TRANSLATING LEVINAS
Bettina Bergo

INTRODUCTION: *TEMIMUT* **OR FAITHFULNESS TO THE LETTER OF THE TEXT**

Levinas is not so much writing *in* French, a language he associated with the Enlightenment, as *through* French. His first languages were Hebrew and Lithuanian, followed by Russian, French, and German. As a child in Kaunas, he studied Bible. It was only three decades later that he would plunge into the Talmud. Now, biblical Hebrew and that of the 4th century C.E. Talmud are not *one* language, but registers, idioms. Their styles are different; complex because they run, each in their respective ways, a gamut between mytho-poetics, epic narration, legal discussion, psalmody and wisdom literature. This is important because translating Levinas's philosophy demands that we keep in mind Hebrew concepts notably from the Bible, "Greek" concepts from phenomenology, and Levinas's idiosyncratic French. To take one significant example, Annabel Herzog reminds us that the "sincerity" with which "I" respond to the other who confronts me is already a translation at two removes: from *sincérité*, but also and primordially, from the Hebrew *temimut*, "innocence," "integrity" (Herzog 2014: 140-41).

Philosophical translators know that their undertaking is overdetermined. Jonathan Rée has documented the difficult "translation" of Greek concepts into Cicero's Latin, and then into Scholastic Latin via a detour through Arabic (Rée 2001: 245-50). In English, even the transparent English of Locke found it had to accommodate Greco-Latin technical terms like *substantia*, short of forging an equally problematic 'Saxon' idiom with awkward 'translations' like "upholding" or "standing under." Rée fairly points out that "Locke's apologetic Latinity has dominated philosophical English ever since…and although the great English philosophical writers…were multilingual, they all preferred to use the English they *inherited* from Locke" (Rée 2001: 249).

Translating Levinas urges that we respect his own technical terms, given the resonances they have with Hebrew, but also given that his work is an ongoing dialogue with Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. That is, Levinas is explicitly conversing with, and criticizing, idealist dialectics,

classical phenomenology, and ontology as first philosophy. If only for that reason—and the fact that philosophical texts carry an extraordinary sedimentation of traditions, some in conflict, some cross-fertilizing each other—my first priority in translating Levinas is faithfulness to the letter of his text. This immediately poses two problems: preciousness and exoticism. Translating French into English means moving out of a language that constantly negotiates Latin roots fully familiar to French speakers. Some of these roots came into English with the Normans, creating a "double language" in which the Saxons ate lamb and oxen, while their conquerors consumed mutton and beef. When English speaks from the heart, it demands "freedom"; when it theorizes, it ponders "liberty." Hence the ongoing problem of preciousness due to Latin roots. Exoticism too results from an over-zealous preservation of Latinisms in the many cases where a Saxon root would be clearer than and as hard-hitting as the original was.

Greater difficulties await translators who value style (as we all do), notably because the later Levinas contests Heidegger's priority of "Being" through 'performative' choices like dropping the verb 'to be' from many of his discussions. This creates long parataxes designed to reproduce the 'situation' of bearing witness to the encounter with the other, like a breathless accounting for oneself. This choice must be preserved, although it is close to impossible to hold subjects and predicates together without reintroducing the verb 'to be' in English. Remaining faithful to the letter and style of Levinas's text thus carries risks beyond the linguistic cosmopolitanism of most French philosophical works.

Another difficulty is found in the motivation underlying Levinas's later works. Stated inadequately, his motivation arises from two pressing questions: how to write philosophy "after Auschwitz"? Or again: what is left of philosophy after the systematic and legal destruction of over six million people? And indeed, how to bring the ethical 'message' of the biblical prophets into a phenomenology that enquires into its experiential source? If we suppose this is a reductive expression of Levinas's rationale, then recall his answer when pressed by Christian Chabanis in 1982 to ground his conception of responsibility to the other: "Starting from the Holocaust, I think

of the death of the *other* man; I think of the *other* man, for whom—and I don't know why—one can already feel like a survivor, responsible" (Levinas 1995: 166, emph. added). As much as they involve protracted debates with phenomenology and hermeneutics, Levinas's texts are inspired by events to which they bears witness, directly and performatively, or indirectly. The centrality of responsibility, and later of "substitution" (cf. *temimut*), places extraordinary emphasis on certain intersubjective *affects* that "I" undergo spontaneously and in situations where another suffers. Husserl's phenomenology had already discussed *Einfühlung*, empathy, defining it as spontaneous and passive affect. But Husserl's crucial influence on Levinas also proved limited. Phenomenology "constituted" the other as 'like me', starting from *my* gaze. Levinas stepped outside the framework of phenomenology by arguing that the other person is never wholly constituted the way objects can be. The other remains enigmatic to me; her force does not awaken empathy so much as provoke a response. The implications are significant: some intersubjective affects give rise to uncalculated acts of generosity and self-sacrifice, but they do not start from *my* initiative. As such they are epistemologically unverifiable, as if eccentric to phenomenological method. We can only bear witness to such 'events', describing them from a first-person perspective and thereby losing the origin in the other.

Bearing witness is not foreign to philosophy. However, as a style it requires recourse to performative registers of language. These are not so difficult to translate in and of themselves. Yet, in Levinas, these registers are said to rest on a consciousness that is pre-intentional, pre-reflective; these registers must therefore convey the transitive, open desire that motivates the witness—in suffering or in passion—to speak. Phenomenology might call this consciousness "horizontal." I would call it a pre-text, something impelling the witness's saying-to us.

