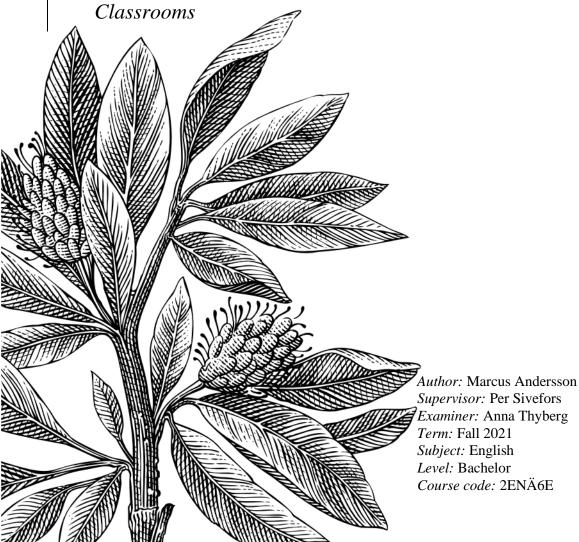# Linnæus University
Sweden

Independent Project, 15 credits

The Gendered Envisionments of Reading *The Poet X*
- Understanding Students' Meaning Making in Swedish EFL Classrooms

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Term: Fall 2021
Subject: English
Level: Bachelor
Course code: 2ENÄ6E

Abstract

This essay applies theories from gender studies and reader response to Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X* (2018). The essay discusses diversity in meaning making by investigating differences in creating envisionments. The aim is to unmask the differences in reading to improve and direct teaching practices in EFL classrooms. Moreover, an additional aim is to discuss whether envisionment can be seen as a gendered concept, or if the different readings are equally possible to reach Langer's five stances. *The Poet X* centres on a female first-person narrator where the critique towards church, society and normative behaviour is prominent. The potential differences can be seen in understanding the characters in the novel, relating to previous experience and differing understandings of social structures. The pedagogical implementation aims at designing a learning situation where these differing understandings of text can be shared through metacognitive reflection and open-ended methods of pedagogy. The shared understanding of *The Poet X* in EFL settings can develop the students' ability to find agency in interpretating texts.

Key words

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1. Introduction

Elizabeth Acevedo's 2018 debut novel *The Poet X* has received a lot of attention since publishing, being a National book award finalist and selling copies worldwide. The vivid and realistic details about Xiomara's coming-of-age have already made the piece enter English education. Prestwickhouse, and Softschool are just two examples of websites that share positive pedagogical experiences of teaching *The Poet X*. The first-person female narrative of a girl finding love in slam poetry by challenging family and religion obviously inspires teachers to use her story in class. But what can adolescent readers interpret when interacting with this text, and does the reader's gender factor into the understanding of Xiomara's story? This essay will investigate the meaning-making of feminine and masculine readings of the book to discuss potential advantages and disadvantages of using it in EFL teaching. By using Judith A. Langer's theory of envisonment, gender theory and reader response studies the essay finds different readings through a reader's analytical or emotional engagement.

Envisionment is "the world of understanding a particular person has at a given time" (Langer 10). The built up envisionment is a reader's understanding of text and is created in interaction with a person's previous experience. Langer describes the five stances of understanding a text as stretching from gathering clues of the story to affecting the reader's world view (17-21). Despite being first constructed 27 years ago, Langer's theory is still referenced in contemporary analyses of literary education. Angie Zapata and colleagues used Langer's theory to test responses among young children in their 2016 study (439), and in 2018 Bogum Yoon and Christine Uliassi used her theory to investigate how to teach literary elements (360). This essay diverts from previous research by discussing how gender influences envisionment building. Langer is not engaging in a discussion on how gender could affect someone's envisionment whilst research on gendered readings claim that gender

differences affect interpretation of text (Odağ 867). By comparing these theories of reading the essay is aiming to find whether envisionment building could be considered a gendered concept and uses Acevedo's novel to exemplify gendered readings. A gendered reading is the interpretation of text based on expectations in gender constructions. This essay follows Beth M. Brendler's definition of gender as a social construct, formed by expectations on how individuals should act and react (225). In the previous research on gendered reading there is not a consensus on how or even if a person's gender affects their interaction with text. In Brendler's study where the participants were nineteen pre-service teachers studying a Master's in Education she contradicts previous results in the field by finding that both males and females made emotional, and analytical connections with the texts (226, 231-32). Based on the participants' comments she found no differences which could be contributed to a person's sex but rather to socioeconomic status or cultural factors (236). In contradiction, Özen Odağ's study of eighty-eight German university students found that female participants more often felt self-conscious emotions such as shame, guilt, fear, and anxiety about a character's fate (867). Secondly, that the male participants became more engaged when the story focused on evolving a plot and sequence of action (867). This essay takes its standpoint in discussing masculine and feminine readings as influenced by normative assumptions while being aware that deviations in practice could occur. The inconsistency in previous research prevents definite statements on how masculine and feminine readings create meaning. However, in order to discuss differences in gendered readings some generalisations with support from previous research will occur and be handled cautiously. To factor in the contextual aspects this essay will use Lundgren and colleagues' rigorous work on Swedish school contexts. In this book they also cover gender performances in Swedish classrooms which allows the discussion to get closer to the target group this essay focuses on. The pedagogical implementations are directed towards English seven at upper secondary school

