
LITERARY TRANSLATION AND CREATIVE WRITING in Spring 2021 (FR3400)

Course Code	FR3400	Professor(s)	Amanda Dennis
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	G-116
Class Schedule	W: 13:45-16:40 in G-207	Office Hours	Mon. 2:00-3:00 p.m. & by appointment
Credits	4	Email	adennis@aup.edu
Semester	Spring 2021	Office Tel. Ext.	

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the theory and practice of literary translation. From the Latin verb, *transfere*, “to carry across,” translation moves a work from a source language into a target language. Its practice demands an intensity of focus—a translator can spend hours on a single sentence—but what is fascinating about translation is that this tight focus can open onto a whole crowd of questions: linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, historical, political, and ethical. How do we make difference legible without collapsing it? How do we carry across ideas, concepts, syntax and even flora and fauna when there is no equivalent in the target language? German thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries argued that translation may revitalize the host language, which stretches to accommodate modes of expression that are foreign to it.

We’ll also ask how the art of translation might feed other forms of creative writing. Literary translation certainly strengthens the creative writing muscle insofar as it demands rigorous attention to language, its possibilities and limitations, its rhythm, syntax, tense, and style. The first part of each class will be devoted to discussion of readings and analysis of short passages by Proust, Beckett, Flaubert, Perec, Maupassant, and Daoud. In the second part of class—a workshop—you will have the opportunity to discuss your ongoing translations of two “core” texts: Albert Camus’s *L’étranger* (1942) and Annie Ernaux’s *La Place* (1983), chosen for their different sensibilities, voices, and subjects. At midterm and at the end of the semester, you will have the chance to select your own texts to translate (from any language) and to give/receive feedback in workshop. Though our emphasis will be on translation from French to English, we will consider translation from other languages in these workshops, and as part of our more general discussion of what translation is and does.

Course Learning Outcomes

Gain practical experience of French-English literary translation through group exercises and

regular individual assignments.

Gain practical experience of using translation as a tool to develop as a creative writer (as a means to expand one's vocabulary, experiment with syntax, write in another voice and so on) through group exercises and regular individual assignments.

Gain knowledge of the most common linguistic challenges that translators face when working from French to English through group discussion and workshopping specific translation problems.

Enhance their creative capacity to conceive and apply creative solutions to translation problems and specific writing tasks through group discussion and regular individual assignments.

Enhance their critical capacity to think through and defend an approach to an exercise as well as specific stylistic choices through critical reflection on work produced in the form of a learning journal and written commentary.

Develop editorial skills with a view to achieving a high standard of presentation in their submitted work by engaging in the collaborative analysis and peer review of texts.

General Education

Course Outline

(subject to adjustment)

Week I – 18th – 22nd (Jan. 20)

After Babel: Introduction to Literary Translation and to “core” texts: *L'étranger* and *La Place*.

Workshop: Translate together Camus's title and opening, with analysis of existing translations.

For Next Class:

Read: Friedrich Schleiermacher, “On the Different Methods of Translating” (1813), trans. Susan Bernofsky pp.49-55; Lawrence Venuti, “Translation, Community, Utopia” pp.16-20; Daniel Hahn's “Translation Diary.”

Translate: Camus, pp. 9-11 (text can be found on Teams and Blackboard)

Week II – 25th – 29th (Jan. 27)

What is Translation? Fidelity v. transparency, foreignization v. domestication.

Discussion of Schleiermacher, “On the Different Methods” and Venuti “Translation, Community, Utopia” along with Hahn’s practical tips for translation.

Workshop: Camus pp. 9-11.

For Next Class:

Read: Excerpt from “Would-be Writer” (Kate Briggs, *This Little Art*)

Translate: Ernaux

January 24th – last day to drop/add courses online

Week III – 1st – 5th (Feb. 3)

Syntax in French v. English: the shape and length of a sentence. Translating the “Venice Passage” from Proust’s *Recherche*.

