

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION  
OF ATA'S LITERARY DIVISION

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## ATA ANNUAL CONFERENCE SAN FRANCISCO, 2016



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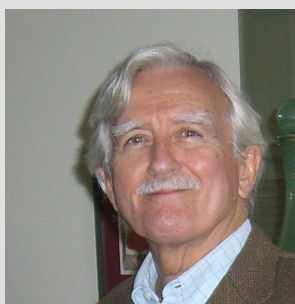


*After examining many different options in 2016, Source is pleased to introduce the Literary Division's new logo on our masthead.*

# FROM THE EDITORS



**Michele Aynesworth**  
Editor-in-Chief



**Tony Beckwith**  
Associate Editor



**Patrick Saari**  
Chief Copyeditor

Our Winter issue presents some fascinating reviews of sessions relating to literary translation presented at ATA's annual conference this past November.

Three sessions, reviewed here, were devoted to the how and why of retranslating the classics. Marian Schwartz's Marilyn Gaddis Rose Lecture particularly focused on *why*: "Why is a new translation needed?" she asked. Rosamund Bartlett's session was more a consideration of *how* to get a retranslation published. And as both Marian and Rosamund had recently published new translations of *Anna Karenina*, they presented a joint session focused on the similarities and differences of their approaches.

We have reviews of two sessions led by Daniel Hahn for the Portuguese Language Division: "Literary Translation in Action: A Close Reading" and "Being a Translator: the Rise of a Powerful New Profession."

Three sessions led by Philip Boehm, Guest Speaker of the German Language Division, also are reviewed here: "Finding the Voice in Literary Translation" (an Advanced Skills Training workshop), "Bottom, Bless Thee! Thou Art Translated (Translating for the Stage)," and "*Die Fremde hier* (Preserving Foreignness in Translation)."

Snapshots from the After Hours Café as well as toons from Tony brighten the issue, along with regular features: Paula Arturo's Letter from the Literary Division's Assistant Administrator, the Readers' Corner, and Tony Beckwith's *By the Way* column, "Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize."

## Upcoming Issues

We look forward to our readers' contributions to *Source's* Spring issue, a tribute to French literature, language, and translation in the aftermath of troubling events during the past two years (please see Submission Guidelines, page 4).

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

**Michele Aynesworth** specializes in translating Argentine and French authors.

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Special thanks to **Jamie Padula** for proofreading and especially to Literary Division Administrators **Jesse Tomlinson** and **Paula Arturo** for their support.

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

## Topic for the Spring 2017 issue:

In the wake of troubling events in 2015 and 2016 in France, a tribute to French literature, language, and translation.

*As the journal of the ATA's Literary Division, Source is both a forum for the discussion of literary translation and a vehicle for LD members and guest contributors to publish their work. Novice translators, as well as those with more experience, are encouraged to submit translations of poetry and prose together with their meditations on the process. We are also constantly on the lookout for submissions from Asia, Africa, and all other less frequently represented cultures.*

FORMAT: Submit articles up to 1600 words, Word or text file, single-spaced. Palatino Linotype size 14 with indented paragraphs (1 tab), no line breaks between paragraphs and no word breaks. Unjustified righthand margin. Endnotes please, not footnotes.

Please include a brief, factual bio and photograph. Links and illustrations, etc., are encouraged. Submissions may be edited.

Submissions go to [michele@mckayaynesworth.com](mailto:michele@mckayaynesworth.com)  
*Submissions deadline for the Spring issue: March 21.*

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## LETTER FROM THE LD ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

Dear LD members,

I'm happy to say that ATA57 included a variety of wonderful sessions on literary translation, some of which are reviewed in this issue of *Source*. We heard from our guest speaker Rosamund Bartlett and Marilyn Gaddis Rose Lecturer Marian Schwartz on retranslating the classics, our very own Mercedes Guhl and Nanette McGuinness on translating children's books, Daniel Hahn on what it means to be a literary translator today, Jay Rubin on translating living and dead authors, Philip Boehm on translating theater texts, and Lydia Razran Stone on Russian proverbs, among many others.

After that, several members of our Leadership Council went to the Guadalajara Book Fair (FIL) and the 20<sup>th</sup> International Saint Jerome Translation and Interpretation Conference by the Mexican Translators Association (OMT), where we discussed all things translation, including translation from the point of view of communication, academia, translators, and even publishers. As in previous years, ATA participated in the Rights Center, helping to connect translators to the publishing world.

November was quite an exciting month to say the least! What I liked best about all these activities were some of the fascinating conversations I had with fellow translators who, like me, are concerned about what appears to be the deintellectualization not only of translation per se, but of how we talk about translation in general and online in particular.



**Paula Arturo** is a lawyer, translator, and law professor. She is a co-director of Translating Lawyers, a boutique firm specializing in legal translation by lawyers for lawyers. In addition to various legal and financial documents, throughout her fifteen-year career as a translator, she has also translated highly technical law books and publications in major international journals for high-profile authors, including several Nobel Prize Laureates and renowned jurists. She is currently a member of the American Translators Association's Ethics Committee, the ATA Literary Division's Leadership Council, and the Public Policies Forum of the Supreme Court of Argentina.

As some of you may already know, I have great hopes of developing a high-quality blog for our division. I have been unable to put together enough content for the blog to go live just yet. Therefore, in the interest of encouraging LD members and other ATA members to submit posts, I'd like to use this opportunity to tell you a bit about this project and why I think it matters.

The idea behind the blog is to start an online conversation about literary translation by publishing at least one no-fluff, content-rich post every other month (six posts per year), creating an online place where we can discuss the ins and outs of the literary world and translation as an intellectual product, and not just as a business. We feel that the fact that translation is a money-making activity should not be confused with the fantasy that translation is all about making money.

While publications like *Source* go a long way toward accomplishing that, it is my belief that a complementary blog can make a significant contribution as well and help support the invaluable work conducted by our editors, Michele Aynesworth, Tony Beckwith, and Patrick Saari, while giving even more visibility to the authors who kindly share their ideas with us and challenge us to think about literary translation from original perspectives.

Several issues ago, Mercedes Guhl, our former Administrator wrote: "As translators, we often complain about what seems to be an ailment: the invisibility syndrome. Our names always appear in small print as credit for our work, almost invisible, or they are on pages nobody bothers to read. Clients fret when they hear about our fees or get our invoices, as they do not know much about what we do and what it involves." A blog can not only let clients know what we do and what it involves, but it can also give us a flexible platform through which we can discuss the issues we care about and subjects that interest us.

If you feel like we do and would like to support this project, please send us a post in accordance with the following guidelines:

- **Audience:** Our target audience consists of experienced literary and/or book translators, authors, and other members of the

publishing world. Our blog is open to all subjects that could potentially be of interest to them.

- **Length and organization:** 1500-3000 words. Although blog posts tend to be shorter, complex ideas sometimes require several pages. Content-rich posts that exceed that length may be published in parts.
- **Bio:** Please include a brief bio with your posts (no more than 120 words). Links to websites and personal blogs can also be included.
- **Content:** The content of each post is up to the author; however, listicles, how-to or self-promotional posts will not be published.
- **Disclaimer:** The blog team reserves the right to select, at its sole discretion, which posts to publish.
- **Editing:** The blog team will revise each post and provide suggested changes where applicable. Please make sure your posts conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

The blog team may also adjust the format of a post for technical reasons. Before publication, authors will receive a revised, marked-up version with our edits and will have the option of accepting or rejecting changes.

