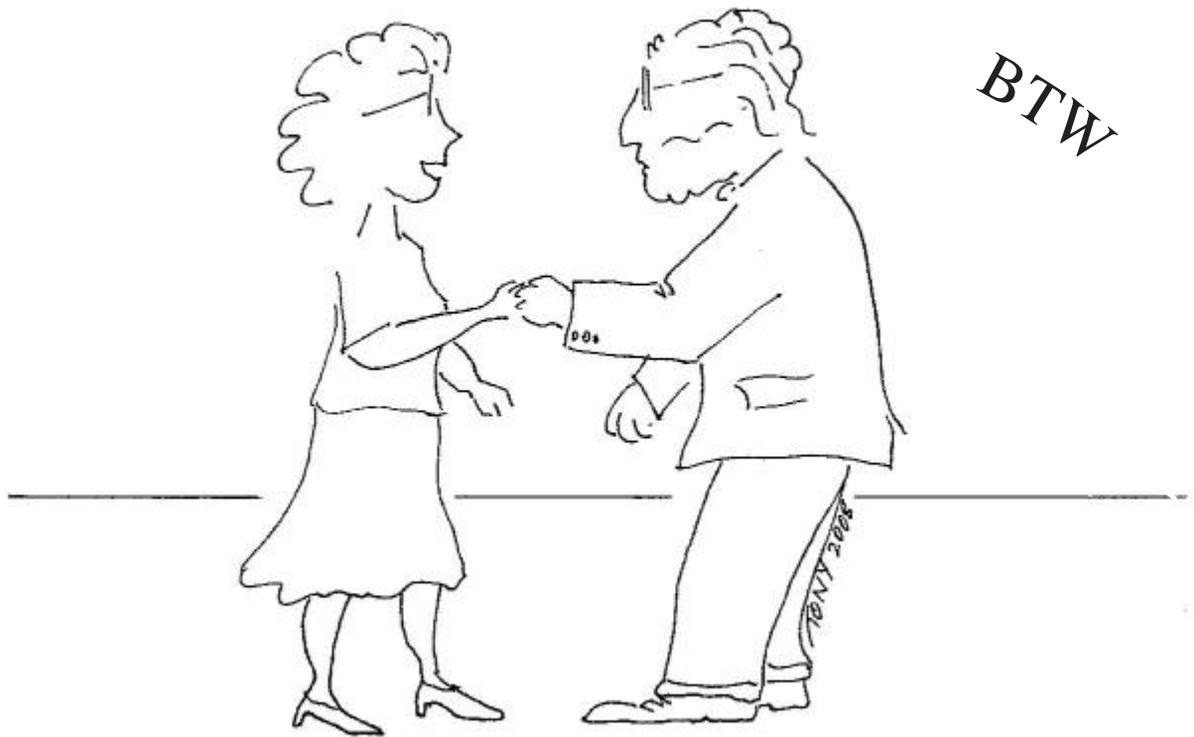


ata

# SOURCE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LITERARY DIVISION  
NO. 43

SUMMER 2008



BTW

Tony

*I was recently betrayed by a false cognate and I'm  
not sure I'm ready for another translation just yet.*



## IN THIS ISSUE

**Cover: Tony Beckwith's BTW Cartoon**

**Letter from the Editor .....2**

**From the LD Administrator .....4**

**In the News .....5**

**FY 2009 NEA Translation Grant Awards .....6**

**More Than Beeps and Blasts:  
Computer Game Localization and  
Literary Translation .....7-10**

**Passage into Literary Translation  
by a Judicial Interpreter .....11-13**

**Hot Links for Literary Translators .....15, 18**

**By the Way: My LitSIG .....14-15**

**Adventures in Poetic Translation .....16-18**

**Martin Luther and the "Papal Asses":  
A Page from the Racy History of Biblical  
Translation/Interpretation .....19-23**

# FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATOR

## **Source: New Online Version**

It is with great pleasure that I write this initial note on the new online version of *Source*, the newsletter of the ATA's Literary Division. Clifford Landers edited *Source* for many years, producing an excellent newsletter that focused on literary translators and their craft. Like other ATA divisions, the Literary Division is now moving its publications online. *Source*'s new editor, Michele McKay Aynesworth, was recently the guest editor for *Beacons X*, the Division's annual journal of literary translation. With *Beacons X* our journal stepped into the twenty-first century with a stellar edition that included literary translations from the origins of this art up to the modern era. This edition may be read online at <http://www.ATANET.org/publications/beacons10.php>, or you may order a hard copy through ATA Publications. Given the quality of the editorial board that Michele put together, the editing of a great variety of texts, and Michele's dedication to *Beacons X*, I want to welcome her as our Editor of *Source*. I want to thank those who have contributed articles for *Source* Volume 43 and Michele for her superb work.

In addition to serving as Administrator of ATA's Literary Division, Enrica Ardemagni is Associate Professor of Spanish and Director of the Certificate in Translation Studies at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, is a board member of the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care, Chair of the Indiana Commission on Health Care Interpreters and Translators, and Chair of the Communications Committee of the Midwest Association of Translators and Interpreters.

## **LD Highlights**

The Literary Division will have two Distinguished Speakers at the upcoming ATA conference in Orlando. Sandra Smith, the Marilyn Gaddis Rose Lecture for 2008, will talk on "*The Story of Suite Française* by Irène Némirovsky." In 2007, her translation of *Suite Française* won the PEN Book of the Month Award and the French-American Foundation and Florence Gould Foundation Translation Prize. Michael Scott Doyle, a Professor of Spanish and Translation Studies at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, will give a presentation on "Five Translators Translating: Reading Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* in English and Spanish." Please check the full program schedule to see other presentations on literary translation, and don't forget to stop in on Thursday evening to socialize at the Literary Café and enjoy the bilingual readings. Bring your translations to read! Then join us for the Literary Division's annual business meeting on Saturday and share your opinions on what we do.

Our numbers in the Literary Division have been increasing, with a current tally of 1,750+ members.

We appreciate your support of our Division and look forward to seeing you in Orlando. Check our website often for updates on the Literary Division, and let's celebrate our newsletter *Source* as it continues to connect us as a community of literary translators.

