

Turning Art Into a Literary Communication Tool

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Abstract

The paper investigates the unity of theatrical and musical arts as supplementary communication tools employed by the literary medium. The literary practice of integrating music and drama into a novel is seen through the prism of intermediality-based processes employed by modernist writers, namely E. M. Forster in his novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). It is revealed that the integration of a dramatic-musical medium and theatre-based conflict into the literary work enhances and deepens the intercultural conflict depicted by the writer, as well as links supporting artistic layers through the intermedia-based principle of fragmentation. Even though the matters under study refer to the beginning of the XX century, the principles applied by Forster remain unchanged and similar literary practices can be seen both in contemporary literature and new media forms, including digital media, pop art and mass art. The paper concludes that integrating other arts into literary forms supports the multi-layer depictions, the extension of the context of a creative artefact, as well as helps establish the polyphonic arts and art forms.

Keywords: Intermediality, Art, Synthesis, Polyphony, Theatre, Medium

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Introduction

Literature has long been seen as a universal medium capable of integrating other media or imitating them with verbal means for various purposes. This process of re-cycling, re-writing, adapting, and integrating non-verbal media into literary works gives grounds to the theory of intermediality which actively develops since the early 1980s, even though the matters under study have always existed in the history of arts and have been actively discussed under different terms and perspectives by Renaissance artists, German Romanticists, and artists of the XX century.

Based on Romanticist and turn-of-the-century traditions and rapid developments, British literary modernism continues the search for syncretic, polyphonic artistic forms and balances between various binaries. It can be seen as an artistic epoch in between “a certain cult of Art” (Clark, 1999, p. 22) and “an allergic reaction against art” (Adorno, 1984, p. 53) being closely linked to materialism (Clark, 1999, p. 139) and negating traditions (Adorno, 1984, p. 31), being a playful cultural response through the re-combination of traditional forms and, as Baudrillard puts it, “an effect of combined technological and cultural processes” (Gane, 1991, p. 93) of the turn of the century and later turbulences.

Traditionally, British modernist literary texts are seen through the prism of cinematography and the principle of montage in the sense of opposing two or more images (Trotter, 2007, p. 2), which makes intermedial not only the content of literary artefacts but their perception by readers and scholars as well. The “revealing” of these and other medial elements should support the re-assessment of the *oeuvre* of the writers and help detect additional layers of the literary works. However, as Donald Clive Stuart argued in 1913, very often the theatre as an independent and legitimate form of art is declined its right for independence and is seen as “worthy” only when it has a “real literary value” (Stuart, 1913, p. 108), which makes the study of a theatrical medium integration into the modernist works particularly interesting, as the role of theatre as art was not yet defined and universally accepted despite its commercial success in the first third of the XX century.

Thus, for this research a medium is seen as a communicative tool (Elleström, 2014, p. 2) including material modality (i.e., “interface” of the medium), sensorial aspects of media perception, spatiotemporal modality, and semiotic modality (Elleström, 2010, pp. 17-21), whereas intermediality would mean “(the study of) specific relations among dissimilar media products and general relations among different media types” (Elleström, 2017), while an artefact is any work of art.

Fusion of Drama, Music, and Literature

Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) is E. M. Forster’s first novel. It focuses on an extended English family that opposes the Italian culture and people due to strong social differences. The novel is charged with sarcasm and represents an early stage of British modernism literature, yet, its intermedial characteristics are strong, as Forster employs two non-literary media – a pictorial and theatrical art – to build strong oppositions between key characters, two countries and mentalities. Whereas veiled and explicit ekphrases are used by the writer to build the images of key characters and convey hidden messages through the early Italian Renaissance paintings and frescoes (Isagulov, 2019) employed as a supporting communication tool, the integration of the theatre serves other purposes.

