Resonant Listening: Reading Voices and Places in Born-Audio Literary Narratives

Sara Tanderup Linkis
Lund University

"Audio books remind us of the sound of literature" (90), according to Sven Birkets's critical essay on the influence of audiobooks on modes of reading. Audiobooks draw attention to the aural aspects of literature, challenging the dominating association of reading with visuality; that is, reading as a process of silently interpreting visual signs on the printed page. Listening to audiobooks thus paves the way for new forms of literary experience and for a new attention towards the significance of sound in literature. We may say that the audiobook implies a return to, and development of, the oral roots of literary storytelling, as it represents what Walter J. Ong calls secondary orality (Bednar); that is, an orality that is dependent on literate culture: "essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print" (Ong 133).

This discussion becomes highly relevant in the context of the audiobook's current development. Though it is far from a new medium, audiobooks have become widely popular, and are no longer primarily associated with aids for people who have visual impairments or reading disabilities. In the moment of writing, the production and distribution of audiobooks make up the fastest growing area within the international publishing sector.[1] This development may be explained by digitization, which has made audiobooks easier and cheaper to produce, distribute, and access. Digital audiobooks may be consumed on mobile devices, via downloading or streaming, thus making it possible to listen on demand and on the go. Accordingly, digital audiobooks have allowed readers to integrate the consumption of literature into the activities and rhythms of modern everyday life: for instance, while commuting, exercising, or doing housework.

How does this development affect our modes and concepts of reading? How does the audiobook, its mobility and aural effects, influence the aesthetic content and

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL DECEMBER 2020 DÉCEMBRE RCLC
0319–051x/20/47.4/407

experience of literature? This article investigates these questions, addressing one of the central challenges for Comparative Literature research today: following modern media development and specifically the process of digitization, the printed book can no longer be taken for granted as the primary mediator of literature. Literature today is developed and consumed across different media platforms, and therefore, a comparative approach must not only focus on crosscultural comparisons, reading across different languages, but also on crossmedia aspects, investigating how the textual content and concepts of literature, and concepts of reading, are influenced and transformed by different media and formats. Addressing this situation, N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman note:

> As the era of print is passing, it is possible once again to see print in a comparative context with other textual media, including the scroll, the manuscript codex, the early print codex, the variations of book forms produced by changes from letterpress to offset to digital publishing machines, and born-digital forms such as electronic literature and computer games. (vii)

While we may question whether the era of print is passing, Pressman and Hayles rightly claim that print can no longer be taken for granted as literature's primary medium. Consequently, they introduce an approach called comparative textual media, which describes the process of comparing texts presented in different media and formats. However, like most scholars investigating the influences of digitization on literature and reading, they focus on the comparison between printed text and text read on screen, thus remaining within the visual paradigm. By turning towards audiobooks, we can move one step further away from the paradigm of print aesthetics, drawing attention to the effects of aurality not only on the text itself, but also on concepts and modes of reading.

Does listening to audiobooks even qualify as reading? This has been a central question in most existing research on audiobooks—which is, notably, limited—as well as in public debate, in which audiobooks are often associated with a distracted and superficial mode of literary consumption.[2] Critics such as Sven Birkets argue that precisely because they invite multitasking and mobile listening, audiobooks take readers' minds off the text. Listeners do not have to concentrate on the task of interpreting the visual signs of the text; according to Michael Bull, the audiobook "frees the eyes" (*Sound Moves* 199) because listeners do not have to keep their eyes on the book.[3] Thus, listening to audiobooks is often opposed to the presumably concentrated silent reading of printed books and is associated with an "easy" and passive mode of literary consumption (Birkets).[4]

Challenging this dichotomy, this article approaches the audiobook and its influence on literature and modes of reading through the concept of listening, as theorized by Jean-Luc Nancy, and through the concepts of literary resonance and resonant reading, as introduced by Wai Chee Dimock and Lutz Koepnick. Notably, though literary resonance is often evoked in a merely metaphorical sense, to describe the influence

of shifting cultural and historical contexts on the semantic interpretation of literary texts, focusing on audiobooks will allow me to use the concept in a literal sense. Thus, this article investigates how audiobooks may produce resonant reading—or, indeed, listening—by drawing attention to the aural effects of literature, and by shaping and reshaping literary texts through the oral performance.

The latter aspect is illustrated by the emergence of so-called born-audio narratives: texts that are written for the audio format and shaped specifically in order to accommodate an auditory literary experience. This category of texts accordingly makes a good case for studying the influence of the digital audiobook on textual content as well as on modes of reading. The second part of the article focuses on a specific brand of serialized born-audio narratives, the "Originals" produced by the Swedish audiobook subscription service Storytel. It examines how the Storytel Originals series are adjusted for audio consumption, focusing on two central characteristics: their use of elements of sound, especially voices and music; and their emphasis on the description of places and local environments. The article points out how these two characteristics respond to the affordances of the audiobook and how, in particular, the general emphasis on the idea of the local, on places within the narratives as well as places of listening, may be related to the concept of resonant reading. The final section moves towards a more metaphorical approach to literary resonance, focusing on how born-audio texts are adjusted for mobile listening as made possible by the audiobook format, and to shifting cultural and media contexts. This approach becomes all the more relevant since the local content of the Storytel Original stories is, in many cases, changed when the stories are translated, as they often are, since Storytel is a transnational company with departments in several countries. In this way, the case of born-audio texts invites a truly comparative approach, focusing on the translation and transformation of texts across different media, markets, and cultures.

