



Counterpoint

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CEATL's European Literary
Translators' E-zine

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From the editors

In the current, rather convulsed world, people everywhere are raising their voices to speak out against the many things that are causing such big problems – climate change, a growing inequality, polarisation, migration, to name a few. The larger community of translators, including literary translators, have not been found wanting in this regard, even though the problems facing the translation community are admittedly on a somewhat smaller scale.

But raising one's voice seems to be at odds with the very nature of being a translator. Aren't we translators bound by what has been said by somebody else?

To answer with a definitive 'yes' would be to overlook what it means to be a translator. Just as much as it would leave out how languages function in society.

"Language is the mirror of our lives," says one of the characters in *Tutunamayanlar* ('The Disconnected'), a ground-breaking novel by Oğuz Atay (1934-1977). The character comments on how political ideologies have shaped

the Turkish language. While purists, who preferred to leave the past behind, engaged in a movement of neologisms, more conservative movements insisted on the use of Arabic and Persian loans from the past – a development which resulted in a nearly diglossic situation, and for quite a while left every user of the language with the obligation to choose either one or the other. It's this dichotomy the disconnected try to get out of, in language as much as in other areas of society.

A present-day example of heavily politicized words and the dilemmas they entail is presented in Johanna Hedenberg's contribution on how to translate Italian *negro* and *negrigura* into Swedish. Many factors are taken into account in her nuanced considerations: the changes in meaning, the different connotations these words have had over time; the literary function of words, how they can be used to characterize protagonists in a novel; the relationship between a translator and her readership; the thoughts of the publishers.

Her account not only tells of conflicting values and assumptions, but also demonstrates the freedom the translator has – and the responsibility this freedom involves: after the publication of her translation, Hedenberg engaged in a public discussion about her choices.

“Translators too can raise their voices, and in many different ways”

In a similar vein, Golda van der Meer shows how translators into and out of Yiddish have played an important role in revitalizing the language and keeping it for the future, how translating untranslated poets is a way of raising one’s voice against the marginalisation of a language, and of what has been expressed in that language. Magnea Matthíasdóttir tells the story of a language that, partly through its translators, ‘speaks up’ against its former colonizer by ‘icelandising’ every word and taking them home.

Overall, this issue of *Counterpoint* shows that translators too can raise their voices, and in many different ways: Werner Richter reports about the trying process of having the DSM Copyright Directive

transposed into Austrian law. Francesca Novajra gives a long list of examples of initiatives taken by translators’ associations all over Europe during the last (Covid) year. Jennifer Croft and Mark Haddon relate how they started their #TranslatorsOnTheCover campaign, a joint initiative of a translator and a writer to persuade publishers. And Renate Birkenhauer describes how the well-known translators’ residency in Straelen, Germany, was set up as a place to meet colleagues, to do research and exchange ideas. All of them show how important it is to raise your voice, to raise your voices together.

Since the last issue of *Counterpoint / Contrepoint* in June 2021, we received some very good news from the [Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature](#) to whom we had applied for funding. Founded in Switzerland in 2004, the Jan Michalski Foundation aims to “foster literary creation and encourage the practice of reading through a range of initiatives and activities”. *Counterpoint / Contrepoint* was granted a generous contribution to the costs of the preparation of this bilingual e-zine which will help to ensure its survival. We editors feel this is a vote of confidence in our work and are very grateful indeed for their support. The grant serves to further highlight the importance of financial support for the field of literary creation and, in this instance, its translation.

“I’m here, dear reader, where are you?” says a writer and vendor of stories at the end of Oğuz Atay’s famous

collection of short stories. We editors hope you are out there, we hope this issue of *Counterpoint* inspires you to raise your voice, through literature or in whichever way you see fit. We are here, and are happy to hear back from you.

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

Changing words – changing history

Translating offensive language in 20th century literature

Johanna Hedenberg

Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare* (*Family Lexicon* in the most recent English translation) starts with a preface where the author states that "[p]laces, events and people in this book are real", that the names are also real and that she has written only what she remembers. Though often defined as a novel, this modern classic is actually more a kind of memoir, with portraits of the author's family as well as friends and acquaintances many of whom played a prominent role in Italy's political and cultural history. One of its crucial features is how the story is told – the first-person narrator describes people and relates events without commenting or judging, without showing much of what she thinks and feels. An equally or even more crucial feature is the 'lexicon' – specific, often dialectal or somewhat peculiar words and expressions are frequently used by the different family members. They serve not only to characterize these persons but also to hold the memories together, to run as a common thread through the story and give rhythm to the text. So, when I retranslated this book (it was

translated into Swedish for the first time in 1981 by Ingalisa Munck), I had obviously to be very careful about them.

The first pages of the novel give much space to Ginzburg's father. He's an irascible domestic tyrant with firm views and severe judgments on others' behaviour, but as the story evolves, he appears in a more conciliatory light. There is often a contrast between his invective and what he really says – it is used in a deprecatory rather than harshly insulting way. Two of his 'lexicon items' are '*negro*' and '*negrigura*'. Just as some of the other items, they are put between quotes and the reader gets an explanation of how the father uses them and what they mean to him. A *negro* is an awkward or ill-mannered person and *negrigura* indicates a wide range of habits or actions which the father dislikes, but all of them are in fact harmless, like wearing the wrong sort of shoes or clothes on mountain hikes or engaging in conversations with everybody. And he uses these words about and towards members of his own family and other persons around him, none of them black.



Covers of Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico familiare* and its Swedish translation by Johanna Hedenberg
Photo: Johanna Hedenberg

The changing meaning of words over time

Once a widely used term for black people, the Italian word *negro* is today considered a racist and strongly offensive term that should be replaced, for instance by *nero* ('black'). And I would say that the use of *neger*, the Swedish equivalent of Italian *negro*, is banned in an even more far-reaching way. It's often replaced by 'the n-word' (*n-ordet*) even in theoretical discussions about racism, literature etc., when the mere mentioning of the word *neger* is seen as a grave offence. Personally, I find this problematic. Values and attitudes change, and striving for more equality and inclusion can bring many positive contributions to a language. But how can we understand changes and discuss them if it's not clear exactly what we are discussing? In Swedish there is in fact more than one word that is considered offensive in this context, and the tendency to use the term 'n-word' hides the fact that there are distinctions between *neger* and *nigger* – the latter also a word used in Swedish and, of course, with even more offensive connotations.

Many would say that these words can't be used anymore or shouldn't be used at all. But in the case of *Lessico familiare* I was completely convinced that *neger* and *negerfasoner* (something like 'negro manners') would be the best translation, for various reasons. Natalia Ginzburg's book was first published in 1963, the story itself begins in her childhood in the 1920s, and her father, Giuseppe Levi, was born in 1872. When Ginzburg wrote the book almost sixty years ago, the use of the word *negro* was not regarded in the way it is today. Thirty or forty years earlier, in the period when the father uses this word in the book (in a period when Italy had a Fascist regime and colonial ambitions), it was even more common, and possibly his language use had been formed already in his childhood fifty years earlier, at the end of the 19th century.

