

## *Some Considerations on the (Un)translatability of (Dante Alighieri's and Juhan Liiv's) Poetry*<sup>1</sup>

JÜRI TALVET

**Abstract.** First, I would like to comment on the motto of the EACL 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference (Tartu, September, 2015) derived from Juhan Liiv's Poem "A Coffin", in which the poet-philosopher suspects that translation as such, instead of enriching a national culture, would curb and suppress it, if not destroying national creative energy and talent. After that I proceed to enlighten some passages of poetry translating practice from the history of Estonian literature and world literature (medieval epics, etc., and especially Dante Alighieri's *Commedia*). My main purpose is to undermine and specify both claims, that is, of poetry's translatability, as well as of its untranslatability, and to accentuate the relative yet undeniable value of poetry translation as such. In the final part of my discussion, I will concentrate on the recent attempts, in which I have myself been involved, of conveying some inkling of Juhan Liiv's poetry to the readers in English, Spanish and Italian.

**Keywords:** poetry translation; history; (implicit) theory; practice; translations of Dante Alighieri's and Juhan Liiv's poetry

### The "tragic sense of life" in minority nations and cultures

According to the Spanish philosopher and writer Miguel de Unamuno, the main aim of life of both individuals and peoples (nations) is to survive either biologically or spiritually. His ideas about existential survival are mainly contained in his essay book *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913; English trans. *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples*, 1926). Unamuno does not speak really much about collective survival, but with some other thinkers at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (like his friend the writer Angel Ganivet who committed a suicide, drowning in the river Daugava, in our neighboring Latvian capital city, Riga) he was seriously worried about the growing might of the materialistic spirit, represented above all by the Anglo-American race.

---

<sup>1</sup> This study was supported by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (IUT20-1), and by the (European Union) European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies).

Unamuno and Ganivet dreamed of a unity of Iberian and Ibero-American people, capable of opposing, by means of a spiritually orientated existence, British and Anglo-American materialism.

Smaller nations have been in the past (and are in the present) incessantly facing the threat of being biologically swallowed up and assimilated by the “leading” nations, hence their “tragic sense of life” is a constant feature. In the present day of their existence obviously none of the smaller nations dare seriously dream of outliving the worldwide tendencies of commercial and economic globalization. However, the idea of spiritual resistance has not at all disappeared but on the contrary, a great number of smaller nationalities reveal in today’s world a new self-awareness of their individual dignity, especially in its cultural-spiritual sense.

The message of Johann Gottfried Herder about the potentiality of spiritual greatness of small peoples and nations, once they retain their heritage of folk songs and keep alive their poetic tradition, has not become obsolete or old-fashioned at all. Original poetry created either orally or in the written form in an autochthonous language (or in its defence) is still being seen as one of the fundamental guarantees of the spiritual survival of minority nations. The poetic-linguistic resistance of minorities is at the same time in full harmony with the maintenance of the world’s human and cultural ecology.

As an example of this conjecture, I have recently been engaged in translating into Estonian (via English) the poetry of Jidi Majia (born in 1961). He does not excel among the unnumbered contemporary poets of China because he writes in Chinese, mostly in free unrhymed verse, close to the Western patterns of Walt Whitman and Neruda, but because of his unrelenting dedication of the bulk of his poetic work to one of China’s minority nationalities, the Yi or, more exactly, the N(u)osu people, their history, traditions, life philosophy and spiritual world.

In this sense Jidi Majia, an outstanding poet of the Yi nationality, defends the bio-spiritual survival of his people, just as the path-finders of our minority nationality, the poets K. J. Peterson, F. R. Kreutzwald, L. Koidula and others did in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century “awakening era” of Estonia. (About Jidi Majia in English, see the introductory essay by the Kenyan writer Philo Ikonya (pp. xii–xxxiii) and the afterword by the translator, American poet Denis Mair (pp. 276–283), in Jidi Majia 2014.)