Listening and Literary Resonance

"What is enhanced by the audio rendition of a book?" (79) Lucy Bednar asks. Her answer is, "Undoubtedly, the immediate experience of the text, including the sound of its prose and the reader's interaction with the voice that embodies the text. Audiobooks enhance our experience of the sound of language and literature and move us away from the belief that a text must be exclusively visual" (79). Bednar's question of what is *enhanced* is remarkable in that audiobooks are traditionally approached with an emphasis on what is lost. Audiobooks have been criticized for their implied loss of concentration, of contemplation, in literary consumption as they turn literature into background noise while the listener focuses on other activities. However, with Bednar, I challenge this emphasis on loss, focusing instead on what is gained by turning reading into listening.

The concept of listening may guide us toward this discussion. Focusing on this

concept, Jean-Luc Nancy introduces a distinction between listening and hearing: "If listening is distinguished from hearing […] that necessarily signifies that listening is listening to something other than sense in its signifying sense" (32). According to Nancy, listening, as opposed to hearing, implies an emphasis on the sound itself, the aural aspects, rather than merely focusing on the intention, the content, or the meaning of what is said. From this definition, Nancy associates listening with a dialogical relation between the world and the listener: "To make listening into something other than listening for signification or indices implies an emphasis on the sensory relationship between world and listener, a listening that begins not with the search for meanings but on the basis of the sensory qualities of sounds" (443). Nancy here addresses the idea of listening as such, which may encompass any kind of sound, speech, or music. Specifically in relation to the consumption of audiobooks, the "listening" approach, in Nancy's definition, would mean an emphasis on the aural aspects of the literary texts rather than merely on the textual content; an emphasis, that is, on the sound of the text itself, of the words, but also of the contextual noises; in some cases, sounds from the recording, the narrator's voice and breathing, perhaps even the sound of flipping pages.[5]

Lutz Koepnick has argued for a similar approach, introducing his idea of "close-listening" to audiobooks. Thus, challenging the dominant association of audiobook consumption as distracted and passive, focusing only on the "story," and not paying any attention to language, he notes:

> Far from mindlessly succumbing to the linear drive of a story, audiobook users may derive pleasure in attending to the movement of words and voices, to how reading animates the corpse of the text. In this way, audiobooks shed light on what is performative and nonnarrative about any act of reading, on how reading at its best may remain indifferent to content or meaning, because the act of reading itself is the focus. ("Reading" 236)

Listening to audiobooks, according to Koepnick, draws attention to the very act of reading or listening, not only because of the aural aspects and the oral performance of the text, but also because of the mobility of the audiobook, which allows the user to move around while listening:

> Listening to audiobooks on the move privileges the haptic aspects of reading over what previous centuries saw as reading's spiritual properties. As they commingle the private and public attributes of reading and ask us to shuttle between different diegetic worlds, audiobooks remind us of the extent to which bodies are the primary media of perception and experience, of being in and reading the world. ("Reading" 235)

Koepnick, like Nancy, thus argues for an approach that focuses less on "hearing," in Nancy's definition, or reading in terms of interpreting the semantic content of the text, and more on "listening," on the sensory aspect of literary experience: "To read between an audiobook's lines, to read an audiobook deeply—means to open our minds to the productive interplay of ears, eyes and bodily motions during the act of

attending to the movements of a text" (Koepnick, "Reading" 236).

This approach complicates the dichotomy between concentrated reading of printed books and distracted audiobook listening because it challenges the traditional idea of close reading as a matter of interpreting the deeper semantic meanings of the text. Close listening to audiobooks is, instead, understood as a process of navigating between the listener's body and the surrounding world, and between the text and its social, material, and physical contexts. In this way, Koepnick's approach to audiobooks may be related to a broader tendency to challenge the emphasis on semantic meaning in textual criticism. Most relevant in the context of audiobook consumption, we may evoke the media-oriented approaches to literature as presented by N. Katherine Hayles. As mentioned above, in light of the development of various media, Hayles calls for more analytical attention towards the significance of the media and the materiality of literature, and with it, for an awareness of the sensory and bodily aspects of reading, as shaped by the medium in question.

Nancy and Koepnick both separate the sound from the meaning, privileging the process of listening and the aural aspects of the text over the meaning and textual content. Hayles' approach, on the contrary, focuses on the interrelatedness of both: how the medium and the materiality of the text shape the text and vice versa, thus echoing Marshall McLuhan's statement that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan). In the case of audiobooks, her approach may pave the way for a consideration of how the oral performance and recording of the text may affect its meaning.

