The UNFATHOMABLE POETIC IN "THE TASK OF THE TRANSLATOR"

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ABSTRACT

On the Basis of a single essay on poetry translation theory, originally intended as a preface to a Baudelaire translation, Walter Benjamin has become influential within the Western tradition of translation theories. In this powerful essay titled "the Task of the Translator," Benjamin strikingly conceptualizes poetry translation through a striking set of metaphors and imagery veering away from all essentialist ideals on poetry translation. A poetic element overwhelms the essay brilliantly making it truly romantic yet revolutionary in intent. This paper is a retrospective attempt to trace the beautiful secrets of the essay's poetic brilliance. It is an attempt to analyze the extremely important role of those metaphors in relaying and interpreting the revolutionary views of Benjamin on poetry translation. Further, it explores how Benjamin's insightful essay bravely challenged the existing translation theories of his time that only preached precision, exactness and fidelity to the letter imparting much inspiration and power to devotees of poetry translation.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin; Task of the Translator; Poetry Translation; Baudelaire; Pure Language; Metaphors

1. INTRODUCTION

Walter Benjamin, the notable twentieth Century German philosopher, critic, and translator has come to be regarded influential in Western Translation Theories on the basis of his single essay on translation, "Die Aufgabe des Ubersetzers" 'the Task of the Translator,' which he, originally, intended as an introduction or preface to his German translation of Baudelaire’s the Tableaux Parisiens and Les Fleur du mal. It is almost ninety years since its 1923 German publication and forty-five years since Hanna Arendt has introduced Harry Zhon's English translation in 1968, yet the essay is still of seminal significance to academics in the field of translation theories and is passionately and avidly under excavation by translation theorists.

Benjamin holds poetry translation as an essential and dignified “literary mode.” He sees translation as an independent convention “of its own” and the task of the translator as distinct and even noble. Benjamin holds poetry translation as an essential and dignified “literary mode.” He sees translation as an independent convention “of its own” and the task of the translator as distinct and even noble. Benjamin sees translators of poetry not as disciples of the original poets as traditional theories of translation do. To him, the translator of poetry does not imitate, copy, or take the task of the poet as a model, or ideal as is often thought about the task of the translator.

In his essay, Walter Benjamin admires the way the Romantics viewed poetry translation and carries their romantic ideas into his theory and understanding of poetry translation leaving an unfathomable poetic intensity in this abstract and idealized essay on the task of the translator. Access to the intensity of Benjamin's romantic thoughts on translation has consistently been a matter of difficulty and pleasure. Anthony Pym (2009) observes, the essay "has been fetishized by literary and cultural theorists" particularly those writing in English. Pym implied the essay is not at all interpretable when he maintained that the essay is often cited by theorists often (indeterminists) whose theories on translation and the role of the translator are profoundly at odds.

In "the Task of the Translator," Benjamin strikingly conceptualizes poetry translation through a beautiful set of romantic metaphors and images. A poetic element overwhelms the essay, and provokes readers to immediately plunge into its layers as a desire to release that poetic depth. The reader by no means can have a look and turn aside without delving into its nadir. It is undoubtedly an enthralling experience entailing physical and also keen spiritual engagement with Benjamin's romanticized, inspiring and also truly philosophical views on poetry translation.

This paper traces the beautiful secrets of the essay’s poetic brilliance. It is an attempt to analyze the extremely important role of the poetic in relaying and interpreting Benjamin's views on poetry translation. It is an attempt to interpret Benjamin's conception of translation of poetry through what Venuti (1992) calls Benjamin's elaborate "use of organic metaphor" (7).
2. DISCUSSION

Percy Shelley celebrates poetry in his essay of 1821, “A Defense of Poetry,” as “The light of life; the source of whatever beautiful or generous or true” (42), “the root and blossom of all other systems of thought,” “the odor and color of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it” (61):

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes: its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms. (64-65)

But even though Shelley believed poetry translation is tempting, he, according to Webb (1976) declared the vanity of poetry translation and assumed earnestly that, while poetry “lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world” (32), his own poetical translations are merely “the gray veil” that is going to always blur the “perfect and glowing” original:

