

To: Copyright Class
From: Prof. Steven D. Jamar
Re: Project 3 – Derivative work
What: The derivative work and a cover page with musings on the process of translating
Value: Unlike the other works which are worth 5 points, this one is worth 10 to reflect the greater difficulty and time expected to be expended upon it

This project involves translating an old French Poem from 1537 by Clarence Marot. Included in this packet are the original French version, a literal translation by Douglas Hofstadter, a translation by me, and a few pages of text from Hofstadter's book to give you some sense of the ideas he explores regarding the problem of meaning, form, and translation. The problems posed by translating this poem form the core of Hofstadter's book, *Le Ton beau de Marot* (1997). The book contains many, many translations by people from all over the world. It seems likely that this little trifle is now the French poem most often translated into English! You are being asked to add to that quantity.

You are to create a derivative work. The type of derivative work is to be a poem and is to be a translation. (There are fairly interesting issues of what it means to translate a French poem when one is dependent upon an English version of it – and that is part of what I want you to think about.) I want you to think about the process of translation, the process of creation, the problem of creativity, and ultimately the issue of copyrightability – what makes your derivative work copyrightable?

Do this alone. Please spend a significant amount of time on it. I think you will find it valuable in providing insight into the creative process, into language, and into the problems underlying copyright. Work on it.

Please spend several different periods of time on it; that is, don't do it only once in one sitting. You may be surprised at what happens as you look at it several different times.

My translation stayed close in form with rhyming couplets, three syllables per line, 28 lines, repeated first and last line, and generally having the stress on the last word of each line. In making your translation, consider what aspects you will keep and what discard. Will you ignore rhyme and meter and structure in favor of content and image? Or will you keep the flow as much as possible while still trying to capture the sense? Which is more important? How can you tell? In copyright terms, when is content an idea and the form the expression? Or is content copyrightable too? To what extent? Where is the line, if any, between the idea of this poem and the content of it? Is the substance of the poem the structure and form or the meaning and ideas in it? What is the distinction between using a work for inspiration and creating a derivative work?

Following the poems is a discussion by Douglas Hofstadter reproduced from his book but without all of the versions of the poems he refers to as on the "facing" pages. The original would be on page 1b (facing 1a), the literal would be on 4b (facing 4a), and the versions on 5b are included. So omitted are 2b and 3b – using my version as a sample instead.

Spend some time on this and enjoy. We'll read some in class and post some with the copyright exhibit.

<i>Original</i>	<i>Literal translation</i>	<i>S. Jamar Translation</i>
<i>A une Damoyselle malade</i>	<i>My Sweet/Cute [One] (Feminine)</i> Clément Marot/D. Hofstadter	<i>My Sweet Dish</i> C. Marot/S. Jamar
Clément Marot		
<i>Ma mignonne Je vous donne Le bon jour; Le séjuour C'est prison. Guérison Recouvrez, Puis ouvrez Votre porte Et qu'on sorte Vitement, Car Clément Le vous mande. Va, friane De ta bouche, Qui se couche En danger Pour mange Confitures; Si tu dures Trop malade, Couleur fade Tu Prendras, Et perdras L'embonpoint. Dieu te doint Santé bonne, Ma mignonne.</i>	<i>My sweet/cute [one] (feminine) I [to] you (respectful) give/bid/convey The good day (i.e., a hello, i.e., greetings). The stay/sojourn/visit (i.e., quarantine) [It] is prison. Cure/recovery/healing (i.e., [good] health) Recover (respectful imperative), [And] then open (respectful imperative) Your (respectful) door, And [that one (i.e., you (respectful)) should] go out Fast[ly]/quick[ly]/rapid[ly], For/because Clement It (i.e., thusly) [to] you (respectful) commands/orders. Go (familiar imperative), fond-one/enjoyer/partaker Of your (familiar) mouth, Who/which herself/himself/itself beds (i.e., lies down) In danger; For/in-order-to eat Jams/jellies/confectionery. If you (familiar) last (i.e., stay/remain) Too sick/ill, [A] color pale/faded/dull You (familiar) will take [on], And [you (familiar)] will waste/lose The plumpness/stoutness/portliness (i.e., well-fed look). [may] God [to] you (familiar) give/grant Health good, My sweet/cute [one] (feminine).</i>	<i>My sweet dish, You I wish A good day. Where you stay, Is a jail. Though so pale, Leave your bed, Regain red. Ope' your door Stay not, poor Child; gain strength And at length, Steve does urge, Please emerge. Then go eat Jam so sweet. Lying ill Means you will become too thin - Merely skin Cov'ring bone; Regretted tone. Eat again, Avoid the fen. God grant thee Be healthy. This I wish, My sweet dish.</i>

