Estonian Pragmapoetics, from Poetry and Fiction to Philosophy and Genetics

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By

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The development of pragmapoetics was assisted by the U.S. Department of State J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Program (2001–2002 academic year), which supported me as a Visiting Scholar at the University of California at Berkeley (Department of Philosophy).

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Lastly, I would like to bow deeply to Professor Emeritus Jüri Talvet, who, as editor-in-chief of the comparative literature journal *Interlitteraria*, has promoted the dissemination of my ideas in English.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I work as a professor of Estonian literature at the University of Tartu in Estonia. I research and teach poetics, literary theory, and the history of Estonian literature. In addition to scholarly articles, essays, and literary criticism, I have also published two collections of poems, one novel, short stories, and other fiction. Even now, I am completing a larger piece of autobiographical (science) fiction. So I consider myself both a theoretical and a practical expert in literature.

This book contains nineteen articles from 1996 to 2022, which represent my work well and may be of wider international interest. I have grouped them into three distinct sections: "General Poetics" (three articles), "Pragmapoetics" (four articles), and "Estonian and Comparative Poetics" (twelve articles).

As a philologist of close reading, I also have philosophical interests. I consider literary studies to be as much a branch of linguistics as a branch of the philosophy of language and mind. The poetic self-referential function is a profound feature of both language and intentionality, that is to say, of the human mind. Over the years, I have become familiar with Hegel's and Marx's dialectical system, delved into Heidegger's cryptic *poiesis* and Freudian psychoanalysis. In the analytical philosophy seminars in Tartu, supervised by the physicist and writer Madis Kõiv, I practiced this logical approach for many years. On an analytical basis, I developed my own system of literary theory, deriving it from the theory of speech acts further developed and sublimated for poetics: Austin, Grice, Searle, Vanderveken—and, surprisingly, still Heidegger. I called it pragmapoetics, or the philosophy of poetic language use, along the lines of pragmalinguistics. Thus, the central object of my approach is the poetic self-representational utterance, the deictic speech act of *poiesis* from which other interpretations grow.

Ever since my first research article on the essence of ballads, I have been amazed at how the deep structures of various topics tend to appear to me as graphical figures. So often my truth is figuratively illuminative. Academic editors soon got used to this idiosyncracy. Visual definitions have great explanatory power. Also, in lecutures and presentations, diagrams as generalizing outlines are always useful—an excellent mnemonic technique.

Within the pages of this book, there are only a couple more traditional literary reviews for which there was no immediate need for visual material to support the arguments. I guess I'm a structuralist and a semiotician by nature, even though I don't particularly emphasize these lines of enquiry.

This volume begins with the innovative manifesto, "Poetics Is in the Genes," which, for the first time in the world, recognizes the common primordial origin of genetics and poetics: the self-perpetuating nature of poetics and its diverse terminology would be excitingly applicable to microbiology as well. Then, in the article "Unified Theoretical Field Perspectives," I manifest an Einsteinian vision of a unified theoretical field that can be transferred to literary studies and to the humanities in general. Although we delve more deeply into only a few reseach methods, it is still good to be informed of the many other reasonable approaches, because both truth and instruction are pluralistic and dialogical. Thus, the analytical discussions are complemented by a critical and graphical development of Martin Heidegger's speculative "theological" system in the article "A Technical Turn and Poetic Declination: God Help Us."

The second section introduces, through four entries, a pragmapoetic idea of two parallel contexts. The essay "Deictic Close Reading" seeks to enrich the good old method of close reading as well as broaden the field of deictic studies in order to encourage new insights into how poetic language functions. Additionally, there are the manifestos, "Pragmapoetics as Literary Philosophy" and "*Postliminaria* of Pragmapoetics," which are the A and Ω of the pragmapoetic vision: if the former represents the ideational birth of the theory of two contexts, then the latter represents the wisdom gained meanwhile after it. The final piece, "Some Time Models in Estonian Traditional, Modern and Postmodern Poetry," also belongs to the theory's developmental phase and plays with temporal deixis.

Approaches in the third section deal with more specific literary-historical and comparativist topics from the fields of Estonian and world literature. With my analysis in "A. H. Tammsaare's Epic Musicality," I highlight for the first time the deeply structural and discrete musicality of texts by the creator of Estonia's 20th-century national epopee, proving it also by means of vocabulary statistics. In this sense, the author of *Truth and Justice* turns out to be a double modernist: Hamsunian and Dostoyevskian in content, Verlainean and Baudelairean in stylistic rhythm of thought. The article "*Kalevipoeg*: Aspects of Genre and Authorship" associates the description of the "death of the author," or authorial pluralism, with a sketch of the balladic internal structure of the modern epic. From these perspectives, the

Estonian national epic from the mid-19th century looks paradoxically very postmodernist. The paradigmatic-syntactic structures and the visual pragmapoetics of poetry are also the starting point for a comparative study of the Estonian poetry innovators from the second half of the last century in "Kaplinski's Line and Rummo's Sparks: Structural Comparison."

