Pragmapoetics as Literary Philosophy[1]

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Pragmapoetics: A Theory of Two Contexts (Merilai 2001, 2003) is a study of figurative language usage as it informs literary texts.[2] It also tries to contribute to our understanding of ordinary language usage. The term suggests a fresh disciplinary branch which is guided by the assumption that poetic speech constitutes the object of analysis above all for a theory of poetics considering data provided by linguistic pragmatics. Pragmapoetics links Jakobsonian poetics with general semiotics: the study of syntax, semantics and pragmatics with an emphasis on the latter. It is primarily, although contingently, based on analytic language philosophy which offers sound advantages regarding methodological rigour and transparency extending as far as the possible affirmation of the Kantian postulate of grounding the research in logic, i.e. mathematics. While pragmapoetics explores the ontology of poetic utterances as a specific way of language usage, it forms, as a branch of language philosophy, the *a priori* philosophy of literature. Since it is concerned with the activity of the human mind in the contexts of fictionality, poetry, and the experience of beauty, it also belongs to

the philosophy of mind, and not only to aesthetics. Thus, it is my aim to contribute to our understanding of the way our mind works. More specifically, it is my contention that the properties of the poetic text reflect mental relations, or, as the creator of illocutionary logic, Daniel Vanderveken, put it "…. *the logic of language use reflects the a priori order of thought*" (1990: 226).

For the purpose of the poetics, pragmapoetics elaborates on theories of deixis (Karl Bühler, David Kaplan), speech acts (John L. Austin, John R. Searle, Daniel Vanderveken), implicatures (Paul Grice), discourse (Teun A. van Dijk), and fictionality (Gérard Genette, Gregory Currie). An analysis of the poetic language usage shows that the common theories should be refined to describe speech of the higher type.

It is assumed that an utterance can perform several speech acts at a time (q.v. Searle, Vanderveken 1985), with respect to both referential and self-referential aspects. It is explicable by the concept of additional speech force F which is expressed, for example, by the expressive assertive EA(p), where the conditions for achievement of an additional expressive act, like the propositional content p or sincerity condition, some preparatory conditions etc, are partly satisfied by the primary assertive act already. Thus, the poetic utterance *Hopes are going to turn to rags* (q.v. Appendix 1) by an Estonian poet Artur Alliksaar[3] can be formalised as an expressive assertive $E_{complaint}A_{description}(p)$, in which the assertive act can be understood as performed in full, while the expressive achieves a partial performance by using conditions partly fulfilled by the main act. Also, such concepts as macro-speech act, complex speech act and conversational implicature have to be considered.

However, pragmapoetics focuses itself on the self-referential, more specifically on the poetic function of the language usage. What is linguistic self-referentiality? It is something that reveals itself rather

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[3] Artur Alliksaar (1923–1966) is a particularly appropriate choice since his extraordinarily imaginative free verse language poetry with its sonorous prosody, associative as well as paradoxical comical semantics, aphoristic, analytic and conversational properties provides an exceptionally representative and rich subject matter for both the study of poetics and language philosophy in general.

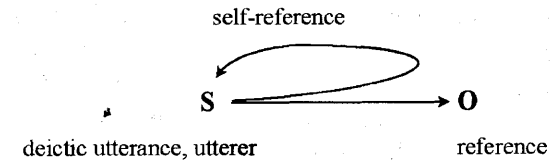clearly, for example, in deictic activity (q.v. Figure 1, Merilai 2005b: 274).

Figure 1. Deictic reference

The two main characteristics of the deixis are: 1) its explicit pragmatic context-dependency, and 2) its implicit semantic self-referentiality. As John Searle exspresses it in his *Intentionality* (1991: 221 ff):
In uttering indexical referring expressions, speakers refer by means of indicating relations in which the object referred to stands to the utterance of the expression itself.

