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow [S3 R3] \rightarrow R2]} \rightarrow R1(A)$

In this speech, without being involved in the event inside the car, Field explains what he represents, saying 'I represent a field you are passing between Grover's Corners, Ohio, and Parkersburg, Ohio'. The use of 'you' here carries out two functions: the first is to inform the audience that they are being addressed directly; and the second is to involve the audience in the imaginary journey taking place on the stage. As in the Stage Manager's direct speeches to the audience, in speeches of this kind some characters such as Town, Field and Hours carry out an expository function in the mediating communication system, but all of them are under the direction of the Stage Manager, and no characters are given the pseudo-director-like status that the Stage Manager holds.

6. Speeches Revealing the Stage Manager's Directorial Aspect

In the play, it is only the Stage Manager that knows all and directs the play as pseudo-director. The following caution to the Hours and Planets gives a good example of Stage Manager's directorial aspect:

(6) (*Some figures begin to appear on the balcony.*)

THE STAGE MANAGER: No, no. It's not time for The Planets yet. Nor The Hours. (*They retire*) (49-50)

Model for Quotation (6)

(D) S1(W) → $\boxed{[S2(SM) \rightarrow \text{'text'} - \{S3 \leftrightarrow R3\} \rightarrow R2(\text{Planets+Hours})]}$ → R1(A)

When the Planets and Hours enter prematurely, the Stage Manager says that it is not time for them yet. These instructions indicate that the Stage Manager as a pseudo-director possesses a schedule for the play based on which he tries to present its performance.

At the beginning of the third movement, the Stage Manager announces the entrance of the Archangels, as in quotation (7):

(7) STAGE MANAGER: ① Now shh—shh—shh! Enter The Archangels.

② (*To the audience*) We have now reached the theological position of Pullman Car Hiawatha. (54)

In this example, the Stage Manager utters his words to the characters on the stage, then to the audience, as is shown in the following two models:

Models for Quotation (7)

(7)-①: (D) S1(W) → $\boxed{[S2(SM) \rightarrow \text{'text'} - \{S3 \leftrightarrow R3\} \rightarrow R2(\text{all characters})]}$ → R1(A)

(7)-②: (F) S1(W) → $\boxed{[S2(SM) \rightarrow \text{'text'} - \{S3 \leftrightarrow R3\} \rightarrow R2]}$ → R1(A)

In this speech, the Stage manager tells all the characters on the stage to be quiet

because of the entrance of the archangels, and then to the audience he announces their significance for the play's procession to the third movement.

7. Ending Of the Play

After Stage Manager's announcement in quotation (7), the play's focus moves inside the car. While the angels are passing by, the passengers in the car whisper in their sleep, and the Doctor draws Harriet's husband into the next compartment. As the angels approach and stand beside Harriet in death, she says that she doesn't want to go to heaven with them. After the angels' whispering into her ear, Harriet addresses and asks the angels, as in quotation (8):

(8) HARRIET:

Oh, I'm ashamed! I'm just a stupid and you know it. I'm just another American.— But then what wonderful things must be beginning now. You really want me? You really want me?

(They start leading her down the aisle of the car.) (57)

The 'You'-references here indicate that Harriet is speaking to the angels. Through these features, we can notice that Harriet conveys her words to the angels as the following model shows:

Model for Quotation (8)

(A) S1(W) → $\boxed{\{S2 = \{S3(\text{Harriet}) \rightarrow \text{'text'} \rightarrow R3(\text{Angels})\} = R2\}} \rightarrow R1(A)$

As the model shows, communication between Harriet and the angels takes place inside the car, which reveals that at this moment the play is focused on the events inside the car.

After Harriet leaves the car with the angels, the Stage Manager makes all characters murmur their individual thoughts or mottoes or nonverbal sounds, while he orchestrates them like a conductor, adjusting the dynamics and tempo of their murmuring. At the height of the sound, the Stage Manager stops their murmuring and announces their arrival in Chicago, as in quotation (9):

(9)

① THE STAGE MANAGER: ^(a)Very good. Now clear the stage, please. ^(b)Now we're at Englewood Station, South Chicago. See the university's towers over there! The best of them all.

② LOWER ONE (*The Maiden Lady*): Porter, you promised to wake me up at quarter of six.

③ THE PORTER: Sorry, ma'am, but it's been an awful night on this car. A lady's been terrible sick.

④ LOWER ONE: Oh! Is she better?

⑤ THE PORTER: No'm. She ain't one jot better.

.....

⑥ THE PORTER: CHICAGO, CHICAGO. All out. This train don't go no further. (59)

Models for Quotation (9)

(9)-①^(a): (D) S1(W) → [S2(SM) → 'text' → {S3 ↔ R3} → R2(all characters)] → R1(A)

-①^(b): (F) S1(W) → [S2(SM) → 'text' → ~~[S3 R3]~~ → R2] → R1(A)

(9)-②:(A) S1(W) → [S2 = {S3(L-1) → 'text' → R3(Porter)} → ~~R2~~] → R1(A)

(9)-③:(A)' S1(W) → [S2 = {S3(Porter) → 'text' → R3(L-1)} → ~~R2~~] → R1(A)

(9)-④:(A) S1(W) → [S2 = {S3(L-1) → 'text' → R3(Porter)} → ~~R2~~] → R1(A)

(9)-⑤:(A)' S1(W) → [S2 = {S3(Porter) → 'text' → R3(L-1)} → ~~R2~~] → R1(A)

.....

