

*The Universe of the Mind of a Poet:
Juhan Liiv's Philosophy and Poetics*

Nations whose cultural tradition due to historical reasons is not large, especially smaller nations, cannot display centuries-old academic traditions which philosophy as a field of knowledge and research would presuppose. Luckily philosophy is not merely a faculty of knowledge but represents the field of perception to which poets have contributed since the oldest times – in parallel with philosophical practice in ancient Greece and long before philosophy became established as a university discipline in Western Europe. It would be too much to expect from poets a rational systematization in developing their thoughts. However, it does not mean at all that their thought would have been incapable of penetrating into life's darker zones, with which enlightened knowledge has often instinctively kept its distance.

The Sources of Estonian Philosophy

Kristian Jaak Peterson (1801–1822), generally considered to be the first Estonian autochthonous poet, asks through the mouth of her little sister: “If people have their heavens, then animals or beasts should also have their heavens, because they, too, have their soul in them.” (Peterson 1976: 101)¹ Peterson immediately hits on the frailest and most vulnerable point of the Western philosophical and also theological tradition. The author of the Estonian epic *Kalevipoeg*, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882) leads his hero Kalevipoeg into the somber underworld, the reign of senses and desires. He keeps him apparently on purpose for a long time in the darkness of the forests, which makes even the epic's poetics, based on folksong's repetitions and abounding parallelisms, contradict the rationalized passion of

¹ Here and in the following translation from the Estonian is mine. (J.T.)

Western enlightened man to haste on and progress and brings into the epic a more feminine conscience than most of epic poets have done before him. Peterson tried to reconcile science and goodness, imagining beside a mental “God-father” (*Jumal-isa*), a material Mother-thing (*Ema-asi*). In Kreutzwald’s Pantheon Taara, a god of the popular-autochthonous belief reigns, though his deeds are in harmony with the spirit of the Christmas-mystery.

Immediately after these two outstanding poets, the next great thinker in Estonian culture is the poet Juhan Liiv (1864–1913). He follows the same path. All three men refute any servile imitation of the centric thought and manner, all of them attempt to fuse into the philosophic discourse a peripheral sensibility open to nature and life’s totality.

The unjustly premature death of the extraordinarily talented Peterson did not allow him to express his universe of the mind more fully than what can be read in the prose fragments of his *Päeva-raamatud* (Diaries). These are but the first touches and guesses towards something greater. The number of his poems remained small, their grasp of reality is mostly limited to what the genre of pastoral poetry had transmitted to the Renaissance and newer times. Death took the poet from this world at the moment when his rapidly accumulating and expanding knowledge and the ensuing opening of the world instilled in him an optimistic faith that by means of education and sciences, a path to noble moral values and virtue would open.

Kreutzwald did no longer share that enlightenment optimism. *Kalevipoeg*’s philosophical symbols are multilayered and complicated, skillfully hidden in the images of the epic. The later interpreters have not been completely successful at deciphering the poet’s thoughts.

Juhan Liiv’s poetry, to the contrary, is apparently simple. His ideas, often made to stand forth in his poetic texts, may easily make one forget Liiv’s ironic hint in “Fragment” 68²: according to Liiv,

² In the present essay the numeration of Liiv’s poetic “Fragments” (*Killud*) follows the one used in dating the most complete Estonian edition of Liiv’s philosophically accentuated poems (Liiv 2010).

“easy”, “peasant-like”, “clear”, “over-viewing” do not comprise at all the quality that would help poetry to persist longer than in a tiny and fugitive time particle.

Thought-stanzas

The subtitle used here does not mean at all that philosophy would be missing in the rest of Liiv’s poetry, including his nature poetry, perhaps the largest segment of his total poetic creation. The term “thought poetry” (*mõttelehule*) which in Estonian above all under the influence of German *Denkpoesie* has been applied as an equivalent of philosophically bent poesy, is not completely fortunate. World poetry which has survived the lifetime of their creators and has been transmitted to posterity, can hardly be separated from a philosophic content. Furthermore, one can assuredly claim that the greatest poets of all time have been at the same time noteworthy thinkers, original philosophers. All of them have hidden their thoughts in different, individual sensual perceptions and image association.

