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HÕBEVALGE – SULLA ROTTA DEL VENTO, DEL FUOCO E DELL'ULTIMA THULE:

A CASE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL TRANSLATION

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Tartu

2020

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Introduction

In this section, I will briefly introduce the object of the thesis' case study: the book *Hõbevalge* by Lennart Meri. The figure of Lennart Meri will also be introduced as it is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the position of the book in both the Estonian and Italian cultural universes. Secondly, the research questions and the aim of the thesis will be introduced and explained together with the parallel works that have been published about the topic – works on which I might draw and rely on or just take into consideration for methodological reasons. Lastly, I will delineate the structure of the thesis and its

This present thesis departs from the object of study, the book *Hõbevalge* (Italian translation: 2016; first edition in Estonian: 1976; Estonian edition used for the translation: 2008), to then discuss theoretical aspects – and not the other way around, where the book could be presented to sustain a theoretical approach. The reasons why the book could be used as a good starting point to support theoretical discussions on translation and culture are the following: (i) the Italian translation of the book was, at the time, the only translation other than the Finnish one, from the original in Estonian; (ii) the *Hõbevalge* can be considered an uncharacteristic work to be translated into Italian. In what regards the latter point, the cultural differences between the two cultures involved (Italian and Estonian) are still significant; the topic of the book is very specific and intentionally aimed at the audience of the source culture (the Estonian reader); and the biggest picture regarding the role of the book – published during the Soviet occupation, an artifact representing a whole population inside the standardized “Soviet” discourse – is inevitably lost in the transposition to the typical Italian reader. Departing from these first considerations, I started investigating who were the people behind the editorial process, in order to understand the real meaning of the translation to Italian and its implications. First of all, I contacted the translator, the Italian semiotician and professor at Tallinn University, Daniele Monticelli, in order to interview him about more specific aspects of the book and its translation to Italian. During the meeting, Monticelli showed enthusiasm in relation to the fact that my research intention behind this thesis is not strictly related to the content of the book - but to the place it occupies in relation to both Italian and Estonian cultures. I was also handed by him an article he wrote for an Estonian translation study journal (Monticelli 2018) where he detailed the process of translation, both literal and editorial, and sketched three possible lines of interpretation of the role of the translation both from the point of view of the Italian audience and the Estonian one.

According to his feedback, I decided not to stress the content of the book in the thesis, and focus on the two following points: (i) the cultural translational aspects in relation to Italian and Estonian readers (with focus on the material aspects of the book, such as its cover), (ii) the place of the *Hõbevalge* between the two cultures (Italian and Estonian), and (iii) the concept of “antilibRARY”. The antilibRARY, a term coined by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2008), represents all those books that have not been read or are yet-to-read but which nevertheless possess a certain value in a library for the same reason of merely existing – of being physically present. I argue that this concept fits well the Italian *Hõbevalge* - the aim of which didn't seem to be a commercial success nor to rewrite cultural dynamics between Italy and Estonia. In order establish a relation between the *Hõbevalge* and Taleb's concept of “antilibRARY”, the importance of the book as an artifact is stressed here, departing from Gérard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997) as a methodological guide to the various parts that books are made of: cover, paper, dust jackets, chapters, among others. In comparison to these elements, Genette dedicates a good portion of his work to book covers. This focus on book covers applies well to the concept of antilibRARY: if a book has value even when it isn't read, where does this value come from? Here I argue that it comes from the cover of the books.

In the first place, agents manipulating the book enter in contact with the title and the author of it. By simply reading the name of the author and the title of a book, a potential reader can infer the content of the book or, at least, extract some information and create some expectations: such as the genre, the content, the style, the historical and social collocation of the book, and more. In a second moment, the cover design also allows the agent to extract important information about the book, being as much telling as the title of the book itself. Given that, I made the choice of focusing the whole first chapter on book covers – defining them as intersemiotic translations. Despite being the first point of contact with the reader, book covers have been seldom conceptualized as intersemiotic translations. The main work I used in this investigation is *Re-Covered Rose: A Case Study in Book Cover Design as Intersemiotic Translation* (2011) by Marco Sonzogni where he brings together covers and intersemiotic processes. This work by Sonzogni seems to be one of the most complete attempts to lay the foundations for a semiotic approach of book covers - which is one of the reasons I used his study as a main source of reference and starting point. Of course, many other writings on book covers contributed to the writing of this thesis and many others have been read in the process, despite not being particularly conspicuous, relevant literature on the topic is present (Baule 2009; D'Astous, Colbert, Mbarek 2006; Dixon, Bortolussi 2015; Gudinaičius, Šuminas 2018; Matthews, Moody 2007; Mossop 2017; Baines 2005;

Hoertz, Badaracco 2001). After arguing that book covers can be approached as intersemiotic translations, I proceeded further by conceptualizing how the process of intersemiotic translation works in book covers. In order to do so, I started by focusing, in subchapter 1.2.2, on some terminological issues. Although the terms “source text” and “target text” as introduced by John Catford (1965) are still widely employed, I will propose to follow, in the course of the thesis, the terminology proposed by Anton Popovič of “prototext” and “metatext” (Popovič 1976). This will be helpful when analyzing a translational process which isn’t absolutely linear and therefore, works pretty well with intersemiotic translations. The later subchapters in the second chapter will focus on the loss that occurs in intersemiotic translation, mainly due to its change in nature, and on the details pertaining the problem of how to deal with this loss. I will mainly refer to the work of Dirk Delabastita (1993), Peeter Torop (1995), Bruno Osimo (2011), and Juri Lotman (1990). This last part of chapter 2 will provide a clear understanding of the steps involved in the intersemiotic translation of book covers. After the part which focus on the theoretical aspects, I will apply the framework to the cover of both the Italian and the Estonian book, with a particular focus on the role the brooch on the cover plays as it offers interesting cues to follow (subchapter 1.3 onwards).

Once made the statement that book covers are intersemiotic translations - already having a link between the text – the content proper – and the artifact, namely the physical book -, the next step would be to investigate how the reader is able to interpret and create expectations regarding the content of the book, namely, to create his own horizon of expectations (2.3.3). Asserting that interpretation ends with a look at the cover isn’t, however, enough: if we have the object and the interpreter, we are still missing the context of interpretation. If covers and readers were the only two actors involved in the process of interpretation, then we would not be able to explain why different readers understand the same book differently. This is the reason why, focusing on the Italian reader, I dedicated the second part of the present thesis to the relations of dominance between Italian and Estonian culture, considering translation as an act of mediation, and investigating the roles of the different actors involved in this mediation – the translator, the editors, the readers, and more. The chapter starts by defining translation as an act of mediation and thus the translator as a mediator. The concept isn’t totally new to translation studies theory as it has been proved by many authors and their works (Kade 1968; Katan 2004, 2016; Hatim, Mason 1990; Clouet 2008; Pym 1992, 2004; Snell-Hornby, Jettmarovà, & Kaindl 1997). Once having defined the translator as the mediator, an analysis on the translation strategies that can be employed is taken with a focus on Gideon Toury (1980) and Anton Popovič’s (1976) works on acceptability and adequacy. In order to address the context of the translation, I used the polysystem theory by Itamar Even-Zohar (1990),

followed by a brief comparison between the polysystem and the semiosphere (Lotman 2005). The polysystem theory allows the translated literature to be properly positioned in relation to cultural dominance while the semiosphere provides a theoretical background to address the role of the translator as position on the bilingual filter of culture (subchapter 2.2.2). After having located the translator and its position, the translator is introduced as one of the actors in the process of (intercultural) translation, followed by the reader, and the editor. For the analysis of the role of the reader, I rely on the works by Umberto Eco (1962, 1979, 1984, 1992, 2001, 2003) – also used as the theoretical background to approach the role of the editor. Although the editor is not a *de facto* actor in the translation, he takes part in the editorial process and in what is defined in chapter one as the paratextual apparatus. Further, I analyze who are the actors in the specific case of the *Hõbevalge* and what were their influences in the process of translation. I will then move to the reception of the book, developed on three possible lines of interpretation as proposed by Monticelli himself (2018): the intention of the translator, the idea of the editors, and the “counter-reception” by the Estonian audience.

Finally, I will introduce, for the first time in relation to a semiotic theoretical framework, the concept of antilibrary (Taleb 2008). This concept will bring together the relevance of the book as an artifact and its role in transmitting cultures across borders, which have been the central arguments on the first chapters. For a book of the antilibrary to be effective, it must exist as a physical object in the first place. E-books and virtual files do not count: the tangible object is what makes a book part of an antilibrary. The second core concept of the antilibrary is that a book, in itself, does not necessarily need to be a book that has been read by the owner. The artifact can serve its role in the process of transmission of knowledge or culture merely by means of its presence: by reading the title, the name of the author, and, finally, by looking at its cover. A conceptualization of the antilibrary in relation to the case study of the *Hõbevalge* couldn't have been possible without analyzing both aspects of the book: its physical qualities and its role in the cultural context. It can be said that the two chapters are then brought together by this last remark which, while answering many issues, leaves some questions open for further development.

When I decided to write the present thesis on the *Hõbevalge*, I knew that I was going to enter an uncharted territory given the author's position from the point of view of the Italian reader. Without properly introducing the figure of Lennart Meri, it would be hard to understand the importance the *Hõbevalge* in the Estonian cultural sphere and, consequently, the relevance of the book's translation into Italian. Lennart Meri, and his central position as a historical figure in Estonia, was so far only known to

me as one of the presidents of Estonia, having the country's main airport – in Tallinn, the capital – named after him. Moreover, he was also a prominent scholar, writer and documentarist. The various nature of his interests and activities cannot be easily summarized in few sentences as he took an interest in a variety of disciplines and subjects which go from history and literature to geography and linguistics. Meri was born in Tallinn in 1929 and left his motherland at an early age to study abroad. He was fluent in five different languages (Finnish, French, German, English, and Russian) and spent most of his early years moving across Europe with his family. In 1940, when the Soviet Union officially annexed Estonia and army forces occupied the territory, he happened to be in Tallinn with his family and was deported to Siberia at the age of 12 where he had to work in close contact with other exiles from different parts of the Baltics and Soviet lands. After the Second World War, the Meri family was finally able to go back to Estonia, where Lennart Meri studied and graduated at the University of Tartu, in 1953, in the Faculty of History and Languages. The Soviet regime did not allow him to work as an historian, thus he found a work as a dramatist at the Vanamuine Theater in Tartu, the first ever theatre to stage plays in Estonian language. From this period on, Meri proved himself a talented writer and published a total of five books: *Tulemägede maale* (To the land of fiery mountains) (1964), *Virmaliste väraval* (At the Gate of the Northern Light) (1974), *Hõbevalge* (Silverwhite) (1976), *Lähenevad rannad* (Nearing Shores) (1977), and *Hõbevalgem* (Silverier White) (1984). As it can be deduced from the translation of the titles, *Hõbevalge* aside, all of his works have, as a dominant element, the topic of journeys. Meri genuinely enjoyed traveling and he often described the places he visited, as he did in *Tulemägede maale* for his journey to Kamchatka. As a matter of fact, the thematic of travel, which encompasses his artistic production, is also present in his major work, the *Hõbevalge* (1976) - the object of the present thesis. In this book, Meri tries to reconstruct the history of the Baltics and the Baltic people following the journey of Pytheas of Massalia, a Greek geographer and explorer of the III century BC, across the European continent as a thread to discover the place of the Baltic region occupies in the general framework of European history. Meri combines history and ancient topographic sources with scientific methodology, literature, poetry - as well as his own imagination - to unveil, step by step, the mystery of the Island of Thule: the legendary most northerly land which Meri seems to recognize in the Estonian island of Saaremaa. According to Meri, Saaremaa as the ancient Thule is just a possibility, one of the many History allows us to consider. “*Hõbevalge*” in Estonian means “silver-white” and it refers to the ancient river route which connected the Baltic and the Caspian Sea through the Volga river, and the Don river with the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean. The first traces of written history of the ancient inhabitants of the Baltic Region date back to the XII century, when Christian crusaders conquered the

land. The aim of Meri's work is thus to find mentions of these populations dating before the Christian accounts. In doing so, he examined several historical sources, from Latin and Ancient Greek literature to the study of maps and chronicles written in Arabic. The journey of Pytheas occupies a central role in the development of the investigation; Meri supposes that the crash of the Kaali meteor in the island of Saaremaa might be the reason that convinced Pytheas to explore those Northern lands. The final findings in the book cannot be considered as scientific proof and neither as historical evidence: rather, they represent one of the possible explanations to a question that still puzzles historians nowadays. As a matter of fact, Meri's approach to history was intriguing and somehow poetic, and his large use of mythological and poetic material as primary sources in the process of writing the *Hõbevalge* does not have to be considered a lack of discipline or scientific methodology. The author himself, in the final pages of the *Hõbevalge*, writes that the depiction of the past that history supports can be found in the pronouncement "It might have happened so, and probably so it happened." (Meri 2016: 252). Thus, it is not surprising that the *Hõbevalge* contains elements and passages that are born out of Meri's own intuition or imagination. In the last pages, Meri defines his book as a "book of poetry" (*Ibid*, 252) and concludes it with the poem *Questions from a Worker Who Reads* by Bertold Brecht, a composition which highlights the side of history made not of generals, kings, commanders, and politicians, but rather by all those common people who took part in the epic events of the past without ever being mentioned. According to Meri, history and poetry are deeply connected, and one begins where the other ends – and sometimes the two are even intertwined. Finally, it is important to remind the historical context of the *Hõbevalge* in relation to the Soviet occupation in Estonia. The book was published in 1976, the same year when the tenth *Pjatiletka* (the five-year plans for the development of the national economy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), imposed by Brežnev, was about to show its catastrophic effects on the Soviet economy (Riasanovsky 2004: 623-630). Meri's book thus represented a breath of fresh air highlighting the connections between Estonia and the European cultural tradition, therefore situating the country in the European cultural context, and giving it a strong identity as opposed to the cultural barrier the Soviet Union were trying to build around the occupied states. By linking the origins of the Baltic people to the classical myth of Thule, Meri argued for the legitimacy of Estonia in having a place in European history and cultural sphere. The book was a great success and gave the Estonian population hope in a difficult period of their history (see Kaljundi 2018) After Estonia declared the restoration of its independence¹ in

¹ The independence was approved by a national referendum where 77.7% of the voters supported independence (Gill 2003: 41).

