



THE AMERICAN  
LITERARY  
TRANSLATORS  
ASSOCIATION

43rd Annual ALTA  
Conference

Sept. 30 – Oct. 18, 2020

# 2020 ALTA Travel Fellows

ALTA**43**

## ALTA Virtual Travel Fellowships

**EACH YEAR, BETWEEN FOUR** and six \$1,000 fellowships are awarded to emerging (unpublished or minimally published) translators to help them pay for hotel and travel expenses to the annual ALTA conference. This year, with the shift of the ALTA conference to an online platform, nine Virtual Travel Fellows, including two Peter K. Jansen Fellows, were awarded \$500 each. 2020 marks the fifth year of the Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fellowship, preferentially awarded to an emerging translator of color or a translator working from an underrepresented diaspora or stateless language.

This year's winners were selected by judges David Ball, Bonnie Chau, and Tenzin Dickie. The 2020 ALTA Travel Fellowships are made possible thanks to the generous support of ALTA's Past Presidents Council, the Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fund, and numerous individual donors including established translators and other devoted supporters of the craft and art of literary translation.

ALTA will celebrate this year's Virtual Travel Fellows with a downloadable audio chapbook of the Fellows reading selections from their translations, introduced by 2009 Travel Fellow Robin Myers. The chapbook will be released on [ALTA's Sound-Cloud](#) at 2:00 pm ET on October 8, 2020. Follow [this link](#) for a transcript of the readings.

Congratulations to these exceptional emerging translators, chosen from among eighty applicants. Their names and bios appear in the order in which they will read.

- [Öykü Tekten, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow](#)
- [Karen Hung Curtis, 2020 Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fellow](#)
- [Kristen Renee Miller, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow](#)
- [Ena Selimović, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow](#)
- [Alex Karsavin, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow](#)
- [Jamie Lauer, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow](#)
- [Dong Li, 2020 Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fellow](#)
- [Shoshana Akabas, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow](#)
- [Laura Nagle, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow](#)

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## Öykü Tekten, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow (TURKISH, ENGLISH)

ÖYKÜ TEKTEK BEGAN TRANSLATING poetry under the guidance and generous support of Ammiel Alcalay, whose impressive body of work and lifelong dedication to literature, translation, and archiving can only be described as a school of its own with a growing number of students who would otherwise remain “uneducated” despite their multiple diplomas and impressive résumés.

Her early translation work included the poets of the Second New Generation, an avant-garde poetry movement that began in the mid-fifties in Turkey and transformed the poetic language of the time by opening a space for experimentation and new forms of expression more accessible for common readers. She particularly focused on translating Cemal Süreya’s “Kurdish” poems to trace the trauma of displacement (both geographically and linguistically) he experienced as a child after

surviving the Dersim Massacre in 1937–38. She says “Kurdish” poems since Süreya never wrote in his mother tongue—he lost both his mother and his mother tongue to state violence—but his Kurdish past appears, implicitly, in his poems as a site of mourning and remembrance or a subtle, yet stubborn resistance against forgetting.

Currently, Öykü is working on a book of selected poems by Birhan Keskin, who, in her opinion, has reintroduced the old Turkish poetic tradition through a uniquely contemporary vocabulary that closes the gap between the personal and the universal and brings, almost effortlessly, human and nonhuman subjects into an open field that blurs the existing distinctions between the two. She is also against writing too many poems since “it is a betrayal of both the words and the trees.”



photo credit Mario Pardo Segovia

Öykü’s dream as a translator is to reach the level of mastery required to translate Turgut Uyar, one of the Second New Generation poets whose death, according to Cemal Süreya, caused all other poets to be fired.

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## Karen Hung Curtis, 2020 Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fellow (CHINESE—HONG KONG)



KAREN GREW UP IN Hong Kong speaking Cantonese, English, and French. She trained as a cellist at the École Normale de Musique de Paris, and studied French Literature at King’s College London. She got her first taste

of translation while working as an editor for a bilingual contemporary art journal in Shanghai, but it was not until several years ago that she fell in love with literary translation when, during the punishing, isolating cold of a Minnesota winter, she began to translate into English a stunning short story by the Hong Kong author Dorothy Tse, and realized that translation was a way to bridge and make meaning of the different fragments of our selves and peripatetic lives.

