In the jungle of the cursed rhythm

Translatorial Solutions and the Spoken Word in the Poetry of Arto Melleri

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1. Introduction

Translating the poems of Finnish poet Arto Melleri (1956–2005) is a thrill in the sense that the intense pleasure to be found in the process is sometimes underscored by feelings of translatorial doubt. These mixed feelings arise principally from three different aspects of the process of making Melleri's poetry work in English. The first is the aesthetic rush of adapting his evocative images and rhythms, bearing in mind, as Walker et al. (2012) have put it, that the idea of a translation "as [a] mirror image of the original is obsolete and should be broadened to a more functional approach which includes adaptation and reformulation." The second aspect is the knowledge that the translations produced are a potential contribution to world literature, and the third is represented by the expected but draining fulfilment in discovering and bringing about translatorial solutions that do justice to the source text's message and tone, while ensuring reading experiences that are idiomatic and nuanced.

As Hilkka Pekkanen puts it, "in view of the crucial role translation plays in all international communication it is surprising how seldom the role of the translator is discussed or even mentioned" (7). One of my principal motivations for writing this thesis is to bring the above issues to light, that is, to write out plainly the aspects that both challenge and inspire the translator in his or her work. It is also important to make at least partly visible the steps that lead up to an adaptational product of the imagination that speaks clearly to its readers but whose processes or "laws of nature" are, ideally, entirely invisible.

There is an obvious paradox here, which is comparable to the very dichotomy of experiencing art in the first place. In one sense an oil painting is merely a mixture of swabbed and drawn shapes produced by applying chemicals and adhesives to a surface, and the short story about a beleaguered space station in the distant future is impossible and fantastic. But by the "willing suspension of disbelief," which English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge described in his *Biographia Litteraria* in 1817, the oil paint becomes a dreamlike representation of a

Spanish mourner and the invented science fiction fancy becomes a turbulent first-hand account of a dramatic crisis. Poetry of all stripes uses this impulse as its starting point: we must accept that there are semantic micro-organisms living on the surfaces and in the crannies of words before we can see those words for what they are and are able – or meant – to signify.

When we become immersed in a work of art, we flip a switch in our heads that has its own arc of movement, a journey of "gearing up" or "settling in." In the case of translations, the only reason they can even exist is because someone else has gone through that process and transferred their own original experience into another language, lived out the eventual and hypothetical reader's emotional response while fine-tuning the formal qualities of the text like a diligent watchmaker.

In fact, to qualify that tired simile, I put it to the reader of this thesis that translation can be understood as an artisan modifying a pocket watch to tell time as accurately as the one he is commissioned to fix – but that each and every gear, spring and dial has to be changed, so that next to nothing remains of the original timepiece's parts. And yet the finished product ticks, stays together, and keeps time – not exactly as the original did, which is impossible because each tiny component is now different. In fact, sometimes the watchmaker may (or must) remove or add features to the watch, or even make it digital. The time this device then displays is simultaneously in three time zones: the zone defined by the era and location of the author of the source text, the zone in which the translation is created, and the zone where it is experienced by a reader.

1.1 Aims and Methods

What is usually left out in allegories like the above is what the translator/watchmaker goes through in choosing the parts he is going to use in his finished product. How many cogs do his hands have to touch before he inserts the "right" one and tightens it? This is the driving force

of this thesis, and the most important insight I can hope to impart lies in trying to answer this question.

I arrive at some answers by four qualitative avenues: by introducing and analyzing the key concepts in my work of translating Melleri's poetry and providing a brief biographical overview of the author; by making a number of thematic, step-by-step case studies of my translations (begun in late 2013 at an international writers' residence); and by investigating one of Melleri's musical publications. I will not be analyzing the few extant English translations of Melleri's work that exist – translated by Herbert Lomas – as I have not included them in my own translatorial process.

First, I foreground and cement the approaches I rely on when translating (Melleri's) poetry, in other words the professional tools at my disposal and their applications (Roinila, Lehto, Lindholm). I will also discuss the difference between the terms "translational" and "translatorial," as I recognize the impulse to use them interchangeably but must conclude that my views more strongly fit the latter. Next, I introduce a theory on performativity (Blackmur) and spoken word poetry and the spoken/written binary (McAlpine) as they relate to Melleri's (written) body of work and my translations. Finally, I briefly demonstrate how these theories pertain to Melleri's poetics and his life in the public eye.

The chapters that follow form the bulk of the thesis and are composed of in-depth case studies or *explications des textes* of my own translations, wherein I use literary analysis and skopos theory (Nord) to identify and explain the thought processes and repercussions of the choices I have made in translating the individual poems from Finnish into English. An understanding of the Finnish language is helpful in grasping the differentiations I make in these chapters, although I motivate the most important solutions at which I arrive. The poems were chosen and thematically arranged based on the criteria of autobiographical vantage points

(chapter 3), culturally bound problems or "bumps" (Leppihalme; chapter 4) and my personal reasoning (chapter 5).

This will be followed by a discussion (chapter 6) of one of Melleri's audio publications, wherein he performed his poems with noted Finnish guitarists. The author's verbal interpretations of his own poems – complete with pauses, enunciations and emphases (Laukkanen and Leino) – will form part of my interpretation of his poems-as-texts, and my subsequent translations.

All translations in this thesis are mine unless otherwise stated.

1.2 Challenges and Resolutions

The impulse to translate comes naturally to those so inclined, and to speakers of multiple languages especially. The frequency of phenomena such as code-switching is likely to attune multilinguals to the nature and cadence of language use due to the variety in their internal and communal linguistic repertoire (Finegan 329). In fact, my own attraction to translating began at an early age thanks to my bilingualism – but it only became a professional calling once I became acquainted with the facts, tools, theories, functions, and hardships it is necessary to experience in order to gain the ability to tackle and mediate cross-linguistic projects. And even as a competent reader and fluent bilingual translator, I use aids that might seem simple to some: without the real-time translations for individual words suggested by *Google Translate* or the plethora of possible synonyms listed by *Thesaurus.com*, my translation work on Melleri would have been painstaking bordering on impossible (more on this in 3.1).

I worked on the translations analyzed in this thesis in various locations: at the Villa Sarkia writers' residence in Sysmä, Southern Finland; at home in Hakaniemi, Helsinki; and in temporary lodgings with some friends in Kallio, Helsinki, which is also where I frequented cafés, pubs, and restaurants and worked on many translations by hand in sometimes busy

environments. Perhaps paradoxically, the bustle of public spaces helps me focus when translating, and in Melleri's case a sense of solitude even among crowds of people is a significant emotion to understand.

Let me now define my understanding of what translation is and what is involved in good translation.

I must begin my overview with a brief terminological definition. This thesis was first called *Translational Solutions*..., as my intent was to approach the issue of translation as a field of study and practice from as universal a perspective as possible. I soon discovered that the ways in which I comprehend and classify translation – and the very personal approach I take toward assessing and tackling translation problems, in which my own personality as a poet is allowed to "shine through" – need a term that refers more to my own stance and my own hybrid theory of translation. I stand by Pekkanen's point that "translators are personalities and have different tendencies in solving problematic issues relating to the process of translating" (7). I thus use the term *translatorial* to refer to the processes I go through in individual translations and the way I involve my own voice in those processes, while *translational* is reserved for discussions on translation itself or issues concerning translation as a field.

It follows from this that even though there are many guiding principles that aid a translator and by which he or she is in part ethically bound, the translator is also in a unique position. While theories and imperatives drive my translation work, so does my own vision, and at times this means taking liberties and possibly crossing certain boundaries. It is my job as a translator to be able to identify and motivate these crossing points, and to always make decisions that will benefit the final product, and its reader.

American theorist William Frawley has said that translation as *recodification* "is an uncertain act, and the uncertainty results from the inevitable structural mismatch of the codes"

(167) and that any target text (TT) is sure to be either a *moderate innovation* or a *radical innovation* with respect to the source text (ST), or to the ”codes that contribute to [the translation’s] genesis” (173). The prefix *re-* in *recodification* is a clue to the pursuit of duplication, of creating something new and different from the original coding through interpretation and invention.

Translations as objects of scrutiny are and ought to be viewed as independent and unique texts, especially in literary translation. As literary products based entirely on sources outside of themselves, translations are not meant to reveal their origins. A translation covers up and replaces its ST with a completely new text: to the TT reader, a translation is a “work” and an end in itself. Or as Maili Öst puts it, ”a great translation stands so firmly on its own two feet that it is nearly impossible to imagine there to be anything behind it” (43). This illusion is created in order for the TT reader to experience the text emotionally in as similar a way as possible to the original, which can be accomplished by various methods such as familiarization, alienation, elision, and so on. Roinila speaks of the translator’s “invisibility default” (50), which consists of creating an illusion of a text that has not been created, but which has come into being – or better yet, simply *is*. Consciousness of the process can detract from the reader’s immersion, and this is seldom a desired state (an obvious recent example of such meta-awareness can be found in Leevi Lehto’s retranslation of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, whose every page is peppered with footnotes).

It is crucial, however, for a poetry translator to understand what *approximate equivalence* means in terms of good translating. Christiane Nord discusses loyalty by saying that a professional translator “has the competences required for translation or interpreting services and constantly tries to improve them” (36). Therefore, in Nord’s and Frawley’s terms, by achieving an understanding of equivalence, the translator becomes a kind of loyal recodifier.

In terms of translation theory, it is worthwhile to consider the concept of loyalty via skopos theory and the conventions of (poetry) translation. Skopos theory is a functional translation theory based on the deliberateness of communication: the need for communication necessitates the communication itself and defines its form. The reader or recipient is especially central to skopos theory. The ST must imply an intertextual coherence, once it is understood that both ST and TT have the same function. But interpretations of texts and the conventions of good translating change with time and from one cultural context to another. Skopos theory introduces a standard into this mutability, which is based on the target culture's (and its readers') conventions of appropriateness. The translator is allowed, indeed often bound by loyalty to make changes to the ST as long as the text's skopos is correctly comprehended.

As noted above, there is no such thing as a perfect, exact, or identical poem translation. This is because, as Lehto puts it, "a poetry translation is always an adaptation [*mukaelma*]" (187), something that cuts close, but does not mirror the original in detail. A duplicate translation is like the speed of light, existing theoretically but never fully attainable. This may not at first seem like a very rewarding starting point for a translation project, what with the common conception of translators as seekers of ultimate truth with mandates of exactitude, but thankfully translation is not akin to physics or mathematics. As a competent reader, the translator understands standards of perfection or one-to-one equivalence to be too black and white for practical work. A good translation is not a clone, and a good translator is thus not doomed to simply "make the same grimaces as his master" (meaning the ST), as translator Maurice Coindreau has stated (quoted in Leppihalme 18). In dealing with cross-linguistic and cross-cultural transferrals of information and emotion, translations aim for what *works* according to a set of standards that even the most able translator cannot be fully aware of until he or she has set to work, as possibilities and alternate answers to translational puzzles often emerge in the translatorial process. Translations are not static artefacts but malleable until such

time as they are brought into the public domain, that is, published. The poems presented in the Appendix underwent changes all the while I was writing this thesis, because introspection and analysis can lead to alternative solutions and renewed attitudes toward translatorial issues.

Now that some of the theory behind translation in general has been foregrounded, something should be said of the processes of translating poetry in particular.

A good translator must come to terms with having a triple role: to see with one's own eyes as well as the eyes of the ST author – that is, the poet – and the TT reader. Juhani Lindholm finds a congruence between the translator's ”plunging into” a text and the ”presence” essential to an actor's work, since both are defined by responsiveness or a sensibility toward reactions and connections (163). Clearly, a translator must find points of reference for ST phenomena in his or her own life for his or her work to be meaningful. In other words, a kind of “empathetic assimilation is the cornerstone of the translator's job” (163), a balancing act of professional objectivism and subjective, creative, and empathetic interpretation. Realizing this is part of the secret to accomplished translating.

As for poetry, this doubly aware translator must first determine the ways in which this form of art differs from both creative and non-fictional writing. It is far more likely for a translator as a professional to be better acquainted with various types of non-fiction, because more of it is written worldwide and because a vast majority of all the job offers a translator receives are for prose texts. When the function of a TT is to transfer a message containing factual information, news, instructions, or the like, loyalty is easier to determine. These kinds of translating are, of course, also the domain of the language professional and specialist, but the process itself can with some exaggeration still be called little more than an exercise in reading comprehension. Poetry, on the other hand, contains very much more than the mere transfer of meaning, as Lehto illustrates, because a poem ”is not simply decorated or intensified

prose, as its devices 'signify' in themselves in ways that make its so-called 'message' impossible to paraphrase" (182). Not only do poems look and sound different to prose, but they also signify familiar things in unfamiliar ways. Complex, creative or "poetic" prose also does this, but its rhetoric is still anchored to prose one way or another. Reading, writing, and translating poetry concerns a ceaseless network of intuitions, emotions, images, and connotations. In translating text of this kind it is more important to focus on *how* something is put forth, not just what the message of the text can be construed to be.

Polysemy is at the very core of all the typical devices employed in poetry (Lehto 186) and involves all the poetic techniques from rhyme schemes and assonance to similes and metaphors. Even subtle characteristics and links need to be taken into account,[1] and as mentioned, a good translator is simultaneously a competent/critical reader who will identify a trope or method such as a rhythmic scheme or a thematic thread and include it in his or her rewriting (that is, the translation), whether semantically unaltered or completely re-represented by some other form when the SL function cannot be duplicated. This is attained through a simultaneity bordering on paradox: Lindholm maintains that the translator's work is "impossible but necessary" (179) and the translator's invisibility is the guarantee for his or her visibility as someone who is inseparable from the TT. My own assertion is that the impetus to understand and reconcile these simultaneous states comes from a kind of lyrical sensitivity in the translator. Thus the translator of poetry is, whether by definition or for all intents and purposes, a poet as well – the ST author's comrade from another dimension, in search of what Lindholm calls the poet's "psychic coordinates" (178).

Another way of illustrating this point is with Leppihalme's three stages of translation. "They are: analysis of the ST and of the translation task in question; problem-solving (on

[1] Even characteristics not necessarily intended by the poet are included here. I consider intent to be a misnomer of sorts in poetry, because I do not believe that the network of possible meanings and interpretations of any poem can be definitively influenced by a knowledge of the poet's alleged motives. This is a view also espoused by the theories of New Criticism, as in "The Intentional Fallacy" by Wimsatt and Beardsley.

various levels); and reverbalization" (19). She goes on to comment that each of these stages can be "fruitfully explored" by scholars and researchers or, as I do in this thesis, by translators themselves who "set down their reflections." It is through this personal introspection that I arrive at and try to communicate a deeper understanding of the translatorial thought processes which lead to eventual solutions, "an imprint of [my] own personality" (Pekkanen 7). The three stages do not occur linearly, but motivate and feed into one another.

