

How does that translation land on your desk?

Tracking a book's path with Literature Ireland

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Sinead Mac Aodha's aim, as Executive Director of [Literature Ireland](#), is "to have the finest of Irish contemporary fiction published by the finest of publishing houses and translated by the finest of translators." A tall order indeed.

Well, if *Counterpoint* thought this would be an A to Z journey, we were sadly mistaken. It is a bi-directional exercise with Literature Ireland promoting Irish literature abroad and, at the same time, publishing houses and translators tapping into their programmes.

Literature Ireland, (then known as Ireland Literature exchange) was established in 1994 as an initiative of the Arts Council, the Cultural Relations Committee of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge (Irish Book Board). It was inspired in part by FILI, [Finnish Literature Exchange](#) and has grown from modest beginnings in one room in the Irish Writers' Centre, Parnell Square, to become a key partner in the [Centre for Literary and Cultural Translation](#) in Trinity College Dublin.

"It's a great honour to be able to bring the stories of Ireland around the world. The Irish literary imagination seems to strike a special chord with readers right across the globe. However, without our special relationship with international publishers and literary translators and their great expertise and dedication to bringing Irish writing to their countries, Irish literature would not have the international reach it currently enjoys," adds Mac Aodha. The works LI supports come from a range of genres including Irish fiction, literary nonfiction, poetry, children's books and drama. By its 21st birthday

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in 2015, 1,650 Irish books had been translated into 55 languages.

Literature Ireland has a many-pronged approach to getting Irish literature out into the world. Its instrument of broadest reach is at major international book fairs, particularly at the Frankfurt and London fairs, aided by its annually produced catalogue, *New Writing from Ireland*. At the fairs, LI talks face-to-face with the publishers about Irish writers' works and it is LI's passion and in-depth knowledge of Irish writers which can result in works being translated and published in foreign language territories. It is of note that a large amount of Irish literature, written in English, is published in the UK by international publishing houses.

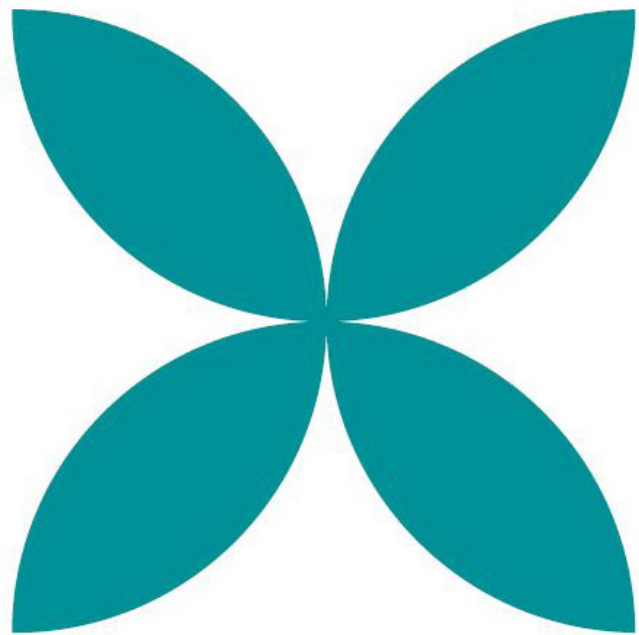
Starting point

The first step in the journey of the Irish writer's work to the translator's desk can begin at these fairs. If, for example, a German or Spanish publishing house feels that an Irish writer's novel would be of interest to their particular readership, the first step for them is to contact either the agent or the publishing house and make a bid for the rights. Once the rights have been acquired, the publishing house abroad can apply to Literature Ireland for a translation grant to help with the translation costs.

LI has a policy of funding a maximum of four titles by any one author in any one territory. This is to allow for new writers' work to have the opportunity of being translated and also because it is hoped that if a publisher is publishing a fifth book then they have already succeeded in creating a profile for the writer and demand for his/her books. The timing of this is of course, like

so many things, crucial. Should a writer win a literary prize, say the Booker or the Dublin International Literary Award, then the price of the foreign rights can rocket upwards.

New Writing from Ireland



Literature Ireland
Promoting and Translating Irish Writing

As with all things international, geopolitical events colour the routes the books take. For different reasons, at different times in recent history, different regions are targeted. A good example of this was the fall of the Berlin wall, the subsequent opening up of Eastern bloc countries and more importantly, the imminent entry of the 10 'new' European countries into the EU. In line with government policy, Literature Ireland went east in the early years of the new century to promote Irish fiction in Eastern European

countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Also, in this instance, it was a two-way exercise, Mac Aodha says, in that former communist countries were keen to publish new writing in translation. Publishers from these countries actively sought out Irish writers to be translated into their national languages. So, LI backed up this promotion by running a translator residency programme, putting out a call for applications to translators in these countries on LI's website, through Irish embassies in countries where there was diplomatic representation and through local translator associations – something for CEATL members to be aware of.

annual programme of short residential bursaries for professional translators working on publisher-commissioned translations of works of Irish literature. The purpose of the bursaries is to enable translators, who apply directly to LI, to spend a period of time in Ireland working on a translation, meeting with authors, carrying out research in Irish libraries and generally immersing themselves in the cultural, linguistic and artistic environment of contemporary Irish literature.

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Section of titles recently supported by Literature Ireland
Photo: Literature Ireland

Openings for translators

One is the **Residential Translator Bursary Programme**, which is a small

Since 2003, LI has supported some 50 translators from all over the world including Ma Ainong who translated works by Claire Keegan and William Trevor, Kuppuswamy Ganesan who translated John Banville's *The Sea* into Tamil and Jerzy Jarniewicz who has translated many great Irish poets including Seamus Heaney and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill into Polish. There is also the annual **Translator-in-Residence Programme** where every year, Literature Ireland and the Trinity Centre for Literary and Cultural Translation collaborate and co-fund the post of Literature-Ireland-Trinity

College Dublin Translator-in-Residence. This four-month post is targeted at a specific language territory each year and is awarded to a practising literary translator of established track record who is working on a translation of a work of contemporary literature. In addition to working on their translation-in-progress a condition of the bursary is that the translator runs a number of translation workshops for Trinity students on the Masters in Literary Translation. In 2019, the Literature Ireland- Trinity College residency was awarded to a translator working in the Japanese language, Hiroko Mikami who translated a number of the late Tom Murphy's play. In 2020 the focus will be on German language translator.

The [Translation Grant Programme](#) allows international publishers to apply for a contribution to the cost of a translator of a work of Irish literature from English or Irish into another language. The process is rigorous – a package of documents is required including proof of rights, translator contract, list of previous publications, translator's cv etc for assessment by LI. The package must include a ten-page sample translation which is then reviewed, anonymously, by an independent expert translator, who sends back a report. There are three rounds a year of almost 250 requests from publishers. In 2018, 85 proposals were funded.

Sinead Mac Aodha is very clear on what her remit does NOT include – either choosing the translator or even recommending one. Nor does LI choose the book to be translated. She feels an arm's length is necessary to maintain balance and transparency

and that LI cannot take on the role of agent when dealing with either the translator or the publisher.

“The former communist countries were keen to publish new writing in translation”

Literature Ireland shares the view of many in our profession that an important part of the translator's role, as specialist and in a position to give an informed view, is to bring other language writers' work to publishing houses. Mac Aodha recounts the case of the translator Mirela Hristova, translator of Sebastian Barry's *A Long Long Way* into Bulgarian, who came to Ireland as a translator and left as a publisher. Plenty of scope for the literary translator!