

Juhan Liiv's Comprehension of Poetry^{1, 2}

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Abstract. Juhan Liiv (1864–1913) is considered to be the first important innovator of Estonian poetry. So far, it has been underlined in Estonian culture that Liiv lacked any ties with world literature and thus world literature had no role to play in the birth of the innovation of Estonian poetry. In this article, I am showing that Liiv's comprehension of poetry is closely tied to German poetic culture. These connections arise from Liiv's essays, which have not been studied so far. I analyse Liiv's essay *Ääremärkused (Marginalia)* and formulate the main theses in his comprehension of poetry.

Keywords: literary history, Juhan Liiv, critical legacy

Juhan Liiv and his critical legacy

Juhan Liiv was born in spring of 1864 on the east coast of the region that was historically Livonia and is now Estonia. The coastline is shaped by Lake Peipus, the natural border *and* link between Europe and Russia. The protagonist of our story was born into a family of Estonian peasants in an Estonian-language culture, which at precisely this time was surfacing from the setting of German spirit and Russian rule: the national Age of Awakening was emerging. Even though Liiv never acquired higher systematic education, he became a journalist. He also wrote critique, poetry and short stories. The young man lived most permanently in Tartu City, labouring away to find happiness in work and in love. It was in Tartu in autumn 1892 that he decided to discover whether he could make a living from writing. Liiv (1996a: 206) felt that 'the time has come when either success or failure is imminent'. He quit his journalist job and started writing professionally. But he found it trickier than expected to publish his work, especially poetry.

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² This article is based on an article in Estonian – see Kirs 2022. The article, including any titles as well as paragraphs and fragments by Juhan Liiv and others originally in Estonian, was translated by Ragne Rambi.

Liiv started to associate his publishing struggles with persecution. In one of his letters to sweetheart Liisa Golding he said, 'If it was not for my persecutors, my work would have been published long ago and everything would have been as intended' (ibid: 212). He soon implied to his loved ones that he was under suspicion and felt that he was being followed and spied on. We cannot know for certain whether Liiv – a writer who was indeed critical of the people in power – was actually being intimidated or whether he was imagining things, but it had an immeasurable effect on him. Just like Josef K., one of Franz Kafka's main characters, Liiv wandered around town and its various institutions, trying to find out of what he was being accused. He demanded that the trial against him be made public and pleaded to be relieved of the charges and for the spying to stop, or then to be found guilty and deported to Siberia. But the trouble was that no one knew what he was talking about. In 1894, Liiv was taken to the Neurology Clinic in Tartu and diagnosed with schizophrenia. Soon afterwards the 30-year-old was declared incurably mentally ill and sent back to his parents' farm on the coast of Lake Peipus. While trying to achieve the status of a professional author, Liiv lost a great deal, writing that, 'apart from my honour and standing, people have now decided I have also lost my mind' (Liiv 1921: 9).

During his years in the countryside, Liiv started to write more poetry. In a way, he *did* become the only professional author working in the Estonian-language cultural sphere at the time. However, the general cultural circles had no idea he existed – in the nearly eight years he spent on the farm, he never tried to publish his work. His earlier connections, both personal and professional, had been severed. There were rumours around Tartu that there once had been a talented young writer, but that sadly he had gone mad and died. In 1902, people discovered the recluse and he found his way back into cultural circles. Liiv's poetry was published. Soon, his first volume of poems came out, and finally he was recognised as a poet. But Liiv himself had almost nothing to do with any of this. His personal notes echoed an increasing sense of loneliness. 'I am like a leper among the living in Estonia' (Liiv 1921: 85), he said in one of his last autobiographical pieces. At the end of his life, Liiv walked aimlessly around the land like an outcast, scaring people with a tale of his origins: actually, he was the illegitimate child of the first Estonian female poet Lydia Koidula and the tsar of Russia, and people were eagerly awaiting the moment he would take the throne in Poland. We still do not know the meaning of this episode. What we do know is that in 1913, Liiv died a pauper's death of consumption near Lake Peipus.

