

An Ethics Of Discomfort: Supplementing Ricœur On Translation

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Abstract:

This article compares Paul Ricœur and Jacques Derrida on the theme of translation and in particular the ethical implications of the different ways in which they approach the untranslatable. While Ricœur's account of translation as linguistic hospitality does offer a model for an ethical encounter with the other, I argue that this account does not go far enough. My central claim is that Ricœur's treatment of translation overemphasizes the movement of appropriation and integration. While it may not be his intention, this emphasis could lead to a certain kind of complacency that would challenge the ethical claims Ricœur makes in favour of translation as a paradigm. I propose to supplement Ricœur's hospitality with Derrida's untranslatable, in order to create a situation of constant discomfort thereby guarding against ethical complacency.

Keywords: Ricœur, Derrida, Translation, Ethics.

Résumé:

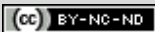
Cet article compare les approches que Ricœur et Derrida font du thème de la traduction en abordant en particulier les implications éthiques de leurs manières différentes d'aborder la question de l'intraduisible. Si le traitement ricœurien du problème de la traduction en termes d'hospitalité langagière offre le modèle d'une rencontre éthique de l'autre, je soutiens que cette approche ne va pas assez loin. Mon argument central est que, dans son traitement de la traduction, Ricœur met exagérément l'accent sur le mouvement d'appropriation et d'intégration. Même si cette emphase n'est peut-être pas intentionnelle, elle pourrait conduire à une certaine suffisance susceptible de remettre en question le pladoyer éthique de Ricœur en faveur de la traduction comme paradigme. Je propose en ce sens d'ajouter à l'hospitalité ricœurienne l'intraduisible derridien, afin de créer une situation de constant inconfort nous préservant de toute suffisance éthique.

Mot-clés: Ricœur, Derrida, traduction, éthique.

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Vol 6, No 1 (2015), pp. 25-45

ISSN 2155-1162 (online) DOI 10.5195/errs.2015.285

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Introduction

Paul Ricœur was a gifted translator. His translation of Edmund Husserl's *Ideas*, published in 1950, played a significant role in introducing phenomenology to the French cultural scene. One could even claim, as Richard Kearney does, that as a mediator between philosophical traditions, Ricœur in fact practises philosophy *as* translation.¹ In this article, however, I will focus only on those texts by Ricœur that deal explicitly with translation.

I begin by examining Ricœur's first thematic treatment of translation where he proposes translation as one of "three models of integration" for Europe. I then examine Jacques Derrida's reading of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* which brings together various themes of this article such as the untranslatable, forgiveness, and theological-political translation. Returning to Ricœur in part three, I discuss his account of the trial of the foreign, arguing that the views on appropriation, which he shares with the German translators of the late eighteenth century, are in tension with certain aspects of his ethics. I also suggest that, unlike Derrida, he finds no ethical value in the untranslatable. Finally, I examine the relation between mourning and hospitality in both Ricœur and Derrida. Overall my argument is that, while Ricœur's account of translation as a model of hospitality has much to recommend it, and indeed much in common with Derrida's account, it ultimately runs the risk of putting everyone on the same level. Ricœur's account of ethical hospitality is "happy" and pragmatic rather than uncomfortable and impossible. My claim is that his model of translation therefore (although perhaps unintentionally) levels the playing field of exchange and does not sufficiently guard against complacency. Derrida, on the other hand, by holding on to the untranslatable as the model of exchange, keeps us on the knife edge of discomfort. For Derrida we are not all on the same level where we can all be equally understood. Rather at the heart of Derrida's account is an insurmountable difference that prevents a comfortable settling into sameness. It is this discomfort, I argue, that is precisely what is needed if the European project is to be a truly ethical one.

1. Three Models of Integration

The first text to be examined in Ricœur's thematic writings on translation is a short essay from 1992, "Quel *ethos* nouveau pour l'Europe?"² It is significant that this first treatment of translation occurs within the context of reimagining a "post-national state" for Europe and reflecting on the ethical-political necessities of such an imagining. It is also significant that the essay is published in the same year as the signing of the Maastricht Treaty which formally integrated and inaugurated the European Union of (at the time) twelve countries in ten languages. Ricœur's question in this essay is how to include the ethical, spiritual, intellectual,

religious and cultural concerns of various groups in the imagining and realization of new political and juridical institutions.³ Including such concerns is not only desirable but necessary for the real implementation, at the formal level, of such new institutions. “Taken as a whole it is a matter of combining ‘identity’ and ‘alterity’ at numerous levels that will need to be distinguished. What we most desperately lack are models of integration between these two poles.”⁴ My claim in this article is that it is this desire for combining and integrating that threatens the type of ethical claims that Ricœur wants to make, that in fact the ethical relation to the Other [*autrui*] demands not a desire to integrate her, but a willingness to live with the uncomfortable fact of the Other’s ability to transcend one’s comprehension. It is about respecting that which cannot be integrated, assimilated or made one’s *own*. My claim is that the test [*l’épreuve*] of the Other is non-assimilation. That which cannot be assimilated is, I argue following Jacques Derrida, the untranslatable in every other. Before setting out my claim I will briefly summarise this first treatment of translation by Ricœur and specifically the three “models of integration” that he proposes.

The first model is that of translation from one language to another. Here Ricœur describes translation as the enactment of the law of a universal translatability. In other words, everything can in principle, in theory, *by law*, be translated. Languages or texts that have resisted translation thus far, such as Cretan hieroglyphs and the Linear A script, are simply awaiting translation as opposed to being untranslatable. To paraphrase Bernhard Waldenfels, there is only an untranslatable *de facto* and not *de jure*.⁵ The practice of translation, for Ricœur, requires two ingredients – a flesh and blood bilingual mediator and their corresponding commitment to a search for “optimum commensurability” between languages.⁶ This second ingredient will be renamed in a slightly later Ricœur text the “construction of comparables.”⁷ The model of translation follows that of von Humboldt and involves “raising the distinctive spirit” of one’s own language to that of the foreign language; it involves “living with the other in order to take that other to one’s home as a guest.”⁸ Such a model of linguistic hospitality seems appropriate to the particular problem of how to construct a new Europe. Practically speaking, it would serve to motivate a multilingual education. On what Ricœur terms a more “spiritual level,” this model of translation would encourage cultural bi- or poly-lingualism, thus welcoming not only the other’s language but also the other’s culture.

For the moment, I simply want to emphasise that this model of translation, one of three models of *integration*, is about taking the other *home*. This movement of appropriation, even if it is the taking home of the other *as guest* and not as captive (as it is in St. Jerome) presupposes three things. Firstly, it takes as its starting point *here, me* and what is my *own* as against what is other. Secondly, it assumes that it is this starting point that is to be enriched by the encounter. Thirdly, it has a corresponding disregard for the other *as radical other*. Given Ricœur’s stated opposition to the idea of a self-same identity and his argument for the idea of a self that is plural, emerging over time through its encounter with multiple others, his emphasis on appropriation in these writings on translation seems at best incongruent. His account of the identity of the self as a pluralistic knot of narratives surely entails equal measures of expropriation and appropriation; and yet, he fails to explicitly make this claim when writing on translation.