because of the strong focus on perspective and strategies both present in *The Poet X* and by the Swedish National Agency for Education in the Syllabus for English seven.

2. Theoretical Framework

This essay forms its theoretical framework from a combination of theories on gender performances, emotional engagement, bodily representations and with Langer's theory acting as a hub for these ideas.

2.1 Langer's Theory of Envisionment

Envisionment is the world of understanding an individual has at a given point in time (Langer 10). Each individual has their own personal and cultural experience which creates a unique envisionment (10). Previous experiences and additional information form the envisionment and creates an understanding of reading, writing, or speaking interactions. As individuals read, their envisionment is constantly open to change as new information builds on previous understandings. A reader relates the gathered clues from the text to their personal and cultural expectation to get a sense of the text's meaning. Langer calls this developing understanding "envisionment building" (10), and it is this concept this essay will test from a gender perspective. She explains that a reader moves through five stances to create meaning from interpreting texts. It is in these stances where this essay looks for different interpretations between genders. The first two stances are about asking questions to a text to understand its content. *Being Outside and Stepping into an Envisionment* is when a reader is trying to gather enough ideas to get a sense of what the text is about (17). The reader is in this stance trying to understand how character, plot, setting, and situation interrelate (17). Langer exemplifies this process by describing a first encounter with someone at a party. She explains that "you might have no knowledge of that person except for physical appearance, dress, and

an assumption that the individual is acquainted in some way with the person who is giving the party. With even these first few clues, you begin to build an envisionment of the person" (10). The first stance will always come first and cannot be bypassed because trying to make sense of a first encounter will happen automatically. However, the process does not have to be finished before moving to next stances and a reader can come back to the first stance when encountering new information in later parts of a text. The second stance: *Being Inside and Moving Through Envisionment* is where a reader feels immersed in the text world. Just as in the first stance, the reader is trying to make sense of the text, but this time takes the analysis further. The reader starts to question motives, feelings, causes, interrelationships, and implications (18). The second stance is where a reader is building an understanding of the whole text world and evaluating its logic. What the readers know from previous experience shapes their interpretation of what the text is saying. The first two stances are about building an understanding of the text-world. The next three stances are about what a reader does with the newly gathered information.

Stepping Out and Rethinking What You Know (19) is the third stance, but the first one where readers start to question themselves instead of the text. They reconsider what they previously knew and develop a deeper understanding. For example, a text about climate change can make a reader question their ecological footprint. Gender expectations make females, males and others act differently which suggests that this stance can vary based on a reader's gender construction. Furthermore, the third stance can make a reader realise that an idea based on previous experience was shallow after viewing the same problem from a character's perspective (19). Meaning that the reader is switching focus from the text-world to their reality and reconsidering what the ideas from the text mean to their understanding of

reality. It is again worth mentioning that envisionment building is not a progression of stances and that the third stance could come directly after the first one for example. The third stance occurs less often than the first two since it requires a text with ideas the reader is able to reflect on and reconsider (19). Moreover, I argue that the ideas in *The Poet X* are ones to reflect on and therefore consider this stance important for finding interpretational differences. The fourth stance is called *Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience*. The reader is now seeing the text, experiences and envisionment from a distance (20). In this stance, the reader moves from being an observer to being a critic (20), comparing the text to other interpretations, theories, their worldview, or similar works to understand it (20). This stance requires some effort from the reader but is also where difficult ideas can be better understood with the help of other interpretations. *Leaving an Envisionment and Going Beyond* happens less often. It is Langer's addition to the revised version of her book on envisionment building and represents the instance when readers use their built envisionment in unrelated situations (21). The last stance happens beyond the classroom situation and will therefore bear less significance for this essay's analysis.

