LITERARY TRANSLATION
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CCEA-UH 1063 **Prerequisite:**
None

4 credit hours
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday, noon – 1pm.

**Course Description:**
In literature and film, on the internet, and in science, finance and international relations, cross-cultural communication is mediated by translation. How do concepts of law and politics, for instance, translate in different cultural contexts? Translations and translation projects such as NYUAD’s *Library of Arabic Literature* play a pivotal role in shaping intercultural exchange and globalizing literary markets and canons. This course approaches these questions from the vantage point of literary translation. We will consider the relationship of literary translation to history, politics, imperialism, globalization, and media. We will ask: why do some translators aim for familiarity and others for estrangement? What does it mean to read in translation and for authors to write with foreign audiences in mind? How does one confront and engage the limits of translatability? Who are the arbiters of international taste of translation methods, practices, and styles? What artistic and political values are at stake?

**Teaching Methodologies**

This course adopts a seminar format that requires students to participate actively in class discussions. Despite its broad title, we focus on the small subset of literary texts that gain currency and acquire new sets of meaning outside of their original languages and cultures of origin. Via discussion, presentations, and research papers, we will discuss how—and to what extent—one can read across time, across culture, and across the divide of language. We will test against the evidence of the literary case studies the hypotheses of theorists who are optimistic and pessimistic about the possibility of cross-cultural translation understanding. Students will have the opportunity to take part in original translation and research drawing upon their linguistic and analytical expertise.

**Course Requirements:**

- Attendance and Participation (20%)
- Short paper (6 pages) on translation (30%)
  - **Beyond the Binary:** Many of the course readings familiarize students with the fundamental distinction emphasized from Schleiermacher to Venuti between *domesticating* versus *foreignizing* practices and strategies of translation. Yet have any literary translations strictly pertained to one or the other category? Venuti himself has come to regret popularizing the binary, and having argued that foreignizing versions are
always more subversive of literary and political regimes. Taking as a model our guest lecturer Matthew Reynolds’ analysis of FitzGerald’s Rubaiyat, problematize this binary of translation studies with reference to a case study of a work you can read in the original language.

- Second paper or Short translation with introduction, (8-10 pages, 30%)
  - Untranslatable? Much recent scholarship has been devoted to the limits of translation, and, indeed, to the philosophical implications of untranslability. In practice, this concern has been manifest in strategies that seek to make visible the limits of any practice of translation. In Jacques Lezra’s example, an English-language translator leaves the final stanzas of a poem in the original German. With reference to the case study of a literary work you can read in the original, consider the linguistic, literary, and perhaps cognitive challenges entailed in this strategy of literary translation. Many of the most successful examples of this strategy have pertained to translations into English and French from Spanish, German, and other closely related European languages, with which the reader is often somewhat familiar. What are the implications of deploying such strategies, say, between Polish and Spanish, or Chinese or Arabic and English?

- Weekly Translation Journal (20%)
  - 1-2 page journal entries will consist of analytical and creative translation exercises (within or between languages and media).
  - E.g., “The Translation Slam.” Students will participate in a translation chain in which a single sonnet is translated in and out of English and the languages students are proficient in. In the first iteration of this course, students translated a sonnet by Camões in and out of English, Polish, Russian, and Chinese. (See the New York Times article, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/education/edlife/edl-17abudhabi-t.html?_r=0)

**Course Learning Objectives:**

At the end of the course you will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the craft and aims of literary translation via readings and engagement with a translator in the field;
- Be attentive to the shaping force of history and politics in translation;
- Recognize and confront the challenge translation poses for “close reading”—how to read in translation?
- Analyze how the translation of a poem, film, or graphic novel to a different context transcends issues of language to include considerations of market and cultural sensibility.

