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Translations

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A Date, a Place, a Name

Jacques Derrida's Holocaust Translations

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Every language draws a circle around the people to which it belongs, a circle that can only be transcended in so far as one at the same time enters another one.

—Wilhelm von Humboldt, quoted in Theodor Adorno's *Prisms*

IN *RAMS*, JACQUES DERRIDA REFLECTS ON HIS “UN-INTERRUPTED dialogue” [*le dialogue ininterrompu*] with Hans Georg Gadamer.¹ Across the impassable caesura of the German philosopher's death, Derrida extends a belated invitation to Gadamer to engage in a conversation on Paul Celan's poetry and prose. Interrupted yet unceasing, the posthumous conversation—“between two infinities, the poem,” as stated in the subtitle—takes place as an act of witness to the third and as a tribute to a common friend and his poetic legacy. This moment of recollection and (double) mourning also involves the translation and retranslation of Celan's poetic word—the word of the poet-translator, whose own poetry has been often deemed untranslatable.

Indeed, the question of the limits of interpretation between hermeneutics and deconstruction pivots on the question of the limits of translation. As has often been noted, the problematic of translation, of the border-crossing both between languages and within each language, is central to Derrida's work.² In his reflection on translation, Derrida acknowledges his indebtedness to Walter Benjamin's articulation of "the task of the translator," on one hand, and to Heidegger's writings on language on the other. What is beginning to emerge here is a constellation of texts functioning as sites of textual encounters that Derrida orchestrates between Celan and Heidegger, to which Benjamin has also been invited (these are the encounters that will culminate in the coda of Derrida's posthumous exchange with Gadamer). For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on three of these texts, which Derrida wrote between the years 1984 and 1987: "Des Tours de Babel," *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan*, and *Of Spirit*.³ In a way, in his respective engagements with Heidegger's texts and with Celan's poems, Derrida takes up the theme of a hoped-for yet unrealized encounter between the thinker and the poet, as it was alluded to in Celan's "Todtnauberg." The poem transcribes a fated meeting between the Jewish German poet from Romania and the German philosopher, and their walk in the woods of the Black Forest down the path that will forever remain "half-trodden" (Celan 2001, 13).⁴ Yet, it is this irrevocably "interrupted conversation" that Derrida will take up and carry toward its unfulfilled promise.

The motifs of translation and linguistic migrations, which organize Derrida's readings of Celan and Heidegger, not only invite the specter of Walter Benjamin into the conversation but also evoke, however obliquely, the circumstances of Benjamin's tragic death. As we know, Benjamin, with an American visa in hand, was in flight from the Nazis when he took his own life at the Franco-Spanish border. In *Shibboleth*, Derrida addresses the themes of "discrimination, passports, and passwords" (2005, 1), and as he explains in a later interview entitled "Language is Never Owned," Celan's work bears many of the marks of these migrations and deportations under Hitler (100). In turn, the stakes of Derrida's textual interpretations/translations involve the philosopher's own passages across the linguistic frontier separating his French "monolingualism" from Benjamin, Celan,

and Heidegger's mother tongue. Moreover, as I will argue, these border-crossings always traverse, touch, and circumnavigate certain Holocaust contexts, which are populated by the spectral presence of a host of other ghosts.

I. ÜBERSETZEN: TRANSLATING THE FLAME

The figure of the Holocaust traces a faint silhouette across a number of Derrida's texts, and it often hinges on his elliptical use of the word "holocaust" as a common noun. Derrida repeatedly insists on his right to use the word "holocaust" in the lower case, to denote the all-burning, at the very heart of language, of the singular in the generality of words and concepts. He remains aware nevertheless of the terrible resonances of the word and occasionally acknowledges the impact of the "upper-case" Holocaust on his work. He explains, for instance, in a 1998 interview: "my experience of the problems of the signature and the date is related, be it directly or indirectly, to the Holocaust . . . even if the uniqueness of this reference is a problem for me" (1998a, 10). Derrida repeatedly admits the difficulty of "naming that thing," and, for the most part, when he has to refer to the "actual" events, he chooses (perhaps after Claude Lanzmann) the term "Shoah." Unlike "Holocaust," "Shoah," (which in Hebrew means "destruction") is free from the sacrificial connotations of the biblical reference to the Akedah (the binding of Isaac). It is also uncontaminated by retranslations via Greek, which have befallen the word "holocaust." The proper name "Shoah" stands in Derrida's texts as an undeconstructed cipher for the events that led to the destruction of European Jewry.

In his 2003 essay "Cinders, Traces, Shadows on the Page: The Holocaust in Derrida's Writing," David Levin argues that the entirety of Derrida's work can be read as a thoughtful attempt to inscribe the Holocaust in philosophy; to an extent, I will be guided by this hypothesis as I trace textual encounters among Benjamin, Celan, and Heidegger in Derrida's work. I will, however, insist upon distinguishing between the two threads, two yarns, in Derrida's "responses to the Holocaust," even if they remain chiasmatically intertwined. When commenting on Celan, Derrida evokes the Holocaust

in light of his own conflicted relation to his Jewish roots, “circumfessing” and simultaneously disavowing the sense of tribal belonging—that is, he responds “as a Jew,” with a circumcised word. He responds to Heidegger, however, primarily within the parameters of “philosophy after Auschwitz” and in the very medium of philosophy.⁵ Moreover, he responds as a philosopher deeply indebted to Heidegger and obligated to discharge or retribute this debt.⁶ Asked in an interview what he thought about the stance of classical philosophy vis à vis “Auschwitz,” Derrida responds, with uncharacteristic anger, that “they philosophize as if nothing happened” (1998a, 19); since it was a specific event in European history, no matter how disastrous, the Shoah is thought to be of little universal relevance. Just as it has done away with the biographeme—that is, with the singularity of the thinker’s signature—so has philosophy, in Derrida’s view, erased *the* date and *the* place of that particular and particularly horrifying historical event. Indifferent to the date, philosophy, as Derrida says in *Shibboleth*, “has nothing essential to say about what dates from Celan or about what Celan says or makes of the date—which may in turn say something to us, perhaps, about philosophy” (2005, 14).

Derrida’s work is, first and foremost, a much broader reflection on the conditions that make possible philosophy’s complicity with totalitarian regimes, of which National Socialism is a monstrous exemplar. From the very start, deconstruction is an investigation into thought’s tacit endorsement of the violence of exclusion and its discreet support of social institutions and practices that discriminate against certain groups of people (the Jewish people, for instance) because it depends on the sedimentation of concepts in language, which it is unwilling to scrutinize. Thus, if philosophy is to bear witness to the singularity of an event, it cannot be separated from the *Durcharbeitung* of the unacknowledged assumptions of Western metaphysics. As Derrida writes succinctly in “Racism’s Last Word” (his reflection on the word “apartheid”), “there is no racism without a language”: acts of racism “have to have a word” and thus they institute themselves as a system of marks, which “outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to *close the borders*” (1985b, 292; emphasis mine).