2.2 Gendered Reading

The gender investigation of this essay emanates from the concept of gender as a social construct. That is, that the daily practices performed by males, females and others are defining and creating the differences we observe between them. Brendler explains that masculinity and femininity are features "evident in all males or all females. A normative construction defines a normal and an abnormal, a standard of what masculinity and femininity should be" (225),

which leads to the performed differences. The essay uses this view of gender because performances seen as biologically innate constructions would mean that the literary performances of males and females look the same no matter the context, which has been disproven by Odağ (857) and later by Brendler (226). Contextual factors shape gender performance. Jonathan Cohen and Nurit Tal-Or also discuss the importance of context for gender interpretations, referring to a study where participants who watched a movie scene on rape-myth acceptance (blaming the victim) with a man led to greater acceptance of the rape myth (148). Perhaps explained through what Brendler describes as men's need to prove non-femininity (226). Moreover, Odağ investigates differences in gendered reading through emotional engagement. How different gender practices affect reading will be important for this essay's discussion on how readers move through Langer's five stances. Emotional engagement is a common concept in reader response research (Odağ 860) and affects interpretation of texts. For example, the emotional engagement of sympathising with a character's oppression could make a reader in the third stance question their own ideas of oppression in the real world more attentively. Odağ uses a binary view of gender when sectioning the participants which could mean that she misses interpretational differences of others. This essay will use the terms masculine and feminine readings to avoid linking gendered performances to an individual's sex. In Odağ's study of German university students, she found that the male participants showed similar emotional engagement in character-driven literature as the female participants (861). This idea is previously presented by Louise M. Rosenblatt who emphasises social values, personal experiences and cultural expectations as determiners for retrieving meaning from a text rather than the biological sex (qtd. in Brendler 224). However, Frank Hakemulder and colleagues maintain that gender constructions and biological sex do factor into reading. They claim that when characters resemble the reader in meaningful ways such as in gender or minority status the reader tends to feel closer to them in

the narrative world (148). The female and male readers of Odağ's participants were a homogeneous group of literary students at university who equally interacted with the characters, imagined what the characters looked like, and kept thinking about the story even after reading (868). However, Odağ did find certain dimensions of engagement differences, in that the female participants more often felt self-conscious emotions such as shame, guilt, fear and anxiety about a character's fate (867). Secondly, it was found that the male participants became more engaged when the story focused on evolving the plot and sequence of action (867). *The Poet X* entails both dimensions, and this essay will refer to these literary response examples in the analysis. In another study on character and reader, Cristina Rose Dubb uses *The Rain Catchers* and *The House on Mango Street* to discuss how an authoritative voice is illustrated through literature. The two female characters Esperanza and Grayling are finding their authoritative voice through their surrounding community (227). In listening to stories of women in their community, retelling them, and creating personal stories the adolescent characters are creating their independent voice (229). According to Dubb, finding independence through others in a community is a uniquely female task (230) which also could expose different readings of *The Poet X*.

Another difference which affects the reading of *The Poet X* is the purely biological differences of readers' bodies. Acevedo's novel is portraying the gender perspective through Xiomara's bodily features. Her feminine characteristics affect how characters in the text relate to her and how she relates to them. Roberta Seelinger Trites describes the reader's body as an important factor for understanding and relating to literary texts. Trites describes that a represented body is the characters in a text's physical stature and that the enacted body is the real-life body of the reader (6). *The Poet X* describes Xiomara's represented body through textual cues, which interacts with a reader's enacted body and the effect of this interaction can arguably differ based on the receptor's bodily features. Despite the represented body's "fake"

nature, it is not disconnected from the real world. Readers can be affected by the represented body in multiple ways and receive positive or negative consequences from it (Trites 6). The interaction can lead to comparisons, greater awareness, or as Trites describes lead readers to perform physical harm to their enacted body (7). She is also describing how patriarchal control is evident through media. Disney classics where a princess is trapped in a tower and ready to be saved exposes viewers to patriarchal control (Trites 131). The female is unfit to rescue herself but instead has to wait for a male to gain control over the situation and as a consequence even of her. The theoretical framework above strives to encompass both mental and physical factors for analysing gendered readings.

3. The Readers' Context

The reader context is important in order to understand the cultural expectations surrounding Swedish students and how these expectations affect their gender practices. *The Poet X* is written from the perspective of female oppression which also highlights the necessity to consider how a reader's social surrounding affects their reading. Previous gender studies have problematised the female situation while masculinity and males were considered the norm, but as equality rises gender studies have shown more interest towards problematising boys/males and masculinity (Lundgren et al. 473). One example of this is the #MeToo movement which changed the omertá, conspiracy of silence, around male's use of power through sexual harassment (Lundgren et al. 473). Shaming exposed women switched to shaming perpetrating males. The Students have grown up in a paradigm of critiquing masculine hegemony (Lundgren et al. 471) where they have learnt to see or at least have an understanding of masculine oppression. This paradigm shift, although sometimes unconsciously, affects how males and females interact in Swedish society and in Swedish classrooms. The gender practices are created by the students and stipulate what is considered

normative behaviour for masculine and feminine constructions (Lundgren et al. 481). The male students are maintaining their gender construction by attacking each other's masculinity, calling each other "fag" or accusing peers of taking schoolwork too seriously (Lundgren et al. 481). While female gender constructions lead to systematic studying, the male construction leads to an anti-studying milieu. The only two areas where a systematic difference between the sexes can be noticed is in boys' higher aggressivity and sexuality (Lundgren and Säljö 485). However, as previously discussed the biological differences are not the main creator of interpretational variety.