Focusing on this idea of a dialogic relationship between sound and meaning leads us to the concept of literary resonance, as discussed by, among others, Wai Chee Dimock. Dimock evokes the concept of resonance in order to emphasize how literary texts are transformed continuously, throughout literary history, by new readers and shifting contexts:

> This primarily aural and primarily interactive concept [of resonance] offers a helpful analogy for the phenomenon of semantic change. Modeled on the traveling frequencies of sound, it suggests a way to think about what […] I call the traveling frequencies of literary texts: frequencies received and amplified across time, moving farther and farther from their points of origin, causing unexpected vibrations in unexpected places. A theory of resonance puts the temporal axis at the center of literary studies. Texts are emerging phenomena, activated and to some extent constituted by the passage of time, by their continual transit through new semantic networks, modifying their tonality as they proceed. (1061)

Resonance is used here as a metaphor for semantic change, as a way of considering how the meanings of texts are affected by the shifting contexts: "For every language resembles an echo chamber, the tones and accents of former users interacting with those of subsequent ones. And so, meanings are produced over and over again, attaching themselves to, overlapping with and sometimes coming into conflict with previous ones" (1062). However, as noted above, focusing on audiobooks allows us to return to the aural origins of the concept of resonance. Thus, audiobooks may be

said to exemplify the "travelling frequencies" of literary texts as the texts are literally transformed, when they are performed and remediated into the audio format. Their transit through new semantic networks includes the oral performance by the narrator, but also the process of mediation, of recording—which in itself may affect the meaning, producing technological "noise"—and of the meeting with the actual listeners, whose experiences are affected not only by the performance and the recording, but also by the whole context of the listening situation. Certainly, the story is recontextualized in the listening situation, as the listeners are able to consume it while moving through the world, watching their surroundings, and listening to the story amidst the noises of traffic or the singing of birds, while walking or running, or amongst the sounds of other people's voices on the train ride.

The aspect of the situated reading experience becomes relevant especially with the digitalization of audiobooks. As Iben Have and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen point out, *mobility*, along with aurality, is one of the central affordances of the digital audiobook. Audiobooks may thus pave the way for reading experiences which are framed by movement and integrated into the activities of everyday life. Focusing on the concepts of listening, as theorized by Nancy, and of resonance paves the way for an emphasis on what these shifting physical and social contexts bring to the reading experience, rather than on what they take away from it, in terms of focused and silent attention. Thus, we may again follow Koepnick, who uses discussion of the presumably distracted consumption of audiobooks to introduce the concept of resonant reading:

> Resonant reading may not operate under the banner of highly attentive, controlled, focused and goal-oriented subjectivity that guides most concepts and pedagogies of reading. […] Resonant reading, instead, takes place at the edges of attention and thereby collapses how we have come to juxtapose, rigidly and normatively, reader and read, focus and distraction, activity and passivity. It hovers at or above the fissure where different worlds, temporalities, states of consciousness and perceptions mesh with or attach to each other. Like the sleeper who in the moment of awakening finds herself in a state of disorientation, yet may also witness different images and frames of reference wondrously mingle with each other, resonant readers never quite know whether they read or are being read all the while experiencing their bodies and perceptions as echo chambers of things that may at first exceed their grasp. ("Figures" 13)

Rather than opposing the idea of the audiobook as promoting distracted reading, Koepnick embraces it, arguing that the distracted approach is what paves the way for resonant reading; for reading not only the text itself but the world through the text, and vice versa. Resonant reading is thus presented as an approach to literature that emphasizes the dialogic relation between the text, the listener, and the world, a "post-representational and highly performative technique of retuning and resonating with what we might simply want to call the world" (Koepnick, "Figures" 11-12).

This concept of resonant reading, or listening, complicates a widespread idea of the culture of mobile listening—to music and to books—as one of isolating oneself from

the world. Michael Bull thus describes what he calls the modern iPod culture as one of privatized consumption in which we use our earphones to block the world out, isolating ourselves within "our pleasurable and privatised sound bubbles" (*Sound Moves* 5). Contrasting with this view, Koepnick, along with Have and Stougaard, emphasize the idea that mobile (audiobook) listening may also be resonant listening, that is, a mode of listening to the world through the text and vice versa.

Koepnick, however, does not provide any actual "resonant readings" of specific audiobooks, focusing instead on discussions of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fantasies of mobile reading, as well as a modern piece of sound installation art. His argument thus remains purely theoretical in relation to audiobooks. The following section explores what the concept of resonant listening may bring to literary analyses in practice by focusing on the genre of born-audio narratives. It investigates the "travelling frequencies" of these stories, as they are shaped by, and for, the audiobook format as well as by shifting contexts of voices, media, and markets.

Born-Audio Literature

Koepnick presents resonant reading as an approach that may, in principle, be applied to any type of text. Indeed, one may listen to any kind of audiobook, any type of text, and focus on the aural aspects of the text, the narrator's performance, noises from the recording, and the listening situation. However, the concept of literary resonance, as presented by Dimock, implies that the shifting contexts affect not just the reading, but the text itself: the text is semantically transformed by its transit through the world. Where Koepnick and Nancy stress the significance of the aural aspects on behalf of textual content, I am interested in the dialogic relation between the two, as implied by the concept of resonance; in other words, I want to study how the digital audio format shapes the texts in question, and how it may accordingly affect the content and concept of literature. This relation between text and context becomes particularly clear when focusing on born-audio narratives.

