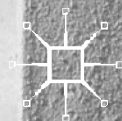


**DERRIDA, THE  
SUBJECT AND  
THE OTHER**

*Surviving, Translating,  
and the Impossible*

**LISA FORAN**



# Derrida, the Subject and the Other

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Surviving, Translating, and the Impossible

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# Contents

<b>Introduction: From Translation to Translating</b>	1
<b>The Saying of Heidegger</b>	13
<b>The Unsayings of Levinas</b>	59
<b>Derrida: Life and Death at the Same Time</b>	117
<b>Derrida and Translation</b>	159
<b>The Impossible</b>	215
<b>Conclusion: Sur-Viving Translating</b>	257
<b>Bibliography</b>	261
<b>Index</b>	273

# List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations reference the texts I cite most often. References to works by Heidegger in German cite the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA) editions, except for *Sein und Zeit* where, as standard, references are made to the original German edition or ‘H’ pagination (whose page numbers are also included in the *Gesamtausgabe* edition of the text, GA2). Throughout, the abbreviation will be followed by the original language page number and secondly by the page number of the English language translation (where available). Other works by these authors which I only cite occasionally appear in the full bibliography at the end of the book.

## Works Authored by Martin Heidegger

- BH ‘Brief über den Humanismus’. In *Wegmarken* (GA 9). Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976. pp. 313–64. Trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi, ‘Letter on Humanism’. In David Farrell Krell (ed.) *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings*. London: Routledge, 2011. pp. 147–81.
- FT ‘Die Frage nach der Technik’. In *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (GA 7). Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000. pp. 5–36. Trans. by William Lovitt, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’.

- In David Farrell Krell (ed.) *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings*. London: Routledge, 2011. pp. 217–38.
- GA 11 *Identität und Differenz*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006. Trans. by Joan Stambaugh, *Identity and Difference*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- GA 12 *Unterwegs Zur Sprache*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985. Trans. by Peter D. Hertz, *On the Way to Language*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- GA 54 *Parmenides*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1982. Trans. by André Schuwer & Richard Rojcewicz, *Parmenides*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- SA ‘Der Spruch des Anaximander’. In *Holzwege* (GA 5). Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977. pp. 321–73. Trans. by David Farrell Krell & Frank A. Capuzzi, ‘The Anaximander Fragment’ in *Early Greek Thinking*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. pp. 13–58.
- SZ *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927. (7th edition) Trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009.

## Works Authored by Emmanuel Levinas

- AQE *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*. Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2010. Trans. By Alphonso Lingis, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.
- EPP *Éthique comme philosophie première*. Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 1998. Trans. By Seán Hand & Michael Temple, ‘Ethics as First Philosophy’. In Seán Hand (ed.) *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989. pp. 75–87.
- TdA ‘La trace de l'autre’. In *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Paris: Vrin, 1994. pp. 187–202.
- TI *Totalité et infini*. Paris: Le Livre de de Poche, 2011. Trans. by Alphonso Lingis, *Totality and Infinity*. Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969.



## Works Authored by Jacques Derrida

- Adieu *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1997.
- Apories *Apories: Mourir – s'attendre aux « limites de la vérité »*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996. Trans. by Thomas Dutoit, *Aporias: Dying – awaiting (one another at) the “limits of truth”*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Apprendre *Apprendre à vivre enfin*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2005. Trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas, *Learning to Live Finally, The Last Interview*. Hampshire & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007.
- Dénégations ‘Comment ne pas parler, Dénégations’. In *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987. pp. 535–95. Trans. by Ken Frieden, ‘How to Avoid Speaking: Denials’. In Budick, Sanford & Iser, Wolfgang (eds.) *Languages of the Unsayable, The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. pp. 3–70.
- DG *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967. Trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Diss. *La Dissémination*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972. Trans. by Barbara Johnson, *Dissemination*. London & New York: Continuum, 2004.
- DTB ‘Des Tours de Babel’. In Graham, Joseph F. (ed.) *Difference in Translation*. London & New York: Cornell University Press, 1985. pp. 209–48. Trans. by Joseph F. Graham, ‘Des Tours de Babel’. In Joseph F. Graham (ed.) *Difference in Translation*. London & New York: Cornell University Press, 1985. pp. 165–207.
- ED *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1967. Trans. by Alan Bass, *Writing and Difference*. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Intro. *Introduction à ‘L'Origine de la géométrie’ de Husserl*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962. Trans. by John P. Leavey Jr. *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry An Introduction by Jacques Derrida*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

