

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU**  
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**AUTUMN IN THE POEMS OF JUHAN LIIV:  
FROM ESTONIAN ROOTS TO INTERNATIONAL TRANSLATIONS**

**BA thesis**

**LAURA ROUHIAINEN**

**SUPERVISOR: *Lect.* KATILIINA GIELEN, TANAR KIRS**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the translation of Juhan Liiv's (1864–1913) poetry into English, focusing on nature imagery, especially autumn colors. The analysis covers two poems 'Lehed lang'sid' (1897) / 'Leaves Fell' and 'Sügise' (1903) / 'Autumn' from a collection of Liiv's poetry translations *Selected Poems in Estonian and English: Juhan Liiv* (2024) by Jüri Talvet and Lee Harvey Hix. The aim of this study is to analyze how the inherently Estonian poetry of Juhan Liiv transfers to a very different linguistic and cultural system of the English language. The comparative analysis concentrates on both the formal features as well as the content of the poems with a special attention on the imagery connected to autumnal colors.

The thesis consists of an introduction that provides a background on Liiv and the translation of his poetry, followed by a theoretical section conceptualizing poetry translation and Juhan Liiv's poetry. The empirical section provides an analysis of the poems and a discussion of the translations. The thesis ends with conclusions where the results of the analysis are presented.

Key words: Juhan Liiv, poetry translation, translation studies, nature in poetry

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## INTRODUCTION

Juhan Liiv (1864–1913) is one of Estonia’s first renowned poets and his influence within Estonian literature can be compared to the global impact of poets like T. S. Eliot and Federico García Lorca; however, while Liiv’s poetry has importance in Estonian literature, his work remains relatively unknown internationally (Talvet 2007: 7). Translation is important, as one can argue that it helps to introduce Estonian literary heritage to a wider readership, and it presents different cultural and environmental elements of literature. Moreover, it raises important questions about how such elements can be conveyed across linguistic and cultural boundaries to help foreign readers understand these texts. According to many authors, for example Friedebert Tuglas (1914, as cited in Talvet 2024: 20; Vinkel 1964) among them, the local Estonian nature is an important theme in Liiv’s poetry. Liiv demonstrates a layered understanding of nature, often giving it emotional depth and a sense of sorrow, while also personifying it and creating an immersive experience (Talvet 2024: 25–26). Therefore, the questions I am seeking answers to in this research are related to the representation of nature in the translations of Liiv’s two poems into English from the collection of translated poetry by Hix and Talvet.

In this thesis I will examine the English translations of Juhan Liiv’s poetry by Jüri Talvet and H. L. Hix. I will be analyzing two translations of Liiv’s poems – ‘Leaves Fell’ and ‘Autumn’ – from *Selected Poems in Estonian and English: Juhan Liiv* (2024) and compare the use of elements of autumn colors and nature in the translations. I chose these poems since both feature one of the key themes in Juhan Liiv’s work– nature (see Kirs 2015: 3). The aim of this research paper is to explore how the perception of autumn nature and specifically its colors is represented in the English versions of these two poems.

In the literature review I will be covering the canon of translations of Juhan Liiv and give a brief overview of the importance of nature in Liiv's poetry. I will also pay attention to poetry translation in general.

In the analysis section of this study, I will examine the two selected two translations in detail, by first analyzing the formal as well as content elements of the original, followed by the comparative analysis of the translation with a focus on the treatment of autumnal imagery, especially the presentation of autumn colors in each of the poems separately and finally comparatively.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review focuses on four different aspects concerning the translation of Juhan Liiv's poetry. Firstly, I will present a broader theoretical perspective on poetry translation in general, followed by an overview of the existing translations of Juhan Liiv's poetry into different languages, and a discussion on translating his work. Finally, I will provide a perspective on the importance of nature in Liiv's poetry. It is relevant to understand, at least to an extent, the scope of existing translations of Liiv's work, to recognize what was important to the translators while translating the poems, how nature functions as a poetic theme in Liiv's writing. The aim is to outline existing perspectives on the aforementioned topics. It is worth noting that there is limited research on Liiv's translations in English, with only few major bilingual editions of Liiv's poetry in English and most academic analysis being in Estonian or often focusing on his life and poetry rather than on translations.

### **1.1. Theoretical perspectives on poetry translation**

Opinions on the possibility of poetry translation differ. Orr (1941: 318) acknowledges that great poetry is best experienced in the original language to get the full effect and meaning of it.

