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# Elevating the Translator: Next Steps in Promoting International Literature

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# **Elevating the Translator: Next Steps in Promoting International Literature**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Writing: Book Publishing

Olenka Burgess | May 10, 2016

Research question: Drawing on increasing media coverage of translated literature and the successful reception of recent titles by Clarice Lispector, Valeria Luiselli, and Elena Ferrante, how can publishers elevate the historically invisible role of the translator to expand the audience for trade fiction in translation?

Enthusiastic readers both inside and outside the publishing industry have lamented the paucity of international literature<sup>1</sup> translated into English. Despite the widely held belief that translated literature doesn't sell, small presses and literary organizations have emerged over the past decade to take the lead in advocating for more translated literature and more recognition for those who, despite the near-impossibility of making a living from their craft alone, continue to spill unfathomable hours into the pursuit of literary translation. In response to this advocacy, media coverage of translated literature has grown considerably, and it is increasingly common to see translations on lists of notable books; but the audience is still small, and publishers of translation are often forced seek additional funding from grants, embassies, and private donors to make their endeavor viable. For international literature to thrive instead of tenuously survive, publishers must explore new means of drawing together and building an audience for translation. Drawing on media coverage and industry panels over the past five years as well as the recent success of translated titles by Clarice Lispector, Valeria Luiselli, and Elena Ferrante, this paper will investigate the emerging visibility of translators and identify opportunities to harness and elevate that visibility in developing a readership for translated literature.

## **Promoting Translations: The Latin American Boom as Precedent**

The push behind publishing translations is by no means a new phenomenon. Leaving aside the Bible and the classics of the Western canon, the Latin American Boom of the mid-twentieth century set a

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, I use the terms "international literature" and "translated literature" interchangeably.

precedent for the promotion of international literature. Then as now, publishers were hesitant to risk the additional cost of translation to promote unfamiliar works to an audience not particularly clamoring for international literature; as Deborah Cohn writes in her study of the Latin American Boom, the job of publishers was “as much about creating an audience as it was about publishing books.”<sup>2</sup> Literary and cultural organizations helped facilitate audience development. The Literature Department of the Center for Inter-American Relations (CIAR) contributed funding to publishers to offset the cost of translation, organized literary conferences and author lecture tours, and published a journal to build awareness of new Latin American literature.<sup>3</sup> CIAR sponsored a number of high-profile works, including *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which became a *New York Times* bestseller, garnering the attention of a broad audience and encouraging commercial presses to publish a wave of Latin American authors.<sup>4</sup> Activities of the CIAR coincided with the growth of the Columbia University’s translation center, which sponsored lectures and readings and launched the journal *Translation* in 1973, and the University of Iowa’s International Writers’ Workshop, founded in 1967.<sup>5</sup> A number of translation-related awards emerged during that time as well: the PEN Translation Prize originated in 1963,<sup>6</sup> and in 1967, the National Book Award introduced a Translation category.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these initiatives, bestselling translations were the exception. Alfred A. Knopf, a major publisher of Boom writers, acknowledged that most of his Latin American books lost money and were “prestige items” more than commercial endeavors.<sup>8</sup> Not all publishers were willing to undertake the same risk, and translations became less attractive with the increasing conglomeration and profit-driven nature of commercial publishing houses. Still, the momentum of academic translation programs and translated literature awards helped fuel a growing discontent with the number of translations published

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah Cohn, *The Latin American Literary Boom and U.S. Nationalism During the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 11-17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-175.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 107, 110.

<sup>6</sup> From the PEN website, <https://pen.org/pen-translation-prize-winners>.

<sup>7</sup> The translation prize was eliminated in 1980. Information from the National Book Award history and awards pages, [http://www.nationalbook.org/aboutus\\_history.html](http://www.nationalbook.org/aboutus_history.html).

<sup>8</sup> Cohn, *Latin American Literary Boom*, 111.

in the United States compared to the rest of the world. Whereas in many European countries, between 20 to 50 percent or more of all books published are in translation, in the United States that number is closer to 3 percent.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Three Percent Problem: Causes and Responses**

The now infamous (and imprecise) 3 percent statistic represents a proportion of all books published in the United States—fiction, nonfiction, cookbooks, education, technology, and so on, as well as retranslations of previously published work—so new fiction in translation is actually an even smaller percentage of the publishing landscape.<sup>10</sup> In 2008, Chad Post, publisher of Open Letter Books and the *Three Percent Problem* blog and podcast, began tracking annual releases of translated literature, excluding retranslations and breaking figures down by language, publisher, release date, and genre (fiction or poetry).<sup>11</sup> From 2008 to 2015, the numbers have climbed steadily, if modestly: in 2008, 143 publishers released a total of 361 translated titles (278 fiction, 82 poetry) from forty-six languages; in 2015, 160 publishers released a total of 569 titles (478 fiction, 91 poetry) from fifty languages.