The article "Estonian Poetic Surrealism: Laaban and Ehin" examines a methodological technique of creation that is close to Jarryist pataphysics but contrasts with Breton's automatic writing. The intriguing "The Double-Tongued Author: Re-reading Sophocles, Thomas Hardy, and Eduard Vilde" applies ideas of refreshing deconstruction in order to defamiliarize petrified classics, critically and comparatively challenging comfortable interprative schemes. "The Ages of Dickens in Estonian Literature: Some Comparative Perspectives with a Marxist Exposure" uses the world-renowed Dickens as a benchmark to comparatively measure and explain one of the fledgling minor literatures. The article has an additional, independent value in that it is a first-of-its-kind, visual and critical exposition of Marx's formal model of society. The same goes for the graphic Heidegger in the first section of this volume.

Two bio-bibliographical overviews paint a comprehensive, creative profile of the poet and novelist Viivi Luik and her unique style of subtle everyday symbolism: "Of Hard Joy: Half a Century of Viivi Luik's Creations. Poetry" and "Of Hard Joy: Half a Century of Viivi Luik's Creations. Prose." These are followed by a short introduction to Luik's most recent novel. Following in the footsteps of Marie Under, Jaan Kross, and Jaan Kaplinski, Viivi Luik is a hopeful nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature from Estonia.

At the end of this volume, we find defining short portraits. I present the content and poetics of the latest novel and poetry collection by the late Ene Mihkelson, another prominent Estonian female author. I consider the technique of the split stream of consciousness in her major novel, *The Sleep of Ahasuerus*, to be an innovation of world literature, blending the subject's opposing Pessoa-like inner voices. Lastly, I conclude with a fair panegyric to Estonia's first brilliant poet, the young genius Kristian Jaak Peterson.

Throughout the book, only minor editorial changes and formal adjustments have been made. Previously published articles without an abstract with keywords never included one.

Four articles will be published in English for the first time: on literary unified field theory, on new gods and Heidegger, on pragmapoetic

perspectives, and on narrative structures of two influential Estonian poets, Kaplinski and Rummo.

To learn more about Estonian literature, please visit the *Estonian Writers' Online Dictionary.*

Vade mecum!

I General Poetics

CHAPTER I

POETICS IS IN THE GENES: FIRST MANIFESTO

Abstract

The manifesto "Poetics Is in the Genes" reveals the commonality between poetics and genetics for the first time. Outside of cellular biology, attempts have been made from both (text)linguistics and semiotics to describe the genome and its interactions as similar to language. However, the approach of this interpretation relies particularly on the poetic function of language and its underlying self-referentiality as the starting point. Poetic relevance reveals itself explicitly in its relationship to the cutting-edge concept of CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats), which thematizes abundant metrical and figurative phenomena and terms on several levels: accumulation, regularity, interval, different repetitions, rhythm, iamb/trochee, stressed/unstressed units, longitude, orchestration; equivalency, substitution, connotation, contrast, analogy; synecdoche, metonymy, metaphor, irony, symbol, paradox, implicature, epithet, simile; palindrome, chiasmus, inversion, ellipsis, zeugma, calembour, polysyndeton; composition, integrity, (re)combination, plot, text, hypertext, architext, collage/bricolage, palimpsest; poem, stanza, chapter, verse, refrain, (identical) rhyme; graphic imagery, symmetry/asymmetry; homonyms, synonyms, antonyms, archaisms, neologisms; words, phrases, sentences, syntax, definition, quote; cacophony/noise, harmony; spatial and time deixis; self-reflexivity of the utterance and utterer. From this perspective, life stems from primordial poetics as the first level. It is a convincing enough association to apply poetic analysis to the free interpretation process of genomes by cells. A universal law of nature is that symmetry dictates design (including asymmetry): poetics is everywhere.