Why, then, the tantalizing obliqueness of Derrida’s references to the Holocaust? Unlike Levinas, for whom speaking directly of the Holocaust

amounts to either idolatry or sacrilege,⁷ Derrida hesitates to name the unnameable primarily out of respect for the word and because of certain awe before the violence inherent in the very act of naming. Yet, without respect for the word, we will never be able to own up to our promise to honor those who died during the Holocaust. Proper names like “Holocaust” or “Auschwitz” will never be worthy to describe that to which they have been summoned to refer. As Derrida writes in *Cinders*, “a word, unfit even to name the cinder in the place of memory of something else. . . . Cinder, the word, is never found here, but there” (1991a, 71). Always already expropriated into another region and another linguistic register, the cinder word crosses the impassable border between the singularity of what it names and the generality of the name.

It is also because of a larger scope of his philosophic reflection on the violence inherent in the structures of language, irreducible to the atrocities of the Holocaust alone, that Derrida resists the false syllogism: Derrida is Jewish; the Holocaust was an attempt to eradicate all Jews from the face of the planet; therefore, the Holocaust (as an attempt to also murder Derrida and his kin) must be relevant to Derrida’s work. His reluctance to see his work circumscribed solely within the problematic of the Holocaust also stems from a genuine abhorrence of any essentializing identity politics, which always colors Derrida’s reminiscence on his Jewish roots. In the interviews in Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman’s documentary *Derrida* (2002), he recalls his unease when, under Vichy, he was forced to attend a Hebrew school. In another interview, he remembers his dread of the family’s religious practices—“thoughtless, blind repetitions” (2003, 3). In an interview with Richard Kearny, he says, “though I was born a Jew, I do not work or think within a living Jewish tradition. So that if there is a Judaic dimension to my thinking which may from time to time have spoken in or through me, this has never assumed the form of any explicit fidelity or *debt to that culture*” (107; emphasis mine). Yet the question of Jewishness surges forth in Derrida’s texts, troped in powerful symbols of Jewish belonging such as circumcision, the talith, or the shofar,⁸ while a more ominous *Judenfrage*, woven into the veiled ciphers of the h/Holocaust, returns in his writings with the force of repetition compulsion. The Jewish experience of

the Holocaust haunts Derrida's texts in a spectral double-speak, scattered in the repressed motifs of ashes, fire, and all-burning, of exile, deportation, transports, and extermination. For a reader with an eye trained on the "upper-case" Holocaust, these palimpsests speak with an obsessive force (although no doubt Derrida's oeuvre can be, and has been, satisfactorily read without recourse to the historical events of the Holocaust).

In *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan*, Derrida issues an apology for circumventing the proper name of the Holocaust: "Forgive me if I do not name, here, the *holocaust*, that is to say literally, as I chose to call it elsewhere, the all-burning [*le brûle-tout*], except to say this: there is certainly today the date of that holocaust that we know, the hell of our memory; but there is a holocaust for every date, and somewhere in the world, for every hour" (2005, 46). To say "forgive me" is hardly a mere turn of phrase for Derrida: the Shoah, as he will write a decade later, has forced us to ask ourselves what forgiveness means, and his own extensive reflection on forgiveness was precipitated by the statement, in Vladimir Jankélévitch's *L'Imprescriptible*, that forgiveness died in the camps (2001, 37). Perhaps, then, the tacit words of this apology, despite Derrida's disclaimer, raise the question of restituting an outstanding debt—a debt related, this time, to the memory of specific events in Jewish history. I would like to trace the correspondences between these twin gestures of restitution: to the philosophical heritage, on one hand, and the Jewish legacy, on the other.

The *incipit* of Derrida's text on Heidegger, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, which was written in the context of acrimonious debates in France over Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, reads: "I shall speak of ghost [*revenant*], of flame, and of ashes" (1989, 1). Derrida investigates the itinerary of Heidegger's use of "spirit," the concept that has been curiously disinherited in Heidegger criticism. Aware of "an extraordinary authority" that the word *Geist* holds in the German language, Heidegger reveals, in *Being and Time* (1927), that it has been the vestige of the Platonic-Christian metaphysical thinking of the *subjectum*; subsequently, he leaves it behind. "Spirit" returns, however, in "The Rectorate's Speech" (1933) and in "The Introduction to Metaphysics" (1935). Derrida interprets Heidegger's unexpected reversion to the idiom of spirituality as

the philosopher's attempt to spiritualize National Socialism. The endeavor to rehabilitate the formerly rejected concept as the spiritual foundation of the German university manifests (in Derrida's view) Heidegger's commitment to an authentic National Socialism, purified of Nazi biological determinism and racist anti-Semitism. Yet, by "regermanizing" *Geist* and reclaiming it in the context of a certain ideology, which now links the very essence of Being to the destiny of the German people, Heidegger falls into a metaphysical trap of appealing to the idiom of identity and subjectivity, which is perhaps "a price to pay for ethico-political denunciations of racism" (Derrida 1989, 40). The price of relapsing into metaphysics, however, also carries the danger of sanctioning Nazism and of enlisting philosophy in the service of ideology, even if Heidegger himself has cautioned against such overstepping of philosophical boundaries.

Derrida keeps a meticulous calendarium of Heidegger's texts: the next reference to "spirit" appears in the essay "Essence of the Poet as Demigod" (which is dated 1942, although it is left to the reader to recall that this was a particularly tragic year for the Jews of Europe). As in *Cinders*, the horror is audible in the dense *sympleke* of tropes: of ghosts, transporting, and deporting, of fire, flame, and ashes, which now begin to haunt the lines from the German poets, as they have been quoted by Heidegger. The subtle irony of Derrida's title now comes to the fore: *Of Spirit* cites the title of Helvetius's heretical book that, in the eighteenth century, was thrown in the fire by the decree of the French king and the Pope, but which is now reminiscent of the Nazis' infamous book-burnings. For Heidegger, however, 1942 marks a turn toward a more originary thinking of spirit: departing from the legacy of the Græco-Christian *pneuma*, it now becomes the thinking of fire, in which the all-burning imperative of language announces itself. The inflamed Spirit also names the space of proximity between thinking and poeticizing: "Let our language get closer to that furnace," writes Heidegger in his 1953 essay on Georg Trakl's poetic word (84).

