

## RESOLUTION

The Translation Committee of the American P.E.N. has been holding a series of meetings on questions arising from translation. We feel that a new attitude towards translators is long overdue, and we have drawn up a list of nine urgent recommendations for the attention of translators and publishers.

Since the translator is the re-creator of a work, which is only as good as his final rendering, we believe he should be given *continuing* rights in the income arising from his work. We believe it is to the advantage of the publisher to extend to him these benefits. In this way publishers will attract more qualified translators and writers of proved literary ability, and at the same time improve the level of contemporary translations.

The P.E.N. Translation Committee believes that it is in the interests of publishers and translators alike that the following nine principles should be generally heeded in all agreements drawn up between them:

1. Translators shall receive contracts similar to those which are entered upon with authors.
2. The translator shall enjoy a *continuing* share in all the earnings of his work.
3. All payments made to translators shall be considered as installments against future earnings.
4. The translator's share in the royalties and subsidiary rights shall not be less than the equivalent of one third of the author's.
5. The copyright of the translation shall be in the name of the translator, and it shall be the publisher's responsibility to renew the copyright in his name.
6. The publisher shall make no changes in the copy without the approval of the translator.
7. The name of the translator shall be prominently displayed on the jacket, the title page and on all publicity concerning the work.
8. The translator shall receive ten or more free copies of his published translation.
9. The translator and the publisher shall agree that any dispute arising from the contract shall be referred to the American Arbitration Board, and their decision shall be binding.

## MANIFESTO ON TRANSLATION

**A Call for Action.** The time has come for translators to come out into the open and to agree on a common course of action. For too long they have been the lost children in the enchanted forest of literature. Their names are usually forgotten, they are grotesquely underpaid, and their services, however skillfully rendered, are regarded with the slightly patronizing and pitying respect formerly reserved for junior housemaids.

Our culture, and indeed all cultures, are thoroughly rooted in translation, and the translator is the unacknowledged vehicle by which civilizations are brought about. We could have no Bible without Tyndale, no Proust without Scott-Moncrieff, no *Tale of Genji* without Arthur Waley. Most of what we know of the past has come to us through translation, and much of our future will inevitably depend on translation. We are the heirs of all the cultures of the past only because the translators have made these cultures available, and without the translator, the lost child, we are all lost.

Too often the translator is brushed aside as though he were some mechanical contrivance adept at converting one language into another. Since he is often poor, it is assumed that he came to his poverty honorably; and his name, if it appears at all, is usually printed in small type, in accordance with his reputation for humility. Reviewers rarely notice his existence. Publishers in their advertisements rarely pay any attention to him. Since the reviewer is the public's sole guide to the quality of the translation, and since only the publisher can give prominence to the translator's name, he remains largely anonymous and the quality of his work is unknown. As a consequence, the translator finds himself far too often in a shadowy no man's land, where he is scarcely distinguishable from the shadows.

Who knows the names of translators? Who cares? Yet the names deserve to be known, and it is necessary that we should care about them. It is absurd that they should be relegated to their own private no man's land, with no court of appeal and without recourse to the usual benefices reserved for authors. They are the proletarians of literature with nothing to lose but their chains.

The duties of translators are well known. Since the time of the first translators, they have always agreed that their task

was to make a faithful rendering of the works they are translating. They know that it is not enough to convey the substance of these originals accurately; they must employ all their gifts of imagination and resourcefulness to make versions which mirror the original rhythms, assonances, structure and style. A sentence in Japanese, for example, has to be examined patiently, broken up into its separate parts and then re-fashioned before it can be expressed in English; and what is true of Japanese is equally true of all oriental languages, and to a lesser extent of all modern European languages. Translation is therefore reconstruction and re-creation, a creative act of immense difficulty and complexity. A translator may spend hours unraveling and recreating a single paragraph. He must somehow suggest the rhythm and structure of the original, and write in a style that conveys the style of the original. He must have a deep and far-reaching knowledge of two languages. The original author is luckier: he needs to know only one language.

Ideally, the best writers should be asked to make translations, and every good writer should at one time or another assume the burden of translation. Rilke translated Paul Valéry, Baudelaire translated Edgar Allen Poe, Dostoyevsky translated Balzac: but such happy conjunctions are very rare. In our own time great works of literature have been translated too often by writers with an insufficient command of the resources of the English language, but on the whole the level of translation has been higher than we had any right to expect under prevailing conditions. Obviously there are reasons why good writers often refuse to embark on translation. The rewards are small, the work arduous, the time can be spent more profitably. Nevertheless, the standard of translations improves every year, and every year there are more and more dedicated translators.