**Required Texts:**

Luis de Camões (tr. Richard Zenith) *Sonnets and Other Poems.*
--- (tr. Leonard Bacon) *The Lusiads.*

Mikhail Bulgakov (tr. Michael Glenny) *The Master and Margarita*

Orhan Pamuk (tr. Guneli Gun) *The Black Book*

Geert Jan Van Gelder, ed. & tr. *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology*

Marcel Proust, tr. Lydia Davis, *Swann’s Way*

Edward FitzGerald, tr. *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*

Fernando Pessoa, (tr. Richard Zenith) *The Book of Disquiet*
Gabriel Garcia Marquez, (tr. Edith Grossman) *The General in his Labyrinth*
Antonio Lobo Antunes, (tr. Gregory Rabassa) *The Return of the Caravels*

Alternative translations of selected passages and additional texts will be available on the NYU Classes site.

**Introduction**

**Week 1**
Dezső Kosztolányi, “The Kleptomaniac Translator”

**The Task of the Translator**

**Week 2**
Selections, various translators: from Sappho, Ovid, Proust, Baudelaire
Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator”
Sandra Bermann, “Performing Translation”
Michael Wood, “Benjamin’s Proust: Commentary and Translation”
John Dryden from his Preface to *Ovid’s Epistles*
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Translations”

**History**

**Week 3**
Selections from the *1001 Nights* by Galland, Lane, Payne, Torrens, and Mardrus
Steiner, from *After Babel*
Susan Bassnett, “Variations on Translation”
Robert Young, “Philosophy in Translation”
Jorge Luis Borges, “The Translators of the *1001 Nights*”

**Method**

**Week 4**
Petrarch, from the *Canzonere*, various translators
Friedrich Schleiermacher, “On the Different Methods of Translating”
**Week 5**
Luis de Camoes, *Sonnets and Other Poems* by various translators, from Burton to Zenith.
Michael Henry Heim, “Varieties of English for the Literary Translator”
Catherine Porter, “The Expository Translator”

**Nation**

**Week 6**
*The Lusiads*, tr. Leonard Bacon
David Damrosch, “Translation and National Literature”
Sandra Bermann, “Translating History”

**Cross- Cultural**

**Week 7**
Geert Jan Van Gelder, ed. & tr. from *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology*
Roger Allen, “Arabic and Translation: Key Moments in Trans-Cultural Connection”
Ferial J. Ghazoul, “*Majnun Layla*: Translation as Transposition”

**The Politics of Translation**

**Week 8**
Mikhail Bulgakov, competing translations, *The Master and Margarita*
Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Thick Translation”

**Week 9**
Orhan Pamuk, Guneli Gun vs. Maureen Freely, *The Black Book*

**Margin and Minor Literature**

**Week 10**
Edward FitzGerald, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*
Fernando Pessoa, *The Rubaiyat*
Matthew Reynolds, from *The Poetry of Translation*
Week 11
Fernando Pessoa, different translators, *The Book of Restlessness*
Clarice Lispector, various translations, *Short Stories*
Venuti, “Margin,” in *The Translator’s Invisibility*

**Imperial and Postcolonial**

Week 12
Selections from *The 1001 Nights*, tr. Richard Burton
Venuti, “Call to Action,” [Foreignizing Translation as Subversive, citing Burton’s *Nights* as chief example] from *The Translator’s Invisibility*

Week 13
From Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The General in his Labyrinth*, tr. Edith Grossman
From Antonio Lobo Antunes, *The Return of the Caravels*, tr. Gregory Rabassa

**(Im)Possibilities**

Week 14
Brian Lennon, “Machine Translation: A Tale of Two Cultures”
Bellos, “Tintin’s Adventures in Translationland”
Michinton, “On Subtitling [Foreign Language Film]”

**Criteria for Participation**

**Class participation:** Since class participation requires an active engagement with your classmates, the first responsibility is attendance. Regular attendance is required. You will be expected to attend every session, to have read thoroughly the reading for the day, and to participate regularly. Absences will lower your grade. Evaluation of class participation also takes into account the ability to ask questions, to offer interpretations, to support and critique other members’ ideas, and generosity toward other class members.