Returning briefly to the idea of conventions in light of the above, it can in fact be said that they guide the form of the TT, because non-Finnish readers of Arto Melleri's work will still be reading *Finnish* poetry, even if it has been translated into another language by somebody else. Nord says that "whenever one claims that a certain text 'must' or 'ought to' be translated in a certain way, he or she is subject to a culture-specific convention" (92). In translating English poetry into Finnish, for instance, the translator relies on existing conventions within the sphere of Finnish poetics, such as the high style and nature references in national romanticism. To give an example, I will cite two lines from a modern Finnish poet that utilize two allusions to different eras.

ja tähkäpäiden päällä täysikuu
hukuttautuu likaiseen lätäkköön

These are the closing lines of the poem "Skidit tahtovat pulkkamäkeen" by poet Harri Hertell, written in 2011. The first line is an allusion[2] to Finnish national poet Eino Leino's poem "Nocturne" from 1903, the second to Arto Melleri's poem "Puukkobulevardi" from 1997. They

[2] Allusions, as cultural information, are extremely central to translation of all kinds and form a major part of the challenges faced by translators of both poetry and prose (Leppihalme 1-5), and are thus also integral to this thesis.

are intentional and clear references to the Finnish poetic tradition: much of Finnish culture and even language use is suffused with Leino's verse, and Melleri's oeuvre is well-known in the modern era of Finnish poetry. The first allusion borrows the image and the atmosphere of the original poem just long enough for a competent reader to make the connection to the early 20th century romantic poem, while the second line immediately fractures that idyllic scene and anchors Hertell's poem in the present. The anachronistic duality is played on by the fact that the moon (*kuu*, Earth's satellite) exists in 1903, 1997, 2001, *and* in the moment the lines are read. In other words, the same moon exists in these lines simultaneously above the "fields of tasseled grain" (which is from Aina Swan Cutler's translation) and in the figurative puddle (*lätäkkö*) at the speaker's and the reader's feet. This dualism is a technique used by Hertell and which a translator of his poetry must take into account, for instance by using an extant translation of the Leino allusion.

I hold that the concept of a convention may be molded, as it represents a way of approaching STs and TTs and is therefore a utility. A translator ought to make use of any parameters or combination of parameters that help him or her to arrive at better translations. For, in the end, a convention is not the same as a rule or an imperative, and acknowledging conventions should not automatically lead to blind capitulation to them (Nord 95). One of these imperative is skopos, or a respect for the *function* of the text, which is not necessarily the same in different cultures or to different translators. A translator is a specialist of the in-between, a lone denizen of No Man's Land, whose work always involves blending and merging.

Parallels to this kind of merging can, in my opinion, be found in linguistics. Language typology recognizes *pidgins*, simplified versions of a language that develop as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common. Pidgins exist because of a compelling need, a function that needs to be satisfied. When such mediating languages begin to be spoken as mother tongues, they are called creoles. Using these terms to

illustrate what translating poetry means to me, I would say that the poetic language used by a ST poet is a kind of pidgin, born from the author's SL conventions and his or her own idiolect (or *voice*, a feature both intrinsic and mutable) to bring about his or her work. Now, when a translator undertakes to translate a poem (or especially a broad or comprehensive sampling from a specific poet), he or she becomes an interpreter, developer and "speaker" of that form of expression. Close reading and the processes involved in dismantling and fusing the linguistic elements into a new TT change that pidgin into a kind of fully-fledged creole, one more mother tongue in the translator's repertoire, whose functional climax is the finished TT or book of translations.

2. Background

After having foregrounded the key principles relating to translation and the work that goes into arriving at a successful target text, I will next specify the nature of my own view of poetics and how that relates to the poetry of Arto Melleri. An important element of the kind of poetry that interest me is *performativity*, the imagined or real-life, spoken expression of verbal art in a live situation. Melleri was no stranger to performing his work, whether on stages at various events, in recording studios, or at impromptu public gatherings, and it is safe to assume (as I do) that performativity also guided his actual writing process. Performance also includes his audio and video recordings, which I analyze in chapter 6. The central concern here is of a style of creative writing that uses, highlights, or even depends upon a performative context or "stage," whether real or hypothetical. It is my claim that Melleri wrote in just such a style, with an awareness of the possibility that the words he was writing down could or even should at some point be performed. Many of the literary techniques in his poems imply such a view (see 2.3). But first let me explain how I understand performance.

2.1 Defining Poetic Performativity

Poet and critic R.P. Blackmur notes in the introduction to *Language as Gesture* that "language is made of words, and gesture is made of motion" (3). This is a dichotomy that in part exemplifies what performance-oriented poetry means to me, and a major starting point for my definition of it. The premise can also be turned on its head, because contrarily "words are made of motion, made of action or response, at whatever remove; and gesture is made of language – made of the language beneath or beyond or alongside of the language of words. When the language of words fails we resort to the language of gesture" (3).

I would not say that performance poetry (or *live poetry*, or *performed poetry*; or *spoken*

word) [3] entails some sort of inherent communicative half-failure that necessitates its performativity. But I will go as far as to say that it is the product of a kind of disappointment in written poetry, of words on the page always lacking some direct avenue to emotional experience. To illustrate this seeming contradiction, we may look at what Michael Wood stated in a critique in *The New York Review* of Blackmur's *Selected Essays*: "His criticism was ... a way of postponing failure, but it was also a way of probing and celebrating it, of turning it into a distinctive glory" (28). This valuing of expressive circumstances and abilities may well be an integral aspect of the contemporary impulse of many poets to take to the stage: to embrace the vagaries of live performances, all the opportunities to fail or "bomb." But it also the counterpoints that risk in the energy of a performance situation that lends its electricity to every word that a poet speaks.

An obvious and useful binarism exists between the spoken and the written, or the read and the heard, and in describing their relationships with performed poetry some authors hold to sweeping value judgements when juxtaposing these kinds of expression. For instance, ex-poet laureate of the United States, Billy Collins, has said that "to hear a poem is to experience its momentary escape from the prison cell of the page" (McAlpine 6). Melleri's work includes both this "prison" (perhaps a better word would be "prism") and the freedom of the spoken word.

But when considering the roots and the mechanisms of the concepts of gesture and motion, we should remember that Blackmur is referring to general concepts that can be used to define all kinds of art. Indeed, although the bulk of *Language as Gesture* focuses on classic authors of poetry, the introduction demonstrates the ways in which gesture runs through everything from dancing and painting to sculpture and architecture. However, I would be hard

[3] These terms are not strictly interchangeable, as I will show in 2.2, but they represent the same basic premises of performativity, so I have not qualified them here. I will say that the most neutral of the terms here offered is "performed poetry" or "performance-oriented poetry."

pressed not to invoke Blackmur's analysis in terms of performed poetry, as it offers both helpful guidance and an opportunity for constructive interpretation. When he maintains that ”gesture, in language, is the outward and dramatic play of inward and imaged meaning ... what moves the words and what moves us” (6), the parallel to performed poetry is clear. In terms of the *spoken/written binary*, this seems to indicate that ”inward and imaged” could refer to printed poetry, while ”outward and dramatic” points to spoken performance (more on this below). Another related point Blackmur makes has to do with uniting form and content, one of the most important concerns when evaluating the quality of any poem. This point was expressed famously by poet Archibald MacLeish in the final couplet of his poem “Ars Poetica”: “A poem should not mean / But be.”[4] Ironically, the poem speaks of the concept of *ars gratia artis* while taking on a wholly didactic function, but the point is that a poem directly represents, in a poetic sense, what it is describing. A good poem can transport its audience by way of a holistic emotional and intellectual experience. Blackmur relates the idea by suggesting “one way of saying what gesture does in art – it is what happens to a form when it becomes identical with its subject” (6). This is true of all art, but in poetry intended to be read aloud, the result of the marriage of content and form is the performance itself with its myriad emotional twists and turns.

Finally, illusion is an important aspect to think about when discussing performed poetry, because the spoken word especially aims to activate emotional responses through linguistic means and methods, such as tropes or rhythmic patterns, expressed directly to the audience in a physical space. The paradoxical nature of poetry is evident when we consider the fact that a poetry performance is at once a manipulation of the feelings of the listeners and also an expression of personal belief, often with a positive, humanist agenda including themes of forgiveness, spiritual development, tolerance, creativity, and so on. All in all, performed poetry

[4] URL: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/6371>

is a shared experience, an instant in time to which each listener reacts both during and after the reading. The brevity of poetry performances, in comparison to the fixity of printed words, invites listeners to interpret and identify with them, not least because of the impossibility of catching every word or understanding every line. Connecting this aesthetic, as Melleri did, with the slow-release force of a poem printed on a page is one way of giving the poem a unique propensity to move the listener, both at the level of feelings and of rhythm.

2.2 On Terminology

I discuss rhythm next, and Melleri's stylistics in terms of rhythm, but let me first clarify six central terms.

Three are general, the most widely used of which is *performance poetry*. This is the term by which all live performances of poetry are collectively referred to today in much of the English-speaking world, including poems written to be performed. It was not until the mid-1980s that the term came into popular use, a few years after American artist Hedwig Gorski used it to describe her experimental theatrical compositions, which were collaborative artistic projects that relied heavily on words and poetry. *Performance poetry* can be considered an umbrella term of sorts for all poetry that is at least partly reliant on a performative context.

An even more general term is *performed poetry*, which simply means any type of poetry that is read aloud to an audience. It does not imply that the text in question is written specifically for the stage, only that poetry is to be performed. Somewhere between performance poetry and performed poetry we find *live poetry*, which again literally means poetry performed and experienced in a live, once-in-a-lifetime situation. This is the only one of these three general terms that cannot entail recordings, for obvious reasons. Additionally, the term live poetry has a connotation of standing up for a subculture and emphasizing the live circumstances of a reading, as in Julia Novak's use of the term in the title of her groundbreaking book, *Live Poetry:*

An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance. It is perhaps the least-used term of the ones defined here.

Three other monikers are familiar to me, and they are all far more specific and easier to describe. The term *slam* or *slam poetry* means a live poetry performance situation wherein performers compete for a set time limit for the favor of a panel of judges. The terms have been used carelessly[5] in Finland as well as in the English-speaking world, as have all those here described. This can also be considered to be due to the postmodern nature of performance-oriented poetry, as genres are blended. All of the phenomena here described at least involve words of poems that are spoken aloud.

Now, *(the) spoken word*, for all its generality, has held its current meaning for only some decades, though especially with the definite article the term considerably predates Gorski's *performance poetry*. Without the article, the term marks a genre of its own. What is interesting about spoken word is that even though its most deep-rooted connotations are in poetry, it also includes other text types. Dr. Martin Luther King's celebrated speech, "I Have a Dream," is an instance of the spoken word in that it evokes powerful emotional reactions through intricately crafted and poetically expressed sentiments. Absolutely central to defining spoken word is understanding the performer as an actor of sorts who acts out his or her words and allows their emotional power to flare up during a performance. Spoken word is often socially and culturally aware, and may include the collaborative use of music or visual art. This term is the most implicitly relevant to my aesthetics and to Melleri's work, as spoken word is performative but not competitive. Thus it is not geared toward achieving victory over other competitors, except in the potential sense of one-upmanship in public performance. I analyze Arto Melleri's audio recordings as spoken word in chapter 6.

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[5] For instance, Harri Hertell, who founded the Helsinki Poetry Connection in 2008, used the term in the early stages of his poetry clubs, even though the events were not of a competitive nature. It may be noted that the confusion over the term in Finland may be due to the fact that the concept is unfamiliar. There is only one long-running slam club in the whole country, *Runopuulaaki* or the Finnish Slam Championship.

2.3 Rhythm and Musicality

Let me now discuss a few aspects of Melleri's poetic style that relate to rhythm, performativity, and musicality. It is true that Melleri was known first and foremost as a poet who published his work in bound and printed collections. The wilder performative aspects of his career were likely attributed to his bohemian lifestyle or his theater background rather than to a methodological approach to poetics and rhythm. However, the fact remains that Arto Melleri's poetry involves powerful characteristics of spoken word poetry, and that as a translator I would be remiss if I did not take those performative aspects of his texts into consideration.

Melleri uses a variety of literary techniques in his poetry that contribute to the broken but masterful rhythmic quality of his work. Most important among these elements are his use of repetition, punctuation, rhyme, consonance, and meter. He was described by Martti Anhava as being "an incredible late blossoming of the great romantic tradition of poetry, a troubadour who laughed at himself" (Melleri 2009, dust jacket text). Self-awareness certainly colors Melleri's work, both in his choice of topics and of techniques. Even at his most formal, his poems are always intentional near-misses when it comes to meter and stress, and it is this playfulness – which also affect his use of punctuation, which is often irregular and untraditional – that creates the right imbalance that highlights his mastery of image and sound. Geoffrey Leech describes meter as an "ideally regular, quasi-mathematical pattern," which he juxtaposes with *prose rhythm*, the "actual rhythm that language insists on" (103). As a performing poet, Melleri was very aware of the disharmony between meter and the spoken word. Each poem he wrote that involved some conspicuously regular rhythm also broke that pattern, creating an almost half-hearted effect, which is a clever way of creating an irregular balance that brings his work closer to the way the human ear comprehends connected speech, even when reading.[6]

An example of this can be found in the poem "Pääkallolipun alla," which is an example

[6] That is, written text is merely a set of representations for spoken sounds which we "hear" as we read.

of Melleri's penchant for writing poems that also seem like song lyrics, complete with end-rhymes and repeated choruses. The so-called chorus of "Pääkallolipun alla" goes: "*Tänne saakka on tultu / pääkallolipun alla, / ja vasta sun luona / mä löysin sataman*" (314). In terms of meter, the lines feature 3, 3, 2, and 2 stresses, with variance in the amount and length of the syllables. The first two lines have seven syllables, and the last two have six, which contributes to the uneven meter – and we must remember that Finnish prosody is very variable because of the lengthening qualities of double consonants and long vowels. Were this verse paragraph to be recited in the form given here – using the enjambment as pause markers, for instance – it would feel off-kilter and truncated, whereas a spoken word performance could run on some of the lines for a more dynamic effect. And this is where performed poetry approaches songwriting: any words can be made to sound rhythmically pleasing and significant by the right arrangement.

In reading and especially in translating Melleri's poetry, it becomes necessary to glance at what Liam McAlpine calls the spoken/written binary. He maintains that "virtually any study of spoken word poetry begins with a glaring contradiction," and that "the very existence of [spoken word poetry collections], published as they are in static textual form, seems to undermine the free-flowing, improvisational air surrounding spoken word poetry. Moreover, they rein in the poets' dynamic, physical voices in favor of a textuality that gives the appearance of stillness" (2). This is significant in Melleri's case but not crucial, because, as mentioned, he was known foremost as a poet of the page and his written works vastly outnumber his recordings. His work exists just as easily on the page as on the stage, so to speak, and straddles what in American spoken word culture is considered a vast gulf between spoken word poetry and "the academy." I believe that this duality is part of the charm and power of Melleri's poetry.