The born-audio narratives produced by Storytel reflect a broader tendency in contemporary literature: a general movement away from the aesthetic conventions established by the print tradition and towards a more multimodal and multisensory approach to literature.[6] They may thus be considered in contrast to traditional audiobooks, which tend to be rather conservative, focusing on rendering the text as neutrally as possible, using very little dramatization, in order to provide the "original" literary experience.[7] However, as Dimock points out, the concept of literary resonance implies a movement away from this emphasis on textual originality—which also informs many studies of remediation and adaptation—focusing instead on texts as emergent and "fluid" phenomena.[8] Born-audio narratives thus exemplify how literature is affected by the modern media development, as they turn away from the conventions of print, adjusting their narrative content and style to the affordances of

the digital audiobook and to the listening patterns of modern audiobook users. The following discussion examines how these stories make use of the aural dimension of the audiobook. It then explores how they are also adjusted to the mobile format of the digital audiobook; that is, how they accommodate local reading experiences and, accordingly, are affected by shifting cultural contexts and processes of translation.[9]

The Storytel Originals stories generally emphasize the aspect of sound by including sound elements in the recordings; for instance, with theme music at the beginning and end of each episode. Furthermore, they are also often characterized by dramatized readings, drawing attention to the sound of the language, to the voice(s) of the performing narrators, and the voices of the characters, even the author's voice. The narrators are usually professional actors, known from television and film, using their acting skills to perform the text and the different characters, rather than merely read the text aloud.[10] Some Originals are even multi-voice recordings, with several actors "playing" different characters in the story, resulting in a highly dramatic performance.[11] At first glance, the born-audio narratives thus draw attention to the aural aspects of the text. However, rather than emphasizing these aspects on behalf of the meaning or the story, as suggested by Koepnick and Nancy, Storytel's productions do, in fact, use these aural effects—the music and the voices—to support the stories. Thus, the dramatized readings contribute to bringing the characters to life and bringing the story forward.[12]

This emphasis on the story may be considered in relation to the Storytel Originals stories belonging to popular plot-driven genres such as crime fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and romance. They are adjusted for audiobook consumption as they are straightforward stories, easy to follow for the (presumed-to-be) distracted listener. Storytel stresses this aspect on their webpage, which presents the Originals brand, noting that some texts do not function well in the audio format because they are "heavy with metaphors" or "have too many vague characters or a disrupted timeline that stands in the way of the listening experience." Seeking to avoid these pitfalls, the Originals series are characterized by "a more straightforward timeline, where you follow distinct characters with a clear goal in mind, without compromising the quality of the content." Rather than focusing on style and language, they focus on characters and plot.

Why focus on this category of popular and "easy" works when exploring the potential of audiobooks to renew literary experience? Many audiobook scholars work with complex literary works by authors such as Virginia Woolf, Zadie Smith, or Jennifer Egan, as they argue that the audio versions draw attention to the aural dimensions of these works that are already in the printed texts (Björkén-Nyberg; Have and Stougaard Pedersen).[13] However, these studies are based on the idea of placing the work at the centre of the listeners' attention. Though they are certainly noteworthy for what they bring to the discussion of audiobooks, demonstrating the potential of audiobooks to renew or deepen our understanding of the particular works, this study focuses on the Originals series precisely *because* they are produced for the distracted

listener. Because they are adjusted for popular audiobook consumption, promoting an easy reading experience, they make good cases for studying literary resonance: how literary texts are adjusted to specific contexts, or rather, how texts become the "contexts" for other kind of experiences. Thus, my point of departure is a situation in which the text is no longer necessarily in the centre. As noted by Dylan E. Wittkower, "the audiobook *forms* a context for physical and social experience rather than being experienced *within* a physical and social experience" (228). An emphasis on literary resonance focuses on this kind of interaction, not only on the text itself and how the meaning of the text is affected by the medium and the shifting contexts, but also the other way around, how, in the words of Wittkower, "audiobook listening changes the way we perceive our social environment" (229).

Storytel's born-audio serials are interesting in this context, because they are characterized by a strong emphasis on local and social environments. They describe specific places in great detail; for instance, Daniel Åberg's popular post-apocalyptic series *Virus*, which follows a group of survivors after the worldwide outbreak of a deadly virus, takes place in Stockholm. The stories list an overwhelming number of specific sites, streets, cafes, shops, and bridges, thus situating the apocalypse within a familiar setting for Swedish listeners. Similarly, Karin Jansson's feel-good series *Byvalla* depicts life in a Swedish village and its relation to the rest of the world, including big city people from Stockholm and Syrian refugees. How may this emphasis on local environments be considered in relation to the born-audio format, and to the notion that the medium promotes mobile and resonant reading?

