

Poetry Translations during Political Transformation: the Case of Spanish Translated into Estonian

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Abstract. This paper explores the changes that took place in publishing poetry translated from Spanish into Estonian between 1988 and 2017, a period of profound political transformation. Within the framework of this research, ‘Spanish’ is understood as the Spanish-related literary system, encompassing also the co-official languages of Spain and indigenous languages of Spanish-speaking America, thus also the role of Salvador Espriu and the first direct translation from K’iche’ are discussed. An overview is given of general trends in publishing during the 1990s and early 2000s. The cultural and political importance of the revised editions published in the 1990s is discussed. For poetry translations from Spanish, the new era started in 2009 and is characterised by bilingual editions and the predominance of academic publications, but also by self-publishing and the emergence of a new generation of translators (Carolina Pihelgas, Mariliin Vassenin).

Keywords: poetry; translation; bilingual editions; political transformation

In his accompanying text for the first collection of poems by Federico García Lorca translated into Estonian, Ain Kaalep (1984: 168–170) pointed out the role of poetry in Spanish literature, especially the role of the generation that came into the Spanish literary sphere in the 1920s (*Generación del 27*). Is this importance also reflected in how we, in Estonia, see the Spanish-speaking world through translation? Has the role of poetry translation changed along with the political transformation that took place in Estonian society during the last decade of the 20th century and the first seventeen years of the 21st century?

The aim of this paper is to analyse the changes that took place in poetry translations from Spanish into Estonian published in book form during the period of political transformations, 1988–2017, and to investigate the new trends that emerged during this time. The present paper is a part of a larger research project focusing on changes in the position of Spanish in the Estonian publishing industry during the period of political transformations.

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1. Methodological comments

In this article I give a brief overview of publishing during the period of political transformation, 1988–2017. I must specify here that I am analysing only *books* of poems, leaving out poems published in journals (in the case of translated poetry, mainly the translations published in the journal *Vikerkaar*). The reason for this methodological choice is that the larger project this paper is based on focuses on the publishing industry and agency networks that were part of publishing decisions; media companies publishing the journals remain outside of the scope of this study.

In this paper I have taken an extremely broad view of the term ‘Spanish’, including under this term the Spanish-related literary system within the territories where Spanish is the dominant language (Spain and Hispanic America). Thus, within the framework of this paper, the term ‘Spanish’ includes in addition to Spanish itself, the co-official languages of Spain (Catalan, Galego and Basque) and the indigenous languages of Spanish-speaking America.² The main reason for this methodological choice is that people who write in these smaller languages are often bilingual, thus it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between Spanish and Catalan literature, for example.³ In addition, in Estonia the cultural mediators for these smaller literary languages have been the same people who mediate the Spanish-speaking world⁴. Although this is an arbitrary decision, if we look at the small subset translation that is translations of poetry from Spanish-related literature to Estonian, it does give us some interesting insights to the image the Spanish-speaking world has in Estonia.

² English may occur among the languages of Spanish-related networks as well, since in some regional literatures (for example in Mexican or Chicano literature) the borderline between English and Spanish can be elusive. However, the list of poetry translations into Estonian does not present examples of English that could be considered part of Spanish-related literature.

³ Roig Sanz et al. (2024: 166) advocate for translation zones determined by the following criteria: (1) geographical scale; (2) historical dimension; and (3) agency networks. Although they use these criteria to split the Spanish-speaking world into subregions (the Andes, Río de la Plata, etc.), the same criteria could also be applied to define larger units, such as Spanish-related literature as it relates to Spanish-Estonian translation flows.

⁴ Jüri Talvet (1995a: 17–18) has pointed out that researching and mediating the Spanish-speaking world has been intertwined with other languages of the region (for example Portuguese) since the 1960s, because for small languages with a small number of specialists, narrow specialisation is not possible, thus the same people teach, translate and research, and often work with several languages.

2. The publishing industry between 1988 and 2017

Estonian sociologists (Masso et al. 2020: 17–18; Lauristin, Vihalemm 2020) have described three cycles of political transformation between 1988 and 2017:

- (1) the liberation cycle (1988–1991) characterised by Gorbachev's reforms, the mass liberation movement known as the Singing Revolution, and the restoration of an independent Estonia;
- (2) the reconstruction and nation state-building cycle (1992–2003), when basic institutional structures were built and the process of European integration started. Important aspects of this period were the end of the Russian military presence and liberalisation and commercialisation of the media;
- (3) the transnational adaptation cycle (2004–2017) that started with Estonia joining the European Union in 2004. This cycle was characterised by the adaptation to the legal, economic and political environment of the EU, and by structural and cultural adaptation to the transnational system, as well as the 'Europeanisation' of national identity "from the image of a victimized post-colonial post-Soviet nation to membership in the most democratic and powerful union of free nations in the world" (Lauristin, Vihalemm 2020: 53).