In October-of the year 1537, Jeanne d'Albret de Navarre, perhaps seven or eight years old, had fallen ill and had to stay in bed, most likely under quarantine, for some weeks. Truly devoted to his sick little friend, Clement Marot wrote her an avuncular get-well letter in the form of a cute and catchy poem, titling it "A une Damoyse malade" – "To a Sick Damsel", one might phrase it in English, or "To an Ailing Maiden". Borrowing its first line, I myself usually just call it by the nickname "Ma Mignonne". Though minuscule, this is a work that instantly enchants, yet also a work whose charm does not fade with time.

Considering that "Ma Mignonne" was written in a French spoken almost five hundred years ago, it is remarkably transparent for speakers of contemporary French, although a few words here or there might be a bit confusing today, such as *mander*; a verb that still exists but no longer means "to command", as it does here, and the word *doint*, an archaic form of the verb *donner* ("to give").

The brilliant *éclat* and the lively *élan* of this cigar-shaped poem derive, most of all, from its tight rhyming pattern rather than from any elaborate meshes of metaphor or multi-layered webs of ambiguity. But the rhyming pattern does not stand alone; indeed, it cannot be separated from a number of other structural features, which, taken together, help one better to understand the poem's unique essence.

Therefore, for the benefit of would-be translators, I once compiled a short list of formal or "syntactic" properties of "Ma Mignonne", respect for which I felt would be crucial in any attempt to carry it over into another language. In posing the translation challenge to other people, I always supplied this list, obvious though its items were, because I did not want them to be overlooked. If someone *knowingly* chose to disrespect one or another of them, that would be all right – or at least far more justifiable, in my opinion, than doing so out of ignorance. Here, then, is my original list:

1. *The poem is 28 lines long.*
2. *Each line consists of three syllables.*
3. *Each line's main stress falls on its final syllable.*
4. *The poem is a string of rhyming colas: AA, BB, CC.....*
5. *Midway, the tone changes from formal ("vous") to informal ("tu")*
6. *The poem's opening line is echoed first precisely at the very bottom.*
7. *The poet puts his own name directly into his poem.*

Several months after drawing up this list, I was shocked to learn that there were yet other tight formal properties of "Ma Mignonne" that had eluded me, one of them extremely beautiful and yet quite subtle to spot, although after the fact it seems obvious. Can you spot it?

The short series of English renditions that constitute the remainder of Poems I is a tiny bouquet of attempts to convey to an anglophonic audience both the literal content and the structural intricacy of "Ma Mignonne". I must give, however, a caveat: My putting these versions at the very front of this book does not reflect the true chronology of my own explorations in translation. In point of fact, not any of the English versions found in Poems I was done at an early stage of the game. They were instead *a posteriori* exegetical exercises -- afterthoughts stimulated by a certain degree of success in carrying out *nonliteral* translations. In short, the next few anglicizations were all fall bloomers, not spring flowers. Despite this violation of our story's chronology, I felt it would be of such utility to English-speaking readers to see a few "cribs" or "ponies" from the very outset that I just went ahead and stuck them in here.

Facing this page is as bland, boring, and literal a translation of Marot's poem as could ever be imagined. In it, no attempt whatsoever has been made at rhyme; rhythm, or any other aspect of form. It is so weak that, I must say, I hesitate even to apply the term "translation" to it. Its sole *raison de naitre* was to provide a "crib" — a clear line-by-line gloss of the poem — for people who speak little or no French, and also to clarify, for speakers of modern but not old French, a few obsolete terms.

