

## **Fair play and collaboration**

*Workshop on intellectual property, working conditions and collaborative actions for writers and literary translators*

15-16 December, Lviv

### **SUPPORT FOR AUTHOR AND TRANSLATOR**

by Bas Pauw

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to introduce myself first. My name is Bas Pauw, I represent the Dutch Foundation for Literature here today, which is based in Amsterdam. I would like to thank the Book Platform in Lviv and the Next Page Foundation in Sofia, and director Yana Genova in particular, for the honoring invitation of being here with you this weekend at this workshop dedicated to the work and the position of the author and the translator.

#### *Outline of the presentation*

Today I will be telling you something about possible forms of support for authors and translators. The idea behind this presentation is mainly to inform you about best practices, ideas and structures that exist in Europe, that are strengthening the position of literature in general and literature in translation in particular. Tomorrow morning I will present a few forms of cooperation that exist in Europe.

Actually, I have a very ambitious agenda for this presentation, because in the next 40 minutes I would like to present to you

- \* an argument in defense of a flourishing literary and translation culture, closely related to the growing importance of translation;
- \* an overview of different possible forms of support: financial, educational, practical;
- \* a brief overview of the situation in Europe, including the situation in smaller language areas; with some remarks about the (changing) role of the government in supporting literature and the arts;
- \* on the position of the translator: rights, recognition, (in)visibility.

As I said, I work for the Dutch Foundation for Literature in Amsterdam. I will sometimes mention the situation in the Netherlands to make things clear or refer to the activities of our Foundation, but I will not present this foundation or the situation in Europe, for that matter, as an example. To me it is perfectly clear that the situation in western Europe is radically different from the situation here or elsewhere in eastern Europe. As you know, in some countries in Europe there is a long tradition of state support for writers and translators and I am well aware that there is no point in presenting that as a model that should be followed or copied.

### *In defense of a flourishing literary and translation culture*

With the current pace of globalization, the question arises how we can preserve local and national identities. To a large extent, the answer lies in language and thus in translation. Language and national culture are inextricably intertwined. And embedded as it is in language, literature has the power to reveal the uniqueness of a culture. The history of European literature shows that the borders between languages are (fortunately) largely porous. It was Milan Kundera who said that the true worth of a novel (which he calls ‘a quintessentially European form of art’) becomes apparent when it is freed from its national confines and placed in the larger context of ‘world literature’. And with ‘world literature’ we do not mean a kind of Champions League of great books, but rather a literature that is open to exchange between cultures.

For this exchange to take place, for us to be able to read the literature from our European neighbors, we need translators. We need good and professional translators. I also think that the crisis that Europe is undergoing, is not only political and economical – it is also a cultural crisis. To me it is obvious that Europe cannot be Europe if we do not read each others books.

The translator is often represented as a ferryman, who pilots the author’s text from one language to another. This image reveals the paradox of invisibility that the translator faces: he or she is supposed to remain invisible in the text itself; but as a result this makes the translator invisible outside of the text as well, and therefore he or she considered to be a financial burden by publishers. We will come back to the issue of invisibility later and to what can be done to lift this paradox.

More than a ferryman, the translator could be described as a ‘cultural mediator’, and translation as a process that also takes place outside of the text: transforming that it transfers, creating something new, reinventing literature and language and keeping it alive.

A literary translation from Ukrainian into Dutch not only enriches the Dutch literary heritage, it also augments the Ukrainian author’s literary capital, enlarging his or hers potential market as well and, indirectly, also enlarging the market for Ukrainian literature in general. An author from the Ukraine whose works are translated gains both a larger readership and greater status, depending on the size and importance of the target language in question.

The rise of digitization – possibly the most revolutionary development in literary media since the invention of the printing press – is helping to multiply and accelerate these exchanges: literary translation is the future.

### *Possible support for authors and translators*

I would like to say a few words about the organization that I work for, about its policy, its ambitions and its instruments.

