

# Translating the City: The Text(s) of Berlin

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Wintersemester 2017/18  
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Hausvogteiplatz 5-7  
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Mondays 12:00-14:00

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**Course Description:** In this weekly course, we will use the idea of translation as lens through which to explore texts written about Berlin by visitors and immigrants to the city.

In seminar-style discussion, we will engage with literary texts, as well as visual art, music, and film, in which writers and artists come to grips with the city's culture, history, and geography. These readings will be supplemented by critical texts that explore the implications of understanding writing and thinking as a process of translation. We will also experiment with various forms of translation, including inter-lingual, intra-lingual, homophonic, inter-medial, etc., and will consider the possible boundaries between a strict definition of translation and a broader philosophical understanding.

Over the course of the semester we will explore questions such as: How is an encounter with a city a process of reading? In producing texts about Berlin, what kind of translation is necessary for a "foreigner" to the city that would not be necessary for a "native"? How does linguistic, cultural, and historical background affect a "reading" of the city and its translation into text? How can we trace in language the city's influence on those experiencing it?

By the end of the semester, you will create your own "translation" of the city in a form of your choosing, and will write an accompanying reflection on the process of your project.

**Language Requirements:** This course will be taught in English and a high level of academic English proficiency (at least B2-level) is expected. All written work must be delivered in English.

**Diversity Mission statement:** As part of the Berlin Perspectives program, this course is conceived as an opportunity for participants to learn from each other's widely varying strengths and experiences. The development of a diverse intellectual community that fosters critical thought and open exchange of ideas is the primary goal. In the service of this goal, this course will also focus on honing written and oral communication skills in English.

**Learning objectives:** Students will...

—practice close reading and critical interpretation of a diverse range of texts that deal with Berlin and translation.

—draw and articulate connections between texts as a way of exploring guiding questions.

—appreciate and learn from a diversity of perspectives and understand how material conditions impact the production of texts.

- use writing as a method for refining, challenging, and articulating ideas.
- learn to respond carefully, critically, and sensitively to language.
- recognize and properly employ relevant literary terms.
- learn how texts address social, cultural, and political concerns, and how they dramatize, explain, reflect upon, and rethink human experience.

### **Required Materials:**

Sabahattin Ali, *Madonna in a Fur Coat*. Penguin Classics, 2017.

Dubravka Ugresic, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*. New Directions, 2002.

Additional texts will be posted on Moodle. You will need to print these texts out, read them, and bring them with you to class on the day they are due. You will also need a pen or pencil, and a notebook or binder from which you can tear out pages; this will be used for in-class writing, as well as for any notes you wish to take.

### **Course Requirements:**

Attendance and Participation: Participation is the key to learning anything and it begins with being present and punctual on a regular basis. If you are absent, you cannot participate, and this will be reflected in your final grade. If you know that you will be absent from class, please inform me beforehand in person or via email. You should consult with classmates to get any notes and find out if you need any handouts that were passed out that day. I will be happy to give you these if you ask, but getting them is your responsibility. In-class writing assignments usually cannot be made up. Lateness is a mark of disrespect and lack of professionalism and will not be tolerated. To be clear, if you arrive a half-an-hour after the beginning of class, you will be marked absent for the day.

**Good** participation also entails coming to class prepared, having done the reading and any required responses. It also involves having the texts for that day's assignment **with you** in class, being engaged in discussions, and participating in group activities. Even if you thought the readings were stupid, meaningless, too difficult, incorrect, or if you didn't understand them, expressing your opinions and exposing them to constructive, critical discourse is always intellectually productive—to you, to me, and to the class as a whole. As a result, your participation grades will factor in your preparedness, the quality of your engagement in class discussions, as well as your attendance and punctuality.

In-class writing: We will often use informal writing in class to explore and gather ideas for more formal writing. This writing will generally not be given a letter grade, but will often be collected and will count cumulatively towards your participation grade.

Final project: Part of your grade will be based on a final project conceived as a "translation" of the city of Berlin. Regardless of form, the project will be accompanied by a 4-5 page reflection in which you will comment on your process, the ways in which the project was influenced by or is in dialogue with texts and theories encountered during the semester, your own growth and development over the course of the semester, and possible ways in which ideas from the class will

affect future work or thinking. You will also be required to present your project to the class and to answer questions about it. We will discuss this assignment in greater detail as the class progresses.

Midterm Exam: There will be a midterm exam which will ask you to identify quotes from the material we've read in the class so far, and to write short essays in response to prompts.

Reading Responses: Over the course of the semester you will write three reading responses. These are informal out-of-class writings that should be typed and 300-500 words in length.