Growth notwithstanding, translated literature represents an infinitesimal proportion of books in the United States. The obstacles to publishing translations are manifold. The profit margin for literary fiction is notoriously small, and the publisher of a translation faces the additional expense of a translator's fee, as well as a host of possible marketing and publicity complications: authors who are unknown to Americans, unable to speak English, or unable to travel; reviewers who may be reluctant to address translations; and readers who might be hesitant to pick up a work by an unfamiliar name. Because of the difficulty of identifying and reaching an interested audience for translated literature, publishers are often reluctant to allot much of what remains of their budget to marketing and publicity,

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<sup>9</sup> Literature Across Frontiers, *Publishing Literature in Europe: A Survey of Publishers*, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Publishing-Translations-in-Europe-a-survey-of-publishers-2012.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Esther Allen, ed., *To Be Translated or Not To Be: PEN/IRL Report on the International Situation of Literary Translation*, 24-25, accessed May 10, 2016, [http://www.pen-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Translation-report\\_OK-2.pdf](http://www.pen-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Translation-report_OK-2.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Excel spreadsheets available at the *Three Percent* blog, <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepencent/index.php?s=database>

thus encouraging a self-fulfilling prophesy whereby nobody ever hears about the book and it falls into further obscurity.

Despite the perception that translations don't sell, the disparity between the amount of translated literature published in the United States and the amount published by other countries has ignited a collective call to action across the literary community. Harkening back to the Latin American Boom, cultural initiatives, literary organizations, and award programs have all been influential in raising awareness of the three percent problem and gathering support for translation. In addition, publishers, reviewers, and translators themselves have begun actively campaigning to increase the appreciation of international literature. This collective advocacy has facilitated an evolving dialogue around the importance of international literature, the work that a translator does, and the need to rethink the publishing infrastructure that inadequately supports them.

The American Literary Translator's Association (ALTA) conducts an annual conference with panels on furthering the craft and demystifying the publication process, readings and networking opportunities, and an inclusive, supportive community. They offer several awards, including a fellowship to help emerging translators attend the conference and a mentorship program that pairs an emerging translator with an experienced one on a yearlong project.<sup>12</sup>

A similar organization is the PEN American Center, which in addition to award and grant programs provides the "Model Contract for Literary Translations" as a starting point for translator-publisher negotiations. Though many translators agree that publishers are unlikely to meet the terms of this contract in full, the guidelines for industry best practices serves as a springboard for standardization and improvement. The contract includes such stipulations as an unspecified<sup>13</sup> royalty on hardcover, paperback, and electronic books as well as a percentage of subsidiary rights in addition to the initial translation fee; the translator's name on the cover in the same font as the author's and no smaller than 60 percent of the type size; and a reversion of rights clause if a work goes out of print or if rights to the

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<sup>12</sup> "ALTA Emerging Translator Mentorships," accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.literarytranslators.org/awards>.

<sup>13</sup> Translator Lisa Carter notes that there is no standard translator's royalty, but 1 to 3 percent can usually be won. From her *Intralingo* blog post, "10 Truths on Royalties and Literary Translation," accessed May 10, 2010, <http://intralingo.com/10-truths-on-royalties-and-literary-translation>.

original work return to the author for any reason.<sup>14</sup> PEN also sponsors the annual World Voices Festival of International Literature, a weeklong series of literary events highlighting a different theme or region each year. The organization also makes media from the festival available on their website.

Though on a smaller scale, the annual publishing industry conferences Book Expo America and the Association of Writers and Publishers (AWP) have hosted numerous panels on international literature and translation—in 2016, AWP featured thirty-nine translation-related panels and readings.<sup>15</sup> As for publishers themselves, while notable independents and imprints like New Directions and Farrar, Straus & Giroux have championed international literature for decades, the past decade has seen a proliferation of translation-specific presses: Open Letter, Deep Vellum, and Archipelago among the most prominent.

Digital magazines also provide wide-reaching exposure for international literature; *Words Without Borders*, which features excerpts of as-yet-unpublished literature centered on a different country or theme with each issue, is a thriving hub for readers, translators, and publishers alike. In addition to their excerpts, they publish reviews and opinion pieces, and they recently embarked on a pilot program to develop lesson plans for integrating international literature into school curricula.

A controversial newcomer to the international literature scene is none other than Amazon, which launched Amazon Crossing in 2010 in response to a perceived hole in the literary market. They are now one of the largest translation publishers and recently invested \$10 million into the program.<sup>16</sup> Naturally, Amazon's angle is more genre-focused than the small translation presses, but books of a more literary bent have found success there as well—Bae Suah's *Nowhere to be Found* (translated from the Korean by Sora Kim-Russell) was longlisted for the 2016 PEN Translation Prize and the 2016 Best

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<sup>14</sup> "A Model Contract for Literary Translations," updated January 1, 2016, <https://pen.org/model-contract-literary-translations>.

<sup>15</sup> "Translation Events at AWP 2016," ALTA blog, February 2, 2016, <https://literarytranslators.wordpress.com/2016/02/02/translation-events-at-awp-2016>.