Poetry indeed is highly varied in its modalities. According to the well-known definition of Friedrich Schiller, poetic creation can roughly be called “sentimental” and “naïve”, which nonetheless does not exclude a mixture, a fusion of both modes – for Schiller the highest perfection of poetry. The great German poet called “sentimental” – perhaps paradoxically – the kind of poetry which lays a stress on bringing “forth” an idea or a thought. It is the germ of any expressionist poetry. It embraces all allegoric expression, as well as any bold-lined symbolism. On the contrary, “naïve” poetry in Schiller’s interpretation coincides with the principle of impressionism: it is the imitation of reality, a mimesis, in which thought need not be absent at all, but has been so deeply “pressed” into the depicted fragment of reality. Only persons provided with a subtlety of senses and instincts can fully perceive it.

One can say that the major part of lyrical poetry of all times departs from the impressionist principle. In the case of Juhan Liiv, it is represented by far the largest thematic section of his poetic creation, his nature lyrics. Ideally, thought and image in such poetry are born simultaneously. A poet does not know his thought “before-

hand”, and probably also knows that the thought would be senseless, if the state of senses and instincts does not let an image be born at the moment of creation. In a highly concentrated manner, Liiv resumes his poetic ideal in Fragment 71 (Liiv 2010: 155):

If no lightning-bolt of thought

lights your tongue afire,
if no flash of sense illuminates your word:
then without a lightning-bolt of thought

you will drag an empty sledge,

if no lightning-bolt of thought
lights your tongue afire.

(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Under the term “thought-stanzas” which I applied in my 2010 selection of Liiv’s poetry, I assembled those poems in which more clearly than in others an “epigraphic” principle is present: it is a short concluding expression of a thought, a truth or a belief – a writing “upon” or “after”. In the manuscript of his 1926 edition of Liiv’s poems, Friedebert Tuglas, indeed first gathered the philosophically accentuated poems under the title of “Epigrams”, but later crossed it out.³ In a number of poems thought can be given to the poet “in advance”, but in the process of its expression spontaneous associations are born, capable of driving the poet apart from his previously envisaged track; sometimes they bring in lyrical shades. The poet does not maintain his position as a spectator or observer from distance (as it mostly happens in satirically inclined poetry),

³ Juhan Liiv spent his life in dire poverty and suffered since 1893 from mental illness. He himself did not manage to publish any books. His poetic canon was almost exclusively established by the writer and critic Friedebert Tuglas, who after Liiv’s death, based on Liiv’s manuscripts, published two selections on Liiv’s poetry (1919, 1926) and two monographs (1914, 1927) on Liiv’s life and work.

does not act as a omniscient prophet, but lets reality enter him with all its anguish and unbeknown.

Liiv's "Fragments"

The bulk of Liiv's "thought-stanzas" belong to his later work. They include more than a hundred short aphoristic pieces, of which a first brief selection was published by Tuglas, under the title "Fragments" (*Killud*) in the back section of his 1919 edition of Juhan Liiv's poems.

The title was not invented by Tuglas but can be found in one of Liiv's manuscripts, which in comparison with many others is somewhat better arranged, maybe with the purpose of publishing (Fond 163 M 3:3, of the Estonian Museum of Literature). On pages 63 and 64 around twenty small poems appear under the general title "*Killud*". Yet the major part of "Fragments" in the posthumous editions have been picked up and assembled by Tuglas. In his 1919 edition (Liiv 1919) their number was only 20, but in the 1926 edition (Liiv 1926) it was increased to entire 92.

After WWII Aarne Vinkel, a literary historian, started to deal with Liiv's heritage on the basis of the poet's posthumous manuscripts. In his 1954/56 and 1989 edition of Liiv's poems Vinkel did not include all "Fragments" published by Tuglas, but added a number of pieces that were missing in Tuglas' selections. Still, the selection of "Fragments" (as well as Liiv's other poems) is not definite. Thus for my above mentioned book of Liiv's "thought-stanzas" and "fragments" (Liiv 2010) I could find from Liiv's manuscripts eight poems never published before!

