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Melodies that speak vivaciously and earnestly

Musical presence in Eeva-Liisa Manner's poetry

Intermediality and translation

The nature of the relationship between different arts and media has established itself as one of the central paradigms in current literature studies. Growing interest in intermediality entails critical analysis of the terminology and the nature of this relationship. My contribution to the discussion presented in this paper is first, to give a concise overview of the terminology involved in the current intermediality research done in recent years. Second, I will argue that more important than engaging the endless debate on which of the prefixes inter-, trans-, or multi- should we choose in order to describe most aptly the relationship between the arts and media, my suggestion is that we concentrate more on the way it works in practical analysis. My argument is illustrated by an analysis of the poetry of Eeva-Liisa Manner (b. 1921), a major Finnish modernist poet, in whose texts a wide variety of different kinds of musico-literal relationships play an important role. Also, basing my argument on the evidence found in Manner's poems I suggest that one approach to consider the nature of the relationship between the arts is to regard it as a certain kind of translation.

But first we need to specify how to describe or rather, define, intermediality as one kind of translation? According to John Sallis, it is the very nature of translation to go astray because "gesturing toward the production of sameness (it is called *sameness of meaning* in the classical determination of translation), it cannot but breach the sameness in the foray that must be made into alterity, for instance, into the alterity of another language."¹ This definition acknowledges the fundamental impossibility to achieve a complete equivalence between two 'languages' be it between natural languages or the languages of different art forms or media. In fact, it would be rather naïve to assume that different art forms could be fully transliterated without involving

fundamental transformations in their structure and as a result in this, in their signification. We cannot, for example, consider intermedial praxis in isolation from socio-cultural developments and aesthetic paradigm shift in the realm of art and aesthetics.² But it is quintessential that there is the gesture, the urge towards contact between two languages. Thomas Eicher for his part locates intermedial relationship where the relationships between sign complexes cross the boundaries between different media (“wo Beziehungen zwischen Zeichenkomplexen Mediegrenzen überschreiten”).³ So here the important term is the crossing of a boundary. In his discussion, Werner Wolf defines the term as the crossing of boundaries between conventionally regarded as distinct communications media.⁴ Another formulation of his reads as follows: “the participation of more than one medium of expression in the signification of a human artefact.”⁵

While there has been uncertainty as to how this contact between language or crossing of borders or participation or gesturing towards the alterity should be understood, Stefanie Stockhurst reminds that it is problematic to speak about *intermediality* because what is actually happening does not take place between the different media but rather is characterized by the crossing of the border, and therefore the proper term would be *transmediality*.⁶ In Irina O. Rajewski’s terminology, *transmediality* is the umbrella category with subcategories such as *intermediality* and *intertextuality*.⁷ Another way of illustrating the relationship between the communications media (Kommunikationsmedien) (Wolf) or the sign complexes (Zeichenkomplexen) (Thomas Eichener) is to associate *intermediality* with the blurring of traditionally ascribed generic and formal boundaries, and the presence of one or more media in the space and form of another medium (Wolf 1999). In fact, there are several interconnected terms and names used to define relations between the arts: sister arts, interart relations, interaction, collaboration, encounter, liaisons, *intermediality*, *collaborative form*⁸ and *composite art*⁹ In literary study, in particular, there is a stress on signifying processes which involve a plurality of discourses and contacts as well as a concern with texts’ encounters with their own semiotic “others”: the visual, graphic, plastic, or spatial arts. Kibédi Varga¹⁰ and Hans Lund¹¹ have divided the possible relations between linguistic and visual signs within a single work of art (e.g., literary text) into three categories: combination, integration, and transformation; transformation is my primary interest. In this area, one finds media that represent or refer to other media, which are indirectly present for the reader, listener, or viewer. For example, a text gives a detailed account of the visual field in the landscape as if it were a two

dimensional framed picture. Another example of transformation is a poem whose linguistic structure imitates or otherwise refers to musical structure (sonata form, polyphony) or a certain piece of music, J.S. Bach's fugue, for example.

Along with the investigation of the relations between literature and visual arts, musico-literary intermediality is the topic of my present paper. For my purposes, Werner Wolf's study (1999) is useful reference, since it provides outlines of a general theory of intermediality and its fundamental forms, in which a more specialised theory of the musicalisation of literature and a typology of the forms of musico-literary intermediality are embedded. The other intermediary relations with literature (painting, graphic art, sculpture, music, and dance) in the texts can also be analysed with Wolf's typology of indirect intermediality. Intermediality as a general term has two approaches. In the case of direct intermediality the intermedial quality of the artefact is immediately discernible on its surface, and the work appears as a medial hybrid, for example opera, which is a mixture (or combination, according to the typology of Varga 1989 and Lund 2002) of drama and music. Indirect intermediality can be defined as the participation of at least two conventionally distinct media in the signification of an art work in which only one medium appears directly with its typical or conventional signifiers and hence may be called the dominant medium, while another one (the nondominant medium) is indirectly present within the first. Music as a transformed medium can be present in a dominant medium (literary text) in several ways.

