

Writing: a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled; never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen.

... There is a language that I speak or that speaks (to) me in all tongues. A language at once unique and universal that resounds in each national tongue when a poet speaks it. In each tongue, there flows milk and honey. And this language I know. I don't need to enter it, it surges from me, it flows, it is the milk of love, the honey of my unconscious. The language that women speak when no one is there to correct them.

In the language I speak. The mother tongue... resonates, the tongue of my mother, less language than music, less syntax than song of words, beautiful *Hochdeutsch*, throaty warmth from the north in the cool speech of the south. Mother German is the body that swims in the current, between my tongue's borders, the maternal loversoul, the wild tongue that gives form to the oldest the youngest of passions, the makes milky night in the French day. Isn't written: transverses me, makes love to me, makes me love, speak, laugh from feeling its air caressing my throat. My German mother in my mouth, in my larynx, rhythms me. Horror the late day when I discovered that German can also be written. Learning German as a 'second language', as they say. Trying to make the primitive language, the flesh of breath, into an object-tongue.¹

1. Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', [1977], in Hélène Cixous '*Coming to writing*' and other essays, edited by Deborah Jenson, translated by Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 1–58, p. 3, p. 21, pp. 21–22.

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These scenes, by the way, are not altogether a literary device – a means of summing up and making a knot out of innumerable little threads. Innumerable threads there were; still, if I stopped to disentangle, I could collect a number. But whatever the reason may be, I find that scene making is my natural way of marking the past. A scene always comes to the top; arranged, representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion – it is irrational; it will not stand argument – that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort; the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene – for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their ‘reality’.²

2. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* [1939–1940] edited with an introduction and notes by Jeanne Schulkind (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985) p. 142.

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What is subject to the work of distortion and rearrangement in memory are not the childhood events (intrinsically inaccessible), but the first traces of them.

...The result of the secondary elaboration which is Freud's interest here is the conscious memory: very precisely, the 'screen memory'. But to evoke this term (*Deckerinnerung*) is to indicate that it both covers over and presents the resurgence of something: precisely, the repressed.^{3a}

... I would like to say that Freud's concept of afterwardsness contains both richness and a certain ambiguity, combining a retrogressive and a progressive direction. I want to account for this problem of the different directions, to and fro, by arguing that, right at the start, there is something that moves in the direction of the past to the future, from the other to the individual in question, that is in the direction from the adult to the baby, which I call the implantation of the enigmatic message. This message is then retranslated, following a temporal direction, which is, in an alternating fashion, by turns retrogressive and progressive (according to my general model of translation – detranslation – retranslation).^{3b}

3a. Jean Laplanche, 'A Short Treatise on the Unconscious' [1993] translated by Luke Thurston, *Essays on Otherness*, edited by John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 84–116, p. 96.

3b. Jean Laplanche, 'Notes on Afterwardsness [1998], *Essays on Otherness*, edited by John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 260–265, p. 265. These 'notes' are based on a conversation between Jean Laplanche and Martin Stanton recorded in 1991. They appeared in *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, edited by John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), and have been added to and revised by Laplanche for this volume (1998).

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Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original,

... The task of the translator consists in finding the particular intention toward the target language which produces in that language the echo of the original. This is a feature of translation that basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the intention of the latter is never directed toward the language as such, as its totality, but is aimed solely and immediately at the specific linguistic contextual aspects. Unlike a work of literature, translation finds itself not in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one. Not only does the intention of a translation address or differ from that of a literary work – namely a language as a whole, taking an individual work in an alien language as a point of departure – but it is also qualitatively different altogether. The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, manifest; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational.

... Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest detail, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.⁴

4. Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', [1921] translated by Harry Zohn, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, volume I, 1913–1926, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996/2004), pp. 253–263, p. 254, pp. 258–9, p. 260.

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