

*Some Aspects of Subversive Rhetoric  
in Juhan Viiding's Poetry*

**0.** The aim of the present article is to study some aspects of subversive rhetoric in the poetry of Juhan Viiding (1948–1995), one of Estonia's most admired and cherished poets and actors whose "Complete Poetry" (edited by Hasso Krull) includes texts written between 1968 and 1994, published either in collections (until 1978, under the pseudonym of Jüri Üdi, which translates as George Marrow in English) or separately in newspapers and magazines. It is important to mention that Juhan Viiding often read and sang his texts (accompanied on the piano by Tõnis Rätsep, a friend and colleague from the Estonian Drama Theatre), quite a few of which are recorded on cassette and CD. Üdi/Viiding was and continues to be widely read, quoted, imitated and discussed by his Estonian readers, fellow poets, intellectuals and critics.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the fact that Viiding's poetry has been translated into sixteen languages, according to Aare Pilv's "Juhan Viidingu ja Jüri Üdi bibliograafia" (Pilv 2010: 170–175), Viiding has not achieved the sort of fame abroad which he enjoys in Estonia. Indeed, the volume of articles and essays written in Estonian on Viiding's poetry is not equalled by writing in other languages. Reviews written in English and Russian are mostly by Estonian critics or Russian critics from Estonia (ib. 196–208). Of course, poetry in general does not submit easily to being translated, but in Üdi/Viiding's case we are dealing with a kind of poetic which makes the process even more complicated, perhaps also partly

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent collection of articles, essays and reminiscences *Juhan Viiding, eesti luuletaja* (ed. by Marin Laak and Aare Pilv) was published by the Estonian Literary Museum only in December, 2010. It includes a comprehensive bibliography (compiled by Aare Pilv) which lists of Üdi/Viiding's works, translations of his poetry into other languages, songs performed by him and by others, his theatrical roles, his TV and theatre performances, and articles, reviews and essays written on his poetry.

unachievable. This seems to be the most probable explanation for the asymmetry of Üdi/Viiding's poetic reputation. So, apart from the peculiar charm of his poetry, with its highly intricate poly-semantic spectrum which calls out for discussion of the organising principles of his texts, I am writing this article<sup>2</sup> in the hope that more foreign critics will take an interest in this exceptional poet and more poets who write in other languages will rise to the challenge of translating his texts or providing their own original pieces of creative writing in Üdi/Viiding's wake.

**1.1** Before I discuss Viiding's poetic based on the example of "Selges eesti keeles" ("In clear Estonian"), a collection published in 1974 under the pseudonym Jüri Üdi, I shall give a broad outline of my approach. First of all, there is the question of language and text. The purely formal-structural approach would understand text as a self-contained system of signs with its own hierarchical structure. The text in this case would be a system of its own discourse. Yet a text is not created in, nor does it live in a void, but in a shared cultural sphere; it is the result of dialogue with other poetic texts and also the common (and of course changing) linguistic usage.<sup>3</sup> Therefore we may say with J. Lotman that "the rhetorical structure does not arise automatically from the language structure, but is a deliberate reinterpretation of the latter [...]; the rhetorical structure is brought into the verbal text from outside, giving it a supplementary orderedness" (Lotman 1990: 49). For example, if we take the title of Üdi/Viiding's collection "Selges eesti keeles" (which may be translated as "in clear Estonian," and also as "in plain Estonian" or "in lucid Estonian"), a mindful reader would not understand it as a heading/text *per se*, but as a heading/text in relation to some out-of-this-text

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<sup>2</sup> The present article in part follows my essay in Estonian on the genesis of spaces in Viiding's poetry (Ploom 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Common oral communication also occurs in situations which should be understood as situational texts, but they are not meant to be preserved as the enounced which in the course of re/presentation engender new enunciations; for once the enunciation in this kind of communication has achieved its pragmatic aim, the text will normally be cancelled, or at least not recorded in the sense of written texts, or film or sound recordings, etc.

usage. In fact, “selges eesti keeles” is part of a great number of everyday communicative and pragmatic utterances. Very often a person who says “Ma ütlen sulle selges eesti keeles” (“I am telling you in plain Estonian”) means either that he wants to make his point plain and simple or that the person to whom the discourse is directed is somewhat slow or stubborn in understanding. But the phrase also has the connotation of the beauty of the Estonian language, both in the sense of clear and logical, and also in the sense of the phonetic beauty of this particular phrase or, by extension, of the Estonian language in general. In this case, “selges eesti keeles” may even be extended to “sulaselges eesti keeles,” which would convey that “the Estonian language is as beautiful as liquid honey.”

