

Hermes' Commerce: An essay on Translation and Hermeneutics

Abstract

The question on the art of translation concerns the very essence of Hermeneutics, for comprehension is always a way of translating the world of the other to whom I am listening or reading. The mythological figure of Hermes will lead the way to acknowledge the ambiguities and paradoxes implied in translating and, therefore, in hermeneutics. The necessity of keeping at the same time the distance and the proximity between our world and the foreign one, has taken us to present the idea of commerce as the central activity in every interpretation. On the other hand, interpretation implies also a common World-Life (Lebenswelt), reconsidering the notion of objectivity, without losing, however, the linguistic dimension of human experience. We will show, in dialogue with Paul Ricoeur, how a meditation on translation impacts the very core of an hermeneutical philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Hermeneutics, Commerce, Translation, Alterity, Lebenswelt.

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Introduction

Hermes' figure is quite interesting in its ambiguity: on the one hand, his mission is to take god's words and messages to human kind; on the other hand, he is incapable of accomplishing his task properly. He is, at the same time, faithful to his destiny and a traitor to its own fate. We will find this same ambiguity in the figure of the translator, for he is destined to take a certain message from an original culture to an-other, knowing that, at the end, his objective is out of his range. *Traduttore, traditore*, as the Italian proverb says. We could establish, without fear, that Hermes is the figure of the translator, or, otherwise, that the figure of the translator is that of Hermes. This connection between these figures is even stronger if we attend to the paradox of translation itself: to translate something is to take it from an original ground to a foreign one without losing its identity – an identity that will always be tied to its origin. We can think this movement of eradication and setting in two complementary-contrary ways: or the translator takes the reader to the original language of the author, or takes the author to the language of the reader. This dilemma of translation – as Friedrich Schleiermacher puts it – is, also, a wider

dilemma that hits hermeneutics in its core – and Schleiermacher is also a main thinker of this philosophical movement: whether we move forward to the foreign in order to understand him, or whether we offer a stranger our hospitality in order to know him, in both cases the paradox of the one and the other is unsurpassable. There is not a third term that can measure correctly this abyss: the difference between ourselves and the foreign is *in-com-mensurable*. However, a bridge is always standing between strangers, and neighborhood is a latent possibility between distant people. And this bridge is built from both shores, in co-laboration, and takes the form of a *negotiation*, that is, a quest for an understanding in which neither of the parts lose more than the other, a search for a just price to a priceless treasure. We must not be astonished by this bond between hermeneutics and commerce: Hermes himself is the protector of businessman, traders and dealers, and also of eloquence and burglars (still hesitating on the paradox of this unique figure?). We should examine, then, this *commerce of Hermes* taking Paul Ricoeur's analyses on translation and thinking how they impact on his general understanding of hermeneutics.

II. The translator's negotiation

Hermes, Greek god that could give hermeneutics his name, is the protector of businessmen, traders, dealers, travelers. Its figure is related with the idea of movement, of passing through known lands to strange ones. The very idea of *translation* is that of movement – although this term is used generally only in astronomy – and therefore Hermes is also the protector of those who travel by words, that is to say of those who moves from a language to another. Hermes himself was one of these language pilgrims, since he was destined to carry gods' words to men. And here we find the other interesting element of this mythological figure: he is, at the same time, in charge of communication and incapable of a faithful transmission, since he is a stutterer. But, as ironically as it could seem, Hermes is also the protector of eloquence: isn't Greek humor a bit tragic! If the protector of eloquence is a stutterer, and he is clumsy when it gets to communication, what is left to us, clumsier creatures? Perhaps, Greek wisdom foresaw a paradox in communication itself, in language itself: words are destined to communicate men but, at the same time, represents the field of every misunderstanding. Only because we can talk, we can misunderstand the words of the other. And we encounter here the very heart of hermeneutics. If language lacked of multiple senses, if it is univocal, communication should not stumble, and there would be no need for any work of interpretation. However, if language is only equivocal, communication could never take place. In that tension between absolute clarity – this endless dream of modern rationality, this Leibnizian *mathesis universalis* – and absolute obscurity – this nightmare of Cratylus – we find Hermes and his art, hermeneutics, as the quest for a possible understanding in a field full of traps. Hermeneutical movement can only stand in this essential paradox of language and in the analogy between comprehension and commerce.

How can we understand communication if is not as a certain *do ut des*? From the very moment that we look to get in communication with another man, we expect that he will also be able to respond to our appeal, that he will also obtain a benefit from our encounter. This could be taken as an instrumental consideration of language, and certainly it is: this does not mean that language is reduced to an instrument, neither to communicate, but it would be stubborn to be unaware of this instrumental essence of language (didn't Wittgenstein and Austin shown us this elementary dimension of words?). Even more, historically speaking, most of the cultural encounters between men had been mediated by commerce, by a search for a reciprocal benefit between people. If a possible benefit wasn't expected of the other, then we find – at best – indifference (*in-difference*, that is to say, a blindness to difference).

