



Counterpoint
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CEATL's European Literary
Translators' E-zine

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From the editors

From its beginnings in Copenhagen in 2018, *Counterpoint* has always striven to cast as wide a net as possible in the topics and areas it covers, and we hope that this ninth issue continues in the same vein.

Although our contributors may be based in Europe, their work as translators brings us to other worlds on other continents, as in the case of the interview with [Djûke Poppinga](#) who translates from Arabic into Dutch. Poppinga not only talks about her specific language pair, but also opens a not entirely pleasant window into the domain of European publishers. Their often stereotypical views on Arabic literature and its translation to a large degree dictate what we get to read from writers of Arabic.

The issue of which books – fiction and non-fiction – written in non-Western languages are translated how, when and by whom has been widely commented on for quite some time now and remains a matter of concern to many of us in the translation community. A couple of items on the [CEATL Click List](#) casts further light on this matter with the link to a powerful anthology of essays on colonising and decolonising the translation of literature, *Violent Phenomena*, and a link to a quite

personal, thought-provoking interview in [Asymptote](#) with Maureen Freely, Turkish to English translator.

The organisational layout, size and breadth of CEATL's member associations vary greatly, from small autonomous entities representing translators of literature into so-called small languages, to broad unions that include interpreters, audio-visual and technical translators. But most associations tend to be monolingual in scope, representing translators to and from one specific language. However, this is not the case with the Swiss association, A*dS, which represents translators working in one or more of Switzerland's four official languages. Barbara Sauser gives us an interesting [insight](#) into dealing with the challenges of a multilingual organisation.

In our regular feature *Notes from around Europe*, Ian Giles gives us an [inside look](#) into the history and workings of the UK Translators Association (TA), a specialist group within the Society of Authors (SoA), representing translators to and from the world's most commonly used language.

One of *Counterpoint*'s principal objectives from the outset has been to showcase all the work CEATL delegates carry out,

often in the background. This time Rafał Lisowski of the Authors' Rights Working Group writes about the **nitty gritty** of European legislation and how important it is for CEATL, on behalf of literary translators, to keep abreast of it.

Ewa Rajewska, Chair of the Board of the Western Section of the Polish Literary Translators' Association, gives readers an **overview** of a decade of literary translation in Poland, in which increased visibility hasn't (yet) led to an increase in fees.

RECIT centres for translators frequently feature in *Counterpoint* and this issue includes an interview with **Jörn Cambreleng**, director of ATLAS, the association for the promotion of literary translation who talks about the work carried out at their international college for literary translators (CITL) in Arles, France, and the many current challenges facing literary translators.

And finally, translator and writer **Andreas Eckhardt-Læssøe** shares his thoughts on the urge to smooth out the text when translating.

As always, the *Counterpoint* editorial team welcomes readers' views, feedback and suggestions for topics that you would like us to include – which we will endeavour to do!

We hope you enjoy reading issue No. 9.

Hanneke van der Heijden,
Anne Larchet and Juliane Wammen
editors@ceatl.eu



Hanneke van der Heijden is a literary translator and interpreter from Turkish into Dutch, and writes about **literature from Turkey**.

Photo: Private Archive



Anne Larchet is a freelance interpreter and translator from Spanish to English.

Photo: Martin de Haan



Juliane Wammen is an award-winning literary translator from English, Norwegian and Swedish into Danish.

Photo: Tim Flohr Sørensen

Knowledge is a powerful tool:

Keeping abreast of European legal matters

Rafał Lisowski

When members of translators' associations in different countries learn about CEATL, one of the first things that comes to their mind is that an umbrella organisation representing translators from all over the continent is probably able to do what national associations often lack the clout and resources to achieve: to lobby for translators' rights at a European level. In fact, CEATL does much more than this, but the fight for authors' rights does play a central role in our efforts. This is why CEATL's Authors' Rights Working Group (WG) is always busy.

Monitoring European copyright legislation

Long-time readers of *Counterpoint* may remember that the WG was featured in the very **first issue** of the magazine in 2019. Back then, the European Parliament had just approved the **Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market** (DSM), the first major piece of European legislation concerning

authors' rights in years. Among its many provisions, the directive included a crucial chapter on proportionate and appropriate remuneration, transparency obligation, and contract adjustment mechanisms which had been the main focus of CEATL's and the WG's lobbying efforts. With the European stage over, the battle continued at national level, where it was up to lawmakers in every individual country to come up with the local implementation of the directive. In CEATL, we turned from lobbying to advising, aiming to assist translators' associations in their push for fair legislation. The WG wasted no time and drafted a detailed document focusing on provisions which could help advance the situation of authors in general, and of translators in particular. CEATL member associations received this in late 2019 so that they could arm themselves for the struggle ahead.

And a struggle it has been. More than three years later, with the European

deadline for implementation long gone, many countries still lag behind. Others have implemented the directive in a less than satisfactory manner, either not giving it due attention, yielding to pressure from more powerful parties such as publishers and producers, or allowing existing laws to compromise the intended aims of the directive.

The CEATL Authors' Rights Working Group

Just like CEATL in general, the Authors' Rights WG is representative of the varied European landscape of literary translation. Its current coordinator is Cécile Deniard (France), with long-time members Elisa Comito (Italy) and Rafał Lisowski (Poland), and the newer members Hilde Lyng (Norway), Andreas Jandl (Germany), Jaakko Kankaanpää (Finland) and Tinna Ásgeirsdóttir (Iceland). When the world stopped during the Covid-19 pandemic, the WG made good use of the newly available technology and now collaborate on a much more regular basis: Instead of meeting only once a year at the AGM, the WG now meets on Zoom every month or two.



The Authors' Rights WG has continued to monitor the situation, raising awareness and conducting surveys on the progress of local legislation. Thanks to our efforts, our member associations have remained well-informed about the DSM directive. Unfortunately, however, many have reported that they haven't been able to fully participate in consultations as rightful stakeholders. We have sent letters of concern to national lawmakers (e.g. Austria) and gathered information on the most significant obstacles and loopholes in individual EU countries in order to draft a dossier for the Copyright Unit of the European Commission. Although the DSM directive is proving to be the first step towards more balanced copyright legislation rather than the cure-all some hoped it would be, we remain both vigilant and optimistic about its effects.

Taking stock of the legal landscape

The Authors' Rights WG believes that knowledge is a powerful tool. Although authors and translators are the weaker party in the publishing market, we can try to tip the scales in our favour by becoming more aware of our circumstances and comparing them to those of our colleagues in other countries. CEATL aims to facilitate such exchanges of information. This is why the Authors' Rights WG has undertaken the task of conducting a large-scale legal survey and disseminating its results. The survey was conducted in 2021-2022 among the representatives of translators' associations from 27 countries and has enabled us to map the legal situation of literary translators in Europe in terms of the overall legal framework, the scope and duration of

licensing, remuneration, transparency, and respecting translators' moral rights.