Enrica J. Ardemagni, Ph.D.  
Administrator, Literary Division  
<http://www.ata-divisions.org/LD/>

## The Literary Division

### Officers



Administrator:  
Enrica Ardemagni  
[eardema@iupui.edu](mailto:eardema@iupui.edu)

Assistant Administrator:  
Montserrat Zuckerman  
[montsezuck@ameritech.net](mailto:montsezuck@ameritech.net)

# IN THE NEWS

## Radio Shows Feature Literary Translators

The Leonard Lopate show's Underappreciated Writers series on WNYC and PRI's The World Books program have been featuring literary translators in recent interviews which have then been posted on their respective websites. Marian Schwartz hit the jackpot with interviews on both programs this August. Her interview with Lopate about a book she translated a few years ago, Yuri Olesha's *Envy*, can be downloaded at <http://www.wnyc.org/shows/lopate/underappreciated.html>. Other literary translators who have been guests on Lopate's summer Underappreciated Writers series include Karen Sawyer Kingsbury, Anthony Chambers, Michele Aynesworth, and Natasha Randall.

Schwartz's interview with PRI's Bill Marx was broadcast over WGBH August 15<sup>th</sup>, this time focusing on her new translation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *White Guard* (Yale University Press). Marx's World Books podcast is described on the site as a "spotlight on international literary news, trends, and authors. Created by The World's Bill Marx, the World Books podcast features interviews with authors, critics, publishers, and translators from around the globe." Marx's interviews with translators Schwartz and David Dollenmayer (July 15), as well as with international authors and publishers of literary translations, can be found at <http://www.theworld.org/?q=aggregator/sources/61>.

## Full Tilt

Issue Three of *Full Tilt*, a journal of East-Asian poetry, translation and the arts, is up and running at <http://fulltilt.ncu.edu.tw/>. Among the issue's features are translations from Chinese, Japanese and Korean poetry by Andrea Lingenfelter, Simon Patton, James Shea, Won-Chung Kim and James Merrill; paintings by Korean artist and activist Ah Il-soon; and interviews with Chinese poets Yu Jian and

SOURCE

Zhai Yongming, Taiwan poet Hsia Yu, Hong Kong Comix Artist-Writer Chihoi Lee, and *Circumference* editors Stefania Heim and Jennifer Kronovet.

## New Budget to Support Online Beacons

LD Board member Liliana Valenzuela has passed on the good news: The ATA Board has unanimously approved her budget proposal to support the LD's online issue of *Beacons*, a peer-reviewed journal of literary translations. The budget includes generous honoraria for a web designer as well as for an editor. The current issue, *Beacons 10*, was the last to be published in print. It can be purchased at the ATA's online store or viewed online at [http://www.atanet.org/publications/beacons\\_10.php](http://www.atanet.org/publications/beacons_10.php).

## New NEA Translation Grant Guidelines

The National Endowment for the Arts has announced three changes to its guidelines for translation grants: "The NEA will broaden its support for the field of literary translation by revising its guidelines for literary translation fellowships in three significant ways. **Beginning in FY 2010, grant amounts will be increased to \$12,500 and \$25,000. In addition, the number of translation fellowships a literary translator can receive will rise to three. Finally, the period of time that a literary translation fellow must wait to apply for another fellowship will decrease from ten to five years.**"

<http://www.arts.gov/news/news08/translation.html>

The deadline for new grant applications is January 9, 2009.

<http://www.nea.gov/grants/apply/LitTranslation/index.html>

See page 6 for FY 2009 grant recipients.

# FY 2009 NEA GRANT AWARDS:

## LITERATURE FELLOWSHIPS FOR TRANSLATORS

The National Endowment for the Arts announced its literary translation awards for 2009 on August 20. The recipients of the Translation Fellowships are as follows:

**Angles, Jeffrey**

Kalamazoo, MI  
\$20,000

To support the translation from Japanese of the memoir *Twelve Perspectives* by Mutsuo Takahashi.

**Aynesworth, Michele**

Austin, TX  
\$20,000

To support the translation from French of *In So Corrupt an Age*, the war journal of Charles Rist.

**Berry, Michael**

Santa Barbara, CA  
\$20,000

To support the translation from Chinese of the novel *Remains of Life* by Wu He.

**Davidson, Robin**

Houston, TX  
\$10,000

To support the translation from Polish of selected poetry from *The New Century: 1999 & Other Poems* by Ewa Lipska.

**Gingerich, Stephen**

Akron, OH  
\$10,000

To support the translation from Spanish of *An Open Grave and Other Stories*, a collection of five novellas by Juan Benet.

**Hedeem, Katherine**

Mount Vernon, OH  
\$10,000

To support the translation from Spanish of the collection *The Poems of Sidney West* by the Argentine poet Juan Gelman.

**Horacek, Josef**

Athens, GA  
\$10,000

To support the translation from Czech of *Is No Beginning: Selected Poems* by Vladimír Holan.

**Novoy, Idra**

New York, NY  
\$20,000

To support the translation from Portuguese of *In the Time of Jaguars*, a collection of poetry by Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros.

**Pottlitzer, Joanne**

New York, NY  
\$10,000

To support the translation from Spanish of the play *Common Words* by Cuban dramatist José Triana.

**Reidel, James**

Cincinnati, OH  
\$10,000

To support the translation from German of Franz Werfel's 1941 novel *A Pale Blue Lady's Handwriting*.

**Rosenthal, Mira**

Oakland, CA  
\$20,000

To support the translation from Polish of *Colonies*, a collection of poetry by Tomasz Różycki.

**Stallings, A. E.**

Athens, Greece  
\$20,000

To support the translation from medieval Cretan Greek of the *Erotokritos* by Vintzentzos Kornaros.

**Tipton, Carolyn**

Berkeley, CA  
\$20,000

To support the translation from Spanish of Rafael Alberti's three-part volume of poems, *Returns*.

<http://www.arts.gov/news/news08/translation.html>

<http://www.nea.gov/Grants/recent/09grants/LitTranslation.html>

# MORE THAN BEEPS AND BLASTS: COMPUTER GAME LOCALIZATION AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

by Frank Dietz, [www.frankdietz.com](http://www.frankdietz.com)



**Frank Dietz, Ph.D.**, is an ATA-certified English-German translator who lives in Austin, Texas. He specializes in technical translation and software localization, particularly of computer and video games. He has translated casual games, science fiction games (*System Shock* and *System Shock 2*), simulations (most of the *Jane's Combat Simulations* titles) and adventure games.

The game development industry is still young, and the practice of localizing games even younger. The field is still somewhat chaotic, with many development teams reinventing the wheel when it comes to localization. At the same time, there are exciting possibilities.

The localization of computer and video games represents a sizeable portion of the overall localization market, yet it remains relatively unknown to many translators who do not have any practical experience with it. When I mention to other translators that I have been translating computer games since the mid-1990s, the reaction is usually:

- a) *Localizing games? Is there really anything to translate?*
- b) *I would never translate games. Games are for children.*

In the following, I will discuss what there is to translate in games, why some games resemble novels and others historical studies or technical manuals, how game localization requires both literary creativity and technical precision, and why game translators should never forget that words cause actions.

