



Counterpoint

Counterpoint • No.5 • 2021
CEATL's European Literary
Translators' E-zine

Contents

From the editors	3
Translating your thoughts <i>Mascha Dabić</i>	6
The new European Directive on authors' rights: Will authors be able to consolidate their gains? <i>Cécile Deniard</i>	9
Translation from Belarusan: No hobby for the sane <i>Anonymous</i>	13
Embattled linguists: An interview with <i>Maya Hess</i>, founder of the Red T organization	17

- “Diversity only exists as long as there is translation”
Expert group formulates recommendations for European cultural policy** **21**
Hanneke van der Heijden
- Below standard?
On translating children’s literature** **25**
Marta Morros Serret
- NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: GERMANY
Remuneration remains a delicate issue** **29**
Andreas G. Förster & Claudia Steinitz
- ME AND MY DICTIONARY:
My *Dictionnaire Royal* – the pleasure of using a historical dictionary** **33**
Kim Witthoff
- CEATL’s Click List:
Links to the world of translation** **36**

From the editors

Visibility for all translators of all genres, and most particularly literary translators, is often a matter of passionate debate, never more so than the present time. Who can translate what? Who decides who can translate what? Is a translator's race, ethnicity, sexuality, colour, religion, nationality, gender, and/or age more important than their translation abilities and professional experience? Less important? And is this even the right way to pose the question, as a choice between the two? Sometimes it is a necessity for the translator to be visible – and sometimes a liability. Where does the point of equilibrium lie? And what does (political) correctness mean when it comes to literary translation? These are some of the many questions that our translator community frequently faces, which are complex and maybe impossible, to answer. But the discussion in itself brings new insights and is always worth delving into.

So, in this issue of *Counterpoint* we look at different experiences and consequences of visibility: Mascha Dabić writes about the difference between being a visible translator and being a visible author, Maya Hess tells the story of how Red T fights to bring attention to the often highly precarious situation of overlooked interpreters and translators in conflict zones, and from Belarus, we hear how the regime is actively disrupting the visibility and spreading of Belarusian literature.

“Discussion in itself brings new insights”

By agreement, and in light of recent events, the author's name and any identifying facts have been removed in order not to compromise their

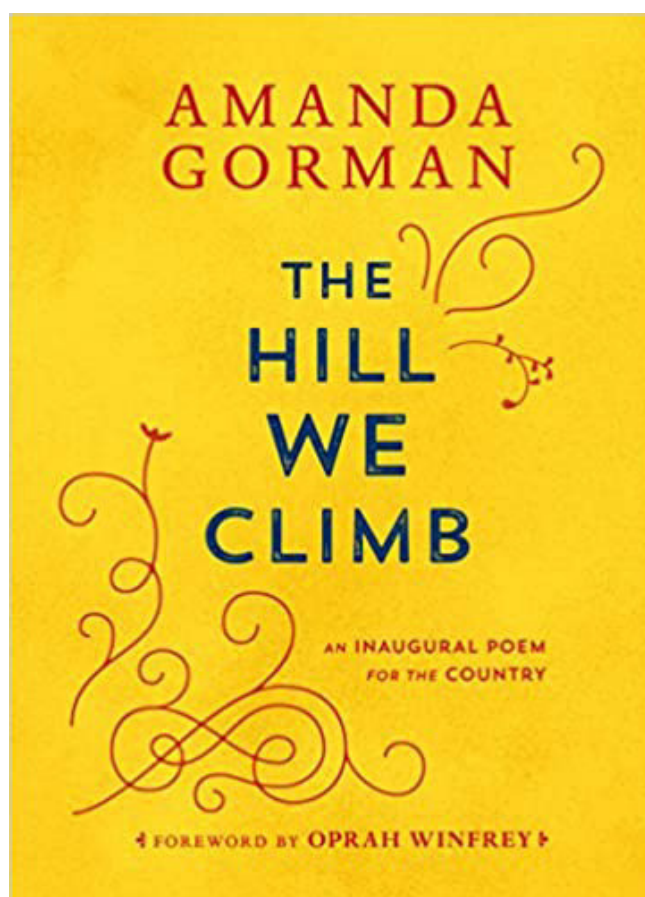
personal safety. Likewise the name of the translator of the article. The publication of this article is a stark real-life reminder of the dangers of translation, including literary translation. Any illusion that translators just convey what's already there and therefore can not be held responsible for the content is clearly dispelled.

“CEATL has joined forces with FIT”

At the moment, national governments are working on implementing the DSM (Digital Single Market) Directive into national legislation – and much is at stake when it comes to how it will be implemented. If the process goes well, fair remuneration, transparency and better contracts could all be a bit more accessible to translators. CEATL has played an active role in the shaping of the directive and continues to advise on its implementation. At the same time, the European Commission has gathered experts from across the EU to offer input on actually spreading literature from all languages across Europe. In that way, focus is turned towards literary translators at a political level in more ways than one, bringing our work and our place in the literary circuit to attention.

Children's literature, on the other hand, still seems to get unmotherly treatment, including when it comes to translation. In this matter, CEATL has joined forces with the global translators'

organisation FIT and participated in the Bologna Book Fair in June, trying to raise awareness so that this extremely important part of the literary landscape is not mistreated or indeed overlooked. While work goes on in the EU to enhance diversity, spread languages and literature, and while it seems that most nations and regions in Europe are rather proud of their literary heritage and keen to spread the word(s), the case is quite the opposite in Belarus. Here the state's attitude seems to be that spreading translated literature from Belarus is undesirable because using this language is considered a political protest. Even the spelling of the name of the language is a topic of political debate.



In the light of the ongoing debate this spring – regarding the translation of American poet Amanda Gorman's

The Hill We Climb – supposedly on “who is allowed to translate whom”, but in reality about questions that are a good deal more complex and therefore rather difficult to answer in two short sentences; in the light of the persistent imprisonment of translators, and of the work of the EU to support the diversity of languages through translation, at least two things are clear: literary translation is (also) political and the visibility of literary translators may be a complex issue.

“Literary translation is also political”

There are, on the other hand, joys to be found, such as sifting through a 250-year-old dictionary to find just the right word, experiencing your own writing being translated, or feeling the strength of a collegial community when fighting for translators’ rights – in a boat on the river Spree in Berlin. All of this and more is part of this fifth issue of *Counterpoint* which we are both proud and happy to present. As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions at editors@ceatl.eu

Hanneke van der Heijden,
Anne Larchet and Juliane Wammen



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

Translating your thoughts

Mascha Dabić

Can you be both *free* and *faithful* at the same time? Well, as a translator this is exactly what you are supposed to be. You have to find a way to accomplish this mission impossible, time and again.

I have been translating and interpreting for ages, literally, but it was only last year that, to my surprise, I experienced another position in the translation process, namely that of being the author of a book which was translated into my own native language. Sounds complicated. And it is complicated. My native languages are Serbo-Croatian and Russian, but I have lived in Austria ever since I was eleven, so German has become my *Bildungssprache* ('language of education'), and it felt perfectly natural to write my first (and maybe last?) novel in German. (The title *Reibungsverluste* could be translated as 'Losses in friction'). My novel is about interpreting in psychotherapy, and it describes a working day in the life of a young Austrian woman named Nora. She interprets for Russian-speaking Chechen asylum seekers in Austria who are struggling to find words to describe their

experiences and memories as survivors of war(s) and torture, during sessions with an Austrian psychotherapist.

I am not Nora. *Reibungsverluste* is not an autobiography. Nora is a native Austrian, and I am not; for Nora, interpreting is not a profession, for me it is. And I, too, have been working as an interpreter in psychotherapy for many years and have continued to do so, even in Corona-mode, which means that ever since March 2020 many of the psychotherapy sessions where I was interpreting took place either online or via phone, but that's another story.