Among the most interesting finds was the fact that time-limited licences (usually 5-10 years) are the predominant form of translators' contracts in more than a half of all European countries. Crucially, however, most translators in those countries never receive royalties, which is of particular concern in large language markets. On the other hand, in countries where rights are usually licensed by translators for the duration of intellectual property (i.e. 70 years after the death of the author) royalty clauses are the norm. The survey has also shown that publishers in nearly all European countries expect translators to license away rights in their contracts in as many fields as possible. Yet, in half of these countries no extra remuneration is offered for secondary uses such as e-books, audio books and streaming services. Surprisingly, no advance is given on signing the contract in most European countries. Among other things, we have found that while the main aim of translators' negotiations is the basic fee and royalties, they tend to be more successful when it comes to modifying the schedule of their work. The survey also included a section on a variety of emerging issues. Back in 2021 our members reported no significant use of machine translation in the publishing industry, but these are obviously fast-evolving issues, and we know the temptation is there, so we are monitoring the situation with the help of our members.

Overall, the [final report](#) paints a mixed picture. On the one hand, it highlights

the universal respect for translators' rights as authors and the good job local associations are doing in providing model contracts, codes of good practice and negotiating standard contracts whenever possible. On the other hand, it shows the relatively weak legal framework of the translation contract and emphasises the unique opportunity to rebalance contractual relationships offered by the DSM directive.

“We can try to tip the scales in our favour by becoming more aware of our circumstances”

A broad reach

Useful knowledge needs to be widely disseminated, so in February 2023 the WG held its first [online webinar](#) on the findings of the legal survey, open to translators, legal advisors and other publishing professionals from all over Europe. We plan further, more targeted online events centred around the report in the future. CEATL is a European organisation, but the issues of translators' copyright clearly aren't restricted to this side of the Atlantic. The Authors' Rights WG has initiated valuable exchanges of information with our American colleagues, meeting with



***Rafał Lisowski** is a freelance translator from English into Polish. He graduated from the Institute of English Studies at the University of Warsaw. He has translated over 80 books of fiction and non-fiction, including works by Kurt Vonnegut, Truman Capote, Stephen King, Colson Whitehead, Jon Krakauer, Akwaeke Emezi and Rebecca Makkai. He is the current chair of the Polish Literary Translators' Association (STL).*

Rafał Lisowski

Photo: Ewa Getter-Lisowska

representatives of [The Authors Guild](#) in 2022 to discuss model contracts, legal guidelines, surveys, and our efforts toward collective bargaining in both United States and Europe. In 2023 we extended our transatlantic network of contacts, talking with both The Authors Guild and the [American Literary Translators Association](#), the [American Translators Association](#), and the [PEN America Translation Committee](#).

The legal landscape is always going to present challenges for translators, making it ever necessary for CEATL to play an active part on this front. The Authors' Rights WG is there for European associations to provide support and information on what can and should be done, and to receive their feedback on the most alarming matters.

NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: UNITED KINGDOM

The Translators Association:

Championing literary translators

Ian Giles

The Translators Association (TA) is a specialist group within the Society of Authors (SoA). The SoA itself was founded in 1884 to advise individual members and lobby for the interests of authors – especially in relation to copyright concerns and contracts. Today, it is a UK-based trade union representing more than 12,000 authors, including writers, illustrators and literary translators. Much like the League of Dramatists which was founded under the aegis of the SoA by George Bernard Shaw in 1931 to advance the interests of playwrights, the TA came into being in 1958 under the umbrella of the SoA “to provide translators with an effective means of protecting their interests and sharing their concerns”. A group chaired by Guy Chapman and known as the Translators Committee had held sporadic meetings during 1957 in anticipation of this, while support from within the SoA came from Gordon Feilden who became the TA’s first secretary.

The TA seeks to advocate for the rights and needs of literary translators – defining a literary translator as anyone translating literary texts, such as fiction

and non-fiction, children’s literature, but also academic writing, graphic novels, plays, screenplays and anything else that requires the skills and expertise of a literary translator. And as their website states, “The TA is committed to the need for more openness and opportunities in publishing, more visibility of translators of colour and more proactive intervention to help dismantle the institutional barriers faced by early career translators.”

Around 7% of the SoA membership (some 850 translators or so) are members of the TA. Within the TA itself, approximately 80% of members are full members of the SoA with a publication under their belt, while the remainder are emerging translators or student members. TA membership is not confined to UK residents, but it has tended to be a gathering place for those who work into English or with British-based publishers and those who live in (or near) the British and Irish Isles. Of course, many colleagues also choose to join the US-based Authors Guild and other associations local to where they live and work. Membership income

represents approximately 65–70% of the SoA's income, with the remainder of the organisation's funding derived from its assets and investments, donations and grants, management fees relating to various charitable foundations, as well as royalties and commission accruing through the SoA's work overseeing various **literary estates**.

The TA is not alone in representing translators in the UK: the **Chartered Institute of Linguists**, founded in 1910, has some 5,000 members, while the **Institute of Translation and Interpreting** was founded in 1986 and has around 3,000 members. However, the TA is the only membership organisation that exclusively represents translators in or seeking publication across multiple languages. Smaller organisations such as DELT, PELTA and SELTA exist, specifically representing translators from Danish, Portuguese and Swedish into English respectively, and many of their members are also TA members. There has also been strong and fruitful dialogue between cross-border virtual networks such as the **Emerging Translators Network** (the ETN, founded in 2011) and the TA, with the ETN often serving as a natural stepping stone for those who go on to join the association.

Impassioned individuals

While much of the TA's early history is consigned to history (but alas! not the history books), it is clear that over its earlier decades the association was driven forwards by impassioned individuals with a strong sense of what was needed for translators in the UK publishing landscape. Among them was Patricia Crampton (1925–2016), a prolific translator whose freelance career

began in 1957, on the eve of the TA's formation, following a period working at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials and for NATO. Almost as prolific as her translation career was her advocacy for translation and translators – after joining the TA in 1962, she was a member for more than 50 years, including three terms as chair. As well as involvement in the establishment of the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society in the early 1970s, she was instrumental in the adoption of Public Lending Right for authors and translators, legislation for which was passed in 1979. In 1976 she helped ensure that a UNESCO recommendation for the protection of translators was passed (despite the UK government entering the only 'no' vote).



TA First Translation prize winners ceremony, February 2023
Photo: Adrian Pope

Unsurprisingly, the concerns of translators are often aligned with those of authors, and the TA and its committees have often sought to ensure that favourable changes for authors also encompass translators. In later years, this has also been reflected in the presence of key TA figures within the wider management of the SoA – translator Daniel Hahn

served as Chair of the SoA as recently as the mid 2010s, for example.

In 1993 the TA set up the journal *In Other Words*, subsequently taken over by the British Centre for Literary Translation and then published by the National Centre for Writing. The journal ran to 53 volumes and all TA members received a copy free of charge until the journal ceased publication in 2019.



TA members mingling at the British Library, February 2023
Photo: Adrian Pope

How the TA works

The TA is run by a managing committee of 8 elected members who serve for 3-year terms. The committee appoints from its own number two Co-Chairs who serve for 2-year terms with a one-year overlap. The 2023 Co-Chairs are Rebecca DeWald and Vineet Lal. The TA is a member of CEATL whose representative also serves on the committee in an *ex*

officio capacity. A particularly positive trend in recent years has been greater interest in serving on the committee and the subsequent emergence of contested elections for these positions.

The TA organisation is also most fortunate to have at its disposal the services of two SoA employees, currently Catherine Fuller and Ambre Morvan, who are responsible for much of the legwork and organisational continuity that in turn allows the committee to focus on its tasks on behalf of the membership. This also ensures that TA concerns are filtered on to other areas of the SoA to inform the wider organisation's policy and lobbying work. Fuller and Morvan also facilitate the return dividend of new information that can help translator members.