1991, Meri served as second president of Estonia for two terms: from 1992 to 2001. In 2009, Tallinn Airport was renamed Lennart Meri Tallinn International Airport in his honor.

1. The book as an artifact

In this chapter the book will be addressed as an artifact given its material qualities, from the cover to the text layout, that deal exclusively with how the book presents itself and how it is materially perceived by the readers. This is relevant not only because of the role of the cover as first and foremost point of contact with the readers or potential buyers: in the case of a translated book, the cover itself can reveal aspects of the translation strategy of the editor. In the case of the *Hõbevalge*, a title not immediately recognizable by the audience, the front cover can play a pivotal role in reaching out to potential readers. I will start from a conceptualization of the cover in general terms in order to then proceed to the case study: the cover of the Italian translation of the *Hõbevalge*. The aim of the chapter is therefore, to show that book covers can be conceptualized as intersemiotic translations: namely from a translation of textual elements to visual/pictorial ones. In order to do so, it is necessary to ask how the intersemiotic translation from text to cover works. This theoretical which will be addressed in the second part of the chapter (from 1.2 to 1.2.7). In order to avoid unnecessary paraphrases and circumlocutions, I will from now on refer to the Italian translation of the *Hõbevalge* as HVIT (*Hõbevalge Italian*) and to the original Estonian as HVEE (*Hõbevalge Eesti*).

1.1. The place of the cover

When consulting and considering relevant literature on book covers, it is not rare to encounter academic jokes built on the well-known saying “don’t judge a book by its cover”. This proverb is often reversed into “do judge a book by its cover” by those of us who realize that the cover does indeed play a pivotal role in how the book is perceived by the audience. In 2018, two Lithuanian scholars, Arūnas Gudiniavičius and Andrius Šuminas, carried out an experiment in a library where several potential buyers were asked to pick a book among 18 different possible titles. The test, which involved a mobile eye-tracking laboratory, proved that the color of the cover does affect the buyer’s choice more than the title or any other extra-textual element (Gudiniavičius, Šuminas: 2018). Other studies went as far as comparing the cover to the packaging of products, both in terms of artwork and of functional marketing device (D’Astous, Colbert, Mbarek: 2006). Having asserted the central role of the cover, where do we place it in relation to the text? Is the cover part of the text or should it be considered as a separate element? In order to answer these questions, I should refer to Gérard Genette’s *Paratextuality* (1997) as it provides a well-written and clear schematic view of the book as an artifact. According to Genette, the cover can be

considered part of the paratext², which in turn is divided into epitext and peritext. The peritext is that part of the paratext situated spatially close to the text (preface, book cover, chapter titles, etc.); the epitext, on the other hand, is situated externally (interviews with the author, reviews, advertisement, etc.) (Genette 1997: 5). Genette wrote in 1997 and of course couldn't have considered the current phenomena of Intermediality³, which brings to discussion problematics such as the fact that a book can be found in paper as well as online in pdf or e-book format – which can change the general perception of it both as a material artifact, as well as the text itself. This technicality could have potentially represented an obstacle in the application of Genette's paratextuality to the case of the Italian *Höbevalge*, given the fact that in the curator's preface we read that three chapters of the translation are not present in the book but will eventually be made available online. Fortunately, for the sake of the method, the website was never created⁴, thus there is no space for a discourse on Intermediality as such. Paratextuality, as conceptualized by Genette, can then be sufficient for the case study without implementing more contemporary sources. A significant condition that Genette puts upon the concept of paratext consists in the presence of responsibility from the author or one of his associates: something cannot be considered a paratext unless the author or someone connected to him takes the creative responsibility for the content (Genette 1997: 9). The HVIT was published already ten years after Lennart Meri's death. The project was nevertheless supervised by the Lennart Meri Euroopa Sihtasutus⁵, and the general coordination for the project was taken up by Lennart Meri's son, Mart Meri. By taking these factors into consideration, I can be sure that both the translation and its paratext can be analyzed in the light of paratextuality: the cover is, thus, a peritext.

1.2. The cover as an intersemiotic translation

It is expected that the cover is the first element which the potential reader come into contact with when encountering a book for the first time. But what exactly is a cover in respect to the content of the book?

² The paratext, for Genette, represents all those elements that accompany the primary text. In our case, the text would be the content of the *Höbevalge* while the paratextual apparatus consists of the cover, the footnotes of the translator and the editor, the events dedicated to the book such as conferences or meeting with the translator, and so on.

³ For further information about the "Intermedial Turn" in the Humanities, see Littau 2011.

⁴ In the first pages of the HVIT is indicated the domain www.hobevalge.it as existing and operative. The website was created but never became fully operational, the hyperlinks were not working and the missing chapters of the translation, supposedly to be found online, were never uploaded. To this date (27th January 2020), the domain results not being connected to any website and it is not possible to reach.

⁵ The Lennart Meri Euroopa Sihtasutus (Lennart Meri Europe Foundation) is an Estonian foundation founded in 2002 with the aim of introducing Estonian culture, people, and economy into the European framework using Lennart Meri's ideas.

First of all, we should make it clear what is meant here by “text” and “cover” in semiotic terms and, in order to do so, it is necessary to clarify what is the relation between the two – namely, their relation in intersemiotic translation and the role covers play in anticipating the content of the text. The main question here is: can we consider the cover under the context of partaking in a process of intersemiotic translation? With the term intersemiotic translation here I follow the classical definition provided by Roman Jakobson in his article *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (1966 [1959]: 233): “[...]an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems”. This question seems to have been avoided in the major academic works regarding the role of book covers. One of the major collections of essays written on the topic, *Judging a Book by its Cover* (Dixox, Bortolussi, Mullins: 2007), doesn’t mention. The link between book covers and intersemiotic translation has to be established starting from the very beginning. A work that tries to do that is Marco Sonzogni’s *Re-Covered Rose: A case study in book cover design as intersemiotic translation* (2011), reaching the conclusion that covers are indeed intersemiotic translations. Covers are mainly non-verbal texts which present themselves to the reader in the form of images. Shall we go backwards to what images are, we would probably not find a definite and exhaustive answer as well as losing the plot of the present thesis in the quest for it. For this reason, I will accept the genealogy of the imagery proposed by William Mitchell (1986: 10), in which images are seen as expressions of likeness, resemblance, and similitude. Departing from this conceptualization, covers can be defined as a representation of the verbal text in so far as they are *similar* to the content, their aim is to convey in few visual elements an immediate explanation of the text, or as Umberto Eco puts it: they take up the heavy burden of parasyonymy, which means to interpret a verbal expression by means of non-verbal elements (Eco 2001: 118). Peter Mendelsund a famous, cover illustrator and author of *Cover* (2014), advises to pick a detail from the content and make a cover around it. This detail can be also called dominant, or the “focusing component of a work of art” (Jakobson 1981[1935]: 751). Of course, the cover alone cannot summarize the whole content of a book – even filmic adaptations rarely succeed in doing so – but they do possess a certain degree of expression and play a strategic role besides the obvious one of being a marketing tool. The target text of intersemiotic translations have the artistic advantage of being somehow autonomous from the source text as they can stand independently from it. Let us think of filmic adaptations: in some cases, the audience is still surprised when, years after they watched a famous movie, they come to know that the plot was taken from a novel. The movie *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) is one example of intersemiotic translation that gained more popularity than the book it is based on, by Anthony Burgess (1962). An even more notable case is the one of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), based on the not as much successful science fiction novel by the British author Arthur Clarke. Nowadays,

many editions of both novels used by Stanley Kubrick feature on the cover the pictures from their cinematic translation. This is to say that target texts in intersemiotic translation can exist independently from the original text - although they do not possess a complete freedom from the source. Marco Sonzogni (2011) argues that the cover should reflect the genre, style, and content of the book; Peter Dixon, Marisa Bortolussi and Blaine Mullins (2015) conclude that there exists a silent and subtle conversation between the observer and the cover in which the latter suggests a certain genre or topic to the former who, in his turn, is able to extract and process this information, thus establishing a proper dialogue between text and reader: “[...] the cover and title provide incidental information that helps readers predict effective features of text” (Dixon, Bortolussi: 2005: 16). But this isn’t the case for everyone. Brian Mossop, for example, takes a very materialistic stance on the matter by considering covers primarily as marketing devices and then as freestanding works of art (Mossop 2017: 11). Mossop further supports his dislike for the idea of covers being a result of intersemiotic translations, thus dependent on a source text, by asserting that one of the criteria for identifying such process as a translation must involve back-translatability (Mossop 2017: 12). I partially agree on the first point, namely on covers being to some extent marketing devices, and although here I have no intention of going into details on the marketing aspect of this problematic, there is undeniably a connection between covers and sales. However, Mossop’s statements regard covers as freestanding works of art should be questioned and discussed (Mossop 2017: 2). I do not believe covers to be entirely independent from the text, as I do not believe that back-translatability should be considered an intrinsic characteristic of translation in general. As an example, let us now consider three book covers (Figure 01) all characterized by the same dominant, i.e. sexuality: *Sexual Personae* (1990) by Camille Paglia, *Porno* (2001) by Irvine Welsh, and of the Turkish edition of *Lolita* (1964[1955]) by Vladimir Nabokov.



Figure 01: book covers of *Sexual Personae* (Paglia 1990), *Porno* (Welsh 2002), and *Lolita* (Nabokov 1964[1955]).

By stating that the three covers all follow the dominant of the book, we are already implicitly asserting that they are not independent from the text; but we can go even further in demonstrating the connection between cover and text by arguing that not only the dominant is taken into consideration in the intersemiotic process, but some more specific characteristics of the content too. As a matter of facts, if the illustrations were independent from the text of the book and were to follow only the dominant and marketing strategies, we could argue that all three images satisfy the first condition by presenting elements of sexuality as the dominant. The second condition, making the cover marketable, was at least attempted by all three editors – taking for granted that publishing houses have an interested in their product being sold and thus take this into consideration when choosing a design for the cover. If this were the case, then we could argue that it would be possible to potentially switch the covers from title to title since, after all, the sex theme is present in all of them as well as the attempt to make a cover “marketable”. However, it doesn’t take more than a basic knowledge of the content of the books to understand that this cannot be the case: Paglia’s work is one of literary criticism from a feminist position; Irvine Welsh’ novel is a crude representation of Scottish youngsters trying to make money to buy drugs by shooting an adult movie; and *Lolita* follows two non-conventional lovers’ journey across the United States. So, are covers anchored to the content of the book? Yes, but partially. Let us observe carefully the cover of *Lolita*, if we are familiar with the plot, we should immediately notice that the girl in the picture cannot correspond to the 12-year old character in the novel. This is because although the book

itself narrates a conventionally unacceptable love between a grown-up and a barely teenager, putting on the cover the latter in a sexual posture would be considered deplorable and unacceptable. The cover has to stick to the content while still being able to be shown on a bookshop shelf – adhering to the marketing clause. In other words, following the three covers I've taken as an example: covers aren't intrinsically freestanding works of art, they are dependent on the book and its content. As such, they are intersemiotic translations.

1.2.1. Intersemiotic translation in book covers

Having defined that book covers are intersemiotic translations, it is now time to look into details of how this process works in the particular case of the covers. Before proceeding, it is necessary to introduce some terminology as well as some theoretical notions which will be later useful to understand the mechanism behind the creation of the cover. The first theoretical point regards the question of how to address the text and the book cover, concerning in what respect they stand to each other and how to define them in translation studies terms.

1.2.1.1. Book covers: Source text and target text or prototext and metatext?

John Catford's *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics* (1965) had been considered for many decades as one of the primary textbooks in the field of translation studies due to the fact that, for many years, it had been one of the few works available on the subject. One of the main concepts introduced in this work is the one of source language (SL) and target language (TL): "Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" (Catford 1965: 20). The metaphor underlying this terminology is a spatial one, where one term is led from one language to another almost as pursuing a fixed equivalence. Catford argues that, by merely substituting the grammatical and lexical structure of the TL to the SL, the translation could be carried out without incurring in any significant problem (Catford 1965: 22). Despite this terminology being positively intuitive, it presents a somehow insufficient theoretical framework to address the translation from text to cover. Catford's linguistic approach and Jakobson's (1959) are somehow poles apart as the former did not consider extraverbal textual elements as pertinent to the process of translation – and thus couldn't possibly deal with intersemiotic translation – and, therefore with book covers. Given that fact, the translation theory I intend to apply to the present case study has to be found elsewhere, specifically in the work of the Slovak translation scientist and text

theoretician Anton Popovič. According to his terminology, internal to a translational process there are two texts: prototext and metatext (Popovič 1975):

Prototext is a text which serves as an object of inter-textual continuity. Every text can potentially be an object of such continuity. The realization of this possibility is a matter of the dynamics of the literary process. *Metatext* is a model of the prototext; the way in which two texts are linked. The rules of this modelling are realized in the text-forming activity of the creator of the metatext. (Popovič 1976: 226)

The prototext is thus the “original” and the metatext corresponds to any text originated from the prototext. This terminology has the advantage to be suitable for any kind of translational process, be it interlingual, intralingual, or intersemiotic. Popovič’s terminology also allows to extend the possibility of translation beyond the literal “target text” and it represents a step forward compared to Catford’s intuition:

The earlier ontological description of translation process compares the beginning and end points of the process and analyzes concrete actualizations of the process, whereas the epistemological description presupposes an abstraction from concrete actualizations into the multiplicity of translation to the virtual multiplicity on the epistemological level. (Torop 2007: 354).

A second consequence of this formulation resides in the fact that, from the prototext, two different kinds of metatexts originate: (i) the translated text, and (ii) all those paratextual elements derived from the prototext (Osimo 2011: 55). This is easily explainable through the definition that Popovič provides of metatext, as any text which is actualized from a prototext. Considering paratextual elements as metatexts and therefore, translations, allows me to apply this terminology to book covers as they can be considered paratextual elements – more precisely, *peritexts* (Genette 1997: 23). To summarize, Catford’s terminology isn’t necessarily incorrect in the field of translation studies, but it is, to the least extent, insufficient to approach intersemiotic translations. For this reason, I choose to make use of Popovič’s terminology and consider the textual content of the book as prototext and the final cover as metatext⁶ for my analysis of intersemiotic translation in book covers.

1.2.2. The (unavoidable) loss from text to cover

Entering the realm of translation processes, a premise has to be made: every translation entails a loss (Osimo 2011: 152). Moreover, the fundamental problem is that *every communication process* presents a loss. This well-established concept in communication theory was formulated in the 1940s with the

⁶ Following Popovič’s use of terminology, metatext will be used as a synonym for “target text” throughout the present thesis.

introduction of the well-known Shannon and Weaver communication model (Shannon 1948: 2). Being translation a particular kind of communicative process, we have to deal with its losses in meaning from prototext to metatext. Intersemiotic translations seems to differ from interlingual translations for they change the morphological aspect of the code used. Peeter Torop individuates four possible kind of translations: *tekstovij perevod* (textual translation), *metatekstovij perevod* (metatextual translation), *In- i intertekstovij perevod* (In- and intertextual translation), and *ekstratekstovij perevod* (extratextual translation) (Torop 1995). It is the latter type of translation that stands in closer relation to more to intersemiotic translation: the characteristic of which Torop highlights being indeed the change of the same nature of the text (Torop 1995: 11). Due to this change of nature, the loss in intersemiotic translation will have to be considered with special attention and a precise approach.

Theoretical premises aside, I will now explain how the intersemiotic translation works in the specific case of book covers.

1.2.3. Intersemiotic translation and creative thinking

Intersemiotic translations, due to their nature, present conspicuous changes from proto- to metatext and entail important losses. A first observation that has to be made for book covers is that the translation happens between a discrete and a non-discrete (continuous) language system. With discrete we mean systems that express meaning through units (written language, Morse code, binary codes, etc.) and with non-discrete (or continuous) we indicate those systems in which meaning is expressed without units (pictorial codes, for example). According to Juri Lotman, translation between these two systems is “impossible” as they are not comparable, but it is exactly in these cases of non-translatability that new texts arise:

However, when we are dealing with discrete and non-discrete texts, translation is in principle impossible. The equivalent to the discrete and precisely demarcated semantic unit of one text is, in the other, a kind of semantic blur with indistinct boundaries and gradual shadings into other meanings. If in these other texts we do find segmentation of a sort, it is not comparable with the type of discrete boundaries of the first ones. Given these factors, we are faced with a situation where translation is impossible; yet it is precisely in these situations that efforts to translate are most determined and the results most valuable. For the results are not precise translations, but approximate equivalences determined by the cultural-psychological and semiotic context common to both systems. This kind of 'illegitimate', imprecise, but approximate translation is one of the most important features of any creative thinking. For these 'illegitimate' associations provoke new semantic connections and give rise to texts that are in principle new ones. (Lotman 1990: 37)

The translation from text to cover seems impracticable by equivalence, creative thinking is thus required by employing a metaphorical process in rendering the metatext.

1.2.4. Expressing meaning through metaphor and metonymy

Roman Jakobson found in the concepts of *metaphor* and *metonymy* the two fundamental rhetorical figures employed in language:

The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed expressions in metaphor and metonymy respectively. (Jakobson 1956: 254)

In metonymy, meaning is expressed through combination of units while, in metaphor, by selection and substitution (Osimo 2011: 51). Book covers are translated through metaphor as their visual – pictorial and chromatic – system is non-discrete and it goes to substitute the discrete text with a code of a different nature. Metaphoric processes lead to a higher degree of abstraction as they “jump” the logical connection between the proto- and the metatext, or at least, they make it invisible, hidden to the agent manipulating them. Another literary device at work in intersemiotic translations is that of *synecdoche*. This concept describes the cases in which the term for a part of something refers to the whole. Therefore, a first major loss in book covers happens on the metaphorical level. Nevertheless, a further detail has to be considered: the space of the book cover is limited. If a text can be developed in three, thirty, three hundred pages, the cover has just one. The translator, who in this case is the artist or the designer who makes the cover, has to choose what to delete and what to keep in order to select the elements which will feature in the front cover.

1.2.5. How to fit a book in a cover

We have seen how translations in general involve losses as any communication process do. In book covers, as I have already anticipated, the factual space of maneuver is limited to the surface of the cover and the format of the print. This requires that, besides the loss, the translation has to account for a selection of dominants to bring in translation while leaving out other elements. This process of removal has been named “deletion” by Dirk Delabastita, where a particular item in the prototext is not rendered in the metatext (Delabastita 1993: 35). Examples of translations via deletion are “reductive translation, abridged version, undertranslation, expressive reduction” (*Ibid*, 39). Delabastita introduced many

parametric models of method of translation (Table 01) which can be suitable for a study of intersemiotic translation in book covers.

<i>Code</i> → <i>Operation</i> ↓	Source language code → Target language code	Source cultural code → Target cultural code	Source textual code → Target textual code
Substitution	higher or lower degree of (approximate) linguistic equivalence	naturalization modernization topicalization nationalization	systemic, acceptable text (potentially conservative) adaptation
Repetition	<i>total</i> : non-translation, <i>copy partial</i> : calque, literal translation, word-for-word translation	exoticization historization (through the mere intervention of time-place distance)	non-systemic, non-acceptable text (potentially innovative)
Deletion	reductive translation abridged version undertranslation expressive reduction	universalization dehistorization (through the removal of foreign cultural signs)	T. T. is a less typical specimen of a (target) text-type neutralization of stylistic or generic peculiarities
Addition	paraphrastic translation more explicit text overtranslation expressive amplification	exoticization historization (through the positive addition of foreign cultural signs)	T. T. is a more typical specimen of a (target) text-type introduction of stylistic or generic markers
Permutation	(metatextual) compensation	(metatextual) compensation	(metatextual) compensation

Table 01: Parametric model of translation methods (Delabastita 1993: 39).

Peeter Torop individuates four relations between prototext and metatext, one of them being “reduction” indeed (Osimo 2011: 85). Torop will also further validate Delabastita’s scheme of mechanisms in translation by incorporating it in his work *Total Translation* (Torop 1995: 71). The scheme as we can see further involves other methods such as substitution, repetition, addition, and permutation. The covers necessarily present some elements of repetition from the text such as the author’s name, the title of the book, and the publishing house. These three I consider to be the essential and minimum elements that has to appear on a cover to be considered as such. Book covers can feature substitution (as we have seen for the *Lolita* cover in Figure 01) whereas one element is substituted with

another due to different cultures being involved. Nevertheless, the main expedient at work remains that of deletion, which brings forward a second order problem: what to delete? Or better, what to translate?

The choice of what to keep in the metatext according to Leonid Stepanovich Barkhudarov has to follow a hierarchy of dominants where the primary dominants – “the “focusing component of a work of art” (Jakobson 1981[1935]: 751) – have the priority over the secondary ones (Barkhudarov 1975: 233). Obviously, not all the dominants, not even all the *primary* ones, can find space on the cover. The selection process is heavily influenced by deletion. In book covers, there is the possibility of selecting a secondary dominant to be carried out in the metatext as, allegedly, the comprehension of the prototext will not depend on it – as it would be the case for an interlingual translation on which the foreign reader would rely on. A good advice, I argue, to solve the issue of selection comes from Zinaida Davidovna L’vovskaja. She highlights the difference between meaning and sense, the former being a linguistic category while the latter a communicative one (L’vovskaja 1985: 81-82). Hinting at the fact that translation should aim for the sense where the transposition of meaning is not possible, as it is the case for book covers, we can derive that a successful cover tries to select the dominants which better convey the sense of the text. This is, of course, subject to a certain degree of subjectivity, on the other hand, as we have seen previously in Lotman (1990: 37): intersemiotic translations are the product of creative thinking and in principles works of art, they depend on the artist’s sensibility and thus there are no strict guidelines to follow.

1.2.6. Final remarks: the three “losses” in book to cover intersemiotic translation

To summarize, the final cover will have undergone three steps of loss: the (unavoidable) loss in translation, deletion, and the selection of one or more dominants according to the sense of the prototext. Only a small part of the sense and meaning of the prototext will make it on the metatext. The proportion between the prototext and the metatext has been conceptualized by Anton Popovič as the *prototext:metatext ratio*:

The ratio prototext:metatext can be defined as the ratio of meaning invariants to variants. Translation serves as a key example of this relation. In translation, semantic shifts occur due to different contexts which the original text enters in each case. The discrepancy between the contexts of the original and of the translation brings about the loss of certain meaning components, but at the same time gives rise to new ones. The ratio of invariants to variant components is different in different metatexts, and defines the various relations between proto- and metatexts (similarity, equivalence, etc.) (Popovič 1976: 227)

In case of a relation of equivalence between prototext and metatext, say, in the case of plagiarism, the ratio will be the highest possible, namely 1:1. In book covers, this ratio, as it has been demonstrated so far, will necessarily be one of the type $x-y:x$ where x is the entirety of the prototext and y the elements removed in the three stages of loss as mentioned above: translational loss, deletion, and dominant selection.

1.3. Intersemiotic translation in the cover of the *Hõbevalge*

We have seen how covers are intersemiotic translations and how the mechanism behind it works – mainly through deletion and selection. If it is true that covers are the first point of contact between the reader and the text, they can also be interpreted after the text has been read. With this I mean that their nature of intersemiotic translations cannot be completely clear to the reader until he has approached the prototext, namely the content of the book. After having read the *Hõbevalge*, the reader can make an educated guess at what the elements on the cover represent and why they have been chosen in connection with the text. The covers of the HVEE and HVIT are similar between themselves. Chromatically, they both present the color blue and the only element which features on them is a silver brooch (Figure 02).



Figure 02: On the left the Estonian cover, on the right the Italian.

In the present analysis, I will consider the cover of the *Hõbevalge: sulla rotta del vento, del fuoco e dell'Ultima Thule* (2016) and the cover of the *Hõbevalge* (2008), the latter being the latest edition printed

in Estonia, and consists of the merging of the *Hõbevalge* (1976) and the *Hõbevalgem* (1984), and is the prototext for the HVIT. The intersemiotic analysis of the cover will be carried out on the HVIT as I will consider it as the prototext the Italian translation. The cover of the *Hõbevalge* (2008) will be considered later in the chapter when I compare it to the cover of the HVIT. In this examination, I will focus on the brooch as the only non-chromatic element present on it. As it will be shown, the brooch can carry different meanings for different readers and can acquire a new interpretation after the book has been read.

1.3.1. Language and defense: the brooch as a shield on the Italian *Hõbevalge*

Printed in order to appear lucid and bright on a matte background, the round metallic figure on the bottom right corner of the front cover of the HVIT seems carved on it. Its shape and its appearance – metallic, broad, thick – can easily trick the observer in claiming it to be a shield. This hypothesis isn't unfounded for the acute reader. From a visual point of view, the guess is effortlessly justifiable by the physical characteristics both the brooch and the shield share: they are round, large, flat and metallic; they often present some carvings; among other shared features. But there is a further layer, besides the visual one, which supports this theory. The careful and attentive reader might link the image to that of a shield, given some passages from the *Hõbevalge*. Shields are defensive pieces of personal armor and the “defensive theme” is indeed recurrent in many paragraphs of the book (see Meri 2016: 66). Firstly, Lennart Meri was definitely interested in the role the Fenno-Ugric language played in keeping the Baltic region a mystery until the XII century and thus *protected* from the outside world. As a matter of fact, he tries to highlight the importance that language had in the territorial and political sphere of the time from the very beginning of the *Hõbevalge*

Our stress lives on the first syllable of the words and our history in the phoneme *i*, here as beyond the snowy mountains. Our words can be dark or pale, short or long, but when they gather under the same roof, they all behave the same (Meri 2016: 16)⁷

Later, he refers to the language of the ancient populations of Estonia literally as a shield: “Language is our only shield and its strategy is based on the mechanism of taboo words” (Meri 2016: 66).

Another interesting hypothesis proposed by Lennart Meri connects the frequent defensive theme of the book with the effect the Kaali meteor had on the perception of the Estonian land from the point of

⁷ The English translation from the original in Italian was made by the author of this thesis.

view of other populations. After the crash, the neighboring peoples started to perceive at the Balto-Finnics as a mysterious, terrifying and untouchable population following reports that associated the meteor to a falling sun, a dragon, or some kind of mythological creature capable of swallowing the Sun:

If the catastrophe [the Kaali meteor] turned the Balto-Finnic peoples into mysterious, terrifying – even unmentionable and untouchable – individuals in the eye of their neighbors, we can also assume that a positive outcome came out of it for them, or at least for the inhabitants of Saaremaa. The neighbors' fear could protect them from their attacks more than their weapons could have done. Provided, of course, that they would be recognized as the inhabitants of the tomb of the Sun. For this purpose, the same relationship between the Balto-Finnic people and the Sun Swallower would have to become ambivalent or even contradictory, fear had to mingle with trust, awe with gratitude, dread with mercy and courage. (Meri 2016: 81)

Thus, the legends surrounding the fall of the meteor somehow discouraged invaders from adventuring in the Baltic region, fearing the inconceivable events that were taking place in that far away and inscrutable land. In this sense, we can argue that the crash of the Kaali meteor seemingly safeguarded the inhabitants and secured them from possible invasions. Therefore, it becomes plausible to associate the brooch on the cover with a shield, which not only protects but also hides that which lays behind it.

1.3.2. The silver of the brooch

The choice of making the front cover translucent gives the brooch a stronger metallic look. The reader familiar with Nordic folklore will connect the material of the brooch to silver. Silver has always been a valuable metal in popular belief and culture in Estonian culture: even nowadays some people will toss silver coins as an offering in forests, lakes, and watercourses. Silver can also be offered by scraping it from metal artifacts following a tradition that is still present in contemporary times (Jonuks, Äikäs 2019: 17). In Taevaskoja, southern Estonia, for example, visitors can read from an informational board with text and picture how to properly offer silver (*ibid*, 17). It is of particular interest to our case study that one of the main artifacts made of silver and used for silver offerings were brooches. Silver brooches have a long-lasting tradition in Estonian and Finnish folklore. In the *Kalevala*, a 19th-century work of epic poetry by Elias Lönnrot, considered one of the most significant texts in Finnish literature, we read of the tragic drowning of a beautiful girl while she was washing herself on a shore:

The beautiful girl has now been killed, she with a tin cross on her breast has pined away, she with a silver brooch has perished, she with a copper belt has suddenly drowned, departed into the surging sea, under the deep open sea to become a sister to the whitefish, a brother to the fish of the water” (Lönnrot 1963[1849]: 27)

As we read from this passage, the girl, wearing her finest dress, had a silver brooch on her. Coming back to silver brooches used for silver offerings, we can refer to the collection of brooches showcased in the Estonian National Museum in Tartu. The museum showcases dozens of silver brooches from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Eight of these brooches come with a description that says that they were used to scrape silver. Many other brooches present signs of scraping but no legend tells us if they were actually used for this offering purpose or not, although it is reasonable to assume it (Kuningas 2014).

1.3.3. Comparing the two covers: from intersemiotic to intercultural translation

The cover of the HVIT is almost a faithful translation from the HVEE. When it comes to the chromatic scheme, it is possible to notice that it hasn't been changed significantly: the HVIT presents a darker shade of blue as compared to the HVEE, but the main element - the brooch in the middle - remained central in the composition and requires a more detailed analysis as the only object present on the cover.

As argued before, the cover isn't independent from the text. The blue color of the HVIT already conveys to the Italian reader an idea of sea, cold weather, and Nordic climate.

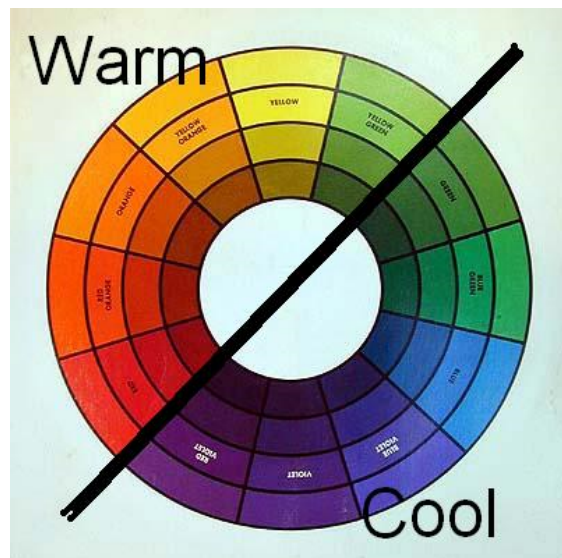


Figure 03: The color wheel divides the colors by “heat”, blue is definitely considered a “cold” color. Source: <https://drawpaintacademy.com/a-comprehensive-guide-to-color-theory-for-artists/>

The color, as shown by the previously mentioned paper (Gudinavičius, Šuminas: 2018), plays an important role in book covers. The publishing house Penguin was among the first one to use colors to differentiate their collections into genres (Sonzogni 2011: 17). In Italy, the color yellow is so strongly

connected to the detective story genre, thanks to the publishing house Mondadori, up to the point that the word *giallo* (yellow) assumed the meaning of “thriller”, “mystery”, “detective story” even in everyday language. In Italian covers, the color blue of the HVIT does not find an antecedent. The only strong connotational example we see are the titles published by Sellerio, an editor that prints only in blue⁸. The brooch reveals itself as an ancient artifact, and it presents no letters nor discernible characters. The Italian reader, allegedly familiar with Ancient Roman manufacture, is free to suppose the brooch to have its origin somewhere outside the Mediterranean area – otherwise there would have probably been carved with some Roman numbers or letters.

1.3.4. Re-translating the cover

The translation of a book from one language to another gives the possibility to also translate the cover. The (intersemiotic) translation from text to cover happens twice, once the book is published, and then once it is translated (Baule 2009). If the choice of the editor had been to keep almost the same cover, it must have been because the visual elements of the HVEE mattered. From one side, the choice can be explained by the will to make the HVIT the more similar as possible to the Estonian version, thus highlighting its origin, stressing the importance of the source text, and focusing the attention on the HVEE. Another explanation can be found in the meaning of the brooch represented on the cover. This brooch represents an artifact deeply culture-specific for Estonia. It is no coincidence that the translator to the Italian version, Daniele Monticelli, found in the translation of the term *sõlg* (brooch in Estonian) a major obstacle to overcome. Monticelli writes that he had to deploy different translation strategies and sometimes different Italian words for the term as in Italian culture *spilla* (the literal translation of *sõlg*) does not have the same semantic spectrum than in Estonian (Monticelli 2018: 99). By “semantic spectrum” I mean the whole set of meanings that a signifier can evoke to the reader (Osimo 2011: 316). While the brooch was a very common object in the Estonian tradition, mainly employed to fasten clothes, we can’t say the same in respect to Italian culture, where *spilla* holds a different meaning. Starting from an etymological analysis, the word *spilla* comes from the Latin *spinula*, the diminutive form of *spina* (thorn). This already designates the signified as a small object. In a more general approach, brooches in Italian culture indicate something that is used mainly to lace together clothes and that can also have an

⁸ Peculiarly enough, Sellerio is famous for publishing the most popular detective stories in Italy, those of the detective Montalbano. A *giallo* printed in blue.

ornamental function. The main difference with the Estonian word has to be found in terms of dimensions (the Italian *spilla* being smaller) and value (a *spilla* is usually something precious when having ornamental value, otherwise it would not be worn). Monticelli shows the two different cultural meanings the word acquires by searching on Google images the word *sõlg* and the word *spilla*, then comparing the results (Figure 04).



Figure 04: Comparison of the Google search for “spilla” and “sõlg” (Monticelli 2018: 99)

A comparison between the two different brooches used on the two covers also reveals another layer of intercultural change. If we observe the patterns of the brooches, they obviously differ from each other. The pattern of the brooch on the HVEE could be more telling than the brooch itself as it represents the “triskelion” – or triskeles, a motif consisting of triple spirals or three concentric bent human legs interlocked. The choice of the triskelion on the Estonian cover cannot be causal as it has a strong link with Saaremaa, more precisely with the Karja church situated on the island (Kersti and Bome 2005). The murals of the church frequently report the triskelion, a symbol used thorough antiquity from the northern lands of Europe⁹ to Ancient Greece and the Mediterranean area. The pattern isn’t conveyed on the Italian cover, arguably because for the Italian reader the motif wouldn’t be of much interest neither he would be able to connect it to Saaremaa. We can also observe, that the symbol is very present in Italian tradition, especially in Sicily, where the triskelion is a cultural reminisce of the Greek influence on the island

⁹ For the use of the symbol in Britain, see Fox 1953.

(Wilson 2000). As a matter of facts, the flag of Sicily shows three interlocked legs in a triskeles pattern (Figure 05), the same symbol that can be found on one of the walls of the Karja church.



Figure 05: The flag of Sicily (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Sicily#/media/File:Sicilian_Flag.svg)

The connection might be too subtle for the average Italian reader to get, but it didn't go unnoticed for the editor of the book, Gianni Glinni, who, in the process of adding images in the beginning of each chapter in the HVIT, chose the triskeles of Karja to be featured at the beginning of chapter 5 (Meri 2016: 153) (Figure 06).



Figure 06: triskelion on the wall of Karja church (Meri 2016: 153)

A discussion of the cultural, folkloristic, and magical meaning of the symbol does not pertain to this thesis, but it is incredibly interesting and valuable to notice in the light of the two covers. In translation studies terminology, referring once again to Delabastita (1993), a substitution has been performed whereas the presence of the triskelion on the Italian cover would have lost its original meaning for the average reader, although we can argue that its presence could have been of great relevance for the model reader¹⁰ of the *Höbevalge*.

1.3.5. Seven categories of book covers

Besides these two elements (the color blue and the ancient brooch) the cover does not present any further key of interpretation. George Salter individuates seven categories of book cover design based on the respective degree of imagery and the interpretation of the text (Hansen 2015: 11-12; Sonzogni 2011: 23). These seven categories of book cover can be summarized in:

- 1- Formal typographical cover with no images, only letters.
- 2- Typographical cover with few elements of visual design, no images.
- 3- Typographical cover that can convey the general mood of the book, pictorial lettering.
- 4- A variation of type 3 plus ornamental and pictorials details.
- 5- Cover with pictorial design that suggests the atmosphere of the book.
- 6- Cover with pictorial design that elicits the atmosphere of the book: scenes are depicted, often with symbolical or psychological imagery.
- 7- A poster style cover, with direct concrete imagery, this category relates closer to commercial advertisement.

As we can see, the categories are ordered from less explicit to more explicit. As in the case of the HVIT, I argue that its cover maps onto the category number 4, where the typographical element is central

¹⁰ A discussion on model and empirical reader will be present later in this thesis in the subchapter 3.3.2.

– the name of the author and the title of the book – and few ornamental (the brooch) and chromatic (the color blue) elements are added to it.

1.3.6. The Back Cover

The back cover should also be approached here, since it can more telling than the front in regard to content and context. Traditionally, it features a synopsis of the plot – or of the content in the case of technical volumes – and usually a brief biography of the author. In the case of the HVIT, the back cover is entirely dedicated to the author, Lennart Meri (Figure 07).



Figure 07: The back cover of the HVIT on the left, on the right the Estonian back cover

On the top part, we find an extract of the preface Meri wrote to the first edition of the HVEE and, next to it, a picture of Meri writing at his desk which can be supposed to be his personal office. On the bottom part, there is a short biography of Meri. It appears clear, judging by the fact that the entirety of the back cover is dedicated to the author, that the figure of Meri is central in this work. To conclude our investigation of the back cover, on the very bottom of it we find the barcode, the price, and the editor's website. What is interesting to note here is that the price is printed both in euros and in dollars, the sum amounting to 25€ and 28\$ respectively, as if the editors or the publishing house had in mind to sell this overseas. Right under the price, it's typed "worldwide distribution" in capital letters.

The back cover the of Estonian does not present anything: no summary of the content, as well as no biographical information on Lennart Meri. This, if anything, supports the central role of Lennart Meri in the cultural environment surrounding the book. For the Estonian reader, the absence of information about the content of the book and about the author is as telling as the ubiquitous presence of it on the Italian back cover: there is absolutely no need to introduce the *Hõbevalge* or Lennart Meri, they are so well-known to the vast majority of the readers that it would be superfluous. Not printing anything on the back cover communicates that the book is extremely cemented in the national culture. The same message is conveyed by the Italian back cover: the focus on the author tells the Italian reader that this book is a pillar of Estonian literature.

As a last remark, in recent times, dust jackets and bands started to appear in order to extend the available surface on the book to include more paratextual elements. The *Hõbevalge* doesn't present a jacket, flaps, nor bands.

2. The *Hõbevalge*: a case of intercultural translation

Translation as an act of mediation necessarily brings forward some interrogatives that have to be addressed. First, what we hereby mean by mediation and why does it make sense to acknowledge translation, even interlingual translation, as an act of mediation. A mediation unavoidably requires the presence of a mediator, in this case the translator: what is his role? How does he mediate? The case study of the present thesis, the *Hõbevalge*, presents us with a particular case in the realm of literal translation, namely the publication of a text considered fundamental in a peripheral culture being introduced into a more dominant and stable system, the Italian literary culture or, as Itamar Even-Zohar would call it, the Italian polysystem. After having established what is the role of cultural mediation, the role of the translator, and the cultural dynamics between the two cultures – addressing the issue with help from the polysystem theory by Even-Zohar –, I will describe the different level of reception that the book had in the two cultures in question; this will shed light on and clarify the position of the book in the Italian polysystem as well as in the Estonian. At the end of the chapter, I will introduce the concept of AntilibRARY as explained by the scholar Nassim Nicholas Taleb and present the *Hõbevalge* as an instance of it.

2.1. The role of the translator in intercultural mediation

In order to better understand the process of translation in intercultural terms, we need to reconsider the role of the translator. Although still nowadays translating is somehow considered by some as a technical task, it is fundamental to regard the translator here as a mediator between two cultures - especially when the prototext-to-metatext translational process involves culturally rich texts as novels, essays, poetry, and books such as the *Hõbevalge*, which present a high degree of genre, cultural, and meaning complexity and interpretation. Translating can be an effortless process for the translator who proceeds quite fluently following a constant flow of reading, translating, reformulating, and writing; however it can also be the case that, a single word or a certain passage – as the “*sõlg dilemma*” we have encountered in the previous chapter – can halt this flow and force the translator to become a mediator. Writing to a Japanese colleague, Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1985) comments that translating implies more than the mechanic action of finding an equivalent to a given word in another language; translating means taking into consideration the metatext in its entirety. If we would like to support this view of the translator as a mediator, we then should start by defining translation as an act of mediation.

2.1.1. Translation as mediation

The translator's task cannot be simply confined to transport meaning codified in one particular language to another language. Certainly, what we can find on the semantic level can be the most prominent part of the work, especially if we are to translate, for example, technical manuals which do not require any sort of cultural alteration in their interlingual transpositions. Aside from these kinds of texts, which are not the object we take into consideration here, translation requires an act of mediation between two cultures whereas the two audiences of a given text – the members of the source and the target culture – might not share the same cultural understanding of the text itself. In this case, the translator has to transfer the meaning of the prototext to a new audience, hence he is a mediator (Kade 1968; Katan 2004, 2013).

Translators mediate between cultures (including ideologies, moral systems and socio-political structures), seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning'. (Hatim, Mason 1990: 223)

From this last quote, it is important to stress that the incompatibilities in translation do exist, but they can be overcome and they have to be. This is the role of the translator as mediator: to seek for a way “around” those obstacles. If these obstacles sometime appear as insurmountable, we need to remember that in interlingual translation, at least, a translation is always possible (Jakobson 1966[1959]: 235).

[I]t is the translator and interpreter's role to reformulate a message, to communicate ideas and information from one cultural context to another without altering what is expressed in the original text or speech through the language of the writer or speaker. This is the main reason why translators and interpreters actually mediate rather than merely translate, as their task is to facilitate the process of intercultural communication. (Clouet 2008: 148)

So, the translator mediates between two cultures, thus dealing with a particular kind of mediation, i.e. intercultural. Intercultural mediators have to consider the impact of cultural distance between two cultures and make sure that this distance will not represent an obstacle to the extent they can manage it not to be. Translation as intercultural communication has been studied extensively by many translation scholars (see Katan 2009, 2013; Pym 1992, 2004; Snell-Hornby, Jettmarovà, & Kaindl 1997). The distance between the Estonian and Italian culture, besides being geographically and historically self-evident, had to be addressed by a translator-mediator who knew both sides very well. The choice to entrust the translation of the *Hõbevalge* to an Italian semiotician with a great understanding of Estonian language and culture, Daniele Monticelli, seems justified. It is worthy to stress out here that there exists a small technical issue in stating that the choice of Monticelli had been exclusively justified by him being the best possible translator available, namely that there aren't that many translators from Estonian to

Italian. Although acknowledging this point, which might lead to think that the choice was made on the basis of availability solely, I'd like to point out that the "best translator" for a text, whom we might define as the "model translator", isn't necessarily a well-defined person among others. As we will see later in the section dedicated to the model reader, with the epithet "model" we do not designate a person, rather a set of felicity conditions that makes that person, be it real or ideal, the model we have in mind in a certain framework.

2.1.2. The translator as mediator

Translation is a personal interpretative and cognitive process (Pöchhacker 2008), therefore, the position of prominence of the translator cannot be overlooked. We read in the very first pages of the HVIT that the choice of Daniele Monticelli as the translator, according to the editor and president of Associazione Italia Estonia, Gianni Glinni, took into consideration the need for a specialized and all-encompassing approach which could account for the cultural differences between the two cultures and thus, transmitting not only meaning on the semantical level but on the cultural, historical, and social as well (Meri 2016: 7). It is important to make clear that when dealing with any translation that is not technical, there is no perfect translation, no translation is inherently better than another. From a single original text, many translations can be carried out, all of them being different but potentially possessing the same value (see Torop 1995). Monticelli's translation can be accredited as one of the best results possible on the premise that the Italian semiotician and professor at Tallinn University possesses the necessary level of understanding of both cultures and is thus able to mediate between them. It is fundamental that the translator has to know that there exists a difference between the two cultures he's working on and therefore, he had to choose, or mediate a balanced application, between two different translation strategies - which Gideon Toury identifies as acceptability and adequacy (Toury 1980).

2.1.3. Strategies in translation: Toury and Popovič

Maintaining that the final aim of translation should be to make it accessible to the target audience, the translator is faced first with a dilemma in the translational strategy concerning this same accessibility: to keep the culture-specific elements of the prototext – be them semantic, syntactic, phonetic, and so on – or to opt for a metatext which will hold a result more similar to the cultural and linguistic universe of the target reader. In the first case, where the text appears as presenting many foreign elements, the reader will be able to tell that she is dealing with a translation from another language. Anton Popovič coined the term *prevodnost* – translatable more or less as "translatability" – to identify the features of a text from

which it transpires the fact that it is a translation (Popovič 1975). *Prevodnost* also indicates the level of creolization of the two cultures in the metatext. A reader will understand that the text he is reading is a translation if he keeps incurring in exotic elements or syntactical constructs that are too dissimilar from those of the language he is reading in. This last case happens when the translator applies creolization, thus mixing elements from the two cultures (Popovič 2006: 49). The theoretical conceptualization offered by Popovič is sound and can be compared with the results of the studies made by Gideon Toury. According to the latter, an analogue to *prevodnost* can be identified in the contraposition between adequacy and acceptability. Toury takes the concept of creolization out of the equation. As it appears from his texts, he believes that the dominant culture will always prevail and impose its dominance – in this formulation we can already see some affinities with another Israeli scholar, Itamar Even-Zohar and his theory of polysystems (Even-Zohar 1990). Acceptability is enacted whereas the translator chooses as dominant and prevalent aim of the metatext an easy fruition in reading for the target reader. Here, the metatext has to be accessible, so that the resulting translation maintains a high level of fluency and little or none exotic elements which would undermine an easy understanding or halt the flow of reading. Adequacy, on the opposite end, favors the presence of the source culture in the metatext. In an adequate translation many foreign elements will be left untouched and/or culturally untranslated – a typical result of an adequate translation will be the presence of *realia* on which I will elaborate later in the chapter. Adequacy, by maintaining the foreign elements of the prototext, promotes and highlights the cultural characteristics of the source culture. Both strategies are not mutually exclusive and a translator can balance between the two, sometimes pursuing the former, sometimes the latter even inside the same text (Van Leuven-Zwart 1990: 93). While choosing between acceptability and adequacy, we shouldn't think that one is inherently better than the other as both strategies present advantages and disadvantages (Osimo 2011: 20), the choice isn't qualitative. In the case of adequacy, the upside is the promotion of diversity and emphasis on cultural differences. Adequate translations introduce the reader to a new cultural universe which can be studied, understood, and recognized in its almost entirety – this strategy tries to provide the reader with an understanding closer to the one the reader of the prototext has. The downside of adequacy, a sort of second order effect of keeping a high level of foreignization, might lie in the fact that by presenting a highly foreignized text some readers might be discouraged by its complexity and difficulty thus abandoning it and being precluded the possibility of knowing a certain author, novel, play, poem, and so on. Acceptability has its own downsides as well, if from one side it can make the metatext easier to read, it could prompt into the naïve reader the impression that the source culture of the prototext

is similar to his own, this misconception can happen easily in inattentive readers situated particularly in a dominant system.

Confronting the two theoretical concepts together, the notion of *prevodnost* of Anton Popovič and the theory of acceptability and adequacy of Gideon Toury, we can come up with the conclusion that a high *prevodnost* equates to adequacy – the metatext appears as foreigner; and low *prevodnost* corresponds to the strategy of acceptability – the metatext does not present elements of foreignization.

The HVIT presents a good degree of domestication (Monticelli 2018: 95). The translator wanted to emphasize the cultural contacts rather than the cultural differences between the cultures. Although the *Hõbevalge* deals with topics that are far from the cultural universe of the Italian reader, the language of the metatext results easily readable and fluent enough to allow the reader to skim the text when necessary. The aim of the HVIT was not to focus the Italian audience of the structural and systemic configuration of Estonian culture, but rather to provide an overview of how the two cultural universes, Estonian and Italian, can be seen as not as far as previously thought. The choice of an acceptable translation might lead, as already discussed above, to a simplistic understanding of the prototext, especially in the case of the Italian reader as situated in a literary dominant system. From here, we can deduce that it was partially in order to avoid this misconception the title was left in the original and a subtitle was added; in this sense, the room for mistake is definitely smaller: it appears clear from the cover that the book is a translation from a distant culture.

Translated texts have the potential of bringing two cultures together. When two cultures are juxtaposed and brought close, relations of dominance are established. One scholar that studied these relations is Itamar Even-Zohar in his work on polysystems (1990) – where with polysystem he means what we could consider to be a cultural universe. Even-Zohar designates a special place for translated texts, namely as serving the function of bridge between cultures (1990: 45). For this reason, translations have a highly innovative potential, not only they can introduce new words and terms on a semantic level but modify and enrich cultures as well. The different roles a translation can play depends on the dominance of the polysystem to which it belongs.

Whether translated literature becomes central or peripheral, and whether this position is connected with innovatory ("primary") or conservatory ("secondary") repertoires, depends on the specific constellation of the polysystem under study. (Even-Zohar 1990: 46)

In central polysystems, such as the Italian literary universe, translations play a more marginal role; in peripheral systems, on the other hand, translations acquire a central position and have the potential of introducing innovation.

2.2. Relations of dominance in polysystems

A necessary step in approaching a semiotic discussion on the *Hõbevalge* would consist in analyzing the relations of dominance between Italian and Estonian culture. Such a task would definitely require an extended analysis and an inquiry aimed at a socio-economic and political investigation which does not represent the aim of the present dissertation. What we can do, without going too much into the specificities of fields and subjects which do not pertain to us, is to address the issue in the framework of the polysystem theory by Itamar Even-Zohar (1990):

Every cultural phenomenon can be better analyzed as a system, instead of studying the data of a phenomenon, study the functions. Elements of a system are considered as interconnected, interdependent and correlated. (Even-Zohar 1990: 84)

[A system is a] Network of relations which can be hypothesized for an aggregate of factors assumed to be involved with a socio-cultural activity, and consequently that activity itself observed via that network. Or, alternatively, the complex of activities, or any section thereof, for which systemic relations can be hypothesized. (Even-Zohar 1990: 85)

Even-Zohar also puts a particular attention to the role of literature and advocates for the existence of peripheral and central literatures:

Since peripheral literatures in the Western Hemisphere tend more often than not to be identical with the literatures of smaller nations, as unpalatable as this idea may seem to us, we have no choice but to admit that within a group of relatable national literatures, such as the literatures of Europe, hierarchical relations have been established since the very beginnings of these literatures. (Even-Zohar 1990: 48)

From this very first consideration, we should not hesitate around the obvious as much as “unpalatable” idea that Estonian literature is necessarily put into a peripheral position in respect to the Italian. In the process of translating, it is necessary to take this into consideration especially when endorsing the strategy of acceptability or low *prevodnost*. It should be necessary to implement other means in order to keep the source culture central despite the acceptable translation and its intrinsic position of periphery in the European polysystem. These elements in the HVIT are to be found in paratextual elements such as the preface, the numerous footnotes of the editor, events dedicated to the

publication¹¹, and so on, all of these trying to stress as much as possible the role of Estonian culture, history, and literature and its place in the European framework. With the help of these paratextual elements, the source culture can be kept relevant although remaining dependent on its counterpart:

The main condition for a literature to become dependent is that it should be weak. This does not necessarily result from political or economic weakness, although rather often it seems to be correlated with material conditions which enable interference through pressure (such as subjugation) (Even-Zohar 1990: 80)

The question of dependency isn't to be considered in linguistic terms – the two languages have nothing in common – but rather on the plane of centrality in forming the canonical literature shared by European tradition. In this light, we can take the word of the literary critic Harold Bloom who lists as authors of the Canon 47 Italians (plus 15 Latin writers) and none from the Baltic Region (Bloom 1994). Furthermore, the political status of Estonia in the past decades has been a main factor in preventing its literature to flourish. The subjugation during the Soviet era substantially prevented not only the growth of internal literature, but its same possibility of reaching other countries and foreign literatures in translation:

A weak literature is the result of a lack of resources, insufficiency: due to young literature or blockage of resources. (Even-Zohar 1990: 81)

2.2.1. The polysystem and the semiosphere

Approaching to a semiotic analysis of culture, the comparison of the concept of polysystem with the Lotmanian semiosphere seems due as the two models linked together could promote a deeper understanding of the case study in question. The concept of polysystem was born in a linguistic framework, although it quickly transitioned to the idea that the object of study should not have been exclusively written “texts” but rather dynamic cultural models – which eventually lead to the creation and construction of cultural objects specific to a culture (Even-Zohar 1997). As we have already seen, for Even-Zohar a polysystem is a network of socio-cultural activities. The idea of looking at these phenomena as systemic helped to reach a more adequate analysis where each single phenomenon is not considered as a single unit; the specific role of each element is defined by its position in the polysystem,

¹¹ *list of events and presentation will be written here as a footnote

by its relation with other elements (Even-Zohar 1990: 85). Here we can draw a first comparison with how Juri Lotman regarded semiotic systems:

The semiotic universe may be regarded as the totality of individual texts and isolated languages as they relate to each other. In this case, all structures will look as if they are constructed out of individual bricks. However, it is more useful to establish a contrasting view: all semiotic space may be regarded as a unified mechanism (if not organism). In this case, primacy does not lie in one or another sign, but in the “greater system”, namely the semiosphere. (Lotman 2005: 208)

The polysystem allows for a dynamic analysis of socio-cultural phenomena as much as the semiosphere models a better understanding of the semiotic universe not as a series of “brick” but rather as a “unified mechanism”. And it is in this dialogic nature that cultural products are indeed created. Both theories do not merely create models of understanding in a somehow abstract quality, rather they advocate for their functional activity in creating concrete cultural artifacts present in every cultural and social sphere – books among them.

[T]he ensemble of semiotic formations precedes (not heuristically but functionally) the singular isolated language and becomes a condition for the existence of the latter. (Lotman 2005: 218)

In this sense, we can see how the dialogue between Estonian and Italian culture functionally preceded the phenomenological actualization of the HVIT as an artifact. It is possible to argue that semiotic contacts between the two cultures were already present before the book entered the Italian semiosphere by being translated and exposed in libraries or book shops. We know that the publication of the HVIT was promoted by several institutions and associations: Associazione Italia Estonia, Lennart Meri Euroopa Sihtasutus, Estonian Ministry of Culture, Eesti Kultuurkapital, and many others. Associazione Italia Estonia played the greater role in both taking the initiative of the translation and looking for funding; this proves that a dialogue between the two cultures was already open, the physical book served as a tool of promotion for further developments of this dialogue and it was not the starting point, but the final product of an uncountable series of cultural contacts.

Lotman defines the semiosphere as a semiotic continuum filled with “multi-variant semiotic models situated at a range of hierarchical level” (Lotman 2005: 206). This hierarchical disposition is present in the concept of polysystem as well under the names of heterogeneity and stratification of the polysystem: a polysystem contains a series of systems which in turn are hierarchized within the

polysystem itself (Even-Zohar 1990: 14). Lotman saw in heterogeneity the true mechanism running the process of meaning-making in cultural systems:

The structural heterogeneity of semiotic space creates reserves of dynamic processes and represents one of the mechanisms for the creation of new information inside the sphere. In peripheral areas, where structures are “slippery”, less organised and more flexible, the dynamic processes meet with less opposition and, consequently, develop more quickly. (Lotman 2005: 214)

Both the polysystem and the semiosphere have a dynamic character which is due to heterogeneity and the contraposition between periphery and the center. The two concepts partially overlap in both theories. The center of the polysystem coincides with the most prestigious canonized repertoire – Even-Zohar here is referring to literature but the discourse can be extended to socio-cultural activities – and eventually ends up determining the canonicity of the whole system (Even-Zohar 1990: 17). By opposition, the peripheral elements tend to have less importance. If polysystem theory is sound and well adapts to an analysis of literature, the Lotmanian semiosphere, and its center and periphery, can provide a better tool to understand the process of intercultural translation of the *Höbevalge*. According to Lotman, the division between center and periphery is the basic organization of the semiosphere and the dominant semiotic systems are located at its center (Lotman 2005: 214). What is important in this conceptualization is that Lotman does not consider the periphery as an intrinsic “weaker” system, peripheral elements have a great potential themselves.

The formation of peripheral semiotics may be represented not by fixed structures (languages) but by their fragments or even separate texts. Falling into the category of “foreigners” within a given system, **these texts fulfil the function of a catalyst in the whole mechanism of the semiosphere.** (Lotman 2005: 214, my emphasis)

We notice how the peripheral elements act as “catalysts”, they are thus necessary and vital for the correct functioning of the system as a whole. Elements in the periphery try to move towards the center and to establish themselves as the (new) core. Even-Zohar also had a similar idea but does not consider the possibility of creolization between center and periphery:

Since the system is dominated by its center, and the latter's main interest is to maintain itself over time, change will be introduced or allowed into the center to the extent that it can provide such domination. (Even-Zohar 1990: 89)

In this sense, elements of the periphery can somehow make a difference or change the nature of the core only if the dynamic condition of the polysystem allows them to become dominant and provide

a new degree of domination above the established center. I believe that peripheral elements can influence the center not only by pure dominance, but also by infiltrating the core as “disguised” elements. The case of the HVIT helps to shed light on this last statement. If it is true that the book itself did not even come close to scratch the core of the Italian semiosphere, its second order effects became quite evident with the publication of YouTube videos¹² by the travel journalist Syusy Blady, a popular TV personality in Italy who has a YouTube channel with almost 10.000 subscribers and presented one of the most popular travel shows on the national television called *Turisti per Caso*. In one of her videos¹³, Blady talks about the island of Saaremaa and provides theories about the role of the Kaali meteor in the formation of the legend of the Last Thule. We can see how the *Höbevalge* definitely keeps its place in the periphery of the semiosphere, but it is nevertheless able to influence its center, or at least more central areas. Translation scholar Ovidi Carbonell notices as well this issue with the theory of polysystems, namely the theoretical indifference to creolization, when he writes that:

[P]olysystem theorists focus only on the manipulation of the source text by the target culture, leaving aside crucial question as to cultural change, hybridization and, especially, the acting of “agency” on the part of the subjects represented in translation. (Carbonell 2000: 60)

The polysystem theory also misses the importance of the border and its bilingual filters as Lotman would say. Nevertheless, we can reconcile the two by analyzing how Even-Zohar reserved a special place for translated literature.

2.2.2. Translated literature and the translator as the bilingual filter

The delimitation of a border is one of the fundamental concepts of the semiosphere. According to Lotman, the semiotic border cannot belong neither to the inside nor to the outside, by situating itself on the very limit, it represents a middle ground:

Just as in mathematics the border represents a multiplicity of points, belonging simultaneously to both the internal and external space, the semiotic border is represented by the sum of bilingual translatable “filters”, passing through which the text is translated into another language (or languages), situated *outside* the given semiosphere (Lotman 2005: 209)

¹² Syusy Blady’s YouTube channel can be found here <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJNcotEMEODtZsw80NDA3Ig> (retrieved 1/04/2020)

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1gRFdwY7XA&t=525s> (retrieved 13/0/2020)

In the polysystem theory, we strive to find an equivalent to this central point as the border isn't necessary seen as playing an essential role in the contact between two cultures, although addressed in the following passage:

Rather, the opposite holds true, as the borders separating adjacent systems shift all the time, not only within systems, but between them. The very notions of "within" and "between" cannot be taken either statically or for granted. (Even-Zohar 1990: 24)

To an almost mathematical definition of border, as an infinite multiplicity of points, the idea that those point could be or work as bilingual filters is absent. At least so it seems. Here I would like to propose that although such a theorization seems missing, Even-Zohar appeared to have approached the bilingual filter from another side, namely with the special place he confined translated literature in. Translated literature have the potential to create and introduce new meaning into the polysystem:

Through the foreign works, features (both principles and elements) are introduced into the home literature which did not exist there before (Even-Zohar 1990: 47)

Throughout his chapter on translated literature, Even-Zohar stresses the innovative role that it can have. Although some of the features he attaches to translated literature seems to be sound with the extra-semiotic space of Lotmanian theory, we should not forget that translated literature is indeed already translated or in the process of being translated, thus cannot be part of an extra-semiotic reality.

The translation of information though these borders, a game between different structures and sub-structures; the continuous semiotic "invasions" to one or other structure in the "other territory" gives birth to meaning, generating new information. (Lotman 2005: 215)

The translation of the *Hõbevalge* can be considered as an act of the bilingual filters of one culture bringing new meanings inside. It is worth here to remember that the *Hõbevalge*, before the translation in Italian by Daniele Monticelli, had been translated only into Finnish language and the work had remained practically unknown to anyone who couldn't speak either Finnish or Estonian. Translated literature thus does have the power of explosive creativity, the appearance of the HVIT brought with it the emergence of a series of other texts and media products – such as the previously mentioned YouTube videos – which goes beyond the mere reading or acknowledgement of the book itself. The role of bilingual filter can be said to have been the one of the translator Daniele Monticelli, someone, culturally speaking, positioned at the limit between two cultures.

2.3. The actors in (intercultural) translation

When considering interlingual translations, the translator alone can be erroneously credited by some to have done all the work as the main actor. This view cannot be applied at all to the case of the intercultural translation of the *Höbevalge*. The interlingual translation was just one of the steps in the journey that this text made from one culture to another. For the HVIT, also the editor and the readers played a substantial role in defining the place of the book in the Italian cultural universe. The same role of the translator, as we have already seen in the previous subchapters, has been more than just interlingual, comprising intercultural mediation to create a bridge between the very different audiences. In the following subchapters we are going to see what the role of the translator exactly was and who else has to be regarded as a fundamental actor in this intercultural translation.

2.3.1. The translator as a bridge

The translator can be considered part of the bilingual filter of a culture as in the act of translating he is situated at the border of the semiosphere. In mathematical terms, a border is a series of points that belong both to the outside and the inside, in the communicative process the translator occupies this same position. The translator reads a text in one language – or cultural language – thus making himself the receiver of the message; at the same time, he is the transmitter of that same message as his task consists of translating it for a new audience (Osimo 2011: 88). By being the transmitter, he not only transmits the meaning but has the capacity of manipulating the source language as far as he considers necessary – as true equivalence isn't possible, translation implies a creative act which in turn implies artistic choices. As Umberto Eco stated in many of his works (Eco 1962, 1979, 1992), there is the need to put a limit to the level of creativity or personal interpretation of the translator so that he cannot substitute himself to the writer by letting his ego take control of the prototext in order to reflect his own taste in the final product (Huet 1997[1683]: 22). Nevertheless, choices have to be made according to the translation strategy adopted – different translation strategies such as deletion, acceptability, adequacy, and others have already been discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation, it suffices to remind that a translation strategy “involve the basic tasks of choosing the foreign text to be translated and developing a method to translate it (Venuti 1998: 240).

The first notable intervention of the translator in the HVIT has to deal with the strategy of deletion and affects the same composition of the book. Three chapters have been deleted, namely chapters seven, nine, and eleven. This choice is connected with what Daniele Monticelli individuated as the dominant of

the metatext. The focus of the HVIT wanted to be Pytheas' journey, Estonian mythology and folklore, Lennart Meri's speculation on the connection between the Kaali meteor and the Last Thule. The chapters that have been edited out were not essential to this dominant and would have distracted the Italian reader with panegyrics too culture-specific or too difficult to understand in the light of a translation which seeks acceptability (Monticelli 2018: 94). The same strategy of deletion can be found inside the chapters that have not been deleted whereas Monticelli wanted to avoid major digressions and long deviation from the main theme (*ibid*, 95). In the light of these choices, it can be said that acceptability took up a major role in the translation strategy, although some chapters have been lost and will never be available to the Italian reader, the translator attempted to build a smooth bridge for the Italian reader to cross and for Estonian culture to reach him.

2.3.2. The model reader of the *Hõbevalge*

Every author, from the very first words he starts writing, already selects a model reader. Commencing writing the first lines, the author already has in mind a model reader for his work: this can be a high school student if he's writing a geography textbook, an erudite reader if translating Latin aphorisms, a bored housewife if he's typing with nonchalance a shallow love story while waiting for dinner to be ready, and so on. These first impressions concern the conscious choice of the author to imagine his or her model reader, although there are other choices, seemingly more subtle and technical, which determine to a greater length to which readers the text will be accessible:

“[...] every type of text explicitly selects a very general model of possible reader through the choice (i) of a specific linguistic code, (ii) of a certain literary style, and (iii) of a specific specialization-indices. (Eco 1984: 7)

These first steps in the writing of a text are nonetheless fundamental in determining the model reader. We can already start to delineate the model reader of the HVIT. The use of Italian language evidently implies that the reader will have to be either Italian or very familiar with the language; the style of the *Hõbevalge*, rich and dense, requires a certain level of attention in order to be followed, the prosody isn't always fluent and the paragraphs sometimes seem to elude a linear order of development. This suggests that the reader cannot be a casual adventurer in the literary world looking for an informal and flowing read to engage with some sort of linear plot easy to follow and to retell to his friends. The author is looking for an enthusiastic reader, someone who is willing to spend hours reading about historical conjectures, folkloristic anecdotes, and elusive topographical references. The reader of the *Hõbevalge*

also has to possess a previous interest in Baltic culture and some kind of encyclopaedical knowledge of the subject.

In the case of translated literature, it is the translator who has to foresee the possible model reader and apply the translation strategy accordingly. It can be argued that Lennart Meri definitely did not have in mind the Italian reader of the 2010s as his target. Daniele Monticelli thus was confronted with the insidious task of not only translating but choosing a new model reader; the model reader of the prototext in this case is different from the model reader of the metatext. It is necessary at this point to make clear that the model reader can only be considered as the “ideal” reader of the text but he will never coincide completely with all the empirical reader, namely those who will read the text:

A text is a device conceived in order to produce its model reader. I repeat that this reader is not the one who makes the 'only right' conjecture. A text can foresee a model reader entitled to try infinite conjectures. The empirical reader is only an actor who makes conjectures about the kind of model reader postulated by the text. (Eco 1992: 64)

Eco here is warning us of two very important things. The first, that the text produces its own model reader – and as we have seen this process is somehow a cooperation between the text, the author, and the reader who can make not “only right” conjectures but who can infer with a higher degree of precision and knowledge. Secondly, Eco tells us that the empirical reader might not be the model reader and those conjectures about the text could end up being completely wrong and unsupported by any kind of formal logic. The model reader thus, more than a physical person, can be considered a set of felicity conditions that have to be met in order for a text to express its whole potential (Eco 1991: 62). Texts are highly explosive cultural devices, the full potential of a text could allegedly go beyond the initial intention of the author, it is debatable whether there is a limit to the potential of a text even when met with its model reader and whether an empirical reader, non-corresponding with the model, could either way enrich the meaning of a text. Speculations aside, one thing is for sure: empirical readers can have a totally wrong understanding of a given text for a series of reasons: lack of linguistic competence, insufficient encyclopaedical knowledge, or even being in bad faith and appositely misinterpreting a text in order to obtain a personal advantage or discrediting the author or a certain philosophical school of thought, and so on. For example, a curious instance of misinterpretation by empirical readers that did not completely coincided with the model readers the author had in mind happened to Umberto Eco himself. After Eco published his second novel *Il Pendolo di Foucault* (1988), some of his readers tried to trace the steps of one of the characters who, in the novel, used to walk around Paris. Eventually, they ended up recognizing

a café that was present in the book. Unfortunately, these readers, although legitimately empirical, were probably not as “model” as they thought as the café they were so sure to have individuated. After a scrupulous investigation and hours of reading, was actually a pure narrative invention by Eco, i.e. it did not exist outside of the novel. In the case of a novel, the damage can be contained as no hurt was done by ordering a cappuccino in the wrong café, but for the *Höbevalge* the situation could be more complicated. The topics dealt with in the book, from Nordic mythology to human physiognomy, could lead to potentially harmful interpretations, especially in a period where racial supremacist ideas and rising nationalist movements seem to be gaining momentum. For this reason, a first step the editors took was to carefully choose the right publishing house. They wanted to avoid publishers which were known to print titles of esotericism, pseudo-science, and speculative history closer to conspiracy than to plausible reality. The publishing house Gangemi was eventually chosen as it already presented a collection for literature and has in its catalogue various books of history and popular literature that are far from being controversial. This definitely helped to stem possible wrong interpretations from that side, but by definition it will not prevent altogether possible wrong interpretations. Some readers, following the example of the Eco’s readers in Paris, could end up taking Meri’s word for real and rent a boat to retrace Pytheas’ journey around the Baltic and Mediterranean sea, thus landing in Saaremaa and declaring triumphantly “we have found the Last Thule”. Although ironic, this could be not far from reality as conspiracy and controversial literature will always be present in the literary universe as many authors look for a brief window of fame.

2.3.3. The expected author: The Horizon of Expectations

If an author can create his model reader, in his turn, the reader will do something similar while approaching a text: he will imagine a “model author” creating an expectation of the text. This inference and expectation from the part of the reader has been theorized by the German academic Hans Robert Jauss as the “horizon of expectations” (Jauss, Benzinger 1970). The horizon of expectations is the structure within which a reader comprehends a text based on a series of cultural codes and conventions acquired from his surroundings, be it the cultural universe he’s part of or his particular historical environment. Every text and every work of art is necessarily read within these coordinates thus each literary work creates some sort of expectation in the reader based on his previous knowledge – similar texts already read, familiarity with a certain genre, memories of other texts, and so on. The horizon of expectations can be assumed to be a sort of model on which the readers foresee their future experience of a text based on their past. In general, it’s a system of reference that the reader use to “navigate” the

text (Holub 1989: XI). The expectations for the readers of the HVIT can be different and it would be impossible to define all of them. What can be interesting is to analyze how the reception of the book has been “manipulated” by editors and people connected with the process of bringing the *Höbevalge* to an Italian audience, thus shaping a defined expectation for the book. For example, the release of the translation was followed by many presentations and events organized to introduce the HVIT and put it into context. I will here take one example which I deem to be the more telling among the many presentations and conferences organized for the HVIT, namely the presentation of the book during the *Festival della Letteratura di Viaggio* (Festival of Travel Writing) in 2016 right after the book was published. This was the first presentation to the Italian audience and among the speakers were present: Daniele Monticelli (translator), Mart Meri (Lennart Meri’s son, politician and philologist who worked side by side with Monticelli in this project), Antonello Folco Biagini (scholar, historian, and vice rector of Università di Roma), Maurizia Giusti “Syusy Blady” (travel journalist and TV personality), Gianni Glinni (editor of the project and president of Associazione Italia Estonia), Arnaldo Colasanti (literary critic). Those names alone let the reader understand the high cultural spirit of the book, many of them are professors (Monticelli, Colasanti, Biagini) which lead the reader to expect some kind of educational content to be encountered. The press release for this meeting anticipated some of the content of the discussion namely relating to the content of the book and the preeminent figure of Lennart Meri. The reader is already directed towards a very specific content belonging to a niche genre, his expectations nevertheless will embrace more than the genre and the content and will be still set in motion as a system, or a model, on which he will anyhow make up his own consideration of the book.

2.3.4. The role of editor and footnotes

The editor can play an important role in the reception, expectation, and understanding of a book. This turns out to be particularly true for a book such as the HVIT. The editor, Gianni Glinni, had been very present thorough the process of translation and actively took part in many “paratextual” activities such as presentations, events related to the book, meetings and conferences. In case of translated literature, the editor can play a relevant role by selecting content for the preface, footnotes, introductions to the text, and so on. This has been the case for the HVIT which presents a preface by Gianni Glinni and many footnotes of the editor. Footnotes in a text, when dealing with translated literature, can be inserted by the author himself, the translator, and the editor. Footnotes from the translator are particularly common in non-fiction books; in general, they are not always welcomed by the editors in novels or fiction while more accepted in philological or historical texts – the latter being genres partially overlapping with the

Hõbevalge. The choice of inserting footnotes also depends on the selection of the target reader and translation strategy. If the text is a novel and the target reader an average person who reads in his free time, then footnotes would probably not be considered as an option as they could distract the reader from reaching the conclusion of the plot as soon as possible. In the different case in which the footnotes reveal necessary, as in essays or manuals, they can be an indispensable source of knowledge as anyone who read Umberto Eco perfectly knows. The *Hõbevalge* seems to have his specialized target reader in someone familiar with the topic, explicative footnotes can be inserted without worrying too much about interrupting the flow of reading as apparently there is no real plot to follow. The editor, Glinni, made large use of this tool to convey further information and details on the text, thorough the text we count around 40 editor's footnotes while the footnotes of the translator are only 19. The choice of Monticelli to write only 19 footnotes is sound with his premise of delivering an acceptable translation, this suggests he wanted to keep the text as understandable as possible to the Italian reader without overburdening them with complicated philological matters; footnotes by the translator are mostly translations of words left in Estonian in the final text (Monticelli 2018: 95). Umberto Eco would have probably been glad of the paucity of translator's footnotes in the 250-page book as he considered footnotes a sign of weakness in the translator (Eco 2001: 50, 2003: 113). Far from it is the thesis Bruno Osimo supports whereas he thinks that this is not necessarily the case (Osimo 2011: 122). For Osimo, there is no distinction between footnotes written by the translator or by the editor whenever they are necessary and provide the reader with an information which would be otherwise lost. A good balance and good judgement between the two seem like the preferable path to undertake although in translation schools and universities footnotes are still seen by many lecturers as a sign of laziness.

The editor is also in charge of creating a strong paratextual apparatus. The preface of the HVIT serves the function of introducing the author, Lennart Meri, and the cultural coordinates of the book to an audience that would otherwise not be familiar with it. Anthony Pym writes about a "cultural wall" that translation has to overcome (Pym 1993: 123), and for Osimo the preface can be that instrument of compensation that must be used to help meaning overcoming this obstacle (Osimo 2011: 124); from here it appears clear why the editor, especially in the case of the HVIT, can be considered a central figure right above the translator. Gianni Glinni also took care of another paratextual apparatus, namely the addition of maps in the first chapters of the HVIT – where Lennart Meri introduces the maritime routes that lead sailor around the silver-white route – and an additional page at the beginning of each chapter with original images of old pictorial art taken from monuments, churches and archeological findings in

Estonia. Here the editor performed an actual translation strategy, addition (Delabastita 1993); this further highlights the impact that he had on the final product and the primary role editors can play in metatexts.

2.3.5. The realia in the *Hõbevalge*

In the previous paragraph I have written about footnotes, especially how the translator's footnotes were mainly serving the function of translating words left in Estonian in the metatext. This opens up the discussion around the role and concept of "realia" as formulated by Sergej Vlahov and Sider Florin (1980). The realia denote elements specific of one culture, they might indicate words or phrases that are part of the popular language or tradition and designate specific objects, traditions, food, beverages, institutions, and so on, typical of a certain geographical or linguistic area. For this reason, the realia almost always represent an obstacle in translation and they have to be addressed with carefulness by the translator. Two are the paths we can take. First, we leave the term in the original language and we explain its meaning through a note or we let the reader figure it out – again, it depends on our strategy; second, we look for a substitute in the target language which approximately conveys the meaning. Both strategies have their pros and cons as we have already discussed when addressing adequacy and acceptability in the previous paragraphs. For example, in translating a menu of an Italian restaurant into Estonian, if we encounter the popular Italian oven-baked folded pizza called "calzone", we could decide whether to leave it like this or translate it as "pirukas", although the two are very different in nature – and in taste. The *Hõbevalge* presents many terms that are left in Estonian, they mostly designate geographical areas, words that are required to be left in the original for philological reasons (Meri 2016: 66), maritime terms indicating the hierarchy on the ships (*ibid*, 158), and so on. The Italian reader will not find realia in the HVIT an obstacle as they have been taken care of by the acceptability strategy followed by Daniele Monticelli.

2.4. The reception of the Italian translation of the *Hõbevalge*

As I have already anticipated, the HVIT created a certain level of expectations also due to the numerous initiatives to promote the project. Once the book had been released and the publication announced, it set in motion different cultural mechanisms of reception and with them different interpretations. The HVIT had an effect both on the Italian and Estonian audience, readers from the two cultures saw the publication of Lennart Meri's work from different points of view and created respectively their own interpretations. Within the same cultural universe there has been opposite, or only partially overlapping, readings of the book. In the following subchapters I will try to delineate what these understandings have been so far

drawing on an article that Daniele Monticelli published in 2018 where he writes about this same process and his experience of the aftermaths of the publication (Monticelli 2018).

2.4.1. The reception of the book in Italy

Being the book a translation into Italian, it goes without saying that the reception has been greater in Italy, although, as we will see later, this publication had a sort of “feedback” effect back to the Estonian audience. According to Daniele Monticelli, the book has been received in three different ways (Monticelli 2018: 107).

The editor, Gianni Glinni, president of the Associazione Italia-Estonia, greatly contributed to the book. As we have seen, he was present at many initiatives and event dedicated to the publication of the HVIT and extensively wrote editor’s footnotes and a preface to the book. The main assumption behind the great interest showed by the Associazione Italia Estonia, according to Monticelli (2018), is one of historical and topographical precision of Lennart Meri’s sources. This will eventually lead to acknowledging as true the hypothesis brought forward by Meri that the Kaali meteor, Saaremaa, and the Last Thule can all be linked together. The Associazione Italia Estonia, allegedly trying to further promote the book, looked for people in Italy who could support this line of interpretation. Among them, we find the nuclear engineer Felice Vinci, author of the thought-provoking book *Omero nel Baltico* (1995) where he claims that some events narrated in the Iliad and the Odyssey actually took place in the Baltic area – the book has also been translated into Estonian. Following the publication of the Italian translation of the *Höbevalge*, Vinci published a book together with travel journalist Syusy Blady and Estonian journalist Karl Kello titled *Il Meteorite Iperboreo* (The Hyperborean Meteor) (2016); in this book Gianni Glinni and Ülle Toode – two main members of the Associazione Italia Estonia – worked as editors and added footnotes. The book is a first attempt to reconcile Lennart Meri’s hypothesis with Felice Vinci’s ideas. The potential for this line of interpretation is highly interesting and culturally explosive as it would somehow “rewrite” history itself, shifting the focus from the Mediterranean Sea towards the North of Europe. I will not go into the details and try to prove their theories right or wrong, it is necessary to consider them if only to demonstrate how different empirical readers could bring forward a new and creative interpretation of a text reintroduced into a certain cultural universe thanks to a translation. This concept is sound with what said so far while comparing translated literature to the bilingual filter of the semiosphere or the product of it.

A second line of reception is what Monticelli himself tried to make of the translation. As supported by his translation strategy, he tried to emphasize the cultural affinities between the two countries and European regions. There is also the underlying intention of giving greater relevance to Lennart Meri's deeply humanistic spirit which was oriented towards cultural openness. The hypotheses and discoveries Meri brings forward in the book are a product of this natural predisposition to humanistic and scientific inquiry. On a more socio-political plane, Monticelli, working and constantly exchanging opinions with Lennart Meri's son and politician Mart Meri, wanted to make the book relevant in the ongoing political discourse in the European framework. By using the *Hõbevalge* as a tool of promoting openness and cultural exchange, Monticelli advocates for the impossibility of cultural closure in a political context where we are seeing a steady rise of nationalist movements that are gaining traction all across Europe – the HVIT was published in 2016, same year the referendum on Brexit took place in the United Kingdom, for example.

The literary critic Arnaldo Colasanti, who took part in one of the first presentations¹⁴ of the book, he proposed the idea that this translation could be a valid tool to rethink Europe in its cultural and political borders and heterogeneity. His main argument would lead to structurally reshape Europe not as a tree-like configuration where the center would be the major cities – Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, etc. – as a somehow more rhizomatic system; in this sense, we would be pushed to reconsider those cities and area of Europe that were once considered “peripheries” as actively functional to shaping the core and highly connected to any junction of the rhizome. There would be no need to think of centers and peripheries as the constant exchange of cultural information would be seen as a multidirectional flow. This, in my opinion, is by far the most interesting and fascinating conceptualization of the HVIT. Although it is undeniable that cultural systems – polysystems and semiospheres – do have a center and a periphery, and that the former is in a dominant position, we cannot abide altogether the complete disregard as the latter as highly functional, especially in a time where travels and exchange of information moves at high speed. Peripheries, in their whole, are as important as the centers.

2.4.2. The reception of the book in Estonia

Given the importance of the *Hõbevalge* as a pillar of Estonian culture and literature, it is understandable why the translation of the HVIT had an echo in Estonia as well. Daniele Monticelli recalls how joyful Estonian people would be when meeting him and thanking him for the work he had done (Monticelli

¹⁴ Here an extract of the presentation from 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvFMN6GDZsQ>

2018: 108). It is necessary and important to remember that the first edition of the book was published in Estonia during the Soviet occupation, it was some sort of miracle that the book was allowed to be printed at that time; witnessing how the book managed to “escape” from the national borders understandably makes a certain clamor, such a thing would have been considered unthinkable at the time of the first publication. The importance that this translation had on the source culture could bring us to reconsider the research done so far in terms of translation study and methodology of translation. Whether we consider terms such as domestication, foreignization, acceptability, adequacy, target culture, target reader, and so on, we realize that this methodology accounts only for a description in the light of the receiving culture; but translated literature can have a significant effect and role in the source culture as well. The example of the HVIT proves it, the same fact that the book exists as a text and as an artifact in the Italian cultural universe is of major importance whether the book is actually read or not (Monticelli 2018: 105). This brings us to the concept of antilibrary.

2.5. The antilibrary

The antilibrary is a term the mathematician and philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb introduced for the first time in his book *The Black Swan* (2007). Taleb uses as an example the library Umberto Eco had in his house in Milan, an immense collection counting tens of thousands of books. Eco used to distinguish between those who thought he read them all, and those who understood that a library is an instrument of research and it is not necessarily a place where to store and catalogue the books we have already read. Precisely so, the books that are yet to be read are the most important as they contain the semiotic potential to increase knowledge and dynamism in a system. This is the whole paragraph where Taleb writes about the antilibrary, the term does not appear anywhere else in his literature:

The writer Umberto Eco belongs to that small class of scholars who are encyclopedic, insightful, and nondull. He is the owner of a large personal library (containing thirty thousand books), and separates visitors into two categories: those who react with "Wow! Signore *professore dottore* Eco, what a library you have! How many of these books have you read?" and the others—a very small minority—who get the point that a private library is not an ego-boosting appendage but a research tool. Read books are far less valuable than unread ones. The library should contain as much of *what you do not know* as your financial means, mortgage rates, and the currently tight real-estate market allow you to put there. You will accumulate more knowledge and more books as you grow older, and the growing number of unread books on the shelves will look at you menacingly. Indeed, the more you know, the larger the rows of unread books. Let us call this collection of unread books an *antilibrary*. (Taleb 2007: 1)

What we can take out from this passage, besides the exquisite literary style Taleb writes in, clearly inspired by Eco, is that a book does not serve its function merely by being read, not does it exhaust it after reading. The same presence of a title in our physical reality can have an impact on the cultural sphere, actually reading the text is just a part of this effect.

The text's first movement is its actualization: the text which exists in a state of potentiality (the book on a shelf, the as yet unstaged play, and so on) acquires reality in the consciousness of the addresser. (Lotman 1990: 69)

The same act of reading isn't fruitful because of the simple codification of words into thoughts. While reading a book, we can create connections with our life, our previous knowledge, an idea that got stuck in our head and that we can't develop, and so on. If the content of a text is important, so it is the same action of reading as a particular kind of meditation:

“[...] the book serves to stimulate the flow of his thoughts. And it does this not by its content, but by the mechanical automatism of the reading” (Lotman 1990: 25-26)

In this sense, considering books on a shelf as “bookmarks” of what we have read so far, besides having an unpalatable “ego boosting” connotation, it is not useful nor it coincides with what memory in Lotmanian terms resembles:

If we have to use a metaphor in order to imagine the capacity for memory, then, the least appropriate one is the image of the library with books on its shelves, or a computer with data of whatever quantity stored in its memory (Lotman 1990: 272)

If it is true that a library isn't the greatest metaphor for memory, the antilibrary is. The antilibrary contains both books that we have read and book that we have not but that are nevertheless part of our memory, of our semiosphere. They are there, on the shelves where we put them, and although we might not open them for a long time, we see them every time we observe our collection; thus, it might happen, that while thinking or reading, we make a connection with a book we have in our antilibrary. Without the physical presence of the book, this exercise would be vane. It is true that nowadays the majority of the texts we consult are, allegedly, online or in e-book format, nevertheless paper books remain the best instrument for memory to work. This goes beyond the decoding of the text, tactile feeling, the smell of a book, the kind of paper, all of this cues us in to the fact that we establish a stronger connection with artifacts than with electronic documents. Going back to the HVIT, as Monticelli said, it isn't necessary that many people or all of those who see or buy the book actually read it cover to cover, as the public of the book isn't the sum of its empirical readers (Genette 1997: 74). The same presence of the HVIT in

libraries, book shops, and, why not, antilibraries makes it a source and an instrument of enhancement of cultural knowledge.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have analyzed the intercultural translation process of the book *Hõbevalge: Sulla rotta del vento, del fuoco, e dell'Ultima Thule* (2016). The thesis has two parts, each of them containing a different approach to a semiotic theory of translation on the basis of the *Hõbevalge*. The book in question lends itself perfectly to trigger discussions regarding semiotics and translation studies. In the first chapter, I will use the book to approach the issue of intersemiotic translation from text to book cover and, then, from cover to cover; in the second chapter, the *Hõbevalge* will be approached as an instance of intercultural translation. Therefore, the book was here approached both as an artifact and as a tool in the context of intercultural translation. By providing a comprehensive semiotic theoretical framework for the analysis of books as artifacts - with a particular focus on book covers, and on translated literature as the bilingual filter of cultural systems. This investigation departed from a definition of book covers as intersemiotic translations and went further into the details of the given process. This particular focus has been put on book covers because: firstly, they are the first point of contact between the text and the reader and, secondly, it is from the cover that the reader creates an expectation regarding the content. As presented, intersemiotic translations of book covers present three major losses: (i) the unavoidable loss proper to any communicative process – and thus in translation; (ii) the losses derived from the operation of deletion and selection (Delabastita 1993: 39); (iii) and the selection of dominants to translate on the cover following a hierarchical structure where the primary dominant – or dominants – have the precedence over the secondary ones. The final product of the intersemiotic translation from text to cover can be defined as the prototext:metatext ratio (Popovič 1976: 227). When applying it to the case of the *Hõbevalge*, we see that a first loss is unavoidable because of the intrinsic nature of intersemiotic translation from text to cover: a textual apparatus can cover more space than a book cover which is confined to a single page. Consequently, there has to be some deletion, it is not possible to translate the entire content of the book in a single pictorial element; with this comes the operation of selection, namely the dominants that are being selected to be conveyed on the cover, for the *Hõbevalge*: the color blue and the ancient brooch and its symbolism. As for the comparison of the two covers, the Italian and the Estonian, we notice that they are similar in that they keep the same chromatic theme - the color blue - and a brooch as the only element on it (besides the textual information). The brooch lends itself to a series of possible interpretations. The two brooches on the two covers differs in their pattern. The Estonian brooch present a pattern typical of the Baltic region - the triskeles -, while the Italian is missing this element. This detail serves to highlights the cultural differences between the cultures in case. The

operations of selection and deletion are here in play in so far as the dominants selected for the cover are the color blue – reminding the sea, the Nordic climate, and the theme of exploration via sea – and the brooch, a typical Estonian artifact, which the Italian reader will have problem positioning into context. For this reason, I propose different interpretations that can be given to the brooch: from a shield to a silver artifact.

I then proceeded to analyze the cultural aspect of the translation. In order to do so, I first introduced the concept of translation as mediation and thus as the translator as the mediator - as the bridge between two cultures. The two main theories used here to analyze the translation process were taken from Toury (1980) and Popovič (1976). In order to understand the relations between the two cultures, I referred to the polysystem theory of Itamar Even-Zohar (1990) complemented by the Lotmanian semiosphere (Lotman 2005). The polysystem theory allowed us to define Estonian culture as peripheral and its system of literature as positioned in a less dominant position in relation to the Italian one. On the other hand, the semiosphere model was used to highlight the importance of the peripheral structures in cultural relationships and to introduce the concept of bilingual filter. The translator acts on the bilingual filter while the translated literature occupies a special place in the polysystem of literature by, at the same time, introducing elements of novelty as well as being the real bilingual filter when it comes to transferring meaning and bringing foreign elements into a culture.

The actors in the process of intercultural translation are defined as: (i) the translator, (ii) the editor, (iii) the readers, and (iv) the author of the book. The translator of the *Hõbevalge* has the function of mediator between the two cultures. The editor played an important role in the case of the *Hõbevalge*, being the translation supported and funded by a cultural association (*Associazione Italia Estonia*). The editor, who is the president of the aforementioned association, took care of many footnotes and supervised the whole editorial process. The reader, here, can be defined as either model or empirical (Eco 1962, 1991). The model reader of the *Hõbevalge* is someone familiar with the subject and who possesses some previous knowledge of the history and folklore of the Baltic region - particularly of Estonia. The empirical reader can be defined as any physical person who actually reads the book. An empirical reader of the *Hõbevalge* could find the work too dense, of difficult understand, or, in the worst case, incur in evident misinterpretations.

Further, I provided an overview of the reception of the book. The reception can be divided into three possible lines of interpretation: (i) the intention of the editors from the *Associazione Italia Estonia*

was to stress the historical veracity of Meri's work connecting Saaremaa to the events of the Kaali meteor and Pytheas' journey; (ii) the idea of the translator was to propose the book as an instance in support of cultural openness and to emphasize the affinities between the two cultures; and (iii) as the literary critic Arnaldo Colasanti argues, the *Hõbevalge* is a book that could allow us to rethink Europe and the European Union itself, not as made by center and periphery, but more constructed as a rhizome, a system in which everything is connected and equally contributes to the construction of a shared culture. Moreover, a short summary of the reception of the book in Estonia, the source culture, is given. Many Estonians were enthusiastic to know that one of their national works of literature managed to cross the national border; this is especially true if we consider that the first edition was published during the Soviet occupation.

The final contribution of the present thesis consists in the first conceptualization in a semiotic framework of the concept of antilibrary (Taleb 2007: 1). The antilibrary is a collection of books yet-to-read that nevertheless possesses a cultural value by means of their simple existence. If we buy a book and shelf it in our library, we are constantly reminded of its existence, of the name of the author, of the expectation of the content, among other points. If this first level of transmission of knowledge from text to reader comes before the latter even opens the book, where does it come from? From the cover, I argue. By relating the cover to the text in the first chapter of the thesis, using the antilibrary, we can connect the reader to both cover and text, thus closing the circle. The *Hõbevalge* is hereby presented as a clear instance of a book which would fit the antilibrary: its physical existence provides great value to the Italian polysystem of translated literature.

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Summary in Estonian

Käesolev magistritöö käsitleb raamatut *Hõbevalge: sulla rotta del vento, del fuoco e dell'Ultima Thule*, 2016. aastal avaldatud tõlget Lennart Meri algselt 1976. aastal ilmunud raamatust. Töö eesmärk on esiteks, selgitada raamatukaante rolli kui intersemiootilist tõlget teadmiste kultuurilise vahendamise protsessis teksti ja lugeja vahel ning teiseks, selgitada tõlkekirjanduse rolli kultuuridevahelise tõlke kontekstis *Hõbevalge* näitel.

Käsitlus on semiootiline ja kasutab eesmärgi saavutamiseks kultuuri- ning tõlkesemiootika tööriistu. Analüüsin raamatut kahest vaatepunktist: kui artefakti ja kui kultuuridevahelise tõlke kandjat. Raamatu itaaliakeelne tõlge, mille on teinud Itaalia semiootik Daniele Monticelli, lubab semiootilist lähenemist kahel põhjusel: esiteks, oma ilmumise ajal oli itaaliakeelne versioon raamatu ainus tõlge soomekeelse kõrval ning teiseks, *Hõbevalge* ei kuulu sellise kirjanduse hulka, mida tavaliselt itaalia keelde tõlgitakse. Oma magistritöö teises peatükis käsitlen raamatut kui artefakti, pöörates erilist tähelepanu raamatukaante rollile kui esmasele tähendus kandjale ja kui intersemiootilisele tõlkele tekstist raamatukaaneks. Kolmandas peatükis toon esile tõlkekirjanduse rolli kultuuridevahelise tõlke protsessides ja vaatlen seda *Hõbevalge* näitel. Lõpetuseks tutvustan ja kontseptualiseerin esimest korda anti-raamatukogu mõiste, mille Nassim Nicholas Taleb on sõnastanud järgmiselt: anti-raamatukogu on selliste raamatu kogum, mida pole loetud, kuid mis ometi osalevad akulturatsiooni ja teadmiste vahetuse protsessis. Mõtestan anti-raamatukogu näitena ka *Hõbevalget*.