

## On the Relevance of Research to Translation

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the interrelation of the critical, academic, and translational heritage of Ants Oras. As his abundant translations, critical interpretations, and statistical analysis of versification were done in socially and politically highly different contexts, the paper asks for the possibility of integrity in all those endeavors. This can be assumed from the cognitive needs of his multiple roles as a critic, a researcher, and a translator.

**Keywords:** Ants Oras, pause patterns, statistical analysis, rhythm as a discourse, Henri Meschonnic, translation

### Oras the Critic

While writing an intellectual biography of Ants Oras (1900–1982), whose texts on Estonian culture and poetry establish an age and a tradition of their own in Estonian literary history, one of my tasks was to bring together all of his work, including translations and academic research produced in Estonia as well as in exile where he spent about half of his life. Although recognised as “one of the most distinguished Estonian scholars and writers of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century” (Seymour-Smith 1985: 202), the scope of Oras’s heritage was only partially known in Estonia due to the artificial split of Estonian culture into its exile and Soviet branches on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. Restrictive measures in his native land – publications kept in depositories that were closed to the public, librarians prohibited from ordering his books – were cardinal and unyielding, for he had not left Estonia as a refugee: his departure in 1943 was organised by the Estonian diplomats who had not returned to Estonia after the 1940 Soviet coup and who wanted him to work for the government in exile that was attempting to regain independence in Estonia. Furthermore, Oras had adopted an unwavering political stance in his 1948 book, *Baltic Eclipse*, published by Victor Gollancz in London. This book, one of the few contemporaneous written testimonies of the Soviet and German occupations of Estonia, made little distinction between the two red banners that had governed Estonia in early

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1940s, and deplored the crimes of communism. It goes without saying that the author of *Baltic Eclipse* was deplored in Soviet Estonia, to such an extent that in 2000, when I was invited to write Oras's biography, the only way to gain access to his post-war work was through interlibrary loans of his publications from the libraries outside Estonia.

At first sight Oras's concerns during the post-war period, the predominantly statistical prosodic studies written in Gainesville and published by the University of Florida, seem to have little in common with those of the Estonian context. Oras himself admits as much in one of his personal letters dated August 18, 1959, in which he describes his ongoing research as "kõige selle vastand, mis võiks tunduda minu esseedest" = 'the opposite of everything that might be expected from my essays' (Letters 1997: 99). Oras, the man of letters, takes his place in Estonian literary history primarily on account of his literary compositions, which frequently centred on the shaping of Estonian culture. Hence at the presentation of my *Ants Oras*, one of the Estonian literary critics who spoke about the book turned to the final pages where I had reproduced some of the statistical tables and graphs of Oras's prosodic studies and showed them to the audience saying, "We know who Oras is, but this is science". He had come to the presentation without having had a chance to read the book beforehand, as it had just come from the printer's, and he assumed that the graphs were my analyses of Oras's translations of Shakespeare.

This misconception was founded on the logic of Estonian cultural history. Oras belonged to a generation that could, for the first time in the history of the country, take up professional careers in the newly independent Republic of Estonia established in 1918, the year that Oras took his school-leaving exams. He was the third student to be matriculated in the University of Tartu after it had been reformed to include instruction in Estonian – also for the first time in its history. By the 1930s, having completed his studies at Tartu and at Oxford, with his thesis on the 18<sup>th</sup> century commented editions of Milton,<sup>1</sup> Oras had the standing needed to perform his perceived mission: to construct for his people an identity that would see beyond obtrusive geographic, linguistic and historical differences. He was out to prove that Estonia had a vital unity with the Western culture. Oras is one of those extraordinary critics who occur in all national traditions, who are cosmopolitan in their interests and who study the world culture primarily in order to better understand their own cultural identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Oras's 384-page thesis *Milton's Editors and Commentators from Patrick Hume to Henry John Todd (1695–1801): A Study in Critical Views and Methods* was published by both Oxford and Tartu universities. It was republished by OUP in 1969 and issued by the US Haskell House in 1964 and 1967.