**The strong student:**
- actively supports and respectfully listens to peers.
- arrives fully prepared for each class session.
- offers comments that are relevant to the issue under discussion and that reflect an understanding of the assigned text.
- offers comments that engage with previous remarks by other students and advance the level of the
The developing student:
- sometimes displays a lack of interest in the comments of peers.
- sometimes arrives unprepared or with only superficial preparation.
- offers comments that are sometimes irrelevant and often lack a specific connection to the text under discussion.
- offers comments which only occasionally advance the conversation.

The unsatisfactory student:
- checks text messages, email, social media, during class
- exhibits lack of interest or disrespect for others.
- shows little evidence of having read or thought about the assigned material.
- seldom participates or makes comments that reflect little understanding of the assignment.
- makes comments that do not advance the conversation or are actively harmful to discussion.

An ‘A’ grade will be given to students who consistently fall into the strong category. A grade of ‘B’ will be given to students whose performance at the strong level is inconsistent or who show a specific weakness within the assessment categories. A grade of ‘C’ will be given to students whose classroom performance requires development in all categories. Unsatisfactory performance in class will be awarded a grade of ‘D’ or below.

Reader Responses:
Reader responses will all be marked with a check mark. Simply doing all your responses on time will warrant you a check mark on each, and a grade of B for the responses.
If write superior responses, that show particular engagement with the texts, with good observations and questions, you will get two check marks for that response. If you average two check marks throughout the term, you will get an A for the response component.

Description of Evaluation

Formal written essays. The basic task of the essays is to present a coherent, original, and intellectually engaging argument that is developed over the course of the paper in a logical manner. Evaluation of an essay is based upon the degree of success in this task. Excellence in logic and argumentation entails developing a thesis and making a compelling case for it:

§ At the most basic level every paragraph must explicitly develop the essay’s stated thesis. Weak papers often argue multiple theses or a thesis other than the one initially stated by the author. For papers of the length we are writing, every paragraph must relate to and develop the thesis explicitly.

§ The second level of excellence comes from emphasizing the author’s ideas and interpretations of the text rather than restating the plot of the text. Papers in the A range
describe plot details only insofar as they assist the author's argument. Anything beyond this is extraneous.

§§ The third level of excellence comes from well-organized paragraphs. Each paragraph in a sophisticated essay develops and documents a clear idea or hypothesis of its own. Less sophisticated essays often have multiple topics in a single paragraph that are likely to appear like unsupported assertions.

§§ The most sophisticated essays develop their argument over the course of the paper in a logical manner that establishes clear causal relationships between paragraphs. Less rigorous essays (like the five paragraph model you may have encountered in high school) have two major flaws in this regard: 1) they do not establish a relationship between paragraphs—each individual paragraph develops the thesis, but they tend not to develop earlier paragraphs; 2) they do not develop the thesis beyond its initial statement in the essay’s introduction. Most sophisticated theses require the author to explore what he/she means by them, rather than simply stating them. If you find yourself beginning paragraphs with phrases like “another reason that…” or “this also means…”, you are probably not developing the relationships between your ideas. Restating your thesis at the start of each paragraph does not constitute developing it. The organization of your paragraphs ought to be dictated by what you feel the reader needs to know first, second, third, etc. in order to be compelled by your thesis.

This list of requirements is recognizably formidable. But this is the model for the most professional and rigorous essays, and it is a model that we can all achieve through hard work. It requires that we be willing to revise our work and to seek advice of peers and/or myself. Professors themselves tend to have minimally two readers critique their work.

Acknowledgments: The Future of Minority Studies Research Project (FMS).

Academic Integrity

New York University Abu Dhabi will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism. When academic dishonesty is suspected, it will be dealt with severely in adherence to the official guidelines of New York University. NYU polices on academic integrity and plagiarism form part of this syllabus: http://nyuad.nyu.edu/students/campus.life/policies/

Status of this Syllabus. This syllabus is a working document.