4. Pedagogical Framework

Swedish EFL education should develop students' ability to express themselves in a variety of social contexts within the target language (Natl. Ag. f. Ed., "Syllabus English 7"). There is a new version of the syllabus for English seven, but as of 24 May 2022 the new version is not yet published in English which forces this essay to use my own translations of the new version. However, there are only a few differences between the new and old version. Both in my previous experience in workplace-based learning and in international research there are encounters of students who find difficulties in expressing and justifying their understanding of written text. Therefore, the pedagogical framework of this essay will discuss how Langer's theory of envisionment can develop students' expression of analyses from reading *The Poet X*. Langer's theory is in itself a pedagogical theory, but this essay will combine her work with Mary Beth Schaefer's theory of achieving interpretational agency in students. Schaefer's investigation takes place at an American urban middle school (248). The students see reading as gaining certain skills to perform in tests rather than an expression of thought (247). With this mindset, it is not strange that my workplace-based learning students felt so reluctant when I assigned them to read *Once* by Morris Gleitzman last fall. In this case

it was the boys of a ninth-grade class who spoke out and described how boring they felt reading was. Being new, my best response was to say that they would find pleasure in reading if they tried. With boys being as outspoken as in my example above, teachers can falsely be led to see reading as a gendered practice overall, and they can find support for this view as well. In a 2009 research study on students' reading engagement, Brozo and colleagues discuss solutions to the PISA statistics showing boys as weaker readers than girls (584). However, Loh and colleagues attribute the differences to socioeconomic factors rather than a student's gender (176). Whether the PISA results are due to socioeconomic or gender factors, Schaefer's study invites teachers to face students where they are in their learning. Getting students to acknowledge their deeper analyses needs to start in changing their mindset of reading in preparation for tests (247). She suggests introducing Langer's theory in class to get students to start thinking about how they read (Schaefer 247). The raised awareness of how they read can according to Shaefer make students find agency in their interpretation which makes it easier to justify their analysis (254).

Journals functioned as a two-way communication between teacher and student where she could give formative feedback without diminishing the student's voice (Schaefer 251). This is an important aspect for sharing thoughts on such a difficult topic as gender oppression in *The Poet X*. An example of how she teaches without questioning the student's interpretation can be seen as she makes Langer's stances visible for them. Shaefer asks the student "how the stories, characters, and ideas in the texts they read related to their own lives and interests" (251). These questions do not negate a previously stated construction of understanding but instead encourages a continued digging. The open discussion can also decrease the risk of placing the student within the binary gender scheme. The aim is to invite a student's metathinking, that is to get the student to start thinking about how they read and interpret. The consequences of metathinking whilst reading looked different from student to

student. In one example, Schaefer describes how Rocky experiences his reading as a way for him to find a form of self-understanding (251). In another case, Mary uses metacognitive thinking about reading to deepen an understanding of the text and develop articulation skills (252). Furthermore, journals were not the only output the students had. Together with the teacher, they had classroom discussions on their reading practices. In this forum, Schaefer uses open questions to get the students to put the construction of meaning within themselves. The classroom discussion also brings forth their peers' understanding of the text, showing how the stances differ between them (253).

Open ended methods resulting in deeper analyses can be seen in other studies as well. In an investigation on eleventh-grade students, open ended questions developed the students' complex understanding of human behaviour and problematised stereotypical assumptions (Krasny 72-73). A first interpretation can look similar to the first stance, a scattered puzzle of clues. A teacher asking open questions can invite students to enter next stances and reflect on their position in regard to the text. Reading is impacted by and reflective of students' emotional, and cultural experiences which puts the position of power in themselves (Schaefer 247, 254). That is, individuals experience the world differently, not wrongly. One individual might describe a painting focusing on the frame, another on the paint, and a third on the style of its era. This theoretical idea is important for managing a pedagogical discussion using Xiomara and *The Poet X* since so many situations represented are relatable but open to various interpretations.

The metacognitive approach of being aware of when and how a reader is understanding a story can provide agency but is also more effective in achieving high results on tests according to Schaefer (254). Out of the thirty students Shaefer taught, twenty-six performed better than the year before. On a four-tier rating system, three students moved up two tiers, one moved up three tiers, and no one lowered their score (255). Shaefer contributes

the good results to the method of making the students aware of their reading through Langer's theory. In her implementation the students saw their own thinking as well as listened to their peers which made them more confident in their interpretations, better at articulating thoughts and understanding themselves.