Furthermore, it is commonly believed that poetry cannot truly be translated, however this does not mean that we should not be translating poetry at all. Orr compares translation as a creative art to painting. Just as an artist interprets a landscape by choosing certain elements to emphasize, a translator reimagines the poem, not producing an exact copy in another language, but focuses on conveying its spirit. (Orr 1941: 318) I find this analogy very intriguing as it shows the creative nature of translation. I would agree that poetry can be viewed as a form of art and translating it could be approached in a similar manner. By focusing on the poem's emotional as well as thematic essence, it may be possible to convey it in another language as well.

The topic of untranslatability is also brought up by Jakobson (1959: 238), who states that poetry in its core is untranslatable as its meaning is often based on sound patterns and how words relate to each other; these elements are closely tied to the specific language, meaning poetry cannot be fully translated. However, the translator can creatively rework the poem (Jakobson 1959: 233–238)

The belief of the importance of capturing the essence of the poem is also supported by Nida (1969: 484), explaining that translation is not simply a matter of substituting words between languages, but a more complex process of firstly understanding its meaning in the source language, then transferring the simple structure to the receptor language and lastly restructuring it in that language to meet the standards of audience the translator wants to reach. Nida (1969) notes that that translation becomes particularly complex when a source text includes ideas that are culturally bound and there are no direct equivalents in the receptor language. In such situations, the translator may have to simplify the translation or adapt it. Moreover, it is also important to consider the emotional and cultural associations of the language, not only the grammatical structure and literal meaning. (Nida 1969: 490–491) These challenges may be the cause of why some believe that poetry is untranslatable. I believe that

the difficulty of conveying the essence of the poem often comes from working around a vocabulary, linguistic and cultural references that are not supported by the receptor language. This can manifest in the need to make certain changes or just concentrate on one dominant feature. This means, as Orr (1941: 318) also points out, any translation inevitably involves compromise.

It seems that these changes can emerge in various ways. Orr (1941: 324–325) explains, with an example of translating for opera, that when translating from German to English, it may be necessary to place the verb at the end of the line and mirror German syntax to match the musical emphasis, even if this results in sounding unnatural in English. He also recommends echoing the original vowel sounds as much as possible, even if this may result in seemingly unusual word choices. (Orr 1941: 325) Building on this, one important factor to consider in translation is the constraints of the form that translation uses. For example, when preserving rhyme is a priority, there may have to be changes in word order or the need to find more suitable (sometimes partial) synonyms.

## **1.2. Translations of Juhan Liiv's poetry**

Juhan Liiv has been widely known for representing a native poetic talent in Estonia since the first decades of 1900. Friedebert Tuglas, a well-known Estonian writer active during the mid-twentieth century, has played a central role in preserving and promoting Liiv's legacy through two major poetry collections (1919, 1926) and two monographs (1914, 1927) that examined both the poet's life and literary contributions (Talvet 2013: 1–3). However, there has not been much recognition internationally – during the twentieth century, there have been relatively few book-length translations of Juhan Liiv's poetry into different languages. One rendition into Esperanto and two into Russian exist (Talvet 2013: 1). It can be assumed that the reason why two of those collections were translated into Russian was Estonia's socio-political ties with Russia and then the Soviet Union during the occupation in the twentieth century. Liiv's

translations into Esperanto were done by Hilda Dresen (1896–1981) and a collection was published under the title ‘Al abelujo ĝi flugas’ as late as in 1980. One of the Russian language collections was translated by Eduard Kantsmann (from 1935 Kansa) 1887–1946, while the other collection featured multiple translators including Leon Toom and Stanislav Kunyaev. (Kivi et al 1999: 254) In addition to introducing Liiv’s poetry to the English language readers through three poetry collections, Jüri Talvet has also edited a selection of Liiv’s poetry translations in Spanish. The anthology *La nieve cae, mi voz canta* featuring translations by Ángela Artero Navarro and Albert Lázaro-Tinaut appeared in 2014. Owing to Talvet’s efforts, a book-length poetry collection, *Schnee stiebt, ich singe: ausgewählte Gedichte*, edited by Jüri Talvet and translated by Sophie Reyer in collaboration with Talvet was also published in German in 2019. In 2015, *Rondine, dove hai preso il tuo grido?*, a selection of Juhan Liiv’s poetry in Italian, was published, translated and edited by Jüri Talvet and Piera Mattei. Finnish translations by Raija Hämäläinen and Kulle Raig appeared in the 2014 collection *Kanssasi ja ilman*. Although only a limited number of collections of Juhan Liiv’s poetry has appeared in translation, a considerable number of individual poems have been translated that have been published in journals, anthologies or books across various languages. These individual poems have been published not only in English, Spanish and Russian, but also Italian, German, Finnish, Latvian and several other languages. (Kivi et al 1999: 233–271) However, in the recent decades, the role of Jüri Talvet as the introducer of Liiv and his poetic input is difficult to overestimate.