The main forms of indirect musical presence in literature are described by Werner Wolf¹² as follows: 1. Thematisation: music is present in the form of a) narrative content focalised by the narrator of the characters of fiction, b) paratexts, for example titles, headlines, and c) contextual connections; 2. Evocation of vocal music through associative quotation, and 3. Imitation and showing (the core area of the musicalisation of literature). The latter can be divided into three types of presentations. First, *verbal music* is a particular use of intermedially imitative techniques, but not an independent technique in itself. The criterion of reference is the dominant aspect. It evokes an individual, real or imaginary work of music and suggests its presence in the literary work by referring to it in the mode of thematisation, but above all by making extensive use of the mode of musical imitation, be it in the form of *word music* or of structural and imaginary content analogies. The term *word music* is a musicalising technique which exploits the basic similarity between verbal and musical signifiers. *Word music* aims at poetic imitation of musical sound by making use of pitch, timbre and

rhythm. In all these cases, literary language must be heard rather than merely read.

Second, Formal analogies operate on the levels of textual materiality, phonology, syntax and particularly semantics. They may exploit both specifically literary discursive devices and basic similarities between literature and music: the lay-out of the text, its formal segmentation into stanzas, chapters or paragraphs, typographical devices, thematic or motive recurrences creating patterns suggestive of musical forms, and devices giving the impression of polyphonic simultaneity. The effect may be the imitation of musical microforms and compositional devices, such as echo, ostinato, thematic variation, modulation, polyphony etc., as well as the imitation of macroforms or musical genres, such as the fugue or the sonata.¹³

Thirdly, imaginary content analogies only make use of the literary signifieds, usually in the form of "poetic" imagery but also in the choice of other, narrative correlatives of music (such as a poet overhearing a singing girl). In contrast to word music and structural analogies, imaginary content analogies supply what is absent in music: referential content. A further peculiarity consists in the fact that whereas word music and formal analogies can be used without references to a specific work of music, imaginary content analogies, by their very nature as transpositions of a particular piece of music into a literary text, are usually linked with such specific references.

Eeva-Liisa Manner's poetized music

For Manner as well as for several other Finnish modernist novelists and poets after the Second World War, from the mid-1940s to the end of the 1950s, the heyday of Finnish modernism, the inspiration for writing literary works came from other spheres of art, notably music and visual arts. Compared with works of other writers, Eeva-Liisa Manner's texts have the greatest store of multiple intermediate relations. There are references to miniature painting, woodcut, Chinese scroll painting, and famous artists' and composers' works (by Anton Webern and Salvador Dalí, for example). Music is an especially important inspiration for her works. As a transformed medium it can be present in Manner's texts in paratextual, intertextual, referential, thematic, imitative, or some other form of musical presence. Several titles of her poems refer to music, such as: "Kontrapunkti I-II" / "Counterpoint I-II," "Bach," "Omistus Webernille" / "Dedication to Webern," "Kunnianosoitus Wilhelm Friedemann Bachille" / "Homage to Wilhelm Friedemann Bach," and "Kromaattiset tasot" / "Chromatic levels". Eeva-Liisa Manner started her career as a poet with two collections of poems which were written in

regular metric patterns. After that she switched from traditional poetry to modern free verse in order to follow the paradigm shift in Finnish cultural life after the war. It is characteristic for Manner's flexibility that she was capable of modernizing her poetic style of writing. However, in her poems the close association with music is never lost. In the course of time, the forms of musical presence may vary, but the connection is always there.