Very few of the concerns here addressed are easily quantifiable, which the idea of

"musicality" demonstrates. Leech maintains that "exactly what a person means when he says that a piece of poetry is 'musical' eludes analysis" (93) and that "the question of what and how a sound pattern communicates is one of the most mysterious aspects of literary appreciation" (95). What he nevertheless states plainly is that the 'music' of poetry is its own justification, without necessarily involving complex tapestries of meaning. Euphony, in this sense, can be considered a favorite strategy of Melleri's because of the inherent aesthetic value in the choices he made – choices which I have also faced as a translator.

Finally, let me quote Melleri himself, who has a short poem which reads: "Rhythm is born / when the beginning knows the end: / in writing – in life it is not so // The melody has always existed / for those with ears to hear it // On the other side of silence" (ST 547).

2.4 Melleri Revisited

Projects centered on translating the work of a deceased author tend to involve plans of canonization (even though the material may already be in the canon), and in today's entertainment age, marketing and advertisement concerns run through much of the arts. The "Van Gogh phenomenon," for instance, according to which an author's artistic output gains exposure and critical acclaim following their death, can cynically be seen as just another technique in the marketing executive's repertoire. There is no doubt that it is easier to mythify figures who have passed away, and that issues concerning image and legend are more easily related to those artists who were in the public eye during their lifetime.

In translating the poetry of Arto Melleri into English, and in planning the publication and distribution of my translations, this is a chain of thought that I return to in spite of myself. Melleri was born in 1956 in Lappajärvi, Southern Ostrobothnia. He spent his childhood and youth in various rural environs in western Finland, and imagery from nature and from the countryside are scattered throughout his juvenilia and his debut collection *Schlaagerisseppele*

(1979) especially. His father died when he was very young, and his mother suffered from a mental illness that made attending to eight children strained. The lonesome Melleri projected himself into his best childhood moments throughout his career. He was schooled in a fine arts academy in Helsinki, and his two plays and general dramaturgical finesse are largely thanks to his studies there.

After this came his "second life," the first steps toward his place in Finnish cultural history. His ultra-bohemian image sprung not only from his powerful work but also from his substance abuse – both legal and illegal – and he recounted thoughts, images, and experiences about being under the influence in his work. But I would say that to call Melleri a "drug poet" or a writer with a self-serving death wish is to underestimate the intensity of his voice and vision, since the speaker in his drug and alcohol-related poems tends to be evocative and philosophical. The narcotic element is also very often metaphorical or ironically cloaked. But the tabloids of the day made endless headlines of Melleri's nighttime exploits, public disgraces, and associations with other well-known artists, musicians, and entertainers. At heart, he was nevertheless extremely motivated and driven to write, and vowed to one day write a magnum opus that would revolutionize Finnish literature. In 1992, he did in fact win the Finlandia Prize, the highest literary honor in Finland and the last one to be awarded to a poet since.

That victory was part of his "third life" (as per biographer Martti Anhava's classification), the last and most painful of the series of events that made up his public life. That entire time, from the early 1990s to his death in 2005, was characterized by the presence of his muse and wife, the much contested film director Nadja Pyykkö. Their life together was stormy and involved increasing alcoholism, though throughout even this complex time in his life Melleri continued to write poetry and publish collections. Melleri suffered two major accidents, first in 1998 and then in 2004, of which he died after prolonged cerebral complications.

The seeming tragedy of Melleri's personal life was nonetheless underscored with a great thirst and love of life, and both in person and in interviews he was always witty, warm, and playful. Maris Gothóni has said that "for Melleri, the essential thing [was] to find the point where reality becomes drama". This constant awareness of the potential absurdity or highlighted beauty of everyday life was central to Melleri's poetics. Gothóni also comments that "Melleri can be reminiscent of Beatnik poetry, the early Allen Ginsberg in particular," but adds that he sees Melleri as being "free from the Beats' later indulgence in mannered wholesale products." In this, Melleri's saving grace was his humor and his vivid sense of irony.

In sum, Melleri's work ought to be read in light of his life but not entirely illuminated by its implications. Melleri was a poet but also a person, and the two met only through the membrane of language, image, and storytelling.

3. Ego as Subject

In line with the above biographical sketch, I will begin the description of my translation process with two poems that are centered on the speaker's ego or persona. By this I mean that the first person speaker is present, even especially strong in the poems presented here, and describes circumstances that have to do with his own personal life, whether meta-lyrically or simply autobiographically. The first person speaker in any poem is commonly (and fallaciously) assumed to be the poet/author him/herself. While this is not a tenable assumption to make in all cases, as poets may also project themselves into imagined external persons or even objects or concepts, in Melleri's case it can safely be said that every "I" refers at least to Melleri's poetic self (his persona), and in some cases even to himself as a person independent of his poetry. Melleri's writing begins with himself as observer and speaker, and sometimes develops into lyrically expressed anecdotes. Melleri's unique character makes his more anecdotal poems thrilling, but they also help readers to gain insight into his thought processes and his life as a poet, while the poems themselves are easier to relate to due to the personal voice.

3.1 "Speedy käy kylässä"

This poem was published in the 1997 collection *Puukkobulevardi* and immediately follows another first person tale that involves borderline criminal behavior. In "Aamulla olen kuulusteltavana" (Melleri 538) the speaker finds himself in a police station in Helsinki, where he has been brought because his "knees gave way" the previous evening, but no further details of why the speaker has been detained are given. If in this situation the speaker may be considered to be a culprit of sorts, in "Speedy käy kylässä" (540) he is very clearly the victim.

The poem is more prosaic than a majority of Melleri's work, since it resembles a recounted anecdote with occasional lines from a poetic inner monologue because of its real-world places and events, including Melleri's own apartment and a once infamous bar

(*Syntipukki*) in Sörnäinen, Helsinki. The poem begins with the speaker leaving a friend of his – "Speedy" – lying asleep on the floor of his apartment. When the speaker returns home at nightfall, Speedy is nowhere to be found and many "wise, thick books" have also disappeared, to be sold in a second-hand bookshop. The speaker confronts the thief in a bar nearby, but because he is "feeling generous" he only asks Speedy whether the bookseller he sold the books to even asked where he had gotten them. The poem ends in a punchline: "Hell no, of course not, / they thought I was you!"

The poem has all the makings of a well-told joke, even though the poetic sentiments scattered throughout (such as TT ll. 15-16: "[the sunglasses] reflected his cards: clubs, spades, / oblivion...") and the poetic form itself makes the final clincher tragicomical rather than outright humorous. The significance here is, of course, that Melleri is likening himself to a drunken layabout and that the booksellers in his area may not have been surprised to see him selling off a backpack full of valuable books for a "trembling pint." The way Speedy is described physically – trembling, sore-eyed, somber, and restless: hung-over, in a word – also makes clear the self-ironic tone of the poem, perhaps because the speaker of any poem is on some level assumed to be in charge and in control, aware and empowered, an invisible but impressive figure that the homeless and pathetic Speedy contradicts. Self-irony, however, has a humanizing effect and lends the person in question believability and character. Thus, insofar as readers will not feel balked by Melleri's bohemian roughness, the picture he paints of himself is a relatable one. The first-hand account of the unfortunate but humorous occurrence lends the poem itself a streetwise credibility, which readers can also find in all of Melleri's oeuvre. I appreciate this humane aspect of his persona in his writing from a translatorial standpoint, as it makes finding a relaxed, constructive attitude toward his poetry that much easier.

It was during the translation of this poem that I accidentally found a quantitative method of describing some of my translation process, which I have used only superficially in this thesis (see Conclusion). As mentioned in the introduction, two of the main aids that I always use when translating are the free internet applications *Google Translate* (GT) and *Thesaurus.com*. Both of these sites remember previous word searches and list them in order upon reopening the page. I used both the PC and mobile versions of these sites in translating Melleri, and the same function was found in each. For "Speedy käy kylässä" I looked up eleven different words in GT, which I also recorded. While many of these searches were used as a simple mental aid, I discuss two of the more challenging phrases here.

The last search I conducted while translating "Speedy käy kylässä" was for the idiom *filosofinen mielenlaatu* (l. 19), literally "philosophical mentality." In Finnish the expression *osoittaa filosofista mielenlaatua* is a way of saying the person uttering it is feeling gracious or considerate and acts accordingly. I could not translate the idiom directly, as the meaning would be lost or hidden, even though connotations pertaining to philosophy would have been relevant to the books that the character of Speedy steals. Apart from that, the expression is simply a way for the speaker to express his learnedness and acts as a pithy reference to the stolen books in the ST. My translation, "I was feeling generous," is a way of expressing the speaker's acceptance of the fact that his property has been taken. This is also why I opted to use "generous" instead of my original rendition, "gracious."

The other search I made that I want to qualify is the word *peluri*, as it occurs in the compound word *jokilaivapeluri*. This part of the poem reads: *Katsoin sitä, peililaseissaan se näytti / mississippiläiseltä jokilaivapelurilta* (ST ll. 12-13). My raw translation first read: "I looked at him, in his mirrored sunglasses he looked / like a riverboat shark from Mississippi." In addition to the fact that *peluri* carries the meaning of a dishonest or impenitent card-player, i.e. a gambler, I felt that the image of an actual shark (teeth and all) tied in with the physical

description of Speedy as a disheveled and even frightening character. But I changed my mind about this rendition, and opted for “gambler” instead of “shark,” because the latter also carries the implication of the character being an accomplished card-player, which does not ring true of Speedy’s pathetic nature.

I also encountered a “culture bump”[7] in the proper name of the bar featured in the poem. *Syntipukki* was a bar in the Sörnäinen district of Helsinki, and it was known far and wide as a squalid and even dangerous place to frequent. This connotation is not deliverable so many years after the fact, but the double meaning of the name is. The Finnish word *syntipukki* translates into English as “scapegoat,” a term related to guilt, which in turn is related to Speedy’s crime in the poem. My translation has the line “I caught up with him in The Scapegoat / behind a trembling pint...” for *Sain sen kii Syntipukista / vapisevan tuopin takaa*... Now, the positive aspect of this solution is that it makes evident the meaning of the name of the bar (the fact that it is a bar is implied by the capitalization and the “pint” that follows), and ties it directly to the events of the poem, as the ST also does. Also, as mentioned, even most modern Finnish readers are unlikely to make the connection with the bar of ill repute, which closed down in the 1990s (though probably not before 1997, when the poem was published). However, inasmuch as Melleri’s poetry captures much of the zeitgeist of Finnish everyday life from the 1970s to the early 2000s, leaving out the original name of the bar could be construed to be a desecration made in the name of intelligibility. Even if the name of the bar – *Syntipukki* – would mean nothing to any English readers of the translated poem, it would carry with it an air of authenticity and of Finnish-ness that would be lost if the name were to be domesticated. Readers would also be deprived of the pleasure of investigating the foreign term; as Leppihalme points out, ”a reader who recognizes a creative allusion achieves a deeper

[7] See chapter 4.

understanding of a passage or text ... and may consequently be rewarded by a sense of achievement and self-congratulation" (32).

3.2 "Varis minun vaakunalintuni"

The second poem I have chosen to analyze here is far less direct, or more precisely, less anecdotal. This is because the poem expresses aspects of Melleri's approach to writing – his poetics – and so involves a great deal of metaphorical and meta-lyrical imagery. However, this explication is accompanied by first-person references to the speaker's own lifestyle, namely "I've spent a long weekend / (ten years)" and the like. The most central translatorial issues in "Varis minun vaakunalintuni" (456) concern terminology, symbolism, and puns.

The translation I use for the Finnish word *varis* is simply "crow," even though technically the breed of crow that is common to Finland and Northern Europe is specifically known as the hooded crow (*Corvus cornix*), distinct from other varieties of the genus *Corvus* in some English-speaking countries. It may also be mentioned that using the word "raven" would have connotations to Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem, "The Raven," which can be interpreted meta-lyrically but whose dark tone would be an unwelcome addition to the lighter *duende*[8] of the Melleri poem.

The first reason I do not make any distinction to the species of the bird in question is that the additional word "hooded" would come off as an adjective to most readers, and would constitute an unqualified addition to the crow-figure's description (similarly to the word "cold" in Jyrki Kiiskinen's rendition of the title of "Puukkobulevardi," see 4.2). The second reason is that the theme of heraldry (*vaakuna-*) runs through the poem from the title onward, and in heraldry the bird is understood simply as a singular symbol devoid of precise classification: the

[8] I use this term loosely, if only to introduce a quote from Spanish poet Federico García Lorca: "All arts are capable of duende, but where it finds greatest range, naturally, is in music, dance, *and spoken poetry*, for these arts require a living body to interpret them, being forms that are born, die, and open their contours against an exact present" (García Lorca 62, emphasis added).

bird is known in heraldry simply as ”Corvus,” and crows and ravens are indistinguishable on crests and coats of arms.

The *Corvus* can denote very different things on a coat of arms, including both avarice and divine providence (Heraldry Symbolism). I’m sure this ambiguity pleased Melleri, if he knew about it, which is presumable because of the many repetitions of the name of the bird and of the explicitness of the heraldic aspect: the crow is relevant to his poetics “in the world of broken heraldry” (*särjetyn heraldiikan maailmassa*). To express both greed and divinity in one symbol would be typical of Melleri, who simultaneously gave voice to contradicting sentiments in much of his work. Lastly, the heraldic context also implies nobility: Melleri was not of noble birth, nor did he or his family have an actual coat of arms, so the implication is sure to be ironic in the same way that the indication of his (or a poet’s) supposed “divine providence” is somewhat sarcastic. But he underlines the point himself: “the lord and the jester are indistinguishable,” after all.

The meaning of a certain line of the poem had always eluded me, until I started to search for the meaning in earnest as part of the translation process (thus my translation project has enriched my understanding of Melleri, regardless of the work involved). In l. 19, the speaker lists three proper names: *Sorbus, Brutus tai Sidi Brahim!* Of these three, I knew the correct meaning of only the first word: Sorbus was a brand of cheap fortified wine that was only taken off the market in 2010. Because I at first assumed “Brutus” to refer to the famous Roman who killed Julius Caesar, but “Sidi Brahim” rang no bells whatsoever, I googled that latter name first. To my surprise, it turned out to be a brand of wine as well, from Algeria. Brutus, in turn, is a Shiraz/Durif red wine from the Barossa Valley in South Australia.[9] The function of mentioning these three varieties of wine from around the world is not clear to me (although Melleri’s understanding of them is in line with the persona he cultivated), and understanding

[9] “Brutus Barossa Valley Shiraz Durif 2009” (Web)

all three references to different types of wine is likely to go over the heads of a majority of contemporary readers of Melleri. As this lack of clarity was most likely his intention, I have retained all three of the proper nouns in my translation without explanation or aid. The least I could do was to add the word “some” before the wines, to make clear that something ingestible is being referred to.