The duties of a translator are well known, but his rights have never been satisfactorily formulated. The P.E.N. Translation Committee believes that the time has come to re-examine the situation. A Bill of Rights for translators is long overdue, and it is proposed to call a Conference on Translation to discuss these rights in the spring of 1970.

**The Rights of Translators.** Among the subjects to be discussed are the following:

(a) The translator has the right to continuing royalties as long as his translation is in print. He is inseparable from the

translation. Under no conditions whatsoever should he accept an outright fee for his work. Even if the royalty is very small, amounting to as little as 2%, such an arrangement is eminently necessary in order to guarantee his *continuing rights*. (This royalty should not be deducted from the author's royalties.) Without these, he becomes merely a pawn in the game, sacrificed as soon as he has fulfilled his elementary duty in the eyes of the publisher. A translator does not deserve to be treated as a pawn.

(b) A model contract suitable to publishers, authors and translators in preparation.

(c) The name of the translator should *always* appear on the title page and in the promotional matter issued by the publisher. It is not possible to insist on any relative size for the name of the translator on the title page, but in general it should be two-thirds the size of the name of the original author. The translator's name should also appear on the jacket.

(d) In general, the translator should retain the same proportional scale of royalties for his own work as does the author of the original work.

(e) Advances to translators based on fixed fees per thousand words, i. e. \$20 per thousand words in current American practice, are clearly unworkable in cases of highly wrought imaginative fiction, and some new basis for computation is needed. It would be absurd to pay a translator of Thomas Mann or Paul Valéry at the same rate as a translator of any "sexpot" novel, but translators are in fact being paid according to the number of words and not according to the inherent difficulties of the task.

(f) Translators are continually faced with the need for special dictionaries, and it is suggested that in addition to an advance and royalties a translator should receive an honorarium to cover the cost of dictionaries.

(g) Translations made in England have been published in the United States only after large-scale revisions have been made, without any mention of the names of the translators responsible for the revisions. This is inherently dishonest, for the reader has no way of knowing who is ultimately responsible for the translation.

**Translators' Conference.** While the prime purpose of the Translators' Conference to be held in New York in the spring



of 1970 will be to draw up a model contract and a Bill of Rights for Translators, there are other urgent matters to be discussed. Among them are the following:

**Professorships of Translation.** Although translations have been made since the beginning of recorded history and many of the best minds have been engaged in this appallingly difficult task, no chair of translation has ever been established. There have been "colleges" of translation instituted for the purpose of translating the Bible, but the art and craft of translation have never been taught as a major subject in a university.

This is a shocking state of affairs, which should be remedied as soon as possible. Such professorships should properly be established in all the major universities. Only in this way shall we have the possibility of constant professional study of the theory and practice of translation as distinguished from philology and linguistics. Exchange professorships with foreign countries are also urgently needed. The establishment of professorships will have the effect of producing an improvement in the quality of translations. Ultimately, it is a question of giving dignity to an art which has hitherto received only a grudging respect.

**Exchange Fellowships.** In addition to professorships there is need of exchange fellowships, because the art of translation is best pursued with constant meetings with translators from abroad. It is not so much a question of asking the foreign translators to take up positions in universities, but it is very necessary that they come to America and meet translators. This could be done under the auspices of P.E.N. It is especially desirable that translators from the African and Asian nations should be invited for a minimum period of two or three months. Ideally, of course, they would be attached to the universities, but this may not always be possible.

**Prizes.** The P.E.N. Translation Committee hopes to establish a number of regional prizes for translation. At the very least there should be prizes for the best translations from the literatures of Asia, Latin America, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Scandinavia. We would also like to see an annual prize for the best translation from Russian, making no distinction whether the work comes from the Soviet

Union or from emigré writers. We would like to see prizes for the best translation from the Japanese and the languages of India-Pakistan. These prizes, if well publicized, would encourage publishers to produce more translations.

**Publishers.** There are already a number of publishers and editors on the P.E.N. Translation Committee, and it is hoped to add more. The Committee should keep in very close touch with them.

**Translations from Russian.** As long as the Soviet Union and other totalitarian regimes insist on censoring their writers and sending them to prison camps, their literature will be subject to intolerable strains. In these countries, the best writers write "for the drawer" against the day when, by a miracle, they will be allowed to write freely. Censorship was light under the Czars; under the Soviets it is all-pervasive, and not a word can be printed without the imprimatur of a government functionary. And this is true of all totalitarian regimes, and may become increasingly true throughout the world.

Like writers everywhere, Russian writers want to be read, they want to be known, they want their emotions to be shared and their ideas to be understood. They will go to almost any lengths to see that their books are read abroad if they cannot be read in Russia. Translators who receive their manuscripts then find themselves attempting to resolve intensely difficult moral problems, for they know that the publication of their translations will inevitably place the author in jeopardy and they will bear a moral responsibility for his fate. There are no simple solutions. We cannot say: "Let us publish, and be damned. We know that the author wanted his works to appear in translation and his intention outweighs all other considerations." Many imponderables have to be weighed, for no one has the right to sentence a man to a prison camp, which may also be a sentence of death.

The P.E.N. Translation Committee believes that there is need to re-examine the situation and to establish certain guide-lines in consultation with as many experts as possible. This is also a question to be discussed at the forthcoming Conference, at which time it is hoped to invite a representa-

tive of the Soviet and other government and any writers who have been heavily censored.

**Untranslated Works.** Translation has always been a rather haphazard affair depending on considerations which do not necessarily have anything to do with the real value of the works translated. The Arabs translated Greek works on philosophy, astronomy and medicine, because they needed them and thus saved them for posterity; they did not translate the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles or the lyric poets, and we are therefore all the poorer. Some works translated by the Arabs are known to be lost. Chance has played its part, and even today translations often come about by chance.

**Index of Translations.** We need an Index of Translations, similar to the annual *Books in Print*, and we also need an Index of Works to Be Translated. This should properly be in the care of a university with a department of translation. A comparatively long list of works that need to be translated can be easily compiled, together with another list of works which have been translated inadequately. We have no adequate translations of Ariosto or Tasso. *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, acknowledged to be the greatest of the Chinese novels, has never been translated in full. There are no comprehensive anthologies of Indian or Japanese poetry. Strangely, there is no body of translations from the Vietnamese. As far as we know, neither the American Government nor any American university has made any conspicuous attempt to make Vietnamese culture known, and it is only with the greatest difficulty that one can find an occasional translation of a Vietnamese poem.

We have nothing from the Nepalese language, and precious little from the Arabic languages. If there is an outstanding novelist in Indonesia, we have not heard of him. Tibetan poetry is still unknown territory, and we are almost totally ignorant of the African languages. There is clearly a need for a comprehensive program to fill up the gaps, and we might very well begin with a serious study of the literature of the emerging African nations.

The question of inadequate translations is quite easily resolved when the books are out of copyright. What happens when the books are still in copyright? Edmund Wilson's

strictures on the translation of *Doctor Zhivago* have not been satisfactorily answered, and there would seem to be a prima facie case for a new translation which would convey the poetry and rhythm of the original more adequately. Similarly, André Malraux's *Antimémoires* deserved a translator with a keener sense of the music of the original. In both cases, we are presented with modern classics in an English dress which fails to convey their extraordinary beauty. Under present circumstances nothing can be done and we shall have to wait until the works go out of copyright before a new translator can improve on them. This is not a very serious matter where minor works are concerned; it is a very serious matter indeed when it is a question of masterpieces.

Wherever we look, we find work for translators to do. There are urgent needs reflecting the contemporary situation, and we need a crash program for translations from modern Chinese and Vietnamese and from the African languages. But we are also living at a time when it has become necessary to re-examine our past and bring to light the important forgotten works of the past. We might begin by examining the 500 volumes of Migne's *Patrologia* to discover what the Christian Fathers were saying. It is not suggested that those immense volumes should be translated in full, but at least we should be permitted to have some idea of the treasures contained in them. What about Bruno's *De Immenso*? The more one contemplates our lack of translations, the more urgent appears the necessity of bringing into existence a publishing house supported by Foundations, which will be devoted solely to translations.

**A Journal for Translators.** We believe that each country should have a translator's journal which will present translations, reviews of translations, and a continuing commentary on the problems of translation. It should not be in the hands of a small academic élite, but represent the broad interests of translators all over the country. Many of the problems confronting translators would be solved by the existence of such a journal, which would provide them with a voice after an eternity of silence.

Although the journal would consist chiefly of translations and critical commentaries, it would also serve to promote the interests of translators and offer them a forum and a



debating ground. They would learn what works are being translated and what works need to be translated. Through the journal serious efforts can be made to raise the standard of translation. Above all, the journal would serve as the translators' vehicle of communication with the outside world, which has rarely listened to them, because they have rarely been heard,

Translators are faced with a choice. Either they can continue to do nothing to improve their lot or they can join together to ensure that at long last they will receive their due. The choice is between apathy and active engagement in a struggle for recognition, between silence and the living voice. The world of translation is still largely undiscovered and unexplored, and the time has come to set the projects in order and to learn what can and what cannot be done.

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