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TRANSLATION AS GENESIS

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Translation of literature is generally understood as a copy of an original. As such, it finds itself compared negatively to the original; judged and found lacking either the style or meaning of the original text it was seeking to translate. However, this paper will explore the relationship between the text and its translation through the work of Jacques Derrida and his neologisms such as the supplement and *différance* in addition to the work of Walter Benjamin. Through understanding the translation as a supplement, this paper will explore whether the original text was complete in and of itself. Through this and Derrida's understanding of the play of language, I argue that translation can be understood as the palingenesis of literature, as it is only through translation that literature is reborn and lives on. Moreover, this paper will conclude with an examination of Blanchot's distinction between the Book and the book in order to argue that literature is in itself a form of translation. Thus, the relationship between translation and literature is one of a cycle of genesis and palingenesis, as translation finds itself at both the beginning and continual rebirth of literature.

La traduzione letteraria viene generalmente intesa come la copia di un originale. In quanto tale essa viene considerata negativamente in rapporto a quest'ultimo, giudicata manchevole quanto a stile o contenuto rispetto al testo originale che cerca di tradurre. Questo articolo intende esaminare la relazione tra il testo e la sua traduzione attraverso l'opera di Jacques Derrida e i suoi neologismi, come supplemento e *différance*, e sulla scorta degli studi di Walter Benjamin. Considerando la traduzione come un supplemento, l'articolo indaga se l'originale sia completo in e di per se stesso. Attraverso questo concetto e la prospettiva di Derrida sul gioco del linguaggio, la tesi sostenuta è che la traduzione possa essere considerata come palingenesi della letteratura, dal momento che è solo attraverso la traduzione che la letteratura rinasce e continua a vivere. Infine, l'articolo si conclude con un esame della distinzione di Blanchot tra Libro e libro al fine di sostenere che la letteratura è già in sé una forma di traduzione. Pertanto, il rapporto tra traduzione e letteratura si configura come un ciclo di genesi e palingenesi, nel quale la traduzione si trova tanto al cominciamento quanto nel continuo rinascere della letteratura.

There are numerous theories, conceptualisations and arguments of origin at play in Western theories of translation, not least the relationship between the original and the translation. In philosophical and theological discourses, the origin becomes a binary of an ideal beginning before a corruption, as evident in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's claim: «Everything is good as it leaves the hand of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man».¹ Lawrence Venuti highlights one key issue with the concerns of the perception of the original as ideal.² The concern for Venuti is the tendency in Western translation theory to conceive of both the translator and the translation as secondary to the original in terms of status and importance. While his argument reduces translation theory to a single understanding, which Venuti argues as common across translation theories, the majority of translation theories can be understood as perpetuating the binary of original and translation, regardless of whether translation is understood as beneficial or negative, possible or impossible.

The original is conceived as complete in itself with the translation developing upon or adding to the work of the original. Yet, for Venuti, the translation is a result of a lack

1 JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, *Emile, or On Education*, New York, Basic Books, 1979, p. 37.

2 LAWRENCE VENUTI, *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*, Abingdon/New York, Routledge, 2008.

in the original, specifically the lack of being comprehended by those who do not know the language. According to Venuti, this creates a dualism:

On the one hand, translation is defined as a second-order representation: only the foreign can be original, an authentic copy [...]. On the other hand, translation is required to efface its second-order status with the effect of transparency, producing the illusion of authorial presence whereby the translated text can be taken as the original.³

This conceptualisation of an ideal origin is a key influence in the history of translation studies, especially in religious translation, as evident in the debate between Thomas More and William Tyndale, over how best to respect the word of the Christian Bible. In debating the correct method to best faithfully reproduce the original, these translation theories perpetuate the concept of an ideal origin, in that they understand the original as the most correct version. This concept of origin is evident in the debates captured in Robinson's anthology⁴ as well as throughout Paul's account of the history of Biblical translation.⁵ The constant issue that underpins these two contrasting approaches, word-for-word or sense-for-sense, is that there is a correct meaning that is present in or through the text; in the case of religious translation what is present is a sacred word, which is the word God spoke during creation.

