COMPARATIVE LITERATURE 260

Literary Translation: Theory and Practice

Professor S. J. Levine

Required Text: READER (Alternative Copy, Isla Vista)

Translation Theory Topics:

1) translation as a domesticating or foreignizing practice: bring the text to the reader, or the reader to the text (Schleiermacher).

2) translation’s invisibility; the hierarchical categories of "translation" and "original"; the concept of the original as "work-in-progress" and of translation (as well as re-translation) as a stage in the creative process as well as a “mode” of writing.

3) critical examination of normative terms, in particular “literal” vs. literary translation; “fidelity” vs. infidelity

4) the history of translation studies: diverse cultural / national / diachronic historical views toward translation: re-translation can be studied under this category as well.

5) the challenges of transculturality: transposing colloquial speech, regional and cultural allusions, language-bound poetic forms, such as the Petrarchan sonnet or the haiku; ideological perspectives on appropriation and reception.

Translation Practice

1) promotes acquisition of language skills, improvement of writing skills, as well as comprehension of translation as an art.

2) provides model for the study of literature, in both national and comparative (or world) contexts.
Course Work:

a) Each student will translate a short text for their final paper, to be presented and discussed in class. The final paper will include an introduction to present and analyze specific difficulties of the translation exercise.

b) Weekly discussion of essays and of translation examples to be handed out in class.

c) Brief oral presentations of the weekly readings.

Final paper: Each student will practice translating a brief text/excerpt from fiction, drama, essay, or a poem) which will be presented and discussed by the group. The final paper will be either a final draft of this translation plus discussion, or, if the student prefers, a translation critique/analysis of a published translation or translations, for example: analyze and compare two or more translations of a poem or a short story, and evaluate the versions from the point of view of their linguistic accuracy as well as interpretative and cultural perspectives.

CLASS SCHEDULE

I. Introduction: The Limits of the Literal Translation:

Read: Schleiermacher, Friedrich, “On Different Methods of Translation”
       Jakobson, Roman, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”

Discussion Points
   1) Are literal translations possible? are they “faithful” or unfaithful translations?
   2) If a translation reads as if it could have been written in the target language does it fail to render the ‘foreign’ aspects of the source language and text?
   3) Is translation communication or interpretation? is equivalence possible?

II. The Original as a Draft.

Read: Jorge Luis Borges, “The Homeric Versions”; “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”
       George Steiner, On Kafka, Borges & “Pierre Menard” from After Babel

Discussion Points:
   1) The reader determines the “fidelity” of a translation.
   2) Is “Pierre Menard”, as Steiner claims, a theory of translation?
   3) Translation Studies is a branch of Comparative Literary Studies.

III. Toward an Ethics of Translation

   By this date students will have chosen a brief text (one poems or two to five page prose) for final project.

Read: Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator”
Borges, “Translators of the 1001 Nights”

Discussion Points:
1) What can we infer as Walter Benjamin's central insight with respect to translation?
2) Translation as “polemical tool” in Borges’ essay.
3) Borges’ essay pertains to the history of translation studies: why?

IV. Midterm: Student presentations

Brief 5-10 minute introduction of text/author you will translate: Contextualize author/text and give one or two example to show what kind of difficulties you will encounter, whether lexical, cultural, stylistic and/or formal.

V. Read sections from The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction

Discuss: Puns and Wordplay. Spoken Language. Intertextuality. Gender and Culture. The original as work in progress. Translation as creation and criticism.

VI: Workshop: bring your one page translation with original (enough copies for class); discussion of each project.

Final Papers: 10 pages: 1) translation: 2) analysis of translation process.

ALL WRITTEN WORK TO BE PRINTED DOUBLE-SPACED.

Grading: 50% class work (weekly discussion & presentations); 50% final project (includes presentation of project).

Some Recommended Bibliography (brief selection)

- Susan Basnett McGuire, Translation Studies, 3rd edition. (Routledge)
- Antoine Berman, The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation
- Carol Maier & Françoise Massardier-Kenney, Literature in Translation: Teaching Issues and Reading Practices
- Sherry Simon, Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity & the Politics of Transmission.
- George Steiner, After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation. (1975)
- E. Weinberger & Octavio Paz, Nineteen Ways of Translating Wang-Wei