(Poetry translation) works in a manner exactly opposite to that of poetry. In a letter of November 1819, to Leigh Hunt, Shelley describes how he has been tempted to translate: ‘. . . the Greek plays, and some of the ideal dramas of Calderón . . . are perpetually tempting me to throw over their perfect and glowing forms the gray veil of my own words.’ (28)

The essence and secrets of the beauty of poetry are behind a swarm of obstinate and longstanding questions revolving around the legitimacy of poetry translation. Many of these questions are obstinate and remain unresolved. They stem from the fact that poetry, perhaps more than any other literary genre, is a reflective expression of the intricacies of the culture, the particularity of the poet’s imagination, and all the peculiar and delicate balance of sound, words, rhythm and imagery. Poetry translation provoked the thinking of many literary translation philosophers and theorists. It is one of the most debated issues in the theory of translation. Speaking at the 15th annual seminar of the Assises de la Traduction Litteraire a Arles (ATLAS), Jacques Derrida (2001) addressed literary translators describing their mission as the “sublime and impossible task,” the “beautiful and terrifying responsibility”

How dare one speak of translation before you who, in your vigilant awareness of the immense stakes—and not only of the fate of literature—make this sublime and impossible task your desire, your anxiety, your travail, your knowledge and your knowing skill? How dare I proceed before you, knowing myself to be at once rude and inexperienced in this domain, as someone who, from the very first moment, from his very first attempts (which I could recount to you, as the English saying goes, off the record), shunned the translator’s métier, his beautiful and terrifying responsibility, his insolvent duty and debt, without ceasing to tell himself “never ever again”: “no, precisely, I would never dare, I should never dare, would never manage to pull it off”? (174).

It is quite fair to say that like Derrida, Walter Benjamin is a great advocate of poetry translation. A great deal of what Benjamin relays in his essay “the Task of the Translator” which derives from romanticist views of translation of the late nineteenth century is truly insightful imparting much inspiration to poetry translators and defenders of poetry translation. As a matter of fact, Benjamin admires to a large extent the way the romantics viewed poetry translation as a venerable and fundamental convention. He laments the fact that the Romantics never approached translation theoretically, yet “their

1 Jacques Derrida speaking at the 15th annual seminar of the Assises de la Traduction Litteraire a Arles (ATLAS). Derrida’s lecture was later translated by Lawrence Venuti and published in Critical Inquiry in 2001 as “What is a ‘Relevant’ Translation?”
own great translations testify to their sense of the essential nature and dignity of this literary mode." In his essay, Benjamin discusses the merits of poetry translation through a beautiful set of metaphors hammering out as it were on the traditional theories of poetry translation and their principles explaining between now and then the characteristics of a bad translation of poetry. His conception and attitude towards poetry translation and translators is original and remarkable. It establishes him as a true forerunner to the contemporary theories and ethics of translation. Johnston (1992) believes, "what strikes us immediately in Benjamin's essay of course is his outright dismissal of the traditional theory of translation" (42). Among his most inspirational views, Benjamin believes translation is a necessity for some originals. Some originals require translation to grow and thrive just as humans and all entities have essential needs for survival. Translation is in some way bestowed with a special gift or responsibility towards the original, because there is something special; something "inherent" in some originals that calls for their translation and makes it appropriately fundamental to them. Benjamin carries his romanticized views of translation further by saying that translation "stands in the closest connection with the original." It is not a secondary connectedness but as a significant necessity to the original and even quite intimate to it.

Benjamin believes that "translation ultimately has as its purpose the expression of the most intimate relationships among languages." The task of the translator is not one of revealing this intimacy between languages but it is primarily a matter of representing it. Benjamin rejects the strong and consistent distinction between the task of the translator and the task of the poet. He rejects the conventional view of translation and translators as mere communicators. He discards the long-held view which confines the task of the translator or translation to a mere copying or a "transmitting function" which entails rendering the "form and the meaning of the original as accurately as possible." Benjamin argues that works of art including poetry translation are not meant to serve the receiver. On this assumption, he rejects the widely-held traditional observation that translation exists only to serve the reader or be meant for readers who cannot read the original. As an original literary masterpiece, a translation should not exist for the sake of the receiver. By emphasizing from the very beginning of his essay that "no poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener." Benjamin's "the Task of the Translator" sets translations of poetry in the realm of art, alongside Beethoven's symphonies, Michelangelo's terribilità art, Rodin's "the Thinker," and all other enduring works of art and literature. Yet only translations that are "more than transmissions of subject matter" are in that realm. (72). They are in the realm of art where the producer, that is to say, the translator, has the first and the last say, for, there is no "muse" for poetry translation (77). Benjamin's translation as a creative task, no less important than symphonies or poetry provided that they are not meant to serve the receiver only.

