

## *An Attempt to Account for Distributed Cognition in Translating the Poetry of Juhan Viiding<sup>1</sup>*

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**Abstract.** This article continues the author’s research into the creative process of writing and translating poetry. It is preparatory work for translating the poetry of one of Estonia’s most widely read and appreciated poets, Juhan Viiding (1948–1995), who wrote under the pseudonym Jüri Üdi until 1978. It proposes that an understanding of Viiding’s work is enhanced when viewed in the wider human perspective of distributed cognition, as elaborated by neuroanthropologist Merlin Donald. In contrast to traditional approaches that look to socio-historical background to contextualise literature and translation research, the distributed cognition model places greater emphasis on the creative processes in culture that take place outside individual minds and focuses less on the capacities and talents of the author as the unique source of creativity. This approach is helpful for the translator of Viiding’s poetry who aspires to produce translated poems that do in another language what the original poems do in their language, for it entails thinking through language to access the working of the individual and the collective minds in the text. The significant role that social connections and public reception play in Viiding’s creative work is illustrated by an essay by Elo Viiding, a poet and Juhan Viiding’s daughter, in which she describes nine types of reader of Juhan Viiding’s poetry, each of which creates their own distinct ‘Juhan Viiding’. Drawing on poet and literary critic Hasso Krull’s study of Viiding’s poetry, Elo Viiding analyses Juhan Viiding’s method of negation as essential to his creative work and engagement with his audience. In this article the author lays theoretical groundwork for the translation of Juhan Viiding’s poetry into English.

**Keywords:** poetry translation, poetics of translation, Estonian poetry, distributed cognition, Juhan Viiding, negation

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## The Poet in Distributed Cognition

Poetry needs readers, as the Irish poet Ciaran Carson once observed in an email exchange on his translations of French poetry. His words remind us that the poet's work (both the poem and the making of the poem) is not a one-way process and that the poet (who is also a reader of their own and others' work) is aware that the poem lives as long as it is read (i.e. *if it is read and every time it is read*). This process and communicative interactive space of the poem and of poetry<sup>2</sup> can be characterised by such categories as context, creative synergy, and distributed cognition. All three categories are used to describe the same cultural phenomenon, but distributed cognition is particularly helpful for the translator of poetry. A view of the poem that is based on context or creative synergy tends to hierarchise the minds involved and treat the poet's mind as the primary or leading source of creativity. A similar hierarchical approach may be seen in a view of the poem that does not take into account socio-historical context or synergy with contemporaries, for example by weighing the poem against some notion of the universal value of poetry; this is a view that also treats the poet as creative genius (even if not the Romantic notion of superior intellectual or artistic capacity but in the sense of being the *isolated* creator of the poem). To work within a poetics of translation as proposed by Henri Meschonnic (1999) entails recognising that "Whatever the languages concerned, there is only one *source*, which is what a text does; there is only one *target*, to do in another language what that text does"<sup>3</sup> (2003: 339; original italics); in other words, the translator's objective and aspiration is to translate a poem *as* a poem. In a hierarchical approach (as outlined above), the translator cannot replace the perceived creative genius or repeat the creative work of the poet, so how is he or she to conceive of and achieve the translational and poetic objective of creating a poem in translation that does for its new audience what the original poem does for its audience? The distributed cognition model is helpful in that it does not locate the source of creativity in a single, defined point, rather it offers the translator the possibility to enter the space of poetry and work on an equal footing with the author of the original, to conceive of the translatorly work as

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<sup>2</sup> The space of poetry is understood here in terms of Maurice Blanchot's philosophical notion of "the space of literature" as presented in his work of the same title (*L'espace littéraire* 1955). It encompasses both the meaning-making space of the poem (opened by the act of reading) and the evolving space of literature (created and inhabited by works as they come into being and are read). It allows me to conceive of the space of poetry as accommodating the creation, reception, and proliferation of poems, and the latter as inclusive of translated poems.

<sup>3</sup> Trans. Anthony Pym.

creative insofar as it is an attempt to make a poem in translation that has the capacity to evoke in the minds of new readers as the original does<sup>4</sup>.

This article uses the concept of distributed cognition as developed by neuroanthropologist Merlin Donald and applied in his writing on the role of art in our cognitive evolution (2001, 2006). Donald's research locates artistic *activity* in the historical perspective of the coevolution of human culture and consciousness and focuses on the cognitive circumstances in which this activity arises and functions (rather than art works or the particular circumstances of their creation or evaluation); the focus is on processes and interaction rather than products (2006: 3–7). This approach allows for a broader view of poetry as *artistic activity*; a view of the poem as a verbal work of art in the human perspective of distributed cognition foregrounds how artists', in this case poets', "sources of [...] creativity, although partly personal, are also public" (ibid.: 14). This unsettles any "illusion of separateness, of isolation from society" (ibid.) that an artist might have or have attributed to them by others and points to the need for a clearer understanding of the notion of the artist as creator. Donald claims that this kind of "isolated mind' bias" treats the mind as located in or confined within an individual brain and by extension treats culture as part of the environment, as background (2001: 150). In contrast, his theory of distributed cognition views the mind – of artist, audience member, or indeed any individual – as "the individual-conscious-mind-in-culture" (ibid.: 285). By and large, distributed cognition is the same phenomenon as culture, but it pays attention to cognitive processes that take place outside individual brains in the evolving sociocultural network which individuals participate in and contribute to. Donald emphasises the dynamic and interactive nature of distributed cognition, characterising human culture as "a marketplace of ideas and images, feelings and impressions" and "based on the sharing of mental representations" that we who "are tethered to that network" are immersed in and take part in (2006: 14). In this view, there is less emphasis on the creative persona of the poet and

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<sup>4</sup> I have set out my conceptualisation of a creative approach to translating poetry in theoretical and practical terms in my doctoral thesis "Mapping the Invisible: The Elaboration of a Creative Approach to Translating Poetry" (McIlfatrick-Ksenofontov 2020). The thesis demonstrates in greater detail than is possible in the scope of this article how Meschonnic's poetics of translation and Merlin Donald's concept of distributed cognition support an understanding of the functioning of poetry in the mind and in culture (ibid.: 36–52), as does my article discussing originality and creativity in poetry and poetry translation (McIlfatrick-Ksenofontov 2018: 388–390). My outline of key concepts and views here necessarily repeats what is articulated in both texts for a reader who is unfamiliar with them.

more on the source of creativity that is the distributed cognitive network of human culture.

### Reading Juhan Viiding

The relevance of the distributed cognition model can be demonstrated in the example of the Estonian poet Juhan Viiding (1948–1995). In spite of being one of Estonia’s most widely read and discussed poets, he is a clear case of a poet who does not expressly set himself up as a leading light for his readers. His intention does not appear to be poetic or cultural affirmation, for example he is not seeking to establish a style or set or modify a trend. His method is manifestly negation, an idea expressed in a number of his poems (discussed below) and elaborated in a 2008 essay “Juhan Viidingu eitamine” (The Negating of Juhan Viiding<sup>5</sup>) by Elo Viiding, a poet and Juhan Viiding’s daughter. Elo Viiding states at the outset that the negation of Juhan Viiding is for her the most interesting aspect of the creative persona and his creative oeuvre (Viiding, E. 2008). She distinguishes between negating that is ostensibly performed by Juhan Viiding the poet, “a negation of unity, of one exhaustive meaning, of a single interpretation”, and negating that is performed by his readers, for which she offers (“intuitively and speculatively, overstating and simplifying”) a tentative and necessarily incomplete typology of nine reader types (“undoubtedly there are more”). In the end, she wonders, and invites her reader to wonder, if an “ideal reader” might be a “mind assemblage” of the best features of all the types. (Ibid.) Whatever the case, both sources of negation create processes that are carried out in reading minds.

Of Juhan Viiding’s negation as manifest in his poetry, Elo Viiding suggests that this might be more than “the generation of multiplicity of meaning and simultaneously of options for negation and affirmation generally characteristic of the language of writing poetry” (ibid.). Certainly, multiplicity of meaning is a recognised aspect of the verbal art of poetry, generally attributed to ambiguity and polysemy, which by and large arise from the potential for words and language in poetry to be both representational and iconic and for these to overlap. For example, Juri Lotman explains how “the semantics of words in natural language are only raw material for the language of the artistic text” (1977: 170; 20–23, 55–56). In her attempt to explore what is specific to Juhan Viiding’s

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<sup>5</sup> All quotations from Elo Viiding’s 2008 essay are my translations.

poetry, Elo Viiding draws on poet and literary critic Hasso Krull's articulation of Jüri Üdi's<sup>6</sup> particular "method of writing poetry":

The first rule of the method of writing for Üdi is that the utterance – not the means of expression – is drawn from language itself. Thus, the traditional relationship between content and form is reversed, as if form completely dominates content, atomising, dispersing, breaking down or parodying it so that eventually content seems to disappear altogether. In fact, these categories are simply deconstructed in Üdi's poems: what is said does not disappear, on the contrary, *the reader is told more things than is usual*, only these do not collect around one central, exhaustive meaning of the poem. In short, *Üdi's poems never form a unity, rather he is always multiplicity*.<sup>7</sup> (my italics)

Krull draws attention to how Viiding simultaneously expresses with language and replaces with language the very utterance that manifests. More specifically, primary meaning in grammatical and rhetorical terms is intentionally unsteady by an accumulation of semanticising elements that predominantly divide attention and disperse meaning in the reading mind. This goes beyond instances of wordplay in a poem or poetic ambiguity, i.e. ambiguity as the capacity of words or language in a poem to generate various meanings that feed into "the emerging discourse of the poem" (McIlfatrick-Ksenofontov 2020: 59). I have written about ambiguity as "a bound and binding feature of the poem" (2013: 182) insofar as it involves the reader in attending to how language draws attention to itself in a poem so as to serve its communicative intent, i.e. the language of the poem seeking significance rather than referentiality (2020: 67). This kind of poetic ambiguity may be knowingly used by a poet to create a poem that nudges the reader into an elaborate meaning-making process, i.e. potentially complicating, slowing down, enriching (perhaps even thwarting) the reading process. However, it is important to keep in mind that ambiguity

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<sup>6</sup> From 1968 to 1978, Juhan Viiding published poetry under the name Jüri Üdi (which he 'translates' as George Marrow (as in bone marrow) in the title of the poem "George Marrow 1011. uni", 1971: 52); this was "not a simple pseudonym, but a consciously developed and portrayed *alter ego*" (Krull 2005: 48; original italics). In 1978, he published a selection under the name Juhan Viiding and the title *Mina olin Jüri Üdi* (I was Jüri Üdi); it ended with a short sequence titled "Poems by Juhan Viiding", thus "concluding his most creative phase with a gesture of self-abolition" (ibid.). In her 2008 article, Elo Viiding mentions that she does not separate Jüri Üdi from Juhan Viiding in her discussion of the negation of Juhan Viiding.

<sup>7</sup> My translation. Here Elo Viiding cites Krull's "Järelsõna" ("Afterword") to *Jüri Üdi ja Juhan Viiding: kogutud luuletused* (Jüri Üdi and Juhan Viiding: Collected Poems) (Krull 1998: 587–588).

is a feature of natural language usage and an aspect of neural processing. Juhan Viiding's ambiguous multiplicity resonates as much, and perhaps more, with neurobiologist and neuroaesthetics scholar Semir Zeki's definition of "true ambiguity":

True ambiguity results when no single solution is more likely than other solutions, leaving the brain with the only option left, of treating them all as equally likely and giving each a place on the conscious stage, one at a time, so that we are only conscious of one of the interpretations at any given time. *Thus a neurobiologically based definition of ambiguity is the opposite of the dictionary definition<sup>8</sup>; it is not uncertainty, but certainty—the certainty of many, equally plausible interpretations, each one of which is sovereign when it occupies the conscious stage* (Zeki 1999). Each interpretation therefore is as valid as the other interpretations, and there is no correct interpretation. **Ambiguity therefore is the obverse of constancy.** (Zeki 2006: 245) (original italics; my emphasis in bold)

This resonates with what Krull identifies in Viiding's poetry as the reader being told more things although the content becomes dispersed. This suggests that Viiding may be intentionally building in multiplicity in the form of more options (i.e. more linguistic elements) that do not cancel one another out, a kind of unappropriated ambiguity drawing on the raw material of the neural processing of natural language before it is shaped into poetic feature. It appears that Viiding does not intend to create a unity that is constant but a whole that has the capacity to compose and recompose itself in the construing mind of his reader.

Reading a Viiding poem, then, may invite or demand time and effort, for it multiplies and complicates identification of a "message" or "truth" in the poem, which is what reader type one (in Elo Viiding's typology) seeks from a Viiding poem. Elo Viiding likens this kind of dwelling on the poem to the "thinking time" that Juhan Viiding himself always needed (three days or at least three hours) before a public performance in order to weigh up his "emotional and moral contribution", a question of personal integrity: "wholeness, not dividedness, but a wholeness that can only be reached through the possibility of negation, through the freedom for negation." (Viiding, E. 2008). We might conclude that Viiding builds into his poems the time- and effort-demanding freedom to grasp their whole dividedness. This thinking time, "the time before negation

<sup>8</sup> Zeki cites this *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of ambiguity at the beginning of his article: "uncertain, open to more than one interpretation, of doubtful position." (2006: 243)

or affirmation, the time beyond negation and affirmation, is like the poet's sub-conscious, his 'thicket of associations'" (ibid.). It amounts to an *essential* freedom in approaching the poetry of Juhan Viiding, essential as in inhering in the poem and vital (alive and waiting) for the reader, however they react to it.

In developing nine (and leaving room for more) reader types to account for the negating that is performed by readers, Elo Viiding effectively describes the evolving spontaneous system that Juhan Viiding's work is immersed in, i.e. their distributed cognitive network. This is not to be confused or conflated with the different readings that a single poem may generate, a comparative approach which is common in literary analysis. Indeed, it is to be expected that different readers of the same reader type may have different interpretations of the same poem and that there may be as many readings as there are readers, including different individual readings. Rather, according to Elo Viiding's typology, every reader type creates another Juhan Viiding, and in this sense 'Juhan Viiding' – of whom the poet Doris Kareva says "his name has become iconic" (2015: 11<sup>9</sup>) – is constantly being defined by the people who read him. Not only does the poet create the reader, but the readers create the poet. The reader types in Elo Viiding's typology are neither hierarchical nor interdependent. Ultimately, this leads her to her most affirmative statement: "Juhan Viiding should not be read in context, but he himself should be read as context" (Viiding, E. 2008), which I would more inclusively extend to not *only* read in context.

Nor is negation here to be understood as nihilism. Rather, it is constructive, forward-looking dialectical thinking. This is reinforced in Elo Viiding's framing of her essay. She opens with an epigrammatic line: "and you affirm me, but this is negating" (ja sa jaatad mind, kuid see on eitamine), which echoes in reverse the Jüri Üdi line "and you negate me, but this is affirming" (Ja sa eidad mind, kuid see on jaatamine)<sup>10</sup> (Üdi 1973: 52). This suggests at the outset that to be sure of one's Jüri Üdi/Juhan Viiding ("you affirm me") would be to negate him. Borrowing Zeki's term, we might say that she sees through to the obverse in Juhan Viiding's line and in his reception. By the end of her essay, she has shown that: "Although this kind of affirmation might come from a so-called pure heart, it would still mean blind reading, suppressed reading – leaving the personality as its own context unread" (Viiding, E. 2008). She closes with a call to pry open the Viiding context in order to keep the negating open: "Let there be negating of Juhan Viiding, in spite of affirming" (ibid.).

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<sup>9</sup> My translation.

<sup>10</sup> My translation.

## Translating Juhan Viiding

This is also a call that echoes onwards to the translator: let there be negating, in spite of affirming, of Juhan Viiding in translation. The translator's objective becomes the following: to create poems in translation that will continue the negating–affirming qualities of Juhan Viiding poems in the minds of new readers in another linguistic and cultural sphere. This is my current translation endeavour, which I have for some time resisted due to the daunting nature of the demands of Viiding's poetics and the poet's persona. Not only a frequently discussed, quoted and imitated poet, but also a professional stage actor and singer who wrote for, acted in and directed films. A consummate performer who has left a lasting imprint on Estonian cultural life: "every reader of his poetry can also recall the highly personal timbre of his voice, that seems to be part of his artistic singularity" (Krull 2005: 48<sup>11</sup>), "there are also collections of memoirs and essays, new recordings of his songs, and even an anthology featuring poets whose work has been influenced by Üdi/Viiding; there was also a weekly culture programme on television called the "Jüri Üdi Club" and a theatre play entitled "Assistant Viiding" (Kareva 2015: 11). And yet he is relatively unknown among readers and researchers outside Estonia, an "asymmetry of Üdi/Viiding's poetic reputation" pointed out by Ülar Ploom and attributed to the problematics of translation – of poetry in general and Viiding in particular (2011: 137–138).

Introductions to collections of Estonian poetry in English translation that include Viiding poems tend to coincide in their account of his poetic reputation. Most agree on the nature and the extent of his impact: he "revolutionised" the language of Estonian poetry in his own work (e.g. Kareva 2015: 19; Sommer 2005: 151<sup>12</sup>; Krull 1998: 596) and significantly influenced the work of other Estonian poets, for example generating "such a flow of imitations, emulations, allusions and remodellings: one might say Jüri Üdi was the principal mould for poetic language for a whole generation" (Krull 2005: 48); he "altered the prevailing perception and meaning of poetry in the second half of the century" (Kareva 2015: 12). There is frequent mention of what fascinates in his work as the very thing that is likely to frustrate translation, for example "Viiding's poetry, consisting as it does of idiomatic dislocations and allusion, is almost impossible to render into other languages" (Sommer 2001: 151); "It is absolutely impossible to translate the way Üdi plays with words and meanings, the way he writes his 'viper lines'. And this is not said disapprovingly – in

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<sup>11</sup> Translation unattributed.

<sup>12</sup> Translation unattributed.



the present globalizing culture where everything is translatable this is praise.” (Kaus 2007: 49<sup>13</sup>). So, the translator of Viiding is faced with an embarrassment of riches, not unlike the writers and critics whose task it is to introduce Viiding to the foreign reader, as poet and prose writer Jan Kaus admits: “What can I add to what has already been said about JÜRI ÜDI or Juhan Viiding [...]? Much has been said, spilt out as if of cornucopia both in quantity and quality. (Ibid.).

Some do in fact attempt to specify what characterises Viiding’s linguistic immediacy and elusiveness. For example, Krull describes Üdi’s poetry as “a series of negations in a process of deconstruction that feeds on proverbs, adages, slang, everyday turns of phrase, and so on” (quoted in Sommer 2001: 151)<sup>14</sup> and “strongly decentred, allegorical and polylogical [...], with puzzling ambiguities and rapid changes of perspective” (Krull 2005: 48). Similarly, Kareva points out how he “plucked phrases from everyday speech which he then parodied or paraphrased in texts that struck a nerve in his own day, lines from his poems are still in common use today – alongside proverbs and well-known historical sayings – as if part and parcel of common knowledge.” (2015: 12). What this collage of poets’ and critics’ views amounts to is an account of a shifting and shaping poetic persona. As perhaps befits a man of the theatre, Viiding appears to constitute his own *dramatis personae*.

My first experience of translating Viiding was eighteen poems selected by Doris Kareva (as editor) for the 2015 Arc publication *Six Estonian Poets* (2015: 19–33). On rereading these translations at the outset of my more recent Viiding research and translation venture, I am aware that I have developed a clearer understanding of Viiding’s creative endeavour in the light of my research into the creative processes of making and translating poetry (i.e. both involve the verbal articulation of what is beyond the grasp of conventional language usage) informed by Donald’s research on distributed cognition. I start with an example of such a *re-visioning* – as in seeing anew – of an Üdi poem with my commentary:

#### Inland Speeches

My self-browsing is **like lucky-dip self-casting, like pouring fasting** oil on a kindling fire; it is a process – self-opposing, self-promoting.

All that I do is an endless prelude, **a life-size picture from lifetime drawing** in lifetime imprisonment, **a primer** for reaching inland.

<sup>13</sup> Translation by Krista Kaer. Kaus cites the Jüri Üdi line “ma kirjutun rästikud read” (I write viper lines) (Üdi 1971: 25).

<sup>14</sup> My translation, which differs from the published English translation.

There, inland, I must make these speeches, once-only speeches on freedom. And only those who hear me out will be free. To them I give my own **freedom that** flew through me.<sup>15</sup>

#### Inland Speeches

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ing oil on a kindling fire; it is a process – self-opposing, self-promoting.

All that I do is an endless prelude, the lifetime drawing of a life-size picture in  
lifetime imprisonment, preparation for reaching inland.

There, inland, I must make these speeches, once-only speeches on freedom.

And only those who hear me out will be free. To them I give my own freedom,  
the freedom that flew through me.

(Viiding: 2015: 23)<sup>16</sup>

#### Kõned sisemaal

Minu eneselehitsemine on nagu iseenese õnneksvalamine, nagu paastuõli  
kallamine laastutulle; see on protsess – enese vastu, iseenese poolt.

Kõik, mis teen, on lõputu eelmäng, elusuuruse pildi eluaegne joonistamine  
eluaegses vangistuses, eeltöö sisemaale jõudmiseks.

Seal, sisemaal, pean pidama need kõned, ühekordsed kõned vabadusest.

Ja ainult need, kes mind lõpuni kuulavad, on vabad. Neile annan siis oma vaba-  
duse, mis minust läbi lendas.

(Üdi 1973: 60)

“Inland Speeches” from the 1973 collection *Käekäik* (which might be translated loosely as *How It’s Going*) is a poem that appears to speak of the poet’s activity as process and product and of his metacognitive reflection on it. Given the above discussion on Viiding and his readers, it is telling that this is expressed in terms of reading the self (“self-browsing”) and verbalisation (“speeches”) as well as a searching journey (“reaching inland”). The outcome of the process is unpredictable, there is no knowing what will become of the self that throws itself into this activity (“lucky-dip self-casting”); it involves some inner contradiction (“self-opposing, self-promoting”) and inner compulsion (“I must make”). This reading–searching activity of and for the self (“self-browsing” and “self-casting”) is a way of knowing through doing insofar as “all that I do” remains “an endless prelude” (not envisaged as final) and “a primer” (a basis to build on). Each of the resulting instances of expression is a one-off (“once-only speeches”) that will be apprehended only by some (“those who hear me out”),

<sup>15</sup> My translation. This is my current re-visioning of my 2015 published translation (cited below); changes are highlighted in bold.

<sup>16</sup> My translation.

i.e. who listen to the end, to that which is channelled by the poet, that which is grasped by him to be released for others (“to them I give my own freedom that flew through me”). The above is an outline of the poem, not a fixed or full interpretation, for there is much more that could be analysed to tease it open further. It serves simply to highlight the dynamics of the poem in order to understand my current altered view of what it does.

In the first line, determining or relational words (‘a’, ‘of my own’, ‘or’) have been removed in order to allow fluid present participial verb forms to follow the uninterrupted flow of the original, both acoustically and rhythmically. The poem hinges on the notion of forming and taking shape.

(my current re-vision) “My self-browsing is **like lucky-dip self-casting, like pouring fasting oil** on a kindling fire; it is a process – self-opposing, self-promoting.”

(my 2015 translation) “My self-browsing is like a lucky-dip of my own self-casting, or pouring of fasting oil on a kindling fire; it is a process – self-opposing, self-promoting.”

In the second line of the re-vision, the same sequential process as in the original has been restored, i.e. a picture (a product) that emerges out of drawing (an activity) carried out in imprisonment (a state), thus retaining the juxtaposition of the “endless prelude” with its current product (“a life-size picture”). The replacement of “preparation” with “primer”, which is both learning material (an elementary textbook or manual) and an undercoat or base coat in painting, ties in with the notion of drawing and an unfinished picture. This in turn allows “prelude” and “primer” to replicate the *play* and *work/study* contrast embedded in “*eelmäng*” and “*eeltöö*”, *mäng* and *töö* meaning game/play and work respectively.

(my current re-vision) “All that I do is an endless prelude, **a life-size picture from lifetime drawing in lifetime imprisonment, a primer** for reaching inland.”

(my 2015 translation) “All that I do is an endless prelude, the lifetime drawing of a life-size picture in lifetime imprisonment, preparation for reaching inland.”

In the last line, “freedom” now appears only once (as in the original), allowing a smoother acoustic and rhythmic sweep for freedom that the poem says “flew”.

(my current re-vision) “And only those who hear me out will be free. To them I give my own **freedom that** flew through me.”

(my 2015 translation) “And only those who hear me out will be free. To them I give my own freedom, the freedom that flew through me.”

One aspect that remains the same in both of my versions is “hear me out” in the last line. The literal meaning of “kes mind lõpuni kuulavad” is ‘who listen to me to the end’, which could be rendered as ‘who listen to the end’. This would be eloquent of both listening *until* the end (in the temporal sense) as well as the end in the sense of the intent and the reach of what is said (what the poet/poem is getting at). However, opting for “those who hear me out” retains the ‘me’ of the original and focusses attention on the poet as both the means or channel *and* the expressing self. The self is expressed and the self gets out, i.e. both emerges out of and is released from “imprisonment”, becomes voice and is heard. In that instant, the giving of his “own” freedom (which “flew through me”) is the receiving of it by those listeners (readers) who hear it by virtue of hearing him. This reflects an understanding of the poem as what is received.

This intuitive understanding of and metacognitive reflection on the poetic endeavour and the freedom of the poem to speak and be heard (or not heard) is not a one-off in Viiding’s poetry. It appears and reappears with different degrees of intensity and in different guises throughout his work. My current view is shaped by the picture of Viiding that is emerging out of my immersive reading of his poems, i.e. reading individual collections in full and in chronological order. Viiding is known to have taken great pains over the composition of individual collections, just as he did over his performances. As Elo Viiding points out, he was “extremely sensitive, pedantic almost to the point of madness about the contexts in which his lines, expressions of truth or mind, arranged themselves or were arranged” (2008). I read on the understanding that each poem in a collection is part of a particular artistic vision. This immersive, methodical reading is part of my attempt to read Viiding *as* context. It has become part of my “prelude” and my “primer for reaching” into Viiding’s artistic and imaginative “inland”. This allows for reflection on two aspects of my translatorly work: whether or how my earlier translations fit into the emerging picture of Viiding and how to work towards a body of poems in translation that would be Viiding-‘casting’ (and generative of unforeseeable readings) rather than reader-typecasting<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> In her selection and translation of 200 Tang dynasty poems, the artist and translator Wong May suggests that a poet may remain “typecast” if only iconic poems are translated. She recommends looking “outside the velvet box of the canon for the

This is what the poet and the translator reach for, as is expressed in the poem “We make, make up for our life” (“Me teeme, teeme ümber oma elu”) from the 1974 collection *Selges eesti keeles* (which could be translated variously as In Clear/Pure/Plain Estonian<sup>18</sup>).

We make, make up for our life  
a huge people-packed wall.  
Not even the tall can reach over.

Me teeme, teeme ümber oma elu  
üht hiigelmüüri inimtihedat.  
Ka pikemad ei küüni üle ääre.

When a stone has fallen outwards,  
making way for a gap as it goes,  
whoever chanced to see out  
has spoken of *la vie en rose*.  
Meanwhile he too is seen through.

Kui mõni sinnapoole väljalangend kivi  
on lahkumisel ruumi jätnud piluks,  
siis see, kes juhtus välja nägema  
on äranähtu nimetanud iluks.  
Ta samal hetkel ise läbi nähtud

and there is no place for feeling distraught.  
A secret is now the only life he knows,  
being himself through and through is his lot.

ja pole kohta, kus võiks tunda häbi ta.  
Suur saladus saab tema ainueluks,  
tal iseennast au on läbida.

(Viiding 2015: 25)

(Üdi 1974: 24)

This poem echoes and extends the idea of being a means or channel of communicating something that life reveals, but it has shifted from the “I” and “them” of “Inland Speeches” to a more inclusive “we” and “whoever”. There is none of the explicit urge and intention of “I must make speeches”; instead, “whoever chanced to see out / has spoken”. This speaks of a capacity to respond to an unforeseen moment of insight (perhaps even when something breaks or is lost in life, “when a stone has fallen outwards, / making way for a gap as it goes”). There is a sense of apartness in this speaking, however, insofar as the one who sees “out” becomes “seen through” in voicing what he has seen (“Meanwhile he *too* is seen through”). He *too* is “making way”, for in speaking, he becomes simultaneously the gap *and* the one who sees through it and reveals something (including, potentially, something about himself). The last line of the poem expresses this as something akin to a calling. The Estonian translates literally as ‘he has the honour of going through himself’, a playful contortion, in part modest but with a hint of being singled out for the role. ‘Having the honour of’

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unanthologized, under-translated work” and suggests that translating “atypical”, “unrepresentative”, “one-of-a-kind” poems might be “a worthwhile venture” (2022: 284).

<sup>18</sup> Ploom suggests multiple versions of the title in English and explores their semantic reach and rhetorical resonance in the context of the collection (2011: 138–142).

doing something has a similar semantic range in both English and Estonian (for example it can also be used in reference to something that is a dubious honour or even not honourable at all), but the reflexive ‘going through himself’ would be linguistically deviant to no clear poetic end. Instead, “being himself through and through is his lot” carries the notion that this is the essence of who he is (“through and through”, meaning thoroughly or to the core, while the repetitive form of the phrase hints at repeated or habitual activity, at a mode of being). That this is “his lot” combines notions of his destiny, his allotted portion in life and all that he is in each and every going-through. In sum, essence and wholeness. This seeing out and being seen through while being himself is the Viiding who is to be continued in translation.

The capacity to be alert to, receptive to and responsive to inspiration, impulse or insight that might generate verbal expression that will evoke in other minds is an acknowledged facet of the creative work of the poet (the “seeing out” and being “heard out” of the poems above). Viiding clearly recognised this. In a memoir of their childhood life (Tarand 2008)<sup>19</sup>, Viiding’s sister shares an insight into the creative persona as recounted by his friend and collaborator in music and theatre performance, Tõnis Rätsep. Early in their student days at Tallinn Conservatory, Rätsep noticed some handwritten poems on cards on Viiding’s table. On learning that they were Viiding’s and impressed by what he read, he asked if there were more – Viiding pulled out a plywood suitcase full of them from under his bed. They read poems through the night and Viiding understood that Rätsep knew how to read poetry; this was the beginning of their life-long creative partnership. According to Rätsep, Viiding kept pencil and paper in his pocket and by his bedside to jot down ideas as they came to him day or night, re-reading later to see what was in them, and this is how most of his poems appeared. When Rätsep asked what distinguished the poet from the non-poet, Viiding replied that “the poet can be bothered to get out of a warm bed at night but not the non-poet – sleep is sweet and he sleeps on.”<sup>20</sup> (Ibid. 250).

This response-ability is communicated in the poem “Mis on see luuletaja luule?” (“What is this poet’s poetry?”) from the 1975 collection *Armastuskirjad* (Love Letters). The title line is already suggestive of an ars poetica.

<sup>19</sup> *Ajapildi sees: lapsepõlv Juhaniga* (Inside the Picture of Time: A Childhood with Juhan). This paragraph is my paraphrase.

<sup>20</sup> “luuletaja viitsib öösel soojast voodist välja tulla, mitteluuletaja mitte – uni on magus ja ta magab edasi”; the Estonian “uni” means both sleep and dream. My translation.

What is this poet's poetry?                      Mis on see luuletaja luule?

It is: when you think about life              See on: kui mõtled elule  
and something else besides.                      ja millelegi muule.

What is the human's part                      Mis on see inimese osa  
in this wide world?                              siin laias ilmas?  
Not to get slept away.                        End mitte ära magada.  
Keep an eye on that.                            Pea seda silmas.

(Viiding 2015: 25)

(Üdi 1975: 10)

In the opening line, “luuletaja” (poet) functions as an adjective qualifying “luule” (poetry) rather than a possessive noun. Hence the question is not “What is *this poet's* poetry?” but something more like ‘What is this *poet-y* poetry?’. (Italicising “*is*” would go some way towards shifting the emphasis onto this question of what constitutes the poetic: What *is* this poet's poetry?) The use in Estonian of “See on” (‘This is/It is’) at the beginning of line 2 is a naturally occurring phatic utterance that communicates a pause for effect in spoken delivery. The effect of the colon in English delivers the idea rather differently. “It is:” is conceptually complete in itself (as in ‘It happens’ or ‘It exists’); the colon signals that what follows is a summation or elaboration. In both poems, a pause is heard and is part of the rhetorical effect of the diction of the poem as a whole. The poem defines and declares how poetry works in the mind (“when you think about life / and something else besides”), whether the mind of the poet/speaker or the reader/listener. The assonance of “elule – muule” (“life – besides”) links them acoustically, binding them together in the mind's ear, “besides” being a necessary addition to “something else” in order to communicate that it is something *more* rather than *instead*. Just what Krull claims that Viiding's poetry does, i.e. it tells you more things than, and as well as, what is said. The poem's response to its own question “What is the human's part / in this wide world?” is to not make ourselves go to sleep (a reflexive twist on how a limb goes to sleep, goes numb); “not to get slept away” (with its acoustic closeness to “not to get swept away”) links logically to keeping your eyes open, being awake and alert to life. This is “the human's part”, whether poet or reader. Hence “Keep an eye on that” is directed equally at poet and reader. An *ars poetica* indeed, for it speaks of Viiding's understanding of the poet's role in the world as speaking of what it means to be human in the world they are part of. The poet in the world is the individual-conscious-mind-in-culture, the mind that is tuned in and anticipates moments of awakening.

## Concluding Words

Juhan Viiding is an outstanding literary and artistic figure in Estonian cultural life who continues to be widely read and discussed today, as he was among his contemporaries. He is known for drawing on the language and encounters of everyday life (habits and modes of speech that reflect habits and modes of thought and conduct), which he shapes to accommodate and communicate poetic insight. A Viiding poem is expressed in language that people recognise and then recognise again as altered as it plays out, replays and proliferates in their minds. Above and beyond the polysemy and ambiguity that is characteristic of poetic communication, Viiding fascinates insofar as he consciously negates linguistic elements that he writes into his poems. In building in more options for construal, more linguistic elements that do not cancel each other out, he generates poems that have the capacity to compose and recompose themselves in readers' minds. In the poems analysed in this article, it is possible to see Viiding's understanding of his work as communication between minds. The model of distributed cognition is helpful for the translator of Viiding's poetry who intends for a translated poem to do in another language what it does in the original language, for it involves the translator in thinking through language and the cultural processes that such a socially connected and engaged poet as Viiding was immersed in. It primes the translator to see through the language of the poem to the poet who wants to be seen through (i.e. to what is beyond the words on the page) and to conceive of their work as creating poems in translation that will continue the negating–affirming qualities of Viiding poems in the minds of new readers in another linguistic and cultural sphere.

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