

OGSCL Newsletter

Organization of Graduate Students in Comparative Literature

Spring 2004

A Message from the Editors

Now that summer has arrived, it is past high-time for the spring issue of the newsletter to find its way from submissions to editing to publication and finally to you. The editors invite you to enjoy reading the insightful articles, poems and department updates.

The two articles on translation highlight a good portion of the department involved in this work. Elena Langdon's article, *In Lieu of a Definition of Translation*, is a non-academic take on translation, and Michaela Schnetzer and Eleonora Barcellandi give us a picture of the American Translation Studies Association conference held at UMass this spring.

In *A Talk to Remember*, Nikolina Dobрева reviews Noam Chomsky's talk given this past September, noting that more rigorous interrogation of the issues on the audience's part makes for a more worthwhile lecture. And Craig Sinclair serves up a clear and unequivocal critique of the new international student fee in his article. Poems by international students estheR Cuesta, BK Tuon, and Xiaoqing Liu are proof that the University would be an impoverished institution indeed without these students in the community.

Enthusiastic congratulations go to Lilian Feitosa on defending her dissertation prospectus entitled, *Found in Translation: Brazilian Women Writers in English, the Cases of Clarice Lispector, Carolina Maria de Jesus and Ana Maria Machado* and for her newborn son, Linton Wichert Feitosa born May 30, weighing seven pounds, four ounces and measuring 20 inches. Also to Shawn Smolen-Morton, congratulations for successfully defending his PhD dissertation *Acting the Child: Separating the Infantile from the Masculine in Film and Literature, 1835-1985* and for

his new son, Ezra Smolen-Morton born April 9. We are all wishing Xiaoqing the best of luck on her Master's defense in June and her future in the Comparative Literature PhD program at the University of South Carolina. Farewell and good luck also to estheR Cuesta, who will be entering the MFA program at the University of Texas at El Paso this fall.

Of course, we try to keep up with all the news, moves, achievements, and events in the department, but if we have missed anyone in this spring, please email us and we'll be sure to make it known in the fall issue. You may notice that, in *Student News and Updates*, we've included only those who emailed us with their news. In the next issue, we'll try to include updates for everyone in the department. Also, don't miss the profiles of the new students joining the program this fall.

We hope this newsletter finds you all basking in the satisfaction of another semester's successful completion and looking forward to the summer ahead. While some will travel to visit family in Puerto Rico or Cambodia, others will be learning languages in Mexico or Japan or will remain most of the summer here in the Valley working, reading, and enjoying the season.

Thank you,
Elena Langdon and Daniel Pope
Editors, OGSCL Newsletter

In Lieu of a Definition of Translation

Elena Langdon

One of the first things one learns in a Translation Studies program is that there are many definitions of the object of study, namely “translation.” Part of the general public seems to think of translation as a simple process of conversion from or into a foreign language, regardless of the context or culture involved. Many people ignore the difference between a translator, who works with written code, and an interpreter, who works with spoken language.

Some people also think that translators and interpreters work with several languages; the most common question I hear after I tell someone what I am studying is “So how many languages do you speak?” “Three,” I reply humbly. *Bel Canto*, a recent popular novel by Ann Patchett, features a “translator” who can interpret from and into an implausible number of linguistically unrelated languages. As far as I know, the vast majority of professional translators and interpreters work with only a few languages, usually linguistically related.

Scholars have defined translation in numerous manners: as a process of communication; as a version of the original; as a functional rendering of the message or context; and/or as many other processes, products or activities. It’s not easy for anyone to figure out what we are dealing with; some scholars write entire books on the matter of defining what translation means.

Personally, translation has taken on many new meanings since I started studying it officially. And some of these meanings are completely unrelated to academics, theories and even the career of translation and interpretation.

One meaning is the translation of identity, or how one sees and presents oneself to the outside world. Like translation, identity is fluid, dynamic and depends on (among other things) audience and context. Personally, when I try to define myself to others, I gather up pieces of past and present experiences to form some sort of coherent narrative. But this is not always easy.

For example, when confronted with the all-too-common question “where are you from?” I must first make a choice as to how much time I want to spend explaining my life story and whether the other

person is interested or capable of deciphering any of it. I was born in the States to an American family, but when I was eight I moved to Brazil and spent ten years there. I then returned to the U.S. and moved around a lot. To complicate things further, I moved back to Brazil for over two years, and then moved to western Massachusetts last year.