Perhaps the only interesting structural aspect of this anglicization is the fact that by switching partway through from "You" to "thou", it respects Marot's curious transition from the formal *vous* to the informal *tu*. It seemed to me that this unlikely switchover carried a good deal of emotional meaning, and therefore I felt compelled to try to "do the same thing" in English, although English's "thou" is hardly "the same thing" as French's *tu*.

Executing a totally literal-minded carry-over of "Ma Mignonne" into English may seem a very mechanical and thus fairly trivial task. However, there are actually many — enormously many — hidden subtleties. As clear a dilemma as one might wish for is posed already by the opening line: *Ma Mignonne*. How in the world to render this literally in English? *Ma* is clearly "my", but what to do with *mignonne*? It is an adjectival noun that means "cute" and also "sweet", and the fact that it is given in a feminine form (*mignonne* as opposed to *mignon*) tells you it is addressed to a girl or woman. But "My cute" sounds most awkward in English. On the other hand, is it so awkward as to render it unacceptable? How about "My sweet"? Less awkward than "My cute" yet still awkward, is it acceptable?

One problem is that neither of these options tells readers that the recipient is female. How about "My cute girl", then? The trouble with this is that it uses three English words to render two French words. Is it crucial for a literal translation to contain exactly the same number of words as the original? Why, or why not? If so, how about "Sweet girl"? Ah, but that's just got two syllables, where *ma mignonne* has three. How about "Girlie mine"? Ah, but that reverses the word order. How about "My girlie"? Ah, but that's accented on the wrong syllable! If we're striving solely for literality, should we pay any attention to things like location of stress, number of syllables, or word order? Exactly what kinds of things are we supposed to pay attention to, and what kinds of things are we free to ignore?

Another seemingly simple challenge is posed by lines 2-3: *Je vous donne / Le bon jour*. This phrase could be variously rendered as "I give you the good day", "I give you the hello", "I wish you good day"; "I wish you a good day", "I wish you good morning", "I greet you", "I bring you greetings" — and on and on I could go till I was blue in the face. What is the proper trade-off among accuracy, awkwardness, and so on to use in a "literal" translation?

Or consider the next two lines: *Le se'jour / C'est prison*. These offer a translator many options, since, as we just saw, there are many different levels of literality, among them these: "The stay it's prison"; "The stay it is prison"; "The stay is prison"; "Your stay is prison", "Your stay has been prison"; "Your stay has been a prison"; "Your stay's been a prison", and so forth and so on. And mind you, all these variants take utterly for granted that "stay" is the proper way to render *sejour* and "prison" is the proper way to render *prison* neither of which is by any means certain.

These opening five lines are certainly bad enough, but lines 14-17 are much rougher, being far more ambiguous and even somewhat vague to a native reader of French. The problem is the unclear referent of the relative pronoun *qui* ("that/who"): Does it refer to the sick girl herself (in which case it would be "who"), or just to her mouth (in which case it would be "that")? I was lucky enough to discover a neat trick in this case — I could sidestep the whole issue by using a present participle ("lying") instead of a relative clause. But of course this is a noticeable syntactic deviation from the original. You just can't win!

Here we have another line-by-line gloss, but in this case I expended quite a bit more effort, with the goal of ensuring that each line consisted of exactly three syllables, with the accent always falling on the final syllable. Considerations of form were thus brought in much more explicitly than in the previous version, even though there, despite the fact that I was striving for nothing but the purest, most austere, least form-concerned type of literality, issues of form raised their little heads all over the place, like crowds of little mushroomlets merrily sprouting up in the most carefully tended of lawns.

I strongly suggest that you read this poem aloud – indeed, I suggest that you do so with all poetry in this book, whether translated or original (in fact, the difference between the two is not even clear, but that is a can of worms that we will delve into much further on...). If you indulge my imprecation and read “My Sweet Maid” aloud, you will find, not surprisingly, that it flows far more smoothly than did the preceding version, but of course there is still no rhyme at all. It is blank verse.