Mobile Listening and Local Content

The aspect of resonance becomes relevant when considering that the local content of the Storytel Originals stories and the mobility of the audiobook promote a situated reading experience. The listener may listen to a story that takes place in the streets of Stockholm while moving around on these same streets, creating a situation in which the text affects how the listener perceives his/her local surroundings and vice versa. Obviously, many listeners may not actually be present in Stockholm while consuming the story; yet, listening to the story while moving around still encourages listeners to see the surrounding world through the lenses of the story.

Describing audiobook consumption in terms of mobile listening, Michael Bull notes:

> Listening frees up the eyes to observe and to imagine, thus differing from the traditional reading of a book in which the reader is visually engaged in the text […] The text becomes a continuous flow of sound on to which he adds a level of physicality in the act of imagination. The sound print of the book is imposed on the silence of the world around him. ("Audio-Visual" 199)

Bull generally focuses on the culture of mobile listening as a culture of privatized

consumption, in which the world surrounding the listener becomes the silent context for the individual experience of the text or music. However, drawing on the concept of resonant reading, the audiobook may also be considered as the context within which the listener experiences the surrounding social world. Accordingly, describing the phenomenology of audiobooks, Dylan E. Wittkower notes how audiobook users participate in different types of imagined and real communities with and through the literary work:

> And so here we see three kinds of community within the seemingly solitary and solitude-seeking act of listening to an audiobook in public: a real but non-local community which is formed around the aesthetic work; a local but imaginary community within the listener's privately contextualized experience of others; and a real and local but unexperienced community of audially unavailable, mere presence-alongside-others. (230)

The first "non-local, but real community" is shaped around the literary work and consists of the user's relations to other listeners, as, for instance, represented in online audiobook listener fora in which listeners discuss audiobooks, including Storytel Originals, with other listeners and perhaps even with the authors, representatives from the publishers, or the performing narrators. The second "local but imaginary" community refers to the listener's "privately contextualized" experience of other people in the local surroundings; many audiobook listeners report that they tend to imagine other people in their immediate surroundings, such as at the local café, on the streets, or in the train, as characters in the story (Bull, *Sound Moves*). This arguably results in a fictionalization of the immediate surroundings. The third category, the "local, and real, but 'unexperienced' community" consists of others who are in the near presence of the listener but without the private contextualization; the people who are close, but with whom the listener does not interact.

The second type of "local, but imaginary" community particularly relates to the idea of resonant reading, as it suggests how audiobooks shape the experience of the local surroundings. The emphasis on local places in the Originals series can be considered in this context. By locating the fictional stories within familiar surroundings, the series produces a situated reading experience. For instance, in the case of Åberg's *Virus*, it becomes possible to listen to a story that takes place in Stockholm, naming several well-known streets and other sites, while moving around in Stockholm, as demonstrated in the passages quoted here:

> Odenplan. Hon minns att hon sprang ner i tunnelbanan vid Odenplan, tog trappan ner med dubbla steg där de bygger Citybanan, Gustaf Vasa Kyrktorn försvann ur sikte, ner till spärrarna, rotade i handväsken och… (7, 1.1.)[14]

> Bussen kör västerut längs Odengatan. Utomhuscaféet i Vasaparken är morgontomt, staplade stolar, fastlåsta med en lång kedja, en hopkurad hemlös under ett bord. Hon kliver av vid parkens slut, fortsätter bortåt, ned mot underjorden vid Sankt Eriksplans tunnelbanestation, ingen avspärring här, entligen är hon på väg hemåt. (7, 1.1.)[15]

By mentioning the subways at Odenplan and Sankt Eriksplan, the café in the Vasa

park, and the Gustaf Vasa church and many other specific places in Stockholm, the story produces a reading experience that most likely resonates with the general Swedish listener's familiarity with Stockholm.[16] It is not the detailed descriptions, but merely the setting, that serves to produce recognizability, allowing listeners to project the story into the familiar setting, imagining the Stockholm of the apocalypse.[17]

The dialogic relation between the imagined and the real Stockholm is visualized in the trailer made for the series in 2016. The trailer emphasizes the setting, as it begins with a deep male voice, pronouncing the word "Stockholm." We see images of the busy big city, people sitting in cafés, traffic, and streets filled with people, while the voice continues in Swedish: "1.5 million different lives which are lived, every minute, every hour, every day—until the day when everything ends…" Suddenly, all the people are gone, and we see an empty ghost city, empty streets, shops, and cafés, followed by the sound of heavy breathing. Thus, by effectively and uncannily defamiliarizing the familiar setting, the trailer turns local Stockholm into an imaginative (non-)community. The effect is, of course, most significant if the listener walks around in Stockholm. However, even when listening to the story in another place, the detailed local descriptions of a recognizable place (for most Swedes) may promote a situated reading experience, an awareness of being in, and listening to, and through, the world, the form of experience that, according to Koepnick, is already stressed by the medium of the audiobook per se.