Liiv's Life-Philosophy

Fragment 1 ("...Everyone has a soul") introduces the core of Liiv's life feeling and wisdom. The world is a great whole, no individual possesses its soul. Yet something of the original soul (of Creator, God) and creativity lives in all that exists. The human being who considers himself the crown of nature, would not understand it.

In newer times such a philosophy of the world's interior-spiritual integrity has been called holism (from Greek ὅλος – whole, entire,

complete), but long before Liiv the same kind of reality's perception can be observed in philosophers not belonging to Western philosophy's mainstream, and also in the work of several major writers and poets. Thus Moria's self-praise in Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* represents a passionate speech by its author in defense of life's integrity. The French thinker Michel de Montaigne was in Europe of the Renaissance era – blinded by the zeal of conquering the world – one of the few intellectuals who dared to assert that the “others” of the New Continent, the indigenous people, since then subjected to the invaders, were by no means an inferior race, but as regards their moral qualities, would be even superior to the Europeans. Thus a crack was revealed in the main pillar of Western conquest philosophy claiming that the duty of the Western man, given his superior reason and soul, was to free the savage peoples from their superstitions and lead them to the true light of Christianity. Montaigne's bulkiest essay, *Apology of Raymond Sebond*, goes in that sense farthest. Montaigne translated into French the work *Theologia Naturalis* by the 15th-century Catalan thinker Raymond Sebond (Ramon Sibiunda). The main idea of it was that possessing a soul was not man's privilege, but God had provided all living nature with a soul.

Such a philosophy/theology, deviating from the rationalistic-materialistic mainstream of Western thought, leaves without any moral ground or justification historical violence practiced by human beings (predominantly men/males) in respect of other human beings, claimed as inferior (including in the first place womankind and indigenous peoples), as well as violating and destroying nature, in which humankind at every moment and opportunity in history, to the present day, has been involved.

The great merit of the spiritual vanguard of the romantic era was that they powerfully generated the understanding of the “other”. Since then, it has been absorbed by the social conscience on a much wider scale than before. Juhan Liiv's favorite poet was Heinrich Heine who quite often (like in a longer poem titled “Vitzliputzli”) condemned the destruction and enslaving of American indigenous peoples. Could Liiv had access to the work of the first great American poet Walt Whitman, he would have found there strong support for his own spiritual-philosophical understanding of the world. As is well known, Whitman

claimed the world's integrity, the unity of body and soul, as well as equality of all peoples, beings, and races. According to Whitman there is no reason or science that could justify man's superiority as regards other men and the wholeness of nature.

Differently from the German philosophers Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, whose anthropocentrism, whether on the biological-sexual or volitive-imaginational ground, would inevitably lead to individualistic solutions, Whitman could see the beauty of all existence and love it so that it would not be a privilege of the select or the strong. His love includes the consciousness of death, suffering and pain, admiration of a perfect and beautiful body along with care and tenderness for simple and low leaves of grass. It contained a germ of existential attitudes, but it differs from later existentialism (as a philosophical current) by being more open and sensible to that greater part of nature remaining beyond man and his consciousness.

As was referred to in the introductory part of the present essay, the philosophy of life's integrity and existence in Estonia was not necessarily taken over from the West. The same basic perception of life can be noticed in the work of both Peterson, who lived before Heine and Whitman, and Kreutzwald who was the contemporary of the German and the American poet.

A cue to Liiv's life philosophy could be found in the poems "Meeled" (Senses) and "Schopenhauer". The former appears in my recent edition (Liiv 2010) with some important additions, as compared to the earlier editions by Tuglas and Vinkel, while the latter is published there for the first time.