Note that in order to achieve a truly smooth flow, I sacrificed the constraint of literality just a mite here and there – for instance, in the choice of “total health” (line 6), “unlatch” (line 8), and “full speed” (line 11). Note also that a teeny bending of the norms of pronunciation was deemed allowable; specifically, there are at least two (and conceivably several) lines that, if this translation were read aloud as plain, ordinary prose, would definitely not be accented on their rightmost syllable (and I don’t mean line 12, since the English name “Clement” can be stressed on its first or last syllable without norm-bending in either case). Did you catch any of these minuscule anomalies while reading “My Sweet Maid” aloud? Did they bother you at the time? Do they bother you now? Another interesting matter is the handling of lines 20–21 (*Si tu dures / Trop malade*). The English solution is a consequence of recognizing what the adverb *trop*, in the original poet’s mind, was *really* modifying, as opposed to what it *appears* to be modifying. In a truly mindless literal translation, “too” would have to modify “sick” and the word “long” would not enter the picture at all. But here, rather than opting for the mindless route, the translator, without much trouble, divined the poet’s genuine intent and respected it – namely, Marot wanted to encourage his little friend Jeanne not to stay sick for too long a time. The idea of “staying too sick”, after all, doesn’t even make sense, for to be sick at all is by definition to be *too* sick. It’s not as if there was some moderate or lowish level of being ill that the kindly poet was suggesting would be acceptable!

The most mundane understanding of health and illness leads one automatically to shift the adverb’s syntactic allegiance when one renders the phrase in English. It takes no genius to do so! We shall find ourselves drawn back to this delicate point toward the end of the book, namely in Poems XV, where we will examine a few translations of “*Ma Mignonne*” that were carried out in what might be called an “utterly MT” fashion.

A final comment on this attempt... Even though, out of the seven constraints for would-be translators that I gave in the list facing the original “*Ma Mignonne*”, this version respects all but the fourth, it still does not merit, for me, the label “translation”, for rhyme is the heart and soul of the original poem. To leave out rhyme in a supposed translation of “*Ma Mignonne*”, or of any rhyming poem, strikes me as not a whit nor a shred less daffy or bonkers than for a publisher to insist, for reasons of economy, on reproducing a color wheel in black and white in a text on painting, and then to claim that this does a perfectly adequate job of imparting a sense for hue, brightness, and saturation to students of art.

P.S. — The truly anomalous lines are 4 and 19 (naturally accented on “sick” and “fruit”, respectively), and then, depending on speaker and whim, any of lines 6, 8, 14, 20, and 21.

At first glance, this rather prickly-looking pastiche of words, slashes, brackets, and so forth may not seem to have any more legitimate claim to being a translation of Marot's poem than a page of erudite text describing Leonardo's brushwork in the Mona Lisa could be plausibly claimed to be a fair reproduction of the Mona Lisa itself. Nonetheless, although "My Sweet/Cute [One] (Feminine)" probably shows you a lot more than you expected ever to see in a translation, it strikes me as constituting a legitimate exploration – albeit a rather extreme one – in the art of literal translation; as such, it seemed to merit being called a "translation" in its own right. Indeed, this hodgepodge reminds me of modernistic buildings that shamelessly, or perhaps proudly, exhibit all of their plumbing, wiring, and other types of functional innards to the people who circulate within them; warts and all, they are still buildings.

Exactly where the boundary line between a set of annotation and a literal translation lies is not clear. But whatever one calls this rhymeless, rhythmless jumble of stuff, it may be of use to nonspeakers of French who want to get a deeper feel for the nature of the precise syntactic pathways and the less precise semantic halos of the words in the French original. If it does nothing else, "My Sweet/Cute (One] (Feminine)" reminds us again, but from a novel angle, of how hazy and how intangibly complex the notion of "literal" translation is.

As you progress through this book and encounter numerous poems in original and translated forms, sometimes isolated and sometimes side by side, it may be instructive to keep in mind a fantasy in which you are going to be the editor of a bilingual anthology of poetry, and are drawing together material for inclusion in it. The structure that you are shooting for is one in which each original poem is printed on a lefthand page, and facing it on a righthand page is an English translation – or rather, the English translation, in a certain sense.