## **1. From Casual to Cosmic – the Range of Games**

“The only game I know is Solitaire in Windows”. “Games – You mean, like PacMan? Is there anything really to translate?”

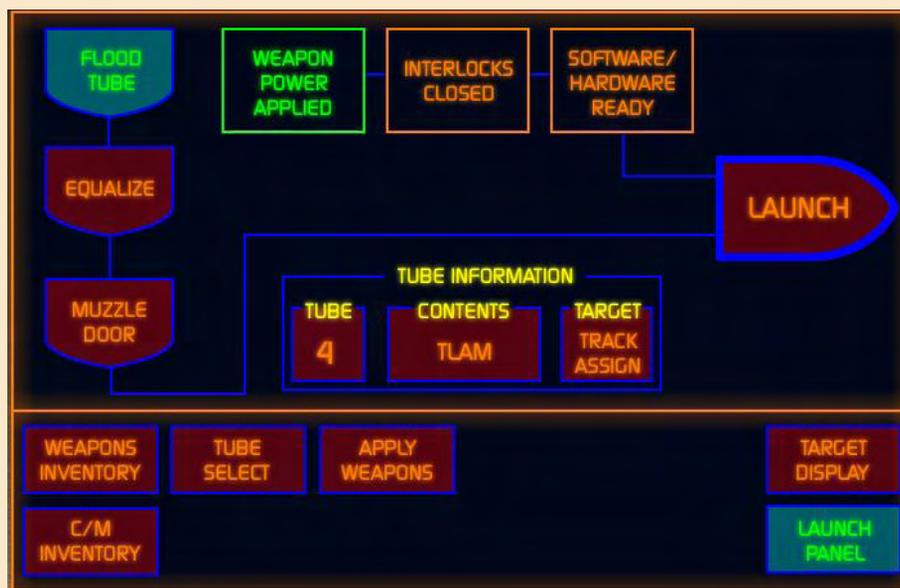
These are statements I have heard in one form or another from numerous translators, and they typify a widespread ignorance of games and condescension towards them. Besides these condescending attitudes towards games, there has been a culture gap between translators and gamers. Translators should recognize that games cover an enormous spectrum, from almost completely visual puzzle games to complex role-playing games containing hundreds of thousand of words, from quick coffee-break entertainment to huge sagas lasting hundreds of hours of playing time.



**Illustration 1:**An almost completely visual “casual game.”  
Scene from *Samorost 2* © Amanita Designs

## 2. Imaginative and Mimetic Game Genres

Besides the enormous range in size and complexity between casual and hardcore games, there is also a major difference between mimetic and imaginative games. Mimetic games, or simulations, more or less faithfully



**Illustration 2.** An example of a mimetic game. Screen shot from *Sub Command*. © Sonalysts, Inc.

reproduce aspects of the real world. They might model sports (soccer, football, basketball, etc.), vehicles (race cars, motor bikes) or military units (jet fighters, submarines, helicopters). In their extreme versions, these games strive for the highest possible verisimilitude, and translators must know, for instance, what such terms as FLIR, HOTAS and HUD mean, how to recreate the patter of a sports commentator in the target language, or how to research the proper terms for nineteenth-century infantry weapons. This is particularly important, as a vocal group of hardcore enthusiast gamers will point out any errors in the translation (see my discussion in Dietz, 2006).

At the other end of this spectrum we find science fiction and fantasy games that create their own worlds. In localizing these titles, translators must exhibit considerable creativity in dealing with warp drives, time portals, tachyon guns, orcs, battle mages and manticores. For futuristic titles, a consistent stylistic level (be it cyberpunk or space opera) is important, together with a good knowledge of science fiction. After all, many game designers are avid SF fans.

Fantasy role-playing games, on the other hand, require different skills from the translator. He or she must be able to employ deliberately archaic language, translate poems, songs and riddles, and be conversant with terminology from such fields as alchemy, heraldry and siege warfare. Most of all, the translator must be able to create names. Of course Tolkien set the standard here, naming hundreds of persons, species and places in ways that suggest much about them (think of the threatening, sonorous name “Mordor”). Translators will have to dig deep into myths, legends and fairy tales of the target language to recreate the linguistic experience of some of the best fantasy role-playing games.



**Illustration 3. An imaginary creature. Screenshot from *Ultima 9*. © Origin Systems**

### **3. Varieties of Game Texts**

Yet no matter how much the game itself deals with pixies and elves, orcs and werewolves, a game localization project involves much more than the in-game text. There are manuals, installation guides, key mapping utilities and patch texts (files explaining new features in updated versions), and much more. This demands that translators straddle the line between literary and technical translation and show proficiency

in both the subject matter of the game itself and platform-specific technical terminology (and maybe marketing language as well, as they are sometimes called on to translate packaging texts and websites).

#### **4. Words and Actions in Games**

One important aspect of adventure and role-playing games is that words do not just tell a story, but often help to propel the action. A conversation may provide the protagonist with clues on what to do next, or the description of an object may suggest an alternate use for it. If the hint is not expressed clearly enough (or the player is sent to find object A, but the object is actually named B), a language-related “plot stopper” may occur, causing players to abandon the game at this point and generating resentment against the game publisher. To avoid this, translators should (if at all possible) play the game as much as possible, or at least ask for screenshots, walkthroughs and other aides to understanding the plot.

#### **5. Conclusion: Overcome your Ludophobia**

The game development industry is still young, and the practice of localizing games even younger. The field is still somewhat chaotic, with many development teams reinventing the wheel when it comes to localization. At the same time, there are exciting possibilities. Books nowadays are not just turned into movies (or vice versa), but also into computer and video games (there are games based on the Narnia novels, the Lord of the Rings trilogy, the James Bond series, Agatha Christie novels and much more). If games seem like an alien world to you, you might want to take some tentative steps into it, and in doing so encounter adventures and new professional opportunities.

#### **6. Resources**

Chandler, Heather. 2005. *The Game Localization Handbook*. Hingham, MA: Charles River Media.

Dietz, Frank. 1999. “Beyond PacMan: Translating for the Computer Game Industry.” *ATA Chronicle* 28 (9): 57.

Dietz, Frank. 2003. “A Translator’s Perspective on Games Localization.” *Multilingual Computing & Technology* 14 (5): 21-25.

Dietz, Frank. 2006. “Issues in Localizing Computer Games” *Perspectives on Localization*, ed. Keiran Dunne, pp. 121-134. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Esselink, Bert. 2000. *A Practical Guide to Localization*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

King, Brad, and John Borland. 2003. *Dungeons and Dreamers: The Rise of Computer Game Culture from Geek to Chic*. New York: McGrawHill.