On one hand there are those theorists who wish to translate sense-for-sense in order that the Bible is more readable to lay people and thus more easily understood. While on the other hand are those who see the individual words themselves as the word of God and thus should not be altered. Gregory Martin exemplifies this second approach when he writes:

And this of all other is the most fine and subtle treachery against the scriptures, to deceive the ignorant readers withal, when they give them for God's word, and under the name of God's word, their own words, and not God's, forged and framed, altered and changed⁶

The theological understanding of the origin of the text stems from notion of divine *speech*, the word of God, which Edward Greenstein⁷ notes is used in Western metaphysics to create a stable centre upon which the meaning of the text is built.

Similar to the religious translation theories, theories that explore translating poetry are framed by the debate between word-for-word and sense-for-sense. However, in this case it becomes an argument that questions whether the words chosen by the poet are pivotal, viz-a-viz the feel and flow of the poem itself. Regardless of whether theorists conceive of poetic translation as possible or not, they ascribe an aesthetic quality as being

³ *Ivi*, p. 6.

⁴ DOUGLAS ROBINSON (ed.), *Western Translation Theory. From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, Manchester, St. Jerome, 2002.

⁵ WILLIAM E. PAUL, *English Language Bible Translators*, London, McFarland, 2003.

⁶ GREGORY MARTIN, *Five Sundry Abuses or Corruptions of Holy Scripture*, in *Western Translation Theory. From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, ed. by Douglas Robinson, Manchester, St. Jerome, 2002, p. 121.

⁷ EDWARD GREENSTEIN, *Deconstruction and Biblical Narrative*, in «Prooftexts», IX (2009), pp. 43-71, p. 53.

present in the work, in a manner similar to that with the hermeneutic translation theories focused on earlier. The division between translation theories that focus on poetry takes on similar dimensions to the one in religious translation, which was occupied with literal versus sense, as both focus on which translation style is most relevant. However, the debate on poetic translation is further constrained by the issue of whether translation of poetry is possible, as they understand a certain 'spirit' of the original much like that of the hermeneutic position. This debate leads theorists to conclude that this spirit of the original disrupts traditional (word-for-word) translation, arguing that translation of poetry is both impossible and incredibly important.⁸ Schopenhauer explains this further, explaining that «[p]oems cannot be translated; they can only be transposed, and that is always awkward».⁹

One of the most famous theorists to explore the effect of translation on poetry is John Dryden, who describes translation practice into three approaches: metaphrase (translating word-by-word or line-by-line), paraphrase (translation with latitude on the part of the translator), and imitation (in which the translator seeks to write the poem again as if the original author had written in that language). In this we can see the influence of the theorists mentioned earlier, with the continued importance or centrality of the debate between word for word and sense for sense. In describing the third way, translation as imitation, Dryden notes that it is not an attempt to translate the words or even the sense of the original poet, but «to write, as he supposes that author would have done, had he lived in our age, and in our country».¹⁰ Of these three ways of translating, Dryden notes that to translate through metaphrasing, that is by doing a word for word translation, is the most difficult, as it is «almost impossible to translate verbally, and well, at the same time».¹¹ John Denham echoes this when he writes that the most vulgar error a translator can commit is by being a 'Fidus Interpretes' or faithful translator.¹² The importance of this imitation for Dryden, especially in the field of poetry, is evident as he continues: «[a] translator that would write with any force or spirit of an original must never dwell on the words of his author [...] whereas he who copies word for word loses all the spirit in the tedious transfusion».¹³

Octavio Paz¹⁴ and Yves Bonnefoy¹⁵ continue the position of free imitation in order

