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David Hinton

Introduction

Translation is perhaps the most dramatic catalyst of cultural change. For literary culture, this normally happens in three stages. First, texts themselves are translated, introducing new ideas to the culture. Second, writers begin writing in styles directly influenced by those texts. And third, the ideas in those texts are absorbed and transformed by innovative writers, whose work combines the new ideas with more familiar ideas to create new approaches to writing and thinking.

In the Samuel Fischer Hauptseminar of 2013–2014, we worked through this process ourselves. Ancient Chinese culture is fundamentally different from Western culture. It is “Another Universe”, and it has been very influential in transforming Western culture in the last half century. This is especially true in America.

We first studied ancient Chinese culture: its philosophy and spiritual practices (Taoist and Zen Buddhist), its language, and its poetic tradition. We also studied the work of modern American poets who were influenced by ancient China, thinking of them as examples of how ancient Chinese thought and poetry can be radically transformed. Then the students produced poems enacting each of the three steps in the process of cultural transformation, and the resulting poems are often quite remarkable.

First, they translated a Chinese poem. Second, they wrote a poem in the style of Chinese poetry, sometimes fairly close to the Chinese style and sometimes quite imagina-

BIOGRAPHIES

ALEXANDER ATMORE was born in 1991 and grew up in North London. He currently studies a BA in Comparative Literature at the University of Kent and is doing an Erasmus year at Freie Universität. In his spare time he likes listening to techno. He rues the day he must return to England.

ANNA BACCANTI was born in 1991 in South Tyrol, Italy. In 2010, she moved to Berlin, where she studies Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the Freie Universität Berlin. Anna has held a scholarship from the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes since 2013.

ELISABETH BOTROS, born in 1989, gained a BA in Creative Writing in Hildesheim and is now completing an MA in Comparative Literature at Freie Universität Berlin.

JOSTA VAN BOCKXMEER was born in 1987 and grew up in Amsterdam. She studied Literature and Philosophy in Utrecht, Potsdam and Berlin. She also spent some time in Nepal, where she practiced meditation and worked on farm

PATRICK DURDEL was born in 1992 and grew up in an idyllic countryside. After his Abitur he spent some time in Italy and Scandinavia. He is now studying Comparative Literature at the Peter Szondi-Institut, FU Berlin.

ANDREA GARCÉS FARFÁN was born in 1987 in Cali, Colombia. She studied Literature in Bogotá and is now d

CLARA MARIE HAUSIN was born in 1988. She studied German Literature and Scandinavian Studies in Kiel and Gothenburg, Sweden. Currently she is studying Comparative Literature at Freie Universität. She has worked as Assistant Director at several German theatres and as Assistant Director/Production Assistant for different films.

LILIANN HÉJJAS studies Literature, Politics and Italian Language at Freie Universität Berlin. She has always loved to write and hopes to finish her first novel soon. After finishing her master's she would like to lead her own bookstore.

JULIA-LUISE HÜSKE was born in 1990 in Bielefeld and grew up in a small town in Western Germany. She studied German studies and Philosophy in Münster. After one year of working in Berlin, she decided to do her Master studies in Comparative Literature at the Freie Universität.

JESSIE KRISH was born in London in 1993. She studies English Literature at the University of Manchester but is currently an Erasmus exchange student at the Freie Universität.

JENS LANGHEINRICH was born in 1981 and grew up in Oberheinriet, a small German village. He is studying North American Studies and Comparative Literature at the Freie Universität, Berlin.

MUJIN LI was born in 1987. She has studied Comparative Literature in Germany since 2008. She completed her bachelor's at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich and is now doing her master's in Berlin.

WEN-TI LIAO was born in Taipei, Taiwan, and has studied literature and philosophy in Europe since 2011. He is an amateur of European Sinology.

ANJA LISOWSKY was born in 1992 and has lived in Berlin all her life. She is studying Comparative Literature and English Philology at the Free University.

MARK MONN was born in Hamburg in 1980. He studied Digital Film Making and Non-Medical Psychotherapy and has worked as carer for the disabled and elderly and as manager for a health and natural food shop.

ANNE NEUBERT, 24, is fond of trees, the Arabic language, Renaissance music and literature. Growing up in the mountains has taught her patience. She wants to become an editor, because she thinks that academic literature should relate knowledge in an enjoyable manner.

MATTHIAS RETTENBACHER was born in 1991 and raised in Austria. He studied Philosophy in Munich and Naples, Italy. Since 2013 he has been studying Comparative Literature at the Freie Universität, Berlin.

DARIA RIABCHIKOVA was born in 1990 and grew up in a Russian town close to the Ural mountains. She studied Foreign Languages and Literature in Russia. She then lived in Moscow for a short time before moving to Berlin to study General and Comparative Literature.

CHRISTINE RINGER was born in 1987 in Berlin. She studied Comparative Literature and Theatre Studies in Berlin and Paris.

LOTTA SCHNEIDEMESSER was born in 1987 in Hamburg. She studied English and German literature and spent a part of her studies in New Zealand researching Maori literature and culture. She has worked on a Native American reservation in the US, as well as spending time in Ireland and France. She is working as a translator and writer while completing her master's degree at Freie Universität.

STEFANIE SCHUHEN was born in 1987 and grew up in the Westerwald. She studied European Literature and Theatre Studies in Mainz and Paris, and she now studies Comparative Literature in Berlin.

MAGDALENA SPORKMANN was born in 1988 and raised in Stralsund. She studied Comparative Literature as well as German and French Philology in Berlin and Lausanne. She lives in Berlin and works as an editor, author and theater critic.

VALENTINA RAMONA DE JESÚS URIBE RESTREPO is a Colombian master student of AVL and member of a family with a long standing devotion to genealogical trees, painting, gardens and the human body.

STEPHANIE WESTPHAL was born in 1992 and raised in Berlin. She still lives there and studies Comparative Literature and Film Studies at the Freie Universität. In her free time, she writes fanfiction and stories set in the fantasy genre.

FRANZISKA ZINTZSCH was born in Leipzig and grew up in Eilenburg and Meißen. She is studying Comparative Literature and Classics at the Freie Universität Berlin.



DAVID HINTON's many translations of classical Chinese poetry have earned wide acclaim for creating compelling contemporary poems that convey the actual texture and density of the originals. He is also the first translator in over a century to translate the four seminal masterworks of Chinese philosophy: Tao Te Ching, Chuang Tzu, Analects, and Mencius. Hinton has taught at Middlebury College, Columbia University, Dartmouth University, Cornell

University, and Smith College. He has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, numerous fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as both of the major awards given for poetry translation in the United States: the Landon Translation Award, from the Academy of American Poets, and the PEN Translation Award. His latest book of essays is *Hunger Mountain: A Field Guide to Mind and Landscape*, which was featured on *The Guardian's* list of "Best Books of 2012".

Prof. Dr. CLAUDIA OLK is Chair of English and Comparative Literature at the Freie Universität Berlin.