Thus, the synthesis of music, literature and drama becomes a key element of the novel serving as an artistic herald of Forster's key messages. Even though in many cases the border between a theatrical medium and a literary medium is vague (Hinchliffe, 1979, p. 2) and in many cases, following Aristotle's *Poetics*, theatre is believed to be a branch of literature (Kirby, 1974, p. 103), Forster tries to make a clear distinction, as theatre represents another world in the novel and is employed purely as an artistic tool for building the modernist binaries. Thus, in a scene that becomes an anti-climax of the novel, the key characters attend the provincial staging of Gaetano Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* which is based on Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) which pre-destines the fate of key characters by its plot. At the same time, the introduction to Scott's novel incorporates a discussion between the writer-narrator and the fictional painter on the sense of arts, which aligns with Forster's key ideas expressed in the novel and his *oeuvre*. Thus, the painter asks the writer to avoid lengthiness and boredom:

[Nothing] can be more dull than a long narrative written upon the plan of a drama, so where you have approached most near to that species of composition, by indulging in prolonged scenes of mere conversation, the course of your story has become chill and constrained, and you have lost the power of arresting the attention and exciting the imagination, in which upon other occasions you may be considered as having succeeded tolerably well. (Scott, 1996)

Forster follows these rules himself – he does not overburden the novel with overly dramatic situations or contexts, yet focuses it on arts and theatre. It reads easily and at an unconscious level interferes with two cultures and their heritage – English and Italian. The methods proposed by Scott help Forster, a representative of another artistic epoch, attach additional artistic fragments and enlarge the fabric of the novel through media as supporting communication tools. This turns the seemingly simple novel into a multi-sided and endless system with multiple overt and covert meanings and contexts at the junction of literature, architecture, painting, music, and theatre. To be more specific, the desire to use theatre, in particular, Italian opera based on the British novel, as a cornerstone of the text helps Forster expose the primaeval character and the holistic nature of arts and demonstrate artistic legacy in Italy as opposed to the limited, censored, conservative traditions of the English society which rejects the art and follows illusions.

Thus, when the key English characters attend the opera, they are openly opposed to local Italians. Englishmen as the bearers of Scott's legacy and Italians as the recipients of musicality are placed in the same building at the same place – the chronotope that is created in this section of the narrative becomes fluid due to the close integration of a fictional stage, the fictional performance of a real opera and fictional characters of a real novel. This scene is rather full of details and the reader is presented with a vision where all masks are taken off as opera equals all characters: the reader does not only “hear” and “see” the staged opera but witnesses the response of two nations to arts as only the actors/singers are allowed to play their roles, which they transcend as well so that to interact with the audience. The focus on the audience and purely its response is the feature typical of the real theatre, not the novelistic writing, as the literary mechanisms here can be seen as “tuned out” or inoperative thank to the focus on the “perceptual mechanism” (Kirby, 1974, p. 104) as the theatre here is the place of revealing the specific response of Italians as opposed to Englishmen, thus supporting the arch of the “English – Italian” cultural and mentality-based conflict.

Thus, the synthesis of music and drama documented in words is shown untypically, rather specifically – it is presented as an interdependent process of compassion, empathy and mutual joy and pleasures shared by the artists and local audience. In Aristotle's terms, it speaks both to the ear and to the eye resulting in a combination of two methods employed to represent the story – the drama of action and the drama of literature (Stuart, 1913, p. 109): in Forster's case, the first one is presented by the focus on actions of the audience, whereas the second one is the interest of the readership-audience by the beauty of the lines. The tendency of the modernist theatre to be "devoid of literary interest" (Stuart, 1913, p. 109) is probably one of the reasons why Forster refers to Scott and Donizetti, whilst the second one is the possibility to attach a powerful artistic fragment through these two artworks, serving the manifestation of the cultural binary. The use of the literary work set on stage, dramatized, should fill the depicted performance with content, whereas "the stage brings this content to objective definiteness and subjective clearness" (Gilyazova, 2019, p. 4). Thus, the theatrical art, the drama becomes a consciously employed tool – Forster uses it to convey several messages: first, through theatre, he shows that the Italians enjoy the singing of Lucia, whereas the singers draw inspiration from the spectators:

Lucia began to sing ... her voice was still beautiful, and as she sang the theatre murmured like a hive of happy bees. All through the coloratura she was accompanied by sighs, and its top note was drowned in a shout of universal joy. The singers drew inspiration from the audience ... (Forster, 2008, p. 84)

The use of theatre as a literary communication tool and a literature-based medium here allows changing the tempo of the text, "claim the audience" (Hinchliffe, 1979, p. 1) showing in a hypertrophied way the synthesis of the Italian society with their artistic legacy, absence of borders, chaos, permissiveness, which is done through various means in the novel, whereas the English society represents a traditional hierarchy and a national tradition of everyone knowing their exact place and limits of what is acceptable and what is not. Thus, Forster manages to resolve in his work the "long-time conflict" between seeing theatre as a textual phenomenon and a social institution (Gilyazova, 2019, p. 5) – in his novel the theatre becomes both a social platform and a textualized art, serving the writer's communicative purposes, as on the British Islands at the turn of the century, it would be unimaginable to see an actress interacting with the crowd and the audience singing along with Lucia, whereas in the novel, in Italy, this distance is eradicated through arts and people and media get merged (Isagulov, 2011):

Violent waves of excitement, all arising from very little, went sweeping round the theatre. The climax was reached in the mad scene. Lucia suddenly gathered up her streaming hair and bowed her acknowledgment to the audience. Then from the back of the stage—she feigned not to see it—there advanced a kind of bamboo clothes-horse, stuck all over with bouquets. It was very ugly, and most of the flowers in it were false. Lucia knew this, and so did the audience; and they all knew that the clothes-horse was a piece of stage property, brought in to make the performance go year after year. None the less did it unloose the great deeps. With a scream of amazement and joy she embraced the animal, pulled out one or two practicable blossoms, pressed them to her lips, and flung them into her admirers. They flung them back, with loud melodious cries, and a little boy in one of the stageboxes snatched up his sister's carnations and offered them. "Che carino!" exclaimed the singer. She darted at the little boy and kissed him. Now the noise became tremendous. (Forster, 2008, p. 84)

It is easy to imagine what is going on in the theatre and see the gestures, actions of the singer and audience, as everyone also becomes a part of the staging due to their active involvement. One could “hear” the noises and sounds if they ever communicated with Italians. The language of stereotypes here supports the musicalization of the novel and is enhanced by Lucia’s pauses and interaction with people. As Forster avoids spoken language in this crucial section of the novel, he clearly employs the theatrical syntax and theatrical signs as determinants of the literary quality of Scott’s writing, thus building his own symbolic level of a “sign continuum”, where an elaborated gesture language, colours and sounds of the crowd bring more meanings than the actual dialogue would/could, which also supports Forster’s focus on the actress in the description of the scene, as “the actor is the most important element” (Kirby, 1974, pp. 105-106). Following the rules of the theatre and drama as art, the depicted events and the theatrical medium employed cannot be static (Perry, 1968, p. 1313), yet, as they are reflected in a verbal form, at the same time, the written language of a literary medium allows Forster to control the vision of the reader who is gently forced to be a fake spectator. This is a psychological trick when by breaking the typical reading patterns the writer creates a fake theatrical presentation and new artistic pattern. Even though the novel is a “one man’s labor”, the employment of various media forces Forster to make his writing synthetic, i.e., multi-medial – as theatre is a “synthesis of many art forms” (Perry, 1968, p. 1314), yet, the entire “orchestration” is led by the single person – E. M. Forster – who in this particular case is a multi-faced creator combining the roles of a playwright, writer, director, designer, technician and the silent narrator-observer.