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- 8 JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET, *The Misery and the Splendor of Translation*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 108-109.
- 9 ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER, *On Language and Words*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 33.
- 10 JOHN DRYDEN, *On Translation*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 19.
- 11 *Ivi*, p. 18.
- 12 JOHN DENHAM, *Preface to The Destruction of Troy*, in *Western Translation Theory. From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, ed. by Douglas Robinson, Manchester, St. Jerome, 2002, p. 156.
- 13 DRYDEN, *On Translation*, cit., p. 31.
- 14 OCTAVIO PAZ, *Translation. Literature and Letters*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 158-159.
- 15 YVES BONNEFOY, *Translating Poetry*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to*

to preserve the spirit, as they understand the act of translation as allowing the spirit of the original to cross into the new text; thus the act of creation is the force that allows the poem to survive through and in translation. Alexander Pope's views of translation followed this notion of imitation to the extent that his Homer is noted as sounding more like an 18th century Englishman than a poet from Ancient Greece.¹⁶ However, Pope defends his translations, writing that «I know no liberties one ought to take but those which are necessary for transfusing the spirit of the original and supporting the poetical style of the translation»,¹⁷ adding that more readers are fooled by a dull adherence to literalism than by a translation that is seen as 'chimerical'. In this position argued by Pope, the understanding of a 'spirit' of a text shares a similar foundation to that used by the hermeneutic theorists. However, there are arguments against this theory of translation. For instance, writers such as Vladimir Nabokov¹⁸ and Paul Valéry¹⁹ place extra importance on a degree of faithfulness to the original as opposed to free imitation, noting that this imitative approach might destroy aspects of the rhyme while keeping intact the integrity of the original and the link to the moment of the texts creation. Ezra Pound²⁰ concludes this position, arguing that poetry cannot be translated as poetry, for to do so is to commit a new act of creation as opposed to translation.

What these two fields of translation studies, religious and poetical respectively, reveal is a focus on the original text through the debate on how best to represent it in the translation. The debate privileges the original text as it presumes that the translation will be open to criticism and judgement over how it represented and translated the original; thus, the translation is compared to the original and inevitably found wanting in one way or another. Despite the hierarchical binary revealed by Venuti earlier, I argue that the relationship between what Venuti terms the 'foreign' text and its translation is not as simple as one text occupying the position of the authentic original and the other that of a copy. Rather, following Derrida, I understand the relationship between the two as supplementary. The notion of origin is not restricted to the field of translation, indeed it has philosophical and religious underpinnings as explained previously. As such, exploring the concept of the supplement is aided by an understanding of Derrida's writing on philosophy. In light of this, I will explain Derrida's notion of the supplement through his deconstruction of Rousseau, before developing this understanding by revealing how it works to deconstruct the notion of origin in translation studies and allow for a new way of considering genesis and translation.

Derrida, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 188-189.

16 ROBINSON, *Western Translation Theory*, cit., p. 192.

17 ALEXANDER POPE, *The Chief Characteristic of Translation*, in *Western Translation Theory. From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, ed. by Douglas Robinson, Manchester, St. Jerome, 2002, p. 193.

18 VLADIMIR NABOKOV, *Problems of Translation. "Onegin" in English*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 127.

19 PAUL VALÉRY, *Variations on the Eclogues*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 115-116.

20 EZRA POUND, *Guido's Relations*, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 92.

I DERRIDA AND THE SUPPLEMENT

Derrida explores the importance of the supplement to deconstruction in his writing on Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*,²¹ focusing in particular on the binary Rousseau identifies between nature and what he conceives of as its opposite, culture. Derrida explains that what is at stake in Rousseau's thought is the notion of purity of the origin, which he argues as evident in Rousseau's idea of a mother's love. Derrida explains that, for Rousseau, a mother's love is «in no way *supplemented*, that is to say it does not have to be supplemented, it suffices and is self-sufficient; but that also means that it is irreplaceable; what one would substitute for it would not equal it, would be only a mediocre makeshift».²² More than this, Derrida concludes that for Rousseau, whatever it is that supplements nature, that which is termed a mediocre makeshift, does not originate from nature, coming rather from something else. Thus, Derrida argues that the supplement, for Rousseau, is evil, an outside addition to a pure origin. However, in Rousseau's account of education in *Emilie*, he attempts to find a position that allows for both the natural and civilised man, which is to say a position that allows for both nature as origin and culture as that which supplements. Robert Wokler provides a useful explanation of what Rousseau intends in this bringing together of the natural and the civil. He explains that for Rousseau natural man lives for himself, while civil man lives for the whole community, so an education that combined both aspects would relieve the tensions or conflicts that are obstacles to human happiness.²³ I would argue that this combined education is problematic according to the very logic relied upon by Rousseau, as he requires something outside nature to work with nature itself. Not only is this addition 'mediocre', as stated earlier, it is also unnatural, according to Rousseau's logic, as nature cannot supplement itself.

