Afterlives: Benjamin, Derrida and Literature in Translation

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Abstract

This thesis argues that all literature is subject to ‘afterlife,’ a continual process of translation. From this starting point, this thesis seeks to answer two questions. Firstly, how texts demonstrate this continual translation; secondly, how texts should be read if they are understood as constantly within translation. To answer these questions, this thesis seeks to develop a model of textuality that holds afterlife as central, and a model of reading based on this concept of textuality.

Chapter One explores how following through the implications of Walter Benjamin’s and Jacques Derrida’s usages of the term ‘afterlife’ in their writings on translation, language and history necessarily implies a model of textuality. The model of reading that this thesis seeks to develop focuses on language and history, as Benjamin and Derrida define these as the parameters within which translation takes place. This study emphasises textuality itself as a third parameter. Chapter One also describes how, following Benjamin and Derrida, language and history are conceived as inescapable, repressive systems. This, paradoxically, allows for the concept of ‘messianicity’ – the idea that all language, and every historical event, has the potential to herald an escape from language or history. By definition, because language and history are all-encompassing, this potential cannot be enacted, and remains potential. An innovation of this thesis is to understand textuality itself as having ‘messianic potential’; all texts have the potential to escape textuality and afterlife, by reaching a point where they could no longer be translated. Understanding texts as having messianic potential, but always being subject to afterlife, is the basis of the model of reading described at the end of this chapter. Due to the ways Benjamin and Derrida suggest we recognise messianic potential, texts are read with a dual focus on their singularity and their connections to other texts. This is achieved through the ‘text-in-afterlife,’ a concept this thesis develops that understands texts as inextricable from the texts they translate and the texts that translate them.

Chapters Two, Three and Four test and complicate this model of reading in response to texts by James Joyce, Aimé Césaire and Jorge Luis Borges. Concepts of textuality and reading are therefore developed throughout the thesis. The three key texts are read with focus on their individual relationships with language, history and textuality, and their connections to the texts they translate. Critics have linked Joyce’s *Ulysses* to multiple other texts, making it seem exceptional. However, the concept of messianicity shows that *Ulysses* is important precisely because it is not exceptional. Césaire’s *Une Tempête* demonstrates how a text can interact with several translations of ‘the same’ text simultaneously, and also that, although language and history are structured by colonialism and are inescapable, there is a huge potential for translation within these terms. Borges’ ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote’ demonstrates the form of texts’ continual translation in afterlife by describing a text that is verbally identical to the text it ‘translates,’ yet is nevertheless different in ‘meaning’ from its original. Borges’ fiction also highlights the endless potential for translation that is inherent to all texts. Through four chapters, this thesis develops a model of textuality that understands literature as defined by an almost endless potential for translation. The value of reading texts in the terms of ‘afterlife’ is to emphasise literature’s immense potential: all texts are continually translated in relation to language, history and textuality, and continually reveal further texts.
Declaration

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“A fragment, like a small work of art, must be entirely separate from the surrounding world and complete in itself, like a hedgehog.” – Friedrich Schlegel
Introduction

“No problem is as consubstantial to literature and its modest mystery as the one posed by translation,” writes Jorge Luis Borges in ‘Las Versiones Homericas.’ This statement suggests far more than that translation is important, or even that it is a central problem of literature. Borges’ usage of the word ‘consubstantial’ suggests that the “problem […] posed by translation” is somehow made of the same substance as literature and its “modest mystery.” The problem of translation, literature, and literature’s ‘mystery’ are composed of the same material. However, “consubstantial” could suggest an even closer linkage than this. In Christian theology, the doctrine of consubstantiality teaches that the three parts of the Trinity always already existed together: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all existed, of one substance, prior to everything else. Through the word ‘consubstantial,’ Borges suggests that the “problem” of translation is inextricable from literature; to attempt to read literature without translation is necessarily to face the “problem” of translation. We cannot read literature without translation. The third part of this trinity, alongside literature and translation, is literature’s “modest mystery,” something which, as modest, may be not noticed, but, as a mystery, remains unexplainable. This ‘mystery’ is present in all literature and all translation. Translation, literature and literature’s ‘mystery’ must necessarily be thought of together.

This thesis grew out of attempting to develop an understanding of what ‘translated literature’ actually constitutes. This means asking not only which texts count as ‘translated,’ but also whether texts understood as ‘translations’ exist in some different way from other literary texts. The question is what marks a translated text, as a text, as different from other literature – if anything. Essentially, the “problem […] posed by translation,” in Borges’ terms, is the question of what a ‘translated text’ is. The answer necessarily has implications for how we understand textuality more generally, and how we read; if translations are different from other literature, presumably we should read them

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1 Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The Homeric Versions’, trans. by Eliot Weinberger, in Selected Non-Fictions, ed. by Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 69-74, p. 69. Further references are to ‘HV’ and page number. For ease of reading, this thesis quotes English translations except where necessary, but, given that issues of translatability are key to the argument developed here, uses texts’ ‘original’ titles when referring to them.
differently. This thesis therefore began with the aim of theorising and demonstrating how to read individual translated texts.

Although there are many theories of translation, much work in Translation Studies is either empirical and practice-based, or studies the cultural contexts and implications of translation practices. Issues such as textuality or the nature of the literary remain largely unaddressed in relation to translation. Walter Benjamin’s writings on translation begin to explore these subjects. Jacques Derrida develops, responds to and critiques some of Benjamin’s concerns in his own writing on translation. Despite Benjamin’s and Derrida’s philosophies of translation differing as much as being similar, both writers were interested in translation as a literary, as well as linguistic, phenomenon, and sought to describe the specific nature of the translated text. This is the importance of Benjamin’s and Derrida’s thinking on translation, and why both writers are central to this thesis. Reading these writers in dialogue shows a type of translation itself; just as Derrida integrated some of Benjamin’s ideas into his own philosophy of translation, this thesis seeks to respond to both writers and go beyond them.

Benjamin seemingly uses a specific term to describe the nature of translated texts – ‘afterlife.’ “A translation issues from the original,” he writes, “not so much from its life as from its afterlife.” Derrida, in his essays on Benjamin and translation, reformulates afterlife as ‘living on’ or ‘sur-vival,’ and writes that “translation is neither the life nor the death of the text, only or already its living on, its life after life.” Translated texts, for both Benjamin and Derrida, are defined by inhabiting a state called ‘afterlife.’ To understand what a translated text is, therefore, we need to understand afterlife. However, what ‘afterlife’ implies is a lot more complex than it might seem. It is through attempting to pin down a precise definition of this term, and following through its implications, that this thesis has developed its current form.

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This thesis argues that Benjamin and Derrida’s concept of ‘afterlife’ suggests that all texts, not just those usually called ‘translations,’ are involved in a continuous process of translation. All texts are translations, and are continually changing: there is nothing outside translation. From this starting point, this thesis seeks to answer two questions. Firstly, how texts demonstrate this continual translation; secondly, how texts should be read, if they are understood as constantly within translation.

The concept of ‘afterlife’ as a continual process of translation is developed in Chapter One through reading Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings on translation, language and history. Language and history are focussed on as Benjamin and Derrida define these as the parameters within which literary translation takes place. An innovation of this study is to emphasise the role of textuality itself as a third parameter. The three key terms for understanding a text in terms of afterlife, for this thesis, are language, history and textuality. The idea of afterlife as a process of constant translation necessarily implies a model of textuality. Chapter One outlines how our understanding of textuality might be shaped by Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writing on translation, language and history. The chapter also begins to develop a model of how to read in light of this understanding of textuality – a model that allows us to see how texts demonstrate the translation process that is afterlife.

The other three chapters, providing readings of texts by James Joyce, Aimé Césaire and Borges, allow us to test this model, but also complicate it and add to it. These texts are read with focus on two elements: their individual discussions of language, history and textuality, and their connections to the texts they translate. We can therefore begin to see the different ways that texts demonstrate the process of translation, and develop and practise a model of reading. Each of these texts illustrates different aspects of the theory developed in Chapter One, while also complicating and modifying it. Not simply ‘case studies’ used to illustrate an already-formed theory, these texts themselves contribute to a theory of textuality premised on ‘afterlife.’ Through four chapters, this thesis develops a theory of textuality that understands literature as defined by an almost endless potential for translation. The value of reading texts in the terms of ‘afterlife’ is to emphasise literature’s immense potential: all texts are continually translated in relation to language, history and textuality, and continually reveal further texts.

**Defining afterlife**

The term ‘afterlife’ comes from Benjamin’s 1923 essay on translation, ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers.’ Benjamin’s statement that “a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife” implies that a text must already be within ‘afterlife’ to be translated (‘TT’ 254). Afterlife makes translation possible. To understand Benjamin’s thoughts on translation, we must therefore clarify what he means by ‘afterlife.’ Derrida discusses ‘living on’ or ‘sur-vival’ in his essays
on Benjamin and translation, ‘Living On/Borderlines’ and ‘Des Tours de Babel.’ For Derrida, afterlife appears to be a matter of a text outliving itself. He cryptically writes that ‘living on’ is “neither life nor death,” and “is not the opposite of living, just as it is not identical with living,” while in ‘Des Tours de Babel’ he writes that in a state of ‘sur-vival’ [survie], “the work does not simply live longer, it lives more and better, beyond the means of its author” (‘LO’ 110). ‘Afterlife’ or ‘living on’ is a kind of extended life for texts that is bound up with translation, but for both Benjamin and Derrida, it is not merely an ‘extra’ life given to texts through translation. Benjamin implies a text’s afterlife must exist prior to translation, while Derrida suggests that, in being neither life nor an opposite of life, ‘living on’ is not simply an extension of texts’ ‘life.’ Additionally, the essay ‘Living On’ seemingly redefines translation to include criticism and other rewritings, or rereadings, of texts. These essays – ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,’ ‘Living On/Borderlines’ and ‘Des Tours de Babel’ – are where Benjamin and Derrida most explicitly discuss afterlife, and are therefore central to this study.

Benjamin and Derrida are far from the only writers to use ‘afterlife’ in reference to artworks, history or language, however. The term has been understood in various ways across disciplines. In literary studies, ‘afterlife’ has been used as an often vaguely-defined term to describe texts’ influence, adaptation or reception, in studies ranging from critical reception histories to studies of popular culture adaptations of canonical literature. ‘Afterlife’ has been used in cultural and historical studies to describe cultural memory, the continuing effect(s) of the past on the present, or a ‘return of the repressed’ in cultural consciousness. It has also served to describe historical painting, the differing

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7 See also Derrida’s ‘Roundtable on Translation’, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, in The Ear of the Other, ed. by Christie McDonald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) , pp. 91-161.
10 For example, Richard Golsan, Vichy’s Afterlife: History and Counterhistory in Postwar France (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India, ed. by Suvir Kaul (London: Sangam, 2001); Thatcher and After: Margaret Thatcher and her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture, ed. by Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
11 Brian Curran, The Egyptian Renaissance: the Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)
representations of historical figures,\textsuperscript{12} and even the hybridised condition of languages such as Anglo-Romani.\textsuperscript{13}

Benjamin’s and Derrida’s own understandings of ‘afterlife’ remain relatively under-discussed in criticism, either in studies that focus on ‘afterlife’ or on Benjamin and Derrida. Both writers have proved influential in thinking about translation, and many scholars, particularly within Translation Studies, have picked up Benjamin’s usage of ‘afterlife.’\textsuperscript{14} However, the term is often used in a way that divorces it from the context of Benjamin’s wider arguments about translation, history and language.\textsuperscript{15} Studies that focus predominantly on Benjamin or Derrida and translation often do not include ‘afterlife’ as a central category. Discussions of Benjamin on translation focus predominantly on his theories of language, while other critics have linked Benjamin’s discussions of translation and history.\textsuperscript{16} Derrida’s importance to writing on translation includes his wider redefinitions of writing and text, which have been used, for example, to argue against some of the more ‘empirical’ assumptions of Translation Studies.\textsuperscript{17}

One of the most detailed readings of ‘afterlife’ as key to Benjamin’s writing on translation comes from Samuel Weber.\textsuperscript{18} Weber argues that Benjamin’s formulation of ‘afterlife’ has implications beyond translated texts, and relates it to “the rise of electronic media” and a reading of the Creation story in Genesis.\textsuperscript{19} Benjamin’s and Derrida’s ideas of ‘afterlife’ or ‘living on’ have also been used as a

\textsuperscript{12} Philip II and Alexander the Great: Father and Son, Lives and Afterlives, ed. by Elizabeth Carney and Daniel Ogden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

\textsuperscript{13} Yaron Matras, Romani in Britain: The Afterlife of a Language (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010)

\textsuperscript{14} Benjamin and Derrida are included in, for example, Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Edwin Gentzler, Contemporary Translation Theories, 2nd edn (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001); and The Translation Studies Reader, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2012).


\textsuperscript{18} Samuel Weber, Benjamin’s –abilities (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 53-94

\textsuperscript{19} Weber, p. 79 and pp. 82-7
lens through which to read literature more generally in Bella Brodzki’s *Can These Bones Live?*, which examines novels’ attestation to the persistence of cultural memory. This thesis argues, similarly to Weber and Brodzki, that Benjamin and Derrida’s statements about afterlife have importance beyond what is called ‘translation’ in everyday speech. This is because, for the theory developed here, ‘afterlife’ names a condition of textuality as such. All texts, not only those usually called translations, exist within a process of continual translation. This translation process is called ‘afterlife.’

This is not something argued by Benjamin or Derrida, but is a conclusion drawn from accepting various arguments in Benjamin’s and Derrida’s texts and reading them together. Following through the logic suggested by some of Benjamin’s and Derrida’s statements leads to this conclusion. Benjamin begins ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’ with the question of texts’ translatability. Since “a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife,” a text must be within ‘afterlife’ to be translatable, to possess translatability (‘TT’ 254). Following Derrida, all texts possess translatability by virtue of existing as texts. Derrida implies a redefinition of translatability in writing that, “totally translatable, [a text] disappears as a text […] Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately” (‘LO’ 82). This means that texts are neither ‘translatable’ nor ‘untranslatable,’ but that all texts exist in the tension between being ‘totally translatable’ and ‘totally untranslatable,’ and this tension is ‘translatability.’ Texts are therefore defined by their necessarily endless potential for translation, but also by the restrictions on their translation. This tension is one of the central ideas for how this thesis attempts to understand textuality and translation.

Since, for Derrida, all texts possess translatability, and, for Benjamin, texts must be within afterlife to be translatable, texts must always be within afterlife. Texts always exist within a state of potential for translation. However, Benjamin’s model of history and Derrida’s model of language suggest that, effectively, texts are constantly in translation. As will be detailed in Chapter One, for Benjamin this is due to the nature of the past’s relationship with the present, while for Derrida, it is because of the nature of all sign-systems. Since texts exist within history and language, they are subject to the conditions Benjamin and Derrida describe, and so never have a stable identity. Texts, therefore, not only always have the potential for translation; texts never have a stable identity, and effectively are constantly in translation. The boundaries between ‘translation’ and literature more generally become blurred, as all literature is involved in a process of continual translation termed ‘afterlife.’ The problem of translation is, as Borges wrote, consubstantial to literature.

The etymology of Benjamin and Derrida’s term ‘afterlife’ suggests how the concept is understood in this study. The English word ‘afterlife’ is perhaps misleading. ‘After’-life implies being temporally secondary to ‘life.’ The words used by Benjamin and Derrida contain different implications. Benjamin’s Überleben and Derrida’s survie might be rendered in English, as calques, as ‘overlife.’ Both the German and French words use prepositions, über and sur – over, on, above – rather than a temporal marker, ‘after.’ Überleben and survie both suggest the sense of following and going beyond ‘life’ that is also implied by ‘afterlife,’ but the German and French words do not imply being temporally secondary, as ‘afterlife’ does. These implications should be remembered when the English word ‘afterlife’ is used here.

It is worth noting the link between the German Überleben and Übersetzen (translation), which consists of the preposition ‘over’ and the verb ‘to put.’ Übersetzen as a separable verb (trennbare Verb) means to ferry something across a river.21 Like the Latin transferre, whence the English translate and the French traduire, the German Übersetzen implies a movement across. Translation is lateral, not vertical, and is not inherently hierarchical.22 Translation and afterlife are linked at the level of etymology by the idea of being above, over, or beyond, but in a non-hierarchical way. Translation and afterlife imply exceeding, but not in the sense of achieving a ‘higher status.’

Benjamin uses a second word to describe afterlife; he writes that the translation “marks [the] stage” of the original text’s Fortleben, which Harry Zohn translates as “continued life” rather than the “afterlife” of Überleben (‘TT’ 254). Derrida glosses Fortleben as “continuation of life rather than life post mortem” (‘DT’ 114). Benjamin’s word choice suggests that, in “mark[ing] the stage of [the original’s] continued life,” the translation does not donate extended life to the ‘original,’ but comes from its ‘overliving’ and demonstrates its ‘survival,’ its continued existence. Translations do not allow the ‘original’ to live on, but show that the original lives on. As will be explored below, this distinction is crucial to the model of afterlife developed here.