Oras's Estonian texts have recently been republished in five volumes (2003, 2004, 2007, and two in 2009), the first three under the shared title *Luulekool* [The School of Poetry]. The first two volumes were included in the monumental series *Eesti mõttelugu* [Estonian History of Ideas]. Oras wrote primarily on poetry, which for him was never simply a genre but an agent of change in the reader. He developed in Estonian ideas that could be coupled with those that Shelley had proposed in his *A Defence of Poetry* (Oras's MA thesis defended at the University of Tartu in 1923 was entitled *Statistical Inquiry into the Use of Colour Names in the Longer Poems of Shelley*). That poetry is a reservoir of the oldest, most intensive and most enduring layers of the human mind is what Oras reveals in the criticism and essays that accompany his translations of English, Finnish, French, German, Latin, Russian and Swedish poetry, predominantly by writers whose work is of particular significance in their home cultures (including, among other works, Shakespeare's sonnets and plays, Heine's *Germany*, Goethe's *Faust*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and poems by Baudelaire, Pushkin, Eino Leino and Otto Manninen). In 1938 Oras compiled an anthology of a new generation of Estonian poets entitled *Arbujad* (translated variably as 'conjurers', 'soothsayers' or 'logomancers'); it included eight poets in whom he identified a new verse culture, a vigilant intellect and human sincerity. As this anthology was one of the last widely resonant manifestations of Estonian poetry before the collapse of democratic Europe, it has become legendary in Estonian literary history, in addition to everything else because it presented a foreboding vision of the subsequent years. Judging by the warmth, quiet pride – and later pain – with which Oras regards the poetry in the anthology, both in his Introduction in 1938 and in his later writings in exile, it is clear that he felt responsible for its emergence. Writing on Heiti Talvik, a key figure in the group, he says (Oras 2004 [1957]: 423), "[e]esti kirjandus on senini paratamatult olnud võitleva rahva kirjandus" = 'Out of necessity, Estonian literature has been the literature of a combatant people.' Thus he speaks of his poets as prophets who depicted the spiritual disorder not only in Estonia but in Europe as a whole, while holding high affirmative ideals.

## Oras the Researcher

Nothing of a charismatic nature can be found in the academic research Oras conducted in Gainesville. While he never sank to the level of producing "dull reading", a quality of writing he had been objecting to since his Oxford thesis (Oras 1930: 219), 32 pages of text versus 56 pages of tables and graphs – as in

his *Pause Patterns in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* – seems like the work of someone with a mindset quite different from that of Oras the great critic of Estonian literature. Admittedly, the format is different, but when confronted with pages that count pauses in Elizabethan verse drama as marked by punctuation, a reader would be justified in wondering whether this experiment in prosody was undertaken in order to justify himself in an age of science and keep his job in exile. Closer examination of the graphs and the conclusions that can be reached from them, however, cause one to reconsider: Oras's texts, be they essays, translations or academic studies, are still "all of a piece", to borrow the phrase he himself uses to describe Boris Pasternak's poetry in his notes on translating Pasternak, which are published for the first time in the present issue of the journal. Oras had not lost his integrity; it endured throughout his forty years of exile.

Proof of this can be found in the same letter of August 18, 1959 quoted above. In this letter to Ivar Ivask, Oras speaks of his academic work of recent years. As the archival record is of explanatory value in many respects, it bears extensive quotation:

Olen imelikus olukorras. Aasta algusest pääle on kogu aja – välja arvat küll ainult uneks, loengupidamiseks ja mõneks muuks paratamatuks toiminguks kulund tunnid ja hetked – olnud painajana pääl prosoodiline uurimus, mis kogu seda vaeva vist päriselt väärt ei ole, kuid mille ümber mõtted palavikuliselt hakkasid lõpuks käima isegi unenägudes. See oli erakordselt vaeva-nõudev – selline, et iga lõtvumine võinuks tähendada selle lõppu. Oma neli-viis aastat tagasi ma selle katkestasingi tüdimuse ja väsimuse tõttu. Nüüd on tulnud mõni väike, kuid otsustav mõte lisaks, ja ajumasin hakkas varsti käima automaatselt ja väga tülikalt, kuigi asjast muidugi mõnevõrra oli ka rõõmu. [...] See protsess näib minul olevat iseloomupärane – kordub ikka jälle mõne aja tagant, ja siis vaid heitlen lainetes. Ei näi tähendavat midagi, kas tegemist luule tõlkimisega, esseedega või rangema "teadusega". Igal sellisel korral olen Manninen'i sõnadega "ollut ja mennyt mies", mind ennast enam nagu polekski. Praegusel korral on asi juba üsna lõpu lähedal. On jäänud küll veel vaevalisi, kuid siiski vaid tehnilisi detaile. Üritus on õieti soomepäraselt-hullumeelselt filoloogiline ja statistiline (kõige selle vastand, mis võiks tunduda minu esseedest). Olen läbi uurind umbes 250 renessansiaegse näidendi sisepauside süsteemid ja esitan need matemaatiliselt ja ka piltidena – iga teose kohta protsentide joonis (pausid esimeses, teises, kolmandas jne silbis [s.o silbi järel], kokku üheksa protsentarvu, mis näitavad sageduste omavahelist suhet). [...] Need kujundid on hämmastavalt säädusepärased, kajastades ajajärku ning sagedasti ka autorit. Neist saab välja lugeda mõndagi ja

nad on muidugi seoses kõige muu luules leiduvaga. Kuid kas see kõik – kuigi see vähemalt inglise prosoodia alal on täiesti uus – tasub vaeva, on lahtine küsimus. Igatahes saan selle asja varsti matta.<sup>2</sup> (Letters 1997: 98–99)

Research in poetic rhythm can never be worthless for a professor of poetry specialised in prosody. Besides, issues of rhythm were on the agenda in the academic context in which Oras was working. In 1957 Columbia University Press had issued a collection of articles, *Sound and Poetry*, edited by Northrop Frye, who introduces the collection with an article entitled “Lexis and Melos” that focuses on rhythm patterns in poetry. In Frye’s interpretation rhythm is a combination of (1) metrical or prosodic rhythm, (2) accentual rhythm, (3) semantic or prose rhythm, the rhythm of the sense, (4) the mimetic rhythm of a reader imitating “the mood of the piece he is reading”, and (5) the rhythm “emerging from the coincidences of the sound-pattern” (Frye 1957: xxvi). The collection included an article by Oras entitled “Spenser and Milton: Some Parallels and Contrasts in the Handling of Sound”. In his article Oras compares the use of vowels – the variations in their phonetic quality – and consonant clusters in *The Faerie Queen* and *Paradise Lost*. His conclusion is that Spenser is more “vocal” while Milton is a “consonantal” poet.

The handling of sound by poets has been the subject of many of Oras’s articles: his 1951 “Surrey’s Technique of Phonetic Echoes: A Method and Its

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<sup>2</sup> I am in an odd situation. Since the beginning of the year my life has been nightmarish – except for the hours and moments of sleep, lectures or other necessities – because of a prosodic study that is probably not worth all this trouble but which still plagues my thoughts even while asleep. It was extremely painstaking – of the kind that any easing up would have meant its end. About four or five years ago I did interrupt it, as I was fed up and exhausted. Now a tiny but decisive idea has emerged and my mind-machine has been operating automatically and in a disturbing way – although there is some joy in it too. [...] The process seems to be characteristic of me – it repeats itself now and again and I am just wrestling in the waves. There seems to be no difference whether it is the translating of poetry, the writing of essays or more rigid “science”. In each case I am, in the words of Manninen, *ollut ja mennyt mies* [a man been and gone], there seems to be no me anymore. Right now, it all is nearing an end. There are still a few troublesome technical details. The enterprise in general is a crazy philological and statistical one in the Finnish style (the opposite of everything that might be expected from my essays). I have researched the internal pause systems of about 250 Renaissance plays and present them mathematically and in pictures – a figure for the percentages of all the works (pauses on the first, second, third, etc. syllable [that is, after the syllable], altogether nine of them showing the ratio of their frequencies). [...] The patterns are surprisingly regular, reflecting the period and often also the author. They can be used to explain a great deal and, of course, the pauses are related to every other aspect of poetry. But whether it is all worth the trouble – even though it is totally new, at least as far as English prosody is concerned – is an open question. Anyhow, soon I can bury it.

