

# Found in Translation

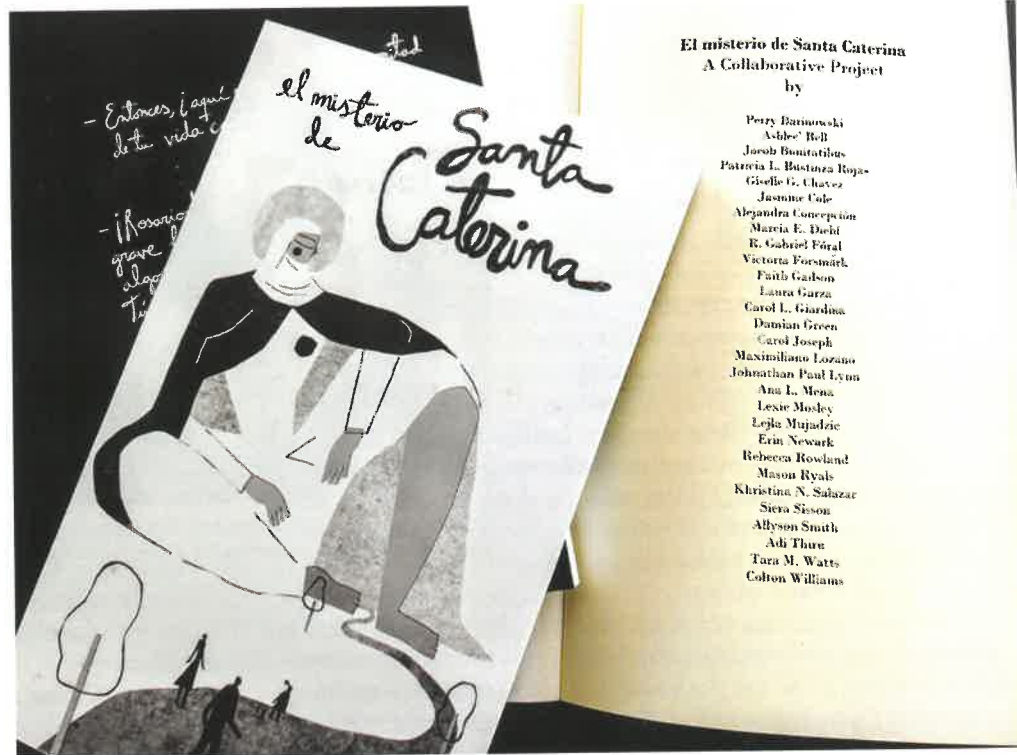
The act of translation may seem straightforward, but it requires an astute grasp of language and culture, as well as strong problem solving skills. Words in one language don't always have an exact equivalent in another. Culturally-specific phrases or ideas may lose important connotations or make no sense when translated literally. Even the typical length, rhythm, and density of expressive sentiments can vary between languages. Translators have to understand these challenges to relay meaning effectively.

To help students learn to navigate these challenges, Associate Professor of Spanish Dr. Giada Biasetti incorporates experiential learning in her courses. Last Spring, students in her Intro to Translation and Interpretation courses worked with author Frank Iodice to translate three chapters of his novel *A Perfect Idiot* into Spanish. Originally written in Italian but translated into English, students consulted both versions of the novel—and received feedback from Iodice himself—while working to render its themes and imagery into Spanish.

According to Biasetti, “With literary translation you can have more freedom (than with technical translations, such as medical or legal documents), but you don't want to change the purpose or meaning of the novel—what it intended to convey. You may also have to change the structure and imagery of a sentiment to have it make sense in the new language. So it can be as hard, if not harder (than technical translation).”

Translating idiomatic phrases and cultural references proved to be the biggest challenges for her students.

“The original Italian version (of *A Perfect*



The translation project resulted in a book titled *El Misterio de Santa Caterina*. (Photos provided by Dr. Giada Biasetti)

*Idiot*) includes the phrase ‘tornare indietro,’” Biasetti says. “In the context of what is said in the story, it means the characters can't go back in time: what's done is done. My students translated this with the Spanish verb ‘regresar,’ but that doesn't really capture the true meaning because it means to go back to a place, not to turn back in time or revisit the past. With my help and the author's, they changed it to ‘volver atras,’ which captures the proper meaning.”

Similarly, the original text includes the descriptor “virginello” which, with its

diminutive ending “-ello,” means “little virgin.” Initially, Biasetti's students chose the Spanish word “virgen,” which lacks the original's connotation of smallness, but later, they changed it to “virgencito,” incorporating the Spanish diminutive ending “-ito” to restore the fuller meaning.

Although only part of the novel was translated, the selected chapters tell a fairly self-contained story about four characters: Don Vito Palladino, Rosario Rossi, Odette, and Meli Montreux—all of whom are searching for the mystery of Santa Caterina when their paths



Dr. Giada Biasetti, right, and her Intro to Translation and Interpretation students translated three chapters of Frank Iodice's novel *A Perfect Idiot* into Spanish.

bring them together in the end.

At the same time, Biasetti challenged students in her Spanish Composition class to compose original short stories in Spanish. As with the translation project, this required them to think carefully about how words and images function in different languages and cultures, and to refine their creative choices through multiple rounds of feedback and revision. Iodice met with the students to give them pointers about plot, character development, and other facets of creative writing.

Thanks in part to Iodice's professional connections, Biasetti was able to publish her students' translations and creative works through the French non-profit organization *Articoli Liberi*, which distributes free books to middle- and high-school students worldwide. Venezuelan illustrator Fernando Cobelo, who Iodice knew through a mutual friend, agreed

to design the cover. The resulting book was entitled *El Misterio de Santa Caterina* (The Mystery of Saint Catherine).

Biasetti says the title is symbolic: "The characters searching for the mystery of Santa Caterina all come together at the end of the story. So the road to the mystery of Santa Caterina represents their individual journeys and how their paths collide. It also represents the collaboration between students, author, professor, illustrator, publishing company, and non-profit organization and how it all 'collided' into one project."

Biasetti hopes these experiences provide three important benefits for her students: Improved comprehension and dexterity with the language; deeper understanding of translation techniques and the code of ethics a translator would have to follow; and the process and challenges of collaborating

with an actual author the way professional translators do.

Beyond her own classroom, Biasetti also hopes to inspire area middle and high schoolers to take an interest in translation as well. Since publishing the collection, she has been visiting schools in Georgia and South Carolina to talk about translation and share some of her students' experiences of working with Iodice. Thinking ahead to the future, she hopes to involve her students in these school visits to talk about their experiences, and is also considering having future classes translate the rest of *A Perfect Idiot* into Spanish. <<

Read more about Biasetti's innovative approach to teaching language and translation on *Jagwire*: [jagwire.augusta.edu/students-publish-spanish-translation-of-italian-novel-short-stories/](http://jagwire.augusta.edu/students-publish-spanish-translation-of-italian-novel-short-stories/)