5. Creating Envisionments

In the analysis part of this essay, the focus will be on describing how envisionments from feminine and masculine readings interpret *The Poet X*. The feminine or masculine perspective comes from the previously mentioned gender studies in 2.2 *Gendered Reading*, and 3. *The Readers' Context*. The different parts are organised thematically but follow some chronological progression. Langer's five stances allows a reader to be in multiple stances at the same time (10) but reflecting on the material occurs naturally at later stages which explains the progression. The different parts of the analyses are named thematically to categorise what is at the centre of attention in the novel. The first-person narrative makes different understandings of Xiomara and her surroundings the focal point of investigation.

5.1 Understanding X

In the first stance, the reader is gathering clues to gain an understanding of how character, plot and setting interrelate (Langer 17). The reader's first encounter with Xiomara presents itself as an unnamed male peer in her neighbourhood exclaims, "'Ayo, Xiomara, you need to start wearing dresses like that!'/ 'Shit. You'd be wifed up before going back to school'" (4). Just a page after comes her mother's comments "'[a] little too much body for such a young girl / . . . / she [Mother] better not hear about me hanging out like a wet shirt on a clothesline just waiting to be worn" (5, 6). Xiomara describes herself as: "[t]aller than even my father / . . . /I am the baby fat that settled into D-cups and swinging hips so that boys who

called me a whale in middle school now ask me to send them pictures of myself in a thong"
(5). Xiomara's character shows distinct features early on. The reader can therefore step into
the envisionment and form an initial understanding of Xiomara. Furthermore, the reader has
enough clues from reading the first pages to ponder over her surrounding's sexualisation of
her and how that will affect the story's plot. The vivid descriptions of her physical features
and how she describes her position in relation to the characters around her are enough to get
to know her and get the reader to start reflecting on the text's presented ideas. Even after five
pages, the reader is simultaneously in the first and third stance, relating the ideas to what they
know. Moreover, how readers position themselves to the ideas above will largely depend on
how they relate to previous experiences of masculine objectification and different social
norms for boys and girls. Similar to Cohen and Tal-Or's example of participants belittling
sexual victims in masculine environments (148), the excerpts above can reasonably lead to
similar outputs. Masculine peer pressure and need to prove non-femininity (Brendler 226),
can create this toxic environment. A masculine reader could be influenced by peer pressure to
reduce the engagement in experiencing Xiomara's feelings of being objectified.

   Furthermore, Xiomara's represented body conveys more with an analytical reading.
The reader can see that Xiomara's bodily representation bears meaning. The representation of
her body arouses desire from her male peers and worrying from her mother, creating a
friction-filled setting. The friction becomes further evident as Xiomara says "[I am] [n]oticing
boys more than I used to" (Acevedo 32). "I'm ready to stop being a nun. Kiss a boy, / shoot,
I'm ready to creep with him behind a stairwell and let him feel me up" (28). At the same time,
she is fearing becoming "addicted to sex / like Iliana … / [t]hree kids, no daddy around" (32).
From these passages, the reader can see that Xiomara feels trapped between the fear of
pregnancy and desire for sexual interaction. The male character in the first excerpt above and
these presented thoughts from Xiomara also show what low risks there are for him (and other

males in the text-world) to engage in sexual behaviour, whereas the consequences for Xiomara can be lifechanging due to pregnancy. These different stakes expose what Trites refers to as a "patriarchal control" (131) over Xiomara's represented body. In Xiomara's reality, fathers have the option to leave while mothers do not. These situations appear in the real world as well as in Xiomara's text world. The reader who has experienced similar situations or have acquired enough literary tools to recognise these patterns can already move through the fourth stance, seeing more dimensions of the text than those who merely sympathize with her character. A feminine reading of feeling self-conscious and relating to Xiomara's fate can therefore contradictorily stand between the reading and seeing certain levels to Xiomara's fate. The feminine reading focuses on how the oppression makes her feel rather than searching for motives behind the oppression. The masculine readings in Odağ's study showed a "significantly more analytical" (866) approach which could indicate that the patriarchal control is easier to identify from a masculine reading.

