

# Dreaming the Hammer Back: On Teodoras Bieliackinas's Translation of *Prymskviða*

Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė  
*Vilnius University*

*Abstract:* The paper deals with the legacy of Teodoras Bieliackinas (1907–1947), a Lithuanian exile in Iceland, the first Lithuanian professional Scandinavianist and the first translator of Eddic poetry into Lithuanian. With its background of the “biographical turn” in translation studies and with the help of the concept of “differential margin” proposed by Theo Hermans, the paper focuses on Bieliackinas’s rendition of *Prymskviða* into Lithuanian. The aim is to trace the translator’s own ideological agenda, which appears to have been inscribed by him into the Old Norse song. It is claimed that the song about the loss and recovery of Thor’s hammer has been invested by Bieliackinas with a new – allegorical – meaning and can be read as a message of hope that Bieliackinas was sending to his countrymen who, like himself, were scattered around the world and mourned the loss of their state.

## The biographical (re)turn in literary and translation studies

In literary studies, the biographical subject has been back for some time now, “resurrected” to a new life, as was professed some decades ago by, among other scholars, Sean Burke. Burke argued that the way in which the concept of the death of the author had been treated in the literary academia had resulted in its insularity, its breach with broad intellectual culture (Burke, 2004, ix), where, as we know, individuals and

---

The research behind the present paper was carried out within the framework of the project “Lithuanian exile in Iceland: Explorations of Teodoras Bieliackinas’s (1907–1947) creative legacy” under the National Lithuanian Studies Development Programme for 2016–2024.

---

Shaping the Rings of the Scandinavian Fellowship. Festschrift in Honour of Ērika Sausverde. Edited by Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė and Loreta Vaicekauskienė. (Scandinavistica Vilmensis 14). Vilnius University Press, 2019.

<https://doi.org/10.15388/ScandinavisticaVilmensis.2019.4>

their lives do matter. Literary scholarship also had to reckon with the ways literature developed, and the growing popularity of “ego-writing” and auto-performative art, which played at the boundaries of fact and fiction, the intimate and the public, and which staged and restaged the author’s own body and life experience, required to reconsider the role of the author vis-à-vis the meaning of his or her own text.<sup>1</sup>

Significant transfigurations of authorial agency have also taken place during recent decades in the field of translation studies. The traditional hierarchical relations between author and translator, which echoed the construed gender distinctions (“creative versus reproductive, original versus derivative, active versus passive, dominant versus subservient, free versus confined, and so on”, Hermans, 2001, 8), have often been questioned, and the personality of the translator has been drawn into the spotlight.<sup>2</sup> Translators have been recognised as active agents of literary production who play a crucial role in shaping the trends and tastes of their cultural environment. They are considered to be an important factor in securing the inexhaustibility of the text: by adding their own touch to a text, they stimulate its unending semiosis, the constant deferral of its final meaning (see Petrilli, 2003, 517). It is in such a framework that translation is promoted by some theorists to the status of art: according to Barbara Godard, for example, translation must be understood not as *mimesis*, but as “*poiesis*, or making with the force of an original and creative act” (Godard, 2003, 92).

The translator’s creative freedom vis-à-vis the original text is not simply “excused” as an inevitable consequence of the differences in languages and cultures to which the source and target texts respectively belong, but is declared by such theorists to be the translator’s right – something for which translators “should not apologize”. Theo Hermans, the author of the article “Shall I apologize translation?”,<sup>3</sup> explicitly renounces the criteria of

- 1 In Scandinavia these tendencies are usually associated with such names, among others, as Karl Ove Knausgaard, Tomas Espedal, Madame Nielsen, Karina Rydberg, Daniel Sjölin, Kerstin Ekman and Yaya Hassan. Different forms of ego-writing, such as autofiction and performative biographism, are discussed, for example in Behrendt and Bunch (2015) and Haarder (2014).
- 2 See, for example, Morini, 2013; Munday, 2008; Rojo & Ramos Caro, 2016. The stress on the translator, as an intercultural mediator, lies also at the core of Bruno Osimo’s approach to translation that combines semiotics and cognitive studies, see Osimo, 2019.
- 3 The title is a direct quotation from John Florio’s preface to his translation of the essays of Michel de Montaigne, published in 1603.

“sameness” and “fidelity” as ideals according to which a translation should be judged. However, contrary to Godard, he is content with translation being called a “mimetic mode”. In a mimetic narrative, he reminds us by quoting Plato, the author speaks “*as if* he or she were someone else, assimilating the diction of the person he or she imitates” (Hermans, 2001, 3). Nonetheless, assimilation, or being “as if”, is not equal to becoming identical; moreover, in mimetic mode, several voices are heard as if they were quoted “verbatim” – whereas in “diegetic narration [ ... ] we continually hear the poet’s own voice” (ibid.). Something similar, Hermans claims, happens in every translation: the translator mimics the author’s voice, but does not abandon his or her own, and there is always a breach between the two voices. Hermans calls this breach “the differential margin” and relates it to the translator’s personal conscious and unconscious agenda, which often has ethical and ideological dimensions:

It is not really a matter of rhetoric or style, of expressive means or idiolect. Rather, it is a matter of voice and value, of a speaking subject positioning itself in relation to, and at a critical distance from, even in direct opposition to the source text. (ibid., 3)

Hermans has an interesting theory about the persistent anxiety to eliminate this margin, which goes back to the times of European colonial expansion, but it will be skipped here, in order to quote at length what seems to be Hermans’ most important message:

[T]he significance of translation as a cultural and historical phenomenon lies precisely in that margin, the slant, the presuppositions, the selectivity and the value judgements it reveals. Translation is of interest *not despite but because* of the way it *prizes open the ever-present interstices* between originals and translations, between donor and receptor texts... [T]ranslation matters, historically and culturally, because it allows us to glimpse the self-positioning of individuals and communities with regard to ‘others’. (Hermans, 2001, 7, emphasis added)

The cultural and historical significance of the differential margin, as a testimony of changing times and self-definitions of the text’s translators, is especially strongly felt when multiple translations of the same text exist. Unfortunately, and for a number of reasons, this is not generally the

case in Lithuania. There is, however, one classical Scandinavian text that has been translated three times into Lithuanian by translators with very different sociocultural and geopolitical backgrounds. This is *Þrymskviða* (The Lay of Thrym), which is part of the *Elder (Poetic) Edda* and is already present in its oldest manuscript *Codex Regius*, usually dated to about 1278–1280. It is one of the best known and most appreciated Old Norse mythological poems – not least due to its dramatic and comic action, and probably also because it ends happily with the re-establishment of the divine status quo (Clunies Ross, 2002, 180–182<sup>4</sup>).