For more information or for submitting a post, please feel free to email me directly: [paula@translatinglawyers.com](mailto:paula@translatinglawyers.com).

I'm looking forward to hearing from you!  
Paula

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## READERS' CORNER

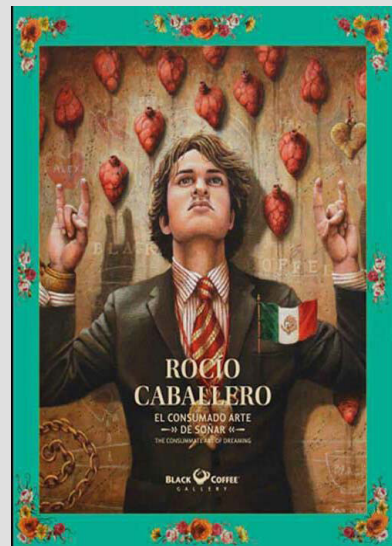


Paula Gordon

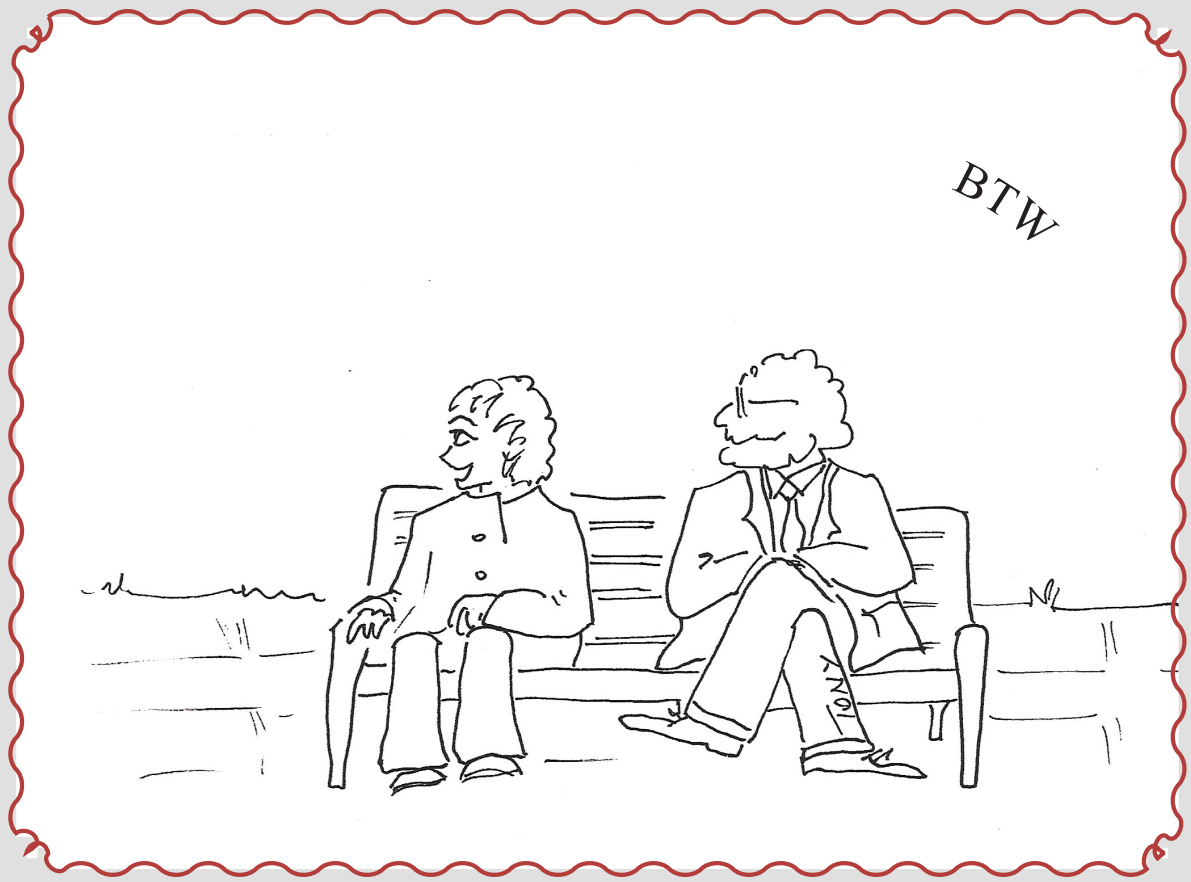
Paula Gordon's translation of the short story "**Meat**" by Montenegrin author Ilija Đurović was published in the 2017 Winter/Spring issue of *Lunch Ticket*. It was selected as a finalist in The Gabo Prize for Literature in Translation & Multi-Lingual Texts. Link to story: <http://lunchticket.org/meat/>



Jesse Tomlinson



**Rocío Caballero:**  
*The Consummate Art of Dreaming*  
Jesse Tomlinson's latest art book translation,  
published by Black Coffee Gallery.



*"I could tell he wasn't a native English speaker  
when he said he was going to shuffle off to bison."*

# LITERARY DIVISION EVENTS

## ATA SAN FRANCISCO, 2016



# MARILYN GADDIS ROSE LECTURE



Marilyn Gaddis Rose

## MARIAN SCHWARTZ ON THE BUSINESS OF RETRANSLATING THE CLASSICS

REVIEWED BY JESSE TOMLINSON



Marian Schwartz  
<http://marianschwartz.com>

Marian Schwartz has translated over 70 volumes of Russian classic and contemporary fiction, history, biography, criticism and fine art. In 2014 Yale University Press published her translation of *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. She joined us in San Francisco at ATA57 as the Literary Division's Marilyn Gaddis Rose lecturer.

Marian began her packed session by saying "Marilyn's presence is with us" and commenting on how essential Marilyn's efforts were to literary translation pedagogy and to mentoring young literary translators.



“Publishers are indecently eager to put out new translated versions of the classics.” And why? Because costs are lower and sales potentially higher when publishing a new translation of a classic. Marian also pointed to copyright details, explaining that as the translator/creator of a new work of literature, you hold the rights to its publications, rights inherent to the author.

It was interesting to learn that before 1973 there was no copyright protection in Russia. There have been many different international agreements on copyright: it first appeared in the latter part of the nineteenth century, then the Berne Convention was ratified in 1887 and the Buenos Aires Convention signed in 1910, along with many other seminal events. Today, as a rule but not always, copyright spans the author’s lifetime and expires 70 years after his or her death. Rights are sold after publication. Works without copyright or whose copyright has expired are said to be in the public domain.

Marian mentioned Edwin Frank’s New York Review Books as one of the “finest small presses publishing retranslations of classics.” Why would a publisher be interested in a new translation? Translation expectations change as does language. And translations already in the public domain may not be up to par. So it makes sense business-wise for publishers to publish retranslations. In addition, publishers often don’t follow foreign language work, so they are at pains to figure out which books have merit. With the retranslation of a classic, they don’t have this issue. The author already has name recognition and they know it’s a good book. There is also the advantage when the new translation is used in courses at universities. Small print runs (and just-in-time printing) are also more cost efficient now. Classics tend to be better sellers and last longer in the market.

However, there are also some drawbacks to retranslating a classic. First, it will be compared to previous editions and often not favorably. And sometimes it’s just the way of the world that original translations are preferred even though they may not be technically better. Marian highlighted again that “classics are ripe for retranslations.”

