

Summer Session 1
Honors 290 01A
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Office Hours
by appointment

Translation as Art

Course Description & Goals

What is literary translation? Why think of it as an art, rather than a craft or skill? Essentially, literary translation makes available works of literature to readers who could not otherwise access them. Works of literature, opposed to non-literary works, rely on poetics (not just poetry, of course) to augment the ‘meaning’ of the work. Literary works operate on many levels, only one of which is the semantic. It is this complexity that requires artistry to engage with in the act of translation.

Translation is essentially a series of decisions, ideally consciously made, about what to prioritize in a given project of literary (re)creation. One goal for this course is to practice prioritizing different parts of different literary works, while reading translations that make decisions in unusual, unsettling, artistic and challenging ways.

Translation is an inherently political act, from the choice the translator makes of what text to translate (and why) to the choices that the translator makes in engaging with the specific components of the text. The theoretical readings that accompany our creative practice will hopefully shed some light on our own process, challenge us to be critical of our own decisions, and even suggest new ways of engaging with the texts we are reading and translating.

Translations are made with the intent of engaging new audiences with literary works. Any responsible artist participates widely in the field of their production. And so must you, even as beginning translators be careful, thoughtful and critical readers of contemporary translated literature (it’s a good idea for everyone, but especially for us). The second primary goal for this course is to develop, examine and practice various reading strategies for engaging with translated literature. We’ll do this by reading recently-published works of new literary translation and discussing the translation of the text, as well as writing reviews of these texts.

This course is a workshop, and so, we’ll be heavily engaged with writing—our own, each other’s, and published works. Translation is a kind of creative writing. And whether you’re translating or writing critically or creatively or doing some high-concept experimental mash-up, *good writing is what makes your writing good*. Accuracy in translation is not enough; creativity in adaptation is not enough; a high concept is not enough. First and last and in between, translators must write well. So, this course will be a place to experiment and improve yourself as a writer.

While only half our classes will actually **be** workshops; almost every class will be **like** a workshop. In our non-workshop class time, we will discuss the assigned reading, focusing on the creative, writerly features of it: poetics, rhythm, structure, tone, voice, characterization, use of form, general excitingness, etc. Of course, we will be discussing these as they relate to the *translator's work* making the text available to us.

ALSO: Each student will have at least one workshop session, dedicated to your own translation work, for which you should submit 15-20 paragraphs of prose or 8-10 poems or 20-25 paragraphs of drama. This must be submitted ONE WEEK BEFORE the class in which you will be workshopped. Cross-genre work should fit somewhere between those outer length limits (8 paragraphs for really dense stuff, 25 paragraphs for more straightforward stuff). Each workshopped student gets about **45 minutes** of our undivided attention. These can be, but need not be, the work that will make up in whole or in part your final portfolio.

Grade structure

- 30% - Final portfolio
- 20% - Weekly reviews
- 20% - Close reading papers
- 20% - Exercises and feedback
- 10% - Attendance & Participation

Final portfolio

Your final grade will be based in large part on your final portfolio. You must have decided what you'll be doing, and gotten my approval, by June 22nd. There are two options for this, a creative **or** a critical project.

The creative project can be any genre. For verse, at least 10-15 pages; prose, at least 30-40 paragraphs. This may be, at least in part, revised, improved, polished versions of what you bring to workshop - though it doesn't have to be. All projects must be approved by me by June 22. You may work independently from a language you read. You may work independently from a language you don't read, using multiple previous translations or trots (literally word-for-word "translations" made by someone who reads the language) to create a substantially new version. You may also work collaboratively with another student if you do not have a reading competency in a foreign language (in which case you EACH must turn in the required amount, and they must be different from each other). Whichever you choose, it must be accompanied by a 1-2 page critical introduction in which you discuss the choices you've made as a translator. I'm flexible about the shape of your final project, so if you have other ideas for a final creative project come talk to me about them!

The critical project is a portfolio of reviews, totaling at least 3000 words, of at least 2 texts we've read in class and 2 texts you've found on your own. That's at least 4 reviews.

The texts you choose may be shorter (a long excerpt from a journal or anthology) but the reviews must substantially engage in the issues of translation we address in class. Choosing this option does NOT mean that you aren't expected to bring translations to workshop; it merely means that your workshopped translations are not going to be part of your final portfolio.

Weekly reviews

Each week you will turn in to me a short (500-700 word) review of the text we've been reading together, engaging critically with the *translation* of the text. These will be due on Monday morning by 10 a.m. That is **BEFORE** our class meeting: this is to make sure you've had time to read and reflect and are ready to start discussing the text, and so that I've had time to read and respond to your thoughts. This will make our conversations better. These will be graded based on how carefully you're reading the text and thinking about the pertinent issues of translation. Good writing also matters, though not as much as substance on these.

Exercise feedback

Download and **print out** your fellow student's work that will be workshopped in class. Please don't use your computer to read the text on during workshop. I know this kills more trees, but it also keeps us more focused on the work. Read through each piece **at least twice** and write comments on the manuscript itself to prepare you talk about it in class. (This means no "track changes" commenting. Pen on paper builds character and wrist strength.)

