

Course Syllabus: Encountering World Literature in Translation

Thursday | 2 PM - 4 PM

January 30, February 6, 13, and 20, 2025

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“Using one word for another isn’t special; it’s what we do all the time. Translators just do it in two languages,” professor and translator David Bellos has written. In this course we will explore literature from around the world, gaining deeper insight by examining these works through the lens of translation. We will take a deep dive into some of the questions literary translators must consider when translating poetry and fiction from other languages into English. In the process, we’ll read literature from around the world, asking questions about translation as a practice and as an art. The reading of multiple poems and fiction excerpts (including some texts that have provoked great controversy in the literary translation world) will give us the chance to explore the art and practice of literary translation in depth, changing the way we encounter world literature in English.

Week 1

- What is literary translation, and how is it different from the translation of other types of texts?
- Is translation of literary works actually possible, or is the essence of a text “lost”?
- Overview of key terms/concepts used in literary translation theory
- Translation and creative writing

Week 2

- The “fidelity” debate: What does it mean to be “faithful” to the original text?
- How much can translators change?
- Why do books need to be retranslated?
 - Comparison: Opening lines of Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*

Week 3

- Who are literary translators?
- Who should be “allowed” to translate?
 - Translation of Amanda Gorman’s “That Hill We Climb” into other languages
- On multiple Englishes

Week 4

- What are some of the political implications of bringing literature from one cultural and linguistic context into another?
 - *Beowulf: A New Translation*, tr. Maria Dahvana Headley
- Considerations around AI and machine translation for literary translators

Required Reading List:

- Hahn, Daniel. *Catching Fire: A Translation Diary*. Charco Press, 2022.
- Kang, Han. *The Vegetarian*. Translated by Deborah Smith, Random House Publishing Group (Reprint edition), 2016.
- Weinberger, Eliot. *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*. New Directions (Reprint edition), 2016.