Background” studies Henry Howard Earl of Surrey’s translation of the *Aeneid* and observes that the translator has tried to imitate the echoing quality of his source text, linking the syllables preceding the caesura by assonance or (near) rhyme. Oras describes Surrey’s instrumentation as more obvious than can be detected visually, and thus his technique loses the charm of discretion – unlike that of Virgil. In 1953 Oras published a study on echoing verse endings in *Paradise Lost* that focused on the various types of rhyme that Milton used to shape the rhythm of his epic. In the same year, 1953, he published an article on the instrumentation of Christopher Marlowe’s verse dramas. In 1954 Oras returned to Milton, studying his early rhyme schemes in “Lycidas”. He showed that Milton’s early poetry imitates the rhyme schemes of Italian madrigals but downplayed the rhythmic regularity produced by rhymes: the English poet varied the length of lines and used enjambments. Characteristically, Oras cherished the unobtrusive quality of Milton’s rhymes as a sign of refined art that knows how to veil those devices that have an effect on the reader’s unconscious.

By limiting his 1960 research to pause patterns, Oras was also tracing those variations that tend to become unconscious – unlike meter. He was less interested in how often pauses occur in a work (because the abundance or absence of pauses can often be a conscious artistic choice depending on the subject matter) than which internal positions they occupy in a line, excluding line-end pauses. Although there may still be much deliberation within a line, for example, the position of the caesura should be in the position of the caesura, the overall patterns, Oras (1960: 2)<sup>3</sup> states in his introduction, are “likely to reveal much over which the person concerned has little or no control, almost as people are unable to control their cardiograms”.

His graphs (which do look like cardiograms) show in black and white the differences in the breathing of different authors, periods, and genres, and render some information that is significant for translators, who all too often pay little or no attention to punctuation, treating it as a part of orthography. But the rhythm of pauses has its semantics, as Oras aptly observes in the case of Shakespeare, in whose work the frequency of feminine pauses (in the middle of the foot) increases steadily as he moves from histories to comedies and from earlier to later periods: “Feminine pauses with the opportunities they afford for suggesting unobtrusive grace contribute to that air of effortless ease which Shakespeare seems to be deliberately seeking, and certainly soon achieves, in his earlier work” (15). In other words, the meter is increasingly less marked and the dramatic verse closer to colloquial speech.

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<sup>3</sup> Further references to the pages of the study are given after quotations in the text.

For Oras, it was the punctuation in the original editions that marked the pauses and constituted the phrasing of a text. Considering the fact that all the texts of his corpus had been first published prior to the establishment of modern so-called syntactic punctuation, Oras could indeed take the commas and full stops in Marlowe or Shakespeare as reading suggestions, the commas of the rhythm rather than those determined by the rules of orthography. Although aware of the fact that these editions were subject to the intervention of scribes and printers, Oras relied on the original folios as maps of simultaneous relations and meanings. In this way he avoided injecting “into the play something of his own rhythm – a twentieth-century rhythm” (2), a practice he had detected in modern editions of Shakespeare that present an editor’s reading of a text, lifting it out of its original “rhythmical climate” (3).

The most conspicuous tendency that the graphs render visible is the gradual shift of pauses from the initial part of the verse to the end and from the end of the foot to within the foot (that is, from the even position to the uneven). The run-on lines increase in frequency and the meter becomes more and more subdued. In Shakespeare’s early works more than a third of the pauses are in the fourth position; in *Hamlet* the fourth and the sixth positions are of equal importance; and in *Cymbeline* pauses in the second half of the verse-line, after the sixth position, predominate.