This brings me to a third point, which intimately concerns the first two (faithfulness to the letter and to style): it is something like the density of language, or the unceasing crossing of what structuralism called the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic axes; i.e. the cognitive sources of sentences and active construction of sentences themselves. When Derrida pondered this density of

language, he observed that he never spoke but one language. Yet he also could not speak *one* language. If this curious antinomy can be 'translated', then we gain a glimpse into another fundamental difficulty of translation: the 'language' that 'I' speak is not the set of words codified in a dictionary, it is an *idiom* that I (as singular speaker, as *idios*) can and cannot make my own. As an idiom, it always outstrips my communicative intentions, and I can never appropriate it the way I do an object, even one communally held. Often, it is not *one* language but many. This is eminently the case for Levinas, whose 'idiom' weaves Lithuanian, Russian, French, Hebrew, and German together, opening questions of linguistic identity, performative authority, and even authorship (all of which are concepts in the semantic universe of *auctoritas*). It similarly raises dilemmas of a text historically and semantically overdetermined like Levinas's *Otherwise than Being*, which attempts to express the conditions of what it states, to set into words that which motivates their expression (Levinas 1974). By this point in my text, we can see that we have moved beyond basic questions of translation. Yet this third, 'psychological' question has actually stepped back or beneath the two initial questions of faithfulness to the text and respect of style.

PROBLEMS OF FAITHFULNESS TO THE LETTER OF THE TEXT

It is a commonplace that we should remain as close to the letter of a philosophical text as possible. One reason for this is that we may not recognise the depth of debate to which a single technical term refers. Some translators have chosen a natural English over the complexities of the philosophical jargon so often characteristic of continental philosophy. But Levinas is fully conscious of his hybrid style and, as I indicated, he uses form as though it were the content of arguments he made elsewhere. Moreover he is steeped in Russian literature. We must feel the cultures of Gogol and Dostoevsky, among others, but also of the great rabbi of Vilna, Chayyim of Volozhin, who wrote *The Soul of Life* (Chayyim of Volozhin 2012), and finally 'humanist' strains of Talmudic interpretation inherited from his teacher, Monsieur Shushani (Malka 1994; Malka 2002: 138-41). Therefore it would be a mistake to try to 'naturalise' Levinas's French, which *does*

not mean that textual hybridity should obscure understanding. Jonathan Rée speaks eloquently of producing an English translation both "unnatural and faithful" to the original (Rée 2001: 228). Because Levinas's textual heterology deliberately impacts his philosophy, we must make do with a significant element of apparent exoticism, notably where he is enacting his response to another as if it were immediate, *here and now*. As to preserving the sedimentation of concepts and traditions, this is often the stock and trade of philosophical translation (Rée 2001: 233-34).

Since French readers confront the problem of exoticism in Levinas's text almost the way English readers do, naturalising amounts to obscuring his rhetoric. As I pointed out, by reinserting the verb to be into Levinas's parataxes, the translator is making an indirect *philosophical* point: the primacy of the copula and its omnipresent transparency. Eliding the verb cannot eliminate 'being', as existence or Heideggerian question. However it is ingredient in Levinas's thematic focus on the other person, whether understood as the face that speaks to me, or the memory that I carry within. Here style must cede to all the elements composing the arguments, including the indirect ones. In another sense, Levinas has created his own paratactic style that performs what is the ultimate task remaining for philosophy: bearing witness to the human context in which it can arise, if only as responsibility or a promise to speak to someone. When Levinas constructs arguments, as he does explicitly in *Otherwise than Being*, chapter 1 (Levinas 1991: 3-20), there is no difficulty translating them. But the challenge at the level of his performative utterances is to convey the affects associated with being called upon or singled out. The language of witnessing carries almost more affect than predication (Lyotard 1988: §§ 110, 134-35), in which case we must not force the text didactically to make more sense than it already does.

Sensitivity to the fact that tone and rhetoric have philosophical consequences means grasping that *they* too determine whether an argument proves probative and even whether arguments that are highly condensed or incomplete will move us. In philosophy as in literature, a fundamental act of faith must be elicited then cultivated between reader and author. This is more than a matter of consistency of arguments. As much as I would like, I do not subscribe to Gadamer's

definition of understanding as the "fusion of horizons," unless said "fusion" be itself asymptotic, and often unstable (Gadamer 2004: 305).

PROBLEMS OF RESPECT OF STYLE

As we have seen, there is a tension between literality and a strong respect of style. This tension is not always present, the two may complement each other. Nevertheless, the effect of style is the creation of tone, which, as Kierkegaard understood better than most, largely determines the reception of a text. He went so far as to say that we cannot properly evaluate an idea if it is presented in a style that corrupts it. An idea or event that should be presented seriously must not be forced into a style that is comical, tragic, much less 'objectivist' or 'positivistic'. In 1844, Kierkegaard pondered this after the scandal provoked by his "Diary of a Seducer," which had been read by a public ignorant of its profound irony. In writing *The Concept of Anxiety*, he changed tones. He was now seeking the right voice in which to explore sin as a real question. It could no longer be a matter of irony, much less of theological piety or scientific curiosity. Indeed, when read by psychology, sin loses its experiential intensity and all its paradoxes to become an object of science. When translated into metaphysics, sin changes into an object of speculation. Its aporetic quality—as that which determines me in anxiety as a possibility and which I realize in an free leap provoked by that same *Angst*—evaporates. Ideas like sin thus depend on the tone in which they are expressed, and tone proves to be the great challenge to a translator who must watchfully adjust style to the voice of the author.

Interestingly, style is both an action and its outcome. There is a reciprocity between style of execution and style of what is produced. The Roman historian Pliny urged that style denoted *ways* of painting and the *stilus*, which spread the wax colours on a surface was the material technology through which style was forged (Pliny the Elder 1857: 250 n. 10). In fourteenth century France, the "*stille*" was both the "*poinçon à écrire*" (a writing brush) and the little rod mounted atop a sundial, which indicated the hour of the day. Objects termed "*stille*" concerned the means of

production and the orientation and conditions under which communication transpired, even communication of the time of day. Technology, technique and their manifestations, material and immaterial, coexisted in reciprocity. While Kierkegaard argued that there is no understanding without the proper tone, in philosophy, style equates to conviction. It is no mere patina that one layers upon one's language. But philosophy is not just logic, when it is *phenomeno*-logy, as the description of what our moving bodies perceive in the world, then philosophy must embrace the literary, despite the objections of some. Philosophy then becomes, to paraphrase Nietzsche, a "dramatische *Urphänomen*," a fundamentally dramatic phenomenon (Nietzsche 1993: 43). By this he meant that philosophy unfolded as a staging of select phenomena with a view to seeing them clearly, and by extension, to understanding what it means to hear them better as well. All of this depends strictly on obtaining the right style.