In his reading of Benjamin, Paul de Man writes that the translation’s existence within afterlife is only possible through the death of the original. Translations “kill the original, by discovering that the original was already dead,” and afterlife merely “confirm[s] the death of the original.”23 The model of reading developed in this thesis offers an alternate understanding, arguing that afterlife is the text exceeding itself. Afterlife is not a secondary ‘life’ after an already completed life. Textual afterlife is

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22 In this, translation is rhizomatic, to use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s term, as it creates a “multiplicity” that “never has available a supplementary dimension over and above its number of lines, that is, over and above the multiplicity of numbers attached to those lines.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1999), p. 9.
23 De Man, ‘Conclusions’, pp. 84-5
about exceeding and extending life, ‘life’ as an experience of potentiality. ‘Overliving’ is more apt than ‘afterlife,’ both as it suggests an excess of life rather than a second, later life, and because as a gerund it suggests continual action. However, it is unidiomatic, and so ‘afterlife’ will be used here, but ‘under erasure’; the sense of ‘overliving’ should be remembered.24

Perceiving potential

The outcome of reading Benjamin’s and Derrida’s concepts of ‘afterlife’ in the terms of their understandings of language and history is that texts exist within a process of continual translation. The value of this concept becomes clearer when it is linked to ‘messianicity,’ another concept of Benjamin’s that Derrida reworks in terms of his own philosophy. The Messiah is for both Derrida and Benjamin that which cannot exist within what we understand as ‘history’ or ‘language,’ as the Messiah exceeds these structures. If the Messiah were to arrive, it would, at least, require a complete redefinition of ‘history’ or ‘language.’ However, following Derrida, the Messiah is always ‘yet to come.’ If we could imagine the Messiah arriving at some future point, this would mean that it could be thought of in terms of ‘history’ – and so would not truly be the Messiah. Essentially, we can never say that the Messiah actually will arrive. Benjamin and Derrida both understand language and history as having ‘messianic potential’ – filled with the potential to bring about the Messiah, but never doing so fully.

The connection between Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings about messianicity and afterlife is suggested by the way they discuss translation in terms of language and history. Elsewhere, both thinkers characterise language and history as having messianic potential. This study furthers this linkage between translation, afterlife and messianicity by understanding textuality as having messianic potential, a step not made by Benjamin and Derrida. While Benjamin’s and Derrida’s ideas of ‘the messianic’ have come under renewed focus in recent scholarship, they have not previously been linked to textuality or afterlife.25 Geoffrey Bennington and Julie Candler Hayes have linked

Derrida’s ideas about translation and messianicity; the current study develops that link, but with reference to literary texts.26

If texts within afterlife have ‘messianic potential,’ they contain the potential to reveal something outside history, language or textuality. However, this potential only ever exists as potential. ‘Messianicity’ means that texts are filled with such astonishing potential for translation that they could even transcend textuality, but never actually will. In the terms developed here, this potential is the “modest mystery” Borges links to literature and translation. Literature, translation and literature’s ‘mystery’ are always linked in the form of literature, a continual process of translation named afterlife, and literature’s potential for translation, understood as messianic. Chapter One’s reading of Benjamin and Derrida begins to develop a model of reading based on these terms in an attempt to describe literature’s immense capacity for change within language, history and textuality. Reading texts in the terms of afterlife and messianicity stresses that literature is defined by its almost endless potential for translation within these parameters. This state of virtually endless change, but within limits, is the tension of messianic afterlife that this thesis sees as defining literature.

The implications of this theory are explored in Chapters Two, Three and Four, in readings of specific texts by Joyce, Césaire and Borges. These texts are read in relation to language, history and textuality since these are the parameters of afterlife: looking at these factors helps us see how texts demonstrate the translation process of afterlife. These particular texts are important because they are all rewritings of previous texts, and so they allow us to read with a focus on the connection between them and the texts they ‘translate’ – just as with the relationship between Benjamin’s ideas and their development by Derrida. It is this connection that is key to understanding the process of afterlife as a movement of change. Therefore, one of the innovations of the model of reading developed in this study is the concept of the ‘text-in-afterlife.’ The text-in-afterlife is all the iterations of a particular text at various stages in the process of change. In other words, it views the text as it exists now, its antecedents, and its translations yet to come as part of one continuum. Reading an individual text therefore requires simultaneous focus on its connection to other texts, and attention to the text’s specificity and uniqueness. This model of reading will be elaborated in Chapter One, and modified through the following chapters. Joyce’s Ulysses, Césaire’s play Une Tempête and Borges’ fiction ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote’ inform the understanding of textuality developed here as much as this model of textuality informs our reading of these texts. At the level of form and content, these texts themselves discuss the possibility or nature of textual change. Rather than only ‘demonstrating’ certain aspects of

the theory drawn from Benjamin and Derrida, these texts also question and explore what it means for one text to rewrite another. These texts ‘theorise’ afterlife as much as participate within it. A model of reading in the terms of afterlife is therefore developed throughout this thesis.

_Ulysses_ demonstrates the problem with claiming that any text has an exceptional status. The ‘Oxen of the Sun’ section of _Ulysses_ shows the impossibility of constructing a narrative of literary history, or ‘proving’ that one text is linked to another. All that can be done is ask what happens if we read texts as linked within afterlife. In showing the untenability of narratives of literature history, ‘Oxen’ provides a model of how to read _Ulysses_ as a whole. _Ulysses_ has been linked to a litany of other texts, being claimed as a ‘translation’ of texts ranging from the _Odyssey_ to Gustave Flaubert’s _La Tentation de Saint Antoine_. The cumulative effect appears to be the claim that _Ulysses_ is the text into which everything translates. _Ulysses_ appears to be the promised messianic text, a text exceeding all others. However, if we understand afterlife and messianic potential as working on all texts, then every text has the potential for linkages to other texts, just as _Ulysses_ does. Every text always has the potential for further translation. _Ulysses_ exists within a state of tension, as the number of other texts it has been linked to show it to be both unique and like every other text. Reading _Ulysses_ within the terms set out in Chapter One prompts us to question how far this study’s redefinition of ‘translation’ can be taken, and how understanding all literature as existing within messianic afterlife might change the way we think about individual, canonical texts.

_Une Tempête_ demonstrates that texts within afterlife are not linear ‘chains,’ where one text simply turns into another through ‘translation.’ _Une Tempête_ demonstrates that translations exist alongside various predecessors; Césaire’s play engages with Shakespeare’s _Tempest_, but also other texts that have followed _The Tempest_. _Une Tempête_ simultaneously engages with several ‘predecessor’ texts. The action of the play mimics this in its use of anachrony: several stages of history seem to exist at once on _Une Tempête_’s island. Additionally, _Une Tempête_ shows the impossibility of radical difference. The play demonstrates that no total escape from colonialism is possible, and to attempt to escape is to become ever more entangled within colonialism’s terms. It is better, _Une Tempête_ suggests, to struggle within the system – within colonial language or history, or within the afterlife of _The Tempest_ – than to attempt to deny the system altogether. _Une Tempête_’s contribution to the understanding of textuality developed here is the argument that translation within afterlife, within the terms of language, history or textuality, always takes place within certain limits – but that radical change is still possible within these limits, and points to the possibility of an ‘outside.’ This is the play’s messianicity.

‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote’ demonstrates the way in which texts within afterlife exist in a tension between singularity and connectedness. The fiction describes the twentieth-century French
author Pierre Menard, who writes sections of *Don Quijote* in words identical to Cervantes’ ‘original.’ ‘Pierre Menard’ argues that Menard’s *Quijote* is different from Cervantes’, even as its words apparently remain identical. Such simultaneous similarity and difference demonstrates the way the constant translation of afterlife is enacted, by showing that it cannot be understood through progressivist models of literary-historical ‘influence.’ Menard’s version of *Don Quijote* seems to stand outside (literary) history, as there is no model of progressive historical change that could account for a sixteenth-century text ‘reappearing’ in the twentieth century. It therefore seems utterly unique. However, Menard’s *Quijote* can only be read in connection to other texts – Cervantes’ *Don Quijote* and Borges’ fiction ‘Pierre Menard’ itself. Due to its nature as a text about a text, ‘Pierre Menard’ also demonstrates texts’ potential for multiple, diverse translations by showing two simultaneous manifestations of *Don Quijote*’s afterlife – Pierre Menard’s *Quijote*, and Borges’ fiction itself. In this presentation of two simultaneous rewritings of *Don Quijote*, and its closing invitation for further translation, ‘Pierre Menard’ underlines the endlessness of the potentiality found in afterlife.

**Linking texts**

The suggestion that texts within afterlife are constantly changing, and are being constantly linked to other texts, may seem to be a redefinition of ‘intertextuality,’ describing how texts are inextricable from other texts. However, ‘intertextuality’ has, like ‘afterlife,’ become a polyvalent term. For Julia Kristeva, who coined the term, ‘intertextuality’ does not describe the relationship between particular literary texts; rather, any text should be understood as “an intertextuality.”

This is because “the text is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language”; every text is “a permutation of texts […] in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralise one another.”

This does not only mean that any text is composed of elements from other written documents, but that texts have a “redistributive (destructive-constructive)” relationship with language. In a text, different ways of using language intersect, and understanding the text as an intertextuality describes this operation.

While intertextuality is related to the textual culture within which a text is produced, it is, moreover, related to the linguistic culture in which it is produced and read. Intertextuality for Kristeva “has nothing to do with matters of influence by one writer on another, or with the sources of a literary work,” but describes “the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another.” Indeed, Kristeva, in a later essay, writes that since ‘intertextuality’

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28 Kristeva, ‘Bounded Text’, p. 36

29 Kristeva, ‘Bounded Text’, p. 36

has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources,’ we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its ‘place’ of enunciation and its denoted ‘object’ are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.31

‘Intertextuality’ as Kristeva understands it, influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s understanding of language as dialogical, has more in common with Derrida’s concept of ‘the trace’ than ideas of influence or allusion. Texts are, for Kristeva, intertextualities because of the nature of language. The concept of textuality and afterlife developed in the current project is not opposed to ‘intertextuality’ as Kristeva conceived it, but does not share Kristeva’s aims. This study’s focus is the links between specific texts, and how those links may help us read those texts – or how those texts may help us understand those links. Kristeva’s concept is concerned with textuality in the abstract, and how meaning is created, while the current project aims to understand textuality through close reading of individual texts.

However, as Scarlett Baron writes, “traditional manifestations of influence, such as quotation, imitation, echo and allusion […] are seen as belonging to the wider set of textual practices […] envisaged by the intertextual theorists of the 1960s.”32 ‘Intertextuality,’ as the term has come to be used, includes these more ‘traditional’ ways of thinking about how texts intersect. Often, the term has been used to discuss deliberate allusion on the part of authors. Discussion of *Ulysses*’ ‘intertextuality’ provides an example. R. Brandon Kershner writes that “‘intertextuality’ has generally replaced ‘allusion’ in contemporary discussions that prefer not to invoke connotations of a conscious and controlling author,” implying that despite changes in terminology, the concepts involved have not drastically changed.33 Kershner even writes that “in place of ‘allusion,’ Julia Kristeva uses ‘intertextuality’ in a 1969 essay,” as if Kristeva’s only innovation were a new term for a familiar concept.34 ‘Intertextuality’ would then allow continuing work within the logic of the figure Roland Barthes calls “the author-god.”35 However, Kershner’s essay discusses *Ulysses*’ similarity to texts ranging from the *Odyssey* to popular songs of 1904, and briefly broaches the question of whether

34 Kershner, p. 171
discussions of ‘intertextuality’ need be limited to those texts of which Joyce was personally aware. Kershner’s use of the term is therefore vague.  

Other discussions of *Ulysses* and intertextuality include Baron’s *Joyce, Flaubert and Intertextuality*. While Baron sees ‘intertextuality’ as describing “both a set of intentional authorial procedures and the status of all literary systems,” she also writes that “the differences between the contexts, textures, plots, structures and tonalities of [Joyce’s and Flaubert’s] various works – as well as between their lives […] – are substantial, and can make the existence of an significant intertextual connection between them seem unlikely.” Baron’s mention of the authors’ lives as having some bearing on ‘intertextuality’ demonstrates how far the concept has come from Kristeva’s and Barthes’ ideas, which look at texts within the terms of signifying systems, not people. Baron reinstates the author as a person as vital to understanding the text. Dennis Brown’s *Intertextual Dynamics Within the Literary Group – Joyce, Lewis, Pound and Eliot* deviates even further from Kristeva or Barthes’ understandings of intertextuality, using the term to mean “mutual influence within the core group of English literary Modernism.” Brown even describes his project as “quite conventional academic criticism” and does not refer to any of the key thinkers connected to ideas similar to intertextuality – Kristeva, Barthes, Derrida, Gérard Genette or Michael Riffaterre – showing just how far the term has moved.

This thesis does not engage with this type of ‘intertextuality,’ a synonym for ‘influence’ or ‘allusion.’ In the terms developed here, a ‘translation’ is understood to be a text that enacts or makes clear a potential latent in another text. A translation expands upon an incomplete element of another text, demonstrating that text’s potential to acquire a new relationship to language, history or textuality. Therefore, rather than source-hunting or tracing ‘influence,’ reading with an awareness of afterlife requires asking what potentialities are enacted or revealed by reading certain texts together. What matters is not authorial intention, or whether a text has a ‘historical’ connection to another text. Potentialities exist within texts themselves, and are recognised when particular texts are read together.

In this study, texts are read together to test how such connections illuminate texts’ specific engagements with language, history and textuality. These are the three parameters of afterlife. Reading with a focus on these terms, and the connections between texts, helps us see how texts demonstrate the constant translation that is afterlife. Through doing this, we begin to develop and practise a model of reading based on understanding texts as necessarily linked to others. These connections therefore help to reveal the nature of literature, and its immense potentiality. To begin to

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36 Kershner, p. 181
37 Baron, p. 3
explore this potential, we will trace some of the implications of the term ‘afterlife’ in Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings on translation – although, as the following chapter will show, afterlife disavows the very idea of ‘beginning.’
Chapter One
“Triumphant translation”: Benjamin and Derrida

Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida both explore the specific nature of translated texts as texts, through the concept of ‘afterlife.’ The question of what is distinctive about translated literature was the starting point of this thesis, and the reason for focussing on Benjamin and Derrida. However, as this chapter argues, the implications of Benjamin’s and Derrida’s arguments on translated texts extend beyond the texts we commonly call ‘translated.’ The aim of this chapter is to follow through ideas from Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings on translation, language and history to two ends. Firstly, to show that these ideas imply a model of textuality; secondly, to suggest a model of reading based on this understanding of textuality. The following three chapters will test and complicate this model of reading. This chapter therefore addresses the two central questions of this thesis, describing how texts demonstrate the constant translation that is afterlife, and suggesting how we should read texts to recognise this translation. This chapter will also define how this thesis understands the three terms that guide our reading of texts in afterlife – language, history and textuality – and show why it is these particular three terms that are key.

This chapter is split into three sections, concerning what is meant by ‘afterlife,’ and how it prompts a model of textuality; how this thesis understands language and history; and the concept of ‘ messianicity.’ Finally, the conclusions of these three sections are integrated in a suggested model of reading. The first section of this chapter follows through the implications of the term ‘afterlife’ in Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings on translation. This section describes three of the key ideas for the model of textuality and reading developed in this thesis. First is the idea, following Derrida, that ‘translatability’ is the tension between being ‘totally translatable’ and ‘totally untranslatable,’ and that this tension is a condition of textuality. Texts are therefore defined by their necessarily endless potential for translation, but also by the restrictions on their translation. How we understand this potential and these restrictions is elaborated in the rest of the chapter. Second is the concept of ‘afterlife’ as a process of continual translation: the potential for translation is constantly enacted. Through reading Benjamin’s writings on history and translation, and Derrida’s models of history and language, this section argues that ‘afterlife’ means that texts are never identical to themselves. Understanding afterlife, constant translation, as a condition of textuality is a way of attempting to
comprehend texts’ potential – their translatability. Finally, the concept of the text-in-afterlife will be discussed. The text-in-afterlife, a concept that understands texts as inextricable from the texts they translate and from their translations, is an innovation of this thesis that comes from this chapter’s reading of Benjamin and Derrida. It is central to the model of reading that will be proposed at the end of this chapter.

