"In a Miracle Wellspring" of Goethe's Poetry: Comments on the Role of Translated Poetry in a Small Literature[1]

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Abstract. In 1944, on the cusp of one occupying power replacing another in Estonia, the beloved Estonian poet Heiti Talvik translated Goethe's poetry and was filled with admiration: "What a youthful abundance of life in every detail! Yes, to delve into Goethe's work is to rinse your eyes in a miracle wellspring capable of renewing your fading vision." By then, the Estonian language and Estonian poetry had already been drawing from this miracle wellspring for more than a century. In this presentation, I will be discussing the significance of Goethe's poetry in Estonian literature and comparing it to that of small and large literatures of neighbouring countries. Based on research, I conducted with my co-authors Vahur Aabrams and Susanna Rennik for our recently published book Goethe's Poetry in Estonian (University of Tartu Press, 2021), I will show the dynamics of the reception and translation of Goethe's poetry in Estonia and in the wider Baltic cultural space, and I will explore the local socio-cultural and more general aesthetic and ideological factors that influenced this reception.

Keywords: Goethe's poetry, translated poetry, literary reception

I Introduction

My article is based on research conducted by my colleague Vahur Aabrams, Master's student Susanna Rennik and myself in preparing the book *Nõmmeroosike. Goethe luule eesti keeles* (Heidenröslein: Goethe's Poetry in Estonian), published in 2021 by the University of Tartu Press (Aabrams, Lukas, Rennik 2021).

This collection contains all of the published and so far only manuscript translations of Goethe's poetry into Estonian, as well as about a couple of dozen translations made just for this edition. The book has all in all 628 translations of 391 of Goethe's poems, made by 83 translators whose names are known and by ten anonymous translators. The translations were published from 1841 to 2021, meaning that Goethe's poetry has been translated into Estonian over a long

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period of 180 years. Some of the poems have been translated dozens of times. The most translated poem by Goethe into Estonian is "Wandrers Nachtlied" II (Wanderer's Night Song II), with 17 different translations. All such translations have been set out side by side to make comparison easier. Such a comprehensive collection of poetry translations is unusual and there are very few poets whose translations could be presented in the same way. Even if Goethe's poetry is not the most translated poetry in Estonian – Heinrich Heine has been more translated –, it has been translated over a long period without any big interruptions. Therefore, Goethe's poetry proves a suitable object for case study, exploring the role of translated poetry in a small literature. But there is another, qualitative reason, too.

The influential and internationally well-known Danish literary critic Georg Brandes (1842–1927), whose capacious Goethe monograph was published in 1915 (Brandes 1915), wrote in 1881 in his essay "Goethe and Denmark": "One can set Goethe in relation with every civilized people, and the stage of development of that people in the modern era can be measured on the grounds of its comprehension of that one spirit; indeed, every epoch, country, and every man can be characterized through the judgment they have made concerning Goethe"[2] (Brandes 1922: V). In his essay, Brandes borrows the word *goethereif* (mature enough to understand Goethe) from Berthold Auerbach as a measuring instrument of the spiritual maturity of a culture or individual. Brandes' idea was that the richness of Goethe's poetic devices has challenged translators and matured and reinforced the host culture to a great extent.

In my article, I will show the dynamics of the reception and translation of Goethe's poetry in Estonia and in the wider Baltic cultural space. I will explore the local socio-cultural and more general aesthetic and ideological factors that influenced the translation process of Goethe's poetry.

Goethe's arrival on the southern shore of the Baltic, his relations with his contemporary Baltic Germans and the reception of Goethe by Baltic Germans have been thoroughly researched and documented by Otto von Petersen in his study *Goethe und der baltische Osten* (Petersen 1930), but the translation of Goethe into the local, Estonian and Latvian, languages has not been touched upon here. The first overview of Goethe's translation into Estonian was given by Villem Alttoa in his voluminous 1931 Master's thesis *Goethe eesti kirjanduses*

[2] Published in 1922 in German translation by Erich Holm and Emilie Stein: "Man kann Goethe in Verhältnis zu jedem zivilisierten Volk stellen, und würde die Entwicklungsstufe dieses Volkes in der modernen Zeit an dem Grund seines Verständnisses für diesen einen Geist ermessen können; denn jede Epoche, jedes Land und jeder Mensch charakterisiert sich selbst merkwürdig durch das von ihnen über Goethe gefällte Urteil."

