

## Academic Writing Online: Crossing Cultures, Courses, Languages, and Educational Levels

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## Instructional Contexts

- **Chalmers** University of Technology, Goteborg, Sweden: Students in Magnus Gustafsson's "Fiction for Engineers" were MSc candidates who used this exchange as journal entries and as preparation for writing their term papers. Although English was not their first language, the course was conducted entirely in English.
- **Clemson** University, South Carolina, USA: Students in Art Young's "Victorian Poetry" class focused on writers in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, on how and why people read poetry, and on how readers from different literary periods (or countries) might interpret poems differently.
- **Tidewater** Community College, Virginia, USA: Students in Donna Reiss's "English Composition 2," an online introduction to fiction, poetry, and drama, composed in a variety of genres to develop understanding of literature and the rhetorical features of reading and writing.

## New Genres and Media: European Perspective



"Before we know it, the genres we teach today, the essay and the traditional academic research paper may be supplemented with **new genres such as hypertext, calling for new ideas on how to teach and how to organize writing instruction.**"

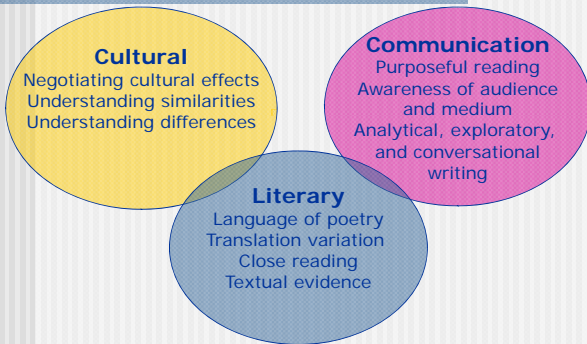
- Lennart Bjork, Gerd Brauer, Lotte Rienecker, and Peter Stray Jorgensen in their introduction to *Teaching Academic Writing in European Higher Education* (Kluwer Publishing, 2002)

## New Genres and Media: USA Perspective

Students participate in a "new community of **critical and creative discourse**. This community, whose conventions are not yet formed, can only be defined by a **confluence of literature, composition, and technology.**"

- Stuart Moulthrop and Nancy Kaplan, "Something To Imagine: Literature, Composition, and Interactive Fiction." *Computers and Composition* 9.1 (1991): 7-23. (8)  
[http://www.hu.mtu.edu/%7Ecandc/archives/v9/9\\_1\\_html/9\\_1\\_1\\_Moulthrop.html](http://www.hu.mtu.edu/%7Ecandc/archives/v9/9_1_html/9_1_1_Moulthrop.html)

## Confluence of goals



## Discourse Chart

	Personal Discourse	Classroom Discourse	Public Discourse
<b>Function</b>	<b>Expressive Writing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-discovery</li> <li>Inner speech</li> </ul>	<b>Interactive Writing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conversational</li> <li>Dialectical</li> </ul>	<b>Transactional Writing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informative</li> <li>Persuasive</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose</b>	Explains to Oneself	Explains to Classroom Colleagues	Explains to Distant Others
<b>Audience</b>	<b>Self and Trusted Others</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privileges Language of Learner</li> <li>Accountability to Self</li> </ul>	<b>Classroom Community: Familiar and Known</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privileges Language of Classroom Community</li> <li>Accountability to Classmates</li> </ul>	<b>Distant and Other: Unknown</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Privileges Language of Critical Audiences</li> <li>Accountability to Public</li> </ul>
<b>Genre</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journals</li> <li>Diaries</li> <li>Logs</li> <li>Notebooks</li> <li>Freewrites</li> <li>Braindumps</li> <li>Fridgenotes</li> <li>Post-it Notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letters</li> <li>Notes</li> <li>Questions</li> <li>Poems</li> <li>Parodies</li> <li>E-mail</li> <li>Presentation Software</li> <li>Web Discussion Boards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essays</li> <li>Articles</li> <li>Reports</li> <li>Presentation Software</li> <li>Memos</li> <li>Multimedia</li> <li>Web Publications</li> </ul>
<b>Response Time</b>	<b>Immediate:</b> Shaping at Point of Utterance	<b>Quick:</b> from "Real" Audience—Visible and Tactile	<b>Lengthy:</b> to Publication or Presentation
<b>Classroom Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social and Collaborative</li> <li>Respects Diversity and Risk Taking</li> <li>Active Learning and Interactive Teaching</li> <li>Motivation for Reading and Writing</li> </ul>			
Developing Knowledge That Is Personally and Professionally Useful			

## "Andrum: Juli" by Tomas Tranströmer

Den som ligger på rygg under de höga träden är också däruppe. Han rännilar sig ut i tusentals kvistar, gungar fram och tillbaka, sitter i en katapultstol som går loss i ultrarapid.

Den som står nere vid bryggorna kisar mot vattnen. Bryggorna åldras fortare än människor. De har silvergrått virke och stenar i magen. Det bländande ljuset slår ända in.

Den som färdas hela dagen i öppen båt över de **glittrande fjärdarna** ska somna till sist inne i en blå lampa medan örarna kryper som stora **nattfjärilar** över glaset.