Campaigns and services

Previously based for many years in a grand residential conversion in Kensington, the SoA moved to smart new premises in Bloomsbury in 2019 where most staff are based – including our own Catherine and Ambre. On a practical level, members benefit from a range of services and advice on offer from the TA/SoA, including the highly prized contract vetting service – which provides all members with detailed professional advice on contracts they have received. This is clearly a valuable service: some authors can rely on agents to check their deals, but most literary translators do not have such back up. The duo are also a valuable resource thanks to their overview – allowing them to provide members with the temperature of the publishing industry at any given time.

Other activities include: outreach campaigns – both encouraging those



Ian Giles is an Edinburgh-based Scandinavian languages-to-English translator. He currently serves on the committee of the Translators Association and has been Chair of SELTA since 2018. Recent publications include translations of Camilla Läckberg and David Lagercrantz.

Ian Giles
Photo: Private archive

who are already translating and aren't members to join, and encouraging emerging translators; a variety of live and virtual events offering members continuous professional development opportunities and the chance to network with fellow translators; and much more. The SoA and TA oversee a number of translation prizes – some in specific language combinations, others non-language specific, such as the [TA First Translation Prize](#).

As well as engaging in ongoing SoA and industry-led campaigns and representing the translators' point of view, the TA also runs its own campaigns. Recent examples include the widely reported [#TranslatorsOnTheCover](#) campaign, as well as seeking to overcome the '3%' myth (which claims that only 3% of the titles published in English every year is a translation) on a data-driven basis, and ongoing work to survey reader's report rates and conditions. In the longer term, the TA is also working on a variety of dedicated resources. There is already a model translation contract available to members, while there are also currently working groups exploring

issues around translating for the theatre and translation and film rights. Another working group is committed to improving diversity and inclusivity both within the TA and the wider SoA.

In 2018, the TA marked its 60th anniversary with a range of events and celebrations, plus a weekly feature across multiple online platforms detailing one significant translation for each year of the TA's existence. Given the strength of the translation market in the UK and the drive to continue doing more, we expect that the TA will still be going strong when it marks its centenary in 2058.



The long road to Damascus

Interview with Arabic
translator *Djûke Poppinga*

Hanneke van der Heijden

When we meet in February, in a café on a waterfront in Amsterdam, Djûke Poppinga has just retired as a lecturer of Arabic at the University of Amsterdam. She is busy nonetheless: in a few days she will hand in a new book translation, her 63rd.

Her long career started more or less as a coincidence. “Honestly, I didn’t have a clue what to study after secondary school. There was just one thing I knew for sure: it had to be a language, a special language. And so I started with Arabic.” Not an easy choice, it turned out. “At first I thought it was horrible; mastering the alphabet alone took me forever. But after spending a few months in Tunisia, I went to Damascus and stayed for nearly a year. That changed everything. In Syria I worked my way through a long list of Arabic literature in preparation for my exams at the University of Amsterdam, and then the language finally came to life, I got a grip on it. That’s when my love for Arabic began.”

Boat on the Nile

From early on, Poppinga’s love for the language was closely connected to her love for Arabic literature. As a student she translated one of her favourite novels, *Al-Mahdi* by the Egyptian author *Abd al-Hakim Qasim*, just for the fun of it.



Djûke Poppinga
Photo: Private Archive



Naguib Mahfouz in café, 1968.
Photo: Public Domain, AUCpress

“I did all kinds of things to learn more about Arabic literature and the literary world,” Poppinga says with a smile. “When I was in Cairo together with a friend at the beginning of the 1980s, we heard that Naguib Mahfouz, the later Nobel laureate, used to host a reception every Sunday on a boat on the Nile, and we decided to go there. We were welcomed and seated at the end of a long, long table, among a crowd of people who all wanted to talk to the author. Every ten minutes the person sitting next to Mahfouz would give up their seat to their neighbour. Slowly we made our way up to the author, and all this time we were part of the other conversations going on at the table.”

Poppinga’s translation of Qasim’s novel was never published, but in the mid-1980s she was more lucky. “A Dutch

feminist publishing house was looking for a translator. As the Arabic texts were written by female authors, the publisher preferred the translator to be female too. The few other active translators were male, and so I got my first commission.”

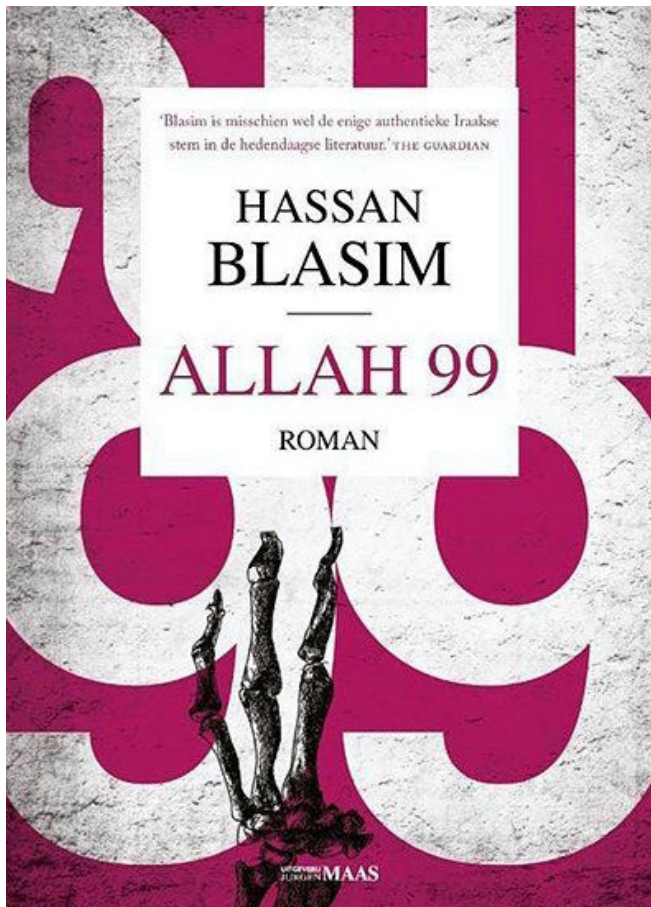
Since then, Poppinga has pursued a career as a literary translator. She occasionally translates poetry, but specialises in prose from the Middle East, novels by Egyptian authors Naguib Mahfouz and Alaa Al Aswani, by Hanan as-Sjaykh from Lebanon, Khaled Khalifa from Syria, and the Palestinian author Adania Shibli, among others. One of her recent translations, *Allah 99 (God 99)* by Iraqi author Hassan Blasim, was nominated for the Filter Translation Prize, an important award in the Netherlands.

Terra incognita

In the beginning of the 1980s when Poppinga started out, Arabic literature was still terra incognita for many publishers. When Naguib Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, publishers became a little more open to literature from the Arab world. Meanwhile, grants and exchange programmes for translators from organisations such as the **European Cultural Foundation** enabled Poppinga and her colleagues to discuss texts with colleagues and authors and develop their skills as translators. Looking back, Poppinga is happy that some progress has been made, but her frustration about the lack of interest from the Dutch book market is easily tangible too.

