



# *Different Tropes for Different Folks* 'Style' in BSL Poetry

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# What is Style?

“The manner of expression of a particular writer, produced by choice of words, grammatical structures, use of literary devices, and all the possible parts of language use”

(<http://quizlet.com/2447907/literary-terms-flash-cards/>)

“The distinctive and idiosyncratic way one expresses oneself”

(<http://www.uni.edu/~gotera/CraftOfPoetry/style.html>)

# Style in Sign Poetry

- **Narrative** style: e.g. choice of theme, framing, voice, point of view
- **Figurative** (or “Literal”) style: e.g. metaphor, simile, allegory, allusion, anthropomorphism,
- **Signing** style: e.g. choice of vocabulary, choice of parameters, use of space, size and speed of signing, non-manual features
- **Performance** style: e.g. use of ‘stage’ space, engaging with the audience

# Background

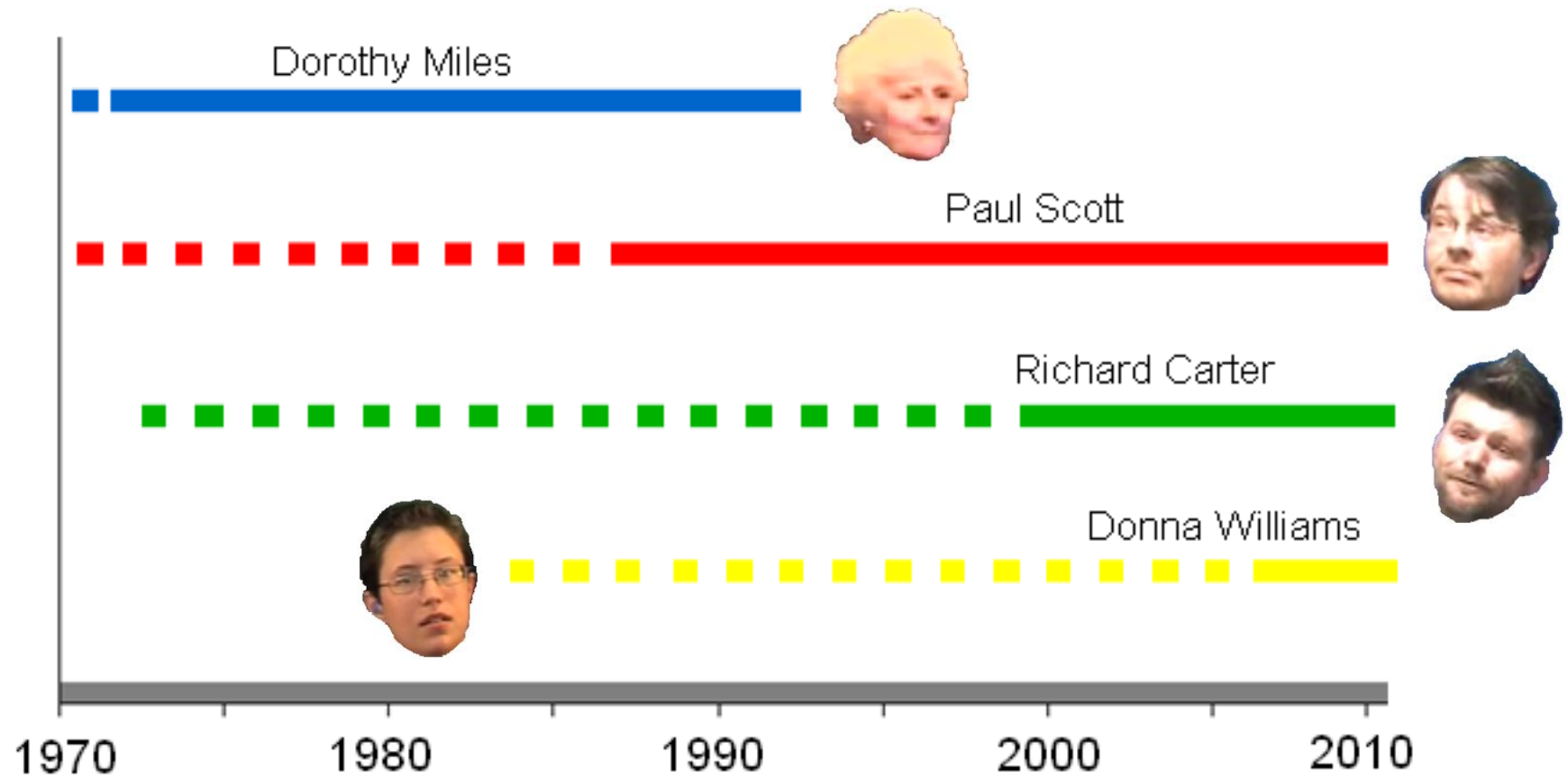
- Rapid development of BSL poetry since 2005
- Development of analytical frameworks
- ‘BSL poetry anthology’ (University of Bristol, 2010) = a large collection of BSL poems, enabling both qualitative and quantitative approach



