

The image features a white background with several overlapping, hand-drawn style lines. A prominent dark blue line starts from the top left and curves downwards. A grey line starts from the top center and curves downwards. A red line starts from the top right and curves downwards. The text 'Counterpoint' is written in a large, bold, red, sans-serif font, appearing to be layered behind the lines. The text is partially obscured by the lines and is repeated in a larger, more faded font in the background.

Counterpoint  
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Translators' E-zine

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# From the editors

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We are very happy to present the first issue of CEATL's brand new e-zine, *Counterpoint*, a bi-annual periodical appearing in both an English and a French version.

The European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL) unites translators' associations from 29 countries, representing some 10,000 literary translators from Iceland to Turkey, and from Lithuania to Portugal.

As European literary translators, we have a lot in common: our profession, the art of literary translation, and our love of languages and literatures being some of the first that come to mind. Beyond the pages of the books we work on, we share a cultural and economic role in the world of publishing. Translations make up an important part of all books published every year, and many of us actively engage in the selection of titles for translation, the introduction of 'new' authors and the promotion of translated books. Still, regardless of wherever in Europe we work, our economic position is precarious. Being spread out over such a vast

area, there are many differences among us too. As literary translators in Europe, we work with a huge variety of languages, of cultural spheres and of literary traditions. Likewise, working conditions for translators in different countries vary greatly due to different economic circumstances, national traditions, copyright practices, size of readerships as well as the role of translated literature. And although global developments in the publishing industry affect all of us, and increasingly so, the effects aren't always equal.

With *Counterpoint*, we hope to touch on topics that unite translators all over Europe, and beyond, and on matters that are specific to some. We'll report on what's going on in CEATL, and we'll look outside. We'll present articles about translators and translating, and we'll deal with the broad cultural, artistic and economic context of our work.

This first issue opens with an article by CEATL's President, Morten Visby, on literary translators and human rights. Our most recent members, translators' associations from Romania and

**“We hope to touch on topics that unite translators all over Europe, and beyond”**

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Macedonia, relate the many challenges they face. CEATL’s working group on Authors’ Rights gives an insight into the variety of topics they deal with, while Secretary-General Lara Hölbling Matković introduces the CEATL board.

Translations from English into other ‘big’ languages make up the vast majority of all book translations. Only recently, awareness on the importance of translations from ‘small’ languages has started to increase. Máire Nic Mhaoláin, translator of Welsh and Irish amongst others, kicks off a series on translating from and into ‘small’ languages. Frank Wynne writes about the daunting task of compiling a book of short stories from all over the world, translated into English. Film director Nitesh Anjaan endeavoured to capture the nature of literary translation in his film portrait of Mette Holm, the Danish translator of Murakami. And Marije de Bie, former editor and new director of the Amsterdam Translators’ House, talks about the dynamics in the publishing world, and the role of literary translators.

We hope that *Counterpoint* will be exactly that – a place where independent and sometimes contrasting voices come together and form a stronger and more enthralling whole, much like the art of literary translation itself.

We welcome all comments and suggestions at [editors@ceatl.eu](mailto:editors@ceatl.eu) for this and coming issues. We hope you enjoy reading it.

**Hanneke van der Heijden,  
Anne Larchet &  
Juliane Wammen**



**Hanneke van der Heijden** is a literary translator and interpreter from Turkish into Dutch, and writes about [literature from Turkey](#). She has an MA in Linguistics and Literary Theory, and in Turkish Languages and Literatures. She was a board member of the Translators' Association Turkey ([ÇEVİRİ](#)), which she represents in CEATL.

**Hanneke van der Heijden**

**Photo: Private Archive**



**Anne Larchet** is a freelance interpreter and translator from Spanish into English. She has a BA in Arabic and Spanish, a Graduate Diploma in Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies and a Certificate in Spanish Law. She was a scholarship student at the American University Cairo, Egypt. Anne has been on the Executive Committee of the [ITIA](#) (Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association) since 2012 and is Editor of the [ITIA Bulletin](#) e-zine.

**Anne Larchet**

**Photo: Martin de Haan**



**Juliane Wammen** is a literary translator from English and Norwegian into Danish. She has an MA in Comparative Literature and Anthropology and is second delegate for CEATL for the [Danish Translators' Association](#). She is a member of the Danish Arts Council's grants committee and co-editor of [Babelfisken](#), a Danish e-zine for literary translation.

**Juliane Wammen**

**Photo: Tim Flohr Sørensen**

# Human rights for translators?

*Morten Visby*

As President of CEATL, I appreciate this opportunity to say a few words about something that is ongoing in the board, and something I feel is quite crucial to what CEATL is all about. In the everyday business of the board we deal with a number of mundane and sometimes important issues: Should we endorse this or that campaign for respect of copyright in library politics, should we be critical of the current Creative Europe programme, and how should we deal with latest absurdities of *Moniteur Belge*?

## Addressing the specifics

However, following our latest Annual General Meeting in Copenhagen, the present CEATL delegates, representing 29 countries in Europe, mandated the board to draft a declaration on the human rights of literary translators. I suppose in a sense that could be a relatively easy task, since there are plenty of other civic organizations with a similar focus on art, language and literature who have issued declarations on freedom of speech and human rights for authors and artists. Declarations that CEATL could surely lean on in this respect.

However, in our initial discussions in the board following the mandate from the AGM, it became clear to us that we wanted to draft a declaration that addresses the specific situation of literary translators, not just authors in general, in terms of human rights and freedom of speech. And this is where things start to get a little complicated.

Because although literary translators certainly share the general concerns of other authors' and artists' organizations when it comes to freedom of speech, for example, we must also acknowledge that translation raises slightly different questions. Which kind of freedom is at stake when it comes to freedom of speech for literary translators? And whose speech are we talking about? Do we as translators derive our freedom of speech from the original author? Or do we have a particular speech of our own that must be protected from oppression and coercion in a cultural and political context? And what happens if we model our own freedom of speech on that of the author? While literary translators do have an authorial command of their own writing, they are



*Morten Visby is a literary translator from English, Norwegian and German into Danish and former President of the Danish Translators' Association. He has worked in the political field of authors' rights and copyright for several years and is currently President of the Danish Authors' Society and President of the Board of CEATL.*

**Morten Visby**  
*Photo: Ildikó Lőrinszky*

also of course subject to an editing and publication process that few translators would claim or even wish to control autonomously. Is that censorship? Indeed, the whole business of translation involves massive alterations of the original work influenced by cultural contexts and, sometimes, tailored to a specific audience. And of course, translators work on assignment, expressing ideas and opinions that they do not necessarily share.

### **Violation of expression**

How can we pinpoint, in all this, where the translator's own right to undiluted articulation, free of censorship and fear, becomes distinct? And seeing that book market dynamics and cultural policies often have limiting consequences on the actual possibility of translating the literary voices you want to make heard, we could also ask ourselves whether this constitutes a violation of our right to express ourselves as literary translators. This last question may be a bit over the top, but it does help point out, I hope, that there is no clear-cut definition of the scope of human rights for translators.