“Most publishing houses don’t have anything close to a policy regarding translations from Arabic. Decisions on

what to publish are often haphazard, a scattergun selection of Arabic books that have been published in English. As a translator, you simply don't get the chance to talk to publishers about interesting titles from the Arab world that could fit their programme." Over the years Poppinga has tried hard to bring about some improvements: she frequently gives lectures and talks, and has worked with many advisory bodies. "Usually, it's only once the rights for an Arabic book are bought that publishers get into contact with a translator. But even then that's not always the case. It happens regularly that publishers prefer to commission a translator from the English."



"The books that do make it to the Dutch market broadly fall into two categories. There are the easy reads, plot-driven stories that in form and theme are familiar to Western readers, such as novels by Alaa Al Aswany. But also books about Islam, sex and oppressed women, such as *Girls from Riyadh* by Rajaa Alsanea, belong to this category. The English translation of this novel was adapted for American readers' taste by the American publisher, in collaboration with the author. The translator Marilyn Booth wrote an [interesting article](#) about this. It's a disturbing incident, also for us, because the English book market has such a big influence on the Dutch." "A second category of translations consists of high-brow literature, complex and intellectually challenging novels, such as works by Abdul Rahman Munif and Adania Shibli. Compared to Western novels these books have a different narrative structure and are less plot-driven. In the Netherlands they are mostly brought out by niche publishing houses."

Gatekeepers

As a result of these preferences, large segments of the Arabic book world remain invisible to the Dutch readership. Non-fiction is one of the gaps. Whereas newspapers and magazines in the Netherlands are filled with news from the Middle East, books about political topics written by authors and journalists living in the region are not considered for translation. "An utterly harrowing situation," Poppinga says. "Why shouldn't we read a book about the war in Syria by an Arab writer or

journalist? Or, for that matter, a book about climate change? But things are even worse than that. I know academics at Dutch universities who spent their lives studying the Middle East without even being able to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in Arabic. As Middle East historians they completely rely on sources from the West. An example of Western arrogance, there’s no other word for it.”

Arabic belongs to the family of Semitic languages and is the mother tongue of an estimated 360 million speakers. All Arabic speaking countries share the same writing language (Modern Standard Arabic; MSA) but have their own Arabic dialect for speaking: Syrian Arabic, Lebanese Arabic etc. For educated language users, Arabic dialects are mutually understandable. In present day literary texts dialogues are often written in the dialect of the country while descriptive parts are written in MSA.

Well-written books with a good story are lacking too. Finding a readership can’t be a problem, Poppinga believes. “The Netherlands has a large community of Moroccan-Dutch people. The children and grandchildren of Moroccans who migrated from the 1960s onwards to work as labourers in the Netherlands are very interested in what’s going on in the Maghreb and the Middle East. Many were brought up in a Berber language, their Arabic is simply insufficient to read books in that language. Unfortunately,

Dutch publishing houses don’t consider this migrant community a readership.” The limited selection of books doesn’t bring the Arab world to life in the Netherlands. “A wider, more diverse selection of titles would give a much better impression of what’s going on in this vast territory. It would arouse the reader’s curiosity instead of reinforcing stereotypes,” says Poppinga. But the gatekeepers of the Dutch book market are either too impatient or not daring enough. “Publishing houses were looking for novels about the Arab Spring when the revolution had just begun. Literary festivals that want to invite ‘new voices’ often get cold feet when it turns out that the numbers of Western followers of these authors is rather low. As if that weren’t inherent in being a ‘new voice’.”

Commas and full stops

It doesn’t stop baffling Poppinga, who knows how much there is to discover. But it also doesn’t stop her translating. She points out some of the differences between Arabic and Dutch that make translating an extra challenge.

“Whether one looks at the grammatical and logical structure of the language, or the use of imagery by literary authors and their love of a bit of drama, an Arabic text is different from a Dutch one in nearly every respect.”

One of the first challenges is something so seemingly trivial as punctuation.

“Commas and full stops were introduced fairly late in Arabic, which is still noticeable in the often erratic use of punctuation. Sentences tend to be long and winding, with clauses connected by conjunctions such as *wa* ‘and, while’ and *fa* ‘then, hence’. In the twists and turns such a long sentence takes, the tense of

verbs can change many times – much more than would be possible in Dutch. Interpreting the logical coherence within page-long sentences and finding out which moment or period the author is referring to are two of the difficulties the translator has to tackle. This is even more true for books written in a fragmentary fashion, such as Hassan Blasim’s *God 99*.’

“Why not read a book about the war in Syria by an Arab writer? Or about climate change?”

The Arabic lexicon has its own difficulties. “In Arabic it’s very common to combine a noun with three or four adjectives which are all near-synonyms. In a literal translation this would stand out much more than it does in Arabic, so I often translate only one or two.” Poppinga has a similar approach to the lyrical descriptions and imagery that can sound exaggerated to Dutch ears. “I don’t smooth them out, but I make sure the translation doesn’t sound too exotic when the Arabic is down to earth. When translating texts from a region with a culture very different from the Dutch in a language that’s more formal by nature, the issue of finding a balance between foreignisation and domestication is always in the back of one’s mind.”

“A little while ago, this issue took on a different dimension when I had a discussion with the Palestinian author Shibli about the word *intifada*. In her view, keeping Arabic words in the Dutch translation would be a case of colonialism. I disagreed. Yes, the word *intifada* (‘uprising’) can be translated without a problem, but in the context of the Palestinian protests against Israeli occupation it became a proper name, a term, widely known abroad. In a similar vein, translating *hummus* with ‘chickpea paste’ would make the translation less neutral than the original; nowadays every Dutch supermarket sells hummus. Leaving the Arabic word in the Dutch translation is sometimes less exotic than translating it.”

“I love this thinking about words,” Poppinga says. “But for me every translation starts with defining the tone of the book. That specific tone, and its equivalent in Dutch, is my guideline in the choices and decisions every translation requires. And there are many decisions to make. Arabic is such a rich language.”

Four languages, one association: A*dS

Barbara Sauser

Switzerland has four official national languages: German, which is by far the most widely spoken, French, Italian and Romansh. Most native speakers of Romansh are completely bilingual, while people from other language regions learn the other national languages only as ‘foreign’ languages at school, (if at all). A feature of German-speaking Switzerland is that people speak in dialect in all settings, but they write in standard German. Books are therefore usually translated into standard German.

For a translators’ association, a linguistic context of this nature means that it has to deal not only with the ‘normal’ diversity of members – different levels of professionalism, different genres and fields, etc. – but also with four distinct cultural spaces. Economic conditions vary from one linguistic region to another and the economic conditions of the reference countries – Germany, France and Italy – are even more different. To give a concrete example: according to the [2020 CEATL survey](#) on the working conditions of literary translators in Europe, the typical rate for 1,800 characters is 22 euros in Germany, 29 euros in Austria,

25 euros in France and 15 euros in Italy. In Switzerland, with its high cost of living, it is 50 euros. Translators living in Switzerland must contend, both at home and abroad, with colleagues who work for lower rates. Above all, it is thanks to the support of the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia and other foundations that it is possible to earn a living as a literary translator in Switzerland.