## xii List of Abbreviations

- L'événement 'Une Certaine possibilité impossible de dire l'événement'. In Derrida, Jacques; Nouss, Alexis and Soussana, Gad *Dire l'événement, est-ce possible?: Séminaire de Montréal pour Jacques Derrida*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001. pp. 79–112. Trans. by Gila Walker, 'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event'. In *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.33, No.2, Winter 2007, pp. 441–61.
- M *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972. Trans. by Alan Bass, *Margins of Philosophy*. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982.
- Mono. *Le monolinguisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996. Trans. by Patrick Mensah, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prothesis of Origin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- OA *L'oreille de l'autre otobiographies, transferts, traductions*. Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1982. Trans. by Avital Ronell & Peggy Kamuf, *The Ear of the Other*. New York: Schocken Books, 1985.
- Points *Points de suspension, Entretiens*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1992. Trans. by Peggy Kamuf & others, *Points... Interviews, 1974–1994*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Pos. *Positions*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972. Trans. by Alan Bass, *Positions*. London: The Athlone Press, 1981.
- Relevant 'Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction 'relevante'? In *Quinzièmes Assises de la Traduction Littéraire Arles 1998*. Arles: Actes Sud, 1999. pp. 21–48. Trans. by Lawrence Venuti, 'What is a 'Relevant' Translation?' In *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2001, pp. 174–200.
- SN *Sauf le nom*. Paris: Galilée, 1993. Trans. by John P. Leavey Jr., 'Sauf le nom'. In *On the Name*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. pp. 35–85.
- Spectres *Spectres de Marx*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993. Trans. by Peggy Kamuf, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. New York & London: Routledge, 2006.
- Survivre 'Survivre: journal de bord'. In *Parages*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986. pp. 117–218. Trans. by James Hulbert, 'Living On / Borderlines'. In Bloom, Harold; de Man, Paul; Derrida, Jacques; Hartman, Geoffrey H. and Miller, J. Hillis *Deconstruction and Criticism*. London & New York: Continuum, 2004. pp. 62–142.

- Transfert      ‘Transfert *ex cathedra*: le langage et les institutions philosophiques’. In *Du Droit à la philosophie*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1990. pp. 283–394. Trans. by Jan Plug & others ‘Transfer Ex Cathedra: Language and Institutions of Philosophy’. In *Eyes of the University, Right to Philosophy 2*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. pp. 1–80.
- VP              *La voix et le phénomène*. Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1993. Trans. by David B. Allison, *Speech and Phenomena*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

# Introduction: From Translation to Translating

The initial idea for this book arose from the experience of living in different countries and languages. Living ‘in translation’ can produce a strange liberation by alienation. Speaking in a second language creates a sense of freedom and discovery whereby new ways of expressing the world are opened up which also opens up new worlds. Accompanying this is a sense of being able to discover oneself through these new experiences, as though the light of what is foreign or other can illuminate hidden recesses of oneself. Perhaps this is because there is an impression of escaping the shackles of what is expected of oneself in one’s home culture or ‘mother tongue’. ‘*Tromper la surveillance*,’ Jacques Derrida terms it: ‘eluding the watchful eye of some monitor, in order to tell the truth.’<sup>1</sup> Words in a second language which seem to reveal something ‘new’ in the world can thus seem more ‘true’. We often don’t notice our ‘own’ language, the strange idioms where history’s ghost can live, whereas idioms of a second tongue can seem to resound with truth and wonder. In discussing translation, Maurice Blanchot describes this as the sensation that ‘words need a certain ignorance to keep their power of revelation.’<sup>2</sup> Yet there is also, paradoxically, a sense of fiction that seems to permeate this experience, as though the words of a second language are both more ‘true’ while at the

same time not being 'real'. Words in another language seem to apply to the other or second country and not to one's home. There can be a feeling of living in a state of suspension when one lives in another country, as if 'real life' were paused and would begin again on the return home.

All of these curious and vague ideas revolve around the linguistic construction of identity and alterity. In Ireland, 'my' country, the relations between language and identity are particularly complex. Few Irish nationals speak the Irish language *Gaeilge*. Ireland is one of very few post-colonial countries that lost its mother tongue so completely. 'I only have one language, yet it is not mine'<sup>3</sup> says Derrida of his relation to the French language; the same could be said for the vast majority of Irish nationals who speak the English language as their mother tongue. Speaking a language that belongs to another country, but having no other language in which to speak, produces a sense of distantiating—the feeling of living in someone else's home and a homesickness for somewhere you've never been. A desire to put philosophical flesh on these skeletal (not to mention subjective) impressions motivated this book and its central questions: can we speak of subject and other as 'constructed'? If so, what role does language play in this construction? Do subject and other relate as languages in a play of mutually constructive translation? If so, what are the ethical implications of that exchange?