Therefore many different out-of-this-text utterances “in plain/clear/beautiful/logical/lucid Estonian” may be drawn into dialogue with the enounced “selges eesti keeles,” both in the title and in many other textual units contained in the same collection. In the light of this kind of dialogue between this communicative utterance and other communicative and pragmatic utterances (outside of this text), the semantic possibilities of a (poetic) text are not confined to the relationship of the code and the message as something fixed and monolithic. They are both bound to change in the act of communication. Jakobson, in his famous article “Linguistics and Poetics” (1960), certainly stresses the supremacy of the poetic function in poetry, but he also warns against its reduction to the absolute: “any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification” (2003: 91). The poetic function which focuses on the message is in interaction with the other linguistic functions also in poetry. Lotman develops Jakobson’s views and shows how the message and code relationship in the process of different communication systems (I-I, I-s/he) may bring about a change in both of them with a resulting shift in context (Lotman 1990: 20–22).

In Üdi/Viiding’s poetry we witness a deliberate transformation of the code and message relationship already on the level of language. The ordinary linguistic code (the choice is thereby mainly made from among idiomatic expressions which are actually already results of previous code breaks) is questioned and the reader is asked to make

repeated moves onto the metalinguistic level. In the case of “selges eesti keeles,” the initial relationship between the code and the message is shattered. From the outwardly simple communicative code and message relationship “in clear Estonian” the reader is called upon to move (because of the intrusion of some other possible utterances quoted above) to a new and altered code and message relationship, even though the out-of-this-announced textual memories of the addresser and the addressee need not coincide. What they must share, though, is the understanding that other texts have to “translate” this very message, acting as its code; therefore, “in clear Estonian” may become “in plain Estonian” or “in lucid Estonian” or even, absurd as it may seem, “in clear Estonian,” which is only seemingly tautological, for this “clear” is no longer the initial “clear.”

Thus it appears that the language of the poetic text is not communicative and pragmatic in the sense of easing and simplifying these processes but, on the contrary, it thickens the possibilities of the semantic field. The poetic language of Üdi/Viiding often questions idiomatic codes and breaks them. But it is not for the sake of breaking the codes as such; it is also to focus the dichotomy of things and words, being and language. As some phenomenologists put it, language while disclosing being also closes it (Gadamer 1974). In this light, “in ‘clear’ Estonian” also hints at some reality beyond the outwardly common, plain and conventional linguistic reality, although its perception by the addresser and the addressee (and here we tackle the difficulty of the implicit “lector” as a textual strategy and the empirical reader drawn into that position) cannot overlap. And they need not. This kind of keeping horizons apart (the difference between *expliquer* and *comprendre*) in hermeneutics has been indicated by Ricoeur (e.g. 1986: 180). Therefore my objective in this article is not to analyse in order to arrive at some final unified understanding of what the author “meant,” but to analyse some aspects of the rhetorical mechanism in Üdi/Viiding which may lead to possible ways for a further understanding of his texts.

**1.2** In Üdi/Viiding’s poetry the question of the transformation of the linguistic code is closely interrelated with the questioning of other

cultural codes. The simultaneous interplay of different codes which get into contradiction is one of the main devices of Üdi/Viiding's textual rhetoric. Rhetoric, in this context, does not mean the art of prose as opposed to poetics as the art of poetry, nor does it mean ornate discourse, but the principle of text organisation and especially the principle of meaning-generation (cf Lotman 1990: 36–53). I shall underline in Lotman's approach one specific idea which for me seems seminal: the opposition, from the semiotic point of view, of stylistics to semantics, on the one hand, and to rhetoric, on the other (ib. 50). A literary text as a complex of hierarchically organised segments cannot be either exclusively rhetorical or exclusively stylistic, but one of these features may be predominant. According to Lotman, a stylistic effect is produced when one and the same semantic content is expressed in different registers, but the signs within each register belong to that particular register, i.e. "a self-contained and hierarchically bonded group of signs", whereas a rhetorical effect arises when there is a *conflict* of signs relating to *different* registers, and when this conflict leads to a structural renewal of the feeling of a boundary between the self-contained worlds of signs (ib. 50–51). The stylistic effect is formed *within* a hierarchical sub-system (ib. 51). Hence, "stylistic consciousness" derives from hierarchical boundaries as something absolute, whereas "rhetorical consciousness" derives from hierarchical boundaries as something relative (ib.).