<sup>16</sup> "AmazonCrossing Announces \$10 Million Commitment to Translating Books into English," Business Wire, October 15, 2015, <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20151013005456/en>.

Translated Book Award, and Open Letter Books has acquired another of her novels.<sup>17</sup> Incidentally, Amazon also underwrites the Best Translated Book Award as part of their Literary Partnership program.<sup>18</sup>

Translators and readers have initiated campaigns to draw attention to translation through social media. Hashtags #namethetranslator, started in 2014 by a group of translators as the Twitter account Translated World; #womenintranslation and #WITmonth, started by blogger Meytal Radzinski in 2014, and #translationthurs, started by book blogger Stu J Allen in 2010 have emerged as a means of bringing awareness to international literature and the underappreciated individuals who make it possible. Granted, the people most frequently using and being exposed to these hashtags are probably the ones least in need of them, but the tags live on, and their ongoing use suggests an unflagging energy behind the ideals they represent.

### **Media Coverage of Translations and Translators**

It is impossible to say what came first—were globally minded readers at the helm of the translation push? Underappreciated translators? Mournful academics? Guilty publishers? Perhaps all these forces are working in tandem, but a cultural shift has taken place, and the media have taken notice. The *New York Times*' "100 Notable Books of 2015" list includes thirteen translations. Compare that to nine in 2014, three in 2013, four in 2012, five in 2011, four in 2010, two in 2009, three in 2008—that's an average of 3.5 percent for the years 2008-2013, closely mirroring the infamous statistic. It appears initially as though no translations were recognized for 2002 through 2005, but upon closer inspection, the few translations that did make the list neglected to mention the translator or even that they had been translated at all. Of course, extrapolating a renaissance from these lists would be inaccurate; even among them, 2007 is an outlier with eight translations on the list, and though many of the original reviews for the listed books don't mention that the books were translated or don't name the translator, one review

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<sup>17</sup> Chad Post, "Four Books from Underrepresented Countries [My Year in Lists], Three Percent blog, December 17, 2015, <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/index.php?id=16382>.

<sup>18</sup> "Amazon Literary Partnership: Helping Writers Tell Their Stories and Find Their Readers," accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.amazon.com/p/feature/mjj6teohnwoppgw>.

(for Zbigniew Herbert's *Collected Poems, 1956-1998*, translated by Alissa Valles) discussed the translation in depth, critically engaging with a contemporaneous article from *Poetry* magazine that compared the translations in the newly released anthology to various previously translated versions.<sup>19</sup>

Aside from book reviews and books-of-the-year lists, media coverage of translators themselves has increased. The *Wall Street Journal* recently published a profile of six prominent literary translators, and the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *New Yorker* have all featured interviews with translators. With the much-bemoaned decline in book reviews in major media outlets, smaller literary review sites and online cultural magazines have risen to greater prominence—they too contribute to the flourishing dialogue around translators. *Book Riot*, the *Millions*, the *Rumpus*, *Literary Hub*, the *Brooklyn Quarterly*, *Guernica*, and *Bomb* magazine are among the notable publications that have featured interviews with and features written by translators.

The way international literature is treated in the media is perhaps the most prominent target of translation advocacy. In addition to the #namethetranslator campaign, considerable efforts have been directed toward encouraging a more robust model for reviewing translations as such. *Words Without Borders* published several articles on how to thoughtfully review a translation without knowing the source language of the original, and the site *Reading in Translation* features reviews of translations by translators.

Not all of these informed reviews are necessarily favorable to the translator. Tim Parks wrote a series of three articles for the *New York Review of Books* after a reader scolded the publication for neglecting to mention a translator in a review. Parks focuses on the 2015 release of *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, edited by Ann Goldstein and comprising the fruits of ten translators' labor.<sup>20</sup> He offers an illuminating close comparison of the new translations against previous versions, sometimes even offering his own translation to address the criticisms he raises. He argues that appreciation of translators only extends to works highly regarded in the original, citing that the widest acclaim for the *Complete*

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<sup>19</sup> David Orr, "Translating Zbigniew Herbert," NYTimes.com, July 29, 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/books/review/Orr-t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/books/review/Orr-t.html?_r=0).

<sup>20</sup> Tim Parks, "The Translation Paradox," NYR Daily, March 15, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/03/15/translation-paradox-quality-vs-celebrity>.



*Works* refer to the three most lauded pieces, which he considers to be the weakest translations of the collection, and barely any coverage for the lesser-known works that, in Parks's estimation, more faithfully and lucidly capture the nuances of Levi's Italian.

Parks concludes his series by emphatically claiming that translators' demand for royalties is absurd: "Some translators' associations ... insist that a translator ought to be paid a royalty for the translation and share in the commercial success of the work, as if the individual translator had the same impact on the work as the author. This is nonsense." He argues that the general reading public can't tell a good translation from a bad one—that plenty of poorly translated books sell well, and it would be unfair for those translators to profit more than those who translate difficult, underappreciated literary works. "To introduce royalties would be to encourage the finest translators to drop literary work altogether and concentrate on genre novels," he writes.