Small(er) nations feel a pressing need to communicate their aspirations and their cultural achievements to the wider world. It is by no means simple in any of the fields of cultural creation, but it is especially arduous in the case of literature and poetry. The task of communicating with the world would be impossible merely through the efforts of national or even international literary scholars. The world not only needs to “know” what is being created in the

autochthonous languages, but it also has to “feel” it. Here literary translation enters as a basic and ineludible factor. The knowledge of major international languages is widespread, but smaller literary cultures can poetically communicate between themselves and with bigger cultures first and foremost – and almost exclusively – by means of literary translation.

Estonian culture can serve as a paradigm of this process. Since the “national awakening” in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, literary translation has flourished in Estonia. There is hardly any Western writer belonging to the canon of world literature whose work today has not at all been represented in the Estonian language. Our language itself has significantly developed in the course of the intertwining and merging of original autochthonous literary creation with literary translation.

### Juhan Liiv’s “Enigmatic” Poem About Translation

The poem “Puusärk” (‘A Coffin’) by Juhan Liiv (1864–1913) was published for the first time fourteen years after the poet’s death, in 1927, in the monograph on Liiv’s life and work written by the writer Friedebert Tuglas:

Puusärki ühte ma tean,  
mis pahem kõikidest.  
mis noore elu murrab,  
murrab jõu südamest.

I know a coffin  
of all the most sinister,  
that wastes young life,  
wastes the heart’s vigor.

See on ümberpanemine –  
töö armetum kõikidest,  
ta kurja aja töö on,  
töö õelusest enesest.

It is translation –  
of jobs the most miserable,  
a job for hard times,  
a job most cruel.

Ta noore luule murrab,  
ja noore kujutusjõu  
ja noore heleda kiire  
ja noore ülema nõu.

It wastes young poetry,  
and young imagination,  
and young brilliance,  
and young ambition.

Ta noori hingesid palju  
on ära hõiganud,  
ta purustand noore kalju  
ja tiivad lõiganud.

Many are the young souls  
it has tripped,  
young rocks it has crushed,  
wings it has clipped.

(Trans. by J. Talvet and H. L. Hix, first published here)

When I started to deal in depth with Juhan Liiv's poetry, my first impression was that Liiv had in mind the early Estonian poetry translations from Western languages, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, because the Estonian language itself was in its very initial stages of written expression and translations were few, early poetry renderings for the most part sound clumsily forced to the modern ear. However, there were some happy exceptions, like the translation by Jaan Bergmann, Estonian poet and clergyman (1856–1916), of the ancient Greek comic epic in hexameters *Batrachomyomachia* and of Friedrich Schiller's "Das Lied von der Glocke" ("Kellalaul"), both in 1879. In 1993 I included the latter in an extensive anthology of world literature for high schools and universities, *Maailmakirjanduse lugemik* (1993: 332–341). These translations are good, hardly to be "surpassed" by modern renderings, despite the changes that have meanwhile taken place in the written language. Bergmann followed closely the metrical rhythm of Schiller's original poem, but throughout the long poem he applied end-rhymes liberally, not at all sticking to the "full" rhymes of the German original poem but instead forming lax rhymes by means of vowels' coincidence in auxiliary or secondary stress of words.

A similar "compensation mechanism" was widely used by Liiv in his poetry. Bergmann, and Liiv after him, understood well a simple truth: a poetry translator cannot struggle against his/ her mother language by violating and forcing it into artificially coined forms or doing something that would be entirely against its nature. The possibilities the Estonian language offers for full end-rhymes are meager, thus other means beyond full end-rhymes must be sought to achieve sonority.

Liiv himself attempted to adapt into Estonian some of Goethe's and Schiller's poems, mostly written in classical meters without end-rhymes. Yet as far as can be seen from his manuscripts, he never tried to apply end-rhymes in his adapted or translated poems. His rebellion against full end-rhymes was conscious and persistent. As he wrote in one of his slightly end-rhymed pieces of the philosophic-aphoristic cycle "Killud" ('Splinters'):

Kes laulab kõlavais sonettides,  
raudriideis lõbutseb see lilledes.

One who sings in sonorous sonnets,  
wears armor to wander through flowers.