The recognition that style has ontological density and virtually creates worlds we are talking about, finds itself caught up in yet another tension: the all too contemporary question of "originalism" implies a static text and style, whose transparency offers itself only to the reader who considers himself unbiased by interpretation. When we attempt to reproduce the style (or insists on remaining close to the letter of the text), we produce, in the idiom of translation, a creature that may not have much equivalency with the original language. In the case of Levinas, then, my initial value often carries more weight than the second one, though this has not spared me hermeneutic perplexities, themselves also philosophical. For the underlying question is whether the configuration of literality and style do get us closer to something like the original intentions of the author. That question admits many, disputable answers. Context and related texts help us, but never definitively set forth the intentions, and certainly not the vast intellectual sedimentations, of the author and the life of his or her mind.

TOWARD AN "OTHERWISE THAN BEING"

In regard to Levinas's two great works, it is particularly difficult to translate *Otherwise than Being* because there is precisely a tone that appears sometimes imperative, sometimes obsessed with mourning. This tone is woven into and continuously overflows the argumentative structures of chapters 2, 4 and 5. It is not so much a suffering that somehow starts from the *individual* Levinas as it is the suffering recurring out of what he saw and heard, as though this suffering were a-subjective and contagious like trauma. The tone of the work is inward-looking, and ongoingly resistant to arguments that would reduce it to existentialism or force it into dialogue with the thinkers of ontological difference. To be sure, Heidegger's influence was considerable, notably because, for him, Being reveals itself precisely thanks to those *Stimmungen* or moods (tones) that open our access to it and to the meaning of our own being (Heidegger 1962: 172-179). Heidegger thus extends Kierkegaard's emphasis on tone and truth, although he does not bear witness to alterity the way Levinas does.

As I indicated, Levinas's witness is prepared by arguments in chapter 1 of *Otherwise than Being*. The first and most important of these is that there is a kind of temporality specific to the intersubjective affect (pleasure or pain) that comes to me from the other who faces me. By the later work, this other is translated into an affective alterity so potent that it interrupts the flowing time-consciousness that defined Husserl's phenomenological subjectivity at the transcendental level (Husserl 1991: 77-79). Yet even this argument is continually disrupted by Levinas's enactment of the 'ethical' interruption that prompts his gesture of bearing witness of it *to* someone. Still, the arguments are clear: affective time does not unfold as a pure flow, as an ordered sequence. Affective time is not a plurality of events moving in a forward direction (Husserl's "rectilinear multiplicity," Husserl 1991: 120). Rather, affective time repeats like a traumatic memory, which renews suffering though it may have no object. And the argument continues: if, for phenomenology, consciousness is fundamentally structured by the flow of time, which integrates *all* lived experience in its passing, even as it preserves the places or times of each event that flows back thanks to time indices, then

the experience of suffering occurs in this flow *and* overflows it. Suffering and trauma return, "obsessively." Levinas writes: "Obsession is not consciousness, nor a species or a modality of consciousness, even though it overwhelms the consciousness that tends to assume it" (Levinas 1974: 139; 1991: 87). But trauma is not 'narcissistic'; enduring trauma concerns the suffering of another person. We might document such a claim with psychological studies of trauma, and then venture that our philosopher was traumatized… by the murder of his family and friends. But we thereby lose the point of the argument: if what we "know"—i.e., what *is*—is possible and conditioned by Husserl's overarching flow of experienced "time," a time more basic and embodied than the socially constructed one of clocks and calendars, then traumatic "moments" and their repetitions, which do not *flow on*, interrupt not merely consciousness but our ability to grasp what *is* in that moment, as well. This is not without philosophical interest, because it sets the origin of philosophical questioning in the other person and in what escapes our grasp of him. Moreover, it complexifies Husserl's linear time consciousness by insisting on an intersubjective time indissociable from affects. While trauma interrupts thanks to both its intensity and its lack of identifiable *reason*, its lack of 'why', it is pre-eminently induced in one who witnesses the suffering or destruction of another. In that sense, trauma is not part of ordinary experience but may befall anyone. What we learn from it concerns the quality of our connection to another person, which "is" otherwise than 'Being' when the latter denotes everything that is, everything that totalises. If Being unfolds, in Heidegger, as the temporalization of the being that we are, as *Da-sein* or open insertion in the world, then the implications of intersubjective trauma contest Being as closure and totality.

This polemical claim proves difficult for two reasons. First, nothing should be outside of what-is, including trauma. Second, the implication for Levinas's argument is peculiar because it means that he *cannot assert* this 'experience' of suffering for-another, or before-another person, as a fact of existence. Levinas's suffering here might be compared to a pure tone, indeed to Heidegger's argument about the verbality of being ('the red reddens' is processual; Be-ing has no 'subject'), except that Levinas proposes that his tone *attaches to* Be-ing's dynamism, like an ad-

verb ("*autrement,*" otherly). Or, as he says, like "the music in Xenakis' *Nomos Alpha pour Violoncelle Seul*…which bends the notes and method into qualities like adverbs. Every quiddity [, every 'what'] becomes a mode, the strings and woods passing into sonority" (Levinas 1974: 71; 1991, 41 trans. mod.). The task then, for Levinas as for the translator, is to convey the performance of this bending of notes as if language could be tonal, and where the tone corresponds to affects attaching to intersubjective encounters and memory—whether we qualify them psychologically as traumatic or simply disturbing incidence.