Impact of national association

Notwithstanding their different languages and the lack of homogeneity, literary translators have joined together to form a national multilingual association. Firstly, because a national association can have more impact in terms of cultural policy, but also because the number of literary translators would be simply too low for separate language-based associations: of the approximately 1000 writers and translators who are members of A*dS, only 140 are translators, and, in the case of Italian and Romansh in particular we are only talking about a handful of people.

The head offices of A*dS are in Zurich, in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. To ensure contact with



Switzerland.

WE SPEAK SWISS

24.3%

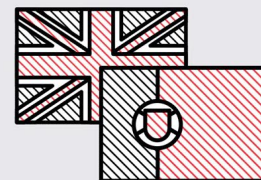
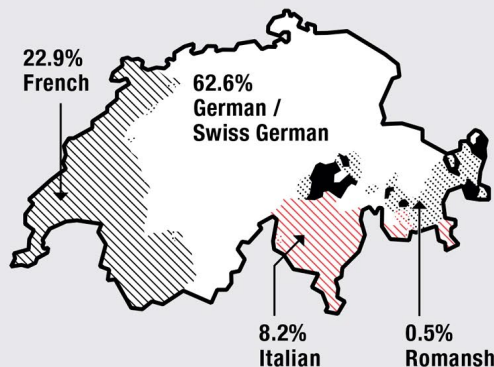
of the population do not have one of the four national languages as main language.

DIALECTS

“Swiss German” is a term that covers a large variety of Alemannic dialects.

4 LANGUAGES

Switzerland has 4 national languages.



English and Portuguese are the most commonly spoken foreign languages in Switzerland.

Romansh is a language from the Rhaeto-Romance family, derived from Latin.

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French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino, there are paid outposts with a small workload. The seven members of the Committee represent the different fields – books for young people, the spoken word, translation, etc. – but also the various linguistic regions including the ‘fifth national language’, which in Switzerland is currently receiving more and more attention in cultural affairs and cultural policy. The ‘fifth national language’ is the multiplicity of languages spoken by 23% of the Swiss population whose mother tongue is not one of the four official national languages. A practical initiative is, for example, the provision of work bursaries for those writing in a foreign language.

One of the objectives of A*dS is, of course, to ensure that translators are correctly paid for their work. The association has published a brochure with recommended rates (the brochure can be downloaded [here](#) in French, German and Italian.) These rather ambitious rates recommended by

the association have indeed sent out shockwaves throughout Switzerland to organisers of (small) cultural events, such as readings. This is much less of an issue in German-speaking Switzerland, with a tradition of paying authors and translators for presentations compared to French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino, where they often do not get paid at all for this kind of work. In its initiatives, A*dS must therefore always strive to ensure that members from all regions feel truly represented and that efforts to achieve professional recognition do not simply lead to the disappearance of cultural initiatives.



A*dS Board meeting, Biel/Bienne, 2023
Photo: A*dS



*Barbara Sauser, literary translator from Italian, French, Polish and Russian into German, studied Slavonic studies and musicology and worked for several years in German-language publishing houses in Switzerland. She is currently an A*dS committee member and delegate for CEATL.*

Barbara Sauser
Photo: Nicola Terzaghi

The cultural message

A*dS also maintains contacts with translation associations in neighbouring countries – for example, we meet up in Frankfurt or at events organised by one of these associations – and participates in discussions relating to a particular language region (with the possible exception of EU-specific issues). In the coming months, A*dS will undertake a survey in Switzerland along the lines of the one carried out this winter by the ATLF, “Machine Translation and Post-Editing”, and in the case of French as the target language will expand on a current **VdÜ** research project for German, on the subject of artificial intelligence.

At national level, cultural promotion is defined by a ‘Culture Message’, each with a time-span of four years. A feature of the latest ‘Message’ is that the Swiss Confederation’s support for cultural endeavours requires the beneficiaries of funding to be paid in accordance with the guidelines of respective umbrella associations on the remuneration of the artists/actors involved. So if a

festival pays fees that are too low, it runs the risk of no longer being eligible for public funding. This places a lot of pressure on the organisers to pay acceptable fees. However – and this is rather complicated – it is not the federal government but the cantons, cities and municipalities that are responsible for the promotion of literature in Switzerland. They are currently engaged in discussions on whether and how they will follow federal measures in relation to fees. The aim of A*dS is to ensure that the 26 Swiss cantons also recognise this principle as a standard, so that the financial situation of writers and translators can be improved.

Increasing visibility and stagnating fees: *A decade of literary translation in Poland*

Ewa Rajewska

For practitioners, researchers and critics within the field of literary translation – and, not least, for readers – the last ten to twelve years have seen some great and inspiring developments but at the same time, other tendencies mark a more worrying development. It has been an interesting, intense time, marked by a clear increase in translation as an artistic activity and as a subject of reflection in Polish translation studies, in literary criticism and in literary life. But simultaneously, the remuneration and working conditions for literary translators do not seem to be improving, actually rather the opposite. I'll explore this paradoxical development by giving an overview of the past decade in the Polish translation landscape.

Professional prestige

The symbolic starting point of the decade was the establishment of the Polish Association of Literary Translators (Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy LiteratURY – STL) in 2010, the end point was the 1st Congress of Polish Translation Studies (scheduled for 2020 but postponed to 2022 due to the pandemic). Both events were crucial to translators'

visibility and created a renewed focus on translation as a topic of research.

Today, the STL has more than 450 members – almost half of all literary translators in Poland. It deals with the representation and protection of the interests of literary translators, educates new and upcoming translators on their rights and promotes literature and reading. In October 2022, STL became a signatory to the Kraków Convention, an agreement which defines the principles of cooperation between publishers and creators with the aim of raising standards in mutual relations. So far, nearly twenty influential Polish publishers have signed this convention.

To make the profession more attractive to new translators, STL emphasises the visibility of translators under slogans such as “A translator is also an author”, “Translators on the covers” and “Shakespeare did not write in Polish”, printed on T-shirts, bags, pins, stickers and internet banners. In 2016, literary translator, co founder of the Association and former president Justyna Czechowska recalled, “I see

a marked improvement in the media since STL was founded. Notoriously, we began sending letters to editors [who had published reviews or excerpts from translated books – E.R.] asking them to include the translator’s name [...]. And indeed, our letters had an effect – several translators even received an apology.” Looking back now, there is no doubt that the climate around literary translation has changed considerably.

Making translation studies visible

In May 2022, the 1st [Congress of Polish Translation Studies](#) gathered translation scholars from 25 universities and academic centres, who presented nearly a hundred papers in thirteen panels and covered a wide range of topics, relating both to the practice of literary translation (such as the problems of multimedia translation, Shakespeare in Polish, translation of children’s literature, and exploring riddles from Polish literary translation history) as well as to translation criticism and problems of contemporary translation studies. The need to make Polish translation scholars’ research more widespread and support their interdisciplinary and inter-institutional cooperation was discussed, and ways were considered to develop a more coherent translation education for young scholars. This work will continue as the 2nd Congress is scheduled to take place in Poznań in 2025 and the [1st Summer School of Translation Studies](#), aimed primarily at PhD candidates and graduate students, will be held on 12–16 September 2023 in Łódź.