(trans. J. Talvet and H. L. Hix; Liiv 2013b: 102–103)

Thus Liiv felt skeptical about poetry applying full end rhymes, let alone translated poetry, in the Estonian language. He could well have compared translated full-rhyme poems as born to death in their “coffins”.

However, as I advanced in my research of Liiv poetic legacy, I came to intuit that Liiv’s idea of comparing translation with a coffin could have to do with his broader rebellion against imitative aesthetic patterns in poetry and literature, in the wider sense, and more to do with his pronounced opposition to acculturation, that is, his fears regarding the tendency of small and minority cultures to become absorbed by bigger “leading” cultures, and especially, by the mass culture and literature produced above all by commercial-economical and political superpowers.

Western mass literature (mainly) of Anglo-American origin has been lavishly pouring into Estonia after the country’s restored political independence (1991). A great many of our translators are actively engaged in transmitting it into our culture. Although some part of such entertainment literature may be skillfully written, its predominant features are still those found in all mass literature. It has next to nothing to do with aesthetical-philosophical aspirations and novelty, a characteristic of most literature admitted into the canon of world literature. Instead, it tends to favor the trend of acculturation and spiritual-cultural decay. Especially vulnerable and menaced are small societies and linguistic communities, like Estonia. Even if the translators for the most part do well their job – in the literal sense of transmitting faithfully the meaning and senses of the original work –, I am afraid the grim prophecy of Liiv could well be applicable to our society at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead of enriching us culturally and spiritually, translation may indeed turn into a sad job of adapting local-autochthonous mentality to the banal stereotypes of imported mass culture, thus curbing and suffocating the original creativity of a nation.

Luckily and symptomatically, poetry and poetry translation can hardly be blamed for being part of acculturation, in its negative sense. On the contrary, they can be increasingly seen as a core element of a culture’s self-defence against commercial dictatorship.

## Theory and Practice

For me, theory of literary creation has significance above all as a mental activity that helps to understand processes which have taken (and are taking) place in literature. Translation theory is not an exception. I believe it should first and foremost contribute to the understanding of the already existing translation experience in the past and the present, and not be so much worried about

establishing rules and prescriptions for an ideal translation or speculate about how translation should ideally be configured.

I have my doubts concerning the fruitfulness and sense of a theory for its own sake, especially if it is completely detached from the existing translation experience. As far as I have been able to observe – without going into details –, the excess of self-centeredness in theory sooner or later leads theoreticians to assume extreme positions, hardly applicable in practice. As regards translation of literary works, one cannot ignore the prevailing average reception capacity of the reading public. Extreme philosophies in translation, either advocating a rigid correspondence of word and syntax patterns in an original work and translated text or, on the contrary, free adaptation and personal rewriting of the original text, are generally rejected by the reading public.

As for poetry translation, my conclusion at the present stage of my experience is that a poetry translator should have full freedom to decide about the formal pattern he or she applies in translation. However, these liberties obviously still have their restrictions, depending on the potential reading public. Thus in our days everybody is free to circulate over the Internet all kinds of experimental translations, following whatever theory they desire. Yet such translations generally do not enter a wider circulation in a society or community. For example, it would be wonderful to have in Estonian two or more parallel translations of Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*, so that readers could choose by themselves which translation is to their liking. Yet the reality is that a hundred years after the budding attempts to translate some cantos of Dante's chef-d'oeuvre into Estonian, the task has not yet been completed... "Inferno" and "Purgatorio" in their full form first appeared in the late Harald Rajamets's translation respectively in 2011 and 2016 (Dante Alighieri 2011, 2016), while until today we are still awaiting the "Paradiso" in the Estonian language.

A hundred years of translating *Divina Commedia* has proved to be a highly enlightening chapter of our national translation philosophy. In my opinion, all major translators have their personal theory or philosophy of translation, regardless of whether they make it explicit by some treatise or essay or have it implicitly incorporated in their translated texts. Probably too much attention of contemporary translation theory has been centered on explicit philosophies. It is high time to explicate and discuss to a greater extent than has been done the theory and its modifications hidden and ciphered in the translated texts themselves.

