

LT255: LIVING IN TRANSLATION: Contemporary European Literatures

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Translation is more than a creative literary practice, it is also a way of seeing and engaging with the world around. How do we make sense of ourselves in ever-shifting personal, technological, and political contexts? Taking Europe as a geographical starting point, this course uses this question as an entry point to explore contemporary European literatures, with a focus on writers who don't fit neatly into categories and whose work offers an expanded and complex view of Europe in terms of 20th and 21st centuries. We'll look at the work of writers living in Europe, including Sulaiman Addonia (UK/Belgium), Balsam Karam (Sweden), Ágota Kristóf (Hungary/Switzerland), Linnea Axelsson (Sápmi), among others, as a springboard for conversation on themes of migration, class, identity, desire and language. Engagement with the assigned readings will be interwoven with discussions and one in-class non-language-specific translation workshop exploring the creative practice of literary translation, with the aim of illuminating the practice of translation itself (for the student curious about the role and work of a literary translator) and how the idea of translation as part of the practice of living can help us make sense of life today: ourselves and another, generational divides, the social contract, technological developments, and more.

Requirements

Students are required to come to class prepared and with the relevant materials.

Participation consists of contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned. This class takes a comparatist approach, so we'll be thinking about the texts on their own and in dialogue with each other. It is key to pay attention to social, political, cultural contexts and references in the reading materials, literary devices and elements of style (voice, tone, metaphor...).

Homework: In the first week of class each student will sign up to prepare one informal presentation (up to 5 minutes) related to the topic and reading of a subsequent week. The goal of the presentation is to kickstart that week's group discussion and offer thoughts and questions for fellow students to engage with.

In Week 12, students will present their final essay topics, up to 5 minutes.

Reading materials will be made available (URLs or PDFs) prior to classes.

Please note that essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. If an extension for an essay is agreed, the essay must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

All assignments must be completed to pass the course.

Students do not need to know more than one language to complete this course.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

The assessment will be made based on two essays, in-class participation and homework. (See 'Grade Breakdown' and 'Essay Deadlines' below).

Assignments

The deadlines for all writing assignments can be found under 'Essay deadlines.'

The midterm essay (2,000 words) should explore and develop some of the theoretical themes, problems, or approaches to translation introduced during the course, using the idea of "living in translation" as a starting point. This assignment can take the form of an analytical reading of a text explored in class; "auto-theory", using one of the texts from the course as a foundation for an exploration of a personal experience of "living in translation"; or a creative/critical essay that includes up to 500-words of original translation done by the student, and 1,500 words of critical reflection on the translation. Students are free to take a creative and/or experimental approach to the idea of translation, including the usage of digital translation tools. Students do not need to know more than one language to complete this assignment.

The final essay (3,000 words) is an opportunity to deepen your engagement with questions and themes that have been explored throughout the course through your particular lens. Taking a comparatist's approach, select one of the texts from the course as a springboard for your inquiry, then relate it to a second text from the course or of your choosing in order explore your question.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation and homework: 30%

Midterm Essay (2000 words): 30%

Final Essay (3000 words): 40%

Schedule

Week 1: 26 January: Living in Translation

Jhumpa Lahiri, "In Praise of Echo" in *Translating Myself and Others*
https://www.pw.org/content/jhumpa_lahiri_in_praise_of_echo

Jhumpa Lahiri, "Why Italian?" in *Translating Myself and Others*

Katy Derbyshire, "Mother Tongue/Muttersprache" *Babelwerk*
<https://babelwerk.de/alphabet/mother-tongue-muttersprache/>

Week 2: 2 February: Why Translation Matters

Edith Grossman "Why Translation Matters", *Words Without Borders*
<https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2010-04/from-why-translation-matters/>

Lawrence Venuti, Ch1 "Invisibility", The Translator's *Invisibility: A History of Translation* (pp 1-34)

