This course will introduce students to the craft of literary translation and the many ways it can help them become better writers. Students will work individually and together to choose authors not yet known in English whose work strikes the students as exciting and innovative. We’ll discuss how the process of choosing an author and bringing that author’s work into English is a way to explore what makes a piece of writing distinctive. We’ll look at aspects such as tone, humor and innovative plotting techniques and explore how students might experiment in similar ways with these aspects in their own work. Over the course of the semester, we’ll workshop translations together with original writing and also look at the work of various leading writer-translators and discuss the connections between the authors these writers have translated and the innovations in their own poetry and prose.

Only a basic familiarity with a second language is necessary for this workshop.

All books for the course are available at the NYU Book Store:

Authors: Eliot Weinberger, Octavio Paz
19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei (Moyer Bell)

Author: Rachel Shihor, Translator: Ornan Rotam
Days Byone (Sylph Editions)

Author: Anne Carson
Nox (New Directions)

Author: Anne Carson
If Not Winter: Fragments of Sappho (Vintage)

First class: January 28th
Introduction to course, discussion of translation myths.

Assignment for second class:
-read 19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei, look for statements that reveal Weinberger’s warrants regarding translation, what he holds to be true/false
-write a version of the poem based on the various translations
- write a haiku of your own inspired by the experience of creating the version and reading Wang Wei
 -bring copies of both your version of Wang Wei and the haiku to pass out in class

Second class: February 4th
Discussion of 19 Ways, presentation of students’ versions and haiku followed by a discussion of the relationship between writing and translation based on the experience of composing the versions and new poems.

Assignment for third class:
-read Days Bygone and the review at this link: http://quarterlyconversation.com/introducing-rachel-shihor-chronicler-of-lost-time
-with a partner, put together two translations of the same poem or prose passage to present to the class next week, prepare comments comparing the translations as Weinberger and Paz do with Wang Wei, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the various translations

Third class: February 11th
-Discussion of Shihor and Quarterly Conversation review.
-Student presentations of comparative translations, set up workshop schedule for the rest of the semester and what will be required for each workshop: a short translation of a work that hasn’t been translated before or an adaptation/version of an existing translation followed by a short piece of writing of your own you generated after working on the translation or version.

Assignment for fourth class:
-read Carson’s If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho and Nox
-come up with three questions in connection with reading Carson’s translation and writing together
-First two students up for workshop hand out translations. Everyone will read and prepare comments on these pieces for next week. These workshop submissions should consist of one or two translated poems or one or two double-spaced pages of translated prose maximum and the same amount of original work. Students should also prepare a cover letter, the contents of which are explained at the end of this syllabus.

February 18th is a university-wide holiday for Presidents’ Day, no class this week.

Fourth class: February 25th
-Discussion of Carson’s If Not, Winter and Nox followed by a discussion on the use of silence in the translations students brought in the week before (please be sure to have these translations with you), also use of silence in your own work, role of silence in literature.
-Workshop first two student pieces

Assignment for fifth class:
-read all the entries on Daniel Hahn’s blog on translation, print and bring in the entry you found most helpful to your work as a translator and writer: http://www.translatedfiction.org.uk/show/feature/Home/Translation-Hahn-blog
-next four students up for workshop distribute their work.
Fifth class: March 4th
- Discussion of the Hahn blog, the entries the students selected and what they reveal about the differences and similarities between a writer’s choices and a translator’s.
- Next five students will pass around their workshop submissions for next week.

**Assignment for sixth class:**
- read workshop submissions and prepare short response letters

Sixth class: March 11th
- Workshop submissions from five students

**Assignment for seventh class:**
- read workshop submissions from next five students and short submissions of original writing inspired by what they translated and prepare response letters

March 18th is Spring Break, no class this week.

Seventh class: March 26th
- Workshop submissions

**Assignment for eighth class:**
- read workshop submissions from next group of students and prepare response letters

Eighth class: April 1st
- Workshop submissions from next group of students

**Assignment for ninth class:**
- read workshop submissions and prepare response letters
- prepare comments on a recent book in translation of your selection

Ninth class: April 8th
- Workshop submissions
- Discuss some of the translated books students selected

**Assignment for tenth class:**
- read submissions for next week and prepare response letters

Tenth class: April 15th
- Discuss the remaining books students selected
- Workshop student submissions

**Assignment for eleventh class:**
- read four reviews of works in translation online, bring in one review you admired and one you found problematic and mark where in the reviews the reviewer’s notion of translation is most provocative
- read student submissions and prepare response letters

Eleventh class: April 22nd
- Discuss the reviews, read excerpts aloud.