By listening to Heidegger's German locutions with his French ear (the ear nevertheless attuned to the subtleties of paranomastic migrations of the word *Geist* and its derivatives *geistig* and *geistlich*), Derrida exposes a conceptual apparatus of linguistic cleansing: in his triangulation of Greek/

Latin/German, the Hebrew word for Spirit, *ruah* [רוח], has been foreclosed.⁹ Although an impassable border seems to separate Heidegger's *Geist* and the Hebrew *ruah*, Derrida reminds us that *ruah* has been imperceptibly incorporated in the Græco-Christian pneumatology, the tradition that the German philosopher sought to dismantle but in which he was also inexorably imbricated. Derrida previously mentioned the word *ruah* (which in Hebrew means wind as well as spirit) in his essay "Force and Signification" (in *Writing and Difference*). In this essay, he wrote: "Writing is the anguish of the Hebraic *ruah*, experienced in solitude by human responsibility; experienced by Jeremiah subjected to God's dictation . . . , or by Baruch transcribing Jeremiah's dictation; or further, within the properly human moment of *pneumatology*, the science of *pneuma*, *spiritus*, or *logos*" (1978, 9). Heidegger, intent on the "unforgetting" of the question of Being, abnegates this "human responsibility." If we consider that *ruah* is the very wind that animates writing, in its *primordial* sense of arche-writing, Heidegger's failure to "think with his ear" (to use Adorno's apt phrase [1967, 19]) when he expulses *ruah* from the European thinking of spirit is not unrelated to his repeated disavowal of writing as philosophy's own *mise-en-scène*.¹⁰

Derrida's exegetic citations of Heidegger continuously foreground the problematic of translation; in the end, *Of Spirit* is revealed to be a treatise on the "quarrel" between languages. In his celebration of the Græco-German linguistic privilege, with German alone capable of naming that "excellence" and expressing the "true" essence of spirit (1989, 71), Heidegger seems immured in a philosophical monolingualism.¹¹ In turn, this linguistic circumference draws other boundaries—between languages, but also, for instance, between the human and the animal. Through the idiom of safeguarding linguistic borders, it sets up the law of noncontamination, of rigorous exclusion. Derrida's task, but also a counter-gift to Heidegger, is to open up the German philosopher's text and to make its borders permeable, so as to allow safe passage to the expropriated other. Indeed, argues Derrida, the extradited idiom of the Jewish other has been inscribed in the Western tradition. The echoes of this constitutive heteronomy reverberate in Heidegger's own texts: in his embracing of the idiom of fire or in the messianic motif of the promise of returning to the preoriginary moment,

for instance.¹² The inflamed, tempestuous Spirit that illuminates Trakl's poems, in Heidegger's reading, is what blazes the path of language; Derrida writes that "this is the being-on-the-way (*Unterwegs*) of *migration* but also of overtaking, of precipitation or anticipation" (104; emphasis mine). As such, it signifies the movement of expropriation, deportation, and transposition "into the foreign," outside the boundaries of the same. Ultimately, Heidegger's use of *Geist*, as facilitated by Derrida's translations, discloses its beginning in the "origin-heterogeneous" and its destination in the opening onto the disavowed other. Spirit returns, "through flame and ash, but as the entirely other, inevitably" (113), and it returns as a gift.

II. ÜBERLEBEN: SURVIVING (THE) WORD

By turning now to Derrida's reflection on Paul Celan, I will argue that his gesture of prying open Heidegger's philosophical word for the sake of the absolutely other was made possible by a conversation with Paul Celan—the poet who, in his verse, "draws from the well" of Heidegger's thinking about language as it is disclosed in the neighborhood of thinking and poetry:

*Arnica, eyebright, the
draft from the well with the
star-die on top* (Celan 2001, 315)

In *Shibboleth*, Derrida makes a parenthetical reference to the meeting in Todtnauberg: "the question, here, of circumcision left unanswered at the time or date of Todtnauberg, when it was, in effect, put to another kind of wise man, one summer's day in 1967" (2005, 62), although he never discusses Celan's poem as such.¹³ The title of Derrida's essay is another gesture of quoting, through which a well-known poem by Celan is embedded in Derrida's own reading of that text (it is worth noting that the manuscript of this essay was completed in Seattle, October 14, 1984, and Derrida, again, meticulously signed the date and the place). Thus, the titular citation foregrounds the inseparability of Derrida's central motif in *Shibboleth*—the aporia of datability—from the law of the text, that is, its structural citationality.¹⁴

The title evokes the biblical story of the Ephraimites, who were required to pronounce the Hebrew word *shibboleth* when trying to secretly escape across the Jordan River after they had been defeated in battle by Jephthah's soldiers. Although the Ephraimites knew the secret password, they were unable to pronounce, with their "uncircumcised tongues," the sound transcribed as שׁ in the Hebrew alphabet, saying "sibboleth" instead. The impotence of the tongue spelled the death sentence for those deprived of the "visa" that permitted safe passage across the otherwise impermeable border. The linguistic frontier is where the right to pass is dispensed, "indeed, the right to live" (2005, 1). Like circumcision, the ability to pronounce the secret password is re-marked on the body of the person required to pronounce it: in the alveoli, in the tongue, on "the lip" (*safah*, which is also the Hebrew word for "language"). Like circumcision, the *shibboleth* cuts with "the double edge": a corporeal badge of an alliance, it is also a declaration of difference that serves to interdict and to pronounce the sentence of exclusion. Wielding the power of death and the power of life, the *shibboleth-pharmakon* allows one to root out the enemy of Israel but also, in the course of history, singles out Jews for extermination. In Derrida's encrypted prose, "one may, thanks to the *shibboleth*, recognize and be recognized as one's own, for better or worse, in the partition of partaking . . . but also, on the other side of partaking, that of exclusion, for the purpose of denying the other, of denying him passage or life. . . . Then it is the circumcised who are proscribed or held at the border, excluded from the community, put to death, or reduced to ashes" (63).

The life saving/deadly force of repetition and difference, the *shibboleth* is welded to the enigma of the date. Derrida draws on Celan's reflection on the date in "The Meridian": the date is what summons the here-and-now of a singular moment in history and archives it in the annals of memory. The inscription of the date within the conventions of a calendrical system ensures its readability. The survival of the event thus depends on the structural possibility of repetition—its datability, although in this movement, the date obliterates the very singularity that it was seeking to preserve. Only in the erasure of the absolutely unrepeatable can the event become legible to those who will celebrate its anniversary in the future yet-to-come.