This man, who lived as an outcast in Estonia but at the same time thought he was to be crowned a king in Europe, became a great mystery for Estonian culture, which was building itself up at the time. Estonian history has also been called a culture of rupture, or one that is characterised by a pattern of sudden

breaks in cultural development. Interpretations of Liiv have been constant, however, and he received attention even in the darkest days of our contemporary history. People talked about him on both sides of the front, against the backdrop of propaganda from both Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union; a deeply communist poet spoke of him at the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg, and almost at the same time, so did a victim of Soviet deportation in the faraway Siberian taiga. Liiv's work remained sacred in his homeland Estonia, which was then under Soviet rule, as well as in the refugee communities of expatriate Estonians. The perception of Liiv, which entered Estonian culture under tsarist rule, thus draws one continuous line in this world of ruptures, becoming stronger and stronger throughout Estonian and Soviet years, and in our latest times, is chasing after its lustre in global culture.

The first translations of Liiv's work were published while he was still alive. The first were one Latvian and one German translation of his prose in 1893. No Latvian-language poems were published while Liiv was alive, but some poems were translated into German (see Kallas, Axel 1911) and Finnish (see Kallas, Aino 1911). The first volume of translations of Liiv's poems was published in Russian (see Liiv 1933), and more of his texts were translated later (see Liiv 1954, 1962, 1976). The most important discussions of Liiv in Russian came from the introductions written for the translations (see Vinkel 1954, Vaarandi 1962, Vinkel 1976), and reviews in the most important culture pages circulating in Moscow (for example *Литературная газета* 1955). The translation of Paul-Eerik Rummos poem that he dedicated to Liiv (see Rummo 1966) is also worth mentioning. After Russian-language discussions about Liiv peaked, his works were also published in books in the Esperanto, Udmurt and Mari languages (see Liiv 1980, 2006, 2010). Translating Liiv has recently picked up pace again thanks to the work of Jüri Talvet in particular: two English-language volumes of a selection of Liiv's poetry were published with Talvet as co-translator (see Liiv 2007, 2013a). It is greatly thanks to his translations and work (see Talvet 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2020) that Liiv has suddenly also been translated into Dutch, Finnish, Spanish, Italian and German (see Liiv 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2019). Activity has been heightened in translating Liiv's work into the old familiar languages as well (see Liiv 2014c).

The heart of Liiv's work lies in his poetry. There is also prose, personal letters and biographical material, and finally, critique and commentary. The first three areas have been published and studied thoroughly enough, but Liiv's critique has not enjoyed the same systematic methodology. Critique is where Liiv started out on his creative path and he continued it to the very end of his writing life. There are around forty papers or discussion pieces that fall under the category of editorial, essay, review, counterargument or commentary. In

his critique, Liiv starts to elaborate on his theoretical context as a poet, giving us an idea of the part of poetic culture that he values, and how he understands and defines poetry. One essay, which Liiv titled *Ääremärkused* (*Marginalia*), stands out in his literary criticism. The manuscript for the essay was finalised in the later years of the author's life, most likely in 1911. Since the text has been published as excerpts only (see Liiv 1921 and 1996b), any close reading of it has to build on the manuscript EKLA f 163, m 2, hereinafter *Mrg*. The essay has not always been appreciated because of Liiv's chaotic style and major edits, but it is here and only here that Liiv tries to give a systematic overview of his comprehension of poetry.

The main starting points for Liiv's comprehension of poetry

When Liiv talks about his critique, he mainly addresses literature in the Estonian language. There are comments on earlier poetic culture: he is deferential towards Estonian folk poems, subtly cheeky about chorales, and respectful of the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*. The core of his poetry critique, however, is contemporary Estonian literature. In *Marginalia*, Liiv looks at the bigger picture of Estonian literature and makes one final attempt to sum up his experience. He says, 'I have not been in the woods, I have read everything over the years, been through all variations of the language' (*Mrg*: 16), as if he knew that people had reason to doubt his body of knowledge: for a long time, he *did* live in the woods, far away from any cultural centres.