5.2 Understanding Setting and Conflicts

The first part has paved the way for readers to gain an understanding of the relationship between Xiomara and her mother's control over her. This is where the main conflict of the novel resides and where the reader is able to enter the second stance and look for depth rather than breadth. Her mother's protectiveness is further developed as Xiomara reminisces using tampons for the first time. She explains that "[w]hen Mami came home I was crying. / I pointed at the instructions; / Mami put her hand out but didn't take them. / Instead she backhanded me so quick she cut open my lip. / 'Good girls don't wear tampones. / Are you still a virgin? Are you having relations?'" (39, 40). The reoccurring incidents with Xiomara's mother leads a reader to seek for depth in the conflict. The reader is moving through the second stance, questioning the motives, and feelings (Langer 18), of Xiomara as well as her mother. This stance can also lead to different envisionments between genders. A

masculine analytical reading which has added the patriarchal control over Xiomara's body to their envisionment will reasonably understand the motives of Xiomara's mother better. Those readers will see the overprotectiveness as a way to help Xiomara rather than oppress her. Whereas a more self-conscious feminine reading focusing on Xiomara's situation is more inclined to feel antipathy towards her mother and empathy towards Xiomara, similar to the results in Odağ's study (867). Searching for motive or understanding the sequence of action reads differently than focusing on Xiomara's emotional dimension. Therefore, despite reading the same text, different take aways from earlier chapters affect the readers' third stance of envisionment. The reader's understanding differs depending on an emotional or analytical engagement. Moreover, another conflict in *The Poet X* is the on and off relationship with Aman, a boy at her high school.

Reading from Xiomara's perspective can challenge a reader's view of reality. Aman and Xiomara are spending a lot of time with each other. Therefore, Xiomara becomes angry with him when she is circled by a group of guys, "one bumps me, both his hands palming and squeezing my ass. And I can tell by how his boys laugh, / how he smirks while saying 'oops,' / that this was no accident. /… / But Aman doesn't move./ … / [H]e's not going to throw a punch. / He's not going to curse or throw a fit. / He's not going to do a damn thing. / Because no one will ever take care of me but me" (218, 219). This passage ultimately asks the reader to question what they would do in a similar situation, stimulating their third stance of envisionment. This conflict is an addition to the reader's built-up compendium of clues, but also ideas for understanding reality. Sexual assault is happening in reality and which perspective to understand this passage from can therefore likely depend on previous experience through media or real life. That is, a normative masculine reading imagines from the position of the oppressors or Aman while a normative feminine reading imagines from the position of Xiomara. However, this does not mean that a masculine reader adheres to the

oppressive behaviour of the group of males. Hakemulder explains that "[w]hen characters resemble us in very meaningful ways in the real world (e.g., similarity in gender or minority status), we may feel closer to them in the narrative world" (148). Resemblance in gender norms is not a necessity to acquire a character's perspective but can be a determining factor. Seeing the situation from either perspective can reasonably lead readers to think about similar situations in the real world in new ways. The impulse of a group of guys to grope a girl in the real world due to higher sexuality and asserting masculinity (Lundgren and Säljö 481, 485), could diminish as they read about the event from another perspective. The borrowed perspective is causing the reader to think about how shallow their perspective is (Langer 19) compared to Xiomara's. Another way to read this excerpt could be to immerse in the empowering dimension. The agitative language and Xiomara's realisation of having to take care of herself are things a reader can choose to take with them in their real life. They could become able to connect to previous experiences or use as future reference, adding depth to the third stance and also entering the fifth stance of *Going Beyond* (Langer 19, 21). In this stance, the reader is able to use Xiomara as a role model to find independence. A sort of "if she is that strong in this situation, I can be as well"- trail of thought. This idea resembles Dubb's investigation of female characters in adolescent literature, where the two characters she investigates are using their surrounding community to find an authoritative voice (230). The characters Esperanza and Grayling find female role models in their text-worlds who help them shape their independent expression (Dubb 227), I argue that the same phenomenon can be transferred from character to reader as well. Dubb also claims that finding independence through interdependence, that is finding independence through others is "a uniquely female task" (230), which suggests that the feminine reading performance might be more inclined to see Xiomara as a role model.

The overall impact from the excerpts above shows that the reader is reflecting on how the conflicts between Xiomara and the people in her community not only reflects on the characters but also on themself. The readers are considering how the patriarchal control, Xiomara's difficult relation to her family and her wish to date a boy relate to their previous experiences. However, the reoccurring theme of Xiomara's parents wanting her to stay away from boys, forces readers to think about the conflict from multiple perspectives. As Xiomara's family finds out about Aman and her kissing the reader is yet again encountered with her parent's strict rules. As she is scolded, she is trying to "unhear my mother turn my kissing ugly" (194), and horrified by her "father call me all the names all the kids have called me since I grew breasts" (194). Again, the understanding of Xiomara's parents will depend on the reader's previously built envisionment. Capturing the feelings of characters remain relatively consistent between genders (Odağ 866), but a masculine analytical reading is more likely to see the parents' motives to a greater extent.