So the expression 'I' refers to the person uttering that expression 'I'. 'You' refers to the addressee of the person uttering the expression 'you'. 'Here' refers to the place of the utterance of the expression 'here'. 'Now' refers to the time of the utterance of the expression 'now'. "Yesterday" refers to the day before the utterance day of the expression 'yesterday'. And so on (q.v. Figure 2, Merilai 2005b: 274).
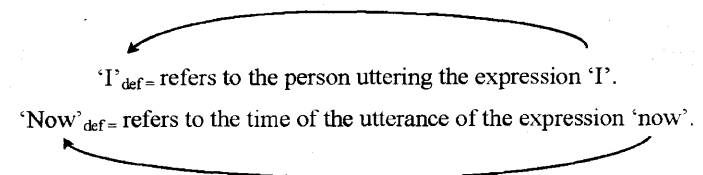

Figure 2. Deictic expressions

The utterance of indexical expressions, therefore, has a form of self-referentiality which is similar to the self-referentiality of certain intentional states and events (for example visual experience). In a word: deictic expressions are not only pragmatically demonstrative but also semantically fundamentally self-referential. More than that: one may assume that deictics can function referentially only due to their basic self-referentiality which is therefore their most interesting peculiar feature. As a result the left side and the right side of the definition of the meaning of the indexical expressions overlap yielding a reflexive circulus vitiosus.

Similar to deixis, the poetic expressions reveal strong self-referentiality, too, only they foreground their linguistic qualities (i.e. similarities) more clearly and background thus their referential contents (q.v. Figure 3, Merilai... 2003: 23, 2005b: 275).
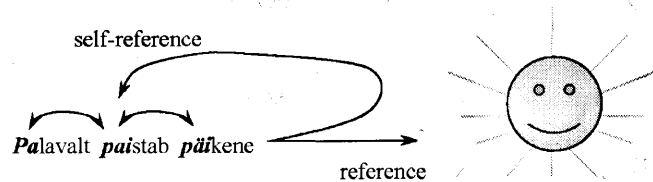

Figure 3. Poetic expression[4]

So it can be said by way of generalisation that language fulfils two main functions: referential and self-referential (q.v. Searle 1991: 218–230), where the latter is usually an implicit, although especially characteristic of indexicality and rhetorics, the former an explicit one. Roman Jakobson (1960), of course, speaks of six functions, but these can be philosophically reduced to two: emotive, referential and conative to referential, poetic, phatic and metalingual to self-referential, or poetic (q.v. Figure 4, Merilai... 2003: 22, 2005b: 275).

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4 Translation of the expression: *Scorchingly, the sun is shining.*
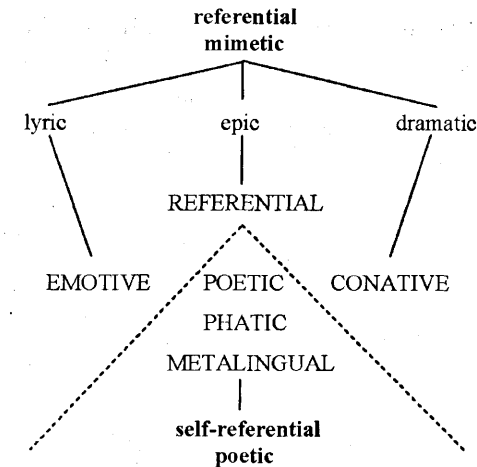
Figure 4. Referential and poetic functions

Considering poetics it seems to be clear that the expressive speech acts tend to satisfy mainly the emotive function (i.e. lyrics), while the assertives the referential one (epics), whereas the directives and the commissives lay stress more on the conative role (dramatics). However, the most essential property of the art of poetry is certainly the fact that it poses self-referential function as primary, while the mimetic activity or the referential function recedes to a more secondary position. Literature boosts linguistic self-referentiality that is relatively covert in ordinary speech, and turns the seemingly or actually referring utterances into an aim in itself, e.g. often shifting the attention from the content of the expression to the linguistic nature of the expressions themselves.