Despite his harsh criticism of prose, Liiv praises several writers with conviction: Ernst Peterson-Särgava, August Kitzberg, Eduard Vilde, the young Friedebert Tuglas and, to a lesser extent, the young A. H. Tammsaare. While he talks about Estonian poetry, Liiv finds 'space and depth' (*Mrg*: 17f) in the rising star poet Gustav Suits. On the one hand, this shows that Liiv was not as plainly harsh about modernism as it may seem due to the impact and consequences of Soviet ideology. On the other hand, it proves that he had little positive to say about his contemporary poetry. Liiv says in *Marginalia* that Estonian literature, and therefore especially poetry, is characterised by 'sentimental spinelessness' (*Mrg*: 6f).

Why does Estonian literature lack a spine? Liiv says that 'a certain pale sentimentality' came about in the writing attempts of the young during the turn of the century, which was supposed to embody 'hopelessness, impotence, an inner burden' (*Mrg*: 5). Liiv thinks that this made poetry a general grey mass, and this 'tired style' came to be known as 'Estonian fatigue' (*Mrg*: 5). According to Liiv, the fatigue comes in part from an external source, i.e. the time itself. In the late 19th century, Estonia was going through a time of Russification. But another

comment on the time and literature makes us think differently. Liiv claims that the times are always hard for a writer, and perhaps rightly so, because 'without that heavy weight, there is no pull' (*Mrg*: 9f). He adds: 'This Estonian fatigue was not the sole reason for our sentimental spinelessness though – another was the Estonian *lack of artful skill*' (*Mrg*: 6f). External influence wore out the Estonian style of literature, but the main fault was still with the inner lives of our writers, the fact that Estonians lacked artistic ability. The final goal of Liiv's poetry critique is to discuss the style of Estonian poetry and determine what it lacks most.

Maybe this is what I wanted to say: some are too keen to hide their weak thought behind an abundance of pretty words – young people, when they write about tender and happy love, fail to adopt a position. / Like spineless fish. / No, it is impossible to deceive the world, cover up your lack of skill with a heap of words. / The tiny bit of spine we had – it drowned. / It is like a predicate without a subject. / In terms of art, it really is. / There is no load-bearing wall (*Mrg*: 4).

First among the issues related to style or poetic technique that Liiv addresses is adopting a position. The notion of position is widely used in the far-reaching sphere of sciences. Liiv used it to denote an act of poetic technique, something to do with literary imagery. This determines whether a poem can stand up on its own or falls flat on its face, whether it is convincing or not, if it even has a point or not. Liiv compares writings without a position to fish without a spine, or predicates without a subject. His critique also extends to other planes. He points out the slack in language that plagues Estonian literature. The example he gives is a phrase by a quite marginal poet named Jaan Lipp: 'Here *flowers* and *leaves* have withered'.

But what is the meaning of *leaves* here? Talking about leaves, when the flower itself has withered? A flower, a blossom surely carries more meaning than a leaf! / Such a tiring, *lax* addition. / People in Estonia have not started to see such distinctions yet, and still, here we have characterised an entire ability – it is as if there was no dissociation at all (*Mrg* 7f).

Another problem of poetic technique that Liiv addressed is dissociation. Dissociation as a modern term is used in the humanities, but also in the realities, biology and chemistry. According to Liiv's thinking, dissociation has to do with poetic language, which separates the essential from the random. Any literary work is made up of language, and adopting a position can only be achieved in dissociation. These two terms are two sides of the same coin.

Liiv says that in Estonia, the kinds of distinction that the art of words demands from language have not even emerged yet. Nowhere does he claim that we should take after the oldest tradition of Estonian folk poetry to create position and dissociation, even though historically, attempts have been made to liken Liiv's style of poetry to Estonian folk poems. Neither does Liiv claim that this distinction could be found in the newest, modernist style. He categorically states that *no one* has begun making these distinctions in Estonia, either in poetry practice or theory, in critique.