The subsequent two models – the model of the exchange of memories and the model of forgiveness – build upon and deepen the first model of translation and all three models are posited as interdependent. If, in the model of interlingual translation, what is required is the

understanding of the other's culture and customs, then the model of the exchange of memories offers a path to such an understanding. This second model entails what Ricœur terms a "plural reading" of, in particular, a culture's founding events. Such events and their endless commemorations as a singular event, that took place in one way and meant something to one people only, can stultify a culture's identity closing it off from others and making it "systematically incommunicable."⁹ As Ricœur points out elsewhere, "[w]hat we celebrate under the title of founding events are, essentially, acts of violence legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right."¹⁰ He thinks that these events need to be de-sedimented by being recounted differently through the exchange of memories presented in narrative form. Every story entails another and this entanglement of stories must be re-vivified (rather than redacted) in a new approach to retelling and rereading the past so that a pluralistic knot of tales is created. Such diversity will enrich the event and our understanding of it. It will also allow a cultural identity to realise itself as a narrative identity, mobile and flexible as opposed to being a fixed eternal substance that excludes as much as it includes. Moreover, insofar as the past lives on in memory, the exchange of memories will give new breath to what has been entombed and lost in tradition. "The past is a cemetery of promises which have not been kept" claims Ricœur.¹¹ Through the exchange of memories, these un-kept promises can be brought back to life. This exchange of memories would seem to entail a "successful" work of mourning that deals with the loss of past promises in order to release a new future where the betrayals of the past are finally forgiven.

And with "forgiveness" we reach Ricœur's final model for a new ethos for Europe that is linked to the first two: "Forgiveness is a specific form of the revision of the past [...] a specific form of that mutual revision, the most precious result of which is the liberation of promises of the past which have not been kept."¹² This third model complements the exchange of memories in that it is an exchange of memories of suffering – both those inflicted and those endured. Ricœur claims that it is through this exchange that the "debt" can be shattered. This shattering of the debt, owed on account of suffering inflicted, lifts a burden that has driven a person or a community into isolation; it is not the abolition of the debt and certainly not its forgetting. Rather, forgiveness consists in lifting the pain of the debt.¹³ It can be linked to the gift: "I want to consider the particular structure of the dilemmas of forgiveness along with the difficulties that result from extending the problematic of forgiveness to a model of exchange tied to the concept of the gift. The etymology and the semantics of numerous languages encourage this comparison: *don-pardon*, gift-forgiving, *dono-perdono*, *Geben-Vergeben*."¹⁴ Forgiveness, realised through the exchange of memories of suffering, has the poetic power to change the past in the present. Ricœur offers various examples of such moments of forgiveness which do not annihilate the past but rather release a community from the shackles of the past into the freedom of imagining a new future: Willy Brandt at Warsaw or Sadat in Jerusalem. These events are not part of the political order; they are not "institutional" as such. Rather they take on meaning due to their "exceptional character."¹⁵ They effectively rupture an existing political order, creating something new in the space of international politics.

These, then, are the three interconnected models of "integration" through which the non-political concerns of Europe's diverse populations may achieve realization or recognition in political and juridical institutions. Models of linguistic hospitality, narrative hospitality and forgiveness; these are all models of mediation and assimilation that are meant to promote

justice.¹⁶ This theme of justice and forgiveness takes centre stage in the next section where I discuss Derrida's treatment of translation.

2. Derrida's Trial of the Untranslatable

Against the speculative dichotomy of translatable/untranslatable Ricœur posits the "practical alternative" of faithfulness/betrayal, to which I return below. In contrast, Derrida holds onto the untranslatable as the very test of translation itself: "Translation always and only translates the untranslatable."¹⁷ While there are numerous works where Derrida puts forward variations on this thesis I will focus here on "Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction 'relevante'?"¹⁸ In this essay Derrida submits his own experience of translation to what he terms "the trial [*l'épreuve*] of the untranslatable"¹⁹ and it is this "trial" that I would like to examine here.

Derrida remarks that his interest has always been directed to "the so-called undecidable words" which deliberately resist a full or complete translation into other individual words. He is interested in words within which a number of meanings operate, forcing a situation of untranslatability or at least a situation in which any translation would lose a certain effect. For example, in his commentary on Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," Derrida plays with the word "Babel," noting that as a proper name it means "City of God" while as a common noun it means "confusion."²⁰ A similar situation arises with the name *Pierre* which in a French language context immediately sounds like *pierre* [rock]. These double meanings are lost in translation but much more significantly, so too is the situation of *undecidability*. As Derrida notes in relation to perhaps one of his most famous commentaries: "Whether one translates *pharmakon* as 'poison' or 'remedy' whether one comes down on the side of sickness or health, life or death, the undecidability is going to be lost."²¹ We get a sense of this lost undecideable, homophonic, homonymic and hence untranslatable effect when we hear the word *relevante*, which forms part of Derrida's title. It is unclear whether this word is a French word that has become English or an English word in the process of "Frenchification." The issue is especially complicated in Derrida's hands since *relevante* here becomes inflected with a Germanic and philosophical sense.²² To it is entrusted what Derrida terms "an exorbitant task," that is, defining the very essence of translation.

A "relevant" translation would be seen to be the "best" translation or at the very least, better than an "irrelevant" translation. Derrida's title here – "What is a 'relevant' translation?" – could in fact be rephrased as either "What is translation?" or, perhaps more appropriately, "What should a translation be?" If Derrida's title can be rephrased or translated in this manner then why leave the word "relevant" in the title at all? Derrida justifies (and "to justify" is one of the senses of "relevant") his choice by noting that this word in particular has been "indispensable" to him in the translation of many words coming from and into many languages. Coming from Latin through various linguistic paths it operates on the borders of language. It is a word which doesn't have a linguistic home so to speak and as such is untranslatable.

"Relevant" is also a word which occurs in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, a play that deals endlessly in the economy of translation: the translation of a pound of flesh into a supposed monetary equivalent, Portia's translation into a male lawyer, and the translation of Shylock to Christianity. "At every moment, translation is as necessary as it is impossible. [...] As

if the subject of this play were, in short, the task of the translator, his impossible task, his duty, his debt, as inflexible as it is unpayable.”²³ It is this notion of translation as impossible yet at the same time necessary that is of most interest to me here. In this “trial” of the untranslatable Derrida must demonstrate what he means by stating that nothing is translatable and nothing is untranslatable *at the same time*.²⁴

Derrida chooses his text, *The Merchant of Venice*, for four reasons. The first is that the play is driven by an oath or a promise. Like translation, it centres on a promise which cannot be kept. Secondly the play, like translation, revolves around economic conditions.²⁵ Thirdly, at the heart of the play, like the heart of any translation, is an incalculable equivalence or impossible correspondence, here between flesh and money. And finally because of the relation between translation and conversion, the destruction of the body of the text to save its sense (or its soul), and the conversion of Jew to Christian:

This impossible translation, this conversion [...] between the original, literal flesh and the monetary sign is not unrelated to the Jew Shylock's forced conversion to Christianity, since the traditional figure of the Jew is often and conventionally situated on the side of the body and the letter [...] whereas St. Paul the Christian is on the side of the spirit or sense, of interiority, of spiritual circumcision. This relation of the letter to the spirit, of the body of literalness to the ideal interiority of sense is also the site of the passage of translation, of this conversion that is called translation. As if the business of translation were first of all an Abrahamic matter between the Jew, the Christian, and the Muslim. And the *relève*, like the relevance I am prepared to discuss with you, will be precisely what happens to the flesh of the text, the body, the spoken body and the translated body – when the letter is mourned to save the sense.²⁶

Derrida notes that while Shylock is offered three times the amount of money he is owed in place of a pound of Antonio's flesh, he refuses this substitution. The basis of this refusal is the sacred oath he has taken, for the contract he made with Antonio was sworn not only between men but also, and more importantly, before God. This oath, made in the language of men, cannot be undone using the language of men; a bond made in language has become stronger than language itself. This leads Derrida to assert that in the act of swearing there is a type of transcendence since it leads man, who is initially positioned in language, to the beyond of language, that is, towards the divine law. “The oath passes *through* language, but it passes beyond human language. This would be the truth of translation.”²⁷ Translation, as a promise, passes through language while at the same time transgressing the borders of language each time it reaches its limit – in the untranslatable.

Once Shylock refuses to accept the translation of the pound of flesh into three times its supposed monetary value, and once Antonio recognizes the bond, Portia passes her verdict: “Then the Jew must be merciful.” For Derrida these words indicate something important about the history of the relationship between the Jew and the Christian. Theirs is a history of translation. Shakespeare's play is, on the one hand, a case, a trial, of a particular Christian (Antonio) and a particular Jew (Shylock); yet on the other hand, it mirrors the case, the history and the trial of Christian power and the Jew in general.²⁸ In this history it is the Christian who asks for forgiveness and the Jew who must forgive. Of course, this is according to a *Christian*

history and a Christian understanding of what forgiveness is. However, this Christian understanding is really a Christian ruse under which is hidden an economic, theological and political play of power. The power to forgive can come only from the one *in* power.²⁹ Interestingly, this question of the “power to forgive” is markedly absent from Ricœur’s account of forgiveness as a model of integration. Perhaps narrative hospitality and the exchange of memories, in particular those of suffering, would re-empower the disenfranchised allowing them this “power to forgive.” However, Ricœur fails to make this explicit. Portia’s speech on mercy, designed to convert Shylock and translate the bond, is not genuine but a hoax. The Christian state offers Shylock an ultimatum – forgive the bond or lose everything. It offers him the power to forgive the debt. Only the State can offer Shylock this power to forgive and thus break the law of his contract. Yet in giving this power to forgive the State is also attempting to impose forgiveness and so is in fact taking away Shylock’s freedom to choose. This, then, is the European relation with the Jew; it is based on the principle of economic power.

However, the play reflects more than Christian Europe’s relation with the Jew. It also reflects the manner in which translation – whether it is of the pound of flesh into its monetary equivalent and/or of Shylock’s bond into a moment of forgiveness – is always a political act. For Derrida language is not a vehicle of political power but is that power itself. At times it seems that Ricœur passes over this possibility of an imposed and therefore violent translation. For Ricœur “[t]o translate is to do justice to a foreign intelligence [...] your language is as important as mine.”³⁰ Yet, it is often the case that to translate is not to do justice but to capitulate in the face of unjust, imperialist demands, or it is perhaps a means to silence dissenting voices. A policy of enforced translation is often at the heart of the exercise of colonial power, something that Derrida himself testifies to in his autobiographical account of being a Franco-Maghrebian Jew in Algeria.³¹ Translation can unify diverse peoples through forced homogenisation. Ricœur, of course, in his insistence on de-sedimenting and retelling a nation’s founding events would no doubt reject this form of homogenisation. Nonetheless, he does not explicitly comment on translation’s power to oppress as well as to liberate.

To return to the *Merchant of Venice*; Shylock, in response to the command to be merciful, asks “On what compulsion must I?” to which Portia responds with the speech on mercy. Mercy here is described in terms similar to Shylock’s understanding of the oath. Mercy is beyond the human, a taste of the divine; like the oath it passes through language but is also beyond it and beyond the law. In this paean to mercy, mercy as forgiveness becomes like prayer offering a double benediction; to the one who asks and the one who receives. In terms of Derrida’s “trial” of translation and the untranslatable, the crucial moment is Portia’s speech on mercy. This Derrida cites in English and translates in two parts, with the final part of his analysis offering his own translation of Shakespeare.

The first movement of the speech is as follows: “The quality of mercy is not strain’d,/It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,/It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.”³² In this way then, mercy is free; it cannot be commanded or ordered (an ironic point given that Portia has just demanded it from Shylock). Mercy is beyond decision, foreign to the law and to economic calculation. As in Ricœur, *forgiveness* is linked to the gift. Like the rain, it is uncontrollable and like the rain it comes from above. The second movement of the speech describes the relation between mercy and power:

'Tis the mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
 The throned monarch better than his crown.
 His sceptre shoes the force of temporal power,
 The attribute to awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
 It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself;
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's
 When mercy seasons justice.³³

For Derrida this reveals forgiveness or mercy as the almighty-ness of the Almighty, it is the very essence of power, of omnipotence, and also beyond them both. The question this raises is that of the superlative; if mercy is *more* divine *than* the divine, *more* monarchical *than* the monarch or *mightier than* the *mightiest*; it must belong to a different order than that of might. Mercy must belong to the order of "the impossible that is *more than impossible and therefore possible*."³⁴ This understanding of the most impossible *as possible* has its parallels in the translatable and untranslatable. As Derrida notes, through his reading of the Christian mystic Angelus Silesius, God would belong to the order of the *most impossible*. What is *more than impossible* would be beyond the impossible; that is, of a different order than the impossible *in general* and therefore possible:

The meaning of "possible," the significance of the concept of possibility, meanwhile, has undergone a mutation at the point and limit of the im-possible – if I can put it this way – and this mutation indicates what is at stake in our reflection on the impossible possibility of translation: there is no longer any possible contradiction between possible and impossible since they belong to two heterogeneous orders.³⁵

To rephrase this in terms of translation; translatability might be understood as having undergone a "mutation" at the limit of un-translatability so that both terms now belong to a different order. The challenge of course with Derrida's thinking here is to think translatable/untranslatable together. It is not the case that Derrida argues for a "relative" translatability or a "relative" untranslatability, but rather the two at once. As Kathleen Davis argues, anything less would leave the "conceptual poles" of a certain oppositional thinking intact.³⁶ The untranslatable, as Derrida argues here and elsewhere, is rather that which sets translation in motion and continues to inhabit every translation so that it is doomed to perpetually begin again: "this untranslatable translation, this new idiom *makes things happen*."³⁷

Derrida notes that what is at play in this speech on mercy, and in particular in this section, is the relation between the power to pardon, the letter of the flesh, and spirituality. What is "divine" here, what is "likest God's," is the power to forgive interiorized in the power of the state, that is, in the heart of the monarch. It is a power that is not reflected in earthly attributes – the sceptre or the crown – rather being a God-like invisible power. "This *like*, this analogy or resemblance, supports a logic or analogic of the theologico-political translation, of the translation of the theological into the political."³⁸ Mercy is what inflects the political with the theological permitting a certain translation of one into the other.