These are some of the questions that have made it difficult for the board to work with this mandate. But it has been an interesting process, and we do hope to be able to have a draft ready for the next AGM in Norwich. I should of course point out that none of the above 'complications' should be taken in any way to imply that CEATL is not fully committed to the human rights of translators. I am not saying that there is no need to defend our rights. There most certainly is. And around the world and in Europe there are fellow translators being persecuted for their literary activities, just as there are a number of developments that can potentially limit the cultural diversity of world literature. This is something that CEATL will always care about. But in drafting a declaration on human rights and freedom of speech we must make sure that it truly addresses our concerns and our realities as translators. If CEATL does not address these things, no one else will. We will talk more about this during CEATL's upcoming AGM in Norwich.

# Lost and found

## Writing and reading translations

### Frank Wynne

Two years ago, I was offered the opportunity of editing an anthology of short stories in translation. The remit was to select 100 short stories spanning up to one thousand pages, at least 40% of the stories and their translations into English should be in the public domain to moderate the budget for permissions, but otherwise I was encouraged to interpret the brief as widely or as narrowly as I chose. The publisher suggested calling the book “Found in Translation”. Though initially, I bridled a littler at this title, in time I came to accept it as a statement of intent because there are few tropes I find as infuriating as the three words “lost in translation” – the hackneyed headline uninspired reviewers routinely reach for when called upon to write about ‘world literature’, thinking a fleeting allusion to Robert Frost will lend gravitas to their own words. As a journalistic headline it seems to me lazy precisely because Frost is *not* suggesting that translation is impossible, but highlighting the fact that certain aspects of language (sound, rhyme, rhythm, etc) cannot be directly mapped between languages. Frost was not the first to voice the thought; indeed, it was rather better expressed a century

earlier by Shelley when he wrote: “the plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower — and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.” Literary translation, then, is not about what is lost, but what is *found*; translation is the careful nurturing of an alien seed so that it can blossom again in a new language.

I accepted the commission with a naïve enthusiasm, excited at the prospect of showcasing the short story in its many forms around the world. Only after I had signed the contract did I begin to wonder precisely what such a book might be and I realised the daunting, terrifying scale of the task ahead.

To dispense with the obvious: there is no such thing as the 100 Best Short Stories whether in translation or otherwise. Every anthology, by its nature, is subjective. In order to make a selection, I first had to read. Obviously, it is impossible to read *every story ever translated*; how then was I to decide when I had read enough? Since the book has now been published, I now know the answer: you will *never* have read enough.



*Frank Wynne is an award-winning literary translator, from French and Spanish, writer and self-confessed terribleman.*

**Frank Wynne**

**Photo: Nick Bradshaw**

### Unknown unknowns

There were writers whom, I felt, *had* to be included, writers who, over the centuries, invented and reinvented the short story – Cervantes and Guy de Maupassant, Chekhov and Thomas Mann, Borges and Karen Blixen. But, as I took my first faltering steps in compiling a list, I came face to face with the limits of my ignorance. Some years ago, Donald Rumsfeld was widely mocked for suggesting that knowledge can be divided into *known knowns*, *known unknowns*, and, famously, *unknown unknowns* – yet this seemed to me to precisely describe my dilemma: there were writers and cultures I knew well, those I was aware of but had not read in any depth, and – crucially – there were cultures that were unknown unknowns. And so, I contacted the hive mind of literary translation – translators I knew personally, those I know only through groups on Facebook and elsewhere, editors, writers and readers who might offer suggestions, and advice and on what and who to read. Thankfully, I received hundreds of recommendations, and had countless conversations and squabbles with friends

who championed a particular story or author, with readers who passionately insisted X was the finest short story writer who ever lived and others equally adamant that X was wildly overrated.

In the year or more I spent reading, I felt the thrill of discovering voices that were new to me, and the ineffable pleasure of rediscovering authors (often in new translations). Editing an anthology, I discovered, is a microcosm of the reading life, a journey filled with startling insights and the occasional disappointment that an author read years ago does not quite stand up to rereading.

### New voices

From the start, I decided that, since there could be no perfect anthology, I wanted my rattlebag to be *ambitiously* imperfect, to include as many languages, eras and cultures as could be crammed between the covers. I was unreasonably excited to discover “The Stone Guest” a magnificent short story translated by Shelley Fairweather from Hamid Ismailov’s original Uzbek. It goes without saying that I cannot claim it is

the best short story ever written in the language since, like so many cultures, Uzbek is little represented in English translation, but I felt it was important for the anthology to include voices new to me, and hopefully to readers. What began as a sprawling list of almost 300 stories, I gradually whittled down to about 160, and, from here – as we acquired permissions – the list was refined to 100. There were stories that I wanted to include but could not – either because permission was refused, or because the rights holder – often a literary agent – simply asked for more money that had been budgeted. In one case, a translator wanted to revise his published translation but could not do so in time for it to be included.



**Found in Translation**  
Photo: Tim Flohr Sørensen

*Found in Translation*, then, is the result of inspiration, advice, recommendations compromises, and many months of reading. While I can read in a number of languages, I decided not to read the originals, since for fully two-thirds of the stories I had access only to translations. If, as Susan Sontag says, translation is “the circulatory system of the world’s literatures”, then translators are the beating heart that makes it possible for stories to flow beyond borders and across oceans. Their task is as simple as it may seem impossible: to quote Günter Grass, “Translation is that which transforms everything so that nothing changes.” It is not a matter of finding equivalent words (since there is never an exact equivalence), but of weighing the weight and heft of words while striving to preserve the cadence and the rhythm of a sentence, to reinvent a pun, to produce a voice that lives on the page. What persuaded me to include an author or a story was the painstaking work of a translator “finding” the author in English, it was the impact – emotional, intellectual, visceral – of the story, whether Antonia Lloyd Jones masterful account of “The Birch Grove” or Saul Bellow’s hilarious version of “Gimpel the Fool”. I hope that the resulting anthology – or, to use the term that I prefer, “rattle-bag” which has the clank and clatter of things found, scavenged, unearthed, jostling between the covers, clamouring for attention – rises to the challenge set by Robert Graves: “A well chosen anthology is a complete dispensary of medicine for the more common mental disorders, and may be used as much for prevention as cure.”

# The Board

## The facts

### *Lara Hölbling Matković*

For those of our readers who are not familiar with CEATL's inner workings, here are the facts about the Executive Board and its work.

The CEATL Board usually consists of five or six members. The idea is to have a geographically evenly distributed team so that several languages and cultural regions are represented.

In this mandate, the team are Morten Visby, President of the Board, Denmark; Bjørn Herman, Vice-president, Norway;

Shaun Whiteside, Treasurer, UK; Kateřina Klabanová, Secretary of the Board, Czech Republic; and Lara Hölbling Matković, Secretary-General, Croatia.