The aporia of datability (the term *Datierbarkeit* is, of course, Heidegger's) is, for Celan, the very essence of poetry: a poem "speaks of what provokes it, to the date that provokes it, thus convoked from the to-come of the *same* date, in other words, from its return at *another* date" (8). The date "fixes" the dated word for the future, for the event that comes after the time that the date thus names. In order to be legible, remembered, the irreducible singularity of the event is sacrificed in the universality of language, "in the *holocaustic* generality of return and the readability of the concept, in the anniversary repetition of the unrepeatable" (48; emphasis mine). Reading depends on these systems of legibility, although, like circumcision, the event of dating happens one time only. Its iteration in the date is a spectral visitation of that which can never return, a commemoration of what will never come back. Although the two moments (of dating and of reading) are separated by a caesura, they are inseparable: the unique, unrepeatable event returns in the repetition, and it speaks to its unknown, undisclosable destination. The date named in the poem inscribes the responsibility of a future witness, who will observe the date's anniversary. Thus, despite the utter unsayability of what it speaks about, "the poem does speak!" as Celan exclaims in "The Meridian" (408), and it speaks because it is a turning toward the future of its repetition—that is, because the poem is an *address* (410). The word "address" (at least in French, English, and German) also signifies a place, a location, a domicile; one can only "address" from the specificity of the place. It is also the uniqueness of the region from which the poem harkens that is sacrificed in the all-burning, although this obliteration-by-flame transforms a poem into testimony to that which has been erased.

The poem is "a message in a bottle, sent out in a—not always greatly hopeful—belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps" (Celan 2001, 396). It is a gift destined to an unknown future, and its hope "has always been to speak . . . *in the cause of an Other—who knows, perhaps in the cause of a wholly Other*" (408). It drifts toward the unknown *for the sake of an encounter*. The poem opens the door to the other who arrives from the future, exposing itself to the unknown, abandoning itself to the "spectral errancy" (Derrida 2005, 105) of wandering words,

wandernder Worte (as Celan writes in “Speak You Too,” 2001, 76). The poem’s ghostly presencing of the unrepresentable singularity is re-marked by the “you” of the address toward whom it is “on the way”; its date is always cosigned by the one who will read it. In that sense, a poem is a witness to the irreducible eventing of that singularity, carrying its trace beyond knowledge of its unique circumstance, “and one may just as well bless it without knowing all that for which and of those for whom it bears witness” (Derrida 2005, 43). Through the inscription of the date, the poem permits an anniversary, even if no visible trace of the event remains, delivering it to a memory without memory, even beyond the death of the last witness.

The poem is a guardian committed to watching over the irreplaceable, the keeper of the seal to whom the task of preserving the date has been entrusted. Yet the responsibility of the guardian is caught up in the aporia of the date: the date recollects on condition that it also forgets, that it forbids passage into memory.¹⁵ Derrida evokes the idiom of responsibility: “To what dates do we ascribe ourselves, turned toward what dates to come do we turn ourselves, do we transcribe ourselves?” (8). To what purpose do we remember certain dates? In the name of what cause do we commemorate their anniversary? What is our responsibility for the dates we remember? Conversely, what is our responsibility for the dates we consign to oblivion? It is also in this sense that the poem-calendarium is a date keeper/gatekeeper, the one who stands guard at the border, issuing visas or forbidding entrance. In order to address those for whom it is destined in the unknowable future—so that the unrepeatable, to which it owes itself and to which it must discharge its debt, will resonate in the anniversaries yet-to-come—the poem must also absolve itself from this absolute responsibility. Were it not for this act of treason, however, the singularity would remain mute and undecipherable. The irony of Derrida’s reading of Celan is, of course, that, in order to elucidate the aporia of the date and to expose it as the general condition of legibility and the very possibility of speech, he must relinquish his responsibility to the singularity of Celan’s voice and translate the anguish of his “ensilenced word” [*das erschwiegene Wort*] (78), the breathlessness of his choking caesuras, into the idiom of philosophy, which partakes in Heidegger’s *Sprache* of path making.

As witnessed in innumerable Holocaust memoirs (of which Celan's poems are a unique example), for the survivors of those especially horrific dates in history, the pain of unavoidable betrayal (committed each time the irreplaceable is substituted with their own translations) resurfaces with formidable force. It is a constant source of unspeakable, stultifying anguish. The witness is acutely aware that the very act of testifying effaces the unique significance of the date, of the place, of the singularity of a given life that was extinguished at that particular moment. The desire to record the date stems from this enduring affliction of language.

As Derrida notes, Celan meticulously dated his poems, both in the form of the signature under the poem and by internal references—the dates inscribed in the poems. Yet, let us consider the case of Abraham Sutzkever, a Jewish poet from Vilno, who hid during the round-ups and deportations from the ghetto and then escaped and stayed with a group of Jewish partisans in the woods, all the while continuing to write poetry. All of his poems are dated in at least as much detail as are Celan's: "Vilna, end of June 1941"; "Vilna ghetto, March 1943"; "Narocz forest, September 1943."¹⁶ The poems truly are a poetic day-by-day calendar of horrific events. Sutzkever scholars have established that, despite some discrepancies in the dating of the poems, they were written in the proximity of the dates indicated in the signature. However, the extraordinary circumstances in which they were written gave rise to speculation that some of these poems may have been postdated—written in Moscow, after Sutzkever and his wife were rescued by the Red Army in 1944.¹⁷ In *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (1995), John Felstiner explains minor discrepancies in the dating of Celan's poems and carefully reconstructs the circumstances that led to the writing of individual poems, as if in an attempt to alleviate the suspicion of misdating, of a counterfeit date. The explanations, however, only reveal the *mise-en-abyme* that engulfs the date, the structural impossibility to master the madness of the date. "A date is mad, that is the truth," writes Derrida (2005, 37), yet he himself appears intent on maintaining the "truth" of Celan's dating practices when he takes care to note (relying on the authority of Celan's friend Peter Szondi's recollections) that some of Celan's poems were dated in the manuscripts, but that the dates were suppressed in the published versions.

In *Shibboleth*, Derrida says nothing about the counterfeit date—the possibility that is, after all, inscribed in the very act of dating. In “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” however, he remarks that the promise of bringing forth testimony is always open to the possibility of perjury. Indeed, writes Derrida, perjury is a structural threat inseparable from testimony, even if “it presupposes this sworn word that it betrays” (78). The possibility of perjury—of a counterfeit word—always inhabits the moment of bearing witness. As Derrida writes in *Given Time*, “it is almost as if the other had not honored the credit” that had been opened for him (1992, 169; emphasis Derrida’s). Analogously, insofar as it is only legible in repetition, in the future of its rereadings, every date is always potentially a counterfeit date, the fact that the Sutzkever example brings to light. The possibility of counterfeiting is irreducibly embedded in the very aporia of the date (of the place, of the signature). Like a false coin, the gift of the date could be a counterfeit gift. Just as the date testifies to that which has always been effaced in the moment of its signing, it also bears witness to the very possibility of it having been counterfeited.