The adverbial would have the kind of unperceived 'insistence' that a performative can have in J. L. Austin's sense of the illocutionary speech act, or indeed, in John Searle's sense of "expressive" illocutionary acts that always carry a specific attitude toward a statement, such as regret, remorse or shared joy. Such speech acts concern address and the way intersubjective connections are established. In Levinas we find similar 'declarations', that, as illocutionary acts, alter a state of affairs and create new interpersonal reality. For example, "The meeting was adjourned" or "The defendant is found guilty"—in Levinas: "And I still interrupt the ultimate discourse in which all the discourses are stated in saying it to one…situated outside the said that the discourse says" (Levinas 1974: 264; 1991: 170). This is one of Levinas's techniques for bearing witness in his text as if *to you*, *here and now*.

Levinas makes use of the illocutionary force of performatives, inherent in the sheer *fact* of declaring (the meeting was ongoing, it is now adjourned), *or* expressing the intention of promptly enacting the deed that is illocutionary act itself. We do not lose sight of the literary artifice, yet it is effective as it moves between a declarative form ("The discussion I am presently holding at this very moment…" [Levinas 1974: 264; 1991: 170, trans. mod.]) and an expressive form ("To be oneself, otherwise than being, to be dis-interested, is to carry the misery and the failure of the other" [Levinas 1974 : 185; 1991 : 117, trans. mod.]).

LEVINAS AND MULTILINGUALISM

Levinas apportions his many languages according to function: Hebrew, for Torah and Talmudic reflection; Russian for home life—but also for literary examples; German for phenomenology and hermeneutics; and French for the idiom of *his* philosophy. What are the implications of this multilingualism for his thought? Derrida's point that we have but one language and it is not ours, holds true. But as Derrida added, Levinas does not 'inhabit' a *Muttersprache* the way Hannah Arendt did with German (Derrida 1996: 111). His inhabitation is distributed and only French plays the role of Enlightenment language. Before discussing other psychological and cultural implications of multilingualism, we should enquire what these many languages mean for translation.

Of course translation is a commerce in multilingualism. Other than remaining faithful to the letter of the text, with its accompanying difficulties, is there a way effectively to translate philosophies proceeding on dynamic distributions of languages and concepts? That is, in translating what are already translations, we must preserve context, perspectival shifts, and even interpretations. This can only be done by knowing the work of the philosopher well—and by being familiar with the theses he contests or adopts. Thus, in addition to being sensitive to semantics, connotation, and the relationship between overarching structure, its design and its performance, we need to be minimally specialized in a given philosophy. But here, and like the later Derrida, Levinas is writing 'Greek-Jew', he is 'translating' the biblical prophets' justice-teaching into a phenomenology of its origin in the address of the other person. He is offering a secular trans-lation while keeping the 'religious' expression as if in reserve. Jonathan Rée offers an illuminating example of this kind of difficulty. The translator of Sartre's *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* stayed close to the letter of the text. So much so that he translated the idiomatic "il n'est pas indifférent que" as "it is not a matter of indifference" (Rée 2001: 234). Thereupon, he translated "*réalité humaine*" by "human reality," which might have found a lighter, more elegant expression were it not for the fact that the term was not so much Sartre's own as the echo of a work he was

criticizing. The philosopher Henry Corbin used the term in his celebrated *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?* itself echoing Heidegger. Indeed this much questioned translation was used in the Portuguese version of *Being and Time*. Despite the fact that *Dasein* is more about the open 'site' of perception and activity in the world, the expression "*réalité humaine*" persisted, following sinuous semantic paths through many Latinate languages. Here, it was not so much 'Greek-Jew' as 'Latin-German'. As Rée points out, "Philosophical translation is never bilateral… other, ulterior, languages keep drawing up a seat at the linguistic table" (Rée 2001: 235). But the lesson remains: faithfulness to the letter of the text may protect us from flattening the many semantic associations and tonal colours of a text. That also implies sometimes translating against one's common sense.

Take the text of the prophet Ezekiel, for example. Appropriate because this prophet of exile is surely the most poetic of these great allegory makers. Further, Ezekiel bears witness to the fury of Adonai against the faithless of Israel. To that end he is commanded to imbibe the scroll of judgement which unfolds before him like the face of the other. The translation of André Chouraqui, faithful to the Hebrew, integrates the most concrete and disorienting terms precisely from the original.

> Make chains: yes, the earth if filled with the judgement of bloods, / the city fills with violence. / I call forth the worst nations, they inherit of their houses. / I interrupt the spirit of the implacables, the powerful; / their sanctuaries are profaned. / Fright comes. They ask for peace, and nothing! / Damn upon damn will come, rumour upon rumour shall be. / They will seek the contemplation of the inspired, / but the torah is lost for the priests, counsel for the elders. (Ezekiel 7:23-27)

Every biblical translation entails interpretation. The Chouraqui edition opens a window that allows us to see the roots of the Hebrew words and syntax. He is unruffled by uncanny usage, and it works. Indeed the success of this translation depends on the sedimentation of prior versions. For here, the value of naturalism gives way to a brutal encounter with a little-mediated original. The voice of Adonai consists in repeated invectives and accusations. How then to extract a message of

justice that is not vengeance? Clearly, from context (which means, for Levinas, the entire Bible) and from commentary, from Talmud. Jewish hermeneutics is fully aware of this, as we will soon see.

But suppose the idiom Derrida identifies as his "one language" represented the dilemma of the translator. One language is not mean a private language, much less that all utterances will be somehow cross-contaminated by other idioms and registers. And yet… Considering his situation of ongoing 'translation', firstly as a francophone incapable of writing Hebrew or Arabic, and possessing shards of Berber, Jacques Derrida extended his claim into an aporia: "1. One never speaks but a single language, 2. One never speaks a single language" (Derrida 1996: 21). In the first place, we have the impression of 'possessing' a language ("I call it my home, and I experience it as such…" [Derrida 1996: 13]). This home language is the implicit one into which we translate other languages, spoken or written. Yet Derrida reminds us that the sedimentations of translations, which are our sedimentations, our "reservoir" of meanings (cf. Husserl 2001: 227), imply a certain 'idiopathy' for each of us; this one language we possess is our 'idiom' though it is not private. Yet this idiom is never pure (Derrida 1996: 23), any more than a language is pure. This destabilises all our hierarchies of languages, dialects, idioms or *patois* (though Derrida is fully aware of linguistics' arguments distinguishing them).[1] Together, the two propositions imply that I am always both the author and not the author, the translator and not the translator of my utterances; together, they urge that the 'language' in which 'I' speak is no purer than my notion of myself in my *id*-entity. This echoes Levinas's ongoing struggle with the illusion of totalisation in philosophy; there is neither pure thought, pure being nor pure logic. For Derrida, "it is impossible to count languages," notably once "the One of a language, which escapes any arithmetical accounting, is never determined" (Derrida 1996: 55). Thus he can add, "I have but one language, and it is not my own" (Derrida 1996: 13).

