

*Forewords and Reviews: Some Notes
on the Translators' Presence in Estonian
Translational Space¹*

According to Gideon Toury, a seminal figure among descriptive translation researchers, translation is a norm governed activity. Translational norms are seen as repeated patterns of translational behaviour in a particular socio-cultural framework: norms are among the tools that can be used to define the translational situation at a particular time in a particular culture; norms denote the line between the accepted and the non-accepted translational behaviour as well as what is regarded as a translation 'proper' in a particular culture and what is not. Hence also the recognition that translational behaviour within one particular culture tends to manifest certain regularities (Toury 2004: 206–207). Although Toury regards normative pronouncements, such as critical formulations around translations, to be the “by-products of the existence of norms” (ib. 214), researchers such as, for example, Şehnaz Tahir-Gürçağlar (2002) have shown that the critical description and study of paratextual elements, as well as texts constituting a discourse around the actual translations, can reveal the regularities of translational behaviour in a particular socio-cultural context.

Accordingly, the present paper will look at such norm-governed regularities, as well as the change in such regularities in translational behaviour, apparent in semi-theoretical and critical formulations. Among such formulations are the statements made by translators, editors, publishers and other persons involved in or connected with the translational activity, as well as the material inside book covers that introduces the main text. Such peritexts and epitexts (Genette 1997) are, on the one hand, positioned outside the main text and on the other

¹ I would like to thank Ene-Reet Soovik and Jüri Talvet for their valuable advice and comments on the present paper.

hand they can be regarded to function as adding an extra dimension to the main text. Due to the fact that the focus in the present paper lies on the issues concerning the visibility and self-representation of the translator, maintaining the difference between the terms epitext and peritext will not be necessary. I will borrow the terminological set devised by Gerard Genette and use the term *paratext* to refer to both – the texts constituting a more general discourse on translation outside book covers (the particular texts circulating independently such as reviews and critical appraisals), as well as the texts inside book covers other than the main text. Before addressing the issues of the visibility of the translator through a comparative case study concerning the translation of Baudelaire and García Lorca into Estonian, I would like to discuss one particular type of paratexts that has come to be widely practiced in Estonia – the afterword.

Literary translation in Estonia: *forewords* or *afterwords*?

Ernst-August Gutt, a well-known translation relevance theorist, points out in his article *Pragmatic Aspects of Translation: Some Relevance-Theory Observations* that the terms people have devised for certain kind of texts or utterances: "...can serve a significant purpose: they can help to coordinate the intentions of the communicator with the expectations of the audience" (Gutt: 1998: 46). Gutt's statement bears similarities to Phelippe Lejeune's (1989) concept of the tacit 'pact' between the reader and the writer concerning autobiographical writing; such 'pact' in Lejeune's case expresses the reader's agreement with the author on the non-fictionality of a text called autobiography. Gutt, on the other hand, proposes that each label attached to a certain text type triggers expectations in the readers and in this way plays an important part in the communicational process. Proceeding from Gutt, what are the reader's expectations concerning a *foreword*? Following the meaning of the word in English, the term *foreword* could broadly be said have three main implications. Firstly, the term certifies its positioning in front of a main text. Secondly, it indicates (in accordance with Gutt) the intermediary function of such a paratext, and thirdly, foreword (as opposed to a *preface*) is written by someone else than the author of the main text. However, in case of translated

literary texts, the translations of fiction as well as poems from another language to Estonian, forewords, in the sense of frontal positioning in regard to the main text have fallen out of practice during the so called Soviet time² and become substituted with a similar literary form positioned after the main text called an *afterword*. Nevertheless, we could argue that in case of literary texts the immediacy of the information provided by a text such as a foreword is considered to be of secondary importance, and thus, whether the information about the main text is positioned before or after the main text itself is not that relevant. Along these lines, if we, firstly, disregard the positioning of forewords in front of a text; secondly, take into consideration texts inside book covers that function as mediators between the main text and the target reader; and thirdly, consider texts that are written by somebody else than the author of the original/main text, we could talk about both *afterwords* as well as *forewords* in much the same idiom – as of texts functioning to mediate between the author of the main text

² Several phases in the change of the position of the translator's foreword to an afterword in a spatial sense can be observed in Estonia starting from the beginning of 20th century. With severe generalizations we could describe a cycle of three phases. Firstly, following an arbitrary phase at the beginning of 20th century, literary translations into Estonian during the 1920s and 1930s, prose and poetry, were generally accompanied with a translator's foreword positioned in front of the main text. Such foreword contained the introduction to the book, notes about the author of the original and very often also the translator's comments on the translation process, difficulties or peculiarities. Secondly, due to the severe censorship during late the 1940s and early 1950s, books published before Soviet occupation underwent severe control in public libraries. As a result many forewords by the translators, former literary elite, who had fallen out of favour were cut from the books, the names of the translators became erased from the publications, inked over or ripped out resulting in the loss of agency in translated literary works (See Monticelli (in print)). Closely connected with the previous, from the late 1940s we can observe a period in Estonian publishing that can be called a silent period with invisible authors and translators (See Gielen (in print)). When, in rare cases, notes on a particular translation appear, they are published after the main text (hence the term 'järelsõna' (afterword)) and are often nameless. From this period up to very recently Estonian counterpart for the English word *foreword* can be said to be *afterword*.

(source text in case of a translation) and the target reader. Generally speaking, the aim of such texts is to provide the readers with background information and negotiate the meaning of the work at hand. However, when talking about the presence of the translator in the context of Estonian publishing traditions there is an apparent need to balance between the terms *foreword*, *afterword* and *translator's afterword*.

When looking at the afterwords of Estonian literary translations (including poetry) from the Soviet period (1945–1991), we can draw up two broad categories. Firstly, afterwords that have been accompanying the main text in the source language and have been translated by the translator of the main text/source text, and secondly, those added by the target text producers. (There is a third negotiable type that can be called a zero foreword, a feature that can be quite telling; such a category is, however, quite dependent on the general arbitrariness of the publishing traditions in Estonia.) Afterwords that have been added to the translated text during the process of translation can in turn be broadly divided into three subcategories. Firstly, afterwords produced by a specialist in the field (a literary critic, a professor of literature etc.); secondly, afterwords by the editor of the translation; and lastly, afterwords written by the translator of the main text – the translation. In the second part of the present paper I am particularly interested in the latter. I will treat the translator's afterwords as a means of mediation between the source text, the original, and the target text, the translation, looking at how the translation is presented to the reader as well as scrutinizing the translator's presence in the afterwords. But first of all I will address some broader issues related to translational practices in Estonia and in a small culture in general.

Translators in a (small) culture

Throughout years statements saying that the vast impact of translations to a small culture is difficult to overestimate³, have caught my

³ See, for example Sepamaa 1960; Talvet 2005: 451; Kaldjärv 2007: 9; Tamm 2010;

eye. Anne Lange, an Estonian translator and translation scholar, says in her *The Translator's Primer*⁴, that we are born into the world that has been translated for us (Lange 2008: 7). The same has been expressed by many other Estonian scholars dealing with translation. However, Anne Lange's further assumption that translation in a small culture is of equal importance to the texts created in that culture is not new but, nevertheless, intriguing. By equalling the significance of the translated work with that of our own, Estonian production, Lange indicates that certain texts, be it then The Bible or Astrid Lindgren's books for children, have been available for us, the Estonians, for a long period of time and have in the course of time become a part of our collective memory. These books have become domesticated by our culture, to use the term rendered popular by Lawrence Venuti (2008). Proceeding in accordance with Venuti, an important question here would be that of the visibility of the translator – the importance of the visibility of the translator to a small culture. And indeed, apart from the names of some of the translators do we know much of the translating process, the methods the translators use, the choices they make? Apart from manifesting themselves in the translated text through those translational choices, are the translators visible outside the translated texts? I believe these questions could point to a larger framework or patterns underlying translational practices within Estonian culture. Contextualization and critical description of material around the translations of the main text can show the processes of and concepts related to translation in the observed socio-cultural context. Therefore the analysis of translator's afterwords as well as other paratextual material related to translations could provide the researchers with valuable information on the translational situation as well as on the position of the translator in general.

Representations of the translator's *self*

The texts under observation in the present paper are the second edition of the translation of Federico García Lorca's selection of

⁴ Translation of the title into English by the author of the present paper

poems into Estonian by Ain Kaalep titled *Mu kättes on tuli*, published in 1997, with an afterword by the translator. I have chosen the second edition because the afterword has also been reviewed prior to the second publishing and the translator has become somewhat more visible, reflecting also on the foreword of the first edition. In addition to Lorca's collection, I will look at the translation of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, translated into Estonian by Tõnu Õnnepalu, published in 2000 and afterworded by the translator. However, the focus of the paper does not lie in the particular source text, the Baudelaire, the Lorca; nor does it lie in the translation of Baudelaire, the translation of Lorca, but rather in the texts around these translations, the paratexts. In case of a translated text the afterword can be said to have the possibility to influence the reader's perception of the text (in case the afterword is read, of course). It is interesting to see the relations between when (temporal sequence) and what kind of information is presented by the translator in the afterword of a translated work. What are the things the translator believes are important to keep in mind regarding the main text and who is perceived to be the target reader of the particular text. But more importantly, afterword contributes to whether the reader perceives the main text to be *the* Baudelaire, *the* Lorca, or the translation of Baudelaire, the translation of Lorca.

Translator's forewording choices can be influenced by the accepted patterns of the genre of forewording/afterwording although the genre itself may have slightly different requirements in different cultures. In Estonian translations of literary texts (novels, short stories and the like) the translator's afterword, as a rule, follows a certain pattern. Such pattern includes, as a compulsory element, the life and other works of the author, the school of writing, the style, and more importantly, the current work as presented in the original/source language, how it is perceived by the source culture. The language, style and problems of translation rarely merit any attention. Commonly, neither the translation, nor the translator is present in the afterword. The translator, however, tends to become more visible in the translator's afterword of more specific literary texts, in our case, poetry translations. And it is from the degree of visibility as well as the choices explicated by this visibility that we

can draw information about the translator's position in a particular culture at a particular time. In Estonia as well as in the rest of the world recent years have brought along a gradual change in the issues concerning the position of the translator. The invisible translator has become more visible. There is an emphasis on visibility which may, first and foremost, be due to the attitude originating from contemporary business and commerce world stating that when you are not visible you are not there, an attitude of a very Western origin, I believe. Secondly, the practice of making the author visible along with the politics of location as originating from feminist critical practice, has become an alternative (not to say new) way to create objectivity also in academic writing. Thus, the movement and gradual change in approach to the visibility of the translator can also be witnessed by studying the paratexts and comparing the relevant discourses of translation.

Translation methods and ideas as well as the concept of 'good' translation are different at different times in different cultures depending as much on traditions as on prominent translators. Anne Lange, among others, has pointed out in the introduction to her doctoral dissertation that the traditional pattern for poetry translation until the late 20th century in Estonia has been *homorythmic* i.e. metrical translation. A strong proponent of the so-called *homorythmic* translation is Ain Kaalep, a prolific translator and poet, who, no doubt, is one of the best experts on poetry translation in Estonia. Referring to a very visible change in the established poetry translation pattern, Lange points to Tõnu Õnnepalu's non-rhyme translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in the year 2000 (Lange 2007). I do not want to suggest that deviations from the prevalent homorythmic translation did not exist prior to Õnnepalu's Baudelaire. Neither do I want to stress the temporal significance of before and after Kaalep or before and after Õnnepalu, but merely to observe the volatile movement of changes in thinking about the practice and the meaning of translation in the light of the translator's presence in the afterwords of poetry translations into Estonian.

Ain Kaalep's Lorca and Tõnu Õnnepalu's Baudelaire revisited

Let us first look at the translator's afterword of the second edition of the translation of Federico García Lorca's poems called *Mu kätēs on tuli* by Ain Kaalep, published in 1997 (first edition called *Kaneelist torn* was published in 1966). The text has a noteworthy format of reversed indentation where not the first line of the paragraph is indented but rather the paragraph itself. In such a manner the key points of the life and career of Federico Garcia Lorca are brought out. The translator makes a mention of the verse forms used by Lorca and the verse forms used in Spanish context in general, bringing out the importance of eight syllable verse and assonance rhyme to Spanish poetry. Without a wish to go deeper into the issue of versificational norms, I hereby want to make the point of the places in afterwords, where it is possible to see the translators' presence. In the case of Lorca's translator's afterword we see the presence via translational choices hinted at by the translator in between a general mediating process. We can say that the formal elements of this particular afterword provide an interesting deviation from general norms of layout allowing thus the writer/translator to accentuate and link information. Starting with the mention of the date and place of birth of the poet, the text precedes with the early years, highlighting by indentation the key points in Lorca's life and career until its tragic end, at the same time contextualizing the events by more general historical and source-cultural facts. In regard to the content of the afterword, we can say that it is designed to fulfil the expectations of the reader at a particular moment in time, in a particular socio-cultural context, since by the time of the publication of the second edition of Lorca's poetry in 1997, Ain Kaalep had been a prominent, norm-setting poetry translator and reviewer for decades.

After the translator's final contemplation about the poet's ivory tower there is a small notice marked off by dots that is of particular interest to me. In this notice the translator explains the background of the figurative image used in the title of the collection's first edition (1966). Kaalep says that during the time that has passed since the publication of the first edition certain things have become clearer. He

subtly points to the end of the Soviet regime and mentions that some of the weaker translations have been left out from the current, second edition (Kaalep 1997: 156). The whole paragraph is in third person singular – Kaalep, the translator himself, talking about the translator and 'what the translator has done'.

In a review essay on Ain Kaalep's translation called "On Garcia Lorca's Poetry and Ain Kaalep's Translation"⁵ (2005 [1997]), Jüri Talvet, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Tartu, another seminal figure in Estonian translational space, stresses that the sales success of Lorca's collection is possibly due to the fact that people in Estonia love Lorca's poems (Talvet 2005: 443). The question for me here is not whether people love Lorca's poetry or not. The question is rather, whether we recognize that this is not Lorca's poetry, but Ain Kaalep's translation, his interpretation that we love. Similar issues can often be seen in the all too scarce reviews of translations into Estonian, where the source culture text is introduced not from the perspective of the translation, but as the text is perceived by the source language culture. Talvet points out that Lorca's poetry: "...could be regarded as the textbook for poets and Ain Kaalep's translation can be the textbook for translators of poetry, who seem to have started to imagine that poetry translation is a simple thing." (Ib. 447). And indeed, translating poetry is never simple. Talvet recognizes that translation, being inevitably a different text, cannot have the same qualities as the original, and that poetry translation is a poetic imitation of the original. Basing my arguments on the aforementioned article, for Talvet poetry translation has a dual authorship of complicated nature, in which ideally the philosophical gist of the original has been not retained (because this would be impossible because of the language differences), but captured or re-created in another language by the author of the translation. This, however, preconditions the existence of a translator, who recognizes the essence of a particular author or a particular poem, does not manifest his own personality or preferences in the translation, but the other way round – one who becomes

⁵ Translations into English by the author of the present paper.

dissolved in the translations, one who is able to sacrifice his/her personality for the sake of the original (ib.451).

Hence, the allusion in both the review and the translator's afterword to Lorca's collection can be said to be source culture oriented, with the aim to enrich the target culture with the masterpieces of world literature, convey in more or less successful attempts of *umdichtung* the philosophy otherwise not available for the Estonian reader.

In this light, it is interesting to look at Tõnu Õnnepalu's afterword of Charles Baudelaire's rhyme dodging translation that was published some three years later and appears to be the first large scale deviation from the prevalent translational norms that has been noticed and that has merited a number of critical appraisals. No doubt, there are several reasons for the interest in Õnnepalu's translation, one of them being his status as one of the most renowned idiosyncratic Estonian authors. Õnnepalu's Baudelaire is the translation from Baudelaire's *Œuvres complete. Tome I*, published in 1975. It is a type of *en face* translation featuring parallel French and Estonian text, a practice that puts the translator in an especially vulnerable position. The translation has been thoroughly afterworded and endnoted by the translator. Õnnepalu starts the afterword to Baudelaire with a poetic, paragraph-long sentence, the first word of it being a significant *maybe* that is repeated once more during the sentence. The passage is difficult to grasp during first reading since the first pair of words: "Maybe psychology, ..." is set off from the rest of the main clause with a number of parenthetical expressions full of allusions and images. To contrast the dreamy beginning, the next paragraph is a matter of fact description of Baudelaire's tombstone and, further on, a colourful depiction of the controversies in the Baudelaire family follows. The translator is creating a scene for the story of Baudelaire in a very artistic, fanciful manner, presenting the facts of life playfully. Apart from manifesting himself in the untypical story-like presentation of information, the register and the idiom, the translator, Õnnepalu, is present in explications of the techniques and methods he has used throughout his translation. The methods of and thoughts on translation are made explicit in a long passage at the end of the afterword. Õnnepalu's immediate

presence is also felt by the use of the pronoun *I*. Keeping in mind that an afterword, similarly to a foreword, can help to coordinate the intentions of the translator with the expectations of the audience – the readers, Õnnepalu openly counters the *homorhymic* poetry translating traditions by saying that it is: “...not worth forcing the content into rhymes and meter since all this mathematics would result in rhymes jingling together in a slightly ridiculous manner.” (Õnnepalu 2000: 484). This particular translator’s afterword can be considered as a strong statement in favour of the self positioning of a translator, the aim being to counter and oppose the conventional invisibility of the translator. In a mock-apologetic mode the translator implies that he has taken action and the action taken might not be in coherence with the expectations of the reader (or critic). *Maybe* is a significant word to begin such an afterword with, especially when considering the reception/discourse that followed the publication. The use of the word *maybe* as the very first introductory element seems to try to create a space for a different view of translation, a different interpretation from the part of the translator.

Contrary to the almost nonexistent response a poetry edition normally receives, Õnnepalu’s Baudelaire has accumulated a relatively large number of critical appraisals. For example, in a review to Õnnepalu’s translation of Baudelaire, Paul-Eerik Rummo, who is a well-known Estonian poet himself, recognizes that this book of poetry, with its conscious renouncement of the traditional metre and rhyme might signify a beginning of something new (Rummo 2001:175–178). This ‘something new’ indicates to both a new attitude as compared to the prevalent norms as well as a new way to present Baudelaire to the Estonian readers. Rummo seconds to the justifications offered by Õnnepalu in his translator’s afterword to opt for a non-rhyme translation because of the density of Baudelaire’s poetry. Nevertheless, other critics are not that benevolent. Tanel Lepsoo, a representative of an academic establishment, University of Tartu, uses a more prescriptive set of expressions to refer to Õnnepalu’s translation: *a translator must..., Bereman also demands..., one has to...* (Lepsoo 2005: 175–179). Such expressions are telling considering the translational situation and context. They suggest the existence of a set of behavioural norms imposed by our cultural

context to the translator; the expressive means used by Lepsoo are also suggestive of the expectations of the target reader. Among other issues such as referential deformations, Lepsoo brings out the problem of translator's excessive subjectivity: "...Õnnepalu, the writer, is never far from Õnnepalu, the translator..."; "...the translator does not look for the message sent by Baudelaire..." (ib.175). We can infer from the previous examples that the demand for translator's objectivity, fidelity to the source text and translator's disappearance inside the translation are the dominant criteria for a "good" poetry translation. It also appears that the translator's afterword is a powerful trigger for the discussion, since both Lepsoo and Rummo draw heavily from the explanations given in the translator's afterword by Tõnu Õnnepalu.

When comparing Ain Kaalep's translator's afterword of Lorca (1997) and the ensuing contemplation by Talvet to the paratexts of Õnnepalu's translation of Baudelaire in 2000, we can see that in the first case the scarce manifestation of the translator and the review indicating the necessity of the translator to suppress the 'self', be objective and become dissolved in the translation, can be considered as being in accordance with the expectations of the target audience and hence also with the norms of translational behaviour. As for Õnnepalu's translation – a breach of these conventions can be inferred when studying the paratextual material. Õnnepalu's approach to the source text can be compared to that of an original author. He sees the translated text as a mediated product that has acquired an extra quality during the process of mediation. The translator has become visible in the case of, spurring heated discussions, and in doing so Õnnepalu's Baudelaire has merited a fair amount of attention.

Maybe...

If we now move one step further to the translational situation from 2000 until the present, we could take a look at the translator's notes in the Internet based literary journal *Ninniku* (published from 2001), the first journal in Estonia that is solely concentrated on poetry translations (edited by Hasso Krull and Kalju Kruusa). On the

introductory page to the website *Ninniku*'s aim is defined to be, among other things, to bring to the fore different ways of translating poetry and to intensify the discussion on poetry translation. The translations freely experiment with the different contexts and meanings added by the target culture in order to bring out different possibilities of the original. In his translator's note to Miroslav Holub's, Janos Pilinszky's, Vasko Popa's translations, Märt Väljataga admits that the translations are made without looking at the original, via English, and that most of the poems are probably incorrectly translated (Väljataga 2001). Such an attitude to poetry translation does particularly stand out considering the prevalent understanding and ongoing discussions on poetry translation in Estonia. This statement also brings out the importance of paratextual material, such as translator's afterword, as well as the importance of the translator to position him/herself in regard to the translated text. And as Jüri Talvet says: "...the translator should have a total freedom in his work with the original" (Talvet 2005: 453). I as a reader would just like to know what has been done and why.

To conclude with, apart from being a source of information on the main text by contextualizing it or trying to mediate the importance of the original in the original cultural context, paratextual material as a frame can be telling in many other senses. For example the foreword/afterword more often than not reveals the attitude of the translator towards the translation and in doing so often also mirrors the attitude of the target culture. What is more, it functions as a mediator between the translator and the target language audience negotiating the space for the translation. In the light of the discussions on the importance of translation for a small culture (see above) such negotiations are inevitable from time to time. The researchers of translation follow discourses such as pointed out in the present paper with keen interest. The particular case of Baudelaire's translation, where a strong presence of the translator can be felt, as opposed to the prevalent norm patterns advocating fluency and invisibility, gives an insight into the field of poetry translation and the possible shifts and changes in translational norms in Estonia. Although the texts under scrutiny point to one particular case related to norms of accepted translational behaviour, paratexts on a broader

scale can show the rises and falls of different approaches to translation and translators. The presented discourse can be observed as illustrative of the volatile movement of different socio-cultural norms that govern translations explicating thus translational behaviour at different points in time, in different cultures. Estonian culture, as well as any other, would only benefit from a wide variety of translational concepts and from the disputes spurred by opposing viewpoints on the matter.

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