Both the establishment of STL and the 1st Congress seemed foundational, which they of course are not; after all, translations, borrowings and inspirations from foreign literatures have nourished Polish literature from

its medieval beginnings, and Polish translation studies celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2007, half a century after the publication of Olgierd Wojtasiewicz’s *Wstęp do teorii tłumaczenia* (‘Introduction to the Theory of Translation’), considered the first modern Polish book on translation studies. The field of literary translation and translation studies is, in short, an ever-changing, dynamic field that has experienced many shifts in topical focus and many highs and lows in the course of time, and right now, there is a sense of ‘new beginnings’ with the two abovementioned events.



Roman clay money box from around the 2nd century AD. Archäologische Staatssammlung, Munich
Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Regaining past prestige

In Poland, the profession of literary translator was quite prestigious in post-war times – in a communist country relatively close to the West, but isolated by the Iron Curtain, the classic works of world literature were translated within the framework of a state publishing policy. In 1989, a new era began with the political transformation and abolition of censorship soon after. The liberation of the publishing market resulted in a flood of translations, all too often of poor quality, and the

prestige of the profession temporarily dropped. Over the last decade, literary translation has regained prestige, reflected in the collective coming-out of Polish translators – from the insides of books to their covers.

“In this profession, the gap between prestige and market practices is huge”

Translators are indeed increasingly visible on the covers of the books they have translated – and not only the most established translators or literary classics. Translators’ prefaces and afterwords are more common than before, and biographical books and interviews with translators are published. Translators can be seen at literary festivals, and an increasing number of cultural events dedicated solely to the art of translation are being organised, such as ‘Found in Translation’, the Gdańsk Literary Meetings (held every two years since 2015). Activities take place on the occasion of International Translation Day, and in the years around 2020, a regular series of meetings with literary translators started in Sopot (‘Translation Before Publication’), in Warsaw (‘Translation Before Proofreading’), in Kraków (‘Putting it Translationally’), in Szczecin (‘Lost in Translation’), and in Poznań (‘Faithful, Beautiful, Invisible’).

Awards...

In December 2009, following the ceremony of the **Angelus Central European Literature Award** where the hosts thanked the sound engineers but forgot to mention the literary translators, Czarne Publishing House submitted an open letter to the Mayor of Wrocław. It read: “How can the foreign books be presented without mentioning their translators? [...] How can one – while boasting a newly created award – fail to mention those for whom it was created?” As a result, the Angelus Prize for the best prose book by a Central European writer has, since its 2010 edition, also included the translator. New literary prizes dedicated to translators have been created as well: in 2014, the Gdynia Literary Prize was expanded to include a category for translation into Polish. Established in 2013, the Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński Translation Award of the Mayor of Gdańsk is awarded to the translation of a single work and as a lifetime achievement. Since 2016, the Wisława Szymborska Award is not only granted to a book of poetry written in Polish published in the preceding year, but also, every two years, for a book translated from a foreign language – to its author and translator.

...and money

However, when we take a closer look at the prizes for translators, we see that they are fundamentally unequal to the prizes for authors of original works. As a rule, the translator of an award-winning book receives a financial sum several times lower than that of the author. For instance, the Gdańsk-based European Poet of Freedom Award values the translator (as much as five times)



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Ewa Rajewska
Photo: Łukasz Bartoszewski

lower than the author: in 2020, Sinéad Morrissey received the equivalent of 22,000 EUR for her volume *On Balance*, while her translator Magda Heydel received ca. 4,500 EUR. Only the Wisława Szymborska Award has adopted the same principle as the International Booker Prize: an amount (ca. 22,000 EUR) shared equally between the author and the translator of the winning book. At the other extreme is the Gdynia Literary Prize: its translation category places literary translation on an equal footing with the other categories – poetry, prose, essay –, all four honouring the winners with the same sum (ca. 11,000 EUR), but in this case it is the original author who has no share in the award.

For all other translation awards, we see that even when over the years the translator's share in the award money has increased a little, the translator never receives more than 25% of the money awarded to the author. The problem of equivalence in translation remains central and still unresolved. All this being said, festivals and awards can give a sense of energy and excess that is misleading with regards to the

working conditions of the translators. In 2016, literary critic Justyna Sobolewska diagnosed the situation: “Translators in Poland are awarded prizes, and they have their festivals, but at the same time they are paid humiliating rates, their names are overlooked, and the publishers look for the cheapest done job rather than the best quality. In this profession, the gap between prestige and market practices is huge.”

A survey of the professional situation of literary translators carried out by STL in the second half of 2022 shows that, despite rampant inflation, the average rates of remuneration for an author's sheet of translation (approximately 22 typed pages) have changed only little in the preceding decade (110–150 EUR in 2012 to a median of 160 EUR in 2022) and generally do not increase with the translator's experience. Sadly, the rise in professional prestige is not matched with an increase in fees. For tangible changes on this latter issue, we will still have to wait.

OUT & ABOUT

ATLAS: Association for the promotion of Literary Translation

Six questions to *Jörn Cambreleng*

The International College of Literary Translators in the city of Arles is one of the 14 RECIT centres of literary translation, and its director, Jörn Cambreleng, replies to questions put to him by Counterpoint.

Can you tell us about CITL?

People often get confused between CITL and **ATLAS**, the place and the structure that underpins it. The ATLAS association was founded at the end of 1983, with the prospect of the first conference on literary translation, known as the *Assises de la Traduction Littéraire*, which took place in 1984. The idea of a permanent location, that was to be the International College of Literary Translators, emerged very quickly and was housed in the *Espace Van Gogh* from November 1989. It is said that the first residents from Central and Eastern Europe saw the wall fall from the CITL. A residency model had already existed in Germany since 1980, and its founder, Elmar Tophoven, was also one of the founding members of ATLAS (along with Laure Bataillon, Françoise Campo-Timal,

Hubert Nyssen and many others). This German residence, **Straelen**, had drawn its inspiration from medieval Toledo in honouring collaborative translation. The concept of a meeting place and a place of exchange is still hugely relevant today in Arles: the fact that we have ten rooms for residents allows it to exist. This is particularly important for a profession that is in essence largely solitary, given that the daily life of a translator is essentially made up of face-to-face meetings with the text. Yet the idea of a translation residency is also linked to the idea of a retreat, of spending time away from the daily grind and finding the necessary calm and concentration.

Currently, in addition to the translation residencies outlined above, we are also developing a new type of residency, linked to an exploration of new voices to be translated. This is the purpose of our *Levéé d'Encres* programme.

ATLAS's activities are mainly financed through public funding (state and local

authorities), but also through its own income, which derives mainly from public procurement. Another important source of funding is Sofia, which collects library loan fees and finances activities of general interest such as ours.

Apart from hosting translators in residence, what other activities does the CITL engage in?

The Conference has become a literary event that is open to all, and this is something we never lose sight of, because the French word Assises, with its strong legal connotations, remains intimidating, since it refers to something for specialists. We also offer another springtime literary translation event, *Printemps de la traduction*, in Paris hosted by the Maison de la Poésie.

Meanwhile, ATLAS is also a certified training organisation, which for the past twelve years has greatly contributed to the renewal of the generations of French translators worldwide, notably through its flagship programme called ‘The Translator Factory’ (‘La Fabrique des traducteurs’) which has already trained 150 young translators in 14 language pairs. ATLAS also offers ongoing training workshops for experienced translators.