The ST features several puns, which I tackled in a number of ways. In addition to finding satisfactory equivalents to the two obvious word games found in the poem, the TT started to move on several levels at once while I was proceeding toward as idiomatic a translation as possible. Firstly, certain solutions suggested themselves off the bat: the word “carats” in the first line sounds like the word “carrots,” punning on the “turned earth” of the next line but also on the “red gold” of the next, while the word ”crowned” seems like a relative of the word “crow.” The rounded-out assonance in <crowing/gold/unknown> along with later <dole/coat/broken> was also accidental. The end of the first long verse paragraph also had *vilkkuluomi* in the ST – meaning the extra membrane that birds have in their eyes – for which the literal equivalent in English is ‘haw,’ a word that even native English speakers would be highly unlikely to understand. Further study uncovered the phrase ‘third eyelid,’ which suited the context well.

There are two puns that I actively pursued. The first is shown below, with the pun emphasized:

*yöllä **siivet saaneet** ajatukset*	at night the thoughts that **took flight**
lepattavat varisparvena	are a flock of crows
vaaksan verran mustan maan yllä,	a full span above the black earth,
*ilkkuvat, **siivillä** kuluvat päivät,*	jeering, the days **take wing**,
*lopulta **siivellä**...*	finally **fly on the dole**...

The English version is by no means as elegant as the ST pun, which changes the entire meaning of the phrase in question simply by changing the verb from the plural to the singular. The word *siivillä* (lit. ‘on wings’) refers to something happening surprisingly quickly, while *siivellä* (lit. ‘on a wing’) indicates living at the expense of others. My rendition uses the idiom “to take wing,” as in to rise rather than move swiftly, and increases the speed of the days to “flying” in the following line. The days pass by quicker “on the dole,” meaning that just as the speaker comes into some money (whether from his friends or the government is unclear) his time starts to run out. Time passing at different speeds is an important theme in the poem, which this obvious play on words in the ST makes clear. Also, although this poem and the previous “Speedy käy kylässä” are from different collections, “Varis minun vaakunalintuni” also refers to drinking and to being hung-over (“Monday’s pale morning”).

It is on this dehydrated state that the final lines of the ST play, and where the poem’s second pun is also found. The speaker is reading a newspaper in the morning, which seems to have only obituaries and sports news:

Tästä maratonista ei kerrota mitään,	There’s nothing on this marathon,
*ja siitä mikä **pysyisi**,*	or on what will **keep**,
<u>sisällä</u>	what I’ll <u>keep down</u>

Again, the one word ST pun requires a full phrasal idiom as its equivalent in English. This time it is because of the Finnish passive’s ability to assume a first-person subject and simultaneously refer to a general state of affairs. The verb *pysyä* literally means ‘to stay’ or ‘to remain,’ and in this context refers to things that will remain stable or stay the same, i.e. ‘keep’ (in bold). At the same time the reference is to food/liquids ‘staying inside’ the hung-over person’s stomach, and to the fear of puking; thus ‘keeping down’ (underlined) whatever one has ingested is the speaker’s worry, alongside the abstract things that may or may not disappear in the course of

time. The word “marathon” can be understood as the speaker’s (i.e. Melleri’s) development as a writer, something he held to his entire career but must also have struggled with in terms of his addictions and his celebrity status. It is also common knowledge that marathon runners sometimes vomit after their feat.

These two poems serve to illustrate how Melleri wrote about himself by speaking through a “hypothetical author” who resembled himself so much that his readers had and still have no trouble in inferring that the division between author and speaker was, in poems like this at least, essentially nonexistent. Insights into the writing process and about a personal, developing poetics can also be gleaned by accepting these two roles as simultaneous and even ubiquitous in Melleri’s work, which tended toward the metalyrical. A translatorial approach that favors shifts based on a congruence with the Melleri-figure and on essential idiomatic and rhythmic concerns works best when translating these poems. It is important for me to put myself in Melleri’s shoes, but to also retain my own way of walking.

4. Culture Bumps

This chapter is also mainly about the translatorial solutions I have arrived at when translating Arto Melleri's work. However, the two poems discussed here have features in common that cut to the very core of translation and the work that especially literary translators face. I refer to those reused units of cultural knowledge that are known as allusions. Melleri's writing is suffused with cultural and historical references which each pose the question: What would be the best way to deal with this piece of culturally bound information so that the effect of the ST expression is at least partially preserved while taking into consideration the TT reader's reading experience?

Three main avenues – domestication, foreignization, and elision – are available to the translator who is faced with allusions that could potentially hinder communication, not so much as culture shocks, but as *culture bumps*. Ritva Leppihalme has studied this phenomenon at length, and emphasizes ”the translator's need to be more aware of his/her responsibility to the readers of the target text, and the need to remember this when choosing translation strategies” because ”a translation that disregards differences in cultural backgrounds runs the risk of being unintelligible” (ix). Melleri used allusions (and non-allusive cultural information) in varying degrees from poem to poem, and I study two poems where these allusive or semi-allusive elements are especially strong. The cultural references discussed here are also inherently Finnish, and thus need special care and attention when considering the English-speaking audience of the TTs I present in this thesis.

4.1 “Päivä on jo minuutin pidempi”

The first allusion is right in the title of “Päivä on jo minuutin pidempi” (394), which translates as “the day is already a minute longer.” While the concept of daylight savings time is familiar to people across the globe, the implication in the title of counting the minutes until the dark,

cold season comes to an end has special significance to Finns. Finland is one of the northernmost countries in Europe, and experiences winters where the sun may shine for mere hours on any given day, or may not rise at all in the far north. Thus those who live here are apt to notice even subtle changes in daylight in anticipation of spring and a brief but much-awaited summer. This and the ”summer tires” in l. 4 are allusions that cannot really be changed or emphasized, nor need they be, but it is worthwhile to pinpoint the cultural context of the poem’s setting before looking at other instances of cultural information, and how I have translated them.

One of the most conspicuous words in the poem is not, in fact, of Finnish origin but is part of musical terminology, which Melleri was familiar with. The word “glissando” in l. 10 means a glide from one pitch to another. It is seen in the way piano players sometimes “wipe” all the keys from lowest to highest or vice versa. In this poem, it refers to the musical qualities of unstudded tires on wet roads, perhaps even to the dangerous way a car may glide on slippery roads. The speaker is addressing a second person, telling them to “drive safe with your summer tires,” which they should not be driving with in the name of safety or under Finnish law during midwinter. However, in the world of the poem, the speaker is speaking to himself, as there are no other people present except the gas station attendants who service his car.

The next problematic word is a complex pun. The poem is split into three parts with em-dashes resembling road surface markings, and in the second one the speaker describes his attitude toward other people. He describes how he is tired of calculating distances, which includes both the distances between people and the kilometers that he is travelling while speaking in the poem. He uses three old Finnish words for units of measurement: *vaaksa, kyynärä, syli*. The first of these is one of Melleri’s favorite terms for distance (he uses it in “Varis minun vaakuntalintuni”), and is called a “span” in English. *Kyynärä* is “cubit” and *syli* is a “fathom,” a term that I remember from reading J.R.R. Tolkien, who used a number of

archaic units of distance in his novels. But the Finnish word *syli* is also a homonym and means ‘lap,’ as in the front of the body when sitting, which has especially strong connotations of security and warmth in Finnish. In light of this information, I could have simply translated the line as ”a span, a cubit, a fathom” and been done with it, but this would have erased the pun altogether. In a poem that is about distances, human contact, and a meditative loneliness, I felt that the implications of closeness in *syli* should not be omitted entirely. It is lucky, then, that the English word ‘fathom’ is also a verb which means ‘to understand,’ and that the word ‘lap’ can also indicate a measurement of distance or of a circuit (a lap around the park, for instance). The solution I came up with for *syli* was ”a fathomed lap,” meaning both a unit of distance and a safe place that the speaker has considered and understood, that is, fathomed. This two word equivalent also makes possible the partly elided repetition, “a span, a cubit, a lap, these are the human dimensions.”

The Finnish phrase *ihmisten ilmoille* means to come into contact with people or with public spaces where people can be found. My solution “the world of people” is a little on the nose, but I still find it preferable to my other alternative, “to where people are.” It indicates an understanding of different worlds: that of solitude, represented by the monologue in the poem that occurs inside a car and at a gas station, and the world where other people can be found and approached.

The rubber parts of the windshield wipers of cars are called *sulat* in Finnish, literally ‘feathers.’ In English such wipers are called blades. The ST phrase *pörhistelevät sulkiaan* (‘ruffle their feathers’) is a creature metaphor, which I covered with the word “snake,” doubling as a noun and a verb.

The last and most clear-cut cultural allusion is in l. 38: *ERIKOISTARJOUS: UUDENVUODENTINAT*. The latter term refers to little cast models of horseshoes made out of tin or a tin-lead alloy, which are melted down and cooled as a traditional ceremony of good

luck in Finland on New Year's Eve. The term does not seem to have a fixed equivalent in English, as the tradition is scarcely practiced outside of the Nordic countries. This means that familirizing the term is not possible in the translation of this poem, and understanding the cultural reference can only be eased. I have done this by changing *erikoistarjous* ('special offer') to "New Year's special," and then using the compound word "casting tin" for the actual product. In this way, there may be enough clues for TT readers to understand what is being referred to. In terms of the poem's analysis, the speaker's somber attitude is maintained in part with his expression of doubt at getting this symbol of good luck for a cheap price without the offer even specifying the price of the New Year's tin amulets.

One additional shift I made in my translation was in inserting an amended line from the lyrics of a song where no such prompt is made in the ST. The line is "I can see clearly now the night is gone," which is an adaptation of Johnny Nash's famous line "I can see clearly now the rain has gone." I defend this decision by saying that it softens the otherwise negative atmosphere of the poem in the same way as the original, but adds a familiarizing element following the potentially foreign element of "casting tin." This will hopefully result in a balanced reading experience for TT readers unfamiliar with the Finnish New Year's tradition.

4.2 "Puukkobulevardi"

In the interest of laying out my translatorial process in translating Melleri's poems, I must mention that this is the poem I most dreaded translating. "Puukkobulevardi" (529) has so many allusions and cultural references that merely outlining the possible problems they might pose took me hours of research and filled an entire notebook page in December, 2013 (see Image 1).

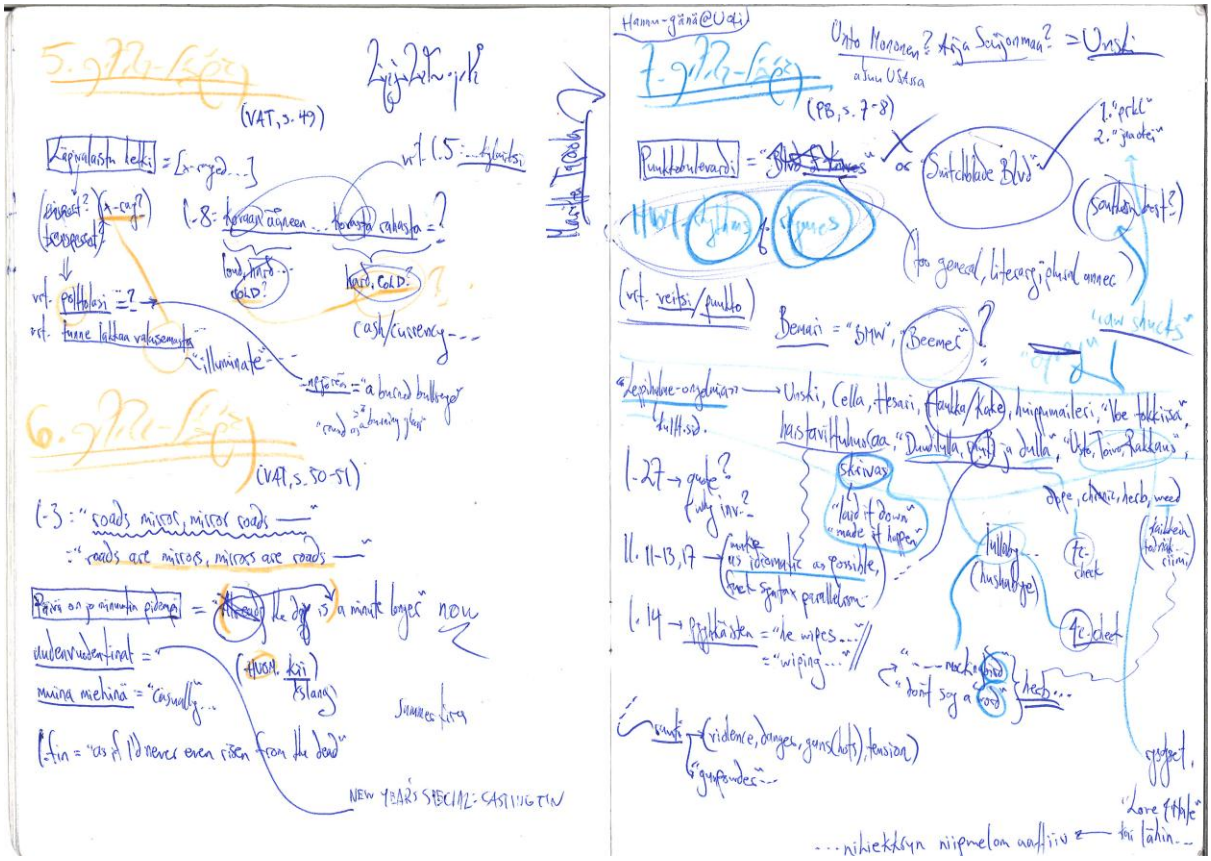

Image 1. Notes for translating three poems by Arto Melleri. The notes for “Puukkobulevardi” are on the right.

After returning occasionally to the issues in the poem over the next fifteen months, I realized in March, 2015 – after misplacing the notebook in question – that I had already subconsciously arrived at solutions to nearly all of the problems without actively working on them. I eventually finished the preliminary translation of the entire poem in less than an hour.

“Puukkobulevardi” is one of Melleri’s most significant and well-known poems. Published in 1997, it describes one evening on a street in the Kallio/Alppiharju district of Helsinki. Melleri did not coin the nickname *Puukkobulevardi* (lit. ‘knife-boulevard,’ see below), and there is some disagreement whether the name refers to Vaasankatu or to nearby Helsinginkatu, since both streets were known for their squalor and proliferation of bars. In common parlance, however, it refers exclusively to Vaasankatu. There is also some controversy as to which street Melleri himself, who frequented the bars in the area for years, was referring

to, but the fact that the speaker of the poem mentions Helsinginkatu outright (*Hesari* in slang) points to the fact that it is distinct from the *Puukkobulevardi* where the poem is situated. In any case, the way Melleri wrote about it and the hypothetical events that could take place there helped cement his fame as a bohemian poet.