So even though I didn't write an autobiography, writing the novel gave me the opportunity to process many situations that I had experienced myself as an interpreter of psychotherapy encounters. Nora helped me to illustrate the restrictions of interpreting and to show how interpreters work under pressure – to understand, translate and convey the meaning as quickly as possible, expressed so concisely in *Zeitnot*.

“I was used to having ‘my authors’, but now I had ‘my translator’”

Negotiating the story

However, Nora also taught me that an author’s freedom is relative as well. I had thought that by being the author of my novel I would be ‘free’: free to choose my words, free to design characters, free to steer the story in any direction I liked. Yes, writing a text definitely brings more freedom to pick and choose your words and to think your own thoughts than when you are translating a text. And yet I discovered that even when writing you are not fully in control of what is happening in the text. The characters that you create turn out to have their own inner lives, they can do and think surprising things. At times, it felt as if I had to negotiate the story with the protagonists, as if it were up to them to see if they had the space and capability to do or say what I wanted them to. Maybe like a film director who has a film script and the actors but still needs to negotiate with the actors to see if they want to stick to the script or if they would prefer to improvise and do something else instead ... While I was working on my text, time and again there were sentences and words and scenes that seemed to pop out of nowhere, and at the same time there were other sentences or words that were in my head but that I couldn’t write down, no matter how hard I tried.

To come back to what I had mentioned in the beginning: last year my book was translated from German into Serbo-Croatian, by a young translator. All of a sudden I found myself at the receiving end of a translator’s questions, such as “What is the exact meaning of this word here...? Could it also mean something else?” I was used to having ‘my authors’, but now I had ‘my translator’, Đorđe Trišović. He did a great job, and I was impressed by the high level of accuracy in his work. It reminded me of my very first literary translations and how nervous I had been when I had to contact ‘my’ authors and ask them questions about their texts, because, to be honest, back then I tended to mystify authors and their work, and it took me a couple of years and translated novels until I realized that there is nothing wrong with ‘bothering’ authors with questions, that on the contrary, authors



Cover of Mascha Dabić’s debut novel



Since her M.A. in Translation sciences (English and Russian) **Mascha Dabić** has translated numerous novels from Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian into German. She has written journalistic articles on the topic of migration and works as a community and conference interpreter Russian–German. Mascha Dabić is a lecturer at the universities of Innsbruck and Vienna. For her first novel *Reibungsverluste* (2017) she received a literary prize of the city of Vienna in 2018.

Mascha Dabić
Photo: Jorgi Poll

actually enjoy seeing someone trying hard to understand every little nuance and hint of their text. The translator is arguably the most studious and careful reader of a text because there is nothing that he can skip (unlike the ‘normal’ reader; me, for instance, I tend to skip descriptions of nature, because I prefer experiencing nature in real life instead of reading about it).

Collective visibility

And then, there is the aspect of visibility. As translators we strive for invisibility in our work, in the sense that a translation is considered ‘good’ when the produced text seems ‘natural’, as if it had not been translated. And yet, on a collective level, as a group of professionals, we translators, of course, strive for visibility in society, and consequently for acknowledgement. I didn’t mind being visible together with ‘my’ authors, at book fairs for instance, when I would interpret their presentations; however, when I found myself ‘visible’ as an author, I found it quite embarrassing. Especially in the beginning, being

visible on stage as an author felt quite suffocating; while as a literary translator I am only concerned about the *quality* of my translation and whether ‘it works’, as an author I found myself worrying about whether readers would like my work... and what if they thought it was stupid? What if I myself thought it was stupid? Well, I guess these self-doubts are part of the concept of visibility too. You somehow have to deal with the ‘limelight’ that you have created by writing a book, and for me going back into the ‘shadows’ of being a translator felt like a relief. Doing your work in a rather ‘invisible’ manner gives you some sort of freedom and peace too – but I guess I needed to experience an author’s visibility to come to fully appreciate the translator’s relative invisibility.

What I have learned from the experience of being present as an author is that, when you come to think of it, to speak and to write actually means to try and translate your thoughts into language. As translators we know that translation can never be perfect. But it’s worth a try.

The new European Directive on authors' rights

Will authors be able to consolidate their gains?

Cécile Deniard

Five years: that is the time that elapsed between the public consultations on a new copyright directive undertaken by the European Commission at the beginning of 2014 and the vote on the final text of the so-called DSM (Digital Single Market) Directive of April 2019.

The battle of the directive

The initial months of this battle gave authors cause for considerable alarm: the Commission's stated objective was to create a single market for works in the digital age, yet in its rhetoric copyright was systematically presented as an obstacle to the cross-border circulation of works, an obstacle that would have to be remedied with exceptions.

Meanwhile, the European Parliament commissioned Pirate Party MEP Julia Reda to produce a draft report on the implementation of the 2001 Copyright Directive. In her report the Deputy recommended expanding the scope of copyright exceptions in order

to promote access to works, while prohibiting any financial compensation mechanism for authors and publishers. The effect of these highly dangerous proposals was to galvanise all advocates of copyright (authors, publishers and producers, collective management organisations) from across the creative sectors (books, music, visual arts, audiovisual) into coordinated action to emphasise the need to prevent these essential industries from being weakened. For their part, the majority of MEPs showed themselves to be sensitive to these issues, and in particular to the situation of authors, with the result that the text finally adopted in July 2015 has little to do with the 'Reda report'. From then on, the remuneration and contractual protection of creators was high on the European agenda.

Since that time, CEATL has continued to be part of the eventful journey of this reform, lobbying the Commission and MEPs (in particular to ensure that



Yüksel Arslan, Le Capitale, Arture XXI, 1973

all provisions in favour of authors could be applied in full to literary translators) and engaging with authors and publishers when this was deemed in our best interest.

Major step forward for authors

Ultimately, we can congratulate ourselves on the fact that the directive includes an entire chapter (articles 18 to 23) which aims to rebalance the contractual relationship between authors and publishers, and thus to ensure that creators receive better remuneration for all their works (digital or otherwise).

This definition of a set of rights represents a major step forward in the construction of European copyright. The rights obtained are as follows: the affirmation of the principle of appropriate and proportionate remuneration; the definition of transparency obligations on the parties to whom works are licensed (in other words, the obligation to account for the exploitation of works); the

possibility of adapting contracts when the remuneration initially provided for proves to be insufficient; the possibility of repossessing one's rights in the event of lack of exploitation; and finally, the obligation to establish out-of-court procedures for settling disputes concerning the transparency and adaptation of contracts.

This latter provision is of particular interest since it will oblige all States to set up an arbitration mechanism that includes authors' representatives. And the directive as a whole attaches considerable importance to the notion of collective action and collective management: for instance, it introduces the notion of extended collective management (already well known in Northern countries) in cases where it is important to provide access to a large repertoire of works at once (e.g. out-of-commerce books) while at the same time preserving the rights and interests of authors. There is also an emphasis on collective bargaining in order to reach agreements on transparency obligations,

but also to ensure fair remuneration. The frequently cited argument that collective agreements would be contrary to EU or national competition legislation should therefore no longer be used by publishers as a reason for refusing collective discussions on remuneration (e.g. to define scales or minimum fees).

The challenges of the transposition process

Nevertheless, in its philosophy and wording, the directive offers considerable latitude to States and stakeholders to define the specific ways in which its main principles are to be implemented (e.g. what is “appropriate and proportionate” remuneration?). By a strange twist of fate, this is partly in response to the demands of our own organisations which, faced with the Commission’s first potentially destructive drafts, had to argue that the text should not undermine systems that were already working and that its provisions could be adapted by stakeholders to very different national contexts.

However, everything now depends on the ability of authors’ representatives to ensure that the progress resulting from the directive is correctly transposed into national legislation and then applied – in other words, to make the case to the public authorities in the face of publishers who have every interest in a minimalist legal transposition, and then in a non-existent application. However, let us be under no illusions: whereas in the heat of battle the “defenders of copyright” (authors, publishers, collecting societies) managed to form a united front and

all brandished the interests of authors as a banner of consensus (although somewhat paternalistically in the case of the publishers and with a fair measure of bad faith or incompetence in the case of the supporters of the Reda report), as far as the application of articles 18 to 23 is concerned, their interests are widely divergent.

“Everything depends on how the directive is transposed into national legislation”

At the end of 2020, CEATL conducted a [flash-survey on the transposition process](#). Its results indicate a high level of involvement of our associations, but also points to uncertainties as to whether the transposition process will lead to significant legislative progress. This will have to be assessed when it is completed (theoretically in June 2021, but there will undoubtedly be delays), but the process has been heavily disrupted by Covid, and has often been side-lined, with what attention there was left focusing on Articles 15 and 17 (on the press and content-sharing service providers). Furthermore, while the ability of cultural sectors to coordinate has proved very successful at European level, and while some countries have a strong tradition



*A literary translator for the past twenty years, **Cécile Deniard** has translated more than fifty books from English to French. She particularly enjoys alternating between fiction and non-fiction (history, political science). Having been a long-time activist on the ATLF Board, she is currently vice-president of the collective management organisation Sofia, and coordinator of CEATL's authors' rights working group.*

Cécile Deniard

Photo: Private Archive

of initiatives involving the various players (I am thinking in particular of Germany with the Verdi trade union and the Initiative Urheberrecht association, and the Netherlands with the Federatie Auteursrechtbelangen, which brings together creators, creative industries and collecting societies), in other countries, by contrast, the landscape remains very fragmented and the custom of fighting on a cross-sectoral basis has not taken hold, which may have been detrimental in this case (in France, for example, everything is structured by sector and it is only recently that creators have recognised their common interests). Five years for its adoption, two years

for its transposition... but, come what may, the story doesn't end there! Even if the transposition process initially proves disappointing, the battle is not over and we must build on the progress achieved with this directive. At European level, by calling on the Commission to ensure that its own principles in favour of authors are respected, for example, in the framework of its translation support programmes. And, at national level, by focusing on these achievements as a reference point in our daily fight for translators.

*Translated from French by
Penelope Eades-Alvarez*

Translation from Belarusan —

No hobby for the sane

Anonymous

I started out as a translator of Belarusian* literature over the winter of 2010–2011. The stone-cold murderous dictatorship was already in existence, only back then they used to imprison those who held a different opinion one by one, not by the thousands. After that parody of a presidential election in December 2010, a mere eight out of the remaining nine candidates were locked up by the tenth – the ‘winner’ – and only one of them got beaten half to death before the polls closed. He was the one Lukashenka feared the most because no-one can enthrall a crowd like a great poet – Uladzimir Niakliaeu. He was taken to hospital but by the time he came to, he found himself in a KGB prison (the same acronym is still used in Belarus to this day). For a week, the country had no way of knowing whether he was dead or alive. Since then he has been incarcerated several times. This is why I changed professions. My first translation of one of his short stories came out (under an alias) quicker, in fact, than he got out of prison. Thus, I was bludgeoned into becoming a literary translator – a less than ideal beginning.

Undesirable spreading of Belarusian literature

The years 2012/2013 more or less marked the end of interest in Belarusian culture that had been temporarily enlivened by the ‘presidential election’ of 2010 and was only reignited last year – not by the subsequent ‘election’ but by the brutally stifled wave of protest that followed. In the meantime, I, for one, was unable to get a line published for two years. It is also worth mentioning that it requires a great deal more effort to coax publishing houses into accepting a text translated from Belarusian than the actual translation process. Routinely hopeless. Neither the Republic of Belarus nor potential target cultures show any inclination to support translation of this kind in any way, Poland, perhaps, being a notable exception – due to the fact that the two countries share much of their history. There is, to the best of my knowledge, a handful of translators in Europe – mostly in German-speaking regions – who possess somewhat keener skills in advancing their interests and/or having their work published privately.

All this, of course, is rooted in Belarus. According to the official Belarusian standpoint, spreading Belarusian literature is undesirable and has been so, for countless years now. The work of the Nobel prize winner, Alexievich, is no exception.

“It requires a great deal more effort to coax publishing houses into accepting a text translated from Belarusian than the actual translation process”

The target language doesn't matter, either. Some of the publishing houses that specialise in Belarusian language literature operate abroad and the same goes for several printing houses. The 'reimportation' of printed products is then zealously hindered by Belarusian customs officials and the police force who, more often than not, are successful.

One of the consequences of this is that my few and far between translations still get published before their originals. If I am lucky enough, a literary journal

might print my translation but, in the meantime, the author – unable to publish – keeps fine tuning their work. A side-effect of this is that the translation strongly resembles but does not fully reflect 'the original'. Luckily, my contemporary authors understand this since I have been fortunate enough to make their acquaintance and am proud to call the majority my friends.

Speaking Belarusian

It is a blessing that the local literary community took me in. The 'opposition' writers' society (ah yes, there is also a writers' society in agreement with the



Postcard of Minsk.

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

government) even admitted me into its ranks. Otherwise, I wouldn't have anyone to talk to in Belarusian: hundreds of years of oppression of the language, from East and West alike, has borne fruit. Using Belarusian can be an act of political

protest. In old-fashioned rural areas, it is not uncommon that inhabitants speak some sort of – or rather several sorts of – mixed languages, most often a Ukrainian-Belarusian-Russian-Polish mix (so-called ‘Trasianka’).

In this completely KGB-controlled country, the use of the Belarusian language was persecuted even ten to twenty years ago. Then it was tolerated, now it’s punishable again, albeit not always in the word’s legal sense. During mass arrests/detentions, the police mark people with paint, using specific colours corresponding to specific activities. Those who use Belarusian are given the cruelest of beatings at the police station. This is in a country where, over the last decade, eager volunteers have offered Belarusian language courses in several towns and cities. Anyone can attend the weekly classes, foreigners included. It represents an opportunity for those who speak the language to converse and build a community.

In a situation like this you think long and hard before you decide to chat with your friends in Belarusian over the phone, like you used to. Personally, I haven’t given up the old habit just yet, but I would be lying if I said I feel no fear whatsoever.

Books and translators

Since they are foreigners for the most part, it is more difficult for the regime to put pressure on translators. Those who still live in Belarus would be considered an oddity and are generally lost in the literary crowd. In any case, if they are European citizens, they are in an easier position than all the writers and poets who have seen the inside of a prison for varying amounts of time

over these 26 years of dictatorship – many of them more than once.

“According to the official Belarusian standpoint, spreading Belarusian literature is undesirable”

Nevertheless, a translator who is not in personal contact with Belarusian authors has no opportunity to become familiar with contemporary literature. Books are customarily printed in batches of 100 to 500 copies. Book stores only keep the most well-known Belarusian literature classics and one or two copies of a few contemporary titles are lucky to be included at all. Which is (among other reasons) why only two or three, relatively fashionable living authors’ works gets published in foreign languages apart from the odd exception. Then, as mentioned above, there is the complete lack of support for translation of Belarusian literature. There’s not much more the regime could do in this regard to make matters worse in the current, progressively more devastating political atmosphere. On the other hand, several authors have noted that interest in Belarusian texts has increased remarkably in the current situation. As a literary translator, I find the increase in

demand for news from Belarus palpable and – for this exact reason – there seems to be a greater appetite for Belarusian culture as well. I have had some work published in recent years, and other work translated a long time ago, appeared in journals. Larger publishing houses and print journals remain uninterested in Belarusian literature – but some sort of break-through is undeniable.

Tipping scale

I do believe in the future of Belarus. I also work for it as a literary translator by promoting the culture and commenting on events. But I cannot finish this piece optimistically based solely on my beliefs.

“Contre nous de la tyrannie l’étendard sanglant est levé!” (“Against us tyranny’s bloody flag is raised!” – tr. Laura K. Lawless.) They truly know no bounds. On 26 February, 24 elderly ladies were detained in Minsk, some because they were reading Belarusian literature on the suburban railway and others because they were found in possession of Belarusian books. The charge was the usual: “attendance at an unauthorised event”. The most common punishment was a fine equivalent to one or two months’ pension although some were detained for between 15 and 20 days. One 75-year-old woman’s trial was expedited but many others were kept in prison a number of days waiting for legal proceedings to take place. This is just one example, nothing extraordinary.

Between August and December 2020, the game between peaceful protesters and a police force armed to the teeth was leaning towards a draw even though it took the lives of 12 people. (Only 4 are officially recognised.) As I am writing

these words, the scale is tipping towards a power that, at this point, has lost all its legitimacy. Tipping – temporarily, one hopes. If the powers that be win, what will happen then to Belarusian language and literature, and what will happen to us, its translators?

**‘Belarusan’ is the author’s choice of spelling. It is used by some academics and linguists who strive for sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus, and was also employed by the UN from 1992 – 1995.*

Translated by a colleague of the author

Embattled linguists

*An interview with **Maya Hess**, founder of the Red T organization*

What led to Red T's foundation?

Firstly, thank you for this opportunity to talk about a cause so close to my heart. The idea came to me on 10 February 2005, as I sat in a U.S. federal court listening with disbelief to the guilty verdict against an Arabic translator/interpreter (T/I) on charges of aiding and abetting terrorist activity. In this case, the government and the jury construed interpreting at attorney-inmate conversations as material support to terrorism, thereby criminalizing the profession in the United States. To provide a much-needed counter-narrative, I wrote my dissertation about the trial and, while doing the literature review, became aware of other unjust T/I-related prosecutions and the serious threats faced by linguists in theaters of war. I grew increasingly outraged and wanted to do my part in addressing my colleagues' extreme vulnerability. So, in 2010, I established the non-profit organization **Red T** to advocate for translators and interpreters in high-risk settings.

Recent violations of translator and interpreter rights in Belarus, for

example, confirm that the targeting of translators and interpreters continues. How does Red T see the future for these professions?

I am always hopeful that one day we will achieve, or at least come closer to, the Red T vision, which imagines “a world in which translators and interpreters can work free from fear of persecution, prosecution, imprisonment, abduction, torture and assassination.” At this point, however, many challenges remain, originating from both state and non-state actors. For instance, insurgents in war zones hunt T/Is who assist or assisted foreign armies, while authoritarian governments continue to crack down on anyone not toeing the line. That said, it is important to recognize that T/Is may be targeted not for practicing their profession but for exercising their freedom of expression, as is the case with the four Belarus translators who were detained because of their opposition to President Lukashenko's regime. As such, it was not a violation of translator and interpreter rights per se; rather, it was a violation of a fundamental human right as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human



Protecting Translators and
Interpreters Worldwide

To learn about Red T's awareness-raising
activities, visit red-t.org
facebook.com/TheRedT
[@TheRedT](https://twitter.com/TheRedT)

Rights. But whatever the context, the world language community must stay vigilant in protecting its members.

Can you give some examples of what was behind Red T's caption "When translating news lands you in prison"?

T/Is across the world are at risk when they translate/interpret content considered controversial by the powers that be. In China, for example, a Uyghur translator, Mirhemitjan Muzepper, was sentenced in 2009 to 11 years in prison for translating Chinese-language news that the Chinese government viewed as subversive. He was charged with inciting separatism, though the station that employed him and posted the translated news was never prosecuted. Then there is the case of Mohammed Ismael Rasool, an Iraqi interpreter who was detained in 2015 by the Turkish authorities along with two British journalists and charged with aiding an organization the Turkish government considered terrorist. In

reality, Rasool was interpreting for the reporters, who were doing a story on the clashes between pro-Kurdish youth and Turkish security forces. But while the journalists were released after six days, the interpreter spent more than four months in prison. And in Venezuela, a local interpreter was hired in 2013 by an Al Jazeera journalist for an interview with the leader of one of the country's most feared colectivos, a pro-socialist community organization with a paramilitary arm. After the journalist left and the interview was published, the interpreter was stalked with "we are gonna kill you" text messages and had to go into hiding for several weeks.

How does Red T monitor violations?

We learn about T/I violations primarily from media sources. We are also alerted to specific cases by concerned parties or approached by individual linguists seeking assistance.

What does Red T do to protect translators and interpreters in high-risk settings?

Red T engages in a variety of initiatives on a macro and micro level. First and foremost, we advocate globally for laws and policies that mitigate the threats to linguists operating in high-risk settings by speaking before governmental and intergovernmental bodies as well as at industry and academic venues. Among other activities, we work with member states of the United Nations and co-organize roundtables in pursuit of a legal instrument that protects civilian T/Is in conflict situations; submit briefs in T/I-related court cases; assist in the resettlement of individual war zone linguists; contribute topical research to the media and documentary filmmakers; and, together with Columbia University in New York, developed a pedagogical module introducing students to the Red T cause, which we plan to circulate at other universities. To scale our efforts, we joined forces with major international T/I associations and academia, as well as with humanitarian organizations. Two key outcomes of these strategic partnerships are the Open Letter Project, which advocates on behalf of embattled linguists by sending [letters of appeal](#) to the relevant authorities, and the [Conflict Zone Field Guide](#) for Civilian T/Is and Users of Their Services.

Has Red T seen positive outcomes as a result of their activities?

On a general level, our awareness raising has borne fruit: The threats to T/Is in high-risk settings have progressively figured on the world's radar, as evidenced by broader governmental, intergovernmental, media and academic attention. For instance, as a result of

our massive mailing campaign and informational events, UN member states are increasingly conscious of the need for a protection mechanism for civilian T/Is in conflict situations, while individual governments have implemented more linguist-friendly policies and/or admitted T/Is on a case-by-case basis. Of course, other organizations have advocated as well, among them our close collaborator, the Conflict Zone Interpreter Group of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), which started lobbying for better interpreter protection at the Council of Europe around the same time our non-profit was established.

“While the journalists were released after six days, the interpreter spent more than four months in prison”

On a more granular level, Red T has been instrumental in resettling interpreters to safety and preventing deportations back to war zones by either working directly with an interpreter or contributing expert opinions/letters of support to asylum and court proceedings. To cite



Maya Hess is the founder and CEO of Red T, a US-based non-profit organization that advocates worldwide on behalf of translators and interpreters in high-risk settings. As a forensic linguist, Maya provided language support and expert witness services in major US terrorism trials and experienced firsthand how vulnerable members of this profession can be. She holds an MA in Journalism from New York University, a Graduate Certificate in Terrorism Studies from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, as well as an MPhil and PhD in Criminal Justice from the City University of New York.

Maya Hess
Photo: Private Archive

a recent result, our Open Letter to the Australian government – which we wrote on behalf of international and national T/I associations and which was co-signed by Amnesty International, PEN International and the International Refugee Assistance Project – facilitated the visa pathway for Iraqi interpreters seeking asylum. Specifically, the Australian Department of Home Affairs dispensed with the requirement that interpreters must physically travel to out-of-country embassies and now permits interpreters to apply by mail or courier at their embassy in Amman, Jordan. We applauded the decision, since the need to travel through war-torn territory has now been eliminated. Click [here](#) for more information.

How can people get involved in Red T?

If any of your readers hear of a T/I persecution in their country, they should please [contact us](#). Moreover, we are building a T/I incident database and would welcome volunteers willing to comb through the non-English-language press on an ongoing basis.

Also, to keep abreast of developments in the arena of high-risk translating/interpreting, we invite your readers to follow Red T on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) and, to amplify awareness raising, share our posts.

“Diversity only exists as long as there is translation”

Expert group formulates recommendations for European cultural policy

Hanneke van der Heijden

Last year *Counterpoint* talked to Valeria Pulignano, professor of Sociology at Leuven University. As the head of a team of researchers on the precarious status of translators and other self-employed professionals, she noted that the economic position of translators is becoming increasingly unsustainable. Pointing to the big difficulties this is causing for both translators themselves and for society at large, she concluded that the system needs to **change**.

Pulignano is not the only one worried about the organisation of the European translation sector. Calls for a more vibrant translation sector can be heard at EU-level as well, though the rationale is different. For the EU, the starting point is the circulation of European cultural works – not only books but also films, plays and music. The more these works circulate, the better for European integration. Since Europe is a continent with many different languages,

translation is essential for the circulation of European works, and thus for “social inclusion and European integration”. Thanks to translation, non-native speakers have access to literary works from other countries. Translation is, in EU words, ‘key to enabling broader access to European content’.

Based on these considerations the EU Work Plan for Culture 2019–2022 provided for the creation of an Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group of Member States’ experts focussing on Multilingualism and Translation. In February 2020 the Council of the European Union (representing EU member states) set up an OMC group of experts from EU member states. Icelandic, Norwegian and Swiss experts also joined. The group, chaired by the French expert and coordinated by the European commission, was mandated with the task of preparing a report with an

analysis of best practices as well as recommendations on the role of public policies and funding schemes. The research question is how policy and funding, whether it be national or European, can help the circulation of translated books, and can help the development of a translation sector that is vibrant enough to cover all cultural sectors.

In March 2021, nearly a year after the OMC group was set up, *Counterpoint* had a Zoom meeting with its coordinator, EU policy officer Arnaud Pasquali, to talk about the background of the OMC Group and its inner workings.

Publishing and selling

“During the Covid crisis it has become clear that there continues to be an appetite for literature. People have more time and they read more. But bookshops haven’t been able to fully benefit from this. Publishers on the other hand, worried by the limited possibilities for book launches and other promotional activities, decided to postpone the publication of new books. Fewer titles come out, and the diversity on bookshelves is diminishing. Factors such as the size of the book sector in a certain country and the original language of a book play a role too. Books in so-called lesser used languages, Portuguese or the Baltic languages for example, are more vulnerable in this respect than titles written in one of the ‘big languages’,” Pasquali says.

As is the case in many sectors of society, the Covid crisis has also put the spotlight on the flaws in the book sector that have been endemic in the system for a longer period of time.

Pasquali notes “It’s often said that Europe is strong because of its diversity. But this diversity will no longer be accessible if the translations published are mainly from ‘big languages’ like English. Diversity only exists as long as there is translation.”

The OMC Group co-ordinator distinguishes between two different attitudes among publishers. “Some say ‘We sell the books we publish’, whereas others hold the view ‘We publish the books we sell’.” While acknowledging that companies need to operate on a sound commercial basis, Pasquali stresses that publishers must be encouraged to also take risks. One of the tasks of the OMC Group is to find out how the EU can best support the book sector in this respect.

Navigating between translation sectors

Supporting publishers is, however, only one part of this effort. In order to enhance the circulation of books, including books with lesser chances of becoming a commercial success, it is necessary to address the entire book value chain – from the author of the original work to making a title available to readers abroad which, especially in the case of lesser used languages, must include organisations such as literary agencies, funding bodies (both national and European), publishers, book fairs and organisations for the promotion of books and reading.

And it is here that translators come in: the mandate of the OMC Group emphasises the essential role of translators, and the wide array of professional tasks they carry out. Apart from translating texts, translators often

act as ambassadors and promoters, both to publishers who might be interested in publishing a text, as well as to a larger audience, once a text has been translated. The role of the translator in promotional activities is especially important in the case of texts written in lesser used languages, i.e. those which are less easily accessible to international publishers.

In order to be able to carry out such a diverse range of tasks translators have to be equipped with a set of different skills. Linguistic and cultural competencies are the obvious ones. The ability to interact with different agents in the cultural market stems from the translators' key role in the circulation of cultural work but it also involves an understanding of the technological requirements in different sectors of translation and of a rapidly changing market.

Pasquali tells *Counterpoint* that "most translators are self-employed and it is often impossible for them to find enough work in one single sector of the translation market. In order to make a living, literary translators are increasingly forced to navigate between different sectors, such as book translation, dubbing, subtitling, interpreting, teaching etc. Translators therefore need to be up-to-date with technological developments, they need professional contacts in different sectors, and they need to be visible. At the same time, translators' work is at risk in all of these sectors, as artificial intelligence and other developments make translations faster and cheaper."

Continuous training for translators is therefore another important topic for the OMC Group, as is the professionalisation of the translation sector, upholding fair pay and adequate contracts

covering the rights of copyright holders despite the threats technological developments and economic challenges constitute to a translator's income.

In this respect Pasquali mentions the EU Digital Single Market Directive which was passed in 2019: "The Copyright Directive is now being implemented by EU member states at national level. It provides a new legal framework for the contractual relationship between the translator and his or her employer, which is a welcome change in some countries." A central feature of this directive, at least for translators, is that publishers will be obligated to provide full transparency on the sales and revenues of the individual book to the individual copyright holder.

Not reinventing the wheel

Who then are the members of the OMC Group? Pasquali says "Approximately 30% of the members of the OMC Group are literary translators themselves. As practitioners, they have professional experience in the field, expertise and a network of contacts. Representatives of national councils for the promotion of books and similar public organisations make up another 30%. Slightly more than 30% of the members are representatives of the Ministries of Culture in their respective countries. They mostly work at an operational level such as financial support or policy, and are keen to learn from colleagues in other countries."

While the composition of the OMC Group itself is a great source of know-how, the group also invites external individuals and organisations with specific expertise or experience to the meetings. "Organisations such as CEATL are consulted on issues concerning literary translators in Europe, and AVTE in relation to subtitling and



Arnaud Pasquali is a policy officer in the Creative Europe Programme Unit of the Directorate General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture at the European Commission. He follows in particular the book and publishing sector. Since March 2020 Pasquali is the coordinator of the OMC Group ‘Multilingualism and Translation’.

The European Commission
Photo: Romaine. Own work CCO

dubbing. Similarly, we interview publishers and other stakeholders such as representatives from book fairs, book sellers and experts from the educational sector. We are, in short, talking to the entire sector. The OMC Group shouldn’t reinvent the wheel,” Pasquali says.

Divided into subgroups working on themes such as continuous training, status, professionalisation and the book market, OMC members compare and collect different national policies, analyse results, discuss examples of best practice and how they can be applied to improve the support system. For instance, is the Creative Europe grant system provided to publishers an adequate instrument for the promotion of a more diverse literary production? Is it compatible with financial support given at national level? How can other kinds of support systems, such as networking possibilities for translators, be organised? What are the requirements for the training of literary translators? How do we ease the access to and dissemination of fair contracts on translation and proper

renumeration, which is a key to making the translation sector more sustainable? Hopefully, the joint effort of the group will be able to provide resources and answers to some of these questions.

The conclusions of the OMC Group will take the form of concrete recommendations for all stakeholders in the book value chain at national and EU level. Considering the sometimes very different practices between EU-countries, Pasquali is keen to avoid one-size fits-all recommendations. The final report is expected to be ready in Autumn 2021.

EU funding for the creative sector

The Creative Europe programme under the European Commission has just launched calls for the 2021–2027 programme. Cultural organisations can apply for funding of cross-European cooperation projects, promotion of capacity-building etc. Application deadlines are 26 August and 7 September. Read about it [here](#).

Below standard?

On translating children's literature

Marta Morros Serret

In the years that I have been working as a professional translator of illustrated books for children, I have, over time, realized how diverse children's literature is and how important it is, not only in the life of a child, but also in their future adult life. The books that we read as children transform us and remain in our memories forever.

Nevertheless, it seems that children's literature, compared to adult literature, has historically been relegated to a minor category, socially, professionally and academically. Likewise, children's rights issues have also been historically marginalized* and somehow, as a domino effect, translation of children's literature has been treated as a minor category of literary translation, to the detriment of the working conditions and rights of translators of children's literature.

Why is that so? Maybe because there is the general belief that the world of adults is more "serious and important" or maybe because children's literature is created for small human beings that

have not yet developed all their potential intellectual capacities. Whatever the reasons, this does not justify that, in the publication of children's books, many publishing companies consistently neglect to use professional standards: e.g. not hiring professional translators, not facilitating translation contracts, not respecting translator's rights and, in some cases, especially when minority languages are involved, translating books from other mainstream languages.

Why hire a professional?

The answer to the above question actually should be obvious, but let me nevertheless explain: first of all, children's literature has its own particularities, which makes the translation of children's books a specialist task. Some of these special characteristics are:

- Orality, especially in books for young children, because they are meant to be read aloud, which makes the cadence and fluency of the sentences immensely important.
- Rhymes: many books play with internal rhymes, a characteristic that helps

children to maintain their attention and makes it easier for them to remember the different passages of the book.

- Word repetitions that must work in different contexts and sentences, which also serve as a pull to keep children captured by the story and to engage them in its reading as a game, by allowing them to anticipate what is going to be said and letting them pronounce that particular word.
- Play on words that make the book fun to read and encourage reading in general.



A page from *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* ('Visible World in Pictures', 1658) by John Amos Comenius, regarded as the first children's book

- The correlation between pictures and text, an imbrication that often determines the translator's choices, especially when there is a pun to preserve.

Secondly, hiring a professional translator is important because when dealing with children's literature, we are dealing also with children's education. The books are supposed to amuse children but also raise their passion for reading and motivate critical judgement, so they can become informed adults and responsible citizens in the future. Quality children's literature goes a long way to ensure quality education, which is one of the goals (no. 4.7) of the [World Education Forum's Incheon Declaration](#) within the UNESCO framework of Sustainable Development Goals. To me, the connection is clear: quality education means quality literature and quality literature needs quality translation, which means professional translation.

Thirdly, hiring professional translators means that publishing houses are committed to both children and children's authors, who deserve to read a good translation and be well translated, respectively. Why should a publishing company make the effort to choose the best authors and best stories, but then not hire a professional translator? Considering the challenges that children's literature present, it should be obvious that hiring a professional translator would be the best option for the sake of the book.

When all this is so obvious, you might wonder why publishing companies in many cases choose not to go with the professional. For me it sometimes seems

that publishing companies forget the important aspects of the first word ‘publishing’ and only worry about the second word: ‘company’. If it’s all about the money, some publishing companies may think that paying the fee of a professional translator and respecting translators’ copyrights is a waste of money. Well, it’s actually the other way round, because a well-translated book could be a success, whilst one that is poorly translated will definitely not and could make the publishing company lose a lot of money.

Moral and economical rights

The bottom line is that, whether we like it or not, professional translators have moral and economic rights under both the auspices of the international law, like the [Berne Convention](#) and the [Nairobi Recommendation](#), and under many national laws, like the [Intellectual Property Law of 1996](#) in Spain, the country where I currently live and work. Without going into detail on the articles, two concepts are at least clear: these laws state that translators have moral and economic rights, and none of them claims that children’s literature translation is exempt from them.

In preparing this article, I reread CEATL’s clear and comprehensive [Hexalogue](#): the six commandments of “fair play” in literary translation, and whilst reading them one by one, I just kept reaffirming myself that, yes, all of them should also apply to the translation of children’s literature. Why not?

I would like to draw attention to the Hexalogue’s 5th commandment on share in profit, one of the most infringed by children’s books publishing

companies in Spain, which reads: “The translator shall receive a fair share of the profits from the exploitation of his/her work, in whatsoever form it may take, starting from the first copy”.

Let me present an example: in Spain, due to the fact that authors’ copyright is usually 10 % and for its translations this is generally reduced to 8 %, the share of translated literature subject to authors’ copyrights should be 2 % – copyright-free books are supposed to be increased up to 8 % – although more often than not it amounts to 1 % and, to make things worse, lately it’s been lowering to 0.5 % while in children’s literature translation, many publishing companies do not share any percentage at all.

“When dealing with children’s literature, we are dealing also with children’s education”

Let’s now do some simple maths. Translators earn one euro out of a hundred; ten euro out of a thousand; a hundred euro out of ten thousand; a thousand euro out of a hundred thousand. The magnitude of the difference is daunting. From my point of view, being asked to have less than 1 % reaches the limits of humiliation and really shows the greed of some publishing companies.



Marta Morros Serret has translated more than a hundred children's books from English and Japanese into Spanish and Catalan. She has an MA on Human Rights and specialized in Children's Literature and Human Rights. She is former president of APTIC and current member of the FIT-IFT Council. She has recently been awarded the 2020 Special Prize of the Narrating Equality Prize for *El sueño de Claudia*.

Marta Morros Serret
Photo: Ilze Fogle

Working together from Bologna

In the last few years, CEATL and FIT have made a joint effort to promote good editorial practices in the translation of children's literature. At Bologna Children's Literature Fair in June, the two hosted an international panel titled "Down the rabbit hole: working (and surviving) as a translator of children's literature", where representatives of both organizations discussed the issues that arose here.

No matter what comes of further cooperation and fruitful talks, one thing is not up for discussion: hiring a professional and respecting translators rights is worth it economically for both the translators and the publishing houses, who will sell more books if the quality of the translation is good.

But apart from being profitable from a financial point of view, the most important thing is that quality translation has a human worth because, as I highlighted above, children's literature is linked to children's education and thereby to a culturally sustainable future. Translating

children's literature serves, in the famous words of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, as "windows and mirrors": windows from where the child can see and understand other cultures and mirrors in which their own cultures can be reflected. Or more simply put, in writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's words, "stories matter, many stories matter". Following this line of argument, I would add that children's literature matters and thus, doubtless, translating books for children – and translating them well – matters a whole lot.

**As argued in Jonathan Todres & Sarah Higinbotham, 'A Person's a Person: Children's Rights in Children's Literature', 45 Columbia Human Rights Law Review 1 (2013)*

NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: GERMANY

Remuneration remains a delicate issue

*Andreas G. Förster
& Claudia Steinitz*

At 67, the German Literary Translators' Association, **VdÜ**, founded in 1954, is far from retiring. Its official name is almost as long as its history, though most of the 1,400 members would have difficulty reciting it in full. Luckily, most of them are young and have better ideas about what to do for the guild than memorizing that name: *Verband deutschsprachiger Übersetzer/innen literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Werke / Bundessparte Übersetzer innen* within the *Verband deutscher Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftsteller* within the United Services Trade Union *ver.di**.

To become a member of the VdÜ, translators have to present at least one published literary translation or an equivalent work. For the last 15 years we have offered candidate status to aspiring translators – they have access to the same information as members as well as individual mentoring for up to two years. However, the German translators' industry is neither a closed shop nor is a special diploma required to translate literature. As a result, there are no exact figures on how many people

form that army of “nameless samurai” (Marcus Ingendaay), but there are about 10,200 books translated every year.

The first and foremost goal for the VdÜ as a professional association and as part of a labour union, is to implement a fair remuneration policy for all literary translators, as well as representing translators' interests whenever necessary. One example of recent achievements was when a new Copyright Act was being discussed in 2001, VdÜ members ‘landed’ near the Reichstag with a boat full of translated books for every deputy and handed them over to Wolfgang Thierse, the then President of Parliament. The new law was passed but did not include the option for collective lawsuits. Thus, some courageous colleagues took individual legal action against their publishers to enforce this law. Up until now, the option for collective lawsuits is also missing in the current national implementation of the European Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market, an issue that has been keeping our boards busy for some years.

In 2014, after several years of negotiation, a joint agreement on fees and royalties for literary translations was signed with a particular group of publishers. However, the hoped-for knock-on effect with other publishers did not materialize. In 2020, the VdÜ board and its negotiating committee agreed a new standard contract with the publishers' association which recommended best practices such as naming translators and reconfirming the standard page norm (of 30 lines max. with 60 characters max.). The new standard contract does not specify any fees though neither did the 1982 contract. Translators have to rely on their individual negotiating skills. Remuneration remains a delicate issue.



Boat full of translated books lands at Reichstag
Photo: Guido Notermans

Knowledge is power

Even though financial malaise is alleviated by the Artists' Social Insurance Scheme, established in the early 80s, which our Writers' Union fought for, the average income of literary translators in Germany is presently 19,000 euros a year. Since 2017, the VdÜ has offered its members contract advice, both from experienced colleagues and from a specialised lawyer. Any changes in income are monitored very closely using regular surveys.

Scientia potentia est – 'knowledge is power'. This is the reason why the VdÜ keeps their members and non-members up to date on political, professional, and cultural developments. This is achieved through the association's biannual print magazine, *Übersetzen* ('Translating'), and the association's publicly accessible website, with daily updates and legal information too. A landmark feature of the association has always been continuous professional development. In fact, VdÜ members themselves have set up independent associations dedicated to particular aspects of translation, the best example being the *Europäische Übersetzer-Kollegium*, which stands out as the first and largest international centre for translators of literature and non-fiction, inspiring similar institutions all over the world.

Part and parcel of VdÜ's activities are networking and influencing public discourse. Back in 1966, translators founded the *Freundeskreis* ('circle of friends promoting literary translations'), which established the tradition of awards for literary translators in Germany. The latest brainchild is the *Rebekka* award for translators of light fiction.



Boat full of translated books lands at Reichstag

Photo: Guido Notermans

Unfortunately, light fiction reviews are rarely included in the press or book reviews despite being a major source of revenue for publishers and book stores. Since 2004, the *Übersetzerbarke* ('translators' boat') is awarded to translator-friendly publishers, journalists, booksellers or librarians. Three years later, VdÜ started presenting a wide range of discussions and talks at the Frankfurt and Leipzig book fairs. Our latest contribution was a panel discussion on "Gendering in the European Context" at the virtual Frankfurt Book fair 2020. There is also a network of outreach associations, such as the *Weltlesebühne* ('World Reading Stage'), founded by VdÜ members in 2008, to bring translators on stage. It ensures that they are paid a decent fee for their performances and increases translators' visibility.

A very special moment for us all was in 1997 when, after several years of intense lobbying, the renowned translator from Russian, Rosemarie Tietze, set up the *Deutscher Übersetzerfonds (dÜf)*.

This translators' fund awards several hundred thousands of euros in subsidies and offers residencies every year. The *dÜf* model recently inspired Italian colleagues in *Strade* to ask for a similar fund. Furthermore, the *dÜf* developed an Academy of the Art of Translation with a wide range of seminars and workshops, e.g. the 'vice-versa' seminars which bring together translators from one pair of languages. Further training and qualifications remain a vital component to strengthening our professionalism. For more than 50 years, VdÜ has been organising an annual meeting for up to 250 participants. Since 2004, we have been meeting in Wolfenbüttel for three days of workshops, readings, and parties.

Wir übersetzen Literatur





Claudia Steinitz has been translating literature from French to German for 30 years. She was one of the founders of **Weltlesebühne e.V.**, an association which brings translators onto the world stage and promotes their public recognition. She was awarded the Jane-Scatcherd-Prize for translation in 2020. Claudia lives in Berlin and is the CEATL delegate of the German association **VdÜ**.

Claudia Steinitz
Photo: Guido Notermans

In almost seven decades, our association has made numerous improvements for literary translators. We have come a long way from being those unknown and almost invisible ghosts, hardly receiving a mention in publications, to becoming self-confident co-authors claiming their rights to being named on the cover, or at the very least on the inner front page. Active members have helped transform solitary freelancers into a strong association and a negotiating partner with publishers and politicians.



Andreas G. Förster is literary translator for political and historical books, and union member for grassroots power. He has been VdÜ's online editor since 2019 and was elected to the VdÜ Board in 2021.

Andreas G. Förster
Photo: María Porciel Crosa

**Association of German-Language Translators of Literary and Scientific Works / Federal Branch, Translators' within the Association of German Authors within the United Services Trade Union*

ME AND MY DICTIONARY

My *Dictionnaire Royal*

The pleasure of using a historical dictionary

Kim Witthoff

If one day, by a misfortune of fate, my home caught fire and I just had time to rush out of the house bringing only my most valuable and precious belongings, I would be sure to grab my *Dictionnaire Royal*; a French–Danish and Danish–French dictionary in two heavy volumes, edited in 1772–1775 by the Norwegian scholar and translator Hans von Aphelen. The *Dictionnaire Royal* is one of the most treasured works on my bookshelf, a work I use continuously and which I would be really sad to have to do without as a translator.

The books in themselves, as artefacts, are fantastic! In heavy leather binding, with the faded remains of rich gold ornaments on the spine, and signs of two and a half centuries of use from previous owners, a folded corner, a piece of paper left as a page marker, underlined words ... In the text, all French words and expressions are printed in *antiqua* typeface and translations and explanations in Danish are printed in black letters – thus the choice of typefaces reflects the nature of the work's bi-lingual and also bi-cultural content. I can only imagine

what a nightmare preparing the printing plates must have been for the typesetter!

To use my *Dictionnaire Royal* gives a pleasure that no electronic resource, how rich and well documented it may be, can equal. Using a real, printed dictionary adds to the feeling, in the act of translating, of being in real dialogue with a text and another age that an online resource simply can't give.

Getting a glimpse into a different world

Especially in my work with translating 18th century French literature to Danish, I have found great use in a dictionary



Dictionnaire Royal
Photo: Kim Witthoff

from the same period. We do, of course, have fantastic online resources with access to works such as the dictionaries of the *Académie Française* from 1694 and onwards; and we also have the great French–Danish/Danish–French dictionary from the last century, referred to as the *Blinkenberg–Høybye*, considered one of the best dictionaries from French to another language.

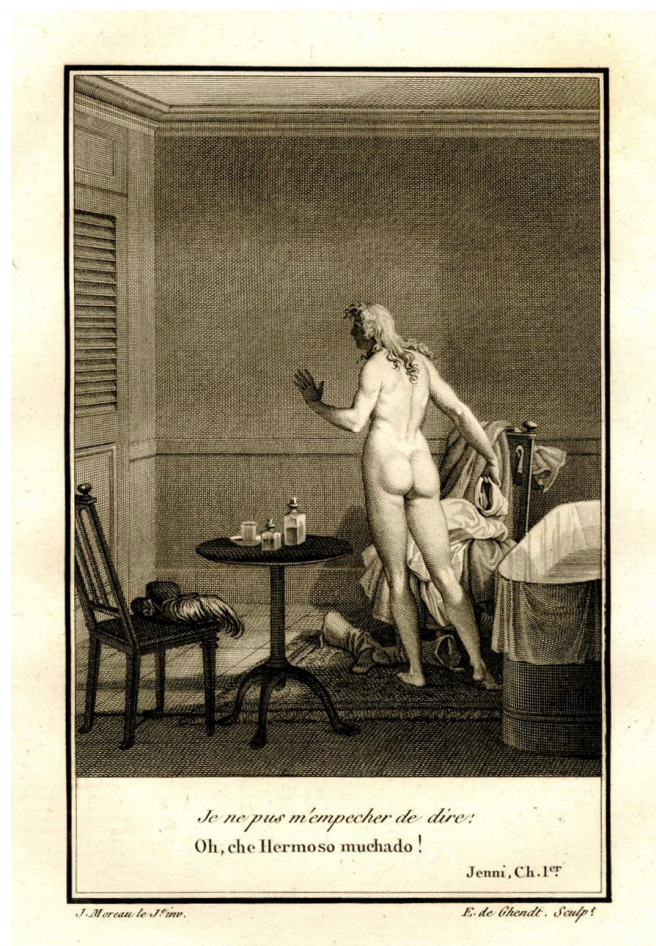
But in attempting to give a contemporary Danish reader a linguistic experience

of what French was like 250 years ago (a task which is in principle impossible, I know, and which implicates many other issues and discussions, but nevertheless...) as well as giving an impression in Danish of how it may sound to the ears of a contemporary French reader, a dictionary edited in the 18th century is not only a very useful but also an amusing tool. It is like peeling off a layer of 250 years of cultural and scientific evolution and getting a glimpse into a different world and a forgotten vocabulary.