Samples with fragments of different Estonian translations of Dante's *Commedia* can be found in a major anthology of Medieval and Early Renaissance literature (*Keskaja ja vararenessansi kirjanduse antoloogia* 1962). The earliest of them is the introductory canto published initially in the magazine "Noor-Eesti"

(3, 1910) by Villem Grünthal-Ridala (1885–1942), a pioneer enthusiast in translating Italian literature into Estonian.

As in the case of most of our subsequent poetry translators, Grünthal-Ridala sought to re-create in Estonian the same end-rhyme patterns used in the Italian original poetic text. As is well known, the pattern of the *Divina Commedia* is *terza rima*, Dante's famous invention, one of the most complicated forms of Western poetics. Grünthal-Ridala, a young translator working in a young culture of a minority nation, with its still under-developed language resources, inevitably ran into trouble. While in Italian and Romance languages, in general, full end-rhymes are relatively easily coined by applying different verbal forms, in Estonian – a Finno-Ugric language almost devoid of prepositions, forming its cases and declinations mostly by means of two-syllable word-endings – finding good full-rhymes is an arduous task. Even if such rare triple rhymes can be found, they inevitably tend to repeat and thus lose their novelty, one of the main charms of Dante's versification. Besides, applying four-syllable, often artificially coined verbal forms at the end of a verse line, as in Grünthal-Ridala's translation, reduces the 11-syllable verse line in such an artificial way that it compels the translator to fill the rest of it with short words. The natural balance of the words' semantic content becomes thus crudely violated, the result being far from enjoyable reading. A modern reader would have difficulty in understanding long verbal forms applied by the translator, such as *rängastades, hädatlevat, haletisest, päästavuses, isaldada, paaritsevad, säälistele, palvelema*, etc.

Canto III in the above-mentioned *Keskaja ja vararenessansi kirjanduse antoloogia* was translated by Johannes Semper (1892–1970), a poet, prose writer and one of the most outstanding literary translators Estonia has had, either of poetry or prose fiction. It is often thought that poetry should be translated above all by poets, that is, not simply by people who know well the language of the original poetic work. At the same time (thus, Villem Grünthal-Ridala was also well known as a poet) one has to admit that not all depends on the poet-translator.

Semper's translation was made after the Second World War, when Estonia in scarcely half a century had accumulated considerable experience in translating poetry. The main rule was still to translate poetry in full correspondence with the formal patterns of the original work, but also first discrepancies and deviations from it could be observed. Thus Semper's own translation of extensive parts of the medieval anonymous epic *Chanson de Roland* (in the same anthology, pp. 105–127) did not follow the assonance rhyme scheme of the French original, but instead end-rhymes were dropped in translation. Semper successfully applied Estonian blank verse, making the epic enjoyable reading. (Approximately at the same time, or even earlier, another major poetry

translator, August Sang, applied blank verse instead of complicated rhyme patterns in his translation of Lope de Vega's comedy *El maestro del danzar* (*The Dance Teacher*), staged in 1951 at the State Drama Theatre in Tallinn. (The translation's publication, however, was delayed until 2004, when it finally appeared with some other (until then unpublished) play translations in the book *Hispaania pärand* (Tallinn, ed. by Riina Schutting.)

Semper's rendering of Dante's Canto III is probably very near to what can be achieved in Estonian by applying end rhymes. His language is flexible, moves naturally, while the imagery is rendered in a close correspondence with Dante's original work. However, because of the extremely hard historical and political circumstances in after-war Estonia – and especially because of the immensity of the task – Semper's dedication to *Divina Commedia* was not continued.