Translation, in both senses of physical and linguistic movement, is motivated by a profitable benefit from it. Even nowadays, we only translate a text that we consider important, that can benefit the reader. Translation, then, is in its core the *conditio possibilitatis* of every exchange, and, at the same time, a consequence of this exchange itself. We could say that translation begins at the same time than commerce, that communication between two men is contemporary to their reciprocal interest. And we could find here a third element that describes Hermes and figures understanding itself: this Greek god was not only the protector of travelers and businessmen, and of orators, but also he was a thief, and the protector of burglars. Surely, as the author of this paper, he who is reading it could find quite amusing and truthful the bond between commerce and burglary (I consider myself most of the times robbed in any type of commercial store!), but surely we would be very reluctant to consider a bond between communication, or let us say, between translation and robbery. However, not only mythology, but also experience, can show us this connection: to translate is to take from the other a message in his words to make of one's own, as the other takes away our words to make them his. Interpretation in its wide sense can be understood like this criminal operation, for every time I say or write something, the person that hears or reads it take my words from myself and make them his: the sense of my message is no longer mine from the moment the other appears. In this sense, hermeneutics represents the necessary work of giving and taking in the order of language, and there is no need that the words in question are native or foreign: we could say that there is an internal and an external translation, since to understand, even in our own language, is to make ours the words of the other, that is to say, to bring to our experience the experience of the other. Perhaps, that is why in the bottom of every personal encounter there is a seminal violence that stands for this incapability to be the other completely, or to receive in our own the *other-qua-other*. We should discuss this problem afterwards. In any case, translation, as commerce, can be understood as a two-hands robbery, for none of the two parts gains completely, neither none of them loses everything: I take and I am taken... isn't violence at the core of the sentence *do ut des*? It is as if as we put into agreement a reciprocal damage, only if there is also a reciprocal benefit. Understanding cannot take place without conflict, and conflict is not but a counterpoint between different interests. Translation, then, is a *neg-otium*: the translator does not look for a pure comprehension of the other, there is no look for an *otium*, a contemplative attitude towards strangeness, but a search of a treasure that, even priceless, is given in exchange. And our currency is our own language, we can pay the other's words with our own: isn't that robbery - or commerce - or communication?

One of the first thinkers of hermeneutics as a philosophical movement, Friedrich Schleiermacher, wrote a brief treatise on translation called *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens (On the Different Methods of Translating)*, a writing, as José Ortega y Gasset states,¹ that contains everything that could be said about translation. At the beginning of this treatise, Schleiermacher affirms that discourses are "translated" in various ways, as we could see everywhere, and that there is also a need to translate "inside" our own language, although he will only focus on translation between different languages.² The profession of a translator can be found in two different areas, each of those have their own particularities: in the field of business, of commerce, and the *real* translator, that will work in the fields of science and arts. This distinction receives, also, two different terms to those who are involve in each area: *interpreter* is the one that works in the field of business, and *translator* - rigorously speaking - the one that inhabits the world of science and arts. While the interpreter is close to the objects of negotiation, due to the way commerce takes place, the translator finds himself in front of the spiritual and axiological world that lives in the core of language. In the first case, objectivity prevails over words, while in the second case, language prevails over the object at stake. This is

why translators must know deeply the author's life and the cultural and spiritual background of the language he is translating. Interpreter, otherwise, turns his attention to the object that is in the center of negotiation, for commercial activities have a certain arithmetic and geometrical character, and translation therefore is made almost mechanically.³ Whereas "interpretation" – in this particular sense – is moved by the will of possession, that is to say, the needs of the object itself, translation confronts the products of art and science, and tries to "transplant" them from a language to the other, for it is moved by a spiritual imperative.⁴ In this matter, we must consider two things: on the one hand, that where ideas – that identifies with linguistic expression – prevails over objectivity, for which the word is only an arbitrary sign, there is no unique correlation between words in different languages. On the other hand, when someone thinks more or less independently and wants to express himself, he is confronted with language in a twofold sense: "in a sense, we dominate the language we speak; ourselves and all our thoughts are products of language. (...) However, in another sense, everyone who thinks freely, and whose spirit acts on his own impulse, contributes also to mold language".⁵ This is why creative works (that appears in both areas of science and arts) must be understood from this double dimension of the foreign language and the author's life that generates new moments on language itself. Translation, then, seems a hare-brained enterprise, for the translator has to penetrate the spirit of the language molded by the author in an original way, foreseeing his peculiar way of thinking and sensing, and must communicate this knowledge to his readers offering his own language and his own limited knowledge of the author he is translating. In this hopeless project, Schleiermacher remarks that two different methods were proposed, paraphrases and imitations: the first one tries to expel language's irrationality, reproducing the content with a limited exactness, renouncing to the impression of the words themselves, for the lived discourse stays irreparably dead; the second one, instead, is dominated by the irrationality of language, trying to get close to the impression that words produce in the reader, but renouncing to the identity of the original work. While paraphrases are often used in the field of science, imitations are use in the one of arts. However, neither of both procedures satisfies the authentic translator.⁶ Schleiermacher, therefore, reduces translation to a unique crossroad: "Or the translator leaves the writer as quiet as possible and makes the reader go to his encounter, or he leaves the reader as easy as possible and makes the writer go to his encounter".⁷

Schleiermacher's treatise keeps on analyzing the problems and difficulties, as the benefits of each method of translation. However, we do not want to center our reflection on his treatise, but to resume his confrontation between the interpreter and the translator, and in the counterpoint between the two possibilities of translating. We will start from the former, and go back then to the latter. If we notice the counterpoint between taking the reader to the writer or the other way round, we shall acknowledge that none of these two methods can be pass through completely, for in that case translation itself would be unnecessary – and Schleiermacher acknowledges this problem. If the author is driven completely to the reader in translation, then the translated work would be exactly *as if* the author wrote his work in the mother-tongue of the reader; if the reader is taken forward the writer completely, then a translation would be vain, for the reader could face the original work *as if* it were written in his language. However, the task of translation is to make real this recreation of the *as if*, for a perfect understanding would imply this absolute trans-lation of foreign to homeland, or from here to there. This is why translation is, in its heart, a ridiculous enterprise, an impossible one. If the reciprocal strange character of both the reader and the writer is irreducible, then translation must find a certain *medium* where both can understand each other at a just price. For, if the reader is brought completely to the author, the original work will show all his linguistic power but at the price of being illegible for the reader; if the writer is taken completely to the reader, then the work will be legible by foreign but will lose all of its originality and linguistic richness. There must be a fair trade...

although justice is unrealizable. Commercial strategies will, then, take place – and commerce is a way of robbery. A part of the treasure of original work will be taken by the reader, as a part of the reader’s world will be taken by the hands of the foreign language. None of the parts involved will stay unharmed, and the translator – playing both the role of judge and lawyer, but also of the businessman and the burglar – will stipulate the damage for each of them, taking from and giving away a priceless merchandise: language.