On the other hand, Forster employs additional “tricks” and elements that are typical of the cinematography and staged arts and would be later actively exploited by other modernists, especially James Joyce. Thus, as mentioned above, while building the binary of the Italian and English, own and strange in the novel, he directly refers to the well-known paintings of Italian artists from the early Renaissance and frescos of Santa Fina located in the collegiate church of San Gimignano. However, while building the scenes and sending the reader hints and veiled messages through ekphrases, he employs “interrupted techniques” of fragmentation, repetition of key scenes and landscapes to build the image of Italy, duplication, slowing down – which all are stage techniques that would later evolve into cinematography and Sergej Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions” (Kattenbelt, 2008, p. 26). This additional overlay supports the intermediality of the novel and links it to staged arts and cinematography in another way – covertly and unconsciously, as the reader would not easily associate these techniques with cinematic art that was manifesting its role at the beginning of the XX century when the novel was written. Consequently, in addition to the actual attempt to imitate the theatrical medium and art in the novel through Donizetti’s opera (which in itself is a media combination), one may see the plethora of intermedial references masterfully planted in the text through its form chosen by the writer (Rajewsky, 2005, pp. 51-52).

Thus, the integration of this music-dramatic synthesis, an opera staged in the theatre, and other stage elements serves the purpose of uniting and enhancing all other intercultural conflicts of the novel, merging various artistic fragments. However, Forster is not the only writer who employs opera and theatre. Gaston Leroux presents his *The Phantom of the Opera* in 1910, a novel about a set of dramatic events in an operatic theatre. However, the most known and appreciated form of the story would be a 1986 musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber, where the media and medial forms are reversed – the literary work with elements of other media is re-cycled into a musical theatre based on a literary text, where there exist own layers of various media that serve individual purposes, or even a theatre within a theatre to convey certain messages and re-enhance the personalities of Phantom, Christine and Raoul. The

adaptation of Leroux's novel into a film in 1925 is next turn into the process of intermedial recycling, whereas the 2004 film is based both on the novel and the musical, which transforms staged performance into a cinematic media and visualises it through additional means which are not available to literature, opera, or other theatrical forms. The continuation of the Phantom's literary story can be seen in various fandom works and Susan Kay's novel *Phantom* (1990) which is a prequel to the story of the main character and involves the theatrical elements as a setting for Erik-Phantom and his progression to the theatre of Leroux. Hence, theatre and music can be employed differently in literary artefacts, yet, the use of these media is specific and depends on the communicative messages to be conveyed. The popularisation of trans-medial adaptations for entertainment purposes nowadays is one of the key factors moving the intermedial adaptations further, creating new forms and genres at the crossroads of literature, cinematography, staged arts, music, painting merged through television, internet, video platforms, social networks, multi-media software and various forms of digital media.

Conclusion

The integration of other arts into literary forms, specifically drama and music, is a long-established process typical for literature. It serves specific purposes of the writers, for instance, supporting the multi-layer depictions, the extension of the context of an artistic work, attaching additional meanings. The establishment of polyphonic arts and art forms helps the progress of the arts further and invent new plots and characters capable of fascinating the audience, like Gaston Leroux's Phantom.

In *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) E. M. Forster masterfully employs a music-drama synthesis in the form of an operatic medium. He integrated it in the middle of the novel as a descending anti-climax to showcase the difference between two nations, mentalities, and cultural traditions – English and Italian. The employment of non-literary media to highlight this binary allows to extend the scope of the literary work by adding additional fragments and linking other works of art – paintings, novels, dramas, etc. – all of which serve the primary goal of a sarcastic metaphoric exposure of Englishness as a negative mental concept.

The use of other media increases the communication capacities of the literary work and, on the other hand, helps establish a polyphonic tool to convey the key messages, as the problem is revealed through various perspectives and different eyes – of the invisible writer, of early Renaissance painters, of English characters stuck in their mentality and stereotypes, of Italian everyday life moments.

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