On another occasion ("Filmi semiootika" – "Film semiotics") Lotman analysed the mythical figure of Charlie Chaplin. Charlie Chaplin has two opposite semantic halves, the gentlemanly half and the tramp half, but these segments are not separated by a rigid boundary: in his gentlemanliness Chaplin all of a sudden becomes the mischievous Charlie, and amid the dowdiness and mischievousness a gentleman bows and doffs his hat. But in Charlie Chaplin's figure, despite these separate halves and a hint of the one in the other, we may still find a kind of symmetry which we do not have in Jüri Üdi/Juhan Viiding. I do not intend to analyse the figure of Üdi/Viiding, who was, by the way, very keen on hats and old-fashioned elegance, which was in striking contrast with "Soviet fashion," nor his habit of using different voices even in everyday

speech. The object of my analysis is his poetic body, his texts which on the one hand reflect his position as an Estonian poet in a Soviet Estonia which could still reminisce about a past world; on the other hand, there is the contradiction between the rough and the civilised, the savage/free and the cultured/normative, which extends well beyond narrow political barriers and questions the depths of human existence. Secondly, and what constitutes the biggest difference from Charlie Chaplin is the fact that the “I” which should link the different segments into one whole is not congruous or analysable, but manifold and elusive. Therefore, diverse and asymmetrical spaces, not clearly definable, are being generated in one and the same text, even in one and the same stanza, in one and the same couple of verses or in a single phrase. As a result, boundaries move and one finds oneself re-segmenting what seems to have been segmented already.

**2. 1** Üdi/Viiding’s collection “Selges eesti keeles” comprises 63 texts all of which I cannot, of course, analyse. My purpose is to draw examples from a number of compositions in order to illustrate a) how his poetic language is built on the interaction of various codes and b) how Üdi/Viiding makes use of a certain rhetoric which generates diverse or even contradictory meanings within and between sub-segments which cannot be easily ordered because of moving boundaries. Under the title “Selges eesti keeles” (“In clear Estonian”) is a footnote which translates as:

When translating this book, please  
alter the title  
according to the language of translation.

Author

This paratextual allusion suggests that the author is very much aware of the “linguistic question” and the difficulty (if not impossibility) of translating his poetry. If this request were acted on, ideally all of the textual specificities which spring from the possibilities of the Estonian language – the specific imagery of its idioms combined with its prosody and rhyme – should be changed according to the

language of translation. Translation, therefore, would mean the transposition of the tension between Estonian figurative language and prosody and Üdi/Viiding's textual language (including the questioning and breaking of its codes), for example, into a tension between English figurative language and prosody with the translator's textual language, which also has to be code-questioning and -breaking.

Estonian sayings and proverbs with their specific prosody and textual transformations very often make the textual *incipit*. In my analysis, I shall explain the idiomatic phrases and sometimes also offer suggestions for possible alternative translations.<sup>4</sup>

võta pikksilm. oota pikisilmi	a) take the long-glass. wait with longing eyes
("Võta pikksilm, vaata pikisilmi")	b) take the spy-glass. spy with longing

öö käest pannakse päeva käele	from the hand of night onto the hand of day is put
koiduni alahoitu	what was preserved until dawn
("Öö käest pannakse päeva käele")	

The Estonian text transforms everyday speech based on metaphoric phrases connected with "hand." E.g. "öö käes" ("in night's hand") has become neutrally communicative and is no longer perceived as a metaphor. In the same neutral way one can say "tuule käes" ("in the wind"), "külma käes" ("in the frost"), and also "päeva käes" ("in the sun"). But the illative case "päeva käele" ("onto the hand of day") is clearly "abnormal" for the Estonian reader. It is not only a question of poeticalness in the sense of personification, but there is a hint of the *unheimlich*, as Freud would put it (cf Freud 1919). The translator should therefore use some idiomatic commonplaces and then subvert them. The same feeling is achieved in the next example.

hirmul on suured silmad	fear has big eyes
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<sup>4</sup> Titles of poems, or the first lines of untitled poems, are given below the quotations in Estonian.

ja kokkusurutud suu                      and a compressed mouth  
 (“Hirmul on suured silmad”)

“Hirmul on suured silmad” is a well-known Estonian saying used in everyday speech to express the idea that when one is frightened, one cannot think logically and tends to see things which do not exist or to exaggerate. But Üdi/Viiding links it to an extension which is never used in everyday speech. The translator’s task is to find an analogous linking pair in which the second element should extend and at the same time question the first element.

I could continue this list with many more examples, but those given should suffice to explain one of the mechanisms of the Üdi/Viiding rhetoric. There is the twofold usage of linguistic spaces: an idiomatic, but out-of-the-poetic-text, normal, correct and “civil” use of language and an extended idiomatic, poetic, abnormal, “incorrect” and savage use. As a result, the first type of normality is questioned and shattered, and at the same time, a new potential idiomatic is created.