Publishing during the transition period (1988–2017) was characterised by the de-monopolising of publishing, a significant increase in the number of titles published, and a decrease in the number of copies published per title (Möldre 2005).

In 1988, publishing was de-monopolised and the government institution responsible for book publishing (*Kirjastuskomitee*) was closed (Möldre 2005: 226). In the early 1990s, the number of institutions that declared publishing among their activities rose to unprecedented levels (750 in 1991⁵) while only about half of them actually published anything. However, in 1998, the record year, 736 publishers issued at least one publication (ibid.: 227–228). The number of titles published initially decreased. While from 1969 to 1986, the number of titles published in a year had been around 2,000 (the record year was 1974 with 2,391 titles) (Möldre 2018: 110), it fell to 1,557 different titles published in 1992 before increasing rapidly, reaching the highest number, 4,685

⁵ For a comparison: in 1988 there were two larger publishing houses (*Eesti Raamat* and *Valgus*), a few smaller, specialized ones (e.g. the publishing house *Kunst* publishing the books on visual arts, and *EKP KK Kirjastus*, the publishing house of the local branch of the Soviet communist party), and *Perioodika* for publishing newspapers and journals, including the book series *Loomingu Raamatukogu* (see Möldre 2005: 138–145).

titles, in 2008 (ibid.: 175). At the same time the number of printed copies fell drastically, with an average of 1,452 copies per title by 2004 (Möldre 2018: 174), while for the 1940–1990 period the average for fiction (including poetry) was 23,800 (Möldre 2005: 159).

More detailed analysis shows that during the early 1990s, the new phenomena that flooded the book market were esoteric topics (astrology, numerology, parapsychology, etc.) and erotic literature, as well as entertainment and light books of history, often published in poor quality. The late 1990s brought some “healing” (as Möldre [2005: 252] calls it) to the market with publications of fiction with a higher literary value and books on philosophy and science, often marketed in book series highlighting the genre (biographies, detective stories, sci-fi, etc.) (Möldre 2005: 251–252). In the 1990s, translations formed about 30% of book production with the dominant source language being English (over 60% of the translations) (Möldre 2018: 174).

According to the Estonian Translation Database⁶, 6,330 books of literature for adults were translated into Estonian during the period researched (1988–2017). Of these, 59 (0.9%) were translated from Spanish, thus, Spanish has occupied a rather marginal position in the Estonian sphere of literary translation. If we add translations from the co-official languages of Spain (three translations from Catalan) and from the indigenous languages of Spanish-speaking America (zero, according to this database), the total number of translations from Spanish-related literary systems is 62 (almost 1%). For a comparison, my database of translations (compiled for research into Spanish in the Estonian publishing industry) from Spanish-related literature for the same period has 162 titles, although this includes children’s literature, young adult literature, and non-fiction.

Of the 6,330 books, 143 (2.2%) were books of poetry. The number of poetry books translated from Spanish, according to this database, is five, and among these five there is one book I have not included in my database (*Maailma luule. Kuldne klassika*, a collection of canonical poems from World Literature where Spanish is only one of the translated languages). The number of books translated from Catalan is two. Compared to my database (see Table 1), the six books published after 2010 are missing.

3. Poetry books translated from Spanish

During the transition period, from 1988 to 2017, 13 books of poetry with translations from Spanish (including co-official and indigenous languages)

