ENG8390: Studies in Literary Translation

The critical component of this course will approach literary translation from historical, formalist, and theoretical perspectives, with a focus on the influence of translation on English literary history. Primary texts will include several major works of English literary translation from the medieval period to the twentieth century: Chaucer as translator of Boccaccio and Dante; Shakespeare as interpreter of Italian *novelle*; Renaissance, Restoration, eighteenth-century, and modern English approaches to Classical epic (Homer and Virgil); landmarks in the history of the English Bible from the Reformation to the present; the history of Psalm-translation and its influence on devotional lyric; the twentieth-century “invention of China” and its influence on Modernist poetics; and twentieth-century experiments in literalist, foreignizing, and homophonic translation. We shall draw on alternate versions of the relevant originals and on our collective knowledge of the original languages to evaluate our works’ theoretical assumptions and literary achievement. We shall read historical, theoretical, and philosophical statements and debates about translation in general, biblical translation, Homeric translation, etc. The latter part of the course will be devoted to work on individual translation projects.

The prerequisite for this course is basic knowledge of one foreign language. Students working in Latin, French, Italian, or Polish can obtain certification of reading knowledge of any of those languages solely through satisfactory completion of this course; students working in other languages will need to obtain certification of their reading knowledge, following the completion of their individual translations, through consultation with a faculty member competent in the given language. The writing requirements for this course will include one short critical paper on a work of literary translation in its cultural context and a manuscript of approximately ten pages of translated poetry or twenty pages of translated prose.