

Translation Woes

Voice-over 1:

Bono insists culture is like a tree, growing and developing, but only if it's constantly nurtured: pruned if necessary to encourage it to flourish, and watered and fed to allow it to bear fruit.

Voice-over 2:

We must help the translators. I stress again that the annual budget for the European Union's cultural commission is less than the annual budget for Amsterdam's opera house. Can you believe that? A cultural budget for twenty-seven nations which is smaller than that for one national opera house.

Voice-over 1:

To really understand the situation, one has to hear it from the horse's mouth. Who better to explain the present difficulties than one of Germany's top translators? What he has to say is not encouraging.

Voice-over 3:

My name is Thomas Gunkel. I've been a translator for the past sixteen years, mostly from English. Most recently I've started translating Irish authors, including the biggest one at the moment, William Trevor. I also translate American authors. I did the second book of John Cheever which has just been published. I can't say that I feel my rights are protected. In Germany, the best translators get between fifteen and twenty-two euros a page. That's gross of course. Out of that we have to pay taxes and health insurance and our pension, so I wouldn't say that we're paid properly.

Voice-over 1:

In addition, translators do not enjoy the same rights as authors. Translation rights generally only last for twenty years, and translators do not receive any financial compensation if the work is republished. More and more of them are having to go through agencies to secure work, paying a commission, and final payment is often greatly delayed by the publishing houses.

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