Keywords: poetics; pragmapoetics; genetics; self-reflexivity; CRISPR; biosemiotics; biolinguistics

Introduction

In 2012, Jennifer Anna Doudna, from the University of California, along with her French colleague, Emmanuelle Charpentier, proved that the bacterial immune system CRISPR 'scissors', or the Case9 system, can change DNA in a laboratory much more accurately and universally than ever before. A new scalpel was crafted giving the possibility to cut a DNA sequence more precisely than ever before. This discovery presents amazing opportunities ranging from the fight against viruses and disease prevention to effective cancer treatment and personalized medicine. In 2020, these two brilliant women were awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

CRISPR is an acronym for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats. The CRISPR sequence is a kind of genetic library, a memory institution that collects, systematizes, stores, and borrows samples from foreign DNA that has attacked cells to distinguish it from the organism itself. This helps to protect the organism against invading viruses, whose DNA is cut into pieces after being detected with the help of the samples. Palindromes fit needle-like bristles onto the nucleic acid thread, marking the best places to cut and sew, something that can now be done by humans. Using this primordial defense mechanism, genetic technologists can alter DNA molecules—the genetic dictionary, but not the text—more efficiently than ever before, which is a powerful instrument. And, as the biotechnological revolution unfolds, this is just the beginning of a long journey, although serious dangers of eugenics overshadow it.

CRISPR and poetics

To the philologist it seems obvious that the concept of CRISPR could emerge freely in theoretical verse theory. Indeed, a CRISPR sequence could be formally described as a poem. The parallel with poetics is obvious, even if we leave aside the Heideggerian idea that the 'state-building act' (which could also be a scientific discovery or invention) is also *poiesis* and that, in this sense, genetics has always been poetic existence-giving.

On one hand, the acronym refers to ordered *intervals* or *interspaces*, such as the unstressed syllables in-between the stressed ones in prosody. On the other hand, it refers to recurrent *tenet-palindromes* and other forms of *repetition* as figurative schemes. Additionally, there are other important poetic terms to which this term refers: *clusters*, *regularity*, *repeats*, and *shortness*, i.e., *longitude*. All components of the CRISPR label refer to the poetic dictionary.

Figures 1 and 2 below explicitly show the striking similarities between genetics and poetics. These visual quotes are extracted from a caption of the CRISPRCas9 system which illustrates the genome editing technique (Bhaya, and Davison, and Barrangou 2011, 277).

Figures 1 and 2 clearly reveal that these graphs could also be used to describe the formal structure of a narrative poem on all levels: from prosody (phonetics and morphology) or figurativeness (syntax and semantics) to composition and textuality. There are two basic principles of poetics: (1) *parallelism*: similarities, repetitions of equivalencies, analogues and substitutes, the interchangeability and regularity of the units of expressions, which tends towards *rhythm*; (2) *contrast*: opposition, meaningful difference, plus versus minus, which can also shape rhythm. Similar contrasted verses, stanzas, refrains, and rhymes represent several fields simultaneously, i.e., metrics as well as orchestration and sentence patterns.

Figure 1. CRISPR array: squares as DNA samples, diamonds as palindromic interspaces.

Prosody

On the lowest level, from the *metric* point of view, the CRISPR sequence in Figure 1 is obviously an *iambic* foot, as the first 'syllables' (diamonds) always come unstressed, followed by stressed: *interval–stress*, or interspace–spacer, and so on. Conversely, the alternative would be *trochee*, of course. One can observe a neat 'prosody' of *binary units* with ordered intervals: an explicitly rhythmical, regular, organized, and well-orchestrated structure.

Composition and textuality

Obviously, Figure 1 could represent a formal model of a *poem*, especially a narrative one such as a *ballad*, with its regularly repeated and isolating *refrains* (identical diamonds), or *rhymes*, between the *verses*, *stanzas,* or *chapters* (individual squares), at any strophic level one might choose. The *composition* is based on repetitions, juxtaposition, succession, *recombination*. It looks like an intended *collage* with a purposeful *plot*—rather than a random *bricolage*—with its constituents (stanzas or chapters) as peculiar quotes culled from other, alien parent 'poems' from outer space. Indeed, one can talk about a rhythmic textuality. As well as *hypertext*—cells in

holistic interaction—or an *architext*—a genome or stem cell as a Goetheesque *Ur-ei*, a primordial embryo as the seed of everything that precedes it. Or one can also consider *palimpsest*, when the texts—individual genes or larger units in the genomes—are overwritten with new information.

Schemes of speech

Sentence patterns are quick to emerge alongside recurrent *palindromes*, *inversions*, *variations*, and other forms of *repetition*. Looking beyond the illustration in a broader sense, one might say: if something is omitted, cut out in the genome, then *ellipsis* is at work. Especially relevant for genetics might be *chiasmus* (e.g., Pelkey 2017), reflections in mirror (Rubens: prince of painters and painter of princes), just as in both chains of nucleotides. These famous four letters—A, C, G, and T—seem to be organized in a clear chiastic manner. Regular palindromes as interspaces also function as *conjunctions* between the spacers, the definitions of foreign genomes, i.e., between *quotations*. It is close to *polysyndeton*, which is the accumulation of conjunction words. One can also speak of a *zeugma* (Mr Pickwick took his hat and his leave), or *pun* or *calembour*. In that case, a single particle acquires a double meaning and function: the individual excerpts could become the basis for multiple outputs, which also brings us to *tropes* or *figures of speech*.