Liiv's critical statement that Estonian poetic culture has not even started to make the correct distinctions hints at his opinion that other literary cultures have been making these distinctions for a while. His critical attitude towards the local poetic culture may have been influenced by German poetics and rhetoric, which he says did indeed awaken him (*Mrg* 5). Liiv made almost no comments on world poetry (there are fragments, mainly on the classics of German Romanticism), and none of the potentially lengthier poetry translations (of Aleksey Koltsov and Homer) have survived, plus there is scant data on the poems he did read, which we should also consider carefully since we do not know the extent to which he delved into the material. As such, Liiv's interactions with foreign literature have not received much attention. In some texts, however, we get a glimpse of his thoughts about the things he read. Amidst the autobiographical subjects of *Marginalia*, Liiv has sketched out one emotional image that relates to his reading: 'I go home *worried*, a history of European literature by Johannes Scherr in my pocket. My derelict childhood home farm is right there' (*Mrg*: 6). Elsewhere, he adds an important sentiment to that image. 'When I read Scherr's literary history...I felt a proximity with all the people active in the literary field' (Tuglas 2013: 212). We can conclude that this man, who was thought of as simple, who lacked a systematic education and who suffered from mental illness, had the strength and found it important to dig into the realm of German thought.

It seems that Liiv created his understanding of what a great poet was under the strong influence of Friedrich Schiller, who was also the only foreign poet about whom Liiv considered writing. In this poem Liiv tells the story of a Prince of Poetry who rises up from his grave to see how far the art of poetry has come (see Liiv 1989: 259). He handles Schiller both at the start and at the end of his creative journey. In *Marginalia* Liiv says, 'One cannot create new life from the *shadows* of the past generation. They have gone into their graves, while the forms and words conveying their *feelings* have remained. No one would read a new Schiller, just like there was no Schiller before Schiller' (*Mrg*: 7). Elsewhere he even says, 'Famous men are great examples. / But nothing *more* than examples!' (Liiv 2013c: 408). Schiller's work was important to Liiv, although less so

in the poetry that he would imitate a hundred years later, more so as context to his poetic theory. When Liiv claims that Estonian literature is plagued by sentimental spinelessness, it is Schiller who leads him deep into the problems of sentimental literature. It is Schiller's essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795), which becomes the basis of the most central definition of sentimental poetry in Western literary tradition.

Schiller discusses poetry against the backdrop of Immanuel Kant's philosophy and the question about man's relationship with nature. Schiller (2020: 33–34) says that the human condition is characterised by two main states of being. In the first state of natural simplicity, man acts as a harmonising whole. Here, man's sense and reason have not yet been separated in their operations. Schiller thinks that through the freedom of his imagination and understanding, man distances himself from the simplicity of nature, and in the second state of culture, the sensuous harmony is annulled in him and he can only express himself as one who is striving towards unity. The original unity of feeling and thinking, which actually took place in the former state, exists now merely ideally. Schiller's main assumption is that in the first state, where man acts as a harmonising whole, all of his nature expresses itself completely in reality, whereas in the second state, the harmonious cooperation of man's nature is merely an idea. If we presume that the task of poetry is to 'give humanity its most complete expression possible' (Schiller 2020: 34), then in the first case the poet has to imitate the real as completely as possible, and in the second case, elevate the real to the ideal, or represent the ideal. Based on this idea, Schiller goes on to define his main differentiation, writing, 'The poet, I said, is either nature, or he will seek it. The former produces the naïve, the latter the sentimental poet' (ibid: 33).