Concerning the other Schleiermacher’s contraposition between the interpreter and the translator, we must remark some difficulties. Although the difference between a poetic or scientific work and a commercial conversation is conclusive, the relationship between objects and words is not that clear. Even in commercial relations, words still sign the objects at stake, so as in poetry the worldly objects still stand in front of the words. Phenomenologically speaking, we could trace this tension to the problem of the *Lebenswelt*: is there a unique world, or is there multiple worlds? Leaving behind the illusion of an objective world – such as the one of geometrical discourse – a world that is not pierced by language, the question for the objective dimension of language catch the attention of hermeneutical thinkers, and it represents, ultimately, the main problem of hermeneutics. Without attempting to solve this tension – hermeneutically unsolvable – we can affirm that if language prevails completely over objectivity, then there would be as many worlds as languages exists, and therefore, no translation would be possible, for such a diversity wouldn’t find a common field to get close; at the same time, if objectivity prevailed completely over language, then the diversity of languages and cultures would be only illusory, and understanding would be a starting point, not a goal, and therefore, translation would turn unnecessary. If this is so, then all *interpreters* – using Schleiermacher terms – are also *translators*, as every translator is also an interpreter. Objectivity cannot be exiled from translation, and, therefore, translators must negotiate with poetical and scientific works such as businessmen do with gold and spices. But also language cannot be unknown in the heart of objects, for interpreters must give up to the possibility of a fair trade, of a fair price, and acknowledge the excess of sense in words that is irreducible to objectivity. The tension and paradox of Hermes’ figure stands again. Concluding, translation is a way of trading the priceless, of transferring the non-transferrable.

III. *L’intraduisible*: the “Other” question

We might bring a central question concerning translation: what place does the translator occupy? As we said, the translator is, in a way, a businessman that looks for the best negotiation possible. However, for whom does he work? Although Schleiermacher’s alternative sheds light on the ways of the translator, we must underline that the translator belongs primarily to only one bank of the river, that of his mother-tongue. Nevertheless, the translator is that who builds a bridge to the other side – and this engineering must be helped from the other shore as well, but only on the demands of the translator’s side – that is to say, a *mediator*. Paul Ricoeur⁸ affirms that translator is he who carries a message, he who is in the middle of two strangers, the reader and the writer, and so he mediates between them. But is he so? Bringing Antoine Berman and Franz Rosenzweig into question, and taking Schleiermacher’s alternative, Ricoeur considers the translator as a server of two masters (Rosenzweig paradox). In this sense, Ricoeur offers a double psychological analogy to understand translation: with the work of remembrance and with the work of grief. On the one hand, translation charges against consecration of mother-tongue, against its intolerance towards what it is not its identity; but also this resistance (Ricoeur’s psychoanalytical terms are eloquent) is also strong in the *other-tongue*, in the foreign language under the presumption of non-translatability, presumption that makes of translation a drama and of the will of a good translation a challenge (and that’s why there is an urge to re-

translate, fed by dissatisfaction towards existing translations). On the other hand, taking now the analogy with the work of grief, Ricoeur finds its equivalent in the renounce of the ideal of a perfect translation, renounce that makes possible to live the impossibility of serving two masters at the same time and to assume the problematics of fidelity and treason. However, this search for an absolute translation governs the enterprise of a continuous approximation to this ideal, for this dream of a perfect translation has not been entirely deceitful, since it has moved the ambition to show the hidden side of the foreign language, and reciprocally, the ambition to de-provincialize the mother-tongue, inviting it to think itself as a language among others and, ultimately, “à se percevoir elle-même comme étrangère”.⁹ At the same time, this will is also marked by other figures: the cosmopolitan desire to build *the* book, that is, the dream of an omni-translation, and the messianic hope (as Walter Benjamin describes in his work, “The translator’s task”) of a pure language that every translation carries in it a messianic echo. Under this figures, states Ricoeur, perfect translation is equivalent to *a profit without losses*. That’s why translation must grieve on these loses, and must accept the *unsurpassable difference* between one and the other, between our own reign and *fo-reign*.¹⁰ Ricoeur, then, affirms that universality would imply to turn everyone a stranger, an erratic nomad, without any mother-tongue. But also this grief means the translator’s happiness when he accepts the distance between adequacy and equivalence, being translation “l’équivalence sans adéquation”.¹¹

En avouant et en assumant l’irréductibilité de la paire du propre et de l’étranger, le traducteur trouve sa récompense dans la reconnaissance du statut indépassable de dialogicité de l’acte de traduire comme l’horizon raisonnable du désir de traduire. En dépit de l’agonistique qui dramatise la tâche du traducteur, celui-ci peut trouver son bonheur dans ce que j’aimerais appeler *l’hospitalité langagière*. (...) Hospitalité langagière donc, où le plaisir d’habiter la langue de l’autre est compensé par le plaisir de recevoir chez soi, dans sa propre demeure d’accueil, la parole de l’étranger.¹²