⁶ Available at <https://kirjandus.tlulib.ee/en/home/> (18/12/2025)

to Estonian were published⁷, mainly by Estonian publishers, although one book was also published by the Catalanian local government (*Generalitat de Catalunya*). These 13 books make up 7.3% of all the translations from Spanish during this period in Estonia. For comparison, during the previous political phase (45 years, 1945–1988) 11 books of poetry were published, making up 15.1% of the translations from Spanish published during this period. In her overview of translations from Spanish, Mari Laan (2024: 182) has calculated that of all the translations from Spanish the proportion of poetry is about 10%, which she considers quite remarkable. However, we can see a clear decrease (over 50%) over time for poetry translations among the translations from Spanish (from 15.1% to 7.3%) that may indicate a certain marginalisation of poetry among the translations. If we compare Spanish with the broader situation in Estonia, then according to the Estonian Translation Database for the period from 1945 to 1987 the proportion of poetry translations (175) of all books translated (3,013) was 5.84%, while for the period starting in 1988 it was 2.65% (189 books of poetry out of 7,121 books translated), showing a similar decrease (over 50%). However, if we compare the proportion of poetry translations from Spanish (15.1% for the Soviet period and 7.3% for the period of transition) to the proportion of poetry among translations (5.84% and 2.65%, respectively), we see that for both periods the proportion of poetry among the translations from Spanish is almost three times higher than for poetry translations among all translations to Estonian, which could point to the role poetry has had in the reception of Spanish literature (see also Kaalep 1984).

⁷ If we define the genre as ‘verses’ there would be four more publications in the form of plays originally written in verse. Two of these are by Pedro Calderón de la Barca: *La vida es sueño* (Life Is a Dream), Estonian translation published in 1999; and *El Gran Teatro del Mundo* (The Great Theatre of the World), Estonian translation published in 2006. One play is by Tirso de Molina: *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest), Estonian translation published in 2006. All three were translated by Jüri Talvet. The fourth book is a collection of previous translations of plays, published in 2004 under the title *Hispaania pärand: “Kuldajastu” komöödia August Sanga ja Aleksander Kurtina tõlkes* (The Heritage of Spain: Comedies of the Golden Era Translated by August Sang and Aleksander Kurtina), thus representing the phenomenon of revised editions. Anne Lange (2015: 19) has presented the translations of Calderón and Tirso de Molina by Talvet as the examples of changing the form of the text in translation, i.e. not preserving the formal characteristics of the verses of the original. There is also another borderline case from this period: the translation of *Platero y yo* (Platero and I) by Juan Ramón Jiménez, translated by Asta Põldmäe and published in 1989 by *Eesti Raamat*. This book is labelled as “prose poems” in the Estonian libraries database ESTER.

Of these 13 books, 10 were translated from Spanish, two from Catalan and one from K'iche' (see Table 1). The book of poems translated from K'iche' is the first direct translation from that language into Estonian.⁸ Catalan has been the most translated language of the co-official Spanish languages, with eight books (of which two are books of poems) published during the 1988 to 2017 period.

3.1. The last representative of the previous era

The first book of poems published within the period researched, a collection of contemporary poetry from Cuba translated by Jüri Talvet and published under the title *Iidse lootuse tagasitulek* (Return of Ancient Hope), belongs to the previous period of publishing, both by its content (Laan (2024: 136) has deemed it to be out of sync with the zeitgeist, since by that time all the Soviet Union had stopped translating socialist poets from Cuba), and by place of publication (Eesti Raamat, one of the two large publishing houses of the Soviet era). It had been inspired by personal contacts Talvet made during his visits to Cuba in the 1980s. Several of the collection's poems had been published before: two poems by Roberto Fernández Retamar in the newspaper *Edasi*, and a larger selection of poets from Cuba in the journal *Noorus* (Laan 2024: 137). This book is monolingual and has a short socio-historical introduction to the poetry in Cuba after the Revolution, together with longer, poetic presentations of the poets and shorter, fact-based biographies of the poets as an afterword, all written by Talvet.

3.2. The importance of Catalan culture

Politically, the most interesting case is the second book within the researched period: selected poems by Salvador Espriu, published in 1994 by *Generalitat de Catalunya* (the place of publication – Barcelona – is not mentioned in the publication (Malin 1995)). Some of the print run was meant to be distributed in Catalonia and the rest in Estonia where the publisher Ilmamaa was selected as the distributor (Malin 1995).⁹

⁸ The first, indirect, translation (from Spanish) of K'iche' culture was *Popol Vuh*, published in Estonian in 1999.

⁹ This book was preceded by an article by Jüri Talvet presenting a profound comparison of the two cultures, Estonian and Catalan (see Talvet 1995b). The article was originally published in the journal *Vikerkaar* in 1992 (in Estonian), and in *Revista de Catalunya* in 1993 (in Catalan).

Table 1. Poetry books translated from Spanish-mediated literature, 1988–2017.