This is, in short, a book that contains many different time layers, and the sixty years that have passed between the publication of the book in Italy and its retranslation in Sweden adds an extra layer which together contribute to the complexity of the text. I think it's crucial not to try to reduce this complexity. But there is another important dimension. Giuseppe Levi was Jewish and grew up in a community where words from an ancient Judeo-Italian dialect with Sephardic and other influences were used. In this context, *negrigura* and *negro* denoted precisely foolish things and awkward, foolish or stupid persons, without any racial connotation. This aspect, which I discovered during my research, is however not often referred to in discussions about the text, and there is no explaining note in modern Italian editions. As far as

I have understood it's not evident to every reader of the original today, and neither was this the case earlier.

Interpreting the author's intentions

How did Natalia Ginzburg regard these words and was she aware of their Jewish history? We can't know, as she didn't comment on it publicly. And neither can we know how aware her father was of it or how he thought about using them. Furthermore, as shown in the preface cited above, the very aim of *Lessico familiare* is to depict the past through the memories in a direct manner, without interpreting them or imposing certain views. Of course, the mere selection of certain memories and the rendering of them in a certain wording *must* be an interpretation in some sense. But Natalia Ginzburg's intention is certainly to be as close to the actual words said as possible, when she relates what she has heard as a child from her parents and other persons – who, in their turn, in many cases furthered a language from their childhood.

All these factors taken together spoke for the choice of *neger* and *negerfasoner* in the Swedish translation. I was strengthened in my conviction by the fact that the latest English retranslation uses 'negro' and 'negroism', combined with a note on the Jewish dimension, a solution which I thought was worth considering for the Swedish edition too. But I was aware that some readers could take offence and that the publisher might have another view. In fact, I was told by the publisher that these words were impossible to use, and after a discussion I reluctantly accepted to find

words without any racial connotations that corresponded to the meaning the father gives them and at the same time were a bit odd or obsolete.

Caught in an absurd situation

The story could have ended there, but when my translation of these words was questioned in a Swedish review of the book, and was said to make the text more harmless, I found myself in an absurd situation. In fact, I agreed with a criticism against my own work and was held responsible for precisely the choice that I hadn't felt entirely satisfied with from the beginning. So I wrote an [article](#) where I explained the whole background, and there was a small debate¹ with the publisher.

“It's crucial not to try to reduce this complexity”

One could ask whether all this is actually worth making a fuss about. When a book is translated, edited and published, there are always compromises, aren't there? Yes, but here the question was raised before the normal editing process, and the literary director of the publishing house was involved as well. It was more than just a common difference of opinion about details, and I felt strongly pressurised. The words I finally chose, *grobian* and *grobianfasoner*, work in the context but don't convey the whole picture; an important dimension is lost. And

¹ The initial article was followed by an answer from the [publisher](#), and the final [replique](#) from Hedenberg. All were [published](#) in the daily Swedish newspaper *Sydsvenskan* where the review for the book was published (note from the editors).



Johanna Hedenberg is a literary translator from Italian, French and Dutch into Swedish. She translated her first books almost 30 years ago but then worked as an EU translator for different institutions in Luxemburg and Brussels for more than a decade, before returning to Sweden and literature. For a number of years, she was a member of the board of the translators' section in the **Swedish Writers' Union**, and president from 2014 to 2016.

Johanna Hedenberg
Photo: Håkan Lindgren

the case of this individual translation sheds light on a bigger problem.

As previously mentioned, values and attitudes change, and so does language. But we underestimate the intelligence of the readers if we presume that they are not capable of reading older texts without a filter, and the more we adapt the past to the present, the more difficult it will be to understand the history.

In my work I try to render texts in Swedish as well as I can, with my experience, knowledge and discernment, but I never try to change them, to smooth over things I don't like or to adapt them to other people's expectations. I don't believe that it's the translator's task to figure out what the author thought or meant, beyond what can be understood by reading the text. And even less how he or she would have written it today. Firstly, because it's impossible to know and can't be anything other

than speculation, and secondly because *the text was not written today.*

The tendency to adapt texts to what one supposes is understandable and suitable for modern readers leads to anachronisms and puts the authors' integrity and the translator's autonomy at risk. Even if such an adaption often springs from good intentions, it reflects a disrespectful attitude to literature. And there is no guarantee that this tendency will be limited to single words or certain areas. I can perfectly well imagine a future where translators are asked to fill in a dialogue situated in 1850 with terms for disabled people introduced in our century, or to change an incidentally mentioned flight into a more politically correct train-journey. I can also imagine a future where this process is driven not by progressive but reactionary forces. But hopefully I will be proven wrong, and hopefully we will be able to discuss these questions, openly and without prejudice.

Good vibrations:

CEATL during the pandemic

Francesca Novajra

I once read that the mother of Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys told him that dogs can sense people's vibrations, especially the bad ones. Wilson figured that human beings were also able to sense good vibrations and he worked extremely hard on this song to translate these *vibes* into music. At our AGMs we have a ritual that we call 'Good Vibes': each delegate is given sixty seconds to share a valuable experience from their association, an example of good practice that could inspire other countries. Now, our 'best practices' had to be adapted to the Covid-world of 2020 and 2021.



A view of Åland
Photo: Juliane Wammen

Translators as inquiring minds

While the pandemic hit us all hard, the way we carry out our work didn't change significantly during the lockdown: after an initial moment of shock and dismay, we continued to translate at our desks, at home. However, even though our job is a solitary one, we are not hermits. Our need to exchange ideas is physiological.

Translators are the most enquiring minds you can meet. And it couldn't be otherwise: to immerse yourself every day in someone else's words, to distil them into another language without losing a single drop, you have to be curious, you have to travel a lot, physically and with your imagination.

With the arrival of Covid the usual windows to the outside world were closed: no more fairs, no more festivals, no more gatherings or meetings with authors, no more seminars with colleagues, and no more conferences. Thankfully, we are also flexible beings and we started to take breaths of fresh air through virtual Zoom sessions. At first we were slightly intimidated, shy or even wary, but little by little we

made this tool our new window to the outside world and we realised that there were so many of us out there, that we could talk to colleagues who lived in another region, in another country, even on another continent.

Zoom, a window to the outside world

Since March 2020, Zoom entered our homes and translators have benefitted from it. Interviews, videos, festivals, meetings have multiplied like never before. Live video conferences, Facebook, Twitter, email exchanges. For instance, in the wake of a project involving the translation of a *nursery rhyme on the Coronavirus* into over 35 languages, the Bologna Children's Book Fair (BCBF) invited CEATL and FIT to an *international forum on working (and surviving) as a translator of children's books*. In Catalonia, the AELC launched a *consultancy programme* that will allow exchanges between pairs of translators from and to Catalan. In Portugal, the *Francisco Magalhães Literary Translation Prize* created a promotional banner that will be placed on the winning book for the first time. APT will sponsor an Afghan refugee translator and has launched a partnership with young Chinese translators in Macao. In the Netherlands, *Auteursbond* is in the process of negotiating a new contract for translators and has created a committee to further reach out to writers and translators of colour and provide them with opportunities and visibility. In Germany, translators have recorded their experiences in *translation diaries* and short *videos* about their work, and *Translationale*, the first German literary translation festival, was launched in Berlin. In Croatia *DHKP* translators broadcast a series of radio programmes *Književni*

trenutak ('The literary moment'), and the Slovenian association *DSKP* produced a video on the new translators' residence *Sovretov kabinet in Hrastnik*. In the United Kingdom, the *Society of Authors* with author Mark Haddon and translator Jennifer Croft launched the *#TranslatorsOnTheCover* campaign calling for the name of the translator to appear on the front cover. And CEATL, FIT and *Petra E-network* were all invited to the first international congress of Italian literary translators *Dall'italiano al mondo*. CEATL's Copyright working group assisted Romanian colleagues in negotiating the transposition of the DSM and two important surveys were conducted among our members: one on their *legal and contractual situation*, the other on working conditions. In Switzerland 84 cultural associations (literature, visual arts, dance, theatre and music) joined in a 'Taskforce Culture' to better coordinate and plan a new start. But the most important thing that