(Goethe in Estonian Literature, Alttoa 1931, for a short summary see Alttoa 1932), which dealt with Goethe's translation from the mid-19th century to 1930. Alttoa's inventory was continued by Liina Sumberg in her article "Goethe eestikeelses tõlkes" (Goethe in Estonian Translation, Sumberg 2000) and in her Master's thesis "Goethe's 'Faust' in estnischer Übersetzung" (Sumberg 2006), which gives a brief overview of the main works of Goethe in translation in the 20th century, although it focuses mainly on the translation history and theory of *Faust*.

The present article can be based on a much more extensive corpus of texts, which, in addition to translations of poems published in the press and in collections, also includes Goethe translations published in songbooks, music books, textbooks, as well as unpublished material (as of 2021) stored as manuscripts in archives.

II Translating culture

Estonian semiotician and translation theoretician Peeter Torop coined the notion 'of translating culture', saying that a culture is always translational, and that the capacity for translation is a characteristic of a truly functional culture. (Torop 2011) However, there are cultures that translate less and those that translate more. In Estonian culture, similar to most small cultures, translation activities are extensive. At the beginning of the 20th century, translations amounted to 50% of published literary texts in Estonia; the percentage was similar in Finland. (Möldre 2012: 90) At the beginning of the 21st century, literary translations totalled up to 41% of books published in Estonia, while in France, for example, translations amounted to 14% of all published books and in English-speaking countries such as Great Britain and the USA, translations constituted only 2–4% of all published books. (Tamm 2010)

In small cultures, translated literature has as large a role in the development of literary consciousness as the original literature (see more Lange, Monticelli 2012; Chalvin, Lange, Monticelli 2011). As Ants Oras, one of the most important translators of Goethe, as well as one of the most prominent Estonian translators of poetry, put it in 1931: "For a small nation, the problem of translated literature is among the essential questions of spiritual life – it is incomparably more important than it could be for any large nation, and even more important, the less the small nation has been able to produce creative works independently" (Oras 2003a [1931]: 31). While the large literatures that establish aesthetic values, or which are nearer to the "Greenwich literature meridian", to borrow the notion from Pascale Casanova (Casanova 2004: 4), can afford to be self-sufficient by claiming to be universal, then small cultures cannot ignore

the existence of others. Small cultures need translations in order to "densify the spiritual atmosphere", as said by Ants Oras (Oras 2003a [1931]:31). We should not take this as 'self-colonisation', as it has now and then been phrased, but treat it, as Juri Lotman did, as a possibility for enriching culture by being its development force. (Lotman 1999)

Estonian literature was a translating literature from the very beginning. It developed in a multilingual cultural space standing at the crossroads of different cultures in which translating, adapting and customising have been the main modi operandi.

Estonian poetry began with translations of German poetry and was even created by originally German-speaking authors. Goethe's contemporaries, the authors of the German Enlightenment, or *Sturm und Drang*, were the models for the Estonian poetry of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. For centuries, the German language was the language of power, education and culture as well as of communication in Estonia. The Estonian literary language was influenced by the syntax, vocabulary and grammar of German and the general import of German culture was even more extensive, meaning that we have a reason to speak about the "deep impact of the German spirit" on Estonian culture, as Jaan Undusk has put it. (Undusk 1992: 710) Or, as the Young Estonian modernist writer Jaan Oks says, the influence of German culture is such that it "has already become so close that it cannot even be well seen because of its closeness. … Much of it has already been taken over as our own." (Oks 1909: 291–292)

We cannot ignore the unequal colonial nature of these cultural relations. The decolonisation process in Estonia started with a rebellion against such cultural domination. Emancipating Estonian literature saw its main task as shedding German influence, and became interested in the cultural heritage of other European countries. This rebellion against German influence involved concerns about the Estonian language, which had to be cleansed of 'useless Germanisms'; both the 'Baltic German mindset' and the allegedly German literary taste of Estonian literature had to be abandoned for the further development of Estonian culture. This rebellion against German influence included Goethe, too. In 1932, to mark the 100th anniversary of Goethe's death, Ants Oras expressed this attitude as follows:

> We have really had to breath in for too long this mediocre atmosphere that has reached us mainly from the Baltic Germans and their relatively little-enlightened spirit. … They were able to make even Goethe, Schiller, Wagner and Nietzsche distasteful for us. This unending flow of monotonous praise and laudations, which wrapped especially the first two of them into the clouds of

> frankincense, hiding their real face, has definitely brought more damage than good to the reputation of German literature. (Oras 2004)