As early as 1923, Benjamin's "the Task of the Translator" has challenged many long held views on the theme of the artificial role of poetry translator and the merits of an acceptable translation of poetry. Johnston (1992) points out "such a view of translation, at least in its practical consequences, accords with much of the twentieth-century practice" (45). Peter Newmark (1982) argues that Benjamin suggests that the longstanding "equivalent effect principle is irrelevant in the translation of a work of art; the translator's loyalty is to the artist (11) in himself. In the same way poems communicate only little to those who understand them, poetry translation should not only communicate or confine itself to passing on only information to the reader. One that does so is hallmarked for an appalling translation. Benjamin lashes at such appalling translations of poetry, which only intend to communicate information whereas the essence of a literary work is the poetic, the unfathomable which should be recreated by a genuine translator. The spirit of a literary work lies beyond the information or message in the poem. Perhaps, it is a task only a poet translator would be able to accomplish (70). In that sense, the Benjaminian sense, we find poetry translation alongside poetry in the realm of art with equal merit and the translator a Beethoven; a Michelangelo.

3. LIFE AND THE AFTERLIFE

To explain how translation ought to be seen or set side by side in the realm of art with the original connectedly and also intimately, Benjamin discusses the relationship or difference between the translation and the original through an impressive metaphor: life and the afterlife. Benjamin argues that there exists in the nature of specific poetic or literary works something latent, something "inherent" that calls for their translations (71). Bush (2001) notes in this respect that a "true translation operates with those works that are translatable by virtue of their poetic quality, where there is not an enormous quantity of information to be communicated" (qtd. in Baker 196). Benjamin finds this relatedness between a literary work and its translation a vital natural connectedness, and it is here that readers of "the Task of the Translator" are introduced with the first spectacular figurative representation of life and the afterlife.

In the same way "the history of great works of art tells us about their antecedents," Benjamin maintains, "their realization in the age of the artists, their potentially eternal afterlife in succeeding generations" (71), translation tells us about the original literary works as it marks the stage of continued life of literary works. This is only true if translations exceed the communication of subject matter or information. On this assumption only, translations ought to be seen as a "special and high form of life" of the original. In translation, the richest and "ever-latest flowering" of the original comes about. (71)
“Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it” translation emanates from the original and is connected to it as its most special and highest flowering (71).

Benjamin then speaks of the affinity of languages, that they are no strangers from one another, that there exists a unique convergence and harmony amongst them. Benjamin is not speaking of the historical relatedness between languages or of the “identity of origin.” What he means is that languages are related in what they intend to express as an entirety rather than in anything else. This intention could not be grasped by languages individually. Rather, languages supplement each other in their intentions. (72) Meaning is a totality, it could never be found in “relative independence as in individual words or sentences, rather, it is in a constant state of flux—until it is able to emerge as pure language from the harmony of all the various modes of intention” (74). Languages grow like any living entity. They keep on growing until at their prime of age translation becomes essential to mark the eternal life of a literary work and “the renewal of its language.” (74) Therefore, through its transformative power, translation assures the survival of language, and yet a survival, that is also a growth of the original. Translation supplements and modifies the original, which, insofar as it is living on, never ceases to be reborn, transformed and renewed through translation.