Author	Cover title (English translations in brackets are mine)	Year	Translator	Publisher	Source language
Jamís, Fayad Diego, Eliseo Fernández Retamar, Roberto De Oraá, Francisco	Iidse lootuse tagasitulek. Kuuba nüüdisluulet (Return of Ancient Hope: Contemporary Poetry from Cuba)	1988	Talvet, Jüri	Eesti Raamat	Spanish
Espritu, Salvador	Mere ääres mul oli kodu. Ran de la mar tenia una casa (I Had a Home by the Sea)	1994	Kaalep, Ain, Talvet, Jüri	Generalitat de Catalunya	Catalan
García Lorca, Federico	Mu kates on tuli (Fire in My Hands)	1997	Kaalep, Ain	Vagabund	Spanish
	Keskaja hispaania luule. Poesía medieval española (Medieval Spanish Poetry)	1998	Talvet, Jüri	Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus	Spanish
Vitale, Carlos	Kohaühtsus (Uniformity of Place)	2009	Talvet, Jüri	Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus	Spanish
Cervera, Jordi	Ära puuduta mind (Don't Touch Me)	2010	Talvet, Jüri	Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus	Catalan
Neruda, Pablo	Kapteni laulud (The Captain's Verses)	2010	Pihelgas, Carolina	Eesti Keele Sihtasutus	Spanish
Al'abal, Humberto	Ega kivid ole tummad (Those Stones Aren't Mute)	2012	Kilk, Maris	Jumalikud ilmutused	K'iche'
Raméntol, Marian	Mu mürgine arm, mina ei ole loogika (My Poisonous Love, I Am Not Logic)	2012	Talvet, Jüri	Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus	Spanish
López de la Serna, Francisco Javier Rohman	Seis más seis es uno = Kuus pluss kuus on üks (Six Plus Six is One)	2015	Olbri, Kai-Mai	Kaarna	Spanish
	Vientos del sur. Lóunatuuled: Tšiili luule (The Southern Winds: Poetry from Chile)	2015	Pihelgas, Carolina; Vassenin, Mariliin; Aulis, Helina	Tallinn: M. Gatica Bravo	Spanish
Gatica, Marcelo	Väljaspool müüre = El extramuro (Outside the Walls)	2018	Laan, Mari	Tallinn: M. Gatica Bravo	Spanish
	Vientos del sur. Lóunatuuled: Tšiili luule II (The Southern Winds: Poetry from Chile II)	2018	Vassenin, Mariliin	Tallinn: M. Gatica Bravo	Spanish

The book contains 19 poems, all previously published in the collection of selected poems titled *Labürindi lõpp* (*Final del laberint*), translated by Ain Kaalep and Jüri Talvet and published in 1977 in the *Loomingu Raamatukogu* series. In this new edition the poems are complemented by the illustrations by Lembit Karu in the form of 10 drypoint prints from the year 1977, inspired by the first publication of the poems. The book is bilingual (the first publication was not). What makes this book especially remarkable (in addition to being published by the local government of Catalonia) is the fact that it starts with two addresses, by Jordi Pujol, President of the Government of Catalonia, and Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia. Both presidents stress the importance of poetry as a tool for creating and preserving national identity during difficult times. There is also a short preface by Jüri Talvet (a more detailed introduction to Catalan poetry, 10 pages in a small font, was part of the first publication in 1977), and short biographies of the translators, Talvet and Kaalep, and the illustrator. As such, this collection of poems has also functioned as a kind of political declaration of friendship or brotherhood between Estonian and Catalan people. In his review of this book, titled *Võim ja vaim ühel pool lauda* (Power and culture sitting on the same side of the table), Jaan Malin (1995) recalls that the initiative for this edition came from some Catalans who had seen the drypoint prints in the home of Jüri Talvet. Malin also mentions that this book was born out of cooperation between two small nations.¹⁰

The first publication of these poems, in 1977 in *Loomingu Raamatukogu*, was the first direct translation from Catalan to Estonian (Talvet 1995a: 22). It is also worth noting that poetry seems to function as a gateway for smaller languages entering the Estonian literary sphere through translation. In the case of Spanish-related networks we have two firsts of this kind: Catalan in