The significance of local settings is emphasized by the transformation of settings and other cultural markers when the Originals series are translated. Storytel is an important transnational actor on the audiobook market, with departments in several countries. Although most of these countries—including Denmark, the Netherlands, India, and Spain—produce their own content, many Originals stories are also translated between different countries; for instance, several Swedish Originals series have been translated into Danish and vice versa. Focusing on the idea of literary resonance in the context of comparative literature studies, this process of translation becomes interesting, especially since it is not merely linguistic translations, but a whole new performance, a new narrator, and a new local setting, that are adjusted to the new market. For instance, the Swedish village of Byvalla, outside of Stockholm, the setting of Jansson's *Byvalla*, is translated into the Danish provincial town of *Bykøbing*, which is located just outside the city of Aarhus. The characters are renamed, so that typical Swedish names are replaced with Danish names; for example, "Mikke" becomes "Mikael," and "Fanny" and "Henny" become "Fie" and "Mie." The strategy is clearly targeted towards establishing a sense of familiarity and local recognizability. This is especially relevant in the case of *Byvalla*, because the story is, in essence, about the small village, in which everything is, indeed, local and everyone knows everything about everybody, and about its confrontation with the world outside, such as a television team from Stockholm in Season One and arriving Syrian refugees in Season Two.

In this way, evoking Dimock's idea of literary resonance, the semantic content

of the texts is literally transformed by the shifting cultural contexts. The different performances of the Danish and Swedish versions emphasize this process of transformation: the narrator of the Swedish version of *Byvalla*, Cecilia Forss, focuses on dramatizing the story, performing in different voices for each character and paraphrasing local Swedish dialects, most notably when performing the voice of Lennart, an old farmer, who embodies the local village spirit the most of any character. The Danish narrator, Tammi Øst, dramatizes the text less, and her reading thus appears more as a traditional reading than as a dramatic performance. This difference between the Swedish and Danish versions becomes even more (literally) visible in their respective *YouTube* trailers.[18] Both trailers use the soundtrack, which is also included in both versions of the audiobook, at the beginning and end of every episode. We hear the theme music, and then the trailer for the Swedish original, like the *Virus* trailer, presents the village of Byvalla in a very filmic fashion: we see images of life in the countryside in strong colours, fields, small houses, and closeups of crops and crops. A male voiceover introduces the story in Swedish: "In the sleepy little village of Byvalla, everybody knows everybody, or so they think...." The narrator, Forss, is then presented in the trailer as though she were a character in the story. The camera focuses on her, as she begins the narration from the perspective of the female protagonist, Hanna. The story is, in this way, presented very much as a cinematic narrative representing the story with visual imagery.

The Danish trailer, meanwhile, focuses on the aural dimensions: the same soundtrack accompanies black-and-white images of the narrator, who arrives at work at Storytel. She brews a cup of coffee and prepares for the reading. She is not presented as a character in the story, but first and foremost as a reader. We see closeups of her as she begins to read, her mouth and her hands gesturing while reading. There is no voiceover introducing the story, only her voice. Thus, the trailer focuses less on introducing the story and more on the reading situation, establishing the intimacy of reading and listening. The black-and-white aesthetics and closeups of the recording devices emphasize the idea that we are watching the reading itself, the performance, rather than a visualization of the story.

The differences between the Swedish and the Danish trailers demonstrate how paratexts are transformed, just like the texts themselves, in the process of translation. They furthermore visualize the difference between the predominantly visual approach represented in the Swedish trailer, which focuses on presenting the story in images, and the approach in the Danish trailer, which focuses on the oral performance, on the reading, and the listening itself, thus representing the idea of resonant reading.[19]

Conclusion

As discussed above, audiobooks in general and the born-audio Storytel Originals

series in particular challenge established concepts of literature and reading by drawing attention to the aural aspects of literature and by promoting a mobile, situated reading experience. Accordingly, they may function as points of departure for reconsidering the overall approach of comparative literary analysis. Indeed, in order to capture the effects of audiobooks, we need a comparative approach to textual media, as described by Hayles, focusing on the significance of shifting medial and material contexts of literature.

Exploring such an approach, this article evokes the concepts of literary resonance and resonant reading in order to discuss how the audiobook influences the content and consumption of literature. The focus on audiobooks allows a return to the aural origins of the concept of resonance, drawing attention to the literal and metaphorical transformations of literary works through shifting contexts; in this case, the oral performances and the mobile listening situation. This study follows a recent tendency in cultural studies to move away from merely focusing on semantics, to investigate the material or sensorial aspects of texts, as represented, for instance, by the theories of Nancy, Koepnick, and Hayles. However, where Nancy and Koepnick emphasize the aural dimension on behalf of the semantic content, this project stresses the dialogic relation between the two: how the oral performance and the audio format influences the meaning of the literary text, and vice versa. This aspect is exemplified by the case of the Storytel Originals, which are specifically shaped for the auditory reading experience. The Originals shape, and reshape, the text according to local, cultural, and medial contexts; in other words, they point towards a situation in which the texts themselves become the contexts for everyday activities and for the experiences of specific places and social environments. Thus, they illustrate the concept of resonant reading by producing a situated and local reading experience, a mode of experiencing the world through the text.