### Three Lithuanian translations of *Þrymskviða*

Teodoras Bieliackinas (1907–1947) was the first person to translate the poem into Lithuanian, although this fact was known to very few until quite recently. His translation was done during the early stage of Lithuania's occupation by the Soviets, while Bieliackinas was living in Iceland. It was published shortly before his death, in Sweden, in the Lithuanian expatriate magazine *Pragiedruliai* (1947). The editor-in-chief of the magazine, the ethnologist Juozas Lingis,<sup>5</sup> a good friend of Bieliackinas's, had suggested some corrections to the manuscript prior to publishing it. The manuscript, together with more than a dozen letters from Bieliackinas's hand, has been preserved in Lingis's personal archive, which is now stored in the library of Vilnius University. Thus, Bieliackinas's translation exists in at least two types of hard copies and in three different textual versions: the translator's handwritten copy (Bieliackinas MS), the same copy, but with Lingis's corrections in red taken into account, and the printed version (Bieliackinas, 1947), which shows that most, but not all, of Lingis's corrections have been implemented.

- 4 While, according to Margaret Clunies Ross's interpretation, this status quo concerns the male hierarchy and social order, and the hammer symbolises virility (its loss is seen as symbolic castration, see *ibid.*, 188), in Bieliackinas's translation, as we will see, the happy end acquires a different frame of reference.
- 5 Lingis (1910–1998) came to Sweden to study ethnology in the 30s on a state scholarship and remained there after Lithuania was occupied. He cooperated with Prof. Sigurd Erikson, taught at the universities of Stockholm and Uppsala, and contributed significantly to the promotion of the Lithuanian language and culture in Sweden. He also translated numerous Scandinavian literary texts of a smaller scale into Lithuanian, most of which have been published in *Pragiedruliai*.



two sources: the translations of the *Edda* by Hugo Gering (1892) and by Karl Simrock (1851). For some reason, Nausėdas's translation has never been published; its typescript is stored at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies at Vilnius University.

The third translation was carried out by Aurelijus Vijūnas (born 1975), whose translation of the *Poetic Edda*, now already a classic, came out in 2009. Vijūnas is a representative of “the generation of transition”: he was born in the time of the Soviet regime, but became a student at Vilnius University after Lithuania's independence was restored in 1990. He later completed his BA and MA studies in Iceland, obtained a PhD degree in Indo-European linguistics from the University of California, Los Angeles, and is now associate professor at the English Department of National Kaohsiung Normal University in Taiwan, where he has been teaching since 2006.

The present paper will not provide a comparative study of the three translations, neither will there be a systematic comparison of Bieliackinas's translation vis-à-vis the original Old Norse version of the *Poetic Edda*. As someone who works with contemporary Scandinavian literature, I hope that such a project will be carried out one day by a scholar from the field of Old Norse studies. It could, among other things, provide answers to the question of whether, or how, the three translators' different backgrounds have affected the form and contents of their respective renditions of *The Lay of Thrym*. And although the present paper will point towards some possibilities for such research, my primary aim has been to draw the academic audience's attention to the earliest literary translation from Old Icelandic into Lithuanian and to pay tribute to its author. This will be done by demonstrating some of the text's “interstices” (to borrow Hermans' word), which Bieliackinas appears to have filled in with his own ideological “agenda”. By understanding how this “agenda” manifested itself, one will be able to contribute in the future to a more nuanced (re)construction of the personality and life of the man who was the first professional Lithuanian Scandinavianist. He could have made a great difference to Lithuanian Scandinavian Studies, had history and fate been less brutal co-authors of his biography.

### “Writing” Bieliackinas

During the period of Soviet occupation Bieliackinas appears to have been mentioned in the official press in Lithuania only once, and only in

passing, without any political implications. It was done on the occasion of the translation of Halldór Laxness's novel *Íslandsklukkan* (*Iceland's Bell*) into Lithuanian, in a review written by the writer and physician Vytautas Sirijos Gira, who in his youth was a close friend of the Bieliackinas family (Sirijos Gira, 1982, 241–244). Bieliackinas's activities had numerous mentions in the Lithuanian expat press, especially in connection with his death: obituaries were published in Germany,<sup>6</sup> Sweden<sup>7</sup> and the USA.<sup>8</sup> After his death, his name and details of his life would continue occasionally to appear in publications by Lithuanian émigrés: there was, for example, an entry on him in the *Boston Lithuanian Encyclopedia* (Biržiška, 1954, 493), and he figured in Pulgis Andriušis's memoirs (Andriušis, 1968, 93). Due to Bieliackinas's outspoken anti-Soviet views, such information was not freely available to those who lived behind the Iron Curtain, and even those few who knew it had no chance of publicly spreading it. It was not until 2009 that there appeared a couple of paragraphs about Bieliackinas's fate in an article written by Svetlana Steponavičienė and published in a special issue of the Lithuanian magazine *Krantai* dedicated to Iceland<sup>9</sup> (Steponavičienė, 2009, 71). A year later, the book *Paviliojo Islandija: Teodoro Bieliackino pėdsakais* (Enticed by Iceland: In Teodoras Bieliackinas's Footsteps), by the German-based journalist and author Leonas Stepanauskas, came out, which sketched and documented, with the help of testimonies from the people who knew him,<sup>10</sup> the outline of Bieliackinas's life story. It was also supplied with extensive quotes from Bieliackinas's own letters and articles, and the author's own impressions of Iceland. An important source for Stepanauskas were the obituaries written by some outstanding Icelandic cultural personalities: the writer Guðmundur G. Hagalín (1947, 3, 5), the editor-in-chief of the conservative newspaper *Morgunblaðið*, Valtýr Stefánsson (1947, 6), the cultural worker Gunnar H. Stefánsson (1947, 4) and the Nobel Prize-winning author Halldór Laxness (1947, 3), whom Bieliackinas had taught Russian.