¹⁰ This year, 1995, also witnessed a whole array of articles about Catalonia in the Estonian press: about a trip to Catalonia, written by Mart Ummelas (*Elu Pilt*, 1995, No 3/4); on the complicated identity of Spain, under the title “Kas Hispaania on olemas?” (“Does Spain Exist?”), written by Mart Linnart (*Eesti Sõnumid*, July 8, 1995); a news article on the role of the Catalan party (Convergència i Unió) in the political crisis of Spain (*Eesti Päevaleht*, July 11, 1995); and an introduction to Catalonia as a tourist destination, written by Raivo Raam (*Postimees: Extra*, Nov. 25, 1995). In addition to the commentary on the identity of Spain both articles on tourism also point out that Catalonia is not Spain by using expressions such as “täisväärtuslik Euroopa piirkond” (“a real region in Europe”, i.e. separate from Spain) by Ummelas, and “mereäärne autonoomne väikeriik Hispaania koosseisus” (“a small autonomous sea-side state within Spain”) by Raam. Ummelas also mentions parallels between the Estonian and Catalan pursuit of independence. The next interest of the same level towards Catalonia in Estonian press was in 2005-2006 in connection with the independence referendum.

1977 and K'itche' in 2012. The reason may be the role lyrical poetry played in the formation of small literatures, where it has been used as a tool to awaken cultural and national self-awareness (see Lukas 2003; see also the prefaces by two presidents to the publication of Espriu in 1994) and therefore might have resonated with Estonian readers.

3.3. Revised editions

In general, published books of poetry from the 1990s were revised editions: in addition to the special edition of the earlier translations of Espriu, the collection of poems by Federico García Lorca, translated by Ain Kaalep and published in 1997, was a revised edition of the first collection published in 1966 (under the title *Kaneelist torn*).¹¹ In his afterword to the new edition, the translator mentions that he has left out some translations from the previous edition that seemed weak, but has added two poems and significantly changed the accompanying essay on Lorca, thus the new title was deemed justified.

Another revised edition is the anthology of medieval poetry with prose translations by Jüri Talvet. This is an amended edition of a didactic publication issued in 1978 under the title *Õppematerjale väliskirjandusest. Klassikaline Hispaania luule* (Study materials in foreign literature: Spanish classical poetry), initially compiled by Arthur Robert Hone¹² but published after his death. The original edition was also bilingual, with translations in prose given as verbatim parallel texts that felt scandalous¹³ at that time, resulting in the major publishing house Eesti Raamat refusing to publish it, thus it was published in the unusual form of didactic material (Laan 2024: 107).

¹¹ Lorca's the first collection to be published in Estonia, in 1966 by Ain Kaalep, was much less politically motivated than, for example, the first collection of Neruda (published in 1953), showing Kaalep's preference. Since this publication, Lorca's poems have been strongly tied to Ain Kaalep in Estonia, and have also had their influence on poetry in Estonian, since their publication coincided with the emergence of free verse on the Estonian poetry scene (see Laan 2024: 122–124).

¹² Arthur Robert Hone (1915–1972) was an Englishman who had studied Romance languages at the University of Cambridge and had accidentally ended up in Estonia in 1939. He taught English language and literature at the University of Tartu, and Spanish as an optional course. He was an inspiring teacher for the most important translators from Spanish (Ain Kaalep, Ott Ojamaa, Tatjana Hallap, later also Jüri Talvet, Jaan Kaplinski and Ruth Lias) during the Soviet period. (Laan 2024: 115–116)

¹³ The cultural norm was translations that function in the target culture as equal to the original texts; translations should not be subpar or surrogate to the original text (see Ojamaa 1969: 709). Overly literal translations were seen as the result of dogmatism hurting the quality of the text (ibid.: 714).

Soviet ideology had also influenced the title of the publication. Jüri Talvet (2021: 270) has explained that “Spanish classical poetry” was used, since according to Soviet ideology, the Enlightenment, the Renaissance and Classicism were good (positive, optimistic), while the Middle Ages and Baroque were bad (pessimistic, too religious); thus the book has the title it was originally meant to have: “Spanish medieval poetry”.¹⁴ The revised edition is also bilingual; in the foreword Talvet mentions that he revised the translation in order that, while in prose, it would follow the original verse structure as closely as possible.

3.4. Bilingual editions

The bilingual edition was an innovation the earliest appearance of which in translations from Spanish-related literature were the didactic materials on Spanish medieval poetry, coming to maturity with the book of poems by Salvador Espriu published in 1994. Since then, bilingual editions have been a constant in poetry books translated from Spanish. There are only three books in this list of translations between 1988 and 2017 that are monolingual: the collection of Cuban poetry (belonging to the previous political regime according to its content and place of publishing), the collection of poems by Federico García Lorca (revised edition, reflecting the previous tradition of publishing), and the book of poems translated from K’iche’ (discussed below).