CEATL delegates in Åland
Photo: Juliane Wammen

has emerged from the testimonies of colleagues is that European national governments have been granting financial aid to literary translators



Francesca Novajra is a literary translator from English and French into Italian. In 2017 she received the **FIT Astrid Lindgren Prize**. She has been a CEATL delegate for the Italian association **AITI** since 2018 and is currently vice-president of CEATL and a member of the Best Practices working group. She lives in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a border region in the north-east of Italy, with her husband, her children, two cats and a dog.

Francesca Novajra
Photo: Lorenzo Cecotto

and this has been a lever to demand fairer working conditions: in many countries such as Poland, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Italy and Spain, literary translators have engaged in negotiations to obtain better conditions and status or to be included in the general aid packages targeted at cultural freelancers and artists.

Åland and ruska

Following virtual AGMs, our colleagues from Sweden (SFF – translators' section) and Finland (SKTL and KAOS) worked for months to organise an in-person meeting knowing that it might be cancelled at the last minute. Finally the meeting was held on a magnificent archipelago in the Baltic Sea in the middle of *ruska*, a Finnish word that describes the explosion of colour of the Autumn foliage. Åland : 6145 islands, of which only 80 are inhabited, an autonomous, demilitarised and neutralised region of Finland (with its own passport, flag, stamps etc.)² where Swedish is the official language (Finnish

is spoken by ca. 5% of the population). A model of peaceful cohabitation. What better place to meet after a year and a half of pandemic! We were about thirty delegates from all over Europe and we enjoyed ourselves, so happy to meet up again in person, almost astonished to be able to once again work side by side in the working groups, enthusiastic about our visit to the **Mariehamn Library** to listen to Ulla-Lena Lundberg, author of the book *Is* ('Ice'), and to chat with its Polish and Finnish translators, Justyna Czechowska and Leena Vallissari. And, of course, we feasted on the tasty *pannukakku* while switching from one language to another, between a Finnish sauna and a dive into the icy sea.

It felt as though a volcanic energy was generated among the translators in Åland, and, as my colleague Andreas Jandl just wrote to me, "the good vibes of Mariehamn are still vibrating".

*Translated from the French original
by Penelope Eades-Alvarez*

² Matthieu Chillaud, 'Les îles Åland : un laboratoire insolite du désarmement géographique?', AFRI (Annuaire français de Relations internationales), volume VIII, 722-735, 2007.

Reaffirming linguistic activism:

Translating Yiddish poetry into Catalan

Golda van der Meer

vi lang kan man shteyn in a fenster
(‘Quan de temps es pot romandre
davant la finestra’)
Debora Vogel (1900–1942)

The Yiddish verse above is from a series of poems titled *3 lider fun vartn* (‘3 poems on waiting’) by the poet Debora Vogel. The verse can be translated into English as ‘how long can one stay in front of a window’. In this poem, the poet waits in her window for a lover to come from another city, but we can also interpret the line as the question of how long an author must wait to be translated. Yiddish poets are seldomly translated, even less so, women poets.

Yiddish and Catalan are two languages that have been subject to persecution in 20th century Europe. On the 25th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of linguistic rights, it is relevant to acknowledge the position of these languages today. While Yiddish is undergoing a sort of ‘revival’, several Catalan linguists have warned of the decline in the use of Catalan.

The Yiddish language has experienced a renaissance in the last few decades. Some of the examples that have helped put Yiddish to the fore include new Yiddish textbooks (*In eynem*, 2020), new translations into Yiddish (*Harry Potter*, 2020 – this translation was such a success that by the end of February 2021, the Yiddish Book Center announced that they were out of stock on their online store), livestream TV-series with Yiddish as one of the main languages (*Unorthodox* and *Shtisel*), online conferences and courses, and a new book on the biography of the Yiddish language (Shandler, 2021). The use of Catalan, on the other hand, is in decline, and Spanish nationalist parties even try to reinforce this tendency, e.g., by threatening to revoke the Catalan linguistic immersion program in schools or to shut down the Catalan regional TV channel. Thus, the language has been at the center of a debate in the Spanish and Catalan parliaments in the past few years.

Catalan as an example for Yiddish

Still, in the past decades, an interest in minority languages has flourished

in the world of academia, and (online) language schools. An example is the Official Language School of Barcelona, an institution dedicated to the teaching of languages to adults, which will offer a course of Yiddish. Teaching Yiddish to Catalan speakers in Barcelona might seem quite atypical, but Yiddish was present in the streets of Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War. And even though Yiddish and Catalan come from different linguistic families, histories, and traditions, they do share certain parallelisms in views on how to standardise the language. To give an example, a conference on Catalan that took place in Barcelona in 1906 and might have served as a ‘spiritual’ precursor to the conference that took place in Czernowitz in 1908 for the Yiddish language³. Both conferences professed similar goals and techniques that could be applied to any minority language regardless of its history:

- (a) standardisation through dictionaries, grammars, dialects atlases
- (b) sensitising the population to language issues and promoting the ideas through the media, literature, and education.

As a direct outcome of the conferences, academic institutions were founded for the study of Catalan and Yiddish respectively. The *Institut d’Estudis Catalans* (‘Institute for Catalan Studies’) was founded in 1907, while the equivalent institution for the Yiddish language, *Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut* (YIVO), was established in 1925. In *Oyfgabn fun der yidisher filologye* (‘The tasks of Yiddish Philology’; 1913),

Ber Borokhov uses Catalan and other minority languages and their fight for prevalence as examples that could serve the Yiddish language. In Borokhov’s opinion, people engaged in arts and culture should take the initiative in the fight for Yiddish. He illustrates this by *Els Jocs Florals* (‘Floral Games’): a poetic contest held in Catalonia during the 1880s (in what has been termed *La Renaixença* (‘The Renaissance [of the Catalan language]’)) which aimed to strengthen and encourage the language’s use via a cultural medium, poetry. Writing and reading Catalan poetry would help the language flourish, and Borokhov expressed how the same could be done for Yiddish.

“The Yiddish language has experienced a renaissance in the last few decades”

Translating to ‘make comprehensible’

Yiddish was a language belonging to the Ashkenazi Jewish communities. Since the 10th century it has developed in both Central and Eastern Europe and spread out into several regions alongside local languages. Part of its syntax and lexicon is rooted in Gothic German, but the language bears traces

³ This example is taken from an article by Holger Nath in *The Politics of Yiddish* edited by Dov-Ber Kerler (1998).

from Hebrew, Latin and especially the Slavic languages as well. Some of the first texts in Yiddish were translations from Hebrew, mainly religious texts. These translations had a practical more than a literary purpose: they were a way of making the Hebrew religious texts comprehensible to the Jewish non-Hebrew reader. This phenomenon of translation was called *taytshn* ('to make comprehensible'). One of the most translated religious books from Hebrew into Yiddish is the *Tsene-Rene* (also called the 'women's bible').