Not so long ago, Bieliackinas's name began re-emerging in the Icelandic press: in the preface and commentary to the republished

6 *Aidai* (April 1947, 1, 8); *Lietuvių žodis* (April 1947, 39 (51), 3), *Tėviškės garsas* (March 1947, 65, 6).

7 *Pragiedruliai* (March 1947, 6, 25).

8 *Draugas* (April 1947, 80, 3).

9 The article is dedicated to the Icelandic linguist Jörundur Hilmarsson, who told its author about Teodoras Bieliackinas.

10 For example, Auður Laxness, see Stepanauskas, 2010, 45.

Icelandic translation of Prof. Ants Oras's book *The Baltic Eclipse* (1948; Oras, 2016, 8, 147), and also in connection with the explorations of the activities of the Icelandic communists during the Cold War and of Halldór Laxness's "flirtation" with the Soviet Union (Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson, 2018, 42).<sup>11</sup> Bieliackinas has also made an appearance in the family saga *Shipwrecked in Africa* by the Icelandic-Spanish author Georg Davið Mileris (2011).<sup>12</sup>

What follows is a short summary of the basic facts about Teodoras Bieliackinas's life. He was born in 1907 in St. Petersburg, Russia, in the family of the distinguished lawyer Semion Beliackin (Семён Беляцкий), who fled from the Bolshevik revolution and settled in Lithuania in the early 1920s. Simonas Bieliackinas, as he was called in Lithuania, had played a key role in creating the legal system of the young state. He co-authored laws, acted as legal advisor for the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, was a professor at Vytautas Magnus University, an active scholar, a practising solicitor and even a writer of fiction. He perished in the Holocaust (his tragic fate is described in the book by Avraham Tory, 1990, 206 and 478–481).<sup>13</sup> Very little is known about Teodoras's mother, only that she could have been a doctor (Hagalín, 1947, 3) and that she could have been killed by the Bolsheviks (*Aidai*, 1947, 8; *Tėviškės garsas*, 1947, 6).<sup>14</sup> Teodoras had studied in Berlin and Kaunas, and he first came to Iceland in 1936, living there permanently from 1939. He graduated from Háskóli Íslands in 1945, with a degree in Icelandic, French and Philosophy. Bieliackinas had a phenomenal talent for languages: alongside Icelandic, which he mastered very quickly, he had a good command of Finnish and Swedish, and could read Norwegian and Danish. He gave classes in German, French, Russian, Classical Greek and Lithuanian, and he worked as an interpreter from English for the British and US armed forces after the war broke

- 11 Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson is the primus motor behind these confrontations, some of which have stirred heated public debate in Iceland.
- 12 The book tells the dramatic story of the writer's Icelandic grandmother Fjóra Steinsdóttir and his German-Russian grandfather Vladimir Knopf Mileris (1916–1999), who was born in Lithuania, found refuge in Iceland during WWII, became close friends with Bieliackinas and spent a good part of his life in Sierra Leone.
- 13 The commentary to Tory's book, however, contains a number of factual mistakes, regarding, for example, Fedja's (a Russian diminutive of Fiodor/Teodoras) place of death and occupation (see Tory, 1990, 481).
- 14 In Simonas Bieliackinas's application for Lithuanian citizenship, which can be obtained at the Lithuanian Central State Archive, it is stated that she died while the family were already living in Lithuania, and no cause of death is provided.

out and his father's financial support stopped. Bieliackinas was officially engaged to a young Icelandic woman, Svava Ágústsdóttir, who was of tremendous help to him in all his Icelandic endeavours. He remained in Iceland until his early death from nephritis in 1947.

After settling in Iceland, Bieliackinas often wrote for the Lithuanian press (mainly for *XX amžius*, *Naujoji Romuva* and *Draugas*) about Scandinavia, spoke on Icelandic radio and wrote articles (mainly for *Morgunblaðið*), thereby spreading the word about Lithuania and later about its occupation; he had also protested against the Soviet invasion of Finland (Bieliackinaz [sic], 1939, 5). His writings made him a target of aggressive attacks from Icelandic communists,<sup>15</sup> who in the Soviet-funded paper *Þjóðviljinn* promoted the view that the Baltic States had voluntarily joined the Soviet Union. They labelled Bieliackinas a “Lithuanian fascist Jew” (“*fasíski litúviski Gyðingur*”; Björn Franzson, 1946, 5) and demanded his expulsion from the country. He had, however, friends among leading Icelandic intellectuals who supported him, especially the writer Guðmundur G. Hagalín and the journalist Valtýr Stefánsson, and even Laxness, although their political views were radically different.

Bieliackinas's letters to Lingis show that he was well read in Old Norse literature and had plans to engage in extensive translations, as do his articles, in which he tried to compare Lithuania and Iceland to each other by finding parallels between sagas and Lithuanian folklore and referring to the Scandinavian-Baltic contacts in the Middle Ages (especially Bieliackinas, 1940, 14). The project of reconstructing Bieliackinas's profile as the first Lithuanian Scandinavianist will have to include the collection of everything that his pen has produced and that can still be traced. His numerous articles in Icelandic can be accessed online at *Tímarit.is*, and some Lithuanian articles published in *XX amžius* can be found on the Lithuanian platform *e-paveldas*, despite the poor quality of its search function. His translations of shorter texts from Swedish classics exist,<sup>16</sup> and his letters tell us that he was working on the translation of Lithuanian literature into Icelandic and that he had himself written a novel in that

15 The party, however, was at that time officially called “The Icelandic Socialist Party”.

16 His translations of the Viking Code (*Vikingabalk*) from *Fritjof's saga* by Esaias Tegnér and of two shorter texts by Hjalmar Söderberg were printed in *Naujoji Romuva*, 1939, 18 (432), 389 and 392–393. The Viking Code was republished shortly after his death in *Pragiedruliai*, 1947, 2, 20–21.

language.<sup>17</sup> Bieliackinas could have left more translations, more personal letters and manuscripts, related to Scandinavian studies, which must be searched for, collected and explored. So far, his translation of *The Lay of Thrym* remains the most complete surviving testimony of Bieliackinas's engagement with Old Norse literature and deserves special attention.