This necessity of something outside coming in to supplement touches upon the privileging inherent in the understanding of supplementation. As quoted earlier, Rousseau understands a purity in the origin that is disrupted through supplementation; nature, produced by the 'Author of things', is disrupted by the hands of man through the supplement of culture or education. According to Nicholas Dent, Rousseau concludes that what is unnatural is 'evil', an evilness that corrupts the naturally pure man.²⁴ Derrida explains the tension within Rousseau's understanding of a pure origin when he writes:

Thus presence, always natural, which for Rousseau more than for others means maternal, *ought to be self-sufficient* [...]. It is in no way supplemented, that is to say it does not have to be supplemented, it suffices and is self-sufficient; but it also means that it is irreplaceable; what one would substitute for it would not equal it, would be only a mediocre makeshift.²⁵

21 JACQUES DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1997.

22 *Ivi*, p. 145.

23 ROBERT WOKLER, *Rousseau. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 115.

24 NICHOLAS DENT, *Rousseau*, Abingdon/New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 99.

25 DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, cit., p. 145.

For Rousseau, the supplement is a necessary evil as it comes in to shore up or fill a lack in nature, as evident in the way he understands culture and education as supplementing the role of nature or the mother.²⁶ This necessary evil is why Rousseau does not accord the supplement the same value he gives the original. Whether or not nature and culture are envisaged as equal or part of a hierarchical binary is not the issue here, rather what is pivotal is the logic of the supplement that Rousseau relies on when he makes the distinction between them. This logic conceives of the supplement, in Rousseau's case culture or education, as coming into a present or sustained role, that of nature.

Developing Rousseau's use of the supplement, Derrida notes two aspects at work in Rousseau's engagement with supplementation. First, that the supplement denotes a presence: «The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence».²⁷ Second, that the supplement does more than add to the presence because it «adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it fills as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence».²⁸ In order to require a supplement, that which is understood as the original must be incomplete. If the original is incomplete and only understood as filled through a subsequent supplementation, then it cannot be understood as an origin, at the least not as an origin that could exist as a complete or present in and of itself. Through Derrida's reading we have so far seen that Rousseau assumes a primacy or original existence that is perverted by the addition of something that comes after. That is, for Rousseau, as Derrida argues, the supplement is either a surplus or that which replaces. Yet Derrida's notion of the supplement is distinct from Rousseau's. The supplement, according to Derrida, is neither this nor that, neither a surplus nor replacement, but an inherent lack. For Derrida, the origin is supplement. As Simon Morgan Wortham puts it when outlining Derrida's position, the supplement is «an essential trait that intervenes constitutively at the very origin of that which it supplements».²⁹

This logic simultaneously diminishes the role of the supplement as a secondary or makeshift solution at the very moment it requires it to fill a void in the concept that was assumed as complete. Thus, what Rousseau considered complete cannot have been. In a manner similar to that of Morgan Wortham, Michael Naas elaborates upon Derrida's understanding of the supplement, describing it as a «violent opening or breaching» when he writes that: «What is breached is always some supposedly pure inside by the outside, living speech, for example, by writing, a singular presence by repetition and absence, the putative origin by the supplement».³⁰ Referring to the «supposedly pure inside» (or origin), Naas reveals how Rousseau's logic of the supplement (the logic that Rousseau falls back upon when he requires education to supplement nature), cannot sustain the idea of a pure origin that exists apart from the supplement. According to

26 *Ivi*, pp. 145-146.

27 *Ivi*, p. 144.

28 *Ivi*, p. 145.

29 SIMON MORGAN WORTHAM, *The Derrida Dictionary*, London/New York, Continuum, 2010, p. 115.

30 MICHAEL NAAS, *Entamer, Entame, to Initiate or Open Up, to Breach or Broach*, in *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology*, ed. by Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan, London/New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2011, p. 121.