Parks's assessment is problematic in several ways. First, the royalty requested by translators is a fraction of the typical author royalty, so it is an exaggeration to assert that requesting a royalty is analogous to translators impudently equating their work to that of the original author. Furthermore, this way of thinking overlooks the fact that a translator has a considerable impact on a work, for without a translator's labor the work would not exist in English at all. Second, it is an overstatement to say that translators could potentially get rich from royalties; with the average book selling less than one thousand copies,<sup>21</sup> it is far more likely that sales of a translated novel would never earn back the translator's initial fee. Even if it were true that a translator could get rich on royalties, assuming that all translators would abandon literary pursuits for pulp fiction is no different than assuming American authors would do the same; yet literary fiction continues to be written.

As a translator himself, Parks's position is baffling and comes across as strangely embittered; to argue that if royalties would allow a mediocre translator to profit, no translator should profit at all does an immense disservice to translations and translators at a time when their status is optimistically in flux.

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<sup>21</sup> Chris Andersen, "A Bookselling Tail: Why Publishers Should Focus on the Misses Instead of the Hits," *Publishers Weekly*, July 14, 2006, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/columns-and-blogs/soapbox/article/6153-a-bookselling-tail.html>

Still, following the logic of the industry maxim “there are no bad reviews,” Parks’s detailed contribution ultimately serves the larger goal of enriching public awareness of translated literature and enhancing the visibility of translators.

### **Visible Translators: Manifestations and Missed Opportunities**

To explore some concrete examples of the visibility of translators, I focused on three translations from the past year that have enjoyed considerable media coverage: *The Story of the Lost Child* by Elena Ferrante, translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein; *The Story of My Teeth* by Valeria Luiselli, translated from the Spanish by Christina MacSweeney; and *The Complete Stories* by Clarice Lispector, edited by Benjamin Moser and translated from the Portuguese by Katrina Dodson. All three of these books were included in the *New York Times* “100 Notable Books of 2015” and shortlisted for the 2016 Best Translated Book Award. *The Story of the Lost Child* was also shortlisted for the 2016 Man Booker International Prize, *The Story of My Teeth* won the 2016 L.A. Times Book Award for fiction, and Katrina Dodson won the 2016 PEN Translation Prize for *Complete Stories*. For each example, I will briefly outline the history of the project and look at the translator’s role in producing or publicizing the work. Afterward, I will identify missed opportunities for augmenting the translators’ visibility.

#### *Ann Goldstein: The Unwitting Proxy*

Ann Goldstein’s translation of *The Story of the Lost Child* is the final installment in a tetralogy collectively known as the Neapolitan Novels. This final installment and the first three novels—*My Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of a New Name*, and *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*—were all *New York Times* bestsellers and have inspired a passionate readership as well as the hashtag #ferrantefever.

Part of the fever surrounding Ferrante has to do with her unknown identity: Elena Ferrante is a pseudonym, and the author behind it has chosen to remain anonymous and abstain from public

appearances.<sup>22</sup> Ann Goldstein has thus stepped into the role of spokeswoman for the author, appearing on her behalf and interviewing in her place—an arrangement unique in its particulars but analogous to situations in which an author is no longer alive or is unable or unwilling to travel for public appearances.

Goldstein began translating late in her career and without formal training, though her work as an editor and copy chief for the *New Yorker* prepared her for the detailed linguistic analysis necessary for the endeavor.<sup>23</sup> After trying her hand at translating a story that went on to be published in the *New Yorker*, Goldstein was invited by Europa Editions, the American sister press of Italy's Edizioni E/O, to submit a translation sample for their first publication: Ferrante's *The Days of Abandonment*.<sup>24</sup> The Neapolitan novels followed shortly thereafter and led to an acceleration of speaking engagements and appearances to promote the book on behalf of the author. In an interview, Goldstein recounted the overwhelming reception of *The Story of the Lost Child*: "Last year I did a few events, but not to this extent. I mean, it's just been wild. . . . I've also been interviewed, which I never was before, except on obscure Italian websites. When this was beginning, I thought, this is a great moment for translators. To have the translator be a figure in the book's presentation seems like a big thing, especially for a book that's really popular."<sup>25</sup>

Along with *The Story of the Lost Child* came the release of *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, for which she translated three pieces and served as project editor. The editor-in-chief of Liveright who hired her says that "her name on a book now is gold,"<sup>26</sup> and indeed on the cover it appears in a larger size than that of Nobel-winning Toni Morrison, who wrote the introduction—this presumably has more to do with the scope of editing three thousand pages and ten editors' work, but nonetheless implies that Ann Goldstein is a valuable name. Goldstein's visibility as a proxy for Ferrante, coupled with her experience

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<sup>22</sup> Elena Ferrante, interviewed by Sandro and Sandra Ferri, "Elena Ferrante, Art of Fiction No. 228," *Paris Review*, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6370/art-of-fiction-no-228-elena-ferrante>.

<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Maloney, "Ann Goldstein: A Star Italian Translator," *Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/ann-goldstein-a-star-italian-translator-1453310727?mg=id-wsj>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Ann Goldstein, interviewed by Katrina Dodson, "The Face of Ferrante," *Guernica*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/the-face-of-ferrante>.

<sup>26</sup> Maloney, "Ann Goldstein: A Star Italian Translator."

at the *New Yorker* and blossoming oeuvre of high-profile translations, has led to her participation on industry panels and as a judge for the 2014 PEN Translation Prize.<sup>27</sup> After one of Goldstein's readings, the booksellers asked her to autograph their stock—the idea that readers would be interested in a translator's signature surprised her, but she has embraced her role as both humble spokesperson for Ferrante and devoted advocate for literature in translation.<sup>28</sup>

### *Christina MacSweeney: The Inadvertent Collaborator*

Christina MacSweeney first encountered Valeria Luiselli's work at Granta Books. MacSweeney was asked to produce a reader's report on Luiselli's first novel—she loved it, offered to do a sample translation, and has been working closely with the author ever since.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps because MacSweeney is based in the United Kingdom, and because Luiselli is fluent in English and able to make public appearances in the United States, she seems not to have been closely involved with the promotion of the book. However, she was deeply involved in its creation—Luiselli embraces the process of being translated, and prefers to think of translations as versions to the extent that she adopted some of MacSweeney's feedback and invited her to devise an additional chapter for the book.<sup>30</sup> In the afterword to *Story of my Teeth*, Luiselli writes that MacSweeney's contribution “both destabilizes the obsolete dictum of the translator's invisibility and suggests a new way of engaging with translation.”<sup>31</sup>

Although MacSweeney is not widely visible in the media, the traces of her are intriguing. She contributed an excerpt of *Sidewalks*, Luiselli's essay collection, to the *Creative Literary Studio* blog. The excerpt featured translation notes built into the document as comments.<sup>32</sup> The sample thus serves not only to promote the book but also to generate conversation around the art of translation and the

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<sup>27</sup> “2014 PEN Translation Prize,” accessed May 10, 2016, <https://pen.org/literature/2014-pen-translation-prize>.

<sup>28</sup> Maloney, “Ann Goldstein: A Star Italian Translator.”

<sup>29</sup> Christina MacSweeney, interviewed by *M-Dash* magazine, accessed May 10, 2016, <https://mdash-ahb.org/past-issues/issue-6-summer-2015/translation-talk-christina-macsweeney/>

<sup>30</sup> Valeria Luiselli, trans. Christina MacSweeney, *The Story of My Teeth* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2015), 194.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>32</sup> “Theme 3: The Translation of Avant-Garde,” *Creative Literary Studio*, accessed May 10, 2016, <https://thecreativeliterarystudio.wordpress.com/translations-other-writings/>.

instability of texts (in this case, too, Luiselli takes some of MacSweeney's creative solutions to difficult translation choices and integrates them elsewhere in the text, adding a layer of distance from the original.

Luiselli's books are MacSweeney's first translations, but their success has helped jumpstart her translation career; two translations are scheduled to publish this year. Aside from another interview or two about translating Luiselli, I was only able to uncover one more hint of MacSweeney's presence in the literary world: an event page at the Center for the Humanities at City University of New York in which authors and their translators discussed their collaborations.<sup>33</sup> Though MacSweeney's public presence is still maturing, she is well primed to continue developing as a translator who embraces and champions the collaborative potential of the translation process.

*Katrina Dodson: The Charismatic Academic*

The case of Katrina Dodson and Clarice Lispector is more traditional (less collaborative) than the others in that Lispector is deceased. Their collaboration is between a translator and words alone. Words alone, though, are a monumental force in Lispector's work: the author is known for her unconventional syntax and innovative use of language. The *Complete Stories* was preceded by a biography of Lispector by Benjamin Moser, who went on to edit a series of Lispector retranslations. The previous translations, initiated during the Latin Boom,<sup>34</sup> are widely criticized for smoothing over and sterilizing Lispector's linguistic idiosyncrasies, so when Moser caught wind of New Directions' plan to rerelease one of Lispector's novels, he seized the opportunity to redress the clumsy choices of previous translators.<sup>35</sup> As a PhD in comparative literature who is fluent in Portuguese and a luminous writer herself, Dodson was a

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<sup>33</sup> "Translation Lab: Authors and Translators Discuss Their Collaborations," accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.centerforthehumanities.org/programming/translation-lab-authors-and-translators-discuss-their-collaborations>.

<sup>34</sup> Cohn, *Latin American Literary Boom*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Craig Morgan Teicher, "New Directions Resurrects Clarice Lispector with New Translations," *Publishers Weekly*, September 27, 2011, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/48801-new-directions-resurrects-clarice-lispector-with-new-translations.html>.

perfect candidate to translate the “ceaseless linguistic searching” of Lispector’s short story corpus.<sup>36</sup> Moser and New Directions set the stage for a Lispector renaissance—the Lispector Mania to compliment Ferrante Fever—with the biography and retranslation initiative, and Dodson carried the momentum through with her active book tour and engaging passion for Lispector’s work.

Dodson was closely involved with the release of *Complete Stories*, doing readings in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Seattle, Portland, and around the Bay Area. I attended two of her events in Portland, at Powell’s Books and the following evening at Mother Foucault’s Bookshop (she made a third appearance to speak to a college creative writing class). The events were both well attended, and each ended with an eager line of readers carrying books for Dodson to sign. At both events, Dodson not only read from *Complete Stories* in both English and Portuguese but also discussed the translation process, rhapsodizing about the enchanting, disorienting qualities of Lispector’s writing, the lyricism of Brazilian Portuguese language, and the weight of Lispector’s formidable, enigmatic presence.

Dodson also recounted her spontaneous decision to visit a psychic toward the end of the translation process—perhaps in homage to Lispector, who was interested in the occult and astrology. Dodson was struggling and willing to try anything for insight on how to proceed. The psychic purportedly sensed that Dodson was obsessed with a dead person, and transmitted a message from Lispector that she did not want to be known—that to fully understand her would make her less complex. Dodson drew from this a reassurance that a translation will always be a version—that to claim full understanding of the intended nuance of a text would be fallacious, and that translators and readers must continuously wonder and search for meaning.

Dodson’s rendering of Lispector’s words is what formed the book, but her rendering of Lispector’s essence—her charismatic portrayal of Lispector’s work and the process of translating it—is what sold the book to everyone present at her events. As an academic and an emerging translator at the early stages of her career, Katrina Dodson is well positioned to seize the popularity of *Complete Stories*

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<sup>36</sup> Clarice Lispector, trans. Katrina Dodson, ed. Benjamin Moser, *The Complete Stories* (New York: New Directions, 2015), xx.

and the renewed interest in Clarice Lispector to develop her own role as a compelling speaker and a progressive literary figure.

### *Missed Opportunities*

Small publishers, like many small businesses, struggle with being short-staffed and overextended; because of this, details may easily slip through the cracks when they promote books or events, and their websites and social media accounts may not be as current or active as the publishers want them to be. My purpose in pointing out the following promotional oversights is not to fault publishers for inadequately supporting their translators. Rather, these omissions point to a historical devaluation of the translator that the publishing industry is still in the process of trying to address: although their visibility is increasing, they are still easy to forget.

One such omission can be found on the About page of Europa Editions: in what must have been a mistake, Ann Goldstein's name is missing from the list of Europa's most successful novels and their authors and translators:

Notable successes at Europa include: **Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* (translated by Alison Anderson)**, which spent almost a year on the *New York Times* Bestseller list and the IndieBound bestseller list; . . . **Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels, including *My Brilliant Friend***, a *New York Times* bestseller; and, **Alina Bronsky's *The Hottest Dishes of the Tartar Cuisine* (translated by Tim Mohr)**, a *Publishers Weekly*, *Wall Street Journal* and *San Francisco Chronicle* favorite read of the year in 2011 [boldface mine].

Europa's website promotes another author's upcoming release with "in a new translation by Ann Goldstein, translator of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels," and they have done well to promote interviews with Goldstein on Twitter, using #ferrantefever and occasionally #anngoldstein, since the translator has no account of her own. However, Europa's editor-in-chief Michael Reynolds neglected to mention Goldstein in his response to *The Story of the Lost Child* being shortlisted for the Man Booker

International Prize: “and she was... #FerranteFever Congratulations to Elena Ferrante from everyone @europaeditions.”

Of the three translators, Ann Goldstein has the most established reputation—the bestselling sensation of the Neapolitan Novels and her affiliation with the *New Yorker* have combined to bolster her status as a literary spokesperson. In this sense, her profile suffers the least when her name is forgotten. However, her prominent, growing role in the literary community is all the more reason to mention her wherever possible. The fact that her name is a hashtag implies an underserved interest in Goldstein as an individual who the *New York Times* described as having “the patience of a dove and the stomach of a lion.”<sup>37</sup> The public is charmed by Goldstein’s persona as a self-proclaimed enabler of language, and continuing to elevate her profile will serve to enable other translators to step up into similar roles.

Christina MacSweeney, despite her notably visible involvement in *The Story of My Teeth*, is the least visible in terms of media coverage or discernible promotional activities. MacSweeney’s name did not appear on the covers of Luiselli’s previous books, but it is featured on *The Story of My Teeth* as well as on two forthcoming novels, one from Coffee House Press and one from Deep Vellum, suggesting that her name might be developing some cachet. However, the Coffee House Press website doesn’t have a page for MacSweeney or any other translators, and while Deep Vellum has a page listing the names of all its translators (but no biographical information), the page has not yet been updated to include MacSweeney—though, to be fair, the novel’s author is also not yet on the site. If nothing else, the deeply creative collaboration between MacSweeney and Luiselli is fascinating—not only did they work together closely on the language of the translation, but the duo communicated with music and collage to more richly explore the emotional, universal territory behind Luiselli’s words. Making some of this process visible, or perhaps even making it available as special edition ephemera, would be a unique opportunity to continue promoting the book and encouraging interest in the process of translation.

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<sup>37</sup> David Lipsky, “Return to Naples,” *Publishers Weekly*, October 1, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/books/review/Lipsky.t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/books/review/Lipsky.t.html?_r=0).



On the other hand, New Directions posted each of Dodson’s book tour stops on its blog, but occasionally overlooked Dodson on other social media—on the Facebook page for the first series of launch-related events, New Directions posted the following:

8/18/15: Tomorrow night! The first of the Clarice Lispector events at Book Culture on Columbus. The excellent Anderson Tepper will be speaking with Benjamin Moser. See you there!

8/20/15: We had a great time with Katrina Dodson, Benjamin Moser and Andy Tepper at Book Culture last night. Looking forward to seeing you all at the Paula Cooper Gallery this evening!

Perhaps in oversight, Dodson was not mentioned on the first event reminder post; the announcement for the event on Book Culture’s website similarly overlooks Dodson: “Please join us on Wednesday, August 19, at 7pm for the launch of Clarice Lispector's *The Complete Stories* with the book's editor, Benjamin Moser. Anderson Tepper will join as a conversant.” I suspect that the audience response to Dodson’s discussion of Lispector’s work was similar to the response at her Portland events, which would make it difficult to forget mentioning her name again.

Of course, these oversights and omissions are not solely the responsibility of publishers and media outlets. The translators must also make themselves more visible, especially within the digital sphere. None of the three translators have websites or public social media accounts (Dodson does have a private Facebook account). In the course of my research, it was often challenging to find information about the translators themselves, much less which literary events they have participated in or what projects they are currently working on. Readers who are interested in translated literature are likely to be interested in the translators themselves, and may want to follow their careers just as they would an author’s. Making translators not only visible but also searchable and discoverable is the next step in developing the audience for translated literature.

### Next Steps for Translators: Developing a Platform

Industry opinion is polarized as to how much a translator should participate in book marketing and publicity efforts. In response to an email survey asking publishers if they expected translators to publicize their books, Jonathan Galassi of Farrar, Straus & Giroux said “No” while Will Evans of Deep Vellum replied with an emphatic “Absolutely.” This disparity of opinion neatly summarizes a major obstacle to increasing the audience for translated literature—if the message from publishers is inconsistent, translators will have difficulty knowing what their role should be aside from simply to translate books. Not to harness the potential of translators to develop and participate in marketing and publicity campaigns for the titles they translate, as well as to engage with the literary community as critics, cultural ambassadors, and tastemakers, is a significant missed opportunity.

The 2014 ALTA conference featured a panel on marketing translations moderated by Jeff Waxman, a book marketing and publicity consultant who has worked in bookselling and editing as well.<sup>38</sup> Waxman reached out to his publishing contacts asking them about their expectations from translators and received conflicting responses—some want translators to be involved for years after the book’s release, while others don’t expect nor particularly want to hear from the translator after the translation has been delivered. Waxman advised translators to push back against publishers who try to push the translator out of publicity plans—a situation Antonia Lloyd-Jones, one of the translators on the panel, often finds herself in: “These are my children, and I’m going to have some say in how they’re brought up,” she said.

Lloyd-Jones recommended building a personal database of contacts at cultural institutions, sources for promotional funding, literary and cultural festivals, possible presenters for events, and lists of potential reviewers (including who has reviewed what favorably). She explained, “Often I know far more about who’s interested in Polish literature than that a publisher can possibly know, because they don’t publish Polish literature every day of the week.” In addition, she translates author interviews and critical praise from the original publication and offers to read from the book at events or serve as an interpreter

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<sup>38</sup> “Marketing Translations,” panel at ALTA 2014 conference, uploaded August 12, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9tw7TRw8tc>.

if the author can make a trip to the US but cannot speak English fluently; she even goes so far as to pick the author up from the airport and provides a place to stay. Once events are set up, she promotes them on Facebook and Twitter and reaches out to influencers who might have an interest in the book. Lloyd-Jones held that because translators know their source culture and the text so intimately, they are naturally situated to accomplish more and communicate the work “better than the best publicist.”<sup>39</sup>

A year before this panel, the London Book Fair also hosted a panel on marketing translations,<sup>40</sup> and the year before that was yet another from ALTA;<sup>41</sup> both were titled “The Marketing Toolkit: How Translators Can Make Their Work Matter.” The Marketing Toolkit referenced in the titles of both panels is a project that was in development by the PEN organization in 2012 and 2013—and seems either to still be in development or to have been abandoned, as the Toolkit is nowhere to be found. The concept of translators aiding in a book’s marketing and publicity is not a new one—ALTA<sup>42</sup> and Dalkey Archive Press<sup>43</sup> have provided free resources on the practice and profession of literary translation, some of which cover the translator’s role in book marketing and publicity, since the early 2000s. However, many of these tips are tentative and out of date,<sup>44</sup> and even the still-relevant information is somewhat buried and difficult to discover. Technology and social media are ever evolving, and considerable time, energy, and strategic thinking are required to harness their full potential.