The French translation of Portia's speech by Hugo, renders "seasons" (in "when mercy seasons justice") as *tempère*. While Derrida does not see this as an "incorrect" translation, he wishes to replace it with the word *relève*. This translation will not pay off all its debts; it in fact will not answer to the name "translation" if by this name we understand "the transfer of an intact signified through the inconsequential vehicle of any signifier whatsoever."³⁹ Derrida's translation will rather be a transformation that supplements what is lacking in the word "seasons" by substituting it with *relève*. For his choice of word Derrida offers three justifications – culinary, elevatory, and dialectical – which I will now outline.

The word *relève* responds to the culinary sense of "seasons." As Derrida notes *un plat relevé* means a "seasoned dish;" a dish which has been made better and whose taste has been heightened. It is "seasons" in this culinary sense that Portia appeals to when she speaks of mercy; adding mercy to justice means justice keeps its taste, keeps *more* of its taste and is thus changed without being changed, converted without being converted – justice is improved and exalted. Derrida's second justification for his "untranslatable translation" is that *relever* expresses the notion of elevation. Mercy elevates justice to a higher realm, towards the Most High. Mercy, in spiritualizing justice, offers it its own transcendence: "mercy sublimates justice."⁴⁰ In this sense Derrida's third justification is an expansion of the notion of *relève* so that it includes "sublimation;" a word most often (problematically) encountered in a Hegelian context.

The noun *relève* and the verb *relever* are the words Derrida used to translate the Hegelian terms *Aufheben* and *Aufhebung*.⁴¹ These German terms were hailed by Hegel himself as reflecting "the speculative risk of the German language" and as such are often cited as being untranslatable.⁴² They tie in too with the notion of economy. Elsewhere Derrida argues that the deconstruction of metaphysics requires the move from a speculative and restricted philosophical economy to a general economy.⁴³ "Restricted philosophical economy" would be that of the traditional understanding of philosophy which leaves no remainder, no unknown outside of its own closed system. In contradistinction to this, deconstruction's "general economy" would allow for the remainder *as* remainder – an always possible outside that would remain unknown. This also parallels Derrida's concerns regarding translation. Against an understanding of translation that carries across a self-identical signified from one signifier to another and without remainder; Derrida seeks a translation which embraces its necessary loss as constitutive. In terms of the *Aufhebung*; the Hegelian notion leaves nothing outside, even after traversing differences it, like so many philosophical concepts, seeks to escape the effect of *différance*. Derrida's French translation questions this "operation without remainder," as translator Alan Bass stresses:

Derrida's playful translation of *aufhebt* (third person singular of *Aufheben*) keeps the *hebt* (*lève*, lifts), but changes the *auf-* (up) to a *re-* [...] the stress is on the effect of substitution and difference, of repetition, that is inscribed in *aufhebt*. Further, the *auf-* is related to negation-and-preservation in a *higher* sphere; the *re-* questions the metaphysics of negation, the theology implicit in dialectical negation as a raising up.⁴⁴

Thus in translating "seasons" with *relève* Derrida offers a "philosophical meaning" to the discourse on justice seasoned with mercy. The movement of *Aufhebung*, argues Derrida, is a process of establishing relevance. It would thus, in this instance, relate mercy to justice as an elevation. The movement in Hegel is always one of interiorization and spiritualization, reflecting

in this translation the relation of spirit and flesh, of Christian and Jew. All of which is not, as Derrida notes, unrelated to a certain European post-Lutheran understanding of translation.⁴⁵ For Hegel, furthermore, mercy is a critical stage in the movement towards absolute knowledge as the truth of the Christian religion. Hegel's *Aufhebung* is a type of translation into absolute knowledge of the Christian narrative of the resurrection.⁴⁶ All of which leads Derrida to claim: "Mercy is a *relève*, it is in its essence an *Aufhebung*. It is a translation as well."⁴⁷ Mercy, like *Aufhebung* elevates and preserves justice at a higher level. At the same time it negates justice as the law, in that, as we saw above, it *exceeds* the law. In this sense it mirrors Benjamin's understanding of translation as that in which "the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were." Mercy most resembles the divine when it elevates, preserves, and negates the law and as such "is a sort of human translation of divinity."⁴⁸

Do these justifications suffice for Derrida's translation? As noted, it is perhaps not really a translation in the strictest sense but "rather one of those other things in *tr.*, a transaction, transformation, travail, *travel* – and a treasure trove [*trouvaille*]."⁴⁹ The word *relève* is involved in a transaction with "seasons"; it substitutes it, relieves [*relève*] it of its duty, in exchange for transforming it. It is travail, labour, or work, in that it sets to work not only a multiplicity of meanings but also a multiplicity of languages; French, German and English, and because of this richness it is a semantic treasure trove. More importantly for Derrida, it demonstrates that "every translation should be relevant by vocation." Here we find the answer to the title of Derrida's essay "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" that is, "What should a translation be?" A translation should be relevant; which would mean that a translation should answer to the call of the original ("by vocation") to elevate it, preserve it, negate it, interrupt it, transform it, and put it to work. In this way it would guarantee the original's sur-vival as prolonged life and life after death.⁵⁰ As Derrida phrases it:

Isn't this what a translation does? Doesn't it guarantee these two survivals by losing the flesh during a process of conversion [*change*]? By elevating the signifier to its meaning or value, all the while preserving the mournful and debt-laden memory of the singular body, the first body, the unique body that the translation thus elevates, preserves, and negates [*relève*]? Since it is a question of a travail – indeed, as we noted, a travail of the negative – this relevance is a travail of mourning, [...] a faithful and mournful memory.⁵¹

I return below to this idea of a mournful memory. In terms of the "trial of the untranslatable," how does Derrida's "definition" of translation above account for his claim that everything is translatable and untranslatable *at the same time*? "Seasons" is untranslatable if we think the translatable as that without loss, remainder or mourning. It is endlessly translatable if we reconsider the very idea of translation under the terms outlined above as transformation, negation and elevation. For Derrida translation is caught in this uncomfortable double bind. In the next section I look at Ricœur's somewhat different approach to the untranslatable.