Borokhov was not the only Yiddishist who advocated for the Yiddish language; linguists and Yiddish activists such as Chaim Zhitlowsky and Max Weinreich opened schools for teaching Yiddish and created Yiddish dictionaries and grammar books. Several well-known authors of the late 19th and early 20th

century Yiddish literature, such as Sholem Aleichem (1859–1916) and Mendele Mocher Sforim (1836–1917), turned from Hebrew to Yiddish in order to attract more readers. On the eve of the Second World War the Yiddish language was spoken by over more than 10 million European Jews – it became the dominant language of the Jews.

Translating as a symbolic act

At the beginning of the 20th century, endeavours to modernize Jewish life and society resulted in a wave of Yiddish translations from world literature (from Balzac to Tolstoy, from Heine to Marx, Kant, and Rousseau), and philosophical, historical, scientific, economic and political texts. This wave reached its climax around the First World War. Translations into Yiddish dropped dramatically after the destruction of the Yiddish population and the Jewish towns in Europe in the Second World War.

In the 21st century, however, translations into Yiddish have regained attention. Most of them are children's books, such as Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* or Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*. Shandler considers these new translations a symbolic act to demonstrate the "viability and vivacity of Yiddish". Thus, they counteract the misconception of Yiddish being a dead language.

Translating to innovate

The Yiddish modernist poets of the 20th century, on the other hand, understood translation as a literary mode, similar to Ezra Pound's understanding of translation, as a technique that is primarily a means of innovating the target language. Translation into a national language was already common



Portrait of Debora Vogel
by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz c.1930
Source: **Public domain**



*Golda van der Meer holds a Ph.D. from the University of Barcelona in linguistic, literary and cultural studies. Her recent research project focuses on the development of Yiddish modernist poetry in relation to the experience of exile during the interwar period. She currently works as a Yiddish teacher and as a translator of Yiddish poetry (with a focus on the work of female poets), is an editor of the **Mozaika** magazine, and collaborates with the Jewish Film Festival of Barcelona.*

Golda van der Meer
Photo: Private Archive

practice in the Renaissance in Germany and France to standardise languages. For minority languages, translation became more relevant as not only the nationalization of the language was at stake, but also its prevalence. In a similar vein, linguistic activists in Catalan and Yiddish felt the urge to translate world literature into their national languages to reinforce and enrich them. For instance, the Catalan poet Josep Carner (1884–1970) vowed to translate canonical literary works to develop and enrich the Catalan language.

Translating as activism

My experience in translating Yiddish poetry into Catalan is a way of reaffirming this linguistic activism. One of the goals of a number of poets was to preserve and innovate their native language, be it Yiddish or Catalan, and so by translating from one minor language into another, I continue to preserve the languages while at the same time creating a dialogue between the two languages I have a close relation to. Yiddish reminds me of my father's library, and Catalan is my mother tongue. I grew up reading Yiddish stories and

understanding how speaking Catalan in Barcelona had not always been easy. Growing up under Franco's regime, when Catalan was a forbidden language, my mother had to learn it in clandestine schools. In fact, translations into Catalan served as a means of activism at that time. This linguistic activism in the field of culture and through translation was made to preserve the Catalan language for posterity.

Vogel's verse translated into Catalan at the beginning of this text opens up a dialogue of a language that was once there and that has been reconstituted through translation. By translating Debora Vogel, a Polish avant-garde Yiddish poet, into Catalan, I am drawing attention to the question of the place minority languages have in Europe. At the same time I am giving a voice to this form of activism in favour of these two languages seeking consolidation in a world that apparently wants to marginalize them: "vi lang kan man shteyn in a fenster" ('quant de temps es pot romandre davant la finestra'). How long, I ask, does a poet of a minority language have to wait to be translated?

“A place to put heads together”

An interview with *Dr. Renate Birkenhauer*, vice-president of the EÜK

Every year, more than 750 literary translators from all over the world make their way to the small town of Straelen in western Germany, very close to the Dutch border. Here, they stay as residents at the Europäisches Übersetzer-Kollegium, which since its foundation has been a place of gathering for translators and translated works – obviously with a strong focus on German language literature but most of all a truly European, or even global, place of cultural activity within the world of translation. Counterpoint has asked the vice-president of EÜK, *Dr. Renate Birkenhauer*, to share her views on the continuous need for a place like the EÜK. But firstly, we wanted to know a little about the background for the foundation of the Kollegium.

The Europäisches Übersetzer-Kollegium was founded in 1978 on the initiative of two translators: Elmar Tophoven, a native of Straelen, translator of Samuel Beckett and then living in Paris, and Klaus Birkenhauer, then chair of the German translators' association, my late husband, then living in Tübingen

(an old university town) who was supposed to manage the house and to develop its cultural activities.

What were the main ideas behind the Kollegium when it was started? And has this changed over the years?

In order to understand the main ideas behind the EÜK, one should be aware that more than 40 years ago people didn't have personal computers. But there was a dream among literary translators in Germany to have a place to come together, a big library with all kinds of dictionaries and reference books from almost every field and every era, and offer all of this, together with studio apartments, to professional colleagues coming from Germany and abroad with their translation project: a place to put heads together, where they could exchange their knowledge and their thoughts and, with a bit of luck, meet a colleague from their source language, a 'two-legged dictionary'. Actually, the name 'Kollegium' does not mean 'college' but is derived from 'colleagues'. A non-profit association was founded

with the aim of finding supporters and financial backers for this dream. Elmar Tophoven managed to convince the mayor and the city manager of his birthplace, the small town of Straelen, to offer a complex of five very old, mostly uninhabited historic houses, which had to be reconstructed according to the needs of an ideal translators' house: a big two-storey library of dictionaries and reference books forming its core, the so-called 'Atrium', and 29 studios arranged around them.

“There was a dream among literary translators in Germany to have a place to come together”

The bookshelves of the two-storied library were filled quite quickly. Klaus Birkenhauer, staying in touch not only with his German but also with his many foreign colleagues, asked them 'to go shopping', to search in antiquarian and modern bookshops and bring along all the important dictionaries and reference books they could find. This is how we managed to get some very rare and famous encyclopedias like the famous one by Diderot and d'Alembert (1751-1772) or the rare 82 volume encyclopedia of the Russian Empire Brockhaus-Efron (1907). But, of course, the Kollegium offers a representative selection of classic and

modern literature written in German as well. These books fill the shelves in the studios, and so you can say that our guests live in a library which creates a productive atmosphere. Translators also get to know new authors and recent publications and a professional librarian is in charge of the library.

Translators appreciate the absolute silence of this place, which is reminiscent of a monastery. They feel stimulated by their industrious colleagues and often report that they work more effectively than at home. By contrast, the big kitchen, where they cater for themselves, is a centre of communication and discussions.

Who funds the Kollegium?