The cognitive mapping of the rhythm of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama by Oras cannot still be without its dubious injections. What Oras had taken on with his rigorous empirical description was in principle an essentialist quest for the true “nature” (30) of his period and his poets. The quest is something no translator can completely avoid without risking that his translational solutions will be incoherent. Oras’s academic studies pose the questions of a translator – just as his essays stem from his professional research. His prosodic studies, even of the most minute poetic detail, focus on the questions every translator must ask and answer with due consideration for the differences between natural prosodies, metrical schemes and their application, and the writers either observing or violating the rules in order to make their statement.

A focused and restricted study of verse was not something that Oras only took up in the US. In 1931 he had published in Estonian a six-page article on the French alexandrine, one of his most influential texts, recognised as the theoretical foundation for the syllabic system in Estonian. The latter had hitherto been traditionally rendered – as in the German translation pattern proposed by Martin Opitz (1597–1639) – as accentual-syllabic. The article recommends treating the alexandrine not as an iambic hexameter but as a twelve-syllable verse-line combining iambic and anapestic feet divided by a masculine caesura after the sixth syllable. The material for this statement comes from his analysis

of a limited number of Baudelaire's originals and relies on a description of their rhythm. To put his finger on the pulse of the French alexandrine, Oras makes use of the terms of the accentual meter – the word stress inevitably shapes the general rhythm impression of a poem – and describes Baudelaire's alexandrine as mixing anapests and iambs, the latter often inverted. As all the rhythm types are present in the Estonian language, he proposed the application of all of them alongside iambs, presenting two of his translations by way of example. In the earlier Estonian translations of Baudelaire, the number of syllables in a line had been carefully counted and in this respect the translations were “syllabic”, but a comparative reading of the two sets of texts, the originals and the translations, revealed that the scheme behind the translations must have been more monotonous than that behind the originals.

This meticulous reading of rhythm in Baudelaire had not been undertaken for the sake of metrical research *per se*. Oras found that the less flexible form of earlier translations had also simplified the content, drawing only its rough contours. Baudelaire's abstraction had been diminished and the translations were remarkable for their steady beat. In addition, by replacing the syllabic meter with the accentual, the French verse loses its “klassikalist tasakaalu” = ‘classical balance’, its “traditsioonilisima veetluse” = ‘traditional charm’, writes Oras (1931: 376), who favoured imitative form not primarily on account of the then imitative norms of translational practice in Estonia but prompted by the realisation that form reflects the workings of the mind. His own translations of Baudelaire annexed to the article (and indeed many of his translations) impress as instructive in tone, underlining the point under discussion and aiming at changing that particular aspect of the prevailing translational practice.

## Oras the Translator

Oras as a translator into Estonian has often been described as a translator of rhythm, meaning that while he might depart from the original on the lexical level, he tries to keep as close as possible to the rhythmic (including metrical) peculiarities of his source text. It is the rhythm that makes a poem, Oras frequently declares in his correspondence and reveals in his translational practice. How did he work while translating? In one of his 1959 letters, written to Ivar Ivask, Oras explains his process:

Olen otse vastupidisel arvamusel neile, kes väidavad, et tõlkijal ei tohi olla oma käekirja. Asi on just ümberpööratud: tõeline tõlkija peab omama käekirja, kuid

see peab olema nõtkke, sensitiivne, väga laia figuuride amplituudiga, kuid siiski isikupärane. Ainult omaenese isiku kaudu on võimalik sukelduda teistesse isiksustesse, ning see, mis toodetakse, peab olema veenvalt isikupärane, sest muidu see ei oleks täiekaaluline luule! See peab olema kirglikult läbi elat ja kirglikult – kuigi distsiplineeritult – väljendat. [...] Tõlkegenius on [...] sukelduja, kes täiesti süüvib tõlgitavasse, säestub oma maaelemendist mereelementi, kuid siiski jääb endaks – transformeerunud, võib olla kirgastet endaks, „undergoing a sea-change. Into something rich and strange“. Kuid ta jääb endaks. Ta on võtnud endasse teise, suurema vaimu ja ise suureneb selle elamuse kaudu. Seda elamust ta väljendab – enesena, kuigi muutudes, nagu muutub suur, tõesti inspireerit näitleja. Ta peab tegema rohkem kui näitleja, sest oma originaalist jätab ta ainult luustiku – ja siiski see peab olema samavereline originaal – põhiinspiratsioon, põhiekstaas (kui on ekstaasi) peab säilima. Kuid see peab käima teissuguseid teid, viies siiski samale [...] sihile. Lugejale peab tulemus andma sama siskonnani ulatuva elamuse – just siskonnani ulatuva elamuse. Alles siis suudab kõik muu tõeliselt mõjuda. Teadmised, teadused võivad aidata kaasa, distsipliini peab olema. Kuid peab olema ka seda „Stirb und werde“ hoiakut, millest alles tõuseb tõeline elu ja mis on võimatu, kui ei panda mängu kogu oma mina (mitte oma minatust).<sup>4</sup> (Letters 1997: 115–116)

