

## LOVE BETWEEN THE ORIGINAL AND ITS SHADOW

Jeff O'Brien

The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the differance which opens appearance (*l'apparaître*) and signification. Articulating the living upon the nonliving in general, origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no concept of metaphysics can describe it.<sup>1</sup>

I wish to begin with the notion that through the provocative act of translating a text the translator actively participates in the production of meaning, for the mark of a coherent and commensurable translation is to be found in the rhetoric of the translated work itself. To this end, Gayatri Spivak demarcates a space for translation as erotic, as intimate; a space that is wholly sublimated by the translator *giving* in to the text, the originary text enforces, dominates and demands that the translator listen... one must acknowledge Spivak's differentiation between the act of *speaking* and the act of *listening*. This affective, productive act of translation, therefore, functions so as to actively produce meaning, of which meaning is situated within the rhetorical devices—the rhetorical gaps—of the originating work. *Spacing*<sup>ii</sup>... I will start with the notion of translation as *meaning-construction* through rhetoric, and then extend Spivak's epistemology of translation and apply said devices to an analysis of the preface of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in which Spivak circularly constructs a Derridean definition of traces that compliments her later epistemology of translation... *Circles*.

### ON TRANSLATING FEELING THROUGH RHETORIC TO TRACES

In the introductory paragraph of "The Politics of Translation," Spivak writes: "The idea for this title comes from the British sociologist Michele Barret's feeling that the politics of translation takes on a massive life of its own if you see language as the process of meaning-construction."<sup>iii</sup> It is based on a feeling, an intuition of sorts—not an *a priori* judgment on the

*Love between the original and its shadow*

epistemic status of translation, for it is this notion of feeling that coheres with the soon-to-come notion of traces, which is where the act of rhetoric is situated alongside translation. Crucially, it is within the sprawling and often indeterminate sites of rhetoric in which one—perhaps the translator, perhaps the reader—finds the specificity of language that demarcates the boundaries of one language from another. As Spivak notes,

Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a dissemination cannot be under our control. Yet in translation, where meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it. By juggling the disruptive rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvages of the language-textile give way, fray into frayages or facilitations.<sup>iv</sup>

The ethical pronouncement that language is not everything coheres with the opening feeling that Barret has with respect to the life that translation takes on through the act of translation itself. As such, we are not to find meaning solely in the translated language itself, for meaning is situated in the rhetorical gaps generated through this process of translation. It will become apparent that these rhetorical gaps are precisely

concomitant with the conceptualisation of traces that Spivak develops in the preface to *Of Grammatology*.

Under Spivak's subheading, "Translation as Reading," one can appropriately surmise that translation is a productive, synthetic act. If translation occurs through the processing of meaning, then the act of translation is not to be found in the singular language itself, for meaning is ascribed through the act of reading the translated text; this act of reading finds meaning through *differance*, that is, the traces that Spivak outlines in her preface to *Of Grammatology*. Rhetorically, and *speaking* to the ontology of rhetoric itself, Spivak asks: "How does the translator attend to the specificity of the language she translates? There is a way in which the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity."<sup>v</sup> The specificity of language with the ethical constraint imparted on it that this is what ought to be translated, this is where the work itself resides, is found in rhetoric and is marked by traces of the accordingly related rhetorical devices employed by a writer... whether intentional, or not. We find rhetoric in the gaps *between* language, not only within the singular language to be translated but also within the languages of the original and translated work. Meaning, agency, and the affect of a work are not to be found within the singular work-qua-work; rather, they are a series of constructed signs

that function to disrupt the logical systematicity of the straight language itself.