The experience of translation, then, can be understood in analogy with the experience of *hospitality*. To receive someone in our own house implies to consider the other as other, but also to consider him as ourselves, for we treat him as our brother, as an integrant of our home. At the same time, the other feels as a stranger in our house, but, at the same time, he feels *at home*; don’t we invite our visitors to feel as if they were at home? The idea of hospitality is central in Paul Ricoeur’s work, and it is possible that this idea is a fundamental heritage of his friend and teacher, Gabriel Marcel.¹³ The centrality of this idea, I think, concerns the respect for alterity and selfhood in the experience of encounter: in hospitality, neither one nor the other *alienates* themselves completely, but at the same time, neither of them stays the same. One of Marcel’s main notions is that of *participation*, and we understand hospitality as a form of participation, for the reality of encounter surpasses the reality of each of the participants, and this excess transfigures the parts involved and takes them to a more plenary way of being. In other words, only in the encounter of alterities, selfhood can embrace its essence. But there is no primacy neither of alterity nor of selfhood: the primary reality is that of encounter in itself, that is to say, the *We* is more original than the *I* or the *Thou*.¹⁴ Although we don’t find a metaphysical statement as this one in Ricoeur’s work, we can surely detect its ultimate concordance: hermeneutics are possible only if dialogue prevails over monologues, only if horizons merge each other. There could not be an hermeneutical work – and translation is a *figure* of hermeneutics – if alterity were absolute, if we talk of an Absolute Other; neither we could understand hermeneutics if we not affirm the possibility of the Self to be an-other.

If this is so, then *l'intraduisible* only stands for an absolute alterity, and hermeneutical project would suppose – at least as a possibility – that everything could be translated. But we would be misunderstanding hermeneutics if we understand translation as *alteration* or *assimilation*: translation would be, in the best case, *encounter*. Perhaps we can get near the dynamics of language if we presuppose this hypothesis, for languages in their own core are transformed in the contact with foreign, and translation is not literal sometimes, but takes place as new ways in which a strange word or expression is included in our mother-tongue. In translation, both languages encounter each other and transforms themselves in this participation, in their being *chez toi*. Perhaps if we follow this lead of a “linguistic hospitality”, we could understand that translation does not mean to bring everything strange to our own, nor to take our own to the foreign; linguistic hospitality could mean that any language, in spite of their strangeness, can encounter with another, and that the shadow of *l'intraduisible* is only a moment in the way to understanding. However, we should be careful of falling into the illusion of absolute universality: as Ricoeur said, this universality would only mean that we are all strangers, or that differences are overwhelmed.¹⁵ The *utopia* of an absolute understanding, or of an ultimate fusion of horizons, must be kept only as utopia. José Ortega y Gasset claimed,¹⁶ concerning translation, that there are two different utopic ways of thinking: an authentic one, and an un-authentic one, being the latter the utopia that conceives as possible its own *realization*, while the former is thoroughly aware of its impossibility to become real. This is the utopic manner of thinking of hermeneutics, that which stands for universal translation as far as it avoids univocal thinking, a logical *mathesis universalis* that would reduce diversity to a vow unity; but also as far as it avoids equivocal thinking, that would spread meaning to infinity, and would make of difference in itself an in-significant term. Perhaps, hermeneutics should turn to analogy and give it a new meaning, understand it from a new point of depart.

Ricoeur addresses this question of *l'intraduisible* in an unpublished paper which title is very suggesting: *Un passage, traduire l'intraduisible*.¹⁷ There are two elements of astonishment: first, the image of a passage, that is to say, translation would be as a step from a known place to an unknown one, from our homeland to foreign lands. Secondly, the paradox expressed in the subtitle: to translate that which can not be translated, that is to say, at the same time, that there is something that isn't translatable, and that it can be translated. We can find the hermeneutical utopic thinking in this paradox, for translating the non-translatable will be forever a task, and no translation will ever overcome the non-translatable. Ricoeur starts claiming that the non-translatable is, in the first place, the languages as far as they are plural, that is to say, as far as their differences affects every operational level (phonetical, lexical, syntactical, discursive); moreover, this differences between languages are expressions of a difference in their *Weltanschauung*, in their particular way to express their vision of the world. This peculiarity is not found in any word, sentence or paragraph, but in *texts*, that as totality of meaning embrace the other semantical terms.¹⁸ This is why, for Ricoeur, the task of translation must not move from the word to the sentence, and then to the text, and then to cultural ground, but instead must move the other way around: “s'imprégnant par de vastes lectures de l'esprit d'une culture, le traducteur redescend du texte, à la phrase et au mot”.¹⁹ In the second place, there is not only an initial non-translatable, but a terminal one as well, for translation exists, and expresses the will to know the foreign (that feeds the *desire of translation*, formula that Ricoeur takes from Antoine Berman). In his *doing*, the translator overcomes the theoretical objection of a non-translatability from a tongue to an other; making translations is a practical response to this principle, whose more powerful argument is that of the relation between a certain language and the mystery, the secrecy, the hidden, the incommunicable.²⁰ Nevertheless, translations are not only possible, but real. How does the translator effectively translate? For Ricoeur, translation is a practice in search of its theory, and instead of giving up in front of the translatable/non-

translatable dilemma, we should think in the loyalty/treason opposition, taking into account that translation is always a risky operation. The “terminal non-translatable” is revealed and even produced by translation itself. The loyalty/treason dilemma is a practical one – not a theoretical as the other – because it is not possible to find an absolute criteria of what would be a good translation. This criteria would be the absurd postulation of a third textual element that communicates the other two, the original and the translation. This is why there is a paradox in the core of translation, for “une bonne traduction ne peut viser qu’à une équivalence présumée, non fondée dans une identité de sens démontrable, une équivalence sans identité”.²¹ Translation work takes the form, then, of a re-translation work, of a revision of past translations. In order to explain this “equivalence without identity”, Ricoeur takes the notion of a “constructive comparatisme” from Marcel Détiene. Translation should be a way to “construct comparatives”:

Grandeur de la traduction, risque de la traduction: trahison créatrice de l’original, appropriation également créatrice par la langue d’accueil; *construction du comparable*.²²

Both of these heterogeneous masters are brought together in comparison due to the translation-construction work: a double treason has taken place, writes Ricoeur. But there is still a third non-translatable, the last one, that we find with the lead of the construction of the comparable, construction that is made in the level of *sense*. The problem with sense is that its united deeply with the flesh of words, with letters: translation can not be satisfied with a translation concerning sense only... for there is an indestructible unity between sense and sound, between significance and sign. This is a terrible issue concerning poetry, mainly, and we can see in Ricoeur’s approach a similarity with Schleiermacher’s difference between *paraphrasis* and *imitation*.

