

# Translators Seek More Recognition

By HENRY RAYMONT

The men and women who help bring fame and fortune in English to writers in German, Russian, French and other tongues are less successful in translating their own efforts onto the recognition and royalties that they garner for others.

A rare look at the lonely, underpaid world of literary translation was offered last week at a five-day conference, the first on the subject held under the auspices of the American chapter of the PEN club. During symposiums, dinners and cocktail parties translators, authors and publishers searched for words adequate to the situation and wondered about such things as:

Why, at a time when many of the world's problems are attributed to the communication gap among nations and social groups, is the vital role of translation still widely neglected? Is the translator, who must transpose dialogues and moods into wholly different cultural contexts, really substantially less creative than the original author? Is he fated to remain unrecognized by the literary community and, most important, by the publishers?

## 'Unworkable' Payment

The conference reflected the new urgency of these questions and the clamor in the publishing world for improved wages and royalties for translators and a broader understanding of their roles. One concrete result of the meeting was a unanimous adoption of a "declaration" contending that the rates of \$15 to \$20 for each 1,000 words currently paid by most publishers "are clearly unworkable" for literary translations.

The declaration also contained a Translator's Bill of Rights, which said that as the "maker of a new work" the translator "should be recompensed accordingly" and "shall possess continuing rights over his work during his life."

In the closing address as chairman of the conference, Robert Payne summed up the views of many participants that translators suffered the same creative anguish as authors. A 59-year-old, blue-eyed and sandy-haired Englishman who is the author of more than 100 biographies, travel books, novels and translations, he argued that translation, unless treated like art, was an impossible task.



Congrat-Butler

Robert Payne, left, and Sidney Alexander, writers, consider the problem of translators

"All translators are trapped right from the beginning to the end of their work," Mr. Payne said. "Grammar, words, colors, moods—everything works against the translator."

"Imagine trying to convey the little sky we show here in New York, so often blanketed by a haze of pollution, to the South Sea Islanders. It implies a totally different cultural heritage which the translation must bear out."

"Better we think of translation as a kind of painting, an art rather than a skilled craft," he added. "It's like painting a landscape where the painter uses all the tools God forgot to use in the original."

## Look at Dog's World

Mr. Payne showed how dogs, and their place in various societies, illustrated the problems confronting translators.

It's worse when you have to portray barks, according to Hellmuth M. Braem, the translator of William Faulkner, E. E. Cummings and William Carlos Williams into German.

"Onomatopoeia begins with the language of dogs," Mr. Braem said at a panel that met at the PEN Club's offices at 156 Fifth Avenue. Amid laughter and applause he provided these examples:

"Bow-wow," for ordinary dogs in English; "arf-arf" or "jeep-jeep" for the more polite dogs of the "English Establishment"; "wau-wau" (pronounced vov-vov) for German dogs, and "guau-guau," for Spanish dogs.

## Political Restraints

The problem of translations in dictatorships under totalitarian governments was raised by Victor Alba, author of several political works on Latin America who now lives in Spain, and Mirra Ginsburg, a well-known translator from Russia.

Mr. Alba pointed out that many military regimes, particularly in Argentina, Brazil and Greece, were "too puritan" to allow faithful translations of many American authors who are known for their free use of obscene language.

"Very often translators may have to leave blanks or even alter the text if he wants a Philip Roth or a Norman Mailer to be published in his country," Mr. Alba said.

A similar situation in the Soviet Union was reported by Miss Ginsburg, who noted that the Government's publishing policies were closely correlated to political propaganda. She likened the situation to a story by Gogol where a Major Kovalev wakes up one morning, looks into the mirror and discovers,

to his horror, a smooth empty place on his face where the nose should be.

"In Russian literature," she said, "there is still an empty place where the genitals should be. And translators still dutifully castrate the texts they are working on to avoid shocking the reader with the vulgarisms of decadent Western literature."

## Favor Annual Session

Almost to a man those who attended the conference thought that it had been productive and should be held annually. Charles Bracelen Flood, a novelist and president of the American chapter of PEN—which stands for playwrights, poets, essayists and novelists—was enthusiastic about the results of the meeting.

"I believe we've succeeded in establishing a true sense of community of interest among translators, writers and publishers," he said. "Our next step will be to hold a series of regional meetings bringing together writers and authors from Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe."

John Macrae Jr., president of E. P. Dutton, said an interest in quality translations was evolving at an ever-increasing rate. He was confident it would result in higher fees and wider recognition for the translators.