The second section of this chapter describes how texts’ translation within afterlife can only ever take place within certain parameters. For this thesis, the parameters of afterlife are language, history and textuality. Translation in afterlife is the demonstration of a text’s potential to acquire a new relationship to language, history or textuality. Texts are read in terms of their negotiation of these systems, to help us see how they demonstrate the translation process of afterlife. We therefore need to define these terms. After the first section, primarily addressing textuality, this second section describes how both Benjamin and Derrida conceive language as a repressive, all-encompassing system. For Benjamin, language is judgement, while for Derrida language is colonialism. Although these writers differ in their conceptions of language, understanding language as an inescapable system of repression is inextricable from both their understandings of translation. Since the model of textuality developed here arises from Benjamin’s and Derrida’s thoughts on translation, the idea of language as repression must form part of this model. This section also describes how this thesis understands history similarly to language – as a system of thought that works through colonial logic, denying the possibility of anything outside itself. Describing how language and history function as repressive systems shows the way in which translation in afterlife is constrained.

However, as described in the third section, it is these very structures of repression that allow for imagining the possibility of genuine, radical difference. Benjamin and Derrida describe language and history as containing ‘messianic potential,’ the potential to reveal something outside language or history. Because these structures are necessarily all-encompassing, this potential must remain potential and cannot be enacted: we cannot escape language or history. However, Benjamin posits that translation’s ultimate, unreachable aim is an escape from the conditions of human language. Derrida builds on Benjamin, to suggest that translation allows us to imagine the possibility of an escape from language or history. An innovation of this thesis is to understand textuality as also containing messianic potential. This means that every text has the potential to escape the conditions of textuality – translatability and afterlife. The value of thinking of language, history and textuality as all-encompassing systems is that it allows for thinking of these systems as containing messianic potential. Paradoxically, conceiving literature as subject to these three limiting systems is a way of emphasising that literature’s potential – its translatability – is almost endless, despite these restrictions.
Understanding every text as containing messianic potential is the basis of the method of reading this chapter develops. The model of reading proposed at the end of this chapter is based on Benjamin’s and Derrida’s theories of translation. Just as they understand translation as allowing us to perceive language’s messianic potential, a reading practice based on a model of textuality that holds constant translation – afterlife – as central is the way to perceive textuality’s potential. The conclusion to this chapter describes a model of deconstructive reading that stresses the gaps between texts as well as within texts, and focusses above all on texts’ potential for translation – a virtually endless potential, within the restrictions of language, history and textuality. Perceiving this potential is achieved through the text-in-afterlife concept, which, as this chapter shows, can be thought of differently through a Benjaminian or Derridean lens. Ideas of singularity and connectedness are central to both Benjamin’s and Derrida’s understandings of how to recognise messianic potential, albeit in different ways. The conclusion to this chapter attempts to integrate these models, in a method of reading that suggests we should simultaneously read texts as if they are unique, while knowing this is not the case, and understand texts as necessarily connected to other texts, but unpick the dissonances in these connections. To understand as fully as possible the immensity of the potential for translation within a text – its ‘messianicity’ – we must read texts as being both radically singular and totally contiguous to other texts. This chapter aims to show why this is the case, and how to go about reading in this way.

A model of textuality and reading are developed through this chapter’s gradually working through the implications of various ideas that are not fully explicated in Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writing. This chapter does not read Benjamin and Derrida to provide support for a presupposed model of reading. Rather, this chapter aims to show that if we accept certain ideas of Benjamin’s and Derrida’s, and logically explore and integrate the implications of both writers’ very different ideas of translation, language and history, we reach a point where our conclusion must be the development of a model of textuality – a conclusion neither Benjamin nor Derrida themselves explicitly made in relation to ‘afterlife.’ The model of reading proposed at the end of this chapter, and further developed throughout this thesis, is in turn a consequence of the model of textuality this chapter’s reading of Benjamin and Derrida suggests. Therefore, this chapter necessarily reads Benjamin and Derrida slowly and at length, showing that if the implications of their arguments are followed to their conclusions, a model of textuality, and thus of reading, must be our endpoint.

Derrida’s essay ‘Des Tours de Babel’ reads Benjamin’s arguments on translation similarly, following through the logic of Benjamin’s arguments to their conclusions. This leads Derrida to suggest that, on occasion, Benjamin’s argument seemingly contradicts itself. Derrida therefore variously supports, builds on and critiques Benjamin’s argument. This chapter aims to read Derrida and Benjamin together in a similar way – pointing out the inconsistencies, and potentialities, that are revealed if we read these texts according to their own, and each other’s, logic. Additionally, reading
these very different writers together means that different arguments of theirs can be read for points at which they coincide or diverge. Benjamin’s and Derrida’s texts are read similarly to other texts in this thesis, asking what happens if we put pressure on certain elements of texts, and read them in dialogue with other texts. In elaborating these latent aspects of their texts, this thesis itself is part of the afterlife of Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writing.

**Afterlife**

This chapter begins by following through the implications of the term ‘afterlife’ in Benjamin and Derrida’s writings on translation. This section argues that the upshot of ‘afterlife’ is a redefinition of textuality. This is because ‘afterlife’ suggests that translatability is a condition of textuality, and that all texts are continually being translated. Following this model of textuality, we will develop a model of reading based upon it. Let us begin by establishing what is meant by ‘translatability,’ as Derrida’s definition of this term is necessary for understanding which texts are subject to ‘afterlife.’

**Translatability**

Rather than translation, it is the potential for translation, translatability, that is central to Benjamin and Derrida’s writing on translation. In ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,’ Benjamin writes that translatability is nothing to do with whether “an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of [the text’s] readers” (‘TT’ 254). Rather, saying a text possesses translatability means that “a special significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability” (‘TT’ 254). The “special significance” is made clear not by the text’s translation, but in its translatability, its potential for change. However, it is difficult to know which texts possess translatability for Benjamin. Works no-one has been able to translate may still possess ‘translatability’; “given a strict concept of translation, would they not really be translatable to some degree?” asks Benjamin (‘TT’ 254). This could seem to deny that any text is untranslatable, or it could suggest that simply because “men should prove unable to translate” a text does not mean that it is ‘really’ untranslatable – which would leave “men” unable to tell which texts were untranslatable (‘TT’ 254). Although Benjamin emphasises translatability as central, then, it is difficult to extract a fully-formed theory of translatability from Benjamin’s writings. The emphasis on ‘translatability’ is picked up and developed by Derrida in his reading of Benjamin’s writing on translation. Although other aspects of Benjamin’s writings on translation are productive, and will be discussed below, it is Derrida’s formulation of translatability that is most fruitful for the current study.
In ‘Des Tours de Babel,’ his most detailed reading of Benjamin’s writing on translation, Derrida argues that texts are translatable because of their incompleteness. Derrida follows Benjamin in describing translatability as not merely the potential for translation, but the text calling for translation (‘TT’ 254; ‘DT’ 121). “If the original calls for a complement,” writes Derrida, “it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself” (‘DT’ 121). De Man writes in his reading of ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,’ “that the original was not purely canonical is clear from the fact that it demands translation; it cannot be definitive since it can be translated.”¹ For de Man, Derrida and Benjamin, if the text were entirely complete within itself, there would be no potential for change; the text would be immutable. To ascertain whether a text is translatable is to question whether it is a comprehensive unity. Since deconstruction in general suggests all texts’ incompleteness, in ‘Des Tours de Babel,’ Derrida places the question of translatability at the centre of deconstruction and textuality.

Derrida’s texts have repeatedly argued that no linguistic statement, let alone text, is entirely self-contained and identical to itself, as all meaning involves the play of differance.² Since signs only ever point to other signs, with no ultimate referent, ‘meaning’ is always deferred, and only exists as the difference between signs; meaning is a continual process of difference and deferral.³ A text that was a self-contained unity, not taking part in such play, would not be recognisable as a text, as it would have to be made up of words that negated the conditions of ‘iterability’ – Derrida’s term for the possibility of re-citation, repetition and changes in ‘meaning.’⁴ Language that was not iterable would be unrecognisable as language. Even a completely incomprehensible language can be copied. In an untranslatable ‘text,’ it would be unclear how to copy or repeat any linguistic element of the text; the ‘text’ would be unreadable as such. Therefore, if the untranslatable exists, it is, by definition, not a

¹ De Man, ‘Conclusions’, p. 82
² ‘Differance’ is often written ‘untranslated’ in English as différence, but this is inappropriate for a number of reasons. Derrida’s ‘differance’ is pronounced identically to the French word différence to emphasise the graphic element of the word; ‘difference’ allows this effect to be maintained in English. Leaving the word ‘untranslated’ suggests only the French term can adequately express the ‘concept.’ ‘Differance’, however, is precisely not a ‘concept’ – it “has neither existence nor essence”; Jacques Derrida, ‘Differance’, in Margins of Philosophy, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 1-28, p. 6. Additionally, ‘differance’ describes how no language can achieve perfect unity of term and referent. To leave ‘différence’ untranslated is to deny differance. ‘Differance’ does not capture the senses of both difference and deferral as neatly as the French word, nor the sense of changing through similarity to the present participle form; see ‘Différance’, p. 8. However, for reasons of clarity and convention, ‘differance’ has been spelled here relatively closely to the French.
³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines differance as the “inevitability of the differentiation (setting off) from, and deferment (pushing away) of the trace or track of all that is not what is being defined or posited”; A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 424.
⁴ Jacques Derrida and Derek Attridge, “‘This Strange Institution Called Literature’: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in Acts of Literature, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 68; Jacques Derrida, Limited Inc., ed. by Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 47-50; Davis, pp. 30-40. Weber points out that iterability is “a structural possibility that is potentially ‘at work’ even there where it seems factually not to have occurred”; Weber, p. 6 and pp. 58-9. ‘Iterability’ functions like ‘translatability,’ a potential that defines what ‘is,’ even if the potential is not enacted.
text. If there is no untranslatable text, then, all texts must possess translatability. Translatability becomes a defining characteristic of textuality, and so we begin to redefine ‘textuality.’

This does not mean, however, that every text is translatable. Rather, texts are “at once translatable and untranslatable” (‘LO’ 82). Both ‘translatable’ and ‘untranslatable’ imply the presence of a complete, self-contained meaning – either a meaning that exists, in a ‘translatable’ text, which can be replicated in another language, or a meaning that cannot be replicated, in an ‘untranslatable’ text. If all meaning involves difference, then such self-identical meaning does not exist. Rather than being understood as (partially) ‘untranslatable’ or ‘translatable,’ texts must be conceived as within the play of translatability. This state of tension defines a text’s existence as a text. It is not that there are (un)translatable elements of any text, but that every text, by virtue of being a text, is involved in the movement of being both untranslatable and translatable. No text can exist outside this condition, and so no text can be entirely ‘translatable’ or ‘untranslatable.’

Texts therefore have a necessarily endless potential for translation, but also are restricted in that translation. This is one of the central ideas for how this thesis attempts to understand textuality and translation. This state of tension is named by Derrida as ‘living on’ or ‘sur-vival,’ his equivalent of ‘afterlife’:

A text lives only if it lives on [sur-vit], and it lives on only if it is at once translatable and untranslatable (always ‘at once…and…’; hama, at the ‘same’ time). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [langue]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. Thus triumphant translation is neither the life nor the death of the text, only or already its living on, its life after life, its life after death. The same thing will be said of what I call writing, mark, trace and so on. It neither lives nor dies; it lives on (‘LO’ 82-3).

Afterlife is the tension between translatability and untranslatability. Although Derrida never explicitly states it, reading different texts of his together suggests that for a text to exist within ‘textuality,’ ‘afterlife’ or ‘translatability,’ it must necessarily exist within the other two conditions. Afterlife and translatability are conditions of all texts. Textuality is therefore defined by these concepts of afterlife and translatability.

The first element in the definition of textuality developed in this thesis is the idea, following Derrida, that texts are defined by the tension between translatability and untranslatability. Following through the implications of Derrida’s writing means that texts always exist in the state of potential for translation, translatability, by virtue of being incomplete. Texts always possesses translatability, but along with untranslatability. Textuality is the interplay or tension between these two poles. This central idea epitomises two motifs repeated throughout this study’s models of textuality and reading.
Firstly, texts are defined by a tension between apparent opposites – as will be seen below in relation to ‘messianicity,’ and the practice of reading texts between singularity and connectedness. Secondly, texts can only exist and be translated within certain conditions. Texts cannot escape the play of translatability. ‘Translatability’ is itself a limit on translation, as no text could become ‘untranslatable.’ As we will see below, language and history similarly constrain texts. Texts are defined by an inherent potential, translatability, and inherent limits, untranslatability.

Following Derrida, for a text to exist between these extremes of total translatability or untranslatability is to “live on” in afterlife. Since texts always have translatability, the potential for translation – there is no point at which texts are self-identical, and so they always possess translatability – texts are always within afterlife. For a text to exist at all is for the text to exist in afterlife. All ‘life’ is afterlife or ‘overliving’; afterlife never ‘begins’ or ‘ends.’ No text can exist outside the conditions of translatability or afterlife. The text’s ‘life’ exists only inasmuch as it has already been surpassed, because the text is never identical to itself and has always already entered the state of potential for change.

The question remains, however, how ‘translatability’ is enacted – what actually happens in translation. To begin to understand how texts change in afterlife, we must turn to Benjamin, and his understanding of history.

**Benjamin’s constellations**

This section will discuss Benjamin’s understanding of history, as this is inextricable from what Benjamin means by ‘afterlife.’ ‘History’ for Benjamin describes the way texts, as well as events, exist within time. Benjamin’s model of history describes how texts within afterlife are translated through time. Thinking of texts as changing in this way changes how we might understand translation, afterlife and textuality, and how we might read ‘texts.’

Benjamin develops a fully-formed model of history far more than he does ‘textuality’ or even ‘language.’ History is understandable through singular events, not attempts to conceptualise history as a whole or system. For Benjamin, the least justifiable structure through which historical

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understanding can be organised is ‘progress.’ ‘Progress’ justifies present suffering by predicating a better future on current conditions – as in ‘vulgar Marxism’ – or excuses the suffering of the past by asserting that the present is that once-promised future.6 “The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time,” Benjamin writes, pointing out the centrality of ‘history’ as a linear ‘filling up’ of time in post-Enlightenment European thinking.7 Rejecting this, historiography should for Benjamin approach the historical subject “as a monad,” understanding events in their uniqueness (‘History’ 396). Since the singularity of the event is fundamental, it is impossible to understand the past “the way it really was,” in Leopold von Ranke’s phrase that Benjamin dismissively quotes (‘History’ 391). The past as the past can never be recovered; this would compromise the uniqueness of the event.

History can only be understood through a particular kind of historiography for Benjamin. Writing history as Benjamin recommends does not rediscover the past, but creates ‘history,’ a way of understanding the relationship to the past, or rather to the passed.8 Events are not important due to causality. “No state of affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical,” Benjamin writes. “It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated by thousands of years” (‘History’ 397). Events are important for the way they link to other, apparently very different, events. Rather than narratives of causality, historiography should radically separate events from their ‘historical context,’ and re-place them within what Benjamin calls a ‘constellation,’ putting different historical events into dialogue (‘History’ 396).9 The constellation does not form a unified image, which would be a totality; it is not a mosaic, as Max Pensky puts it.10 Rather, a constellation is a model of reading, necessitating connections being read between its seemingly disparate parts. The relationship between the recontextualised fragments allows for a greater understanding of the relationship between the past and the present, and thus of history itself. Events from the past and present that seem radically different or remote will, when thought of together, reveal the ‘truth’ and significance of themselves, and history itself, as part of a constellation.

Only certain constellations can exist, however. Constellations are not subjective interpretations for Benjamin. As Marc de Wilde writes, the past event “only becomes ‘readable’ […] in a particular present, that is, in the ‘now’ to which it corresponds because of a ‘displaced similarity.’”11 While the historical event must be understood outside its assigned position in history-as-progress, “it cannot be projected arbitrarily onto any other context instead,” as the event is only meaningful in its particular

6 De Wilde, p. 183
8 Mosès, p. 101
9 On Benjamin’s use of astrological metaphors, see Mosès, pp. 76-9.
10 Pensky, p. 186
11 De Wilde. p. 188
relation to ‘now.’  When a “historical materialist” draws a constellation between a past event and ‘now,’ the individual event is “blasted out of the continuum of history” and “filled full by now-time [Jetzzeit]” (‘History’ 395). This does not mean that the past is made synonymous with the present, but that the individuality of the event and the significance of the constellation are appreciated as indicating “a conception of the present as now-time” (‘History’ 397). The precise, “messianic” nature of this “now-time” will be discussed in greater detail below. For Benjamin, the past does not help us to understand the present; rather, a proper understanding of the past leads to a proper understanding of the nature of the now, and the nature of history itself.

Benjamin’s model of history allows for a model of reading literary texts, in understanding them as existing similarly to historical events, and therefore readable in a similar way to events. Benjamin insists that texts within afterlife have a “history of [their] own” – they can be understood as historical monads – and are “not merely the setting for history,” objects within homogeneous empty time upon which some force of history simply acts (‘TT’ 255). “The existence of a work of art in time and the understanding of it are but two sides of the same thing,” writes Benjamin.  