Derrida, what was breached was never a pure origin, as a pure origin is «only dreamed of and always already split».³¹ Geoffrey Bennington explains this further when he notes that all metaphysical thought that seeks to return to a pure origin does so on the assumption that something has gone wrong, either from the outside as an accident or from the inside as a monstrosity.³² These two options can actually be seen as the same, because the internal monstrosity is the lack in the origin that necessitates the breaching from the outside; the origin was never pure.

In the context of the genesis of literature, this has ramifications in how we understand the relationship between the text and its translations. As quoted earlier, Venuti demonstrates that the translation occupies a secondary or marginalised position when compared to the original text. However, the translation takes the place of the original in the new language, it fills in for a void in the original text, a void understood as the lack of the text to be readily received in multiple cultures or languages. Thus, the translation can be seen as operating as a supplement. The supposedly complete original text requires additional supplementation in the form of translation in order to be understood and read in other languages by other readers. While it might appear to be a negative, the role of the supplement in translation is not so much to undermine the text as it is to allow for the text's survival. Indeed, once translation ceases to be viewed as merely a secondary copy or necessary evil, the translation can be understood as part of the life of the text itself, as is argued by Walter Benjamin, who explains:

Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame [...]. The life of the originals attains in them to its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering.³³

What is key to Benjamin's argument is the understanding of translation as allowing for a continuation of the original text. In this way, translation can be understood as the palingenesis of literature. Through translation, the text is reborn and its life continues anew. Thus, translation, as the supplement, is a necessary part of the texts survival. This is why I argue that translation is the palingenesis of literature.

Similar to Benjamin, Derrida also understands translation as a necessary part of the life and rebirth of a text. He explains that:

A text only lives if it lives *on* [*survit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable (always 'at once ... and ...': *bama*, at the 'same' time). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately.³⁴

³¹ DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, cit., p. 112.

³² GEOFFREY BENNINGTON, *Jacques Derrida*, Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 15-16.

³³ WALTER BENJAMIN, *The Task of the Translator. An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's Tableaux Parisiens*, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, New York/Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, p. 77.

³⁴ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Living On/Borderlines*, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. by Harold Bloom, New York/London, Continuum, 2004, pp. 82-83.

Derrida's argument is similar to Benjamin's as he connects the survival of a text to the act of translation. Indeed, for Derrida, if a text were untranslatable it would cease to exist as a text, in that if a text were untranslatable it would also be unreadable or impossible to interpret and understand. Thus, once more the text needs its translation in order to live on,³⁵ and from this the argument of translation as *palingensis* is clear. However, Derrida adds a caveat in that he problematises the concept of translatable at the moment he places it at the heart of the texts survival. In describing a text as being both translatable *and* untranslatable, Derrida introduces the importance of context and his deconstruction of transcendental meaning. That is to say, if the sign were capable of being completely grasped, which would suggest that it has a meaning that can be understood and interpreted completely, then the sign would cease to exist as such. If the sign has no universal meaning, no transcendental signified, then not only is language impossible to completely grasp and translate, as Derrida argues in the above quote, language would also find itself wanting in its attempt to express concepts and objects. This is the other origin this paper will explore, literature as translation. To explore this further, I will now briefly outline some of Derrida's key points in his deconstruction of a universal meaning.

2 DECONSTRUCTION AND LANGUAGE

Much of Derrida's work is concerned with deconstructing what he terms the metaphysics of presence, an understanding that posits that there is a true or present meaning to which the sign refers. Developing upon Saussure's thesis that the meaning of the sign comes from its difference to other signs,³⁶ Derrida adds the notion of deferral. Whenever we wish to find the meaning of a sign, we inevitably encounter other signs in the form of definitions and explanations. Thus, the meaning of the sign is endlessly deferred onto other signs in the language system, as no sign contains a meaning that can be immediately grasped when first encountered. The differing and deferral between signs is what produces meaning and this is the heart of what Derrida terms *différance*.³⁷ According to Derrida, as language is structured by *différance* there can never be one true meaning. That is, «there is no intrinsic connection between word and thing, because language is based on differences, and that there can be no true, universal, unchanging reality to which a word refers», rather «reality (the world) is constructed in and through the language we use. The "real" world has no value or meaning independent of us»³⁸ and therefore all meaning is dependent on context. Derrida's *différance* reveals that signifiers refer only to other signifiers, never to a transcendental signified, instead it is these differences that enable meaning (signifieds).³⁹ Meaning is a result of play of differences as signs endlessly point to the other signs from which they differ.⁴⁰

35 KATHLEEN DAVIS, *Deconstruction and Translation*, Manchester, St Jerome, 2001, p. 40.

36 FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE, *Course in General Linguistics*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1959, pp. 113-115.