This perspective may again pave the way for new approaches to comparative literary analysis; namely, for the comparison of medial, material, and social contexts of literature as well as of the texts themselves. This article demonstrates such an approach by comparing the Danish and Swedish versions of the stories and their paratextual trailers. This approach suggests how the traditional focus area of Comparative Literature, the comparison of languages and the study of literature in translation, is affected by media development, suggesting a situation in which we compare not only languages, but also voices, and in which we focus not just on linguistic translations but on cultural transformations of texts across media.[20] Further analyses may be done within this field, exploring how audiobooks and born-audio literature may promote resonant reading, especially since born-audio fiction is still an emerging genre. At the time of this writing, Storytel is still in the process of developing the concept, and other producers approach the genre differently. For instance, the American subscription service *Audible* focuses on the high-quality production of multivoice recordings of literary texts, such as classic novels and plays. Thus, future research may focus on the developing genre: how the content and the format are gradually developed to fit

the equally developing technological affordances of the audiobook, and our changing modes of reading and listening. Will we, for instance, see more texts that include different types of music and other sound elements? How will new technologies affect the format, style, and language of these texts, and how will this affect the way we use the texts? Do such texts even still qualify as literature? These questions reflect some of the challenges of literary studies in the age of audiobooks and born-audio literature. Following the concept of resonance, future studies in Comparative Literature should investigate the ongoing transformations of the content and usage of literature, as literature is shaped by shifting contexts, new media, languages, and readers.

Notes

1. The current growth of the audiobook market is reflected in the report "Audiobook: Global Market Outlook (2019-2027)," which states that the global audiobooks market accounted for $2.67 billion USD in 2019 and is expected to reach $13.45 billion USD by 2027. This prediction is based on the observation of an increasing number of regular audiobook listeners: in a 2018 survey, 18 percent of American adults said they had listened to an audiobook in the past twelve months, an increase of 4% since 2016, and this development has reportedly continued in 2019 and 2020 (Stewart et al.).

2. For discussions of audiobook listening in terms of reading, see Birkerts; Have and Stougaard Pedersen.

3. Birkerts presented this critique in the 1990s, but it has since been repeated widely, both in the public debate on audioboks (see Pennlert) and in the publishing business, in which audiobooks are associated with popular content and with texts that should be easy to follow for a distracted listener (see Åberg).

4. This dichotomy between concentrated and distracted/passive reading, is also evoked in comparisons of reading print books with reading texts on screen (see e.g. Baron and Hayles), since the screen also seems to encourage multitasking. Furthermore, as the anonymous peer reviewer of this article has pointed out, the presumption of distraction is also common to early assumptions about television, and similar arguments may be made in relation to podcasts and music, for instance. However, the concept, and indeed, the ideal of concentrated, "absorbed" consumption, seems more established within a literary context, resulting in a stronger criticism, within this context, of the audiobook as promoting distracted reading. For more on the discussion of concentrated and distracted reading in relation to audiobooks, see Linkis, "Reading Spaces."

5. Many audiobooks today are recorded in professional studios that make it possible to remove all such contextual sounds. However, other audiobook productions also experiment with different sound effects. See Linkis, "Reading Spaces," for a discussion of a specific Original series, Cecilia Garme´s *Dagbok från Coronabubblan*, which includes such contextual sounds.

6. For example, the serial organization of Storytel's Originals, in "seasons" and "episodes," reflects a clear inspiration from television series and podcasts; for an analysis of Storytel Originals as a remediation of television series, see Linkis, "Literary Remediations." See also Linkis and Pennlert for a discussion of Storytel's use of the serial format.

7. A similar tendency may be observed in ebooks and ebook reading devices that imitate the aesthetics of print, such as the page design, the sound of flipping pages, and the physical dimensions of printed books.

8. The notion of literary resonance may thus be associated with John Bryant's concept of fluid text.

9. Born-audio serials may be compared to other, more experimental texts that use locative techniques in

order to connect the story to the listener's immediate surroundings; see, for instance, the categories of "mobile narratives" and "ambient literature" discussed by Farman and Spencer, respectively.

10. The narrator's status as an actor, or as the author of the text, can feed into the experience of the text in a variety of ways and be used to market the text. For instance, several of Storytel's crime fiction series are performed by Danish actors who are well known from crime television series, whereas autobiographies are often performed/read by their authors.

11. In this way, the Originals series are close to the more established genre of audio drama, just as they may be compared to the less scripted genre of fiction podcasts. The idea of using the audiobook to dramatize the text may also be seen in audio versions of classic literary plays, such as the plays of Shakespeare, which are often produced in high-quality multiple-voice recordings with professional actors, resulting in a remediation of the traditional genre of the play.

12. One example of an Original series that uses multivoice narration in this way is Ida-Marie Rendtorff's 2019 science fiction series *Pionér*. It is performed by two different actresses, telling the story from the perspectives of two young girls, with the result that the experience of listening to the audiobook echoes the situation described in the story, in which new technologies allow people, including one of the girls, to follow the experiences of the other girl, who participates in an advanced reality program: wearing a special-designed mask, users are able to hear her thoughts "read out loud in a manner that is similar to listening to an audiobook" (Rendtorff n.p.).

13. Thus, audiobooks may draw attention to the orality and the emphasis on the sound of language in modernist works by authors such as Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, and may be used to emphasize the use of dialect and the connection between language and ethnicity in works such as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*.