So I have to translate all of this into an answer. The quickest fix is “Brazil” because that is where my heart is. Brazilian music, literature and visual memories make my heart beat faster, make my body move and bring a heaviness to my throat and clouds to my eyes. A longer translation of myself adds a little detail: “I am an American, but I was raised most of my life in Brazil, and that’s where my mother and brother still live.” This answer is the most common.

From there, when prompted with questions, my translation moves onto the long history of how many years in each place and in what order, and then particulars such as the many states I’ve lived in and schools I’ve attended, where my parents are from (Colorado), and why I went to Brazil in the first place.

Many people (if they’re still listening) translate the presentation of myself into what they know: missionary or military brat, but neither of these apply (I went to Brazil because my mother got a job there as a professor). That’s the way all definitions, translations and interpretations work: they are limited expressions of experiences that cannot ever be fully conveyed through words only.

In addition, experiences and definitions change, and sometimes we forget to update the translation. I am going to Japan on an exchange program this summer and will be staying with a host family. I had to write a short personal description of myself, and it included the word “shy.” Well, this might have been true several years ago, but that description no longer applies. In fact, when I told Eleonora and Michaela (see article below) that I was once shy, they looked at me like I was being ridiculous. They are more likely to think of

me as an “incessant chatterbox,” or “the-one-who-constantly-interrupts-professors.”

Without realizing it, I changed drastically over time and as a result I committed one of the worst translation mistakes: I forgot to revise.

So how do you translate yourself? For comments, complaints and more of this, and for an ongoing journal on my stay in Japan, visit www.xanga.com/oreoqueen

American Translation Studies Association (ATSA) Conference

Michaela Schnetzer and Eleonora Barcellandi

The Second American Translation Studies Association (ATSA) Conference was held at the University of Massachusetts Amherst from March 26-28, 2004. The conference focused on Translation Studies in the United States, particularly on the theory, research, training and technology areas. The discussions were grouped into four main categories: the Friday and Saturday sessions were dedicated to translation theory and teaching translation and were held at the Campus Center; the topics of the Sunday sessions, which took place mainly at the Translation Center, were translation technologies and literary translation.

The wide range of topics covered brought eminent scholars from diverse backgrounds and from all over the world to Amherst. Speakers included Suzanne Jill Levine (Univ. of California, Santa Barbara), R. Radhakrishnan (UMass Amherst), Nitsa Ben-Ari (Tel Aviv University, Israel), Marilyn Gaddis-Rose (SUNY Binghamton), and Else Vieira (Univ. of London). Along with these well-known scholars, a number of UMass students also contributed to the conference.

Among others, the four students currently enrolled in the MA in Translation Studies program presented their research findings. First-year student Eleonora Barcellandi gave a paper entitled “Translation under the Military Dictatorship in Argentina 1976-1983.” She used Itamar Even-Zohar’s Polysystem Theory as a framework for her study. Elena Langdon and Michaela Schnetzer, who are also in their first year, both presented papers in the session that dealt with translation and the media. Their paper topics were “The Translation of American Culture on Brazilian Television: *Seinfeld* and *Friends*” and “Translating Film Titles in Switzerland,” respectively. As part of her thesis, Xiaoqing Liu delivered a paper on “Translation in Patricia Powell’s *The Pagoda*.”

Comparative Literature’s own BK Tuon presented a paper entitled “Translating Metaphor/Culture,” while Peter Kahn, a candidate in the PhD program of the Spanish and Portuguese Department, presented “Poetry, Translation, and Transformation: the Identities of Alejandra Pizarnik.” Kahn’s paper discussed how different translations might

reflect a translator’s view of the author, particularly in terms of identity.

Altogether, over 110 people attended the conference, including 50 presenters. The presentations were followed by animated discussions: linguists were talking with literary translators, and translation techies were exchanging ideas with cultural studies people. The friendly atmosphere was characterized by collaboration and mutual respect. This atmosphere was also prevailing at the social events to which the conference organizers Edwin Gentzler and Maria Tymoczko invited the attendees. These included a potluck dinner at Maria Tymoczko’s home as well as a banquet at the Lord Jeffery Inn.

“Insomnia”*

Bunkong (BK) Tuon

I was in my room trying to sleep when I heard giggles outside my window. I opened the window to find out who was giggling and, to my surprise, got slapped by a soft delicate hand. Because the afternoon sun was blinding me, I could not see anything. I retreated into the corner of my small room and, like a child of seven, began to weep.

Then I told myself that I was a man's man and that I must return to the window and seek justice for the slap I wrongfully received earlier. But when I returned to the window and cautiously stuck my head out, I got slapped again by the same soft delicate hand.

Like before, I could not see the face behind that hand. Blinded by the glorious light of the sun, I stumbled back into the corner of my room and, like before, wept like a seven-year-old child.

