

## 2009-2010 Seminar Participants

### "Exploring Translation Theory"

*John Golden*

#### *Rationale:*

Throughout my career, I have always taught courses in Foreign Language (French, German, Russian) and in Literature in English (French Literature in Translation and German Literature in Translation at Winthrop College, Russian Literature in Translation, Senior Honors Seminars on "Saint Petersburg in History and the Arts," and GL100/140 at Stonehill.) This teaching profile follows logically from my academic training: BA in French, MA in German, MA and PhD in Comparative Literature. The two sides of my training and teaching produced, almost inevitably, an interest in translation, which I have pursued over the years - but only sporadically, never systematically.

In the GL100/140 that I have taught since the inception of the current Cornerstone Program at Stonehill, I include only non-English texts. This choice rests on two reasons: first, that students have ample opportunity to read English and American Literature in courses within the English Department; second, that students benefit from thinking about "what it means to read a text in translation." In the GL100/140 course, I foster this thinking primarily by comparing multiple translations of several poems from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. I do get students beyond the cliché that "it loses something in translation." We wind up, though, at my own cliché: "translation implies interpretation," a position I adopted after reading Marilyn Gaddis Rose's *Translation and Literary Criticism: Translation as Analysis*, in 1997. "Translation implies interpretation" means that translators make their choices based on their sense of which elements of the original are most important. Now I would like to go beyond my own cliché and explore - systematically - the current state of Translation Studies, which has emerged as a scholarly discipline in the last twenty years.

#### *Project:*

This is a "reading around" project. I propose to start with three core texts and follow as they lead me to other texts. The three core texts are:

Barnstone, Willis. *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (1993)

Bassnet, Susan and Andre Lefevere, eds. *Translation, History, and Culture* (1990)

Venuti, Lawrence, ed. *The Translation Studies Reader* (2000)

My GL100/140 has already been enriched by my participation in the Pilot Writing Program, which infuses an emphasis on writing into sections of the four First-Year Cornerstone courses. My proposed project will result in a more sophisticated understanding of "what it means to read a text in translation" on my part, which I will then incorporate into my GL100/140, infusing it into the whole course, rather

than limiting it to a separate unit, as I do now. I expect to find several core concepts and to use one of them as part of our discussion of one text, another on another text, etc. This "infusion approach" parallels exactly what I have done with the writing material introduced to faculty in the pilot sections of GH, GL, GP, and GR.

### *Benefit:*

Three groups will benefit from this project.

Students who recognize "what it means to read a text in translation" will be empowered to become more critical readers of and more critical thinkers about translated texts they encounter - often absent serious consideration of the fact of translation - in their other courses.

The Foreign Language Department has begun to discuss offering courses in English. My work will inform those discussions. The Department also plans to offer a course in Foreign Language Pedagogy, to be taught collaboratively, by members of all the language sections in the Department. My work could conceivably lead to another collaborative course on Translation.

Faculty who normally teach texts in translation - those in History, Philosophy, Psychology, or Religious Studies, for example - may be sensitized to the issues involved in reading and teaching translated texts.

### *Community Outreach Plans:*

I served on the Steering Committee for the very first "Academic Development Day" (Faculty Conference on Teaching, 1990) and presented on "Thinking, Critical Thinking, and Foreign Language." I have presented consistently ever since; on the last two Academic Development Days, for example, I organized a panel and presented on "Reading" and presented on "Reinventing One's Teaching at Mid-Career." I also participated in a Learning Triangle last year and have served a Faculty Mentor for two new faculty in the recent past. All of these are good opportunities for outreach. In preparing this application, I discovered *Metamorphoses*, a journal of Translation Studies published by the Five Colleges; this is a potential broader outlet.