5.3 Understanding Xiomara's Goals

In the first two parts of *The Poet X*, Xiomara's main goal seems to revolve around breaking free from her community and dating Aman. However, in the last act the red herrings about writing start to amount up to what Xiomara really wants to achieve. She has always been writing, collecting her thoughts in notebooks, but it is only when Xiomara's teacher Ms. Galiano invites her to a poetry club that she switches interest from boys to words. She thinks about what her family has said about dating Aman and decides that "[m]aybe it's better we ended. Because what can I give him? / Nothing but infrequent kisses. Nothing but half-done poems. / Nothing but sneaking around and regret at all my lying. / Nothing. But at least there's tomorrow. At least there's poetry" (254). The previous hardships she has gone through do not only function as tools to understand why she chooses to leave Aman, but also as

empathic character traits. A character that keeps going, despite losing the right to date a boy she likes and who finds independence from the constriction and opposition of her community.

Moreover, in the poetry club, she feels that her "little words / feel important, for just a moment" (259) And the positive response from her peers makes her think: "[t]his is a feeling I could get addicted to" (259). Xiomara is happily writing and reading her writings out loud in the poetry club, preparing to compete in slam poetry until her mother finds her notebook and realises what she has been writing. In a climactic moment towards the end of the novel, her mother says: "[y]ou think I don't know / enough English to figure out you talk about boys and church and me?" (300), as she fires up a match and burns the notebook. The horrific event makes Xiomara think she will "never write a single poem ever again" (311). However, the plot takes a sudden twist as "this woman who has been both mother and monster, the biggest sun in my sky- /bright, blinding, burning me to the wick- /she hunches her shoulders and begins to sob" (339). Xiomara's reaction makes her mother regret how tightly she has controlled her daughter and softens her strict rules on what Xiomara is allowed to do. Her mother allows Xiomara to perform slam poetry and the people who Xiomara previously has tried to push out of her life now join in to support her in achieving her goal. The conflicts between Xiomara and her mother, Aman, and religion are resolved as she finds strength in keeping them close and converts that strength into powerful slam poetry. The third part is when the plot and sequence of action are most noticeable. Xiomara's action of writing slam poetry causes her mother's anger, which in turn prohibits Xiomara from reaching her goal. When Xiomara's mother relieves the control over her, she can pursue her goal and the conflict is resolved. The story's last pages fit both gendered readings in Odağ's study. The finale is both plot-driven and character-driven (866). A reader has the option to relate to the faith and hardships Xiomara goes through with her family or find engrossing elements in the story's movement towards closure. Even though few readers will have the exact same goal as the

protagonist, the notion of succeeding against all odds is something most readers will be familiar with. Facing obstacles and overcoming them is a concept the reader easily finds resembling traits of in their own life. Even on a smaller scale, the reader will have experienced accomplishment when passing a test for example. The fourth and fifth stance are created through distancing oneself from the envisionment and the text (Langer 20, 21). In the fourth stance, a reader is reflecting on the story as a whole and can relate it to theories or other interpretations of the text (20). For example, a first reading can form a text world understanding of a girl constrained by her mother, but a theoretical lens allows new readings which can unmask a story about patriarchal control or class struggle. These final remarks of the excerpts bring this essay to the pedagogical implementation where the teacher can make use of students' envisionment building to deepen a first interpretation of the text.

6. Inviting Deeper Interpretations

Students can gain a lot of information from each other's envisionments. As Schaefer describes there are benefits of classroom discussions where peers are facing other interpretations of the text than their own (253). Through literature circles or classroom discussions the students can provide each other with the different lenses their gender practices lend them. As discussed above the masculine reading is more engrossed in a plot-driven storytelling where the focus is on how Xiomara is oppressed. Discussing this interpretation with someone in the class who understands the text through Xiomara's internal emotional dimension could broaden the understanding of the text as a whole and vice versa. In short, the students can help each other enter the fourth stance by providing their lens to deepen their individual understanding. This exercise practices a student's ability to develop strategies to take in oral or written communication mentioned in the core contents in the Swedish Syllabus for English seven (Natl. Ag. f. Ed.). *The Poet X* fits well for comparative discussions because

of the multiple ways readers can understand the story and character, as shown in the analysis section.