37 DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, cit., p. 23.

38 NICOLE ANDERSON, *Poststructuralism*, in *Cultural Theory in Everyday Practice*, ed. by Nicole Anderson and Katrina Schlunke, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 51.

39 BENNINGTON, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., p. 73.

40 NICOLE ANDERSON, *Free-Play? Fair-Play! Defending Derrida*, in «Social Semiotics», XVI (2006), pp. 407-420, p. 407.

Derrida's *différance* reveals that meaning is never a fixed or permanent in the sign; rather there is the potential for a multiplicity of meaning as meaning is produced through differing contexts as meaning is constantly deferred to other signs through the trace.⁴¹ Derrida explains the significance of the impossibility of a transcendental signified when he writes:

From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs*. Which amounts to ruining the notion of the sign at the very moment when, as in Nietzsche, its exigency is recognized in the absoluteness of its right. One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play.⁴²

As Anderson suggests, this play (often mistaken for limitless play) is not an endorsement of nihilism on Derrida's part.⁴³ On the contrary, Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence does not lead to an absence of meaning, rather it questions any logic that takes the presence of meaning for granted.⁴⁴ Davis explains this shift away from meaning as a permanent presence in the sign towards a more open understanding of meaning, when she notes that meaning comes from the language and the context and institutions that govern the system of language.⁴⁵ She notes that this creates an almost stable meaning, in that words have a communally understood meaning through convention and past uses, while it also creates a system of untranslatability, as there never is a complete origin from which the institutions can centre the meaning.⁴⁶ The absence of a fixed centre does not lead to an absence of meaning; rather, meaning is contextually relative. This, according to Derrida, is why any sign can break away from its original context and the meaning created from it.⁴⁷ This role of context is why Derrida frequently refers to the trace as the 'instituted trace', by which Derrida is suggesting that meaning comes from the institutions and context, which surround all signs and readings, both those present as well as absent.

This lack of fixed centre problematises translation, as Andrew Benjamin explains that any theory that perceives of recovery and exchange in translation is naïve, as it presumes a subject and other that are already constituted and can be known as such, thus ignoring the possibility that the other can remain elusive and unrecoverable or resistant to exchange.⁴⁸ Jan-Louis Kruger's presents a similar position, writing that it is impossible to conceive of substituting a signifier while keeping the signified intact, disrupting the notion of a complete unchangeable kernel.⁴⁹ Kruger is quick to note, however, that deconstruction is not a theory of nihilism as deconstruction does not deny that the notion

41 BENNINGTON, *Jacques Derrida*, cit., pp. 70-84.

42 DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, cit., p. 50.

43 ANDERSON, *Free-Play? Fair-Play! Defending Derrida*, cit., p. 408.

44 NICOLE ANDERSON, *Derrida. Ethics Under Erasure*, London, Continuum, 2012, p. 12.

45 DAVIS, *Deconstruction and Translation*, cit., pp. 31-32.

46 *Ivi*, p. 42.

47 JACQUES DERRIDA, *Limited Inc.* Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1998, pp. 9-10.

48 ANDREW BENJAMIN, *Translation and the History of Philosophy*, in «Textual Practice», II (1988), pp. 242-260, pp. 242-243.