(9)-⑥:(A) S1(W) → [S2 = {S3(Porter) → 'text' → R3(Passengers)} → ~~R2~~] → R1(A)

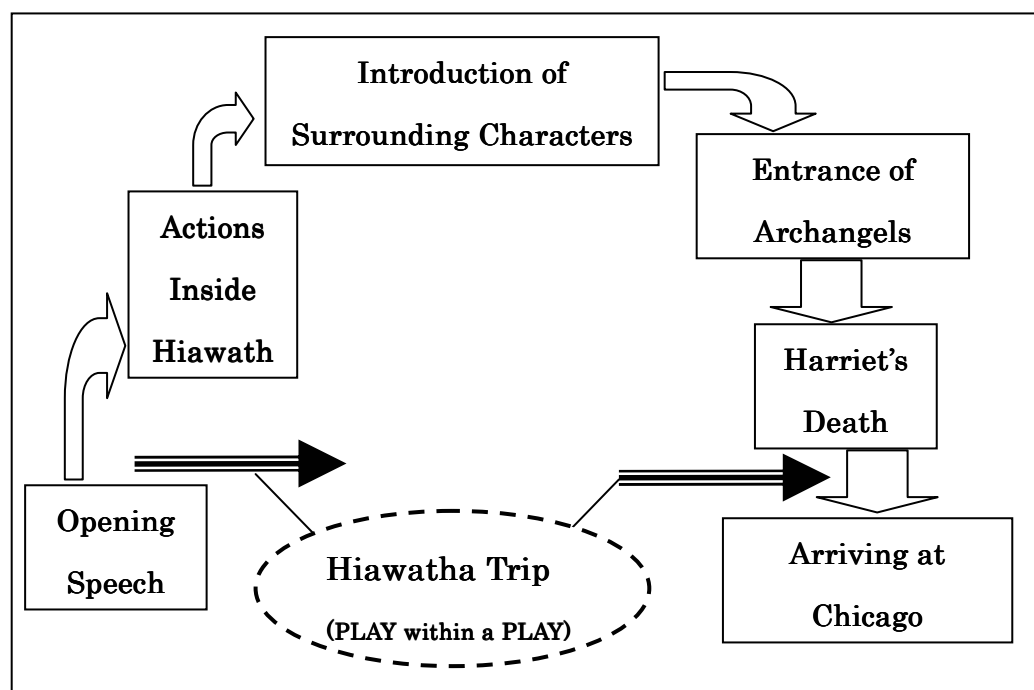
As the model (9)-①^(a) and (9)-①^(b) show, the Stage Manager first gives instructions to all characters, and then he announces their arrival in Chicago followed by a casual, and oddly disconnected, reference to the university's tower. That a series of dialogue follows his announcement means that at the last moment the play focuses on the action inside the car again, and the passengers resume communicating with each

other through dialogue, as is shown in Model (9)-② to (9)-⑥.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to investigate both the mediating communication system and the dual time scheme in *Pullman Car Hiawatha*. In one time scheme, the train trip from New York to Chicago is meant to be projected on the stage through the dialogues and actions by the characters inside the car. In the other time scheme, via his opening speech, actions inside the car, introduction of the characters that represent the surroundings of the car, the entrance of Archangels, Harriet's death, and the arrival in Chicago, the Stage Manager through his general movement controls the overall progress of the play. From these features, we may deduce that the Stage Manager tries to project the Hiawatha's trip as a play within a play, as the Figure 1 below shows:

Figure 1



The mediating communication system enables the Stage Manager to direct the other characters, and to give explanations to the audience. Without this system, Wilder generates neither the communication between S2 and R2, which enables the Stage Manager to direct, nor the utterances from S2 to R3, which allow the Stage Manager

and some other characters to utter their words directly to the audience. By arranging 3 types of speeches dependent on 7 Sender-Receiver Relationships, the playwright succeeds in presenting a *Pullman Car Hiawatha* invested with a dual time scheme. These two features exploit the play's fictionality and presentness to maximum effect. I believe this reflects Wilder's belief about plays (Wilder 1941 [rpt., 2000], 122, 124) that 'The theatre is a world of pretense', and 'the action on the stage takes place in a perpetual present time'.

Notes

1. Burbank (1961, 71) contends that "*Pullman Car Hiawatha* has been considered as a remarkably constructed allegory combining all levels of time and space."
2. All quotations from *Pullman Car Hiawatha* are cited from *The Collected Short Plays of Thornton Wilder; Volume I*, eds. Donald Gallup and Tappan Wilder (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997) 42-89. Henceforth, only the page is indicated in the brackets.

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