

From Manuscript to Marketplace: Toward Eternity

Transcript of Live Webinar

The following transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

Lily Philpott:

Thank you so much for being here. So I want to start off with Anton. There's a lot of audience members who are curious how you found time to write this novel alongside your prodigious translation practice and career. How long did it take to get the manuscript to a place where it was ready to be queried? And how did your translation work maybe inform your creative practice as you wrote this book?

Anton Hur:

Thank you, Lily. It took a very long time. I remember doing a translation class with an author named Kim Sehee, and she was talking about how long it took for her to debut. And there was something she said in that class that really struck me, she said, it took me longer than I thought to get to a publishable level of prose.

That really struck me because when I was starting off—I wanted to be a writer since my age was in the single digits—and I thought I would be at that level at, I don't know, 27, 29? I'm sure there are a lot of people who do reach that level at that age, but I wasn't one of those people. It took quite a long time, longer than I thought it would, to get my manuscript up to a level where I felt like I think I could see it, you know, in a bookstore.

And then of course, once it went through the agent process and the editing process, a lot of this book changed. This book is as much a product of Safae and Tara as it is my writing, because so much of their input went into it. Which really brought the book way up to a different level.

I wrote the book off and on for about seven or eight years. It started off as a short story, and I showed it to my husband, in the beginning of our relationship, before we were married. And then he did not like it [laughs]. And he told me all the reasons why he did not like it. And then I looked at all of the reasons. And I was like, okay, it's going to take forever for me. This is going to be a novel, not a short story.

So I put it away, and then I started writing it on the subway on the way to work. The bulk of it was written on my commute, because I do my translation in an office, and I do my writing going to and from that office.

So the goal was always to be a writer. Whenever people ask me, how is it that you are so productive? My answer is always, I don't have children. If I had children, I don't know how I would do it. I don't know how writers with children do it, really, because my life is designed in an extremely selfish way. I can do whatever I want whenever I want. I mean, I do have a husband

who requires sleep at night. So I had to change my work schedule so that I work during the day and then sleep at night, which almost destroyed our marriage because it was so difficult for me to adjust to that. But aside from that, he's very supportive, extremely supportive.

Even before I went into literary translation, you know, translators make a lot of money. I was quite comfortable, and I could afford to try to venture into literary translation, which is not as lucrative as the other areas of translation.

I think the biggest contribution that translation did for my career is that it gave me a financial foundation. I think the number one thing that people get mistaken about my husband and my relationship is that he's a STEM professor, and I have a social science humanities degree, and so people assume that he supports me. But believe me, that was not the case for a very long time. For the first eight years of our relationship, that was not the case. He was a graduate student, a Ph.D. student. I was a working translator. I paid for everything. I paid for a semester of his tuition, even.

So, the translation really enabled me to have financial independence, and that was really important. It also enabled me to get used to meeting deadlines. I went to graduate school for English literature late, when I was 33 or 34. And when I went, I was amazed at how these students who were like 10 years younger than me, they would ask the professors for extensions, and I'd be like, what's an extension? At that point, I had never asked for an extension for anything, and I had had a hundred clients. It gave me a work ethic, for better or for worse, because I feel like that's not always a good thing, because sometimes you kind of have to sacrifice some things to make the deadline.

Quite often in publishing, your editor, like Tara, will tell you, Safae will tell you, you should take some time. We can give you an extension, we can move things around. The important thing is that your work realizes your vision like. That's what they tell you. I feel like I got into this habit of rushing and getting things done by a certain deadline, instead of saying, oh, maybe we need to let it cook for a little bit.

I still kind of struggle with that. But yeah, translation gave me money and bad habits.

Lily Philpott:

Amazing. I love hearing about the extended timeline of this novel as well. I think it's always really useful for younger writers to hear that it may not happen in a day, and it is always worth it to continue plugging away at the story.

I want to talk about getting the team together, and I want to turn to Safae. When you all agreed to participate in this conversation, Anton was like, this is amazing, we have a very dramatic getting-together story as agent and client, and I want to hear it. I would love to hear how you came across *Toward Eternity*. Did you know Anton's work before it came across your desk?