On the stylistic level of a poem (as opposed to the content level) the mutual referentiality of multiple phonetic, verbal, syntactic and semantic similarities takes place. This is essential to the parallelistic linguistic structures which the poems most genuinely are. It can be illustrated by the Figure 5 (Merilai... 2003: 36, 2005b: 280) where the rich mutual referentiality of linguistic equivalencies on different

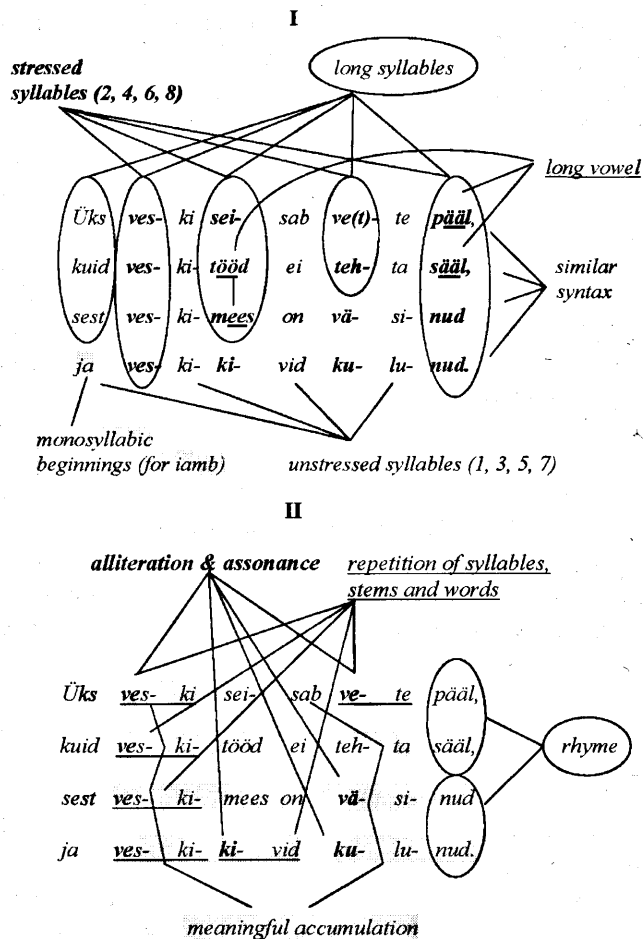levels in a single simple stanza of a poem by another Estonian poet Hando Runnel is well demonstrated[5].

I

stressed
syllables (2, 4, 6, 8)

long syllables

long vowel

Üks	ves-	ki	sei-	sab	ve(t)-	te	pääl,
kuid	ves-	ki-	tööd	ei	teh-	ta	sääl,
sest	ves-	ki-	mees	on	vä-	si-	nud
ja	ves-	ki-	ki-	vid	ku-	lu-	nud.

similar
syntax

monosyllabic
beginnings (for iamb)   unstressed syllables (1, 3, 5, 7)

II

alliteration & assonance   repetition of syllables,
                            stems and words

Üks	ves-	ki	sei-	sab	ve-	te	pääl,
kuid	ves-	ki-	tööd	ei	teh-	ta	sääl,
sest	ves-	ki-	mees	on	vä-	si-	nud
ja	ves-	ki-	ki-	vid	ku-	lu-	nud.

rhyme

meaningful accumulation

Figure 5. Poetic self-referantiality

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[5]   Translation of the stanza: *A mill stands upon the waters / but no millwork is being done there / as the millman is tired / and the millstones are dull.* (Hando Runnel, "A Mill Stands upon the Waters", 1972.)

It may be tempting to call this kind of poetic auto-referentiality among the linguistic and semantic equivalencies also deictical but it would be a mistake. Deixis does not work everywhere, pan-deictically, instead the more basic self-referential function of language reveals itself in different ways, either deictically or non-deictically. Not everything self-referential in language usage is automatically deictical, there is no such implication. On the contrary: one may claim that everything mutually reflexive in language is also poetical, at least implicitly. Both phenomena have fundamental self-referentiality in common which is therefore a more general and deeper feature of the language they reflect. This is why the self-manifestation of the poetic expressions looks pretty much like discourse deixis and vice versa: although stemming out of the same root, they are certainly different.

So, in addition to the previous analysis of the EA(p) poetic speech act with its additional force, the possible rhetorical speech forces of the Lotmanian secondary modelling system (e.g. Лотман 1972: 18–23) have to be taken into account. A central idea of *Pragmapoetics* consists of a model of the two contexts of literary perception: the aspect of the content, or the narrow context, and the aspect of the expression, or the broad context – single utterances but two levels of perception, of meaning and force (q.v. Figure 6, Merilai 2001: 166, 2003: 223, 2005b: 281).