The residence
Photo: Association ATLAS

Furthermore, one of our key tasks is to make the public aware of the cultural role of literary translators and to highlight their craft. To this end, we run a variety of programmes, both through public events and through promoting the art of translation, for example, through a literary translation competition – the ATLAS Prize for high school students. Our cultural activities are also aimed at audiences that may be less familiar with literature: *Quai des langues* is aimed at exiles in the process of integration, based on the idea that a positive experience of translation will enhance their language and culture of origin and encourage them to learn French.

In this joint **March 2023 publication**, Atlas and ATLF (the French Association of Literary translators) warn about the imminent dangers of AI in their field – literary translation – which they continue to insist is an essential and deeply human intellectual activity. The text is available in Spanish and English and is being translated into several other languages.

In the same vein, can you tell us about the **ATLAS Machine Translation Observatory**?

Having noted the spectacular progress of generative algorithms for machine translation, five years ago we set up a long-term observation system. Contrary to popular belief, which extolled the results of these machine translations, there has been no change in the nature of so-called ‘neural’ translation, with

the application of ‘artificial intelligence’ techniques. The rationale behind this is statistic-based, but it is supported by big data: the algorithm looks for the most probable translation, and therefore the most standardised, i.e. the furthest from singularity and style. Its effectiveness is based on the size of the mass of data available. In order to learn a style, a machine must be trained on a particular corpus, which is not cost-effective today. While these are relatively obscure topics, they are regarded with certain fascination, leading some publishers to believe in productivity gains and to propose that literary translators change jobs by becoming machine pre-translation proofreaders, and move towards what is known as ‘post-editing’.

The translation profession, like the fields of illustration and computer coding, is at the forefront of anthropological changes that concern everyone (doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.). ATLAS endeavours to anticipate, inform and accompany the changes that are taking place with unprecedented brutality, by helping to clearly identify what distinguishes a literary translation from a translation generated by an algorithm.

“The idea of a translation residency is also linked to the idea of a retreat”



The gardens of the residence
Photo: Association ATLAS

In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges facing literary translators (in Europe) at this time?

The challenges are numerous. It is likely that the appeal of productivity gains will lead to the development of a low-cost translation sector which, by pillaging the work of humans and stepping into a legal vacuum, will devastate an already considerably weakened professional landscape. The performance of algorithms is indeed spectacular, but it must be distinguished from intelligence. The term artificial intelligence carries with it a fallacy that still captivates the world. It is imperative that we make it clear that translation is an interpretation, that it is a subjective reading of a text, and therefore a work of the human mind, that a language conveys something other than information, that literary translation is a creative craft. The report ‘[Translators on the Cover](#)’ produced by the OMC expert group of the EU member states says it all: cultural diversity cannot be achieved without increased public funding for literary translation. This financial backing is justified by the fact that translation is a constituent part of our European identity.



*With a background in theatre, **Jörn Cambreleng** has translated Schiller, Wedekind, Gerhart Hauptmann and R. W. Fassbinder, among others, for the stage. For many years a reader for France Culture, he has long been a close observer of contemporary dramatic writing. A former director of the École Supérieure de Théâtre de Bordeaux-Aquitaine, he now gives priority to his work as a translator, and, as director of ATLAS, his attention is clearly focused on the cause of literary translation.*

Jörn Cambreleng
Photo: Romain Boutillier

In your opinion, what is the role of the CITL in particular and of translators' residencies in general, in the world of literary translation?

The CITL must move towards enabling literary translators to become agents in the book chain (in the sense of taking an active part), rather than executors. If they remain in the 'ancillary' position described by Antoine Berman, they run the risk of becoming mere subordinates, of being placed at the service of machines, and of doing work that is less and less gratifying and increasingly alienating. Translators must stand up for their work and proclaim it loud and clear in the public arena. Contrary to what some media think, we are lucky, readers are interested!

What about you? What is your own background, and what brought you to CITL?

I did my first translation during my residency at CITL. That was in 1995. I fell in love with the place and the opportunities it offers. After spending some time in the world of theatre, I applied for the position of director in 2008 with a view to consolidating the existing resources and developing training. The structure has grown a lot since then. In 2023, we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of ATLAS.

*Translated from the French
by Penelope Eades-Alvarez*

Stretching the limits of language:

On ‘bad’ translation

Andreas Eckhardt-Læssøe

Last year saw the publication of *Ikke at dø*, the Danish translation of American poet Anne Boyer’s *The Undying*, which translator and writer Ditte Holm Bro and I had been working on together on and off for two years. Previously, the two of us had collaborated with the editor and writer Rasmus Graff (of [Ovo Press](#)) on the publication of *Beklædning imod kvinder* (*Garments Against Women*), a book of poetry, also by Anne Boyer.

Boyer’s books are tricky; they often use wordplay and stretch and strain the playing to the almost absurd, but without becoming absurd. Boyer thinks through her imagery, more than she uses imagery to illustrate thought. One poem in particular, ‘The Open Book’, was incredibly nerve-wracking. This is because the whole poem rests on a series of wordplays revolving around the imagery of an open book and legibility and book-keeping, and the overall point of the poem is to show and explore a complex and confusing relationship between honesty and greed, capitalism and literature. Lucky for us, though, it turned out that enough of the idioms used also existed in Danish, so the structure of the poem held – barely.

In other words, Anne Boyer’s poems are some of the most frustrating and thrilling I’ve ever translated. In fact, when I look back at the first emails initiating the collaboration between the three of us, we all used the word ‘irritating’ to describe why we couldn’t really get over these poems, they got stuck in our metabolism of them, and we had to translate them to figure out why.

Conveying weirdness

After the poems came the prose. *The Undying* is a book about Boyer’s personal experience with breast cancer – not quite surviving it, but also not dying from it, hence the title – which is a prime example of the challenges the translation of the book posed. How to translate something so eye-catching and immediate, but at the same time so layered and complex? We chose to focus on the complexity of the title, ignoring that the most obvious reading of it was as a noun. Instead, we chose to focus exclusively on the verb form inside it, on the process. To us, it seemed more like Anne Boyer to choose complexity over style when you can’t have both. Following that, I would go so far as to say that we sometimes chose clunky

over smooth in terms of stylistic register in order to represent the weirdness of Anne Boyer's prose. That weirdness has its own form of precision, and we wanted to convey that weirdness and that precision, making the reader acutely aware of the frictions of the text and thus the friction of the content.

A critic called our translation unreadable, and while it was hurtful to be viewed as incompetent, I think what we did was indeed outside of the conventional way of translating. Instead of a smooth and 'correct' form of Danish, we tried to keep the tension that's palpable in the English

text by transferring this weirdness to the Danish. It would definitely be too self-aggrandizing to say that we created a new language, but I would feel comfortable saying that we stretched the Danish language a bit; we carved out a small, new space in the Danish language where Anne Boyer's writing could live.

A process of negotiation

When translating, I go through the following three stages: outlining, negotiation and polishing. In the first phase, the translation moves along fast and is not bogged down by editing or even too much thinking. I call it outlining. The English source-text is somewhat obvious throughout the entire translated text, and in many places, I'll leave entire sentences or even paragraphs untranslated, or I'll write several possible translations alongside each other in yellow highlighting.