However, knowledge of the German language, culture and literature was self-evident and translations from German dominated the Estonian literature of the early 20th century. In the early years of the Estonian Republic, at least 40% of all translations were made from German. (Möldre 2012: 93) By the end of the Republic, German translations had been reduced to 25% (however, these numbers could still have been bigger, since the statistics indicated that for 32% of translations, the language of origin was unknown, although it was probably still German). The leading position of German literature was broken only by the Soviet regime, which pushed Russian literature to the forefront to replace German for political reasons. However, it was during the Soviet period that German literature became a really translated literature for the Estonian literary field. When speaking about Goethe's translations into Estonian, we need to take into account this special status of German literature in Estonian literary history.

III Regional circumstances of the reception of Goethe's poetry in Estonia

The other factor to be considered is the mediating role of Baltic Germans in domesticating Goethe, which was influential not only for Estonia but also for neighbouring countries Latvia, Finland and Russia which, until 1918, were part of the Russian empire. Among the Baltic Germans we can find close friends of Goethe, as well as renowned researchers of Goethe's works. (See more Petersen 1939.) Goethe had lifelong contact with Baltic German intellectuals. Here let us mention Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz (1751–1792), who grow up in Tartu and met Goethe in Strasbourg, their creative collaboration giving impetus to the German *Storm and Stress* literary innovation; or Friedrich Maximilian Klinger (1752–1831), Curator of the University of Tartu, who was a friend of Goethe; or Karl Morgenstern (1770–1852), professor at the University of Tartu, who was closely acquainted with Goethe and taught Goethe's work in his lessons in Tartu. It was Morgenstern who coined the notion *Bildungsroman* to characterise Wilhelm Meister's novels by Goethe. (Morgenstern 2020) Morgenstern's successor in Tartu was Victor Hehn (1813–1890), whose works on Hermann and Dorothea (*Über Goethes Hermann und Dorothea*, 1893), on Goethe's poems (*Über Goethes Gedichte*, 1911), and especially the voluminous monograph *Thoughts on Goethe* (*Gedanken über Goethe*, 1887) were quite well known at his time. (The latter appeared between 1887 and 1909 in nine prints (Taterka

2000: 142).) Otto Harnack (1857–1914) took up the baton from Hehn. His life's work became the edition of the collected works of Goethe. Harnack edited volumes 46 to 49 of the so-called Sophien-edition (1908–1909); he also published selected poems by Goethe (*Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 1901), the 5th, 22nd, 23rd and 24th volumes of Johann Wolfgang von Goethes Werke (1902–1907) and Goethe's conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann (*Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, I–II, Berlin 1913). In additon, Harnack wrote several works on Goethe's life and life work (*Goethe in der Epoche seiner Vollendung 1805–1832*, 1887; *Der deutsche Klassizismus im Zeitalter Goethes*, 1906, etc.). Woldemar Masing (1836–1923), literature lecturer at the University of Tartu, published a study on the musicality of Goethe's lyrical language (*Sprachliche Musik in Goethes Lyrik*, 1910). The line is continued by the next scholar from Tartu, Wolfgang von Oettingen (1859–1943), who in 1909 became the director of the Goethe National Museum, and in 1911 director of Goethe und Schiller Archive in Weimar.

Goethe's poetry also reached the Russian language through or under the influence of the Baltic Germans. (See Kahlenborg 1985) The first admirers of Goethe in Russian culture, such as Wilhelm von Küchelbecker (1797–1846) and Vassili Žukovski (1783–1852), were associated with or descended from Baltic German circles. Küchelbecker, a friend of Alexander Pushkin, was a member of the Baltic German nobility and spent his childhood in the family-owned manor of Avinurme in Estonia. He met Goethe personally in Weimar. His poem *К Прометею* was written in homage to Goethe. Žukovski's love for Goethe began in Tartu, where he lived in the years 1815–1817 and was involved in Baltic German literary circles. In the house of his friend, Tartu medical man Johann Christian Moier (1786–1858), he heard songs composed on Goethe's poems by composers from Tartu such as August Heinrich von Weyrauch (1788–1865) and Johann Friedrich Bonneval de La Trobe (1769–1845). Žukovski's translations of Goethe's poems into Russian appeared from 1816 to 1818. During the wave of romanticism, Goethe's work received more and more attention, as did his personality, his views on poetry, and his dramatic work (especially Faust), while less attention was paid to his poetry. The translations of his poems by Apollon Grigorjev (1822–1864) and Konstantin Aksakov (1817–1860) appeared in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1840, the famous translation of the "Wanderer's Night Song" (*Горные вершины*) was written by Mihhail Lermontov (1814–1841). However, in Russia and the Baltic countries and Finland the middle of the 19th century passed rather under the star of Schiller than Goethe, who remained in the shadows. It was not until the 1860s that Goethe's poems became more valued and translated. This was prompted by Russian-language editions of Goethe's works (1865–71, ed. by P. Veinberg;