Even though Schiller uses the naïve and sentimental to distinguish first and foremost between styles and not epochs, he tends to relate naïve more with older poetry and sentimental with modern poetry. The former moves us through nature, through sensuous truth, through the living presence, while the latter moves us through ideas (ibid: 35). Sentimental poetry is the offspring of abstraction and silence, i.e. these are the states to which this kind of poetry draws us. Naïve poetry, however, is the child of life (ibid: 76). In the second half of his essay Schiller also points to the potential pitfalls of naïve and sentimental poetry. While the naïve genius sometimes misses *mind* or *spirit* (*Geist*), sentimental poetry often has issues with *object* (*Gegenstand*). Rising to the plane of ideas it rejects reality, and thus, the sentimental poet sometimes has trouble staying sober. However, 'an object without spirit and a spiritual play without object are both a nothing in aesthetic judgement' (ibid: 84–85). Nearly a

hundred years after Schiller, Liiv scrutinises the literature of one small nation and realises that Estonian literature has fallen into the trap of sentimentality:

The sameness, seeing sentimentality in all, has suffocated plasticity... This endless elegy and mystical pain in all of nature – shake this nature off like a nightmare! It is not this! (*Mrg*: 6f).

Liiv finds the newest Estonian poetry decidedly dismal.

But that exhausting, exhausting sadness... The melodies are obscured by the tired style of its time, modernism.... One keeps seeking more contrast, more heat, more naivete – without it, any melody is reduced to a chorale – but one fails to find it (*Mrg*: 12).

Liiv thinks dynamic sentimentalism is a thing of awe, but Estonian literature is unable to realise its potential (*Mrg*: 13). The literature is disproportionately sentimental, and literary forms have lost credibility – nature is depicted in nightmarish contortions. The keywords Liiv uses to describe Estonian literature are ‘sameness’ and ‘wateriness’ (*Mrg*: 9f). He understands the lack of balance in Estonian literature in a fashion that is similar to Schiller’s critique of sentimental poetry. He says throughout that Estonian literature needs more sobriety. Liiv is critical of the abundance of sentimentality, and takes naïve literature as his starting point in poetic theory. He associates naivete with ‘more contrast, more heat’ (*Mrg*: 12). By mockingly saying that without the naïve, a poet is nothing more than a church songbook, Liiv is saying that the path of naïve poetry is the only path for the true poet.

The main theses in Liiv’s comprehension of poetry

Liiv starts out defining the path of a true poet through the distinction between music and plasticity, the latter also being used by Schiller in his essay. Looking at his contemporary sentimental poets A. v. Haller, H. v. Kleist and F. G. Klopstock, Schiller says that Klopstock’s greatest work *Der Messias* is wonderful from the musically poetic point of view, but inadequate from the point of view of plastic poetry. According to Schiller, there is much that is abstract in Klopstock’s work, but very little that is bodily. When Schiller talks about the relationship that poetry has with sound and the fine arts, he defines musical and plastic poetry in one of the footnotes. Here he claims that depending on whether the poetry imitates an object, as happens in fine arts, or merely creates a certain state of mind, as does sound art, without needing a specific object,

it can be called either plastic or musical (Schiller 2020: 55-56). Elsewhere, Schiller has stressed the connection between music and plasticity, stating, '... poetry in its most perfect state has to draw us in powerfully like the art of sound and surround us with peaceful clarity like plasticity' (Schiller 1961: 103). Liiv works with the distinction between musical and plastic in a way that is comparable to Schiller's definition:

Music communicates feelings by changing one's voice, speech through words, things and beings from which thoughts and feelings spring. / And so, the art of poetry, of lyrics, is more akin to music; the thinking, the contemplating, the descriptive more akin to the plastic, bodily, physical, the thing (*Gegenstand*) /---/ I say this along with Mihkelson: others see the rhythm, harmony, delicacy only in poetry, as if prose had none of it! / Speech – it is all music! / And yet it is all also plastic! (*Mrg*: 2f–3).

Even *Marginalia* compares musical, emotional literature with plastic, thing-oriented literature. *Thing* in Liiv's definition is similar to Schiller's *Gegenstand*. Sensing a certain similar vein of thinking to the young Mihkelson aka Tuglas, Liiv points out that it is often believed in Estonian culture that only poetry contains music, which he describes as 'rhythm', 'harmony', 'delicacy', 'vigour'. He thinks that speech is music as well as plastic in both its bound and unbound states and thus, music should not be absent even from a work of prose – and by the same token, plasticity should not be absent from poetry. This means poetry has in essence more room to play than Estonian poetry can take advantage of, or so it seems to Liiv.