### Approaching Bieliackinas's translation of *Þrymskviða*

Most Scandinaviavians will remember that *The Lay of Thrym* tells the story of the loss and recovery of the hammer *Mjöllnir* (*Mjöllnir*), which had been stolen from its owner Thor (*Þórr*) by Thrym (*Þrymr*), the king of the giants (*Jötnar*). It is an asset of crucial importance to the gods (*Æsir*), because it keeps the giants, their greatest enemies, at bay. The story ends well, but the hammer is recovered only after wit and physical strength join forces. Loki, the trickster, takes Thor to Jotunheim (*Jötunnheimr*), the realm of the giants, disguised as the beautiful goddess Freya whom the giants demand as ransom – to be married to Thrym. As soon as “the bride” again lays hands on *Mjöllnir* in a fake wedding ceremony, (s)he kills the giant king and his greedy sister.

There are various ways to approach Bieliackinas's translation of this poem. One often starts with the title, which in this case is especially rewarding, as the title presents an issue that Lithuanians like to quarrel about – the transliteration of foreign proper names. Bieliackinas's choice of *Trimas* reflected the modern Icelandic pronunciation, but Lingis corrected it to *Trymas*, which was closer to the original Icelandic orthography. Obviously for the same reason, the king of the giants was also called *Trymas* by Nausėdas, whereas Vijūnas found the variant *Triumas* most appropriate, as it complied with the reconstructed phonology of Old Icelandic.

Since there exist three different versions of Bieliackinas's translation, a contrastive and comparative analysis of these versions could also be undertaken with the aim of exploring whether all changes to the manuscript are justified. One of Lingis's interventions, which appeared in the printed version, is found in the lines in which Thor demands that Loki deliver

<sup>17</sup> So far, one published translation of a short story by the Lithuanian realist writer Petras Cvirka has been traced: *Samviskan, Fálkinn*, 1944, 31, 8. As to Bieliackinas's novel, he claims in his letter of 26.08.1945 that it had been accepted by an Icelandic publishing house. It has not been published though.

his recount before landing: Loki had just returned from *Jötunnheimr*, to which he had flown on a scouting trip with the help of Freya's feather dress. Although Bieliackinas's original version (ex. 2 below) contains the word that is also used in the Old Norse poem (*pasakos* – *sögur* – (fairy)tales) and has a more natural flow, Lingis's suggestion (ex. 3) follows the most common trend: the phrase *sögur of fallask*<sup>18</sup> is most often rendered in a way that means that a seated teller's memory is deceitful, and stories are forgotten or things are easily mixed up (ex. 3–6 and 8–10 below). Bieliackinas, however, had rendered it differently in his handwritten text: if seated, people often “tell fairy tales” (ex. 2), that is, they let their imagination run away with them and thus tend to tell things not exactly the same way as they happened, if they happened at all. He is not alone in his choice: seated storytellers' aptness for producing fiction (as opposed to lying, which is expressed in the subsequent lines) is implied in George Johnston's English translation (ex. 7) and in the Danish translation by Thøger Larsen (ex. 11).

<p>1. <u>Finnur Jónsson</u> (1932)</p> <p>10</p> <p>...</p> <p>opt sitjanda</p> <p><i>sögur of fallask</i></p> <p>ok liggjandi</p> <p>lygi of þéllir.</p>	<p>2. <u>Teodoras Bieliackinas</u> (MS)</p> <p>10</p> <p>...</p> <p>Dažnas, kas sèdi – <i>pasakas seka</i></p> <p>ir tam, kas guli, melas išsprunka.</p> <p><i>Literally:</i></p> <p>Often the one who sits <i>tells fairy tales</i></p> <p>And from the one who is lying down, a lie</p> <p>slips out.</p>
<p>3. <u>Teodoras Bieliackinas</u> (1947)</p> <p>10</p> <p>...</p> <p>Nes <i>mintys</i> sèdint dažnai <i>nusilpsta</i></p> <p>O gulint gi melas dažnai išsprunka.</p> <p><i>Literally:</i></p> <p>Because <i>thoughts</i>, while sitting, often <i>slacken</i></p> <p>And in a lying position, a lie often slips out.</p>	

18 I am grateful to Professor A. Liberman for the following explanation in a letter: “*fallask* is a reflexive form of *falla*, which means something like ‘to fall with regard to oneself’. But -sk sometimes does not affect the meaning of the verb, so the literal translation should be something like ‘to get lost’”.

4. Vladas Nausėdas (TS)

9 [sic]

...

Sėdintis kartais *žodžių pritrūksta*,  
 Gulintis dažnas ima meluoti.

*Literally:*

The sitting one sometimes *gets short of words*,  
 The lying one is prone to a lie.

5. Aurelijus Vijūnas (2009)

10

...

Tas, kuris sėdi, dažnai *susimaišo*,  
 O tas kurs guli – per daug primeluoja.

*Literally:*

The one who is sitting often gets *confused*,  
 The one who is lying down, tells too many lies.

6. Karl Simrock (1851)

10

...

Dem Sitzenden manchmal *mangeln Gedanken*,  
 Da leicht im Liegen die List sich ersinnt.

*Literally:*

The sitting one sometimes *is short of thoughts*,  
 And in a lying position a deceit is easily devised.

7. George Johnston (1990)

10

...

seated messengers  
*say more than truth*,  
 lying down messengers  
 lie every word.

8. Jackson Crawford (2015)

10

...

*Stories are often forgotten*  
 When the teller sits down,  
 And lies are often told  
 When people lie down.

9. Olga Smirnickája (1999)

10

...

Часто, кто сядет,  
в беседе нескладен,

Часто, кто ляжет,  
ложь затевает.

*Literally:*

Often the one who sits down  
*is awkward in a conversation,*  
Often the one who lies down  
contrives a lie.

10. Rolf Stavnem (2018)

10

...

den siddende  
*glemmer sager*

den liggende  
lyver om alt.

*Literally:*

The one who sits  
*forgets things*  
the one who lies down  
lies about everything.

11. Thøger Larsen (1926)

10

...

Den, som sidder, *snakker i Taage,*  
den, som ligger, har Løgn i Halsen.