Facts or cultural stereotypes in Voltaire

I have recently been working with Voltaire's romances. A fantastic thing with reading Voltaire, and especially his tales, is that you get an insight into 18th century life and thought rare in other writers. The vocabulary is rich and covers a wide range of 18th century life, science and thought. And you meet people in all conditions and social positions: priests, soldiers, countesses, conquistadores, enslaved people, atheists, princesses, philosophers, Jesuits, captured women, etc. During my work with their many exploits and extended *philosophico-theologico-scientifico* discussions, my *Dictionnaire Royal* has given me new cultural and linguistic experiences.

These linguistic experiences not only help the translator not to make mistakes in the target language, but also give, sometimes amusing, diachronic insights into the networks of meaning and their cultural context. You discover that the illness that several of the protagonists are exposed to, *la vérole* ('syphilis'), in 18th century Danish was called 'Franzoser', literally: 'Frenchmen'; and you may wonder if that term,



Nude male figure standing in a room, beside a bath, and looking at the door at left; finished state of illustration to an unidentified edition of Voltaire's *Histoire de Jenni*, ca.1804/1805 Etching and engraving (Source: British Museum / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0))



Kim Witthoff is a translator, text worker and language teacher. Former teacher of Danish language and literature at the Sorbonne and instructor of Danish as a foreign language and linguistic coach at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Kim Witthoff
Photo: Julie Polar de Greeve

originally imported from Germany, mirrors a fact or if it is the result of a cultural stereotype... A *coquin*, today something close to a ‘rascal’, at the time of Voltaire was translated into Danish as *Kieltring* (‘scoundrel’) and *liderligt Menneske* (‘horny person’).

You also experience the fact that some words in the course of time have changed meaning, sometimes to the complete opposite. The word *énervé*, today meaning ‘to get angry’, in Voltaire’s age meant *svekke*, in Danish, ‘to lose one’s forces’ (derived from the act of cutting the nerves of an animal).

And what do you do with the French word *art* in a Voltairean context? “*Tout est art*”, says the religious character Friend in *Histoire de Jenni* in his attempt to win the atheist youngster over to the Christian faith. But at a time when art was not an emanation from the spirit and a creating genius but a set of rules for a trade, i.e. the opposite of nature, you can’t translate the phrase into: “*Alt er kunst*” – “Everything is art.” So what does *Dictionnaire Royal* say? It translates

Art as: “*Maade at gjøre en Ting got og vel efter visse Regler*”, or in English “a way of doing something fine and well according to certain rules.” So, the good Friend refers to the world as intelligent design, created by a god, and not as *kunst*, as a work of art in the modern sense...

This, of course, is nothing new; it is the work of any translator with any given work to plunge into its linguistic universe and transmit that in the target language. But in the digital age we live in where everything we wish to know – and so much more that we didn’t think that we needed to know as well – is available online, it is still possible to find use and pleasure in using a regular, paper, printed dictionary. I would be extremely sad to lose my *Dictionnaire Royal*!

CEATL's Click List

Links to the world of translation

An analysis of the Gorman/Rijneveld debate

“The default invisibility of translation makes the intensity, the reach, and the staying power of the debate around the choice of Marieke Lucas Rijneveld as Dutch translator of Amanda Gorman’s *The Hill We Climb* all the more noteworthy. Translation – and more specifically, the translator – is for once finding itself shoved into the spotlight, becoming a topic of controversy in an unprecedented slew of newspaper opinion pieces and tweet-skirmishes, both in the Netherlands and abroad,” says Haidee Kotze, professor of Translation Studies at Utrecht University (The Netherlands). In her detailed article she analyses the positions taken, the arguments used, and comes to the conclusion that the debate “is not about translation, primarily – or perhaps even at all”. Instead, she considers it “nothing but a flashpoint for a much more fundamental contestation, a deeper cultural battle.” Kotze’s analysis can be read [here](#).

PEN Report on repression of cultural workers in Belarus

PEN is an example of the vital role that international organisations have in informing the world of threats to the freedom of expression of people all over the world. In January of this year, Belarusian PEN published an 18 page monitoring report outlining a catalogue of repressive acts against cultural workers – arrests, beatings, forced resignations and dismissals. The unprecedented scale of repression against those in Belarus who try to assert their right to peaceful assembly, protest and expression is cause for deep alarm and has been widely criticised by numerous European states, the European Union and the United Nations.

Read, download and share the report *With No Right to Culture. Belarus 2020* [here](#).



Bologna Children's Book Fair

At Bologna [Children's Book Fair](#), which took place online from June 14 to 17, CEATL and [FIT](#) hosted the international panel titled '[Down the rabbit hole: working \(and surviving\) as a translator of children's literature](#)'. The aim of the panel was to enhance the focus on the people who translate this extremely formative literature, to explore the reasons for their lower status inside the world of literary translation and ultimately to try to change this.

On June 16, the [Annual Literary Translation Forum](#) took place, featuring a panel discussion on the topic 'Who Gets to Translate? Diversity & Inclusion in Literary Translation' and an Italian/English Translation Slam.

Alongside the Book Fair, several other articles, events and resources, all of interest to translators of different genres, were available online – including an interview with Daniela Almansi who talks about her experiences with [translating nonsense](#), more specifically the famous poem "The Hunting of the Snark" by Lewis Carroll.

A workshop in March on 'Machine translation and creativity' led to a '[guided tour](#)' by translator Simona Mambrini around this interesting and fascinating topic, with special focus on the translation of children's literature. A recording of the workshop, in which CEATL's general secretary Lara Hölbling Matković was a part, is available on demand [here](#). And then, of course, you can still find last year's Covid-19 initiative, 'Is there something in the air?' The poem "[Che cos'è in aria vola?](#)" by the well-known Italian author Roberto Piumini has been [translated](#)

into more than thirty languages. The online event was made possible by the two Italian translators' associations, [Strade](#) and [AITI](#) and many translators across Europe donating their time and creativity to the project.

The practical problem of finding a qualified translator for a children's book may be solved by using the [World Directory of Children's Book Translators](#), a resource developed and launched through an initiative between the Book Fair and [UNESCO's Index Translationum](#). The directory lists professional translators specializing in children's literature, currently representing 55 countries. Anyone who has translated at least two books may register – unless your language is "minority or seldom-translated", in which case the requirement is one book.



**BOLOGNA
CHILDREN'S
BOOK
FAIR**

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.

ISSN: 2708-4418

Editorial board:

Hanneke van der Heijden
Anne Larchet
Juliane Wammen

Coordination of French issue:

Valérie Le Plouhinec

Proofreading English:

Penelope Eades-Alvarez

Proofreading French:

Valérie Le Plouhinec

Design:

Róisín Ryan
roryan.com

Webmaster:

David Kiš

Visual consultant:

Yunus Çetin

Distribution:

Valérie Le Plouhinec

Suggestions and comments can be sent by email to editors@ceatl.eu

To subscribe to the e-zine, please [click this link](#)

To unsubscribe, please [click here](#)

The editors reserve the right to edit all material submitted. Views expressed in *Counterpoint* do not necessarily reflect the official views of CEATL. All rights of reproduction, translation and adaptation reserved for all countries. CEATL, *Counterpoint* and officers accept no responsibility collectively or individually for the service of agencies or persons advertised or announced in the pages of this journal. The good faith with which we publish offers no implied/implicit guarantee.