Safae El-Ouahabi:

Yes, in a really special way, Anton's own journey into becoming an author also aligns with my own journey into becoming an agent. So while this is Anton's English language debut, this is my first book as an agent that I took the lead on and I pulled out of the submissions pile. So it's a very special book for me professionally and also personally.

Anton submitted *Toward Eternity* a few years ago to the agent that I work with, whose name is Jon Wood. He does speculative fiction, fantasy, and commercial adult fiction and non-fiction, and I showed this to him. Part of being an assistant is reviewing the submissions and talking to an agent about what they should be requesting the full manuscripts of. We both read it, and I connected with it a lot more strongly than he did. We kept coming back to it whenever we'd have meetings about submissions. I kept bringing it up again, and he said, look, you keep mentioning this. Do you want to just take the lead on it, and then I can support you? Send out some feedback and just see what happens. See where it goes.

That early process of seeing how an author kind of responds to feedback, and Anton is a dream author. He works so brilliantly with feedback. And it's such a collaborative process. He doesn't just accept everything that you give him. He also comes back and says, well, what do you think about this? What do you think about changing this instead? And that's the collaborative process you look for, and that works so well.

We offered him representation jointly, Jon and I, and I put the pitch together. We edited it for several months. I put the pitch together, sent it out through John's email and sent out widely to U.K. and U.S. publishers, and luckily we landed Tara, who was the best editor for this book. I think we absolutely nailed it with this. Tara is someone who was on my radar. We worked with her in a book called *Ghost Girl, Banana*, by Wiz Wharton. The agent I worked with for that is Claire Wilson. So I was familiar with Tara, and I thought Tara might be a good fit for this. Let me let me just send it and see what happens.

And she gave amazing feedback and really pulled the whole book together. I mean, it's thanks to her that the book is the way it is. The book is so different to the version that we sent out on submission, even though we'd worked on it repeatedly. I think Tara had the vision to pull it through, and she even came up with the title, which was right in front of us the whole time.

It was a word in in the book, a sentence in the book, and Anton and I spent several months trying to come up with alternative titles. We really tried to find something else, but then *Toward Eternity* came up and it was just perfect, it worked so beautifully.

So that was basically what launched my career into agenting and was a massive step for me professionally. I've since then taken on multiple clients. I've taken on rom-com authors, YA contemporary romance, and also translators as well. I'm building my own translator list at RCW, so that's kind of the big, exciting story. I think everyone who becomes an agent has kind of a similar story. Pretty much everyone at the agency started out as assistants. Claire also started out as an assistant, so did Sam Copeland and various other people. It's about finding the right book and following your gut instinct. I'm so glad that it went really well and that we're here today. Thank you so much as well, Anton, for taking the chance on me, because, as an assistant, it was naturally quite terrifying. Will this person want to work with me if I don't have any other clients? He's a dream author. So thank you so much.

Lily Philpott:

That's such a perfect segue into talking to Tara, who is the last piece in this puzzle, member of this team. Can you talk how you knew that this manuscript, when it crossed your desk, even if it was in quite a different form than we see it in now—how you knew there was something there that needed to be polished and published. And why, specifically, Harper was the best possible home for this book?

Tara Parsons:

Honestly, it was such a story of kismet. And I have to say, because I think I've now been in publishing for 26 years, which is really disturbing, and I have this role now where I'm really lucky because I get to edit a handful of books every year. But then I work, you know, sort of more on a business level across a number of books here, and they all are actually speaking to a different passion I have, or a different thing that I want to help people bring to the world, which is really satisfying.

But when I work on a book as an editor, which you know is a real commitment and undertaking, you want to do really right by the author and help them. It's really like their child, right? That's that I feel like, I'm like their doula. When I do that, I want to really make sure it's a book that I'm super passionate about, and that I can do right by the author, and, of course, the agent. So I don't take it on lightly. And now, this magical thing happens where I start reading the pages and different things from my life start to come into it. And that's when I know I want to work on the book.