While I was weeping, the giggles burst into laughter. More than ever, I felt insulted. I got up, straightened myself, put on my leather jacket and combat boots, and proceeded to exit the backdoor of the apartment complex to find the face behind that soft delicate hand in order to avenge the slaps, the giggle, and the insulting laughter that I wrongfully received.

And when I opened the exit door of the apartment complex, once again, the same soft delicate hand was waiting to slap my face. I immediately closed the door before it got a chance and ran back into my tiny studio. I went to my corner, sat down, and with arms around my knees, I wept. Like a child of seven.

* This and the other poems by BK printed in this issue arose out of writings he read in the classroom to help generate student interest.

Sueño: 23 June 2005

estheR Cuesta

I feel free. I can walk and go anywhere I want. I don't fear anything. I don't have to hide anymore. Pretend that I'm not looking. Or run. Watch all sides. No tengo miedo. Without fear of being mugged. Raped. Killed. I'm alone, going to the store to buy milk and pan de dulce. I'm not a child anymore. I'm the woman life has made me, a life without my mother. I'm walking down that dark alley between my Street and Second Street, the only paved street in the neighborhood, where all the stores and two-flight houses are.

That strong trigueño man will no longer pass by and flash himself at me, asking me to jerk him off, to suck it. No weeping after I see him cross the street. And if he appears, I'll scream.

But now I'm grown. This time, I don't have to try to block my ears 'cause he won't speak. He's not gonna scare me 'cause he won't do shit.

There is no smell of Trópico or rum. The neighborhood kids don't do drugs anymore. I think it's drugs what they did because it wasn't alcohol. It was nothing I had smelled before, anywhere else. Mi mami said it was marihuana. She was right. It was marihuana and crack and cemento de contacto.

I see a beautiful house now. It has flowers all over the front and the left side, chabelitas de todos los colores. Someone planted an acacia tree. He's still a teenager, growing strong. A light post. Who paid for the light post? The neighborhood? The new owners of the house that faces the callejón? No way it was the city. Luz! Luz! Qué lindo! I've been waiting for you all this time!

The alarm goes off.

Static like always. I have to get up but want to continue my dream. Es mío, mine.

I want to know what happens after I cross the callejón a la calle Segunda. I force myself to keep dreaming but it's no use. Ya no vale. It's a forced dream, then it's not a dream anymore. ¡Ya no vale!

A Talk to Remember

Nikolina Dobрева

This semester, UMass students and the local community had the wonderful opportunity to see and hear Noam Chomsky live. On February 24 of this year, the renowned professor, who is now better known for his liberal views than as one of the leading linguists in the world, gave a talk on the war in Iraq. The talk was scheduled for 7 p.m., but by 5:30 the foyer of the Bowker Auditorium was already packed. Due to the impeccable organization of the event, a half hour before the lecture began, the prospective audience was forced to leave the building and stand in a line that extended all the way to the Campus Garage. However, after that initial drawback, everything went smoothly except for the great disappointment of those whom the space (too tiny for the demand) could not fit. Tickets to the free event were distributed, and the speaker himself appeared.

In his usual relentless style, Professor Chomsky dealt a few precise and deadly blows to the Bush administration and its policies in Iraq. His statements were supported by up-to-date examples taken from US meddling in dangerous political situations and wars around the world. Despite having driven to Amherst from Boston, and having already given another talk earlier that day, the almost-eighty-year-old professor spoke smoothly and clearly without referring to any written notes. US involvement in terrorism, its favor of controlled democracy and its lowering the “bar of aggression” towards other countries, were exposed and criticized. The one-hour-long lecture was followed by few and unexciting questions by audience members, after which everyone left happier and even more sure of their own liberal views.

That is precisely what could be criticized about the talk. It sounded

bland because the audience was composed of people who could only nod in agreement to everything Chomsky was saying. In other words, he was preaching to the choir. This could not even vaguely compare to the professor's talk given in October 2001 at MIT. Appearing before an audience of mixed background and various convictions, and criticizing the US for policies in the Middle East so soon after that country had suffered from the worst terrorist act in its history, Chomsky was confronted with counter questions and examples that made everything more exciting. At the end of the day, the professor's supreme debating skills earned even more value for his arguments. The UMass lecture lacked the edge of that and other earlier talks, but still, being in the presence of this great mind at work was worth every minute.

Diversity and Domesticity—The International Student Fee

Craig Sinclair

Our graduate program is one of the most internationally diverse on campus, especially considering its size. Of the 38 of us currently enrolled, 23 are international students, and several more are US citizens but not US nationals. This background makes for a rich and varied cultural collective, one that can only broaden the UMass experience for all. One might think we were a model for the future of UMass, but it seems that the university has other ideas about this.