3.5. A gap in publishing

After the revised editions of the 1990s, there is a notable, 10-year, gap in the publishing of poetry translations from Spanish between 1999 and 2008. This period includes 2006, when a considerable increase occurred in translations of other forms of literature from Spanish: from one to five translations from Spanish per year (the lowest point being 2003 with only one translation) to six or more translations per year (eight in 2006, six in 2007, 11 in 2008 and so on). In addition, the publication of classical plays translated by Jüri Talvet

¹⁴ In the volume *Valitud tõkeluulet I: hiliskeskajast modernismini* (Selected poetry in translation I: from the late Middle Ages to Modernism), published by Tartu University Press in 2021, Jüri Talvet has published some poems in the form of ‘properly translated’ poetry, i.e. poems that follow the metric properties of the source text and which present themselves as poems that could be read independently of the source text. This collection is monolingual, i.e. without parallel texts, thus reflecting compliance with the norm of a translation being functionally equal to poems written in Estonian.

came within this period (see Note 4 above). Since Talvet was the most prolific translator of poetry at that time, the gap could have been caused by him working on other translation projects.

3.6. Academic publications

The next stage of publishing poetry translations could be described as academic publication, since the distinctive feature of these books is that they were published by the University of Tartu or Eesti Keele Sihtasutus (the Estonian Language Foundation). Four out of five books published between 2009 and 2012 fall into this category. However, this can also be interpreted as the marginalisation of poetry, since during the previous political phase, collections of poetry were often issued by the prestigious (and popular) series *Loomingu Raamatukogu*. The books of poetry published by the University of Tartu Press belong to the *Kaasajaluule* (Poetry of our time) series supervised by Jüri Talvet, and all have short but dense introductions to each author, with parallels drawn to world poetry and Estonian poetry tradition. All the editions are bilingual.

The book published by the Estonian Language Foundation, *Kapteni laulud* (Los versos del capitán) by Pablo Neruda, translated by Carolina Pihelgas, is especially remarkable due to the fact that it is the first full book of poems translated into Estonian from Spanish. All earlier publications were selected poems from various publications in the source language. In the earlier books by Neruda in Estonian (translated by Johannes Semper; the first collection published in 1953, and a somewhat different, less political, selection in 1968, then in 1976 in his collected works and again in 1977 as a separate volume) the poems were selected predominantly based on their political content¹⁵, thus his love poems were under-represented in Estonian, a gap which this book filled.¹⁶

¹⁵ The first edition, published in 1953, consisted of a poem about Stalingrad (“Nuevo canto de amor a Stalingrado”) and a selection of poems from *Canto general*, selected with the intent of highlighting critical attitudes towards the USA, imperialism and racism, and of describing the simple life of the Latin American peasants. Later publications (published in 1968, 1976 and 1977) probably represent the preferences of the translator better, presenting a less politicised selection of Neruda’s poems (see Laan 2024: 96–99).

¹⁶ Later, in 2019, this translation was incorporated into a larger volume of love poems by Neruda published under the title *Armastusluuletused* (Love Poems). This edition, included translations of the books *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair) and *Cien sonetos de amor* (100 Love Sonnets), was published in the prestigious Hieronymus series and was nominated for the annual literary prize that year. Thus, in comparison to the books published in the

3.7. The first translation from K'itche'

The book *Ega kivid ole tummad*, translated by Maris Kilk, is the first direct translation from K'itche' to Estonian. This book was published by Jumalikud Ilmutused in the Ji series, being the only book of translations in this series, which published predominantly younger and/or alternative contemporary Estonian poets.¹⁷ In addition, it is the only book (except Lorca and the collection of Cuban poetry that belongs to the previous tradition) that is monolingual. It therefore represents the previous norm (see Ojamaa 1969) still prevalent in culture, i.e. that translated poetry should function as an independent text in the target culture. The place of publishing, a series that published Estonian poets, also points towards this functional approach. The book is the only one without an introduction to the author of the source text. Since Jumalikud Ilmutused is a one-man publishing house run by the Estonian poet Kivisildnik (Sven Sildnik) that publishes books using the print-on-demand approach¹⁸, offering the possibility to publish but without much editorial support, this was most probably the decision of the translator.

3.8. Self-publishing

The last four books on the list (but to a certain extent also the book published by Jumalikud Ilmutused) represent another phenomenon of the new era, self-publishing. Aile Möldre (2018: 176) has pointed out that self-publishing (including small publishing companies owned by the authors) developed in Estonia in the 2000s and was adopted especially for the publication of poetry, although there are also some authors of prose who favoured this method.

The first of the self-published books, *Seis más seis es uno = Kuus pluss kuus on üks*, is a fully hand-made book, printed (most probably hand-printed) in 30 numbered copies. The name of the publisher, Kaarna, is the real family name of the translator of this volume, Estonian artist and poet Kai-Mai Olbri, thus reflecting the personal nature of this publishing project.¹⁹

Kaasajaluule series, which may be considered marginalised, this later publication is prestigious with high visibility.

¹⁷ The Ji series was published from 2006 to 2019 following the print-on-demand principle and had 98 issues; *Ega kivid ole tummad* is Ji No 33.

¹⁸ See <https://www.err.ee/353132/kirjastus-jumalikud-ilmutused-esitlesid-seitset-uudisteost> (17.03.2026)

¹⁹ Kai-Mai Olbri has also published her own original poetry in the form of Estonian–Spanish bilingual editions: *Täiskuu põhjatü kaev/El Pozo sin Fondo de la Luna Llena* (Editorial Canopus, 2013) and *Elujooned/Líneas de la vida* (Kaarna, 2017).

The other three books in this category were published by Marcelo Gatica Bravo (without an official publishing company, however, and with the first book acknowledging the editorial Toledo for their help) with support from the Estonian Cultural Endowment (*Eesti Kultuurkapital*). All three books are bilingual, including the titles.

The first book, *Vientos del sur. Lõunatuuled*, is a collection of Chilean poetry. The publisher, who is a Chilean living in Estonia for family reasons, wanted to present the literary canon of his homeland to Estonian readers. The authors in this volume (Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Vicente Huidobro, Nicanor Parra and Rodrigo Lira) are presented in a personal way through postcards before their poems, and there is an introduction describing the personal background to publication of the book.

The second book, *Vientos del sur. Lõunatuuled II*, arose (according to the Preface) from common interests shared by a Chilean artist residing in Estonia, Izak One (Walter Mora Marambio), Estonian poet and translator Mariliin Vassenin, and Marcelo Gatica, the book's publisher. For this volume they chose poets from different generations who represented different styles (15 poets, one poem each). In the Preface Gatica compares Chilean poetry to Estonian choral singing and the editors dedicate the volume to the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, thus reflecting rootedness in the Estonian cultural sphere.

The third book, *Väljaspool müüre/El extramuro* by Marcelo Gatica, combines photos and poetic prose/free verse poems that were born (in Spanish) during the author's walks around Tallinn old town during the first year of his son's life. By that time he had lived in Estonia for several years. Gatica explains in the Preface that in this book he wished to represent his (non-touristic) view of Estonia, the 'walls' he sensed surrounding the physical and emotional space he had found for himself in Estonia. The book is therefore a representative of another phenomenon that has arisen alongside political changes, the multiculturalism of the Estonian literary space²⁰. Although the Estonian part of the book is a translation (by Mari Laan), the Spanish part had not been published before, i.e. it is not a text from another culture brought to the Estonian cultural sphere through translation, but a text born in Estonia in Spanish and presented to us in a bilingual form. While translation is usually understood as communication between two cultures (all other books discussed here are representations of intercultural communication), this book could be interpreted as an act of autocommunication for Estonian culture.

²⁰ In Estonia, this phenomenon has mainly been discussed from the viewpoint of literature written in Russian. See, for example Kotjuh (2012).

4. Translators

The previous generation of poetry translators is represented in this period by Ain Kaalep and Jüri Talvet. Ain Kaalep (1926–2020) translated (mainly poetry) from many languages (French, Polish, German, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Spanish, English, Tajik, Portuguese, Finnish, Latin, Turkish, Latvian, Galician, Catalan, Ancient Greek, Uzbek, Russian, Provencal, Georgian, Swedish, Farsi, Egyptian Arabic; the list may be incomplete). He was among the most influential mediators of the Spanish-speaking world in the 1960s and 1970s; within the period of research he is represented by two revised editions (Lorca and Espriu).

Jüri Talvet (b. 1945) has also translated from several languages (at least from English, Spanish, Catalan, Serbian, French, Provencal and Portuguese), but above all is known as the mediator of the Spanish-speaking world in the role of translator, researcher, adviser and teacher. He has been active during the whole research period and in addition to poetry has published translations of folk tales, aphorisms, philosophy and plays.

The book *Kapteni laulud* is remarkable for its representation of a new generation of poetry translators. Carolina Pihelgas (b. 1986) is the most notable among them, especially with her translations of Pablo Neruda, although she has also translated Gabriela Mistral for the collection of Chilean poetry *Vientos del sur. Lõunatuuled*. This collection also showcases the works of two other translators from the younger generation: Mariliin Vassenin (b. 1980) and Helina Aulis (b. 1975). Another representative of the new generation of translators, Maris Kilk (b. 1980), specialises in mediating American (especially Mexican) indigenous cultures.

5. Concluding remarks

We could say that during the period researched (1988–2017) the most prominent aspect that emerged alongside the political transformation of society is the publication of bilingual editions. This type of publication had been almost non-existent (the only exception being the didactic materials of medieval poetry), but during the period of transformation bilingual editions became the norm for publications of poetry translated from Spanish-related networks and published in the form of books in Estonia (the only exception being the book translated from K'iche'). One reason for this trend could be the texts published by academic institutions. In Jüri Talvet's case, the pedagogical aspect (making the source texts available for readers interested in Spanish-speaking culture but whose language skills are not good enough to read in Spanish/Catalan) is also

present, explicitly so in his collection of Medieval poetry (published as didactic material in its first edition). Since Talvet is also the editor of the Kaasajaluule series, presenting bilingual translations of poetry probably reflects also his personal preference. The translation from K'itche', positioning itself among Estonian poets in Estonian only, is an exception here that represents a different cultural stance.

The pedagogical aspect of bilingual editions is also present in the publications of Marcelo Gatica Bravo, who mentions in the Preface to *Vientos del sur/Lõunatuuled* and *Väljaspool müüre/El extramuro* that he teaches Spanish in Estonia. In the Preface to the second collection, *Vientos del sur/Lõunatuuled II*, he mentions having heard teachers of Spanish using the first collection in their classes. In the publications of Marcelo Gatica Bravo there is the addition of a personal aspect in that he represents his Chilean identity in Estonia as well as (and especially in the last book of the selection, *Väljaspool müüre/El extramuro*) being part of Estonian culture. His bilingual books, as well as the books by Kai-Mai Olbri, are representations of their reality of living in a bilingual world.

Thus for the translations of poetry from Spanish, the period from 1988 to 2017 could be divided into three stages. The initial period, 1988–1998, was characterised by revisiting and revising older translations. This was followed by a nearly 10-year hiatus, which probably highlights the role of Jüri Talvet in mediating poetry from Spanish-mediated literary system, since he had been working on the translations of plays (Calderón and Tirso de Molina) and there were probably no other translators to fill the gap. The third period, starting in 2009, is characterised by publications that are either academic (published by Tartu University Press or the Estonian Language Foundation) or self-published. This period also witnessed the appearance of new translators of poetry for Spanish, for example Carolina Pihelgas and Mariliin Vassenin, as well as Maris Kilk, who focuses on mediating the indigenous cultures of the Americas, both from Spanish and indigenous languages.

Almost all the publications have received some financial support, either from Estonia or from Spain, the only exception being the self-published book by Kai-Mai Olbri. In addition, the collection of medieval poetry does not have any official declarations of financial support.

We can therefore suggest that the position of poetry translated from the Spanish-mediated literary system in the Estonian literary landscape has become more marginal, or at least less central, over time. Even if the number of published titles has not necessarily declined, its visibility and symbolic prestige within the broader literary field appear to have weakened. However, there was a clear succession of visible changes during the period researched. The 1990s were characterised by revisiting previous translations that were important for

Estonian culture (Lorca for his influence on poetry in Estonian; Espriu for his description of political momentum transforming into political declaration). The next highlight for poetry translated from Spanish-related literature arrived with a new generation of translators (Carolina Pihelgas) who revisited classics, Pablo Neruda's poetry and brought a new aspect of his work, love poems, to the Estonian literary sphere (and consequently in 2019 receiving a nomination for the annual literary prize). The later part of the transformation, from 2009 on, is dominated by academic publication and self-publishing, which can be described as the marginalisation of the translation of poetry, the only exception being Neruda's love poems (especially the second, extended, edition published in 2019).

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