As Derrida makes clear in the apology mentioned above, no direct references to the Holocaust as a historical event are to be found in the text, although World War II is recalled as “the war of extermination.” Faint echoes of the Holocaust reverberate throughout the text, however, as Derrida in turn repeats Celan’s words. As in *Cinders* and in his reflection on Heidegger’s use of spirit, in *Shibboleth*, the “lower-case” holocaust is Derrida’s predestined name for the incineration that, at the heart of language, “takes place prior to any operation, it burns from within” (2005, 42). By cremating that which is unique, the flame makes its entry into language possible, even if only as spectral “ash.” “Ashes. Ashes, ashes,” writes Celan (2001, 123); Derrida continues to echo these words in this own text. Derrida’s cinder words and phrases (“the other’s singularity is incinerated, deported from its unique place” [2005, 37]), just like, for instance, Celan’s choice of the word “concentration” [*Konzentration*] to name the “gathered multiplicity of the dates in the anniversary,” are “terrible word[s] for memory” (10), which Derrida nevertheless keeps repeating. Why these haunting echoes, the phantoms repeatedly conjured? They keep returning for the sake of

memory, but I would also argue that, just like Celan's poetic word, they recur *for the sake of the encounter*. Such is the effect, for instance, of Derrida's repeating the line in Celan's poem "À la pointe acérée": "After / the unrepeatable, after / it, after / everything," followed by "Spluttering tracks to that place" (qtd. in Derrida 2005, 3). In light of Celan's Holocaust experience, one begins to hear the sound of the cattle trains carrying their human cargo to the death camps, such as the camp in Transnistria, where both of Celan's parents perished. Yet by repeating the word—tracks, *Wege*—in the German original several times, Derrida also asks us to hear Heidegger in Celan's voice. Poems are the paths on which "language becomes voice" because, as Celan insists in "The Meridian," the poetic journey toward the unrepeatable is the way to language. Derrida's homage to Celan, whom he also singles out as his friend, draws on Heidegger's vocabulary of waymaking, of giving, sending, and gathering, of encryption and unconcealing. Indeed, Derrida explains in parentheses that "several times I have abstained from mentioning the interpellation of Heidegger or to Heidegger" (52).

Once again, in Derrida's philosophical witness, these remarkable encounters between Celan and Heidegger are themselves couched in the idiom of witnessing. In his later text on Celan, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing," Derrida argues that Heidegger's articulation of *Dasein's* attestation [*Bezeugung*] to its own existence in *Being and Time* is fundamental to Celan's poetics of witnessing (80). Conversely, Celan's unique use of the trope of breath, such as in the poem "Etched Away":

Deep
in the time crevasse
by
honeycomb-ice
there waits, a Breathcrystal,
your unannulable witness (2001, 247; emphasis mine)

must now be reread in the context of Derrida's inquiry into the legacy of the Greek *pneuma* as it resurfaced in Heidegger's thinking of *Geist*. The citing of Celan's wounded, breathless words allows Derrida to perceive the opening

in the enclosure of the German philosopher's word. In Derrida's dispatches, a conversation about the essence of language begins to take place: "Chance and risk of the windmill-language, which is related as much to wind and mirage as it is to breath and spirit, to the breathing bestowed" (2005, 28). Again, encrypted in the spirit/breath, is the Hebrew wind-word: *ruah*.

As Derrida notes, "*Atem*"—the word for "breath" in German—is dear to the author of *Atemwende* (*Breathturn*). Considering the linguistic coincidence that, in Hebrew, "*atem*" [אָתֶם] means "you" (plural masculine form), another imperceptible instance of translation occurs within the space of the breath-turn. It is in this translation *within* a word that a meeting par excellence between languages takes place. The passage within the word, from the German *Atem* to the Hebrew *atem*, bestows the turning of the breath toward "you" as the very possibility of language and as the gift of life. As Derrida says in "Majesties," "at the beginning of speech, there is breath" (110); yet at the beginning of speech, there is also a turning toward the entirely other to whom my speech is addressed. In the (non)space of this translation, the poem bears witness to the other to whom it calls forth. It apostrophizes "you, the word *you*," which each time "exceeds the economy of discourse, its being alongside itself" (51). Although Derrida does not remark this particular instance of homonymy in one of Celan's word *shibboleths*, he comments on the resemblances and resonances among Hebrew, Greek, and German in Celan's poems, and in the title poem "Shibboleth" in particular: "madness slumbers in this aleatory encounter, this chance among heterogeneities that starts giving meaning to the date" (39).

The ability to pronounce "shibboleth" presupposes belonging to a linguistic community whose members speak with the same "lip"; in that sense, *shibboleth* grants one "the right of asylum or the legitimate habitation of a language" (26). Yet, Celan's poetic word interrupts this immanence of language—in this case, Heidegger's German, through the dissemination of word visas without which linguistic borders would remain impassable. In the process, the word as inscription of belonging is transformed into the mark of strangeness. Evicted from what is most properly "mine," the word is now "on the way" toward a poetic experience of the multiplicity of languages. The intranslatable encounters of different languages in Celan's

poems, as well as his “translating interpretation of German” (100), become the poet’s countersignature in the German language—the language that, as the poet has proclaimed in his Bremen speech, “had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand of darkneses of deathbringing speech” (Celan 2001, 395). Derrida remonstrates: “Let the word pass through the barbed-wire border, through, this time, the grid of language or thanks to it” (2005, 51).¹⁸

This inscription of difference in the body of language marks the multiplicity of languages, but also a linguistic heterogeneity, a migration of significations “within language, the insignificant difference as the condition of meaning” (407). In this way, the poetic word also stands guard against “linguistic nationalism” (101). It exacts unceasing vigilance of the witness since no guarantees can be offered against the sedimentation of words into tools of oppression and exclusion, against their perversion into acts of policing and discrimination: “the value of the *shibboleth* may always, and tragically, be inverted. . . . Watchword or password in a struggle against oppression, exclusion, fascism, and racism, it may also corrupt its differential value . . . making of it a discriminatory limit, the grillwork of policing” (30).