Currently an MFA candidate in Creative Writing and Literary Translation at the Vermont College of Fine Arts—studying with writer-translators Evan Fallenberg and Jason Grunebaum—she is translating the works of Wong Bik-wan, grande dame of contemporary Hong Kong literature yet a name not as widely known beyond the Sino-

phone literary world. One of Wong’s best-known novels, *Portraits of Heroic Women*, written largely in Cantonese, is the narrative of three generations of working-class women against a bleak hundred years of Hong Kong history. Karen strives to convey the fluidity and musicality of Cantonese in English and to reclaim, in a sense, the language closest to her heart with these stories of struggle, resilience, and hope, the stories of her own grandmothers and mother.

Karen is grateful to ALTA for the opportunity to present her work. Her translations of short stories and poetry by Hong Kong writers Dorothy Tse, Hon Lai-chu, Ge Liang, and Stuart Lau Wai-sing can be found in *Read Paper Republic* and *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*.

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## Kristen Renee Miller, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow (FRENCH)

A POET, EDITOR, AND community arts advocate, Kristen Renee Miller first came to translation looking for a new writing ritual. In 2016, as a poet-in-residence at Blackacre Conservancy, she began each morning by translating a short poem from the French, Spanish, or German. She was especially drawn to the way translation activates many modes of understanding at once: intuitive and analytical, mechanical and musical. She found the brief translations compulsively fun to make, and what began as an early-morning exercise soon eclipsed her other writing projects.

Kristen's first full-length translation, *Spawn*, by Ilnu Nation poet Marie-An-drée Gill, was published in April 2020. Kristen first encountered Gill's work in a Montreal bookstore when she picked up a volume of her poetry, *Framer*, in the original French and was immediately drawn to Gill's signature minimalist poems, with their highly distilled music and imagery.

Gill's *Spawn* is a collection of brief, untitled poems braiding themes of 21st-century imperialism, ecological blight, '90s-kid culture, and coming of age, set on the Mashteuiatsh reserve in Quebec. Ecological decline is viewed through the lens of imperialism and the encroachment of development,

logging, overfishing, and pollution into the natural landscape of the reserve. Throughout the collection, the uninhabitable land is closely linked to the uninhabitable language of colonizers ("Nous nous baignons dans le mal de vivre de l'asphalte chaude / en attendant de trouver la parole habitable . . ."). Part of Gill's project, formally, was to create tension and discomfort through language, to subvert the language she was writing within by resisting its conventions. Her formal and stylistic choices amounted to a full-scale resistance to imperialism that was as much about its effect on the land as on the language. In translating Gill's poetry into English, Kristen worked to preserve the tension of Gill's formal choices: her reversals of convention and shifts in register, her project of disruption. She worked to render in English a voice as sensitive and intimate as it is raw and elemental.

Selections from *Spawn* have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *Guer-nica*, *The Common*, *The Offing*, and elsewhere. Kristen's other poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *POETRY*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Best New Poets 2018*. A recipient of grants and awards from The Kennedy Center, The Humana Festival, The Kentucky Arts Council, and the Foundation for Contem-



photo credit Amber Estes Thieneman

porary Arts, Kristen lives in Louisville, Kentucky, where she works as an editor for Sarabande Books. She is the program director for Sarabande Writing Labs, which offers free writing, mentorship, and publishing opportunities to communities that have been historically and systemically excluded in Louisville. Sarabande Writing Labs have been held in community centers, homeless shelters, youth detention centers, libraries, and virtual forums, producing seventeen anthologies of writing and publishing more than two hundred Louisville writers. In each of her roles as editor, program director, and translator, Kristen intends to amplify the work of women and nonbinary writers, who are too often underrepresented in publishing.

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## Ena Selimović, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow (BOSNIAN/CROATIAN/SERBIAN)



WHILE LEARNING ENGLISH after arriving in the United States, Ena Selimović completed her first translations: bills, residency applications, and other convoluted word collections for her parents. The process was challenging, creative, important, exhilarating, and unpaid. (Many of those initial impressions have stuck.) She did not realize then that translation was anything but a necessity, let alone a constant source of future happiness or a career.

Born in Yugoslavia and speaking Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian at home, Ena and her family spent six years in

Turkey as refugees of the war and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She learned Turkish and had begun attending primary school when her family's residential status expired. Still other geographic migrations were accompanied by linguistic ones. She enrolled in the second grade in St. Louis, Missouri, and, somewhere along the way, she forgot Turkish.

Somewhere along another way, she began unforgetting her past. Literature had always anchored her, and she continued reading and writing voraciously. During college and her increas-

ingly comparatist training in graduate school, she realized that Comparative Literature and translation, not erasure, would measure up to the task of multilingual living and that she wasn't alone in that endeavor.

Thanks to supportive and committed faculty members, Ena defended her PhD dissertation in Comparative Literature at Washington University in St. Louis in May 2020. Her research focuses on the racialization of language in contemporary multilingual American and Balkan literatures. The texts in her archive—including the work of Gary Shteyngart, Jhumpa Lahiri, Téa Obreht, Bekim Sejranović, and Dubravka Ugrešić—dramatize alternative models for comparative race studies and migration studies, revealing

how racio-religious and antimigration rhetoric grounded in language politics fuels inter-imperial racial discourses. The variously multilingual texts she analyzes engage and revise what she calls “forms of foreignness.” She holds an MPhil in Comparative Literature from Trinity College Dublin and a BA in English from the University of Missouri–St. Louis.

Currently, Ena is translating the novel *Underground Barbie* by Maša Kolanović. Set in 1990s Yugoslavia–partially-turned-Croatia, the story follows an adult's recollections of her childhood in the midst of war as she accumulates Barbies, or what the narrator calls “sliver[s] of plastic perfection.” It retains the voice of a child whose wit and humor cut through air raid sirens while she

embalms her Barbies for an uncertain trip. Kolanović's illustrations embolden the tragicomic voice whose obsessions with Barbie signal life-sized stakes.

Ena's translations are motivated by the work of translators like Ellen Elias-Bursać, Julia Sanches, Jennifer Croft, and Annelise Finegan Wasmoen. She and her two translator friends, Mirgul Kali, who translates from Kazakh, and Sabrina Jaszi, who translates from Russian and Uzbek, have recently started a Turkic-Slavic literary translation collective. In addition to translating *Underground Barbie*, Ena is working on essays that fall under the rubric of Comparative Literature and writing her first novel, *Rather the Ant*. She looks forward to the new writing she has in the works and is now relearning Turkish.

## Alex Karsavin, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow (RUSSIAN)

ALEX KARSAVIN IS A Russian–English translator, with translations published in *Sreda*, *PEN America*, *Columbia Journal*, and *HOMINTERN* magazine. Ilya Danishevsky's hybrid prose-poetry novel *Mannelig v tsepyakh* (*Mannelig in Chains*) forms Alex's main translation project, a collaboration with veteran Russian–English translator Anne Fisher, funded by the University of Exeter's RusTrans project. *Mannelig* is a highly experimental work, braiding several narrative threads that span queer coming-of-age to geopolitical annexation into a tapestry loosely inspired by Homer's *Odyssey*.

Alex's current projects revolve around Russia's contemporary queer poetry community, a milieu that includes Danishevsky. They encountered these writers after a childhood as a queer Russian-American, reading Russian novels in cars as they moved around the Soviet expatriate archipelago in North America. As an editor of *HOMINTERN* magazine, they were able to consistently publish and translate poetry from this queer literary community. These promotional activities included an essay in *The New Inquiry*, and culminated recently in their participation in an online bilingual reading,

“Queer Russophone Poetry: Readings, Translations, and Contexts,” hosted by Globus Books. Their translations of feminist Russian poets Stanislava Mogileva and Elena Georgievskaya will appear in *F-Letter: New Russian Feminist Poetry*, edited by Galina Rymbu and Eugene Ostashevsky.

Mogileva's work presses the folk song and oral epic forms into the service of Russian feminism; Georgievskaya queers the language of biblical revelation. Alex is similarly interested in the precursors to contemporary queer Russian writing, especially since the historic logocentrism of the Soviet Union allows literature to, contrary to W. H. Auden's claim (made in “In Memory of W. B. Yeats”), *make things happen*. To this end, they are working with fellow translator Signe Swanson on a series of translations of poems by Yevgeny Kharitonov, a gay writer and theater director who rose to some literary prominence in 1970s Moscow before dying of a heart attack in 1981. Kharitonov's depiction of gay life in the Soviet Union is often encoded at the level of language, a choice that is mirrored in the cryptically written *Mannelig in Chains*.



Alex is currently attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as a graduate student in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. In their spare time they are working on a debut collection of poems. They are very grateful to ALTA for the opportunity provided by the travel fellowship.

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## Jamie Lauer, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow (SPANISH)



**TRANSLATION IS A PROCESS** of both creation and collaboration, so it makes sense to Jamie Lauer that she would be drawn to the endeavor of sharing another author's unique voice, tone, and style with an audience in a new linguistic and cultural setting. As a Spanish–English translator and freelance editor, her ambitions lie equally in expressing her own creativity and working with others so their voices can be heard and understood.

Her interest in translation grew out of a love for the Spanish language that evolved during twelve years of formal language study and visits to Spain, Mexico, and Chile. In the fall of 2011, she studied at the Universidad Adolfo

Ibáñez in Viña del Mar, Chile, and the experience gave her a deep appreciation for Latin American culture and the singularities of Chilean Spanish. (And, after visits to both of Pablo Neruda's ocean-view houses, it instilled the dream of someday owning her own eccentrically decorated waterside getaway.)

While abroad, she was introduced to Pía Barros's collection of flash fictions titled *Llamadas perdidas* (*Missed Calls*). Barros is well known in Chile and throughout Latin America for her short fiction. Nonetheless, it wasn't until Lauer participated in a literary translation workshop as part of her MA in Comparative Literature at Indiana University Bloomington that she properly appreciated the wit and literary evocativeness of Barros's writing. The translation process foregrounded each story's careful selection of language and manipulation of literary conventions, the primary techniques that enable so few words to hauntingly play with audience expectations and lead readers to gut-punching revelations or twists that stick with them long after they have closed the book.

Through translation, Lauer also further came to appreciate Barros's use of feminist and erotic themes to critique

the legacy left to Chilean society by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, now infamous for its violations of human rights. As Resha Cardone points out in "Refashioning the Book in Pinochet's Chile: The Feminist Literary Project, Ergo Sum," the dictatorship frequently relied on gendered terminology to position itself as dominant ("masculine") over subservient ("feminine") citizens. For Barros, then, writing against gender stereotypes becomes part of a larger political protest, and this creates an intriguing overlap between gender, protest, and literature that breathes new life into the established genres of literary reflections on the Pinochet dictatorship and feminist literature.

That the traditionally male-dominated landscape of Latin American literature in translation has overlooked great female literary writers such as Barros is something Lauer wishes to rectify. She will continue translating Barros's work and hopes to see the full collection published in translation someday. In addition, she intends to identify additional female authors whose voices and unique perspectives on critical literary and social issues deserve to be heard and shared across the globe.

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## Dong Li, 2020 Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fellow (CHINESE – MANDARIN)

**TRANSLATION, OF LANGUAGE AND** of cultural sensibility, is nothing new to Dong Li, as he moved to the United States from P.R. China to study at Deep Springs College, and eventually earned his BA in Comparative Literature as well as an MFA in Literary Arts at Brown University. Since then, he has embarked on becoming a poet writing in English and translating from Chinese, English, and German.

Dong Li started to translate contemporary Chinese poets during his undergraduate years. The encouragement of Forrest Gander, Katie Peterson, Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, and the late C.

D. Wright was essential in giving him a free sense of the language and how it can break boundaries, engage ethically, and form communities. In 2014 he participated in a Luce Residency at Vermont Studio Center with the Chinese poet Zhu Zhu, which resulted in the full-length publication of *The Wild Great Wall* by Deep Vellum/Phoneme Media in 2018. He also won an OMI Ledig House Translation Lab Residency and a PEN/Heim Translation Grant to translate the Chinese poet Song Lin.

Increasingly, Dong Li is drawn to a group of more independent poets from China, including Song Lin, Zhu



photo credit Michael Jordan,  
Humboldt Foundation

Zhu, Ye Hui, and Liu Ligan. They have never formed an official alliance nor produced a manifesto or developed a school; what matters to them is how words mutely explode, and how language rises and sinks in face of it all. Even their more politically charged poems are not meant to take sides, but to reflect a layered and nuanced aesthetic reading of history and politics. The poems remain open and resist easily reductive interpretations. Song Lin is an unusual poet who served his sentence for political activism but has never used this to his personal advan-

tage. This nomad poet sticks his fingers into various soils and grows poems that take in different poetic traditions. With an erotic streak and clinical control of language, Zhu Zhu's paced poems set readers adrift with a view of personal and biographical landscapes. His understated lines unroll like a watercolor and slowly accrue meaning. The meditative Ye Hui weaves Chinese metaphysics into real-life snapshots and creates compelling collages of contemporary myths and mysteries. A kind of newness seems more pronounced in Liu Ligan's work. His

use of narrated and narrative histories to allude to current affairs is perhaps not dissimilar to the ancient masters speaking through the voice and veil of pining courtesans. These four independent poets are entirely obsessed with how language can redeem, politically or otherwise.

Dong Li is grateful for all encounters and in any form with poets, writers, and translators in different language environments, and hopes this life of a literary translator will be resilient and continue with greater possibilities.