3. Ricœur's Trial of the Foreign

The title of Antoine Berman's 1984 work *L'épreuve de l'étranger* provides Ricœur with a phrase that threads its way throughout the latter's writings on translation. It is a phrase that can

be variously translated as the “trial or test of the stranger” or, as it is rendered in the English translation of Berman’s work, *The Experience of the Foreign*.⁵² In this work Berman traces the importance of translation back to the idea of ‘Germanity’ (*Deutschheit*), to the idea that Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible was a historically definitive event that placed translation at the heart of German culture, language, and identity. In this Berman follows that wing of the hermeneutic tradition which elevates the reformation debates in general and Luther in particular to an importance that they perhaps do not deserve. As Jean Grondin has pointed out “this pivotal period is much less revolutionary than the classic history of hermeneutics, itself indebted to Protestant theology, would suggest.”⁵³ Regardless of Luther’s importance here, it is true to say that translation operated around the end of the eighteenth century as a way of identifying a peculiarly German culture and education – *Bildung*. German translators at that time sought to define themselves against the prevailing French and English literary trends. Rather than aiming for a transparent translation where all traces of the “original” text’s foreignness had been erased, German translators endeavoured to make the foreign as obvious as possible. In 1767 Johann Gottfried Herder advocated “bending” German itself to a foreign strain in order to accrue “great advances” in the German language.⁵⁴ In this regard, Johann Heinrich Voss’s translations of the *Odyssey* (1781) and the *Iliad* (1793), the first to retain the hexameter in German, had a profound impact on the German literary scene.⁵⁵ They ushered in an openness to translation as a possibility of transformation – not of the foreign text but of the German language itself. Between Voss’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad* Immanuel Kant’s three critiques appeared; the German philosophical counterpoint to (one might even say the German philosophical translation of) the French socio-political revolution.⁵⁶

This period marks, then, the creation of a German identity through appropriating what is foreign or other. Herder’s “bending” of the German language might at first seem to be an ethical “foreignizing” strategy in the terms of contemporary translation theory. However, it is not without nationalistic and political motivation. Berman begins his work with a series of quotations from Leibniz to von Humboldt all praising the gift of the German language (and the German language alone) to welcome foreign languages to itself. In this bending-welcoming German demonstrates its own flexibility and its commensurability with the “great” works of classical Greek and Latin authors. This movement of appropriation, of bringing the “foreign” author to the native German reader, allows the German to discover herself in this encounter with the other. It is also a strategy advocated by the few and for the few. Venuti, following Berman and Ward, has pointed out that Schleiermacher and Schlegel’s approach to translation is marked by its engagement not with contemporary literature, but rather with the literature of the educated elite – the works of Cicero, Plato and Homer. As he claims: “Because this is a strongly nationalist elite, it employs foreignizing translation in a remarkable project of German cultural imperialism, through which the linguistic community ‘destined’ for global domination achieves it. Here nationalism is equivalent to universalism.”⁵⁷ Thus appropriation of the foreign can in fact hide a certain will to domination.

Ricœur, in his writings on translation appears to follow in this tradition of welcoming the foreign in order to enrich oneself. His model of linguistic hospitality eschews the theoretically untranslatable, so crucial to Derrida, in order to make room for the “practical” alternative of faithfulness and betrayal. As noted above, Ricœur posits a “principle of universal translatability” and this, I want to argue, is not in-dissociable from a principle of appropriation. What can be

understood can be taken home, what can be translated can be appropriated and thus universal translatability masks an (in principle) universal appropriability. For Ricœur, what motivates the welcoming act of translation is not reducible to either constraint or usefulness but is found rather in the desire to translate; “the *broadening* of the horizon of their own language – together with what they have all called formation, *Bildung*, that is to say both configuration and education, and as a bonus [...] the discovery of their own language.”⁵⁸ Translation allows the discovery of the self – but what are the ethics of this journey of self- discovery? Ricœur’s ethics of translation would seem to centre on the question of balancing pleasure – the “pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language” and the “pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home.”⁵⁹ But surely if we are to respect the alterity of the other what we need is not a balance between same and other but a situation of dissymmetry that is closer, perhaps, to the asymmetry of what Ricœur elsewhere calls the “forgiveness equation”; a disjunction between ownness and foreignness that is not simply bridged by translation but allowed to remain unbridgeable.

So why does Ricœur want to lose the theoretically untranslatable? What “threatens” Europe he claims is not “the triumph of one great cultural language as the sole instrument of communication; rather it is the danger of incommunicability through a protective withdrawal of each culture into its own linguistic tradition.”⁶⁰ This concern is similar to that around founding events which, as we have already seen, exercise an illegitimate control over collective memory, freezing cultural identities into a systematic “incommunicability.” This incommunicability of cultural identity is to be shaken up by a new invigorated and plural reading of the past. This threat of incommunicability is surely to be taken seriously on every level. A person who retreats entirely into themselves is lost in their own abyss. It is no co-incidence that the language of depression often echoes this sense of being cut-off, of being “stuck in one’s own head” of being “unable to get out of oneself.” Such isolation, such untranslatability, can lead eventually to destruction. At the social level, endogamous societies, such as the Samaritans, invariably disappear over time whereas exogamous societies flourish; genetic translation does indeed produce enrichment or expansion. Whether we take translation in its strict sense as between languages or in its broad sense as between cultures and people, total untranslatability surely marks the end of a language or a culture. The encounter with what is other and the transformative impact of this encounter is necessary to anything that can be described as having “life.” This is what Derrida aims at in describing translation as the survival of a text, its “living-on” in a transformed state. However, as noted above, Derrida claims a text is both translatable and untranslatable *at the same time*. And it is this tension of two things at once that creates a discomfort at the heart of Derrida’s model of translation – which is also, as in Ricœur, a model of hospitality and a model of mourning.

Ricœur’s reason for wanting to escape the untranslatable is not only due to the threat of isolation it carries, but also because of its implications. The idea of the untranslatable or the impossibility of translation between languages has its roots, claims Ricœur, on one side of a set of “ruinous alternatives.” On the one hand, if we travel the route of the Sapir and Whorf hypothesis, there is the claim that linguistic diversity reflects a radical heterogeneity between peoples. This is the idea that each language imposes a world view, or in Donald Davidson’s terms a “conceptual scheme,” which is so unique to the people who use it that translation simply cannot take place. Such an understanding, of course, passes over the very fact of translation – that it takes place all the time even between the most divergent languages such as Hopi and English. As Ricœur wryly

observes, in the absence of a theory of translation we may have to conclude, then, that “bilinguals are schizophrenics.”⁶¹

The alternative to this untranslatable/translatable impasse, which marks the theoretical approach, is to be found in acknowledging the fact of translation and proceeding from there. However, before Ricœur makes that move, he stops to consider the various attempts to establish a theoretical basis *for* translation. He notes that those who argue that translation is theoretically possible tend to rely on the notion of a “common fund.” This “common fund” is variously understood either as a prelapsarian original language, sought for in the hermetic traditions, or as a set of a priori codes which can be constructed along the lines of Leibniz’s universal lexicon of “simple ideas.” This alternative to the untranslatable – that is, a universal language that would provide the standard of all translations as the “third” text between source and target – fails and has to fail, argues Ricœur, for two crucial reasons. Firstly, because a “lexicon of simple ideas” presupposes a total equivalence between sign and thing; it does not allow for the space or mediation of language between speaker and world and the necessary arbitrariness and ambiguity that ensues. Secondly, and in a not unrelated vein “no one can say how the natural languages [...] could be derived from the supposed perfect language: the *gap* between the universal and empirical languages, between what is *a priori* and what is historical, certainly appears insurmountable.”⁶²

