Workshop 1 | Room: Castle Peak | 4:30–6:30pm, October 4, 2014

Translating Poetic & Inspirational Materials
with Holly Gayley, Wulstan Fletcher, Andrew Quintman

Holly Gayley
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Holly Gayley is Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Her research focuses on the revitalization of Buddhism in the Tibetan region of Golok since the 1980s. She completed her master’s degree in Buddhist Studies at Naropa University in 2000 and Ph.D. at Harvard University in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies in 2009. Currently, she is finalizing a manuscript on the life and love letters of the contemporary female tertön, Khandro Tāre Lhamo, and her consort Namtrul Rinpoche. As a second project, already well underway, she is translating texts of advice to the laity by Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok and his successors at Larung Buddhist Academy in Serta, including his Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21st Century (Dus rabs nyer geig pa’i gangs can pa rnams la phul ba’i snying gdam).

Holly Gayley’s Presentation
TRANSLATING POETIC & INSPIRATIONAL MATERIALS

Literary Translations of Poetic Texts: Examples from Rdza Dpal sprul rin po che

The Call of a Sacred Drum: Advice for Solitary Retreat

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I do not mean to imply that literal translation is impossible; what I am saying is that it is not translation. It is a mechanism, a string of words that helps us read the text in its original language. It is a glossary rather than a translation, which is always a literary activity. Without exception, even when the translator's sole intention is to convey meaning, as in the case of scientific texts, translation implies a transformation of the original. That transformation is not—nor can it be—anything but literary.

Octavio Paz, “Translation: Literature and Letters”
Translation Issues:

- Critique of fluency of translation, which masks the translator’s intervention (Lawrence Venutti, Theo Hermans). “Preserving foreignness in the very quest for readability” (Anthony Yu) and avoiding at all costs “Buddhist-hybrid English” (Paul Griffiths).

- Importance of functional equivalence in terms of aesthetic impact on the reader over semantic equivalence, which Umberto Eco argues is not always possible even at the level of individual words.

What is the “deep sense” of a passage, its core or aesthetic aim? (Umberto Eco)
Example 1: Foreignizing through Metaphor

Kye ho! In the illusory city of saṃsāra, appearing but not existing, the merchandise of karma accumulates in the warehouse of the three sufferings, while ignorant beings swarm around it like bees.

High up the rocky precipice of lustful and angry thoughts and in the crooked forest of confused conceptuality, here the king of garuḍas enjoys natural freedom, and the gazelles of empty awareness frolic in play.
Example 2: Wordplay as Stylistic Core of a Verse or Line

Entering the meditation that purifies illusion, the illusory yogin intones a resounding Hūṃ and just revels carefree in illusion’s sphere, leaving perceived objects and clinging to them behind.

Awareness-wisdom, removed from elaborations, is the supreme essence of all solitude. Fortunate ones who enjoy this kind of solitude, even when staying in town, act as if utterly alone.

... [the yogin] enjoys the joys of solitude with joyful laughter.
Example 3: Parallelism as Stylistic Core of a Verse

Whether the nature of appearances is true or false, whether the nature of mind exists or not, whether the nature of confusion is empty or not, why analyze according to your own system?

If you're confused even before logical analysis, with still more analysis, you'll be more confused!

Resting in non-fixation within non-thought, the spontaneously perfect basis has never wavered.
Example 4: Rhetorical Impact of Parallelism/Repetition

Now, don't talk. There's no true or false in conversation. Now, don't analyze. There's no "is" and "isn't" to things. Everything has the same taste, whether true or not, it’s nothing more than indiscriminate, frivolous chatter.

Examining and examining, everything is a lie. Practicing and practicing, the dharma has no aim. However much you say, there's no end to talking. Realizing the inexpressible is the root of all expression.
Example 5: Functional Equivalence: Self-Deprecating Humor

Who knows the true nature? Certainly not me.
This utterance like an echo, generated by the voice of the precious lineage of omniscient fathers and heirs.
I myself have nothing in mind to say.

At heart a rogue, I wear the shell of holiness; seeming mature but immature, I am the lazy uncle.
The words set forth here, like bright hues of bitter fruit, how lovely they appear when you gaze at them.
Reflections:

- Style and content are equally important to conveying the meaning of a passage and replicating its aesthetic impact.
- Texts are necessarily domesticated in the translation process, while attempting to preserve a text’s foreignness and render it intelligible in the target language.
- If speech is just “frivolous chatter,” what does this say about the project of translation *writ large*—from inexpressible realization into words and then between languages?
- Given Rdza Dpal sprul’s description of his instructions as a mere echo of past voices in the lineage, is translation then a further echo, carrying its resonance but growing dim?