

*Editorial*¹

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For Vanesa

*You give me the greatest poet
of your country, Prešeren – in English.
I give you the greatest poet
of my country, Liiv – in English.
The world would never understand
their greatness anyway. It is enough,
if you believe in it and I believe in it
at this moment amid history's wind and dust,
in the quiet shadow of lindens' leaves and poplars',
in Lipica, amid their friendly whispers.*

(Jüri Talvet, transl., H. L. Hix)

This poem serves as an apt opening to an issue dedicated to World Poetry and the translation of poetry. In addition, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Jüri Talvet, Editor-in-Chief of *Interlitteraria*, on his 80th birthday.

The current and forthcoming issues bring together articles based on contributions presented at the 16th International Conference of the Estonian Association of Comparative Literature, *World Poetry Today: Production, Translation, Reception*, held from 1–4 October 2025 in Tartu. The conference featured around 100 papers from 16 countries. Both the conference and its proceedings were organized within the framework of three research projects: *The Factor of Lyrical Poetry in the Formation of Small Literatures* (PRG1106), led by Liina Lukas, and *Translation in History, Estonia 1850–2010: Texts, Agents, Institutions and Practices* (PRG1206), led by Daniele Monticelli, both funded by the Estonian Research Council; and *Voices of Youth in Digital Age Poetry*:

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Poetics, Attitudes, and Identities, led by Rebekka Lotman and supported by the Estonian Ministry of Culture.

This is already the second conference that our association has devoted to lyric poetry from a comparative perspective in a short span of time. In 2021, we invited contributions on “The Factor of Lyrical Poetry in the Formation of Literary Cultures” the results of which were published in 2023 in two issues (1 and 2) of *Interlitteraria*. This time, we have set our sights higher with “World Poetry Today.” The rationale for this is as follows.

Because lyric representation is closely tied to the materiality of language, poetry has often been regarded as particularly resistant to translation. Roman Jakobson’s well-known formulation that “poetry by definition is untranslatable” is immediately qualified by the claim that “only creative transposition is possible” (Jakobson 1959: 238), emphasizing not the impossibility of poetry translation as such but the impossibility of complete equivalence. The close association of poetry with particular languages may also have contributed to the fact that theories of poetry have not spread transnationally as widely as, for example, narratology. As Jonathan Culler, one of today’s most influential theorists of poetry, has noted, literary theorists have failed to develop a rich theoretical discourse about lyric – or about poetry in general (Culler 2015: 3).

Yet contemporary poetry demonstrates more clearly than ever that poetry is a transnational, intertextual, and multilingual phenomenon, or, as Jahan Ramazani (University of Virginia), who was one of the keynote speakers at our conference, puts it, a “multinationally heterogeneous array of traces.” (Ramazani 2020: 2). Poetry is inherently “worldly,” both polytemporal and polyspatial. While poems belong to their immediate historical moment and national culture, they are at the same time transnational and transhistorical through their forms, techniques, rhetorical strategies, and language. In this sense, they share common building blocks.

This multifaceted worldliness can also be approached through the cultural-semiotic perspective outlined by another of our keynote speakers, Peeter Torop (University of Tartu). In his influential framework, ‘total translation’ is understood not merely as linguistic transfer but as a complex process of cultural mediation operating across textual, metatextual, and intertextual boundaries (Torop 2000: 607). If Ramazani draws attention to the transnational traces that constitute poetry, the concept of total translation offers a framework for understanding the multiple textual and cultural mediations through which such traces circulate across languages, traditions, and historical contexts.

The growing interest in transnational poetics forms part of a broader revival of lyric studies, after a period in which lyric had been overshadowed by the international rise of narratology, which, even in poetry studies, focused

more on fictionality and narrativity than on poetics and rhetoric. To name a few significant milestones: in 2015, Jonathan Culler's seminal *Theory of the Lyric* appeared; in the same year, the International Network for the Study of Lyric (INSL) was founded to encourage the interdisciplinary study of poetry, lyric, and verse across languages, forms, media, and functions. A year earlier, in 2014, the journal *Studia Metrica et Poetica* – founded by Mihhail Lotman, Igor Pilshchikov and Maria-Kristiina Lotman – was launched here in Tartu, devoted to the comparative study of prosody and poetics, including non-Indo-European traditions. Estonian comparative literature is an active part of this international discourse on lyric theory.