49 JAN-LOUIS KRUGER, *Translating Traces. Deconstruction and the Practice of Translation*, in «Literator Society of South Africa», XXV (2004), pp. 47-71, p. 57.

of 'truth' is important. Rather, deconstruction proposes that this truth cannot be perceived as original or pure as it cannot escape the play of the language and the affect of the trace.⁵⁰ Thus, even without the work of the supplement, explored above, the notion of perfect original to flawed copy is already problematic as the supposedly perfect original is open to the same play of language as all other texts and signs. As Peter Florensten puts it, *différance* and the trace remove the meaning from the transcendental signified implied in the source text itself, that is, there cannot be a meaning or kernel that the source text refers to absolutely.⁵¹ As I will explain in the final section of this paper, this absence of the transcendental signified is imperative in the continued creation of texts and literature.

However, Derrida's quasi-transcendentals do not remove the possibility of meaning, rather they remove the possibility of transcendental meaning because, as Derrida writes, «the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content [...]. Above all, this essential absence of intending the actuality of utterance, this structural unconsciousness, if you like, prohibits any saturation of the context».⁵² Derrida explains that while the author's intention gives meaning to the sign in a particular context, it does not do so at the expense of all other possible meanings; even the author or animating intention cannot completely saturate the context and instil a pure 'truth' in the text. This is one of the key differences between Derrida and theorists such as John Austin, who argues that context is determinate in that it exists prior to the speech act. When Derrida writes «I shall try to demonstrate why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, why its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated»,⁵³ he is not claiming that context is undeterminable. Rather, in describing the contexts 'determination', Derrida argues that it is the very act of determining context that precludes it from being absolutely determinable. That is to say, that one can, and indeed must, determine the context is a result of the context not being determinable in itself. Colebrook and McHoul explain that Derrida does not advocate indeterminacy, rather that the determining factors of the context and meaning be taken into account.⁵⁴ Thus, undecidability results not from a lack of determination in the context, but rather from «the strictest possible determination of the figures of play, of oscillation, of undecidability, which is to say, of the *differential* conditions of determinable history».⁵⁵ That a context can be determined is not questioned by Derrida; rather, he questions that this context is always determinable as the same, that is to say, he challenges the notion that the context exists in a way that the sign can and will always be interpreted as meaning one thing, which would allow for a transcendental meaning. Thus, undecidability is not indeterminacy in the sense of a fluid or unstable meaning. As stated previously, Derrida argues that there is nothing outside but the text, rather it is indeterminacy in that the context cannot be saturated or transcend its reading.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 54.

⁵¹ PETER FLORENTSEN, *Translation, Philosophy and Deconstruction*, in «Perspectives. Studies in Translatology», II (1994), pp. 225-243, p. 241.

⁵² DERRIDA, *Limited Inc. Cit.*, p. 18.

⁵³ *Ivi*, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁴ CLAIRE COLEBROOK e ALEX MCHOUL, *Interpreting Understanding Context*, in «Journal of Pragmatics», XXV (1996), pp. 431-440, p. 434.

⁵⁵ DERRIDA, *Limited Inc. Cit.*, p. 145.

If we consider the two points made so far, that is the role of the supplement in deconstructing the relationship between the text and its translation and the role of neologisms such as *différance* in problematising the concept of transcendental meaning, an interesting situation develops for translation. Not only is the translation now an important part of the life of a text, as indeed it is needed to supplement the life of the text itself. Derrida also undermines any argument that would seek to marginalise the translation as being further from the original meaning, as using signs that are removed from or distanced to the transcendental or 'correct' meaning created in the text. Any issue with language, specifically how the language itself creates or shapes the meaning it seeks to express, are evident in both the text and its subsequent translations. It is from this understanding that the argument of this paper can now develop. Not only is translation necessary for the texts survival, it also allows for a new engagement with or creation of the very meaning the text desired to convey. This is one of the key ways in which translation can be understood as palingenesis; translation is not a secondary re-telling of an existing text. Rather, translation becomes the new life of the text, supplementing as it seeks to interpret the meaning of the text. As the meaning of the first text is not present in the sign themselves, in that they are not transcendental signs that produce a meaning irrespective of the context in which they are received, the translation is both an interpretation and a re-birth of the text.

However, there is more at stake than this understanding of translation after the text. As language itself is part of the way we shape and understand reality, as argued by Anderson previously, then the initial act of writing a text becomes one of translation as concepts and ideas are composed and shifted into semiotic signs and language. In exploring this, this paper will conclude with an examination of Blanchot's distinction between the work and the book in order to argue of translation as both genesis and palingenesis of literature, however, not in a way that sees translation as the ideal origin I argued against earlier.