Jüri Talvet (2007: 7) differentiates Juhan Liiv from, for example, T.S. Eliot and G.G. Lorca by their global recognition, saying that internationally Liiv is still hardly known outside Estonian language community. In the foreword to the translations of Liiv’s poetry *Meel paremat ei kannata. The Mind Would Bear No Better* Talvet (2007: 7) also states that the book represents

the first comprehensive attempt at translating Liiv's poetry from Estonian into a global *lingua franca* – English.

With the beginning twenty-first century and largely due to Talvet's activity, Juhan Liiv's works have started to gain more recognition and reach broader audiences in the world. For example, in 2007 Jüri Talvet edited and published the first bilingual edition of Liiv's poetry *Meel paremat ei kannata. The Mind Would Bear No Better*, which features texts in both Estonian and English and marks a significant contribution to the accessibility of Liiv's work for an international audience. Not only did the 2007 edition have an anthology of about forty translated poems, but it contains a foreword describing Juhan Liiv's personal and poetic background. After the publication of the first bilingual Estonian-English edition of Liiv's poetry in 2007, there have been a few more translations in journals, for example in the U.S., Spain and Slovenia. (Talvet 2013: 1) This shift of starting to translate Liiv first and foremost into English, but also the publishing of the translations of individual poems in journals at the beginning of the new century could be tied to Estonia having liberty once again and the freedom to share the culture and literature with the world. After the 2007 collection edited by Talvet, the second Estonian-English collection *Snow Drifts, I Sing: Selected poems* (Liiv: 2013) was published which was followed by the publication of the latest collection of Liiv's poems (2024).

In addition to the collection of translations of Liiv's work, his poetry has also been analyzed in English in *Interlitteraria* (international journal of Estonian Association of Comparative Literature) by Jüri Talvet in two articles: "The Universe of the Mind of a Poet: Juhan Liiv's Philosophy and Poetics" (2011/1: 103–122) and "The Lingering Journey of Poetry from 'Peripheries' to 'Centres': the Estonian Case of F. R. Kreutzwald's Epic Kalevipoeg (1861) and Juhan Liiv's (1864–1913) Lyrical Work" (2012: 93–107). Talvet's 2011 article in *Interlitteraria* is also reprinted in *Selected poems in Estonian and English* (2024: 142–153) as an afterword. More recently in *Interlitteraria*, Liiv's work has been discussed by Tanar Kirs in "Juhan Liiv's

Comprehension of Poetry” (2023/1: 87–102). Hix’s (2013: 9–13) translator’s introduction is also reprinted in the later collection that was published in 2024.

### **1.3. Translating Liiv’s poetry**

There are many possibilities when choosing a strategy for the translation of poetry; according to Talvet (2024: 11–12), considering the challenges of translating lyric poetry, which is fundamentally influenced by sound and rhythm, Talvet and H. L. Hix favored free verse when translating into English. This approach was preferred to assist a more effective conveyance of the image structures between different cultural contexts (Talvet 2024: 12). Talvet explains that his collaborations with H.L. Hix are structured in a way that Talvet translates the first draft which is followed by Hix making his own conclusions on how to ultimately convey the finished version (Kiisler 2025: 41). This means that Talvet provides Hix with a raw interlinear translation and Hix finalizes it in English. Hix (2013: 10) explains that the key difficulty in translating Liiv’s poems into English lies in expressing the deeper meaning beneath their surface, which depends on the intrinsic character of the Estonian language, therefore the aspect that resonates with native Estonian speakers is challenging for the translation into English. Moreover, Hix (2013: 10) illustrates how in translating ‘Leaves Fell’, he experienced challenges with balancing contrasting words, maintaining fluency and avoiding common English clichés. Additionally, according to Hix (2013: 10), he was unable to incorporate a subtle personification that is a part of the original poem ‘Leaves Fell’ in Estonian due to it sounding irrational. With this, the aims of the translation, its dominant foci are delineated: fluent and uninhibited reading, balanced lexical contrasts and avoidance of banalities and platitudes. To conclude, the translator seems to value natural flow and stylistic elegance, which may lead to some loss of the original text’s features.

Although both Iambic meter and free verse are relatively natural within the structure of the Estonian language (Lotman 2018: 8). Early Estonian poetry exhibits trochaic metrical forms

that are inherent to the Estonian language, since the natural word stress of Estonian native words falls to the first syllable. According to Lotman et al (2013), during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the time of the activity of Juhan Liiv: “the syllabic-accentual trochee was the main verse meter in the metrical repertoire of Estonian literary poetry” (Lotman and Lotman 2013: 264).

