

English 607.47 — Theory and Practice of Literary Translational Poetics

Instructor: Robert Majzels

Winter 2009

Thursday 13:00 -15:30

Course Description

This course combines the study of theoretical texts and examples of translational poetic practice with a writing workshop of students' own attempts to explore these translational techniques. **For the purposes of the course, only a very basic knowledge of a second language is required, and any language will do.**

Good translation seeks not to abolish the difference of the Other language but rather to allow it to bring violent or subtle changes to bear on the target language. Foreignizing methods, putting ethno-deviant pressure on Anglo-American cultural values while registering the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, is not merely a clever trick to generate poetry. The approach to the source text, to the Other, to the face of the Other, as Emmanuel Lévinas has clearly argued, is a fundamental ethical and philosophical issue confronting us as humans.

We will look particularly at translational poetic practices, work which cannot be properly classified as translation because it deviates, departs from the original sometimes to the point of being unrecognizable in its relation with the original. Yet it cannot properly be classified as original because it originates with another text, another author. This, of course, raises issues of authorship, subjectivity, originality, fidelity and the nature of language.

“Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux” (W. Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator, in *Illuminations*).

Each student will give a formal presentation to the class based on one or more of the assigned readings. Following the discussion, the student will produce a short final research paper on that same subject. In addition, a number of exercises involving poetic strategies of translation will be assigned and discussed in class. Each student will also undertake an individual poetic-translation project of 20 to 30 pages over the semester, involving moving from a source text in a language other than English into a form of English translation based on the theories and methods discussed in the course. The workshop will discuss each student's progress with his or her project over the course of the semester. Students are expected to read their colleagues' work with care, and to contribute to significant and beneficial class discussion.

Assignments and Grades

Students will be expected to generate approximately 30 pages of polished creative work by the end of the course, accompanied by a critical component discussing the theory and techniques used in the work. The completed and revised manuscript with critical component will account for 60% of the final grade. 20% of the grade will be based on the

formal presentation and short research paper, and 20% on assigned exercises and participation in class discussions on assigned texts and the work of fellow students.

List of Readings

- Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator" in *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968/1999.
- Bergvall, Caroline. "Shorter Chaucer Tales." <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Bergvall.html>.
- Carson, Anne. *If Not Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. New York: Knopf, 2002.
- Celan, Paul. *Breathturn*. Translated with an introduction by Pierre Joris. Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin*. translated by Patrick Mensah. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Huot, Claire. "Spinning Chinese Characters, Hebrew Letters and Plain English," *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, no 17, vol. 2, June 2006, 67-78.
- Moure, Erin. *Sheeps Vigil By A Fervent Person*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2004.
- Nichol, bp. *Translating Translating Appollinaire*. <http://www.thing.net/~grist/l&d/bpnichol/lnichol1.htm>.
- Norôdahl, Eiríkur Örn. "You Are A Pipe." Calgary: N^o Press, 2007.
- Ouaknin, Marc-Alain. *Mysteries of the Alphabet*. Translated by Josephine Bacon. New York: Abbeville Press, 1999.
- "Translating Translating Montréal" *dANDelion Magazine* Special Issue, Winter 2007.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Scandals of Translation*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Waldrup, Rosemarie. *Lavish Absence: Recalling and Rereading Edmond Jabès*. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan Press, 2002.
- Zhaoming Qian, ed.. *Ezra Pound and China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003.
- Zukofsky, Celia and Louis. *Catullus*. <http://www.ofscollge.edu.sg/z-site/notes-to-poetry/Catullus-1969.php> and <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Zukofsky-Catullus-excerpt.html>.

*Note: Please make all efforts to take assignments directly to the instructor. If it is not possible to do so, take your assignment to SS1152 and put it in the dropbox, where your assignment will be date-stamped and placed in the instructor's mailbox. Please keep a copy of your work in case of loss by any cause. Assignments **cannot be returned** by staff in the Department office.*

Grading system:

The following grading system is used in this course:

A+ (90-100%) /A (85-85%) (GPA4.0); A- (80-84%) (3.7); B+ (77-79%) (3.3); B (73-76%) (3.0); B- (70-72%) (2.7); C+ (67-69%) (2.3); C (63-66%) (2.0); C- (60-62%) (1.7); D+ (57-59%) (1.3); D (53-56%) D- (50-52%) (1.0); F (0)

Late assignment policy:

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a third of grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Student's Guide to the Presentation of Essays:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/grammar/guide.htm>

Plagiarism:

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Please refer to the following information and *read the attached statement on plagiarism*.

http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/how/How_LB.htm

Grade appeals:

Consult the following University Calendar links. Please note that “mere dissatisfaction with a decision is not sufficient grounds for the appeal of a grade or other academic decision.”

(University Calendar, http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/how/How_J.htm)

http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/how/How_JA.htm

http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/how/How_JB.htm

Students with disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237), and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/Others/DRC/>

"Safewalk" Program

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot pay booths.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/departments/RISK/security/safewalk/about.html>

English Department Website:

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English, please go to our website at <http://www.english.ucalgary.ca>