The Kollegium's work is being funded by the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the small town of Straelen, who endorsed the idea of establishing international contacts and creating an international meeting point in a rural area.

The *Kunststiftung* ('Art Foundation') of Northrhine-Westphalia is a very important donor as well, endowing the great annual *Straelener Übersetzerpreis* together with a promotion prize as well as sponsoring the bi-annual *Atriumsgespräch*. This is a 4-5-day conference where a German author of a successful recent publication meets all the translators of their book to discuss all the difficulties and special features from the first page to the last.

What other activities does the EÜK engage in, besides residencies for translators?

The EÜK is a founding member of the DÜF *Deutscher Übersetzerfonds*

(the German Translators' Fund) which, apart from awarding working grants and residence scholarships to colleagues who translate into German – has developed a variety of training courses for professional translators. The EÜK organizes and hosts various of these seminars and workshops throughout the year, for instance the very effective bilingual *Vice-Versa-Workshops* like German-Chinese or German-Spanish which bring together translators from one pair of languages, e.g. six translators with German as target language meet six colleagues with German as source language for one week, each of them translating his or her current book, guided by an experienced translator from either language. Thus, each translator meets a native speaker from their source language.

Literary Translation is a course at the University of Düsseldorf, and twice a year the students have a work placement at the EÜK. For one week, experienced colleagues supervise their work and also teach them practical skills of the profession like copyright law, negotiating with

publishers and doing research and translating under time pressure.

The EÜK has become something of a home for literary translators, and the three of them – the German translators' association, the EÜK and the DÜF – complement each other in professionalising the work of literary translators and promoting self-confidence. Translators are involved in public readings and events nowadays and have become more visible to the reading public, although public awareness of this professional group is low compared to other freelancers.

What do you see as the greatest challenge(s) for literary translators (in Europe) at the moment?

I think there are two problems: Firstly, the still very low fees in many countries. There are differences, of course. Most European translators cannot live on their work and have to do other work as well, at least those among them who do not translate from English. Secondly, the general decline in the culture of reading which also affects independent bookshops. Reading has lost its status as an important leisure-activity, especially among young people, whose reading ability is declining.

What role do you think EÜK in particular, and translators' residencies in general, have to play in the world of literary translation?

Translators' residencies have to keep up their strength and creativity in drawing the attention of the public to their work. There is still a need for information about the importance of this job. We have to make the public aware that translations of books by international authors do not just fall



The Atrium at EÜK
Photo: EÜK



Renate Birkenhauer was born in Berlin and studied German literature and linguistics, lexicography and electronic procedures in Tübingen. After doing her PhD, in 1983 she co-founded the publishing house Straelener Manuskripte which focused on two areas: the publishing of special vocabularies that had been collected by translators and were not available in dictionaries of that time, and the publishing of bilingual editions of foreign poetry and books on the art of literary translation. Since 2009, she has had an honorary post as vice-president of the EÜK.

Renate Birkenhauer
Photo: EÜK

out of the sky, nicely translated into the readers' mother-tongue. We have to insist that the names of the translators appear on the cover and in reviews and that they are estimated as authors.

The **Europäisches Übersetzer-Kollegium** ('European Translators' Kollegium', or EÜK) in Straelen offers residencies for varied periods of time in its 30 studio apartments and large self-catering common kitchen. The Kollegium accepts applicants for residencies from all languages, as long as they have published at least two longer translations and are working on a translating project commissioned by a publisher. Residencies are free of charge for professional literary translators, and it is possible to apply for grants in connection with a residency.

The overall objectives of the EÜK are threefold:

1. to introduce foreign literature in Germany and to make German literature known abroad
2. to improve the quality of non-fiction and literary translations
3. to emphasise the significance of translating internationally

Besides residencies, the EÜK arranges seminars and workshops, offers a 'translator in residency' program and is the home of an extensive library of dictionaries, lexica and literary works from all over the world.

SMALL TO SMALL

Small to tiny: *A case of Icelandisation?*

Magnea Matthíasdóttir

I was twenty-four when I was first asked to translate a book from Danish to Icelandic. “Piece of cake”, I thought when offered the job, “I studied Danish in school for years and I’ve lived and studied in Denmark so I know the language pretty well. I also have some experience as a translator, admittedly only from English, having translated fairy-tales for children, short stories and a few articles for magazines, but translating a book can hardly be that different, can it?” So I said yes. The next few weeks were – well, very instructive.

Translating between two ‘small’ languages, for instance between Nordic languages, is often more complicated than translating from a large linguistic area or a *lingua franca* like English into a tiny language like Icelandic, which nowadays has a little more than 300,000 native speakers. The influx of translations from a ‘big’ language into the smaller culture is greater than from less widely spoken languages, resulting in general familiarity with ideas, phrases, expressions etc. stemming from the larger culture and subsequently adopted by the smaller, not only from

books and written text but on many levels, from films and popular TV-series, all kinds of multimedia, radio and the Internet, and from many other influencers. This familiarity with the larger culture makes translation of recurring idioms and phrases easier up to a point (somebody else has already done the heavy lifting, maybe even the translator herself) and there is less need to explain certain phenomena and idiosyncrasies to a smaller culture target audience that already knows them. Translating literature from a smaller and/or less known culture for the same audience is altogether a different story, even when that culture is closer to the translator’s own, as is the case with Denmark and Iceland. As an example, both Danish and Icelandic children know a lot about Halloween, an imported custom from the USA, but little about celebrating *fastelavn* (like dressing up in costumes on Ash Wednesday) in the other’s country, where traditions are different. Therefore, a translator might have to add some explanations to the text when translating a children’s book from a Nordic language or otherwise adapt it to the target audience but

doesn't have to make as many changes, if any, in a translation of an English text.

Iceland became independent in 1944

The Nordic languages, other than Finnish, Sámi and Kalaallisut (Greenlandic), were once the same language, Old Norse, which the Icelanders used to call *dönsk tunga* or Danish tongue. After 1200 the language started to diverge and develop into different vernaculars, which later became the national languages spoken today in the Nordic countries. (We Icelanders pride ourselves on speaking the original language, but that's not really true, although our language is probably closest to the old tongue.) Historically, culturally and even politically we have much in common and the Icelandic people's connection to Denmark goes a long way back, as Iceland was under Danish rule for centuries, until we became an independent state in 1944. As we kept our own language, this meant that since the Middle Ages on we have felt bound to translate any and all Danish names, be that of people or places, into Icelandic or at least 'Icelandicise' them in some way. For instance, the rest of the world may think that the Danish monarch's name is Margrethe; we Icelanders invariably call her Margrét Þórhildur. Accordingly, the Danish crown prince is Friðrik, but for some mysterious reason his wife is not called María but Mary, maybe because she comes from Australia and we don't find it necessary to translate non-Nordic names. They are not family.

Why am I telling you this? Well, because the name of the protagonist and the title of the first book I translated from Danish was a two-letter word with more than

one meaning in that language and no natural equivalent in Icelandic. It could be translated by numerous different words, or rather one of them depending on the context, and none of those words are used as a given name in Icelandic. I anguished over this particular problem for days but ended up using the Danish name unchanged and tried to scramble though any wordplay that might be lurking in the text, probably with a very ham-fisted translation. Fortunately, this was a serious novel for adult readers and there weren't that many. Or I missed them, which is always a possibility.

