

# Dutch translators meet

## Jan Klerckx reports on this year's Dutch Network Weekend Workshop, which took place in Utrecht

This year's ITI Dutch Network Weekend Workshop, from 9-11 September, was attended by 29 members, 23 of whom are based in the Netherlands, five in the UK and one in Sweden. It was held in one of the most historic Dutch cities, Utrecht, a lively university town and the hub of the Dutch railway network, making it very easy to reach from all parts of the country and indeed from abroad. It is also the archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands, and abounds in churches and monasteries, some of which are now museums.

We started on Friday night with a fine dinner at a restaurant called Paviljoen de Colonie. As always, it was great to see familiar faces again, giving everyone a chance to do some 'bijkletsen', as many of us see each other only at these weekend workshops. But it was also an opportunity to meet some new members. It is good to see that the Dutch Network is attracting some younger people, who may help ensure that it continues to exist and flourish.

### Art and literature

On Saturday morning, at 9.15 sharp, we all assembled at the Universiteit voor Humanistiek, located in the very heart of Utrecht, where our more serious workshop activities were to take place. We got off to a flying start with a rather intense two-and-a-half hour workshop on creative writing by the dynamic Steve Schwartz, entitled 'Art with a small a'. After encouraging us to try our hand at creative writing by pre-empting all the well-known excuses for not doing so ('I don't have a creative bone in my body', 'I've got nothing to say', etc), Steve presented his 'Four Commandments' of writing: focusing on being original, moving the story forward, thinking of your readership, and showing rather than telling. As if all that wasn't enough food for thought, we were then set some pretty tough exercises, including explaining why carrots



The weekend began with a challenging practical workshop on creative writing

don't talk, and writing a kind of acrostic on each other's names (with Marjo becoming 'Manages A Really Jolly Outing'). And, oh yes, he told us to avoid adjectives like the plague, which is not always easy, as evidenced by the present report.

After lunch, two Dutch literary translators, Harm Damsma and Niek Miedema, talked us through some of the special problems of literary translation, such as puns, dialect, neologisms and the relation between form and content (especially in poetry). Damsma and Miedema know all about this, as they are currently working on a new translation of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. The tasks they then set us to work on in small groups showed that they entertained great expectations of our capacities, including as they did a passage from *Alice in Wonderland* crammed full of the most ingenious puns. As a translator, you might at times be forgiven for thinking that authors are trying their very best to make their books

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and poems as untranslatable as possible.

As prescribed by DN tradition, the Saturday evening was the time for the gala dinner, held in a splendid room in one of Utrecht's two 'city castles', called Oudaen, dating from the thirteenth century. Here we were served an absolutely sumptuous five-course meal and, as if that wasn't enough, the organising committee had thoughtfully provided fireworks on a grand scale outside, in the form of a terrific thunderstorm.

### Talking transcreation

Dutch Networkers are a tough lot, however, and at 9.15 on Sunday morning, there we were back at the Universiteit voor Humanistiek building for the third and final workshop of the weekend, presented by Percy Balemans, who explained to us what is meant by 'transcreation'. It turned out to be a type of creative translation mostly for the purpose of advertising, where much more is required than just 'vertalen wat er staat' [translating what it says]. It involves being keenly aware of cultural differences between nations, adjusting the 'translations' you produce closely to the intended target group, coping with the plethora of puns that are so characteristic of British advertising language, and making sure your translation fits into the framework dictated by the layout of the ad, and is compatible with the visuals. We were then set to work 'transcreating' some advertising slogans and headlines, using whatever creative resources we could still muster at this stage.

The final item on the programme was a boat trip through the Utrecht canals. Although they may not be as famous as the Amsterdam canals, they offer the unique feature of the wharves and cellars lining some of them, which connect the mooring stages where goods used to be unloaded from barges with the houses situated in the streets several metres higher up. Many of these cellars have been turned into cafés and restaurants, making this a very lively part of the city.

After a final drink at the Oudaen café (which has its own brewery in the cellar), it was time to part company and look back on another successful weekend workshop, and to thank Marjo Crins and Janet Limonard for their efforts that made it all possible.