Trainor, Helen. 2003. “Games Localization: Production and Testing.” *Multilingual Computing & Technology* 14 (5): 17-20.

# PASSAGE INTO LITERARY TRANSLATION BY A JUDICIAL INTERPRETER

**Diane Teichman**



Diane Teichman is a licensed court interpreter in Houston, Texas. Her articles and lectures can be found at [www.linguisticworld.com](http://www.linguisticworld.com). A founding member of White Oak Writers and Critique group, she is completing a collection of original short stories and a book of original poetry. She can be reached at [speakeasy@pdq.net](mailto:speakeasy@pdq.net).

The setting was the large conference room of a law firm filled with dark suited attorneys. I was the interpreter of record in the midst of a deposition in a high profile lawsuit against two major multinational corporations based on several fatal vehicular accidents. Having interpreted for over twenty-five years and in countless depositions, I knew to expect particularly sensitive testimony when surviving family members were deposed. It is common for plaintiff lawyers to elicit testimony demonstrating the extent of the loss suffered by the family as part of laying a foundation for placing a financial figure on pain and suffering. I was accustomed to adhering to my oath to render a verbatim and accurate translation of testimony without alteration or emotional affectation.

This witness was a South American woman who, along with her mother, had been in an accident. She survived but her mother died in her arms at the scene. In very respectful tone, the witness was asked to describe her relationship with her mother and how her loss had affected her life. After tearfully talking about her own children losing their beloved grandmother, she eloquently pointed out the very special and close bond she had had with her mother. She then produced a two page poem written in her native Spanish and I was asked to sight-translate it into the record. With trembling hands she tendered to me pages revealing delicate words that flowed with passion, pain, and honor. I looked up into her tear-stained face and then into the expectant eyes of the attorneys. In the obligatory third person I said, "The Interpreter respectfully declares that she is not qualified to sight-translate this poem as it requires the expertise of a skilled literary translator."

Court interpreters are bound to a Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities stating that we should not perform services that we are not qualified to perform. Our oath prohibits any paraphrasing or synopsis of testimony. Sight-translating this poem was the function of a separate profession with its own set of skills and parameters. As I carefully stated this, on the record, it became clear to the lawyers that I was well within my rights to ask to be released from this task. If they refused my request the defense would have the option to move my translation be excluded since I had declared myself not qualified to provide such a translation. I knew I was taking a risk that the lawyers would be angry at me for the delay and for having to learn that all translation wasn't the same. To my relief, both sides demonstrated a genuine respect for the integrity of this woman's expression of grief. The more respect demonstrated by the defense the happier the

plaintiff's attorneys were. When asked for the correct procedure to follow, I recommended that the plaintiffs hire a proven literary translator and attach the resulting translation and the original to the deposition. The plaintiff's lawyers expressed gratitude for my clarification, noting that the added value bestowed upon this exhibit called for its careful handling. Still on the record, I was asked for and I provided professional resources of literary translators – all the while simultaneously interpreting this for the plaintiff, who smiled as she stroked the poem with her fingers. To this day I still work with the lawyers from both sides.

Codes of Ethics and rules aside, I feel that both judicial interpreting and literary translation earn respect through skill development and market education. I was not going to lower myself to the level of “taking a stab at it” just to save face in front of my clients as so many untrained people do. I also know how much we judicial interpreters are set back when unqualified people interpret in legal settings.

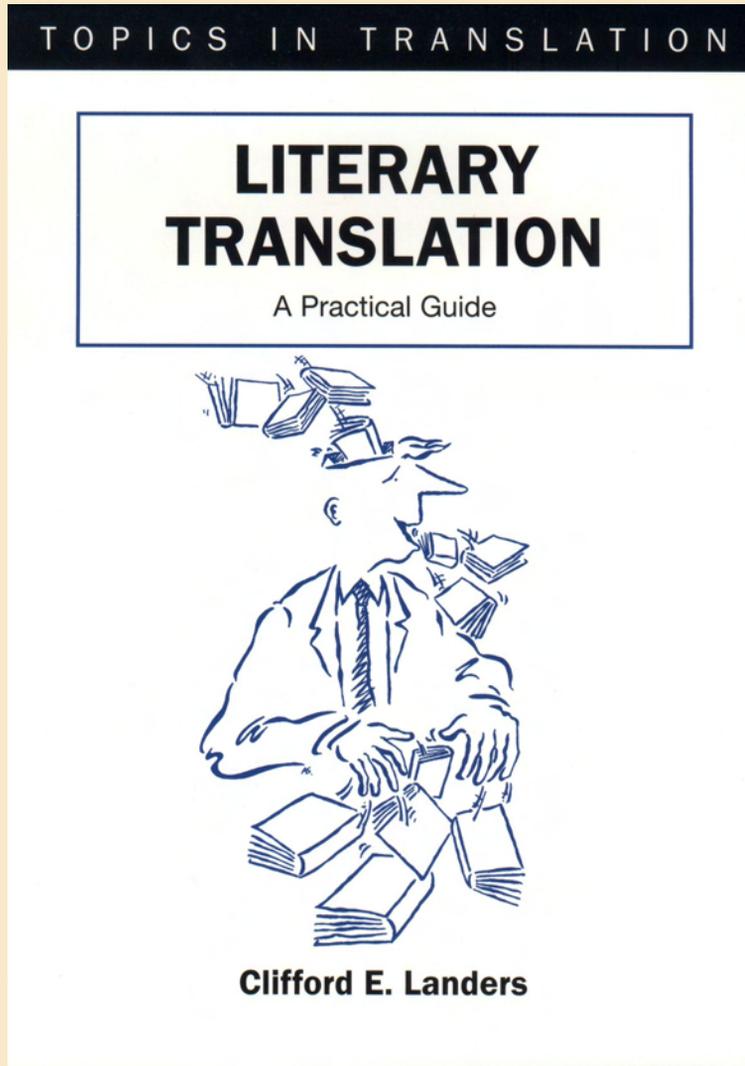
However, this event rekindled in me the legendary allure of literary translation. Before logic prevailed, I too fantasized spending months on a tropical island while effortlessly translating the latest Pulitzer Prize winner. The reality is that the literary translator's path mirrors

the writer's journey, which is driven by a passion for creative expression. Not by money. Nor by financial security. Not even by the guarantee of a subsequent book deal. The excitement of publication lasts as long as the book is a hot seller, and while the author ends up with plump royalties, the translator may garner only a flat fee or a paltry percentage of the royalties,

but the reality is that another solid base income is usually requisite for the freedom to pursue literary translation.