Imagine that in the course of long years of spadework for your anthology, you have collected in your files, for each original poem, many different translations to pick among for its righthand page. Which of those many will you wind up selecting? What criteria will you use to rank one translation ahead of another? You might find some translation delightful or daring or graceful and yet despite its virtues still feel it is inappropriate for selection as "the" translation of the original poem. Would you ever feel free to tamper, ever so delicately and tastefully, with a near perfect translation done by someone else, in order to make sure that the best possible translation gets onto the facing page? Why or why not? Thinking about such issues will surely carry you deep into the spirit of this book.

“My Small Princess” (in which the stress should fall on “ess” and not on “prince”) is a translation of the rhyme, in which the choice of line-breaks’ placement has been handed from creator to a piece of mindless software – or in other words, abandoned to the winds of fate’s caprice. The basic aim was that of stating just the content of the rhyme in standard prose that felt as simple and as flowing as could be, with special care devoted to the bringing-out of the avuncular perspective that the poet chose to take. “My Small Princess” sounds like a quite straightforward note dashed off with love by some male friend who deeply cares about the health of this small lass of noble birth.

The role of line-breaks having been subtracted out, this prose translation is freed up from the constraints of word-for-word fidelity; in recompense (and thus and hence), the local freedom that one gains shifts one’s attention to more global, higher planes, and so the translator must try to figure out the motivations lurking in the poet’s mind, which can be sensed between his lines. It was the quest for this new style of being faithful that gave rise to “ghostly pale” and “skin and bones”, and also led to “Uncle Clement” (where the stress falls not on “ment” but just before it) as the phrase by which the poet flings himself into his verse. And that is that, for well or worse.

* * *

We embark on the saga of “Touchstones” – a pattern of words telegraphic, a list that was penned at the outset as a set of mere memory jogs. For those who would tackle the challenge to render the ditty in English, this chain of the keys to its message will reveal what mustn’t be skipped. A keychain so tight’s hardly slapdash; but rather, like all the creations lending grace to the pages herein, it came from a long search for phrases that capture the heart of the poem while charming the eye and the ear.

Now given the *vous/tu* transition inserted midstream by Marot, my first thought was “equipartition” – in other words, half of the themes on a line destined solely *pour vous*, with the other half solely *pour toi*. Well, no sooner a *fait accompli*, this pattern cried out for more oomph, which led to a set of gay couples (a noun with a noun every time), always tied by a dot-hatted comma and flanked by a dot on the floor. In a nutshell, I’ve told you of “Touchstones”; our embarked-upon saga’s thus o’er.

* * *

And now, my dearest reader, I would pose to you the challenge of converting into English (better yet, your native tongue) “Ma Mignonne” by friend Marot. Let me give you my assurance that having read as far as this, all you’d need to know you know. As for you, a proper reader who from start to finish plows, you who’d never skip ahead nor ever itch to browse about (or hardly ever, shall we say?), you’re as pure as pure can be and not polluted in a slightest by the sight of others’ tries, for you’ve kept your eyes in check by holding fingers back from riffling through the oh-so-tempting pages of my book. Not one look!

Or even if you’ve sinned and now a teeny bit are tainted by a peek at what some other folks’ already generated, still my challenge stands withal: What would you do, O dear reader, to come up with not just *a*, but rather *the* Anglicization of this swell, sweet, short, svelte well-wish by a chap who first saw daylight *dans le sein du beau Quercy*, near the old Pont Valentré whose stony towers and stately arches (six half-circles side by side) stand astride the bubbling Lot just as it’s doubling back upon itself to yield a giant “U”; there to cradle in its crook a little town once called “Divona” by a tribe once called “Cadourques”?

My Small Princess

D. Hofstadter

My small princess, I send you a warm hello. Your long stay in bed has been like a term in prison. Uncle Clement urges you to recuperate, and to get out of there soon. You've always loved sweets, so don't let being bed-ridden stop you from indulging – have some, jam! And don't stay sick too long because you'll get ghostly pale and start looking like skin and bones. God will surely bring you back to good health, my small princess.

Touchstones

D. Hofstadter

Vous: Cuteness; hail: Quarantine, cure. Egress: speed. Clément; insistence.

Tu: Epicurism; threat. Appetite; jams. Pallor; gauntness. Prayer; cuteness.