Discussion of *This Little Art* (student presentation #1)

Workshop: Ernaux

For Next Class:

Reading: Excerpts from Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Inseparables.” Please prepare two questions for translator, Lauren Elkin.

Translate: Camus, pp. 31-34. *Also choose your midterm translation text and prepare a short justification for why you chose it.

Week IV – 8th – 12th (Feb. 10)

February 8th – 10th, Mini break 1, (no classes)

Week V – 15th – 19th (Feb. 17)

Class Visit: Lauren Elkin, translator of de Beauvoir's "The Inseparables" (Vintage 2021).

Workshop: present texts for midterm translation; Camus pp. 31-34.

For Next Class:

Read: Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator,"

Translate: Ernaux

Week VI – 22nd – 26th (Feb. 24)

February 24th – 28th, Mini break 2, (no classes)

Week VII – 1st – 5th (March 3)

Translating French tenses: Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Lydia Davis's strategies for translating the *imparfait*.

Discuss Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (student presentation #2)

Workshop: Ernaux

For Next Class:

Read: Emily Wilson, "Ah, How Miserable!" and "Why I Gave Homer a Contemporary Voice in the Odyssey"

Translate: Camus

Group A prepare Midterm Trans. + Original

Week VIII – 8th –12th (March 10)

Due: (Group A) Midterm project translation + original

Self-translation and the blurring of original-copy distinction; translating (dark) humor: Beckett's *Malone Dies*; strategies for responding to and workshopping others' translations.

Discuss Wilson's two articles and the politics of translation (student presentation #3)

Workshop: Camus

For Next Class:

Read: Idra Novey, *The Visitor*

Critique group A midterm translation projects; Group B prepare Midterm Trans. + Original

Week IX – 15th – 19th (March 17)

Due: (Group B) Midterm project translation + original

WORKSHOP for midterm project: Group A.

Discuss Idra Novey's *The Visitor* (student presentation #4). Translation and Creative Writing: hosts and visitors. Creative dialogues with your midterm text's author.

Due: (Group B) Midterm project translation + original

For Next Class:

Read: Short excerpts from Maupassant

Critique group B midterm translation projects.

March 17th, Mid-semester/March 19th, Mid-semester grades due

Week X – 22nd – 26th (March 24)

WORKSHOP for midterm project: Group B.

Translating third person: Maupassant and building characters. Also translating across time, and the importance of setting (weather, space, time).

For Next Class:

Read: Perec, *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien/How to Exhaust a Place in Paris* (+ other excerpts)

Translate: Critical reflection and revision of midterm projects due April 1

Week XI–29th – 2nd (March 31)

Site Writing: meet at Place Saint Sulpice by the fountain to discuss Perec, before creating contemporary adaptations of Perec's writing about place. You will be invited/encouraged to share your work and to reflect on translation as a form of adaptation, as well as upon the differences contemporary setting makes to both translation and adaptation.

For Next Class:

Read: Eliot Weinberger, "Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei"

Translate: Ernaux

April 2nd, last day to withdraw from a course/last day to choose CR/NC grading option

Week XII – 5th – 9th (April 7)

Discuss: "Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei" (student presentation #5)

Translating poetry: Rimbaud and Jaccottet

Workshop: Ernaux

For Next Class:

Read: excerpts from *Fragments of Infinite Memory*

Translate: Camus

Group B prepare final translation project

Week XIII – 12th – 16th (April 14)

Due: Final translation project + original (Group B)

Class Visit: Peter Behrman (translator) and Maël Renouard (author) of *Fragments of Infinite Memory*.