Texts cannot be understood separately from ‘history.’ Literary history should take account of texts’ fate, their reception by their contemporaries, their translations, their fame. For with this the work is transformed inwardly into a microcosm, or indeed a micro-eon. What is at stake is not to portray literary works in the context of their age, but to represent the age that perceives them – our age – in the age during which they arose. It is this that makes literature into an organon of history; and to achieve this, and not to reduce literature to the material of history, is the task of the literary historian.

As with historical events, we should attempt to separate texts from their ‘context,’ and recognise the connection between texts from the past and the ‘now.’ Texts are not the “material of history,” but should read as if they are ‘history.’ History for Benjamin is ‘read’ as if it is textual, and texts are read as if they are historical. It is texts’ “fate” and “translations” that helps us see this. Let us now turn, then, to how Benjamin’s understandings of history and afterlife might mean we read and understand texts.

Understanding texts within the terms of Benjamin’s concept of history would mean reading texts in the way he suggests we ‘read’ events. The text from the past – the ‘original text’ – should be read as part of a constellation along with a text from ‘now,’ the translation. This would change how we read

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12 De Wilde, p. 188
14 Benjamin, ‘Literary History’, p. 464
texts together. Benjamin recommends we ‘read’ the connections between events, separating them from a place in ‘homogenous empty time.’ Therefore, rather than read individual texts within their ‘historical’ contexts, the focus of our reading would be the connections between texts – their similarities, or points of dialogue between texts. Understanding these connections would help us understand the nature of translation, textuality and afterlife, just as the constellation helps us understand history and ‘now.’ As with the focus on translatability, reading via the constellation model moves attention away from ‘the translation’ as a category, to the relation between ‘originals’ and ‘translations.’

The constellation model also suggests a different understanding of what ‘translating’ is. Removing belief in homogenous empty time means that change does not occur over time. However, nor has the text within afterlife been translated through being read in the present. This reader-response approach would be anathema to Benjamin; the first sentence of ‘Aufgabe’ reads, “In the appreciation of a work of art […] consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful” (‘TT’ 253). Translation occurs in the connection between the past and present, as recognised in a constellation. In other words, translating happens between originals and translations. The translation is therefore not something that allows the text to change, but demonstrates that it has already changed. Again, this draws attention to the relationship between texts, not individual texts.

Benjamin’s model of history, based on attempting to understand the relation between the past event and the present, provides us with the beginning of a model of how to read texts within afterlife. However, Benjamin’s model of history, and its development by Derrida, has an even greater implication for our understanding of afterlife. ‘Afterlife’ is not merely a state within which texts can change, but is a process of continual translation. In other words, as we will now see, Benjamin and Derrida’s writings imply that texts are never stable, but are continually changing, and this continual translation is what is named ‘afterlife.’ This is the central idea of the definition of textuality Benjamin and Derrida imply.

**Continual change**

As detailed above, Benjamin’s model of historiography can become a model for reading texts, which emphasises connections between texts. One further implication of applying this model to texts is that we effectively perceive texts as always already translated. The past as the past is unknowable for Benjamin, and so the historical event, or text from the past, experienced in the present is necessarily different from its iteration in the past. Although the physical text-object, unlike the historical event, may still exist, it cannot be understood as it was in the past. Therefore, we can only encounter texts, or events, as different from their previous existence. What this means is that, regardless of the precise nature of a text’s translation, we can only ever understand texts as if they were translated. Change is
always prior to our reading of a text. Inasmuch as we can read texts, every text is always already translated. As argued above, following Derrida, to exist as a text is to be within translatability and afterlife. Following Benjamin’s model of history, in afterlife, translation has always already occurred. Every text is ‘translated.’

Benjamin’s model of history suggests that change has always already happened. Derrida is explicit that such change is originary; there is no origin, only always already change. As David Huddart writes in another context, “a familiarly Derridean gesture” is for “questions of origin [to] become questions of process.”¹⁵ For Derrida, texts’ ‘originary change’ is due to their being made up of language. Language is never stable, not only because of individuals’ use of language, but also because of the nature of language itself. Differance is a necessary characteristic of language, and so every text is shot through with differance. No text has a single meaning or identity, because it always differs from itself; texts only exist thanks to the play of difference and deferral between signs. Following Derrida, texts have not so much always already changed as have never had a stable identity to be ‘changed.’

Derrida develops an idea of differance as an experience of temporality as well as language in Spectres de Marx, where he writes that “no time is contemporary with itself.”¹⁶ This is because the significance of any event, including its status as an event, can only be comprehended retrospectively. However, the process of signification points to a ‘presence’ that is not present; this deferral is part of differance. Naming always names something that is not here yet. To call any event ‘an event’ means, by definition, that it is yet to come, because the sign never reaches synchronicity with its referent. As Catherine Kellogg writes, “All ‘being’ then, is an event, and in order for it to be possible, strictly speaking, it cannot have already occurred […] to be possible it must be not yet.”¹⁷ Because of this disjuncture, there is an aporia in presence-within-time. All events, like all signs, exist within the logic of differance.

This understanding of events as differance means that Spectres redefines ontology as “hauntology” (SM 10). The logic of haunting or spectral presence is necessary as no event is ever entirely present and identical to itself, just as the ghost troubles the binary of being and not-being. In this temporality of haunting and differance, the event is always, by definition, ‘to come’ and yet always already ‘present,’ and can never be apprehended as such as it will never fully become past. Therefore, no event can be reduced to a self-identical existence at a particular moment in linear time. As Derrida

puts it, “haunting is historical […] but it is not dated” (SM 3). Derrida illustrates this with reference to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*; if a spectre is haunting Europe, “haunting would mark the very existence of Europe” (SM 3). The spectre “does not befall, one day, Europe,” as if there were no spectre until a particular date (SM 4). Equally, if Europe is always already haunted by the spectre of Communism, Communism itself could not ‘arrive’ on a given date, as it was already, in some sense, there. Within Derrida’s spectral ‘time out of joint’, “in the incoercible differance the here-now unfurls” [sic] (SM 37). The present and future need to be reconfigured as the ‘here-now’ and the ‘to come’, since no event is fully identical to itself. In the movement of time-as-differance, the ‘here-now’ is a non-present present, “without delay, but without presence” (SM 37).

To return to texts, this means that the text existing within history never fully arrives as itself – it is never a self-contained unity. Since texts are made of language and exist within history, they are ‘sites’ of differance in both language and time. Texts never exist as such: they always already differ from themselves, and will never attain ‘completion’ because there is nothing but differance. While reading texts via Benjamin suggests that we should focus on the relationship between texts, and understand texts as always translated, reading via Derrida stresses that ‘living on’ is characterised by a total absence of stability, and the continual movement of differance.

Samuel Weber argues that Benjamin describes something similar to this continual movement. Weber reads Benjamin as arguing that the text is continually becoming other than itself – that the potential of translatability is always being enacted. For Weber, Benjamin describes this in the sentences, “So wie die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst [sic] mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen, ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten, geht die Übersetzen aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem ‘Überleben.’”18 Weber writes that

what characterises Benjamin’s language […] is the critical movement of departure, of taking-leave, a movement […] outward and away. The word that is translated in the published version [i.e., Harry Zohn’s translation] simply as ‘phenomena’ [sic] is in fact literally constructed around the prefix ‘out’- (aus) and the adjective or adverb außer, meaning ‘outside of’, ‘except.’ This movement outward is then taken up in the shift from the familiar noun ‘life’ (Leben) and the gerundive, built on the present participle, which I translate as ‘the living’; in German, ‘das Lebendige.’ […] In Benjamin’s [German] text, life is taking leave already from the start: instead of displaying itself in its manifestations [as in Zohn’s translation], it begins to lose itself in its ‘utterances’, a movement that is then intensified in the shift from ‘life’ to ‘the living.’ For ‘the living’ names a movement in

18 Walter Benjamin, ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’ in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Vol. IV.I (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 10. Zohn translates this as “Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife” (‘TT’ 254).
which life, paradoxically enough, is only rendered ‘present’ by expending itself, that is, by opening itself to a movement of iteration in which it is constantly being altered.\footnote{Weber, p. 66}

The present participle construction ‘das Lebendige’ suggests, writes Weber, that life “is present only in departing […] never fully, never completely present.” This movement is named as ‘überleben’, ‘afterlife’, “not simply as that which comes ‘after’ life has gone, but a life that is ‘after’ itself – that is, constantly in pursuit of what it will never be.”\footnote{Weber, p. 66}

Afterlife is a \textit{constant} and \textit{perpetual} movement away from the ‘original’ text, “constantly in pursuit” of existence as a self-contained, entirely fulfilled text. Since, following Derrida, translatability and afterlife are inextricable, it is not merely that the potential for translation always exists, nor even that the potential for translation has always already been enacted – translation is \textit{constantly} being enacted. All textual ‘life’ is ‘living on’ or afterlife; ‘living on’ is inseparable from translatability, the potential for change; this potential for translation is constantly being enacted. Benjamin describes how the “constant changes in meaning” that happen to the text within afterlife are owing to “the very life of language and its works,” which is “one of the most powerful and fruitful historical processes” (‘TT’ 256; emphasis added). All texts are involved in a continual process of becoming other than themselves. For a text to exist is for it to be within translation, to be \textit{being translated}.

Textuality, afterlife, translatability and translation are therefore all conditions of each other. ‘Afterlife’ names the fact that texts always have the potential for translation, and are constantly in translation. This is how the concept of ‘afterlife’ contributes to our understanding of textuality: it suggests that texts have no stable identity, are always filled with the potential for translation, and are continually enacting this potential. Texts never exist outside translatability or the process of change that is afterlife.

We can begin to construct a model of how to read texts on the basis of the understanding of ‘afterlife’ derived from reading Benjamin’s and Derrida’s texts together. Following Benjamin, the way to perceive texts’ potential and translation is to read for the connections between texts. Following Derrida, texts exist within the play of (un)translatability and differance, and so we must read texts with attention towards their internal tensions and differences. Understanding afterlife via Benjamin and Derrida, together, means focussing on both the connections between texts, and disjunctures within texts.

However, the specific nature of the connections between texts – originals and translations – remains perhaps the greatest difference between Benjamin’s and Derrida’s ideas on translation. It is the
question of the relationship between supposedly distinct texts that prompts this study’s concept of the ‘text-in-afterlife.’ It is to this that we now turn, to continue developing a model of reading that holds afterlife as central.

Textuality in afterlife

As explored above, both Benjamin and Derrida posit that there is no point at which the process of translation ‘begins’ for texts within afterlife; it is a continual movement. If the ‘original’ text is already subject to afterlife, differance or the understanding of history that Benjamin describes, the original/translation distinction is disrupted. However, Benjamin seemingly contradicts the implications of his own model of history by maintaining this distinction. Benjamin contends that translations are themselves untranslatable. Since languages develop through time – seventeenth-century English is not the same as twenty-first-century English – “even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to perish with its renewal” (‘TT’ 256). Translations simply become outdated. Translations do not supersede the original, writes Benjamin, but prompt later translators to return to the original, which remains the source for newer translations; “thus, ironically, translation transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm” (‘TT’ 258). Benjamin here destabilises the traditional hierarchy between the original and the translation: translation stabilises the original’s ‘value,’ while the translation owes its existence to the original. However, there remains a distinction between the two categories of text. A translation can never become an ‘original’, and ‘originals’ are not subject to the same conditions as ‘translations.’

Both Derrida and the model of textuality developed in this thesis depart from Benjamin on this point. In maintaining the original/translation distinction, Benjamin, for Derrida, “repeats the foundation of the law” (‘DT’ 127). This is meant both in the “quasi-transcendental sense” – Benjamin reinscribes the sense of ‘presence’ Derrida wants to deconstruct – and in the quotidian sense: Benjamin upholds the distinction on which copyright law rests (‘DT’ 127). It is for Derrida ludicrous to assume that the “creator of the original were not – he too – indebted, taxed, obligated by another text, and a priori translating” (‘DT’ 129). Texts, always moving away from themselves, never have a ‘connection’ to their authors, and never have a stable identity. This is equally true of all texts, ‘translations’ and ‘originals,’ and so the distinction collapses.

Derrida deconstructs the distinction by seemingly suggesting the translation is part of the original text. Since the original itself changes in afterlife, “the original lives on and transforms itself. The translation will truly be a moment in the growth of the original, which will complete itself in enlarging itself” (‘DT’ 121). Since the translation responds to the original’s “call for” translation, the translation goes towards completing the original, adding to it, giving to the original that which it lacked. Although Derrida goes not use the term here, translation can be thought of as a supplement to
the original, as the term is used in De la Grammatologie – an additional but necessary complement, excluded but retained.\textsuperscript{21} There is no clear separation between the original and translation; they are part of the same continuum. This is meant both in the sense that ‘originals’ and ‘translations’ do not exist as distinct categories, and that the ‘original’ and ‘translation’ are different aspects of the same ‘text.’ The outcome of the argument that texts are always changing, and that there is no distinction between originals and translations, is that translations as texts do not exist separately from their ‘originals.’

As suggested above, Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings on translation and history, when read together, suggest that textuality, translatability and afterlife, or ‘living on,’ are inextricable, and that texts are involved within a continual process of translation. ‘Afterlife’ names this process of continual translation. Since texts are always within a process of continual translation, a text is necessarily inextricable from various previous texts, which it translates, and the translations that follow that text. ‘A text’ cannot be separated from its translations and the text(s) it translates. This follows and develops Derrida’s suggestion that a translation is part of the ‘original.’

Therefore, this thesis argues that, for the purposes of discussing afterlife, the idea of ‘the text’ as an individual unit should be replaced by the ‘text-in-afterlife.’ This is not a concept found in Benjamin or Derrida’s work, but is a development of this thesis based on a reading of their work. The text-in-afterlife is all the iterations of a particular text at various stages in the process of translation, ‘afterlife.’ The text-in-afterlife names a continuum, involving the text as it exists now, its past and future iterations, and the movement(s) between these stages; for example, Michel de Montaigne’s ‘Des Cannibales,’ William Shakespeare’s The Tempest and Césaire’s Une Tempête are parts of the same text-in-afterlife. The text-in-afterlife necessitates thinking of a process, which is legible in the moments we call ‘texts’ – not ossified results of the process, but glimpses of a text-in-afterlife as it is changing. ‘Texts’ are individual moments that manifest the process of constant change and are themselves continually changing. Individual texts do not ‘create’ afterlife, or donate extended life to an ‘original,’ but show how the process of change occurs in relation to a particular text-in-afterlife.

The text-in-afterlife focusses our reading on the process of afterlife, and the relationship between texts, rather than on individual texts. The concept can be understood differently through a predominantly Benjaminian or Derridean lens. Benjamin insists on the uniqueness of elements in a constellation, and looks at connections between them, while Derridean deconstruction unravels connections between elements within a single text, stressing the text’s internal difference. Following Benjamin, the text-in-afterlife could be understood as a constellation, forming connections between disparate texts; following Derrida’s suggestion that the translation is part of its original, the text-in-afterlife is a ‘supratext’ composed of multiple ‘texts’ that supplement each other.

\textsuperscript{21} Derrida, Grammatology, p. 144-5
If we understand Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings themselves as parts of the same text-in-afterlife, since Derrida’s writing responds to Benjamin’s, and we are to use this as the basis for thinking about afterlife, we should think these ‘Benjaminian’ or ‘Derridean’ inflections of the text-in-afterlife together. This would mean highlighting dialogue between texts, while also focussing on texts’ internal contradictions. The concept of afterlife developed above necessarily implies a model of textuality, and allows us to begin to formulate a model of reading. However, this understanding of textuality is further complicated by Benjamin and Derrida’s writings on language and on messianicity. It is by discussing these writings, below, that this chapter will suggest a model of how to read texts within afterlife. The following three chapters will exemplify, test and complicate this model.

The above part of this chapter established an understanding of afterlife as a continual process of translation in which all texts participate. Such translation is limited, however, by various factors, the first of which is textuality itself. No text could change such that it transceded textuality. Following Derrida, texts must, by definition, exist in the play of translatability. No amount of change could allow a text to escape the play of translatability. Texts can only exist in the tension between translatability and untranslatability; a text could never become “totally translatable” or “totally untranslatable” (‘LO’ 82). Texts cannot exist outside textuality, translatability and afterlife.

The next part of this chapter will seek to describe the other structures that limit texts’ change—language and history. Textuality, language and history form the three parameters of afterlife, and so the reading method this thesis develops and practises reads texts in terms of language, history and textuality. We therefore need to define these terms. The previous section addressed how afterlife and translatability contribute to an understanding of ‘textuality,’ showing why textuality and translatability are central categories for understanding texts in terms of afterlife. This section also began to explore Benjamin’s and Derrida’s differing models of history. The next section will delineate how language and history are repressive, all-encompassing systems, and why their being understood in this way guides this thesis’ reading of texts. Despite their differences, Benjamin and Derrida both theorise language as a repressive system. This is an essential part of how they understand translation, and therefore how this thesis understands afterlife, textuality, and how we should read.