+   +

de dicto / de se aspect of utterance   de re aspect of utterance
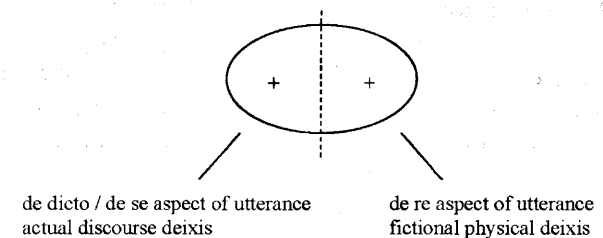actual discourse deixis   fictional physical deixis

Figure 6. One utterance, different speech acts

According to *Pragmapoetics*, all linguistic communication takes place on two contextual levels simultaneously (probably a tacit

Fregean idea). In the narrow, or linguistic-semantic context, the type of the utterance is interpreted generally, against the background of possible worlds, while in the broad, or semantic-pragmatic context, the particular meaning gets fixed according to the actuality (q.v. Figure 7, Merilai 2001: 167, 2003: 223, 2005b: 282).
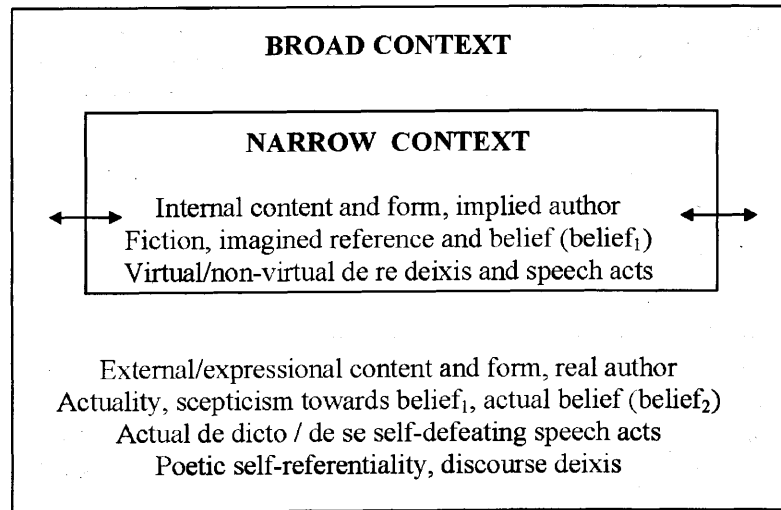
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│   │             NARROW CONTEXT                   │   │
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│ ←→│   Internal content and form, implied author  │←→ │
│   │ Fiction, imagined reference and belief (belief₁) │
│   │ Virtual/non-virtual de re deixis and speech acts │
│   └─────────────────────────────────────────────┘   │
│                                                      │
│                                                      │
│    External/expressional content and form, real author │
│  Actuality, scepticism towards belief₁, actual belief (belief₂) │
│     Actual de dicto / de se self-defeating speech acts │
│      Poetic self-referentiality, discourse deixis    │
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The narrow context box contains: Internal content and form, implied author / Fiction, imagined reference and belief ($belief_1$) / Virtual/non-virtual de re deixis and speech acts

The broad context contains: External/expressional content and form, real author / Actuality, scepticism towards $belief_1$, actual belief ($belief_2$) / Actual de dicto / de se self-defeating speech acts / Poetic self-referentiality, discourse deixis

Figure 7. Perceptional aspects of literature

So, when somebody calls out *"A wolf's coming!"*, we all know the general meaning of the utterance. But its particular meaning becomes clear only in the actual situation: it may be true at a dangerous wolf-hunting event in the forest, but it may be just an innocent game of make-believe at a wild-goose chase with the kids in the park. Hence there are two simultaneous contexts, the general and the particular. In this instance, it is a matter of survival not to confuse the two: it is of utmost importance to know whether one's father is smiling or winking his eye (the rhetoric speech force markers) while saying "A wolf's coming!" or really trying to escape in panic.