Apart from the usual tasks of running an association, the board members each have special CEATL interests at heart: So, Morten and Bjørn work hard on authors' rights policies, Shaun is actively involved in creating a platform for representing best practices, Kateřina is the heart and soul of our so-called "small languages" project, and Lara is widening CEATL's reach by encouraging struggling and/or potential members.

The board is in daily contact via e-mail, but also tries to meet face-to-face, preferably in person, but sometimes through a video conference, two or three times a year. One of these meetings is always a day before the AGM.

This year, in Norwich, one of the tasks will be to prepare the new elections to the Board. New candidates have been encouraged to run for the board, so the delegates will have a comfortably broad

***“In Norwich this year, one of the tasks will be to prepare the new elections to the Board”***

spectrum to choose from when they elect six members for the next mandate.

We are looking forward to seeing all the CEATL delegates in May, and welcoming new faces and voices.

**“We aim to represent our members broadly, both language and culture-wise”**



**The Board, from left to right: Bjørn Herrman, Morten Visby, Lara Hölbling Matković, Kateřina Klabanová, Shaun Whiteside**  
**Photo: Ildikó Lőrinszky**

**Lara Hölbling Matković** is a literary translator and subtitler from German and English into Croatian and former Vice-president of the **Croatian Literary Translators' Association**. She has done extensive work on promoting reading and literature for children and is the current Secretary-General of the CEATL.

# Punching above our weight

## *Working for authors' rights*

**Bjørn Herrman**

The Authors' Rights Working Group (WG) was reborn, so to speak, at CEATL's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Berlin in 2014. Although there had been a Copyright WG earlier, since all former members were gone at that time, it must be fair to say we started from scratch. Present at the first WG meeting in Oslo, were Cécile Deniard (France), Elisa Comito (Italy), Morten Visby (Denmark), and Kevin Quirk and Bjørn Herrman (Norway). Since then, the group has grown steadily, with the participation of Anke Stark (Germany) for a year, Gertrud Maes (Netherlands), Rafał Lisowski (Poland) and Heikki Karjalainen (Finland) – a representative sample of national backgrounds, with diverse legal traditions and economic situations. The working group works together year-round via the e-mail group and meets in person at the AGMs, as well as once a year between AGMs.

### **Amazon Crossing changed their contracts**

To begin with, one of our main concerns was [Amazon Crossing](#), recently established in Europe under Luxembourg jurisdiction and publishing translations

in several European countries. What concerned us was their 'one click' contract, the moral rights of the translators, the remuneration level, etc. Different initiatives at national and European levels led to a meeting with AmazonCrossing at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2014 and, thankfully, to AmazonCrossing changing the standard clauses in their contracts. Proof positive that coordinated action pays off!

### **A digital single market**

Since December 2015, when Jean-Claude Juncker launched the idea of the [Digital Single Market](#), the DSM directive has been the main focus of the WG. Right from the outset, there has been plenty of lobbying activity. Our initial fear was that the directive would be hostile to authors' rights, but it turned out, in part, to be the opposite. Among other things, we have seen the introduction of the idea of fair remuneration for authors, including translators, and also a transparency obligation requiring publishers to regularly present authors with information on the exploitation of their work, as well as a contract adjustment mechanism when the



*Members of the Authors' Rights Working Group in Oslo  
Photo: Eirik Bræk*

original remuneration for a work is disproportionately low compared to the revenues it generates (Articles 14, 15 & 16). The wording of Article 12, giving publishers the right to claim a share of compensation for uses of works made under exceptions or limitation to copyright, caused quite a lot of disturbance at one point when the Estonian presidency wanted to include Public Lending Rights schemes. Together with the European federations of authors (EWC) and publishers (FEP), CEATL signed a petition asking for the deletion of this addition. At the time of writing, the directive is in the trilogue-negotiation and beyond the reach of our lobbying. (Since the final version of this article was finished, the directive has been approved by the European Parliament, eds.).

## “Coordinated action does pay off!”

### New guidelines for fair contracts

Last but not least, CEATL's [Guidelines for Fair Contracts](#) were adopted at the AGM in Copenhagen in 2018. The first draft, based on the [Hexalogue](#) and various national Best Practices documents and presented at the AGM in Barcelona in 2016. All member associations were asked for comments, and we received an overwhelming response, with answers so numerous and complex that it proved impossible to finalise the Guidelines for the 2017 AGM. Following extensive review, a final version was



**Bjørn Herrman** is an award-winning literary translator from English into Norwegian and former President of the Norwegian Association of Literary Translators. He played a crucial part in the Norwegian translators' campaign for better conditions, *Oversetteraksjonen 2006*, and is currently Coordinator of the CEATL Authors' Rights Working Group and Vice-president of the CEATL.

**Bjørn Herrman**  
**Photo: Private Archive**

sent to the member associations and adopted in 2018. It would make little sense merely to post the Guidelines on our website and leave them to fester, so CEATL has since sent them to fellow international authors' and translators' associations, not to mention the FEP; the WG would also like to prompt the member associations to organise within the next couple of years some sort of event about them focusing on their different national situations, to establish the Guidelines as a reference and make them a tool for the associations.

Neither the WG nor CEATL as such could hope to have any strong influence on processes like the DSM directive without cooperating with other authors' organizations; networking has been the keyword – not to forget the sheer will it takes to plough through hundreds of pages of disconcerting official documents!

# Translating between 'small' languages

## *A case of Celtic languages*

*Máire Nic Mhaoláin*

Is there a difference between translating from one major language to another and translating between minor languages, or between major and minor, or vice versa? I have translated to varying extents into Irish from French, Italian, Latin, Welsh, and occasionally English. That sounds like a lot of major-to-minor, not to mention the category 'ancient-to-modern', but I've had some minor-to-minor experience too, in my case with Welsh to Irish.

For a bit of background, Irish and Welsh are Celtic languages, and belong to a branch of Indo-European once widespread over huge swathes of western and central Europe and spoken as far south as Iberia and ancient Galatia in Asia Minor. But as Latin and the Germanic languages spread Celtic declined, and in modern times, despite official recognition for Irish and Welsh, community use of Celtic languages is confined to a few regions of Ireland, Britain, and Brittany in northwest France.

Celtic has two branches. Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx (now being revived

on the Isle of Man, where they've recently translated *Casino Royale*) are closely related and termed Q-Celtic. Welsh, Breton, and Cornish (now being revived in Cornwall) form the P-Celtic group, being closely related to one another and more distantly related to the Q-Celtic group. 'Five' is *cúig* in Irish and *pump* in Welsh, for example.