The result is a rather chaotic text that carries me over to the much slower and painstaking process of negotiation. Often, this second step will involve an editor or another reader of some kind, and together we'll go through two to three readings, making this stage by far the lengthiest one. When collaborating with another translator, this is also the phase where we would go from having divided the chapters between us, to taking turns going through each other's texts. It is in this part of the process that I'd like to dwell on what is being negotiated, and why working with Anne Boyer's texts made me think of the whole process of translating in a new way.

When translating, I go through several revisions in which the translated text



Cover for *Ikke at dø*, by Thea von der Maase/OVO Press.

is neither the original anymore, nor a real and finished translation yet. This may feel as if the once stable ground of language is shifting underneath your feet. And while that is in fact something in the nature of language – it always shifts and changes, morphs – the experience can be quite overwhelming when you find yourself face to face with this. In this phase, I often feel like I am losing touch with how my own language, Danish, actually works, and I find myself doubting everything, at every turn. The authority of language – the rules of syntax and punctuation – is supposed to harness this sense of being lost, but I would venture that it's sometimes important to stay with the lostness. That keeping in the specificity of the language, staying true to its weirdness, is the hardest job for the translator.

An urge towards smoothness

And then, a certain urge to smooth out weirdness creeps in. And while it is easy enough to say that you shouldn't do this and instead be true to the original text, not fearing the clunkiness and weirdness, it is quite hard to practice. An instinct towards making the text 'readable' probably characterizes much of what translators do. And there is also this feeling of not wanting to get in the way of the text, that the best possible outcome is to have made yourself invisible as a translator, and I think that can sometimes lead to choices that won't stick out.

Trying to exemplify this, remembering all the choices leading to the published text, is hard. But let me try and reconstruct. Here is a short paragraph in English:

“What being a writer does to a person is make her a servant of those sensory details, obedient to the world of appearances and issuing forth book after book compliant with deceptive and unforgivable showing, full of cruel and unnecessary showing, irresponsibly sparing every ethically required telling, as telling is that other truth, and the senses are prone to showing's lies.” (*The Undying*, p. 113).

“It may feel as if the once stable ground of language is shifting underneath your feet”

And the Danish:

“Hvad det gør ved et menneske at være forfatter er at hun bliver en tjener for disse sanselige detaljer, lydig over for den ydre verden og at hun udgiver bog efter bog i overensstemmelse med et vildledende og utilgiveligt *showing*, fuld af ondartet og unødvendigt *showing*, uansvarligt afstående fra enhver etisk påkrævet *telling*, eftersom *telling* er den anden sandhed, og sanserne er til falds for *showings* løgne.” (*Ikke at dø*, p. 121).

From the very outset, we were in trouble with this sentence. It was long and



*Andreas Eckhardt-Læssøe is a writer and translator. He has published the book of poetry *Det skal nok gå* ('It's going to be all right') and several translations including works by Anne Boyer and Eileen Myles.*

*Andreas Eckhardt-Læssøe
Photo: Jarl Therkelsen Kaldan*

winding, running through the stop lights of typical Danish syntax where carrying the subject of the sentence across several clauses is much harder to do. If we had given in to the urge of smoothing, of making the sentence more accessible, we could, for instance, have split it up in two, thereby losing part of the unruly, chaotic nature of the original. The compromise was to just straighten it out a little bit, putting in an extra *hun* ('she'), hopefully making it a little more readable. Then there was the question of punctuation. We worked from an idea of not over-punctuating, since commas, especially, can weigh down a sentence in Danish. The sentence has both a run-on energy in the first half, and also a complex listing in the second, and more commas weren't necessarily going to help with the understanding.

Achieving this balance between smoothing out and conveying the weirdness is a hard balance to find, and it is, of course, easier said than done. If we were to do it again, I am quite sure the result would come out differently. But then, that is the beauty of translation: it is a living, breathing thing, precisely like language itself.

CEATL's Click List

Links to the world of translation

Violence in translation

[Tilted Axis Press](#), founded in 2015, publishes work “mainly by Asian and African writers, translated into a variety of Englishes”. In July of last year, they brought out an anthology of essays entitled *Violent phenomena: 21 Essays on Translation*. The publication was supported by, amongst others, the [National Centre for Writing UK](#), as part of the [Visible Communities project](#).



Although several of the essays touch on positive areas, such as how multilingualism in some countries

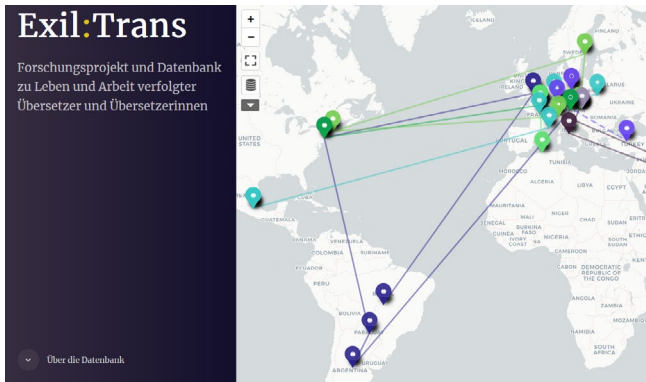
has led to the hierarchical norm of only translating into L1 no longer being applied, there are others which highlight personal experiences of discrimination, the power imbalance in literary translation and the harm done to languages and cultures in the colonial world. Definitely worth both a click – and a read.

Exile and translation

Researchers at universities of Vienna (Austria), Lausanne (Switzerland) and Mainz/Germersheim (Germany) have spent the last three years mapping the fate of those translators who had to flee Germany in the years before and after the Nazi takeover. Some of the refugees already worked with literature and languages while others became translators of literary and scholarly texts so they could make a living in their new circumstances.

The academic undertaking has now resulted in the German-language database [Exil:Trans](#) which makes it possible to follow the geographical path of these translators and find information on their lives and work. What consequences did the status of being in

exile have for the individual translators? What kind of literature did they bring to their new locations? And is a life in exile in itself a kind of translation process? Read more about the project [here](#).



Turkish translator Maureen Freely on the lessons of a semicolon
Asymptote, a website for literature in translation, has published a compelling interview with **Maureen Freely**, the translator of novels by Orhan Pamuk and other Turkish writers and who is a novelist herself. The detailed interview by writer and researcher **Rose Bialer** touches upon a wide variety of topics, such as how a semicolon taught Freely about privacy (or the lack of it) in a busy



Maureen Freely
Photo: Private Archive

communal household in Istanbul, or how her first experience as a translator when her American father had an argument with a Greek taxi driver, paved the way to her involvement in PEN: “I have come to understand that all the most important conversations happen in this liminal space, if you can learn to understand the tensions, [you can] transcend the barriers they create.”

To read the interview, please click [here](#).

✦ ASYMPTOTE

Translating and multilingualism: the case of Gujarati and Marathi literature

In a lengthy interview by author and translator **Jenny Bhatt**, poetry translator and professor of English **Sachin Ketkar** dwells on the interplay between the official national language (Hindi), native languages (such as Gujarati and Marathi) and the language of the former colonial power, which is at present the major gatekeeper to the international book market (English). How does the sociolinguistic make-up of a multilingual country affect literary translation?

The interview is published on the website of **Words without Borders**. Click [here](#) to listen to the conversation or read the transcript.



Colophon

Counterpoint. CEATL's European Literary Translators' E-zine is an online publication of the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL) and is published twice a year in English and French.

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