The challenge was taken up by Harald Rajamets (1924–2007) whose translations in collaboration with Aleksander Kurtna (1914–1983) of Cantos V, X, XXXII and XXXIII can also be found in *Keskaja ja vararenessansi kirjanduse antoloogia*. Rajamets apparently worked on the base translations prepared by Kurtna, a well-known translator of Italian prose fiction. Rajamets indeed published a book of his original satirical verse, but otherwise he is still above all remembered as a principal translator of Shakespeare's sonnets. He was a great master in rhyme translation, excelling in precision and inventiveness of language usage, as well as in his effort to follow as exactly as possible the original rhyme patterns. After Kurtna's death, Rajamets continued to translate *Divina Commedia* alone, in fact, it became the great work of his life. It is possible that by 1993, when I edited the anthology of world literature for high schools and universities, *Maailmakirjanduse lugemik*, he could have completed his translation in full end-rhymes of "Inferno". He offered for the anthology three cantos (I, III, IX, pp. 144–156), thus having created his own versions of the parts previously translated by Grünthal-Ridala and Johannes Semper.

Yet in the subsequent years a substantial change occurred in the saga of Estonian translation story of *Divina Commedia*. Rajamets, the perfectionist, came to the conclusion that completing the entire translation of Dante's chef-d'oeuvre in rhymes was impossible. His perfectionism did not allow him to pass from the rhymed "Põrgu" to unrhymed blank verse in "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso", therefore he decided to recreate the "Inferno" in blank verse, leaving aside his former full rhyme translation. Rajamets' blank verse "Inferno" was published posthumously. The huge task was left to be completed by some of his followers.

I would call it a substantial shift in the hitherto reigning poetry translation philosophy in Estonia. Rajamets, a long-time firm supporter of the "homopoetic" principle, finally adopted the dramatic decision of translational

“heteropoetics”, or, in other words, a translation philosophy that in English, as regards the translation of Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, was adopted by Henry W. Longfellow nearly 150 years earlier.

### Translating Juhan Liiv’s Poetry

To compare the translation process of Dante’s *Commedia* in Estonian with Juhan Liiv’s poems translated from the Estonian into English is not an arbitrary choice, despite the fact that six centuries separate these two poets. Dante’s main work is saturated with a complicated religious symbolism, while Liiv’s lyrical poetry may appear at first glance elementary and simple, since it relies on a direct expression of thoughts and feelings. Besides, as Liiv spent his last twenty years of life troubled by mental illness, he was unable to concentrate for a longer period of time on writing. His attempts to create longer poems failed, so he was at his best in short lyrical poetry and also in aphoristic-philosophic poetic miniatures, published posthumously under the title of “Killud” (‘Splinters’). He indeed has left us some short philosophically inclined meditation fragments in prose, but these do not amount to any larger systematically organized essay or treatise, comparable, for instance, with Dante Alighieri’s *Convivio*.

Nonetheless, there is a strong similarity between two poets. Without any doubt, both belonged to the minority of Western poet-philosophers, in the sense that their poetic imagery emerges from a coherent mind-ground. In the case of Dante Alighieri (and his follower Francesco Petrarca) it could probably be called a kind of Platonic idealism. In Liiv’s case his philosophic stance may best be described by terms invented long after his death. It could be existentialism, intertwined with holism: a deep conviction of the world’s biological-spiritual unity and the uniqueness of every life on earth, regardless if it be human, flowers or birds.

There is a substantial difference between the work of professional philosophers and poet-thinkers. In poetry, the “contamination” of thought by senses and personal sensibility is normal, while in philosophy, as a professional activity, one of the main endeavors has been, on the contrary, to suppress the senses, in order to clear up ideas and formulate concepts in their “naked purity” and objectivity.

In other words, the presence of philosophy in the major poet-thinkers does not mean rejecting the senses. For the most part, the originality of their philosophic expression derives from the integrity of perception and thought. To translate for instance Liiv’s poetic epigram or “splinter” is relatively easy, because the idea, even if “camouflaged” by a paradox or other contrastive poetical means, clearly dominates the image. The translator optimally has to

try to find some slight end-rhyming sounds, as they have been applied in the original text, and keep the idea as intact as possible.

Yet in the great majority of Liiv's most famous poems there is a perfect harmony and balance between idea and feeling merging in a poetic image. Thus the translator's aim should be to retain and transmit the feeling and the idea united in a poetic image as wholly as possible. Naturally, the slack end-rhymes applied by Liiv are often an important factor in making a poem musical and sonorous, thus supporting the lyrical quality of it. Yet my firm conviction – derived from translating Liiv's poems into English, Spanish and, more recently, Italian – is apparently the same translation philosophy that Henry W. Longfellow used in transmitting Dante Alighieri's poetry into English in blank verse, thus abandoning Dante's perfectly rhymed *terza rima* of the original Italian *Divina Commedia*.

In translating end-rhymed poetry the losses in the target language, compared with the original text, are in any case inevitable. If we sacrifice the philosophic content for the sake of sound harmony supported by end-rhymes, we are likely to recreate a poem that indeed sounds like poetry, but at the same time block the source of the main magic of the original poem – the philosophy embedded in a sensually perceived image. The semantic-philosophic accents can hardly be transmitted if the translator's main care is to find at any cost rhymes for the line-endings. Especially in Estonian, a language devoid of a larger choice of rhyming words – at least for full rhymes – it would be a *tour de force* with extremely doubtful results.

There are by far greater chances to transmit the original sensual-philosophic integrity of the image in translation, if we were at least partially to sacrifice the formal harmony of end-rhymes, looking at the same time for other compensating means of transmitting lyrical tonality: assonances, alliterations, rhythms – and also end-rhymes, whenever they can be found without the special effort of coining them, that is, in a natural unforced way.

Even doing so, I also admit the risk that a poem in translation still remains "alien" to the original poem. It depends very much on individual cases. When choosing Liiv's poems to be translated into English, I consciously left aside one of Liiv's most brilliant poems written in the vein and rhythm of our traditional folk-poetry – a poem without a title, starting with the line "Mis ju vahib vainu pääalta..." (It was published for the first time only in 1953). The poem reflects the arrival of spring-time in a powerful semi-allegoric imagery. It abounds in alliterations, assonances, rhythmic alterations and other characteristics of our folk-poetry. It seemed to me impossible to transmit it in English. However, now I have some doubts: maybe I still could have tried it with Harvey L. Hix, my faithful collaborator in the efforts to convey Estonian poetry to readers in English?

To conclude, let me add a few general remarks on translating Liiv into other languages. As Liiv was until 1904/1905 known in Estonia above all as a short story writer, it was natural that the first translations ever made of his work were those of his short narrative pieces. Two stories, “Igapäevane lugu” (‘An Everyday Story’) and “Kuulus mees” (‘A Famous Man’) appeared in 1893 – the year Liiv fell mentally ill – in German and Latvian translations respectively in newspapers in Tartu and Riga. Most significant was the early translation into Russian of Liiv’s longer prose narrative masterpiece, *Vari* (‘The Shadow’; published in Estonian in 1894). The translation appeared in 1901 in *Severozapadnaya nedelia*, a weekly Russian newspaper in Riga. It is very likely that these early translations provided a strong moral support to the writer who in the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century disappeared from the public view, to the point that people thought he had died. (As for *Vari*, a new translation in Russian appeared in 1954, reprinted in 1976; the third ever translation of that short novel was made and published privately in Dutch by Renée van Beuningen – *Der Schaduw*, Groningen, 2013.)

Liiv’s earliest poem adapted to a foreign language appeared in 1894 in Finnish, in a Finnish newspaper. The most remarkable translation of Liiv’s poetry in his lifetime was the inclusion of seven of his poems (“Meel paremat ei kannata”, “Laul sellest kaduvast”, “Nagu ilusamgi hele hääl”, “Oh, mu armas emakene!”, “Oh sõbrad, ei lase ma öelda”, “Külm” and “Noor-Eestile”) in a book entitled *Merentakaisia lauluja* (Helsinki, 1911). They were selected and translated by the renowned Finnish writer Aino Kallas, the wife of the Estonian folklorist Oskar Kallas. Five poems by Liiv appeared the same year in a selection *Estnische Klänge* in Dorpat (Tartu), translated into German by Axel Kallas, poet and pastor, the nephew of Oskar Kallas.