### **Varying orthographies**

Let me say at once that Irish and Welsh, though related, are far from being mutually intelligible. There is an underlying correspondence in syntax and grammatical features, but that's about it. Sentences begin with the verb, nouns have two genders, adjectives follow their nouns; there is no indefinite article; and both languages feature initial mutation, in roughly the same circumstances, but differently. Where written Irish keeps the original initial and shows the mutation as well, Welsh will show only the resultant mutated form. For example, if 'horse' is *capall* in Irish and *ceffyl* in Welsh, 'my horse' is *mo chapall* in Irish but *fy ngheffyl* in Welsh. Etymological connections can



A graduate of Queen's University Belfast, **Máire Nic Mhaoláin** was for many years an editor in the state Irish-language publishing house (An Gúm) in Dublin, dealing with bilingual dictionaries, terminology, and educational texts in Irish, including translations. An honorary member and one-time chair of ITIA, she served on CEATL 2012–2014.

**Máire Nic Mhaoláin**  
**Photo: Private Archive**

be buried deep, and further obscured by two widely varying orthographies. Yes, *capall* is a bit like *ceffyl*, but only because they are both from Latin. The visual impact is very different too. The letters *w* and *y*, for instance, are not found in normal Irish but proliferate in Welsh, often side by side (as in *gwyrth*, *cywir*), and in the accented forms *wŷ* and *ŷy*.

A further refinement of Welsh spelling is the use of digraphs, whereby *ch*, *dd*, *ff*, *ng*, *ll*, *ph*, *rh*, *th* are considered single entities when determining word order in the dictionary. Initial *ch*, *ff*, *ll*, and *rh* have (or had in those days) separate sections in the dictionary from words beginning with simple *c*, *f*, *l*, or *r*. Add in possible initial mutations, and finding new words in the dictionary could be hell. I once met a scholar who had devised an algorithm to predict 'pretty accurately' the 'real initial' of Welsh words. I often wish I'd got his number.

### Influence of English

Both Irish and Welsh are increasingly influenced by English vocabulary — Welsh more so, given its geographical position. (I once spent ages scouring

the dictionary for *o diar* before realising it was just 'Oh dear!')

Irish-language organisations and agencies have often looked to the achievements of the Welsh in preserving their linguistic heritage. I had studied the Celtic languages at university in Belfast, and later on, realising the particular dearth of reading material for teenagers in Irish, was moved to attempt translating something from Welsh. So, with little or no acquaintance with the Welsh literary scene, I chose a juvenile novel more or less at random, and set to work.

The essentially rural setting for my first novel was not very different from its Irish counterpart, and in those pre-digital days there wasn't much technology to be translated. Phones were answered in Welsh (or Irish) with 'Hello! Carnan 392.' I had decided to relocate the action of the story to Ireland, changing personal names and place names (invented) accordingly. I kept one Welsh name, however, for a visiting artist, turning him at once into an exotic Welshman.

Welsh has an informal (singular) and a formal (or plural) form for 'you'. My young Welsh characters used the plural pronoun to grown-ups, etc, and the singular to family and friends. Everybody uses the singular in Irish. (An old honorific plural is occasionally used when addressing a clergyman). In the Welsh, a new boyfriend was overheard arranging a date with the heroine, in the singular! Her uncle remarked that for two people who had allegedly just recently met they were very pally. The heroine rushed to claim (in the Irish) that nobody worried about 'things like that' any more. Irish readers may presume the uncle disapproved of the friendship, whereas in Welsh he was merely amused at the give-away use of the pronoun.

Welsh expletives, at least in print, seem rather mild. In informal Irish, on the other hand, one may freely invoke the deity or saints with a confident familiarity. At one point the heroine, fearing to be late home, exclaims in Irish 'Ó, a Mhaighdean Bheannaithe, caithfidh mé imeacht!' ('Oh, Blessed Virgin, I have to go!') Whatever she said in Welsh, that wasn't it. Though not commissioned, that first translation won a small award and was accepted by the publishing house where I worked, finally appearing in 1989. Dizzy with success, I had meanwhile undertaken to translate a second novel by the same author, Mair Wynn Hughes. From a different publisher, this one actually appeared before the previous one, in 1986. I left the story in its original setting, where all the Welsh names and passing references to 'rugby' and 'open prison', added a degree of foreignness at the time to the Irish version.

Later on, I was invited to translate a little story by Bob Eynon, about a group of Welsh children on a school trip to Spain. That came out in 1994. Then I translated two short novels by the same author, featuring the detective Debra Craig fighting crime in Spain and California. These all had built-in foreignness, so no relocation was attempted. Published in 1994 and 1996, they were originally written for adult learners of Welsh, with simple language and grammar, which I tried to reflect in the Irish versions.

It is a while since I've translated any Welsh. Translations from Welsh to Irish do appear sporadically, but it remains the case that such translations at any level are rare indeed.

## NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE

# Hope springs eternal

## *Update from Romanian association ARTLIT*

### *Lavinia Braniște*

The idea of ARTLIT (Asociația Română a Traducătorilor Literari – Romanian Association of Literary Translators) started in 2013 when Andy Jelčić, then Vice-president of CEATL, and Peter Bergsma, President of RECIT, came to Bucharest for an event organised by the Goethe Institute about perspectives in the profession of literary translators in South-Eastern Europe. It was supposed to be the first of a series of such events but as far as I remember it was the only one.

After carefully listening to our stories and questions, Mr. Jelčić strongly encouraged some of us to start an association and gave a lot of useful tips.

There was also (and still is) a literary translators branch in the Writers' Union but we were unaware of any of their activities and understood that admission wasn't very straightforward.

So we thought it was better to start afresh with a new association and thus ARTLIT was legally created in the summer of 2014. This took place 25 years after the events of 1989, 25

years during which the translation market was a jungle with no regulation whatsoever of the relationship between translators and publishing houses.

We became members of CEATL in 2016. The other delegates were very supportive and encouraging and somebody told me not to expect it to be easy, there would be results in about ten years. I thought that was fair enough.

We had energy and enthusiasm for about four years, and then the new fiscal code came into force at the beginning of 2018. It is complicated to explain how much damage it has caused to independent workers, especially to those working on copyright, but this is a brief summary: up to 2018, taxes were paid by the publisher, and translators negotiated a net fee. Starting this year, taxes have to be paid by the translator and we negotiate a gross fee. So last year's rate of 3 euro net per page became 3 euro gross per page this year. And taxes were doubled. We now pay 45% tax to the state. Romania has the highest tax rate on work in Eastern Europe. Some publishers agreed to raise the fees to around 4 euro per



*Lavinia Braniște is an author, poet and translator from French and English, as well as a founding member of ARTLIT, the Romanian Literary Translators' Association.*

**Lavinia Braniște**  
**Photo: Adi Bulboacă**

page, but this is still not enough to cover the taxes and definitely not enough for a translator to make a living from literary translation. For that we would need at least 8 euro per page (a page in Romania is considered to have 2000 characters with or without spaces, it depends on the publisher). All the negotiations were on an individual basis, because we are too small and frail for collective negotiations.