On the example of the two autumn poems by Liiv, we can see that his poetry does rather have the characteristics of the trochaic meter. If the translator chooses not to focus on preserving the original meter of the poem, it can result in a rhythmic change losing the support of the form to the content; however, opting for a more natural form in the target language and concentrating on the content is what poetry translators often have to face. The choice is made depending on their preferences.

Hix (2013: 11–12) acknowledge that it is improbable to the average English-speaking reader to have the necessary background knowledge, such as familiarity with Estonia’s culture and history, when interpreting a poem. However, it is likely that the reader can speculate some context from the poem itself and make educated guesses about the intended meaning (Hix 2013: 12). This point is further emphasized by Hix (2013: 12) “/.../ a footnote explaining the particulars, which would have to be much longer than the poem itself, would have an effect something like explaining a joke.” Thus, the translators recognize, and to an extent also address the issue of rendering traits of local idiosyncratic culture and history. This demonstrates their awareness of the cultural gap between Estonian and English-speaking target audiences, as well as their choice to prioritize poetic impact over heavy contextualization.

In *Snow Drifts, I Sing: Selected Poems* (2013), J. Talvet and H. L. Hix have translated the poems largely without the emphasis on rhyme, as opposed to consistently converting Liiv’s loose rhymes into smooth full rhymes, which English could easily allow (Pilter 2013: 939–940). Pilter (2013: 939–940) suggests this approach effectively conveys Juhan Liiv’s use of

rhyme, which also aligns with the Imagist tradition of poetry in world literature. However, in the poem ‘Rändaja’ (‘Homeless Man’), rhymes occasionally appear in a seemingly effortless manner. (Pilter 2013: 940) According to Pilter (2013: 940), this demonstrates the translators’ sensitivity to the distinct emphasis logic about the characteristics of native speakers of both languages. Anyhow, the rhyme is not in the focus in the translations as the main formal element.

It is worth noting that Liiv himself believed translation to be a form of imitation that suppresses and kills the creative energy which is essential for the growth of young cultures; moreover, he expressed this critique of translation in one of his poems where he paralleled it with a coffin (Talvet 2013: 5). This sarcastic poem may be directed at Liiv’s contemporaries’ attempts at adding full rhyme and strict form when translating no matter, even if it may have not been suitable or necessary for the original meaning or style of the text. (Talvet 2007: 8)

#### **1.4. Juhan Liiv and nature**

Nature and natural phenomena appear to play an important role in Juhan Liiv’s poetry, serving as one of its central themes (see Tuglas 1914, as cited in Talvet 2024: 20; Vinkel 1964) According to Tuglas (1914). Liiv’s poetry reveals its deepest meanings through the interplay of two elements; his tragic portrayal of human existence and his sensitive reflections on nature (Talvet 2024: 20). The importance of nature seems culturally logical as this aspect is still relevant today, but one can assume that in the past nature carried even more significance.

Liiv’s approach to nature is not solely observational, but immersive, e.g. waves, spring and a bird can seem to be transformed into conversational partners for him in a few poems. Moreover, his works frequently incorporate an underlying element of melancholy, which is often interlaced with a sense of delicacy and emotional depth. That said, Liiv does not appear to romanticize or idealize nature in his poetry, instead his works suggest a nuanced perspective, acknowledging both the beauty and the harsher realities of nature. (Talvet 2024: 25–26)

One example of Juhan Liiv's nature poetry is an early poem 'A Small Flake of Snow', which demonstrates the author's gentle and intimate bond with nature. In the poem, Liiv uses the image of a snowflake to symbolize the vulnerability of human existence while capturing the beauty of fragile and fleeting things. The poem features repetition, which is a technique often seen in Liiv's later works. Moreover, the meaning of repeated words – "silence, silence" – shifts throughout the poem as it initially describes the snowflake itself, later, however, the snowflake takes a voice of its own as it is personified. Then the poet turns inward, using the repetition as an imperative to calm his restless heart. (Talvet 2024: 23–24)

In conclusion, although Juhan Liiv's poetry is relatively known within Estonia and some translations and scholarly studies exist, there remains a notable gap concerning how his poetry functions in translation, particularly in translations to English. In the following analysis, I will analyze two poems reflective of Estonian autumn nature and compare their formal as well as stylistic features to the corresponding English translations.

## **2. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LIIV'S TRANSLATIONS**

In these sections of the study, I will be examining Juhan Liiv's poems 'Leaves Fell' and 'Autumn'. I chose these two texts because of their reflective mood and because the theme of nature awaiting the imminent winter is very relevant in both. Through the analysis it became apparent that colors are an important feature in both of the poems and thus the focus is on the implications of the descriptions of autumn skies and waters first in the original and comparatively in the translation. My method is to firstly deconstruct the translation in comparison to the original to understand the overall function of both the Estonian and the English versions.