Figures of speech

Alongside the *metric*, *syntactic* and *compositional rhythm*, *metonymy* as a figure of speech seems equally salient. The *metonymicality* of the CRISPR sequence leaves no room for doubt, as its storage units, the spacers, are causally in a *synecdochic* pars pro toto relationship with the sample parent genomes. But *metaphoricality* may also be observed in genomes. For example, when a completely new meaning or meanings are assigned to an earlier concept. The pleiotropic polyfunctionality, i.e., double meaning, of a genetic unit is like metaphor in language. Additionally, the spacers may also be considered as representing *symbols* of something else, something much bigger, and more important. All of these represent the relationship between the set and the subset.

One may even detect analogues of *verbal irony* (conversational implicature in Paul Grice's terms) or *situational irony* or *paradox* when cells—obviously cancer cells in particular—attempt to convey one thing, but the results is the opposite: destructive proliferation instead of growth, death

instead of eternal life. It is also recognizably ironic and paradoxical when mutations useful in near-future evolution turn out to be boomerangs, developmental setbacks, or dead ends for the species in the long run. Metaphor, metonymy, symbol, irony, paradox—these are figures of speech where A is said but B is thought, implied.

One can also consider *epithets*, i.e., accompanying descriptive terms, as well as *similes*, i.e., explicit comparisons with something else. Epithet and simile differ from other tropes in the sense that they are literal and straightforward, rather than non-literal, expressions. However, metaphors are sometimes called implicit similes.

Graphic patterns

If the cell had eyes like ours, these associations could also call forth *graphic image patterns* as it is the case with the 'mushrooms', i.e., palindromic interspaces, in Figure 2. Puzzling though it may be, the cell is somehow able to see these fungi, otherwise these regular and highlighted patterns would not exist.

Figure 2. Palindromic interspaces of a CRISPR array.

Deixis

In the future, I would be intrigued to find out whether one can speak about *deixis*, pragmatic (linguistic) orientation acts (q.v. Merilai 2005; 2020) inside a cell. Is there an *origo*, an orientation center in a cell? Is it its nucleus? Are there any observable deictic space and time dimensions: here, there, in, out, up, down, above, below, in front, behind, left, right, towards, forwards, now, earlier, later, and so on? That would be astonishing—cellular self-reflexive, context-dependent deixis.

Poetic lexicon and syntax

When it comes to a stylistic vocabulary, one might say that a cell can interpret the clusters of *homonyms*, *synonyms*, and *antonyms* as well as *archaisms* and recurring *neologisms*—numerous 'words' or phrases that have either lost or not yet acquired meaning—from the genome. In fact, *synonymous mutation* is a regular term in genetics, another self-evident

borrowing from the poetic lexicon. Semantic *cacophonic noise* in a genome which adjoins meaningful *harmony* is also an important lexical phenomenon. *Words*, *phrases*, *quotes*, and *definitions* are all to be considered on this level. Comparative research on syntactic and genome patterns forms a worthy collection, which could be reactivated from the vantage point of poetic function.

Library

The 'bibliographic' indications of *accumulation—collections*, *catalogues*, *definitions, quotes, labels*, *exhibits*, *repository*, etc.—can also be interpreted from the poetic point of view.

Thus, it is tempting—and by no means rhetorical—to say that genetics seems to be fully poetic. Although the formal similarity is diverse and obvious, it is not worth equating the two disciplines with different methods and goals in a stricter sense. This parallel, however, could be acknowledged more broadly, creating a new perspective and common ground in both the natural sciences and the humanities.

My hypothesis is that genomes can be shaped by a *primordial poetics* just as a poem is. Life—the language of polymers and nucleic acids, the communication of proteins—seems to be primordially poetic. Therefore, it may be argued that genetics and poetics grow from the same root, from the same primal function. Genes as language and text have been written about both metaphorically and literally (see López-García 2005; Raible 2001). Not long ago, Suren Zolyan and Renad Zhdanov (2018) called the genome a *hypertext*, or a process, which may be approached from the viewpoint of *text linguistics*. Within this, however, the activity of the cell could still come under more precise focus and observation from the perspective of the *poetic function of language use*. I have been tempted for a long time to bring the idea to cellular biologists, but now, facing the genetic concept of the *palindrome*, which was borrowed from the poetic dictionary and made famous, it is again the time to seize the drawstring of genetics.