Oras came from a generation that believed that “a man’s rhythm must be interpretative, it will be, therefore, in the end, his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable” (Pound 1968 [1913]: 9). The question of rhythm, therefore, bringing together the subjective and the objective, was for Oras important

<sup>4</sup> Contrary to those who say that a translator should not reveal his own hand, I think that a true translator must do so – but flexibly, sensitively and with an abundance of figures, yet still a personal hand. It is only through one’s own person that it is possible to dive into another’s personality and the product must be persuasively personal, otherwise it will not be poetry in its own right! It has to be passionately experienced and passionately expressed – albeit in a disciplined way. [...] The translator-genius is [...] a diver who immerses himself fully in the text to be translated, subsiding from his earth-element into the sea-element, while still remaining himself – transformed, perhaps transfigured, “undergoing a sea-change. Into something rich and strange”. But still himself. He has absorbed another, a greater mind, becoming greater in the process. This is the experience he has to express – as himself, though changing, just as a great and truly inspired actor does. He must do more than an actor, because what is left of the original is only the skeleton – and yet it has to be of the same blood as the original – the basic inspiration, the basic ecstasy (if it is ecstasy) must be preserved. But it has to travel different paths leading to the same [...] objective. The reader must get from the result a similar experience to their very core – right to the core. Only then can it have an effect. Knowledge and research may help, one must have discipline. But also that *Stirb und werde* attitude that gives birth to true life and that is impossible unless you put at stake your very self, not your selflessness.

enough to invest in it in both his translations and his research. Although he often focused on only one aspect of rhythm – rhyme, accents, pauses, or meter – the sum total of his work supported the tenet *le style c'est l'homme*. In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye (1990 [1957]: 268) writes: “in all literary structures we are aware of a quality that we may call the quality of a verbal personality or a speaking voice – something different from direct address, though related to it. [...] every writer has his own rhythm, as distinctive as his handwriting”. This is not far from Oras’s (2003 [1940]: 250) credo that “stiil on kujundava, loova printsiibi kõige nähtavam väljendus” = ‘style is the visible expression of the formative, creative principle.’ Thus it cannot be prescribed: it is possible, Oras wrote in his 1940 “Arvustajaist ja arvustusest” [On critics and criticism] for the grammar or the verse to be “faulty” but the style still good (*ibid.*)

As already mentioned, there is an essentialist element in his claim to be able to specify the nature of a poem/poet, and this essentialism is related to the task of a translator as he perceived it. An illustration of Oras’s disposition can be observed in his post-war translations of Estonian poetry into German. In 1964 in Sweden Oras issued a collection of Estonian poetry entitled *Acht estnische Dichter*, preserving the full rhymes of the originals – as if he had not noticed that rhymed poetry (for example, that of Baudelaire or Valéry) was seldom rendered in rhymed translations at the time. When asked about his rationale for the poetics of the collection, Oras told Ivask (Letters 1997: 214): “See on mõeldud tervikuna – võib-olla mitte päris ‘kaasaegsena’ – ja ilmugu sellisena” = ‘It is conceived of as a whole – perhaps not exactly “contemporary” – and has to be published like this.’ So, W.H. Auden (1967: 1039) was not postulating an all-embracing truth when he wrote “in this age poetry [...] can no longer be written in the High, even in the Golden Style, only in Drab Style [...] which deliberately avoids drawing attention to itself as poetry with a capital P”. Oras, a student of Milton, could hardly forget the Preface that Milton had added to *Paradise Lost*, in which he called rhyme “the invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meeter [...] hindrance, and constraint, to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have express them”. All true, unless rhyme is the only way of making your statement at all, which was, for Oras, his solidarity with times gone by that he wanted to remember. By translating Estonian end-rhymed patriotic poetry of firm declarations into German (and later into English), keeping as close to the rhythm of the original as possible, Oras was creating a “discrepancy between the original central literature and the translated literature” (Even-Zohar 2002 [1978]: 195), underlining the historical and political realities that alone help to make sense of his translational poetics, which stood