**2.2.** Sometimes in the process of transformation the linguistic code is combined with other specific cultural codes (mythological codes, biblical codes, army-life codes, codes of the criminal world, etc.):

laev tuli kaua üle suure lombi  
 the boat took long to cross the big pond  
 (“Meremehe küsimus”)

“Suur lomp” (the big pond) here, of course, stands for the Atlantic Ocean (the pond), but by extension it means the shut-out or mythological or dream world in general, when juxtaposed with Soviet reality.

tuhat korda kulpi löödud  
 a thousand times the hand scooped up  
 (“Sõja eelõhtul”)



“Kulpi lööma” in military slang means raising an ostentatiously and eagerly cupped (literally “ladled”) right hand abruptly to the ear when saluting an officer, and it also means respectful behaviour in general towards those of higher rank.

me ei tea, mis Luukas kodus teeb    we do not know what Luke is up to  
at home

(“Hobuste laul rändajale”)

The common menacing expression “Näitan sulle, kuidas Luukas õlut teeb” (“I’ll show you how Luke brews beer”), i.e. I’ll teach you a lesson, is transformed in the text.

ma loodan täna ei saa nuga neeru    I hope, I won’t get a knife in the  
kidney

(“Õhtu Valgas”)

The alliterative “nuga neeru” is clearly connected with the criminal code, yet it is also facetious. Very often the use of this kind of idiomatic phrase springs from the principle of melopoeia.

Sometimes Üdi/Viiding’s poetic language transforms the existing linguistic code completely, e.g.

oma särk on kõige ligedam (instead of “oma särk on kõige ligemal”)  
 (“Oma särk on kõige ligedam”)

one’s own shirt is wetttest or sweatiest (instead of “one’s own shirt is nearest”, i.e. dearest)

The common saying for indicating egotism – “one’s own shirt is nearest to oneself” (“one’s own skin is dearest to oneself”) – is transformed into apprehension and weariness. Perhaps the translation could be something like:

one’s own shirt is weariest

or something similar; all the more so since the text speaks about shirts hanging on a line and which seem to have an individual existence separately from their wearer.

The same kind of phenomenon is manifest also in:

ma tulin saama kõhtu varju I came to get some shade into the stomach  
 (“Laps”)

The Estonian saying “kõht on hele” (“the stomach is light,” i.e. “not dark”) means that one is hungry. Perhaps the etymology is connected with the sounds made by an empty stomach, as “hele hää” means a “clear and high-pitched voice,” but there may be other possibilities. In any case, the poet extends the code, suggesting that “when the stomach is light,” it should be filled with “shade.”

This described mechanism actually anticipates the leading of the normal linguistic code into crisis and, as a result, the generating of new and unexpected meanings. The message does not “hit home” easily, and so the code is checked and the revised message provides a shift in context. Code- and context-shifting often occur within a single line or within a couple of lines and act as a kind of hinge uniting different, even contradictory, semantic spaces. In the example above, we have the normal “civilised linguistic space,” which, although idiomatic, is not present in the text, and the savage “uncivilised” linguistic space, which is present, but which without the other one is not translatable. “Kõht on hele” (“the stomach is light”) is “normal” use, “kõhus on vari” (“there is shade in the stomach”) is “savage” use. However, as a result, a new meaning is generated which is no mere aesthetic game, if we just think that when hungry, there is even “no shade of food” (“mitte toidu varju”) in the stomach.

**2.3** So far we have been dealing only with some prerequisites, albeit very important ones, for semantic rhetoric. One of the essential traits of this kind of textual organisation is that the boundaries between the sub-segments should not hold, as will be seen in the poem “Me ei sõitnud metsast läbi” (“We did not drive through the forest”), one of

the most striking examples of Üdi/Viiding's semantic rhetoric. I shall reproduce the text in Estonian and give an English translation.

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me ei sõitnud metsast läbi mina üksi sõitsin	we did not drive through the forest I alone did drive
ajasin end hästi sirgu nägin kõik on hästi	I pulled myself well upright I saw that all was well
kuused kasvanud õigesti lilled õitsenud õieti flowers blossomed blossomwise	spruces grown upright and wise [spruces sprang respectable] [flowers sprang receptacles]
mütoloogias lennanud hiigellind oma tiivaga lehvitas tuult	a giant bird of mythology with its wings waved the wind
mis ma tean sellest Lõhavere linnust valvanud hiigellinnust	what do I know of the bird keeping hold of Lõhavere stronghold
läbi metsa üksinda sõitsin kitkus sulgi õõ minu rinnust	I drove alone through the forest the night plucked feathers from my chest

I have made some slight changes in the translation in order to convey the semantic rhetoric of the poet. Let us first analyse the third couplet, which functions as a kind of hinge opening into two different and asymmetrical spaces:

kuused kasvanud **õigesti**  
lilled õitsenud **õieti**

There is no valid translation, for there is no single valid understanding and interpretation. One could be “spruces grown straight, flowers blossom by blossom.” But besides the idiomatic usage, of

which “õigesti” (“straight”) is common, and “õieti” (“blossomwise”) understandable but rare, there is in parallel an allusion to normativity and grammaticality, for in Estonian “õigesti” also means “in the correct way.” “Õieti” means “blossom by blossom,” but it may also mean, and is actually widely used in the sense of “correct,” though this is not normative or grammatically correct usage.