Liiv tends to compare a writer's choices and actions with the very functioning of nature, saying, 'sameness is death, life is in the varied' (*Mrg*: 20f), and wondering how can it be that creative people neither notice nor utilise this pattern, which repeats itself in everything that occurs in life and nature. For him, there is value in the sheer variety of the room for play that poetry has. When he thinks about a writer's actions, Liiv says, 'We want to pause the turbulent actions of the heart, the quickness of our emotions; we want to make move what is frozen; make the old grey times speak, the rocky mountains talk about vigour [---]. Nature does the same, it alters' (*Mrg*: 8f). This is the origin of Liiv's synthetic original position on actions undertaken in the room that poetry has for play: he does not tend to prefer one path when it comes to the various options in poetry and shun all others; he likes to alter and vary different options. First, Liiv considers the choices within poetry in issues of imagining.

Because everything emotional is the shape of the tangible, we must begin with the *things* we can see when we create, tie the shadow-like with the clearly

apparent – visibility, physicality, of bodies, of materials! /---/ Now can we build on the bodily, of things (depiction). Many bodies – may mean coldness. / ... musical, lyrical images in long rows without their master, the position, may bore one to sleep (*Mrg*: 3p–4).

Liiv, along with others, says that the essence of poetry is first and foremost to express emotions, and, in that sense, the heart of poetry is musical. However, a poet has to begin by communicating the visible, bodily world, meaning plasticity. Since Liiv's idea in literary work is to keep emotions in the background and bring descriptions of things to the forefront, his ideal of poetry is in a way skewed towards the epic as defined by the main types of literature.

The aspects Liiv emphasises when it comes to the way poetry is composed are determined by his understanding that musical or lyrical pictures alone are not enough to carry a poem. They need a master, which for Liiv is the position. This is the cornerstone on which feeling rests, the base from which emotions are conveyed. But creating a position is plasticity in Liiv's view.

In the previous excerpt, Liiv already discussed the fact that emotions emerge from objects and being, and now he adds that everything we perceive is the shape of the things we can see. One can build from bodies, derive emotions from bodies, Liiv stresses. His perception is anchored in the understanding that an object and a feeling are in a similar relationship to a body and its shadow: if a poet wants to convey a feeling, a shadow, he must first show the object, the body from which it emanates. One wants the music but is forced to choose the plastic. But when one speaks using only the names of emotions, then one merely conveys shadows, claims Liiv, who says in his opening line, 'Let us convey the *bodies*, not the *shadows*. The shadows of stones do not make a wall; the stones themselves do' (*Mrg*: 9f–10). Apart from literary depictions, Liiv also talks about poetic phrasing:

Just as one off-key voice can ruin a piece of music, so also can each superfluous word take the power that the music of language has. Both links and breaks have to be as clean as possible, so that an unnecessary word may not drain or exhaust the performer of the main idea. /---/ Oh, you really are a posh boy, you there, painting with your words. / Let the latter not [---] do anything, but *feel*, become sound, its original being, the *word*; and the latter, so-called outline, which is sober and descriptive, which builds and creates frontlines, scaffolding, not emotional cries, but perhaps unseen compassion – like attracts like... the invisible secretly attaching itself... (*Mrg*: 7f–8).

Just as in the issue of literary depiction, the analysis of poetic language also begins with music. At the very start of the essay, Liiv compares word to note

head and tells us it is compositional in essence. When he talks about music, he generally imagines the piano being played, and this is where the bulk of his examples comes from; just like a piano player may play the wrong key, so may a poet choose the wrong word with very similar results.

Liiv speaks of the components of poetry, linking together and breaking apart various parts in a piece of work. He may have learned this from German rhetoric (cf. *Trennen und Verbinden*) (see Hoffmann 1875: 52).