The Dutch Foundation for Literature was established in 2010, as the result of a merger between two major Dutch literary organizations, that were much older. Dating back from the sixties was the *Fonds voor de Letteren*, the Foundation for Literature, founded by authors to support them in their goal to make their living as an author. The former *Fonds voor de Letteren* has been

doing this, supporting Dutch authors and translators into Dutch, by providing financial support in the form of grants and travel grants.

Founded in 1992 was the Foundation for the Translation of Dutch Literature. Its main goal was to promote Dutch literature abroad and to create a larger audience for Dutch authors, who are unfortunate to write in a relatively small language area.

Now both these Foundations have merged, creating the Dutch Foundation for Literature, a single foundation that is promoting literature in the broadest sense of the word and in numerous ways; that is not only Dutch literature but also literature in translation. The Foundation is subsidized by the Dutch Ministry of Culture and has an annual budget of approximately 10 million euros. Altogether 35 people work here, including the people working at the Amsterdam Translator's House.

I will introduce the main activities of this new Foundation, with a clear distinction between the activities at home and abroad, and I will focus on the activities and instruments that are relevant for you as authors and translators from the Ukraine.

### *Support for authors*

As I said, the support for authors originates from the sixties, when Dutch authors urged the government to support writers in their desire and their ambition to make a living with their writing. This system has undergone a few minor changes over the past few decades, but basically it is still the same. Authors can apply for a working grant, on the basis of a proposal for one or more books. These proposals are judged by a committee of peers; any Dutch author or poet who has published two or more books, and therefore in a sense proved his or her worth, can apply for a grant. There has to be a contract with a publisher for the publication of the book. Such a grant allows the author to concentrate on writing full time for a longer period of time. Authors of all genres can apply; prose, non-fiction, poetry and children's literature. There are also stimulation grants for young authors. A similar grant system operates for translators into Dutch.

This system of support for authors has been in function for around five decades now. In recent years it has come under pressure from the government and also from society. I will come back to that later.

### *Support for translators*

The other main branch of our foundation is the promotion of Dutch literature abroad. In a publishing world that is more international than ever and where the dominance of English-language literature continues to increase, a small language area like ours has to make an extra effort to focus attention on its literature. Dutch is a language that is close to German and to English, spoken by around 23 million people in Europe, in the Netherlands and in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. This makes Dutch one of the larger languages in Europe (for instance, Dutch is spoken by more people than all Scandinavian languages together), but still it is a relatively small market for an author to make

a living by book sales alone. We are convinced that in Dutch literature there are a lot of voices that deserve a much wider readership than this Dutch language community. That is exactly why we try to raise interest in Dutch books among international publishers.

I will give you a few examples of how we do this, because this is the way in which much of our support towards translators is structured.

### *Translation subsidies*

In order to promote Dutch literature in other countries, the Foundation maintains close contacts with publishers all over the world by means of regular visits to the important international book fairs in Frankfurt, London and Bologna, as well as many others. To keep foreign publishers informed about interesting new titles, we make these brochures twice a year, called *10 Books from Holland and Flanders*, presenting a selection of commercially and artistically successful novels that can be expected to do well abroad. We make similar brochures for other genres: *Quality Non-Fiction from Holland*, *Children's Books from Holland*, *Dutch Classics* etc.

Once a foreign publisher has expressed interest in a specific Dutch book and he or she has acquired the translation rights for the book, the publisher can apply to the Foundation for a translation subsidy. The process of applying for such a grant is quick, easy to understand and not at all time-consuming. We meet every month and decide on all the latest applications for subsidy, sometimes in consultation with external advisors. Publishers do not have to wait for more than a month for a decision. The Foundation has developed this procedure to suit the dynamics of Dutch and foreign publishing houses, which after all operate as businesses.

