Comparative Literature 1710A T/Th. 9:00-10:20

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*Theory and Practice of Literary Translation*

This course is intended for advanced students of foreign literatures. We will focus on several aspects of literary translation: purpose, technique, function, cultural significance, relation to the original and independence as a work of art. An important component of translation is close reading, so literary interpretation will be a major part of our discussions. Depending on the languages read by members of the course, we will work through issues of representation through discussion.

While students will prepare original translations for various assignments, the focus in this seminar will be on understanding, through comparative study or works in translation and through practice, the nature of translation as a vehicle for the study of literature, as an essential aspect of preparing polished translations. *The underlying assumption is that translation inevitably involves interpretation, and so may function as a form of literary criticism as well as a representation of the work of art.*

1. 9/4 Introduction: *Translation as criticism: the art of persuasive rhetoric*

2. 9/9 How do we talk about translation…

9/11 and who cares?

3. 9/16 Words, words, words: *Jabberwocky*

9/18 *Jabberwocky*, cont.

4. 9/23 Short poems in historical perspective

9/25 Short poems, cont.

5. 9/30 Short poems, cont.

10/2 Short poems, one more time

6. 10/7 Philosophical and/or critical texts

10/9 More of these

7. 10/14 Philosophical and/or critical texts, continued

10/16 Philosophical and/or critical texts, encore

8. 10/21 How translation affects an author’s style

10/23 Text and method: the translator as artist *and* critic

9. 10/28 Dialogue: making drama live

10/30 More dialogue on dialogue

10. 11/4 Translating for performance

11/6 Performing in translation

11. 11/11 Longer texts, poetry or prose: framing a project

11/13 Continued

12. 11/18 Continued

11/20 Continued

13. 11/25 No class

14. 12/2 Final presentations

12/4 Final presentations

Assignments

Assignments will be adjusted according to the interests and range of languages in the class. We do have to tackle some critical writing on the nature of translation, so here goes:

For Week 2: in Lawrence Venuti, ed.: *The Translation Studies Reader* (Third Edition, 2012)

Introduction, pp. 1-9

Chapter 5, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Translations,” 64-66.

Chapter 6, Friedrich Nietzsche, “Translations,” 67-68.

*Choose one of these:*

Chapter 7, Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 75-83.

Chapter 8, Ezra Pound, “Guido’s Relations,” 84-91.

Chapter 9, Jorge Luis Borges, “The Translators of *The One Thousand and One Nights*,” 92-106.

*And one of these:*

Chapter 10, Vladimir Nabokov, “Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English,” 113-125.

Chapter 11, Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” 126-131.

And sent to the class via email as scans: essays by Donald Carne-Ross ("A Mistaken Ambition of Exactness"), and Simon Leys ("The Experience of Literary Translation").

We’ll see how these go over, then consider others, perhaps. If you wish to gain a historical perspective on the underlying imperatives of translation in the 20th century, Venuti’s introductions to his decade sections are excellent.

The critical essays on the nature of translation are beyond my count, and they do indeed veer from the sublime to the ridiculous. Be aware of cultural context and inevitable bias. The purpose of this course, however, is to help you begin as translators yourselves. To this end, you will engage in various exercises throughout the semester, culminating in a completed translation project of approximately 15 pages.

These are the exercises:

Week 3: The Great Jabberwocky Project

Weeks 4 & 5: Translation of a short poem (no more than 20 lines).

Weeks 6 & 7: Translation of a passage from a work or philosophy or criticism

Week 8: Probably catching up

Weeks 9 & 10: Translation *and performance* of short passages of dialogue

Weeks 11, 12 & 13: Foundation and drafts of final projects