**Language**

Theories of language are central to Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings on translation. Both Benjamin and Derrida view texts as important to their theories of translation because they demonstrate
something about language and history. This thesis, understanding afterlife as a condition of textuality, is more interested in language and history as demonstrating something about texts. However, Benjamin’s and Derrida’s theories of language are not only important here as an analogue for textuality. Both Benjamin and Derrida understand language as a restrictive, totalising system – for Benjamin, as judgement, for Derrida, as colonialism. Understanding language in this way means that translation is necessarily limited. History is understood as similarly limiting here. Language, history and textuality itself are the three limits on the translation process of afterlife. Texts can only change within the terms of these systems. As we will see in the third section of this chapter it is, paradoxically, these very limits that allow us to imagine literature’s true potential; this is the radical value of the concept of textuality, and model of reading, developed here. Before this, however, let us delineate how this thesis understands language and history as necessarily limiting. As with the discussion of afterlife above, working through these ideas helps us develop a model of textuality, and a model of reading based on this.

**Benjamin’s language of judgement**

Benjamin understands language as inherently judgemental. This view is developed in his 1916 essay ‘Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen,’ which suggests that everything has its own ‘language.’ Language does not communicate ‘meaning,’ but is a result of the partial communication of a thing’s nature: “the language of this lamp, for example, communicates not the lamp […] but the language-lamp, the lamp in communication.”22 The ‘lamp-ness’ of the lamp is expressed in the fact that there is language, not through that language. Because “all language communicates itself”, but no ‘content’, language therefore falls short as a means of communication (‘OL’ 63). Benjamin also suggests the power of language, however – “precisely because nothing is communicated through language, what is communicated in language cannot be externally limited or measured” (‘OL’ 64). Since we can only communicate using language, which cannot communicate ‘meanings,’ we cannot describe what language itself ‘means.’ The possible meanings of language cannot be quantified, and so “all language contains its own incommensurable, uniquely constituted infinity” (‘OL’ 64). Language is limited since it cannot communicate “through itself,” and infinite because its communication “in itself,” the meaning of language as such, is limitless (‘OL’ 64). Language as we can use it is limited and limiting, but language itself encompasses infinity. Peter Fenves points out that the infinity in language links Benjamin’s language theories to “eschatological historiography,” as discussed in further detail below.23 This paradox, apparent infinity within a restrictive, closed system, encapsulates the way this thesis understands language, textuality and

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history, as will be seen below. However, its lack of ‘content’ is not language’s only restriction for Benjamin.

Human language is restrictive for Benjamin because the human misuse of language renders language the language of judgement. The epitome of language’s misuse is its being used to describe abstract concepts, foremost among which, for Benjamin, is ‘evil.’ In Eden, “the knowledge to which the snake seduces, that of good and evil, is nameless” (‘OL’ 71); evil is nameless in Eden because it does not exist. The inception of evil, the Fall, is the moment when language became a way of communicating concepts and information. From then on, language can describe abstract things, such as ‘evil.’ The first evil act was the linguistic creation of ‘evil.’ At this point, human language turns on itself, telling of things that do not exist except in human language. Humans’ attempt to make language ‘meaningful’ is precisely what makes language meaningless, rendering language both fallen and failed. Concepts communicated in human language only exist within human language – which cannot communicate. Human language is used to communicate, imperfectly, concepts that do not exist outside of their imperfect conception in language. The apotheosis of such ‘communication’ may be abstract terms such as ‘evil,’ but once language is used in this way, all language is fallen. Since all human language is used in a communicative way, Benjamin is not positing a historical moment when language ‘fell,’ or that it would ever be possible to return to a ‘prelapsarian’ language; human language is fallen language.

The creation of ‘evil’ means that language is inherently judging. The “immediacy in the communication of abstraction came into being as judgement”; communicating abstract concepts, such as evil, through language is synonymous with judgement and the Fall (‘OL’ 72). The human word became “the judging word” as it always contains the suggestion of the originary sin, the naming of evil and ‘sin’ (‘OL’ 71). Human language is that which names things as ‘evil’ or not, and so innately judges. Language’s fall does not make language innately ‘sinful’; the Fall is language’s becoming innately judging in allowing for the concepts of ‘evil’ and ‘sin.’ Benjamin anticipates Michel Foucault here, in describing how human language ‘creates’ categories, in this case ‘evil,’ through naming them.24 Language is not ‘infected’ by a sense of judgement; language is judgement, and every use of language is an act of judgement.

Language-as-judgement reveals language to be a totalising system. In Benjamin’s conception, language’s fall, rather than the transgression of an external standard, is language committing a transgression against itself. The first ‘evil’ act is the linguistic creation of evil, and the first act of judgement is the conception of ‘judgement.’ Judgement presupposes a law to be transgressed, but this

24 For Foucault, names create categories of subjectivity; see, for example, The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, trans. by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).
‘law’ is not external to language’s conception of evil or judgement. Rather than a sin against God’s law, language transgresses the law it has itself inaugurated, through the inauguration of that law. Language judges itself because of its conception of ‘judgement.’ Language makes its own ‘punishment’—indeed, the transgression is the punishment, as the Fall separates human language from God and God’s language (‘OL’ 68). In making the laws that govern itself, language reveals itself to be an entirely self-enclosed, totalising system. This is the most important element of the way language is conceived in this thesis, building on Benjamin and Derrida: language is inescapable and all-encompassing. The only escape from judgement would have to be an escape from language, and there is no escaping language.

Since language-as-judgement is a legacy of the Fall, a project to ‘restore’ human language is for Benjamin a project to ‘restore’ the world and postlapsarian history.25 Translation, in drawing attention to the multiplicity of languages, highlights the Fall and judgement, but in working between languages, is also partially restorative.26 This dual nature of translation as highlighting the nature of the restrictive, totalising system of language, while also working towards escaping those restrictions, is discussed further below in relation to Benjamin’s ‘messianicity,’ and is a part of the reading practice this chapter develops. Before discussing this, to nuance this thesis’ understanding of language, and how it links to afterlife, textuality and reading, we will now turn to Derrida’s formulation of language as an all-encompassing system, which figures language as colonialism.

**Derrida’s language-as-colonialism**

Although Derrida has a far more complex philosophy of language than Benjamin, he follows Benjamin in conceiving language as repressive and all-encompassing. In Derrida this repression manifests as colonialism, which emphasises language as a controlling system that structures culture, rather than the more personal, moral conception in Benjamin. However, both thinkers share the essential idea of language as an inescapable, self-perpetuating, all-encompassing system. This is a key idea for how this thesis understands ‘language,’ and therefore key to this thesis’ model of reading.

Derrida’s understanding of language as colonialism is arguably in evidence from the beginning of De la Grammatologie, which Derrida describes as an exploration of “the ethnocentrism which, everywhere and always, [has] controlled the concept of writing.”27 Logocentrism is categorised as “nothing but the original and most powerful ethnocentrism […] imposing itself upon the world.”28

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26 Fenves, p. 89
27 Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 3
28 Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 3. ‘Logocentrism’ is reworked by Derrida as ‘phallogocentrism’ to suggest the role of gender in language’s restrictiveness; see ‘Tympan’, in *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. ix-xxix. This is picked
Derrida’s most explicit elaboration of language as colonialism is *Le Monolinguisme de l’Autre*. Here, alienation is described as our essential relationship to language.29 ‘Our’ language is never entirely our own, but is always already appropriated by the other. Language therefore asserts itself in terms of a colonial logic, since it always exists within another’s terms, which it attempts to impose on any speaker. Language operates as a colonial system, an ‘outside’ force asserting itself and denying all else. There is no true ‘outside’ of language, and so there is nothing but this colonialism. Just as texts cannot escape translatability or textuality, translation must take place in the terms of language-as-colonialism.

*Monolinguisme* begins with two seemingly contradictory maxims: that “we only ever speak one language,” while “we never speak only one language.”30 These statements could be explained with reference to differance. As Derrida has consistently argued, language can never be a complete, fully closed system, as meaning relies on difference and deferral; just as the untranslatable ‘text’ could not exist as a text, the realisation of ‘monolingualism’ in language – the arrival of an entirely self-contained language-system that needed no reference to anything ‘other’ – ‘would also be the death of language, because it would herald the end of difference.’31 However, the claim to monolingualism – that a language is a total, all-encompassing system – is also a necessary condition of a language’s being recognised as a language. No matter how languages may rely on things outside themselves, from differance to the use of loan-words between languages, without the claim to monolingualism, a language cannot claim to exist as such. We are therefore always within a system that claims itself to be the sole language, while it can be no such thing.

However, the solution is not simply to learn more languages. There is no ‘genuine’ polylingualism because there needs to be a claim to monolingualism for linguistic identity. To speak in a culture or community requires the monolingualism of that culture, the agreement of ‘a’ language, as a basis for up in poststructuralist feminist critiques suggesting that language is inherently masculinist: see, for example, Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *The Portable Cixous*, ed. by Marta Segarra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 27-39, and Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). The idea of language as inherently masculinist was further developed by the Quebecois group of feminist translators exemplified by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood’s *Re-Belle et Infidèle: La Traduction comme Pratique de Réécriture au Féminin/The Body Bilingual: Translation as a Re-Writing in the Feminine* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1991), and the work of Barbara Godard; see Louise von Flotow, *Translation and Gender: Translating in the ‘Era of Feminism’* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997) for a summary. Feminist language theories, in describing language as inescapably gendered, would provide an alternative conception of language-as-repression to that described here. This thesis follows Benjamin’s and Derrida’s conceptions of language as judgement and colonialism since these theories are inextricable from Benjamin’s and Derrida’s understandings of ‘the messianic’, which, as explored below, forms one of the central concepts of this thesis.

29 See also Claude Lévesque’s question to Derrida about whether the Quebecois writer’s “curious relation to the maternal tongue where the latter never appears except as a translation language” is “the normally abnormal relation to any language”, in *Ear of the Other*, pp. 142-5.


being understood. If we are not within the same language-system, we cannot communicate, and so any linguistic community must be monolingual; therefore, as part of that system, one must adhere to monolingualism. Speaking *any* language thus requires submission to monolingualism; speaking multiple languages is simply different iterations of the same logic. The step beyond monolingualism, writes Herman Rapaport, is as difficult as the step beyond metaphysics.32 ‘Spoken’ language seems to raise different issues from written or ‘textual’ language, but it should be remembered that for Derrida, ‘language’ is understood as ‘arche-writing’ or *écriture*, and so is always ‘textual.’33 ‘Written texts’ and spoken language conform to the same logic of monolingualism. Translation of texts within afterlife occurs within the terms of this monolingualism.

The operation by which we only ever, and never, speak one language, is described in *Monolinguisme* as language’s colonialism. Language is colonial because *a* language or *a* culture can only exist through a claim to homogeneity. By definition, culture operates via

this monolingualism imposed by the other [that] operates by relying upon that foundation, here, through a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial, which tends, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogeneous (*MO* 40).

Although language may well be imposed through empirical colonial practices, such operations merely manifest the nature of language itself. Language is subject to originary violence, because it aims for a ‘reduction to the One’; this is the claim to monolingualism that is a necessary condition of ‘a’ language’s identity. One’s language is divided at the outset because it is ‘ours’ but not ours; it is always already appropriated by the other because it must be “reduce[d]” to hegemony. This homogenising movement “is always colonial,” as it is “law originating from elsewhere,” always the language of the other imposing itself and dispossessing us of ‘our own’ language (*MO* 39-40). Therefore, ‘our own’ language does not belong to us. The monolingual person who “never speaks only one language” is never able to speak *any* language of his or her own and is “deprived of *all* language” (*MO* 60).

The homogenising, colonial operation of language requires submission to “hegemony of the homogenous” – not merely incorporation into the same logic, but incorporation into the logic of sameness (*MO* 40). Monolingualism expands to render everything not similar, but identical. There is no way in language for the other to be recognised as other, because of language’s colonising logic.34

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32 Rapaport, p. 42
33 Derrida, *Grammatology*, pp. 30-44 and pp. 118-40
An empirical example is provided by Derrida: Arabic was “an optional foreign language” at his childhood lycée in colonial Algeria, while “Berber was never included”; every Algerian’s ‘first’ language must be French (MO 38). However, since language as such is colonial, the dominance of French over Arabic, Tamazight or Ladino in Algeria affords no any special status to French or to Francophones. Metropolitan Francophones possess ‘their own’ language no more than colonised Algerians – “The master does not possess […] what he calls his language” (MO 23). We are all equally, innately alienated from ‘our own’ language. No-one can lay claim to any language.

Although “it does not follow that all exiles [from language] are equivalent,” there is, says Derrida, an “a priori universal truth of an essential alienation in language – which is always of the other – and, by the same token, in all culture” (MO 58). It is an essential alienation because there was never a point at which the ‘external’ homogenising, colonising force was absent. There is not a “prior-to-the-first language [avant-première langue]”, as linguistic colonialism is a condition of all human language (MO 61). There is for Derrida “no metalanguage,” no language as such, and so “a language will always be called upon to speak about the language”; there are only colonial human languages (MO 69). Language is colonial because it is not ‘our own,’ but it is the only language we have. Language-as-colonialism is inescapable. For the model of textuality developed here, this means that not every text has the same relationship with language-as-colonialism – “not all exiles are equivalent”; indeed, attaining a different relationship with language is part of what constitutes translation. However, no text can ever escape language.

It is because of this inescapability of language-as-colonialism that Derrida writes that monolingualism is “primarily the very language of the Law. And the Law as Language” (MO 39). Like Benjamin, Derrida categorises language as an inescapable system of law, founded on originary violence, which claims itself as absolute. However, Derrida’s understanding of language is perhaps more ambivalent than Benjamin’s. Language is inescapable, but fights repression as well as enforces it. This ambivalence is particularly demonstrated in relation to translation. In examining how Derrida understands language in relation to translation, we will begin to explore how theological metaphors are used in Derrida’s thought to show totalising systems to be characterised by a tension that threatens their dissolution at any moment. This idea, characterised as messianicity, will be discussed in further detail below, and is key to this thesis’ understanding of textuality. First, however, let us see how, for Derrida, translation both confirms and challenges language’s repressiveness.

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35 On the relationship between language and material colonial practices, see, for example, Homi Bhabha, ‘The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism’, in The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66-84.
Language-as-colonialism and translation

Derrida links monolingualism or language-as-colonialism to translation because the movement whereby “we only ever speak one language… (yes, but) we never speak only one language…” is not only the very law of what is called translation. It would be the law itself as translation” (MO 10). The reinscription by the other of ‘our’ language – the homogenising movement of monolingualism – is translation, moving into ‘our own’ language.36 Translation is part of the operation of “the law” – hegemony, or what Derrida calls monolingualism. This does not, however, mean that translation is entirely a homogenising, colonial force for Derrida. In fact, translation reveals an ambivalence and fragility at the heart of language – just as it reveals an ambivalence in textuality itself, as will be discussed below.

Like Benjamin, Derrida invokes a Biblical myth to discuss the centrality of judgement to language. In Derrida’s reading of the Babel myth, as in Monolinguisme, translation is a necessary part of language’s repressiveness. The Tower of Babel symbolises translation’s position as both “necessary and impossible […] necessary and forbidden” (‘DT’ 105). God’s judgement makes translation necessary, due to the multiplicity of languages, yet simultaneously forbids it, as to translate is to escape the punishment of Babel. A further ambivalence about translation is seen in the fact that the aim of constructing the Tower of Babel is for the Shemite tribe to “impose[e] their tongue on the entire universe on the basis of this sublime edification.”37 Derrida writes that the Shemites’ attempt to impose their language on the world “signif[ies] simultaneously a colonial violence (since they would thus universalise their idiom) and a peaceful transparency of the human community”; humanity would be united under the common tongue (‘DT’ 111). Translation is then the sign of a lack of colonial totality, but also a sign of division. The ambivalence here is illuminated when read against Monolinguisme, where (linguistic) colonialism provides both violence and the only ‘home’ the monolingual has. The Francophone Maghrebian Jew Derrida describes as the exemplar of monolingual alienation longs to translate into a language of ‘his own,’ despite the fact that there is no language other than that of the coloniser. There is no language but colonial language.

Translation in Monolinguisme seems far from liberatory; it describes the sense of alienation the monolingual feels, “thrown into absolute translation, without an originary language, and without a source language. For [the monolingual], there are only target languages [langues d’arrivée]” (MO 61). Translation names the state in which there is no language. However, translation also challenges

37 Derrida, Ear, pp. 100-1
hegemony. For the Algerian pupils at the lycée where Arabic was a ‘foreign language’, translation is necessary, to speak one’s own ‘first’ language, but also denied: you must opt to study Arabic, you must choose to attempt translation – and, Derrida remarks, “the percentage of lycée students who chose Arabic was about zero” (MO 38). Translation symbolises the point at which language-as-colonialism has its firmest grip on the subject, and allows for challenges to that power.