Networking in writer's groups, I was surprised by how little published authors knew about literary translation, including the translation of their own books. But then it baffled fellow writers that I hadn't translated literature already. They cited my language skills, years of studying creative writing, and experience in the publishing business. I had also successfully published two poems and my own nonfiction work, and had been hired to edit the series *Professional Interpreting in the Real World* for Multilingual Matters (<http://www.multilingualmatters.com>).

Still, before translating literature, I wanted to apply the same dedication to skill development that I had to interpreting. I had yet to learn the major differences between these two fields of translation. So I turned to two texts from Multilingual Matters' *Topics in Translation* series: *Literary Translation, A Practical Guide* by Clifford E. Landers, and *The Translation of Children's Literature* edited by Gillian Lathey.



and name recognition, useful for enticing more assignments from publishers. The dedication that literary translators have to making fine literature available in other languages should be appreciated by authors as well as publishers,

Together they provide the perfect balance, offering practical elements of literary translation as well as issue analysis.

Cliff Landers, a prize-winning translator of many books, confidently answers questions in a personal and friendly tone that puts the reader at ease. The author covers an orderly progression of practical steps that lead to being respected as a translator and to enjoy the experience. The distinction I faced in my transition between judicial interpreting and literary translation became clear when he noted that “how one says something can be as important, sometimes more important, than what one says.” He matter-of-factly informs translators

about the publishing industry, distinctions between genres, how to approach getting one’s work published, and securing rights and permissions, as well as detailed information on contracts. His advice about the unpredictable terrain of the translator-author relationship is well heeded. He provides helpful techniques for navigating challenges such as dialect, register, tone, cultural cues, puns, word play, and restricted source or target language vocabulary. These techniques are illustrated by examples from literature and enhanced with alternative translations, a freedom this judicial interpreter rarely encountered. Landers demonstrates both empathy for the translator and respect for the profession. Now a mainstay of my translation training, this book serves as an excellent guide for successfu  
m a n e u v e r i n g  
while fueling my passion for literary translation.

**Having been asked to translate a children’s book, I knew I needed to learn how to convey meaning to the child reader, and so I turned to the essays in Gillian Lathey’s *The Translation of Children’s Literature*.**

The issues examined in Lathey’s book cover the historical transformation of perceptions of children’s literature, narratives for children, translating the visual, cross cultural influences, geographical border crossings of stories, and the translator’s voice. The discussion of these issues brought focus to my translating. I learned to consider the reader’s attraction to specific components of a children’s book. As noted in Ms. Lathey’s introduction, Austrian scholar Richard Bamberger has observed that the child reader is interested in a book because of the power of the narratives, not because it is a translation of a famous original work, as may be the case for an adult reader. Illustrations are so important in this genre because they convert text into pictures. I was surprised to learn that historically they were sometimes redrawn for the translated version. I also learned about the transferability of the socioeconomic values and morals of the nineteenth-century author.

Still working as a court interpreter, I have now translated two children’s books by a self-published author and have three more translation projects under consideration. I am also working on my own writing. Though I am not quite looking at tropical island property, I thoroughly love what I’m doing. Reading these books has helped me to understand the expertise involved in the translating process. I can now state, even under oath, that I will honor an original work of literature with an equally compelling translation.

## TOPICS IN TRANSLATION

# THE TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

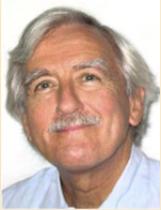
**A READER**



**Edited by Gillian Lathey**

# BY THE WAY

by Tony Beckwith,  
<http://www.tonybeckwith.com/>



Tony Beckwith was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, spent his formative years in Montevideo, Uruguay, then set off to see the world. He came to Texas in 1980 and now lives Austin where he works as a writer, translator, poet, and cartoonist. “The Span-glish I spoke with my bilingual peers during my childhood was a perfect education for a translator, as it taught me how to deconstruct both languages and create a hybrid form with rules of its own.”

## My LitSIG

There were seven of us at the Literary Special Interest Group meeting this afternoon. That’s actually a pretty decent number, compared with times when only three of us showed up and — just once — only two. So there was a veritable throng of translators there today, and a lively group we were too. It was one of those rare days in Texas when the sun is warm but the air is cool and dry, so we sat outdoors in a circle on the patio. A frisky little breeze had just kicked up as we arrived and it suddenly felt a bit chilly in the shade so we lit a fire in the *chimenea*, which added a coziness we all appreciated.

The plan for the meeting was to talk about “The Translation Issue” published by Poetry magazine in April 2008. We had all received a copy in advance, courtesy of the Poetry Foundation, and had spent some time reading the poems in translation and the accompanying notes. Those familiar with the issue will recall that it consisted of English translations followed by the translators’ comments on the material and the process. About thirty poets were represented: Marina Tsvetaeva, Ovid, Ho Xuan Huong, Rilke, César Vallejo, Hafez, et al. None of the original versions were included, which was viewed as either a good thing or a bad thing, depending on one’s point of view: some of us wanted to compare each translation

against its source, others preferred to consider the translation as a work in its own right first.

Not all literary translators translate poetry, of course, but it is surely one of the essential challenges of our calling, and I think even those who never stray far from prose are drawn to it in one way or another. It certainly does provide a small group of devotees with some fascinating material to discuss over coffee and cookies.

The general idea at this meeting was for each of us to select and talk about a particular poem in the magazine, and to perform a sort of autopsy on the translation for the benefit of the other attendees. Some focused on the more esoteric qualities of their chosen piece, whereas others were more interested in analyzing and commenting on the technical process. In fact, certain questions had been posed in advance, such as whether it is necessary to have a firm grasp of the more subtle aspects of the poet’s craft in order to create an acceptable translation of the poet’s work. Should one, for example, be able to distinguish between a trochee and a dactyl and be on speaking terms with, shall we say, an iambic pentameter? In what I suspect may be a universally representative response, everyone at our small gathering had his or

her own view on such matters, and there was no majority opinion one way or the other. Also, no attempt to sway the decision in any way. The comfortable coexistence of independent minds is, in my view, one of the great attractions of this particular LitSIG.

Perhaps of greater concern than the technical question was the ability of the translator to understand — to deeply understand — the meaning and context of the poem in terms of time and place, and then to be able to transmute something of that meaning and context into the translation. In discussing the work of Yannis Ritsos, for example, David Harsent refers to the poet's work as being "indelibly Greek: in landscape, in weather, in the recurring statues and geraniums and balconies, the ever-present sea, the underpinning of myth." In his translation, therefore, Harsent strives to evoke a similar sense of

Greece; "And this was midday: a fierce sun, the blaze / of their nakedness, the glitter of repetitions, a dazzle / rising off the sea, the scents of pine and hyacinth..."