Liiv makes a point of saying that any links and breaks have to be as clean as possible, and poetic language has to be free of any additives that do not enhance the essence of the thing. He is opposed to circular sentences in literature that blur or merge the lines of various compositional units so that it becomes difficult to grasp the point of the text. Understanding this division or separation of various components as dissociation, Liiv feels it is important that language should be able to shed brilliant light on all parts of the work. He discussed the keywords of the language that create dissociation in a manuscript that was probably originally meant to accompany *Marginalia*. In it, he says, 'Be so [initially 'clear', but this has been replaced by] brief that another would be unable to be more succinct. Only then is your description comprehensive' (*Mrg*: 23). In other words, Liiv postulates that clarity and brevity or finding the most accurate wording are seen to be the most important characteristics of poetic language. He sets out from the belief that even though a poet might strive towards high-level poetic language, resounding language music, one must start with simple language.

Taking a look at Estonian literature from the point of view of the language issue, Liiv does not point to any one poem, but instead highlights a few works of prose. His most colourful depiction touches on *Paised* (*Boils*, 1899–1901) by Peterson-Särgava. Liiv says, 'Peterson is rough, concise, clear in his depictions', eschewing 'all of that tired silky style, the cathedrals of times gone by, the heap of polished words in a dream-like caress' (*Mrg*: 18). Against the 'posh boy' of Estonian poetry who paints with words, here stands a 'short and stout man' (*Mrg*: 8). Liiv recognises something there. His ideal of poetry is in a way skewed towards prose, as defined in the main forms of literature.

In his critique of the posh style that paints with words, Liiv asks in *Marginalia*, 'But what power do I get from weak vodka? Schiller's language is reflected in the names he gave to the creatures he created. What use is it when a small-time novice just repeats that high-brow language?' (*Mrg*: 10). When one uses lofty words just for the sake of it, it is nothing but weak vodka; it has no impact. He emphasises, 'Thought, feeling itself created its language, the high language of poetry. Beginners should begin with simple matters and simple language – the heat will bring the language' (*Mrg*: 10). Liiv believes high poetry

language simply appears of its own accord. The fragment cited here says that nothing should be done using poetic language. What is interesting in Liiv's text is that, in the hands of a poet, the word should become an 'original being' – such originality is called sound. Liiv explained the logic of literary depiction on a visual plane, using bodies and shadows, but in the case of poetic language, he is guided by the auditory image of sound and echo. If a poet is after the high music of language, then that is nothing more than an echo, and he should start with simple language because it resonates and creates an echo. The shadow is analogous to the echo, and so Liiv continues his earlier thought patterns with an analysis of language dynamics. In summarising his analysis, Liiv says, 'Let them write with plasticity, using solid shapes. / Bodies, bodies together, things, names, events. They probably will evoke feelings. / They evoke *echoes*, the aforementioned shadow, and the echo becomes the main character. Thus, the subjective will start to dominate the objective! / This is the artist's dowry, his pay' (*Mrg*: 10).

Since the heart of Liiv's comprehension of poetry does not lie with the depiction of emotions, but rather objects, which requires one to look outside oneself, entering the perceptible world, he stresses 'not emotional cries, but perhaps unseen compassion' (*Mrg*: 8). According to Liiv, the lyrical in its basis is not so much an expression of feeling, but the art of compassion. In contrast, one of the bases of the new, symbolistic Estonian poetry, i.e. 'digging deep within oneself', Liiv says, 'Inside myself is where I am trying to get out of; into someone else, into life, into light, into contrasts – when it comes to my writing' (*Mrg*: 11) (cf. Schiller's definition: naïve poetry is the child of life). Liiv has also penned a certain principle of contrast.

Before contrasting, set like and like together, and discard what does not fit – and make it big! / Nowhere is the abundance of words and 'but', 'however', you see, repetition worse than it is there – suddenly, no contrast! Where did it go? The cat ate it. / Divide and choose, divide with contempt of death! Eventually, the divided will come together with violence – taking you with it – creation! (*Mrg*: 4f)

Even at the very cryptic end of the previous excerpt, Liiv started to talk about the principle pertaining to poetic technique that like attracts like, and here he continues explaining the same principle. The quotation cited here could be one point in all of Liiv's legacy where he tries to clarify his principles about poetic technique in the most systematic fashion. His train of thought screeches to a halt in the manuscript, when he says, taken aback, 'what could become so crude. Too long!' (*Mrg*: 4f) and has erased the fragment in its entirety. However, the

'crudeness' is not a random step off the beaten path, but the finale of Liiv's comprehension of poetry.