First of all, Anton is a famous, incredibly acclaimed translator. So as soon as I saw his name, I was like, I gotta read this immediately, so that there's that, of course. And Jon and Safae, their reputations are fantastic. So of course, this combination, I thought, I've got to read the pages right away.

When I first started reading it, especially at that point, it was more like a mix between science fiction and the literary fiction aspects of it. And when I first started reading it, to be honest, I thought, I've got to do this book for my son and my husband, because this is the kind of book that they love so much.

And then the book starts talking. Anton gets into this space with Ellen, and she's classically trained as a musician, and I am, too, from back in the day, from before I went into book publishing. That just felt like this amazing connection that spoke to me. All of those things came together, and then we talked.

Anton is such a gifted translator and writer that he could really choose whatever he wanted to do. He could choose whatever genre, whatever mix of genres, and he would make it work.

But I felt like there's a couple of different books in here that are happening, maybe, and these are the parts that really resonated with me the most, and it felt like maybe they resonated with you as

a writer. The prose in those sections felt so assured and felt so of your own, and thankfully he agreed. Otherwise I probably wouldn't have been the right editor for it, and I would have said that at the time, you know what, you should go with somebody who can help you craft this part of the book.

It was beautiful. He would do the revisions so quickly, but so thoughtfully, too. They didn't appear to me to be rushed. I felt like you really were careful in how you did your revisions in the best way possible. I have to tell you, as an editor you get a little nervous. You're like, I hope I didn't make this book worse. I hope I helped him bring out the best of his work.

As an editor, you can't help but look at the reviews, even though you tell the authors don't look at them. I hope everybody loves it too, and they really have. And it's amazing to see which parts of the book move people. Including my children. This is for a lot of different age groups. My father loves this book. My son is obsessed with Anton and loves this book and shows it to his friends. He's like the teen ambassador for *Toward Eternity*.

Lily Philpott:

I love this so much! And I love hearing how incredibly collaborative and conversational this whole revision process was.

I want to hear you talk about the editorial process at multiple stages. I loved what you said about how a first test is how an author responds to an initial feedback request from the agent. Anton and Tara, what did that editorial revision process look like. Were there major structural changes that were made? And how did you keep pushing through as they were done?

Safae El-Ouahabi

Anton, we made you do a lot of different redrafts. And yet we still couldn't quite get it right, because I think the biggest thing at the time for us was, structurally, the first half and the second half felt like they were a bit disconnected. We were trying to work out a way of making it flow a lot better. And so we did multiple drafts to work out those things.

From the agent standpoint, our job is to kind of edit the book with the author, and work on it as much as possible, to bring together a vision of a manuscript. I see what they're trying to do, I see where this is going. And then they're the ones who pull it together and really take it off. And so I think it was Tara who did that, and she did so much editorial work on it, which I understand these days it is a lot more rare to get because publishers can sometimes expect manuscripts are 99% ready.

Tara was someone that was very hands-on with *Toward Eternity*, and we were very lucky to have her on board.

Anton Hur:

The most important thing for me going into this was I felt so much gratitude about the fact that someone was willing to give me notes on the manuscript at all. When Safae and Jon contacted me, saying, can we have a meeting? And then we have a meeting, and they give me notes about how they think the manuscript might be improved.

I'm writing down the notes, and then they asked me if I have any questions, and my question was, so are you guys signing me? They had not mentioned anything about signing me. Jon was like, I'm not sure if I'm signing on new authors at the moment. But let's just let's just see how you do with the edits. And then in my mind immediately, I was like, oh, this is an audition.

I am a literary translator, and I have to the rodeo many times. I can do that. So I told them, all right, I will get you these revisions by such and such date, and then I got Covid. And then I got double long-listed for the Booker Prize. So that was a funny email to write. I was like, hey, I need an extension. I never ask for this, but I need an extension because I got Covid, and also I've been double long-listed for the Booker prize. So.

Lily Philpott:

No big deal.

Anton Hur:

No biggie. they came back, saying like, Oh, I hope you get better soon, and congratulations. I got a slight extension. I remember they wanted to change the opening a little bit. So I changed the opening. There was some concern about the first part and the second part not quite coming together. This would be solved later on by Tara.

But at the time, because I had just basically written the book very extemporaneously, the bones were there, but it kind of didn't quite all cohere together. It took a bit more of an editorial process afterwards for that. But there was a lot of structural editing to make it ready to be sent out to editors. One of the agent rejections that I got early on, the agent said, oh, I could see how this would work, but also, it would take a lot of work to put into it.

But that agent happened to have just had a baby, and it was during the pandemic, and she was like, Oh, I don't think I'm the person to do it. She gave me a page of notes which was very useful, so I used that to rearrange things, and to just be really ready for edits. I'm coming from a literary translation background where you're not allowed to do structural edits. The thought of doing structural edits is so gleeful to me. Tell me to take things out, tell me to take a sledgehammer, because I never get to do that.

When you're a literary translator, you're solving problems all the time. It's like one very long math equation. A math problem. As a writer, how do I make this work? These two don't connect. How do you make them connect? That was so fascinating for me to go through that. I knew that getting structural edits and getting edits is very rare these days.

The fact that Tara and you know Tara is V.P., she's very high up in her organization. She does not have the time to give you structural edits, but she still does. I don't know how, but she still does. By the time that we went into the editorial process with Tara, she solved so many of those problems. Even her son, who she mentioned, who I thank in the book. There was one conceit in the book where the nanites were contagious, and the world was turning into sort of a nanite planet. And her son, he did some math, and he was like, you know the lily pad principle where things start doubling very slowly, and then at some point they double very quickly. The lily pad principle would apply, and everyone would be basically a nanite android in two months. I was like, okay, I don't want that, so we're going to take that out. So I thank Hunter, Tara's son, in the acknowledgements, for his input.

Tara Parsons:

It's the highlight of Hunter's entire life.

Anton Hur:

I'm still so grateful to him. And there was another problem where Tara felt like the structure just didn't quite cohere. And I thought, what would connect the first part of the book and the second part of the book. Tara suggested that it should be emotionally resonant like it shouldn't be a dramatic space laser war or whatever, but it should be something that's very quiet and emotional. It should cohere these two aspects of the novel together.

And she made some suggestions, and I used some of the suggestions. One of my high school friends who I also thank the acknowledgements, she was like, why did none of these clones want children? And I was like, the ones who apply for the clinical trial are deliberately chosen, so that you know they don't want children. And then she's like, well, what about the one clone that was not chosen in the clinical trial? Cloning just happened to him. Doesn't he want children? And I was like, oh, yeah, he might want children.

Tara and I were talking about it, and I said, one of my friends suggested that Pan might want to have a child, and Tara was like, that's a great idea. Write me that. Just like she told me, how it might go about, and how that child would be the connecting character that literally connects the first two books together. It solved so many problems.

When Tara said just now that she was like a doula. That's really funny, because she literally helped me give birth to this child that is in the book. This character in the book.

Lily Philpott:

It's so beautiful as well in those sections, when you realize who the character is that you're following and how they connect, too. It's wonderful. Tara, I want to hear your take on the editorial side, but I'm also curious: where does the agent's revision, editorial role end, and yours start?

Tara Parsons:

Oh, that's an interesting question. I think it's so different for every agent. Safae was a unique experience to me, too. It's the same thing in the editorial world. When I first started in this business, you could nurture a book like a fine wine. I signed this book 10 years ago, and we're in our sixth draft.

And now we're all so much more like businesses. We all have P&Ls, and once you sign a book and you pay, you just want to get the book out as soon as humanly possible.

And so some of that editorial work, like old-school, working closely with the author, has just become either really condensed or people just don't do it anymore. And it's the same thing, I imagine, on the agent side, where some people are like, you know what, I am going to get in there, and I can see where this is going. And this person is going to be one of our biggest award-winning authors in the future. He just needs a little guidance here.