Poetic self-referentiality

In language and literary studies, the self-referencing ability of the text is called the poetic function of language. Already in 1958, Roman Jakobson (see 1981) described the poetic work of language in a ground-breaking and transparent way according to the Slavic schools of form. For him, the literariness of language was one of the six functions of communication,

which, if left unstudied, would leave linguistics incomplete. The basic functions of language, slightly modified (q.v. Merilai 2003, 382–383), would be: (1) *referential* (contextual, epical), (2) *emotive* (expressive, lyrical), (3) *conative* (addressing, dramatical) functions as referential activity; (4) *metalingual* (language- or semantic-driven), (5) *phatic* (contact- or channel-driven), and (6) *poetic* (expression- or form-driven) functions as linguistic self-referential activity. This, apparently, could also be projected to the vegetative iconic communication of cells.

The poetic function reveals itself when the paradigmatic similarities of language are recognized, combined, and directed into an ordered syntax, the expression end speech. This creates linguistic equivalents at the level of the perceptible form of self-communication: language becomes visible, highlighting not only the content but also itself, its composition and structure, which in ordinary cases remain hidden. However, it can be argued that linguistic self-manifestation is not absent from the ordinary language, something that has been proven in work related to deixis (Merilai 2005).

Although the Nobel Prize is not awarded in philology, Jakobson undoubtedly formulated a breakthrough vision that underpins modern poetics as well as cultural semiotics based on a secondary model system. It is presumable that Jakobson, like many other linguists, semioticians, or other researchers, comprehended the direct linguistic potential of genetics, since the processes of encoding and exchanging molecular information are structurally similar to linguistic communication in both their stability and variability (Jakobson 1970, 437–440). However, he did not pay attention to the possibility of poetics in genetics, probably since molecular biology was still too young. But now the time seems to be ripe for what is ripe.

I consider the self-referencing capability of the expression, i.e., the textual auto-reference, to be the core of poetics. In introducing and developing pragmapoetics, I have visualized the poetic self-referentiality as depicted in Figure 3 (Merilai et al. 2003, 23; Merilai 2007, 382; 2013, 12). In genetics, this pictorial generalization could be applied to self-recognition and self-copying processes in cells.

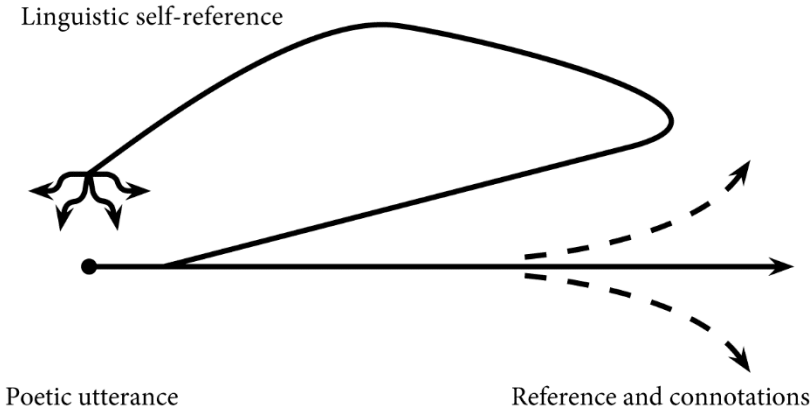

Figure 3. Poetic function.

I sketched the predecessor of this diagram as a university student while pondering philosophy and discussing phenomenology; many times before, I was inspired by the explanatory power of that scheme in poetics as well. In addition to intentionality, i.e., the subject's self-awareness and self-reflection, this image helps to show the reflexivity of the utterance. First, a poetic utterance refers to its propositional and modal contents. Secondly, its textual qualities create communication between the language elements on the formal surface. The first is the *mimesis* or truth level—de re—, the second is the *poiesis* or expression level—de dicto. This 'two-faced' Wittgensteinian or Lotmanian, back and forth, roundabout, flashing scheme is supplemented with additional arrows, as it corresponds better to the associatively referential—connotational—and pluralistically autoreferential, formal quality of the poetic expression.

Thus, the same model would also be applicable when characterizing the primordial poetics of genetic writing, reading, multiplying, propagation, learning, memory, and communication processes in cells. Naturally multiplying, identical, parallel sequences—identity reestablishment—simultaneously shape the opposition, the contrast to foreign sequences, which is poetic by definition. It seems, that DNA replication in matrix synthesis, which ensures the accurate transmission of information, must have the self-referentiality mechanism at work somehow similar to that of the poetic expression. However, how it functions on a biochemical level remains a mystery for my layman's eyes at this point. How molecular self-reflection occurs in the copying process is my next question for microbiologists, but the similarity to the poetics of language does not seem

coincidental. Especially thought-provoking is the characteristic fact that poetic self-referentiality—as *the core* of the secondary modelling system—always transforms the initial linguistic disposition (on the primary modelling level), as the latter may sometimes be barely restorable from the final result or even beyond recognition. This particular phenomenon must have its counterpart in genetics, too, if my hypothesis has any truth to it.