I used Harsent's work as my material for the "autopsy" process referred to above, and would like to quote from his comments as they relate to an issue that always stirs debate among translators of poetry: whether or not (and if so, how?) to attempt to reproduce the original poem's form and rhyming structure in the other language. Harsent says there is "nothing new about the business of making 'a version' rather than offering what is sometimes called a strict translation; in fact, I suspect that this is the approach to translation now most often taken. One way of defining this method is to speak not of 'translation,' but of 're-imagining.' It is, in short, a creative act in support of an earlier creative act."

We've probably all thought or said something along those lines at one time or another. A few years ago, in a review of Andy Hurley's translation of "Collected Fictions" by Jorge Luis Borges, I wrote: "Borges thought of literature as guided dreams. Translator Andrew Hurley has entered the writer's dreaming at the point where vision coalesces into words. He has reverently re-directed Borges' fictions, at the source, carefully choosing words and images that echo the rhythms of the original, giving us Borges in English that still sounds like Borges. What a joy!"

Translating poetry is indeed a joy, as is the immense good fortune of having a group of like-minded colleagues to hang out and talk shop with on a Saturday afternoon.

THE EU [EUROPEAN UNION] TRANSLATION CENTRE  
<http://www.cdt.europa.eu/cdt/ewcm.nsf/ /8F422D256807CD0DC1256E9000364EC6?OpenDocument>

OPEN LETTER and THREE PERCENT  
[http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/images/OL\\_announce\\_final.pdf](http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/images/OL_announce_final.pdf)

Information about The University of Rochester's new publishing house dedicated to literature in translation + the new website which Open Letter oversees.

THREE PERCENT  
<http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/>  
Featuring "an international lit blog, reviews of untranslated books, sample translations, and a calendar of grants and prizes for translation."

HOT LINKS

# ADVENTURES IN POETIC TRANSLATION

## A LESSON PLAN FOR INTRODUCING ISSUES OF POETIC TRANSLATION AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

by Lydia Razran Stone, [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net)



Lydia Razran Stone is an ATA-certified Russian-into-English translator who has edited the Slavic Language Division's newsletter, *SlavFile*, for the last 13 years. She may be familiar to LD members from her multiple gigs mc'ing the *After Hours Cafe*. She has published two bilingual books of translated Russian poetry and is currently working on a bilingual book of children's poetry.

First a bit of background information: 1) North Carolina is reputed to be lovely in April; 2) I have been trying to produce metric rhymed translations of Russian poems for almost 20 years and have virtually exhausted my available audience of people who want to hear in detail about the challenges of this activity. So, when my friend and colleague, Anastasia Koralova, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, half-jokingly suggested I might like to come down and give a guest lecture on the subject to her class in Russian<>English translation, I jumped at the chance.

On the plus side (in addition to the inducements listed above) Anastasia told me that her class consisted of a dozen heritage speakers (essentially young immigrants whose first language was Russian but who had received most of their education in the United States in English) fluent in both languages, who were bright, receptive, and very interested in the subject. On the minus side, she warned me that I could not count on their having the knowledge of or enthusiasm for Russian poetry that can usually be assumed in émigrés from the ex-Soviet Union. Also the class was two and a half hours long, scheduled at 5-7:30 on Monday. So, aside from the challenges I wanted to discuss, I faced one of keeping their attention at a time when low biorhythms and hunger can dampen all but the most avid intellectual curiosity.

In developing my lesson plan, I made what turned out to be two felicitous decisions. The first was to draw all my examples from my translations of famous Russian children's poetry. These poems were most likely, I felt, to be familiar to the young immigrants and have pleasant, non-academic associations. Indeed, I was gratified to note smiles and even exclamations of recognition when we began reading. In addition children's poems are typically straightforward in meaning and do not require the extra (and frequently groan-inducing) step of exegesis. Finally, most children's poems are full of humor. My mother, who started a second career as a poet in her seventies and gave readings all over New York, used to say that no matter how highbrow or intellectually pretentious the audience at a reading, what they will like best is humorous poetry.

The next successful decision I made was based on advice I received, not from my mother, but from the staff of the nature center where I served a volunteer stint running programs for three to five-year-olds: “Keep the lecture segments short and intersperse them with something participatory involving moving around.”

With all this in mind and with Anastasia’s help, I devised the following lesson plan. After briefly introducing myself and my topic, I had one of the students read aloud in the original what is arguably the most beloved and popular Russian children’s poem (*Baggage* by Samuel Marshak), after which I read the English (see box).

I then presented a short description of what I see as the essence of translating poetry: Like all translation, but to a more extreme degree, it is a series of compromises (though occasionally punctuated by miracles). I then described the factors that had to be taken into account in a poetry translation, going into as much explanation as seemed required judging by student reaction. These factors are meter, rhyme, other sound related aspects, overall (thematic) meaning, details of meaning, and overall impression. I emphasized that any attempt to improve a translation with regard to one factor is likely (if not certain) to cause a problem with some other factor, constantly necessitating compromises.

I then explained the structure of the next part of the class. After a short introduction focusing on particular translation challenges, four humorous poems or excerpts (ranging from 4 to 50+ lines) would be read first in Russian by a student and then in English. Class members had handouts containing all bilingual texts and were urged to follow along. After each reading, questions and comments would be solicited and then the students would assemble into small groups and grade each translation on the six factors discussed, using the matrix provided below each poem on the handouts.

Meter	Rhyme	Other sound aspects	Meaning: Overall	Meaning: Details	Impression

The compromises featured in each of the four translations were the following:

- 1) inexact rhyme (forefather, together, other, brother) and compromise of meaning details;
- 2) shift from trochaic meter (characteristic of Russian folk poetry and its imitators) to iambic in a very long narrative poem to accommodate English syntax in which clauses and sentences tend to start with unstressed articles and prepositions;
- 3) the use of made-up, or at least atypical, English diminutives to reflect the completely normal Russian diminutives at the ends of most lines (The cat was too lazy/To catch him a mousy/The boy was too lazy/To help in the housy); and
- 4) for a Russian poem about a train journey from Leningrad involving numerous place names, the substitution of a train journey between Hackensack, New Jersey and Boston, Massachusetts, as the Russian place names seemed too foreign for English speaking children and were nearly impossible to rhyme in English – not to mention the fact that Leningrad is no longer the current name of a city.

The group grading activity allowed the students to move around and interact (though I realize now it would have been better to request that they form different groups each time) and, I hope, enhanced their attention to the translation in general and to the aspects to be graded in particular.