The “wild” and the “cultured” are thus mixed, and the border is unclear, for besides the naturally wild there is also the linguistically “wild,” differing from the normative. Spruces seem to have grown “straight” (wild), why not?, and this is suggested as normal, why not? But flowers seem to have grown “blossom by blossom” (wild), why not?, although it is suggested that this may somehow be outside the norm, which clearly makes it absurd. How can what is natural be incorrect? Both spruces and flowers belong to the natural and the wild, and they grow as they may. Flowers cannot blossom “straight,” that would be absurd. But herein lies Üdi/Viiding’s semantic anarchy, the possibility of the correctness of language and also its normative power is questioned and subverted. The cultural space of Soviet Estonia was very normative; the same held true for the official grammar of the Estonian language. It was both a defence system against foreign loans and influences and also a symptom of civic narrow-mindedness and political correctness. The normativists of the Estonian language fought against the incorrect form “õieti” (“correct”), but nature – wild flowers – does not allow itself to be shaped by norms. Once again, Üdi/Viiding’s anarchy is broader than political anarchy.

Of course, in the poem in question we must juxtapose also other spaces of linguistic and cultural existence – the individual space and the collective space, the mythological dream space and the concrete space of collective activities (linguistic activities, for example). The outer collective space seems to be a normative space, the inner individual place is also a dreamy place, though even here one part of it is collective, for “Lõhavere linnus” – Lõhavere stronghold – is a mythical place associated with the age-old resistance of the Estonians against foreign crusaders. Another hinge which unites and separates these spaces is therefore the isomorph “linnus”; in one instance, it is the accusative case of “linnus” (“stronghold”), and in

the other instance, the ablative case of “lind” (“bird”). So there is the collective myth of a “giant bird which keeps hold of Lõhavere stronghold,” but it is the “I” alone from whose chest the bird plucks feathers. It is far from meaningless that in the Estonian original “rinnust” (“chest”) rhymes with both the ablative case of “bird” (“linnust”) and the accusative of “stronghold” (“linnust”). Therefore, in this “chest of the lyrical ‘I’” the collective mythological space and the individual signifying space interrelate. In Dante’s “Divine Comedy” wings and writing are associated, e.g. at the end of “Paradise” Dante says, “ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne” (“but my feathers were not cut out for this,” XXXIII, v 139). Surely, in Üdi/Viiding’s text there is the additional feeling of the *unheimlich*.

**2.4** Another decisive factor of Üdi/Viiding’s semantic rhetoric and the asymmetry of the textual sub-segments is the question of the incongruity of the “I”. Of course, we may say that the signifying space is united by the writing “I” and through the “grammar” of the writing “I” with “we”: we have the Estonian language (collective grammatical space, image space, verse traditions, etc.) and Estonian culture (collective mythologies, historical memory, etc.). So it would seem that the signified promises itself through this collective language as an institution. But it also denies itself, for besides the outer institutionalised and somewhat abstract language-culture space, there is the individual concrete body, the “chest from which the mythological bird plucks feathers,” and this subverts the collective and the normative. Therefore, the writing “I” is posited in the collective cultural space, which interrelates with the cultural-linguistic being of the cognising “I” and also with the latter’s non-linguistic and non-cultured being which expresses itself in fear, in the *unheimlich*, in the dreamlike.

Hasso Krull, poet and editor of the “Complete Poems,” has written in his analysis that the subjective centre of Viiding’s poetry remains undetermined (Krull 1998: 558–560). So we cannot speak of the unified lyrical “I” typical of classical lyrical poetry. Viiding’s lyrical “I”-s often juxtapose and confront the “we,” “he,” and “they”. Sometimes it seems that there is an attempt at the unification of the “I” with a kind of meta “I,” a meta character in the texts:

ma näen seda kõike läbi vihmase hommiku	I see it all through a rainy morning
ühest kõrgest tornist kuhu ronin peaegu igal ööl	from a tall tower onto which I climb almost every night
("Suveöö piiril")	("On the frontier of a summer night")

But even then, there is the suspicion that we are dealing just with another position, another voice, though on a different level, in a different space, as if observed by another observer. Consequently, these spaces appear very fragmentary and hardly distinguishable, so it is difficult to establish precise frontiers between the to-ing and fro-ing between concrete places and mythological space, dream space, memory space, etc, which the writing "I" creates and then observes from aside with the help of some meta "I"-character making this observation an integral part of the game, a kind of meta-space within the space of representation.