The application (an A4 sheet) should come with two contracts: one with the original publisher, for translation rights, and – this is very important – one with the translator. We want to make sure, as good as we can, that the translator receives a decent fee for his or her work. When we judge these applications, we take a few things into account: the quality of the book, the quality of the publisher (backlist, distribution, publicity and so on) and the quality of the translator.

The publisher can receive a subsidy of up to 70% of the translation costs. We feel that the publisher should make a financial effort for the book as well. For genres like poetry and literary classics we do subsidize a 100% of translation costs. A publisher can apply for a maximum of two titles by the same author in the same genre.

When it comes to the promotion of Dutch literature abroad, these translation subsidies are our most important tool. A lot of translators from Dutch into many other languages benefit from it directly. There are many other tools we use for this promotion: we run a Visitors Program for foreign publishers; a Writers Program, which supports appearances by Dutch authors abroad, at festivals, universities and so on, we organize larger literary events abroad etcetera. Maybe we can come back to these topics later today, if you wish, but for now I would like to return to our support for translators.

*Other support – education, information, guidance*

Because without good, professional translators, all this promotion abroad is futile. The Foundation has always regarded the training, support and guidance of literary translators as one of the main pillars of its translation policy. The Amsterdam Translators House was established with this aim in mind, as a place where five translators of Dutch literature at a time can live and work for a period of one or two months at the invitation of the Foundation. There are a number of similar places in Europe; I will tell a bit more about that tomorrow.

The Amsterdam Translators House regularly organizes translation workshops, where new young translators work on the translation of a short literary text under the guidance of an experienced translator, sometimes also in presence of the author. We also finance mentorships: a young translator can work on the translation of a book under the guidance of an experienced translator, whose fee is taken over by our foundation.

We have lists of certified translators from Dutch into almost any language. Young aspiring translators can send in a text for us to review; if approved, he or she will be on the list. These lists are sent out to publishers who would like to publish a Dutch book in translation.

*'Great translation by the way'*

By now you may have the impression that the situation in the Netherlands for translators is virtually ideal. You may even regret that you never learned Dutch. But four years ago we published this little book, called *Great translation by the way*. Its subtitle is *A pamphlet for preserving a flourishing translation culture*. The reason why we published it was a bit of a paradoxical situation in the Netherlands. On first look, the situation seemed quite healthy: more and more Dutch translations of foreign books were sold in the Netherlands, and more and more Dutch novels were sold abroad. Literary translation appeared to be flourishing in both directions, partly because of the grants awarded by literary foundations. If you would take a closer look, you could see that the group of literary translators is ageing rapidly and new recruits are hard to find. The reasons are clear: meager pay, a low professional status and little visibility, and a lack of educational facilities for translators.

The title of our little pamphlet, *Great translation by the way*, refers to the comments with which a literary critic or book reviewer usually dismisses the work of a translator. These comments make painfully clear where translators are in the literary pecking order: at the bottom. With this book we wanted to change that; we want to give a central place to literary translation as a true, honorable, important profession. The pamphlet suggests five clear and concrete recommendations for this.

- > literary translation is a creative profession that requires an academic level of knowledge and critical thinking skills; therefore it should be a university discipline;
- > there should be more guidance, in-service training and more opportunities for ongoing development for both new and experienced translators, in the form of workshops, master classes and mentorships, to establish a system of lifelong learning;
- > the economic and cultural position of professional literary translators must be strengthened;
- > there should be a 'diversification of supply' – by giving literary funds more room to fund the more 'difficult', demanding books;
- > the European Union should embrace literary translation as a European discipline par excellence (amongst other things by supporting the network of European translator's houses).

### *The situation in Europe*

In Europe, there are many literary foundations at work, that do similar things to what we do. Yet there are also big differences. The biggest state funded support for authors and translators can be found in the Scandinavian countries, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium; roughly speaking the northwest of Europe.