*Literally:*

The one who sits *speaks in mist* [in an obscure way],  
the one who lies down, has lie in the throat.

Probably the most relevant thing would be to investigate how Bieliackinas translates the details of Scandinavian mythology, or rather what solutions he comes up with regarding some trickier cases. One example could be the lines that John Lindow refers to as “a troubling passage” (Lindow, 2001, 170), because the words *sem vanir aðrir* (literally: “like other Vanir”) may imply that Heimdall (*Heimdallr*) also belongs to that group of gods, although he is normally numbered as one of the *Æsir*.<sup>19</sup> Translators choose different solutions with respect to this episode: Bieliackinas (ex. 2), Benjamin Thorpe (ex. 5) and Rolf Stavnem (ex. 9) do not attempt to avoid the implication, while others decide to remove it outright, probably in order not to confuse the reader not well versed in Old Norse mythology:

19 The word *annarr* (other) is often used redundantly, or may here mean “else”, “otherwise” (i.e. Heimdall could see the future, which otherwise (only) the Vanir can do) (Wimmer, 1877, 168).

1. Finnur Jónsson (1932)

15

Þá kvað þat Heimdallr,  
hvítastr ása,

vissi vël framm

*sem vanir aðrir:*

...

2. Teodoras Bieliackinas (MS; 1947)

15

Heimdalis tarè, dievų balčiausias,  
Kas bus žinojo, *kaip visi vanai* –:

...

*Literally:*

Heimdall said, the whitest of gods

He knew what will be, *as all the Vanir* –:3. Vladas Nausėdas (TS)

14

Heimdalis tarè, dievas gudriausias –

Viską žinojęs, *nors jis ir ne vanas* –:

...

*Literally:*

Heimdall said, the shrewdest god –

He knew everything, *although not a Vanr* –:4. Aurelijus Vijūnas (2009)

15

Heimdalis tarè, asas šviesiausias –  
Išmintim savo *prilygo jis vanams:*

...

*Literally:*

Heimdall said, the brightest of gods

In his wisdom he *equalled the Vanir:*

...

5. Benjamin Thorpe (1866)

16 [sic]

Then said Heimdall,  
of Æsir brightest -  
he well foresaw,  
*like other Vanir* –

...

6. Karl Simrock (1851)

15

Da hub Heimdall an, der hellste der Asen,  
*Der weise war den Wanen gleich:*

...

*Literally:*

Then Heimdall started, the brightest of Æsir

*The wise one was like the Vanir.*7. George Johnston (1990)

15

Word from Heimdall  
whitest of gods,  
second-sighted  
seer, *like the Vanir:*

...

8. Olga Smirnickája (1999)

15

Хеймдалль сказал,  
пресветлый ас,  
Ведал он судьбы,  
**как вещице ваны:**

...

*Literally:*

Heimdall said,  
a brightest Áss,  
He knew destinies  
**like the prophetic Vanir.**

9. Rolf Stavnem (2018)

15

Så sagde Hejmdal,  
hvidest af aser,  
vis om fremtiden  
**som andre vaner:**

...

*Literally:*

Then said Heimdall  
the whitest of Æsir  
wise about the future  
**like other Vanir.**

A comprehensive analysis of Bieliackinas's translation should certainly also include an investigation of the aspects that have a major impact on the translation's artistic quality. One could explore whether, or how and to what effect, the traditional metric and alliterative patterns of Eddic poetry have been rendered, although Bieliackinas (as later did Vijūnas) explicitly expressed the decision to disregard the original alliteration (Bieliackinas's letter to Lingis of 19.12.1946; Vijūnas, 2009, 27). One of Bieliackinas's most creative choices was the employment of grammar in order to (re)create the style and characters of the poem. For example, he evoked the archaic effect by using the dual form of the verb *vykti* (to go) and the dual personal pronouns *mudu* (we two, masc.) and *mudvi* (we two, fem.).<sup>20</sup> Loki says to Freya:

Finnur Jónsson (1932)

12

...

bitt þik Fręyja  
brúðar líni,  
vit skulum aka tvau  
í Jǫtunhęima.

<sup>20</sup> The dual form of verbs is extinct in most Indo-European languages, but is still used, although mainly in dialectal forms, in Lithuanian. The dual form of the personal pronoun remains a standard in Lithuanian.

Teodoras Bieliackinas (MS)

12

...

Tu puoškis, Frėja, jaunosios rūbais.

**Vyksiva mudu** nūn Milžinijon.*Literally:*

You, Freya, better dress yourself in bride's clothes.

**We two** (masc.) **will go** now to Giantland.

And when Loki tells Thor that they have to go to the giants disguised as women, he says:

Finnur Jónsson (1932)

21

...

Mun ek ok með þér

ambótt vesa,

**vit skulum aka tvær**

í Jotunheima

Teodoras Bieliackinas (MS)

21

...

Aš tavo vergė dabar štai būsiu

**Vyksiva mudvi** į Milžiniją.*Literally:*

So now I will be your slave-maid

**We two** (fem.) **will go** now to Giantland.

In this last example, the choice of the feminine dual first person form seems to be well grounded – not only because it corresponds to the grammatical form of the source text (*vit ... tvær*) and contributes to conveying the comic character of the situation, but also because it reflects Loki's androgynous nature and the ease with which he adapts to his often-changing identity.

**The treasure lost will be restored**

As previously discussed, Bieliackinas's translation does not exhibit any drastic breach with the source text. The situation becomes different when one takes into consideration the translation of some key words that pertain to the topology of action and to some degree also of the words that identify the *dramatis personae* of the epic poem. It is here that one notices the greatest "differential margin" between the "donor" and "receptor" texts, that "interstice", according to Hermans, where the translator's own agenda can make an appearance.