In addition, write a one-page, single-spaced critique letter for each piece. Give the letter to the author following his/her workshop. Also send a copy of that letter to me as an email attachment **before class**. (Even if just 45 seconds before.) These will be graded based on how thoughtfully and thoroughly you've commented on your fellow student's work. We're not correcting the translation based on dictionary definitions: assume the translator is making choices, not mistakes, and that they have access to a dictionary and thesaurus. Of course, it's perfectly valid (and very useful) to question choices! Also, correcting punctuation, while important, is not particularly substantial commenting - really get into issues of style, craft, theoretical framework for decisions the translator has made.

Attendance & Participation

This is a seminar, and a workshop, so you being here is the most important part of participation. You get 1 unexcused absence, and after that any unexcused absence will take ½ a grade off your final grade. To excuse an absence, you must email me **before class** and it must be for a college-approved reason (see the student handbook, but basically, illness with a doctor's note or death in the family).

You must participate thoughtfully in class discussions and in the workshop.

Meetings

I expect you all to meet with me at least once before June 22nd to discuss your final portfolio project. Come to office hours, or email me to schedule something outside of them.

Electronic device policy

If I see you texting, browsing the internet, on Facebook, or tweeting, I'll quietly note it, and your final grade will lose points. It's just a matter of respect.

Laptops are ok, though I reserve the right to forbid laptops during discussions. **No laptops during workshop.**

Plagiarism

For the creative work, you're going to have to try very, very hard if you want to get in trouble for plagiarism. The whole point of this class is to translate, adapt, and otherwise use other writers' stuff. That said, there is a line (it has to do with turning in something that involves almost no modification of source material on your part), and you can cross it, and if you do, you fail the assignment, maybe the class, plus other bad stuff will happen to you. If you have an idea for a creative assignment, and you don't know if it crosses the line into plagiarism, talk to me about it. Ahead of time.

For the reviews, plagiarism is just like normal. You quote somebody without citing – plagiarism. You paste from Wikipedia or whatever – plagiarism. You already know this.

Required Texts

A Life on Paper by Georges-Olivier Châteaureynaud, translated by Edward Gauvin (Small Beer Press, 2010). \$19.95
<http://smallbeerpress.com/books/2010/05/25/a-life-on-paper-stories/>

Bhagavad Gita translated by Mani Rao (Autumn Hill Books, 2010). \$11.95
http://www.autumnhillbooks.org/bhagavad_gita.html

Killing Kanoko by Hiromi Ito translated by Jeffrey Angles (Action Books, 2009). \$12.00
ISBN: 9780979975547
<http://www.actionbooks.org/catalog.html>

Ventrakl by Christian Hawkey (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2010). \$15.00 ISBN: 978-1-933254-64-7
<http://www.uglyducklingpresse.org/catalog/browse/item/?pubID=142>

Online Resources

Almost all of the critical reading we'll be doing for this course is online. I highly recommend installing the Readability app (www.readability.com) in your browser to make online reading more comfortable. This app allows you to support online publishers with a nominal fee for reading these articles, which would be much more expensive collected into a coursebook. There is a free version of the app if you cannot afford to support the publishers of these works. If you choose not use Readability, I encourage you to consider donating a minimal amount to the publishers. They are all not-for-profit organizations that can only continue providing valuable resources with our support.

[Words Without Borders](#) - the best journal of contemporary literary translation, with some great critical articles and reviews.

[Asymptote](#) - a brand-new online journal of contemporary literary translation, also with some great critical articles and reviews.

[Three Percent](#) - a blog for Open Letter Press, home of the Best Translated Book Award, lots of reviews.

[Brooklyn Rail in Translation](#) - a section of this great journal, devoted to literary translation

[American Literary Translator's Association](#) - the professional association for literary translation, some good resources for beginning translators.

DEVELOPED & TAUGHT BY ERICA MENA

WEEK 1 - A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

June 1: **Introductions**

In-Class Translations: Du Fu's "Facing Snow" & Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina

For next week: *A Life on Paper* (The Only Mortal; Delaunay the Broker, The Excursion; The Bronze Schoolboy; Another Story) (64 pgs)

Exercise 1: "Blind" translation

WEEK 2 - TRANSLATION AS A STRATEGY

June 6: **Getting Started**

Review of a short story from *A Life on Paper* due at 10 AM

“The Eight Stages of Translation” by Robert Bly (13 pgs)

Brooklyn Rail review of *A Life on Paper*
<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2010/07/books/tokens->

June 8: **Reading and Reviewing Translation**

“How to Read a Translation” by Larry Venuti (6 pgs)
<http://wordswithoutborders.org/article/how-to-read-a-translation/>

Rabassa (5pgs)

On Reviewing Translations (10 pgs)
Susan Bernofsky, Jonathan Cohen, and Edith Grossman
<http://wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/on-reviewing-translations-susan-bernofsky-jonathan-cohen-and-edith-grossman/>
(2 pgs)

“Confessions of a Book Reviewer (of works in translation)” by Jonathan Blitzer
<http://wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/on-reviewing-translations-confessions-of-a-book-reviewer-of-works-in-transl/>
(3 pgs)