The different spaces which are often hinged together or kept apart through the juxtaposition and confrontation of character-positions need not only be those of "I" and "we"; they can also be "he" and "they," as in the poem "Orkester Glehni lossi pargis" ("The orchestra in Glehn Castle park") where there is also the confrontation of the binary oppositions "wild/natural" – "normal/correct." The second opposition is between rhyme and non-rhyme. But what is important is that these oppositions subvert one another. In the first stanza, the confrontation is between the sub-segment marked "teine viiul" ("second violin") and the sub-segment marked "teised pillimehed" ("other players"):

väikses lavakastis mängib	in the tiny pit is playing
ainult teine viiul	only the second violin
teised pillimehed peavad	other players have a birthday party
sünnipäeva Hiikul	somewhere in the Hiiu zone

Hiiu is actually a nice quiet suburb on the outskirts of Tallinn. "Viiul" and "Hiikul" rhyme, but the sub-segments which they unite have opposing semantics. Only one member of the orchestra is

playing in the pit (normative), but the others are doing something free, wild and fanciful (having a birthday party).

In the second stanza, two rhyming couplets represent phonetic unison, but the lexical meanings do not match at all, and the result is absurd. I shall first give a literal translation (a), then a modified version (b):

a)		
igäühel kaasas forte		everyone has his forte
vabandage torte		please excuse the cakes
igäühel mustad noodid	everyone	has black notes
lumivalged voodid		beds as white as snow
b)		
igäühel kaasas forte	everyone	has his forte
vabandage torte		please excuse the torte
igäühel mustad noodid	everyone	has black notes
lumivalged voodid		lily-white are throaties

In parallel with the so-called “real” room, an absurd and playful fantasy room is created. (The “forte” might also refer to woman, man’s “better half”). In any case, fantasy relates to freedom, to infantilism, although there is also perhaps some warning in the juxtaposition of “black notes” and “snow-white beds.” Whatever the case, liberty and fantasy are stressed in the third stanza, where some play with the sculpture of a crocodile, while others pick flowers in the “wild and free park.”<sup>5</sup>

However, in the fourth and last stanza, there is yet another confrontation of the “he” and the “they”. The “he” is no longer the “second violin,” but a “tired oboe (player)” that slides into a pool, and it is not actually clear what is happening – drowning due to drunkenness, suicide, or perhaps it is just a dream. What *is* clear is

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<sup>5</sup> Nikolai von Glehn (1841–1923), the founder of Nõmme district, which also includes the Hiiu zone, built a castle with a fanciful park around it which later became known as Glehn Castle and the park of Glehn Castle. The park is still a popular place of recreation.

that the “abnormal,” wild and playful space which almost became “normative” and “natural” is subverted in its turn:

a)

aga kusagil basseinis	but somewhere in a swimming-pool
kuigi see ei loe	though it does not matter
vajub tasakesi vette	silently sinks into water
väsinud oboe	the tired oboe

b)

aga kusagil basseinis	but somewhere into a basin
kuigi see ei loe	though it does not matter
vajub tasakesi vette	slides the overtired oboe
väsinud oboe	and he does not splatter

It is not even clear where this space is. Is it also in Hiiu, in one of the pools at the foot of the hill on which Glehn castle stands? Is he a member of the same orchestra? The poet seems to create, with very neat and concise expedients, an image of a polyphonic world of diverse instruments that do not play the same tune. These voices express both the correct professional space, but also the childish space of fantasy, the space of fear and the fear of death. And the “realities” of the water world are altogether different from those of the dry world. One juxtaposition is almost never enough for Viiding. “They” links with both “he”-s, “the second violin” and “the tired oboe,” whereas the latter remains enigmatic. This “he” is situated neither in a wild and free space, nor in ordered spaces, and is therefore left out of the game, or the game stops, for there is nothing else to say. That world is not analysable.

**2.5.** Let us now discuss some aspects of what is seemingly one of the most binary and “political” texts in the collection – “Palmimaja” (“Palmhouse”), but not political in the ordinary sense of socially or politically biased poetry. It is rather a question of the coming together/remaining apart of different time spaces.

vange kasvatati lillepottides	captives were grown in flowerpots
vabu lõikelilledena müüdi	free ones sold as cut flowers



Paradoxically, potted flowers are living flowers, but only because they are grown in custody, they are prisoners; equally paradoxically, cut flowers are dead, but they were once wild and free. We also witness a splitting of the “I”:

mööda jalgu ronin üles nagu roos I climb along the legs like a rose  
olen roheline, kuid kas enam mina I am green, but is it still me

Green flowers are known to be living flowers; when flowers are dead, they usually change colour. Therefore the “climbing rose” (the climber) is alive, but dead, for the “I” does not exist any longer. In the juxtaposition of the two “I”-s, here and now, there is also the sensation of time. Time now is different from what it was.