At some point in his essay Benjamin admits he would give up his dreamy views, his “futile detours” of romanticized thinking and join the traditional theorists (72), which hold that for a translation to bring the relatedness of languages to light it must render the form and meaning of the original as correctly as translators are able to. Benjamin joins in with his revolutionary views in order to contradict essentialist theories that preach precision, exactness and fidelity to the letter. Once more, he lashes at translation theories of equivalence and resemblance for it is not the similarity or likeness between the two works of literature that translations should seek. What all existing translation theories at his time preached is only “a sterile equation of two dead languages” (73). But to Benjamin, the afterlife, in which translations exist and the original came to live through, is associated with resurrection, “renewal” and the ‘transformation” of the original (73) because languages never stopped growing. To treat translation as a mere equalization of form and meaning means to deny the original growth and survival, to turn the original into “the coup de grace,” and to deny “one of the most powerful and fruitful historical processes” that is the growth of languages. The original lives a new continued life in the translation as the most highly flowering of the original Benjamin hammers out on the traditional theories of his day which argue that above all things, translation should be after the sameness of form and content. Exact equations of the form and the content are only ephemeral and short lived. To Benjamin, such translations are barren equalization of two literary works through which the original comes to an end transients. Benjamin based his assumption on cognition critiques saying “in cognition there could be no objectivity, not even a claim to it, if it dealt with images of reality.” Because of that assumption, we have to view translation as a different life stage of the original; its continued life; its flowering stage because the original submits itself entirely to transformation and therefore renewal. Words “mature” in terms of meaning. “Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process.” The original writer’s style may give way to new tendencies in the new literary creation of translation. Nothing passes by without transformation and change. How can “poet’s words endure in his own language” and endure longer in the translation while all meaning and the intention of literary works go though change and transformation over time. All languages undergo transformation. This is what the afterlife is all about: the transformation of the original. A newer literary form will be born in the translation. But it is not one that comes with ease; it is an arduous task, just like a human being’s birth; the flowering comes with pains with “pangs.”

Never before has translation theory witnessed such an inspiring view of literary translation in the same way Benjamin has put it: “Of all the literary forms it (translation) is the one charged with special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original and the birth pangs of it” (73) Benjamin argues that when we translate a work of art from one language into another, the former transforms the latter assuring its growth and survival. In the Benjaminian sense, the translator has an exceptional task. He is a guardian, a custodian who observes over the transformation process and the renewal of the original, and creates the resonance of the original in the translation. Venuti (1992) believes that according to Benjamin, “translation canonizes the original text, validating its fame by enabling its survival” (7).

4. The ROYAL CLOAK OF TRANSLATION; THE FRUIT AND ITS SKIN

Freeing translators of the restraints of fidelity to the letter or what Benjamin calls “the surface content” which had enjoyed a principal authority for centuries in translation theories, Benjamin asserts that “if the kinship of languages manifests itself in translations...kinship does not necessarily involve likeness.” It is through the notion of the pure language that translators are able to translate and not through mere resemblance. All languages have similar intentions. They are related to each other through the similarity of these “intentions,” yet languages have different conventions or modes for expressing these intentions. Languages supplement each other in intentions. The comprehension of the intention of a certain language becomes clear when compared to the intention of another language; when it gets translated. No single language can convey its intention on its own. The intention of one language is attained only by the totality of all intentions in all languages. All languages meet or converge
somewhere regarding a specific intention. That's how translation becomes viable and possible, not through likeness of single words or sentences but through what Benjamin calls the pure language, the true language. It is "the harmony of all the various modes of intention" through which translation occurs. Translation, says Benjamin, takes the original to a region of "higher and purer linguistic air." Strikingly enough, translation takes the original to a region where languages' intentions converge; where languages are no longer strangers to one another; to a "realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages." In another striking romantic metaphor, Benjamin explains how translation or what he earlier describes as the maturing or flowering stage of the original occurs. When translated, "the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air." (75). But it does not rise there in its entirety, something is always left behind. Benjamin alludes to the bitter fact that translations could never be perfect, but this is no dilemma to Benjamin. The original in rising into that "higher purer linguistic air," leads itself to an area of "reconciliation" of the languages or of the priori of languages. What rises to this purer linguistic air of the priori of languages is the essence of the original literary work, something beyond its subject matter, something that does not submit itself wholly to translation. Only a good or as Benjamin points out "a genuine translator" can reproduce the core of the fruit whereas bad translations relay or concern themselves only with the skin or the "surface content." The core of the fruit is "that element in a translation which goes beyond transmittal of subject matter." The language of translation is more exalted and dignified than its content, it wraps the original like a royal cloak generously and richly with its "ample folds" (75). Newmark (1991) notes that Benjamin's image of the "looser … cloak is quite memorable" (125). This is how the original rises up to this area where the foreignness of languages fades away, to the area of the reconciliation of languages. It reaches there transformed and new. Translation strives to motivate language development through its ample, generous and rich royal robe by aiming at "a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation" when the original rises into this area transformed and new. Benjamin projects poetry translation as generous and royal. Bal (2002) states that "comparing the task of the translator with that of the poet, Benjamin creates a powerful image of the former's product as both rich (royal) and encompassing (ample) expansive yet enveloping" (57).