No official translation of "Puukkobulevardi" yet exists, but a quick search yields two variations on the poem's title, both used offhand in a superficial and merely explanatory sense in running essay prose. The first is "Hunting Knife Boulevard" (Thompson), the second "Cold Knife Boulevard" (Kiiskinen), neither of which I would prefer over my own rendition, "Switchblade Boulevard". The word "hunting" involves connotations of animals as quarry in a forest or on a plain and is unnecessary in terms of the urban context of the poem, whereas the word "cold" is an unqualified addition that sounds too melodramatic. These different versions of the title are due to the word *puukko*, which refers to a type of short blade, being difficult to translate directly. *Puukko* is a word for different types of durable cutting tool used by hunters and laborers as work knives, but the word has strong connotations of the type of weapon used by muggers and criminals – connotations that the word "knife" alone could not entail. It is for this reason that I translated the title as "Switchblade Boulevard," because a switchblade most clearly carries overtones of delinquency and violence to an English-speaking readership. It may also be noted that the word *puukko* is differentiated from the word *veitsi*, "knife," in the poem itself (l. 30).

A noticeable element of "Puukkobulevardi" is its use of rhyme. As I have noted, Melleri almost never used rhyme or meter uniformly, and the same is true here. However, when the poem in fact features an obvious end-rhyme (scheme ABAB) it is important for the translation to include it as well.

Tamara nousee Bemarista	Tamara rises from a BMW
Puukkobulevardilla	on Switchblade Boulevard
Syksyn tuuli kourii Tamaraa	The autumn wind gropes at her mini-skirt
minihameen alta	in front of a sleazy bar

Many case suffixes in Finnish end in either /a/ or /e/, which means that simple end-rhymes are common. In the above quote the rhyme is so slight that it should really be called assonance: it is formed from the similarity in sounds between the line-final words *bulevardilla* and *alta*. But the effect it delivers is nonetheless of a fairly regular pattern, and the repeated title refrain provides an anchor to much of the rhythm throughout the poem.

In this first verse paragraph, I made an addition that was not present in the poem as such, but which is more than well enough assumed. To rhyme with the /ar/-sound in "Boulevard," I had to resort to one of at least two options: a phrase ending in 'car' – which would have tied in with the BMW – or in '(sleazy) bar,' which identifies the milieu as sketchy immediately, and foregrounds both the "dive" and the "karaoke joint" that are introduced later.

The next verse paragraph (ll. 10-20) includes about six different allusions that I had to take into consideration. The first of them is the slang term *Hesari*, which I have noted refers to Helsinginkatu. This is a long street running through a part of Helsinki and whose stretch from Sörnäinen to the Brahe field has, for at least half a century, been known for being lined with many licensed establishments with cheap drinks. It is in "every single dive" on this infamous street that the speaker of "Puukkobulevardi" finds "the same guy, tattooed blue," ranting drunkenly about his life. Leaving *Hesari* untranslated would hinder understanding even if it would be truer to the ST, but the overtranslated and Anglicized "Helsinki Street" (which was included in one of my versions of the poem) would mean using a non-existent term for the road and would leave out the local color of the expression. I thus used the official Finnish name of the street, *Helsinginkatu*, because it gives the impression of being the name of a street while

keeping the solution localized and thus sufficiently foreignized to transport the reader to the Finnish-speaking locale. I would compare this solution to the names of German streets, which are almost always left untranslated with their names ending in *-straße* without causing undue confusion even in English translations. Since *Hesari* is also the nickname for Finland's top newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, I did not want to run the risk of making that a referent.

The next allusion I in fact left unchanged, even though it is also a nickname, this time for a person – one of the roughneck denizens of the mentioned dive bars. The line reads "written by Melleri – based on Haukka," where the nickname *Haukka* (lit. 'hawk,' slang for 'bicep') gives the impression of being a person's nickname. This same person is called *Kake* a few lines later in the ST. This is a nickname for the Finnish male first name Kauko, and has connotations of being streetwise or rough, similarly to English names like Jimmy or Jack or Jimbo for the name James. This is the only straightforward elision that I employed in my translation, because using an English equivalent would have familiarized the line too much, and the colloquial "Sorry **man**" has the same effect. Leaving this name untouched would also risk TT readers pronouncing the word as ['k^{h}ejk] or /cake/ instead of ['kake].

This tough guy, Kake/Haukka, has visible tattoos, and when the character wipes his mouth on the back of his hand he wipes it on *Usko, Toivo ja Rakkaus*. To me, this clearly indicates that the character has tattoos on his hands, because the three capitalized words are so blatantly mentioned in connection with his wiping his mouth. The words are a biblical reference: "And now these three remain: **faith, hope and love**. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13, New International Version). Since Haukka curses, drinks, and is heavily tattooed, this quote from Scripture seems out of place. Brief research uncovers, however, that the popular tattoo symbol for faith is a cross, the one for love is a heart, and the symbol for 'hope' is an anchor, as in "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:19, New International Version). Now, an anchor tattoo is one of the most common

tattoos in the world, used by sailors for centuries. Before I hit on this connection, I had replaced *Uskoon, Toivoon ja Rakkauteen* with ”Love and Hate,” because both words can be tattooed on the first four fingers of each hand and displayed when making a fist, and because the opposite sentiments of the words would have brought across the ambiguous figure of Haukka/Kake. I have since settled for the direct translation, owing to its biblical nature.

“Puukkobulevardi” features two more so-called name-drops – *Cella*, a restaurant in Kallio; and *Unski*, the nickname for the male name Unto – both of which I have kept. Cella is a real restaurant in Helsinki which not even all Finnish readers would be familiar with, and even if Unski might refer to a celebrity or singer (such as Unto Mononen) it may just as well refer to one of Melleri’s friends, or more than likely to a random singer in a karaoke bar whose name can be seen flashing on a screen. I appreciate the fact that these interpretations may be contested by other readers or even translators, but I have done my best to uncover the possible actual meanings of some of the more cryptic allusions Melleri makes, and I am content with my reading of this poem.

The song that this character can be heard singing in the poem is another matter entirely. The references, on l. 23 and l. 27, are direct quotes from a well-known song called *Ystävän laulu*, written by the Russain singer-songwriter Vladimir Vysotsky and sung in Finnish translation by the famous Juha “Junnu” Vainio. The quotes are embedded in the poem without being marked as quotations, and Finnish readers of the ST must rely on their ear for 1980s songwriting to realize the loan. This is of utmost importance in terms of the effect that these lines deliver, because according to the principles of skopos, the same effect or function must be delivered to TT readers as well. The quotes are also thematic, in that they color the social situation in which the character of Tamara (who has a Russian first name) finds herself. The line that Unski sings is *mistä löydät sä ystävän*, literally “where will you find a friend,” which is followed by an “ex-pro runner” asking a black-eyed woman to dance. The second line from

the song that is mentioned, which ends the verse paragraph, is *Onko oikea sulle hän?* It means "Is he right for you?" and directly comments on the budding relationship between the runner and the woman. In domesticating these lines, I relied on my intuition and went with the first song lyric that involves 'friends' in some form. The one I chose was Randy Newman's *You've Got a Friend in Me*, and the opening line of that song is the one I put into the Unski-character's mouth. The commenting line is from the same song and delivers a function similar to the one in the ST: "Your friendship will never die..." The ellipsis is also my own addition, as it introduces doubt as to the longevity or propriety of the relationship between the ex-pro runner and the woman with a black eye. The Newman song is sufficiently popular to be familiar to many English readers, but may not be immediately recognizable to all readers, just like the ST quote.

The black-eyed woman exclaims *Voe tokkiisa* in the ST, an expression of surprise from the Savo region of Finland. The regional expression marks the woman as being from out of town, and involves a connotation of naïvety or being "from the sticks."

The next allusion relevant to the translation process is in the form of a lullaby: *Duudilulla, ruuti ja dulla* (l. 36). "Duudilulla" is a version of the singsong phrase *tuutilullaa*, used exclusively in Finnish children's lullabies, which is immediately offset by the next words: *ruuti* means 'gunpowder' and *dulla* is a slang expression for marijuana, or to heroin until the 1960s. This duality is typical of the atmosphere of this poem and to Melleri's aesthetics in general. The importance of rhyme is again central here, as is the lullaby phrase. I first considered using an allusion to perhaps the most well-known American lullaby, "Hush little baby," which begins "Hush little baby don't say a word / mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird." This would have lengthened the line unduly, however, so I once more opted for the first lullaby phrase I could think of. This was "biddy bye," and perhaps both ironically and fittingly I knew it from its use in a song by the California rap group Cypress Hill ("Boom Biddy

Bye Bye"). In terms of rhythm, this seemed a good fit, as did the literal translation of *ruuti* to "gunpowder." However, I did not find a suitable equivalent for *dulla* and so originally had the line as "gunpowder and rye" after rye whisky, continuing the alcohol theme. After investigating expressions for various types of marijuana, I landed on a rhyming term that also held a suitable double meaning, making the line "gunpowder and Thai," since it refers to Thai sticks, which are "bundles of marijuana soaked in hashish oil; marijuana buds bound on short sections of bamboo" (Marijuana Slang Terms). Not only does this term collate with the term "khat" in l. 32, it can also be seen as a reference to the many Thai massage parlors along Vaasankatu, that is, *Puukkobulevardi*.

There are just two other significant allusions that I had to deal with via shifting. The first relates to another rhyming issue:

> *Tamara tanssii karaoke**baarissa**,*
> *isäntä maksaa tuplakossuvissyt*
> *Master**cardilla***
>
> - - -
>
> Tamara dances in a karaoke **bar**,
> her sugar daddy pays for the double vodka tonics
> with his Platinum Master**card**

These rhyming segments are testament to Melleri's affinity for spoken word, and I feel that I did that impulse justice with my translations. Admittedly, I first used the word "joint" instead of "bar" as it tied in with the marijuana reference only three lines earlier. I also originally changed the Mastercard reference to "frequent flyer points," valuable bonuses accrued by wealthy travelling businessmen, because I thought it would make the translation pop. I was thankfully talked out of this by my professor. To keep the rhythm even when reading aloud, I made the credit card "Platinum."

The final allusive concern I had was at the end of the poem and with the word *kohmelo*. This is a colloquial word meaning “hang-over,” but I felt that using that translation would come off as too obvious and rhythmically prosaic. I therefore used “sleeps off its shakes” (the tremors that can accompany dehydration) for *nukkuu kohmeloaan*.

These two examples serve to demonstrate the connotational power of allusions, and the challenge that lies in translating them into another language. The above examples show that creative liberties must at times be taken to preserve the functions of the ST puns and allusions, and to succeed in transporting the TT reader to another time and place, that is, the real-life locations of the poems and Melleri’s Helsinki state of mind.

5. Favorites

Finally, I have chosen the poems in this section based on the prerogative of a translator: that of personal preference. If this seems irresponsible, I ask the reader to bear in mind that it is the seeming whim of translators that not only leads to new literary discoveries but also helps to ensure that a translation project does not die down halfway or lose steam in the face of any number of obstacles. That is, without enthusiasm there is little point in undertaking something as prolonged and financially uncertain as a major translation project. The poems I have chosen for this section are of special significance to me, because they were both among the very first poems by Arto Melleri I started translating into English. They will also contain translatorial issues in common with the poems in the previous analytical sections.

5.1 "Elävien kirjoissa"

Perhaps the most conspicuous single translational element in poems with titles is the title itself, that is, the heading that draws the reader in, even if the translation process does not necessarily begin with the title. A poem and its title are locked in a dialogue that changes and colors the reader's interpretation of each, and the relationship between them also changes with time. The title of an artwork can only be grasped by coming to terms with the artwork itself, but the opposite cannot be said with the same certainty, as the work itself can be understood whether with or without a title. The most important thing is to acknowledge the interplay between text and title, which requires literary competence.

Arto Melleri's seventh poetry collection *Elävien kirjoissa* (1991) happened to be the starting point for my project of translating his work. I was drawn to the collection's title poem (Melleri 476–7; see Appendix), and so to the questions that Finnish and English capitalization conventions[10] raise for translators. In English (American English especially), all titles tend to

[10] NB: the titles of those poems that have them in Melleri's *Runot* are all printed in bolded block capitals.

capitalize all words except certain prepositions and conjunctions (and, of, the, with, etc.). Still, I am overwhelmed by my conviction that part of what makes Melleri's poems so dynamic is partly due to a nonchalant and speech-like quality that offsets the deliberateness of his free verse. My solution was to capitalize only the first letter of each poem title, as if beginning a sentence which the poem then complements or continues, not least since sometimes the title will either echo or strongly resemble the first line of the poem anyway. I also wanted to retain something of the essential Finnish nature of the poems (although many idioms and realia have been familiarized for Anglo-American readers), and Finnish titling capitalizes only the first word and proper nouns. Thus "Puukkobulevardi" > "Switchblade Boulevard" because it is a nickname for a street in Helsinki and thus a proper noun, but *Elävien kirjoissa* > "In the land of the living", not "In the Land of the Living." I am not worried that the lack of capitalization might connote particularly British English stylistics for some native readers, as typographical elements in poetry tend to be approached as artistic techniques and are somewhat less reliant on common standards of language use such as orthographical rules.

I made the decision to translate the Finnish idiom *elävien kirjoissa* (lit. 'in the books of the living') into a full English equivalent before I had even written any notes down, because the solution leaped out at me at once. It was also lucky (and translators are indeed partly reliant on luck) that that equivalent – "the land of the living" – happens to be close to the ST key phrase, both containing the idea of living people. The metalyrical aspect present in the original Finnish idiom is admittedly lost, but I make up for that lack later in the poem (see below). In addition, the physical space indicated by the word "land" anticipates the "prairie of ether" that follows the verse from which the title is picked (ll. 26–27). Elsewhere in the poem, as in a lion's share of all idiomatic translation work, expressions and turns of phrase that lack this lucky similarity have to be replaced with some degree of variance and invention. Sometimes this necessitates additions, but it should be noted that substitute phrases and elisions are more

common, because they are less intrusive and necessary. This ties in with the translator's ethics and his or her (subjective but abiding) loyalty to the ST.

The poem itself begins with three italicized lines which only well-versed Melleri readers will identify as a quote from within the poet's own canon: they are lines from the poem "Apache Line" (1983), as is the second italicized set (ll. 22–23). This eight-year flashback to the author's own work makes the whole poem that much more personal and ironic: Melleri is recollecting a poem he wrote for a play called *Sopimus Mr. Evergreenin kanssa* and returns from these daydream-like reminiscences to the present, a messy room full of light. But his memories blend with descriptions and hallucinations: the speaker of the poem refers three times to someone called Mary, and the reference is unclear. None of the characters in the play are named Mary, although it is conceivable that the reference, especially considering the glitches in time, the poem's absurdist visuals and the poet's own fondness for narcotics, is to marijuana, which is also referred to in slang as "Mary Jane."