Since these fiscal measures were brought in this year by our very competent socialist government we have had a very difficult time. Our members' morale has dropped and we even lost some members, which puts us in an even more delicate situation financially, because members' annual fees are our sole source of funding.

So it goes with ups and downs and now we are in a 'down' moment. However, we have a new board and I hope they will have more energy and ideas for accessing funding and negotiation strategies than the initial team of founding members had (myself included). We were very good at visibility (but then again, that is the easiest part, isn't it?)

but at least people started to be more aware of our profession. And some publishers, while continuing to offer 3 euros per page, started to put the translator's name on the cover. Too bad that doesn't make the cover edible...

artlit  
asociația română a traducătorilor literari

## NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE

# Tilting at windmills

## *The charge of the Macedonian Association of Translators and Interpreters*

*Marija Spirkovska  
& Kalina Janeva*

The Macedonian Association of Translators and Interpreters (MATA)—formerly the Macedonian Translators' Association—was founded in December 2010 by ten eminent translators and university professors. Its foundation arose from two chief reasons: the fragility of a legally unprotected job done mostly by freelancers and the continuous professional development that it necessitates. MATA is the first national translators' association that aims to advocate for the translation profession in Macedonia in its entirety.

And there is plenty to advocate for. Being a translator in Macedonia is often fraught with challenges, some of which are faced by translators worldwide, while others are endemic to the specific economic and legal climate that surrounds translation professionals in the region.

Firstly, the high unemployment rate in the country makes it difficult for professionals of any field to obtain full employment, and thereby exercise their labour rights, particularly the right to health insurance and a retirement plan. Currently, the law

allows individual translators either to establish their own translation companies or to register as trading physical entities, neither of which can fully accommodate the specific traits of the freelancing profession. In an attempt to address this, in 2016 MATA members drafted a self-employment model for all freelance professions to be incorporated within the new Labour Relations Bill. MATA representatives met with the Minister of Labour and Social Policy to negotiate the terms of the proposed model, but with the intensification of the political crisis and the subsequent change of government, negotiations came to a halt. We still hope to create more equal employment opportunities for freelancers of all kinds and, while we may be tired, we are by no means defeated.

### **Translator behaviour**

However, it would be fair to admit that, more often than not, the existing issues are exacerbated by trends in the behaviour of translators themselves. Many often do not know their legal rights and means of protection, they disregard professional standards, agree

to work without signed contracts, or fail to recognise their limitations by accepting to translate topics for which they lack expertise. On top of that, many refuse to commit to their own professional improvement and advancement, and to get involved in activities that may not offer immediate reward but are aimed at improving the status of the profession in the long run. For instance, MATA has been struggling to mobilise its already small membership, a good portion of which remains passive, its immense potential untapped, and many of the Association's plans continuously postponed.

Yet, considering the conditions in the Macedonian translation market, the focus on immediate reward is quite understandable. In recent years, unfair competition from amateur translators, dubious yet massive government translation projects, and the willingness of otherwise employed language professionals to translate literature for a fraction of the recommended cost have brought about unprecedented drops in translation rates. The overproduction of university-educated translators working with major languages, such as English and German, further complicates this problem.

### Encouraging young translators

Furthermore, the translation market in Macedonia can present a daunting environment for young, burgeoning translators. Landing the first translation contract, particularly for literary works, seems especially tricky. The market is small, so publishers rarely fund translations themselves, and rely on external funding sources, which

make using experienced translators a condition for granting subsidies. With this in mind, in 2013 MATA and the Delegation of the EU in Macedonia cofounded the Babylon Best Young Translator Award, which has since promoted over a dozen young literary translators. The competition targets students and early-career translators up to 26 years of age. More importantly, unlike any other translation competition we know of, Babylon invites translations from multiple source languages (all official EU languages) into multiple target languages (all languages spoken in Macedonia), and allocates separate awards for each target language that entries have arrived in. Traditionally, the award is presented on the European Day of Languages, 26 September.



*From Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote by Gustave Doré, 1863*

In our continuing efforts to give future translators a leg up, in these past two years we have been running a mentorship programme in collaboration with the Blaže Koneski Faculty of Philology from Skopje. Students are given the opportunity to do practical work with an experienced translator or interpreter for which they can also receive credits for their university internship requirements. Unlike during internships in translation agencies, they receive individualised attention from seasoned freelance professionals, and are assigned a mentor who specialises in their translation field of choice.

**“We are particularly proud of the voluntary commitment of our members”**

Our crown achievements in professional development, however, are the international conferences for translators and interpreters that MATA has been organising for six years in a row. The 2018 conference focused solely on court translation and interpreting, and next year's, which will once again cover multiple areas, including literary translation, is already in the works.

### **Collaboration**

Additionally, MATA succeeded in joining professional networks and forming partnerships with a European or global relevance. MATA is now a member of the **TermNet** network, as well as a partner organisation of **IAPT** (International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters), and a member of **CEATL**, the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations. MATA also maintains close relations with the Macedonian Association of Macedonian Language Editors, the Croatian Association of Literary Translators, the Croatian Association of Professional Court Interpreters, and the Serbian Association of Court Translators and Interpreters. MATA is the first and only Macedonian association to represent translators in this fashion and to make these valuable connections. We are particularly proud of the voluntary commitments of our members and working groups, especially since all our results have been achieved with no external funding apart from the modest membership fees, no infrastructure or permanently employed staff.

In summary, although the bulk of the work is currently being handled by a handful of dedicated members, who often feel as if they were tilting at windmills, considering the limited resources, infrastructure, and manpower, the prospects of changing the legal framework for freelancers' employment, the Babylon competition, the mentorship programme, and the growing number of the international conferences represent no mean achievements. The current active members are aware that they are sewing seeds that will most likely be reaped

by future generations of activists and supporters. The obstacles are many and seemingly unsurmountable, but someone must strike the first blow and break the first block of the wall that divides us. This, above all, is MATA's greatest mission—to advance the profession by shifting perspectives: rather than competition, we constitute a community.

**Kalina Janeva**, translator from English and Italian into Macedonian, is an active member of MATA, the Macedonian Association of Translators and Interpreters. She is currently reading for her MA in English Literatures and Literary Theory at the Albert Ludwig University in Freiburg, Germany, where she works as a research assistant and tutor.

**Marija Spirkovska** is a translator from English into Macedonian and vice versa, an active member of MATA, and a 2014 winner of the Babylon Best Young Translator Competition. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Anglophone literature in Giessen, Germany.



Association des traducteurs de la République de Macédoine

Асоциација преводачиков Републики Македонија

马其顿共和国翻译员协会

Translators Association of the Republic of Macedonia

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Здружение на преведувачи на Република Македонија

# Dreaming Murakami

## *Bridging language and imagination*

**Nitesh Anjaan &  
Juliane Wammen**

When Danish translator Mette Holm begins translating Haruki Murakami's debut novel *Hear the Wind Sing*, a two metre tall frog shows up at an underground station in Tokyo. The Frog follows her, determined to engage the translator in its fight against the gigantic Worm, which is slowly waking from a deep sleep, ready to destroy the world with hatred.