## 2.1 ‘Lehed lang’sid’/‘Leaves Fell’

The first translation of Juhan Liiv’s poem I will be analyzing is ‘Lehed Lang’sid’ (‘Leaves Fell’) by H.L. Hix and Jüri Talvet (Liiv 2024: 64–65). The original poem in Estonian has three stanzas (5+4+4 lines respectively) and is written dominantly in alternating trochaic tetrameter with lines starting with a stressed syllable and commonly ending in an unstressed syllable forming a feminine rhyme pattern, which gives a soft ending to the lines. The rhyme scheme of the poem is AABBC, DBBC, FFCB, with A end rhymes softly echoing also in C rhymes (cf. *vetesse/laintesse – sügise*). There is a strive for full rhyme that can be seen in the repetition of the second half of the compound words ‘tuhakarva-tinakarva’ and ‘vetesse-laintesse’, as well as ‘jahutuse-lahutuse’ pair forms a perfect full rhyme with only one letter difference. The author also used alliteration in various places, for example ‘lehed lang’sid laintesse’ and ‘leinalained lahutuse’. The use of such techniques in Estonian appears to create a melodious rhythmic effect. Said formal rhythmic patterns support the tone and mood of the poem, as a steady rhythm can make the poem feel calm, matching the reflective tone; alliteration and repetition put an emphasis on the emotional depth of the poem. Moreover, the rhythmic effects strengthen the imagery – e.g. repeated mentioning of the waves/water and alliterative ‘tuhakarva-tinakarva’ points to the gentle but steady lapping of waves, or more generally also the alteration of seasons, steady flow of the life towards imminent death. Typically for Liiv, the first stanza captures a moment in the autumn nature: wind, falling leaves, colors of the autumn sky and waters. The following second and third stanzas are more pensive, reflecting the mood and inner feelings of the narrator: the autumn nature matching the mournful mood and bringing peace and consolation.

In the translated poem – ‘Leaves Fell’ – I found the syllable count as well as the stress pattern to be different, pointing to the dominant aim of the translator to convey the theme, imagery and the mood of the poem rather than adhere to the formal patterns of the original. One

of the key differences in the translation related to the form is that the verses are iambic, meaning the stress is on the second syllable of the two-syllable foot; moreover there are lines ending with a stressed syllable – masculine verse ending as opposed to the subtle and smooth lap of the original feminine line endings. There are also less instances of rhyming and alliteration in the translation; alliteration occurs once in the phrase ‘waves were’ and rhyming occurs in places where the lines end with ‘ash-gray’ and ‘tin-gray’. While the language in the translated poem is mostly neutral and not specific to either variety of American English or British English, the use of *gray* (American English) and *autumn* (British English) could indicate the personal or poetic style of the translator.

The first two lines of ‘Lehed Lang’sid’ end with an illative case, creating a natural end-rhyme, in the translation however the preposition *into* is only used once, possibly to avoid unnecessary repetition – two different words ending with an illative case seem more effortless than repeating the same preposition twice. Moreover, later in the poem, the last two words of the first two lines are switched in the translation, which could be a stylistic choice. In Estonian the subject (*tuulehoog – gust of wind*) impacts the object (*vetesse – into the waters*) which creates the imagery of moving water, in ‘Leaves Fell’ the use of the word ‘waves’ over a literal translation ‘water’ creates a dynamic and poetic combination with the object (‘A gust’) as one occurrence affects the other. Furthermore, the word ‘waves’ appears in the third line of the poem – both in Estonian (*lained*) and in the translation – and the variation in word choice can help to create a natural, effortless rhythm that, although different, is also present in the original poem. In the third line, there is also one instance of alliteration (**waves were**), this repetition supports the image of the movement of waves, and it also may be compensation for something else that got lost in translation. In the first stanza there is an instance of replacing the original version’s colon with a comma (*lehed lang’sid laintesse: vs leaves blew into the water,*). This change may

create a more continuous rhythm in the line, but it could also reflect a stylistic decision to better align with the natural flow of the English language.