Aside from the obvious claim that I neither fully possess a language nor could claim that it somehow *belongs* to that linguistic formation by which I learned to say 'I', this suggests something

translators know well: the translation (and with it models of adequation between languages) as essential as it is impossible. Derrida equates this less with semantics than with tone. "If I have always trembled before that which I could say, it was because of the tone…and not the content [*fond*]. And that which, obscurely and as if despite myself, I sought to imprint, giving or loaning it to others as to myself, to myself as to the other…I believe that in all things, it is with the *rhythm* that I risk everything, for everything" (Derrida 1996: 81, emph. added). Tone thus includes rhythm and together they are what 'speaks,' like Kierkegaard's moods, before we have so much as unfolded the argument—indeed, before we know the 'milieu' in which we understand! This is what Chouraqui preserves of the prophets, the obsessive rhythm of the voice of Adonai; this is what passes through Levinas's parataxes. Tone is clearly central to witnessing, and Levinas has set all his French 'monolingualism' in service to this uncanny performative dimension. For example:

> Exposure precedes the initiative—that a voluntary subject might take—of exposing itself. For the subject finds no place for itself, even in his own volume, nor in the night. He opens himself in space but is not-in-the-world. The restlessness of breathing, the exile in oneself, the in-itself without rest…is a *panting, a trembling of substantiality, a within the Here*—a passivity of exposure that does not manage to take form…. *But the relation to the air through which are formed and uttered, the experiences expressed in these truths, are not in turn an experience*... (Levinas 1974: 276-77; 1991: 180-181, trans. mod.)

Panting out the trauma of investiture, Levinas enlists the 'images' of space, air, breathing and exile to the passive affect he calls the *Dire*, that innocence and integrity expressed by *temimut*. Here and elsewhere, the language is strange but recognizable. However, affect is carried strictly by tone and rhythm, which reflect the sincerity of the witness and an exasperated attempt *to say*; almost the way Ezekiel 'translates' the invectives of Adonai. In both cases, the words run on—even run out of breath. Without these tones and rhythms, witnessing becomes declaratives and descriptions, and

Levinas's adverbial "*autre-ment*" slides back into Heidegger's Being, into predication and totalisation.

I tremble to imagine what translating *Otherwise than Being* must have felt like for Alphonso Lingis. Notoriously untranslatable—above all in his tone—Levinas, like Derrida, resists translation, just as they both resist the reduction of their witness and arguments. This is not a facile resistance. "Not that I cultivate the untranslatable," writes Derrida. "Nothing is untranslatable if one so much as accords oneself the time of the effort [*le temps de la dépense*] or the expansion of competent discourse…Yet 'untranslatable' remains—must remain…the poetic economy of the idiom, that which counts for me, as I would die fast or sooner without it…there where a formal given 'quantity' always fails to restore the singular event of the original…" (Derrida 1996: 100-101). Not an otiose resistance, then, it is an invitation to recognize waters beneath the waters, the affective preconditions of the text.

TRANSLATING LEVINAS'S HERMENEUTIC "REDUCTION" TO A COMMON ROOT OF SIGNIFYING

The singular event that is the original poses yet another problem in Levinas. Because he unequivocally adopted French as *the* "language of philosophy" (Derrida 1996: 111 n.), and because the subtlest nuance of 'idioms', including Hebrew, had to find or forge a place in this 'Greek', there ought to be no insurmountable problem with the contents of what is *said*. But as we have seen, the translation of tone and rhythm is, in Levinas, also that of conveying the intersubjective affect at the root of responsibility. That is why Levinas himself performs the first act of translation on his *own* thought, using a hermeneutic reduction of words said (*le Dit*), designed to reveal the underlying affective process of signifying (*le Dire*). I believe he adopted this strategy from Heidegger, whose ontology was itself firstly hermeneutic. Heidegger's was the self-interpretation of (our) existing as that open site (the *Da-*) in which our 'worlds' unfold in different moods, authentic and inauthentic. His initial task entailed translating the silent speech or call of Being to us. This curious translation

proceeded through the suspension or 'reduction' brought about by moods like anxiety, joy or boredom. That is, just as moods colour the way we perceive our worlds, they incite us to set aside our concern with objects and events therein. Thus the extraordinary project of approaching what overflows everyday language, via affects that afford us access to some extra-thematic 'x', is found in both Heidegger and Levinas. The latter takes up the affective suspension to ask what lies beneath my concern for another person, and sometimes my ongoing mourning of their suffering and demise. He came to call this 'ground' "the Saying" (*le Dire*). It is affective and "sensible," that is, embodied and *between* me and the other.

> In sensibility the qualities of perceived things turn into time and into consciousness…has not sensibility already been *said* then? Do its qualitative variations not make the *how* of the verb stated in it understood [as in Heidegger's hermeneutics]? Do not the sensations in which the sensible qualities are lived resound *adverbially* and, more precisely, as adverbs of the verb 'to be'? (Levinas 1974: 61; 1991: 35)

By using an utterly new reduction to affects or "sensibility"—one that digs beneath Husserl's cognitive intentionality *and* Heidegger's hermeneutics of moods that 'unveil' Being, Levinas is effectively *translating* a flesh and blood body in the situation of facing another person. Conscious awareness (Husserl) and existence, or Being (Heidegger) are still 'with us' (i.e., "the qualities of perceived things turn into time [as flowing consciousness]"). Yet the process called Being is doubled by qualities that inflect it in different ways. These 'qualities'—finding an appropriate language for them means uncovering something not-yet-conscious and so, not yet 'existing'—are themselves comparable to tone and rhythm. They 'condition' existence, but they are expressed neither by nouns or verbs. Literature, notably poetry, seems to have understood and utilized this. The problem—which Nietzsche early on called the "great falsification" created by grammar and predication—is *translating* intersubjective sensibility as it plays out in rhythms and tones largely unattended to, not to mention the unanticipated performatives. "*But then if they [the sensations]*

could be surprised on the hither side the said, would they not reveal another meaning?" (Levinas 1974: 61; 1991: 35)?