“Sometimes it’s not the merit of the translation but the circumstances of the publishing that lead to success...” The most important decision is



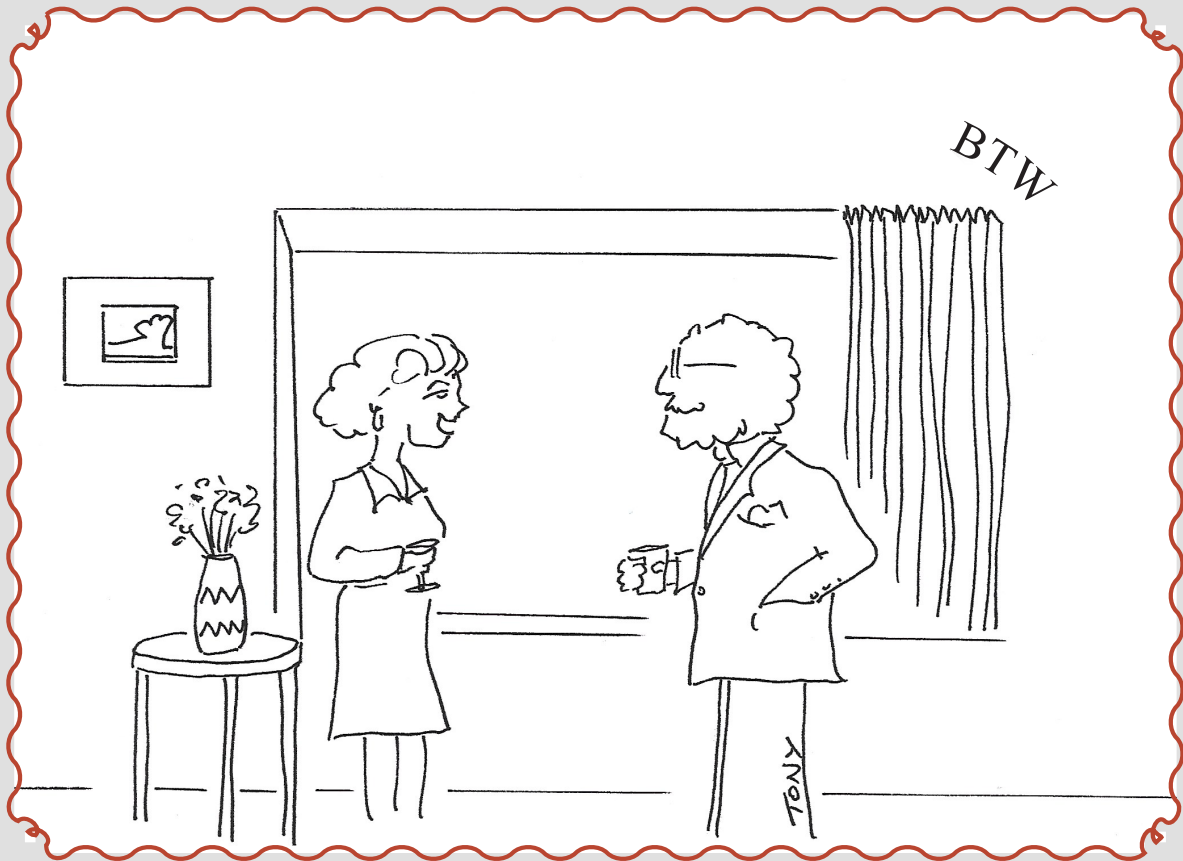
choosing the right project—one with the greatest likelihood of success. And that means choosing something for which there is a need.

Be aware that retranslations entail more research, mainly about translations already in print. Why would yours be better? Why is a new translation needed? Your work must be of superior quality and demonstrate significant differences. Marian suggested looking for funding sources, for people and organizations giving grants to fund your translation. She gave a great tip: if there's a movie in the works on a book then that's typically a great choice. Publishers are also very reliant on academics so try to be sure to please academics.

In response to a question during this session about the importance of reviewing other translations of a book we are thinking about retranslating, Marian's response was clear that researching previous translations is essential.

Despite noise from a simultaneous session next door, it was easy to concentrate on Marian's compelling talk. She gave many concrete and helpful tips and ideas on how to publish retranslations of the classics. It was also a pleasure to see her session so well attended. It started out fairly full and was completely packed by the end, with people sitting on the floor and standing at the back to fill the room.





*"I know people who can hack into my ex's smart home system in the middle of the night and turn all the lights on."*

# ROSAMUND BARTLETT

## ON

### LITERARY TRANSLATION AND LATERAL THINKING: HOW TO PUBLISH NEW VERSIONS OF THE CLASSICS

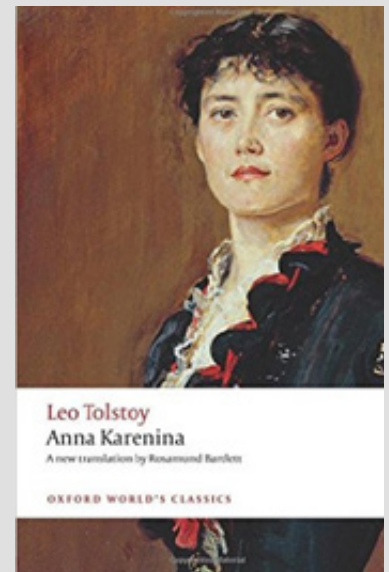


**Rosamund Bartlett**  
*began her career as a scholar of Russian literature, earning her doctorate from Oxford, and now spends her time as a writer, translator, and lecturer on the same subject.*

Reviewed by Alison Duncan

Rosamund Bartlett, having published a new translation of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* in 2014, joined us at ATA's Annual Conference in San Francisco to discuss her experience of retranslating the classics.

By way of introduction, Rosamund recounted her journey of becoming a published literary translator. For her it began as a writer, publishing scholarly books on Russian literature. She told the room that when the opportunity to co-author *Literary Russia* came her way she had hesitations, primarily because she already had



various ongoing commitments, but she said yes anyway. Rosamund feels this eagerness paved her way toward more publishing opportunities and ultimately toward translation. From there it was, to use her own word, *serendipity*. The contacts she had made in the publishing world approached her about translating and, again, Rosamund eagerly said yes.

In 2004, she published both a biography of Anton Chekhov, *Chekhov: Scenes from a Life*, and an anthology of selected Chekhov stories, *About Love and Other Stories*. As a student and lover of music, Rosamund quickly fell in love with translating Chekhov, recognizing his stories as exceptionally lyrical. Her translation anthology was published by Oxford World's Classics, an imprint of Oxford University Press that makes literature from around the world widely available with editions that are regularly revised on the basis of the latest scholarship. Ten years later, in 2014, Rosamund published a new translation of *Anna Karenina* with the same imprint, making her version the newest in 96 years. Both of these translated volumes were met with great praise. Which brings us to the point of the presentation: Rosamund's experience has proven time and again that there is an appetite for new translations of the classics.

As a newcomer to the ATA Conference, I was among those in the audience eager to hear Rosamund's "how to" for breaking into the field of literary translation. Unfortunately, the question of the hour could not be answered so simply. Rosamund's success truly has been serendipitous, often a case of being in the right place at the right time and knowing the right people. However, her passion for her craft and for Russian literature is what helped the stars align. Rosamund has been and continues to be highly involved in the world of Russian literary scholarship. For instance, Rosamund regularly organizes events, such as literary festivals and lecture series. She also actively pursues charity work as a trustee of the Anton Chekhov Foundation where she is currently directing the Early Chekhov Translation Project aimed at making all of Chekhov's stories available to English readers.