1878–1880, ed. by N. Gerbel), which immortalised Goethe as a classic. Goethe was highly valued by Russian symbolists, who saw him as a prophet of new aesthetics. Although the symbolists' interest in Goethe was more theoretical, some new translations of his poems also appeared (by Konstantin Balmont, 1867–1942, Valeri Brjussov, 1873–1924, Innokenti Annenski, 1855–1909).

The first Finnish translation of Goethe was published much earlier than the Estonian, indeed in the very year of Goethe's death, though interest in Goethe in Finland is of much earlier origin, extending back into Goethe's lifetime. The founders of Finnish literature – Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739–1804), Axel Gabriel Sjöström (1794–1846), and Immanuel Ilmoni (1797–1856) – were all true admirers and translators of Goethe, albeit into Swedish initially. For the Helsinki romantics, led by Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884), Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–1881), and Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–1877), Goethe's declarations of cultural autonomy remained as foreign as the German Goethe cult, although in the (Swedish-language) poetry of Johan Jakob Nervander (1805–1848) and the (Finnish-language) poetry of Kallio (Samuel Gustaf Berg, 1803–1852), traces of Goethe are amply evident; Runeberg's Hanna epic has been compared with Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea* (Grellmann 1948: 62). Just as in the Baltic lands, Finland in the 19th century was Schiller's era, ruled by Russian emperors with a special fondness for Schiller. In 1851 Goethe was even spoken of in Finland as a forgotten writer (Grellmann 1948: 96). Goethe's 100th birthday passed practically unnoticed, while Schiller was celebrated in 1859 in Helsinki and Riga.

From the 1860s on Goethe began to attract interest again, first in university lecture halls and shortly thereafter on stages: in his doctoral dissertation on German historical drama (*Om det historiska dramat i Tyskland*, 1868) Kaarlo Bergbom (1843–1906), founder of Finnish theatre, refers to Goethe as Germany's greatest poet (Grellmann 1948: 108). Goethe's popularity in Finland also increased after his poetry was successfully put to music (Martin Wegelius, Karl Flodin). In 1884, when the first Finnish-language translation of *Faust* was published by Kaarlo Forsman (1851–1918), the first Finnish translation of a collection of Goethe's poetry *Goethen runoelmia* was published too, translated by Knut Ferdinand Ridderström (1829–1897). At the beginning of the 20th century, Eino Leino (1878–1926) appreciated Goethe and translated his poems. The next wave of Goethe's translation came in the 1920s, when the collections of Goethe's poems, translated by Veikko Antero Koskenniemi (*Runoja*, 1922) and Otto Manninen (*Runoja*, 1928, 1980) appeared. Between 1956 and 1965, Goethe's selected works were published in three volumes in Finnish. (Koponen 1993)

Goethe had a great influence on the emerging Latvian literature in the second half of the 19th century. He was a favourite poet of Rūdolfs Blaumanis (1863–1908), who often quoted and commented on and translated Goethe. However, the greatest Goethean in Latvian literature was Jānis Rainis (1865–1929), for whom Goethe was an absolute ideal and whose development as a poet was influenced by Goethe's work in a significant way. Janis Rainis' exemplary translation of *Faust* into Latvian had already been published in 1898, while for Estonian, this touchstone of Goethe maturity was as yet far beyond the horizon.

Rainis translated only nine of Goethe's poems, although he considered a successful translation of a poem greater proof of his poetic talent than the composition of his own poems (Volkova 2019: 99–102).

IV Goethe's poems in Estonian translation

Considering these facts, it is even slightly surprising that Goethe's poetry arrived in Estonia relatively late. The graph shows the years in which translations of Goethe's poems were published. The first text is from 1841, although it is only a prose retelling of the Goethe poem "Legende", with only the last four-line verse of the poem, containing the morale and teaching, rendered into verse. Goethe's poem had been reshaped into an allegory and published in a school reader. The first full translation of a poem, Johann Voldemar Jannsen's (1819–1890) translation of the ballade *Der Sänger* (The Minstrel), was published only in 1860. Starting from the end of the 19th century, such contemporary authors as Chr. F Gellert, L. H. Chr. Hölty, M. Claudius, G. A. Bürger, Chr. Fr. D. Schubart had been translated and adapted into Estonian. The first Estonian translations of Friedrich Schiller were published in 1813 (the poem "An die Freude" (Ode to Joy), which was even published in two parallel translations). However, we cannot find Goethe among these authors.

What was the reason for such a delay in translating Goethe's works? There is no doubt that Estonian intellectuals knew Goethe's poetry. Most of them had received German education, where Goethe's works played a central role. Attempts had been made in the 1830s to translate Goethe's poems into Estonian, but these translations remained unpublished. The earliest dated, but until 2021 unpublished, translation was made by Suve Jaan (Johann Friedrich Sommer, 1777–1851) under the title "Kalamees" (Fisherman) from the ballad *Der Fischer*. The 'father' of Estonian literature, and author of the national epic *Kalevipoeg*, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), also translated Goethe's ballads in the 1830s, although he was finally forced to admit that translating Goethe's poetry was beyond his ability: some better expert has to

Translations of Goethe's poems into Estonian

come forward (Kreutzwald in a letter to Georg Julius von Schultz-Bertram 23/12/1869, see Kreutzwald 1959: 220). There is only one exception, a translation of Goethe's ballad *Der Sänger*, which Kreutzwald had printed right after the publication of Jannsen's translation, which he did not find satisfying.

The next poems to be published in Estonian in the 1860s were "Gefunden" (Found) (all in all nine different translations), "Heidenröslein" (all in all 13 translations) and both versions of "Wandrers Nachlied", while the second Night Song with its 17 translations is the most translated of Goethe's poems in Estonian.

These poems are actually song lyrics which have been set to music many times and were translated into Estonian not as poems, but as lyrics. For a few decades afterwards, Goethe was mainly known as an author of song lyrics in Estonian, a feature that also characterises the international spread of Goethe's poetry. It is because of the songs written for Goethe's texts that the German word *Lied* became widely known and was adopted into several other languages (the *lied*, le *lied*). Goethe's poems were provided with music by his contemporary composers, who were his personal friends, such as Johann Friedrich Reichardt and Carl Friedrich Zelter, as well as the most famous composers of the time, such as Franz Schubert, who wrote music for 70 to 80 of Goethe's poems, as well as by Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf (Schuh 1952). Goethe's poems have also been set to music by Baltic German composers such as Johann Friedrich Bonneval La Trobe and August Heinrich von Weyrauch, as well as by Estonian composers such as the sculptor August Weizenberg (1837–1921). Music has also been created for Estonian translations of Goethe's poetry (by Gustav Ernesaks, 1908–1993, Friedrich Saebelmann, 1851–1911, and Mihkel Lüdig, 1880–1958).

Song lyrics were translated in order to provide schools and singing choirs with a repertoire. The translation had to be simple and understandable, and it had to sound good – in a word, suitable to be sung in Estonian. Translators generally had in mind the needs and the ability of their target group to understand the poems. These texts should rather be called adaptations, *Nachbildungen* in terms of Friedrich Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher 1963), not real translations. For example, the title of the first Estonian translation of "Heidenröslein", set to music by Franz Schubert, Heinrich Werner and others, was "Strawberry" (Est. "Maasikas"), and it was not a popular ballad with a subtle erotic undertone, relating the story of a boy picking a rose, but a children's song talking about the innocent picking of strawberries. Occasionally, the author of the source text was even totally left out, which is why several translations of Goethe's poems have been taken as the original creations of the translators, such as Ado Grenzstein's (1849–1916) translation of the poem "Das Veilchen" ("The Violet,

Est. Ellerhein"), or Carl Robert Jakobson's (1841–1882) translation of Goethe's poem "Gefunden". As adaptations, these texts were naturalised, and became an inseparable part of Estonian lyrical poetry, a tradition shaped by just such translations of song lyrics. Anna Haava's (1864–1957) poem "Nõmmelill" ("Heath Flower") has a strong smell of Goethe. Goethe's poetry has even contributed to the Estonian vocabulary, with the word *nõmmeroosike* (heather rose) created as a translation of "Heidenröslein" by Jaan Nebokat (1844–1908) in 1870. The simple and melodious tone that characterises the translations of Goethe's poetry (cf. the translation Leitud (Found) by Karl Eduard Malm, 1837–1901) can later be found in the poetry of Juhan Liiv (1864–1913).

We should mention that when translating a simple, folksong-like, song such as the "Heidenröslein", the translators did not use the acoustic or metric characteristics of Estonian folksongs. By that time the easily sung German song had become so familiar to Estonian culture that, although the collecting and publishing of folklore were going on at the same time (publishing Jakob Hurt's folklore collections began in 1875), translators did not come to the idea of using the poetical means of the folk song.[3]

Outside of song culture, serious translation of Goethe's poetry began only in the 1880s, when the number of translations grew rapidly and translations found their way from the songbooks to the pages of newspapers and magazines. The time for philosophical verses had arrived, although ballads were also translated in large numbers. Among the new generation of translators were Jaan Bergmann (1856–1916), Jakob Tamm (1861–1907), Juhan Liiv and Anna Haava. However, the translation strategy had not changed: the translation must be domesticated, and the translator should bring the author of the source text closer to the reader in the sense of the well-known notion of Friedrich Schleiermacher, and not vice versa.[4] At the same time, let us remember that these translators were themselves poets and the Estonian poetic language developed significantly through poetry translations.

Translation of Goethe's more voluminous works (*Faust*, *Egmont*) started in the 1920s but the translation of poems was halted for quite a long period. Only in 1932, to mark the 100th anniversary of Goethe's death, did the magazine *Looming* publish a small number of poems made by a new generation of translators – Ants Oras (1900–1982), Marie Under (1883–1980), and Johannes Semper (1892–1970) – with new demands on poetry translation. For them,

[3] About the translation of German song see Lukas 2018, 2019.

[4] Schreiermacher in his essay *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*: „Entweder der Uebersezer läßt den Schriftsteller möglichst in Ruhe, und bewegt den Leser ihm entgegen; oder er läßt den Leser möglichst in Ruhe und bewegt den Schriftsteller ihm entgegen." (Schreiermacher 1963: 47)

Goethe was a master, a miracle wellspring to be drawn from, a unique creation to be showcased. Important treatments of Goethe's work were now appearing.

Paradoxically, the 1940s, a time of Soviet and German occupations in Estonia, accelerated the translation of poetry. At that time many intellectuals, whose creative activities were limited or hindered by the occupation regimes, were able to ensure some income by translating books. In the 1940s, the best Estonian lyrical poets dedicate themselves to the translation of Goethe.

Preparations were made during the German occupation (1941–1944) to publish Goethe's collected works in nine volumes. Many translators started work, including the well-known and much-loved Estonian poet Heiti Talvik (1904–1947), whose poetry was suppressed by the regimes of both the Soviet and German occupations as too decadent. In 1944, on the cusp of one occupying power replacing another in Estonia, Talvik translated Goethe's Wilhelm Meister novels and the play *Götz von Berlichingen*, both of which include poems. Talvik was filled with admiration: "What a youthful abundance of life in every detail! Yes, to delve into Goethe's work is to rinse your eyes in a miracle wellspring capable of renewing your fading vision." (Talvik 1944)

Alas, he could not publish any translations under his own name: the NKVD arrested Heiti Talvik in 1945 and he died a prisoner in a forced labour camp in Siberia in 1947. *Götz von Berlichingen*, which he had translated, was published the same year – in 1947 – under the name of his wife Betti Alver (1906–1989).

Ultimately none of the planned, and partly ready-to-print, volumes of Goethe's collected works were published because the Nazi regime did not consider Estonian to be *goethereif*, i.e. Estonian was said to be too poor to convey the richness of Goethe's work. (Orav 1988: 53)

However, in 1943, 1947 and 1949, literary magazines publish a series of translations of Goethe's poems. In 1957 Ain Kaalep joins the top three Goethe translators, with a total of 22 translations of Goethe poems.

Among other things, the iron curtain also separated Estonian translators of Goethe. We will now follow the fascinating translation competition between two translators, Ants Oras, who emigrated to the USA via Sweden, and August Sang (1914–1969), who remained in the homeland. They translated *Faust* at the same time, and after the publication of their translations (Oras' translation was published in 1955 and 1962, and that by Sang in 1946 and 1967) both turned to poetry, becoming the most prolific translators of Goethe's poetry of all time. Almost all translations by Sang (we included 206 in our book) were published in his collection titled *Goethe luuletusi* (Goethe's Poems) in 1968 (i.e. under the Soviet regime), which was then the only collection of Goethe's poetry in Estonian. Of the poems translated by Oras (we included 108 in our book) only about half were published, mainly in the exile Estonian literary magazine

Tulimuld (which published 41 poems by Goethe, 40 of which were translated by Oras), while the rest remained unpublished until 2021.

Translations made by Sang and Oras differ greatly because of their different personalities as well as their different translation situations. Sang translated for a wider Estonian reading public (his translations were included in school textbooks), while Oras translated for elitist readers (his translations were without exception published in the literary magazine *Tulimuld*, founded in Lund, Sweden, in 1950 by his friend Bernard Kangro). Oras primarily translated for his own interest and purposes to avoid losing his ties with the Estonian language, meaning that he had no need to consider who his readers were. For the most part, his work was a conversation between Goethe's poetry and the Estonian language.

In a more general sense the translation strategies of both Oras and Sang were quite similar. Their ambition was to produce translations that would be as close to the source text as possible, representing the formal and stylistic qualities and meaning of the original. Both Oras and Sang belong to one and the same school of translators, the aim of which was, as Aare Pilv put it, "to develop the Estonian cultural language, experimentally using as accurately as possible all the formal possibilities found in the history of Western poetry" (Pilv 2016: 38). Although the strategy was to keep close to the source text, it had to work for the target culture.

Indeed, Ants Oras has described his translation principle in the following way: "One of the primary tasks of our national culture is to fertilise its spirituality with all great achievements of spiritual work of the past and the present" (Oras 2003b [1937]: 94). His contemporary and friend Heiti Talvik also talked about the potential of translated literature: "Translations of the great works of world literature acquire ever more importance as power sources for our own culture." (Talvik 1944)

In itself, this principle is also characteristic of Goethe. Goethe drew ideas and formal features from other languages for just this purpose and recommended it to Eckermann: "… it is good that you are constantly familiarising yourself with all features from the homeland and abroad in order to find out where we could truly find the highest world education so much needed by a poet" (Eckermann 1836 II: 15).

Enriching the target culture was the aim of both translators of Goethe. The formal and spiritual richness of Goethe's poetry was well suited to the task of widening and developing the possibilities of poetic Estonian. Plenty of new forms and practices arrived in Estonian because of Goethe (and through the translations of Goethe), and found application in Estonian poetry. For example, in Betti Alver's poem

Mu juurde voogas sinu suurest särast
hetk laias joas
ja lamp ei kustund ainult sinu pärast
mu vaikses toas"[5]

we can see not only a verse form and meter in common with Goethe, but also the motif – the confirmation of eternal faithfulness and closeness – and poetic suggestibility found in Goethe's poem *Nähe des Geliebten*. To our knowledge, Alver has not translated this poem, but wrote her own poem in 1943, a year in which she was intensely engaged in translating Goethe. Later, Oskar Kruus (1957) and August Sang (1968) published translations of the same poem. Ants Oras has made several translations of this poem, although none was published.

At the same time, neither of the translators has ever adhered too strictly to the source text. Oras and Sang have never explained their translations; on the contrary, they published their works 'stark naked' without any commentaries or afterwords. Even the collection of Goethe's translations by Sang has no accompanying text. This also means that the poems which were selected for translation were liberated from the larger context of the source texts. For example, quite often even the cycle from which the poem originated was left unidentified. In this way, the translations were more independent than the source texts, which had belonged to certain cycles or had been in a mental dialogue with Goethe's other texts (for example the songs found in his novels or dramas, which in Estonian are presented independently, without referring to the works from which they came).

However, there are significant differences in the approach of both translators. Translations by Sang seem to be very simple, natural, and more 'Goethe-like' with the translator less visible, while those by Oras show the translator's personality much more boldly. This is in accordance with Oras's notion of the translator's role. Oras has said that: "*the true translator needs to have a style of his own, but it has to be flexible, sensitive, with a very wide amplitude of figures and images, but still individual. Only through a personality of one's own it is possible to delve into others' personalities and that which is thus produced must be convincingly individual, otherwise it wouldn't be accomplished poetry*" (Oras 1997: 115).

Translations by Oras aspire to language innovation. He uses plenty of neologisms coined by Estonian language innovator Johannes Aavik, as well as dialect words and folkloric expressions. He unlocks the drawers of the different layers of language in order to convey as flexibly as possible the images and formal

[5] A literal translation by Lauri Pilter: "Towards me a ray / of your great shine flowed / and only because of you / my silent room had light."

characteristics of Goethe's poetry. Sang, on the other hand, uses ordinary words. His translations are easier for today's readers to follow. Some critics have therefore perceived Oras's translations as alien. In Estonia, Goethe's poetry is still known in Sang's translation.

However, both translations are brilliant masterpieces. As an example, let us look at a translation by Ants Oras under the title *Õhtu* (Night) – the title given by the translator – published in the *Tulimuld* in 1982. This is the translation of the untitled poem "Dämmrung senkte sich von oben" (Twilight from above was lowered), which belongs to the cycle *Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten*, written in 1827. The title given by the translator already separates the poem from its original context, so that even the author of a monograph on Ants Oras did not recognise the source text, thinking it had been the poem "Die schöne Nacht".[6] (Lange 2004: 268–269) In his translation, Oras closely followed the metric and strophic qualities of the source text, although he chose different sound and rhythm figures. While Goethe uses inversion and sound repetition ("Holden Lichts der Abendstern", "Schlanker Weiden Haargezweige"; "Durch bewegter Schatten Spiele"), Oras achieves the sound with alliteration ("võlulõng virgub värisevais varjes"). While Goethe uses common words, Oras surprises with his choice of words and phrases, serving more of the sound than the content-related objective (for example "hämar laugles", "rinda nirgub õhtu hõng"). His translation poetics renders the form and meaning of the source text, but still leads away from it, being independent, playful and interesting, making the translator visible. At the same time, Oras has captured the spiritual shades of the original well, so that one has to agree with Ivar Ivask, who wrote a review of Oras's translations of Goethe: "A miracle is born: we completely forget that we are dealing with a translation – even a very good one – and indulge unreservedly in the pleasure of an Estonian poem." (Ivask 2007: 396) Ivask believes that Oras's best translations vibrate with the whole tradition of Estonian poetry. (Ibid.: 408) The same can be said of August Sang's translations, which Ivar Ivask, who lived in exile, could not appreciate because they did not reach him. The competition between Sang and Oras in translating Goethe's poetry is the most productive competition in Estonian translation history, and it could only have happened under these tragic circumstances.

The level of translation achieved in this competition remains unsurpassed. Recent years have brought Goethe's important prose works (*From my Life: Poetry and Truth, Elective Affinities* and *Conversations of Goethe with Johann Peter Eckermann*) to the attention of Estonian readers, but little has been added

[6] The two poems have nothing more in common than the rhyme scheme and the trochaic tetrameter.

to the translation of Goethe's poetry. At the behest of the editors of the book that inspired this article, Mati Sirkel has translated the hitherto missing *Roman Elegies*, Meelis Friedenthal and Ivo Volt have translated a selection of the *Venetian epigrams*, Andreas Kalkun has translated some of Goethe's poems into the southeast Estonian (Seto) dialect, and a few new translations have come from Jüri Talvet, Maarja Kangro, Jaan Undusk and others who have been interested in Goethe's late lyrical works of which there have been fewer translations so far. However, in today's Estonian literature, Goethe's poetry does not have the same meaning it did in the mid-20th century, in those difficult, turbulent times. The new collection of Goethe's poetry translations will, it is believed, help to bring the poetry of this master up to date again. After all, the themes of Goethe's poetry, his sense of nature and his perception of the environment are more topical than ever.

Concluding remarks

Translation of Goethe's poetry started with adaptions (often song lyrics) made in consideration of the needs of the target language. The influence of Goethe's poetry on early Estonian poetry is hidden. The lyrics of popular songs using Goethe's poems were remembered, but their original texts were forgotten. At the same time, in the original Estonian poetry, we can find poetic devices used by the translators of the song lyrics, sometimes also motifs familiar from Goethe's poetry. By and by, the translations moved towards greater faithfulness to the source text, reaching their peak in the translations by Sang and Oras. With their translations of Goethe, both translators led Estonian translation culture to its zenith. They demonstrated that Estonian culture is *goethereif*, mature enough for Goethe. Despite fidelity to the source text, the translations by Oras and Sang do not have an alienating effect. They demonstrate that Goethe's poetry is not alien but can be understood even without knowing the context. Goethe's poetry did not need explanation in order to reach out to Estonian readers. We can explain this on the one hand with the deep influence of the German spirit on Estonian poetry. On the other hand, this influence tells us that Goethe's poetry has perfectly withstood the test of time. No matter which models Goethe followed or into which mould – of form or role – he poured his poetry, it always contains something human and timeless which could be translated. Oras's and Sang's translations of Goethe prove that good poetry translation does not age.

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