LANGUAGE & TRANSLATION ESSAY

We’ll be discussing literature in translation throughout the semester, exploring essential questions about literary translation such as: When we read literature in translation, are we missing out on anything? What is the reader’s role in translating a text? How, exactly, does translation “transform” a text? Can translation account for linguistic, social, personal, temporal, and cultural differences, or are these “lost in translation”? What can translation teach us about language and its relationship to culture and identity? Is reading, simply reading, an act of translation?

For this essay, you have two options to choose from; each has two parts:

1. **Literary Exploration**: When we interact with any art form, including when we read literature, the optimal experience is that we are moved, enlightened, even changed by the encounter. Choose any passage (1-4 paragraphs or a short poem is probably enough) from any literary text we’ve read this semester that somehow moved, enlightened, or changed you. **Part 1**: Write a 2 to 3-page (roughly 800-1000 words) lyrical reflection on what the passage means to you personally: how you relate to it, resist it, are inspired by it, learn from it, or identify with it. Be sure to consider both the content of the passage and the language. How do form and content come together to have a specific effect on you? You might start your reflection by narrating a personal experience that connects in some way to your chosen passage and your feelings about it.

   **Part 2**: In a 4-page essay to accompany your chosen passage and reflection, answer the question: What does reading world literature—and thinking about literary translation and/or the process of reading—teach us about language and identity? Cite specific examples from your chosen passage and your reflective essay to support your position. To help make your case, you should also use 2-3 juicy quotes from 2 additional class texts as evidence to support your answer. Be sure to analyze your quoted evidence, as we discussed with the optional essay assignment (see “Tips for Optional Essay,” on the Blog Assignments page).

2. **Literary Translation**: **Part 1**: Write an original translation of any of our class texts. Your translation could be from another language into English, or from English into another form of English. Your translation should not exceed 2-3 pages (roughly 800-1000 words), so choose an excerpt if you want to work with a longer text. For poetry, see me. Depending on the length, you can do 1-3 poems or an excerpt of a long poem.

   **Part 2**: In a 4-page essay to accompany your translation, formulate an argument about the task of literary translation. Explain what you tried to do with your translation and how and why your choices varied from the English version we read together in class. Cite specific examples from your and other translation(s) (if applicable) as you 1) defend your translation choices and 2) make a compelling argument about the primary task(s) and responsibilities of a literary translator. To help make your case, you should also use 2-3 quotes from 1-2 of the essays on translation that we read in class: Anne Carson, “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent;” Richard Pevear, “The Translator’s Inner Voice: A Talk;” or William Weaver, “The Process of Translation.” Be sure to analyze your quoted evidence, as we discussed with the optional essay assignment (see “Tips for Optional Essay,” on the Blog Assignments page).

**Language & Translation Essay Proposal due Tue Nov. 18 (100 points)**
Submit a 3-page (typed and double-spaced) proposal introducing readers to your Essay. Your proposal should include the following elements:

- State if you’re doing Option 1 or 2, and identify the text and passage you will write about or translate. You should start drafting Part 1, but you don’t have to submit it with your proposal.
• Submit the introduction of your accompanying essay (Part 2). Your intro should be 2-3 paragraphs or roughly 1.5 pages long. It should establish your essay’s main point and your desired effect on the reader. Even more importantly, your intro should make your essay sound interesting; it should entice your reader into wanting to read more.

• An annotated outline of what the rest of Part 2 will be about, what main topics or sections it will include, and how they will add to the point, purpose, and effect established by the introduction.

• Please attach your two Reflections on Translation (see attached sheet), with comments from me, to your 3-page Proposal that you will submit to me.

• Bring three additional copies of your proposal to class (one for me and three for classmates).

• Attach a Proposal Cover Letter: 1-page, typed and double-spaced. Attach the cover letter to all four copies of your proposal that you bring to class. In your cover letter, explain why you chose the specific topic you’ve chosen and what you’re hoping to teach readers with your essay. What do you like about your topic/approach so far? What is your biggest challenge with the essay so far and how have you attempted (or will you attempt) to address it? What do you need help with at this point?

Final Essay due Tue Dec 9 (200 points, including your presentation)
Presentations on the Translation/Essay will take place in class on Tue Dec 9 and Thu Dec 11.
Instructions for the presentations will be distributed closer to the due date.

Attach a Cover Letter to your finished Essay:
Your 1 to 2-page cover letter should highlight the instructive qualities of your Essay and discuss your experiences in the process of writing it, including: 1) what you expected as you began work and what surprised you, 2) what worked/didn’t work and why, 3) what you learned about the experience of reading and/or literary translation and about yourself as a reader or translator of literature, and 4) how the project gave you new insight or perspective on our class materials.

Requirements of the Language & Translation Essay

1. Your Language & Translation Essay should have a strong sense of purpose. That is, you should communicate to your readers the value of your work. Strive to deliver a message about what thinking about literary translation, or the act of actually doing a translation, taught you—and what it should teach your readers. In fact, think in terms of instruction as you write your essay. The most successful Essays will teach your readers something surprising and original that will help them see the literature and ideas you’re exploring in an entirely new way.

2. Your essay should use good evidence from your sources (usually direct quotations) and analyze your evidence well.

3. Your essay should be creative and inspiring. It should be unique and lyrically written. Try to make it a pleasure to read.

4. Attach your two Reflections on Translation with my comments and your Essay Proposal(s) with my and classmates’ comments to your final essay.

5. Submit a cover letter when you turn in your Essay Proposal and Final Essay.