This simultaneity of translation as commanded but forbidden reflects Derrida’s understanding of all texts as involved in the play between translatability and untranslatability. There is no choice but to translate, within a system that is both reinforced and challenged by translation, whether this is language or textuality. In the terms of afterlife described above, translation reinforces a totalising system – indeed, translation is that totalising system: for texts there is nothing but translation since all textual ‘life’ is afterlife, continual change. We will explore in further detail below how translation in terms of afterlife also challenges the totality of textuality. Following Derrida, translation reinforces and deconstructs self-proclaimed totalising systems.

However, for texts within afterlife or for language, translation only ever happens within certain parameters. There is no ‘outside’; there is nothing but textuality or language-as-colonialism. For Derrida, at Babel God “ruptures the rational transparency” (‘DT’ 111). God’s punishment of humanity is the multiplicity of philosophical languages, the removal of a ‘translatable’ philosophical truth or reason. Derrida writes that “the thesis of philosophy is translatability,” because philosophy aims for a meaning or ‘truth’ “before or beyond language, [and so] it follows that [that ‘truth’] is translatable.” If God “ruptures the rational transparency,” there is no translatable philosophical truth. All we have is language; there is no ‘truth’ we can access beyond language. This is one of the central principles of Derrida’s philosophy, and is important here in emphasising the inescapability of language. Following Derrida, in studying the translation process – as in this study of afterlife – we are not seeking a philosophical ‘truth’ beyond translation. We can only ask how language asserts itself in a particular instance, or in what form afterlife has manifested in a particular text. No text – including criticism or philosophy – will break free from language, just as no text can step outside afterlife.

Although both Derrida and Benjamin connect language’s inescapable repressiveness to God, the theologies at work are very different. For Benjamin, language has fallen from God, and translation is partially restorative and can point towards God. For Derrida, translation serves to deconstruct authority, colonial or divine, and so moves away from God. However, God also “destines” humans “to translation,” and so “translation becomes law, duty and debt” (‘DT’ 111). As necessary,

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38 Derrida, Ear, p. 120. See also ‘Theology of Translation’, trans. by Joseph Adamson, in Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 64-80, where Derrida describes an action like translation as the basis of both philosophy and the university.
impossible duty set by God, translation is also a movement *towards* God, an imperative that works towards redemption.

It is important to emphasise that the movement ‘towards God’ cannot, in terms of a theory derived from Benjamin and Derrida, imply a teleological progression. As discussed above, teleological history is rejected by Benjamin as it cannot but justify suffering, while for Derrida, teleology would require a dateable future event identical to itself – impossible within ‘hauntology.’ However, although neither Benjamin nor Derrida explicitly state this, history itself, over and above any understanding of ‘history,’ is as inescapable as language. History is the third inescapable system, alongside textuality and language, which this thesis understands as key to conceiving how texts are translated within afterlife. For the model of reading summarised at the end of this chapter, and developed and practised throughout this thesis, we therefore need to define how we understand history in relation to afterlife, just as textuality and language have been defined above. Benjamin’s and Derrida’s models of history, as discussed above, are central to the model of textuality developed here, as they suggest that translation in afterlife is constant. However, we will now momentarily depart from Benjamin and Derrida to see that history can be thought of in much the same way as language and textuality – an all-encompassing system.

**History as colonial**

This section argues that history, like language, is inherently colonial because there is nothing it cannot expand into, overtake and claim for itself. This goes beyond any critique of specific types of historiography, although such critiques are also important in drawing attention to the ideological function of ‘history.’ For example, Barthes argued that narrative historiography is necessarily ideological due to its form; as narrative and text, historiography can only create meaning in a certain way. Moreover, as many postcolonial critics have argued, the predominant narrative of world history does not give enough emphasis to non-European pasts. Additionally, assuming the European conception of ‘history’ – or indeed, ‘philosophy’ – can be universalised is Eurocentric in privileging one mode of knowledge above all others.

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One of the most sustained examinations of the latter claim is Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*. Chakrabarty contends that any method of history writing based on historicism, which he defines as historiography that “takes its object of investigation to be internally unified, and sees it as something developing over time,” always has European modernity as its ultimate referent. This is because ‘Indian’ history, for example, can only “speak from within a metanarrative that celebrates the nation-state; and of this metanarrative the theoretical subject can only be a hyperreal ‘Europe,’” since the modern nation-state, and historicism, are concepts that arose from European modernity (*PE* 40). Therefore, any Indian history necessarily “remains a mimicry of a certain ‘modern’ subject of ‘European’ history” (*PE* 40). History writing based on historicism is essentially colonialist, as it cannot but hold Europe as an ultimate model. Chakrabarty’s own project is to attempt to describe, and begin to practise, a type of historiography that accounts for certain groups’ – for example, Indian peasants’ – relation to capital being ‘less developed’ than other groups, while also rejecting both the historicism inherent in phrases such as ‘less developed,’ and the assumption that one factor, such as a relation to capital, implies a particular place within a unified, continuous historical time.

Chakrabarty suggests different ways of writing ‘history,’ or conceiving history. However, his argument implies an even greater type of repression that history as a concept carries out. Chakrabarty notes that no event is not co-optable into ‘history’ – “everything can be historicized” (*PE* 73). This goes beyond any particular method of historiography or model of history, even one as pervasive as the belief in ‘homogenous empty time’; the concept ‘history’ innately allows any event to be integrated within it. While it is possible to conceive historiography such that certain events or types of event would necessarily be outside its scope, adhering to ‘history’ as a way of thinking about time means that no event, *due to its nature as an event*, is necessarily outside history. ‘History’ denies the possibility of anything beyond the scope of history. ‘Prehistory’ is not time outside history itself, merely time outside historiography, which could be brought into ‘history’ if certain conditions were met – more material or textual artefacts, for example. “The time of human history […] merges with the time of prehistory” because history is understood as simply “part of nature” (*PE* 73). Even if history is not conceived as homogenous empty time, we can still describe any event from the past as taking place within a model of history. There is no event that is inherently ‘ahistorical.’ Since any event can be placed within history, it is always possible for groups with alternative conceptions of time to “discover ‘history’ […] even if [they] were not aware of its existence in the past” (*PE* 74). History can lay claim to every event as its own.

Although Chakrabarty’s own argument does not go this far, ‘history’ itself is therefore colonialist. There is nothing that history cannot take over and claim is its territory. History works through the

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same logic as language does for Derrida, attempting a ‘reduction to the One,’ because every moment must only be thought in terms of history, just as all language must be thought in terms of monolingualism. Indeed, Derrida writes that “the word ‘history’ […] in and of itself convey[s] the motif of a final repression of difference.”\footnote{Derrida, ‘Différence’, p. 11} We cannot conceive an event outside history any more than we can conceive a text outside textuality. Even prehistory can only be understood in relation to history, or it would not be called ‘pre-history.’ The very prefix ‘pre-’ indicates a historicist way of thinking, demonstrating how saturated all language and thought is with the code ‘history.’ History, like language, cannot be escaped – and this is due to history’s nature as a colonial mode of thought. It is not that ‘history’ as a discipline, genre of writing or even mode of thought arises out of a specific moment where material colonial practices were taking place – although this is the case \textit{(PE 7-10)} – but that the very concept ‘history’ itself operates through a colonial logic in that it overtakes any other way of conceiving what history claims as its territory, that is, time.

Therefore, we cannot simply reject history any more than we can reject language. We \textit{must} think in terms of history: there is nothing but history. Since translation occurs within time, history is, like textuality and language, an inescapable system within which afterlife occurs. Translation necessarily takes place within the terms of textuality, language and history. To escape afterlife would necessitate escaping these three structures. It is not necessarily that there is nothing outside these structures, but that we could not conceive it. The totalising nature of these structures means that we cannot think outside them. Texts in afterlife are constantly in translation, but always within the limits of the repressive systems of textuality, language and history.

Chakrabarty suggests that the only thing outside the scope of history – what could never be historicised – is divinity. Even beyond the writing of ‘academic history,’ which is necessarily secular and based in ‘reason,’ divinity cannot be understood as acting within what we understand as ‘history,’ by definition \textit{(PE 104)}. Chakrabarty quotes theologian Rudolf Bultmann to explain that “the presupposed, ‘closed unity’ of the historical process” – what could be called, following Derrida, history’s ‘reduction to the One’ – “means that the continuum of historical happenings cannot be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers.”\footnote{Rudolf Bultmann, ‘Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?’, trans. by Schubert M. Ogden, in The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present, ed. by Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1985), pp. 242-248, p. 244} Since history claims to describe every event, it cannot acknowledge a (divine) actor from outside history intervening within it. Bultmann writes that while, for example, the Old Testament narrative speaks of an interference by God in history, historical science cannot demonstrate such an act of God, but merely perceives that there are those who believe in it. To be sure, as historical science, it may not assert that such a faith is
an illusion and that God has not acted in history. But it itself as science cannot perceive such an act [...]; it can only leave every man free to determine whether he wants to see an act of God in a historical event that it itself understands in terms of that event’s immanent historical causes.\footnote{Bultmann, p. 244}

Although we cannot definitively say that God has \textit{not} acted within history, Bultmann argues that a ‘divine’ action could never be conceived as ‘historical.’ Were God to act within history, we would either need to redefine ‘history’ – thus not ‘thinking outside history’ – or we would not perceive God’s action as such. Both Benjamin and Derrida categorise that which would challenge the unity of history as an understanding of divinity they call ‘messianic.’ It is this category that the next section will discuss.

This section has described Benjamin’s and Derrida’s theories of language as an inescapable system to show that the translation of texts, afterlife, can only occur within three restrictive systems: textuality, language and history. However, following Derrida, translation shows the ambivalence and fragility of this system: it is always being reinforced \textit{and} challenged. The idea of translation as demonstrating systems’ fragility is developed in the next section. This section will describe Benjamin’s and Derrida’s notion of ‘the messianic,’ the element within a totalising system that continually threatens, but only ever threatens, that system’s destruction. Following Benjamin’s and Derrida’s understandings of history and language as messianic, this study develops an understanding of afterlife itself as messianic. Understanding afterlife as messianic is the final element in the understanding of textuality developed here, and allows for the final part of this chapter: a model of reading literature.

\section*{The Messianic}

‘The messianic’ is used here to mean that which is outside history, language or textuality. Since these systems are by definition all-encompassing, the messianic either cannot exist as such, or would require a redefinition of history, language and textuality if it came into existence. Since we cannot think outside history, language and textuality, the form of the messianic cannot be imagined. However, we can imagine the \textit{possibility} of its appearance. As with ‘afterlife,’ a concept of messianicity can be developed through reading Benjamin and Derrida. For both Benjamin and Derrida, history has ‘messianic potential.’ This means that every moment in history \textit{could} bring about

\footnote{Bultmann, p. 244}
a messianic event that redefines ‘history,’ but that this will never actually occur. Developing this concept, this thesis also understands messianicity as present as a potential within language and textuality. The messianic challenges totality, and in this, is a key motif of afterlife.

Benjamin’s messianic history

For Benjamin, history must be understood as filled with the possibility of the Messiah’s arrival. The task of the historian is to recognise the messianic nature of history. As detailed above, Benjamin recommends that historiography should recognise the connection between a particular past and present. Such connections allow us to work towards recognising the true nature of history, and achieving “a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (‘History’ 397). ‘Now-time,’ Jetzeit, is a conception of the now that recognises the possibility of the Messiah’s imminent arrival. The essential qualities of the messianic for Benjamin are that it is unpredictable, it destroys history entirely, and it cannot be imagined.

The concept of the messianic appears to suggest that Benjamin’s thought remains within the logic of ‘progress’: eventually the Messiah, literal or otherwise, will come to redeem humanity and history. However, Benjamin writes that “the Kingdom of God […] is not the goal but the terminus [Ende]” of the “historical dynamic.”46 The Messiah may well ‘redeem’ history, but Benjamin’s Messiah is Judaic in that history is ‘redeemed’ only inasmuch as it is destroyed. As Michael Jennings points out, paraphrasing Gershom Scholem, “Christian understandings emphasize messianic intervention in history itself, while for Judaism the messianic event is synonymous with the cessation of historical time.”47 The messianic event would annihilate and cancel history. This is representative of a wider schema in Benjamin’s thought. Writing on Benjamin’s view of history, but extrapolating to his thought as a whole, Jennings writes that “Benjamin’s revolutionary fervour was not teleological. It envisioned no necessary betterment but hoped instead for the violent erasure of current conditions of oppression.”48 There is no movement through history towards a better future, only the hope for an event of divine violence that will utterly erase the current state of being.49 Benjamin’s Messiah does not redeem within history, but would annihilate history itself.

Benjamin’s conception of the messianic follows the tradition that stresses the unpredictability of the Messiah’s arrival. As Scholem writes, in this theology, the Messiah is “in no causal sense a result of previous history”; the Messiah “comes suddenly, unannounced, and precisely when he is least

48 Jennings, pp. 60-2
expected.” Every moment contains the possibility of the messianic coming – “every second [is] the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter” – yet this coming is entirely unpredictable (‘History’ 397). Thinking of history as messianic means that, at any moment, history could be destroyed. As explored below, relating this idea to afterlife and textuality would mean that every text, or translation, could destroy textuality.

Since the messianic event cancels history, it cannot take place within history. Benjamin writes that “nothing that is historical can relate itself, from its own ground, to anything messianic.” Asking ‘when’ the Messiah will arrive is practically nonsensical:

Whoever wishes to know what the situation of a ‘redeemed humanity’ might actually be, what conditions are required for the development of such a situation, and when this development might be expected to occur, poses questions to which there are no answers. He might just as well seek to know the colour of ultraviolet rays.

Thinking of the Messiah in terms of history because time cannot be conceptualised any other way is a category error, like imagining “the colour of ultraviolet rays,” as if the spectrum can only be conceived in terms of colours visible to humans. However, “the historical materialist determines the presence of a messianic force in history […] just as a physicist determines the presence of ultraviolet light in the solar spectrum” (‘P’ 402). The messianic does exist, but will not actualise in terms we can fully comprehend or describe.

The messianic event for Benjamin would not just change history, but also language. History is linguistic and language is historical; the fall of language inaugurates history. As detailed above, this is suggested by ‘Über Sprache Überhaupt,’ and elsewhere Benjamin conflates history with languages in writing that “the multiplicity of history resembles the multiplicity of languages” (‘P’ 404). The current numerous histories are a symptom of the Fall, just like the multiple languages of humans. Benjamin cautions that “universal history in the present-day sense,” attempting to gather all history together, “can never be more than a kind of Esperanto” – not an escape from language-as-repression, but an attempt to use fallen language to overcome itself, or a ‘historical’ attempt to escape history (‘P’ 404). It is only within the “messianic realm” that “a universal history exist[s]” (‘P’ 404). The messianic coming would gather all history, or language, into a unity, simultaneously cancelling history or language.


51 ‘Theological-Political Fragment’, p. 304
History’s violence is linked by Benjamin to textuality as well as language: “There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (‘History’ 392). Stéphane Mosès writes that for the Benjamin of the Passagenwerk, “history […] will appear as a text.” To overcome history, language or textuality in a messianic event would be to overcome the others because they are inextricable. History, language and textuality are linked for Benjamin, as for the model of textuality developed in this thesis, and so the messianic overcoming of one would necessarily change the others. A messianic irruption into the translation process of afterlife would thus cancel history, language and textuality. Benjamin does suggest the possibility of a messianic end of language that is, at least partially, revealed through translation. Benjamin’s ideas on language in translation, when linked to the ideas of afterlife detailed above, provide us with a vital element of this chapter’s model of how to read texts in translation

**Translation and the messianic in Benjamin**

Benjamin’s translation essay, ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,’ introduces the concept of ‘pure language’ [die reine Sprache]. Although Benjamin never explicitly calls pure language ‘messianic,’ pure language exists in relation to language much as the Messiah’s ‘universal history’ does to history. The realisation of pure language is described as the ultimate aim of the translator, just as the realisation of “now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” is the ultimate aim of the historian (‘History’ 397). As this section will show, the way in which Benjamin describes how these messianic possibilities can be (partially) revealed is central to the way this thesis understands textuality. Benjamin understands imperfect connections between translated languages as helping us begin to see ‘language as such.’ This thesis develops this idea by understanding imperfect connections between texts in translation as helping us begin to see ‘textuality as such.’

Benjamin makes explicit, if not unambiguous, recommendations for translators. He surmises that “the task of the translator consists in finding the particular intention toward the target language which produces in it the echo of the original” (‘TT’ 258). The translator must not attempt to convey the same ‘meaning’ as the original text – language is never ‘meaningful’ anyway (‘OL’ 64). It is the word’s effect and connotations in its original language, its ‘mode of intention,’ that the translator should attempt to replicate, rather than necessarily the word in the translating language with the same ‘intended object.’ This conception of translation remakes the translating language, by seeking to produce similar effects to one language within another. Benjamin quotes Rudolph Pannwitz arguing that translators should “allow [their own] language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue,” and “turn German into Hindi, Greek, English” rather than “turning Hindi, Greek, English into German” (‘TT’ 261–2). Translating requires the reshaping of languages.