Bieliackinas calls the individual *Æsir* and *Jötnar* by their proper names (*Toras – Thor, Frėja – Freya, Lokis – Loki, Trimas – Þrymr*); nonetheless, he never refers to these characters collectively as the *Æsir* or *Jötnar*. Instead, he uses the more general nominations *dievai* (gods) and *milžinai* (giants). This is the first little step towards minimising the distance between his intended reader and the world of the song, which in all respects lies light years away from his countrymen (never before had they been exposed to Old Norse material in their mother tongue, and few had read it in any other language). Furthermore, Bieliackinas never calls Thrym a king, but always “**commander of the giants**” (*milžinų vadas*), which brings in disquieting associations with the military and political conflicts of the time. The distance is reduced further when Bieliackinas translates *þing* (the assembly, where Old Norse gods and men alike gather to resolve vital issues) as *seimas*. This is what the Lithuanian parliament, which had its origins in the parliamentary tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Petrauskas, 2005), was called before the Soviet occupation of 1940 (and what it has been called again since 1991). In the same stanza, Bieliackinas lets the female deities (*dievaitės*) hold (literally: enter) a council (ex. 2). Thus he not only keeps the stanza within the register of political discourse, but also emphasises that the loss of the hammer was a matter of “state importance” to all the gods, both male and female on equal terms – a threat to the entire kin’s collective security. This “gender equality” is lost after Lingis’s revision (ex. 3):

1. Finnur Jónsson (1932)

14.

Sęnn vęru æsir  
allir á þingi  
ok ósynjur  
allar á máli.  
ok of þat réðu  
ríkir tívar,  
hvę Hlórriða  
hamar of scetti.

2. Teodoras Bieliackinas (MS)

14.

Tada į *seimą* dievai suėjo,  
ir į *tarybą* stojo dievaitės.  
Dievai aukštieji ėmė čia tartis,  
kas Toro kūjį parnešt galėtų.

*Literally:*

Then the gods gathered in the *seimas*  
and the goddesses *entered a/the council*.  
The High Gods started here conferring  
who could bring Thor’s hammer back.

3. Teodoras Bieliackinas (1947)

14

Tada į seimą dievai suėjo,  
*pasikalbėti stojo* dievaitės.  
 Dievai galingi tuoj ėmė tartis,  
 kas Toro kūjį parnešt galėtų.

*Literally:*

Then the gods gathered in the seimas,  
 the goddesses *entered into converse*.  
 The powerful gods started conferring at once  
 who could bring Thor's hammer back.

The same wish to emphasise the political implications of the disaster the gods were facing seems to have governed Bieliackinas's translation of *Ásgarðr* (the home of the *Æsir*) as *dievų valstybė* (the gods' state):

Finnur Jónsson (1932)      Teodoras Bieliackinas (MS)

18

18

...

...

þegar munu jøtnar  
*Ásgarð* búa,  
 nema þinn hamar  
 þér of heĩmtir.

Valdys galiūnai *dievų valstybę*,  
 Jei neatgausi iš jų tu kūjo.

*Literally:*

The powerful will rule *the gods' state*  
 If you do not get your hammer back from them.

Lingis did not interfere with this choice, but for some unclear reason replaced the word *galiūnai* (the powerful ones) with the word *milžiniai* (giants) in this stanza.

The home of the giants, *Jøtunheimr*, is not called a state by Bieliackinas, however, but is systematically referred to as *Milžinija*. The root of the word means "giant", while the suffix, together with the inflexion, reflects the usual way of forming country names in Lithuanian. For instance: Lenkija (Poland), Vokietija (Germany), Anglija (England) and, of course, Sovietija ("Sovietland") – the pejorative form used by Lithuanian émigrés when referring to the Soviet Union. This association is weakened in the printed version, where the word is no longer capitalised.

Taken together, Bieliackinas's lexical choices, which have been discussed here, symbolically relocate the action of the story to the Lithuanian reader's own dramatic space and time, and inscribe into the topos of the

hammer the allegorical significance of lost (Lithuanian) statehood. This probably explains why so much energy is put by Bieliackinas into the last stanza. In no other translation does there seem to be such genuine rejoicing at letting the giants get what they have deserved for laying hands on the gods' treasure. The final blow in this poem is struck not only with Mjollnir, but also with the translator's own – onomatopoeic and also alliterative (at least in the modern sense of the notion) – hammer. Hopefully even people with no understanding of Lithuanian can feel its emotional charge:

Finnur Jónsson (1932)

34

Drap hann hina öldnu  
jötna systur,  
hin 's brúðféar  
of beðit hafði;  
hón skell of hlaut  
fyr skillinga,  
ęn hogg hamars  
fyr hringa fjöld.  
Svá kom Óðins sonr  
ęndr at hamri.

Teodoras Bieliackinas (MS)

34

nukovę seną milžino sesę,  
kur dovanų sau prašyti mėgino.  
**Čakšt per pakaušį** – štai pinigėliai!  
**Žiebt jai su kūju**<sup>21</sup> – štai ir žiedai tau!  
Taip savo kūjį Toras atgavo.

*Literally:*

He slayed the giant's old sister  
who had tried asking for presents.  
**Wham on the back of the head** –  
here is your money!  
**Bonk with the hammer** –  
here are the rings for you too!  
This is how Thor his hammer regained.

### “Bringing Scandinavia and Lithuania closer to each other”

Bieliackinas's original translation of *Drymskviða* is one of many proofs of the paradoxical power of the myth to express and explain things, which, in a given historical moment (or in one's personal experience), may, without this background, appear to be specific and singular, and often tragic, beyond consolation.

Other scholars have noted the political undertones of the divine drama in this song and related it to concrete historical events:

<sup>21</sup> Lingis changes the onomatopoeic interjections “čakšt” and “žiebt” into “taukšt” and “žybt”, respectively. While Lingis's second suggestion may be a matter of personal choice, his first suggestion is more exact with regard to the sound of the hammer.

according to Paul Beekman Taylor, for example, the story about the loss and retrieval of Thor's hammer ("an essential mark of cultural identity") anticipated the deterioration of the traditional Icelandic political and religious institutions (Taylor, 1994, 277). Almost 50 years earlier, Bieliackinas already seemed to be aware of the universality and elasticity of this myth when he invested his translation with Lithuanian political reality and thus created in it a direct reference to the catastrophic present of his homeland.

