

World Poetry Today: Production, Translation, Reception

Liina Lukas, Rebekka Lotman, Jaanus Valk*

Ours is the era of poetry. Poetry is more alive than ever. It's alive in the traditional book format, but also in song, on stage, on social media, in the urban landscape, and in translation. It also gives a boost to the academic study of poetry.

Poetry is worldly, and that in several ways. First, it is inherently “worldly”, both polytemporal and polyspatial, as stated by Jahan Ramazani. While poems belong to their immediate historical moment and national culture, they are, at the same time, transnational as well as transhistorical through their forms, techniques, rhetorical strategies, and language (Ramazani 2020). Secondly, thanks to digital possibilities and cultural policies that pay more attention to small poetry cultures and historically repressed voices, more poetry from different eras, languages, and cultures reaches us than ever before. Today, poetry is living and circulating as never before, both in book form and in digital as well as physical environments – its spread into the public space is already demanding attention in poetry studies (see Benthien, Gestrung 2023). And thirdly, as emphasized by Juri Lotman, the aim of poetry is not merely its ‘devices’, but a knowledge of the world itself. He further explains: “Simultaneously, the poetic world is a model of the real world but is correlated with it in an exceedingly complex fashion. The poetic text is a powerful and deeply dialectical mechanism of the search for truth, for understanding the surrounding world and our orientation in it” (Lotman 1976: 132). Poetry, through its intricate interplay of forms and languages, emerges as a multifaceted reflection of both the global human experience and individual cultural identities.

Defined by Juri Lotman as a “complexly constructed meaning” (Lotman 1976: 35), poetry continues to pose new challenges for writers and translators,

* Authors' addresses: Liina Lukas, University of Tartu, Institute of Cultural Research, Ülikooli 16, Tartu 51003, Estonia, email: liina.lukas@ut.ee; Rebekka Lotman, University of Tartu, Institute of Cultural Research, Ülikooli 16, Tartu 51003, Estonia, email: rebekka.lotman@ut.ee; Jaanus Valk, University of Tartu, Institute of Cultural Research, Ülikooli 16, Tartu 51003, Estonia, email: jaanus.valk@ut.ee.

critics, and readers. The Estonian Association of Comparative Literature (EVKA), together with the University of Tartu and Tallinn University,¹ announces the international conference *World Poetry Today: Production, Translation, Reception*, which will take place on 1–4 October 2025 in UNESCO City of Literature and 2024 European Capital of Culture, Tartu (Estonia).²

Using the term “world poetry”, we aim to highlight poetry as an intrinsically intertextual and intersemiotic mechanism operating on different semantic and constructive levels. Poetry engages in complex relationships not only with other texts from different poetic cultures, but also with various modes of expression beyond written or spoken language, such as visual art, music, or performance. Additionally, we invite papers focusing on the intercultural dissemination of poetry and exploring how global production, translation, and reception of poetry are influenced by (and influence) the digital environment, leading to the emergence of new mediums/forms of poetry.

With this conference, EVKA is continuing in the direction it took in 2021 exploring “The Factor of Lyrical Poetry in the Formation of Small Cultures”. The results of this exploration were presented in two consecutive special issues of the EVKA journal *Interlitteraria* in 2024.³ One of the intersectional themes of the conference was minority literature and literary multilingualism. A special issue of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*, titled “Entangled languages in the poetry of the Baltic countries”⁴ has been prepared to explore this increasingly topical issue in more depth. The scope of the upcoming conference is much broader taking a closer look at the global circulation of poetry.

The keynote speakers of the conference are Claudia Benthien (Universität Hamburg), Francis R. Jones (Newcastle University), Jahan Ramazani (University of Virginia), and A. E. Stallings (University of Oxford).

Dr. phil. Claudia Benthien (b. 1965) is Professor of German Literature and Cultural Theory at Universität Hamburg, Germany. Her research field

¹ The conference is the initiative of two research projects funded by the Estonian Research Council: *The Factor of Lyrical Poetry in the Formation of Small Literatures* (PRG1106, 2021–2025), led by Liina Lukas, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Tartu, and *Translation in History, Estonia 1850–2010: Texts, Agents, Institutions and Practices* (PRG1206, 2021–2025), led by Daniele Monticelli, Professor of Translation Studies and Semiotics at Tallinn University.

