

Stories we could tell

Laura Bennett reports from an inspiring MAT Network literary translation workshop led by publisher and translator Stefan Tobler



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Publisher Stefan Tobler with MAT Network Coordinator Alison Hughes

The Media, Arts and Tourism Network held its annual workshop on a bright spring morning in early March. Once again the location was London's Imperial College in South Kensington, with this year's session focusing on literary translation. The attendees had again travelled from far and wide to an event that is fast becoming one of the most popular on the CPD and networking calendar.

This year's main speaker was the independent publisher and translator Stefan Tobler, one of the founders of *And Other Stories*, a small publishing house dealing predominantly with literature in translation and recently shortlisted in the Newcomer category at the Independent Publishing Awards. Stefan began by providing a little insight into his background; having been born to translator parents in the Amazon he later found himself working for the online retail giant of the same name here in the UK, studying Portuguese poetry and living in Germany en route between the two.

It was during his time in the commercial publishing industry that Stefan became frustrated by the sales- and marketing-driven selection of titles for publication. He believes this often leads to the neglect of books that might be considered more obscure, often by foreign authors. Comparing the state of the UK publishing industry with that of France and Germany, for example, where literature in translation from all over the world thrives, Stefan made the point that not only does this lack of book diversity in the market damage the quality of books available, but also, crucially for us, it makes it difficult for literary translators to establish themselves.

And Other Stories makes a concerted attempt to reverse this pattern with a selection of diverse books available on subscription. Of the four books it published last year, three were in translation –

from Portuguese, Spanish and German – and its first two of Russian have been translated from Russian and Spanish. Emphasising the collaborative aspect of its methods, the books *And Other Stories* chooses to publish often else from the foreign language reading groups it sets up to gauge initial interest¹.

Moving on to discuss aspects of literary translation in a more general sense, Stefan spoke of the fact that the work of a literary translator can often be one of feast or famine, usually requiring a certain element of ‘diversification of income’. He highlighted the importance of finding a project that excites you and translating samples for literary magazines, as well as starting small and entering competitions in order to build your portfolio. The relevance of carrying out research when approaching publishers was also emphasised, making sure that your project fits in with their catalogue is paramount.

Stefan ended with a point that provoked a certain amount of discussion regarding rates of pay. Referring to the fact that some translators feel that they are invisible and under-appreciated, Stefan advanced the theory that literary translators are, in fact, comparatively well paid in relation to other roles in the publishing industry, receiving more than the writers themselves and often more than the publishers. As a member of the Society of Authors Translators Association committee, he advised referring to their suggested rates for the translation of poetry and prose and for more information about current levels of pay².

After a break for coffee and some networking that allowed us to put faces to names and catch up with old friends, we were treated to an informative panel discussion and question-and-answer session. Stefan was joined by experienced translators Louise Lorraine Rogers and Ingrid Price-Gschlössel, and by Beth Fowler, who translated Iosif Hawilo’s *Open Door for And Other Stories* and was the first recipient of the Harvill Secker Young Translators’ Prize in 2010. The members of the panel provided translators like myself who have an interest in getting into

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the field with many useful tips, including the various grants available, translation residences, and the role of literary agents. They also discussed copyright and contract issues of which to be aware, how to find out whether a book’s translation rights are available, and the differences in dealing with these issues in the various European countries depending on translators’ source- and target-language combinations.

As the morning session was rounded off, a bubble of conversation filled the lunch area where previous attendees were delighted to see the return of last year’s delicate and crunchy macarons. As we left with notebooks full of tips and ideas and a newly stimulated appetite for literary translation, it had been a very successful morning. Thank you to Network coordinator Alison Hughes for organising the event and to all the speakers and panel members for their efforts and input. 

FOOTNOTES

¹For more information about *And Other Stories*, or to take out a subscription, please see www.andotherstories.org

²See www.societyofauthors.org/translators-association



ITI DUTCH NETWORK WEEKEND WORKSHOP

7-9 September 2012, Bristol University, UK

Bristol – from Slave Trade to Fairtrade

This year the Dutch Network Weekend Workshop will be held at Goldney Hall, Bristol University, in the south-west of England. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to network and enjoy a bustling city with a fascinating history. Clifton, where Goldney Hall is situated, is a beautiful area renowned for its stunning Clifton Suspension Bridge built by the legendary engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who is also famous for that other Bristol landmark, the SS Great Britain.

Inspired by Bristol’s maritime history, the intriguing theme for our workshop is Bristol – from Slave Trade to Fairtrade, with a possible link to the Dutch slave trade. Bristol is a leading proponent of Fairtrade, enabling it to give something back to communities in developing countries. We are planning to have an expert speaker on each of these subjects, as well as translation workshops with relevant texts to challenge your translation skills.

Leading on from Fairtrade, the second translation workshop will be on the topical theme of sustainability, and, tying in with this, our Saturday dinner will be at the UK’s first restaurant to receive a gold eco award for sustainable catering. An interesting excursion will take us to some of Bristol’s key places, including the floating harbour which extends right into the city centre and has charming walkways with lively cafés, restaurants and galleries.

Bristol is easily accessible with daily flights from the Netherlands, Belgium and other parts of the UK, as well as a railway station that connects with most parts of the British mainland.

Please take a look at our provisional programme and timetable: www.itidutchnetwork.org. If you have any queries, you can email us at the addresses below.

We hope very much to welcome you there!

The organisers,

Karl Koonin and Aleita Stevens

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