Thus far, Ricœur’s account is not so very far from Derrida’s. The emphasis on the necessity of mediation, the ensuing loss of total transparency and the subsequent abandoning of ideas of a “universal” language can all, I believe, find their echoes in Derrida’s own work. What I want to argue, however, is that although Ricœur gives up the untranslatable, and gives up the idea of a universal language, positing instead the idea of “an equivalence without identity,” he nonetheless falls into the trap of subsuming the other into the same and so undermines the ethical impetus behind the model of linguistic hospitality he wants to promote. How? I claim that he does so in two ways. On the one hand Ricœur, as noted above, follows his romantic precursors, Goethe, Herder, Schlegel and so on, in privileging the role of appropriation. In Ricœur’s case it is a matter of emphasizing “ownness” and integration. I am not claiming that Ricœur does so for the same reasons – that is for the creation of some sort of national culture – but that he does so nonetheless. Secondly, in viewing the untranslatable as something to be eschewed, something which might occur “intermittently” but which ultimately can be overcome, Ricœur ends up with a “relative” idea of the foreign. That is, Ricœur’s account does not allow for a radical foreign or other who would exceed one’s capacity to understand. While there may occasionally be failures to understand the other, an occasional untranslatability; these are merely incidental they are not inherent to the encounter with the other. This has implications for his models of hospitality and of mourning. In the next section I support these claims by contrasting Ricœur’s versions of these models with those of Derrida.

4. Hospitality, Mourning, and the Untranslatable

Ricœur draws on the Freudian concepts of the work [*Arbeit/travail*] of memory and work of mourning to describe the practice of translation. Translation, like the work of remembering, must go through the trial of resistance, a double resistance in fact. On the one hand the resistance of the mother tongue, its fear that in welcoming the other, in being subjected to the test [*l’épreuve*]

of the other, it itself will be forgotten.⁶³ On the other hand, there is the resistance of the source or departure language which challenges the translator in her initial approach to the text “as the presumption of non-translatability.”⁶⁴ This initial resistance of the foreign text to the work of the translator is, however, only fantastical for Ricœur;⁶⁵ once the work has begun the block of untranslatability gets chipped away. The translator then encounters only small segments of untranslatability which can be “worked through” in a creative betrayal leading to the “construction of the comparable.”⁶⁶

The work of mourning that falls to translation involves “giv[ing] up the ideal of the perfect translation.”⁶⁷ The promise of a perfect translation is the promise of some kind of literary absolute, found in the work of the German Romantics, which governs an approximation enterprise regenerating the target language and potentiating the source language.⁶⁸ This dream of a perfect translation has had its benefits, notes Ricœur; specifically in de-provincialising the mother tongue, forcing it to see itself as one language amongst many. The danger, however, in this promise of perfection is firstly an idea of “omni-translation” wherein all untranslatables would be erased. This, notes Ricœur, is a cosmo-political dream of a “rationality fully released from cultural constraints and community restrictions.”⁶⁹ The second danger is found in Benjamin’s “pure language;” that messianic promise at the heart of “The Task of the Translator.” These aims of perfect translation are married to the idea of translation as gain, a gain without any loss:

It is this very same gain without loss that we must mourn until we reach an acceptance of the impassable difference of the peculiar and the foreign. Recaptured universality would try to abolish the memory of the foreign and maybe the love of one’s own language, hating the mother tongue’s provincialism. Erasing its own history, the same universality would turn all who are foreign to it into language’s stateless persons, exiles who would have given up the search for the asylum afforded by a language of reception.⁷⁰

This account would seem to put paid to my argument that Ricœur falls into a kind of universalism. However, there is an emphasis in Ricœur on a movement of mutual appropriation, of mediation or balancing, a suggestion that ultimately “the agonistics that make a drama of the translator’s task” can eventually be overcome.⁷¹ He holds out the hope that, in mourning the idea of a perfect translation, we can open up a future happiness in linguistic hospitality. As noted above in the description of Ricœur’s second model of integration, that is the “exchange of memories,” Ricœur seems to favour a successful work of mourning over a failed one. Of course, this does not mean Ricœur is committed to a fixed translation, but rather that he can find happiness in any translation regardless of its unfinished status. For Ricœur, the necessity to “retranslate after the translator” produces a successful process of recollection and mourning; rather than a melancholy or mania.⁷² Translation is arduous, Ricœur seems to say, but that doesn’t mean it is impossible. Untranslatableness is never “so radical that translation has to be declared impossible in principle.”⁷³ An aporia such as translation or memory faithful to the past may pose “a genuine difficulty to thought” but never “an impasse” as such.⁷⁴ Even where the issue of the untranslatable is tackled head on, in the last of Ricœur’s essays on translation, even there the impasse, the untranslatable is worked through; comparables are constructed from the level of culture, to discourse, to text, to sentence. In this downward shrinking trajectory the translator finds a way through.

In contrast to this difficult but possible work, Derrida poses the challenge of thinking two things at once and it is here, I think, that we can supplement Ricœur. We can say yes to all that Ricœur offers while simply adding one more thing – the constant discomfort, the irresolvable disquietude of a failed mourning rather than the happiness of a successful one. This failed mourning is intimately linked with the gesture of hospitality. Derrida gives the example of certain Mexican cultures wherein it is traditional to welcome the guest to one's home with tears, to cry at the arrival of the other. The reason for this strange rite of hospitality is that newcomers are considered to be ghosts of the dead coming back and as such are to be greeted with tears of mourning.⁷⁵ I want to claim that if we are using translation as an ethical model of how to relate to the other person, of how to in some way deal with the fact of our diversity – which seems to be what Ricœur wants to do – then we have to take seriously Derrida's challenge to think translatable and untranslatable at the same time. Under the rubric of this challenge I would claim that it is precisely to the untranslatable in every other – text, language, culture, person [*autrui*] – that we must be hospitable. This is what makes absolute hospitality impossible, uncomfortable and interminable. Because we can never succeed in welcoming that which exceeds us, our welcoming is thus also always and already a failed mourning: "I speak of mourning as the attempt, always doomed to fail (thus a constitutive failure, precisely), to incorporate, interiorize introject, subjectivize the other in me [...] a mourning that is moreover impossible."⁷⁶

To a certain extent it seems as though Ricœur's position converges here with that of Derrida. If we go back to the former's "models of integration" we remember that those models involved a constant retelling of narrative identities through which sedimented features and broken promises of the past could be released to a new future of forgiveness. Certainly Ricœur does not claim that narrative identity is fixed or stable, rather it is mobile and flexible changing over time through encounters and entanglements with various others. However, this interminability is not Derrida's impossible. It is not simply the case for Derrida that we can "always say the same thing differently" so that the other's narrative (or our own) can be simply retold over and over. Derrida goes further by claiming that in this retelling there remains an untranslatable "kernel" that we *never* even approach. Because this untranslatable remains, the desire to retranslate is born. Derrida offers a "dogmatic syllogism" on his understanding of translation: "1. Quasi-parricide is the condition of translation; 2. Translation always and only translates the untranslatable; 3. Therefore quasi-parricide remains the condition of the translation of the untranslatable."⁷⁷