As noted by Spivak above, *language is not everything*. Rather, language constructs a framework that delineates one work from another, setting textual boundaries between what *is* and what *is not*; the search for meaning solely within the initial singular language is fruitless if one does not consider the function of rhetoric in the affective traces. Largely from the influence imparted on her through the act of translating *Of Grammatology*, Spivak draws on Derrida's notion of language-as-textile, as an interwoven construction where *rhetoricity* is to be found not in the woven piece itself but, firstly, in the generative act of weaving and, secondly, in the frayed threads that hold the textile singularly—albeit falsely—together. These acts are rhetoric *sui generis*, for these are the traces, the in-between situated *nomos* that the translator ought to pursue through the act of translating a text. Appropriately,

The task of the translator is to facilitate this love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay. The politics of translation from a non-European woman's text too often suppresses this possibility because the translator cannot

engage with, or cares insufficiently for, the rhetoricity of the original.<sup>vi</sup>

One is left with a poor and inadequate liminal translation of a work, given that the translated work did not account for the liminal spaces themselves, the spaces of traces, the spaces of rhetoric.

The above passage raises the question of where logic itself resides in language. This is itself a rhetorical question for the answer resides in the structural syntax that binds the question together. Logic is to be found in the syntax, mistakenly identified by some as the act of translation itself, for the received view is that translation is the “is-and-of” language—of syntax, signs, signifiers, thereby leaving out the function of rhetoricity which is where the specificity of language is situated. Thus, translators ought to translate the specificity of rhetoric in the ethical act of creating an... accurate or, contentiously, a “good” translation.

Prior to shifting to Spivak's preface to *Of Grammatology*, it is prudent to draw out further the specificity of the specificity of rhetoric itself through the employment of rhetorical devices in an act to convey the function of rhetoric as Spivak sees fit, and necessary. While it is “logic (which) allows us to jump from

*Love between the original and its shadow*

word to word by means of clearly indicated connections,"<sup>vii</sup> it is insufficient to situate translation within the realm of logic itself, as text is non-singular, is wholly referential and the act of translating—not unlike an *archival* act—is not only as much but more about what is not said than what is said in the ~~final~~ translated text. As I have constructed through the employment of my own system of rhetoric above, Spivak accordingly notes,

Rhetoric must work in the silences between and around words in order to see what works and how much. The jagged relationship between rhetoric and logic, condition and effect of knowing, is a relationship by which a world is made for the agent, so that the agent can act in an ethical way, a political way, a day-to-day way; so that the agent can be alive, in a human way, in the world. Unless one can at least construct a model of this for the other language, there is no real translation.<sup>viii</sup>

A question promptly arises out of the construction of this passage, through the logic of the passage itself: who is the agent and where do we ~~ontologically~~ situate the agent? For the purposes of this paper, I will associate the agent with the reader, the beholder? ... the viewer, the one who, given the heading I drew on earlier, succumbs to the synthetic act of "Translation as Reading." And through such rhetoric it is necessary to reiterate that rhetoric is at work and functions "between and around" the translated text itself both in the process of translation and the

translated. Perhaps crucially, contrary to Walter Benjamin's *translator*<sup>ix</sup>, Spivak's *translator* is involved in the act of constructing a model that coheres with the original work, whereas for Benjamin, the translator constructs a text that corresponds to the original work.

Rhetoric has two normative functions that have been loosely drawn out above. Firstly, rhetoric is epistemically normative for it is where the meaning itself is found through the specificity of language—quite literally 'through' as it is in-between language and syntax. Secondly, the translation of rhetoric is ethically normative for there resides an ethical imperative on the active translator to sufficiently account for the epistemically normative function of rhetoric if the translator wishes to provide an accurate, that is, coherent, text. For Spivak,

Unfortunately it is only too easy to produce translation if this task [the task of constructing a model of rhetoric of the ordinary language] is completely ignored. I myself see no choice between the quick and easy and slapdash way, and translating well with difficulty. There is no reason why a responsible translation should take more time in the doing. The translator's preparation might take more time,<sup>x</sup> and her love for the text might be a matter of a reading skill that takes patience. But the sheer material production of the text need not be slow.<sup>xi</sup>

## RHETORIC AS TRACES

In situating the ontology of rhetoric within the spaces-in-between language, it is crucial to first draw out what the relationship is between two terms in the logical systematicity of language and how these terms can potentially have a gap and give rise to the notion of traces. In her superbly rhetorical preface, Spivak draws on Hegel in asserting that,

Aufhebung is a relationship between two terms where the second at once annuls the first and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence; it is a hierarchical concept generally translated “sublation” and now sometimes translated “sublimation”.<sup>xii</sup> A successful preface is aufgehoben into the text it precedes, just as a word is aufgehoben into its meaning. It is as if, to use one of Derrida’s structural metaphors, the son or seed (preface or word), caused or engendered by the father (text or meaning) is recovered by the father and thus justified.<sup>xiii</sup>

The preface, or the word, signifies the potentiality for rhetoric that finds its roots in the father, the text or meaning itself. The seed is never recovered; rather, it is left open to interpretation vis-a-vis the function of rhetoric.

