



2025 French-American Foundation Translation Prize

Finalist Interview with Jeffrey Zuckerman, translator of *Jellyfish Have No Ears* by Adèle Rosenfeld (Graywolf Press)

Q: What did you enjoy most about translating *Jellyfish Have No Ears* by Adèle Rosenfeld?

Jeffrey: What *didn't* I enjoy? I'm a deaf translator and this is a book all about being deaf; to say that this is one of the most deeply personal projects I've ever taken on is no understatement. On almost every page, I came across a line or an image that felt like it had come right out of my own world – my life. A brilliant author in France had put words to it all. How could I not be moved to render all this in my own language?

And I just had an absolute blast working with the puns, misunderstandings, and general wordplay – I mean, the frequently bewildered narrator stares at an ant-obsessed man and says something about "fourmimania." The second I saw that word, I knew it had to be "antsanity"! Among its many (many!) other qualities, *Jellyfish Have No Ears* was a book that let me think, each day that I worked on Englishing it, "Isn't language just *great* sometimes?"

Q: You've been a French-to-English translator for nearly a decade now. What translation trends have you noticed in the publishing world lately?

Jeffrey: My first job – before I became a translator – was as an editorial assistant at the extremely indie press Dalkey Archive Press, which published a dizzying number of translations from a slightly less dizzying number of languages. At that point, translations were starting to become trendy, but they still had an "eat-your-vegetables" whiff about them. But in the years since my own baptism by fire, I've seen readers start to really catch onto the sheer strangeness and coolness and utter wonderfulness of books from other corners of the world. The number of readers for those books from elsewhere has gone up, up, *up*. Who would have guessed, back in 2015, that in a decade the first volume of a tetralogy by an anonymous Italian writer would be chosen by American writers and readers as the best book of the 21st century so far? And that the National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Awards would boast new Translation categories? I was worried for a while that the interest in translated lit would prove to be a passing fad among English-language readers – but I'm starting to get the feeling that this love is here to stay!



Q: The French-American Foundation Translation Prize seeks to honor translators and their craft, and recognize the important work they do bringing works of French literature to Anglophone audiences. What does being named a finalist for this prize mean to you, and, in your own words, why does a Prize like this matter?

Jeffrey: Even as prizes for translated literature proliferate, I still put especially great stock in the French-American Foundation Translation Prize because it evaluates the care and attention that went into the translation itself. I often joke that translating from French is "translating on Level Easy," because editors and readers are already primed to consider books from the language, given their early exposure, however fleeting, in American schools – but this ubiquity is a double-edged sword, as French's proximity to English opens the door to false cognates and literalisms that would be harder to slip into when translating from more distantly related languages such as Arabic or Chinese. The mark of a truly great translation is a text that takes full advantage of what English can offer without retaining any unintentional traces of the original French; the French-American Foundation Translation Prize is one of the very few prizes in American that recognizes the true difficulty of such a feat, and rewards those truly capable of achieving it. Just to be shortlisted is already a huge honor; anyone who wins it can and should feel deeply proud of their success.