## "Breathing Room: July" by Tomas Tranströmer

Lying on his back under tall trees he is also up there. He **rills** into thousands of twigs and branches, is swayed back and forth, as if in a catapult seat outflung in slow motion.

Standing down by the jetties he squints across the waters. The docks age sooner than men. Made of splintered silver gray planks, and with stones in their bellies.

**The blinding light rips its way straight through.**

Sailing all day in an open boat over the **glittering lights**, he will fall asleep at last inside a blue lamp while islands like **great nocturnal moths creep over the glass.**

- translated by May Swenson

## "Breathing Space July" by Tomas Tranströmer

The man who lies on his back under huge trees  
is also up in them. He **branches out into thousands of tiny branches**.

He sways back and forth,  
he sits in a catapult chair that hurtles forward in slow motion.

The man who stands down at the dock screws up his eyes against  
the water.

Docks get older faster than men.  
They have silver-gray posts and boulders in their gut.  
The dazzling light drives straight in.

The man who spends the whole day in an open boat  
**moving over the luminous bays**  
will fall asleep at last inside the shade of his blue lamp  
as the islands **crawl like huge moths over the globe**.

- translated by Robert Bly

## Assignment Letters

1. **Introduce** yourself and respond to one or more poems by Tranströmer, explaining how changes of 3 or more **key words or phrases** among translations of the same poem affect the meaning.
2. **Write a personal response**, referring by name to at least two group member. Explain how their explanations and reflections **contributed to your understanding** of a poem.
3. **Write a personal response** about some of the reflections, citing by name at least one person from a college other than your own. Either find or create an **illustration or music that captures the theme or mood** of one poem or one version of a poem. Explain the **relationship between the artwork** and the poem.
4. **Write a personal response** about some of the reflections and cite by name at least one person from a college other than your own. **Reflect** on some ways this **conversation and composition have contributed to your understanding** of Tranströmer's poems, your knowledge of how poetic language works, and your thinking about poetry as a literary, artistic, and cultural experience.

## Online Conversations

The last word of the phrase in May Swenson's translation is "**lights**," in Robert Fulton's translation is "**straits**," and in Robert Bly's translation is "**bays**." The three words are not synonymous and give a **completely different description by that one word change** in the three translations. The distinctions amongst the **translations can confuse and mislead the reader** into directions the poem wasn't intended to "take" the reader. (Wayne, Tidewater)

Something that **disturbs me** in all of the translations is the use of the word **moth** as a translation to *nattfjäril*. Maybe there is no such word as "**night butterfly**" in English, but I think that would give a more accurate translation in aspect to the overall mood of the poem. I don't know how you react, but I definitely **don't get a pleasant image on my retina when I read the words "crawl like huge moths"**. (Adrian, Chalmers)

## Online Conversations

I have to **agree with Wayne** that even slightly different word choices in translation (or in the original for that matter) can **confuse and mislead** the reader....I especially appreciated the letter from Adrian ... I, too, felt the "harmony" between the man lying under the branches and the branches/tree/world...I also felt the Robert Bly translation was a little jarring, but I can't explain why. I especially **appreciate the reference to the "night butterfly"**. There is no similar word in English: unfortunately, **"moth" doesn't have quite the same poetic softness and luminary quality**.

The **night butterfly imagery, especially coupled with "hela natten / entire night,"** changes the whole feel of the last stanza. (Karen, Clemson)

## Online Conversations

My impression on reading the Swedish version is that of the **forever longed for Swedish summer**. That time of the year when life seems to slow down and offer a chance to live and breath. I also read into it the longing to return to nature. To lie beneath the trees, to stand by the lake, to sail all night - **all these things represent freedom to me. It is funny to see how Bly seems to have interpreted it as more or less the opposite. I think it goes to show how much power the reader still has.** (Sandra, Chalmers)

## Online Conversations

**Thank you** especially to Cheryl and Sandra for you references to **slowing down and basking. I failed to see that when I initially read** the interpretations. Sandra's remarks about the "forever longed for Swedish summer" helped put it in perspective. With the very mild winters and the summer heat and humidity we have here **in South Carolina (and in tidewater Virginia as well), I failed to see the appeal that July would have in Sweden.** For those of us that don't like the oppressive heat, "July" hardly evokes a time when we could slow down and breath easy. **Only serves to illustrate that not only the author's context, but the reader's context, will affect the interpretation of a work.** (Karen, Clemson)

## Online Conversations

For my musical connection to the poetry, I chose to connect "Breathing Space July" translated by Robert Bly and a song by the Twilight Singers called "That's Just How That Bird Sings." Hope all of this works.