H. L. Hix (2013: 10) points out that Liiv's poetry appeals to native readers because it conveys complexity through simple language, drawing on the natural, expressive potential of the Estonian language, and this is what makes the translation into English challenging. Hix (2013: 10) presents an explanation that, in 'Leaves Fell' Liiv uses two compound words for shades of gray: *tuhakarva* ('ash-gray') and *tinakarva* ('tin-gray'). These words are formed from *tuhk* ('ash'), *tina* ('lead' or 'tin') and *karv* (which literally means 'hair', but can be also used describe a color). These expressions are not rare in Estonian and fall somewhere between conventional and poetic – they are neither clichés nor invented terms. In addition, they also carry a delicate meaning, and suggest a kind of personification, contrasting the lightness of ashes with the weight of lead. That kind of layered meaning is difficult to keep in translation. While 'ash-haired' might sound natural in English, the phrase 'lead-haired' can feel awkward or overly strange, therefore the translator chose to avoid these such word pairs. Another combination to use would be 'ash-gray' and 'tin-gray', in order to avoid the overused expression 'lead-gray', the translator opts for 'tin-gray' using the fact that *tina* can also mean tin. (Hix 2013: 10)

However, *tuhakarva* and *tinakarva* are just normal or slightly poetic words in Estonian to represent color, and in this context the word *karva* does not mean literally 'hair'. Therefore, the use of 'ash-gray' and 'tin-gray' is well justified. These translations preserve the intended color imagery without sounding unnatural or overly literal in English.

In the original Estonian poem, *tinakarva* appears in both of the final two lines of the second stanza (*taevas üle tinakarva, / tinakarva sügise*), but in the English translation, one occurrence is replaced with 'ash-gray' (*tuhakarva*), therefore the lines are "the sky tin-gray, / ash-gray the autumn". This subtle shift can create a sense of rhythm, as 'ash-gray' is also used

in the second and then repeated in the fourth line. Moreover, the same structure of ‘ash-gray’ and ‘tin-gray’ is used in the first stanza which contributes to the overall rhythmical quality of the poem. Although some poetic devices such as end-rhyme and alliteration are more difficult to reproduce in translation, this strategy can balance the rhythmical aspect of the poem.

The third stanza begins with the translation of *tuuleõhk* (compound of wind+air) as “the breath of wind”, which sounds more poetic than a simpler translation such as ‘wind’ or ‘breeze’. Furthermore, with the following line’s opening phrase “the waves of mourning”, the translator has found another way of adding rhythm to the poem as both of these are noun phrases with prepositional postmodifiers. What I also found interesting is that in the third stanza, ‘autumn’ is used without a definite article, matching firstly the repetition in Estonian, and secondly, reflecting the semantic meaning of the line in Estonian (*taevas üle tinakarva/tinakarva sügise* cf. the sky tin-gray/ash-gray the autumn) where autumn (as well as the sentiment of the narrator) is described as gray. The original ends with *sõbrad teineteisele* (friends for each-other), which indicates already being friends, however the translated version “befriend each other” implies they are in the process of becoming friends.

## 2.2 ‘Sügise’/‘Autumn’

Secondly, I will be analyzing the translation of Liiv’s ‘Sügise’ – ‘Autumn’ (Liiv 2024: 38–39). The poem carries the theme of nature and autumn with a slightly reflective, gently melancholic tone that carries a sense of solitude. The poem offers abundant visual imagery especially through its adjectives and descriptions.

‘Sügise’ has three stanzas, each consisting of four lines. The poem has a consistent syllable count (the first two stanzas have an 8/5/8/5 pattern, and the last stanza has an 8/5/6/5 pattern) and demonstrates longer and shorter lines balancing each other, which can give the feeling of folk poetry or song. The last two lines that have a shorter couplet can create a feeling of resolution at the end of the poem: *Nõmm on sügisele / langend kaenlasse* (*The moor has*

*fallen / into autumn's embrace*). 'Sügise' is written in a trochaic tetrameter that has dominantly unstressed (feminine) line endings. There are few cases of rhyming.

'Autumn' also features three stanzas, as well as four lines per stanza. In the translation, there is no consistent syllable count, making it difficult to determine whether some form of meter is followed or not. The decision to not follow the syllable count of the original, can mirror the prioritization of conveying the theme of loneliness through autumn nature of the poem without being restricted by the form. The translation takes on an iambic verse that consists of mainly masculine verse endings. The few cases of rhyming from Estonian are not articulated in English. In the original, the title 'Sügise' is in a genitive case, however this can be a natural way of saying *sügis* in Estonian. Therefore, simply rendering it as 'Autumn' in English can preserve the same natural tone and effect. The translation uses a mix of American English (e.g. *gray*) and British English (e.g. *autumn*) spelling. Considering the fact that the translator has a background of American English, opting for a British word 'autumn' instead of American 'fall' can probably be explained when we look at the last two lines of the translation: *The moor has **fallen** /into **autumn**'s embrace* cf. *Nõmm on sügisele/langend kaendlasse*. The stanza would have had two times *fall*: *The moor has **fallen**/into **fall**'s embrace*.