“Danish used to be the first foreign language we learnt – now it's English”

Some school textbooks were in Danish

Danish used to be the first foreign language we learnt in school – now it's English. Many generations of Icelanders, up until the year 2000 or so, sincerely believed that being able to read *Donald Duck* in Danish and do translation exercises to test our grammatical knowledge and vocabulary between Danish and Icelandic made us fluent in the language, a delusion that was quickly eroded on our first visit to Denmark when nobody could understand what we said and we couldn't understand the natives. Nonetheless some of our textbooks in school were in Danish if



Magnea J. Matthíasdóttir has a Master's degree in Translation Studies from the University of Iceland. She has translated many books for all age groups from English and Danish into Icelandic and twice been awarded for her work. She was chairman of the Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters in 2013–2017 and the association's delegate in CEATL for 5 years.

Magnea J. Matthíasdóttir
Photo: Private Archive

we didn't have an Icelandic alternative. Literary works, originally written in Russian or even Spanish and French, that had been translated into Danish, were then translated into Icelandic, Danish being the intermediary language. Danish literature – well, not so much. After all we could easily read the original. Or not.

In hindsight I realise that many of the numerous almost insurmountable problems I encountered in my first 'real' translation job are quite common and basically par for the course. New vocabulary had to be acquired, 'false friends' – more frequent in closely related languages – avoided and functional translations and turns of phrases found, in order to deliver an

adequate version of the original book in a different language. This was in the dark days before the Internet and Google, so finding answers and solutions was more complicated and time-consuming than it is now. Suffice to say that the results were less than sterling. I'd probably have done better with an older text by a different writer, maybe H.C. Andersen or Martin Andersen Nexø. After all, that was what my schooling had prepared me for – a sturdy (if antiquated) vocabulary in fishing and agriculture. But I finished the translation and the book got published, so that was that.

Now I just hope nobody ever, ever finds it on a dark and obscure shelf in the library and decides to read it.

Implementing directives the Austrian way

Werner Richter

When the Digital Single Market (DSM) Directive was passed in the European Parliament, many of us all over Europe had high hopes that our national ministries of justice would perform well—after all, the necessity to implement the directive provided an excellent opportunity to modernize and improve existing copyright law. In Austria for instance, the last substantial copyright reform had been decades ago, so artistic/cultural associations in this country saw an open door (or, at least, light at the end of the tunnel) and soon united to form *Initiative Urheberrecht* ('The Copyright Law Initiative'). We managed to bring all genres and fields together (film, music, literature, visual arts, theatre), and were quick to agree on a joint statement putting forth our main expectations from a modern and author-friendly copyright law.

Battle lines

Then, after a government upheaval, we got a conservative/Green government that even put 'fair remuneration for artists' in their programme. And although the pandemic certainly shifted the focus to other political issues, there

was still some hope for an artist-friendly interpretation of the directive, as both the ministries of justice and cultural affairs had landed in Green hands. Then again, the Greens are often on the side of 'cyberculture' whose freebie attitude is somewhat at odds with artists asking for fair remuneration for the use of their works. Still, it felt better than once again having a minister from the conservative side stonewalling our demands for decades in the interest of 'the economy', i.e. commercial producers.

However, our initial impression was that the responsible officials had good intentions, which must have been on the instructions of the minister (a really competent woman and the first Austrian minister from an immigrant background, itself news to Austrian politics). The Ministry of Justice opened the debate with plenary meetings to assemble all the stakeholders, i.e. representatives of the creative professions and of the exploiters/producers of artistic output. Plus their lawyers, I should add, though we have some legal counsel on our side as well, fortunately. Soon enough the battle lines became evident. The

producers (especially the movie and music businesses, the radio stations and to a lesser extent art galleries and publishers) as well as the libraries (!) were most vociferous in calling for minimum implementation of the directive and rejected ‘gold-plating’, their term for better conditions for artists than the DSM asked for.

When our Initiative made negotiation offers, the producers turned us down, but behind the scenes they must have exerted considerable pressure on the ministries since the recently published proposal for a new copyright act is far below our expectations—and also much less favourable to artists’ demands than some of what was previously discussed in the plenaries. The Initiative (and all member associations individually) have been (and still are) very active in getting that proposal changed and improved, with the cultural department seemingly giving us some support, but the latest government crisis has been putting every prognosis into the realm of crystal-ball reading.



*‘Only fair funding will lead to fair pay’
Photo: Hanneke van der Heijden*

Our main complaints with the currently planned copyright act are as follows:

- The central demand of **Adequate Remuneration** for creative output (phrased in Article 18 of the DSM directive) is allowed to be ‘subject to contractual agreement’ (according to Austrian proposal §37f), i.e. any contract can now state that §37b (on fair remuneration) shall not be applied, and poof goes the fairness. What’s more, many translators (or other artists, for that matter) won’t even notice because who will look up copyright law to check what §37b is actually about?
- The **Transparency Obligation** (Art.19 of the DSM-D), i.e. the right to information on the revenues generated by our work, is not enforceable because of a sweeping exception clause (Austrian proposal §37d: no obligation to inform if such information ‘is disproportionate for other reasons’).
- There are no provisions for **Collective Action**/collective bargaining (cf. Recital 73 of the DSM-D).
- A so-called ‘**Bagatelle Boundary**’ (minimum claims limit) for online excerpts (less than 15 secs of music, 160 characters of text, 250kB of image data) does not require permission—good for quotations, also for parody etc.—but it doesn’t establish any entitlement to remuneration either. The new German copyright law, on the other hand, does speak of ‘adequate remuneration’ here!
- Overall, the German implementation of the directive, though far from perfect, is a lot better than the Austrian proposal in numerous cases, in particular in those instances where the German law provides for remuneration, while the Austrian does not:
 - compensation for online uses

directly from platforms

- compensation for uses for the purpose of online citations, parody, caricature, pastiche
- compensation for the above minimum uses on online platforms.

Other creative genres have other axes to grind with the proposed copyright act, but I have stuck to those points that concern us, literary translators, most acutely.

A foot in the door

Currently (end of October) various associations of ‘creative workers’ as well as *Initiative Urheberrecht*, acting as their umbrella organization, have sent their position statements to the ministries and to the parliament website, and the Initiative has also had a meeting in person with the two ministries and their staff, bringing along three (in Austria) well-known movie actors who supported the artists’ demands—a good way of trying to get the attention of the mass media.

“Our expectations are far from great...”

The message of the (Green) minister was that the other party (conservatives) would not allow too much improvement of copyright law (because this runs counter to the interests of the ‘creative industries’, i.e. commerce) but that at least we’d have a foot in the door for future changes.



Artists in Austria demand fair remuneration
Photo: Hanneke van der Heijden

We all have been active by supplying arguments in favour of our positions to the ministries, and my own association of translators (*IG Übersetzerinnen Übersetzer*) called out to all our international allies, such as FIT, CEATL, and EWC, all of which have reacted at short notice—which has really reassured me about the professionalism of those organizations, all of which are largely dependent on voluntary work. We’re very grateful for all the support! Previous campaigns in the interest of artists’ rights have sometimes been of an activist nature, with writers, painters and musicians marching through the city centre (along the Ringstraße, one of the main avenues in Vienna) dressed as hospital patients, carrying a stretcher with ‘ailing art’ on it, complete with IV drip and bloody bandages. We’ll see what the collective power of imagination will bring forth this time – and keep you posted if it’s an idea worth copying.

At any rate, the next step will be the presentation of the proposal



Werner Richter was born in (West) Berlin, studied literary translation, has a degree in French, Russian and English, and profound smatterings of Spanish and Croatian, though de facto he only works from (and sometimes into) English, mainly fiction, non-fiction and texts on art from English, e.g. Patricia Highsmith, Graham Greene, E.F. Benson, Allan Gurganus and T.C. Boyle. Richter was awarded the Austrian State Prize for Literature Translation 1993. He has been President of **Austrian Literature Translators' Association** since 1999

Werner Richter

Photo: P.P. Wiplinger

to Parliament by the judiciary committee, to be voted upon most likely before the end of this year. And our expectations are far from great...

“We all have been [...] supplying arguments in favour of our positions to the ministries”

Addendum end of November 2021

The proposed bill seems to be heading for the Justice committee without much discussion in Parliament. The usual evaluation procedure has been skipped, and any criticism at this high-handed approach is met with remarks of annoyance. Obviously, ‘the industry’ (i.e. the film and music producers) have had their say, and the conservatives dictated a minimum implementation of the EU directive. So they just did what they had to do, which is still better than what we had, but so much for the opportunity to make a copyright law that would have strengthened the position of creators.

NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: FINLAND

The Finnish Connection

Profiles from our new and not-so-new associations

KAOS – A Labour Union Chapter for Literary Translators in Finland

In 2010, when the Union of Journalists in Finland started to open its doors to a broader range of freelancers working in the media industry, a group of literary translators decided to seize the opportunity. And so the spring of 2014 saw the birth of **KAOS**, the Literary Translators' Branch within the Association of Freelance Journalists in Finland, which is one of the most notable member organizations of the Union of Journalists. For the first time in Finland, literary translators had representation with trade union status.



*The board from left to right: Riina Vuokko (secretary), J. Pekka Mäkelä, Outi Järvinen (vice-chair), Jaakko Kankaanpää (chair)
Photo: Anna Skogster*

In Finland freelancers and other self-employed workers in creative fields have always had a problematic relationship regarding collective bargaining, as the national reading of anti-trust laws has been extremely strict, resulting in a notable chill factor – the fear of litigation by authorities over any attempts to collectively further freelancer rights, fees and working conditions. However, one of the long term goals of KAOS, alongside with its parent organizations **AFJ** and **UJF**, is to gain the right to collective bargaining for freelancers and other self-employed creators, especially when they are facing large media houses on a wildly uneven negotiation basis. We are hopeful that the tide in this matter, largely with help from the EU and European cooperation, is slowly but surely turning in our favour.

In addition to the trade union side of things, i.e. pushing for collective bargaining rights and better social security for freelancers, KAOS also organizes a wide array of training courses and workshops for translators, both beginners and established professionals, members and non-



Jaakko Kankaanpää, MA, Cultural History, University of Turku, is a professional literary translator from English to Finnish of both fiction and fact, with over 100 titles under his belt.

*Jaakko Kankaanpää
Photo: Private archive*

members alike. The most recent one of these was a master class for beginner Swedish to Finnish literary translators, a group currently much in demand due to the continuing popularity of Nordic Noir flowing in from our Scandinavian neighbours.

KAOS also hosts a yearly summer event for literary translators nationwide, alternating between a two-day seminar in Helsinki and a longer summer camp in a rural setting in Laukaa, Central Finland – which we can proudly claim is the largest and most notable professional get-together for literary translators into Finnish. In addition to this (barring Covid-19) we have monthly informal bar meetings in Helsinki for everyone working in the field.

A new and exciting development is the Genius Loci Travel Grant, awarded for the first time in November 2021. The grant was established by means of a donation from the legacy of Anja and Erkki Haglund, a late married couple, both notable literary translators, and its aim is to provide translators with the opportunity to immerse

themselves in language and culture in some location relevant to their source language or a specific work, for a longer period of time. The grant is a joint venture between KAOS and the [WSOY Literary Foundation](#), one of the major literary funds in the country.

KAOS
kääntäjien ammattiosasto

KAOS has a steadily growing membership, currently a little less than a hundred, comprising of a significant portion of professionally active literary translators in Finland, and is the only translators' association in the country exclusively representing literary translators. Its board is made up of a chair plus three members, elected yearly by an AGM, and no paid staff. The various activities are mainly financed by grants from both government and private sources on a one-off basis. KAOS has representation on the board of its immediate parent organization,

the Union of Freelance Journalists in Finland, as well as in the General Assembly of the Union of Journalists in Finland. KAOS is also part of various artists' and copyright associations.

“A long term KAOS goal is the right to collective bargaining for freelancers”

Having joined CEATL in 2020, KAOS is one of its newcomers, but is looking forward to a long and fruitful membership.

Jaakko Kankaanpää

SKTL

The Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters SKTL, founded in 1955, is the oldest association representing translators and interpreters in Finland. It includes an exceptionally wide array of translating and interpreting professions, including teachers and researchers in the field.



SKTL's newly elected board at the autumn general meeting in 2019
Photo: Maarit Laitinen

SKTL's approximately 1800 members are professional literary, document and audio-visual translators, court, conference and community interpreters, and researchers. In addition, SKTL also has student members. The association has five sections, one of them being the Literary Translators' Section, which currently boasts over 350 members. The sections, as well as the local branches in Turku, Tampere and Vaasa, organise a variety of informative events each year.



SKTL promotes the conditions and valuation of translation and interpreting in Finland. It is in contact with authorities, cultural organisations, businesses, and trade organisations. SKTL provides on-demand guidance and pre-arranged training sessions on, for example, negotiations and contract issues for its members, as well as a community of professionals that makes up a prominent networking forum for translators and interpreters in Finland. SKTL also produces publications and awards grants.

SKTL participates actively in international organisations and maintains strong contacts within the translation and interpreting sector throughout the world. SKTL is a member of international organisations such as CEATL, FIT, Baltic Writers' Council, EULITA, AVTE, Norne and NFÖR, and literary translators represent SKTL in many Finnish organisations. In 2020, SKTL joined the CROWD project (2020–2024) that is part of an international literary network.

Authors and translators united

An interview with Jennifer Croft and Mark Haddon of the #TranslatorsOnTheCover campaign

International Translation Day 2021 saw the launch of #TranslatorsOnTheCover which calls on every writer to ask their publishers to include the translator's name on the cover of their work. The campaign's creators, Jennifer Croft and Mark Haddon, kindly agreed (at very short notice) to an interview with Counterpoint.

How did you both, translator and writer, come together to start this campaign?