14. Odenplan. She remembers that she ran down to the subway at Odenplan, took the stairs down in double steps where they are building the City Line, the tower of the Gustaf Vasa church disappeared out of sight, down to the tracks, she went through her handbag and…. (My translation.)

15. The bus drives westward along the Odengatan. The outdoor café in the Vasa park is empty in the morning, the chairs stapled and locked with a long chain, a homeless man bundled together under a table. She gets off at the end of the park and continues down towards the subway at Sankt Eriksplan, no barriers here, finally she is on her way home. (My translation.)

16. The places described in the quotations are particularly recognizable for commuters, many of whom use the Stockholm subway described in the text.

17 The serial format of the Originals series further adds to the experience of literary resonance, to produce a dialogic relation between the imaginary world and the real world, because the serial publication form allows producers to include references to current events. For instance, the *Virus* series includes the mentioning of a German Wings airplane crash in 2015, while Season Two of *Byvalla* includes references to the refugee crisis in Europe in 2016.

18. The Swedish trailer is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjYt52IV-w4 (accessed 15 Jan. 2021), and the Danish trailer is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgwkeHicywk (accessed 15 Jan. 2021).

19. For further analysis of the trailers, but not in the context of literary resonance, see Linkis, "Läsning i rörelse."

20. Within translation studies, we also see a growing recognition of the medial aspect of translation; see Bosseaux, who focuses on vocal dubbing for visual media.

Works Cited

Åberg, Daniel. "At skrive til øret." *Passage*, vol. 35, no. 83, 2020, pp. 71-84.

Baron, Naomi S. *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World*. Oxford UP, 2015.

Bednar, Lucy. "Audiobooks and the Reassertion of Orality: Walter J. Ong and Others Revisited." *CEA Critic*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2010, pp. 74-85.

Birkerts, Sven. *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. Fawcett Columbine, 1994.

Björkén-Nyberg, Cecilia. "Når stemmer brydes på nye måder." *Passage*, vol. 35, no. 83, pp. 29-43.

Bosseaux, Charlotte. *Dubbing, Film, and Performance: Uncanny Encounters*. Peter Lang, 2015.

Bryant, John. *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*. U of Michigan P, 2002.

Bull, Michael. "The Audio-Visual iPod." *The Sound Studies Reader*, edited by Jonathan Sterne, Routledge, 2012, pp. 197-209.

---. *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*. Routledge, 2007.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "A Theory of Resonance." *PMLA*, vol. 112, no. 5, 1997, pp. 1060-71.

Farman, Jason. *The Mobile Story: Narrative Practices with Locative Techniques*. Routledge, 2013.

Have, Iben, and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen. *Digital Audiobooks: New Media, Users, and Experiences*. Routledge, 2016.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. U of Chicago P, 2012.

Koepnick, Lutz. "Figures of Resonance." *SoundEffects*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2019, pp. 5-19.

---. "Reading on the Move." *PMLA*, vol. 128, no. 1, 2013, pp. 232-37.

Linkis, Sara Tanderup. "Läsning i rörelse." *Från Stringberg till Storytel*, edited by Julia Pennlert and Lars Ilshammar, Daidalos, 2021, forthcoming.

---. "Literary Remediations of Contemporary Television Series: From *The Familiar* to *Storytel Originals*." *Television Series as Literature*, edited by Reto Winckler and Victor Martin Huertas, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, forthcoming.

---. "Reading Spaces: Original Audiobooks and Mobile Listening." *SoundEffects*, vol 10. no. 1, 2021, pp. 42-55.

Linkis, Sara Tanderup, and Julia Pennlert. "Episodic Listening: Analyzing the Content and Usage of Born-Audio Serial Narratives." *Journal of Electronic*

Publishing, vol. 23, no. 1, 2020, quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jep/3336451.0023.102?view=text;rgn=main.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. MIT P, 1994.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell, Fordham UP, 2007.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy*. Methuen, 2002.

Pennlert, Julia. "Röster om den kommercielle ljudboken i Sverige." *Digitalt*, edited by Anna Nordenstam and Suzanne Parmenius-Swärd, Natur & Kultur, 2019, pp. 31-44.

Rendtorff, Ida-Marie. *Pionér*. Storytel Originals, 2019.

Rubery, Matthew, editor. *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Culture*. Routledge, 2012.

Spencer, Amy. "Literary Thresholds: Exploring the Edges of Ambient Literature." *MatLit: Materialities of Literature*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 149-58.

Stewart, Duncan, Mark Casey, and Craig Wigginton. "The Ears Have It: The Rise of Audiobooks and Podcasting." *Deloitte*, 9 Dec. 2019, www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/technology-media-and-telecom-predictions/2020/rise-of-audiobooks-podcast-industry.html

Storytel Originals Writing Guidelines. support.storytel.in/hc/en-us/articles/115001670910-What-is-Storytel-Original

Wittkower, Dylan E. "A Provisional Phenomenology of the Audiobook." *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies*, edited by Matthew Rubery, Routledge, 2012, pp. 216-31.