The possible implications of drug terminology aside, the verse itself had to be realized with reference to the words on the page and the overt tone. My translation defuses some of the confusion surrounding this unknown character by resorting to an intertextual method. The lines *Mary, suotta surullinen / sulka hiuksissasi!* (ll. 17-18) become "Mary, a feather in your hair, / do not stand and weep!" The solution I use is a fitting, albeit obscure reference to a rather little-known American housewife named Mary Elizabeth Frye (1905–2004), who is remembered only for her contribution to elegiac poetry. One of her poems is often recited at gravesides, and includes the lines: "Do not stand at my grave and weep. / I am not there. I do not sleep." The Finnish word *surullinen* ("sad") and its connotations are included in the word "weep" as well as in the intertextual link to death, whose somber quality is offset by the mild alienation in using an allusion in the first place.

Returning to the chronology of the poem, after the nostalgic opening quote (which I

return to below), the poem proper begins with a metatextual but also highly concrete image: *On aika tuulettaa* (l. 4). There is no directly equivalent English verb for *tuulettaa* in this context. ‘Ventilate’ is a literal translation, but it does not have the same immediate connotation of airing a room by opening doors and windows as it does in Finnish (or subsequently the ironic freshening of Melleri’s own poetry, what with flashbacks giving way to new lines). The Finnish form is also both passive and intransitive, which are verb characteristics that often pose problems in English translation. This leads to a lengthened but clear-cut solution: “It’s high time this room was aired.” I should mention that the idiom ‘high time’ (here meaning that the airing should have happened a long time ago) happens to bear on two hypothetical poetic points in the poem; (1) the dual meaning of expressing joy in the verb *tuulettaa* and (2) the reference to marijuana/Mary Jane later in the text.

The reader is transported into the room in both the ST and TT, in the former with the connotation of a room (being aired) in *tuulettaa* (and in the outright use of the word *huone* in l. 5) and in the latter with the deictic demonstrative *this*. Lines 4–6 of the ST also prompt a wordplay. Puns and the like are seldom translatable where they occur, so opportunities to catch up with wordplay, so to speak, have to be taken where they are found, as long as it ties in with what the ST lines are communicating. In this case the TT wordplay is subtle:

(a) *läpiveto huoneessa saa sarastuksesta kudotut verhot lepattamaan...*	(b) the cross-breeze makes the drapes drawn by daybreak flutter...

The ST phrase “*sarastuksesta / kudotut verhot*” indicate that the curtains (*verhot*) are lyrically actually composed of the dawn or morning (*sarastus*). My English translation uses the word

”drawn”, which can either refer to the cross-breeze[11] pulling the curtains aside from the window or the curtains being symbolically ‘drawn’ (as by a writing utensil). The knitting needles (*kutoa*, to knit) are subtly exchanged for a pen or pencil-like image, reintroducing the metalyrical hint in the ST title, but the metaphorical reference to the wind making the curtains flutter remains salient.

The TT lines here also represent an attention to the sonority of language that Melleri usually included in his texts with his casual but effective use of natural Southern Finnish speech patterns, such as the passive used in l. 4 (*On aika tuulettaa* instead of, say, the much more cumbersome active sentence *Meidän on tuuletettava [tämä huone]*) and his skill in assonance and near rhyme. Because the spoken variant is difficult to translate into English without reverting to a more colloquial variety and thus an unwanted web of connotations (for instance, “We’ve gotta air this room out” would be too casual and would dismiss the passive voice that contributes to the slightly unreal atmosphere of the poem), I have opted to include a phonetic technique instead. The partially repeated consonant clusters /br/, /dr/, /cr/ and /fl/ onomatopoetically represent a windy, untidy room. For the same reason, I use the word “daybreak” instead of the rhyming “dawn,” as the word “break” helps reinforce the idea of a ransacked room.

In the ST poem at hand, as in much of Melleri’s work, both basic and archaic poetic tones are used. The free verse images are punctuated with romantic exclamations, such as *Tuntemattomat jumalat rakastelevat / vastamuodostuvassa galaksissa / vain meidät siittääkseen!* (ll. 28–30). The verb *siittää* literally means ‘to sire, to father’ but neither of these can be used here because the archaic effect would divert attention from the development of the poem’s narrative flow. The effect is less noticeable in the ST, because Finnish syntax does not require a fixed word order and so word-swapping is fairly common: the effect of *meidät*

[11] Other alternatives included *draft*, *cross-draft* and *cross-draught*, which were not idiomatic enough.

siittääkseen versus the SVO order *siittääkseen meidät* gives the lines a slightly lofty sound, but not enough to be off-putting. The minor discrepancy here is once again solved with intertextuality in the TT. The phrase *tuntemattomat jumalat* (lit. ‘unknown gods’) is replaced with an order-swapped “gods unknown,” which I use as a reference to American author John Steinbeck’s novel *To a God Unknown* (1933). In addition to the word-order giving the expression an old-fashioned tinge, some readers of the TT may well find themselves reminded of the romantic, pastoral scenes of nature and Americana in the novel’s setting. Such subconscious landscapes may well tie in with the “prairie of ether” mentioned in the preceding line. Ether, of course, can refer to both the classic metaphysical element once believed to fill the region of the universe above the terrestrial sphere (also spelled aether) or to diethyl ether, which at one point was used as a recreational drug.

The importance of phonoaesthetics in translating Melleri’s poetry cannot be overstated. There is a natural tendency, at least for me as a reader, to approach his poems as performances, and this is where an ear for the performative and for spoken word poetry comes in handy. I ask myself: If this part of the TT needs to invoke a strong contrast, how could I bring that about while adding to the rhythmic, performative value of the lines in question? The inverted word order, typography, and italicization of the quotes in ll. 1–3 and 22–23 make the short ellipses resemble song lyrics despite the lack of rhyme. My solution was to try to include some, as in:

(a)
Moni jää tielle, moni jää tien oheen,
moni koskaan pääse ei edes
lähtemään

(b)
Many stay behind
or on the side of the road,
many are those who can never let go

The song- or chant-like nature of the ST lines is embellished in the translation through the use of diphthongal assonance ([oʊ̯], road/those/go) and a loose tetrameter: the ST lines employ about four stresses per line (there being only two actual lines, the latter of which is interrupted by a caesura after the word *edes*), which I copied. In addition to rhythm, typography played a part in the eventual TT: the translated verse paragraph quoted above has visually been turned upside down.[12]

While the ST states in l. 3 that *moni koskaan pääse ei edes / lähtemään* (‘many are never even able to leave’), in order to maintain the rhythm I metaphorize the line’s intent. Many people are never able to leave (along the road, *tie*) because they cannot ‘let go’ of the past, their fears, their duties, or the like. Here, as elsewhere, I have taken the creative freedom which I feel serves the message and the sense of the ST verse. The same reasoning goes for the second inter-quotation:

(a)
Moni jäi ovelle, moni jäi oven väliin,
moni jäi avaimenreiästä katsomaan

(b)
Many stopped at the door or were caught in between,
others stooped to look through the keyhole and see

As can be observed, the TT forms the quote into an end-rhymed anapestic couplet, which is intended to act as a contrast to the free verse of the rest of the poem. The effect is also performative in that the asides are defamiliarizing in their own right due to their detachment, but the TT audience is even less likely than the ST audience to have enough background information on Melleri’s collected works. This is, of course, in part because Melleri’s work has

[12] The Finnish verb for translate, *kääntää*, literally means ‘to turn (over/around)’.

not yet been made properly known to the English-speaking world. But Finnish readers at least have this possibility, and the end rhyme is meant to act as an effect compensating for the lack of identification that fully informed ST readers would experience when reading the allusions to “Apache Line.” Assonance and rhyme are important in English literature because unlike Finnish, the morpho-phonology of English enables a large amount of rhymes or half rhymes. The lines following the quotes in the TT are in rhyme (”The silence still **shrieks**, / your bird’s heart **beats**!”), because they lead readers back to the free verse structure of the rest of the poem, whose major literary technique is repetition (as is often the case with Melleri, see 1.6).

There is one more translatorial issue I want to raise in connection with this particular poem. In the final stanza of “In the land of the living,” the second person monologue (perhaps addressed to the mysterious Mary) that runs through the whole of the poem up to this point gives over to a new, shared moment. After the compulsive and circular description of the ransacked room and the declamatory imagery, the speaker turns to a more subdued and romantic form of expression. The silence (*ollaan vaiti*) follows the violence, implied throughout by the “crackdown,” once the “chest of ... silence” is “forced open.” The metaphor is ambiguous, because the ST again plays with words having to do with sounds. The shared experience expressed by the second person singular softens the unusual scenario, as do the words relating to ringing and dancing (*soida, tanssia*). All of this is readily translatable, but the pun on the word *kieli* is not. It means “tongue”, but in the two-part noun *lukon kieli* it refers to the latch or bolt of a lock. However, the use of the word *kieli* makes the metaphor corporeal, and my solution was to play on words referring to parts of the body to convey the sense of the ST stanza:

(a)

Ollaan vaiti,
simpukat, kielellä tunnustelen
helmeä kielesi alla,
ja me murramme auki hiljaisuuden lippaan,
lukon kieli jää soimaan

(b)
We stay quiet,
two seashells, I nudge a pearl under your tongue
with my tongue
and we force open the chest of our silence
so that the latch rings, keeps ringing

Chest is a homonym denoting both (1) a box and (2) the top of the torso. “Chest” insinuates *kieli* by relating to the body, and “latch” reinforces the idea of a physical box while referring also to *lukon kieli*. As a bonus, the word ‘ring’ is also a homonym. Thus, with the help of the word “chest” and its connotations of precious things being stored, it is safe to assume that some readers will make the connection to golden rings, Western symbols of love and companionship.

5.2 “Viiden aistin todistus”

My second personal choice of poem is also a title piece, though of a different collection, 1990’s *Viiden aistin todistus*. The appeal here is in the association I made to Welsh poet Dylan Thomas’ poem “When all my five and country senses see,” and in the many intercultural references that the short (24-line) ”Viiden aistin todistus” imparts. The poem is a description of a stream-of-consciousness moment in an Indian restaurant (or perhaps even a restaurant *in* India), where the speaker briefly considers links between Eastern and Western cultures (and religions) while he reminisces over a deceased friend. Although the poem’s imagery is somewhat complex and the urban setting prosaic, the depth of emotion and association

displayed in the speaker's flow of thoughts as well as the clever repetition make this a touching poem.

The very first issue I was faced with was the translation of the word *todistus*, which is ambiguous in Finnish and can refer to (1) a testimony, (2) witnessing (as in *Jehovan todistaja*, 'Jehovah's Witness'), or (3) a certificate or report. The root of the word is *tosi*, 'true.' Bearing in mind the strong religious symbolism found in the poem, the second meaning with its overtones of fundamentalist Christianity could have served as an equivalent were it not for the difficulty in the word's noun and verb forms being used naturally and for the stern associations. There is also the fact that the poem itself, while seen through the eyes of the speaker, is more a half fictional concoction than a report of witnessed events. I chose another term connected to Christianity but which also involved the idea of testifying to something true or discovering a truth: thus the title is in the form "Confirmation of the five senses" (without the initial definite article for brevity's sake and in order to avoid unnecessary repetition). For me, then, the speaker *confirms* the emotional reality of his friend's death to himself by switching between the concrete world of the senses and his own internal world where he projects himself into history, and also undergoes a symbolic *confirmation* of acceptance. He finally awakes from his reverie in the restaurant where he is sitting and again hears the sounds and comes to terms with death and with his sorrow (*curry saa silmät kyyneliin*). In my translation, the final line reconciles the Western and Eastern imageries by referring to the Bible ("the prodigal son") and to the Indian city of Kolkata.

The first stanza, later partially repeated, presents two interesting challenges right off the bat. The first of these is more a prompt than a challenge. The ST has the lines *kaikki hohtaa valoa* / *sille joka tietää*, and while a direct English translation might read "everything glows with light / for one who knows," the temptation for an intertextual allusion is here quite overwhelming, and the line became "everything is illuminated / to one who knows." The

reference to American author Jonathan Safran Foer's 2002 novel *Everything Is Illuminated* contains the same image of glowing light as the ST key phrase, and the novel's historical context and themes of discovering one's heritage and the communicative potential of American popular culture suit both the poem's time-travelling reveries and Melleri's penchant for allusions to American phenomena. As Foer's novel's title is itself a partial quote from Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* from 1984, its philosophical underpinnings of nostalgia and of death are also available to a competent TT reader. The line from Kundera is: "In the sunset of dissolution, everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine." (1.1.6)

The second translatorial issue in the first stanza is more complex, and caused some confusion for me when I discovered a discrepancy in one of my first versions. The ST lines are: *puun syyt aina järkisyitä*. In Finnish, the term for a warp or swirl in the grain of wood is the wood's *syy*, plural *syyt*. This word is polysemic, as *syy* also means '[the] reason [for something].' Thus, the ST term *järkisyyt* involves a pun that cannot be readily translated into English, and must be dealt with in a different way. The image with which the translator is faced concerns something in the speaker's immediate vicinity in the restaurant: the (presumably wooden) *table* at which the speaker is seated. The wood-swirls are an indication that the speaker is, at this point in the poem, preoccupied with visual or even tactile details in his immediate environment, which can reasonably include the table. Such details in the ST indicate that the words in ll. 3–4 serve to demonstrate a realization: the speaker's friend is dead, and that there is some accepted, dogmatically rational function to his or her death, which the word *järki-* (meaning 'sensible' or 'rational') implies. But the rationalism in the ST word *järki-* refers the translator to another image, perhaps that much better suited to the meaning of the original lines: "the cards are neatly dealt / on the table," meaning that the truth of the death is made

explicit at last (the “cards are shown”). There may also be a connotation to a Tarot deck, since reading Tarot cards may indeed involve predictions of death.

Let it also be noted that a preliminary translation of this poem had “long dead” instead of “dead,” which I altered once the poem’s theme of arriving at acceptance became clear. The implied death has to be fairly recent for the speaker’s emotion to be topical in the poem.

Next I was confronted with an issue of terminology that I only checked on a whim. One of the sounds the speaker hears in the restaurant is the sound of a musical instrument (*yksinäistä sitaria komppaa*..., l. 7). My first response to the Finnish loanword *sitar* was to over-Anglicize it, and so my first raw translation of this passage had the sounds of a “zither” floating through the poem. I soon realized, after double-checking, that this was quite wrong and that the words “sitar” and “zither,” while sounding alike, have little to do with one another except that they both denote string instruments. Indeed, as the word zither refers to a whole family of instruments from all over the world, the balance of cultural references in the poem would have been seriously upset had I not corrected the initial mistake.

