

## The Politics and Poetics of Translation

NEAR E 392/C LIT 392 | Grad. sec.: NEAR E 588 | Fall 2021

Tue. & Thurs, 1:30-3:20 | SAV 167

Professor Aria Fani | [ariafani@uw.edu](mailto:ariafani@uw.edu) | Denny 233

Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 3:00-4:00



I designed this course based on three core ideas:

1) Courses on literature in translation tend to ignore the multifaceted question of translation altogether. Alternatively, we should critically engage translation as a process of linguistic and cultural negotiation.

2) The academic study of translation will equip us with practical and interpretive uses well beyond the humanities (and your university life!).

- 3) Translation studies is a rapidly growing field, yet it remains largely focused on certain western European texts, critical theories, and cultural presuppositions. **What happens if we theorize the problem of literary translation from the perspectives of Near Eastern literary cultures?** That is to say, instead, we form our ideas about translation based on texts like the Qu'ran or the poetry of Rumi and Yehuda Amichai!

The fruit of such a pursuit will produce new questions and assumptions; it can also help us challenge certain negative and wrongheaded anxieties and obsessions with which we address translation today. **A translation culture that is positive, generative, and collaborative must go beyond assumptions of “lost in translation,” “the translator as a traitor,” and the idea of “untranslatability.”**

If these ideas resonate with you, then this course is for you, regardless of your major or the languages you know (or don't know)! Before you join us on this journey (I know, it's a worn out metaphor but bear with me), here is how the course is structured:

- 1) For eight weeks, we will tackle specific case studies (see schedule) that deal with questions that are central to the question of translation. We will delve into a

primary text and a scholarly/theoretical text that frames it. Theorizing in the abstract often produces ideas that pose as universal, and we can certainly do with less universalizing ideas that pretend to be suitable for all times and places!

- 2) Having modeled certain types of reading, I will then turn the course over to you! Along with your peers, you will come up with readings (rubric will be provided) for us to discuss and analyze. In this section, ***all*** literary traditions are welcome!

» **Knowledge of a second language would be ideal but is not required.** Good humor, empathy, and intellectual curiosity are however assumed.

## Why is this course good for your life?

Through a critical understanding of the cultural and historical roles that translation has played in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, we can better investigate the idea of linguistic and cultural difference. We will learn how not to treat linguistic and cultural difference as a given, and instead ask: what are the discourses of power that produce the idea of difference and who stands to benefit from the flagging of certain cultures as fundamentally different from our own? This course may be focused on one particular subject (translation), but ultimately, we will use the process of humanistic inquiry to promote the values of pluralism and equity. Those values lie at the heart of a growing movement that aims to rebuild our societies based on justice, compassion, and accountability.

## Key Learning Outcomes

### Critical Literacy

As US Americans, we live in a cultural ecosystem that poses as monolingual and treats translation at best as an afterthought. Translation is however ubiquitous! It is imperative to develop the cultural competence, linguistic proficiency, and **critical literacy** required to appreciate and fully understand the many roles it plays in our worlds today.

### Analytical Skills

Translation is not a transparent, automatic, and unproblematic transfer of information from one language into another; it involves acts of interpretation that are never divorced from questions of power and ethics. In order to examine this process, we need to cultivate certain badass **analytical skills**.

### Academic Writing

Translation is a culturally and linguistically challenging and ethically-charged endeavor. Its difficulty makes it more —and not less— vital for our world today. In order to better understand what is at stake when we translate (and when we speak of translation), we need to create a language that **affords more nuance** and complexity. We will pursue this aim through academic reading and writing.

Your final grade will depend on the following criteria:

**1) Weekly exercises (30%)**

**2) Participation (15%)**

Come prepared, ask pointed questions, and provide insights based on your own reading of the text. *#BeThere*

**3) Weekly annotations (15%)**

Through a tool called Hypothesis, you will annotate one assigned text a week as a way of closely engaging with the readings and interacting with your peers. Weekly annotations are due on Sunday at midnight.

**4) Critical Lexicon (10%)**

You will compile a list of key terms that are central to our discussions of translation. Due at the end of the quarter (rubric will be provided).

