

Translation Project Assignment
ENG 205-004: Poetry

Informal Letter Due: September 11
In-class Practice: September 16, 18, & 23
Published Projects and Presentations Due: September 25

We've spent most of our time together so far talking about translation and poetry written in earlier Englishes. For this assignment, you will prepare a Modern English translation of a poem originally written in either Old or Middle English. You'll also write a 3-4 page translator's statement explaining your choices. Here's the process I envision.

First, you'll want to **choose a short poem** (or a brief passage of a longer poem, absolutely no more than 20 lines) with which to work. By September 11, you should write a brief letter to me concerning your text and why you've chosen it. *Nota bene: Choosing a text you find exciting, intriguing, or otherwise engaging will make this assignment much easier for you in the long run!*

Your next step is to find at least **two Modern English translations*** of your chosen text. You should compare these translations to your original text and to each other. Read each translation closely, using glosses and dictionaries whenever you need to, and get a sense of what you believe is important to your poem. (This might be rhyme, meter, form, narrative, etc.) Once you've read all your materials, briefly identify the specific differences between the Modern English translations. Use *The Oxford English Dictionary*, other dictionaries, your textbooks, and your own judgement to figure out their strengths and weaknesses.

**You are welcome to use as many translations as you like, but don't become overwhelmed! If you have chosen to translate a text we read together, you are welcome to use the translation we discussed in class. However, you may want to consider finding and using a third translation.*

After completing your survey, **translate the poem** you've chosen into Modern English as you see fit. Tinker as much as you'd like in order to capture the qualities of the poem you believe are most important. (Do you think it's more important to be faithful, or transparent? Would you rather preserve linguistic meaning or poetic feeling? Do you have to compromise?) If you find it helpful, you may write more than one translation of specific lines or the entire text.

Once you're happy with your translation, **write a translator's statement**. Explain your choices in relation to the original Old or Middle English text as well as to the Modern English translations you used for comparison. You should also use evidence from dictionaries, glosses, and any outside sources** you might use. Please include a work's cited page and format your translator's statement according to MLA Style.

***You may use outside sources about your poem if you find it necessary, but I suggest you stick to your own ideas. It'll be more fun that way. If you do use outside sources, be sure to cite them properly.*

Once you've finished your translation and statement, you'll **publish** both to your domain. On September 25, we'll devote our class time to presentations of your work. You should plan to **present** for 5-7 minutes.

Here are some resources:

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED): You have access to this historical dictionary of the English language through [Emory's library databases](#). We'll practice using it in class.

A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Usually called simply "Clark Hall" by those who study Old English, this dictionary provides simple definitions without a lot of other distractions. You can find the dictionary online in several forms. [This one](#), digitized by the Germanic Lexicon Project at UPenn, is most helpful to me.

Middle English Dictionary (MED): This [digitized version of the MED](#) is made available by the University of Michigan. It's searchable in ways the print *MED* isn't, but that means you'll have to look for things a bit differently than you would in a paper text. To find a certain word, use the "Lookups" link and type the word into the search box next to "Headword." If you don't get results you like, try changing "Headword" to "Headword and forms" or using the "Regular expression searching" options explained on the Lookups page.

[An ABC of Translating Poetry](#): Written by Willis Barnstone, this primer on translating poetry is both useful and beautiful. If you're feeling lost, look to this. My favorite passage: "A translator operates in the unknown. To choose the unknown path risks loss—and often brings gain. The translator must gamble on gains to balance losses."