out from its context. An element of phenomenological recognition that the questions of meaning, subjectivity and time cannot be separated has always been present in the literary exegesis of Oras. This also seems to hold true for his own writing.

## The Contingency of Rewriting

Rewriting (translating, reviewing, criticism) is cognitive travelling. From the translator, it demands a performative initiative of the nature of I-here-now kind, but rewriting must also take into account all the sedimentary values of the poetics of literature. This is the perception of Ants Oras which finds its counterpart in the perception of Henri Meschonnic (1932–2009), a poet, translator and scholar who is internationally better known. The sediments in question are of temporal and spatial origin, and cannot be reduced to language alone, at least not to language understood in terms of an innate linguistic competence and individual aesthetic creativity. Instead, these are discursive histories, the histories of displacement, of writing of what (and where) one is not. “Maybe the poem consists in making that ‘other place’ gradually what takes up the whole place”, Meschonnic (1988: 108) proposes in an interview, resorting to spatial terms in order to elucidate his concept of writing a poem, which he defines as a place one has to go to by way of a “historical adventure of a subject” (Meschonnic 2003: 341). The equipment for the adventure includes at the very least maps of literary, linguistic, historical and anthropological discourses. Meschonnic’s theoretical practice of translation has been developed in order to defend historical thought against the ahistorical, the latter being combined with the strategies of power. His instrumental device is rhythm – the continuous movement of *signifiance*, a special semantic meaning, and the dynamic in language.

In his 1982 *Critique du rythme: Anthropologie historique du langage*, Meschonnic, contrary to traditional metrical or rhythmic analysis, aims at engaging “all” of language and the subject; he argues that rhythm governs meaning while the subject constructs itself in and through a text. He develops this idea in his later *Poétique du traduire* (1999: 99), treating rhythm as an instrument of language with which to organise the subject as well as an instrument of the subject with which to organise language: it is rhythm that specifies the historicity of a text, and this must be the primary object of translation. Alongside the historicity of rhythm, there is one more aspect of translation that is of importance for Meschonnic: if the subject is not only influenced by

discursive necessities but also determines language by transferring it from one container to another, one has to recognise the “movability” of language, irrespective of the differences of natural prosodies. The difference in a translation can never be pure; the rhythmic impulse of the source could be carried over to the target, while the rhythm detected depends largely on the observer and his competence and expectations. As anything in language or in history depends on the observer, any recognition is a tie which modifies what one observes (Meschonnic 1982: 30). In other words, Meschonnic is arguing for the subjected nature of writing, its subjectivity.

The translator’s self for Oras, as quoted above, is a meeting point of a minimum of two minds. His 1960 study, which takes the verse as such as its object (not prosodic analysis as a means of solving problems of chronology or of authorship, as was the case with his research (Oras 1966) on Milton’s blank verse), also considers the possible influence exercised upon an “original” verse by other genres, and in his background research, Oras goes as far back as Chaucer and his foreign models, and sixteenth-century French and Italian verse. He realises that dramatic verse cannot be researched in isolation, without considering the possible influence of other genres.