World poetry lives today – and not only in poetry books; it lives at poetry festivals, on the web, in songs, in cityscapes, and in translation. It is translatable, as evidenced by the many poetry translators participating in both special issues of *Interlitteraria* dedicated to *World Poetry Today*.

The focus of this issue is indeed poetry translation. The first three articles are devoted to the practice of translating poetry, and their authors are internationally recognized translators whose theoretical reflections are grounded in extensive practical experience. While the translation of poetry is often seen as a “solo venture,” Francis R. Jones (Newcastle University), twice awarded the Poetry Society's Popescu Prize (formerly the European Poetry Translation Prize), demonstrates the complex networks of collaboration within which poetry translation actually takes shape and the benefits that collaborative (co-)translation can offer.

This latter method is also practiced by Jüri Talvet (University of Tartu), who in his contribution outlines his translation philosophy, which he terms “heteropoetic.” This approach assumes that each poem requires its own translation method, compelling the translator to revise established principles and to search for strategies and means that best suit the particular work at hand.

This comes close to what Douglas Robinson (Chinese University of Hong Kong) describes as a perspectivist approach. Using the poem “Ikävyys” by the Finnish writer Aleksis Kivi, he experiments with four translation strategies – literal, rhythm-for-rhythm, iambic, and homophonic. The article advocates a perspectivist method, suggesting that multiple partial translations, taken together, can offer a fuller understanding of a poem's complexity.

The following articles address translation as a culturally, politically, and ideologically mediated practice rather than a neutral act of literary transfer. Līva Bodniece (Rīga Stradiņš University), Jovita Dikmonienė (Vilnius University), and Maria-Kristiina Lotman (University of Tartu) examine the translation, adaptation, and staging of the Greek tragic chorus across Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian theatrical traditions, demonstrating how the

chorus – widely regarded as one of the most resistant elements to translation and modern performance – becomes an active means of reflecting on how communities are imagined, represented, and challenged on the contemporary stage.

Ehte Puhang (University of Tartu) explores the changes brought about by the transitional period between 1988 and 2017 – a time of profound political transformation – in the publication of poetry translated from Spanish into Estonian.

The next two articles likewise focus on the external forces – social, ideological, political, and cultural – that shape the translation of poetry. Maurizio Calusio and Stefano Fumagalli (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan) investigate the Italian translation and reception of Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, while Vjollca Osja (University of Tirana) and Brikena Smajli (University College, Bedër) examine the Albanian translation and reception of Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo during the period of socialist realism.

Pablo Neruda's poetry is also the subject of Delphine Rumeau's (Université Grenoble Alpes) article, which focuses on the section "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" from *Canto general*. Dedicated to a specific place – Machu Picchu in Peru – the work is examined, in dialogue with Jahan Ramazani's reflections on the relationship between the local and the global in poetry, through the interplay of the particular and the universal in its composition, reception, and translation.

Topographical poetry is likewise taken up by Monica Manolachi (University of Bucharest). Drawing on an interdisciplinary perspective informed by Danube studies, her article explores the Danube as a dynamic site of memory and as a "voice-bearing agent" in Romanian poetry from the nineteenth century to the present, situating these works within broader cultural, historical, and ecological frameworks.

The following three articles examine the multilingual literature of the Baltic region in the 19th century, in which translation, imitation, adaptation, and transformation across languages were the main literary practices. Liina Lukas (University of Tartu) discusses the phenomenon of "wandering poetry" in the work of the Baltic German Romantic poet Casimir Ulrich Boehlendorff around 1800 and proceeds from there to reflect on the possibilities of wandering poetry in later Estonian literature, which, instead of free movement, was shaped by experiences of forced travel. Māra Grudule (University of Latvia) and Maris Saagpakk (Tallinn University) explore the foundational role of the 19th Century authors of the region and their extensive translation activity in the formation of Estonian and Latvian literatures during the 19th century. Grudule

sketches a sweeping historical panorama, tracing the gradual, fluid transition of Latvian poetry from a predominantly translated corpus into a national literature with its own agency. Saagpakk examines a coherent collection of poetry translations compiled by Friedrich Nikolai Russow in 1854, which, employing a range of translation strategies, offers Estonian readers a selection of German poetry of various kinds, thereby broadening their understanding of poetry. Gitana Vanagaitė (Vytautas Magnus University) focuses on the role of lyrical poetry in the Lithuanian nation-building process, examining illegal Lithuanian monthly periodicals from the late 19th century during Russification in the multinational Russian Empire.

The next issue will continue the discussion of world poetry today, with new topics and perspectives.

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