Reflections on Translation

As you develop your Language & Translation Essay, you will do TWO of the following four "Reflections on Translation" assignments. You can only do two: no extra credit or re-dos. Each should be about 1.5 pages-long. Please submit them in class on the day they are due. No extensions; if you miss one, do another one. You can use any of the writing you do in your Reflections in your final Language & Translation Essay: feel free to reuse, recycle, and revise whole passages of the Reflections into your Essay.

Reflections on Translation; Choose TWO (100 points each)

1) Reflection on Translation #1 due Thu Oct 2
Choose 1-2 stanza from one of Keats’ Odes on the syllabus for today. Translate the stanza into your own words and in your own style and vernacular. Some ideas:

- Translate the stanza(s) into a form other than a poem (a story, a dialogue, a letter).
- Use only words found in another text, like Anne Carson did.
- Translate in the style of Robert Frost or Edgar Allen Poe, or any other poet you know and like.
- Translate the stanza(s) into a more familiar poetic style, such as rap or a nursery rhyme.

In another paragraph or two, discuss what you tried to do with your translation and how and why your choices work, in your opinion. What is the desired effect on the reader of your translation? How, specifically, did you try to achieve that effect? How does your translation illuminate, clarify and/or improve upon the original? And how doesn’t it work? What is lost in your translation?

2) Reflection on Translation #2 due Tue Oct 21
In "The Translator's Inner Voice," Richard Pevear says, "Translation is not the transfer of detachable ‘meaning’ form one language to another. It is a dialogue between two languages. It takes place in the space between two languages. And most often between two historical moments” (26-7). This quote makes me wonder: Does reading also involve reaching across spaces between cultures, languages, and historical moments? Is reading world literature, in effect, an act of "translation”?

Write a 2-3 paragraph response, applying Pevear’s assertion to any ONE text we've read so far this semester. Consider how you, as a reader, encountered your chosen text (in translation or not) across the gulf of time and cultural or linguistic difference, and how you “translated” it into your own terms and experiences. After reading Pevear’s essay, do you think that reading is a kind of translation?

3) Reflection on Translation #3 due Tue Nov 4
What do contemporary English-speaking readers miss when they read Lu Xun’s work? Choose any passage from any Lu Xun story and comment on what’s lost in the translation from the Chinese language into English. Alternatively, you could consider what’s lost in the space between early 20th-century China to our contemporary moment in NYC. Use your chosen passage to point out specific examples of what’s lost, and how. In one final paragraph, answer the question: is there any way to bridge these gaps, or are gaps a necessary part of reading world literature from across the ages?

4) Reflection on Translation #4 due Thu Nov 13
What do contemporary English-speaking readers miss when they read Neruda’s work? Choose any Neruda poem and comment on what’s lost in the translation from Spanish into English. Alternatively, you could consider what’s lost in the translation from a male to female point of view, if you think Neruda’s poems reflect a specifically male perspective on life and love. Use your chosen poem to give specific examples about what is lost, and how. In one final paragraph, answer the question: is there any way to bridge these gaps, or are gaps a necessary part of reading world lit? Alternatively, you could spend your whole Reflection arguing (based on specific examples from your chosen poem) that absolutely nothing is lost, that reading across time, language, culture, gender, or any other difference is seamless, and/or that the experience of poetry (like love?) is universal.
Alternatively, you could choose one short Neruda poem, or 15-24 lines from a longer poem, and translate your chosen poem or poem fragment using only words found in another short text, like Anne Carson did in the reading we did earlier this semester. Suggestions are: use words from any other text on our syllabus (a Keats poem, or a Lu Xun story, or the scene in which Frankenstein first animates the creature, or...), or words from another love poem you like, or words from something that is the opposite of a love poem, such as The Declaration of Independence; a Fox News broadcast; the Baruch homepage, a page from CUNYFirst, or some other website; or the syllabus for this class. Pick a text that has language that—in your view—somehow resonates with the Neruda poem you’ve chosen to translate. Please provide a copy or transcript of the text you’re borrowing your language from (unless it’s a text from our class, like Frankenstein).

After your translation, in another paragraph or two, discuss what you tried to do with your translation and how and why your choices work, in your opinion. What is the desired effect on the reader of your translation? How, specifically, did you try to achieve that effect? How does your translation illuminate, clarify and/or improve upon the original? And how doesn’t it work? What is lost in your translation?