The performatives that cross through his late work are like an invitation to translate backwards, from utterances to their affective condition: "unsaying the Said" (Levinas 1974: 19, 70; 1991: 7, 40). This shows how the immediacy and simplicity of witnessing, what Levinas calls the *kerygma*-quality underlying all language, prove to be as difficult to nail down as their expression (their translation from the body) is open to doubt. Levinas took French for the universal language of philosophy, as we have seen. Yet *his philosophy* is drama, poem, and at times lamentations. A translation of what philosophy calls a pre-condition—maybe even a transcendental pre-condition— even as it flatly refuses being integrated into (Kantian *or* Husserlian) logics of conditions of possibility. The criticism Levinas wages against Husserl challenges the abstraction of the latter's formalism, notably that of homogeneously flowing time-consciousness; then later and above all, Husserl's "standing-streaming" (*Stehend-Strömend*) that is the consciousness in which *all events* flow, sediment, and from which neither perception nor our subtle apperception (awareness of self) ever escapes.

We have seen similar wagers, even beyond literature. Freud was uncomfortable with reifications of the unconscious, yet he knew that access to the part of the unconscious created by repression of affective conflicts, was possible only through traces, dreams, and neuroses, like words forgotten, slips of the tongue, the 'composite' people and places of dream life. Access required dialogue and analytic interpretation, precursive to the task of translation, which ultimately only the subject herself could do. Like Levinas's adverbial affects, *this* problem precedes translation of words and sentences. Yet it returns in two times: first, when we confront the original text; second, when the cultural heritage of the new language attempts to accommodate the linguistic and extra-linguistic preconscious of the author.

TRANSLATING SILENCE AND THE "NEGATIVE SENTENCE" OF AFFECTS

This dimension of witnessing did not escape a reader sensitive to the disturbance felt by the victims who brought Holocaust denier and 'historian' Robert Faurisson to trial in 1979 for racial defamation. Called to prove that the gas chambers both existed and operated, the survivors were caught in the double-bind of explaining how one might be both a victim of the gas chambers and still alive today. Facing the positivist, juridical language into which they were challenged to 'translate' their experience and those of their loved ones, the victims were caught up in what Jean-François Lyotard calls a performative "*différend*," adding that "the differend is the unstable state and the instant of language wherein something that ought to be able to be set into sentences cannot yet be so. This state entails the silence that is a *negative sentence*, but it also appeals to sentences [still] possible in principle. *What we ordinarily call a feeling* [affect] *points toward this state*" (Lyotard 1982: 29, my trans. and emph.). I will return to the question of silence and negative sentence. Note for now that a similar problem of translation inhabits Levinas's text, and I would venture, with Lyotard, that the only way of securing something indemonstrable—much less giving voice to such a feeling—is by repeatedly bearing witness to it, and in Levinas's case, by witnessing with parataxes, hyperbolic expressions, and self-interruption. If it were simply a matter of replaying classical phenomenology's descriptions of intersubjective *Einfühlung* (empathy), then there would not be the "*différend*" that, Levinas recalls, encourages the return of skepticism or doubt (Levinas 1974: 163-165). Nevertheless, and unlike Lyotard's project, Levinas witnesses from a first-person perspective rather than describing (from a third-party perspective) a blocked confrontation between two parties (the different). Levinas chooses to speak out of the singularity of his experience in all its passivity: "As if set under a blazing sun, supressing in me every shadowy corner, every residue of mystery, every *arrière-pensée*…I am a witnessing—or a trace, or a glory—of the Infinite, breaking with the bad silence protected by [Plato's] secret of Gyges (Levinas 1998: 75, trans. mod.)." This means that bearing witness to an experience that emotionally overflows argumentative

grammars (abstract subjects and predicates) is bearing witness to what Levinas calls in-finite 'experience' of intersubjective sensibility.

If we suppose that this is just God-talk, then we have reduced Levinas's witness to some religious ontology. Did Heidegger not argue persuasively that ontology and religion stand opposed, or that the one betrays the other? More important than this is breaking "the bad silence," whether it be that which lies at the depths of subjectivity (Gyges), or the silence of not being able to find the words by which to state one's 'experience'. To be a witness, beyond the responsibility of our assuming the first-person position, is to fold what we call our 'inside' as if 'outside', to open out those inner sufferings we prefer to hold far from the light of day. This amounts to 'translating' a feeling into something that never fully enters an intentional act. Consequently, the 'translation' here (as in Lyotard's victims' dilemma) is always suspect—something from which the translation from one language into another will also suffer. Levinas asks, "How does the Saying differ from an act beginning in a conquering and voluntary ego, its *signifying*, an act transforming itself into being, its 'for the other' taking a hold in identity?" (Levinas 1991: 153, trans. mod.). One answer was provided by Derrida who repeatedly expressed Levinas's *Dire* (Saying) as a fundamental promise made to an other.

> As soon as I open my mouth, I have already promised, or sooner, sooner still, the promise has seized the *I* who promises to speak to the other, to say something, to affirm or confirm [something] by his word… This promise is older than I. This is what appears impossible, as the theoreticians of speech acts would say: like all authentic performatives, a promise must be made in the present. (Derrida 1987: 547, my trans.).