In January 2004, UMass introduced a new fee for International Students requiring internationals to pay for budget shortfalls, our own surveillance and—depending on the current spin—innumerable other things. UMass has scoffed at suggestions that this is unfair, unjust and

even discriminatory, refusing to discuss this fee, which violates various stipulations of our graduate contracts, and the basic rights of our undergraduate colleagues in good time or in good faith.

Nearly 600 international and domestic students have thus refused to pay the fee this semester, and attracted local, national and international news attention as others have recognized the violations that the University is threatening us with and the fact that they are demanding ransom for what is for them a relatively small amount of money.

We want a healthy UMass and a healthy International Programs Office (IPO), we realize that these are dire

financial times in this state, and have fought in the past to “Save UMass,” but now the university is using the traditional methods of the oppressors to try and coerce us into paying a fee by reminding us that it is the establishment.

What’s even more insulting is that it is using the IPO as a channel to get the money, the very organization that is supposedly here to support and help us, and the organization on whom the University depends for international students and scholars, without whom many departments would be unable to function.

It is the Chancellor who has decided that IPO should be funded in this discriminatory manner, and yet he has scant support on his own campus. Our current supporters include:

- The 967 current respondents to our online petition: <http://www.petitiononline.com/survfee/petition.html>
- The Massachusetts Society of Professors
- The Faculty Senate
- The Graduate Employee Organization
- The Graduate Student Senate
- Various other Academic departments and faculty groups—including our own department of Comparative Literature
- The Amherst Human Rights Commission

- And the matter will soon be discussed by the Amherst Town Meeting

Despite the weight of public opinion being stacked against him, Chancellor Lombardi remains resolute in his stance regarding the fee, signaling a new era of privatization at UMass: whenever a budget cut is ‘necessary’ a fee can be imposed on those who use the service. IPO is ‘used’ by far more people than just the international students, in the same way that the Stonewall and Everywoman Centers benefit far more people than their immediate constituencies.

These are sad days indeed when a University tacitly threatens its members with deportation. Sadder still that it invokes the contemporary political mechanisms of fear, unease and distrust—the very things we are protesting against—as a way to leverage our paying of the fee. This is precisely because the University realizes just how calamitous it would be if we don’t pay; not financially, not for us as individuals, but because the University would have to work out an appropriate, respectful and non-discriminatory way to pay for this fee, something it seems strangely unwilling to do.

“Fever”*

Bunkong (BK) Tuon

It is unusually hot today. I take off my shoes and stick them in the nostrils of a sleeping giant. The giant wakes up and asks me, "What are you doing?" "I am lost, sir." I explain to him. "Do you know the way to Cambodia?" The giant puts me on his back and jumps up to the sky. Together, we fly over the seven seas and cross the glass mountain of the East. It is night and day and week and month. Then I open a bag of jasmine rice, take a cup of it out, wash it with lukewarm water, and put it on a stove to cook. I am frying salted fish and the aroma puts the giant's wife to sleep. I feel so lonely that I sleep beside her and dream of dancing butterflies. I could not help myself.

“Message”*

Bunkong (BK) Tuon

I'm sorry I can't stay
By the phone
Waiting for it to ring.

I have a life too.
If you don't believe me,
Just call.

* These poems arose out of writings BK read in the classroom to help generate student interest.

Standing Northward

Xiaoqing Liu

When spring flowers ceased swinging in front of my window
Whistles and watchwords died in the evening
Postman forbade his footsteps at my door
The world unfolded its heavy curtain in its silent language
Signaling that ancient freezing semaphore

In a second, the sky turned into a waterfall
Pouring down on my unprepared shoulders
Turning the castle into ruins
At that moment, I refused to meet anyone's eyes

Turning around
I stood northward

Standing northward
I, the deserted, deserted the world with my last residue of pride
Thereupon, wind is behind me, passing on others' echoes
Sweetness and warmth distant; strings plucked only to please strangers
While you are only a light leaf clinging on an old branch

I
Plain-dressed, reticent, and ascetic
facing
my own land and sea
serenely

Student News and Updates

NEW GRADUATE STUDENTS IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, FALL 2004

Nicole Calandra joins our PhD program with a teaching assistantship, received her BA and MA from Bryn Mawr College, majoring in French. Her areas of academic interest include French literature and women writers in the comic genre.

