

PEN TRANSLATES

Assessment Form

Introduction

PEN Translates applications are assessed against the following assessment criteria:

1. **Literary quality (40% weighting) – your report will focus on this criterion**

We aim to support literature of outstanding literary merit. This will be judged on the quality of the original manuscript and the translation sample.

2. **Strength of the publishing project (30% weighting)**

We support projects accompanied by a strong business plan identifying the target audience for the book; showing how this audience will be reached through a marketing and publicity campaign; and giving a realistic estimate of all costs.

3. **Contribution to UK bibliodiversity (30% weighting)**

We support the translation of quality books that will contribute to, or enhance, bibliodiversity in the UK. The programme is committed to championing harder-to-access languages and cultures by supporting the translation of books that might not otherwise be published in English. You can read our 'What do we mean by bibliodiversity?' FAQ here.

English PEN is asking you to assess the publisher's application with regard to **Criterion 1, Literary Quality**. You will provide a report, responding to questions about particular aspects of the application. **Please use your specialist knowledge to assess Criterion 1, Literary Quality.** (The assessment of Criteria 2 and 3, Strength of the Publishing Project and Contribution to UK Bibliodiversity, will mainly be assessed by the Selection Panel, who determine the final awards.)

At the end of your written report, please give an overall score of 1-10 for Criterion 1, Literary Quality, and indicate whether you recommend this title for an award. Details on how to arrive at an overall score are provided.¹

Throughout your assessment, **please avoid reproducing or paraphrasing information from the publisher's application, and instead offer independent critical evaluation of the information provided.**

If you have any questions, please get in touch with Will Forrester: will@englishpen.org

Project and Assessor Details

¹ If you have previously assessed PEN Translates applications, you will have been asked to give scores of 1-5 against each of these criteria. Please note that, on this new form, you will be asked to provide assessment focusing on Criterion 1, and provide an overall score of 1-10, rather than scores for each criterion of 1-5.

Book title:	Book A
Applying publisher:	ABC publications
Author of the book:	The Author
Original language:	French
Grant requested:	£2,500
Name of assessor:	X

Report

Literary Quality is assessed on the basis of the original manuscript and sample translation, though we do ask you to consider any example of positive coverage or endorsement in the book's country of origin, and other relevant points you would like to make regarding this application.

SECTION 1	Assessor comments
<p>Please assess the original manuscript. We would like you to make a value judgement about the literary quality of the title in question; is the work well written in its original language? Do you think it would be well received by a UK readership? Do you have additional insights on how the book was received in the original language (beyond e.g. sales figures and reviews provided by the publisher)? We would like to know how good this book really is.</p> <p>Would you recommend it? <u>Please refer to the original manuscript provided.</u></p> <p>Do you agree with the publisher's summary of the book? Would you characterise the title differently, or do you have comments based on your reading of the original manuscript? <u>Please refer to box 3.a. in the publisher's application.</u></p>	<p>Book A is an exploration of identity and the trials of the indigenous community of country X during a time of drastic change in its history. Set in the 19th century – when there was much turbulence and political upheaval in country X, as well as industrialisation that drastically altered the indigenous community's way of life – the story spans thirty years and follows the pre-teen protagonist into parenthood. We see how they encounter the new customs of the coloniser and the ensuing conflict between tradition and change, all whilst dealing with traumas of their own. This story can be difficult to read – we observe the robbing of the childhoods of an entire generation and the brutal subjugation of a community – but it also beautifully celebrates a forgotten people through its descriptions of its language, culture, and customs.</p> <p>The original is exceptionally written, and is very careful in its handling of this traumatic chapter in country X's history. The Author – a member of the indigenous community – understands the complexities of bringing their community's experiences to an international stage and is meticulous about not retraumatise their people. They successfully convey the lyricism of the local dialect in a way that I've not in before in the context.</p> <p>The book has had great success in the Francophone world, winning an X award for best debut, and being shortlist for several other prizes. Its reviews have praised its raw storytelling and its role in opening important conversations about who gets to tell their own stories. I think this book will find an audience in the UK as it's themes of family, reclaiming voice, and hope are similar Book B and Book C, which have both been successful among UK audiences over the last year.</p> <p>I found the book to be a refreshing account of a marginalised community in country X, with details only someone of this community could capture faithfully. I would recommend this book, with the caveat that it is a difficult read in places, but an essential one, nonetheless. I agree with the publisher when they say the author is not just a voice for their community, but of a new generation who are subverting the existing status quo in country X's publishing industry.</p>

