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Language Professor Translates Novel for Amazon Imprint

July 13, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan’s Scott Sheridan spent several months last year translating a novel set in Georgian England, written in Italian, into English.

“Imagine *Pride and Prejudice* meets *Fifty Shades of Grey*,” said Sheridan, associate professor of French and Italian and director of International Studies. “I thought it was a very dynamic work and a provocative translation project.”

The 2014 novel, *Lemonade* by Nina Pennacchi, is available through Amazon and was published this month by AmazonCrossing. Last year Sheridan approached editors at AmazonCrossing, the largest publisher of translated literature in the United States, about possible freelance assignments. Based on his knowledge of translation theory, his extensive translation experience and his linguistic skills in both French and Italian, Sheridan was selected for several projects. *Lemonade* is the first Sheridan translation to be published by AmazonCrossing.



Scott Sheridan

According to the publisher, *Lemonade* is the story of Anna Champion, who knows all too well the social mores that value prettiness over sense, and etiquette over honesty. But when she stands up to the boorishness of dashing Christopher Davenport at a summertime ball, Anna unwittingly attracts his wrath—and becomes entangled in his malicious scheming.

Sheridan said his greatest challenge in translating the work involved its setting and tone. “It’s a period piece about early 19th-century England and written by an Italian,” said Sheridan. “I wanted to give it just a hint of Jane Austen without sounding old fashioned or archaic. The book is daring in many ways, from some of the controversial content to the experimental nature of the psychological narrative.”

Language translation is much more than choosing the right words, according to experts. Scholars have called it an art form, with selection of an English equivalent to the original word or phrase just the first step. “It’s exciting to put my skills to use to help introduce interesting works of ‘foreign language’ fiction to English-speaking readers,” he said.

Sheridan often uses translation and theories of translation in upper-division language classes because it requires students to think of language as a whole, not as fragmented bits and pieces of learned knowledge.

In his Italian courses, Sheridan has shown examples of some of his AmazonCrossing projects to discuss language and issues in translation. “I can show an excerpt in the original Italian, and there will be numerous linguistic issues to discuss with students,” he said. Those issues might include the difficulty of finding an equivalent for the lexical definition of a term, an idiom, or a difference in tone.

“Even choices such as how to translate curse words can be tricky,” Sheridan added. “Nuances in linguistic register become important. You have to consider questions such as: is this word accurate but too harsh? Is another word more acceptable or believable, given the context in English?”

Sheridan said such experiences help students see a different side to language learning. “It’s where the ‘rubber meets the road,’ so to speak. It’s eye-opening for students to see how many lives one person’s knowledge of a second language can impact.”

Launched five years ago, AmazonCrossing has grown rapidly to become a leading publisher of foreign literature in the United States. Sheridan’s second book for the publisher is an English version of the bestselling 2014 Italian thriller *The Guardians of History*, by Elisabetta Cametti, scheduled for release in November.

Sheridan holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and a Ph.D. in French literature from the University of Iowa. While at the University of Iowa, he worked as a research assistant in the Translation Laboratory. In addition to being a scholar of 19th- and 20th-century literature, he is a translator of both literary works and scholarly articles from French and Italian into English. Sheridan joined the faculty at Illinois Wesleyan in 1998.