*We are now ready to explore different styles and genres that exist within BSL poetry.*



# The Four Poets



# Dorothy Miles

- 1931-1993
- Born hearing, English as first language
- Pioneer of sign language poetry
- Years active: 1970s -1993



# Paul Scott

- Age: mid 40s
- Deaf school, BSL as first language
- Acknowledged poet in British Deaf community
- Years active: late 1980s -





# Richard Carter

- Age: early 40s
- Deaf school, BSL as first language
- Established and experienced poet
- Years active: 1999 -



# Donna Williams

- Age: late 20s
- Education: mainstreamed, English as first language
- Years active: 2006 -



# A collage of their styles

- We do not offer any statistical analysis of their styles, but rather comment on the sort of areas we might look at, giving first impressions of the features of their work
- We present a brief selection of their poetry
- [www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology)

# Narrative Style

# Choice of theme

- All Four poets – Deaf identity



Deaf community, celebration of sign language



wider, more symbolic themes



Deaf/gay identity, relationships



general, less Deaf-focused

# Framing

(“Frame Semantics” Fillmore 1982)



mixed



‘*collage*’ – conceptual blending of different narrative frames



single-linear-coherent frame



contrastive narrative of personal experiences

# Voice and point of view



allegorical narrative with the poet as narrator



mixed



fictional narrative told in characters' voice



narrative of personal experiences through "Poetic-I"

# Figurative Style



# Preferred Tropes



overt metaphor, simile, allegory



mixed/unresolved metaphor, allusion



anthropomorphism



juxtaposition (analogy & contrast)

# Allegory

- Allegory is an extended metaphor in which an entire story can be read as a symbolic reference to people and situations outside the narrative.

e.g. Aesop's *Fables*

# Allegory



# Anthropomorphism

- Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics onto animals, inanimate objects and abstract concepts.
- In sign language poetry, non-human concepts can literally be 'embodied' on the signer's face and body.

# Anthropomorphism



# Overt metaphor, simile, analogy

- In overt metaphor, similes and analogy, two concepts being compared can clearly be identified.
- The metaphorical link between the two concepts is often explicitly stated as well.

# Overt metaphor, simile, analogy



# Allusion

- Allusion makes a reference, either explicitly or implicitly, to names, places, events, and so on, which are in the domain of shared public knowledge (e.g. history, folklore, existing literary work).
- We may overlook an allusive remark if it is implicit and we don't have the prior knowledge.



# Allusion



# Signing and Performance Style

# General



manipulation of lexical signs, strong tie with the audience



manipulation of sublexical features



constructed actions, cinematographic effects (speed, zoom-in/out)



poetically significant placement of referents

# Vocabulary



more exposure to English  
→ use of established lexicon  
Less transparent



strong BSL users → more visual  
and productive signs  
More transparent (closer to “visual  
vernacular”)

# Diction

- Selection and arrangement of words



“formal” (scholarly & lofty)



“informal” (relaxed but educated)



“slang” (newly-coined words, other terms not accepted in formal use)



“colloquial” (used in everyday speech)

# Segmentation

- Short, discrete signs or longer segments



segmented



mixed



longer segments



strongly segmented

# Eyegaze



Gaze to the audience (narrator's role)



mixture



Character's gaze (immersed in the story)



Gaze of Poetic-I (not constantly acknowledging the audience)

# Summary

- All four poets have different styles in delivering their poetic discourse.
- Age, education and linguistic background can (partially) explain their differences.
- Analysing different styles provides a critical perspective which cannot be obtained by studying a single poet. It clarifies and diversifies the potential of sign language poetry.



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- [www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology)