

NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: UNITED KINGDOM

The Translators Association:

Championing literary translators

Ian Giles

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

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

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

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

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

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

Impassioned individuals

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

How the TA works

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

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

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

Campaigns and services

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

Other activities include: outreach campaigns – both encouraging those



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

Ian Giles
Photo: Private archive

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

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

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

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