² <https://tartu.kirjandus.ee/>.

³ See <https://ojs.utlib.ee/index.php/IL/issue/view/28.1> and <https://ojs.utlib.ee/index.php/IL/issue/view/28.2>.

⁴ See <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rbal20/54/4>.

covers German literature of the 17th–21st centuries (especially Baroque, Classicism, Early Modern, and Contemporary) as well as contemporary art and culture. The theoretical framework she uses spans cultural theory, gender studies, intellectual history, aesthetics and intermedial studies. Her recent research deals with poetry in the digital age (for which she has received an ERC Advanced Grant), specifically ‘public poetry’ in urban space and on the internet, as elaborated in her monograph *Public Poetry. Lyrik im urbanen Raum* (with Norbert Gestring, 2023).

Dr. Francis R. Jones (b. 1955) is Emeritus Professor of Translation Studies, Newcastle University, UK, and a translator of poetry, mainly from Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian into English, though also from Dutch, Hungarian and Russian. He has twice been awarded the Poetry Society’s European Poetry Translation Prize (later renamed the Popescu Prize), among many other honours. In his book *Poetry Translating as Expert Action: Processes, Priorities and Networks* (2011), he explores how translators work within networks of other people and texts – publishing teams, fellow translators, source-culture enthusiasts, and translation readers and critics.

Dr. Jahan Ramazani (b. 1960) is Professor of English at the University of Virginia, US, a literary scholar specializing in modern British, Irish, American, Indian, African, and Caribbean postcolonial poetry, always with a global approach, as is evident already from the titles of his books: *A Transnational Poetics* (2009, the American Comparative Literature Association’s Harry Levin Prize for the best book in comparative literary history), *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* (2014), *Poetry in a Global Age* (2020). Ramazani is a recipient of numerous prizes and fellowships, he has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2016), and the American Philosophical Society (2022).

A. E. Stallings (b. 1968) is an American poet, essayist, and translator (from Ancient Greek, Modern Greek and Latin), a Master of Studies in Classical Languages and Literature from Oxford University, UK (1991). Since 1999, she has been living in Athens, Greece. Stallings is the author of the multi-award-winning poetry collections *Archaic Smile* (1999), *Hapax* (2006), *Olives* (2012), *Like* (2018), and *This Afterlife: Selected Poems* (2022). She has also published the highly praised verse translations of Lucretius’s *The Nature of Things* (2007), Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (2017), and *The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice* (2019). In 2012, Stallings was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and for 2023–2027, the Oxford Professor of Poetry.

The conference will focus on four axes: the notion of “world poetry”, translating poetry, poetry and multilingualism, and poetry between media.⁵ The deadline for submitting **abstracts (200–300 words) with short bio notes as well as proposals for panels or poster presentations is 30 October 2024.**⁶ Acceptance notices will be sent by 15 January 2025. The panel proposal should include a brief description of the panel (100–200 words), the names and bio notes of the convenors and the abstracts and bio notes of the panellists. Panels can include 3 or 4 presentations.

The main working language is English, poster presentations are welcome also in Spanish, French, German and Estonian. The conference participation is free of charge. Participants cover their own costs of travel, accommodation and catering. If necessary, conference organizers advise and assist in making suitable arrangements.

References

- Benthien, Claudia; Gestring, Norbert 2023. *Public Poetry: Lyrik im urbanen Raum*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Lotman, Yuri 1976. *Analysis of the Poetic Text*. Translated by D. Barton Johnson. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Ramazani, Jahan 2020. *Poetry in the Global Age*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

⁵ See more on the homepage of the conference:
<https://sisu.ut.ee/evka/conference-world-poetry-today-production-translation-reception/>.

⁶ Abstract submission and conference registration forms can be found here:
<https://sisu.ut.ee/evka/abstract-submission/?lang=en>.