Some agents will jump in and use their editorial eye. Some agents come from the editorial world. I have some really good friends who were formerly editors and who are now on the agent side. And that's one of the big things that they bring to the table, those relationships.

I love it when that has already happened, and then it comes to me because it makes it easier to see where the book can go. I have this belief, from everything we do, from marketing, whenever I'm working on a book with any of our marketers like, I have done Facebook campaigns myself. I've done Google ads myself. I like have created them myself many times, because I think when you do it yourself, you understand it better, and you understand how to use the tools better. You understand who the audience is more when you do it yourself.

I think, too, in the pitch letter, which is so much work for the editor, that the agent has put in together, the pitch really frames it for us so that we can go in and write that acquisition memo really easily, and not delay the process and kind of envision where you're going.

I have worked without agents, of course, but I find it much easier with agents, 99 percent of the time. This team in particular is really wonderful. We're all just like, coming from a very similar

place of thinking Anton is the superstar, and wanting this book to be the greatest book it could be, and so excited that it's out in the world.

Lily Philpott:

There's also an audience question saying they're currently working with their editors and marketing team on a title and cover for their book. Congratulations, first of all. But I'd love to hear from all of you. You talked a little bit about how you landed on the title. Can you talk about the cover, Anton, if you had any input? I've talked with writers before who loved a certain artist or piece of artwork and then managed to get that approved to be on the cover. And I actually don't know anything about this cover. There's also a really beautiful interior part. Can you talk about the physical object of the book?

Anton Hur:

Steven Brayda, who is at HarperOne, designed the cover. I did not give any input. I did not know that the cover was in the process of being designed, even. It didn't really cross my mind. When people ask me about what you envision, I would think of Emily St. John Mandel. I saw a planet, like Emily St. John Mandel's *Sea of Tranquility*. And I also thought of the Korean cover to *The Warm Horizon* by Tracy Young. It's been translated by Soje. But the British cover and the Korean cover are very different, and the Korean cover has the moon, it's planetary.

And I thought, I would actually like the cover to be like set in the very last part of the book where it has that kind of planetary image. But I never told anyone this. And Stephen Brayda basically walked into my brain and walked out of it. Tara sent over the cover, you know, this is what we're thinking of the cover, and then I was like, oh, my God, how could you have read my mind? This is so extraordinary. I even like the font.

And as a translator I've had about 20 books so far, whatever it is now. I know that the cover is really, really important, and I know that if I don't like the cover I have to say it. I have to be the one, because certain houses will be like, oh, no, everyone in the house loves the cover, and they're totally B.S.ing you whenever you hear that phrase. That's when you have to put your foot down. So, I was totally ready to do that when I got the emails.

Harper has such gorgeous covers. My favorite cover from HarperVia aside from mine is the Dolki Min cover for *Walking Practice*, translated by Victoria Caudle. I was going to demand that I have a cover like that, but I didn't have to, because when I saw the cover I was just so blown away, and the interior of the book is also really beautifully done. Someone else did the interior for it, and she did this really fantastic job as well. I'm very, very grateful for just how beautiful the book is, because it really does matter, it really super matters a lot.

So much work and art goes into it. The physical object of the book is like a translation of the book, and as a translator I appreciate all translations. It's like the audio book edition, which is an incredible production.

The audio cast for *Toward Eternity*, they won an award for the book.

Tara Parsons:

They won. Day one, people read it, and were blown away.

Anton Hur:

Exactly. I've never won an award. So for me, I was like, oh, wow! So it was really incredibly wonderful for me that that happened to our cast. It's a really, really amazing experience.

I think Safae mentioned that someone came up with the title. It was Tara who came up with the title, by the way. We had so many titles, and we were considering so many things, and like right up to the very last moment, where we had to have a title in order to go into production, like the book, was basically like fully complete, and I could not come up with a title to save my life. I mean, I can't for my translations either. Usually my editors come up with the titles for those too.

Tara said, why not *Toward Eternity*? It had been staring us in the face this whole time, and it had to be Tara who picked it up. So I'm very grateful.

This book is such a collaborative effort, and as a translator, I'm sorry I keep saying as a translator, but as a translator, I appreciate collaborative efforts. It was just so wonderful how everything came together, and how everyone was so open to ideas and putting all of their talent into it.

Lily Philpott:

Tara, can I ask you to talk a little bit about what marketing looks like, from marketing and publicity on the HarperVia side, and maybe stepping back a tiny bit as well. There was an audience question about the pitch letter which she mentioned, if you could talk a little bit about what that looks like. In my understanding, you're selling it not to the public, but to your colleagues, and I'm always so curious how you craft that pitch, that narrative.

Tara Parsons:

I think one thing that people don't realize even within the publishing world, if you're in editorial sometimes you don't realize this about your sales team, and I'm very much a conduit to our sales team, is that you have to position a book differently to your different clients. The way that you would pitch to an indie bookstore who loves literary fiction is very different than how you would pitch a book to like target, or to even Barnes & Noble.

A lot of the larger chains, and these merch stores, they use metrics to figure out whether they're going to consider a book from the start. When we talk about putting together the acquisition

materials, that's kind of like the first step in which the editor is saying, how am I going to position this to somebody who's maybe not necessarily come from a passionate editorial love of this kind of book, right? How am I going to help them sell it to other people.

That's where you see a lot of, I know it's a little cheesy, but it's like so-and-so meets so-and-so, it's like this movie meets blah blah, you know. You kind of have to position it out outside of a very specific and narrow window, so that people will understand.

You know what's so exciting about the book? This just reminded me. Yesterday we had a sales conference, and I have to present a number of our books at sales conferences, but we don't have the editors do it at that point. It's really someone from marketing or publicity who is pitching the book to our salespeople.

Talking about marketing and publicity, you give a little hook. I had just read this book, translated by Gretchen Schmid, who's fantastic, and it's called *Make Me Famous*, and it's by an amazing author named Maud Ventura. I had read it over the weekend, and just lost my mind because it was so fantastic, and it made me think. The character at the heart of it is like a super-famous singer, and it's a psychological kind of harrowing, but sort of gleefully harrowing, character. You kind of love to hate her and hate to love her, and I was so excited that I started talking about it extemporaneously, and I started talking. I said something like, it's as if Sabrina Carpenter were really this sort of icy, sexy, terrifying, psychopathic genius that, like you can sometimes see in her pop songs.

And everybody got really excited about that description, because everybody knows who Sabrina Carpenter is in that room, and they can kind of picture, then, who that person is. So that's really the job of marketing to say, who would really enjoy this book on an authentic level, but who may not even be necessarily reading books every single day, right? And then you have to think, how am I going to explain this book to them or to the people who are going to stock this book in their stores in a way that's going to appeal to them? It's a tricky thing, because you don't want to be a sellout. You don't want to dumb it down. You want to respect all the different audiences that can come to the book. But you also want to be selling as humanly possible to get people excited about it.

Lily Philpott:

Safae, to round out this conversation about marketing and publicity as the book moves towards its publication day, can you talk about what your role as an agent is? I'm actually, really, specifically interested, because again, this is a global conversation. We're on many different continents right now. As an agent working from the U.K. with a U.S. publisher and an author based in Korea, how did that work? Not just in terms of like coordinating time zones, but working as a as an agent in the U.K.?

Safae El-Ouahabi:

It's a really interesting question, because it varies so much author to author. Anton being the dream author that he is, because he has this translation background, and he's worked with publishers before, and he's done so much of it on his own. He is very independent, and he goes out and tackles things head-on.

Some authors, where publishing is still a bit of a mystery, and you need to demystify a lot of it, require a lot more input. And so it varies in terms of level of input an agent has in the process. After a book is sold with an author, it just depends on what they're like.

Anton is someone who is very independent. He's very good at getting things done, who knows exactly what he wants, which, as an agent, it's a dream. And HarperVia have done such a good job in terms of coordinating his U.K. and U.S. tours and making sure that he's being taken care of and answering any questions that he has.

As an agent, it's my job to coordinate everything and make sure that everyone's happy. The author is happy. People are getting along. When that's already happening, it makes your job a lot easier. From our perspective, we've kept back the translation rights for *Toward Eternity*, which basically means that we have an in-house Foreign Rights department that sells Anton into translation abroad, and they have done so already. They have him in Germany, in France, and in Korea. Bora Chung is actually doing the translation for the Korean edition, which is very exciting.

It's been very interesting. Obviously, seeing the different covers that have come out. The German edition has a very different cover to the U.S. and U.K. edition. Essentially, it's my job to coordinate all of those sides and talk to our rights team and get them to give the information to our people. We had *Toward Eternity* in the foreign rights London Book Fair 2023 hot list last year, which is where an agency gets to pick like four or five titles that they're selling rights to kind of highlight and put forward. So he was one of those.

I guess my job as the agent is coordination, and to make sure all of the things are kind of working together, and it's been a blessing. So thank you, Tara. Thank you, Anton, for being the dream team.

Tara Parsons:

I just want to also plug something that Safae does, too, which is, sometimes you have to ask your publishing house tough questions, or push them a little bit, to give you a plan, and then stick to that plan. I think as an author, sometimes you don't want to be the one to be like, what are you doing for me, you know? That's where your agent can come in and demand answers that will then hold everybody accountable to what happens next. I think Safae did that beautifully, because you have to use a gentle touch. Like, I need this, but also, working together and talking things through. I just felt like it was beautifully handled. I feel like we all just got along so wonderfully.

Anton Hur:

I just want to add one more thing that I thought was really interesting, and especially working with Tara. When I was working with Safae, you know, she's an agent. So of course, it's going to be a lot of networking with different people in the industry, and as a translator I could understand.

With Tara, she would introduce me to many people in HarperVia and in HarperCollins U.K. also, because we also met during London Book Fair. And she was just so charming in the way that she introduced me. Basically, the way that she would introduce me was like, please pay him more attention when his book comes out. And I didn't know the political structure within a publishing house was like that. I thought Tara is, you know, vice-president. Why doesn't she just eat the sales team? I couldn't understand why the big one just doesn't eat the small ones. But it was very much like there had to be a lot of communication. And that's when I realized that, oh, your editor really needs to have a really good relationship with everyone else within the house. And if you happen to have an editor who doesn't, then the book will probably suffer in the marketing and P.R. steps. So, I got to ride a lot on Tara's coattails for the success of my book. I'm just so grateful that this is the editor that happened to pick up our book, because I don't know what would have happened otherwise.

Tara Parsons:

I think you're giving you way too much credit, but I think you're right in that you really have to like your agent, your editor, and you yourself, as an author, have to be such an advocate for yourself.

It's so funny even going back to that cover conversation, Anton, it's funny. You're so, I keep saying superstar, you are a superstar. So I think I never even had this moment of being like, are you sure you're okay with this cover? Sometimes with debut authors, I will have that conversation to say, look, this is the time, because a lot of people won't tell their editor if they don't actually like it, because they feel like they have to go along with things. You can't give no direction, and then be twelve covers in, and then not go anywhere, because then you're hurting the whole process. You have to have the cover so early now to start selling it and so forth.

But I really do try and remind debuters, this is your baby, and you're going to have to look at this cover for God-knows-how-long. Definitely tell me if there's something you hate about it, because we can fix that. And you know we want it to be something that you're so proud of

Lily Philpott:

That's such a good reminder for all of the writers here, to advocate for yourself, to say if you don't like it.

I know, Anton, you've been apologizing for introducing yourself as a translator, but I do actually want to ask one translation and representation question. You shared a really sweet little Twitter, whatever, Thread, on working with Safae as your agent, please. It's very, very sweet, and Safae is your agent for *Toward Eternity*, your creative work, but also your agent for your translation

work. And I'm so curious how that came to be. Is that typical, Safae? Do you also represent other translators and authors at the same time, like I'd love to hear from both of you how that happened, what that looks like.

Anton Hur:

Basically, how it happened was, was it only last year? It was 2023 during the spring, I was going through an extremely horrible situation with getting my grant paid by LTI, Literary Translation Institute of Korea. At the end of it, I had CC'd Safae throughout the correspondence I had, I BCC'd her or something, basically just to show her what I go through on a daily basis.

And I was like, Safae, is there any way that you can also take on my translation work? I know it's very rare for translators to have agents. Frank Wynne has an agent, but he was the only example that I really knew of. So can you just do this for me, please, like I don't know how much money is there for you, but maybe you could get some connections out of it. Can you maybe take a look at this? And Safae was like, sure. Then she went to talk to Frank Wynne's agent, and Frank Wynne's agent is in RCW, the same agency, and she came back and was like, okay, Anton, we'll take it on.

Okay, great. Here are the 10 contract negotiations that I am currently embroiled in right now. And then she comes back to me, and was like, oh, my God! Anton, everyone at RCW is wondering, they are aghast, how did you do all of this, all on your own, this whole time? My answer was, badly. I did it very bad. So I need help.

And yeah, I was a bit of a victim of my own success for a while. It was just so many interest groups, like editors and authors' agents. And then there was also funding bodies. And there's just so many moving parts that I just felt so overwhelmed. All the things that you did for my writing, I kind of need you to do for my translations. Ever since then, my life has changed completely. It went from hell to heaven.

Safae El-Ouahabi:

I also have to give credit to Anton because I represent a lot of translators now. And it's because of him. He's introduced me to 99 percent of them. From our perspective, it's so interesting, because when we were talking to Anton, we thought translators don't have agents because they don't want to have an agent taking commission on their work and then translator agents don't want us as clients, because it's not that much money. I think for a long time there was this disconnect, and there probably still is, where there aren't ways for these two parties to come together, work together, and for them to be represented by an agent.

Which I think is very far from the truth. I think that there definitely is a way to have a relationship with an agent. There's so many different forms that it can take. A lot of it is, of course, contractual and negotiation, because, that is what primarily an agent is there for. You

don't have to have these uncomfortable conversations with a publisher, getting cover credit and things like that.

And then the translator contract templates are a whole other ballpark which I've been navigating for Anton and for my other translators, and seeing them kind of do it all on their own. I was quite shocked because it is so labor-intensive. It takes so much time. And I was just thinking, Anton has over ten different projects ongoing. How is he doing that? A lot of other translators have multiple jobs.

It's been really interesting talking to various people and working out whether having an agent would be worth their time. And I also represent Shanna Tan, who translated *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop*, who Anton introduced me to, and Clara Richards and various other people. And it's been such a fruitful relationship. I've also had translators bring projects to me and say, I've read this book in Korean. I really like it. What do you think about working on it and pitching it together? So that has brought more projects to us as an agency, and I don't read Korean fluently, so I wouldn't know how to read a book cover-to-cover. A translator is in the best position to do that.

Translators are so plugged in, they always have an ear to the ground, and they've got really great and interesting taste. It's definitely worth agents taking a look at how they can work with translators, because I think that they definitely need representation in various aspects of their career. I'm hoping I've been very helpful to people like Anton and others. We're still kind of working out the different ways to pitch things and where rights are placed and things like that.

I hope that more agents step forward and are able to fill that gap that is needed. Especially now, translation is international, it's so popular, of course, in the U.K. And the U.S. There's a lot more appetite for it, to acquire more of it.

Lily Philpott:

It's so important, and I think this is a good moment as well to remind everyone that often you can go onto an agency's website and take a look at the individual agents and see what they are interested in and who they represent.

This has just been such a beautiful conversation. I love collaboration and this sharing of resources and energy there has been between the three of you. Thank you all so much for joining us from different continents, different time zones.