The indeterminacy of language in being *open* to competing translations—both in the nominal sense that syntax and signs may not accurately translate, and, of course, that rhetoric itself

can be difficult to coherently apprehend and translate—entails *erasure*. Spivak notes,

Inaccurate yet necessary. My predicament is an analogue for a certain philosophical exigency that drives Derrida to writing “sous rature,” which I translate as “under erasure.” This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.) To take an example from Derrida that I shall cite again: “...the sign ~~is~~ that ill-named ~~thing~~... which escapes the instituting question of philosophy...”<sup>xiv</sup>

A text without beginning, middle, and end, by necessity; one astutely notes the competing, unstable, fluctuating ~~ontology~~ of the agent beholding, situated in front of the translation. This device adequately points to the problematics of a fluctuating syntax, but the necessity of syntax itself cannot be washed away. One can problematically situate the notion of being, of actuality, within the text itself, but as noted by Spivak, through Heidegger, this is highly problematic as it puts a particular strain on language that points to its inherent inadequacies, most notably the inability to account for the spaces in between. As Spivak notes,

Heidegger crosses out the word “Being,” and lets both deletion and word stand. It is inaccurate to use the word “Being” here, for

*Love between the original and its shadow*

the differentiation of a “concept” of Being has already slipped away from that precomprehended question of Being. Yet it is necessary to use the word, since language cannot do more.<sup>xv</sup>

Accordingly, language cannot do more for, just as Spivak noted in “The Politics of Translation,” language is not everything. It is insufficient to avoid rhetoric in an attempt to salvage or save language, for the generated word that stands in place of the original word that precedes translation is a cipher and, by necessity, will not encompass the rhetorical project where the specificity of language is situated. A logical error of substitution is made through the inadequate translation of one word for another as it is not the language that is to be translated, but the traces in between. As such, we can now move to the explication of the concept of traces, with reference to rhetoricity and feeling.

It is precisely *here* that both this essay and Spivak’s preface arrive at the same necessity for a formal conceptualisation of traces. Both works have drawn on notions of rhetoricity, for this essay has been prodding at the nuanced idea of affective translation as-rhetoricity-in-traces; for Spivak, it is a transition from translation through ~~being~~ as traces. Spivak notes,

Now there is a certain difference between what Heidegger puts under erasure and what Derrida does. “Being” is the master-word that Heidegger crosses out. Derrida does not reject this. But his word is “trace” (the French word carries strong implications of track, footprint, imprint), a word that cannot be a master-word, that presents itself as the mark of an anterior presence, origin, master. For “trace” one can substitute “arche-writing” (“archi-écriture”), or “differance”... I shall begin with “trace/track,” for it is a simple word...<sup>xvi</sup>

Further, to draw out the concept of traces (upon which we can begin to circularly relate back to rhetoric) and with reference to possibly the most quoted passage from *Of Grammatology* of which Derrida does not write, Spivak notes,

Heidegger’s ~~Being~~ might point at an inarticulable presence. Derrida’s ~~trace~~ is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.<sup>xvii</sup>

This absence of a presence that is always present within a text (it is the originary lack that is a necessary condition of thought and experience) is no different than the conceptualisation of translation as the point “where meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages.”<sup>xviii</sup> This parallel is too strong to be ignored. Spivak’s conceptualisation of translation is thus closely aligned with her formulation of

Derridean traces, for she was drawing on the counterfactual existence of traces when developing an epistemology of translation. The tracking footprints make their way through a coherent translated text; it is these traces, these marks, which constitute the logic of rhetoricity that conveys the implied meaning and subtext of a successful translation.