Workshop: Camus

For Next Class:

Read: Daoud, *Meursault, Contre-Enquête/The Meursault Investigation*, Ch 1 & 2

Critique group B final translation projects; Group A prepare final translation project

Week XIV – 19th – 23rd (April 21)

WORKSHOP for final project (Group B)

Discuss: The politics of retranslations and retellings (excerpts from Kamel Daoud's, *Meursault, contre-enquête* (Actes Sud, 2014));

Due: Translation draft of final project (Group A)

For Next Class:

Translate: Critique group A final translation projects

Week XV – 26th – 30th (April 28)

WORKSHOP for final project (Group A)

General discussion: Translation and Creative Writing. What possibilities does translation give us as writers? Tips for live readings/performance.

April 28th, Last day of classes; April 29th, May 2nd, Reading days (May 1st, holiday)

Final Exam: Performance/Reading of Translations, TBA

Due May 3rd: Final Translation Project + Creative Piece or Commentary

May 26th, all grades due

AUP ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Covid-19 temporary amendments:

Students studying at The American University of Paris are still expected to attend ALL scheduled classes. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students will have the option of attending classes remotely when special circumstances apply. For example, when students are placed under quarantine by the French authorities or by their doctor, or when students present symptoms of Covid-19 and are directed, by their doctor or the AUP Health Office, to remain home. It is still the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that their professor might have set in the course syllabus. In particular, Students attending remotely from distant Time Zones should check with their professors about the specific attendance policy for remote learners.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory. In all cases of missed course meetings, the responsibility for communication with the professor, and for arranging to make up missed work, rests solely with the student.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may also recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level. Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Textbooks

Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN	Required
LEtranger	Albert Camus	Gallimard Folio	9782070360024	Yes
La Place	Annie Ernaux	Gallimard Folio	9782070377220	Yes

Attendance Policy

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Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

In addition to group work in class, you will have weekly translation assignments throughout the semester. You will also be required to submit two more fully realized pieces: translations accompanied by creative writing or commentary (critical reflection), once at mid-term and again at the end of the semester. Assessment will also be based on regular and engaged participation throughout the course.

The assessment methods for this class are:

- In-class discussion, group exercises, and workshops. Each student will also give a short oral presentation of one of the readings (to be assigned the second week of class).
- Seven short individual translation assignments from our “core” texts. Your rough draft will be due in class, and a more polished draft will be due via Blackboard the day after.
- Two longer translation assignments with critical notes or a creative component; you will be asked to do some thinking (and speaking) about why you chose your particular text(s). For the final, you may continue translating your midterm text or choose a different one.

Participation	30%
Regular Translation Exercises	20%
Midterm translation (with critical reflection)	20%
Final translation (with critical reflection or creative writing assignment)	30%

Other

ADVICE

For your midterm and final translations, do some thinking about *why* your text should be brought into English. If your text has been translated before, consult the existing translations to assess why they might need updating. **Justify your selection**, as a translator.

Keep a **journal**, in which you record translation problems and solutions you’ve devised as well as excerpts from theoretical statements that seem useful, whether in solving a particular problem or creating a larger cultural and social context in which to frame those problems.

Consult **dictionaries** when you translate—always. Don't rely on what you take to be your knowledge of the source language. Bilingual dictionaries might suggest alternative word choices.

Read translations as translations—that is, as a transformed version of the source text which addresses a different audience in a different language and culture. Read not only for meaning, but for style, register, and textual effects that work only in the target language

PARTICIPATION AND ONLINE ETIQUETTE

This course is a workshop/practicum, so a large part of your grade will depend on your regular attendance and consistent preparation, demonstrated by your participation in discussion and in workshop. After one unexcused absence your participation grade will be lowered and, in the case of more than two unexcused absences, you may be required to withdraw from the course. Attendance at all midterm and final workshops is mandatory. If there is an emergency that prevents you from attending, please contact me as soon as possible.

When we meet on Teams, I ask that you keep your camera on whenever possible. This helps to create community in the virtual space and, I find, a more convivial atmosphere. If there are reasons why this is difficult for you, please be in touch with me to discuss them. I consider it polite to turn on your camera (at least) when you are speaking.