Thus, the 2017 documentary, *Dreaming Murakami*, by director Nitesh Anjaan, is presented. And from this point, the movie unfolds as a dreamy, poetic and engaging portrait, not only of Murakami's world renowned literary works, but also, and most especially, of Mette Holm and the processes at work when a literary translator dives into her author's literary universe and goes on a quest to find the (near) perfect translation.

### **Making literary translation visible**

But how is it even possible to capture this very internal and private process in moving images and narrative form? How do you go about making literary translation visible and

interesting as a movie – an art form so apparently distant from the art of translating literature?

This was the task the young Danish director set himself – to make the seemingly difficult move from literature to film without compromising either art form. Furthermore, Anjaan wished to provide an insight into Murakami's fantastical universe and the world of his Danish translator – both of which has been an inspiration for Anjaan since his first encounter with Mette Holm seven years ago.

*“The process of making such a movie is of course influenced by both artistic and practical considerations, and I've been working on it, via both straight paths and many detours, for a couple of years. At first I was really worried that I wouldn't be able to show just how fascinating I find Mette's work. For how to make the act of translation interesting, right?”*

### **A giant Japanese-speaking frog**

Then the idea arose of a two metre tall, Japanese-speaking frog following the translator around. And with the frog in

mind, Anjaan began writing the compass for a movie to be spun around Mette Holm's work on translating Murakami's debut novel, while also moving into that special world existing somewhere between one's own immediate reality and the imagined reality one enters into when translating a spellbinding tale. When listening to Holm talking about books she has translated, Anjaan felt they sounded less like books and more like worlds she had visited. That was the idea he wanted to translate into a movie.

*"The compass was continuously adjusted as me and the rest of the crew got a clearer idea of where the story was heading. In fact, we didn't actually know where it would end until the very last week of editing – which, of course, was a little anxiety-triggering. But I'm getting used to a working method where we alternate between first improvising material and afterwards developing and structuring the material into different shapes."*

## **"A dreamy, poetic and engaging portrait"**

### **With the help of a cat**

In this way, Anjaan feels that Mette Holm and the rest of the cast – other Murakami-translators, friends, publishers and, not least, Mette's cat – in many ways have helped shape the movie, that they are the movie. But of course, as film artists, the director and crew made the final choices.

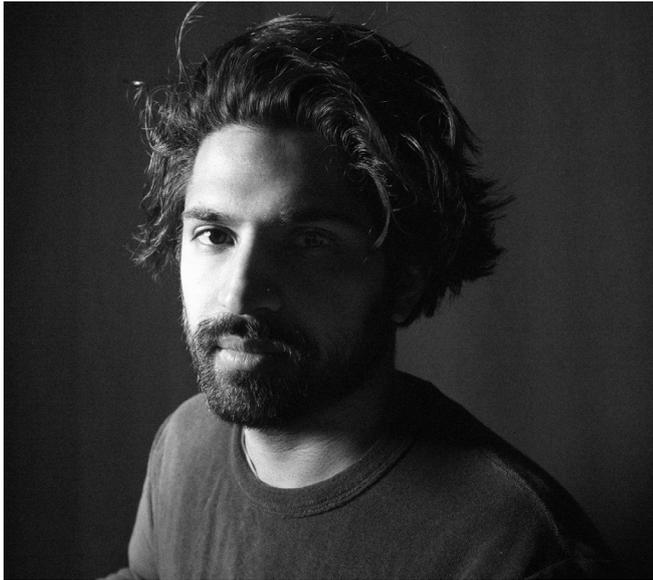
*"Fortunately, Mette was very positively surprised when she saw the end result. She felt we had seen something in her life and work that opened up new questions and perceptions on the process of translating great literature. Overall, we've had many reactions from translators – including other Murakami translators – who feel recognized and inspired by the movie. This means a lot to me, because I really wanted the film to shed light on the translator; a figure that is often overshadowed by the writer he or she is translating."*

Likewise, it means an irrationally great deal to me when the film resonates well with a Japanese audience. I don't speak or understand Japanese, so it has been a daunting task to achieve a Japanese language for the movie that is correct, but also a Japanese that is alive and narrative in the right way for the story. I wished Dreaming Murakami to be Danish when looked at through Danish eyes, and Japanese seen through Japanese eyes. So that the movie would somehow be suspended in exactly that (invisible, intangible) place between geographical and linguistic realities where well-translated world literature is also placed. This fall, the movie will premiere in Japan, and I'm very excited to see how the audience will react to it."

### **Passionate perfectionists**

For Anjaan, there are many parallels between his work as a director and Mette Holm's:

*"As I see it, she's a passionate perfectionist who for the sake of the reader, and of course her own professional satisfaction, goes to great lengths to ensure that content and form ends up as*



**Nitesh Anjaan** is a Danish film director and writer living in Copenhagen. His debut as director, “Far from Home”, premiered at the film festival CPH:DOX ‘14 and won Best Debut Documentary at Mumbai International Film Festival. In 2016, his first novel, Kind of Blue, was published in Denmark. He is currently studying at The National Film School of Denmark. Dreaming Murakami is produced by Final Cut for Real and was officially selected for IDFA in 2017.

**Nitesh Anjaan**

**Photo: Michella Bredahl**

*harmonious as humanly possible. This is something I can really identify with.”*

He – and most of his crew – also strongly identify with the working conditions of the translator, the great number of more or less lonely days, months, years, going into the individual work, something none of the readers or viewers get a feel of.

*“But it’s not a negative loneliness. I would prefer to use the English word ‘solitude’ for this feeling, but we don’t have that word in Danish. A protected kind of loneliness.”*

To Anjaan, Mette is very much like a medium; one who is able to look at things he doesn’t understand – in this case Japanese characters – and recreate them, turn them into sentences that make sense. These sentences create universes and give the reader a chance to meet all kinds of characters and follow them into stories that move and inspire, entertain and enlighten. Reading Murakami’s works, and other great books in translation, Anjaan says, we as readers

get to travel the world and go places we wouldn’t be able to know without literature – and we also get to travel into ourselves and reflect on our own lives.

### **The power of imagination**

The fantastical elements are quite prominent in *Dreaming Murakami*. And as such, the film doesn’t resemble a classic documentary. But for the director, this is actually an important point when dealing with this specific material.