5. THE ECH AND THE FOREST

Dante was clearly distrustful of poetry translation thinking that it destroys the melodious "sweetness and harmony" of the original. "Let all observe that nothing harmonized by the laws of the Muses (that is, any poetical work) can be changed from its own tongue to another one without destroying all its sweetness and harmony" (qtd. in Robinson 48). While the agonizing complication of harmonizing and balancing many indispensable elements in the poem while translating led many to be skeptical about poetry translation, Benjamin persisted in conferring honors on translation expressing at the same time more admiration for the romantics who held poetry translation as an essential and dignified literary convention of its own. While speaking of the task of the poet and the task of the translator, Benjamin introduces another remarkable metaphor: the echo and forest (76). With the representation of the echo and the Forest, Benjamin invests poetry translation with more romantic traits and honors the task of the translator saying, "translation is a mode of its own, the task of the translator too, may be regarded as distinct and clearly not inferior to the task of the poet. The translator's task is genuine, one that transcends the search for definite likeness or communication of information. It "consists in finding that intended effect [Intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original." The translator produces in the translation the "echo" and the resonance of the original. He intends language in its totality, its intention as a whole, unlike the poet who only considers or relies only on "specific linguistic contextual" meaning or intention (76).

Translation is always in the exterior of the language forest outside its borders calling into it from the outside as a necessity "aiming at a single spot where the echo is able to give in its own language the reverberation of the work in the alien one". (76) In that sense, the translator's task could be far from being only imitative, or merely echoing that of the poet which is "spontaneous" and original. Quite the opposite, even when the translator's task is viewed as derivative and dependent on that of the poet and "takes it as a point of departure," it is a new life for the original it is "ultimate" and great consisting mainly of assimilating many languages "into one true language." To Benjamin, this is something only translation is able to do. Neither literature nor criticism or linguistics can hold up this great task of representing this amalgamation of languages together into "one true language." Translation ought to be viewed as such in that it leaves no less important trace on history than poetry does.

6. THE BROKEN CLAY VESSEL AND THE FRAGMENTS

Translation is a philosophy. It is halfway between poetry and theory (77).

In this way Benjamin views the task of the translator criticizing time and again the traditional theories of literary translation, which stresses "fidelity to the word" (78) as almost equivalent to literalness and freedom as the basic regulations of the recreation process. Benjamin finds such concepts not any more functional in the theory of meaning. He condemns how traditional theories of translation set these two concepts at two extreme edges as if they are in a battle: to be faithful means you can not be free and vice versa. To Benjamin, meaning rests not upon the word or the syntax only, there are associations,
connotations that rise above the literal denotation of a word. Benjamin is remarkably looking forward to a theory that reconciles the two conflicting notions. Incidentally, Benjamin introduces his readers with another unforgettable metaphor, the earthen vase or vessel and its fragments. As remarkable as it is in the translation essay, the image of the vessel or the vase occurs frequently in Benjamin's other essays. In "The Storyteller" Benjamin says, "the traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the fingerprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (92). Benjamin also repeats this representation of the vase image to the letter in the second section of "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." “It thus bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand.” (159)

Words either in the translation or in a literary work resemble fragments of a broken vessel whose overall outlook is what particularly matters to the beholder. In other words, each fragment needs not resemble each other in shape. But attached together, as a total, they should form the overall look of the broken vase. They complement each other for the sake of something more all-encompassing that is the overall appearance of the vase. In the same way, meanings of individual words in a translation need not resemble individual meanings of words in original poem; rather include what they signify as an entirety. To Benjamin, the totality of meaning comes through the partial, the whole through the fragment. Meaning can be realized not through the individual words but as a totality. However, Jacobs (1986) suggests, “Benjamin insists that the final outcome is still a broken part” (qtd. in De Man 90).