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## Shoshana Akabas, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow (HEBREW)



**SHOSHANA AKABAS GREW UP** in New York City, where she learned Hebrew at Beit Rabban, an innovative elementary school with an immersive approach to language learning. Her personal interest in languages developed when she attended Stuyvesant High School, which was a microcosm of the city's linguistic diversity, and she was inspired to start studying Spanish and American Sign Language.

She majored in English and Organic Chemistry at Penn, where she continued taking ASL courses. While this was an entry point into the world of translating and interpreting, her first formal introduction to translation was in an MFA workshop taught by Alyson Waters at Columbia University. Shoshana initially signed up for the course hoping that the detail-oriented work of translation would make her a sharper editor. But in that class she fell

in love with translation as an art form, and she continued to pursue translation studies by taking courses with Monica de la Torre, Edith Grossman, and Lynn Sharon Schwartz, among others.

Shoshana first stumbled upon an excerpt of the novel *Coffee & Cake* by a young Israeli writer named Inbar Livnat, and she was immediately drawn in by Livnat's dark humor and emotional clarity. Shoshana has continued to translate Livnat's writing for the last four years, enjoying the challenge of preserving the rich, ancient roots of modern Hebrew while capturing the liminal space inhabited by Livnat's characters, who exist between the worlds of mental illness and health, national belonging and exile.

Since earning her MFA in Fiction and Literary Translation, Shoshana has served as a teaching assistant to Professor Peter Connor for his Introduction to Translation Theory course at Barnard College. In addition to her own writing and translation work, she has volunteered with refugees in various capacities for the past eight years. This work has involved translating and advocating for translation access for migrant populations in educational and medical settings. Working specifically with the Afghan refugee population in Queens has led Shoshana to begin studying Pashto in order to better serve and connect with newly arrived refugees from the southeast region of Afghanistan.

Shoshana has always been drawn to translation as a way of forging new connections, whether through community translation, providing English readers access to new authors, or helping students form a deeper relationship with the languages they speak. Israeli writer Etgar Keret said in an interview, "When we read a book, we exercise the muscle of empathy, which is a muscle that we usually, in everyday life, do our best not to put into stress." Shoshana has found that translation—in any form—helps exercise that muscle of empathy, allowing us to continue learning, growing, and seeing the world from new perspectives.

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## Laura Nagle, 2020 ALTA Travel Fellow

(FRENCH, SPANISH, IRISH)

**BORN AND RAISED IN** New York's Hudson Valley, Laura Nagle is a freelance translator and writer now based in Indianapolis. She first took an interest in translation as an undergraduate French major at Hamilton College, where she wrote her senior thesis on Samuel Beckett's practice of self-translation. While pursuing graduate studies in Romance Languages at the University of Pennsylvania, and throughout her years as a high school language teacher, she continued developing her translation skills. Laura's language studies have taken her to several regions of France; Trois-Rivières and Montréal, Canada; Santander, Spain; and Gleann Cholm Cille, Ireland.

Laura translates prose fiction. In addition to working with contemporary authors, she seeks to bring previously untranslated works from the 19th and 20th centuries to English-speaking readers. To that end, Laura is currently translating *La Guzla, ou Choix de poésies illyriques recueillies dans la Dalmatie, la Bosnie, la Croatie et l'Herzégowine*. This collection of short stories and prose poems, ostensibly based on Illyrian folk tales and ballads, was published in French in 1827 as the work of an anonymous "translator," who peppered the collection with his decidedly amateurish cultural insights and travel anecdotes. The book was well received by readers and scholars all over Europe before being revealed as a hoax; these tales were the invention of a young Prosper Mérimée, who had never visited the Balkans and had only a passing familiarity with the region's

languages and cultures. A humorous and entertaining read, *La Guzla* establishes the penchant for satire-tinged exoticism that characterized Mérimée's later, better-known work.

In addition to various virtual readings this summer and fall, Laura is presenting a session at the September 2020 virtual conference of the Oregon Society of Translators and Interpreters on research methods for literary translators working with pre-20th-century texts.

Alongside her translation work, Laura is a fiction writer working to complete her first novel, which follows a group of teachers and high school students traveling from the United States to France in the summer of 2019. She is also an active choral musician and enjoys translating and writing about classical music.

Laura is grateful to ALTA for its commitment to the Travel Fellows program at this year's virtual conference and for the opportunity to share an excerpt from her translation of Mérimée's *La Guzla* with the ALTA community.