*“I have a strong belief in the power of storytelling. I believe that what we come to believe when reading literature or watching a movie have enormous potential with regard to our ability to dream up our own world and remind ourselves that we actually exist. We exist right here, in this world, as sentimental and reflecting creatures. Born with an amazing gift: the power of imagination. My wish was to create a bridge between language and the imagination. Internally, I used the concept ‘a documentary of the imagination’ in my work on Dreaming*



**Still from Dreaming Murakami**  
**Final Cut for Real/Agapi Triantafyllidis**

*Murakami. It's a way of insisting that the things we imagine when we read are just as real as that which we otherwise call reality; the physical, social world. Because that's how I feel myself: The things I experience and feel when I read well-written literature often feel more true and more real than the strange and absurd world passing by outside my window or online."*

On a more humble level of ambition, it makes Anjaan very happy when people tell him that the film has made them think about literary translation for the first time.

*"The idea that people have lived their whole lives reading literature from foreign languages, but never have been conscious of the actual person writing and retelling all those words. That they suddenly become aware of something which has had such a significant, yet invisible presence in their lives, ever since they had stories read to them as*

*children and the literature of a whole world began shaping their imagination."*

He is grateful and feels inspired when Murakami readers and translators experience a further understanding of Murakami's works through watching the movie, or even feel that *Dreaming Murakami* is like actually being inside one of the author's books.

*"And it's fantastic when people without any relation to either Murakami or literary translation seem to get something out of the movie. Because this was the very first question I posed myself: How do I make translation relevant and interesting? That is, as relevant and interesting as I actually felt the work of the literary translator was when we started – a sentiment that only grew in strength while working on Dreaming Murakami."*

# The challenges awaiting Marije de Bie

*A talk with the new head of the  
Amsterdam Translators' House*

*Hanneke van der Heijden  
& Gertrud Maes*

Located in a residential area close to works by Rembrandt, Van Gogh and modern artists, but far away from the buzzing lines of tourists waiting at the museums' entrances, the *Amsterdam Translators' House* offers residencies to translators working on Dutch literature. Last September, Marije de Bie succeeded former director and literary translator Peter Bergsma, who led the house since 1997. On a rainy day in December, while preparations for the annual 'Translation Days' were in full swing, Marije de Bie talked with us about her impressions of the Dutch translation landscape and the challenges awaiting her.

Marije de Bie (1977) has been engaged in languages, literature and translation ever since she enrolled as a student at the department of Latin and Classical Greek at Amsterdam University, "where the focus is very philological". Upon her graduation she taught classics in grammar schools for several years, then did a Master in Publishing in Oxford, and continued her career as an editor at two major publishing houses in Amsterdam. There she collaborated with foreign translators of Dutch authors, and with Dutch translators working on fiction

written elsewhere in the world. But the fast-paced reading routine, common in today's publishing world, eventually started to bother De Bie. She decided to resign and later applied for this position that allowed her time for slow reading. "At the translators' house I'm a host to the residents of the five rooms that we have available. My new position seems to combine the best of being a teacher and being an editor. The many contacts with translators from all over Europe, the possibilities of discussing their work with them and their opinion on Dutch and Flemish literature, promise a more quiet and profound way of dealing with literary texts."

But hosting translators in the literary, linguistic and more practical aspects of their profession, is only part of De Bie's job. De Bie is also a staff member at the Dutch Foundation for Literature, the umbrella organisation of the translators' house, and has responsibilities in policymaking. What are current topics in translation policy?

**A dire need for young translators**

The Amsterdam Translators' House



*Marije de Bie opens the annual “Translation Days” activities in Amsterdam, December 2018  
Photo: Chris van Houts*

is visited by translators from all over Europe and beyond. In 2018, the House hosted 50 translators of 22 different nationalities. But however varied the linguistic background of the visitors, the residents are remarkably similar in age: while most residents are elderly translators who have been in the profession for a long time, young translators starting out are a minority. “The underrepresentation of younger residents is partly due to their personal circumstances, which often don’t permit them to leave their homes and jobs for a one or two month-stay in Amsterdam, and partly to the present selection criteria at the translators’ house which are easier to meet for experienced translators. We might reconsider them.” But the small number could also be caused by a lack of young people in the field. A recent user survey shows that half of the translators of Dutch literature is now over 55 years old. “Recruiting young translators is one of the biggest challenges. Not only

in the Netherlands, but all over Europe few young people decide to start a career as a literary translator.” Participation in projects like *The Chronicles* and *de Vertalersfabriek*, where translators are mentored at the start of their career by experienced colleagues, is one of the ways in which the translators’ house attempts to improve this situation.

### **Supporting the literary market**

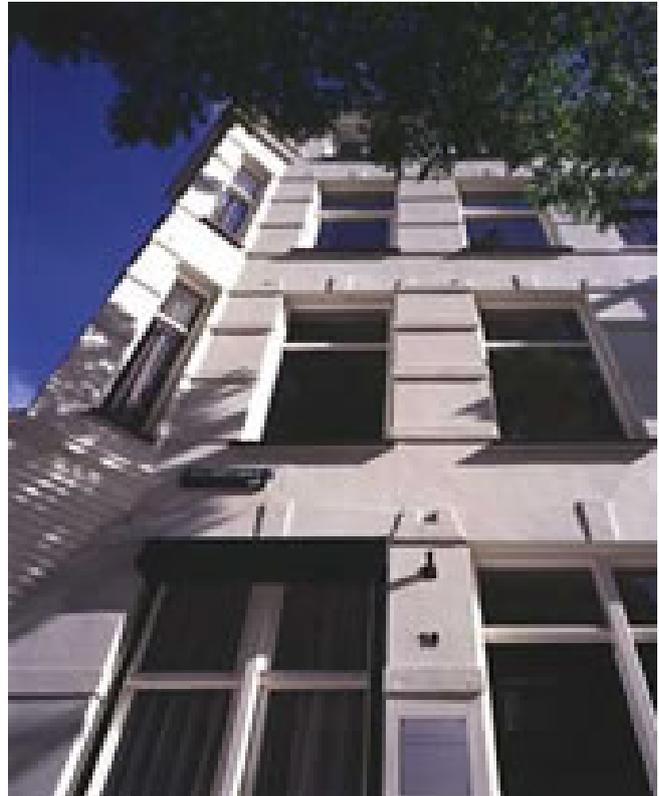
The age factor is not the only challenge awaiting De Bie. “With the changes in the book market that we’ve been witnessing over the last years, convincing publishers to keep on publishing translations and securing the position of translated literature on the book market has become another major task. Now that the number of readers has been dropping, publishers in the Netherlands and abroad tend to think of book translations as expensive projects, in terms of both advance payments and translation costs.”

**“Yet translators could do a lot too to strengthen their position and the position of translations in the market.”**

De Bie sees several ways for supporting translators as well as publishers. “First of all the Dutch Foundation for Literature offers grants to translators and publishers: publishers worldwide who wish to introduce Dutch authors to their markets, can apply for a **Translation Grant**. The Foundation also tries to monitor the **quality of literary translations**, from and into Dutch. In collaboration with other partners we organise translation workshops, meetings and trainings. This year I hope to talk to publishing houses, existing translators’ initiatives and other players in the literary field. But I also hope to organise regular informal meetings, such as a monthly cocktail. It’s very important to build a common platform.”