Literary discourse clearly explicates the difference of the levels, by practising the imaginative referential function in the former (often

in a self-defeating, fictional or rhetorical manner); as well as amplifying the self-referential function of language in the latter, a real rhetoric context of the author and the reader. It is very important that the audience does not run onto the stage to save Othello and Desdemona from their dire straits or to chastise Harpagon, although some people whose personal pain is actually touched by the situation would like to stop the play. But it remains still a play and, as grownups, they recognise, what is an illusion and what is real. It is common intuition that the story is brought forward via a fictional author who is neither the intradiegetic narrator nor the actual author, or the producer using the actors to perform a text, but an extradiegetic construct between the narrow and the broad contexts implied by the audience – a well-informed, more or less imaginary mediator who is forwarding the event immediately unravelling in front of the spectator's eyes. This is just imagined. On the broad plane, however, the composition of the story, the absorbed acting and expression of the performers is observed. It constitutes an attempt to participate in a dialogue with Shakespeare, Molière, or the producer of the utterances. In case of the arts it is even "good" if the truth or success of an utterance in the narrow context does not pass the test of reality, which shows that something else has been striven for than the referential de re speech: the shift of attention from the content of the expression p – with its narrower de dicto environment – to its stylistic and artistic nature de se.

As a result the picture, as it may be outlined, forms itself eventually as tripled (q.v. Figure 8).
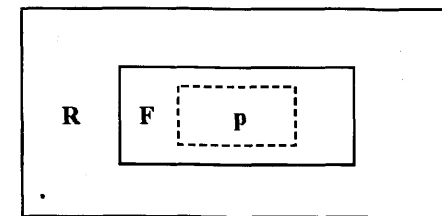
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Figure 8. Imaginative speech act in rhetorical context

The secondary modelling system that has concentrated around the poetic function enters the horizontality of ordinary language usage on the vertical axis, whereas the secondary (or self-referential) becomes the main aim and therefore primary; the usually primary (or referential) can be made virtual and therefore it remains secondary – a spring-board, a stage prop, although not only that. The matter of the content, whether Anna comes to a happy end or ends up under a train, is an important inductive basis to this theory; however, the eyes of a deductivist literary scholar easily tend to glide over this level in favour of stylistics and can thus be mistaken for the detriment of the holistic whole.

Thus: in the narrow scope, the sincerity condition is reduced to imaginary belief, or make-belief; in the broad scope, to actual one, the relation of which to the former may often be sceptical. The spontaneously transgressible boundary between the two contexts, or aspects of the perception, with them also merging into each other, is signified by the symbol for the caesura $//$. So the complex utterance can be described with the help of formulae such as $R_{metaphor(ical\ hyperbole),\ assonance}//EA(p)$ or $R_{metaphor(ical\ hyperbole),\ assonance}//EA(p)...R_{irony}(q)$ where the possible ironic or sarcastic implicatum of the narrow context $R_{irony}(q)$ (which is, of course, also an anticipated trope on the broader level) may perhaps once hint at a meaning like 'the Soviet life makes everything sordid' or something close to that. Attention shifts spontaneously between de re and de dicto / de se aspects of the poetic utterances, in which the imagined belief (or belief$_1$) is constantly alternating with the actual belief (or belief$_2$). The analogue would be Louis Necker's psychophysical cube from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1996: 5.5423) and the drawing of the rabbit/duck from his *Philosophical Investigations* (2005: II, xi) with its *Aufleuchtung*, flashing up of its perceptual aspects (q.v. Figure 9). Such mental roundabout traffic could be called a game of literary or artistic make-believe.
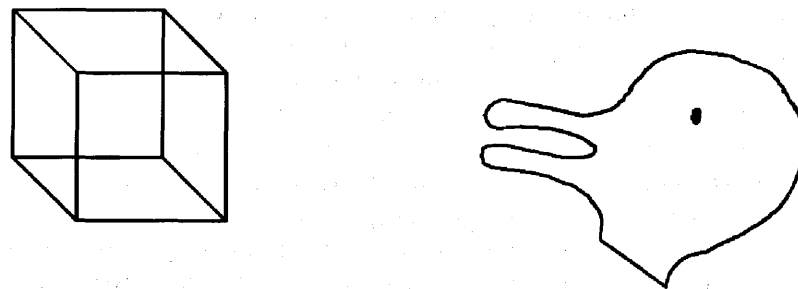
Figure 9. One expression, two objects