In the speech from which this quote is drawn, Derrida was invited to address the *question* of negative theology. He spoke at length of a promise or a pre-condition—and its paradoxes. "Before or rather within a *double bind: how [do I] avoid speaking*, since I have already begun to speak and always already begun to promise to speak. That I might already have begun to speak, or rather that

the trace at least of a word might have preceded this one, is what we cannot deny. *Translate*: *we cannot but deny it*" (Derrida 1987: 549). Following Levinas closely, Derrida translates an intersubjective affect as a pre-reflective promise. The skeptics' denial he mentions comes from various places: from a charge of irrelevance ("there are always conversations going on, they are not preceded by a promise"); the question of a ground or first gesture ("let us focus on what is said, rather than some conception of what preceded it *in your mind*"); or a demand for transparency ("how would you *know* that you promised anything, when your interlocutor invited you first and you merely responded?"). These objections begin from a petition of principle, that everything is always already conscious or 'about' something. Yet they indicate that the pragmatic *translation* of Derrida's apparent commonplace sets it straightaway into an antinomy. I would argue that the contradiction has as much to do with the openness of interpretation, *and translation*, as it does with Levinas's core element of intersubjective existence: the unstated promise to respond that is immediately elicited in face-to-face confrontations. This immediacy, however we translate it, comes to be so fundamentally a part of our affective lives that the later Levinas will assign it the trope of "obsession".

INFINITE TRANSLATION AS A TASK: JEWISH APPROACHES TO THE TORAH

The question of a promise and of hermeneutic openness brings us back to bearing witness to an affect that overflows both ordinary intuition and categorical understanding. Translation as witness and communication would be an infinite process of conveying an in-finite 'experience'. Nevertheless, what Levinas calls "infinite" is not the same in Christian negative theology and in Jewish approaches to the Torah and the Talmud. Bearing witness in *Otherwise than Being* should be read as the translation of rabbinical reading practices into phenomenological philosophy. How to understand this? It is well known that in Judaism, readings (translations) of the Torah entail four levels, expressed in the initials of the word *Pardes* (paradise): *pshat*, the literal reading; *remeze*, the allegorical reading; *drash*, the haggadic or moral meaning, and *sod*, the mystical signification. The

reasons for this perspectivism are many, but must be read in the context of a Jewish conception of history and the absent God. It entails an orientation toward the future, that of awaiting the coming of a messiah (who is not God) and knowing that the messiah will never come. This sets the future up as an imperative ("continue to wait!") but also as a confidence that knowingly destabilizes itself.

As Levinas observes, translating the *Tractatus Sanhedrin* (98b): the voice of Ullah proclaims "'may the Messiah come, but may I not see him'," to which Rabbi Yossi responds, "'may he come, and may I deserve the favour of sitting next to the shadow of his mule's manure'" (Levinas 2010: 122, my trans.). Again, the messiah does not come, but that neither closes down the openness of the future nor justifies abandoning the waiting. Moreover, if we allow the premise that the Torah is a revealed text, then translating it entails setting secular, or non-Jewish words in the place of the 'holy' ones. How, then, to translate such words (many of which precisely bear witness)? Marlène Zarader ventures, ironically, "under one condition only: provided the new word adds nothing to the text, provided it limits its presentations to *delivering* the text" (Zarader 2006: 92).

This again recalls my value of remaining as close to the text as possible. Yet it quickly falls into a skeptical dilemma: how could one possibly urge, much less show, that *the* text has been *delivered* (and how, to echo Derrida, does one ever do anything but this)? Moreover, what becomes of the translator, or the reading 'subject' in such a delivery effort? Drawing from David Banon's *La lecture infinie* (Banon 1987), Zarader reminds us that the Jewish tradition, which is "through and through an exegetical" one (Zarader 2006: 93)—and thus ongoingly concerned with translation, i.e., moving voices and texts amongst each other—solved the dilemma early on with a distinct conception of the interpreter (translator). The latter should not be compared to the "classical position of the reader." Instead, she or he is "the indispensable partner, the interlocutor of a text that speaks only in this dialogue" (Zarader 2006: 92). In treating the Torah as a spoken word, a word proffered in and as a promise, no doubt, translation (interpretation) belongs from the outset both to dialogue and to our hearing it.

The implications of this may seem extreme, as there are surely better and worse translations. However, as Betty Rojtman has argued, Hebrew as a language without vowels (added later to certain texts) *requires* the vocalization provided by the reader, and thereby the textual performance assured by him or her. Like the "score for a song, whose vowels determine the diction, always actualized, always taken up again and different from itself, the Torah is presented as a call by the text itself, which bears witness—even in its typographical 'blank white spaces'—to a 'void' in which the meaning finds its inspiration" (Rojtman 1998: 2-3; Zarader 2006: 93). This 'void', which Rojtman qualifies as processual and temporarily 'filled' by sound, argues that each reader, each translator, will—indeed, must—approach the text as interlocutor *and* as re-creator. Hardly controversial, one might respond, but hardly an assurance of the aforementioned completeness or fidelity. Yet the argument has scarcely begun: "if we want, in effect, the task of the interpreter [translator] not to be subjective, while being resolutely active, we must declare that there is nothing in the interpretation that is not already in the text" (Zarader 2006: 94). Now, given the Jewish conception of the future as open, the implication is that the text "already contains, albeit in a latent mode, all the elements that will [ultimately] be discovered in it" (Zarader 2006: 94, trans. mod.).