Roughly speaking you could say that support is more common in countries where the government feels a responsibility to support the arts, it is more common in smaller language areas than in larger countries. Many smaller Eastern European countries like the Baltic states have similar foundations in place, often very small – because they need to make an extra effort to get their authors out on the international publishing market. Countries like the UK, France, Russia or Germany do not feel this need. These countries are so large that their literature is much more visible internationally; also it is not evident who should be doing the promotion.

For instance, literature from the UK is very widely translated globally; it doesn't need any support. On the other hand, very few non-English literature is translated in the UK (or in the US, actually). Therefore, the Arts Council in the UK is not promoting English literature getting out, it is actively funding foreign literature coming in. This is of course quite exceptional.

In tomorrow's presentation I will be mentioning a few more projects and European structures that are related to this. After my talk, Yana Genova will give you a few figures on how this support for translation is developing through Europe and how big the market for literary translation is exactly.

### *The position of the translator*

These differences in Europe are also visible when you look at the position of authors and translators. In many countries there is no support for authors and they need to rely on sales and performing fees. For translators there are also dramatic differences in working conditions. A yawning gap exists between the well-organized, reasonably well-paid Norwegian translators, and their extremely poorly paid Italian colleagues, who have scarcely any rights at all. Roughly speaking, Europe can be divided into two groups: countries where translators can survive reasonably well on their work (Scandinavia, Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands / Flanders – the latter heading the subsidized sector, while coming last in the unsubsidized sector), and countries where conditions are so poor that there are almost no professional literary translators, or where translators are forced to produce such an incredible volume of work that translations can hardly be said to have any individual artistic value.

In general it can be said the vicious circle of invisibility (low recognition *leads to* low pay *leads to* low quality *leads to* low recognition) is seen everywhere, though the degree of recognition, payment and quality varies from country to country.

### *Raising visibility*

A number of initiatives have been taken in the past few years to raise the visibility of translators – I will mention a few, and please forgive me for choosing my examples mainly from the Netherlands again.

Programs were started to get the translator on stage – in literary festivals, book tours, presentations and so on. In the Netherlands we have launched a series of events called ‘Translator’s Happiness’. These are public interviews with translators talking about their work, about a specific book they translated, what problems they encountered and which particular solutions they were happy with. To my amazement, these programs have been very successful; it appears that readers are very much interested in the work of a translator.

In Germany, publishers are urged to put the translator’s name on the cover of the book. This is of course a very elementary form of visibility, that is quite easy to establish. As a result of this initiative, German Amazon now also mentions the name of the translator.

Also in Germany there is the initiative to ‘educate the critic’ – to increase the attention paid to the translation in book reviews and to establish some sort of seriously argued criticism of translations.

There are many literary awards aimed at the translator on a national level, but until recently there were few international literary awards for translation. Now there are a few interesting initiatives. The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the Prize of the Leipzig Book Fair and the Dutch European Literature Prize were recently established.

Our Foundation has also established an annual award for translators who have played a very important role as an ‘ambassador’ to Dutch literature.

### *Conclusion*

The title of this meeting is 'Fair play and collaboration' – I find that title well chosen. As you all know, in the book business it isn't always fair play and there is hardly enough collaboration.

This may be ridiculously naive, but I am convinced that we need collaboration to enable fair play. Authors, translators and publishers should unite themselves and form bodies or unions, to speak up for their rights. Between them, they should work together closely and frequently – because they all share the same goal. In some way or another, there should be some mutual trust in order to work together on the publication of books, books in translation, and to make literature flourish.

There should also be collaboration on an international level. Literary foundations and platforms can work together – to enable literary exchange, to exchange ideas and to address the European Union.

This may sound easy coming from somebody who originates from a country where the book trade has a very high level of organization. But you should bear in mind that many of these organizations are not that old, and many of them started with a protest, with an initiative taken by writers or by translators who felt that their rights needed protection.

I hope that this weekend will take us a few steps closer towards this cooperation.

*Many thanks for your attention.*