Often it is only after multiple readings that the nature of certain poetic expressions can be clearly construed. The third stanza begins with a minimal, cryptic description of the circumstances of the speaker’s friend’s death: *hän sotkeutui viittaan ja miekkaan* (l. 10). A cape (*viitta*) is a cultural item that modern Finns would consider either outdated or outlandish or both, so the image I saw upon reading this line was of a Bedouin fighter complete with baggy attire and scimitar. This may well be a fitting reading, as the following lines seem to contrast that stereotypical image of Far Eastern clothing with something Western and indeed very Finnish: a *Kaleva-puku*, or a men’s suit manufactured since the 1920s by a firm called Karjalan Puku Oy and commercially known as Kaleva (I have thus retained the word). But it occurred to me later that the word combination *viitta ja miekka* resembled an idiom I could not at first place, but then realized was a version of the idiom *viitta ja tikari*, which is a very literal

translation of the English term “cloak and dagger.” Thus, while I retained the ST word “sword” (*miekka*), I changed the word “cape” to “cloak,” hopefully giving the impression that the friend met his end in mysterious circumstances.

An issue of phraseology in this stanza also led to several versions of ll. 11-12 (*vaikka hyvä ratkaisu joka tapauksessa on* / *Kaleva-puku*). The almost clumsily lengthy turn of phrase resembles an advertising punchline (*hyvä ratkaisu* = ‘a good solution’), and my renditions of it included “is the way to go” and “would have sufficed” before landing on the suit always being an idiomatic “good bet.” The length and slight banality of the phrase in the ST leads me to think that it might, as something of an interruption, be the speaker’s way of postponing his sorrow over his friend. It also acts as a bridge to two more dampening effects that serve to assuage the speaker’s sadness: (1) the historical throwback to ancient philosophy and religion (see below) and (2) the last stanza’s repetition of earlier lines, followed by a final break in pattern, a matter-of-fact coming to terms.

Melleri’s use of punctuation and capitalization was not consistent but based on the context, disregarding uniformity. The lack of punctuation in a poem with otherwise regular punctuation can be seen as a way of juxtaposing a string of images for heightened effect, of implying the simultaneity of states or events. Lines 13–16 are a run-on sentence rampaging through history in the blink of an eye, to Biblical times and Ancient Greece: *filosofit asuivat tynnyrissä* (‘philosophers lived in barrels’) is a clear reference to Diogenes the Cynic (c. 412–323 BC). But as the ST phrase uses the word for barrel in the singular (*tynnyrissä*, not plural *tynnyreissä*), it would appear to be another pun on a Finnish expression. If a person is unaware of some widely known event or piece of news, he or she might be asked whether they have been living in a barrel – much like the English expression, “living in a cave.” That phrase could certainly have been substituted here, were it not for the following line which mentions the

“spirit of fermentation” (*käymisen henki*), indicating a wine or beer barrel, thus making the cave substitution incompatible.

Because of the run-on syntax here, the final line of the third stanza gives the impression of stopping short, even though an intelligible phrase can be found in the garbled sentence. If the full phrase is understood to be *filosofit asuivat tynnyrissä siellä missä* / *käymisen henki[kin]*, both the philosophers and the ”spirit of fermentation” inhabit the barrel. I wanted to take this into account while retaining the abruptness and seeming interruption of l. 16, so the word “and” in my translation hopefully delivers the same effect as the ST phrase.

As already noted, the final stanza reintroduces the sensory elements of the setting and repeats them in part almost compulsively, in the speaker’s return to reality. Two more additional elements pose questions for the translator. First, l. 19 mentions people drinking *Kristuksen verta*, literally “Christ’s blood” but my rendition has the archaic form “... people drink *of* Christ’s blood” due to the literal translation being slightly macabre in English and because the contrast between the prosaic restaurant and the miracle of transubstantiation is highlighted with the old-fashioned turn of phrase. Second, the word for the city of Kolkata is here stylized “Calcutta” because of its old feel, because that was still the accepted English spelling at the time Melleri wrote the poem, and because most English-speakers still strongly associate the pre-2001 spelling with the Indian city in question.

Finally, the strange interjection in the third-last line – *Kali Kali* – is also left unchanged, because the word is a clear reference to the Hindu god Kali, and also an onomatopoetic representation of the sound of a string instrument. Additionally, in Finnish, *kalikali* is an expression of chilliness and shivering, which a strong emotional experience could also simulate.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

The six poems I have analyzed and qualified in the above chapters represent a small portion of the process of translating the poetry of Arto Melleri, and illustrate some of the steps that need to be taken and the issues that need to be taken into consideration when translating his work from Finnish into English. It has been and continues to be a learning process that incorporates both a trust in my own intuition and a reliance on research, which together amount to translatorial solutions that are successful in delivering the functions found in the source texts and which also hold their ground as representatives of spoken word poetry. Each one of the poems I have translated I have also read out loud, either just to myself or to a roomful of people, and these performances have also helped me arrive at decisions that truly exude Melleri's spirit and his sense of style and rhythm.

6. On *Kirotun rytmin viidakossa* (cassette, 1992)

Arto Melleri's second audio publication *Kirotun rytmin viidakossa* (*KRV*, 'In the jungle of the cursed rhythm') was published in 1992, by which time he had made his name as a performing artist in addition to being a celebrated author. His first LP, *Mau Mau* (1982), featured band leader and drummer Edward Vesala. On *KRV* ten years later, he performed a selection of his poetry from several different collections with guitarist Pekka Rechardt, who is also known for his role in the rock band Wigwam.

KRV is also interesting in the sense that it was only published as a compact cassette, and the recordings themselves are mostly unedited: the guitarist seems to be improvising much of the music, oftentimes Melleri can be heard to comment something to Rechardt – "Strangle that guitar, boy!" and the like – and a few times Melleri makes small mistakes as he is reading but continues his performance. The atmosphere is immediate and tied to the moment of recording, just as live performances can be raw but evocative.

Laukkanen and Leino hold that "for speech to be expressively effective, it must include enough variation in different speech parameters, which include things such as pitch, volume, and timbre" (15). These parameters must also be "in meaningful relation to what is being said," and even though Laukkanen and Leino are describing everyday spoken language, this is true of Melleri's performances and performed poetry in general. Even though it is evident that Melleri relied on the impressiveness of his bass baritone voice and on the power of his complex imagery, his theater background also enabled him to interpret his own texts emotionally. Some poems on *KRV* are scarcely more than whispers, while in others he raises his voice to a growl or a yell. His range as a spoken word poet was broad. It is also true that "expression, especially stage expression and recitation, is a field of its own and requires a certain talent and training" (Laukkanen and Leino 206), in which Melleri was an autodidact, but he also received some formal teaching. Laukkanen and Leino go on to state that "sound qualities produce powerful

images of the speaker's personality, and for this reason especially actors should be able to modify their voice according to the characters they are interpreting" (20). This is also true of spoken word, where the "character" is the poetic persona or speaker.

I will analyze a few of the tracks from *KRV* in light of what I consider to be good spoken word performance, while discussing his poems as texts in relation to the spoken/written binary, and the intimacy or authenticity present in the confessional style of both the performed and textual spoken word.

The opening track of the cassette demonstrates the structure by which all the tracks are composed. First, Melleri starts to recite the poem in question a cappella, and only after a few seconds is Rechardt's guitar introduced. The accompaniment is unintrusive by and large, giving the words themselves and Melleri's performance precedence. But at the same time the guitar compositions and improvisations color each poem, often powerfully and occasionally less so, depending on the rhythmic relationship between Melleri's performance (which, though professional, is not uniform in quality) and the volume or tone of the music. In terms of timbre, Melleri has a kind of "back vowel quality" to his pronunciation (Laukkanen and Leino 205), meaning that the long [i] sound in words like *kirjaimiin* sounds closer to the open-mid front unrounded vowel [ɛ]. This will give some listeners the impression of "lazy" speech, which is in line with Melleri's natural Southern Finnish accent and with features of Helsinki speech.

"Kirjaimien murtumisen aika," the first track, begins ethereally with Melleri's voice rumbling in quietly as he voices the abstract first lines of the poem. This intensifies quickly as the poem asks loaded rhetorical questions of the reader – *Miten voisi olla puhdasta oppia?!* ("How could there be such a thing as pure learning?!")[13] – and Melleri raises his voice at these junctures. The guitar accompaniment "makes way" for it, giving it space, which is typical of

[13] At the time of writing, I have not yet translated all of the poems found on the cassette.

KRV: Melleri and Rechardt represent two separate performers who play off one another, while prioritizing the content of the poems.

Melleri makes a small mistake in his reading in “Kirjaimien murtumisen aika”: during the line *on oltava valmis*... he stutters, *o-on oltava*... This small “fluff” (as recording mistakes are called) does not go unnoticed by Melleri himself, who speaks the last word of the verse paragraph (*tietääkseen*) with self-conscious emphasis. He thus, as it were, saves the halting effect of the error, and pushes through with credibility. The intense expression of the poem grows calm as Melleri varies his recital to a whisper, then back again to a final growl.

The third track on side A, “Emmä kysy,” is a graphic, romantic confessional poem that describes the speaker’s desire for a sexual act with an unidentified second person (with phrases like “I want to” and “Let me”). Both Melleri’s delivery and the improvised guitar riffs sound distinctly delicate, resembling a touching love poem spoken to a lover. As the passion in the poem intensifies, however, the reading becomes louder and more emphatic. Melleri even employs deliberate stutters to emulate the moments of sexual passion resulting in climax, which also lead him to make an actual fluff as he acts out the confusion of carnal pleasure: *E-emmä muista enää ees mun omaa nimeä!* (“I-I c-can’t even remember my own name!”). The romantic guitar sound also switches to a rock’n’roll aesthetic as the action gains momentum. In the poem itself (Melleri 371, from *Viiden aistin todistus*, 1990), these effects are implied, though only in part, by the single run-on verse paragraph that uses no punctuation and the typographically progressing enjambment:

... hampaitakalisuttavaa himoa emmä kysy ootsä

eläin vai enkeli

anna mun tulla sun sisään anna mun

panna sua kauan sun jokikiseen

sykkivään aukkoon

Now, as I came to side B in my listening session, I realized something about the improvisational nature of the recording. As an artistic but recreational undertaking, it is not inconceivable that Melleri would have been drinking during the recording, meaning that some of the performative choices and reactions might be attributable to a state of intoxication. Side B includes about the same number of recitational errors but more extratextual speech acts, such as voiced comments (like *Jes!*) on the session itself or Rechardt's playing.

These examples demonstrate that Melleri was a dedicated performer who nonetheless relied on improvisation and the spur of the moment, as actors are wont to do. He was also able to interpret his own work skillfully, which not all authors are capable of. This affinity for performance is one of the main reasons I consider Melleri a spoken word poet, and why I believe that all of his poetry was motivated, one way or another, by the possibilities and characteristics of performance poetry.

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to demonstrate the lengths to which a translator of poetry must go in order to retain, offset, enhance, diminish, collate, and effectively rewrite a source text as part of a work of translation, and be able to explain his or her actions in detail. Such procedural studies are rare, perhaps because "parting the curtain" can be seen as problematic in light of the invisibility assumption of translators and translations discussed above. But showing the process of the work is important in understanding what values are inherent to this kind of cultural mediation, and analyses like this can serve to highlight central concerns in literary translation. A diachronic standpoint – which this thesis does not employ – could also be used to show how values change over time, and how we as creators and consumers of culture express ourselves and situate ourselves in the social spectrum.

Good translations may depend on the invisibility of the processes by which they come to be, but at the same time readers place their trust in translators, whether they realize it or not. It is because of this trust and the translator's duty toward the eventual readers of his work that it is important to understand the techniques and thought processes that are involved in translation. If poetry viewed as language at its most malleable and innovative, we can also hope to glean the same kind of understanding of language and life from investigating poetry translation as from experiencing poetry itself.

The methodology I have employed in explicating features of my translatorial work is qualitative and introspective, and it was also self-evaluated in real time as I wrote out my solutions. This means that I have had the opportunity to re-evaluate my decisions and comment on their efficacy once new points of view were introduced by my interpretations and research. As I have noted, a quantitative research method presented itself halfway through writing, namely the lists of search terms I used in *Google Translate* and *Thesaurus.com*. Had I so desired, I could have employed these resources to evaluate the complexity of each poem under

discussion. The quantity of search terms did not, however, directly correlate with the difficulty of the poems translated, so this avenue of research would only have resulted in critiquing the research process itself. Partly due to time constraints and partly because of my point of view in this thesis, I did not pursue this method but relied on my qualitative reflection of the translatorial solutions I undertook.

The English-speaking world is long overdue for an introduction to Arto Melleri, one of the most widely known, beloved, and yet misunderstood Finnish poets in recent times. The impulse to bring that introduction about is hopefully evident from this thesis as a foray into the mechanisms that have aided me in translating his work, and will continue to do so.

Appendix

[From *3. Ego as Subject*]

SPEEDY KÄY KYLÄSSÄ

Olin päivän vaan poissa,
aamulla Speedy jäi nukkumaan lattialle, koditon
muuten paitsi A-peräänkuulutus, pidätettävä
tavattaessa

Tulin takaisin illansuussa:
Speedy oli häipynyt, vienyt divariin
Platonin teokset, ja monta muuta paksua, viisasta kirjaa
Rinkan niitten raijaamiseen Speedy lainasi
vaatehuoneen yläkaapista

Sain sen kii Syntipukista
vapisevan tuopin takaa...
Katsoin sitä, peililaseissaan se näytti
mississippiläiseltä jokilaivapelurilta –
ne heijasti sen kortit, ristiä, pataa,
unohdusta...
”Otanny perkele noi typerät okulaarit veke!”

Speedy hieroi silmiään, levottomia, tulehtuneita,
kostutti muovimukin vaahdolla käheää kurkkuaan...
Osoitin filosofista mielenlaatua,
ihmettelin vaan eiks ne mitään kysyneet,
edes sitä mistä se kirjat varasti?
Se ei edes virnuillut vastatessaan:
”Ei helvetissä, tietenkään,
ne luuli että mä oon sä!”

Speedy pays a visit

I was only gone for the day,
in the morning I left Speedy asleep on the floor, homeless
except for a standing warrant, to be arrested
                on sight

I came back at nightfall:
Speedy had bolted, gotten away with
Plato's collected works, and many other wise, thick books
The backpack he used
he borrowed
        from the top shelf of my closet

I caught up with him in The Scapegoat
behind a trembling pint...
I looked at him, in his mirrored sunglasses he looked
like a riverboat gambler from Mississippi—
they reflected his cards: clubs, spades,
                oblivion...
"Take those stupid goddamn shades off already!"