Derrida asks: “How can one bless ashes in German?” (2005, 63). Counterpoising Adorno’s dictum, Celan insists that one can only write poetry in the very language of barbarism. The word must be rescued, resuscitated, before it can be uttered again. It must be infused with breath, so that the word that was choked in the throat can be spoken into existence. In “Noc-turnally Pursued,” Celan writes:

*A word—you know:
a corpse.*

*Come let us wash it,
come, let us comb it,
come let us turn
its eye heavenward. (2001, 91)*

Summoning the unrepeatable across “the holocaustic generality” of words, Celan writes poetry against the murder of words, and, in addressing himself to Celan’s work, so does Derrida; this is why the problematic of translation has such a prominent place in Derrida’s work. As the textual encounters begin to reveal, and as Derrida himself thematizes in his later text “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” the relation between testimony and translation is a necessary one. Like translation, testimony is a matter of crossing borders—between bearing witness (which is an act of faith and as such “belongs to the space of believing” [2005, 78]) and the proof of the events, the order of knowledge—“a border that is at once rigorous and inconsistent . . . uncrossable *de jure* but *de facto* crossed” (78). The singular—that which happens only once, *une fois*—remains radically untestifiable and can be avowed only by virtue of faith. A trace of his own commitment to the singular is etched in the homonymy, in Derrida’s French this time, between *une fois* and *une foi* (faith).¹⁹ Since the truth of the testimony must be vested in the singularity of the event to which one bears witness and thus is a matter of belief, testimony resists translation. “But what would an untranslatable testimony be worth? Would it be non-testimony? And what would a testimony that was absolutely transparent to translation be? Would it still be testimony?” (69). Although Celan’s poetry, in which different languages meet, is about “multiplicity and migration of languages, certainly, and within language itself: Babel” (27), the threat of the untranslatability of the testifying word—of the ultimate “No pasaran” (Celan 2001, 75)—pervades these migrations.

The possibility of there being no witness is tantamount to the testifying word dissolving into babble:

*Came, if there
came a man . . . ,
he
could
only babble and babble,
ever-ever-
moremore.*

(“Pallaksch . . . Pallaksch”) (159)²⁰

III. ÜBERTRAGEN: CARRYING (YOU) TOWARD . . .

As Derrida writes in “Les Tours de Babel,” Babel is both a proper name—issuing from God, who shouts in anger at the impious tribe of Shem—and a common noun that means confusion. The declaration of the proper name of Babel is a demand to respect its singularity, but this propriety of the proper name is already contaminated by the generality of the concept.

In “On Language as Such and the Language of Man,” Benjamin writes that the dispersed condition of language, as it has been allegorized in the story of Babel, indicates that man’s word, with which he names things, is infinitely short of the purity of God’s creative word that speaks things into existence (1986b, 318). Thus, as he will argue in “The Task of the Translator,” translatability points to inherent interrelatedness between languages, gesticulating toward the horizon of “pure language,” regardless of whether there will ever be a person capable of translating a given work (Benjamin 1986a). Translatability means that the text always “calls” for a translation; in this sense, translation orients itself toward “pure language,” revealing the unattainable horizon of linguistic possibility. Like Celan’s poem, which is always in search of a “pure poem” (“I am speaking about a poem that does not exist! The absolute poem” [410]), translation is an address, a promise of communication, destined to an encounter in the future. Speaking from its “address,” from its domicile in the language of the original, it always addresses, thus bearing witness to its own survival in the wholly other language. Invoking the language of witnessing, Benjamin writes that the life of literary works has its highest testimony in translation: renditions into other languages bear witness to the work’s life but also to its afterlife, its posthumous survival. Like memory, translations are always belated and they mourn the passing of the original text. As Derrida notes in his reading of Benjamin, translating [*übersetzen*] is always related to surviving [*überleben*]: “Right away everything moves in and about *Übersetzen, Übertragen, Überleben*” (1985a, 178). Yet the translator’s task is not to ensure mere survival, but also to give the work something more and better, beyond the means of the author. In translation, the sound of the native tongue, furrowed with the traces of the obliterated point of the text’s departure, returns as foreign—uprooted from its native soil [*unheimlich*]. Instead of striving to

preserve the status quo of the target language, the translator must allow that language to be affected by the foreign tongue, to release the inscription of the trace of the other. Yet the translator is also a guardian of the frontier between languages, the one who regulates the migrations of meanings: he ensures safe passage but he is also responsible for halting their uncontrolled proliferations. Translation is thus an injunction to a national language to be deeply self-reflective about what it has excluded, to confront its own investments and assumptions, and to listen with “the ear of the other,” as Derrida has poignantly remarked in *Otobiographies* (1988), his earlier text on Nietzsche.

Like Celan’s poem—like the date—translation must efface the very thing it preserves; in this sense it fails to deliver what it has been consigned to bring forth.²¹ Yet this failure, this betrayal [*traduttore traditore*] intrinsic to every act of translation, stems from the lack in the very language of the original, from *its* failure to articulate what it has always already disarticulated and sent into exile: “From the original to be translated there is fall and exile” (1985a, 188). And this is why, writes Derrida, ever since Babel, languages are destined for translation, and why the translator’s task is a mission—“the commitment, the duty, the debt” (177) to reveal a language’s originary indebtedness to that which it has always excluded. As Derrida adds, we do not know to whom the translator is thus indebted, but it is from the place of this inarticulable alterity inherent in every national language that a work calls for translation; like a poem for Celan, it is an address.

Derrida’s discussion of the date, the place, the name, is always underwritten by this Babelian problematic. The survival of particular dates, places, and names depends on the willingness and ability of those yet to come to translate their unique, unspeakable eventing into words. As Derrida writes in *Demeure*, “this appeal for universalization is an appeal to translation” (2000, 42), the word’s supplication to be taken up in a countersignature, in another place, at another date. Translation communicates the promise of an alliance, which in itself is nothing except this promise. Orienting itself toward the future of the yet-to-be-translated, like Celan’s absolute poem, translation announces a pure event of communicability through asking the minimal question, “are you listening?” Thus translation offers a word of opening “that permits one to pass through the door. . . . Promised by *me*

(*mein Wort*) to the singular other, ‘this one’” (2005, 61), even if it is always an “interrupted” word, striated by the strangeness of its origin and marked by its diasporic condition.

A translation of the testifying word is always a translation of the word that has been “ensilenced” by the uniqueness of that which it has erased. This “ensilencing” is often heard in the silences that perforate the halting speech of testimony. As Derrida remarks, bearing witness is sometimes silent, yet the poem addresses even in keeping silent (96). Graphed in the caesuras that fracture the words in Celan’s poems, this silence calls for translation while marking the limit of the poem’s translatability.

And yet, just as he allows the name “Shoah” to stand as an undeconstructed (abandoned?) name, so does Derrida not discuss perhaps the most paradoxical instance of Paul Celan’s activity as a translator: the fact that he “translated” his proper name from Antschel (or Ancel) to Celan, that is, translated that which, by Derrida’s own account, always remains untranslatable. Although proper names do not properly belong to a national language, marking the undecidable boundary between languages, Celan changed his family name to a somewhat French-sounding anagram. Celan abandons his German Jewish name, although it is only in the act of this erasure, in this now counterfeit signature of “Celan,” that the Jewish name has been preserved. Encrypted in the name “Celan” is the mourning, the saying of the Kaddish, for the abandoned, exterminated German Jewish name. For Celan, to write poetry means that the Jewish name must be forsaken so that it can be mourned and the words can be found again. Celan writes, in “The Sluice”:

I lost a word that sought me:

Kaddish

Through

the sluice I had to go,

to salvage the word back into

and out of and across the salt flood:

Yizkor. (2001, 151)

The intractable untranslatability of the proper name, which Celan has translated nevertheless, reveals the narrow and precarious nature of the strait that allows the passage across the border between languages.