Rigoberto González

<http://wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/on-reviewing-translations-rigoberto-gonzalez/>
(2 pgs)

Scott Esposito
<http://wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/on-reviewing-translations-scott-esposito/>
(3 pgs)

For next week: *Killing Kanoko* (Translator's Introduction; Killing Kanoko; On C; The Maltreatment of Meaning; A Poem for Ueno-san; The White Cat that Shone Like Sunlight; Nashite Mountain; So as Not to Distort; Underground; Snow; Today, I; Happy Destroying; Translator's Notes) (24 pgs)

Exercise 2: intra-lingual translation

WEEK 3 - POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

June 13: **Who is unseen**

Review of *Killing Kanoko* due at 10 AM

Venuti (*Invisibility*, 1-9, 15-20) (13 pgs)

June 15: **What is unread**

Munday Ch. 8
(14 pgs)

“Manifesto of a Disabled Text”

<http://exoskeleton-johannes.blogspot.com/2008/06/manifesto-of-disabled-text.html>

(4 pgs)

For next week: *Bhagavad Gita* (Translator's Note, 1.01-1.44; 2.11-2.72; 7.04-7.30; 9.16-9.34; 10.12-10.42; 11.05-11.08, 11.15-11.30; 16.06-16.21; 18.64-18.78) (40 pgs)

WEEK 4 - CRACKING OPEN THE SACRED ORIGINAL

June 20: **The Original Meaning of the Original Text**

Review of *Bhagavad Gita* due at 10 AM

Other Translations of the Gita:

<http://www.duhgita.com/translations.html>

<http://www.gitasupersite.iitk.ac.in/>

“Suspension of Belief: Some Thoughts on Translation as Subversive Speech” by Jen Hofer

[http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org/5/articles/hofer/webspecial.h](http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org/5/articles/hofer/webspecial.htm)
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(8 pgs)

On the Function of the Line by Denise Levertov

(8 pgs)

June 22: **Open Sesame**

1st half of “The Rejection of Closure” Lyn Hejinian

(stop after “Art exists by means of this interaction or struggle.”)

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237870>

(6 pgs)

“Translation.” A manifesto.

<http://exchanges.uiowa.edu/translation-a-manifesto/>

(1 pg)

Exercise 3 Due: human vs. machine - bring copies for everyone

For next week: Selected texts

Catullus by Louis and Celia Zukofsky

<http://www.z-site.net/notes-to-poetry/Catullus-1969.php>

(1st 2 paragraphs)

<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Zukofsky.php>

(listen)

[“from An Introduction to Venantius Fortunatus for Schoolchildren or Understanding the Medieval Concept World through Metonymy: a Beginner’s Book.”](#) by Mike Czagany

(listen & read)

[“Diepalic Orchestration”](#) by Luis Palos Matos, translated by Uroyen Noel

(both versions and translator’s note at bottom of page)

[“from The Aenid”](#) by Joyelle McSweeney
(translator’s note at bottom of page)

Exercise 4: Charles Bernstein’s “Experiments” and “Wreading Experiments”

<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/bernstein/experiments.html>

<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/bernstein/wreading-experiments.html>

Pick a technique and try it. Note which technique you used!

WEEK 5 - TRANSLATION AS EXPERIMENTATION

June 27: **Experimental Translation**

Review of one of the selected texts due at 10 AM

2nd half of “The Rejection of Closure” Lyn Hejinian
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237870>
(5 pgs)

What is Experimental Literature?
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experimental_literature
(seriously, yes, this is a good overview.)

Close reading 1 due

June 29: **Formalities: Oulipo, Concrete and Flarf, oh my!**

What is Oulipo?
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oulipo>

“Translation and the Oulipo: The Case of the Persevering Maltese” by
Harry Mathews
<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/ethno-linguist>

“Uncreative Writing” Kenneth Goldsmith
http://www.ubu.com/papers/kg_ol_goldsmith.html

“For an Unoriginal Literature”
http://canopycanopycanopy.com/2/for_an_unoriginal_literature

Exercise 4 due

For next week: *Ventrakl*

Exercise 5: Pseudo-translate

WEEK 6 - UN-AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION

July 6: **Speaking to the dead**

Review of a *Ventrakl* due at 10 AM

“Channeling Georg Trakl” by Marjorie Perloff

<http://lareviewofbooks.org/post/5573392428/channeling-georg-trakl>

(4 pgs)

Pierre Menard, Borges

Preface of *After Lorca* & “Second Letter to Lorca” Jack Spicer

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/spicer/lorcaletter.html>

Exercise 5 due

For next week: TBA

Exercise 6: multiple versions

WEEK 7 - THE END

July 11: **Fake-outs**

“Pseudotranslation” Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies

“Faking it: The art of literary forgery” Terry Eagleton

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/jun/06/londonreviewofbooks>

“Review: DOUBLED FLOWERING: From the Notebooks of Araki Yasusada.” Forest Gander

<http://jacketmagazine.com/04/ganderyasu.html>

Exercise 6 due

July 13: **Final portfolio due**

Close reading 2 due