The end of World War II, during which Lithuania had changed hands several times between Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia, did not bring liberation to the country, but marked the beginning of a new occupation. For Bieliackinas, this was a personal tragedy, and when Lingis's letters made him realise that he had no chance of returning home, he wrote in his reply from 2 August 1945:

I do not know what to do. When I had opportunities to create a future for myself here, I did not take care of that, because I dreamt of coming back to Lithuania, to teach Icelandic literature, to work for bringing Lithuania and Scandinavia closer to each other...<sup>22</sup>

Being a Jew, he suffered twice, and during the time he was working on the translation, in 1946–1947, he must have at least suspected what had happened to his family. What he could probably never imagine was that the time would come when Lithuanians, in whom he had invested so much trust and whom he considered himself to be one of, would have to evaluate their own role in the atrocities of the war, in which the divisions into gods and trolls did not neatly follow nationally and politically established lines. Neither could he anticipate a much brighter vision: that Iceland would be the first country to grant political recognition to Lithuania in 1991 and therefore become an object of almost uncritical reverence for Lithuanians.

It is difficult to say to what degree Bieliackinas himself was conscious of the semantic implications in the poem his translation had produced. He had after all consented to most of Lingis's emendations, which minimised the effect that has been explored in this article. Possibly, the

22 Orig.: Nežinau, ką daryti. Kai buvo progų susitvarkyti savo ateitį čia, nesirūpinau tuo, nes svajojau grįžti į Lietuvą, dėstyti islandų literatūrą, dirbti Lietuvos ir Skandinavijos suartinimui ...

translator simply conceded to his authority: his letters demonstrate his great respect and warm affection for Lingis, who was a Lithuanian native speaker and also his senior – not in terms of age, but in academic status.

These circumstances notwithstanding, there is little doubt that the idea of the restoration of “the hammer” must have been the central concept in Bieliackinas’s Icelandic life. Probably, one could even call its pursuit, with reference to Jurij Lotman’s (1992, 369) concept of literary biography, one of the governing codes of Bieliackinas’s creative life script. The belief that the lost Lithuanian statehood will be recovered constantly emerges in his letters and articles. It is sometimes expressed in a somewhat naive and sentimental way, as when he urges Lithuanians living in exile to move together, establish a colony and start a new life until “things return to their usual course” (letter to Lingis of 2 August 1945). It can also be discerned behind his public actions, his cultural activities and even his last wish, according to which he bequeathed his clothes to Lithuanian refugees (see Svava Ágústsdóttir’s letter to Lingis of 12 April 1947). And, as the present article has tried to demonstrate, we find it allegorically expressed in his translation of the old Scandinavian poetical text, as a message of hope to his countrymen who, like himself, were scattered around the world and mourned the loss of their state.

As for Lithuanian Scandinavianists of today, the topos of “the restoration of the lost hammer” posits a very concrete and easily performed task – to restore the original handwritten version of Bieliackinas’s translation in printed form and make it accessible for the Lithuanian audience as well as for scholarly research.

## Bibliography

### *Þrymskviða* and its translations

#### *Old Icelandic version*

Þrymskviða (1932). In *De gamle Eddadigte*. Udgivne og tolkede af Finnur Jónsson (pp. 114–119). København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag. Retrieved from [http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Þrymskviða\\_\(FJ\)](http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Þrymskviða_(FJ)).

#### *Danish translations*

Þryms-Kvadet (1926). Oversat fra oldnordisk af Thøger Larsen. In *Nordens Gudekvad (Edda-Myterne, 1)*. Lemvig: Herman Bechs Boghandel. Retrieved from [http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Nordens\\_Gudekvad](http://heimskringla.no/wiki/Nordens_Gudekvad).

Trymskvadet (2018). Nyoversat og kommenteret af Rolf Stavnem.  
In *Den Poetiske Edda* (pp. 193–203). UPress.

*English translations*

The Lay of Thrym or the Hammer Recovered (1866). Translated by Benjamin Thorpe. In *Edda Sæmundar Hinns Frôða*. The Edda of Sæmund the Learned, 1 (pp. 62–66). London: Trübner & Co.

The Lay of Thrym (1990). Translated by George Johnston. In his *Endeared by Dark. Collected Poems*. Ontario Porcupine's Quill. Retrieved from Paul Douglas Deane (Ed.). *Forgotten Ground Regained*, <http://alliteration.net/poetry/thrym.htm>.

Thrymskvitha (2015). Translated by Jackson Crawford. In *The Poetic Edda. Stories of the Norse Gods and heroes* (pp. 115–122). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

*German translation*

Thrymskvidha oder Hamarsheimt. Thryms-Sage oder des Hammers Heimholung (1851). Übersetzt und mit Erläuterungen begleitet von Karl Simrock. In *Die Edda: die ältere und jüngere, nebst den mythischen Erzählungen der Skalda* (pp. 61–65). Stuttgart: Verlag der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung.

*Lithuanian translations*

Giesmė apie Trimą (manuscript, ~1947). Translated by Teodoras Bieliackinas (with markings by Juozas Lingis). Stored in Juozas Lingis's Personal Archive, Vilnius University Library, archive file F247–879.

Giesmė apie Trymą (1947). Translated by Teodoras Bieliackinas, comments by Juozas Lingis. *Pragiedruliai*, 4, 11–14.

Trymo giesmė (typescript, 1980). Translated by Vladas Nausėdas. In *Poetinė Eda* (pp. 19–24). Stored at the Centre for Scandinavian Studies, Vilnius University.

Giesmė apie Triumą (2009). Translated by Aurelijus Vijūnas. In *Poetinė Eda* (pp. 161–166). Vilnius: Aidai.

*Russian translation*

Песнь о Трюме (1999). Перевод О. А. Смирницкой [translated by Olga Smirnickaja]. *Атлантика*, 4, 222–233. Retrieved from Norrøen Dýrð, <http://norse.ulver.com/src/edda/thrym/ru2.html>.