What could it mean to set like and like together? Perhaps further discussions of one select subject or viewpoint, the development of a whole idea, one half of a juxtaposition that will emerge later. Whenever like is added, then a smaller or larger depicted whole is being constructed or composed. If an important change occurs, bringing in something that does not fit, it needs to be separated and divided clearly from what precedes it – as verse and stanza allows, it should be pushed to another location. What does not fit here could be the starting point of a new set of thoughts, which could undergo similar development when separated and as further similar thoughts are added to it, form the other half of the juxtaposition. And so, Liiv brings to the table the principle of contrast, which stresses the individual elaboration of various sets of thoughts. Going forward, Liiv once again warns writers against circular sentences and an abundance of words, since they may destroy contrast. Finally, describing the culmination of a work of literature, Liiv initially says to divide with contempt of death and then to 'connect the contrasts' (*Mrg*: 4f), but is unhappy with his original choice of words. He replaces this with the phrase, 'Eventually, the divided will come together with violence' (*Mrg*: 4f). According to Liiv, the culmination of a work of art arrives when all the divided parts connect. Initially, Liiv also gave the subject a certain part to play, but by the end he has begun to understand this connection as evidence of the violence and strife inherent in the work of art itself. The connection must be a multilevel phenomenon getting its power from the intense work done in dividing various details within one half of a contrast, but even more so from the divided positions that the two halves of a juxtaposition take against each other.

Such a composition, in Liiv's comprehension of poetry, aims towards a work whose whole is made up of parts that were built individually. In music, a composition consisting of separate sections that are still related is called a sonata. Hando Runnel (1984: 289) has noted that Liiv lies close to the sonata culture, saying that he often varies one subject as several smaller topics. The model of the poem given in *Marginalia* could indeed be called sonata-like.

As a young schoolboy, Liiv first found his way to art through music. It is known that the first book that he deemed important was the biography of Joseph Haydn, and subsequently his last attempt to understand art also ends up in music again. It is notable that Liiv finds music thanks to Haydn, who is also thought to be the man who crystallised the classical sonata (Jürisson 1965: 31), the implications of which become significant to Liiv at the end of his life. Haydn's music is well received in Estonia (see Jürisson 1967: 89), but it is difficult to reason whether Liiv is thinking about Haydn's oratorio *The Seasons*

(inspired by sentimental English literature) when he writes his cycle of poems titled *One Summer's Day*. It is still a fact that Liiv's perception of poetry centres around music, and, in its culmination, he sees the principle of contrast which Haydn had emphasised almost a hundred years earlier.

Conclusion

The exploration of Juhan Liiv's understanding and definition of poetry began with an analysis of his critical work, mainly his essay *Marginalia*, which he wrote towards the end of his life. This has led me to draw three main conclusions. First, Liiv did not live in a cultural void. The material he read shows that despite his lack of formal education and his mental imbalance, he was able to delve into the German-language sphere of thinking, and doing so held significance for him. There is no reason to assume that his comprehension of poetry evolved in a cultural vacuum. Second, Liiv analyses poetry on the basis of a distinction between sentimental and naïve poetry, which originates from the famous essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795) by Schiller. This means Liiv himself positions his comprehension of poetry within the cultural space of German thinking. Third, Liiv constructs his comprehension of poetry in strong correlation with music both in the aspects of conveying emotion as well as use of language. It would be prudent to make further explorations into Liiv's understanding of poetry against the backdrop of German classical rhetoric, aesthetic and music. Another point of research could be the new aspects in Liiv's poetry that emerge thanks to insights into the context of his poetic theory.

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