In her early collections, the use of regular metre, rhyme and alliteration are suggestive of song and music. To illustrate this form of musical presence, the *word music* to use Wolf's terminology, I quote here Manner's poem called "Pizzicato": "Mistä tulen minne menen – miksi kaikki tää / josta jotain joka hetki hiven jälkeen jää, / hiven iät olevaista – outo ounastus, / veteen vana viri väre kuulto kimallus? // Mitään ei se lopulta – ja kaikki kuitenkin./ Siinä jatkuu oleminen muodoin tuhansin: / jatkuu jana linnunlennon, humu tuulen puun, / virran vana kymin / kumu kulku maan ja kuun."¹⁴

It is not necessary to understand Finnish language in order to discover that the acoustic dimension of this poem becomes manifest in the form of melodic sequences and by the means of phrasing, in the respiratory pulse or in the prosodic alternation of long and short syllables. The poem is also packed with rhymes: the word "tää" rhymes with "jää", "ounastus" rhymes with "kimallus", "kuitenkin" with "tuhansin", and "puun" rhymes with "kuun". Particularly interesting are the last lines of the both two stanzas. The sequence of short vowels ('a', 'i', 'ä') in the words "vana viri väre" alternate with words that contain longer vowels, such as "veteen" and "kuulto". In the second stanza the first words of the third line "jatkuu jana" rhyme with those of the fourth line "virran vana". In the third and fourth lines, there is also alternation of long vowels ('u' and 'a') ("tuulen ja puun"; "maan ja kuun") with short vowels ('u' in "humu", "kumu", and "kulku").

The incorporation of musicalizing techniques and verbal music by exploiting the ample resources of Finnish language with its high frequency of long and short vowels typical for their vocal song-like qualities was the common characteristics of Finnish lyric poetry before the Second World War, and for a short time after it before the rise of post-war modernism. There is a considerable variety of other forms of musical presence in Manner's early poems. For example, in her poem "Kirje provinssista" subtitled "kaukaiselle rakastetulle" ("A letter from province" subtitled "to a distant beloved") Manner uses the direction, *con sordino*, usually indicated in musical notation to alter the sound produced: by affecting the timbre, reducing the volume, or both. It is not only the question of giving instructions how to recite the poem

but also indicating that the text have an emotional impact. *Con sordino* describes the intimate atmosphere of the poem, its subtle emotional quality. Besides the poems that refer directly to musical terminology as in the poem “Kirje provinssista” there are multiple references to images of singing and song, and musical instruments like violin, lute and harpsichord.

The relationship of the poem “Chromatic levels” with music is especially interesting. Consisting of a total of 530 lines, it is the longest of all the poems contained in the collection *Fahrenheit 121* (1968). The themes range from the philosophy of Heidegger and the theme of emptiness to the references classical music and jazz. The poem is subtitled “An Introduction to the breaking of captive form.” Interpreting the poem’s reference to chromaticism is to explore how such concepts as *pitch*, *chroma*, *enharmonic equivivalence* and *chromatic notes* are related to each other. The term *chromatic* derives from the Greek word *chroma*, meaning color. A “chroma” is an attribute of pitches, just like hue is an attribute of color. Distinct spellings can refer to the same sounding object: B#3, C4, and D4 all refer to the same pitch, hence share the same *chroma*, and therefore belong to the same pitch class; a phenomenon called enharmonic equivalence. In modern music and notation, an enharmonic equivalent is a note (enharmonic tone), interval (enharmonic interval), or key signature which is equivalent to some other note, interval, or key signature, but “spelled”, or named, differently. In other words, if two notes have the same pitch but are represented by different letter names and accidentals, they are enharmonic.¹⁵ One could think that this enharmonic equivalence could be seen analogous to the duality of the typography of text and text’s acoustic image. This analogy has a historical relevance, because one of the many issues over which Finnish modernists and traditionalists debated was the question; is the modern poem meant to be recited in front of the audience or was it something to be written for a solitary reader only. As is well known, poetry’s textual and acoustic identities differ from each other, and this affects the ways poetry is written by poets and heard or read by the audience or readers.

Manner has commented on the poem’s connections with music as follows: “(...) I have tried (...) to apply musical ‘models’ to the poem whenever it is possible; melodic fragments alternate with long string-like murmurs, *accelerando* alternate with *ritartando*; additionally, there are smooth descents echoing terrace dynamics and some lamento solos, even so, that poem is not a technical experiment.”¹⁶ Despite the poem’s cryptic title, “Chromatic levels” is obvious that Manner’s musicalized, “chromatic” language promises to break a captive form of poetic language.