In the poem "Meeled" Liiv centers on the relation between reason and senses, inevitably the basic question of any philosophy. Liiv starts by letting reason / conscience assert life's contradictory nature, opposing the desires of logic and reason: "what we knew in advance, did not come. / We did manage what we didn't think we could. / What seemed to be achieved, remained impossible."⁴ The sphere of reason cannot develop without restrictions and thus grant a new Eden, because biosphere or the cosmic unknown attacks it ceaselessly, as does death that puts a limit to an individual's life (with

⁴ Here and in the following quotations, translation is mine. (J.T.)

every single reason and conscience). At the same time Liiv alludes that even the broadest knowledge obtained by reason cannot provide comfort to the human soul: “But such a life would be impossible.” After that conclusion, the poet turns to the senses. In the following assertion, “The guides of the half-blind / are blind themselves!” it is not possible to understand if Liiv meant by the “half-blind” reason and by “blind guides” senses, or vice versa. In any case Liiv claims both reason and senses to be deficient.

The following exclamation, “At least the senses are seers!” (omitted in the editions by Tuglas and Vinkel), nevertheless confirms that without the sense of seeing it would be altogether impossible to perceive the world (either as real or as a dream). Even though senses delude us, the liberation from delusion can anyway take place only at the initiative of the senses (“they themselves betray them.”) Liiv thus reconciles the senses and reason (“forgiving is honest”), as the only way to perceive the world’s integrity and perhaps also the only way to believe in the meaning of existence. The idea of the poem’s last line seems to be: those who are mindful of the deceptive nature of the senses, are not capable of faith – which however is the precondition of feeling life’s wholeness.

The poem “Schopenhauer” develops an analogous topic, but covertly enters into a polemic with the main ideas of the German philosopher about life as will and imagination and biological determinism. The introductory line exposes Schopenhauer’s main thesis, but the exclamation mark at its end does not mean its acceptance but, on the contrary, a strong doubt. One can impose one’s will on “others” only at the expense of “others” and life itself: somebody has more rights than the rest. Liiv shows life’s wholeness and unity: “But life has a common ground?” The interrogation mark hints probably at Liiv’s reply to Schopenhauer: he cannot imagine how “one” could realize himself in the “other” without the “other” contradicting it (“several hopes on the same thread”). In the line “self-will should be an educated man!” Liiv spaces out “educated”, thus referring to Schopenhauer’s hope that that subtle (educated) sensibility and the arts could purify the biological-sexual urge. If it is absent, the imposition of one’s will on the other (“wanting other”)

turns into grotesque (“it is ugly!”), because in doing so “one” inevitably is made dependant on other (“there is no self!”).

The line “Educate and – divide” seems to be ironical. As in a number of poems, Liiv manifests his skepticism as regards the hope that scientific-rational education – which above all means “dividing”, driving one apart from life’s wholeness – could provide any solutions. “Love and forgive” embrace Christian principles, close to the poet’s heart (compassion in Schopenhauer). Nonetheless, also the Christian desire for justice, as Liiv seems to allude, collides in reality with law, manipulated by men of power by means of words / rationality – in their own favor and to the detriment of those who do not manipulate words with the same skill of the law-makers (“it means bending the letter – but some don’t have the letter!”).

Liiv does not accept Schopenhauer’s fear of the biological-sexual urge nor Nietzsche’s exaltation of the same. Both justify violence against nature and human beings, despite their apparent contrariness a germ of nihilism is never absent in them. They can be adapted to inciting ideologies of the male kind and big nations, rather than to supporting small nations or womankind.

Neither is irony absent in the final line of the poem. Truth is the basis of everything, but paradoxically it is identical with the eternal change of substance (“chameleon of matter!”). There is an obvious hint at the aspiration of all ideologies and philosophies to establish rules of general validity for the present as well as the future: life implacably overthrows them. In his final conclusions Liiv seems to recommend the same as Montaigne long before him: to live as fully as possible in one’s time, in harmony with life’s wholeness, to participate in its bodily as well as spiritual gifts.

Nature, Original Creator, Life’s Wholeness, Man’s Limitations

These are the main themes the variations of which Liiv’s thought-stanzas and “fragments” offer. Liiv celebrates Nature and the Original Creator, in comparison with whom even supreme human creation looks pale. In the poem “Pott ja potissepp” (Pot and Potter;

for the first time published in Liiv 2010; strangely enough not noticed by Tuglas and Vinkel), Liiv reflects the limits of man and his creation, as well as of science and art, similar in his “oriental calm” to the sensibility of Omar Khayyam, the Iranian poet, scientist and philosopher of the start of the 12th century.