The pedagogical opportunities of sharing each other's "worlds" (Shaefer 248), do however bring with it the need for some scaffolding. It is important that the teacher allows everyone to feel safe in articulating their reading. The power of agency has to be with the one who has created their own envisionment (Shaefer 254), non-dependent on gender, sex, or other factors. Like Shaefer demonstrates, the implementation can go more smoothly by letting the students express interpretations gradually. The first step of her process is to use written journals. The student's reader response can be less restricted when they know that the teacher is the only recipient of their ideas. This is a smooth start to let the more difficult thoughts about Xiomara's objectification be expressed without risking judgments from peers for example. Hopefully, the use of journals will also spark an interest to share or hear what envisionments the other classmates have created from reading *The Poet X*. The next step then follows naturally by asking open questions in classroom discussions. It is still important that the teacher is using open questions to allow creativity, and let the students remain agents of their understanding (Schaefer 251). The purpose is to construct the students' understanding of self as a reader and understand other people's reading skills in a deeper way (251, 255). As short-term objectives along the way the students are developing skills in arguing, explaining, discussing, and listening (Natl. Ag. f. Ed., "Syllabus"), which heightens their EFL proficiency. The implemented practices could also result in raising the boys' low scores on international tests discussed by Brozo and colleagues (584).

I see positive consequences of being able to return to the thoughts written in the journals which the students may previously have experienced as too daunting to express. Implementing a positive classroom discussion can also be achieved with a scaffolding introduction of Langer's five stances. A pedagogical approach can be to highlight that an

envisionment is not a set state, which could make students see a greater motive in arguing their standpoint. Those who are acting on peer pressure will have more difficulties in defending their interpretation. This could be why Krasny found that open-ended methods counteracted stereotypical responses (72-73). As Langer states: "[a]n envisionment is always either in a state of change or available for and open to change" (10). I believe that this notion can be emphasised so that students do not attack each other's interpretation but instead discuss other ways of understanding the text to move deeper in the envisionment. The difficulty will in some cases lie in creating an open atmosphere without inflicting on another student's world view, but the step-by-step of sharing thoughts could be a good way in. The aim of this model is training to see their envisionment from afar, finding arguments for how they think and in turn allow them power and control over the reading process (Shaefer 255). The interactions between how they think and how their peers think can not only give them tools for self-realisation but also develop multiple knowledge requirements stated in the Curriculum.

7. Conclusion

Langer's theory of envisionment takes different forms based on a reader's gender construction. The need to prove non-femininity or peer pressure can affect the reading experience by conforming to normative expectations. Belittling the unreciprocated sexual advances Xiomara faces can be more common among masculine readings because there is a need to maintain masculinity. However, the paradigm switch after #MeToo resulting in shaming perpetrating males instead of shaming exposed women could reduce this effect. There is diversity also in looking for how plot, story and characters interrelate. Having previously experienced an absent father or using an analytical reading more common among the masculine gender leans toward a search for motives. This is perhaps where gendered

readings perform the greatest variations. How a reader chooses to understand Xiomara and the other characters will largely vary depending on an analytical or emotional reading. The emotional reading can understand the mother as an oppressor, and Xiomara as a subject of oppression. Seeing Xiomara as a role model for breaking through the adversities and succeeding against odds in slam poetry can also have a larger focus in this reading. As opposed to the analytical reading where Xiomara's mother's motives of protecting her from pregnancy can reduce her antipathic features. Gender construction should not interfere with understanding Xiomara's goals. The events have a relatable nature in which all readers could find similarities. With the examples discussed in the analysis section there does not seem to be a gendered concept in Langer's theory.

Despite taking different forms based on a reader's gender, the different readings do not result in an understanding vis-à-vis non-understanding of *The Poet X* due to someone's gender construction. Langer does not discuss how gender could influence creating envisionment, but as demonstrated in the analysis, all five stances can be entered from an adolescent masculine or feminine reading. Some aspects can be more engaging by sharing diverse gendered readings. Challenging previous belittling of characters squeezing Xiomaras "ass" (219) can through a feminine lens change former conceptions created in the masculine construction of gender. In the same way sharing a masculine lens can provide others with an understanding of the motives of Xiomara's mother. In addition to this, pedagogical opportunities of working in a norm critical way emerge from sharing interpretations. Comparing these readings in an EFL setting can provide students with new perspectives which allow a deepened understanding of how individuals think and how to express one's thoughts. Communicating interpretational differences can practice EFL students' ability to take in and structure complex information as well as interacting from different perspectives. A teacher's use of open-ended methods and practicing students' metathinking could make the

students reach these abilities effectively. Continued research on gendered readings in adolescent literature could aim to provide empirical data on how readers construct meaning using Langer's theory. Previous research has involved younger students or focused on pedagogical rather than reader response aspects. There are few reader response studies investigating gender diversity in reading at this age overall. The previous reader response studies on gendered readings are mainly investigating individuals studying higher education or children. This surprises me since the diversity in constructing meaning of a text at the age 15 to 18 could reasonably provide interesting results. I hope that this essay can inspire an interest to investigate these readers' meaning making further. Understanding diversity in gendered readings at this age can potentially bridge the differing results we see between sexes in national and international reading tests. Analysing their differing readings could unmask methods of elevating boys' reading and more effectively provide each student with agency in their interpretation of text.

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