3 CONCLUSION: BLANCHOT'S WORK OF THE BOOK

As I have argued so far, the relationship between literature and translation is not one of original to marginalised copy. Rather, translation allows for the survival and rebirth of the text as it introduces it to new languages and readers. However, both literature and its translation find themselves in a language that cannot express determinate meanings or readings; rather, there is always the possibility of new readings or interpretations. However, it is important to note that this is not a negative. As I will conclude by arguing, this plurality of meaning in language actually allows literature to be, in a way, an act of translation. Literature thus becomes the palingenesis of translation, as translation is the palingenesis of literature.

It is in the work of Blanchot that this understanding of literature as the palingenesis of translation is evident. In the final section of *The Infinite Conversation* that Blanchot explains what he terms «the absence of the book». It is here that Blanchot explains the desire of the author to produce what he refers to as the Book, which he understands as

the ideal or absolute of the book or the totality of the Work. Thus, Blanchot separates writing into the attempt to produce the ideal Book or Work of knowledge, and the book that is created from this attempt. Lkening the process to the story of Orpheus, due to Orpheus's desire to gaze upon his wife as they left the underworld in Greek mythology, Blanchot explains that the author is drawn to the Work. However, despite desiring to compose the Work, the writer ultimately fails⁵⁶ and is left with the book. This is why Blanchot concludes that «we necessarily fall short of the work».⁵⁷ Critchley explains this as a positive when he writes that, for Blanchot, «the possibility of literature is found in the radical impossibility of creating a complete work. That is to say, it is *the impossibility of literature that preserves literature as a possibility*».⁵⁸

The paradox Critchley describes here, in that the impossibility of literature is that which allows its possibility, is reminiscent of the passage from Derrida cited above where he explains that the text survives through both its translatability and untranslatability. Indeed, the similarity between Blanchot and Derrida's thought is evident in the passage in which Blanchot further explains the positivity of the absence or impossibility of the book, as he describes the absence of the book as something the book does itself, insofar as the book undoes itself, which leads not to the absence of books, rather to the future possibility of other books or works.⁵⁹ That is to say, it is the inability of language to properly express the Book that allows for other attempts in the future. Thus, in a way, literature becomes its own genesis, or rather it is in the process of always becoming its genesis, as it is through this failure that the next attempt will be made.

However, there is more here than literature as the genesis of literature. In Roman Jakobson's theory of translation, he outlines three types of translation: translation inside of a language, translation between languages and, finally, translation between different semiotic systems.⁶⁰ While he mentions specific examples, such as between a language and another medium such as dance or visual art, I believe that this can be extended beyond that. Rather than just between semiotic systems, I envisage this form of translation as between the concept or ideal and the language used to express it; to explain differently, translation between the Book and the book, the Work and the work, to use Blanchot's terms. The author is thus one who seeks to translate the ideal book into the language he or she and the reader has to use. Thus, translation is the genesis of literature as literature is the genesis for translation.

This is where the importance of the second section becomes clearer. If language was capable of expressing the ideal, then it would merely be a matter of a single genesis or origin. However, as language is open to what Derrida refers to as play, through the multitude of meanings that each sign can express, it is not the case of a single genesis. From

⁵⁶ MAURICE BLANCHOT, *The Space of Literature*, Lincoln/London, University of Nebraska Press, 1989, pp. 170-183.

⁵⁷ MAURICE BLANCHOT, *The Infinite Conversation*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p. 425.

⁵⁸ SIMON CRITCHLEY, *Very Little...Almost Nothing. Death, Philosophy, Literature*, London/New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 36.

⁵⁹ BLANCHOT, *The Infinite Conversation*, cit., p. 430.

⁶⁰ ROMAN JAKOBSON, *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, New York/Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, p. 139.

this, all literature can be understood as both a genesis and palingenesis as it is both something new and a rebirth of something that has come before. Literature, as translation and through translation, finds itself in an endless cycle of birth, rebirth and the future birth to come.

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PAROLE CHIAVE

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