POT AND POTTER

You are a pot, don't be sad!
 A nice pot that tries to be liked.
 If you are liked, you will win you master, too.
 He bows before you,
 like a pagan before his god.
 Nonetheless, don't grow proud:
 one day surely – you will be broken.

You are a potter, don't be sad:
 you can make nothing better than a pot!
 You can make anything out of clay,
 but without clay – a potter would be impossible.
 You can even become famous,
 but one day you still – will have to die.
 Your body must decay into clay –
 so that others can make from it a pot.
 (Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Both creation and the creator are turned to clay, so that other creators could make of it new pots. The final aim does not exist: buckthorn exists because of its berries, as berries exist because of buckthorn (“Kitseviinapuu”). The poet's irony is directed against human ambitions and desires in the poems “...Ole sa roomlane” (Whether You Are a Roman), “Aeg” (Time), “Veel kõlab Toome tornist” (Still It Sounds from the Tower of Toompea), “Tuisk” (Blizzard), “Lained” (Waves), “Vulkaan” (Volcano), Fragments 61 and 96, etc.

BLIZZARD

A blizzard races a blizzard,
neither can defeat the other;
now one pulls ahead,
now it is behind the other.

I watch until my eyes tire,
the mind's world enters my thought.
a blizzard races a blizzard,
neither can defeat the other.

(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix, in Liiv 2007: 109)

Liiv is ironical about the earthy aspiration of humans to eternity either by accumulating power, wealth or spirit, as he concludes in Fragment 68, alluding to death:

“You will become eternal/ in a twinkling of an eye”.

Liiv of course knows well that some noblest work still has its significance: aspiring to elevated goals, living following the calls of heart and love, even without expecting remuneration or pay in material terms, as in Fragment 25: “Koolinoorteale” (To Students). Such aspirations can finally make darkness withdraw, as in “Vali on...”(It's Hard...), “Viimne võimalus” (The Last Chance), Fragment 24: “Isamaa” (Fatherland).

THE LAST CHANCE

Take from beauty ultimate beauty
and from truth ultimate truth,
if you must – take from falsity ultimate falsity
and from grace ultimate grace,
from the good ultimate good
and from femininity tenderest tenderness
and take from pain ultimate pain –
and the final trial of suffering! –
Light up such a fire,
lift up yourself and others.

(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

One's faith in life can generate love and beauty, help others to resist and aspire to virtue despite the misery of human existence, as in Fragments 104 and 105.

In Fragment 2 Liiv draws a conclusion similar to the one gradually emerging in our present era, in the most recent science and cultural philosophy: letter/script has existed in(side) humans, ever shaping them, since the remotest times. It is not a text outside man enabling him by means of mental efforts to become wiser. Spirit and body, form and matter are mutually inseparable (Fragment 3: "Maailm on õrnalt koos"). In its long history humankind, however, has not understood that simple truth and, as a result, continues to procreate evil and to destroy itself (Fragment 5). Despite humankind's deficiency and deformity it considers itself superior to the rest of nature (ironical Fragments 7 and 8). Every particle of nature needs the other, is supported by it and depends on the larger whole – a theme whose variations frequently appear in Liiv, as in the poems "Lained" (Waves), "Pae" (Limestone) and Fragments 6 ("Kirves ja mets"), 7 ("Üksik kaasik"), 56 ("Elu") and 100 ("Õpetus"). Man is not an exception. He is and remains a part of nature, being submitted to nature's cycles in the short instance of time between individual life's beginning and end.

WAVES

"Don't push me so hard!"
said one wave to another.
"Why do you always push me?"
Leave me alone."