Mark: I knew about Jennifer's work largely through her Booker International Prize-winning translation of Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*. When I subsequently read her article in the *Guardian* about the invisibility of translators, arguing that, since their hard creative work has gone into the choice of every word, they should be named on the covers of the books they've translated, I felt a stab of guilt. I'm in touch with a few of my translators (Harry Pallemans in Holland, Hamid Dashti in Iran...), but on the whole I've treated translation in much the same way as the whole book industry does, as something which happens invisibly and far away. The stab of guilt, however, was followed

by a lightbulb moment. Translators have virtually no power to change the status quo. Publishers have more than enough power but no motivation. I realised that if authors cared about the way their translators were treated then change might be possible. I contacted my own agents, *Aitken Alexander Associates*, and asked whether I could insist that all future translations bore the name of the translator on the cover. They were really supportive so I contacted Jennifer and we drew up a list of authors we thought might be interested in doing something similar.

It was when I got in touch with Nicola Solomon, the formidable chief executive of the Society of Authors, however, that momentum started to build. Between us we concocted a *letter of intent*, the society mailed all their members and by the time we reached 1,000 signatures, Pan Macmillan had already committed to naming translators on their covers.

As for Jennifer and I, we've still not met, if you discount a brief tactical zoom and a joint transatlantic radio

interview for the BBC. So we're definitely due some coffee and cake when we find ourselves in the same time zone.

“Publishers will hopefully see this as the path of least resistance”

Given the overwhelmingly positive response, how do you propose ensuring that this actually converts into more publishers putting translators' names on the covers of books?

Mark: The campaign now (beginning of Nov. 2021) has over 2,300 signatories and we've recently emailed all of them with suggested statements which they can forward to their agents and/or publisher to ask them to use their best efforts to put translators' names on their covers. There will be complications, of course. Some publishers are digging in their heels, none of them offering very substantial arguments, though some kind of prize must go to Pushkin Press who responded to a letter from authors by saying, “What is getting lost in this is the fact that the translator isn't the author and no one's really asking how the author feels.”

And there are, of course, territories where many mass market titles are translated and edited heavily in-house by groups of people in a way that means many books don't have ‘a translator’ as such. Nevertheless, if a substantial proportion of our signatories follow through with their public promise we hope that Pan Macmillan will be the first of many publishers to change their

policy, hopefully because they see it as morally right, or at least because it becomes the path of least resistance.

How do you foresee the campaign's influence on translations into and out of minority languages?

Jenny: Although it seems many other cultures already feature translators' names on book covers, it is certainly my hope that raising awareness of the collaborative nature of translations in general—of the fact that every translation is a co-written work—will help translators everywhere.

How would you respond to critical voices claiming that fair remuneration and fair contracts are more important issues than having one's name on the cover?

Jenny: Fair contracts come into play when translators are recognized as creative agents in their own right. By foregrounding the identity of the translator, publishers who feature



Covers of translated literature, naming the translator

Source: CEATL book cover collection



Jennifer Croft won the 2020 William Saroyan International Prize for Writing for her illustrated memoir *Homesick* and the 2018 Man Booker International Prize for her translation from Polish of Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*.

Jennifer Croft
Photo: Private archive



Mark Haddon is the author of four novels, including *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* and, most recently, *The Porpoise*.

Mark Haddon
Photo: Private archive

translators' names on their covers are demonstrating their commitment to this recognition and enabling readers to arrive at the same. If no one knows who the translator is, why should they receive royalties? If everyone knows that this is the person who wrote every word of this book, who advocated for the author to editors, agents, journalists, foundations, who's been posting on social media and organizing readings, then won't it feel impossible not to pay them what they deserve?

Letter of intent

"For too long, we've taken translators for granted. It is thanks to translators that we have access to world literatures past and present.

It is thanks to translators that we are not merely isolated islands of readers and writers talking among ourselves, hearing only ourselves.

Translators are the lifeblood of both the literary world and the book trade which sustains it. They should be properly recognized, celebrated and rewarded for this. The first step toward doing this seems an obvious one.

From now on we will be asking, in our contracts and communications, that our publishers ensure, whenever our work is translated, that the name of the translator appears on the front cover."

CEATL's Click List

Links to the world of translation

Whole books to be translated by machines

As we highlighted in [Counterpoint #4](#), machine translation and CAT tools in various forms are on the rise in the translation industry, for better and worse. So far, though, no publisher has openly stated that they intend to use AI translation, i.e. the tool DeepL, to get whole books translated, leaving real live translators to do the post-editing.

This changed when the science publisher [Springer Nature](#) in October declared that they henceforth planned to do exactly that. CEATL's secretary and member of the French translators' association [ATLF](#), Valérie Le Plouhinec, commented on this decision to the French book-market magazine *ActuaLitté*. Read the interview [here](#).

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Translator shortage in the streaming business?

With all the streaming of TV and films from all over the world going on these days, one might think that AV translators – the people doing the subtitles – were having a field day. Unfortunately, and maybe not surprisingly, this is not the case, as bad working conditions (i.e. underpayment and bad or non-existent contracts) have simultaneously become more and more common, forcing the most experienced translators to leave the business. Despite the huge demand for their services, it is almost impossible to make ends meet in a sustainable way.

The initial result is poorer work being done by less qualified translators, who quickly leave the business again – leading to what is now turning out to be a world-wide shortage of translators, [as reported by](#) the investigative tech site *Rest of World*. It is a vicious circle, that, in the end, leads to still worse quality of subtitles – one of the universally most read text genres in fiction today, especially among children and young people. AV translators' associations have been trying to get this message

through for years – and recently they managed to garner the attention of the more general public, when criticism was raised about the bad quality subtitling of the hit series *Squid Game* on Netflix.

In response to the large amount of media coverage, the American Translator Association (ATA) sent out an open letter calling for fair working conditions for translators in the entertainment industry – underlining that the lack of qualified AV translators is not the real problem. As they put it: “The professionals who work painstakingly to craft the multilingual versions of our favorite movies and shows should be able to share in the revenue generated thanks to their work.”

Petra-E Conference in Dublin

The Petra-E Conference, entitled *Literary Translation Studies – Today and Tomorrow*, was held at Trinity College, Dublin from 4–6 November. Its aim was to take stock of the current state of the art of literary translation and to look down the line and see what the future might hold. Of the many themes covered, those relating to the keynote topic *Machine-Aided literary translation: State of Affairs in the early 2020s* raised great interest. CEATL Honorary member, Françoise Wuilmart (Belgium), gave a paper on the first day of the conference and CEATL delegate for the Bulgarian Translators' Union, Teodora Tzankova, was a member of a Framework working group who also gave a talk.

Arun Viswanath on translating Harry Potter into Yiddish

Last year, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the first volume of J.K. Rowling's famous series, available in over 80 languages, was translated into Yiddish. The translation met the demand – the first 2,000 copies were sold out within two weeks. In this video Viswanath explains how he went about challenges of finding Yiddish equivalents for famous names from the Potter universe, such as Slytherin, Voldemort, The Mirror of Erised and quidditch. Along the way, he gives some background information about Yiddish and its connection with Jewish culture, and explains what this translation means to him and his readership.



Cover of the Yiddish translation of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

Colophon

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Editorial team:

Hanneke van der Heijden
Anne Larchet
Juliane Wammen

Coordination of French issue:

Valérie Le Plouhinec

Proofreading English:

Penelope Eades-Alvarez

Proofreading French:

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Design:

Róisín Ryan
roryan.com

Webmaster:

David Kiš

Distribution:

Valérie Le Plouhinec

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