I chose this song because I thought **the music reflected the stillness and quiet reflection of the man in the poem. The lyrics also seem to pierce the colors involved with the blue lamp and mention of the ocean and water.** I don't know though, could just be the mood of the music and the mood I was in reading the poem. (Kara, Clemson)

## Online Conversations



It is wonderful to see what other people think of poems and how we all can draw so many different ideas....**Anna states, "Transtömer has chosen words that, to me, all symbolize calm and beauty." I do not feel that** when I read "Breathing Room: July". So it seems that the feel of a poem can really be **lost in a translation, now I wish I could interpret the Swedish version of this poem.**

[This image] **relates to "Breathing Room" July" because it is truly blinding light** that makes me squint just looking at it.... In the picture the, "The blinding light rips its way straight through." (in the translation by May Swenson) the leaves and grass. (Ashlee, Tidewater) [U.S. Dept of Agriculture](#)

## Online Conversations



The artwork I picked really corresponds more to the second stanza of "Breathing Room" than the entire poem. "Monk by the Sea" is by the Romantic artist Caspar Friedrich, and I think it **embodies that feeling of the hugeness and vastness of nature**. The monk in the painting is like the man described by Trströmer who is "Standing down by the jetties [as] he squints across the waters."

The waters are so vast that he cannot see the other side. When looking at the poem alongside the painting, the waters may be seen as **literal water or as symbolic of life**.  
(Michele, Clemson) Loyola University Dept of History, David B. Dennis

## Online Conversations

Up to now we have talked a lot about the importance of light in "Breathing Room: July", but I'd like to **turn the discussion more toward the first paragraph and the description of the tree as water...** I feel that **Bly has failed in his translation** when he writes "branches out into thousands of tiny branches". First of all he uses "braches" twice which, to me doesn't look or sound good. He also **loses the reference to water when he uses branch instead of rill**.



... the picture I get when I read the last part of the poem, especially the **blue light** that covers the whole picture.  
(Anna, Chalmers)

Lake Superior Magazine

## Student Reflections

**Poetry as a visual art has never been so real** to me as it is now, after reading the third letters.  
(Meredith, Clemson)

I also found the discussion about different translations inspiring. It made it **obvious how written language really is a two-part way of communication and the message is only transferred after being "translated" by both the writer and the reader** (Erik, Chalmers)

## Student Reflections

Reading poetry has **opened a wide range of different emotions, feelings, and perspectives...**It also helped me to **accept constructive criticism ...enjoyed communicating and sharing different thoughts** about the poem. Rather poetry, literature, or having cultural experiences, you will be able to **expand your vocabulary, thinking strategies, writing, and creative abilities in writing**. (Katinka, Tidewater)

## Student Reflections

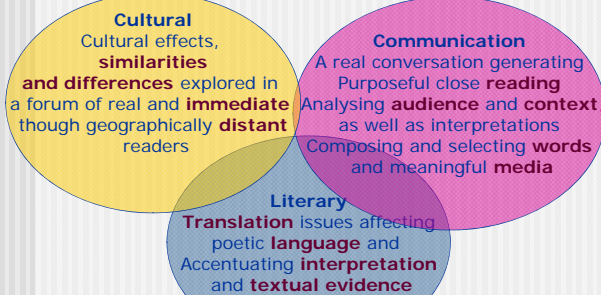
**We've all had fun** (I hope), trying our best to understand the poems in our own ways, letting them lead us to conclusions of our own, and **if these conclusions are close to what Tranströmer had in mind or not when he wrote them doesn't seem very important** to me at all. (Maria, Chalmers)

...being able to talk about poems as they appear in two separate native languages... has been an amazing experience. Also, I've never had the opportunity to participate in a conversation about particular poems over the course of days rather than minutes or hours. I've found that the **extra time and space, as well as being able to leave the poems and come back to them a day or so later, has proved more meaningful and lasting than a few hours discussion of one poem** has ever been for me. (Jennifer, Clemson)

## Student Reflections

I love that the people taking part in this project are from different countries and speak different languages and that the poems we have been reading are, in fact, "translations." **This idea of translation really strikes me, not just as a means of changing words from one language to another, but as a way of changing our thoughts into coherent and meaningful group discussion. In that way, we have all been "interpreters" in a sense.** (Jessica, Clemson)

## Why did this project work?



## Selected Observations

- Students quickly established an academic, international discourse community for communication, negotiation, and learning.
- Students' written discussion moved from deciphering the intentions of the author to discovering the impact of word choice and variations in translation on the reader's experience.
- Students moved through various strategies for academic conversation: narrative, expository, textual and multimodal hyperlink support for interpretive claims, reflection, and evaluation.

## Selected Observations

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- Communication technology offers rhetorical contexts for writing and learning across geographical and disciplinary boundaries.
- The Internet expands the traditional genre of letter writing to increased immediacy for correspondence with multiple and diverse audiences for academic purposes.
- Demonstrable collaborative and generative power of electronic conversation to enhance subject area knowledge (the reading of poetry, literary translation, poetry of Tranströmer).

## What's next?

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- Further research
  - Outcomes of teachers' intervention in the discussion
  - Methods of assessment and evaluation of each student's contribution
  - Measurable growth in subject area knowledge
  - Measurable growth in development of academic writing abilities
  - Effectiveness in other subject areas across the curriculum
  - Rhetorical, discourse, and genre analysis of student conversation

## What's next?

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- Additional exchanges
  - If you are interested in having your students participate in an international discussion board exchange, please see us during the conference or email us.
  - Now: Please give us the benefit of your comments and questions.