The consensus among all of the panelists was that we are teetering at the edge of a golden age for translation and the translator’s visibility, translators should be more involved with the promotion of their translations, and translators should endeavor to establish an online presence to cultivate their reach and their status as cultural curators. In addition to an oeuvre of translated works, translators have a set of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “Literary Translation Centre at LBF 2013 - Tuesday 16th April - The Marketing Toolkit,” panel at London Book Fair 2013 conference, uploaded May 7, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIT9h-7FzLY>.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Bernofsky, “Recruiting for the Reviewer Hall of Fame,” *Translationista* blog, October 13, 2012, <http://translationista.net/2012/10/recruiting-for-reviewer-hall-of-fame.html>.

<sup>42</sup> “ALTA Guides,” accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.literarytranslators.org/resources/alta-guides>.

<sup>43</sup> Gill Paul, *Translation in Practice: A Symposium*, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/product/translation-in-practice-a-symposium>.

<sup>44</sup> For example, ALTA’s *Getting Started in Translation: The Literary Translator and the Internet* lists MySpace as a popular social network. Accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.literarytranslators.org/sites/default/files/imce/Publications/Guides/TheLiteraryTranslatorAndTheInternet.pdf>.

cultural specialties that they should tap when structuring their online presence, opening up the opportunity for a potential reader to come across a translator's work through cultural rather than literary avenues.

### **Next Steps for Publishers: A Culture of Cultivation**

To most effectively harness the potential of translators as audience builders, translators themselves must invest strategic effort into developing their platforms, but publishers play a crucial role in facilitating that development. First, publishers should offer a royalty in translation contracts as a matter of course and should ensure that the translator's name appear on the book's cover and on promotional materials. Royalties and name acknowledgment are both a means of giving due credit to an immense undertaking, but they also serve to encourage a translator's continued effort to publicize and sell their books, nourishing the long tail. Ideally a publisher could offer a generous royalty without cutting into a translator's fee, but if this is not a possibility and the translator is able to accept a smaller advance, a higher royalty creates even more of an incentive for a translator's continued promotional efforts.

Second, in addition to author and product pages, a publisher's website should include pages with translator biographies and accolades as well as, at minimum, internal links to other translations they may have done for the press. From the standpoint of Search Engine Optimization, the more pieces of information associated with a book the better; though the audience who follows a translator's career and seeks out other work they've done may be slim, the information should be available for those who might seek it—those rare dedicated readers are exactly the kind international literature thrives on. In addition, giving space to the translator's accomplishments on the press website creates a positive feedback loop whereby a translator's skill, reputation, and network broadens the reach of the press and potentially channels a wider audience back toward it. The translator's role as author liaison, cultural ambassador, literary tastemaker, talent scout, and creative writer should be celebrated and fostered in the same way that small publishers have traditionally fostered the careers of emerging authors. The creativity involved

in a nimble translation is just now beginning to gain recognition; FSG's Jonathan Galassi, a translator himself, has added that some translators are gaining a reputation as literary figures in their own right.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, marketing and publicity departments should begin working with translators from the beginning of a project to develop ideas for outreach and events, assist in developing their platform, and encourage their promoting the book. This last point is not vastly different from the prevailing and relatively recent expectation that authors will maintain a social media presence and assist in their books' publicity. Translators are positioned to meaningfully engage in the literary community as both writers and deeply engaged readers. Even in promoting their own work, translators stand to gain much less from the book's sale than an author does; spending months meticulously bringing another's work to American readers is a dedicated act that lends credibility to a translator's opinion and impact to their passionate advocacy.

By no means does ramping up the expectations for translators' promotional activities, rethinking royalties and contracts, or praising the challenging art of translation solve the myriad difficulties of producing international fiction. But to ignore these difficulties is a disservice to all parties: to translators, because it does not honor their work; to publishers, because there are still translations being produced and on backlists to be sold; and to readers, because it deprives them of the world's best literature. Publishers are sitting on an underutilized asset, and translators are in a powerful position to generate discussion, cultivate appreciation, and encourage the growth of an audience for international literature. In a moment when the translator is emerging from anonymity, publishers must push them forward proudly just as they do authors. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy to assume that translations don't sell because readers view translations negatively. Readers want good literature, and a publisher's due diligence in sourcing, curating, and disseminating that literature can only be amplified by the agent most responsible for its ultimate manifestation in English: the translator.

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<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Galassi, email correspondence, April 21, 2016.