**5) Presentation (30%)**

Your presentation will be collaborative and focus on a topic related to literary translation. *\* Graduate students will write a 8-10 page paper in addition to this.*

A = 4.0-3.9 | A- = 3.8-3.5 | B+ = 3.4-3.2 | B = 3.1-2.9 | B- = 2.8-2.5 | C+ = 2.4-2.2  
C = 2.1-1.9 | C- = 1.8-1.5 | D+ = 1.4-1.2 | D = 1.1-0.9 | D- = 0.8-0.7 | E = 0.0

**Technology in Class:** It is fine to use your laptops in class for note taking and for referencing class readings. Surfing the web, checking emails, checking Facebook, online shopping (particularly at Amazon!) are prohibited. Such activity is disruptive to the individual, the instructor, and to the remainder of the class. If I do find a student using a laptop for any purpose other than note taking, the privilege of using the laptop in class will be revoked (and I call dibs on any purchased goods!). Please turn off your cellphones before coming to class; the use of cellphones is prohibited for any reason. If it is an emergency, just let me know in advance.

**Disability Resources for Students:** If you need any type of accommodation, please contact the [Office of Disability Resources for Students](#). I will be more than happy to work with Disability Resources to provide appropriate accommodations for you.

**Self-Care:** There is no learning without self-care. It is important to care for our body, mind, and spirit while we are in school. Toward that end, there are many different kinds of support services on campus, including the Counseling Center, Hall Health, and the IMA. If you are concerned about yourself or a friend who is struggling, Safecampus, at 1-800-685-7233, is a very helpful resource to learn more about how to access campus-based support services. Ultimately, the best type of self-care is community care.

**Religious Accommodation:** Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy (click [here](#) to read more). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form ([here](#)).



**Academic Honesty:** Students are expected to treat their fellow classmates and instructors with honesty and respect throughout the course. All assignments must reflect your own work. The following [link](#) has information on academic honesty, plagiarism, and consequences. Students are expected to adhere to the UW Code of Student Conduct which can be found at the following [link](#).

**Civility for All:** I am committed to creating a space that is inclusive to all. By all, I mean whoever may be reading this. Disruption of classroom discussions can prohibit other students from fully engaging and participating. Any student causing disruption may be asked to leave any class session, and, depending on the severity and

frequency of that behavior, an incident report may be filled with Community Standards and Student Conduct. As a condition of enrollment, all students assume responsibility to observe standards of conduct that will contribute to the pursuit of academic goals and to the welfare of the academic community. For more information on these standards, please visit [here](#).

**Painting:** Akbar, the famed Mughal Emperor (r. 1556–1605), instituted a forum for interreligious dialogue between Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. Representatives from each tradition read each other's texts and engaged in debates on various philosophical and theological topics. This image shows Akbar presiding over discussions in the *Ibadat-khāna* or the House of Religious Debate. From the *Akbarnama* (The Book of Akbar, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin). I borrowed from Akbar the term “civility for all,” from the Persian *Sulh-e kul*.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

*This schedule like life itself is tentative*



\* All readings will be posted to Canvas; please read assigned readings in advance of our class meeting as dated in Canvas (Files). Class exercises will be posted with instruction to Canvas.