For Celan (as is the case for another Holocaust survivor, Austrian Jew Hans Meier, known to us as writer Jean Améry²²), the translation of his German Jewish but also Romanian name underscores a profound and irreparable exclusion from a linguistic community to which he nevertheless belongs. For both Améry and Celan, the destruction-incineration of their proper names—those “names at the edge of language” (Derrida 1985a, 185)—was necessary for their post-Holocaust speech to carry the horrific burden of the German words. To the best of my knowledge, Derrida is silent on the question of Celan’s im/proper name, even if he is otherwise scrupulously attentive to substitutions and translations of names (for instance, in *Shibboleth*, he comments on the significance of the fact that the German word for February appears in Celan’s poems in different German dialects, either as *Feber* or *Februar*). He also knows that the Shoah was an attempt to erase the proper name of the Jew, “as if the names were really the very thing that the extermination was aimed at” (1998a, 10); Babel thus always names a struggle for the survival of the name (1985a, 183). Is Derrida’s critical vigilance paralyzed, perhaps traumatized, by the recurrence of certain proper names? Are these names the limit-names of his deconstructive engagements, an internal impassable border that continues to traverse Derrida’s texts?²³

To a large extent, I am inclined to concur with David Levin’s hypothesis that Derrida’s indirectness on the subject of the Holocaust is a way—perhaps the only way possible—of writing the Holocaust into the discourse of philosophy, while at the same time ensuring that it will not be appropriated by the philosophical thought (2003, 286). The scintillating figure of the Holocaust in Derrida’s texts, its waning and wading in the disseminated tropes, might be read as a word of caution against the foreclosure of the dates yet-to-come, even if the obliqueness of the references will continue to offend sensibilities of Holocaust scholars, myself included. Derrida is rightly wary of the danger of the sanctification, holy elevation of the name—firstly, because such acts of monumentalization foreclose

the possibility of the future and silence the word of address.²⁴ They carry the danger that the hallowed name shall become hollow, obliterating the past, erasing traces and strangling the testifying word. Yet, for Derrida, the name is never empty (though it is never full either): it carries within it a cinder, a trace of the absence of the event that it names. Carrying the past, the word is also turned toward the future, as testimony to that which is yet-to-arrive into being-named, into being offered a hand/place and a name [*Yad va-Shem*].²⁵ This also means that the word “holocaust,” as the figure for the aporia of the date, the place, the name, as that which—burning within language—makes all words possible, has in turn occurred to Derrida not only because the fire of this word scorched the texts written by Hegel and Heidegger, but also because it refers to the dates, the places, and the names of the events that he never names as such. Yet these “Nameable un-/utterable names” haunt Derrida’s texts (Celan 2001, 269).

Why the elliptical references to the Holocaust? I would argue, once again: *for the sake of the encounter*, the secret encounter, perhaps, and the secret of encounter [“Geheimnis der Begegnung”] (2005, 9). In “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” Derrida embarks on a reading of Celan’s “Ash-Aureole,” focusing on the striking image of knotted hands:

*Ash-aureole behind
your shaken knotted
hands at the Threeways* (2001, 261)

Unlike in earlier *Shibboleth* (in which he quotes the German version and one of the French versions), in this essay, Derrida feels compelled to cite different, competing translations of the poem, including his own, thus assuming an even more ponderable responsibility for these translatory encounters. The reference to the “Threeways” directs Derrida’s attention to the question of the “third” at the scene of testimony. There are always at least three present at that scene, although it is the surviving third—*terstis superstes*—who represents those in whose name he bears witness. Derrida relates the threesome configuration of testimony to “the three fingers that are raised in taking oath” (2005, 85–86). The etymology of the French word

for “witness” (*témoin*, from Latin *superstes*) relates testimony to surviving: he who survives to testify can bring the events he witnessed into the present—before the court of law, before the trials of memory (although, as Derrida notes, the German family of words—*Zeugen* [witness], *bezeugen* [to bear witness] belongs to a different semantic context). In *Rams*, on the other hand, Derrida picks up the last line of Celan’s poem, “Vast, Glowing Vault”: “The world is gone. I must carry you” (2005, 141). He interprets it as the words of mourning: the survivor is left to “carry” the departed friend, and to support the entire world that has vanished with his death. Derrida repeats:

I must then carry it, carry *you*, there, where the world gives way: that is my responsibility. . . . I carry *you* and must do so, I owe it to you. . . . Always singular and irreplaceable, these laws or injunction remain untranslatable from one to another, but that makes them no less universal. I *must* translate, transfer, transport (*übertragen*) the untranslatable in another turn even where, translated, it remains untranslatable. This is the violent sacrifice of the passage beyond: *Übertragen: übersetzen*. (2005, 162)

By repeatedly quoting and retranslating the last verse of the poem, by taking up the poem’s work of mourning and pledging to carry the other, a friend, across the chasm of the disappearance of an entire world, Derrida also seeks to carry out the promise of an encounter.

Throughout this essay, I have spoken of the threesome of Celan, Benjamin, and Heidegger; I would posit that these proper names, as they all relate to the threefold of *Überleben*, *Übersetzen*, *Übertragen*, are “the three fingers” that Derrida raises in *his* oath, pledging to bring about the encounter among the three into the “present” of his text, before the law of the text. That means, of course, there are always more *revenants* crowding at the gate; the finger count is by no means a simple calculation. . . . In inviting these names, the hand/name Derrida names the threshold, “an extraordinary crossing” (100), which is “a door open to the other” (Celan 2001, 375) who must remain unnamed. The text by Derrida, the Derrida-text, like Celan’s poetry, is a place of welcome for different languages, where the voices whose “paths”

would otherwise never cross begin to call to one another, to “address” one another in the happening of this *Begegnung*. The voices return, implacable *revenants*, reverberating in the Derrida-guestbook, which aspires to be a more hospitable one than the book once signed by Celan at Todtnauberg:

into the book
—whose name did it take in
before mine? (2001, 315)

Despite the danger of a misencounter, a counterfeit encounter, perhaps, the voices repeat: “At this moment, in this text,—here I am.”²⁶