Ricoeur leaves this paper *open*, without any solution, how it must be... But we could synthesis his position stating that there is translation because we find a stranger, and that translation is not possible because there is a stranger in front of us. This paradox, unsurpassable in the level of theory, is surpassed in the level of practice, but only if we accept that this surpassing is not an absolute one, only if we remain in the core of the difference between oneself and the other. The Other question is, then, forever a question, but a question that we address continuously, that we respond to once and again...

IV. Hermeneutics and the paradigm of translation as linguistic hospitality

Translation is an art, a practice in search of its theory: the question of the non-translatable hits the very heart of translation, and, although theoretically this question is unsurpassable, practically this abyss between our world and the foreign one is crossed. The experience of alterity is at the core of the experience of translation. That’s why hermeneutics, as a philosophical tradition, finds a central field to its reflection in this experience. In effect, on the one hand, translation is a practice that concerns principally the level of language; on the other hand, language cannot be understood as a simple *medium* to communicate one another, but as the way the world reveals to a community (the bond that ties language with world, with *Lebenswelt*, is a fundamental postulate of hermeneutics); finally, translation underlines the double-fact, the paradox, of the diversity and the unity of language (and therefore, of the world itself), and the necessity of a mediator, of a bridge that communicates the incommunicable. With all his complexity, the mythic symbol of Hermes *invites us to think*, and the question of translation and of the identity of hermeneutics are involved in one another.

One way to consider translation is to think about it as if it were a kind of plastic art, where there is a reluctant material that has to be molded in order to be understood. The *form-matter* pairing is, then, a nodal concept. This demiurgic practice would inform a chaotic material, giving sense to what is meaningless: while sense would play the function of form, the flesh of the words would play the one of matter. As we have seen, Ricoeur himself (and before him, Schleiermacher) report this illusion of a sense without a sign. The idealist tradition that goes all the way to Plato, and is still present in Husserl's phenomenology, ignores the historic ground of ideas, as the bond that ties meaning to words. Hermeneutics, instead, stands upon this tension history-reason, language-meaning, without attempting any synthesis for these oppositions. Translation, then, is no plastic art, but an hermeneutical one, and its great difficulty lies on this impossibility to isolate meaning from words. Hermeneutics – and its figure of translation – is the art of constructing bridges, of bringing diverse worlds close one to another. There is a certain *mystery* in this experience of *becoming an-other*, and this mystery is in the heart of hermeneutics.²³

But hermeneutics itself not only finds in translation a central question concerning understanding of the strangers, but also finds the question of understanding in the community of language in which we are living. As Ricoeur states, translation is not only necessary concerning the foreign, but also appears to be urgent inside our reign's walls:²⁴ on the one hand, we can say the same things using other words; on the other hand, every dialogue implies two interlocutors, behalf of their condition of strangers or fellowmen, and many times there is a lack of understanding concerning the words we use, even if we share the same language. Beautifully said by Ricoeur: "Il y a de l'étranger dans tout autre".²⁵ Another paradox of language, that hermeneutics should underline, is that language communicates us at the same time that isolates us; words are at the same time the source of every understanding, and the cause of every misunderstanding. And we find here a statement, already noticed, that Ricoeur does not develop in his work, but that should be a central question: my own language, when confronted with others, appears as being foreign.²⁶ But, while Ricoeur understands this foreign condition in a comparative way (that is to say, as being foreign to foreign), this statement should be understood in its own: my own mother-tongue is itself a stranger to me. Jacques Derrida could help us to deepen this paradoxical truth: we don't own our own language.²⁷ This paradoxical truth can be trace, also, in Heidegger's *die Sprache spricht*. Alterity is in the core of our identity, and language is but one of the elements of our *Self as an-Other*. However, this alterity is not absolute, as far as we can appropriate language as we speak it, and moreover, we can open new fields of meaning and words inside language itself. Hermeneutics is here, again, central to understand this tension between a *dead language*, and language in its dynamic and living aspect: there's no meaning without an intention to signify, that is, there is no meaning in language as an objective and independent system, but only when a dialogue happens, only when *I want to say something to another*.

This also underlines another tension, the one between *tradition* and *innovation*: there's no possible creation without a ground from where to jump, and there is no tradition without its living transformations and new significances (a closed tradition is only an abstract idea: if it were closed, then we could not speak about it, for speaking is already a way to open meaning). Here we can find again Schleiermacher's distinction between arts and science, and commercial languages: both artists and scientists expand language itself in their creative activities. Although we have nuanced this difference, it is true that some linguistic activities impact on language deeper than others, and that the difficulties concerning translation appears mostly in these works. Schleiermacher uses a double figure that also concerns the paradox of mother-tongue as

foreign: in every artistic or scientific work (although we should say in every work, period) there is a marriage between a personal/spiritual principle and an impersonal/traditional one. Whereas the personal spirit of a writer plays the role of the mother, the mother-tongue (the difficulties of translation in action!) plays the one of the father: the work that is generated from this relation, then, reveals at the same time the traditional element and the innovative one, the impersonal and the personal, the strangeness of language and its appropriation. With this figure, Schleiermacher intends to show that meaning and sign are inseparable, for a new-born could not be the same if the father changed, as a text could not be the same if the author wrote it in German or in Greek.²⁸