"I am not pushing anyone,
I am being pushed.
The sea is full of us,
my opposition is futile."
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; Liiv 2007: 73)

A great part of Liiv's critical charge is targeted at human arrogance, especially at the illusion that humans by a kind of specially de-

veloped reason or science could imagine themselves free from the limits prescribed to living nature in all its manifestations. Now by irony, now in images shaded by the grotesque Liiv grounds the optimism of positivist science and philosophy as they claim that the origins and causes of life could be found and explicated (Fragments 8: “Uurijale“, 14, 38: “Hää ja halb”, 41: “Otsatus”, 65: “Mötte-teadus”, 66: “Pott”). Similarly with the sceptical French master of sentences La Rochefoucauld, Liiv alludes to the deficiency of the spirit: it fades like the body and can never substitute heart and love (Fragments 9, 26, 29: “Vaim”, 32). He decomposes the Enlightenment illusion that it would be possible to shape, by means of mere knowledge and teaching, man’s spiritual qualities (Fragments 25, 26, 63: “Taeva tuli”). The more crudely man tears himself apart from the rest of nature, the more quickly he moves toward his spiritual degeneration (Liiv’s criticism of routine and torpidity, crowd spirit and stagnation in the poem “Kiil” and in Fragments 12, 15, 43: “You sleep”). Immortality is possible, but paradoxically (as Liiv demonstrates in Fragment 57: “Surematus”) only due to mortality.

Criticism of Anthropocentrism and Occidentocentrism

Against the background of his philosophy of nature’s integrity and existential feeling of life, Liiv criticizes in effective images the anthropocentric and occidentocentric way of thinking. Liiv insists on the necessity of respecting every single nation and culture, however small and secondary, to understand their right of independence and differing from others. It makes Liiv a predecessor of Yuri Lotman’s philosophy in its late stage: there is no universality that could justify acculturation – the levelling of cultural differences. As creativity, culture cannot act apart from nature – from the biosphere, whose ceaseless change makes “explosions” and “shifts” in artistic creation unpredictable.⁵

Time and again Liiv refutes the imitation of bigger nations and their cultures, as well as a forcible imposition of an alien culture or

⁵ These ideas are especially visible in Lotman’s last book, *Culture and Explosion* (Den Haag – New York, Gruyter 2009), originally published in Russian: Ю. М. Лотман, *Культура и взрыв* (Москва 1992).

its voluntary acceptance. Western aggressive ideology is directly ridiculed in Fragment 51: “Aafriklane eurooplase kriitikas” (an African in European Criticism).

A slavish moor is – crawling like a beast;
 a rebel moor is – cruel like a beast;
 a moor is a beast no matter what!
 (Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; in Liiv 2007: 141)

One should not necessarily look for Liiv’s interest in Buddhism in Fragment 49, but in any case it embodies a vigorous opposition to the importation of ideologies and religions.

What builds houses in China?
 Maybe Christian Hymns
 and perpetual poverty?

Must death scythe
 a strange culture, like grass,
 and annex it to Christ –
 or should they praise Buddha
 and the meadow be improved?
 (Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; in Liiv 2007: 139)

In Fragment 99: “Looja” (Creator) Liiv attacks Estonia’s Germanization and calls for original creation, however difficult the task in smaller nations. In the poem “Puusärk” (Coffin) Liiv adapts to the same context translation, which can easily become a tool of acculturation, quenching the original creation of a nation, and above all, of small nations. The thirst for levelling languages, mentalities and cultures, at which big nations have always excelled, is derided by Liiv in the poem “Estonian Art: Child of Sorrows”

Oh you, the forgotten one, the despised one,
 oh you deliberately trampled underfoot,
 oh you smeared with bile,
 oh you gloated over by asses –
 Estonian art!

How do they criticize –
 an ass would not understand Estonian?
 Not at all: an ass always understands
 any language, and its hee-haw is ready.
 An ass doesn't even care to understand:
 it treads with its hoof and
 judges!

(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; Liiv 2007: 137)

In a fable-like poem “Ahvid” (Monkeys) Liiv shows in the role of monkeys humans who mock at the animal in the prison of its cage.

At the same time Liiv does not idealize the “other” as primitive race (the well-known poem “Aafrika mehed”, shadowed by black humor), nor turns into an idyll the relationship between humans and animals (Fragment 32: “Triina kõigest südamest”, also close to black humor), relations inside the family or species (the poems “Koer”, “Leiva pärast”, “Perekonna riud” I–II, Fragment 52: “Moor” I–II) or the idea according to which the relationship between those who organize work and those who work could easily be turned into a peaceful idyll (the poem “...Kes kapitalis nägi vaenlasi”).