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53 Mosès, p. 87
However, this is not itself a messianic destruction of language: all human language is equally limited and judging. Messianic potential, the possibility of pure language, is found in the gaps inherent in translation. Perfect translation is never possible, because exact matches for modes of intention will never be found – *Brot* and *pain* are not equivalent words, and in fact “strive to exclude each other” (‘TT’ 257). Yet these gaps in synchronicity reveal that translation is happening, and clearly show the differences between languages. This helps us understand language as such. Just as the connection between different events can help reveal the nature of ‘now,’ translation, working between languages, can help us begin to understand the nature of language itself. Translation is “a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” – its aim is show our alienation from any individual human language (‘TT’ 257). It is only within the process of translation that it is possible to speak in more than one language at once, and speak in no specific language. It is only *in translating*, when we are in neither one language nor the other – not in the translated text – that language is momentarily shattered. As Rodolphe Gasché writes, “language in translation represents nothing but the power of language […] independently of all content it may impart.”\(^{54}\) We begin, then, to understand language as such thanks to difference in translation.

Language as such is ‘pure language.’ For Benjamin, ‘pure language’ is “[not] achievable by any single language but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another.”\(^{55}\) Like the messianic ‘universal history,’ pure language is the sum total of language. ‘Pure language’ is not a perfect language that allows total synchrony of word and thing, but language as such, beyond human or any other language. When the ‘gaps’ between languages are made obvious, a glimpse of the nature of language as such is possible.

Since difference in translation allows for this glimpse of the nature of language, Benjamin recommends that translations “touch the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense”: the translation should differ from the original in terms of ‘meaning’ (‘TT’ 261). As Gasché notes, for Benjamin, translatability is a potential more fulfilled when the translation differs from the original, as this shows just how translatable the original is. A good translation “does not only disregard content and sense, it destroys the original’s *structures* of reference and sense communication as well.”\(^{56}\) The translation should be radically different from the original. As we will see, this idea is central to the texts discussed in the next three chapters, albeit in different ways.

Pure language is desirable as, in the terms of this study’s argument, ‘pure language’ would escape human language’s repressiveness. Since pure language is language as such, it goes beyond the limitations and judgement of human language. Pure language would undo postlapsarian history,

\(^{54}\) Gasché, p. 92 \\
\(^{55}\) Gasché, p. 91 \\
\(^{56}\) Gasché, p. 91
because it would transcend the conditions of language and history that are based on language-as-judgement. Pure language is a messianic language beyond what we can understand as language.

As messianic, pure language will not eventually be brought about through translation, just as the Messiah does not arrive at the ‘end’ of history. “An instant and final rather than temporary and provisional solution” to “the foreignness of languages […] remains out of the reach of mankind,” writes Benjamin (‘TT’ 257). Language must be understood as inherently fragmentary. Understanding pure language as a utopian language, achievable if only we correct language’s flaws, would be a return to ‘progress.’ The Messiah will never enter history, and pure language cannot ‘complete’ and redeem language. This is suggested in Benjamin’s image of language as a “vessel”:

Just as fragments of a vessel, in order to be articulated together, must follow one another in the smallest detail but need not resemble one another, so, instead of making itself similar to the meaning [Sinn] of the original, the translation must rather, lovingly and in detail, in its own language, form itself according to the manner of meaning [Art des Meinens] of the original, to make both recognizable as the broken part of a greater language, just as fragments are the broken part of a vessel.57

Both de Man and Carol Jacobs stress that this passage contains no suggestion of the broken vessel’s possible restoration, or that the vessel was ever whole. Language cannot be ‘restored’ to a perfect state as there is nothing for it to ‘return to.’ Pure language is not, as Andrew Benjamin characterises it, the “utopian impulse.”58 Walter Benjamin was anything but a utopian thinker. Tejaswini Niranjana suggests translating this passage as, “to make both [the translation and original text] recognisable as fragments of the greater language, just as shards are the fragments of a vessel,” suggesting that whether or not the ‘fragments’ are themselves ‘broken,’ there is no suggestion that they would be able to reconstitute a completed unity.59 It is only in the messianic realm that we could have ‘universal history’ or pure language – but this messianic realm is unreachable.

The messianic nature of pure language means that it is not fully achievable, but its absence is not a ‘failure.’ De Man states that Benjamin is interested in the figure of the translator because “the translator, per definition, fails. The translator can never do what the original text did […] a translator as such is lost from the very beginning.”60 However, as explored above, Benjamin rejects the idea that the translation’s purpose is even to attempt to ‘represent’ its original. This focus on failure is more central to de Man’s linguistic theories than Benjamin’s. For Benjamin, the possibility of the messianic arrival remains ever-present. In comprehending the historical constellation, the connection between

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57 Translation given in Jacobs, p. 762
58 Andrew Benjamin, p. 98
59 Niranjana, p. 137
60 De Man, ‘Conclusions’, p. 80
events, the historical materialist does not fully cognise *Jetzeit* and summon the Messiah, but gains a sense of “the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time”; every moment is partially messianic and could be the coming of the Messiah (‘History’ 397). Similarly, in translating, there is a moment in which language momentarily ‘halts,’ *in between* the original and translation. In this moment, where we begin to sense, if not fully comprehend, the nature of language as such, we can become aware that every word could reveal pure language. For the translator as for the historical materialist, it is in the connection between events or texts that possibilities can be recognised. Just as the messianic irruption into history cannot be conceived, the shape of pure language cannot, but its potential can be glimpsed through translating. We cannot comprehend the form of pure language, because it is necessarily beyond language as we know it. We can, however, imagine the potential for pure language.

It is the imperfection of connections between translations that allow us a glimpse of messianic potential for Benjamin. This begins to complicate our provisional model of how to read texts within the terms of afterlife. As detailed above, Benjamin’s model of history suggests we should read for the connections between texts, while Derridean deconstruction prompts focus on texts’ internal contradictions. We should also, however, attempt to realise the imperfection or incompleteness of connections between texts. If imperfect connections between translated languages help us begin to see ‘language as such,’ then imperfect connections between texts in translation can help us begin to see ‘textuality as such.’ Moreover, if it is the moment of translating that highlights messianic potential, and texts in afterlife are continually in translation, then reading in a way that recognised afterlife as continual would allow us to glimpse texts’ messianic potential. Benjamin’s ideas on language in translation can be linked to the ideas of afterlife detailed above to help us read texts in translation. How this might work in practice will be elaborated below.

For Benjamin, the shape or arrival of pure language is unimaginable and impossible, but it is translating that allows us to imagine the potential for pure language. The realisation of pure language is the ultimate aim of translation, but it is not a goal that will be reached. These ideas, when integrated with the concepts of afterlife and textuality detailed above, allow for the model of reading described below, understanding textuality and the translating process of afterlife as having messianic potential. However, Derrida’s development of messianicity is also important for how this thesis understands language and history, and for the model of textuality and reading developed here, and it is to Derrida that we now turn.

**Derrida’s messianic time**

As with Benjamin, there is no one text of Derrida’s which focusses predominantly on ‘the messianic,’ although the theme recurs in several texts. Derrida understands the messianic as always
‘to come.’ The potential for the messianic arrival is an integral part of history or language, but the messianic arrival is impossible within the terms of those systems. The messianic is always about to arrive, but never will.

Derrida’s clearest discussion of messianic time appears in Spectres de Marx. As detailed above, Spectres describes a model of temporality-as-differance and redefines ontology as ‘hauntology.’ The ‘here-now’ is a non-present present that is always yet to come. This makes every moment a “pledge (promise, engagement, injunction and response to the injunction, and so forth),” and what is promised and called for is the element of a Marxist understanding of history that Derrida wants to recuperate (SM 37). This is a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice – which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights […]

(SM 74)

Every moment is a promise that Derrida characterises as ‘messianic.’ The precise way Derrida uses the term here needs clarifying. Messianism as teleology, awaiting the arrival of a particular event, identical to itself and fully present, at a knowable date in the future, is to be rejected. Examples of this include various ‘religious’ messianisms, Francis Fukuyama’s ‘end of history,’ or the “Marxist ontology grounding the project of Marxist science or critique” that “necessarily” implies “a messianic eschatology” (SM 73). This ‘messianism’ remains progressivist.

Instead, what is essential to Derrida’s messianic is “thinking of the other and of the event to come” (SM 74). Thinking of time as Derrida suggests, aware of the aporia between the ‘here-now’ and the ‘to come,’ “open[s] up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise” (SM 94). The promise is the arrival of something genuinely unpredictable, “an alterity that cannot be anticipated” – the Messiah (SM 81). Messianic futurity is “a future that would carry beyond what has up until now been called history” (SM 92). This is not a future that will one day arrive, but a time always ‘to come’ – always potential. The Messiah must never actually arrive, “because his coming, if it were possible, would close off the messianic structure itself as perpetually promising a coming” (‘Tonguing’ 30). The Messiah’s arrival would close down messianic potential. A messianic understanding of time, for Derrida, rejects teleology and involves total openness toward what the ‘to come’ might be. Derrida’s ‘messianic’ names a way of thinking about time that implies an ethical openness, as well as an event that stands outside ‘history’ as such. The question of how this ‘ethical openness’ might be related to reading literature is an important consideration, if we are to connect Derrida’s messianicity to textuality; this will be explored further below.
To remain deconstructive, it is important to emphasise messianicity, the “structural opening” of potential (MO 68). As Arthur Bradley points out, there is the possibility that ‘the messianic’ “begins to make the aporia look like a transcendental concept or logic that exists before, or outside of, history.”\(^{61}\) Due to the logic of hauntology, the messianic element of history is always already ‘present,’ although can never be fully present as such. Although messianic potential – the fact that every moment is a ‘promise’ – is coterminous with history, since it is ‘always already’ there, it could seem a transcendental category. There is the possibility of ‘the messianic’ defining the structure of history, and becoming just as much a ‘reduction to the One’ as messianism. In stressing messianicity, we avoid the illusion of a binary – which deconstruction would always want to reveal as aporetic – between the messianic and messianism. Messianicity remains a structural possibility, like iterability, but cannot be reduced to a totalising category since it is a potential, not a state of affairs. Derrida’s messianic is always within history but never actualised, with a total openness towards what is ‘to come.’ For our purposes, perhaps the most important aspect of Derrida’s messianicity is that it stresses potentiality, an awareness of every moment as filled with possibility. This is similar to Benjamin’s understanding of time as “shot through with shards of messianic time” (‘History’ 397). The sense of the potential contained in every moment is key to the understanding of messianicity sketched here, and links to translatability – every text contains potential.

To understand precisely what kind of potential texts contain, and how this relates to translatability and thus afterlife, we must turn to Derrida’s linkage of language and messianicity. More explicitly than Benjamin, Derrida links language and translation to messianic potentiality, in Monolinguisme. The way in which the messianicity of language is revealed is bound up with an apparent description of Derrida’s own autobiography as exceptional. This description of a single set of circumstances is inextricable from the way Derrida understands messianicity working, in between singularity and connectedness. This tension between singularity and connectedness is the final complication of our provisional model of reading within the terms of afterlife, and is particularly important for our understanding of the text-in-afterlife.

Singularity and connectedness

Monolinguisme seems to posit the Algerian Jewish community of Derrida’s childhood as the ultimate exemplars of linguistic alienation, cut off from metropolitan French, ‘indigenous’ Algerian, and Jewish culture (MO 50-55).\(^{62}\) French was not ‘their’ language, but the majority could not speak Arabic or Tamazight, or a communal language such as Yiddish or Ladino to give “the protection of a

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home of one’s own [un ‘chez-soi ’] (MO 31, 54). Derrida goes even further than claiming an
exemplary position for Algerian Jews, in claiming Monolinguisme will “present myself to you here
[…]”, in parody, as the exemplary Franco-Maghrebian” (MO 19). The question is then how Derrida’s
own experience can “testify” to what Monolinguisme claims is a “universal destiny,” alienation from
‘our own’ language (MO 27).

Monolinguisme focusses on autobiography as the ‘singular’ and ‘universal’ are inextricable in its
argument. The text is only ‘anti-deconstructive’ or narcissistic if the text is read superficially.
Monolinguisme is presented as an anonymous dialogue, and Michael Syrotinski sees this as
dramatising the text’s play between the singular – Derrida’s own experience – and the larger question
of one’s, anyone’s, relationship with language.63 The fact that the dialogue structure becomes
muddled and unclear suggests the inextricability of the singular figure, represented here by Derrida’s
autobiography, and the ‘universal’ – inasmuch as anything can be ‘universal’ in a deconstructive way
of thinking – the concept of originarily colonial language. The autobiographical elements are more
than an example of Derrida’s argument, but equally are not the basis for it.

The ‘autobiographical’ elements of Monolinguisme challenge what Derrida calls “homo-hegemony”
even as they seemingly reinforce it (MO 40). If the ‘singularity’ described in Monolinguisme were an
autobiographical self, this would assume selfhood identical to itself. This is a totalising way of
thinking, precisely what Derrida opposes here – a ‘reduction to the One.’ Yet resistance to “the
hegemony of the homogeneous” does not come through ‘letting the other speak’ (MO 40). Derrida
even writes that “openness to the other” as a thematic remains complicit in a type of homo-hegemony
– “we cannot and must not lose sight of […] this colonial impulse which will have begun by
insinuating itself into, overrunning without delay, what they call […] ‘the relationship to the other!’ or
‘openness to the other!’” (MO 40). We cannot resist monolingualism or colonialism through ‘allowing
others to speak.’ This is because the Other cannot speak as Other within monolingualism, and an
invitation to do so is merely a further incorporation into monolingualism’s logic (MO 39). As Gayatri
Spivak put it, the subaltern cannot speak.64 We cannot overcome language-as-colonialism through
language-as-colonialism.

However, for Derrida, it is through a call within language-as-colonialism that messianic potential,
the possibility of escaping language, can be glimpsed. This is because of the tension between
singularity and connectedness. The singular remains part of a system, as it can never be entirely cut
off from the ‘surrounding’ structure, such as colonialism or language, or the other singularities that

63 Michael Syrotinski, Deconstruction and the Postcolonial (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 17
64 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A
Reader, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66-
111. Huddart’s ‘Making an Example of Spivak’ links Spivak’s rewriting of ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in A
Critique of Postcolonial Reason to Monolinguisme through the two texts’ ambivalent use of autobiography.
make up that structure. Therefore, “every singularity also contains (or is affected by) every other. So every singularity is exemplary” (‘Tonguing’ 25). Derrida’s citing of ‘himself’ as an example, claiming a unique status, puts forward the idea of singularity actually standing for ‘universalilty.’ Plurality is to be understood as a collection of singularities that, thanks to originary alienation, are in some sense ‘the same,’ but that are not grouped together under any larger collective identity, as this would be a reduction to the One.

This understanding of multiple singularities is extremely important. In political terms, it seems necessary to think of the singular in relation to plurality in this way so that “the promise […] is not absorbed by, or mortgaged to, the phantom of its ontological fulfilment” (‘Tonguing’ 35). The homogenising force cannot claim to be liberation finally arrived; any claimed ‘Messiah’ is a false one. Bennington notes that the arrived ‘emancipation’ becoming another oppression is particularly relevant to postcolonial states’ history, not least Algeria itself (‘Tonguing’ 31). A multiplicity of singularities irreducible to a unified whole also cautions us against the “tendency to homogenise the heterogeneous, either on the side of the particular or local, or on the side of the general or universal.”65

This structure of singularities irreducible to ‘One’ is also important for how we think about texts within afterlife. It allows us to recognise texts for their specificity, while seeing how they are necessarily connected as parts of texts-in-afterlife, but without the text-in-afterlife becoming a closed totality. This model brings together Derrida’s focus on deconstructing texts’ internal logic with the Benjamin-derived ‘constellation’ model that focusses on connections and revealing these connections as imperfect. It stresses texts within afterlife as both individual texts and parts of irreducible multiplicities. The full implications of this model of ‘singularity’ for how we read texts will be discussed further below, in light of the following discussion of how Derrida shows this model to be key to understanding messianicity.

For Monolinguisme, the model of ‘multiple singularities’ allows for a challenge to homo-hegemony, precisely because it is impossible to enact (MO 39). As Bennington writes,

suppose I want to write […] the singular story of the singularity that I am, a sort of absolute autobiography. Respect for that singularity would require breaking with all available norms and forms in the interests [of a] sort of absolute idiomaticity […] this is strictly impossible: for an event even to take place as an event, it must already compromise its singularity with the conditions of recognisability that take the form of structures of repeatability or iterability (‘Tonguing’ 30).