In more recent years, after Liiv’s death, quite a number of his poems in about twenty languages have been sporadically published in newspapers and magazines in many countries. Among the most translated poems, published in nearly a dozen of languages, are “Ta lendab mesipuu poole”, “Helin”, “Must lagi” and “Sügise” (“Nömm”).

In English, ten poems were first translated by E. Howard Harris (in *Estonian Poetry. 1*. London, 1950), while eight poems appeared in W. K. Matthew’s translation in an *Anthology of Modern Estonian Poetry* (Gainesville, USA), in 1953.

There were only three book-long selections of Liiv’s poetry in foreign languages by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – two in Russian (Tallinn, 1933; Moscow 1962) and one in Esperanto (Tallinn, 1980). In other words, the wider Western, European and world public has not until recently had much access to Liiv’s poetic work.

Since 2007, when in collaboration with my long-time good friend, the American poet Harvey L. Hix I published the first book-long selection of Liiv's poetry in English (Liiv 2007), I have been deeply committed to researching and publishing Liiv's poetic work. Besides a monograph (Talvet 2012) as well as to date the largest selection of Liiv's poetry in Estonian (Liiv 2013a), a renewed and enlarged book selection in English translation was published in collaboration with H. L. Hix in Toronto by Guernica (Liiv 2013b). A parallel selection appeared in 2014 in Spanish, translated by Ángela Artero Navarro, Albert Lázaro-Tinaut and myself (*La nieve cae, mi voz canta*, Madrid: Xorki). A small book with Liiv's lyrical poems was published in Italian (*Rondine, dove hai preso il tuo grido?* Trans. by myself and Piera Mattei; Roma: Superstripes / Gattomerlino, 2015), while a somewhat larger second selection of his poetry is under way in Italian translation.

Whether these efforts will help to move our great Estonian poet into the "active canon" of world poetry can hardly be prognosticated at present. Yet the spontaneous, surprisingly enthusiastic and wide reception of a couple of Liiv's poems (of "Leaves Fell" and "Music", above all) in our English translation, on Internet blogs and web pages is, beyond a doubt, an excellent cause for hope.

#### Jüri Talvet

talvet@ut.ee  
Tartu Ülikool  
Kirjanduse osakond  
Ülikooli 16–113  
51014 Tartu  
EESTI / ESTONIA

#### References

- Alighieri, Dante. 2011. *Jumalik komöödia. Põrgu*. Trans. Harald Rajamets, Afterword "Sissejuhatus Dante maailma ja tema "Jumalikku komöödiasse"" and comments by Ülar Ploom. Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.
- Alighieri, Dante. 2016. *Jumalik komöödia. Purgatoorium*. Trans. Harald Rajamets, comments by Ülar Ploom. Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.
- Jidi Majia. 2014. *Shade of Our Mountain Range. Selected Poems*. Trans. Denis Mair; Introduction Philo Ikonya; Afterword Denis Mair. Cape Town: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing.
- Keskaja ja vararenessansi kirjanduse antoloogia*. 1962. Ed. Villem Altoa. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus.
- Liiv, Juhan. 2007. *Meel paremat ei kannata. The Mind Would Bear No Better*. Ed. J. Talvet, trans. J. Talvet and H. L. Hix. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus.

TALVET

---

- Liiv, Juhan. 2013a. *Lumi tuiskab, mina laulan. Valik luulet.* Ed. Jüri Talvet. Tallinn: Tänapäev.
- Liiv, Juhan. 2013b. *Snow Drifts, I Sing. Selected Poems.* Ed. Jüri Talvet, trans. J. Talvet and H. L. Hix. Toronto: Guernica.
- Maailmakirjanduse lugemik keskkoolile.* 1993. Eds. Jüri Talvet, Linnart Mäll, Peeter Torop, Jaan Unt. Tallinn: Koolibri.
- Talvet, Jüri. 2012. *Juhan Liivi luule. Monograafia.* Tallinn: Tänapäev.