Finally, during the last half hour of the session the class as a group was asked to translate a Russian children's poem into English. For this I selected a somewhat mediocre but still pleasantly amusing 70-word poem with no special challenges but no obvious translation solutions, the first stanza of which literally translates into

English as  
When I go without  
My glasses  
(In my fog) I step  
On beetles.

All the students seemed pleased to work on this project and a good two thirds participated actively, proposing their own versions of lines and stanzas and occasionally snickering at some mildly salacious line one of them had come up with. A sign of involvement, I thought. Anastasia and I tried to keep our own suggestions to a minimum. Some of the students' proposed lines were quite good. At the end of the class, a young man who had been one of the quieter ones came up to his professor and suggested that there be more classes such as this one. Can translation of poetry be taught at the college level? Well, probably not, really, but that is no reason why it should not be introduced.

And, oh yes, North Carolina is indeed lovely in April.

*A copy of the handout used in the class, including Russian and English versions of all poems can be obtained by emailing Lydia at [lydiastone@verizon.net](mailto:lydiastone@verizon.net).*

#### LOST IN UN-TRANSLATION

<http://nymag.com/arts/books/features/33136/>

"Everyone's gaga for Roberto Bolaño this summer. But what else is crying out to be translated into English?"

#### THE BRITISH COUNCIL

<http://www.literarytranslation.com/>

"In this site we explore the role of the translator and the challenges of Translation and in the workshops area you can read for yourself how the translation process works."

#### AMERICAN LITERARY TRANSLATORS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.utdallas.edu/alta/publications/calls.html>

Calls for submission, grants, even jobs!

#### UNESCO'S CLEARING HOUSE FOR LITERARY TRANSLATION

[http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=1523&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1523&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

Links to international journals, lists of translators' associations, books needing translation (click on the world map), funding sources, etc.

HOT LINKS



tell me that the papists are causing a great fuss because Paul's text does not contain the word *sola* (alone), and that my addition to the words of God is not to be tolerated. . . . You can give the papists this answer from me, if you like.

First of all if I, Dr. Luther, had expected that all the papists together were capable of translating even one chapter of Scripture correctly and well into German, I would have gathered up enough humility to ask for their aid and assistance in translating the New Testament into German. However, because I knew (and still see with my own eyes) that not one of them knows how to translate or speak German, I spared them and myself the trouble. It is evident, however, that they are learning to speak and write German from my German translation, and so they are stealing my language from me, a language they had little knowledge of before this.

It is my Testament and my translation, and it shall remain mine. If I have made some mistakes in it (although I am not aware of any, and would most certainly be unwilling to deliberately mistranslate a single letter) I will not allow the papists to be my judges. For their ears are still too long and their hee-haws too weak for them to criticize my translating. I know quite well how much skill, hard work, sense and brains are needed for a good translation. They know it even less than the miller's donkey, for they have never tried it.

It is said, "He who builds along the road has many masters." That is how it is with me also. Those who have never been able to speak properly

(to say nothing of translating) have all at once become my masters and I must be their pupil. If I were to have asked them how to turn into German the first two words of Matthew, *Liber Generationis*, not one of them would have been able to say Quack! And now they judge my whole work! Fine fellows! It was also like this for St. Jerome when he translated the Bible. Everybody was his master. He alone was totally incompetent, and people who were not worthy to clean his boots judged the good man's work. It takes a great deal of patience to do good things in public. The world believes itself to be the expert in everything, while putting the bit under the horse's tail. Criticizing everything and accomplishing nothing, that is the world's nature. It can do nothing else.

But I will return to the subject at hand. If your papist wishes to make a great fuss about the word *sola* (alone), say this to him: "Dr. Martin Luther will have it so, and he says that a papist and a donkey are the same thing." *Sic volo, sic iubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas*. For we are not going to be students and disciples of the papists. Rather, we will become their teachers and judges. For once, we also are going to be proud and brag, with these blockheads; and just as Paul brags against his mad raving saints, I will brag against these donkeys of mine!

**Are they doctors? So am I.**  
**Are they scholars? So am I.**  
**Are they preachers? So am I.**  
**Are they theologians? So am I.**  
**I. Are they debaters? So am**

**I. Are they philosophers? So am I.**  
**Are they logicians? So am I.**  
**Do they lecture? So do I.**  
**Do they write books? So do I.**

I will go even further with my boasting: I can expound the psalms and the prophets, and they cannot. I can translate, and they cannot. I can read the Holy Scriptures, and they cannot. I can pray, they cannot. Coming down to their level, I can use their rhetoric and philosophy better than all of them put together.

Please do not give these donkeys any other answer to their useless braying about that word *sola* than simply this: "Luther will have it so, and he says that he is a doctor above all the doctors of the pope." Let it rest there. I will from now on hold them in contempt, and have already held them in contempt, as long as they are the kind of people (or rather donkeys) that they are. And there are brazen idiots among them who have never even learned their own art of sophistry, like Dr. Schmidt and Dr. Snot-Nose, and such like them, who set themselves against me in this matter, which not only transcends sophistry, but as Paul writes, all the wisdom and understanding in the world as well. Truly a donkey does not have to sing much, because he is already known by his ears.

For you and our people, however, I shall show why I used the [German equivalent of the] word *sola* — even though in Romans 3 it was not [the equivalent of] *sola* I used but *solum* or *tantum*. That is how closely those donkeys have looked at my text! Nevertheless I have used

*sola fides* elsewhere; I want to use both *solum* and *sola*. I have always tried to translate in a pure and clear German. It has often happened that for three or four weeks we have searched and inquired about a single word, and sometimes we have not found it even then. In translating the book of Job, Master Philip, Aurogallus and I have taken such pains that we have sometimes scarcely translated three lines in four days. Now that it has been translated into German and completed, all can read and criticize it. The reader can now run his eyes over three or four pages without stumbling once, never knowing what rocks and clods had once lain where he now travels as over a smoothly-planned board. We had to sweat and toil there before we got those boulders and clods out of the way, so that one could go along so nicely. The plowing goes well in a field that has been cleared. But nobody wants the task of digging out the rocks and stumps. There is no such thing as earning the world's thanks. Even God himself cannot earn thanks, not with the sun, nor with heaven and earth, nor even the death of his Son. The world simply is and remains as it is, in the devil's name, because it will not be anything else.