**Assignment for twelfth class:**
- hand out a polished revision of something you translated earlier in the semester and of your own writing from the semester

Twelfth class: April 29th  
Workshop half of the revisions  
**Assignment for thirteenth class:**  
-work on final portfolio

Thirteenth class: May 6th  
Workshop the remaining revisions

Last class: May 13th  
Concluding discussion, sharing of final translations.

**Course requirements and grading:**

Your grade will depend on the quality of your final translation (or version) of a work of foreign literature, a piece of original writing you generated while working on the translation or version, your completion of assigned readings, and your class participation in workshops and discussions (including attendance).

**Policy on late workshop submissions and response letters:**

Your workshop submissions are due the week before you’re scheduled to present your work and you should arrive with copies for everyone in class as well as an additional copy for me. If you don’t have copies the week before your workshop slot you will lose the opportunity to workshop your work in class and your final grade in the course will be affected.

Response letters for your peers are due the day their work is discussed. If you are absence for a workshop, you should send your letters to them via email as soon as possible and CC me. To arrive for workshop without prepared letters and comments for your peers will also affect your final grade in the course.
Plagiarism and academic integrity:

Translation is a kind of writing. To use somebody else’s phrasing without acknowledging that you have done so is plagiarism. For this class you will be translating works that haven’t been translated previously and every word choice in your translation should be your own. If you aren’t able to translate and are doing a version instead, it should be a radical reworking of an existing work in translation and you will be required to hand in the existing translations you consulted along with a preface explaining what makes your version a new work of writing.

For your own writing for this course, every word should be of your own devising. If you hand in work that contains somebody else’s creative writing you will be at risk of failing the course.

Class participation and attendance:

Participation is worth 50% of your grade. This includes participating in discussions, coming to class prepared to thoughtfully critique the texts we read and each others’ translations and original writing. To participate in class you need to arrive on time and have no more than two unexcused absences over the course of the semester. Missing three or more classes will affect your final grade. If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you will be marked as absent.

Final portfolio contents:

Your presentation of a work in translation is worth 10% of your grade. Please see me about which book you’d like to discuss before you begin working on it.

The final version of both your translation or version and your own poetry or prose should be significant revisions from what you handed in for the first workshop. These two pieces of writing will comprise the remaining 40% of your grade.

Students with disabilities

I need to hear from anyone who has a disability that may require some modification of seating or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Please see me after class or during my office hours.

Workshop submission guidelines

Each of you will have the opportunity to workshop a translation or version together with some original writing written around the same time you completed the translation. Afterward, you’ll have a chance to workshop a revision of these two pieces or some new work instead. Copies of your workshop submissions will be due in class the week before you’re up for workshop so your peers will have a week to read your translation and writing carefully and prepare written feedback. Along with your translation and original work, you should prepare a short intro, no longer than a single double-spaced page in length, to let us know a little about the author you’ve chosen to translate and the work and how its mood, content, style, voice, etc. lead to new writing of your own.

Some things to think about when choosing what to translate:
What makes this piece of writing worth translating? When you tell us about the work you’re translating, you’ll also be telling us about what, for you, makes for meaningful fiction, poetry, nonfiction, or theater. The act of choosing an author and work previously unavailable in English means you have to decide what kind of style, story, or voice is worth translating, and why.

What moments in the original were particularly difficult to translate? Every translator struggles with jokes, dialogue, and phrases whose subtleties get lost in English. There may also be passages or lines you don’t understand or don’t like but will need to translate anyway. You can let us know about these passages in your intro and how these challenges affected the way you approached your own writing.

Responding to workshop submissions

A workshop only succeeds in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Read each of your classmates’ translation carefully and thoroughly, adding your comments and questions in the margins. For each workshop submission, you should bring a short response letter. If you like or don’t like something about the work, tell us why and use specifics. Keep in mind that critiquing a translation is different from the way we critique an original work. In other words, we’re not critiquing character development or plot structure. We’re looking at things like readability, nuance, and authenticity and consistent use of voice. We’re looking for the places that “don’t translate,” so that we can help each other find ways around these inevitable roadblocks.

Finally: Welcome!