The practice of translation is of course as old as the history of languages. Insofar as it seeks to make an unintelligible meaning intelligible, it forms part of the history of hermeneutics. While hermeneutics as a discipline may only have arisen in the post-Kantian atmosphere of Romantic Germany, its roots reach back across antiquity. 'Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken.'<sup>4</sup> Aristotle's description of language as the clothing of inner mental experience in many senses offers a neat summation of the dominant approach to translation for many centuries. As Jean Grondin has pointed out, the Greek understanding of saying as *hermeneuein* or 'interpreting' arises from the notion of language as a translation of the soul's thoughts. Expression or *hermeneia* 'is simply the logos comprehended in words.'<sup>5</sup> *Hermeneuein* then, as the interpretation of those words, is the process of mediating external signs inwards towards the 'inside' of meaning. Translation, as the transformation of

a word in one language into a word in another language, would follow much the same path as a general *hermeneuein*. The meaning, the inner logos or thought (*dianoia*) could change its 'outer' clothing as simply as one changes a coat.

The occasional commentary on translation found in the works of Roman orators and unnamed grammarians, stages translation as a choice between two opposites. Faced with a text in Greek, a Latin scholar, in the later words of St. Jerome following Cicero, should proceed: '*non verbum e verbo sed sensum de sensu*'—'not word for word but sense for sense.'<sup>6</sup> Yet these Roman commentators and their early Christian counterparts in many senses follow the Greek approach to language in that the transposition of meaning is considered a simple dissociation of signifier from signified—whether that be at the level of the word or the broader level of the phrase. What is distinct in St. Jerome, and also in the commentary of Augustine, is the question of divine inspiration. Provided the translator proceed in faith, her words are guaranteed by the presence of the divine logos. While the Reformation placed interpretation and translation at the centre of the European stage, the resultant theories of translation remained largely confined to biblical exegesis. Although Wilhelm Dilthey claims that the Reformation led to the birth of hermeneutics in its Romantic form, Grondin argues that the influence of the Church fathers was far greater than often thought 'so that this pivotal period is much less revolutionary than the classic history of hermeneutics, itself indebted to Protestant theology, would suggest.'<sup>7</sup> Through the Reformation debates, the question of translation, or more broadly interpretation, centred on the relation to a transcendental divine spirit which made itself present in the transformation of words. Moreover, for many centuries translation was concerned with the transfer of meaning from one text to another, from one said to another said. My interest here is the movement of translation towards its own limit; towards the unsaid, unsayable and untranslatable.

The first step of this movement, propelled by a conflux of historical and philosophical forces, was taken by Eighteenth Century German speakers. German speaking 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, translators working in German

endeavoured to make the foreign as obvious as possible. Johann Gottfried Herder advocated ‘bending’ German itself to a foreign strain in order to accrue ‘great advances’ to the German language.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> They ushered in an openness to translation as a possibility of transformation—not of the foreign text but of the German language itself. Such a view of translation as linguistic enrichment marks the move away from the separation of language and thought towards an understanding of thinking as inherently linguistic. As Lawrence Venuti phrases it ‘language is conceived, not as expressing thought and meaning transparently, but as shaping them according to linguistic structures and cultural traditions which are in turn shaped by language use.’<sup>10</sup> Between Voss’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Immanuel Kant’s three critiques appeared; 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). The seismic shift in thinking that ensued evidently led to a radical re-evaluation of language and translation, although this was by no means immediate.

Kant’s phenomena/noumena distinction introduced both an emancipation and a limitation of reason. On the one hand, the projection of a finite subject’s categories upon the world of experience is what makes that world and the experience of it possible. On the other hand of course, the world as it is experienced is not the world as it is in itself. The disjunction introduced by Kant made way for the philosophical hermeneutics of the twentieth century via its romantic precursors of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Grondin describes post-Kantian philosophy as unfolding along two different paths: speculative idealism and hermeneutics. While these may well not have been in line with Kant’s own ambitions, they nonetheless emerge from an interpretative, that is to say hermeneutic, engagement with the latter’s thinking. It is in Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s response to Kant that we can find the beginnings of a shift in the direction of the unsaid; the concern of post-Heideggerian philosophical hermeneutics as it is found in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur.<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally understanding was considered ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ so that a method of hermeneutics was considered requisite only in the