#	Date	Agenda
1	Thurs. Sept. 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meet &amp; Greet</li> <li>- <b>Theme: The World of Literary Translation: Which World? What Translation?</b></li> <li>- <b>Reading/listening:</b> Arundhati Roy, "In What Language Does Rain Fall Over Tormented Cities?" (Watch it <a href="#">here</a>)</li> <li>- <b>Keywords:</b> Modern India, Multilingualism, Inter-cultural exchanges, Nationalism</li> </ul>
2	Tue. Oct. 5  Thurs. Oct. 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Theme: Routes, Not Roots: Inter-cultural Negotiation as the Condition of Translation</b></li> <li>- <b>Secondary readings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Finbarr Flood, "Introduction" and "Remaking Monuments" In <i>Objects of Translation</i>.</li> <li>- <b>Thur.:</b> Audrey Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation of the Sanskrit Mahabharata."</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Primary reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- None</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Keywords:</b> Medieval India, Translation &amp; Empire, Premodern architecture, Sanskrit-Persian cultural interplay</li> <li>- <b>Exercise:</b> Record instances of translation in your daily life (instructions on Canvas)</li> </ul>
3	Tue. Oct. 12  Thurs. Oct. 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Theme: The Politics of Literary Untranslatability</b></li> <li>- <b>Secondary readings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> M. R. Shafi'i-Kadkani, "On Poetic Untranslatability."</li> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Aria Fani, "The Allure of Untranslatability"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Primary reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Thur.:</b> A Ghazal by Hafez</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Keywords:</i> Persian poetry, Lyric/Ghazal, Untranslatability</li> <li>- <i>Exercise:</i> Translate Hafez's Ghazal into a language other than English, then annotate it in English</li> </ul>
4	<p>Tue. Oct. 19</p> <p>Thurs. Oct. 21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Theme: Mediation Is Generative! Translation as Commentary</i></li> <li>- <i>Secondary readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Chana Kronfeld, "Celebrating Mediation: the Poet as Translator," In <i>The Full Severity of Compassion: The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai</i></li> <li>- <i>Optional:</i> "The Scholar as Translator," Presentation at the University of Michigan (<a href="#">here</a>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Primary reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Thur.:</b> A poem by Yehuda Amichai</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Keywords:</i> Hebrew poetry, Mediation, Commentary, Transmission</li> <li>- <i>Exercise:</i> Look up a key term in the <i>Dictionary of Untranslatables</i> (PDF on Canvas) and discuss how it has a different conceptual genealogy in the languages you know</li> </ul>
5	<p>Tue. Oct. 26</p> <p>Thurs. Oct. 28</p>	<p><i>Theme: The Inimitable: Translating the Qur'an</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Secondary readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Excerpt from Abdelfattah Kilito's <i>Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language</i>.</li> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Excerpt from Travis Zadeh's <i>The Vernacular Qur'an: Translation and Rise of Persian Exegesis</i>.</li> <li>- <i>Optional:</i> "How (Not) to Translate the Qur'an" (<a href="#">here</a>) by Shawkat Toorawa</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Primary reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Thur.:</b> A Surah from the Qur'an</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Keywords:</i> Arabic Language, Scripture, Commentary/exegesis</li> <li>- <i>Exercise:</i> Go on <a href="#">Quran.com</a> and compare different translations of <i>Surah al-Fatiha</i>. For further instruction, see Canvas.</li> </ul>

6	<p>Tue. Nov. 2</p> <p>Thurs. Nov. 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Theme:</b> Englishes, Not English: The Poetics of the Target Language</li> <li>- <b>Secondary readings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Michael Cooperson, "Introduction" <i>Impostures</i>.</li> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Podcast: Michael Cooperson in dialogue with Shin Yu Pai (<a href="#">here</a>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Primary reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue. &amp; Thur.:</b> Excerpts from the <i>Maqamat</i> of al-Ḥarīrī</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Keywords:</b> Premodern Arabic literature, Global Englishes, Target audience</li> <li>- <b>Exercise:</b> Select a literary text in English and rewrite it in a distinctly different register, then reflect on the process.</li> </ul>
7	<p>Tue. Nov. 9</p> <p><b>Thurs. Nov. 11 (Holiday)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Theme:</b> Translation and the Making of the Global Author</li> <li>- <b>Secondary readings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Orhan Pamuk, Nobel Lecture (watch/read <a href="#">here</a>)</li> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Gloria Fisk, "World Literature as an Artifact of the University in the United States: The Part about the Critics."</li> <li>- <b>Optional:</b> Möller, "Pär Lagerkvist, Barabbas and the Nobel Prize for Literature."</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Primary reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- None</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Keywords:</b> Nobel Prize in Literature, Literary awards, Cultural hegemony of English</li> <li>- <b>Exercise:</b> Examining how literary anthologies deploy (or fail to deploy) translation.</li> </ul>
8	<p>Tue. Nov. 16</p> <p>Thurs. Nov. 18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Theme:</b> In Spite of Islam: Sufi Poetry in English Translation</li> <li>- <b>Secondary readings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Rozina Ali, "The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rumi."</li> <li>- <b>Tue.:</b> Sophia R. Arjana, "Mysticism, Incorporated" In <i>Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi</i>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Primary reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Thur.:</b> The Prelude to the Spiritual Couplets of Rumi</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Keywords:</b> Sufism/Spirituality, Poetry, New Age Movement</li> <li>- <b>Exercise:</b> Examine translators' preface/notes</li> </ul>

9	Tue. Nov. 23  <b>Thurs. Nov. 25 (Holiday)</b>	¡Group presentations!
10	Tue. Nov. 30  Thurs. Dec. 2	¡Group presentations!
11	Tue. Dec. 7  Thurs. Dec. 9	¡Group presentations!

### Bibliography

(In alphabetical order)

Ali, Rozina. "The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rumi." *The New Yorker*, January 15, 2017.

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