This living aspect of language, that arose the question of translatability inside our language, is also a key access to the question of the Other, for there could not be an entirely new expression that wouldn't take root in tradition: this means that there is not an absolute Other that could appear, but there is always a common ground from where expressions and meanings can blossom. But there is more: if translation happens inside our own language, and can only happen if there is a grounding horizon of sense – using Gadamer's image – then translation concerning foreign cultures would also imply a common ground where to meet. The image of *horizon* in itself concerns not only the notion of amplitude and of surrounding, but also the notion of *frontier*. This notion could show that, at the one hand, horizon is essentially dynamic, that changes as much as we move, so the frontier is in itself unreachable;²⁹ but on the other hand, a frontier is, in itself, already a fusion, for in it two heterogeneous elements (the earth and the sky, our side and the other-side) are in contact. And if the frontier is a certain cut, it is, with no doubt, a possible one, not a necessary one; the frontier is the zone of *indécidabilité*, a zone that is neither one thing nor the other, but where a fusion has merged. To be at the frontier is already to be crossing it. No other-side is absolutely other, or absolutely foreign. To speak of *fusion of horizons* (Gadamer) could misunderstand the key question of the Other, for it underlines the diversity of *horizons of sense* that could come together in dialogue, but does not point out the grounding community of divers worldly experiences, a transcendental community that would play the role of a condition of possibility of encounter and dialogue. Perhaps, the question of the *Lebenswelt* arises here as a central one, and we could find in Husserl's writing a touchstone to paradox of the unity and diversity of the world, as for the articulation between *horizonticity* and horizons.³⁰ In a way, we could say that we are *already* in dialogue, and that the art of translation is a way of reassuming this forgotten community (maybe, as an effort of reaching the lost understanding after Babel's Tower).³¹

Translation, then, is only possible in the encounter between the Self and the Other, between our Reign and the Foreign. Translation is not at the origin of community, for, if that was the case, then an understanding would be impossible; nor community is at the origin of translation. There seems to be a community before community, that makes possible an encounter, and that encounter makes real or effective. We lack the words to refer to this community, and using Aristotelian ontological notions as potency and act to describe a passage from a potential community to an actual community seems to be misleading. Gabriel Marcel used the notion of *nostrité* or *usness* to refer to this metaphysical grounding essence of men.³² Perhaps we could try to understand this essential *co-esse* of men from a transcendental point of view, or as an *existentiary*. I don't know... But this primary *communauté* lead the way to the understanding of the encounter between foreign, between alterities – and translation is a central experience to deepen this *mystery*. Hermeneutics itself is grounded in this transcendental community that beholds inter-subjectivity: an understanding, a communion in language, is always possible, although a plethoric communion is only an idea, an utopia that must be pursued. However, this communion in its transcendentality is not enough to bring together two

strangers, nor language in itself can build a bridge towards foreign cultures: hermeneutics is not only a *philosophy of community*, but also an *ethical philosophy*, since communion is only granted in praxis. This ethical dimension of hermeneutics is underlined in Ricoeur's considerations on "linguistical hospitality" referred to translation:³³ ultimately, to translate is an ethical act, not an instrumental one, for in translation we receive an-other as an Other, and we give our-selves as others to an-Other. We have remarked the difficulties that the experience of hospitality brings forward; however, what we must emphatically reassure here is that there will be translation only where there's a *good will*, an unconditioned willing to attend the Other, a categorical imperative to make justice to the Foreign. We could say, even - and following the Kantian path - that hermeneutics, as far as it is concerned on communion, is also a *political philosophy of peace*, far from any attempt of totalitarianism: where an Other is recognized, there will be hermeneutics. In this sense, to postulate an *in-translatable* could mean to get rid of ethical imperatives, for the Other is no longer Other *for me*, and, under the disguise of tolerance, an absolute *in-difference* can be hidden. To postulate an in-translatable is to simply ignore the *exigency of communion*.

Translation, then, is a certain *response* to a transcendental *call*: the exigency of communion.³⁴ *Responsibility* is at the core of translation, and therefore Hermeneutics is essentially an ethical philosophy. However, most of the time, translation is seen as a methodical, instrumental activity to communicate strangers, something that can be studied and can be learned, with its rules and steps. In other words, translation is considered in its scientific meaning. Nevertheless, we could think that there is a certain concealment of its original sense in this viewpoint: as Husserl spoke of a *Substruktion* to explain how the geometrical world of science concealed the *Life-World* as far as it presented as its Ground, we could think that to consider translation as science as the ground for any experience of translation is also guilty of a *Substruktion*, that is to say, of presenting the order of foundation upside down. The experience of translation, as we have seen, is already present in our daily life, every time we walk into someone else, every time we speak with *ourselves as another*. Translation is not a scientific experience, but a life experience, and that's why translation is also present in *affection*: Schleiermacher said that the real finality of translation is the *joy (Genuss)* of foreign works.³⁵ Translation is the path to *le plaisir de l'autre... heureux de faire votre connaissance*.