If Ángel López-García (2005, 155, 173) could reach a reasoned hypothesis, in his detailed monograph, that genetic codes may have been a pre-program from which linguistic codes originated, then the same conclusion can be logically extrapolated to poetics as an inevitable part of language. Consequently, literary codes may also have their pre-programs on the genetic level.

Therefore, based on the pioneer of generative grammar Noam Chomsky (see Chomsky 1980), the biolinguistic discussion of a genetically inborn universal grammar, the so-called language instinct, may be revived in the context of cellular poetics, as the poetic self-referential function is an integral part of the definition of language.[1] As biolinguist Lyle Jenkins (2000, 232) says, a better understanding of human language—and poetry, to be added—helps better understand the language of cells.

Everything that lives interprets. From this point of view, poetics is the basic principle of life, apparent in the self-referential genetic reading and translation process of organisms as self-interpreting biotexts, a notion introduced by biosemiotics (Kull 2002; Maturana, and Varela 1980). The genome itself is a passive sequence of defined signs that only comes to life when the cell reads it. However, the cell is free to choose which section it is currently activating. This is not an individually determined, (neo-)Darwinian process, but an open plurality. The cell is the first level of life, and, according to biosemioticians (see also Weber 2016; Noble 2006), this life is a freely choosing and creative ambassador from the beginning.[2] Creation:

[1] If language (and mathematics) has an inherited structural basis, it must be polygenetic. At the end of the last century and the beginning of the current one, it was even argued that some genes specifically capable of affecting language ability—thought to number in the thousands since the time of Salvador Edward Luria (Jenkins 2000, 124)—are already localizable (see, for example, Lai et al. 2001).

[2] Berlin science writer Andreas Weber (2016) calls his fascinating, essayistic, and figurative approach biopoetics. However, he does not approach poetics in a textual-analytical, formal-structural manner but rather from a cognitive standpoint, from the inner experience of the receiver and the first-person expression. In this case, the term poetic, meaning lyrical—emotional, soulful, aesthetic, sensual—is central to the

poetry, music, whichever primordial activity is already occurring in the cell. The complex weave of protein texts from the genetic threads is in constant search of new patterns. Thus, old metaphors are successfully changing in recent epigenetic research of gene expressions. It is no longer a common belief that evolution is based solely on changes in DNA, but more on novelties in cellular interpretation and holistic interaction.

If life is based on primordial poetics, then where there is life, there is interpretive primary poetics. However, Zolyan and Zhdanov, who approach from a textual linguistic perspective, also casually mention the possibility of *poetics* and briefly compare the DNA helix to music,[3] while Tartu professor Kull (1998), to whom they refer, has clearly relied in his own work on the idea of *autopoiesis*, which one could consider the root of poetics. So,

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subject's self-perception, as opposed to formal poetics. Biopoetics in this sense is rather biopoetry in a non-fiction form. If such biopoetic approach gives life to and introduces (micro)biology, then analytical biopoetics, which has not yet even been created, should look at the technique of (micro)biological 'texts', its formal devices and the autoreferential principles behind their composition. The formalist biopoetic approach has a different object, goal, and methodology. If the former is more Platonic, humanistic, then the latter is Aristotelian, structural: the logical discipline itself, not the popularization of it.

Again, Denis Noble's biopoetic book, *Music of Life,* does not adhere to Weber's elevated style but is just as sublime in mood. Both approaches are connected by the perception that their subject is clearly poetic. Noble's program is Systems Biology, an integrated viewpoint, a larger holistic picture that is otherwise often lost in narrow disciplines. His metaphor approaches music—the idea of rhythm, a part, a score, orchestration, polyphony, symphony, harmony—with a poetic potential. "The organism is an orchestra without a conductor," says Kalevi Kull in the afterword (in Estonian) of his translation book, which refers to "the poetic, aesthetic, creative aspect of life" (Kull 2016).

[3] Recently, Suren Zolyan has published new articles bordering on the poetics of genetics:
2022. "Semio-poiesis: On the Emergence of the Semiosphere within the Biosphere." In *Lexia. Rivista di semiotica*, No. 39–40 (December). Re-Thinking Juri Lotman in the Twenty-First Century, 101–120;
2022. "From Matter to Form: The Evolution of the Genetic Code as Semio-poiesis." In *Linguistic Frontiers*, No. 3 (2), 44–56;
2021. "On the Context-sensitive Grammar of the Genetic Code." In *Biosystems*, Vol. 208 (October), 1–7.
(A.M. 2023.)

it would be right to follow this Ariadne thread—as a method—to find a way through the maze as Theseus did.[4]

Just as our brains have been noted to have the same honeycomb-like structure as the universe, one may juxtapose genetic interactions with poetry, because both, in macro and micro, have a form-bound, self-referential text and entangled speech structure. The analysis of poetic form that we have learned to master in literature can be projected back to the genetic level, which is less well known in this respect, to point out typological similarities. Thus, philology can be of help in more areas than just humanities and didactics.