Rosamund's advice for those also interested in retranslating the classics is to become involved in events and to be aware of key publishing dates. Anniversaries, whether of a particular book or of a writer's birth or death, are natural times when a publisher may be interested in introducing a new translation to the market. Likewise, curating a new collection of stories puts a fresh spin on your translations and creates an interesting way to reintroduce them to readers.

Rosamund did not set out to become a literary translator, but because of the passion she brought to the varied projects she undertook and because she said "yes" to whatever novel opportunity came her way, translation found her.

You can find a comprehensive list of Rosamund's published work on her website at [www.rosamundbartlett.com](http://www.rosamundbartlett.com). To learn more about the Early Chekhov Translation Project, please visit <http://antonchekhovfoundation.org/en/translation-project>.

**Alison Duncan** is a Boston-based book editor, copyeditor, and translator. She earned her BA in French and Francophone Studies at Vassar College where she first began translating contemporary French literature. She started her career in publishing in foreign rights and is now a non-fiction book editor. She also works with self-publishing fiction writers to copyedit and prepare their manuscripts for publication. Alison is currently working toward a graduate degree in French to English translation at New York University.



Alison Duncan



# TRANSLATING ANNA KARENINA: TWO APPROACHES

A JOINT SESSION PRESENTED BY MARIAN  
SCHWARTZ AND ROSAMUND BARTLETT

Reviewed by Mercedes Guhl

As a translator of books, I have always been interested in how other translators do their work. Therefore, a session with Marian Schwartz and Rosamund Bartlett, translators of the two most recently published versions of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, had a special appeal to me.

Despite our daily toil as translators, reading texts to turn them into other texts, we still honor the notion of having one excellent translation while all other versions are not as good or plain bad. In a session like this one, it was easy to expect a duel-like confrontation with a final victory of one of them over the other. And, as translation involves a fair share of intellectual work, it could end up calling to mind one of those legendary chess matches some decades ago: a Karpov vs. Kasparov kind of show.

The truth is nothing like that happened. The presentation was more akin to a friendly tennis match or a pool game, where one player made her move in order to get a higher score but without

wanting to crush her opponent. The idea was to keep the game going, enjoying it, while allowing chances for the opponent to display her skill and increase the challenge.

Schwartz and Bartlett had chosen a handful of points that were useful to illustrate their take on the original. Those examples were not just sentences but also overall stylistic features and terminological problems. They discussed the novel's well-known first sentence and their options for it, and each explained why she had decided to translate it the way she did. It was interesting to find that no alternative was objectively better than the other. It all appeared as a matter of personal choice, but it was also coherent with the rest of each one's specific translation strategy.

They also touched upon Tolstoy's style and its not-very-polished quality. Both of them agreed they had opted to reproduce that and stayed away from a very educated high-register style. Referring to previous translations of *Anna Karenina*, such as Pevear & Volokhonsky's and Garnett's, they showed the novelty of their common approach, as polishing a text while translating it so it will more closely fit certain literary parameters is easily mistaken to be an integral part of the translation process.

There was a very informative discussion around the particular choice of terms for a specific type of footwear: *поршни* (*porshni*). Bartlett, on the other side of the Atlantic, used "moccasins," whereas Schwartz, on this side of the ocean, used "ghillies." Neither can be viewed as wrong renditions of the Russian term, but both may carry undesired connotations in certain contexts. Bartlett chose a word of Native American origin, that Americans associate with first-nation ethnic groups, so it might not fit properly in a Russian novel for them. But it worked for British readers. On the western side of the Atlantic, however, Schwartz opted for a term that would have unmistakable Scottish roots for a British reader, but not for an American one. The session was an excellent opportunity to witness

the regional flavor of a translation and how the scope of a publication can affect word choice: it was indeed a very vivid way of underlining how translators never work in a vacuum and need to keep a specific reader in mind. Otherwise, the reader may end up wondering why Russian peasants wear the same kind of shoes as Native Americans or Scottish rural inhabitants.

The last example selected to showcase their work was a surprisingly frequent word in the novel: веселый (*vesyoly*), which is an adjective, and other words stemming from the same root—at least one noun and one verb. Its meaning encompasses an assorted list of adjectives in English from cheerful to glad, joyful, and jovial. Because the two translators encountered the word repeatedly in a novel that is not exactly cheerful or merry, both agreed they had not translated it automatically, that is, they had not used the same word in English every time it appeared in the original, but rather they had shifted to synonyms as required by the context. Does that mean that cheerfulness in English has more shades than in Russian, where the same term can be used for many situations? This question was only hinted at as an idea that could be further pursued in an academic environment. But here, in the session, the problems were more down-to-earth.

The contrast between the two versions and the two translators was striking evidence of why translation is the result of one translator's reading and how a different reader can lead to an altogether different translation of the same original text.

It was also a welcome chance to understand that, in translation, there are no rights and wrongs in an absolute framework, but rather the construction of a particular set of guidelines for the translation of a text and the development of strategies within that set. Translating is not the mere conversion of words in one language into the words of another, but the actual redesigning of a foreign reality with the vocabulary and stylistic resources of the target language. What the audience had in that session was Bartlett's and Schwartz's *Anna Kareninas* standing side-by-side and rounding each other off to provide a deeper and more complete picture of Tolstoy's novel.

## TWO SESSIONS LED BY DANIEL HAHN FOR THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE DIVISION



**Daniel Hahn** is a writer, editor, and literary translator, with some 50 books to his name. His translations (from Portuguese, Spanish, and French) include fiction from Europe, Africa, and the Americas, and nonfiction by writers ranging from Portuguese Nobel laureate José Saramago to Brazilian footballer Pelé. He is a former chair of the Translators Association (the British translators' union), the Society of Authors (the national writers' union), and a past director of the British Centre for Literary Translation. He speaks regularly about translation and literature on the radio, at conferences, and festivals all over the world.

## Literary Translation in Action: A Close Reading

Reviewed by Nanette McGuinness and Mercedes Guhl

Daniel Hahn is an experienced writer, editor, and translator with around fifty fiction and nonfiction books for adults and children to his credit. His fascinating session on Saturday, November 6, 2016 (his second of the day) showed a skilled literary translator at work, in this case, transferring a Brazilian children's picture book<sup>1</sup> from Portuguese, *A Felicidade é uma Melancia na Cabeça* (Callis Editora, São Paulo, 2011), into English, *Happiness Is a Watermelon on Your Head* (Phoenix Yard Books, London, 2012). Although officially a session from the Portuguese Language Division, it was accurately billed as accessible to all. The takeaway? Hahn amply proved the truism that translators must be good writers, as what started out for him as a translation assignment quickly became a good deal more.

Asked to translate *A Felicidade é uma Melancia na Cabeça* from Portuguese into English, Hahn began—as translators always do—with the original. In his talk he pointed out that he set out on his “watermelon” journey when he realized that, although *A Felicidade...* had wonderful, whimsical illustrations (by Bulgarian artist Stella Dreis), its text (also by Dreis) was not close to being as good as the art nor did that relatively weak text consistently line up with the illustrations.<sup>2</sup>

By definition, even the best picture books tend to be driven by their illustrations. However, Hahn showed how the text for *A Felicidade...* seemed like an afterthought. Thus the original text was simultaneously Hahn's starting point as well as his dilemma: what should a translator do when a deserving (or contracted) original needs major improvement to succeed—in any language?