Speedy rubbed his eyes, restless, inflamed,
moistened his hoarse throat with the plastic cup's foam...

I was feeling generous,
so I just wondered out loud, didn't they ask him anything,
            not even where he'd stolen the books?

He didn't even grin when he answered:
"Hell no, of course not,
they thought I was you!"

VARIS MINUN VAAKUNALINTUNI

Kuka täällä korisee karaateista?

Vain aurinko möyrityn maan yllä
on punaista kultaa,
tämä tuntemattoman metallin maku suussa
on jotain muuta, olen viettänyt
pitkän viikonlopun, saveen tallatuilla
pullonkorkeilla kruunatun...
yöllä siivet saaneet ajatukset
lepattavat varisparvena
vaaksan verran mustan maan yllä,
ilkkuvat, siivillä kuluvat päivät,
lopulta siivellä...
Non je ne regrette rien!
varis raakaisee, ja laskevan auringon
vilkkuluomi

Varis minun vaakunalintuni
särjetyn heraldiikan maailmassa
missä herraa ei erotella narrista,
Sorbus, Brutus tai Sidi Brahim!
karheaa kaikki moraali joka toimii
täällä, jouhipaidan sukua
herkällä iholla

Non je ne regrette rien!
ja ryvettynyt ymmärrys enemmän viisautta
vitriinissä!
varis kuiskaa korvaani
kaikki risasiipinimensä,

muut linnut täältä jo lähteneet
lämpimämpiin maihin

Olen viettänyt pitkän viikonlopun
(kymmenen vuotta),
käsillä, lopulta, maanantain kalpea aamu:
vapisevassa sanomalehdessä pelkkiä
kuolinilmoituksia,
urheilu-uutisia

Tästä maratonista ei kerrota mitään,
ja siitä mikä pysyisi,
sisällä

The crow on my coat of arms

Who’s that crowing about carats?

Only the sun above the turned earth
is red gold,
this taste of an unknown metal in my mouth
is something else, I’ve spent
a long weekend, crowned with bottle caps
        trodden in clay...
at night the thoughts that took flight
are a flock of crows
a full span above the black earth,
jeering, the days take wing,
        finally fly on the dole...
Non je ne regrette rien!
the crow caws, and the third eyelid
                of the setting sun

The crow is on my coat of arms
in the world of broken heraldry
where the lord and the jester are indistinguishable,
        some Sorbus, Brutus or Sidi Brahim!
all morality here
is coarse, like a hair shirt
on sensitive skin

Non je ne regrette rien!
and a dirty epiphany means more wisdom
                in the drinks cabinet!
the crow whispers in my ear
all its broken-winged names,
the other birds have already left
for warmer lands

I’ve spent a long weekend
(ten years),
upon me, finally, Monday’s pale morning:
the trembling paper full of nothing
but obituaries,
the sporting news

There’s nothing on this marathon,
or on what will keep,
what I’ll keep down

[From *4. Culture Bumps*]

PÄIVÄ ON JO MINUUTIN PITEMPI

niin kuin sataa räntää
alhaalta ylös
on tie peili, peili tie on – – –
aja varovasti kesäkumit alla
läpi talvipäivänseisauksen,
pidä turvavyö kii – – –
auton valot polttoleikkaa
sakenevan jääneulatuiskun,
pimeää pimeän takana,
tie on peili, ja kesäkumien glissando

– – –

miten paljon voi olla niin vähästä kii,
miten pienestä kaikki:
vaaksa, kyynärä, syli – – –
tunnustan ne jo, väsyneenä mittaamaan
mittaamatonta
matkalla ihmisten ilmoille,
vaaksa, kyynärä, syli, ne on ihmisen mitat

nyt sataa räntää alhaalta ylös,
nopeusrajoitus
leimahtaa valoissa, en näe sitä
vaikka tuulilasinpyyhkijät kuinka
pörhistää sulkiaan – – –
on jo myöhäistä palata, tie vain vie,
peilaa tätä matkaa Ei-Kenenkään-Maalta
ihmisten ilmoille

– – –

talvipäivänseisauksen jälkeen
juon kahvia huoltoasemalla
kaupungin ulkopuolella, pakastaa,
poika vaihtaa öljyt – – –
päivä on jo minuutin pitempi,
mitä tekisin sillä,
minuutilla?
sen verran vähemmän aikaa pimeyden töille
radiossa puhutaan Romaniasta
kuuntelen sitä, selvisin hengissä yön yli,
miten, sitä en mieti,
riittää että olen tässä
ERIKOISTARJOUS: UUDENVUODENTINAT
niin halvalla en ole koskaan saanut mitään,
en edes varjokuvaa seinälle – – –
tytöllä tiskin takana
silmät surulliset, täytyy maksaa,
lähteä liikkeelle – – –
kaupungin ulkopuolella nopeusrajoitus 50 km/h
näen sen nyt kun yö on ohi, räntäsade, päivä
jo minuutin pitempi,
jatkan matkaa muina miehinä
niin kuin en olisi kuolleista noussutkaan

The day is a minute longer now

like the sleet raining
vertically upwards
all roads are mirrors, mirrors are roads all– – –
drive safe with your summer tires
through the winter equinox,
remember your seatbelt – – –
the headlights flame-cut
the thickening blizzard of needles,
it’s dark behind the darkness,
the road a mirror, the glissando
of summer tires

– – –

how can so much depend upon so little,
such tiny circumstances:
a span, a cubit, a fathomed lap – – –
I confess them now, I’m weary of measuring
the immeasurable
on my way to the world of people,
a span, a cubit, a lap, these are the human dimensions

now the sleet is raining upwards vertically,
a speed limit
flashes in the beams, I can’t see it
no matter how the windshield wipers
snake their blades – – –
it’s too late to turn back, the way bears on,
mirroring this journey from No-Man’s-Land
back to the world of people

– – –

it’s after the equinox
and I’m drinking coffee at a gas station
outside town, it’s getting chilly,
the new kid is changing the oil– – –
the day is a minute longer now.
what should I do with it,
with that minute?
sixty seconds less for quick work in the dark
they talk about Romania on the radio
I listen to it, I made it through the night,
how doesn’t concern me,
it’s enough that I’m here
NEW YEAR’S SPECIAL: CASTING TIN
I’ve never gotten anything that cheap,
not even my shadow on the wall – – –
the girl behind the counter has sad eyes,
        I pay up, gotta keep moving – – –
outside of town the limit is 50 km/h
I can see clearly now the night is gone, the sleet, the day
        a minute longer now,
I keep going like it’s nothing
as if I’d never even risen from the dead

PUUKKOBULEVARDI

Tamara nousee Bemarista
Puukkobulevardilla
Syksyn tuuli kourii Tamaraa
minihameen alta
Äreät vaahterat narahtelevat
Puukkobulevardilla,
ja vettä kun pyydän minulle kaadetaan viinaa:
etsin kadonnutta säettä,
se on piilossa jossain täällä

Ja jokikisessä kuppilassa Hesarilla
sama siniseksi tatuoitu jätkä jonka elämästä –
vittu – kys sais – vittu – kirjan niinku sillee
”skrivas Melleri – aiheen antoi Haukka”
(pyyhkäisten vaahdot viiksistään
kämmenselkään,
Uskoon, Toivoon ja Rakkauteen)
”ja tulot fifti-fifti niinku sille fair play”
Sori vaan, Kake, etsin kadonnutta säettä
Puukkobulevardilla
Välillä vaikka Cellan vessan seinästä

Tamara tanssii karaokebaarissa
korkeilla koroilla
Ja Unski laulaa mistä löydät sä ystävän
On ilta ja entinen huippumaileri
on nuori lupaus taas ja nainen jolla musta silmä
”Voe tokkiisa” lähtee joraamaan
Onko oikea sulle hän?

Ja sinisten somalien silmämunat
välähtelevät

katulyhdyn alla kun ne veitsin selvittää välejään
Puukkobulevardilla:
kymmenen kiloa khatia, ja klaanien asiat
Joku huutaa haistavittuhuoraa,
porttarissa lorisee, puolikuu hukuttautuu lätäkköön
Puukkobulevardilla

Duudilulla, ruuti ja dulla
soi kehtolauluna
Puukkobulevardilla
Tamara tanssii karaokebaarissa,
isäntä maksaa tuplakossuvissyt
Mastercardilla,
ja valomerkki tulee varoittamatta
Puukkobulevardilla

Etsin kadonnutta säettä, tiedän:
se on täällä
kun kaupunki nukkuu kohmeloaan,
ja inisevin kärryin lähtee liikkeelle
lehden jakaja, tuo vihdoinkin sanoman

Switchblade Boulevard

Tamara rises from a BMW
on Switchblade Boulevard
The autumn wind gropes at her mini-skirt
in front of a sleazy bar
The angry maples creak
on Switchblade Boulevard,
and I ask for water but they pour me liquor:
I'm looking for a lost verse,
it's hiding around here somewhere

And in every single dive on Helsinginkatu
the same guy, tattooed blue, whose life would –
fuckin' – make a – fuckin' – great book y'know like
"written by Melleri – based on Haukka"
(wiping the foam from his moustache
on the back of his hand,
on Faith, Hope and Love)
"and we split the take fifty-fifty like fair play like"
Sorry man, I'm looking for a lost verse
on Switchblade Boulevard
Sometimes on the walls of the john in Cella

Tamara dances in a karaoke joint
in her high heels
And Unski sings you've got a friend in me
The night is young and the ex-pro runner
is a young stud again and the woman with a black eye
"Oh gawsh" goes dancing
Your friendship will never die...

And the eyeballs of the blue Somalis
flash

under the streetlamp when they settle their scores with knives
on Switchblade Boulevard:
ten kilos of khat, and the affairs of clans
Someone yells out a ”fuckyoubitch,”
piss gurgles in the gateway, the half-moon drowns itself in a puddle
on Switchblade Boulevard

Biddy bye bye, gunpowder and Thai
is the nightly croon
on Switchblade Boulevard
Tamara dances in a karaoke bar,
her sugar daddy pays for the double vodka tonics
with his Platinum Mastercard,
and last call comes without warning
on Switchblade Boulevard

I’m looking for a lost verse, I know:
it’s here
when the city sleeps off its shakes,
and when with his whining cart the mailman
sets out, delivers the message at last

[From *5. Favorites*]

VIIDEN AISTIN TODISTUS

Että viiden aistin todistus riittää,
kaikki hohtaa valoa
sille joka tietää: puun syyt aina
järkisyitä

Istun intialaisessa ravintolassa,
muistan kuollutta ystävää
kun yksinäistä sitaria komppaa vaan
keittiöstä kantautuva lampaanlihan
vasaroimisen ääni:

hän sotkeutui viittaan ja miekkaan
vaikka hyvä ratkaisu joka tapauksessa on
Kaleva-puku,
2000 vuotta sitten sakramentin
nauttimisesta ristiinnaulittiin
filosofit asuivat tynnyrissä siellä missä
käymisen henki

Istun intialaisessa ravintolassa
curry saa silmäni kyyneliin
olen kuullut juotavan Kristuksen verta
mutta viiden aistin todistus riittää,
puunsyyt järkisyitä, kaikki hohtaa valoa
Yksinäistä sitaria *Kali Kali* komppaa
keittiöstä lampaanlihan vasarointi:
ei tullut poika kotiin Kalkuttasta

Confirmation of the five senses

The confirmation of the five senses
is enough, everything is illuminated
to one who knows: the cards are neatly dealt
on the table

I'm sitting in an Indian restaurant
remembering a dead friend
as a lonely sitar is accompanied
by the sound of lamb's meat being hammered
in the kitchen:

he got tangled up in a cloak and sword
though a Kaleva suit
is always a good bet,

2000 years ago people were crucified
for taking the sacrament
philosophers lived in barrels and the spirit
of fermentation

I'm sitting in an Indian restaurant
the curry makes my eyes water
I'm told some people drink of Christ's blood
but the confirmation of my five senses
is enough, the cards are on the table,
everything is illuminated
A lonely sitar *Kali Kali* is accompanied
by the sound of meat being hammered:
the prodigal son never came home from Calcutta.

ELÄVIEN KIRJOISSA

Moni jää tielle, moni jää tien oheen,
moni koskaan pääse ei edes
lähtemään

On aika tuulettaa:
läpiveto huoneessa saa sarastuksesta
kudotut verhot lepattamaan...
Kolkuttamatta ne tulivat, hyvästeittä
lähtivät, katso Mary,
nouseva aurinko löytää heti sen
mitä ne etsivät, väärästä paikasta,
koko sinkkivalkoisen yön!

Sarastaa ratsian jälkeen,
ja läpiveto nostaa papereita
lattialta, sopimukset
maailman jaosta eivät enää ole voimassa
salaiset lisäpöytäkirjat...
Mary, suotta surullinen
sulka hiuksissasi! sarastaa
ratsian jälkeen,
ja valo tanssii valtoimenaan
myllätyssä huoneessa

Moni jäi ovelle, moni jäi oven väliin,
moni jäi avaimenreiästä katsomaan

Hiljaisuus kirkuu yhä,
sinun linnunsydämentykytys! me olemme
hereille, Mary, elävien kirjoissa!
Miten siivekäs hevonen ravaa eetteripreeriaa!
Tuntemattomat jumalat rakastelevat

vastamuodostuvassa galaksissa
vain meidät siittääkseen!

Sarastaa ratsian jälkeen,
ja läpiveto nostaa papereita
lattialta... Ollaan vaiti,
simpukat, kielellä tunnustelen
helmeä kielesi alla,
ja me murramme auki hiljaisuuden lippaan,
lukon kieli jää soimaan,
valo tanssii valtoimenaan
myllätyssä huoneessa

In the land of the living

Many stay behind
or on the side of the road,
many are those who can never let go

It's high time this room was aired:
the cross-breeze makes the drapes
drawn by daybreak flutter...
Without knocking they came, without a word
they left— look Mary,
like a charm the rising sun discovers
what they were looking for, in all the wrong places,
all the zinc-white night!

Day breaks after the crackdown
and the cross-breeze lifts strewn papers from the floor,
the contracts for dividing up the world
have expired, all their secret protocols...
Mary, a feather in your hair,
do not stand and weep! day breaks
after the crackdown,
and the light dances unchecked
in the ransacked room

Many stopped at the door or were caught in between,
others stooped to look through the keyhole and see

The silence still shrieks,
your bird's heart beats! we are
awake, Mary, in the land of the living!
How a winged horse charges through a prairie of ether!
Gods unknown are making love
in an emerging galaxy,

just to give birth to us!

Day breaks after the crackdown,
and the cross-breeze lifts the papers
from the floor... We stay quiet,
two seashells, I nudge a pearl under your tongue
with my tongue
and we force open the chest of our silence
so that the latch rings, keeps ringing,
the light dances unchecked
in the ransacked room

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