Is Manner saying that her art is confined in the restrictive structural parameters of language and outdated poetic forms? The breaking down of traditional forms of literature is reminiscent of the modernist principles of cubist painters, for example, the aim of whom was to break natural forms down into basic geometric parts on the two-dimensional picture plane. Also, the poem's formal innovation is combined with a philosophical treatment of the theme of emptiness, a challenging enterprise for the poet, because emptiness can be defined only by way of negation. Could it be possible to understand the musicalization of the poem as a certain kind of language which identifies something – emptiness, for example – which is not translatable into any imaginable sort of language? While discussing the (im)possibility of translation in general terms, John Sallis contemplates the impossibility of translating something into language and the possibility that this impossibility itself can indeed be discussed:

(...) untranslatability can itself become a theme of speech, even to such an extent that the speech may identify, name, or mark something that cannot be said in that very speech, something untranslatable not only into that speech but into any speech whatsoever. One may, for instance, write about how what one *would* say escapes what one does – indeed can – say. In such a case one writes about the untranslatable, supplementing what one writes with a writing that testifies to a certain untranslatability operative in what one writes (...) There are indeed exceptional cases in which that which is attested to be untranslatable into linguistically signifiable meanings comes to provide the very medium of the attestation. In such cases there is a peculiar coincidence of attestation with that to the untranslatability of which it attests.¹⁷

In the light of this reflection, I would suggest that musicalized language provides Manner with the means of identifying, of translating the theme of emptiness into the language of poetry. She comments on her writing about the emptiness as follows: “All the definitions of emptiness / are reverse. / I cannot say what it is; I can only say what it is not. / I cannot tell about its essence; I can only tell about its / effects.”¹⁸

I will conclude my paper by exploring how the musical counterpoint is incorporated into Manner's poetry. In her essay, “The Modernist poem” (1957), Manner goes as far as to saying that getting to know Bach's music and understanding it was a vital stimulus to her switching from traditional poetic forms to modern poetry which is structured in a completely new way. Especially inspiring for Manner are the contrapuntal structures of Bach's fugues. The term contrapuntal in music normally applies to music in which independent melody lines play simultaneously – so in a musical composition counterpoint is

the relationship between two or more voices that are independent in contour and rhythm, and are harmonically interdependent. The so-called counter voice plays simultaneously with a given melody; a melody has its counter voice, and in the more complex musical forms such as Bach's polyphonic works, there are several melodies and their counter voices that play simultaneously. In order to demonstrate how the idea of counterpoint works in Manner's poems, it is best to take an example, a poem from the collection of poems *Tämä matka* (1956), which makes explicit its connections to music and which is structured on the idea of contrapuntal organization of ideas.

Kontrapunkti

Ne kaikki putosivat sylistäni,
puutarha, piha, talo, äänet, huoneet,
lapsi: pääskynen ja kala kädessään,
potosivat maahan
joka kivet työnsi.

Olen tyhjä huone,
ilmansuunnat ympärillä,
kivet ilman jalkoja,
istuvat kivet, opetetut.
Mutta kädelläni
kohoaa kaikki mitä rakastin,
piha, ruusut, saviruukkutalo,
täydellinen,
talo niin kuin kota, hiljaiset siemenet,
kuolema ja liike kudoksessaan,

pieni kaivo, pieni koira, näkymätön kaulanauha.
Pieni huone, pienet luukut, pienet vilkkaat nauhakengät
sydäntä ja juoksemista varten.
Kengät kammioista eteiseen
juoksevat ja vereen rakentavat
lapsensormin kivilaiturin
kivisiä soutajia varten.
Unet niin kuin kivet
syvyydessä,
luetut, omistetut kuolemalle.
Ja luukuista, korvista
viritetyt linnut leijailevat
naurua nokassaan,
mozartin pisaroita
zart zart¹⁹

(*Counterpoint: //*They all fell from my lap, / garden, yard, house, voices,
rooms, / the child, a swallow and a fish in her hand, / they fell to the

earth / which pushed up the stones. // I am an empty room, / amidst
 compass points, / and trees wrapped in snow, / cold, cold, empty. / But
 on my hand / everything I loved rises up, / the yard, the roses, the
 flowerpot house, / perfect, / the house like a tent, quiet seeds, / death
 and movement in its fibre, // a small well, a small dog, an invisible
 neckband. / A small room, small shutters, small lively lace-ups / for
 the heart and for running. // The shoes run from the chamber to / the
 atrium and with childish fingers / build a stone jetty into blood / for
 rowers made of stone. // Dreams like stones / in the deep, / numbered,
 dedicated to death. / And from between the shutters, from ears // tuned
 birds flutter / laughter in their beaks / drops of Mozart / zart zart.
 (20)

In terms of poetic imagery, the poem is based on a central trope: the house as the metaphor of the self. Throughout the poem, the different parts of the house are assimilated with the various parts of the human body: lap, hand, heart, and ears. Also parts of house are included: an empty room which is a metaphor of the self, a yard, a chamber and an atrium. All these parts are constituents of a human being both in psychological and physical sense. As to the function and significance of counterpoint in this poem, life and death are melodies that run throughout the poem. They are poetic motifs that are analogical to musical melody and its counter melody. At times, as in the passage that describes the transition from life to death these otherwise independent motifs/ melodies play simultaneously and hence become interdependent. Here, a transformation occurs: the representatives of vital youthful flow of life, the “small lively lace-ups/ for the heart and for running” and “shoes that run from the chamber to the atrium”, are transformed into messengers of death. The process of fossilizing and of dying is underway. The shoes that run from the chamber to the atrium build “with childish fingers/ a stone jetty into blood for rowers made of stone”.