In the first stanza, the first two lines suggest a muted and quiet atmosphere, this is rendered into English as well: *Igav liiv ja tühi väli, / taevas pilvine* (*Drab sand and empty field, / sky gray with cloud*). In the second line, *taevas pilvine* (poetic inversion of adjective and noun) is translated as 'sky gray with cloud', which I find conveys the original meaning effectively. This phrasing helps preserve the core of the line while maintaining some poetic effect. It is worth noting that the punctuation is consistently preserved in translation, except for the last two lines of the first stanza, where there is a comma missing: *jõuan tulles metsa äärde, / tuleb nõmmetee* (*walking I reach the forest / where the woodland path starts out*). This may be due to the Estonian version having two separate parts of a sentence while in English it is one

continuous sentence on two lines. In Estonian, the last line, *tuleb nõmmetee*, can convey fluidness and it can indicate it reaching the narrator. In English, however, ‘where the woodland path starts out’ can indicate more of the path simply beginning and being stagnant. Moreover, *nõmmetee* emphasizes the subdued and muted atmosphere mentioned in the beginning, while ‘the woodland path’ can carry the connotation of a forest full of trees, which can make it more descriptive and renders the word in a more poetic manner.

In the second stanza, ‘pines’ is translated in the first line as plural while in the original *männi* is in the singular. However, it is not uncommon in Estonian to refer to one tree when meaning several trees, therefore the translation of ‘pines’ can make the English version sound more natural, while making a slight change in the literal meaning. In the third line of the second stanza, occurs a use of dialect in Estonian with the word *pedak*, which can be a synonym for the previously mentioned pine tree or in general an evergreen tree. To preserve the alternating pattern of tree names, the word is rendered into English as a ‘spruce’ which conveys the same meaning of an evergreen tree as in Estonian but loses the dialectal synonymy. In the same line *heleroheline* is translated as ‘blue-green’ which is not a direct translation but helps maintain a poetic tone while expressing the general meaning. In the last line *kuldkollane*, which literally means ‘golden yellow’ is simply translated as ‘golden’. This can mirror the actual meaning of the word in the original, without the need for a literal translation.

In the last stanza, the first two lines are intended to repeat the last two lines of the second stanza. However, in the translation, the order of these lines is reversed. This results in a repetition of the final line of the second stanza as the first line of the third stanza, creating a framing effect with repeated lines at the outer edges and a variation in the central pair. What also carries importance is the fact that the punctuation mark changes within this repetition from a period to an exclamation point to convey noticing of these colors and possible emotional emphasis (*Pedak heleroheline, / kask kuldkollane!*). This shift is preserved in English as well

(*A golden birch, / a blue-green spruce!*). The last two lines of the poem are treated as a single flowing sentence, split across two lines both in the original and the translation. However, in the translation, this results in a different word order between the two lines, while still maintaining a natural rhythm that can be compared to the Estonian. These final lines have subtle personification in Estonian, as well in English. In the penultimate line of the original poem, *nõmm* is mentioned, which appeared in the first stanza as well. This repeated use of the word can show that Liiv is economic with his word use and tends to favor simplicity in expression. This time, however, it is rendered into English as ‘moor’ which allows it to convey slightly more meaning than the previously translated ‘woodland’.

It is also worth mentioning that Liiv often excludes the verb when assigning colors, for example saying *pedak heleroheline* (‘a blue-green spruce’) instead of the common way of phrasing *pedak on heleroheline*, omitting the verb *to be*. This can highlight the importance of colors in Estonian. If Liiv had wanted to stress the object *pedak*, the color would have preceded it at the beginning of line as *heleroheline pedak*. This importance of colors is reflected in the translation by shifting the color to the beginning of the line as opposed to leaving it at the end of the line as it is in the original.

### 2.3 Discussion of the Translations

Both poems, ‘Lehed Lang’sid’ and ‘Sügise’, consisted of structured syllable counts and were written in a trochaic tetrameter giving the poem a rhythm alternating between stressed and unstressed syllables which can give the impression of the lines fading. Therefore, the Estonian poems consisted largely of unstressed, feminine line endings. In these interlingual translations the trochaic tetrameter is replaced with iambic verse that includes primarily masculine verse endings. Compared to ‘Sügise’, the use of poetic devices such as alliteration, repetition and rhyming appears more often in ‘Lehed Lang’sid’, supporting the rhythmic effect. That said, these techniques are not entirely absent from the former poem either. Nevertheless, the aspects

that give the poem a rhythmic effect in Estonian are not consistently rendered into English, starting with the syllable count and pattern, but also alliteration and rhyming. What remains predominantly is the repetition and there are some instances of accidental alliteration and rhyming. This can suggest that conveying the formal patterns of the original was not the main focus of the translators. Moreover, possibly indicating that expressing the theme and imagery was more important. Giving up some of the prosodic constraints, such as the original meter and rhyme, means more freedom in conveying the imagery. This prioritization aligns with Orr's explanation that translation often involves a compromise. In this case, reflecting the essence of nature appears to outweigh the structural and rhythmic elements of the original.