Thus, the theory is concerned with poetry and fiction operating simultaneously as a two-faced Janus around the borderline of two contexts: in the narrow one or in the world of make-believe inside a text (that at times can coincide with actuality but not necessarily), and, in addition, in the broad scope or the world of the actual belief of the author-text-reader. The speech force of the broader level is not applicable to the proposition as it is in the narrow context, but has the whole speech act of the narrow scope as its object: not simply p as de re but rather $EA(p)$ as de dicto, or $R_{metaphor(ical\ hyperbole),\ assonance}//EA(p)[...A_{irony}(q)]$ in its entirety as de se. Thus, the secondary (and clearly partial) speech act of the broad context can rather be described according to the principles of de dicto and de se – about itself, about its expressional qualities – than de re speech. The sense of the first level, *Sinn*, through which the reference, *Bedeutung*, is achieved, becomes itself the content on the second level and the reflexively indicated – obviously a Fregean idea (q.v. Frege 1892). Precisely the meaning of expressions is the content of art and its real object, the real indication; references to the actual world as an aim become virtual, or at least made secondary. So the actual content of a poem is not, or is not only, its particular content (as a string of the propositions or their summary), but rather the way this content is linguistically presented, its form and style. Expression itself becomes a content.

To sum up: the hypothesis of the two contexts seems to have a good explanatory power. According to it, poetic activity is con-

centrated around two elliptical centres: single utterances, but two centres of force, content and contextual orientation. One should learn to follow the game as it is not an inborn capability, but rather a sophisticated system of cultural conventions, i.e. higher language games. Slowing down the process of everyday reception, its defamiliarisation is the very nature of the aesthetic as has been claimed already by the Russian formalists, especially Victor Shklovksy.

In everyday communication it is referentiality that rules. However, poetic discourse reveal explicit linguistic self-referentiality. Poetic expression is more complicated than ordinary speech, a language usage governed by numerous artificial restrictions that is sometimes referred to as a secondary modelling system above the primary one. These hundreds of restrictions, i.e rules and devices of the artistic style (as well as the rules of breaking old rules), created throughout the centuries, are all more or less explicitly self-referential by nature: art boosts expressional self-referentiality. At least in literature, "The most important is the game," as one of the titles by Artur Alliksaar declares.

The deep sources of explaining language, mind and art lie in poetry, literature and the analysis of these. Linguistics and language philosophy without poetics do not make always sense, just like poetics does not make sense without them – it is not only Roman Jakobson or Juri Lotman (or even Martin Heidegger with his *Stiftung* by the poetic declarations) who present this opinion. However splendid it would be to clear up all the beautiful ways of auto-referentiality – alas, there is no proper mathematics yet.

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Appendix 1

ARTUR ALLIKSAAR (1923 – 1966)

WHERE TO,
WHERE TO,
UGH!!!

Time-tables.
Hail-tables.
Gain-tables.
Are the trains still going to hurry to the parties of strikingly struggling joys?!
Breath-nets.
Heat-nets.
Death-nets.
Are the shins still going to spray the blue sparks of spring?!
Hopes are going to turn to rags.
It doesn't matter – we'll sew them up with the thread of dreams stolen from the bushels of midnight.
The charm is going to grow thinner.
It doesn't matter – it can't vanish anywhere from the tight tin cup of our tribulations.
Yet the spell is really going to fade!
With more tension and greater gulps let us drink then its dusky brightness!
The soul is worn to holes like a prehistoric engine.
·Never mind – we will race forward in a canoe carved out of the trunk of the future-tree.
You, wind, are a very frolicsome insect indeed!
For ever with us, chasers of captivations, for ever with us, trackers of transfigurations.
Never falling behind.
Look, how many pretend to be dumb!
Look, how respectably they make fools of themselves!
Look, how benightedness is boasted about!
Look, how many take muck for marmalade!
You can understand everything because you can jumble up things, in order to put them in proper order.
A fly is walking on the time-table and believes it is in Bergen and Berlin and Baku.
There is no moment when no one feels killed.
There is no moment when no one reaches out for an embrace.
There is no moment when no one is on the road.
Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead wrapped in the clouds of the dandelion-fluffs of your wish-dreams!
The branching out of fingers and toes, of thoughts and memories has neither beginning nor end.

Translated by A. Merilai and Ene-Reet Soovik

inter litteraria

inter litteraria

12 - 2007

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