In addition, there is a second counterpoint of the life and death in the middle of the poem, “the house like a tent, quiet seeds, death and movement in its fibre”. This image is called the oxymoron: antithetical concepts are contained in an image of “living death”. It can also be said that both the vertical axis (harmony) and horizontal axis (melodic line) of contrapuntal technique are reflected on the contents, the fictional world of the poem. There are descriptions of vertical and horizontal movements in the poem: the image of loss at the beginning of the poem: “They all fell from my lap (...) But on my hand everything I loved rises up.” There is also a passage such as “the dreams like stones” mentioned at the end of the poem, “in the deep”, and “dedicated to

death”, and in counter voice to that there is the music that soars high with birds, laughter and joy, and with drops of Mozart.

In conclusion, as the poems of Eeva-Liisa Manner have shown, the primary concern of intermedial research should be less a matter of terminological debate which is sometimes based too much on abstract metaphors and images, more the concrete analysis of the ways literature interact with other forms of art in a historically, socially and culturally changing constructions.

Notes

¹ John Sallis, *On translation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press cop. 2002, xi.

² See *Literatur intermedial. Paradigmenbildung zwischen 1918 und 1968*. Herausgegeben von Wolf G. Schmidt; Herausgegeben von Thomas Valk, Gruyter 2009.

³ “Was heisst (hier) Intermedialität?“, in Ulf Bleckmann (Ed.), *Intermedialität. Vom Bild zum text*, Bielefeld 1994, p. 18.

⁴ Werner Wolf, “Intermedialität. Ein weites Feld und eine Herausforderung für die Literaturwissenschaft“, in Foltineck and Leitgeb (Eds.), *Literaturwissenschaft: intermedial – interdisziplinär*, Wien, 2002 p. 167.

⁵ Wolf, *The Musicalisation of Fiction. A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Amsterdam, Atlanta. GA: Rodopi, 1999, p. 1.

⁶ Stefanie Stockhorst, “Intermediale Erzählstrategien im urbanen Kontext” *Literatur intermedial* 2009 Gruyter.

⁷ Irina Rajewski, *Intermedialität*, Tübingen, Basel 2002, p. 157.

⁸ Thomas J. Hines, *Collaborative Form. Studies in the Relations of the Arts*, Kent 1991.

⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Spatial Form in Literature” in *Critical Inquiry* 1980: 6.; W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago 1994.

¹⁰ *Discours, récit, image*, Liege-Bruxelles, 1989.

¹¹ “Medier i samspel” in *Intermedialitet: Ord, bild och ton i samspel*, Lund 2002.

¹² Wolf 1999, pp. 55–70.

¹³ See Horst Petri, *Literatur und Musik: Form und Strukturparallelen*, Göttingen 1964, Steven Paul Scher, *Verbal Music in German Literature*. New Haven 1968, Calvin S. Braun, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts*. Hanover 1948 /1987, Peter V. Zima, *Literatur intermedial. Musik, Malerei, Photographie, Film*. Darmstadt, 1995.

¹⁴ Eeva-Liisa Manner, *Kirkas, hämära, kirkas, Collected poems by Eeva-liisa Manner*. Juva 1999, p. 90.

¹⁵ Julian Rushton, “Enharmonic”, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Second edition, edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell. London 2001.

¹⁶ Eeva-Liisa Manner, *Miten kirjani ovat syntyneet*, Porvoo 1969, 222. (English translation by Leena Kaunonen).

¹⁷ John Sallis 2002, pp. 113–114.

¹⁸ Eeva-Liisa Manner, *Fahrenheit 121*, Juva 1968/ *Kirkas, hämärä, kirkas*, *Collected poems* by Eeva-Liisa Manner. Juva 1999, p. 381.)

¹⁹ Eeva-Liisa Manner, 1999, p. 147–148.

²⁰ Eeva-Liisa Manner, *Bright, Dusky, Bright*. Translated by Emily Jeremiah. Waterloo Press 2009, p. 30.