I know very well that in Romans 3 the word *solum* is not in the Greek or Latin text — the papists did not have to teach me that. It is fact that the letters *s-o-l-a* are not there. And these blockheads stare at them like cows at a new gate, while at the

same time they do not recognize that it conveys the sense of the text -- if the translation is to be clear and vigorous [*klar und gewaltiglich*], it belongs there. I wanted to speak German, not Latin or Greek, since it was German I had set about to speak in the translation. But it is the nature of our language that in speaking about two things, one which is affirmed, the other denied, we use the word *allein* [only] along with the word *nicht* [not] or *kein* [no]. For example, we say “the farmer brings *allein* grain and *kein* money”; or “No, I really have *nicht* money, but *allein* grain”; I have *allein* eaten and *nicht* yet drunk”; “Did you write it *allein* and *nicht* read it over?” There are countless cases like this in daily usage.

We do not have to ask the literal Latin how we are to speak German, as these donkeys do. Rather we must ask the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace. We must be guided by their language, by the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly. Then they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them.

Yet why should I be concerned about their ranting and raving? I will not stop them from translating as they want. But I too shall translate, not as they please but as I please. And whoever does not like it can just ignore it and keep his criticism to himself, for I will neither look at nor listen to it.

A translator must have a large store of words so that he can have them all ready when one word does not fit in every context.

Why should I even bother to talk about translating so much? If I were I to explain all the reasons and considerations behind my words, I would need an entire year. **I have learned by experience what an art and what a task translating is, so I will not tolerate some papal donkey or mule acting as my judge or critic.** They have not tried it. If anyone does not like my translations, he can ignore it; and may the devil repay him for it if he dislikes or criticizes my translations without my knowledge or permission. If it needs to be criticized, I will do it myself. If I do not do it, then let them leave my translations in peace. Each of them can do a translation for himself that suits him — what do I care?

So much for translating and the nature of language. However, I was not depending upon or following the nature of the languages alone when I inserted the word *solum* in Romans 3. The text itself, and Saint Paul's meaning, urgently require and demand it. For in that passage he is dealing with the main point of Christian doctrine, namely, that we are justified by faith in Christ without any works of the Law. Paul excludes all works so completely as to say that the works of the Law, though it is God's law and word, do not aid us in justification.

Furthermore, I am not the only one, nor the first, to say that faith alone makes one righteous. There was Ambrose, Augustine and many others who said it before me. And if a man is going to read and

understand St. Paul, he will have to say the same thing, and he can say nothing else. Paul's words are too strong — they allow no works, none at all! Now if it is not works, it must be faith alone.

Therefore the matter itself, at its very core, requires us to say: "Faith alone justifies." The nature of the German language also teaches us to say it that way. In addition, I have the precedent of the holy fathers. The dangers confronting the people also compel it, for they cannot continue to hang onto works and wander away from faith, losing Christ, especially at this time when they have been so accustomed to works they have to be pulled away from them by force. It is for these reasons that it is not only right but also necessary to say it as plainly and forcefully as possible: "Faith alone saves without works!" I am only sorry I did not also add the words *alle* and *aller*, and say, "without *any* works of *any* laws." That would have stated it with the most perfect clarity. Therefore, it will remain in the New Testament, and though all the papal donkeys go stark raving mad they shall not take it away.

But this is getting too long. Let this be enough of an answer to your questions for now. More another time. Excuse this long letter. Christ our Lord be with us all. Amen.

Martin Luther,  
Your good friend.  
The Wilderness,  
September 8, 1530

Luther's translation of the Bible is just one episode in a

long and fascinating history of translations and revisions. Ironically, the Catholic Church's sacred Vulgate was originally translated into Latin from the Greek and Hebrew precisely so that the common people—to whom the name Vulgate alludes-- could read it.

"The intention of St Jerome [translator/compiler of the definitive Latin Vulgate Bible around 405]. . . was that ordinary Christians of the Roman empire should be able to read the word of God. 'Ignorance of the scriptures', he wrote, 'is ignorance of Christ'." <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ac66>



The Whore of Babylon  
with papal crown

Yet Luther's own translation was a gauntlet thrown in the face of Church hierarchy eleven centuries later as he sought to make the Bible once more accessible to the "common people." He even went so far as to add woodcuts depicting Biblical characters that supported his own interpretation of the Bible.

"When Martin Luther first translated and published the New Testament, he thought that Revelation should not have the same status or authority as the gospels or the letters of Paul or Peter. And so he put it at the end, but he didn't number it. He didn't put a "saint" in front of [John's] name. He thought it was an edifying book, but not of the same status. But what's interesting, even though he felt that way, it's the one book that he illustrated, where he put woodcuts, because Revelation allowed him to make one of his central points, which was that the papacy was the Antichrist, and the end of the world was coming. And so there you see the only woodcuts in the New Testament. You see the whore of Babylon wearing a papal crown. You see the seven-headed beast wearing a papal crown. The message was clear. You didn't have to read (as most people didn't).

You got the message. The papacy, the papal office--not the individual popes but the papal Church--was where Satan was working to undermine Christendom. And the fact that Satan was there meant the world was coming to an end soon."

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/apocalypse/explanation/martinluther.html>

For an interesting website where you can specify a Biblical text and choose to see it translated from many Bibles in many different languages, try:

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%203:28;&version=31>.

Thus, we find these diverse versions of Romans 3:28 in English:

### **King James Version (KJV)**

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

### **English Standard Version (ESV)**

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers](#).

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

And in Greek:

### **1881 Westcott-Hort New Testament (WHNU)**

λογιζομεθα γαρ δικαιοσθαι πιστει ανθρωπον χωρις εργαων νομου

### **1550 Stephanus New Testament (TR1550)**

λογιζομεθα ουν πιστει δικαιοσθαι ανθρωπον χωρις εργαων νομου

Note the key word in the Greek is "χωρις," meaning "without" or "devoid of."

Of course, the real problem with translating the New Testament is the scarcity of original manuscripts. The "original" Greek manuscript upon which Erasmus based his Latin translation, and upon which Luther apparently based his, was in fact a medieval version.



The Antichrist in the figure of a dragon  
[http://www.asherbooks.com/S124\\_v.html](http://www.asherbooks.com/S124_v.html)

For more examples of these woodcuts see [http://www.asherbooks.com/S124\\_v.html](http://www.asherbooks.com/S124_v.html):

"Lucas Cranach had made a series of 21 expressive woodcuts for the Book of Revelation. The woodcuts were first published in the famous Septembertestament, the first edition of Luther's translation. The astonishing apocalypse sequence of 21 full-page woodcuts made this work one of the most important woodcut-illustrated books in Germany. The woodcuts were modelled after Dürer's work on the same theme, but Cranach succeeded in revealing Luther's message in his depiction of the apocalypse. The Antichrist, in the figure of a dragon, and the Whore of Babylon, are wearing a papal tiara. This representation amounted to a fierce attack on the Catholic church."