### **SPOOR TO SPORE TO RHIZOME**

The notion of difference/difference is predicated on the assumption that the English reader—agent for Spivak—is aware that these two words are pronounced precisely the same in their French mother language. The difference in spelling aligns difference with trace, for it is this mark of the absence of a presence in the spoken language that cannot be iterated yet is present. This is potentially lost through the act of translation from the French to English when one only hears the text and does not see it. Leading to the final segment of this paper is Spivak’s observation that,

Derrida gives the name “trace” to the part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign. (I stick to “trace” in my translation, because it “looks the same” as Derrida’s word; the reader must remind himself of at least the track, even the spoor, contained within the French word.)<sup>xix</sup>

A spoor is the track which an animal makes by way of walking or running, and it is spoor that are the mark of a coherent translation for they are the reified traces. Similarly to difference, it is the case that if one were to read this passage aloud an aural issue of translation would arise, namely, the question of what spoor/spore is Spivak referring to here. It is with this wordplay that we can segue into the notion of the *rhizome* through the recognition of the misheard spore that now resides in the preface to *Of Grammatology*, planted by Spivak’s translatory act.

In closing, I turn to a third and final introduction—*A Thousand Plateaus*—where Deleuze and Guattari write,

How can the book find an adequate outside with which to assemble in heterogeneity, rather than a world to reproduce? The cultural book is necessarily a tracing: already a tracing of itself, a tracing of the previous book by the same author, a tracing of other books however different they may be, an endless tracing of established concepts and words, a tracing of the world present, past, and future... A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.<sup>xx</sup>

I conclude by way of drawing the multitude of concepts examined here together, as one, for rhetoric, traces, spoor, and rhizome all collapse into Spivak’s formulation of translation as

## *Love between the original and its shadow*

developed in “The Politics of Translation.” As the rhizome has no beginning, middle, or end, neither does the text; given the existence of traces, the text is not confined to its mere syntax for these traces and in between, internal, and external to the act of translating, insofar as we acknowledge the translatory act as an act of reading. Thus, this closing is as much a beginning, this text rhizomatic, and circular, with as much not said as said, not quoted as quoted, its logical systematicity found in the rhetoric employed through the examination of rhetoric itself... as translation.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 65.

<sup>ii</sup> Bear witness to Rodney Graham’s *Reading Machine for Lenz* (1983): in Arni Haraldsson’s essay *In-Quest of Folly: Reading Rodney Graham’s LENZ*, Haraldsson notes “*Lenz* is, in Graham’s words, about “exploiting a happy accident in the Mueller translation of the Buchner novella in which I found it possible to loop the story by having the text from the 241st word (‘the forest’) to the 1434th word (‘through’) set so that it occupies exactly four full pages, i.e. one folio sheet. The sheets, then folded alternately one way then the other, could be endlessly interfolded into gatherings (signatures) of any size and thus sewn and bound into a book-like form . . . The piece is, again, about orientation — in the landscape — and being lost in the text.” <http://ccca.concordia.ca/c/writing/h/haraldsson/hara009t.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 200.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-203.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.* 203.

---

<sup>ix</sup> As in Walter Benjamin’s *The Task of the Translator*.

<sup>x</sup> Taking more time as the translator is involved in the creative constructive act of model making and involves not simply a concern with the construction of a one-to-one, corresponding translation which, by necessity, is unable to account for rhetoric.

<sup>xi</sup> Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 203.

<sup>xii</sup> This is notable in terms of the rhetoricity of translation and the importance of the ethical act of translating. For Spivak to note that it is translated as such but was once translated as another is itself an act of sublation/sublimation of the entire notion of rhetoricity, for sublation/sublimation are necessarily insufficient and the definition which she wishes to assert will be found in between.

<sup>xiii</sup> Gayatri Spivak’s *Translator’s Preface* in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xi.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii

<sup>xviii</sup> Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 202.

<sup>xix</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xvii.

<sup>xx</sup> Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 24-25.