Benjamin sees both fragments of meaning of the original and of the translation as equal fragments of a greater language fused together for the sake of a greater overall effect, just like the fragments of a broken vase:

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way, a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are a part of a vessel. (78).

Benjamin takes Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles, to be exemplary of meaning being lost in following words' senses individually. Benjamin writes, these "were his last work; in them meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language" (82). Benjamin’s message is that the language of the translation must set itself free, unshackle itself from the purpose of communicating information or meaning giving way only to the intention of the original not as imitation of meaning but as supplementation and as “harmony” (79) of all the intentions of languages. The idea that meaning arises from supplementation and harmony between languages is perhaps clear in what Benjamin says in “On Language As Such and on language of Man” of 1955, “translation attains its full meaning in the realization that every evolved language (with the exception of the Word of God) can be a translation of all the others.” (325)

Benjamin’s insightful views bravely challenged the existing translation theories that only preached precision, exactness, fidelity, or seeking an ultimate translation that could capture the poem in one enduring masterpiece such as the original, to quote Hermans, the “unique” original “versus repeatable” translations (12).

This becomes clear if one considers how Thomas Hogg compares the task of poetry translation to “gluing a sheet of paper over a statue” (qtd. in Webb 28).

Imparting much power and inspiration on devotees of poetry translators, Benjamin believes that translation occurs and can be transparent. He praises transparency. “A real translation is transparent. It does not cover the original “but let the “pure language” (79) shine through by its own mode of expression. Bush (2001) commenting on Benjamin’s essay says that “the transparency of real translation is not that which makes the meaning transparent, but one which does not block out the light of the purity” (qtd. in Baker 196)

To Benjamin, only translation has this fabulous power of retrieving the pure language in its own language. Turk (1990) sees Benjamin’s conception of translation “convincing”, because it takes into consideration “our knowledge of the world which is interpreted by language” and also because it “allows us to understand that the relation of interpretations to each other is complementary” (53).

7. THE AEOLIAN HARP

Through recreating the pure language in the target language, the translator is a liberator, a savior of the pure language from its prison in the literary work. The translator too breaks the worn out ‘barriers’ of the source language letting translation touch the original at one point of sense only transiently, lightly; like when a tangent touches a circle at some point and then onward moves in its

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2 Thomas Jefferson Hogg (1792-1862) was an English biographer and the lifelong friend and biographer of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.
straight trail, in its own linguistic world (80). Or like when the wires of “an Aeolian harp” are touched and tuned in by the wind transitorily and fleetingly leaving music in the air (81). This fleetingness is no dilemma to Benjamin because translation occurs. It is enthralling because it leaves music in the air. On the other hand, this fleetingness, as Anthony Pym calls it, through which meaning in the translation attaches itself to the original i.e. the translation touching the original only transiently at one point, but not entirely is perhaps what propelled Robert Frost to expel the translated poem from the territory of poetry and to declare its death in translation: “poetry is what gets lost in translation” (qtd. in Honig 154).

8. AFTERTHOUGHT

Rose (1990) states “Walter Benjamin’s “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” (1923) was recovered by Harry Zohn masterly, readable translation of (1955) to give an Aphoristic collage of translation in a cosmos controlled by speech/language (die Sprache)” (57).

Reading Harry Zohn’s translation of Benjamin I have attempted to address the unfathomable poetic in Benjamin’s language of the celebrated translation essay that specifically, heroically remains beyond communication. Perhaps Rose’s (1997) description of the essay as “mythic” (40) best fits that element. “In all language and linguistic creations,” Benjamin has said, “there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated” (79). In Benjamin’s own work, in his, cryptic style and in the essentially abbreviated articulation of his thought, a surcharge of meaning is imprisoned in instances of silence. Something poetic, something unfathomable is defiantly beyond communication. It is the task of the reader to listen to these instances of silence. For my attempt of interpretation and oversimplifications of this poetic essay, my own translation of it highly idealized language is a captive in Benjamin’s own images. Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator,” remains truly the untouchable core which rises to a higher sphere and remains beyond communication. It is the ear of the other that signs as Jacques Derrida once said. To Benjamin, translation of poetry occurs; it occurs despite the birth pangs, despite the fleetingness and the fragmentation of words and of meaning. Translation occurs leaving music in the air.

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