Presentations: Once during the semester, each student is expected to act as discussion leader for the day's reading. These are informal presentations in which you should introduce the reading or assignment, including any useful background information, and talk about what you feel is important or interesting in the reading. Presenters must also come to class prepared with at least two questions about the readings to help stimulate class conversation. These questions must be submitted to me for approval by the Friday before the presentation. Remember to check your own schedule before signing up for presentation dates. Let me know well in advance (at least 1-2 weeks beforehand) if you will be absent when you are scheduled to present so we can try to reschedule.

### **Class Policies and Expectations:**

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the act of stealing someone else's work and claiming it as your own. Examples of plagiarism include the act of copying a word-for-word passage from a source and pasting it into the body of your paper with neither quotes nor citation (obvious), or the act of lifting a passage from a source and changing a few of the words to make it sound more "like you" (not-quite-as-obvious-but-still-really-stupid). This is the most egregious academic offense one can commit and all instances of plagiarism will be punished accordingly. If you are caught plagiarizing, you will receive no credit for the offending assignment, and possibly for the course, no questions asked. In short, just don't do it. If you're unsure whether the language you are using in your writing is your own or someone else's, quote it and cite it just to be safe.

If you have any questions or concerns about the necessity of quoting something in your writing, please feel free to talk to me or write me an email.

### Grading:

First response paper:	10%
Second response paper:	10%
Third response paper:	10%
Final project:	20% (10% project, 10% reflection)
Project presentation:	5%
Discussion presentation:	5%
Midterm:	15%
Participation/In-Class Writing:	25%

Behavioral Policies: Though most of this falls under what I would consider to be “common sense,” there are certain kinds of behavior that are unacceptable for a university classroom setting.

- Absolutely **NO** use whatsoever of any kind of cell phone, tablet, laptop, or any other kind of device, unless specifically permitted by me. This includes texting, talking, surfing, email-checking or anything else you can do on a piece of plastic and a little screen with buttons. Make a habit of turning them off or silencing them before sitting down.
- Eating small snacks and drinking is fine as long as it does not become distracting or disruptive.
- Treat each other with respect and dignity, i.e., no hate speech, insulting comments or superiority complexes. The classroom is a safe learning environment of open, thoughtful, inquisitive discourse where everyone should feel comfortable expressing his or her thoughts at all times. The only dumb ideas are the ones left unexamined.

### **Statement of Contractual Obligation**

This syllabus is your contract with me. If you feel you are unable to fulfill any of the terms of this syllabus, please contact me immediately so that we can make arrangements if possible. The syllabus is a blueprint for the class, and contains all the important dates, as well as a good overview of what’s ahead. A copy of the syllabus is also available on Moodle, so there is no excuse for not knowing what is expected of you. Reading assignments are due on the date they appear in the syllabus, ie. you must come to class prepared to discuss the text on that day.

It is important that I know that you have read and understand this syllabus. In order to start the semester with a clear understanding of the goals and expectations, please send me an email stating that you have read, understand, and agree to this syllabus and the stated policies, and take the opportunity to ask any questions that you have. By **October 22**, everyone should have sent this email to me.

#### **Course Calendar:**

Note: This is subject to change. I promise to provide you with up-to-date schedules, but it is your responsibility to follow them!

#### **October 16 Dies Academicus at HU – no class**

**October 23** Introductions / Michael Cunningham, “Found in Translation”; Viktor Schlovsky, *Zoo* (excerpts)

**October 30** Gregory Rabassa, “No Two Snowflakes are Alike: Translation as Metaphor”; Vladimir Nabokov, “A Letter that Never Reached Russia,” “A Guide to Berlin,” “On Translating Eugene Onegin”

#### **Response #1 due**

**November 6** Christopher Isherwood, “A Berlin Diary (Winter 1932-33)”

**November 13** Sabahattin Ali, *Madonna in a Fur Coat*

**November 20** Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin* (excerpts)  
**Response #2 due**

**November 27** Katherine Anne Porter, "The Leaning Tower," Anne Carson, "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent"

**December 4** Cynthia Beatt, *Cycling the Frame*, Ian McEwan, *The Innocent* (excerpts)  
**Response #3 due**

**December 11** Emine Sevgi Ozdamar, *Bridge of the Golden Horn* (excerpts)

**December 18** Darryl Pinckney, *Black Deutschland* (excerpts), Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (excerpt), Rudiger Meyer, "Antjie in Berlin"

**January 8** Dubravka Ugresic, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, part I

**January 15** *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, part II

**January 22** Bae Suah, "Toward Marzahn," Sarnath Banerjee, *Enchanted Geography*, (selections) Wladimir Kaminer, *Russian Disco* (selections)

**January 29** Filipos Tsitsos, *My Sweet Home*

**February 5** Project presentations

**February 12** Project presentations