“Yet translators could do a lot too to strengthen their position and the position of translations in the market. Their knowledge of the literary landscape in their source culture is very valuable to a publisher. During my time as an editor, translators’ views, for example on how ‘their’ books were

received in the authors’ countries, taught me a lot. It helped me sharpen my thoughts, and often provided me with arguments I could use, for instance when presenting a title to the publisher.



**Translators’ House Amsterdam**  
**Photo: Gerhard Jaeger**

Translators’ higher awareness of this value could strengthen their position vis-a-vis the publisher. Teaching young translators how to present themselves and their knowledge, both of the language and of the literary landscape, is one of the things we aim at in projects like *de Vertalersfabriek*.”

### **Diversity in the body of literary translators**

A third challenge is exemplified by an **open letter** in one of the Dutch leading newspapers last year, written by the directors of the Dutch Foundation for Literature and other national art



Several years ago, **Gertrud Maes** exchanged French cuisine for French literature. After a bachelor in French Language and Culture and a master in Translation Sciences at the University of Amsterdam, and a practical at *La fabrique européenne des traducteurs littéraires*, she started working as a literary translator. Spring 2018 she was nominated for the Elly Jaffé Stipendium, an award for promising translators during the first five years of their translation career.

**Gertrud Maes**  
**Photo: Martin Waalboer**

foundations. They announced that a more inclusive policy will be pursued – in the selection of staff for the respective foundations, in the evaluation of grant applications from artists, and by stimulating young people starting out as an artist. “We want diversity to be self-evident. We want all stories to be told and all stories to be heard,” as it was formulated in the letter. De Bie adds: “This statement raises a lot to think about and to discuss, also in the field of translation, which is, after all, a field of cultural exchange par excellence. In terms of ethnic background, the body of literary translators in the

Netherlands shows very little diversity. Should this change? And if so, how could we diversify more? Could we do something to make the profession of literary translator more appealing to people with different cultural roots? The discussion also entails questions such as whether a specific ethnic background is an advantage, or even a requirement, to translate literary work that is set in a particular background. These questions are new to the Foundation, and very much a topic for discussion. Though it’s not always easy, we have to think about our position and role in this matter.”

# CEATL's Click list

## *Links to the world of translation*

### **A plea for slow translation**

“There seems to be a commonly held belief (among translators, publishers and readers alike) that the more books you translate, the faster you become,” writes Ros Schwartz, awarded French to English literary translator and former President of CEATL. Schwartz asked a number of award-winning translators whether they had a formula to calculate their speed of translating, and whether they felt that they had become faster with experience. You can read their answers in “How long will it take you to type this in English?”, a plea for slow translation.

[How long will it take you to type this in English?](#)

### **Dreaming Murakami at home**

More information on Nitesh Anjaan’s documentary *Dreaming Murakami*, including a link to the film, a press statement, stills, and information on how to buy or rent the dvd, you can find here.

[Dreaming Murakami](#)

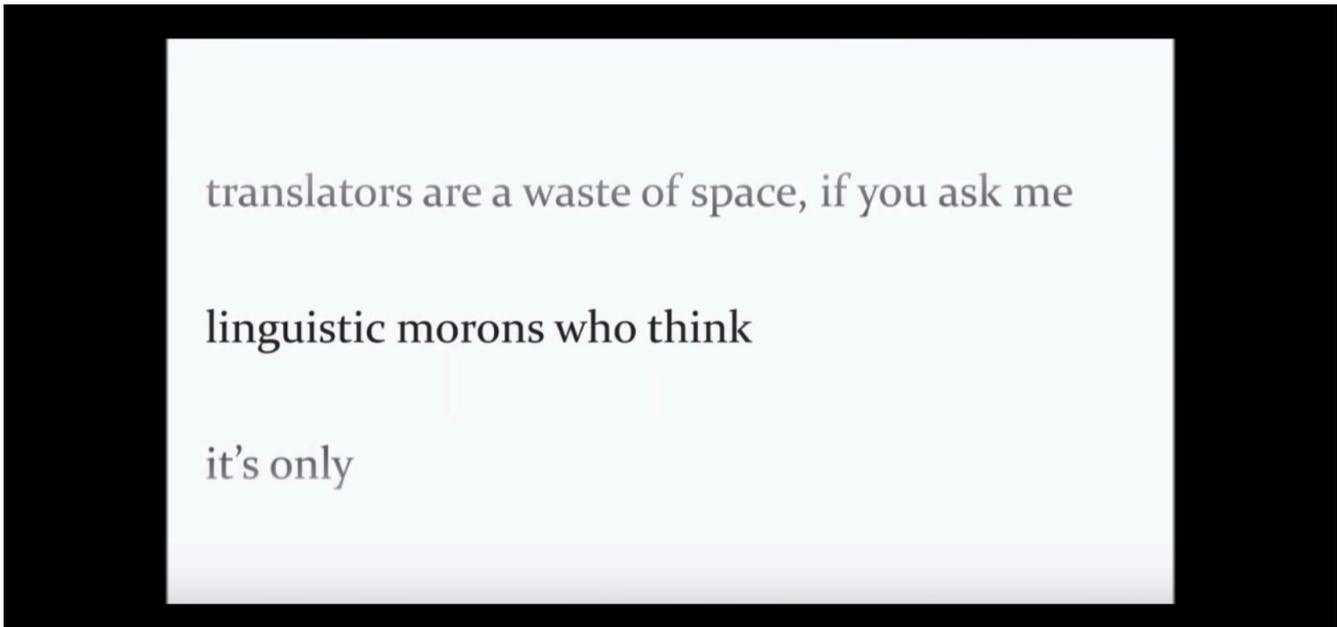


**Mette Holm. Still from Dreaming Murakami.  
Final Cut for Real**

### **Translators are a waste of space**

Erik Skuggevik and Iver Grimstad made this minimalist video for the Norwegian Association of Literary Translators (and won CEATL’s second international video contest ‘Spot the translator’ with it). Make sure you watch till the end!

[Translators are a waste of space](#)



*Still from the video by Erik Skuggevik and Iver Grimstad*

### **CEATL's Guidelines for Fair contracts**

In September 2018, the Authors' Rights Working Group of CEATL published a set of guidelines for fair contracts for literary translation across Europe. The guidelines are the result of several years of dedicated work, taking the previous CEATL hexalogue (or "six commandments of 'fair play' in literary translation") as its starting point.

[Guidelines for fair contracts on translation](#)

An appendix regarding 'work made for hire' contracts is here:

[Work made for hire](#)

In this article, Gertrud Maes, member of CEATL's Authors' Rights Working Group, explains the background of the guidelines.

[Fair contracts for all](#)

# Colophon

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