I propose that the untranslatable is what remains *arrivant*, still to come, in the other, that which escapes our horizon of expectation. In every other there remains this arrivant, this remainder that escapes our appropriation. In the relation with the other we are in the double bind of what Derrida terms "ex-appropriation": of giving oneself over to the other *and* of taking the other into oneself without obliterating their alterity. This is the very condition of originary mourning. To remember the dead is to keep them alive in one's own self, but to appropriate them and hence erase their otherness is to be unfaithful. To forget the dead, however, to not appropriate them, is equally unfaithful for it is to deny their living-on. Mourning thus is a "constitutive failure."⁷⁸ Yet, this mourning does not wait for the so-called "actual" death. We mourn in the welcoming of the Other because, as with a translation, we are doomed to failure – we can never fully welcome or finish welcoming. A translation can only translate the untranslatable; if something was simply translatable it would have no need for translation. Once

a translation takes place, the untranslatable remains (the impossible haunts the possible) but its untranslatable-ness is now hidden. Every translation begins in failure because it cannot succeed in carrying over all that a text may say; each accomplished translation (if we can ever say that a translation is accomplished or finished) manically mourns its loss.

The loss mourned for is not only what it could not “carry across” but is also the untranslatable itself. Of course another untranslatable emerges as soon as another text emerges – the translation which also demands further translation has its own untranslatable. The untranslatable itself as *arrivant* lives-on. In our relation with the other we attempt to translate them; appropriate them, take them home, offer them welcome, understand them. But they remain untranslatable; the *arrivant* is always yet to come even in its return. As such we mourn not only the other’s death (to come) but also we mourn what we cannot welcome, what remains absolutely other. It is this caveat that I find missing in Ricœur – this discomfort of Derrida’s double bind.

The issue of translation then as a “quasi-parricide” is crucial. Within the narrow understanding of translation as transposition of one language into another (and all the complications even this narrow understanding entails) a translation *quasiment* kills its parents. There comes to mind an initial straightforward way of reading this claim. A translation comes *after* the “original,” like a child *after* its parents. A translation takes (its) life from the parent-original and lives-on after the death of its parent. Yet the term “quasi-parricide” is richer and more ambiguous than this, the “*qua si*,” the “as if” must be read with all its force. “Translation is an *as if* (quasi-) parricide,” which is to say that it is not a parricide, is not a “murder” but merely appears as such, or we could say it is an “almost” murder, not quite a murder, perhaps an unfinished (or unfinishable) murder. Yet the question then is who is “as if murdered”? “Parricide” is the *cidium*, the killing, of a *parus*, a relative. A translation then “as if, almost, kills a relative” and we could think of this “relative” as the other language. In this way a translation looks *as if* it kills the other language or text, yet it does not *in fact* do so. Rather a translation is a text’s very survival.

I would like to rephrase Derrida’s dogmatic syllogism on translation so that it is made to address the relation with the Other: 1. Almost/as if killing the other is the condition of the relation to the other 2. The relation to the other always and only relates to the *arrivant* (the untranslatable) in the other and 3. Therefore *almost/as if* killing the other remains the condition of the relation to the *arrivant* in the other. As we saw, this is in a way what Derrida calls originary mourning; the constitutive failure, the double bind of ex-appropriation. The relation to the other as translating is to appropriate the other and hence to *almost* erase, to *as if* murder, their alterity; yet their alterity, is precisely that which we cannot “murder” or appropriate. The untranslatable, is that which *remains*. Remains to come and remains to come back; the *arrivant*, the untranslatable, is always a *revenant*.

Conclusion

Finally, to return to where we started with Ricœur and the models for a new Europe, what does the supplement of untranslatability or the failure of appropriation bring to Ricœur’s account? It seems to me that by disrupting models of integration with the fact of failure we can introduce an ethical discomfort that prevents us settling into a kind of complacency. I wish to be

very clear that I am not claiming that this complacency is what Ricœur posits. In fact in many senses Ricœur warns against this complacency precisely in his insistence that translation is never finished and must always begin again; hence the desire to retranslate. Furthermore, Ricœur explicitly links justice itself to the need to mourn the perfect translation.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, my claim is that Ricœur's account *could* lead to this complacency; that if we follow these models of integration we might think that we will reach success and that in thinking we have succeeded to understand the other – in their language or their narrative or even in their suffering – we might stop trying to understand future others. My claim is that today, as Europe faces yet another series of crises, it must not fall into the easy position of welcoming what is other only for its own enrichment. Rather, Europe must remain vigilant to its own unavoidable failures. If the model of translation offers us something in terms of re-conceiving European institutions, it must be on the basis of that which exceeds – the untranslatable.

- ¹ Richard Kearney "Ricœur's Philosophy of Translation" in Paul Ricœur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan, (New York: Routledge, 2006), vii-xx.
- ² Paul Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," trans. Eileen Brennan, in Richard Kearney (ed.) *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action* (London: Sage, 1996), 3-13.
- ³ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 3.
- ⁴ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 3-4.
- ⁵ Bernhard Waldenfels, "The Other and the Foreign" in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, (London: Sage, 1996), 111-124. Waldenfels' phrase is "In the end there remains only a foreignness *de facto*, not *de jure*" (119). Similarly, Ricœur claims: "Translation is *de facto*; translatability is *de jure*." "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 4.
- ⁶ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 4-5.
- ⁷ Paul Ricœur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 36.
- ⁸ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 5. See also Paul Ricœur "Introduction," in Paul Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1-41, 30: "Beyond the technical means used to reduce the difficulties encountered by interpreters better or worse trained for the work of translation, there is the spirit of translation consisting in transporting oneself into the sphere of meaning of the foreign language and in welcoming the other's discourse into the sphere of the target language."
- ⁹ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 7.
- ¹⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 79.
- ¹¹ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 8-9.
- ¹² Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 9.
- ¹³ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 10.
- ¹⁴ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 479-80.
- ¹⁵ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 477-8. In this Ricœur comes very close to Levinas's reading of "political significance" as that which ruptures the political order – see in particular Emmanuel Levinas, *L'au-delà du verset*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1982), 222-228.
- ¹⁶ Ricœur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe," 12.
- ¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life That is to Say...*, trans. Laurent Milesi & Stefan Herbrechter, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 6.
- ¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," trans. Lawrence Venuti, in *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 27, No.2, 2001, 174-200. This was originally a conference presentation at the 1998 *Quinzièmes Assises de la Traduction Littéraire à Arles* (ATLAS).

