

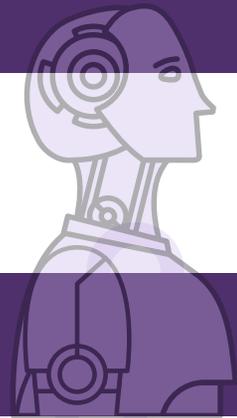
MC CONFLUENCE

Translation Conference in the Capital Area

Roots and Routes: Possibilities in the Art and Science of Translation

Saturday, March 25, 2023

Montgomery College Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus



10:45 am – 11:45 am **SESSION 4 - Room HC227**

Transplanting Poetic Form: Tending the Roots of Swahili Verse

Presenter: Richard Prins

With some 100 million speakers, Swahili is the most widely-spoken indigenous African language, and it boasts a rich poetic tradition with surviving manuscripts dating back to the 17th century. Unfortunately, this tradition has received little recognition outside of East Africa and niche academic circles, in part because it is rarely translated, and most existing translations aspire to a literal/academic rather than a literary standard. One of the difficulties of translating Swahili poetry is predominance of form, including strict rhyme schemes and syllable counts. This presentation discusses the challenge of transplanting poetic forms between vastly different poetic traditions, arguing that in order for the roots of the source text to thrive in new soil, the translator must be especially attentive to those roots of sound and form.

Presenter Biographical information:

Richard Prins is a lifelong New Yorker who has also lived, worked, studied and recorded music in Dar es Salaam. He received his MFA degree in poetry from New York University, and is currently completing an MFA degree in literary translation at Queens College. His poetry has been published in dozens of literary journals such as Gulf Coast, Jubilat and Ploughshares. His essays have received "Notable" mentions in Best American Essays 2014 and Best American Travel Writing 2020. His translations from Swahili appear in publications like Columbia Review, Harvard Review Online, Los Angeles Review and No Edges: Swahili Stories (Two Lines Press 2023), his paper on translating a Swahili poet "The Signifyin' Muyaka: Translating Cultural Tropes in 19th Century Swahili War Poetry" is forthcoming in Swahili Forum, and his translation-in-progress of the African futurist Swahili novel *Walenisi* by Katama Mkangi was awarded a 2023 Pen/Heim Translation Fund Grant.



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