

## **Translation and Other Transformations**

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In this faculty humanities seminar on the topic of translation, imitation, and other rewritings of earlier texts by later texts, our object of investigation will potentially include all those modes of transformation Gerard Genette has called paratexts, up to and including such suspect or problematic modes as parody, forgery, and plagiarism. Nor will we necessarily limit ourselves to texts; the reworking of novels as films might be a major focus during the second semester of the seminar.

This topic is a timely one, in at least two ways. Translation has long played a central role in humanistic disciplines, and never more than now. For all their commitment to the study of texts in their language of origin, literature departments have in recent years relied increasingly on texts taught in translation, and the same is of course true for other departments in the humanities as well. This is not only because fewer students have a reading knowledge of the ancient and modern European languages once considered a prerequisite for a liberal arts education, but because our curriculum increasingly includes works originally written in a greater diversity of languages than any of us commands; to work only with texts in the original would in practice mean limiting our own and our students' reading to texts in those few languages each of us finds the time to learn. It is a matter of some debate whether literary studies should become more open to the use of translations; but in any case their inevitable role in undergraduate education suggests the value of more self-conscious use.

Furthermore, the theory of translation, which like its practice has important origins in the ancient Roman encounter first with Greek literature and later with the Bible, has in the past few decades seen an extraordinary burst of scholarly activity; in the field of translation studies, sometimes viewed as subfield with links to both Comparative Literature and Linguistics, sometimes as a discipline in its own right, is flourishing. This may be partly because of the central role of translations as noted above; but it also has to do with the fact that the activity of translation engages a variety of contemporary critical concerns such as linguistics, interpretation, historical context, cultural difference and cultural imperialism, boundary crossing. Indeed, current extensions of the idea of translation, together with the usefulness of translation as a metaphor at a time when culture is viewed as just another text to read (and texts as just one instance of cultural discourse) have contributed to a context in which, to quote a recent critic (Barbara Godard) "the concept of translation is enlarged to include imitation, adaptation,

quotation, pastiche, parody—all different modes of rewriting: in short, all forms of interpretation of works and discourses.”

As with previous seminars, the readings and the topics of particular sessions will in part be determined by the interests of the participants. But the seminar will include both theoretical readings and readings of particular instances of translation and imitation; primarily from other languages into English, but from English into other languages as well. We will also try our own hands at translation, possibly incorporating in the seminar both periodic exercises in translation and presentations of a long-term translation project. Given that the seminar participants may well have no common language other than English, we will have to rely on each other’s explications of source texts and target texts in languages unknown to us; we may also on occasion invite participation from colleagues who have languages not represented in the seminar.

The first semester will focus on theories and examples of translation proper; we will read a number of central and seminal theoretical works from the history of translation theory, explore typologies of translation, and focus on some current controversies (or version of long-standing controversies). In the second semester we would move on from translation proper to assorted modes of imitation of one text by another and of versions in different media. During both semester we will bring visiting speakers to campus (perhaps two a semester), both theorists of translation/imitation and practitioners, including controversial examples of each.