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A couple of weeks ago, I struck up a conversation with a woman in a store, and she asked me what I was studying. When I told her I was getting my masters in Literary Translation, she gave me an odd look and said, “Huh! That’s kind of...niche.” I didn’t know what to say to that. I laughed and said, “I suppose it is.” BU’s program is one of just a few translation MFAs in the country and is only in its second year of existence. But as “niche” as our degree may seem, the skills my cohort and I have learned over the past year are anything but.

In her archive, my personal translation hero Barbara Wright kept a list of “Axioms of Translation”—bits of wisdom that she had collected from other translators in an attempt to define what the practice of translation entailed. I’d like to humbly put forth a few axioms of my own—things I’ve learned about “This Little Art” of translation, as Kate Briggs calls it, during my time as an MFA student in this department.

Number one: Translators read deeply, and they read widely. We have learned again and again that translation is the very closest form of reading. The task of the translator is to absorb a text—its style, its content, everything about it that makes it unique—and understand it so fully that they can reproduce it in another language. This takes time and patience, and I have learned to spend hours and hours with a text, dissecting it, figuring out what makes it tick, solving its problems, and building it back up in English. But it isn’t enough to simply read in the language from which you translate. Literary translation requires an understanding of how your text connects to a broader literary tradition. I came to BU to study French translation, but I emerged with an appreciation for an astonishing breadth of world literature: from haiku and Al-Hariri to Kafka and Cavafy. No literature or language exists in a vacuum,

and it is especially exciting to see where they bump up against each other; like when I find out that a French slang word I'm translating into English actually comes from Arabic. Or when I read that Virginia Woolf loved *The Tale of Genji*, or that Proust probably wouldn't have written *In Search of Lost Time* the way he did had he not been exposed to the work of the English writer John Ruskin. Being a translator means drawing from and contributing to this global network of literature.

Number two: Translation is personal. When we translate, we bring our entire lives into our work: every book we've read, every place we've visited, our likes and our dislikes. Eliot Weinberger compares the relationship between a source text and its translation to that of a parent and a child, and if that's true, then multiple translations of the same text are like siblings: alike in some ways, different in others, and never truly identical. This is because we as translators are all unique. We have different ways of reading and of seeing the world. Every time I read my classmates' translations, I get a glimpse into what kind of literature they believe in and want to champion.

And finally, number three: Translation is an art, and translators are artists! I knew from day one of the program that I had joined a group of brilliant linguists and self-proclaimed language nerds. Between us, we speak at least five languages. We have lived and studied in Japan, Argentina, Lebanon, France and beyond. But what I came to realize over the many months I spent with my classmates and their translations is that they are also remarkable poets, prose stylists, and storytellers who care deeply about writing as an artistic pursuit. I am so excited to walk into a bookstore someday and pick their work off the shelves.

I hope it's clear that learning to read well, to empathize, and to create aren't "niche" skills—they're essential. As the world leans increasingly towards nationalism and xenophobia, there is nothing more important than understanding and respect for the existence of all cultures, countries, and literatures. These are all lessons that literary translation has the

capacity to teach us. However, it would be disingenuous to say that translation has always been a force for good or an act of friendship. As often as translation has historically been used to bridge gaps between cultures, it has also been weaponized as a means of exoticizing, controlling, colonizing, and silencing marginalized peoples. So, what I sincerely hope for our class is that we have come away from our year at BU not only with the ability to translate well, but with a clear understanding of the ethics of translation, and a commitment to making space for diverse voices and allowing these literary texts to exist on their own terms.

I'll close with a quote from Kate Briggs that served as a sort of rallying cry for me as I finished my final semester. She says: "Do translations, for the simple reason that we need them. We need translations, urgently: it is through translation that we are able to reach the literatures written in the languages we don't or can't read, from the places where we don't or can't live, offering us the chance of understanding as well as the necessary and instructive experience of failing to understand them, of being confused and challenged by them" (58).

Thank you to our professors who have spent the past year encouraging us to do translations, and to engage with them thoughtfully. And congratulations to the class of 2022! It has been a delight to learn alongside you, and I cannot wait to be challenged by what you create.