Interpretation, like translation, would thus face the task of teasing out elements present "in a latent mode" in its text. It would confront the responsibility of realizing potentialities. This is less a call to hermeneutic activism than it is the recognition that in each translation, something will (continue to) be lacking, the work of the translator proceeding *according* to her or his level of linguistic, cultural, hermeneutic, and 'auditory' competence. The perspectivism and futural emphasis here addresses the charges of skepticism, which, as Levinas is fond of saying, arise *as a positive thing* (Levinas 1974: 261). Skepticism would contest arguments that proceed as though truth could be stated once and for all, or as if philosophy could forge a monolithic and transparent order. However many interpretations and even translations have proved to be possible, this in-finity is multiply attested and still open. Gershom Scholem recounts the parable that the Torah reveals itself uniquely to each of its readers, and that, since Sinai, it is different at various ages. Thus, in

the (Kabbalistic) age in which we stand, one letter is missing or incomplete. It may reappear in the next cosmic age at the same time that a letter, presently perceived, vanishes (Scholem 1996: 80; Zarader 2006: 94). This allegory casts light on the *here and now* of Levinas's witness, as it does on time conceived as the moment of hearing-interpretation (translation) in light of an open future: each one to whom the witness is addressed participates in its actualization. *That* is one sense of Levinas's "substitution" (one letter for another, one witness for another, but always *for* the others), and it entails the promise or responsibility of which Derrida and Levinas both speak.

> That means that Jewish hermeneutics is marked by a double "supplement." On the one hand, it is not [so much] a matter of making a sense appear that was, on first glance, hidden, but rather of giving oneself to an "inexhaustible quest," to a "perpetual movement." On the other hand, this movement consequently is more than an act of knowledge, more even than a cast of mind. It becomes something like a way of existing. In this way the Jewish tradition can define itself…as an "infinite reading." (Zarader 2006: 95)

This open movement does not mean that 'anything goes' in translating. Taken together with the norm of faithfulness to the text, it intensifies the responsibility of the translator. She finds herself obliged to provide a reading faithful to the letter and the style of the text, knowing that such a project will succeed *and* fail. The aforementioned question of competence thus stands in parallel with the four planes of reading ("*Pardes*"). It is not a matter of translating Levinas's *philosophy* as allegory, or mysticism; but neither is it one of focusing just on the literal meaning. It is a matter of realizing that, in his performatives, bearing witness is open, "more than an act of knowledge," and that it will be multiply heard (or not heard! Cf. Levinas 2009: 233 nos. 1-2). Indeed, even where there seems to be no "hearing," no force of conviction, the addressee (translator) may find a "letter" hitherto undiscovered. Again, not so much Gadamer's fusion of horizons as ongoing encounters in which we cannot be sure that two horizons, supposedly given, ever merge. This is "the idea…of a

text that is open…in its own most being, awaiting a future" (Zarader 2006: 96). It clearly expresses the task of the translator who confronts Levinas.

Again, nothing of this diminishes the force of our responsibility. It is, rather, the sharpest acknowledgement of the finitude of the translator (interpreter) and of their capacities, *just as it is* the call to textual ethics. One might even venture that Levinas's 1961 *Totality and Infinity* sets the interpretable alterity of the Torah into the context of a phenomenology of the face, where the face is pure expression rather than a phenomenon or object (Levinas 1961). Simply to assert that the face is "expression" is to urge that one has 'understood' something, passively and *in the moment* of responding, before one has recognized "the colour of his eyes" (Levinas 1995: 85). "To renounce the psychagogy, demagogy, pedagogy [that] rhetoric involves is to face the Other, in a true conversation. Then this being is nowise an object, he is outside all grasping. This detachment from all objectivity means, positively, for this being, his presentation in the face, his *expression*, his language…. The relation of conversation is necessary to 'let him be'…" (Levinas 1961: 42-43; 1969: 70-71, my trans.). Does this amount to saying that Levinas's ethical responsibility has set the Torah in the place of a human other? The more interesting question would rather be: *how* would the Torah and the other person "flow together," and what is it in the human experience—call it intersubjective life lived from within—that nourishes the hermeneutics just described? What is it moreover, in first-person experience, that gave rise to a monotheism in which *hearing* a word, a dialogical word, had priority over *seeing* 'the God'? These questions may best be left open to avoid reification or dogmatism, but they stand at the root of what Derrida deemed, translating Joyce with irony, "Greek-Jew is Jew-Greek." They are, then, a matter of translating into a philosophy largely unconcerned with its non-Greek sources, ideas that return to it from a host of thinkers, explicitly or implicitly. Levinas, Derrida, and Zarader, among others, set about "to translate" these sources back into phenomenology. In so doing, they develop an expanded, and deeply philosophical, sense of what translation might be. "It is clear that this theory of translation—still judged 'hallucinatory' today—breaks radically with the habitual comprehension of what a text is" (Zarader 2006: 97).

CONCLUSION

It is crucial to grasp, when reading or translating Levinas, that Jewish hermeneutics enquires into an open text, not into its author. Whether this concerns qualities of the "author," the nature of his existence, or his inscrutable will, is secondary to listening to a text and to its ongoing realisation. This is well known, of course. Yet less well known is the implication for Levinas's phenomenology. Because Judaism is not preoccupied with *theo-* or *theio-*logy, the position of the other remains open, an empty space. Thus, when the other addresses me, it is perfectly admissible to ascribe humanity to that other. But it is just as admissible to conceive the address as coming from a word, a voice, as in Ezekiel's witness. This is why in Chapter 2 of *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas seeks a reduction unheard of in classical phenomenology, one leading back to something like a common root of iterative performance *and* object constitution. In the 1974 work, nothing of his witnessing to obsession necessitates that the condition he calls the "other-in-the-same" might not be a word or a text in him. It is not, however, just any text, but justice text of the biblical prophets. In that respect, the prophetic utterance—from whomever it came—has priority in *Otherwise than Being*. Put simply, prophetic performances are not visions of future events the way Greek seers foretold what was to come to their public. Ezekiel is not Cassandra. The 'function' of the Hebrew prophet is to summon a community to justice. Nevertheless, the implication of the reduction might also be that human experience, at the affective level that concerns Levinas, contains the seed that elicits both prophetic saying and a response to an other in the world. That would be the ultimate meaning, and ambiguity, of his *Dire*, Saying. What this implies for the translator is simultaneously a recognition of finitude, and the continual balancing of tone and textual letter. The lesson that Scholem, Banon, Rojtman, Goldwyn, and Zarader teach us is that each translation will bring its specific "letter" into a universal discourse that includes the philosophical. This 'lesson' should provide the translator as much hope as it does anxiety.

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