<p>SECTION 2</p> <p>Please assess the sample translation provided with this application. We would like you to consider the literary quality of the translation. Having read the original manuscript, do you think the translator has done a good job? We encourage you to recognise the subjectivity of literary translation, and that balance between faithfulness to source language and fluency in target language is a complex issue. Please flag up any issues you foresee. <u>Please refer to the translation sample provided.</u></p> <p>Please do not offer subjective commentary on specific translation choices, or suggest alternative translations for passages.</p>	<p>The translator has had a successful partnership with the publisher for several years. Having read their previous translations, I was confident that the translator would be able to be faithfully convey the tone and voice of the text.</p> <p>This for the most part is true, however, I have some concerns around some phrasal choices and mistranslations of the local dialect that I'm surprised were not picked up before sending the application. The local dialect is a mix of French and the indigenous language, as well as influences from neighbouring countries. As a result, it is very lyrical and filled with idioms that convey the humorous and playful nature of the indigenous language in a unique way. I felt that some of this was lost by an attempt to overexplain some phrases – I think that the translation would be more successful if the glossing were less heavy-handed, and more editorial consideration to this point were paid. This would further add to the humour of the coloniser's confusion in this sample, while staying true to the original.</p> <p>That being said, the rest of the translation is excellent (the tension of the extract is captured faithfully, and the voice of the protagonist feels well understood) and so I hope that these concerns can be straightened out in the editorial stage. The publisher – who has a trusted reputation for working with translated projects from this region – has flagged that the translator and author are working closely together (the translator is travelling to country X in the Spring) so I hope that this will help to alleviate the flagged concerns.</p>
<p>SECTION 3</p> <p>Please assess the style, voice, genre, form, cultural context and original language and consider to what extent this title is offering something 'new' or original compared to other work from this region and language.</p> <p>Is this title original in terms of the writing style (literary techniques) the subject matter (story message), and the themes (current affairs, relevance to UK readers, intercultural understanding)?</p> <p>Do you have any concerns regarding sensitivity or how this book engages with issues of diversity in its original context that the Selection Panel should be made aware of?</p> <p>Please use your specialist insight into language and cultural contexts to inform your comments, rather than reproducing content from the publisher's application.</p>	<p>The story of this community is well known and taught in country X, however it is little known outside its context. Many works that already exist about this community have been from those attempting to write about the community from outside the community, rather than from those within. This has resulted in the perpetuating of derogatory stereotypes and a loss of nuance.</p> <p>The author has spoken about their writing experience during a very successful publicity tour in country X, stating that they felt they had to fight internalised prejudice in country X, as well as within themselves. While much of their research was based in the oral history and folklore from their community, large parts of the source material is biographical, taken from the experiences of their great grandparents. This explains the tactful way the story is handled – there is a respect and sorrow felt through the entire book – but there is also enough levity (such as when the protagonist encounters the "unusual" objects brought by the coloniser as gifts) to hold the reader through the more disturbing scenes.</p> <p>The story is a unique one. Told through lens of a pre-teen at the cusp of change in their personal life, this is a point of view rarely seen in literature from country X. The author is an own community voice, which is also rarely seen coming out of country X due to the heavy monopolisation of the publishing industry.</p> <p>I'm excited to see a title from this community being considered for a PEN Translates award. It showcases the beautifully lyrical literary tradition of this community. The Author is known for their poetry in country X and this is their first foray into literary fiction. Their poetic craft is seen through the book and adds a unique voice to the local as well as international publishing industry.</p>

<p>ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:</p> <p>Do you have any additional comments on this title that you would like the Selection Panel to be aware of?</p>	<p>A beautiful book! I thoroughly enjoyed reading this and am excited to see this author being translated into English.</p> <p>I have some concerns around the translator's fee (it is slightly lower than the TA-observed rate) which I think should be queried.</p>
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Score and Recommendation

Please score this application from 1 to 10, using the scale explained below. This score is exclusively for Criterion 1: Literary Quality.

1	No Literary Quality	Very strongly advise not awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation are incredibly poor.
2	Very weak Literary Quality	Strongly advise not awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation are very poor.
3	Weak Literary Quality	Advise not awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation have limited merit. Or one aspect is good, but the other is very poor.
4	Limited Literary Quality	Tentatively advise not awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation are mediocre.
5	Some Literary Quality	On balance, very tentatively advise not awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation have some merit. Or one aspect is very good, but the other is weak.
6	Good Literary Quality	On balance, very tentatively recommend awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation are good, but not incredibly compelling. Or one aspect is very strong, but the other only has some merit.
7	Fairly Strong Literary Quality	Tentatively recommend a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation are very good, but not outstanding. Or one aspect is very strong, but the other only good.
8	Strong Literary Quality	Recommend awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation very strong. Or one aspect is exceptional, but the other is only strong.
9	Very strong Literary Quality	Strongly recommend awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation are incredibly strong.
10	Exceptional Literary Quality	Very strongly recommend awarding a grant	The original manuscript and sample translation are exceptional.

Score for this title in terms of Literary Quality:	8
<p>Please explain your score, and give your recommendation as to whether or not this title should receive a PEN Translates award:</p> <p><i>(max 300 words)</i></p>	<p>The original work is exceptional, and the sample is good. My concerns around how carefully the translation handles local dialect have made me hesitate with awarding it any higher, but I trust that the translator can correct this with the help of the publisher.</p> <p>I think that this work is an important addition to literature in translation in the UK.</p>
Any final comments?	No further comments
Signed: English PEN assessor	
Date	