65 Syrotinski, p. 23
Such a completely singular text would be, in the terms Derrida uses in ‘Living On/Borderlines,’
entirely untranslatable – the text would be meaningless outside of itself as no element of it would be
iterable (‘LO’ 82). The entirely singular text is impossible. However, we can nevertheless attempt to
formulate such a thing. This attempt will necessarily fail, but in its failure, there is a ‘promise.’ Even
though “we may not ever be able to perform something radically inventive,” we can “think and
even call for something radically inventive” (‘Tonguing’ 30). The failed attempt to bring about
something unique allows us to imagine the possibility of something unique.

What is being ‘promised’ in Monolinguisme, as demonstrated through the performative attempt to
write an ‘absolute autobiography,’ is a language not subject to an originary colonial violence. This is
not “some lost language of origin” but “a target, or rather a future language” (MO 62). Derrida calls
non-colonial language the “language to come” because it is messianic, always ‘to come’, à venir, not
in the future, l’avenir. The messianic language outside colonialism can never arrive as such, because
language is language-as-colonialism. ‘Language’ that was not part of this would either necessitate a
redefinition of ‘language,’ or would not be recognisable as ‘language.’

However, it is the inescapable nature of language-as-colonialism that allows for imagining a
language to come. Understanding language as an all-encompassing, repressive system is essential to
messianicity. It is primary colonisation that creates the alienation from ‘one’s own’ language. This
allows for the singular case of oppression – here, Derrida’s ‘autobiographical’ reminisces – that can
promise the non-colonial language. Without primary alienation, there could be no ‘call’ for the non-
colonial language. The language to come “must be written within languages, so to speak” (MO 64).
As with Benjamin’s pure language, Derrida’s non-colonial language must exist as potential within all
language – “each time I speak or write, I promise […] and this promise heralds the uniqueness of a
language to come” (MO 67). The language to come is messianic: a potential within all language,
constantly threatening to destroy language as we know it, but never able to arrive as such.

It is precisely the fact that language is always colonial that allows for the possibility of its becoming
something else – although the essential ‘coloniality’ of language means that potential can never be
fulfilled. The structures that foreclose the messianic allow for its possibility. Similarly, in Of
Hospitality, Derrida describes how the impossible injunction to absolute hospitality – “The law” –
requires “the laws (in the plural)”:  

Even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, the unconditional law of hospitality
needs the laws, it requires them. This demand is constitutive. It wouldn’t be effectively
unconditional, the law, if it didn’t have to become effective, concrete, determined, if that
were not its being as having-to-be. It would risk being abstract, utopian, illusory, and so
turning over into its opposite. In order to be what it is, the law thus needs the laws, which,
however, deny it, or at any rate threaten it, sometimes corrupt or pervert it. And must always be able to do this.  

The very conditions that prevent the ‘to come’ make the ‘to come’ what it is – always ‘to come,’ since it can never arrive, yet also liberatory, messianic. The messianic is that which cannot be conceived within the current state of things, but which is ‘promised’ by that very state.

What remains key to the messianic structure Derrida sketches is that the totally other is totally unpredictable. The aporetic nature of messianic time is “necessary for the good, or at least the just, to be announced” – it is the very possibility of justice (SM 26). However, it is also “the very possibility of evil” (SM 34). Similarly, since the language to come is messianic, it “can always run the risk of becoming […] another language of the master, or of new masters” (MO 62). However, “without the opening of this possibility, there remains […] only the necessity of the worst” (SM 34). Potential, even if it is the potential for evil, is necessary. As Benjamin put it, “that things are ‘status quo’ is the catastrophe.”

For Derrida’s later writings, messianicity is essential because it is the very condition of the possibility of justice, hospitality or ethics – openness to the other.

If messianic potential is found in both language and history, and language, history and textuality are intimately linked in afterlife, then textuality itself can be understood as having messianic potential. We can read texts as filled with messianic potential, promising something outside current structures. Having summarised Benjamin and Derrida’s understandings of messianicity, our task is now to ask how their ideas about messianicity can be related to textuality – how the ideas of afterlife and messianicity can be integrated.

However, we must first ask what is ‘promised’ by the messianicity of literature – what potential it contains. Following Derrida, in being open to messianic potential, we are creating the possibility of ethics. It is difficult, however, to read literature based on the idea that it contains a messianic potential for ethics. Before clarifying the model of reading this chapter develops from combining the concepts of afterlife and messianicity, let us explore precisely what the relationship might be between messianicity, afterlife, reading and ethics, and how this might open up, or limit, our reading.

‘Ethical’ reading?

Messianicity can be seen as an attempt to understand ethics. As detailed above, the messianic always exists as a potential or promise. What is promised is something outside current structures and thus

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unimaginable. Suggesting that literature contains a messianic promise is to suggest that literature contains a kind of absolute alterity, something completely ‘other.’ ‘Ethics’ is conceived by Derrida, following Emmanuel Levinas, as the relationship with the other. In his first major essay on Levinas, Derrida describes “the ethical relationship” as “a nonviolent relationship to the infinite as infinitely other, to the Other.”

In aiming for total openness towards the ‘to come,’ attempting to understand the alterity of messianicity as such, we are engaging in what could be termed an ethical project.

Aside from the relationship with alterity as ethics, other elements of Levinas’ thought appear to overlap with some of this study’s concerns. For example, in Autrement qu’Être ou au-delà de l’Essence, Levinas conceives language as the “betrayal” of “the saying” by “the said,” or the necessary reduction, through language, of “the otherwise than being.” Language cannot but prevent us from accessing the infinite or otherness, because otherness is circumscribed as soon as it enters language. This is similar to Benjamin’s and Derrida’s ideas about language as a totalising system. It may appear that much of Levinas’ philosophy forms at least a parallel to the model of textuality and reading detailed here, if not a necessary part of its full development.

However, combining Levinas’ thought with a model of textuality based on afterlife would be difficult because the majority of Levinas’ writings are deeply sceptical of literature, indeed all art. For Levinas, artworks have a time of their own and “can play no part in our time.” Since ethics is the condition of the experience of time for Levinas – “the very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future” – artworks cannot participate in ethics. Ethics is the very ground of being in Levinas’ thought; art is therefore suspect.

By Autrement qu’Être, however – apparently in response to Derrida – language is for Levinas the condition or possibility of ethics. What art does is demonstrate its essence; words in a text demonstrate that they are words, for example. Art demonstrates the said (language) and cannot reveal the saying (transcendence, the ethical ‘space’). Nevertheless, Levinas’ writing uses quotations from literature as both “examples” and “authorities” – suggesting, implicitly, that literature can at least disrupt the said, if not fully reveal the saying. It may appear that what literature can do, following what Derrida would call ‘a certain Levinas,’ is allow us a sense that there is a saying, if not

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68 Derrida, ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, p. 83
69 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981), pp. 6-7
72 Eaglestone, p. 140
73 Levinas, Otherwise than Being, pp. 41-3
74 Eaglestone, p. 160-1. Examples from Otherwise than Being include references to, among others, Paul Valéry (p. 40 and p. 129), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (p. 146) and Alexander Pushkin (p. 195).
reveal the nature of the saying. In this, Levinas’ theories of ethics and language appear to be a parallel version of this chapter’s arguments about messianicity: language and literature can allow us to imagine the possibility, if not shape, of a ‘beyond.’ Messianicity could then be understood as a way of understanding the possibility of ethics.

However, understanding messianicity, as formulated here, as a version of a Levinasian ethical promise would allow us to say nothing specific about texts – only that reading allows us to imagine the possibility of ethics. As Robert Eaglestone explains, it is impossible to talk about texts ‘ethically’ within the terms of Levinas’ argument, because the saying is necessarily reinscribed into the said. Language, or texts, could never allow us to say anything meaningful about ‘ethics.’ This only means, however, that attempting to reveal the saying, the infinite, could not be the programme of criticism, just as revealing the ‘language to come’ cannot be the aim of this thesis.

Additionally, however, the problem with using ‘ethics’ as a way of understanding the promise of alterity that this thesis posits is that ‘ethics,’ in Levinas’ sense, does not allow us to talk about texts. The aim of this thesis is not to describe the specific nature of the alterity present in literature, but to use the idea of this alterity – ‘messianicity’ – to develop a model of reading texts within afterlife. We are attempting to formulate a way to read texts, not only to describe textuality as such. Conceiving language as repressive and positing a language to come allows us to examine a text’s specific situation within language, and to describe a text’s specific mode of promising a language to come. This is part of seeing how texts demonstrate the translating process that is afterlife, one of the central questions of this study. Something similar is true of a text’s relationship to textuality and history, as all texts participate in language, textuality and history. Texts have linguistic, textual and historical content.

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75 Eaglestone points out that, even within Levinas’ terms, the alterity suggested by literature’s “disruption” of the said need not be ethical; Eaglestone, p. 158.
76 Eaglestone, p. 168
The same is not true of ethics. There is no textual equivalent to ‘ethics’ that exists in the same way as language or history; texts do not have ethical content. This is not to say that texts cannot describe ethical systems, but that texts do not, in themselves, consist of a ‘lesser,’ compromised version of Levinasian ethics in the way they consist of a restricted version of, say, the language to come. To examine a text’s specific relationship to the language to come, we can look at a text’s language. There is no compositional element of a text we can look at to understand a text’s specific relationship with Levinasian ethics. Language is only ever ‘restricted,’ whereas ethics, the encounter with the other as other, is only ever impossible.

Since the ethical relationship, following Levinas, is understanding the other as other, anything that helps us move towards this goal is ‘ethical.’ In one sense, then, this thesis’ entire project is a Levinasian attempt at ethics, because attempting to recognise messianicity is a (necessarily failing) attempt to conceive absolute alterity as alterity. However, this is the ground for and purpose of any reading developed here, the reason why it is worth reading at all. It does not provide the basis for a specific method of enquiry, or indeed a method that would allow us to say anything specific. If ‘ethics’ is understanding alterity as such, there is no privileged element of a text we can examine to give us the best understanding of this text’s relationship with alterity in general.

Rather than ‘ethics,’ then, the messianicity of literature suggests the language to come, a messianic universal history, and a text outside afterlife. Language, history and textuality are the three systems that constrain translation in afterlife, and literature’s messianicity promises an escape from these systems. Part of what this allows us to do is to read texts for their specific engagements with language, history and textuality. To understand how this might be developed as a method of reading, we must return to Benjamin and Derrida. The final section of this chapter combines the concepts of literary afterlife and messianicity to suggest how we might understand textuality, and how this understanding allows for a method of reading individual literary texts. This method, based on reading texts as both radically singular and totally contiguous to other texts, allows us to understand as fully as possible the immensity of the potential for change within texts in spite of the restrictions of language, history and textuality. This is literature’s ‘messianicity.’

**Messianic afterlife**

A Derrida-like understanding of messianicity as openness is important in allowing us to understand literature’s potential for change within afterlife as potential, not the potential ‘for’ any particular outcome. Derrida has repeatedly written that his is an ‘affirmative’ deconstruction, and this ‘affirmative’ nature remains central to the model of reading developed here. This does not mean

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78 On ‘affirmative deconstruction’ see, for example, the insistence on the invitation “come, come” in ‘Living On/Borderlines’, the ‘yes’ of ‘Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce’, trans. by Tina Kendall and Shari
thinking that “the dominant is ipso facto demonic and the marginal precious per se,” as Terry Eagleton characterises Derrida’s politics. Rather, it means openness towards all possibilities. This openness, even if not understood as ‘ethical,’ is essential to theorising afterlife. There is no way of predicting where a text’s afterlife will lead, and so openness towards the ‘to come,’ without prescribing or naming what is ‘to come,’ is a necessary part of understanding a text’s potential as potential.

Messianicity is the opening towards that which is outside current possibilities or systems of thought. It can therefore be thought of as the possibility of opening towards infinity or the absolute other. Such a possibility need not have an ‘affirmative’ character. The infinite can be the void or the abyss. Maurice Blanchot views death, “real death,” as central to language. Literature’s aim for Blanchot is to “attain this absence absolutely in itself and for itself” – to make the absence recognisable as absence. Similarly, de Man characterises language as innately failing, a view he argues is present in Benjamin. Benjamin does describe how, in translation, “meaning” can “plunge from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language” (‘TT’ 262). Failure, death, nothingness could be the absolute otherness that afterlife promises.

In following Derrida, we are not denying this possibility. Messianicity is an openness to whatever comes. Characterising literature’s promise of otherness as ‘failure’ or ‘death’ stops openness by naming or characterising the necessarily unknowable other. Literature does not contain death, but potentiality – afterlife. Characterising this as ‘messianic’ means it could include death, but also much more.

Because messianic potential is located everywhere – for both Benjamin and Derrida, every moment has messianic ‘presence’ – it is not rooted in any one place, and no one moment, linguistic relation or text could serve as the measure of all things. There is no text that has a more pronounced relationship to the messianic than any other, and so no text is the one by which all others must be judged. Equally, any and every text could be the measure of all things, since every text contains messianic potential. Every text could be the one that manifests this potential and brings the messianic into being. To use a metaphor whose history Borges traces in ‘La Esfera de Pascal,’ messianic potential is a sphere whose

Benstock, in Acts of Literature, pp. 253-309 (further references indicated by ‘UG’ and page number), or Of Hospitality’s invitation to “say yes,” p. 77. See also Spivak, Critique, pp. 426-31.
81 Blanchot, ‘Right to Death’, p. 325
82 De Man, ‘Conclusions’, p. 80 and pp. 84-5
centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. Every text is ‘the centre,’ meaning that messianic potential is not circumscribed or limited to any specific (textual) location. All texts are unique, and simply one among many.

Understanding the messianic as present in every text means that any text could open up to reveal the messianic end of afterlife. The text outside afterlife would be a text that could no longer be changed in any way. This could be the complete text – the text that already manifested every potentiality latent in itself – or the text that contained no potentialities at all. Any text could open to reveal totality, or radical singularity – uniqueness that is unique in its expression of uniqueness. This is a necessary condition of understanding texts as participating in afterlife: if every text is filled with the potential for continual translation, and is continually in translation, then all texts do, in some sense, contain every other. If a text were to be translated continually and endlessly, it would, at infinity, reveal every other possible text – including the ‘text’ outside of textuality, due to its exhaustion of potentiality. Having manifested its every possibility, the text would attain completion, but would no longer have existence in itself as a text. At infinity, the ‘complete text’ and the text with no potentialities would be the same thing. How this idea works in relation to individual, specific texts will be explored in the next chapter.

Afterlife, the constantly enacted potential of translatability, is necessarily messianic. Afterlife is a way of describing unpredictable potentiality, and the messianic arrival is the possibility of every potential manifesting at once. The idea of afterlife implies that all texts potentially contain infinity, since texts are always within the process of translation and have endless translatability – endless potential. Every text potentially contains the entirety of literature and the ‘opposite’ of literature, the ‘text’ that is outside textuality. Messianic potential is located between the uniqueness and connectedness of texts; the messianic arrival would be the crystallisation of a text’s total singularity or total connectedness.

It is this tension between singularity and connectedness for literature within messianic afterlife that allows for the development of a model of reading literature. For both Benjamin and Derrida, messianic potential is linked to something radically unique. For Benjamin, messianic potential is located in the relationship between the historical ‘fragment,’ the event separated from its context in homogenous empty time, and Jetztzeit. For Derrida, the imaginative call for the absolutely singular, something outside current restrictive structures, contains messianic potentiality in its openness towards unpredictability, a future always ‘to come.’ Following Benjamin and Derrida, we could discover the messianic potential of a text by attempting to read it as completely singular. The text

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would be treated like Benjamin’s unique fragment of time in his understanding of history – a unique fragment of text.

However, as Derrida makes clear, it is impossible to conceive the form of the totally singular, or recognise the singular as such, as it cannot exist within current structures. In Monolinguisme, the performative attempt to write an ‘absolute autobiography’ necessarily fails, as would an attempt to conceive the shape of the language to come. A radically unique text would not be recognisable as a text, and would not participate in afterlife. To read at all, we must read texts in connection to other texts; a text is made of language, our understanding of which is shaped by other texts. An attempt to read a text as if it is truly unique would necessarily fail, but would, like the ‘authorial’ voice of Monolinguisme, call for a ‘text to come,’ the end of afterlife. For Derrida, the recognition of messianic potential, the opening that calls for the radically other, is located in the necessarily failing attempt to make the ‘to come’ present, calling for the ‘to come.’ Reading a text as if it is unique is such a call, and highlights messianic potential.

Since attempting to read a text as singular would necessarily fail, texts must be read in relation to other texts. Using Benjamin’s understanding of history as a guide for literary history makes connections between texts the focus of reading. The true nature of history as “now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” would be revealed for Benjamin if the connection between the past event and the now were to be fully comprehended; this would be the realisation of messianic potential (‘History’ 397). Messianic potential is for Benjamin located in connections, or the gaps revealed by connections. We can glimpse messianic time’s possibility through connecting the past event to the present imperfectly. The perfect connection would be messianic time, gathering all history together in a movement that equally cancels history. