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Estonian literature in the Czech lands : summary

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SUMMARY

Estonian Literature in the Czech Lands

The core of the text *Estonian Literature in the Czech Lands* consists of the bibliography of Czech translations of Estonian literature and the bibliography of other texts regarding the value reflecting reception of Estonian literature, as for example literary historiography and reviews. The bibliographies have been compiled by using different, already existing lists, both printed and digital, and by manual search in periodicals and books.

The bibliographic core is briefly commented. The comments are time oriented, summarizing the tendencies in translating and editing Estonian literary works with respect to the language of the original text or the mediating language as well as to the genre preferences and the extend of its conformity to the preferences in the Estonian literary canon, individual and political motives, quality of the translated works, the context which the works and authors have been placed into – during the history from the first contacts with Estonian literature in the beginning of 19th century up to the latest translations and reviews.

The first reviews on Estonian literature were motivated by the strategic comparison of the political and ethnic situation of the Estonians in the Russian Empire and the Czechs in the Austrian Empire. Such concern for the small Baltic people has since emerged several times again – after establishment of independent Estonia and Czechoslovakia and after re-establishment of the independent states. However, Estonia has never gained wider attention, and with the exception of the initial period of romanticism, its literature has never been truly prominent there.

At the turn of 19th century, first translations appeared – Alois Koudelka alias O. S. Vetti's and later on Josef Obr's translations from Estonian. Up to WWII, the direct translations from Estonian were accompanied by translations via German, but Russian has replaced German as the language of mediated translations after WWII. As many classic pre-war

authors either emigrated or were executed or arrested after the Soviet occupation of Estonia, their works had been replaced by creations with cultural and intellectual roots alien to those of Estonians. As the process was very similar in post-war communist Czechoslovakia, only the poor quality translations of Estonian socialistic realism trash and propaganda drama were published there during the 1950s and early 1960s. Among the few exceptions were the direct translations by the Estonian immigrant Kyra Platovská and Miloš Lukáš, who turned back to the classic (Vilde) or better quality contemporary (Smuul) literary works. Although Lukáš had probably translated the whole *Kalevipoeg*, only parts of it were actually published.

The number of translations in the 1960s went down. The Estonian literature was perceived as part of Soviet literature and so, during the political and cultural thaw in Czechoslovakia that succeeded the previous period of a strict censorship, it had no chance to compete with literary works coming from the free world.

The Soviet context helped once again to promote Estonian literature in Czechoslovakia during the time of Russian occupation, when the censorship was re-installed. This time, however the strong Estonian generation from the 1960s (Kross, Kaplinski, Valton, Vetemaa, Unt, Luik, Alver, Viiding etc.) with its poetry and short prosaic genres, and the pre-war prose (Tammsaare, Vilde, Gailit) were introduced to Czech readers. The *spiritus agens* of Czech reception of Estonian literature since the 1970s till the 1990s was Vladimír Macura, the pioneer of critical, philologically conducted translation from Estonian, who was followed by Naděžda Slabihoudová, a translator specialized in classical Estonian literature along with Kreutzwald's fairy-tales, and Květuše Nováková, who has been the prominent translator of Estonian literature for children.

The golden age of Estonian literature in Czechoslovakia lasted mere 15 years. After the breakdown of the Eastern Block in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991, the interest of publishers, not to speak of readers, in Estonian literature lingering – from the Czech perspective – in the post-Soviet context has decreased rapidly.

Only recently, during the last decade, we can witness a new interest in contemporary Estonian literature (Kivirähk, Friedenthal, Aleksejev) accompanied by translating activity of Macura's disciple Jonatan Tomeš along with a new generation of translators educated at the Estonian and Finnish universities, as for example the Finno-Ugrist Petra Hebedová.