NOTES

1. For an account of the debate between Derrida and Gadamer (between deconstruction and hermeneutics) as it hinged upon the notion of “interruption,” see Donatella di Cesare, “Stars and Constellations: the Difference Between Gadamer and Derrida” (2004).
2. See, for instance, *Deconstruction and Translation* by Kathleen Davis (2001) or *The Reception of Derrida: Translation and Transformation* by Michael Thomas (2006).
3. For the dating of Derrida’s texts, I have relied on Geoffrey Bennington’s bibliographical compendium in the appendix of *Jacques Derrida* (1993).
4. For the sake of consistency, I have decided to use John Felstiner’s translations of Celan’s poems from *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (2001) throughout the essay, with the exception of “À la pointe acérée” and “Grosse, Glühende Wölbung,” from the cycle *Atemwende*, and “Chymisch,” from *Die Niemandrose*, which were not included in Felstiner’s selection. In those cases, I draw on the translations used by Derrida in *Shibboleth* and in *Rams*, as indicated.
5. In the same interview, while admitting the impact of the Holocaust on the reshaping of the post-Holocaust intellectual horizon within which he situates himself, Derrida is critical of well-intentioned attempts by some scholars to reinterpret deconstruction as a whole (and thus presumably his own work) as commentary on the Holocaust (1998, 2). In that respect, David Levin’s analysis is more nuanced than Robert Eaglestone’s argument that “Derrida’s work grows out of the Holocaust” (2004, 299).
6. In “Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing” from *The Truth in Painting* (1987), Derrida’s discussion of the debate between Shapiro and Heidegger (concerning Heidegger’s interpretation of Vincent Van Gogh’s paintings of shoes in “The Origin of the Work

- of Art”) is motivated by the need to reconstitute his philosophical debt to Heidegger in the context of the Holocaust.
7. In “Loving the Torah More Than God,” Levinas writes: “I refuse to offer up the ultimate passion as a spectacle and to use these inhuman screams to create a halo for myself as either author or director. The cries are inextinguishable; they echo and echo through eternity. What we must do is listen to the thought they contain” (1999, 81).
 8. For a general account of Derrida’s use of Judaic symbols and Hebrew words, see Gideon Ofrat, *The Jewish Derrida* (2001).
 9. For a discussion of paronomasia in Derrida’s interpretation of Heidegger’s *Geist* in *Of Spirit*, see chapter 3, “Paronomasia,” in Herman Rappaport’s *Heidegger and Derrida* (1989).
 10. Perhaps, we shall add, it was a necessary forgetting: the elision of the copula (of the verb “to be”) in the Hebrew language, indicates a displacement of Hebrew from “the house of Being.” This might be what Derrida is suggesting when he refers to Hebrew as the language never thought and never named by Heidegger, “and which perhaps would no longer submit itself to historical epochality and to the history of Being” (1989, 102).
 11. See also Derrida’s *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998b).
 12. A similar argument is forwarded by Jean-François Lyotard in *Heidegger and the “Jews.”* Important to my discussion here is the way in which Donald Stoll, in “Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida: Forgetting and Remembering the Jews” (1999), locates the problematic of the repression of Judaism in Heidegger in the idiom of place and rootedness. He discerns a paradox of Heidegger’s inability to accept the insight of his own philosophy of *Dasein*, “that the human being as *Dasein* is essentially rootless and homeless” (343).
 13. The commentaries on the encounter between Celan and Heidegger have been numerous, of which Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s *Poetry as Experience* is the best known one. For an overview and a critical discussion, see Mark M. Anderson’s “‘The Impossibility of Poetry’: Celan and Heidegger in France” (1991). Most relevant to my discussion here is Krzysztof Ziarek’s “Semiosis of Listening or an Other Meeting between Heidegger and Celan,” in which the author explores the parameters of this encounter as it pivots on the question of “listening as the threshold of alterity” (1994, 182).
 14. Derrida comments on his own practice of quoting the title of the work being interpreted in the very title of the commentary in “Before the Law,” his reading of Kafka’s parable (of the same title) in *Acts of Literature*.
 15. The aporia of datability is thus related to the ambiguity that Derrida discusses in *Archive Fever* (1996a): with every act of archiving, of collecting, classifying, and sorting out the bites of memory in order to effect the piety of memory, we contribute to the forgetting of the singularity of the event.
 16. See chapter 25, “Abraham Sutzkever,” in Lawrence L. Langer’s *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (1995).
 17. See Abraham Nowersztern, *Avrom Sutzkever-bibliografye* (1976).
 18. The fact that translatability, the possibility of crossing the barbed wire frontier of

national languages, is the condition of surviving is literalized in the Nazi death camps. Holocaust survivor Primo Levi reimagines the death camp as the modernity's version of the Tower of Babel: "The confusion of languages is a fundamental component of the manner of living here: one is surrounded by a perpetual Babel, in which everyone shouts orders and threats in languages never heard before, and woe betide whoever fails to grasp the meaning" (1986, 38). Untranslatability, or the impossibility to communicate—to understand the orders and to obtain life-saving information from other inmates—is the true force of extermination, more menacing in the camps than hunger or physical coercion.

19. Derrida comments on this chance encounter between "une fois" and "une foi" in "Foi et Savoir" (1996b).
20. As Felstiner explains, "Pallaksch . . . Pallaksch," quoted by Celan in "Tübingen, January," were reportedly the nonsense words that Hölderlin used to utter after he suffered a mental breakdown; the words by which he sometimes meant "yes" and sometimes "no" (1995).
21. As Paul de Man notes, in "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" the German word for "task," *Aufgabe*, also conveys the sense of giving up, relinquishing, falling, or failing: the task of the translator is "also the defeat, the giving up, of the translator" (1986, 80).
22. In "On the Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew" (2001), Améry muses on the significance (indeed the difference between life and death) of the translation of his German name "Hans" into either its French equivalent, "Jean," or its Hebrew equivalent, "Yochanan." I would like to thank Aram Hong for pointing out that passage in Améry's text.
23. Asked, in one of the interviews, why he has avoided using the proper name of Auschwitz, Derrida answered: "because I do not feel I have the right to give one proper name to all genocides, to all exterminations, and even to the extermination of Jews under Nazism." He then added that "Auschwitz is still a place, a town, there are restaurants in Auschwitz" (1998). As is now well known, the name of the town in which the former concentration camp Auschwitz was located is Oświęcim, and, considering its political import, Holocaust historians have been very careful to avoid this particular mistranslation.
24. One of Derrida's main examples of the ideological manipulation of the name is using Holocaust to justify aggressive policies of the State of Israel against the Palestinians.
25. The Hebrew word "yad" means both "hand" and "monument," a place of commemoration. "Shem" stands for "name."
26. This is a reference to Jacques Derrida's reading of Levinas in "At This Moment, in This Text, Here I Am" (1991b).

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