As Ludwig Wittgenstein said (1958, 19): "To imagine language means to imagine a lifeform." And vice versa. A text is an organism, and an organism is a text; a text is a complete holistic process in the context of other wholes. In literary studies, it is called intertextuality, rhizome, and intermediality.

Expanding the program

We know that the general idea of poetic function, where symmetry dictates design (and thus also asymmetry), was also harbored in Albert Einstein's theoretical thinking, as is the case with many other natural scientists. It is evident that the question of poetics may as well be reduced to the observation level of inanimate nature, but let this perspective remain the crystallizing punchline of this manifesto.

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[4] Surely it would be tempting to pursue the newly discovered primary thread that the genetic code of the human Y chromosome also contains long (multicopy) *palindromic* loops, *inversions*, *variations* and other highly *repetitive* (tandem, ampliconic) sequences. See, for example, Pille Hallast et al. 2023. "Assembly of 43 human Y chromosomes reveals extensive complexity and variation." In *Nature*, 23 August. www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-06425-6; also Arang Rhie et al. 2023. "The Complete Sequence of a Human Y chromosome." In *Nature*, 23. August. www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-06457-y. (A. M. 2023.)

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CHAPTER II

UNIFIED THEORETICAL FIELD PERSPECTIVES: SECOND MANIFESTO[1]

Abstract

Estonian cultural studies constitute a rich and promising area of research. This area is uniquely positioned to bring together the vast array of methodological approaches that increasingly have come to define our postmodern mindscape. It allows us to unpack salient aspects of national and world literature more productively and to bring into sharper focus the role of the humanities in general. Contemporary research, teaching and supervisory activities in the university environment proceed from an unprecedented openness to multiple differences, older and newer constructions, and deconstructions, congruent or incongruent points of view, active merging of many paradigms, intra- or interdisciplinary, and a permanent disposition towards innovation. There are theoretical clusters that focus on the form and structure of a work, combining with linguistic and stylistic, author-centered, or reader-centered approaches; intertextual relations; content-driven, i.e., socio-semantic and historical interpretations; and complex combinations of all of these. As a result, contemporary literary research has to integrate an overwhelmingly rich multitude of different productive methods to encompass both levels of mimesis and poiesis, in their respective hermeneutic circles: literary historical, textological, bio-bibliographical and reception studies; close reading, poetic, linguistic, structuralist, semiotic, narratological; intertextual, translation-theoretical; psychoanalytical, cognitivist; socio-psychological—including gender and memory studies, post-colonialism, new historicism, ecocriticism—as well as intercultural studies; post-structuralist discursive, hermeneutical-phenomenological, mytho-theoretical; analytical philosophical, formal

[1] This article is based on the paper "Towards a Comparative Poetics: "Unified Field Theory" Perspectives" presented on July 19, 2013 at the University of Paris-Sorbonne at the 20th congress of The International Comparative Literature Association (Merilai 2013).

statistical, digital and other current and plausible approaches. Such anthological versatility en gros is necessary as different authors, types of texts, phenomena, traditions and levels can actualize separate points of view, networks and methodologies. Thus, the in-depth study of literatures, avoiding shallow eclecticism and levelling synthesis, should be implemented within a comprehensive, unified meta-multi-theoretical field that integrates diverse paradigms and polylogical perspectives central to the humanities today. The theorisations may be exclusively collateral, have inclusive intersections or be more generally congenial. The use of one cluster does not exclude the consideration of others, even opposing ones. Although the comparative meta-theory, or general poetics, does not aim to erase inevitable and inspiring incoherencies, a synchronisation of meta-languages can often be achieved at the appropriate levels of description, even between analytical and continental language philosophy evident in pragmapoetics (q.v. Merilai 2003; 2007a, b). While the humanities encourage diversity, no scholar, however astute, is expected to have a full command of all relevant discourses within the whole polysystem; hence the need for shared synergies.

Keywords: theory of literature; literary unified field theory; methodology; comparative poetics; pragmapoetics; polysystem

In our profession, we are used to assuming that word art creates, preserves, and develops a native language as a basis of culture and society. Poetic language as a secondary modeling system plays an important role in shaping the spiritual foundation and identity of a nation. An effort must be made to get to know the laws and rich data of this domain, to create the conditions for its survival and progress.

In addition to regular studies across three levels of higher education, the literary scholars of the Institute of Cultural Sciences at the University of Tartu consider their primary undertaking to be general or in-depth Estonian literary research and the comparative introduction of the acquired results to the world. They study poetics, narratology, and reception, striving to be both traditional literary historians and internationally communicative comparativists. These activities are carried out by using a historically formed, persistently valuable, and efficient set of methods.