Throughout both translations, there seems to be a minimal mixture of American English and British English, aside from this the language may be considered as primarily neutral and not specific to either variety.

In the original, the importance of colors is observable in both poems as these are commonly present when portraying autumn nature. The colors can be seen as descriptive as they are often depicted as compound words (e.g. *tinakarva*, *kuldkollane*) and this quality can make these representations relatively immersive. Liiv's preference of compound colors is rendered into English as well (e.g. *tin-gray*, *ash-gray*, *blue-green*), preserving this key aspect of both poems.

An alternative approach of highlighting the significance of color for Liiv is omitting the verb from the line where the object's color is presented. By removing the verb, the focus can shift to a descriptive color rather than the object that it is modifying. In English, this aspect is frequently solved by using conversion and placing the color at the beginning of the line which is then followed by the object.

Considering that this element of color appears to be maintained regularly, it can be suggested that this may have been a deliberate focus for the translators. Applying Orr's theory

that translators often choose a specific angle to emphasize in a work; it is reasonable to suggest that color was one of those components in this case.

In the two English renderings, there is an instance of switching line order compared to the original. More specifically, in both instances this shift was applied in the lines where colors were present; as this occurred in places where color was already being repeated, it is likely that the change was intended to further emphasize a certain poetic device.

As neither of the translations are a literal word-to-word copies of Liiv's original texts, it can be assumed that the translators' process was somewhat similar to Nida's theoretical framework of firstly understanding the Estonian version of the poems which then is translated into English as a simple structure and lastly reconstructing it properly in the latter language. This aspect may be reflected by both poems having one instance of change in punctuation marks; the removal of a comma in 'Autumn' and replacing a colon with a comma in 'Leaves Fell'

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to analyze how the poetry of one of the first Estonian national poets, Juhan Liiv, transfers to a very different English language. The objective was to explore the elements of nature, more specifically the colors of autumn in the translations of Liiv's two poems, 'Leaves Fell' and 'Autumn' that are published in a collection *Selected Poems in Estonian and English: Juhan Liiv (2024)*, translated by Jüri Talvet and Lee Harvey Hix. A comparative analysis of the original and translation was conducted paying attention to both the formal, prosodic features of the poems as well as the content, especially the imagery connected to the autumnal colors. A key finding was that nature imagery in Liiv's autumn poems seems to be prioritized in translation over other, especially formal aspects, for example preserving the metrics and rhyme. The translations put an emphasis on the transfer of the imagery,

foregrounding the colors of autumn skies and seas. This results in a vivid presentation of the core images of the two poems by Liiv in the translations at the expense of such formal features as the meter. The Estonian trochaic pattern was substituted for a iambic rhythm. As Juhan Liiv's poetry is an important part of Estonian national heritage, further research could examine other aspects regarding the translations of Liiv, for example the other important themes in Juhan Liiv's poetry, seeking out different translators or translations of poems for a comparative study.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Laura Rouhiainen**

**Autumn in the Poems of Juhan Liiv: from Estonian Roots to International Translations /  
Sügis Juhan Liivi luules: Eesti juurtest rahvusvaheliste tõlgeteni**

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Annotatsioon:

Bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on analüüsida looduse ja sügisevärvide temaatikat Juhan Liivi luuletuste tõlgetest, täpsemalt kuidas on antud temaatika antud edasi 'Lehed Lang'sid' ja 'Sügise' tõlgetes. Uuritakse tõlketeooriat, Juhan Liivi luuletuste suhet loodusega ja varasemaid Liivi tõlkeid.

Töös on teoreetiline ja analüüsiv osa. Teoreetilises osas antakse ülevaade Juhan Liivi luuletõlgetest ja täpsemalt ka Liivi tõlkimisest, kuidas loodus kajastub ta luules ja teoreetiline raamistik tõlkimisele. Teises osas tutvutakse lähemalt kahe valitud luuletusega, nende analüüsiga ja nende omavahelise võrdlusega.

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Märksõnad: Juhan Liiv, tõlkevõrdlus, luuletõlge, loodusluule

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