- ¹⁹ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 178.
- ²⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," trans. Joseph F. Graham, in Joseph F. Graham (ed.) *Difference in Translation* (London & New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165-207, 165-172.
- ²¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, trans. Avital Ronell & Peggy Kamuf, (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 120.
- ²² Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 176.
- ²³ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 183.
- ²⁴ This is a claim often repeated by Derrida throughout his work. In his most autobiographical of writings *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), Derrida claims, "In a sense, nothing is untranslatable; but *in another sense*, everything is untranslatable; translation is another name for the impossible," 57. Elsewhere is discussing translation as the necessary "living on" of every text he notes: "A text lives only if it lives *on* [*sur-vit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable (always 'at once... and': *hama*, at the 'same' time)," Jacques Derrida, "Living On /Borderlines," trans. James Hulbert, in Harold Bloom *et al.*, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004 [1979]), 62-142, 83.
- ²⁵ Simon Critchley and Tom McCarthy, in a slightly different reading of the play (though still drawing on Derridean ideas) argue that the play illustrates the Aristotelian distinction between two types of economy. On the one hand a "proper" economy of the household or *oikos* which would be understood as a good, that is to say, finite or limited economy which seeks only what is necessary for the household to live well – the *oikonomia* of Antonio. And on the other hand, an illusory or indefinite economy based on the infinite exchangeability of goods through the introduction of money (*to chrema*) – the *techne chrematisike* of Shylock. See Critchley & McCarthy, "Universal Shylockery: Money and Morality in The Merchant of Venice," *Diacritics* vol.34, no.1, 2004, 3-17. See in particular 7 and 13-14.
- ²⁶ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 184.
- ²⁷ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 185.
- ²⁸ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 186.
- ²⁹ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 192: "the experience of forgiveness is an experience of 'power', of the 'power-to-forgive'." Derrida also plays with the term "grace" as "mercy" or 'forgiveness': "the fact that great people are often called Your Grace or Your Gracious Majesty clearly underscores the power we are discussing here."
- ³⁰ Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, 31.

- ³¹ Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, in particular 12-27. Derrida discusses the manner in which he was both a guest of the French language but also taken hostage by it and forced therefore to play the role of the coloniser. Enforced translation was also at the heart of the 1539 Villers-Cotterêts decree which made French (rather than Latin) the language of the law. Ricœur sees only something positive in the elevation of Europe's "vernacular languages from the village setting" initially to Latin and then no doubt to "French." See Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, 28-9. Derrida, on the other hand, recognises the extent to which this translation was quite literally the death of provincial languages. See Jacques Derrida, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. Jan Plug & Others, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 11-14.
- ³² Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice* [MV] 4.1.180-3, cited in Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 191.
- ³³ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 191.
- ³⁴ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 193.
- ³⁵ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 191. n.5, 193.
- ³⁶ Kathleen Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation*, (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2001), 50.
- ³⁷ Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 66. See also Derrida, "Living on/Borderlines," 95 where Derrida notes that unreadability "is not the opposite of the readable but rather the ridge that also gives it momentum."
- ³⁸ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 194. This idea of inter-faith translation is taken up by Richard Kearney who argues, against Jürgen Habermas, that it is in discovering what is different in one religion (rather than what is the same) that the uniqueness of one's own religion truly comes to light. Indeed Kearney argues "at the root of every translation between self and stranger, within or without, there remains that 'untranslatable kernel,' that irreducible alterity that resists complete assimilation into a home whose doors could finally be closed." See Richard Kearney "Translating Across Faith Cultures: Radical Hospitality," in Kemp, Peter & Noriko Hashimoto (eds.) *Eco-ethica*, Vol.3, 2014, 145-156. Nonetheless, Kearney's motivation here remains, in a certain sense, self-illumination as in Ricœur. I would like to argue for an encounter with the other that cannot be reduced to a journey of self-discovery, but is rather the interruption of such a journey by a radical untranslatability.
- ³⁹ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 195.
- ⁴⁰ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 196.
- ⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 69-108.
- ⁴² Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 196.

- ⁴³ Jacques Derrida "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 327-350.
- ⁴⁴ Alan Bass in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 43, n.15.
- ⁴⁵ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 198.
- ⁴⁶ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 199-200.
- ⁴⁷ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 197.
- ⁴⁸ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 197.
- ⁴⁹ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 198.
- ⁵⁰ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 199.
- ⁵¹ Derrida, "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?," 199.
- ⁵² Antoine Berman *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, trans. S. Heyvaert, (New York: SUNY Press, 1992). See also Derrida's reference to this work in his short essay "Theology of Translation" which he describes as a "supplement" to Berman's text. Here Derrida stages a contrast between Kant and Schelling on the place of philosophy in the university and the challenge of translation between the universal and the particular. Jacques Derrida, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, 64-80.
- ⁵³ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 19.
- ⁵⁴ Johann Gottfried Herder, "Fragments on Recent German Literature (1767-8)," trans. Michael N. Forster, in Michael N. Forster (ed.), *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33-65. Herder's phrase in full: "What great advantages would not inevitably accrue to our language if it learned to mold [*sic.*] itself to the Greek and Latin languages as far as possible and showed its flexibility to the public's eyes!," 38.
- ⁵⁵ The translations are praised by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the preface to his own translation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and the "foreignizing" strategy they employ is also praised by Goethe in the *West-Eastern Divan*. Interestingly, they inspired Hölderlin's ill-received translation of Sophocles which was vehemently attacked by Voss's son Heinrich (though it was later praised by Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin).
- ⁵⁶ *The Critique of Pure Reason* was published the same year as Voss's *Odyssey* (1781, second edition 1787), followed closely by the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and the *Critique of Judgement* (1790). For more on this idea of the German "translation" of the French Revolution see Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) in particular, 8-25.
- ⁵⁷ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 109.

- ⁵⁸ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 21.
- ⁵⁹ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 10.
- ⁶⁰ Ricœur "A New Ethos for Europe," 4.
- ⁶¹ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 15.
- ⁶² Ricœur, *On Translation*, 17.
- ⁶³ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 4-5.
- ⁶⁴ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 5.
- ⁶⁵ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 5.
- ⁶⁶ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 37.
- ⁶⁷ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 8. See also *Reflections on the Just*, 31.
- ⁶⁸ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 8.
- ⁶⁹ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 9.
- ⁷⁰ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 9.
- ⁷¹ Ricœur, *On Translation*, 10.
- ⁷² By way of contrast, the simultaneity of the translatable/untranslatable produces a "manic mourning" for Derrida, wherein the translation conceals the untranslatable so that it "moves on" so to speak by repressing the memory of what it has lost (i.e. the untranslatable). The relation between mania and language itself is a recurrent theme in Derrida. See for example *Monolingualism of the Other*, n.9, 78-93, in particular 84-90 where Derrida, in a commentary on Arendt's relation to the German language, discusses the idea of mania and maternal languages.
- ⁷³ Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, 24.
- ⁷⁴ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 494.
- ⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," trans. by Gila Walker, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.33, No.2, Winter 2007, 441-461, 453.
- ⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Points*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 321.
- ⁷⁷ Derrida, *H.C. for Life That is to Say..*, 6.
- ⁷⁸ Derrida, *Points*, 321.
- ⁷⁹ Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, 31: "What is more, the tie to the idea of justice is perhaps most concealed, but strongest, in renouncing the dream of a perfect translation."