Kanchuka Dharmasiri comes to our MA Program from Sri Lanka where she earned a B.A. from the University of Peradeniya with a major in English. She has been awarded a teaching assistantship and is interested in literary theory, film, theatre and art: "...the scope of your program allows me to continue exploring widely."

Matthew Goodwin has been accepted into our PhD program with a teaching assistantship; his areas of specialization include immigrant literature and critical theory. He received his MA degree from the University of Arkansas in Comparative Literature.

Ting Guo joins our MA Program in Translation Studies, supported by the Comparative Literature/Translation Center Research (CLTC) Award. She was awarded an MA in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics from Central South University in Changsha Hunan, China.

Brandon Shaw joins our MA/PhD program with a teaching assistantship, having earned an MA in Philosophy from the University of Georgia, Athens with a specialization in German and Greek literature. He has taught German and Spanish classes at the high school level as well as Introduction to Psychology as an adjunct instructor at Virginia College.

Maura Talmadge will be joining our MA Program in Translation Studies with her BA in Hispanic Studies from Wheaton College. She is currently working as a language assistant in a Technical/Professional secondary school at the Académie de Montpellier, France.

Scott Vangel enters our MA/PhD program with a specialization in film studies/French. He received his BA in English/Film from Framingham State and his MA in Religion/Literature from the University of Chicago.

Erica Walch is entering our MA program in Translation Studies, having received a BA from UMass Amherst and an MEd from Elms College. She has taught English as a Second Language in colleges and community-based organizations for several years.

CURRENT STUDENTS

The profiles and updates below are the ones we received this spring. For students without new updates this spring, please see the Fall 2003 newsletter online at: <http://www.umass.edu/complit/ogscl/Newsletters/>.

estheR Cuesta

It seems that I'll graduate this September. I'll be staying in the Valley for the summer...writing and editing my thesis. With the M.A. in Comp Lit, next fall I will go to a very particular—and unique—place in the U.S.: the U.S.-Mexican border. At The University of Texas at El Paso, I'll be joining an MFA Program while focusing on Border Studies. It also seems that for the first time ever I'll have a paper published, which is a revised version of a paper I presented last summer at the MALCS (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social) Conference at the University of Texas at San Antonio. This essay is a mixture of genres: somewhere between a testimony and a theoretical-political reflection on the entanglement of the politics of immigration and translation/representation in the processes of formation of Latina subjectivities. So, the news is that I plan to continue writing and reading (some things will be fun, others won't, pero así es la vida), watching films, and listening to Mercedes Sosa and R. Kelly, and anything that my ears may pick up on the streets.

Lilian Feitosa

This semester I finally defended my dissertation prospectus, entitled "Found in Translation: Brazilian Women Writers in English, the Cases of Clarice Lispector, Carolina Maria de Jesus and Ana Maria Machado." The greatest news is: I am moving to Philadelphia in late July/early August because my husband has accepted a post-doc position at Upenn's physics

department. I hope to continue working on the dissertation there, while taking care of my two sons. I'll miss everyone and hope to see many of you at the MLA later this year!

Juan G. Ramos

For goodness sake!!!... it seems that my first year in grad school is coming to an end, and not a minute too soon. During the spring semester I had my first teaching experience at the college level. I'm still trying to digest it all and look forward to a much needed break from academia. Unfortunately, at this point, there are no trips planned for the summer. It should come to no surprise for some of you in the Department to learn that I'll be staying in the area doing all sorts of menial jobs to make ends meet since all teaching opportunities during the summer seem to be reserved for senior "faculty"... (oops!!!) senior grad students who have been here for God knows how long. No offense to fellow grad students!!! I'm currently working on some papers dealing with the nature and impact of dictatorships in the memory of Argentineans, as well as two contemporary Latin American films (from Ecuador and Colombia), in which violence and homosexuality are represented. Along the way, I wish to find time to enjoy my fiancée's company before she leaves me to pursue her dreams in another part of the country. Hopefully I can also relax, read stuff I actually WANT to read, listen to even more hip-hop, and I don't know what else...whatever may pop up.

Neil Hartlen

I am currently completing my dissertation, while continuing to recruit and orient students for UMass's Year/Semester Abroad in Paris Program. I am also pleased to report that I have had two paper proposals accepted for the 2004 MLA Annual Meeting. Drawn from my dissertation material, these presentations are entitled "Crimes of Identity: Paul Smail's *Ali le Magnifique* and Samuel R. Delany's *The Mad Man*" (for a panel entitled "Comparatively Queer") and "Identity and Perversity in *Nowhere* and *Les Amants Criminels*" (for a panel on "(Un)Veiling Sexual Identity in Film").