Aesthetics and Poetics

The “Young Estonians” (an influential group of young intellectuals acting between 1905–1915) did not take seriously the “Fragments” of Liiv reflecting his aesthetics and poetics – the general philosophy of artistic creation, as well as what concerns the elements of creating a poem (assembled in Liiv 2010 in Fragments 69 to 90). Tuglas who for the first time included “fragments” about aesthetics and poetics in his 1926 edition of Liiv’s poems was surprised that Liiv stubbornly fought against rhymed poetry. The linguist Johannes Aavik, another leading member of “Young Estonia” went as far as to mention in his brochure *Eesti luule viletsused* (Miseries of Estonian Poetry, 1915) Liiv’s well-known nature poem “Sügise” (Autumn; also known with the title “Nõmm”) as an example of a bad use of metrics. Tuglas, Aavik and other “Young Estonians”, like Villem Ridala, followed enthusiastically the models of French symbolism, which indeed at

the turn of the century and at the beginning of the 20th century spread like wildfire everywhere, including Eastern Europe and Latin America. They did not understand how Liiv could rebel against the voice of the European intellectual center and do something different, not coinciding with what was demanded by young modernist fashion.

Juhan Liiv, always suspicious of imitating foreign models or any models (Cf. his ironic Fragment 78: “Eeskujud”) was convinced that a poet’s highest goal was to give birth to something as close as possible to what had been achieved by the Supreme Creator, the Author of the world. A great poet should transcend models and look for his own originality, create his own personal poetics, instead of blindly imitating theories or forms invented at “centers”. He refers to the example of German poetry whose originality started when it broke with the French examples (Fragment 76) and alludes to the task of Estonian poetry to abandon the example of the “giants” and find its own originality (Fragment 77: “Saksa kirjandus”).

Simple impressionism did not satisfy Liiv. For that reason he could not appreciate Villem Grünthal-Ridala’s much praised poem “Talvine õhtu” (Winter Evening; cf. Tuglas’s memories of Liiv in *Juhan Liiv mälestustes* 2000: 103). In the cycle “Ääremärkused” (Marginal Notes) in Liiv 1921: 78 he says about Ernst Enno: “Enno’s main drawback is that he is without a backbone, without his own character.” In the same writing Liiv made an observation about Ridala. “I cannot understand anything of “Igatsuse laul” [A Song of Yearning]. It would be a madman’s song. If I could let stay the first four lines and the last six lines, then it would be something.” (Ib. 77) Liiv was ironical about any plainly sentimental poetry. In my 2010 edition of Liiv’s poetry, departing from Liiv’s manuscript, I added to Fragment 73: (“...Kas pressitud lille nägid sa”) the final line suppressed by Tuglas: “*mis tärgand on tulest vahel*” (that sometimes was born from fire). It is not at all unimportant: Liiv admits the vigorous authenticity of sentimental poetry, but observes its weakness in a poet’s incapability of creating an image that would make the feeling persist. Indeed, the problem of the greater mass of either romantic or symbolist-modernist poetry is that impression-based images have no philosophy to rely upon. Differently from

romantic poetry, symbolist poetry abandoned the direct expression of feeling. However, allusiveness that since then became the great fashion, would neither achieve its goals when there is nothing to allude to.

Liiv himself looked for a deeper spiritual ground for poetry. At the same time he was perfectly aware that by a mere effort of thought, philosophy or will one can never create poetry that would persist in a larger span of time. That idea is in its most concise form expressed in the above quoted Fragment 71. The act of creation in Liiv's experience is symbiotic: thought cannot be separated from feeling, as language cannot be separated from the senses. Ideally, it can become reality at a certain moment, in a certain state of mind; once it is past, the result is what was described by in Fragment 89: "Lüürika" (Lyrics):

See, I am blushing –
kiss me!
Later even a hundred kisses
will be in vain.
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Liiv's idea that great poetry cannot be achieved without inspiration, by means of mere reason on intellect, is resumed in Fragments 74: "Grönlandis" and 90: "...On mõistus üle tundmuse" (Is reason higher than feeling?):

Is reason higher than feeling?
Oh, inspiration, whatever its source,
what will you create *w i t h o u t i t* in the world?
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix; in Liiv 2007: 143)

Liiv spaces out the words "thinking" and "feeling" in Fragment 72, stressing the need for their unity. The same Fragment 72 also refers to the relation between imitation and original creation: a flower would not bloom without itself, but on the contrary: it thinks and feels itself into bloom. It perfectly harmonizes with Liiv's symbiotic-holistic life philosophy.

It goes without saying that Liiv, who set such high demands for his own poetry, did not attribute any value to verse-scribbling inspired by local-political events (cf. Fragment 70). At the same time it is evident in Liiv's poetic work as a whole that he painfully followed everything that was going on in the Estonian society and in the entire world. In Fragment 85: "...Hoia et sa ei luuleta" he shows his reluctance as regards poetry which either out of cautiousness or under the influence of aestheticism makes itself deaf to life's pains and sorrows. In Liiv's philosophy poetry is the kind of creation that should provide the suffering and tired human soul refreshment and comfort (Fragment 88: "...Sa oled kui õhkuv lilleke").

In his first monograph on Liiv (Tuglas 1914: 66) Tuglas writes: "It was quite clear to Liiv that poetry could not exist without matter, meter and rhyme; it was especially clear to him who still bore in his blood instincts of early romanticism." It is obvious that Liiv as a great poet knew much more than Tuglas or Aavik – who in the field of poetry were mere theoreticians – about poetic matter and rhythm. Liiv's poetry as a whole embodies at the same time his poetics in images. However, as regards rhyme, what Tuglas says only shows how the overwhelming contemporary fashion could blind talented young spirits to the extent that they forgot what had already become a proved phenomenon in world poetry: Heine's and Whitman's unrhymed free verse, also, unrhymed odes written by German Enlightenment and Romantic poets, as well as by our own Kristian Jaak Peterson, under the influence of ancient Greek or Roman poetry. The symbolist-modernists at the start of the 20th century tended to consider their own method of art and literature eternal. It is more ironic still that only a few years after Tuglas's monograph on Liiv, the vanguard-radical phase of modernism stormily broke out and under the labels futurism, expressionism and, later, surrealism, rhyme in poetry was massively abandoned, so that unrhymed free verse, during the 20th century, became established as a universal phenomenon in world poetry.

Liiv indeed wrote the bulk of his poetry in rhyme. However, at the early stage he intuitively understood that in Estonian, whose morphology is characterized by a great variety of individual forms – with declinations and conjugations formed by word-endings – rhyme

cannot be formed in such a natural way as in the case of the Romance languages (the originating area of rhyme in European poetry). To apply full rhymes in a language whose possibilities for rhyme are meager, would mean violating poetry, as Liiv eloquently shows in Fragment 83:

The one who sings in sonorous sonnets,
in armor entertains himself amid flowers.

Liiv's irony as regards rhymed poetry is best of all manifested in the poem "Vormidessel!" (Into Forms!). In his selection of Liiv's "Fragments" Tuglas published only four initial lines of it. Vinkel restored the complete poem. I have analyzed it in a greater detail (Talvet 2008: 94)⁶ Preplanned rhymes do not let the spirit express itself spontaneously, they wither the "lightning-bolts of thought", the true origin of great poetry. For that reason Liiv continuously applies lax rhymes, hardly qualified as good and adequate by verse science. Liiv does not hesitate to repeat the same rhyming word several times in a poem, whenever he feels that the interior rhythm of the poem requires it.

The reception of Liiv's poetic work by the posterity confirms what Liiv anticipated in Fragment 86:

You sang for the sake of rhyme,
and got a beating because of rhyme.
You sang from your heart,
and even now you are thanked for it.
(Trans. by myself and H. L. Hix)

Adapted to his own poetic work, "Liiv's "now" is fully valid today, a hundred years after the poet's passing away. Most likely it will be heard, at least for some time, in the future.

⁶ In Estonian, the essay was published in the journal *Methis* 1–2, 2008.

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