Week 3: 9 February: Migration and Culture

Ester Allen, "Translation, Globalization and English", *PEN Report* (pp 17-33)
https://www.llvs.lt/img/File/PEN_studija_vertimai.pdf

Michael Cronin, "Translation and Migration," in *Translation and Identity* (pp 43-74)

Jen Calleja, *Fair* (Extract: pp 11-39)

Week 4: 16 February: Approaching Translation

Jen Calleja, "G5: Hall of Mirrors (Reflections on a Sentence)" (40-47) and Workshops chapters (pp 70-81), "The Ungeziefer in the Room" (pp184-190), *Fair*

Lawrence Venuti, "How to Read a Translation", *Words Without Borders*
<https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2004-07/how-to-read-a-translation/>

On Reviewing Translations, *Words Without Borders*

<https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2011-03/on-reviewing-translations-susan-bernofsky-jonathan-cohen-and-edith-grossman/>

Jhumpa Lahiri, "Where I Find Myself: On Self-Translation,"

Words Without Borders

<https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2021-04/april-2021-where-i-find-myself-on-self-translation-jhumpa-lahiri/>

Week 5: 23 February: Acts of Translation: Creative/Critical Practice Workshop

Non-language-specific in-class exercises and discussions

Week 6: 2 March: Loss and Translation 1

Balsam Karam, *The Singularity*

Week 7: 9 March: Loss and Translation 2

Balsam Karam, *The Singularity*

Ágota Kristóf, *The Illiterate (Extract)*

Week 8: 16 March: The Colonial Gesture 1

Linnea Axelsson, *Aednan*

Saskia Vogel, "The Same River Twice: Notes on Reading,

Time and Translation", *Words Without Borders*

<https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2023-01/the-same-river-twice-notes-on-reading-time-and-translation-saskia-vogel/>

Week 9: 23 March: The Colonial Gesture 2

Linnea Axelsson, *Aednan*

Brian Friel, *Translations (Extract)*

SPRING BREAK: Monday, 30 March - Monday, 6 April
(Monday, 6 April is a Federal Holiday. This class will not be rescheduled.)

Week 10: 13 April: Class and Translation 1

Elvia Wilk, "The World of Yesterday", *The Baffler*

<https://thebaffler.com/salvos/the-world-of-yesterday-wilk>

Vincenzo Latronico, *Perfection* (extract)

Guest: Vincenzo Latronico (via video)

Week 11: 20 April: Class and Translation 2

Didier Eribon, *Returning to Reims* (Extract)

Jen Calleja, "Snack Stand" and "Cash Point" (pp. 143-146),
Fair

Week 12: 27 April: Desire and Translation 1

Sulaiman Addonia, *The Seers*

Presentation of Final Essay

Week 13: 4 May: Desire and Translation 2

Sulaiman Addonia, *The Seers*

Jacqui Cornetta and Kira Josefsson, "Mother Tongue/Lover Tongue", *Erotic Review* (optional)

COMPLETION WEEK Monday 11 May - Friday 15 May

The Spring semester runs from Monday, January 26 and runs until Friday, May 15, with the Spring break planned from Monday, March 30, - Sunday, April 5, 2026.

- Normal course sessions end on Friday, May 8.
- Completion week is from Monday, May 11 through Friday, May 15.
 - Make-up classes and final exams can take place in completion week.
 - Students are required to be on campus during completion week.

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:
<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/search/?semester=spring-2026>

Classes missed due to federal holidays will not be rescheduled. Classes missed due to conferences or due to illness (of the professor) are rescheduled.

<https://berlin.bard.edu/for-students/academic-calendars/>

Essay Deadlines

Creative/Critical Practice Essay (2,000 words): due 23:59, Wednesday, 25 March 2026

Final Essay (3,000 words): due 23:59, Thursday, 30 April 2026

Library and Book Purchase Suggestions

All materials for the course will be made available online.

You may want to purchase the texts you'll be using for your assignments, for your personal library.