We must, in the concluding paragraph, however, unveil the everlasting shadow behind hermeneutics and translation: a mediation is not possible. Although we could think of the translator as a certain *mediateur*³⁶ between the writer and the reader, the translator himself is, first of all, a stranger towards his own language (as we already said), and secondly, serves only one master, his own world, his own language. Hermeneutically speaking, every man is engaged with his own world-language: one could know another language as a first language, but it is only a way of speaking, and the comparative "as if" reveals the impossibility of being a citizen of two different worlds. The very notion of *mediateur* is compromised: there's not such an impersonal, unaffected subject, that could mediate between two parts. Mediation is already an impossible act that is, nevertheless, under the imperative of Justice. We can't be a *mediateur*, although we are asked to be one unconditionally. Hermes also stands for the burglars, and translators are really one of them: when we translate, we serve a master, and we steal from the other. There is no way to transcend this self-interest. Hermeneutics, then, affront its impossibility to achieve community, to achieve peace... but only in that impossibility is that hermeneutics can gain its authenticity, for impossible is - unconditionally - the unreachable lighthouse we must pursue in order to rest being human.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. José Ortega y Gasset, “Miseria y esplendor de la traducción”, in *Obras Completas* (Madrid: Alianza-Revista de Occidente, 1994), volume V, 431-452. This interesting essay by Ortega reveals in its very title, the paradox that is behind the present article, and also behind Ricoeur’s writings on translation. We can see the pascalian style in Ortega, when *misery* and *splendor* are, both, essential to understanding mankind and its human tasks, a style that, we know, is also a very ricoeurian one.

² Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Sobre los diferentes métodos de traducir/Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens (edición bilingüe)* (Madrid: Gredos, 2000), §2.

³ Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, §4.

⁴ Schleiermacher will use this analogy between *trans-plantation* and *trans-lation* again to refer to the need of Germany in both natural and cultural dimensions to enrich its soil and language by getting in touch with the foreign (Cf. *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, §38, 106-108).

⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, §5, 35.

⁶ Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, §§8-9.

⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, §10, 47.

⁸ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction* (Paris: Bayard, 2004).

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 17.

¹⁰ Although the etymology of *foreign* comes from Old French “forain”, and from Medieval Latin “foraneus” (both meaning “on the outside, exterior”, and from Latin *foris* (adv.), “outside”, literally “out of doors”, the english spelling was altered in XVII century, perhaps under the influence of the word *reign, sovereign* (Cf. Online Etymology Dictionary: www.etymonline.com). For the sake of our argument, we wanted to capitalize this political semantical reference to *reign* in the word *foreign*.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 19.

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 19-20.

¹³ Gabriel Marcel thinks hospitality in the frame of gift (*don*): “Si nous fixons ici nos yeux sur l’acte d’hospitalité, nous verrons immédiatement que recevoir n’est point du tout combler un vide avec une présence étrangère, mais faire participer l’autre à une certaine plénitude. Le terme ambigu de réceptivité s’applique donc à un clavier fort étendu qui s’étend du pâtir, du subir – aun don de soi; car l’hospitalité est un don de ce qui est sien, c’est-à-dire de soi-même” (Gabriel Marcel, *Essai de philosophie concrète* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 48).

¹⁴ Cf. Martín Grassi, “El nosotros como fundamento metafísico de lo personal en la filosofía de Gabriel Marcel”, in: *Stromata: Revista trimestral de Filosofía y Teología* (Universidad del Salvador, Área San Miguel, Buenos Aires, Argentina), Año LXX, n°1 (January-June 2014), 57-86. See also: Brian Treanor, “Constellations: Gabriel Marcel’s Philosophy of Relative Otherness”, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 80 (3), Summer 2006, 369-392.

¹⁵ We could think that the question of the *Lebenswelt* is again present here, for the unity of the world of life can not be an absolute one. The diversity of worlds is an essential character in the very notion of *Lebenswelt*. But, transcendently, unity stands over diversity; whereas politically, diversity should stand over unity, if we should escape totalitarianism.

¹⁶ “Hay un falso utopismo que es la estricta inversión del que ahora tengo a la vista; un utopismo consistente en creer que lo que el hombre desea, proyecta y se propone es, sin más, posible. (...) El mal utopista, lo mismo que el bueno, consideran deseable corregir la realidad natural que confina a los hombres en el recinto de las lenguas diversas impidiéndoles la

comunicación. El mal utopista piensa que, *puesto* que es deseable, es posible, y de esto no hay más que un paso hasta creer que es fácil. (...) El buen utopista, en cambio, piensa que *puesto* que sería deseable libertar a los hombres de la distancia impuesta por las lenguas, no hay probabilidad de que se pueda conseguir; por tanto, que sólo cabe lograrlo en medida aproximada. Pero esta aproximación puede ser mayor o menor..., hasta el infinito, y ello abre ante nuestro esfuerzo una actuación sin límites en que siempre cabe mejora, superación, perfeccionamiento; en suma, 'progreso'. En quehaceres de esta índole consiste toda la existencia humana" (José Ortega y Gasset, "Misericordia y esplendor de la traducción", 438-439).

¹⁷ Paper included in Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 53-69.

¹⁸ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action: Essais d'herméneutique II* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), Part II: "De l'herméneutique des textes à l'herméneutique de l'action", 137-280.

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 56. This motive is a central one in hermeneutical tradition, and can be found already in Schleiermacher's way of understanding translation.

²⁰ "En efecto, todo lo dicho viene por fuerza a resumirse en una fórmula que ostenta francamente sus insolentes bíceps de paradoja. Es ésta: no se entiende en su raíz la estupenda realidad que es el lenguaje si no se empieza por advertir que el habla se compone sobre todo de silencios. Un ser que no fuera capaz de renunciar a decir muchas cosas, sería incapaz de hablar. Y cada lengua es una ecuación diferente entre manifestaciones y silencios. Cada pueblo calla unas cosas *para* poder decir otras. Porque *todo* sería indecible. De aquí la enorme dificultad de la traducción: en ella se trata de decir en un idioma lo que este idioma tiende a silenciar. Pero, a la vez, se entrevé lo que traducir puede tener de magnífica empresa: la revelación de los secretos mutuos que pueblos y épocas se guardan recíprocamente y tanto contribuyen a la dispersión y hostilidad; en suma, una audaz integración de la Humanidad" (José Ortega y Gasset, "Misericordia y esplendor de la traducción", 444)

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 60.

²² Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 66.

²³ We should understand the term *mystery* as Marcel does, as a problem that encroaches in its own data, as a problem from which we cannot take any distance, in which we are compromised, and which defines us deeply. Translation would be a practice that only translators understand, a practice with no "third person" involve, a certain dialogue between languages that can't get any help from an external element that could embrace both interlocutors.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 43-46.

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 46.

²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 17.

²⁷ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Le monolingüisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996). For a comparative study on Jacques Derrida's and Paul Ricoeur's viewpoints on translation, cf.: Putt, B. Keith. "Traduire, c'est trahir – peut-être. Ricoeur and Derrida on the (In)fidelity of translation" (*Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015).

²⁸ "Denn wenn von Werken, die in einem höheren Sinne der Wissenschaft und Kunst angehören, der eigentümliche Geist des Verfassers die Mutter ist: so ist seine vaterländische Sprache der Vater dazu" (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, §33, 94).

²⁹ "Gadamer opposes the view that horizons are mutually exclusive or that world views are hermetically sealed and non-porous. In fact, Gadamer wants to emphasize that the very idea of a horizon includes not just the idea of circumscription but also the idea of openness. Horizons are not just limits but are essentially open to other horizons; they are moving boundaries. Horizons also can overlap and indeed are essentially overlapping and interpenetrating. Every meaningful subject or object belongs within many horizons at once.

There is an ongoing never finished process of the interpenetration of horizons, which Gadamer calls 'fusion of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*, TM, 306) and which he carefully emphasizes is not a single horizon but rather a coalescence of horizons (plural). There is a dynamic interaction between the horizon of the interpreter and that of the text from the past: 'Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own' (TM, 306)" (Moran, Dermot. "Gadamer and Husserl on Horizon, Intersubjectivity and the Life-World", in: Wiercinski, Andrzej (Ed.). *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2011, 84).

³⁰ The phenomenological influence in the hermeneutics movement of the XX century is unquestionable, and the main topic of *Lebenswelt* could help us much to understand the double exigency of plurality and unity in our every-day and scientific experiences, respecting both historical and transcendental structures in all our significations and horizons of sense. For a comparison study on Husserl and Gadamer concerning the notion of Horizon and the importance of *Lebenswelt*, Cf. Moran, Dermot. "Gadamer and Husserl on Horizon, Intersubjectivity and the Life-World", 73-94.

³¹ We are aware that the myth of the Tower of Babel is a figuration of a primary fact, the diversity of languages and the problems of understanding (Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 33-37).

³² Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Journal Métaphysique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), 196. In another text, Marcel propose the term *together-ness*: "Cette remarques très concrètes venaient nourrir ma réflexion [sur l'intersubjectivité]: je pense surtout à l'irritation que ne manque pas d'éprouver quelqu'un qui constate que deux autres personnes (par exemple) s'entretiennent à son sujet en sa présence, en disant de lui «Il» (*il est de telle façon, ou il a l'habitude de...*, etc.). Celui qui est ainsi visé se sent traité comme objet et comme rabaissé au niveau des choses ou disons même des animaux. Il est destitué pour autant de sa qualité de sujet. On pourrait dire aussi qu'il a le sentiment de ne pas être *avec* les autres, d'être exclue d'une certaine communauté à laquelle cependant il a la prétention d'appartenir. Dans une perspective comme celle-là le mode de relation désigné par la préposition *avec* apparaît en pleine lumière: mais s'agit-il bien en réalité d'une relation? Ce qui se présente à nous n'est-il pas plutôt une unité de type supra-relationnel comme celle que Bradley pensait trouver dans le *Feeling*? «Il suffit, écrivais-je, de réfléchir sur une relation comme celle que traduit le mot *avec* pour reconnaître combien notre logique est insuffisante et pauvre. Il est en effet susceptible d'exprimer des rapports d'une intimité croissante» à partir de ce qui n'est qu'une pure et simple juxtaposition. Si je suis simplement «posé» dans un compartiment de chemin de fer ou dans un avion à côté de quelqu'un à qui je n'adresse pas la parole et dont le visage «ne me dit rien», je ne peux pas dire que je suis vraiment avec lui. Nous ne sommes pas *ensemble*. Je note en passant que le substantif anglais *togetherness*, d'ailleurs inusité, n'a pas d'équivalent possible en français. C'est comme si la langue française se refusait à substantifier, c'est-à-dire en somme à conceptualiser, une certaine qualité d'être qui porte sur l'*entre-nous*" (*La dignité humaine* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1964), 61-62).

³³ "Il me semble, en effet, que la traduction ne pose pas seulement un travail intellectuel, théorique ou pratique, mais un problème éthique. Amener le lecteur à l'auteur, amener l'auteur au lecteur, au risque de servir et de trahir deux maîtres, c'est pratiquer ce que j'aime appeler l'*hospitalité langagière*" (Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 42-43).

³⁴ Cf. Deweer, Dries. "Communication, Translation, and the Global Community of Persons" (*Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, vol. 6, n. 1, 2015). In this article, Prof. Deweer analyzes how Ricoeur's studies on translation are in the core of his hermeneutical anthropology, influenced by Emmanuel Mounier's philosophy, since translation is an ethical and political act that looks for an enlargement of the political community, in the acceptance

of plurality and alterity. However, we are trying to show that this call for community and communication is not only at the end of a political and ethical path, but it is already at the very “beginning” of personal existence; therefore, community it is not merely a political question, but rather a metaphysical and ontological one. Moreover, community is a theological postulate that pushes forward metaphysical, ethical, anthropological and political reflections on Ricoeur’s work; but we shall undertake that semantical level in other papers.

³⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, §35, 100.

³⁶ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la traduction*, 8-9.