Hahn's deep reading of the original text led him to decide to honor the best part of the book—the illustrations—by doing what translators are taught never to do, “embellish” the text. With the blessing and encouragement of Emma Langley, his editor at Phoenix Yard Books, and



with the consent of the artist and writer, he began to toy with solutions to bring the text up to the brilliant level of the art, eventually creating a rhyming version. He also redistributed the text, both on individual pages—in order to pair the words with the exact placement of the art—and also across pages and page turns—to build anticipation and expectation via the structure of the printed text. These “embellishments” took advantage of his editorial and writing skills, and corrected major flaws that normally would have been taken care of at the editorial level in the original book. The result was no less than... well, brilliant.

As he showed in his session, Hahn’s translation is more an adaptation than a “mere” translation and his presentation yielded multiple insights for both novice and experienced translators. For novice translators, it stressed that we cannot always do a text justice if we stick too closely to the original; for experienced translators, it stressed that we are not alone when—forced by the text itself to decide whether to follow the original slavishly or adapt freely—we make seemingly radical choices. For novice, intermediate, and experienced translators alike, Hahn’s session also highlighted that, in the rare situation in which we encounter a poorly edited book, we must train ourselves to be ready and able to point out the problems inherent to the original and offer solutions.

Using such a short text as his source material for the session gave Hahn the luxury of walking the audience through the entire book to show how he first translated and then adapted his original—giving attendees a rare insight into a talented literary translator’s choices. By discussing details across an entire project and looking at the overall picture of his picture book, as it were, Hahn enabled attendees to understand the reasons behind his choices and decisions, as well as how a literary translator might read and deconstruct the text of a children’s book and its connection to the illustrations before rebuilding it in a new language. Unsurprisingly, his approach in the presentation also reminded attendees of another truism: every translation emerges from one person’s deep reading, one person’s point of view, and is one person’s interpretation at one moment in time.

Hahn's session was an intriguing eye-opener, suggesting that there are times when an alternate reading of a text can help a translator create a clearer understanding and interpretation of the original, so that s/he can proceed with the translation and, in the process, do greater justice to the overall work, potentially giving it longer "legs" and a stronger footing in the target language than it might otherwise have had. *Traduttore, traditore?* Definitely not!

<sup>1</sup>For the uninitiated and those who could not attend on November 6, picture books (PBs) are terse "tomes" of roughly 500 words. Generally a maximum of 48 pages and often fewer, PBs are intended to be read aloud to young readers under the age of 8.

<sup>2</sup>A good picture book is much like a *poésie concrète*. Ideally every word does yeoman's duty, and the placement of each word, line break, and page turn is planned as carefully as a Napoleonic campaign.



**Nanette McGuinness** is the translator of over 40 books for children and adults, including several popular graphic novel series. An award-winning opera singer (blog: <http://MusicAndWordsOnTheRoad.blogspot.com>), she gave the first-ever translation session for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) in 2015.



**Mercedes Guhl** started translating children's books in 1990. She now comments on translation in her blog: <http://traduzcoluegoescribo.mercedesguhl.com/>. Since 2008, she has been involved in organizing the Mexican Translators Organization's annual conference within Guadalajara's International Book Fair (FIL).

## Being a Translator: The Rise of a Powerful New Professional

Reviewed by Jesse Tomlinson

When I saw on the program that Daniel Hahn was ATA's Portuguese Language Division Guest Speaker for 2016, I was very excited. I had recently stumbled come across an article he wrote for *Slate* magazine, "We've Stopped Translating Children's Books into English. Where Will We Get the Next *Tintin*?"<sup>1</sup> and his writing struck me as clear and true. His speech for the session "Being a Translator: the Rise of a Powerful New Professional" was moving, funny, thoughtful, and inspiring. What a treat to experience such a thoughtful and captivating presentation! His first session was just like something you would listen to in a high school auditorium in that muffled giggles and exclamations rippled from the audience and the air was tight with attention.

Daniel Hahn started off by stating, "I'm not really a linguist" which prompted me to think about what a real linguist is. Especially since I considered him to be a top linguist. He went on to comment that in Britain they are "very good at exporting culture and very bad at importing it" in reference to translation, but he was also positive when he said that these are good times for translated literature; in fact we are publishing more translations than ever before.

For Hahn, being a translator is about so much more than translating, and he was not just referring to accounting and managing your business. He referenced a Greek adage (one of a few very apt sayings he translated into English) which is "running without arriving" which means being busy in the context of doing 'busy work', e.g., answering and writing emails or spending time on social media but not actually getting anything accomplished.

*There are days when I prefer being a translator to translating.*

*We are so busy being a translator that we don't have time to translate.*

He also spoke about all the ways we are translators—such as writing reviews and articles, reading, editing, studying, researching, and attending press conferences, shows, expos, and book fairs—that we often have a hard time finding any time in our work lives for translating!

And this despite the fact that when translators are translating, they are hybrids who turn gold into gold. They take all the words out of a book, change the language, and then they have to fit all the words back in there again. Literary translation is, “writing someone else’s book, but backwards and in high heels.” Translators are the ultimate communicators, and literary translation is fundamentally tied to the morally good, according to Daniel Hahn.

I thoroughly enjoyed the rhythm of his talk, the well-placed pauses and theatrics that made it a delightful experience. People around me looked actively engaged in what he was saying, and there were also a few well-timed jokes in the mix.

I found Daniel Hahn’s talk to be thoughtful, inspiring, and engaging. Kudos to the Portuguese Language Division for inviting him and many thanks to Daniel Hahn for the gift of his presentations.

## NOTES

1 Daniel Hahn, “We’ve Stopped Translating Children’s Books into English. Where Will We Get the Next *Tintin*?” (Nightlight: Children’s books and the adults who make them, *Slate*, August 18, 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/nextchildrens>)



# AFTER HOURS CAFÉ



The After Hours Café, an “open mic” reading event hosted every year by ATA’s Literary Division, took place at the conference hotel on Friday November 4, from 9 to 11 pm. During the first hour and a half, attendees read their English translations of literary works. The last half hour was for those who shared their translations into languages other than English.



# THREE SESSIONS ON LITERARY TRANSLATION LED BY PHILIP BOEHM, GERMAN LANGUAGE DIVISION GUEST SPEAKER

REVIEWED BY  
PAULA GORDON AND SHELLEY FAIRWEATHER-VEGA



**Philip Boehm**, a translator from German and Polish into English, has translated more than 30 novels and plays. Among his many accolades are two ATA Ungar German Translation Awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He is also a playwright and stage director and is the founding artistic director of Upstream Theater in St. Louis, Missouri.

Philip Boehm presented three times at ATA57: one Advanced Skills & Training (AST) session and two regular sessions. The title of the AST session, reviewed below by Shelley Fairweather-Vega, was “Finding the Voice in Literary Translation.” This would have been an appropriate title for either of the other sessions as well, “Bottom, Bless Thee! Thou Art Translated (Translating for the Stage)” and “*Die Fremde hier* (Preserving Foreignness in Translation),” reviewed by Paula Gordon.

## Finding the Voice in Literary Translation

Reviewed by Shelley Fairweather-Vega

I jumped at the chance to sign up for the Advanced Skills Training (AST) session “Finding the Voice in Literary Translation” with the award-winning translator, stage director, and playwright Philip Boehm. Three and a half hours of talking about the craft of literary translation, at a conference where we rarely get that luxury, was not an opportunity to be missed. I also saw it as a valuable chance to receive feedback on my own work from a fellow translator.

Registrants were asked to indicate a language pair and a genre of interest. Prior to the conference, Boehm selected a passage for each one of us. I received the prologue to a Russian murder mystery, as requested. Others received excerpts from novels and memoirs in German, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and probably other languages I’m forgetting. Translators from Finnish, Japanese, and Chinese picked their own source texts, which included excerpts from a war-time memoir, a stream-of-consciousness short story, and religious verses. About ten of us submitted our finished translations to Boehm before the conference, and he managed to read through and comment meticulously on every one of them in time for the workshop.

The format of the session was simple. Submitted translations were projected onto the screen alongside their respective source texts. Each translation was peppered with comments, and Boehm led us through them one translation at a time. He gave each translator a chance to answer his questions and respond to his feedback, and others were able to chime in with additional suggestions on every



Shelley Fairweather-Vega

**Shelley Fairweather-Vega** is a certified Russian to English and enthusiastic Uzbek to English translator. She translates for academics, authors, attorneys and activists from her home base in Seattle, Washington.

point. This could certainly have been a nerve-wracking experience, but Boehm set the perfect tone, one of calm inquiry rather than judgment or competition. It also helped that most of us had worked on completely different texts and that we were all asked to comment on work translated from languages we didn't read. These factors combined to help ensure that the feedback, from both the instructor and our peers, was specific and personal enough to be useful without feeling combative. (True, the three German translators who all received the same text to work on debated their different choices and approaches with passion, but even that discussion remained very civilized.)

Boehm was able to offer detailed evaluations of translation choices for the Romance and Slavic languages represented, as well as for German, but not for Finnish, Japanese and Chinese. For each text, whether he knew the source language or not, Boehm focused on how the translation read in English. He invited us to think of him as an editor evaluating or revising our work for a publisher, and reminded us that the art in the translation process resides in getting across the original meaning, imagery, and characterizations in *the best way possible in English*, with all the different types of transformations that might entail. For my excerpt, and for many others, that meant streamlining our writing in English to allow the action to move along rapidly. Other translators had to grapple with awkward metaphors or unusual syntax in the original, or with syntax so different from English as to be a distraction. Many of us had to work to capture a particular voice or style (a very old woman telling a story aloud, for one). For each issue, Boehm pointed out the problem he saw and a possible solution, and other participants offered suggestions as well. Could we leave out certain details or move them a few sentences forward or backward in the text? When was it right to define a culturally specific term, and in how much detail? When is an idiomatic phrase rendered into English just too foreign-sounding to use in translation?

Most translators are well aware of those questions, but we don't all ask them of ourselves, consistently, as we work. This workshop was a wonderful forum for revisiting those perennial issues, in a friendly setting, with gentle, expert guidance.

**Bottom, Bless Thee! Thou Art Translated (Translating for the Stage)**  
***Die Fremde hier (Preserving Foreignness in Translation)***

Reviewed by Paula Gordon



Paula Gordon

**Paula Gordon** translates from Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian into English. She translates drama, short stories, poetry, memoir and documentary/archival material. She also provides editing services for researchers and policy analysts working in public health, health economics and biotechnology.

Philip Boehm presented as the Guest Speaker of the German Language Division, but there were more than a few literary translators from other languages in attendance who, like me, were interested in translating dramatic works and who wanted to hear an accomplished translator talk about whether and when to leave words and phrases untranslated. The overarching message that I took away from both sessions is that capturing the voice of the characters is key.

In play translation, hearing the voice of each character is crucial, because the translation is a script meant to be spoken aloud. Often in theater, the dialog is all an actor has to go by to delve into a character's personality, motivation, backstory, and relationship with other characters. Even when there are stage directions for the actors, they are not available to the play-goers. Audiences have no omniscient narrator to describe how the characters are feeling or what motivates them. Your translated dialog and the actor's delivery of those lines must carry the plot. And that dialog must be speakable. Boehm warned against "literariness"—the dialog must sound like speech and not like written words on a page. He said, "Lines must ring true in the context of the play and in the ears of the audience."

Boehm described the written play as “potential,” a “score for performance.” Because of course, the translation on the page is not the final product—the staged performance is. I asked what approach he recommended when translating a play without having a particular theater company in mind, not even knowing whether the play is destined for a stage in the United States or the United Kingdom or Australia. Should the translator avoid country-specific language or slang that would set it too firmly in a precise place? No, he said, finish the translation for your locality, be as specific as is called for by the text. Then when you shop it around, indicate that you are willing to work with the company to adapt it to their setting or for their audience.

Boehm described finding a character’s voice as a process of impersonation. You have to inhabit each character, understand where they come from and how they talk in their native language, and then find that equivalent in English.

Other tidbits from the first session:

- You get more credit for an adaptation than for a translation (an adaptation might change the setting of the play, for instance, or update the time period).
- The pay isn’t great. (I bet most of us did not need to attend the ATA conference to find that out!)
- Royalties for play translation are linked to the author’s royalty agreement (for instance, a percentage of ticket-based revenue).
- Not many theaters commission translations (see “The pay isn’t great,” above).
- If you are interested in play translation, contact local theaters and stay abreast of what’s playing nationally and which theaters are open to translations and adaptations.



Boehm began the second session with a reading from his translation of letters written by Franz Kafka to his Czech translator, Milena Jesenská (*Letters to Milena*, New York: Schocken Books, 2015). In fact, it was more of a performance than a reading. My impression was that Boehm had fully internalized the voice of Kafka when translating his letters.

The letters were all written in 1920. Kafka wrote from a sanatorium in Italy near the Austrian border; Jesenská was at that time living in Vienna with her husband. Despite being one-sided, the letters tell a story of Kafka's relationship with Jesenská and reveal his personality and frame of mind at the time. Boehm told us that, for the most part, Jesenská wrote to Kafka in Czech and he wrote to her in German. (A detail I appreciated, because that is how I communicate with "my" authors—they write to me in their native language and I respond in English.)

Boehm's translation demonstrated his use of foreign words as a strategy to preserve the foreign flavor of the original. Boehm retained *Frau* in the opening greeting of the letters, "Dear Frau Milena." English translators of languages that use second person plural in formal address to an individual often face the problem of how to indicate formal or polite address in the English translation. Boehm explained that he kept *Frau* precisely to impart that formality, suggesting that retaining titles in the original language is a good strategy. To imbue the text with a sense of place and historicity, he retained the original place names.

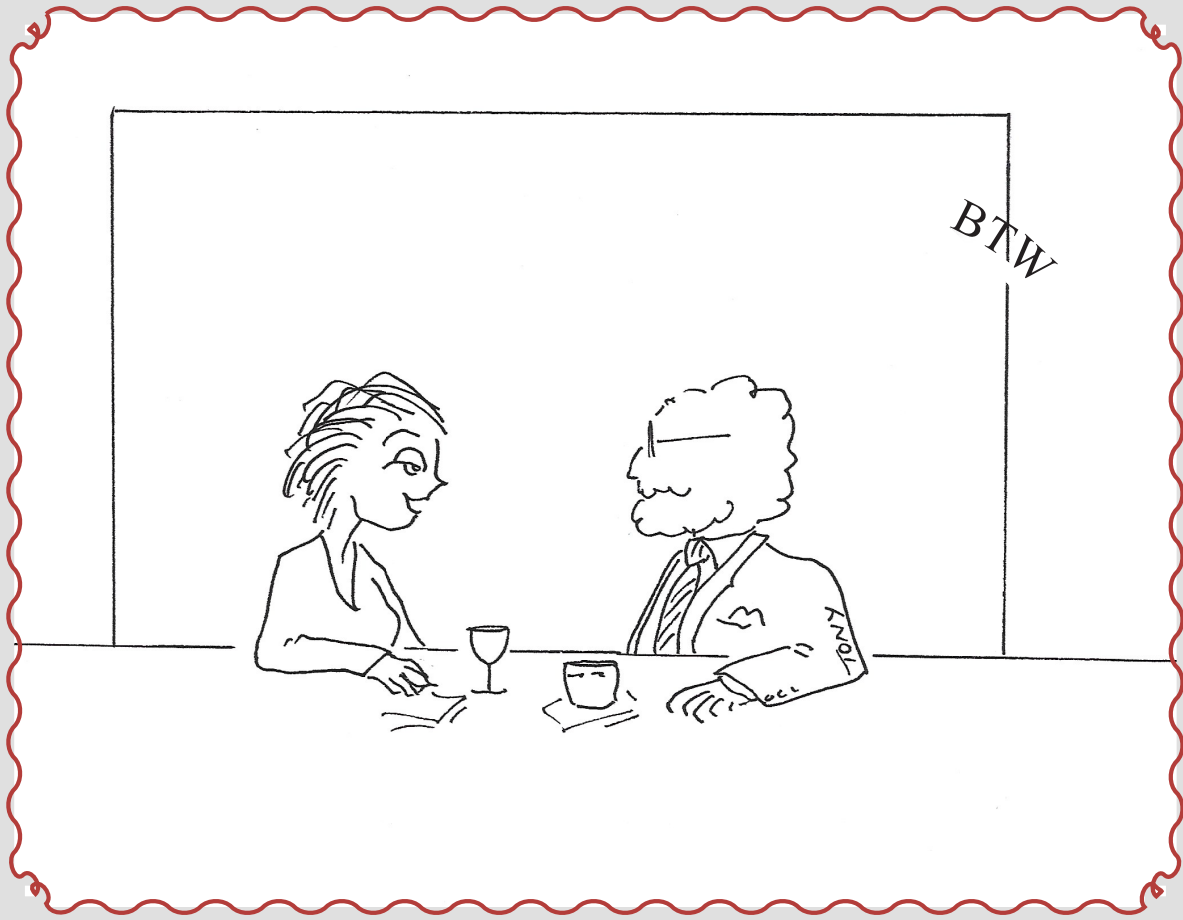
Another dilemma translators face is how to treat text not in the primary source language, for instance, if one character overhears a conversation in a "foreign language" or uses foreign phrases in speech. Boehm said that he retains the third language; he left French expressions in the translated letters. He also left individual words in German when he felt those words "added a flavor that would be impossible to translate." He told us he did not feel the need to make or adhere to strict rules about this. In the case of novels or memoir, if there

is a concern that not all readers will understand the foreign words, then footnotes or endnotes giving the translations or context can be included; in *Letters to Milena*, he provided translations of foreign expressions in an appendix. (My notes—or lack of them—indicate he did not tell us what he would do in a play.)

In both presentations, Boehm discussed examples from other works he has translated and answered questions from attendees. Only in writing this review did I notice that his presentation abstracts promised audience participation, but there was no time in either session for that. His manner was confident and collegial; he was well prepared and comfortable reading and speaking in front of a room full of translators (not surprising given his theater background). Based on these sessions, I am looking forward to reading his work and will gladly attend future presentations.

### Resources and Further Reading

- Philip Boehm, short translator profile: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/philip-boehm>
- Upstream Theater: <http://upstreamtheater.org/>
- *Letters to Milena* Amazon page: <http://tinyurl.com/Letterstomilena>



*"The medical marijuana conference starts tomorrow. There's a disorientation session somewhere at 11 a.m., more or less."*

# BOB DYLAN'S NOBEL PRIZE

BY TONY BECKWITH



**Tony Beckwith**, a writer, translator, interpreter, poet, and cartoonist, is a regular contributor to Source.

*I would not leave anything to a man of action  
as he would be tempted to give up work;  
on the other hand, I would like to help dreamers  
as they find it difficult to get on in life.*  
Alfred Nobel

**Alfred Bernhard Nobel** (1833–1896) was a Swedish chemist, engineer, inventor, businessman, and philanthropist. When he died in Sanremo, Italy, in 1896 his last will and testament revealed that he had left the bulk of his fortune to the establishment of the Nobel Prize, a decision inspired by a simple twist of fate. A few years earlier, following the death of his brother, Ludvig, Alfred's obituary was accidentally published in a French newspaper instead of Ludvig's. The newspaper called him "The Merchant of Death" for

having invented dynamite (in 1867). That characterization upset Nobel and prompted him to ponder his legacy.

Alfred Nobel was very wealthy and was also something of a Renaissance man, with a broad range of interests. Despite his lack of formal education, he learned to communicate fluently or at least comfortably in French, Russian, English, German, and Italian. His library housed an eclectic selection of literature in several languages, and he turned to writing fiction in his later years. After reflecting on the newspaper's negative description, he decided he would sponsor a way to honor those who "have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind." He created five prizes, to be awarded annually to men and women from all over the world, for outstanding achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and the quest for peace.

The project was launched in 1901, when Sully Prudhomme<sup>1</sup> (1839–1907), the French poet and essayist, became the first person to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature "in special recognition of his poetic composition, which gives evidence of lofty idealism, artistic perfection, and a rare combination of the qualities of both heart and intellect." The Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded in five categories: drama, history, philosophy/essay writing, poetry, and prose. An unhurried scroll through the list of recipients generates an emotional roller-coaster of memories<sup>2</sup>. The Literature Prize has so far been awarded 109 times to 113 Nobel Laureates<sup>3</sup> (four prizes were shared), 14 of whom were women. Prudhomme was the first of the 33 poets who have, to date, been awarded the prize. Most of those Laureates wrote or write in English (28), followed by French (14), German (13), and Spanish (11).

Under the terms of Alfred Nobel's will the Literature Prize was intended for the person who, according to the Swedish Academy, had produced "the most outstanding work in an ideal direction" (*i idealisk riktning* in Swedish). The Academy's statutes defined literature as "not only belles-lettres, but also other writings which, by virtue of their form and style, possess literary value." There is an unsatisfactory vagueness in the terminology (an ideal direction? literary value?) that has led to a constant struggle to interpret an imprecisely worded will and to reflect the Academy's evolving sensibility.



Space will not permit an exhaustive review of the changing interpretations of terms such as “an ideal direction” over the course of the Prize’s lifespan. Suffice it to say that standards and criteria have fluctuated as they do in any field or institution, given sufficient time. Evolving aesthetic tastes, greater international communication, wars, social advances, and political trends have all influenced opinions one way or another, leaving behind a rich catalogue of the world’s literature. Former Academy Secretary Lars Gyllensten pointed out that, in his day, the term was “not taken too literally. It is realized that on the whole the serious literature that is worthy of a prize furthers knowledge of man and his condition and endeavors to enrich and improve his life.” The Nobel Prize is, ultimately, not given to an attitude towards life, a set of cultural roots, or the substance of a commitment; it is awarded to honor the unique artistic power by which the human experience has been shaped into literature.

But, what is literature? The Nobel Foundation’s definition is mentioned above. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* has several definitions of the word, such as: “knowledge of books: literary culture.” Others include “writings in prose or verse, especially writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest,” and “the aggregate of musical compositions, specifically compositions of regional or historic significance, or for any particular instrument or group of instruments.” Most people seem to agree that, very broadly, literature means something written, fictional or not, that transports readers out of themselves to a different experience or understanding.