### Other references

- A+A Teodoras Bieliackinas (1947). *Pragiedruliai*, 6, 25.
- Andriušis, Pulgis (1968). *Septinton įleidus. Rinktiniai raštai*, 1. Boston: Lietuvių enciklopedijos leidykla.
- Behrendt, Poul, & Bunch, Mads (2015). *Selvfortalt. Autofiktioner på tværs: prosa, lyrik, teater, film*. København: Dansk lærerforeningens Forlag.
- Beekman Taylor, Paul (1994). Völundarkviða, Þrymskviða and the function of myth. *Neophilologus*, 78 (2), 263–281.
- Bieliackinaz [sic.], Teodoras (15.12.1939). Endurminningar frá Kyrjálanesi, *Morgunblaðið*, 294, 5.
- Bieliackinas, Teodoras (22.02.1940). Lithauen – landið, sem norrœnir víkingar huggu á strandhögg og rœndu konum. *Vikan*, 8, 14.
- Bieliackinas, Teodoras (1945–1946). Letters to Juozas Lingis, unpublished. In Juozas Lingis's Personal Archive, Vilnius University Library, file nr. F247–1183.
- Bieliackinas, Teodoras (1954). In Vaclovas Biržiška, Antanas Bendorius, Pranas Čepėnas & Juozas Girnius (Eds.). *Lietuvių enciklopedija*, 2 (p. 493). Boston: Lietuvių Enciklopedijos Leidykla. Retrieved from <http://lituapedija.net/Puslapis:LE02.djvu/493>.
- Björn Franzson (15.08.1946). Sannleikurinn um Eystrasaltslöndin. *Þjóðviljinn*, 283, 5.
- Bubnys, Arūnas (2005). Kauno ir Vilniaus getų žydų policija (1941–1944 m.). *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 1 (17), 66–86. Retrieved from <http://www.llks.lt/pdf2/Bubnys-Kauno-geto-policija.pdf>.
- Burke, Sean (2004). *The death and return of the author: Criticism and subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh University Press. (First published in 1992).
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (2002). Reading Þrymskviða. In Paul Acker & Carolyne Larrington (Eds.). *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse mythology* (pp. 180–194). London and New York: Routledge.
- Godard, Barbara (2003). Translation poetics, from modernity to post-modernity. In Susan Petrilli (Ed.). *Translation translation* (pp. 87–99). Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- G.St [Gunnar H. Stefánsson] (22.02.1947). Minningaorð. Teodoras Bieliackinas. *Vísir*, 55, 4.
- Guðmundur G. Hagalín (26.02.1947). Í minningu látins útlaga. *Alþýðublaðið*, 95, 3, 7.

- Haarder, Jon Helt (2014). *Performativ biografisme – en hovedstrømning i det senmodernes skandinaviske litteratur*. København: Gyldendal.
- Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson (2016). Formáli. In A. Oras. *Örlaganótt yfir Eystrasaltslöndum* (pp. 7–10). Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið.
- Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson (2018). The Apologist Halldor K. Laxness. In his *A twentieth century intellectual totalitarianism in Europe. Three case studies* (pp. 33–50). Retrieved from <https://www.acreurope.eu/files/ACRE-Totalitarism-preview%28low-res%29.pdf>.
- Hermans, Theo (2001). Shall I apologize translation? *Journal of Translation Studies*, 5, 1–17. Retrieved from [http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/516/1/Ep\\_Apologizetrans.pdf](http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/516/1/Ep_Apologizetrans.pdf).
- HKL [Haldór Laxness] (25.02.1947). Nokkur orð um Teodoras Bieliackinas. *Þjóðviljinn*, 46, 3. Later included into his *Reisubókarkorn*, 1950.
- Lindow, John (2001). *Norse mythology: A guide to gods, heroes, rituals, and beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lotman, Jurij = Лотман, Ю. М. (1992). Литературная биография в историко-культурном контексте. К типологическому соотношению текста и личности автора. In his *Избранные статьи в трех томах*, 1 (pp. 369–376). Талинн: Александра.
- Mileris, Georg Davíð (2011). *Skip mitt braut við Afrikuströnd. Örlagasaga Fjólu Steinsdóttur Mileris og fjölskyldu hennar*. Reykjavík: Salka.
- Mirè Teodoras Bieliackinas (1947). *Aidai*, 1, 40.
- Morini, Massimiliano (2013). The interpersonal function/1 (External): The translator's personality. In his *The pragmatic translator: An integral theory of translation* (pp. 64–82). London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Munday, Jeremy (Ed.) (2008). *Translation as intervention*. London: Continuum.
- Osimo, Bruno (2019). *Basic notions of translation theory: Semiotics – linguistics – psychology*. Kindle edition (*Studi sulla traduzione*, 7).
- Petrauskas, Rimvydas (2005). Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės Seimo ištakos: didžiojo kunigaikščio taryba ir bajorų suvažiavimai XIV–XV a. *Parlamento studijos*, 3. Online resource, [http://www.parlamentostudijos.lt/Nr3/Istorija\\_Petrauksas.htm](http://www.parlamentostudijos.lt/Nr3/Istorija_Petrauksas.htm).
- Petrilli, Susan (2003). Translating with Borges. In Susan Petrilli (Ed.). *Translation translation* (pp. 517–530). Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Rojo, Ana, & Ramos Caro, Marina (2016). Can emotion stir translation skill? Defining the impact of positive and negative emotions

- on translation performance. In Ricardo Muñoz Martín (Ed.). *Reembedding Translation Process Research* (pp. 107–130). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Sirijos Gira, Vytautas (1982). Kelios mintys Islandijos varpo proga. H. Laksnesas Islandijos varpas, 1967. In his *Iš gyvenimo į knygą* (pp. 241–244). Vilnius: Vaga.
- Stepanauskas, Leonas (2010). *Paviliojo Islandija: Teodoro Bieliackino pėdsakais*. Vilnius: Versus aureus.
- Steponavičienė, Svetlana (2009). Jörundo dvidešimt lietuviškųjų gyvenimo metų... Jörundar saga Hilmarssonar Lithaugalandsfara. *Krantai*, 1, 66–89.
- Svava Ágústs dóttir (1947). Letter to Juozas Lingis, April 12. In Juozas Lingis' Personal Archive, Vilnius University Library, file nr. F247–1183.
- Tory, Avraham (1990). *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*. Cambridge, Mass./ London: Harvard University Press.
- V.St [Valtýr Stefánsson] (1.03.1947). Nokkur minningaorð um Teodoras Bieliackinas. *Morgunblaðið*, 50, 5.
- Wimmer, Ludvig Frands Adalbert (1877). *Oldnordisk læsebog med anmærkninger og ordsamling*. København: C. Steen & Søn.