järjest pragunevad vanad lillepotid  
old flowerpots crack one after another

nende põhjast leian vaevalt kadund aja  
at the bottom I hardly find the time which has gone

[at the bottom I find the time which has just gone]

Therefore, “Palmimaja” (“Palmhouse”) creates a kind of confrontation of two spaces and times. It is clear that cut flowers are no longer part of life, but neither is the imprisoned life of pot-flowers. Old time spies from behind the cracked pots. We again come close to Üdi/Viiding’s genesis of spaces, which might be qualified as the creation of mythological time and space, in a predominantly backward direction. What we seem to have here is a case of initiatic, orphic poetry, of which there are not many examples in Estonian poetry. Perhaps the best example of this kind is “Terve elu” (“The whole life”), where we encounter a confrontation between objective time and subjective time.

ei ta kulu ega kuku aina veereb it neither wears out nor falls, only  
rolls on

## PLOOM

The topic is either life or time or life-time. There are three very common sayings in a row: “aeg/elu kulub” (“time/life wears out”), “kell/aeg kukub” (“the hour strikes”), “aeg/elu veereb” (“time/life rolls on”), but they are in confrontation, the first two are opposed to the third. The two first expressions may be connected with the sense of time, subjective time, and third is the constation of the objectivity of the flow of time. But the objective flow of time is soon to be subverted by the repetition of a line:

hualde hammustan ja tardununa I bite my lip and gaze in consternation  
vaatan  
hualde hammustan ja tardununa I bite my lip and gaze in consternation  
vaatan

This repetition is extremely important, for between the two lines there is the sense of time.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the first glance at time seems to be an objective one – time rolls on. But the second is subjective. The gaze is turned backwards, in search of a lost time and space.

terve elu mööda pikki tänavaid	throughout life down long streets
ajan taga sinu hiigelkübarat	I chase after your huge brimmed hat
heidan õlapuult ma kitsenahast	I push off my shoulders a goat-skin
mantli	coat
oma õnne sisse jooksen tagurpidi	I run backwards into my happiness
valged toolid ennast punuvad mu	white chairs entwine themselves
ümber	around me
jalad lehtlamulda juuri ajavad	their legs take root in the arbour's soil

Strangely enough, the finding of what is sought after does not occur in this space but somewhere else, and by someone else, not by the seeking “I.”

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<sup>6</sup> The repetition of words also tends to question their “meaning” and empty the signifier of meanings. This could also lead to a reading in an *unheimlich* register.

mida otsisin ma sügisest pargist    what I was seeking in the autumnal park  
 seda tormi ajal mere äärest leiti    was found in the storm on the seashore

Therefore, lost time and space are constructed in fragmentary fashion in quite another space, not where they were sought, and somehow these time spaces do not meet. We see a kind of Rimbaud-like “Moi, c’est l’autre.” Indeed, in another text “See on võõras andumine” (“It’s an alien self-giving”), the second stanza says:

aga mina olen teine	but I am another
ja mu käsi ammu nõrk	and my hand has long been feeble
ajan liblikana taga	I chase like a butterfly
tüdrukut, kel käes on võrk	the girl in whose hand is a net

We may see some resemblance to the so-called troubadour *adynata* (impossibilities), as in Arnaut Daniel (“En cest sonnet coind’ e lèri”) – “I am Arnaut who catches the wind; /I chase the hare with an ox/ and swim against the current.” But there are of course some significant differences. Arnaut’s *adynata* are connected with the precision of expressing one’s love and the implication that love has taught Arnaut to do impossible things. So, in Arnaut, love unites possibilities with impossibilities, yet the lyrical “I” happily unites these two worlds. The absurd is somehow appeased in the cognising subject. But Üdi/Viiding’s semantic rhetoric does not foresee that these worlds meet in the same cognising character.

There is often some ideal world juxtaposed with the real one, and the subjects are alien to one another. The incompatibility of different times, spaces and senses of time is also revealed in the poem “Kokkulepe” (“Contract”), the title of which is emblematic too. A contract is an agreement and suggests the presence of two parties, and therefore a dialogue. Üdi/Viiding’s “Contract” is a very unusual dialogue. There is a dialogue, but the voices are not textually marked. If throughout the texts in the collection there is generally very limited use of punctuation, here there is none at all. At the same time, it is important that the “I” form is used by two voices (maybe even three), thus allowing for diverse scenarios:

## PLOOM

näita tube kallis proua palun	show the rooms dear lady show
näita	them please
on see tõsi et meil siin ei teki	is it true that here we shall know no
hirme	fear
jaa kui tarvis võite ahju teha tule	yes and you may light the flame in
	the oven
ümber paigutada kergeid hiina	and move around the light Chinese
sirme	screens

In the first stanza, it is clear that one or perhaps two voices ask for refuge (possibly a couple) in a landlady's house (the first two lines). Whatever the reason for seeking refuge, there is uneasiness and fear. The landlady seems reassuring. In the second stanza, the landlady suggests things that the lodgers may do if they wish, with a hint of irony in the second verse:

jääge sellisteks just nagu olete	remain exactly what you are now
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The real and concrete space is at once linked to the mythological space when the landlady asks about the lodgers' provenance. The refuge-seeking man seems not to be from this time and space:

mina proua olen pärimustest	I come my lady from tradition
minu elu on nad jälle teinud tõeks	my life they have made it come true
elan päikesest ja hommikusest	I live on sun and morning dew
kastest	
see mu naine ta on halastajaõeks	here's my wife she is a ward sister

So this "I" is not a normal "I" from the "normal" world – which the landlady may or may not represent, hers is a different world, at least – but somebody from the mythological world of "we/I" which has been aroused at somebody's will, or which is allowed to pass from that mythological and separate space (back) to reality. It is of course possible to read Üdi/Viiding in an ideological register and see a family returning from a deportation camp, but surely it would be far too limiting to suggest only this reading. It is clear that the image of the "house" is of utmost importance here. The house is both "my house" and "a lodging house that provides me with refuge,"

depending on the I-function. Thus the “I” here is the organising function in the text on the level of the signifier. On the level of the signified, there are no clear-cut spaces, no clear-cut identities, not of the lady, not of the man coming from some illusionary world, not of the wife, of whom all we know is that she is a nurse, not of the children. In a way, it is reminiscent of Pirandello’s “Six characters in search of an author.” The uncanny, the *unheimlich* of the house, of the room is evident. In the first stanza, there is the almost a negative question:

on see tõsi et meil siin ei teki hirme	is it true that here we shall
	know no fear

In the last stanza, comfort, uneasiness and fear follow close behind one after another, ending on an existential note.

jääge lapsed minu majja olge üüril	stay my children in my house stay as
	lodgers
kui just kõhedus ei aja liikuma	if of course not driven by uneasiness
on üks kõis seal akna taga müüril	there is a rope behind the window on
	the wall
palun sinna ärge minge kiikuma	please don't go and swing there

The segment of comfort (line one) is linked in opposition to the segment of menace (line three), while the segment of uneasiness (line two) is in harmony with the segment of prohibition (line four). So in one case the rhyme correlates with the lexical segments, in another it does not.

The lack of identification of the inner space of the house is in correlation with the danger of the outer space. But the danger is concealed and expressed only in a hypothetical “if not driven by uneasiness” which correlates with a negative imperative “please don’t go and swing there.” The offer of shelter correlates with the civic. The resulting effect is that of some fantastic and metaphysical space and a borderline situation. Üdi/Viiding masterfully creates different spaces simultaneously. In English “a rope” does not correspond to the Estonian “üks kõis,” which conveys both “a

rope/any rope” and “a certain rope.” As a result, there is a concrete house, but it does not seem to be this concrete house. There is an “I,” but it seems to come from some other space. There are some refugees, whom the landlady also calls “children” and who are menaced by “a (certain) rope.” We cannot say that something is or is not, but that something is and is or is and is not simultaneously.

## Conclusions

Üdi/Viiding’s text generating mechanism is that of predominantly semantic rhetoric, which Juri Lotman has distinguished from stylistic rhetoric. It combines the juxtaposition of diverse segments of a text in a subversive way. Very often different segments are in confrontation on the level of language (out-of-this-text’s normative use in their textual subversion). Rhyme may serve within a single stanza to both correlate the semantic unity on the level of language or to disrupt this unity, and sometimes there is both unity and disruption. Different fragmentary time spaces are created which are often linked with an “I,” but it is not necessarily the same “I”; the “I” functions rather as an organiser of the signifying space. The “I” often emerges at some point of intersection of the collective (Estonian) language and culture and a cognising individual “I” with its own linguistic and non-linguistic being. The effect is often strange, grotesquely comic or uncanny. The poet seems to be quite aware of this kind of semantic rhetoric. Perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found in the text called “avatud laul” (“open song”):

Ei vasak käsi tea, mis tegi parem.    The left hand does not know what  
the right one did.

See teadmine on kolmandamas    This knowing is in the third hand.  
käes.

Further on, it appears that the left and the right hand act under a glass globe.

Kuid kolmas käsi kupli tõstab ära    But the third hand will lift the globe  
ja teised kaks niiviisi ühendab    and thus unite the other two.

The third hand may belong to the writing “I” or to someone who takes some meta-position in Üdi/Viiding’s space of cognition and writing.

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