

Call for Action. The field of literary translation has changed significantly in the fifty years since the PEN Translation Committee published its manifesto, which paved the way for translators' work to be highly valued in a globalized world. Translators working in the United States now stand at a crossroads. We understand translation to be a creative art in its own right, even as it continues to be regarded as marginal and derivative by the greater literary community. In recent decades, we have made meaningful steps in the right direction. National and international institutional structures have been established to recognize the cultural value of translation, while translation studies has emerged as a discipline that has opened up innovative new ways of theorizing and practicing translation and maps possible interventions in literary translation today.

Globalization from above has intensified asymmetrical relations among nations, peoples, cultures, and languages. At the same time, new networks of cultural exchange, new technologies for sharing and building community, and new markets that value differences of many kinds have come together to shift our understanding of the local, national, and international. A broad spectrum of social, cultural, and educational institutions in the U.S. has adopted global frameworks for understanding media and artistic practices. Translation has played an integral role in these major societal shifts. It is essential to the globalization of everything from forms of cultural expression to laws, scientific knowledge, and politics and frames how readers in the United States engage with literature from other languages and cultures. Contending with the ethics of such politically charged work, translators are in a position to actively challenge the reactionary forces pushing for cultural and linguistic homogeneity and hegemony, and the unequal distribution of capital and knowledge in all their forms. Indeed, translators can be advocates and change agents for more democratic forms of globalization from below, ones responsive to the overlapping histories of empire, colonialism, and white supremacy.

First and foremost, we call for translation to be understood as a specialized form of writing. A translator creates a new text by making aesthetic choices that are inextricable from their social and historical moments. In this way, the text intervenes in the current geopolitical economy to either reinforce or resist existing asymmetries. A translation establishes a set of interpretative relations with an existing text; the translator's aesthetic sensibilities shape it for a new literary context and pave the way for dynamic and varied readings. Both text selection and translation itself can and should work against histories and ongoing practices of exclusion. Since translation always produces new interpretations, it reveals the collaborative nature of the production, circulation, and reception of texts. Translation communities in the U.S. must therefore play a meaningful role in counteracting disparities in power and prestige among the world's languages and peoples.

Despite an increase in attention paid to translators in recent decades, the broader public and the publishing industry still misconstrue, obscure and undervalue translation. In 2020, translators remain underpaid, absent from book covers, and regarded as supplementary. Most publishers do not prioritize the promotion of texts in translation. Thus, translation sales underperform and readership remains narrow. This political and economic moment demands a paradigm shift. It is imperative that translations account for a larger percentage of U.S. cultural production. Looking to the future, we must continue to push for infrastructural change so this crucial work is financially viable. We must also keep a clear eye on how we can reshape U.S. attitudes about translation and non-Anglophone cultures through our work, as well as how we represent our work in public life.

We announce this call for action in the belief that translation has transformative potential; it is a fundamentally social practice that, at its best, creates new forms of artistic and cultural expression. We call for the entire translation community to move forward with a critical approach that recognizes the capacity of our work to resist the assimilative gestures of globalization, and to understand translation as the creative, collaborative writing practice that it is.

Translation is a form of writing.

- We call on everyone who engages with translation to acknowledge translation as a creative art in its own right. Translation must be understood as a specialized form of writing. Translators shape texts in social and cultural contexts based on aesthetic sensibilities and interpretations of their own that are inseparable from those contexts.

Translation must be sustainable as a livelihood.

Translators have responsibilities.

- We call on translators to educate themselves and others to understand the cultural, social, political, and linguistic contexts in which they work, and how translation can impact asymmetrical power relations. We challenge the tendency to assimilate texts from distinct cultural and historical contexts into a universalizing account of human experience.

Publishers have responsibilities.

- We call on the U.S. publishing community to radically alter its relationship with translators and the translation community—to support and nurture translators and translation opportunities as a means to collaboratively challenge the existing reality of the U.S. literary industry.

Institutions have responsibilities.

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