To get a better idea of the Swedish Academy’s perspective, it is interesting to read the citations that have accompanied the award. Here is a sampling:

*For his work which, rich in ideas and filled with the spirit of freedom and the quest for truth, has exerted a far-reaching influence on our age* (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1964).

*For the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work (Saul Bellow, 1976).*

*For her novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import that give life to an essential aspect of American reality (Toni Morrison, 1993).*

*For poetry that, with ironic precision, allows the historical and biological context to come to light in fragments of human reality (Wisława Szymborska, 1996).*

To this list we must now add the citation for the winner of the 2016 Prize: “For having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition” — Bob Dylan<sup>4</sup>.

Which brings us back to the question, what is literature? And more specifically, what sort of literature deserves to win what is arguably the most prestigious literary award in the world? Both these questions, it would seem, led many to scratch their heads and ask: “Really? Bob Dylan?”

I should state right away that, though I no longer listen to his music as I once did, I have been a fan of Dylan’s work for decades, and have often predicted that he will be remembered as one of the greatest poets of my generation. Leonard Cohen (1934–2016), who died just the other day, is surely another contender, but I don’t think his influence has been as universal as Dylan’s. Some might wonder if a so-called “singer-songwriter” can be considered a poet, but I think a look at Dylan’s lyrics will convince even the most skeptical critic that they are poetry, set to music. Whether one likes this particular poetry is another question altogether, but it is one that applies to every other poet, even those 33 who share the distinction of being Nobel Laureates. Every reader’s reaction to poetry, and literature in general, is entirely subjective. How could it be otherwise, when the criteria involved are so vague?

Another factor that probably had something to do with the aforementioned head-scratching is that, generally speaking, there are “book people” and there are “music people.” Sometimes they overlap, sometimes they don’t. The gap is at its widest when the music in question is what we call “popular music” as opposed to what we call “classical music.” While pondering this phenomenon I remembered that my local classical FM radio station is often at pains to “remind listeners

that all music was once new.” The same could be said of “classical” poetry and prose; how many works, and writers, were once rejected by the Swedish Academy on the grounds that they did not “further man’s knowledge and condition or enrich and improve his life,” only to be welcomed with open arms (and prizes) some years later when tastes had changed and taboos had softened or shifted? Anatole France and George Bernard Shaw, for example, were both passed over in the early years of the twentieth century, but became Nobel Laureates in 1921 and 1925, respectively. In every age we have had “serious literature” and “popular literature,” but over time some works and authors have migrated from one category to another.

I would also venture to say that perhaps some of us are so set in our views about what constitutes literature that we can sometimes be blind to the literary qualities of what we might dismiss as works of lesser value. I have fallen into that trap myself, and feel slightly embarrassed whenever I think of my short-sightedness on occasion. So, in considering Dylan’s work, I return to the definitions stated above and ask myself whether it transports me out of myself to a different experience or understanding. The answer is a resounding *Yes!* Here are a few examples.

During a dark, sad time in my life I was moved, and comforted, by these lines:

‘Twas in another lifetime  
One of toil and blood  
When blackness was a virtue  
The road was full of mud  
I came in from the wilderness  
A creature void of form  
Come in she said I’ll give ya  
Shelter from the storm<sup>5</sup>

Dylan explained that “When you got nothing, you got nothing to lose” and asked:

How does it feel  
To be on your own  
With no direction home  
Like a complete unknown,  
Like a rolling stone?<sup>6</sup>

When immersed in frustration and despair, these lines have lifted me up and introduced me to a broader perspective:

How many years can some people exist  
Before they're allowed to be free?  
How many times can a man turn his head  
And pretend that he just doesn't see?  
The answer my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes, saying it simply says it best and, in so doing, gets it off your chest:

Broken bottles, broken plates,  
broken switches, broken gates  
Broken dishes, broken parts,  
streets are filled with broken hearts  
Broken words never meant to be spoken  
Everything is broken<sup>8</sup>

Taking the high road is usually the best course, but sometimes I've needed someone to remind me to do so:

I ain't saying you treated me unkind  
You could have done better but I don't mind  
You just kinda wasted my precious time  
But don't think twice, it's all right<sup>9</sup>

Dylan seemed to understand the plight of those who feel invisible:

Why wait any longer for the world to begin?  
You can have your cake and eat it too.

Why wait any longer for the one you love  
When he's standing in front of you?<sup>10</sup>

Being uprooted and displaced can be hard physically, mentally, and emotionally. It's soothing to hear about getting to the end of the line:

Throw my ticket out the window  
Throw my suitcase out there too  
Throw my troubles out the door  
I don't need them anymore  
Cause tonight I'll be staying here with you<sup>11</sup>

And of course, what became an anthem of the 1960s and is still relevant today:

Come gather 'round people  
Wherever you roam  
And admit that the waters  
Around you have grown  
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone  
If your time to you is worth saving  
Then you better start swimming or you'll sink like a stone  
For the times they are a-changing<sup>12</sup>

These are just a few samples of Dylan's songs; it is not possible to convey here the full range and power of the works that have "created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition." He has written hundreds more, and is still writing and performing. He has won Grammys, an Academy Award, a Golden Globe, and a Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor the United States has to offer. As far back as 1963, TIME magazine noted that "he has something unique to say, and he says it in songs of his own invention that are the best songs of their style." His roots run deep in the American folk, country, and blues traditions. As a young man he was influenced by Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and the Beat Generation. He rose to fame as part of the protest movement of the early 1960s, singing deceptively



simple songs that were provocative dissertations on the social and political problems of the day. But he has always gone his own way and, by his own admission, is no mainstream artist. In 1972 the critic Ralph Gleason called Dylan “the first American poet to touch everyone, to hit all walks of life in this great sprawling society.”

His lyrics stand on their own but they are composed as songs and are more moving when we hear him sing them, despite the fact that, in my opinion, his voice is not his strongest suit. Often written in the register of the man in the street, some are raw expressions of cynical contempt (“All the money you make will never buy back your soul”), bitter acknowledgements of life’s conflicts (“You’re right from your side, I’m right from mine”), and sage advice from a world-weary wanderer (“Every pleasure’s got an edge of pain, pay for your ticket and don’t complain”). Others are poignant ballads to love lost (“She was born in spring, but I was born too late, blame it on a simple twist of fate”) and love found (“If not for you, winter wouldn’t hold no spring, couldn’t hear a robin sing, I just wouldn’t have a clue, if not for you”). There is a wry wisdom in many of his songs that set them apart from what we tend to define as popular music: “You don’t need a weatherman to tell you which way the wind blows.” But the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature was not awarded on the strength of his words alone. What the Academy said of Sartre could just as well apply to Dylan; his work, “rich in ideas and filled with the spirit of freedom and the quest for truth, has exerted a far-reaching influence on our age.”

## NOTES

1 Sully Prudhomme was the pen-name of René François Armand Prudhomme.

2 See: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/index.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/index.html)

3 The word “Laureate” is a reference to the laurel wreath, a crown made of bay laurel leaves and branches. In Ancient Greece laurel wreaths were awarded to victors as a sign of honor, in athletic competitions and poetic events.

4 Born Robert Allen Zimmerman in 1941

5 “Shelter From the Storm” 1975

6 “A Rolling Stone” 1965

7 “Blowin’ in the Wind” 1963

8 “Everything is Broken” 1989

9 “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right” 1963

10 “Lay, Lady, Lay” 1969

11 “Tonight I’ll Be Staying Here With You” 1969

12 “The Times They Are A-Changing” 1964



Bob Dylan in Barcelona, Spain, 1984

# CREDITS

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Photo of Bob Dylan

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