

Module 1

For FLCL 271H (Classical Mythology: Honors Section)

Searching for the “Right” Translation of an Ancient Work of Literature

Course

Classical Mythology: Honors ■ FLCL 271H ■ 3 semester hours

The honors component of Classical Mythology is intended to give students a deeper understanding of the subject and its relationship to other academic areas such as art, music, and psychology. Each student must complete a project that involves reading one or more pieces of Ancient Greek and/or Roman literature in translation.

Module 1: Description

This module teaches students to use basic computer searching strategies to select the translation of a literary work that is the best suited for a particular purpose (e.g., studying the primary source of a myth). Depending on a student’s technological capabilities, this module either teaches or strengthens the student’s ability to access World Wide Website, to successfully search library catalogues (employing the principles of Boolean logic), and to make a print copy of material found on the Web. This module also encourages the use of full-text websites.

Most classical mythology research projects involve reading at least one ancient literary work in translation. It is, therefore, imperative that the student be able to find a translation that is suited to his or her purpose. Since most libraries, both academic and public, have online catalogues, searching for a translation of a literary work involves computer skills. In addition, many translations of ancient literary works may be found at full-text websites.

To familiarize the students with some of the challenges involved in a search for a translation that fulfills the requirements of a particular project, each student is assigned (1) to find at least ten translations of a work of literature that is the source of a myth merely summarized or mentioned in the mythology textbook, and (2) to choose a translation to read.

In order to search for a translation, the student must know how to use the library’s software. If the students need assistance, either a librarian or the teacher provides instruction, using a computer with access to the school’s library and a screen. The session should include information about obtaining books the home library does not own. Students will often be able to access ILLNET or even OCLC’s WorldCat. If printing is allowed, the process should be demonstrated. A written set of instructions for searching, printing and ordering materials through interlibrary loan is especially helpful. If the teacher has the requisite skills, the teacher (or a librarian) could develop a Web tutorial.

The teacher should warn the students of possible challenges in the search for a translation such as the following:

- Some pieces of literature, especially dramas, are found in books containing collections of literary pieces. A subject or keyword search—for example, “Greek drama”—will locate titles.
- Sometimes a translation is catalogued under the name of the author of the work and sometimes under the name of the translator. Try a title or keyword search as well as an author search.
- Sometimes a work is catalogued with its title in the original language and sometimes with its title in English or another language (e.g., *Oedipus Rex* [Latin] and *Oedipus the King* [English]). Try an author or keyword search to find more books.
- Spellings of an author’s name may vary (e.g., Euripides or Euripedes). Sometimes the anglicized version of a name is employed (e.g., Ovid rather than Ovidius).
- A subject or keyword search, such as Ovid, may result in hundreds of entries and will need to be limited by adding additional keywords. (At this point in the session, a discussion of and a handout on the basic principles of Boolean logic as well as a demonstration of its application to searching would prove enlightening. Instruction in Boolean logic can be found at <http://library.albany.edu/internet/boolean.html>.)

Full-Text Websites

Students should also be taught how to access and print translations of ancient literary works that are found on full-text websites, a list of which has been provided by the teacher. Some such translations, even though done by famous literary figures, may prove difficult for the student to understand or fail to be accurate translations.

Choosing a Translation

Once a student has located several translations, he or she has to determine which translation best suits the purpose of the project at hand—in this case, a fairly literal translation of the original work.

Students need to be advised that, generally, translations published by university presses and done by professors of Ancient Greek or Latin tend to be close to the original in both sense and tone. Especially reliable are texts which are components of the Loeb Classical Library Series (www.hup.harvard.edu/loeb/), published by the Oxford University Press (each book has the Greek or Latin on one page with the English translation on the opposite page); the Great Books Series, published by Encyclopedia Britannica; and the Harvard Classics Series, published by Harvard University Press. During the library training sessions (see above), students should be taught how to access these collection titles. Free translations, adaptations, and simplified versions (often designed for young readers) must be avoided when searching for a literal translation. The card catalogue entry sometimes mentions an adapter or notes a juvenile book.

There are several full-text websites of interest to students of classical studies, the most important of which is *The Perseus Digital Library*, Gregory Crane, editor-in-chief, Tufts University, located at www.perseus.tufts.edu/. Students should be wary of texts and

information on websites that are not maintained by accredited universities or faculty members affiliated with them.

The teacher should mention the following factors to be taken into consideration when choosing a translation:

- Objective of search—(e.g., find as literal a translation as possible or find a translation suitable for a dramatic reading)
- The option of a prose or poetic translation of a poetic work (a poetic translation is not necessarily better.)
- Readability—some students prefer translations using archaic language; others are confused by such translations.

Finally, the student should be encouraged to consult with the teacher when in doubt.

Discussion of Search

After the students have done their searches and made their selections, part of a class session is devoted to a discussion of problems the students encountered in carrying out their respective searches. Did they encounter any of the expected challenges (see above)? In addition, each student explains why he or she chose the translation selected.

Transferability

Students studying a foreign language can use skills taught by this module to find translations of literary works in the language that they are studying. Since they know the language, finding a literal translation will not be a problem for them. Students in other academic areas related to classics can use the skills developed to find translations of ancient works pertinent to their area of expertise. For example, in comparing the comments of Freud and Fromm on *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, psychology students may wish to read a literal translation of the Sophocles' tragedy.

Faculty Technology Skills

- Ability to search library catalogues
- Ability to search the World Wide Web using a search engine such as Google.
- Ability to access and print texts on full-text websites
- Ability to use a document camera and an LCD projector (equipment in a “smart” classroom)

Student Technology Skills

None, but the ability to use library software would be helpful.

Faculty Equipment

- A computer with access to the Internet and a library's online catalog
- A printer
- A document camera and an LCD projector (not absolutely necessary)

Student Equipment

- A computer with access to the Internet and access to a library's online catalog
- A printer

Benefits of Technological vs. Traditional Presentation

Since most libraries now have only online catalogues, knowing how to use them is essential to finding a translation of an ancient literary work. The ability to access translations found at full-text websites allows a student with computer access to search and study—at any time of the day or night—without visiting a library in person.

Language Resource Center Usage

Seated at computers in a language resource center, students immediately practice the searching skills just taught by a librarian or the teacher (see above). They are able to access the full-text websites, and, if desirable and possible, print a text. Then, they carry out searches on any library's catalog. Problems encountered can be discussed immediately and solved with the help of a teacher or librarian.

Note: Students often must pay a fee in order to use a language resource center.

Internet Online Resources

The Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University
www.perseus.tufts.edu/

Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University
www.hup.harvard.edu/loeb/

Illinet Online (44 ILCSO Libraries)
<http://pac.ilcso.uiuc.edu/>

Primer on Boolean Searches
<http://library.albany.edu/internet/boolean.html>

Illinois Virtual Library
www.vic.lib.il.us/

OCLC WorldCat
<http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org/> (Contact your college library for authorization and password; can be published in a handout but not online.)