This is an unrealistic approach. Spenser, who never produced a play, will be found to be one of the principal figures in the present essay, a poet whose pause patterning decisively influenced the dramatic verse of the 1590s. Similarly, some important developments in blank verse would probably have been different but for the strongly anti-Spenserian influence of John Donne’s early verse. (Oras 1960: 4)

As nothing can exist in a void, and poetry is often born out of contacts across linguistic and spatial barriers, the list of his sources, beginning with Eustache Deschamps, the author of the first treatise on French versification (*L’Art de dic-tier*, 1392), is long, yet relevant for the stated subject, an aspect of Elizabethan and Jacobean prosody. So while writing a poem, the writer considers not only the genre conventions but also the fashionable diction of the period, irrespective of its linguistic or cultural origin.

Oras’s aim as a translator or as a literary scholar seems to have been to observe the historicity of his texts. The helpful fact(or) of his geographic displacement in the second half of his life made him keenly aware of all the possible conflicts present in a poetic text – not only the conflicts between the meter and the natural prosody, the meter and the syntax, etc., but also conflicts arising from the rewriter working in an intercultural space. All of these, he seems to say in his critical and poetic choices, are still a vital part of a text, its physical quality in its situational dependencies. Or rather, a rewriter in his

physical body inevitably brings together – in an actual time and place – the languages and cultures he is working with (Pym 1998: 181), and the physical reality cannot help but be manifest.

The language in which a poet, a translator or a scholar writes can only be the language of specificity, and not a language dependent on the mainstream discourses of the receiving context. The latter can be modified only if the writer has viable arguments (at least for himself) for violating them. To have such arguments and to master the technicalities, there seems to be no alternative for a translator of poetry but to move away from poetry to analytical research that is able to map meticulously the poetics of the original; this alone can convince that rhythm is a discourse rather than regularity and that it has to be translated – unless we want to re-ideologise the original.

There is a utopian dimension to translation, a text of obscure origin. Translation is a space in which new perceptions resulting from the mental travelling of the writers that is relevant for the text can be imposed. Due to cultural differences, translated texts acquire resonances that may not have been present in the original. Due to the differences between natural languages, it is impossible to copy the rhythm of the original. But the epistemology of poetry cannot be the epistemology of its sound, of its physics. Rather, poetry, its analysis and translation can teach us that everything is translatable, just as any artefact can be transported from one place to another. A translator might just select the most cost-effective means of transport considering the present state of cartography. The concept of total translation (Torop 1995), which includes both textual and metatextual translation, opens up multiple options to choose from when translating poetry and “invents within language new ways of being with oneself, others and the world – a continuous invention of the social and of poetry, and therefore a form of utopia” (Meschonnic 1988: 106). Utopia, traditionally employed as a device for criticism, has to consider – in the case of its poetic manifestation – that human perception presupposes, first, a meaning in the natural language that may be supplemented with extra meanings achieved by poetic idiosyncrasies (Lotman 2006: 315–316). But once a poem can be followed on an elementary linguistic level, that is, lexically and syntactically, a translation is, as I believe, justified in presenting the differences of the place and the discourses of the original.

This is what Oras the translator does: the sense of foreignness encountered in his translations is to be understood not as a clumsy transporting of the reader into the source text but as showing the working(s) of language and a wish to modify the receiving culture. This is most obvious in the metatextual comments which accompany his translations, and of course in his meticulous work with new rhythmic possibilities. The presence of syllabic and also of

quantitative meters adjusted to the prosody of the Estonian language is largely related to his work. Although working with metrical schemes with a long tradition, his translations express the modern subtlety and awareness that every poet and poem worthy of translation is a rhythmical variation of a scheme, and it is the variation, not the scheme, that must be translated.

Travelling and mapping the world as a metaphoric way of describing the workings of the human mind – which has been the approach in this article – is both relevant and tarnished. Just like any cliché, it can be used as a substitute for clear thinking, while in the case of a literary scholar and a translator working with texts that are far from each other in time and place, it has a descriptive function: it recognises not only the structural patterning of a text but also its social production in a particular place and at a particular time. Literary scholarship and translation are both concerned with the poetics of the original and network a translator with research that combines the poetic and the academic.

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