Contemporary scholars—as researchers, lecturers, and supervisors—quite regularly encounter diverse intra- or interdisciplinary ways of interpreting literature. The theory and practice of modern humanities is determined by postmodern pluralism, a simultaneous multiplicity of truths, points of view,

and methods. On the contrary, we have no reason to avoid it. An equal openness to new aspects and methods as well as to earlier proven processes has long become the new challenge of the once historicist-stylistic, positivist approach to literary studies, particularly when trying to integrate as many relevant contemporary theoretical approaches as possible. Many different styles of interpretation or critical deconstructions are practiced in modern literary studies to encompass levels of both *mimesis* and *poiesis* in their respective hermeneutic circles: literary historical, textological, bio-bibliographical and reception studies; close reading, poetic, linguistic, structuralist, semiotic, narratological; intertextual, translation-theoretical; psychoanalytical, cognitivistic; socio-psychological—including gender and memory studies, post-colonialism, new historicism, ecocriticism—as well as intercultural studies; post-structuralist discursive, hermeneutical-phenomenological, mytho-theoretical; analytical philosophical, formal statistical, digital and other plausible approaches. There are theoretical clusters that focus on the form and structure of a work, combining with linguistic and stylistic, author-centered or reader-centered approaches; intertextual relations; content-driven, i.e., socio-semantic and historical interpretations; and complex combinations of all of these. Such a versatile, partially congruent, partially incongruent methodological richness is natural, as different authors, types of texts, phenomena, and traditions enliven and weave together multiple points of view and approaches.

It should be acknowledged that, as humanities scholars, we work in a theoretical unified field, whether we realize it or not. But if we as researchers prefer this or that more general or individual, familiar set of methods, then it does not seem sensible to fixate on only tried-and-true solutions when guiding our academic successors, as innovation is both the motivating requirement of scholarly research as well as the legacy of the new generation. University lecturers face the constant challenge of staying theoretically informed, as dissertation topics and approaches are encouraged to be chosen "wall to wall." Aren't changing spiritual interests also to some extent a dynamic of the anxiety of influence? It is better to learn together with the undergraduate and graduate students we are mentoring, discussing together, and instructing less, trying not to impose tried-and-tested templates too hard. Undoubtedly, there is charm in and justification for appreciatively continuing settled traditions as well as for innovatively supplementing and transcending them, insofar as one approach supports and does not exclude the other. It is apparent, though not paradoxical, that the idea and necessity of a theoretical unified field are equally based on both philosophical and didactic assumptions, thus being pedagogically applicable in all its abstract meta-levelness.

Therefore, in-depth research of national literature with discussions and informative publication of the results could occur even more explicitly in a comprehensive, theoretical unified field, which would actualize and integrate any point of view capable of explanation and communication. Of course, no scholar, no matter how systematic or experienced, can be so versatile that they would be equally capable of mastering all the world's major research paradigms. But they may nevertheless wish to consider the bigger picture from the perspective of more immediate potentials, relying on more competent experts if necessary and encouraging the development of both their colleagues and themselves. After all, not everything can be reduced to literary history, comparativism, poetics, or cultural semiotics; there is still more to be found in the world of literature. The great advantage of *Universitas* is an environment that favors interdisciplinary synergy, real or virtual brainstorming, that values research in a pluralistic or multi-level unified field.

How to describe a theoretical unified field? Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind is the abstraction of abstractions, which is not accompanied by anchoring images: either a meta-level that brings together an equivalent or opposing plurality, or its reflection, i.e., an assumed base format. One can speculate about a multi-level, universal, unified structure, and its encompassing theoretical environment. Itamar Even-Zohar has already attempted to delineate literature—although not the theory itself—as a semiotic polysystem (Even-Zohar 1990). He considers a polysystem to be a system comprised of systems that is inherently synchronously and diachronically structured—open and heterogeneous in terms of joint participation and co-determination, a comprehensive unified structure of dependency and independence based on different assumptions.[2] And without a doubt, the thought of this concept leads to Pierre Bourdieu's (see Bourdieu 1996 et al.) literary field (*champ littéraire*) or wider social fields (*champs sociaux*), from which it is easy to derive the concept *champ théorique* (although it is questionable as to whether *champ magnétique* may also be similarly derived; common sense skepticism is still necessary).

The indirect inspiration for this thematic vision is, of course, the hypothetical unified field theory of physics outlined by Albert Einstein and his successors, which has thus far been unachievable: a congruent

[2] According to Itamar Even-Zohar, a polysystem is "a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent" (Even-Zohar 1990, 11).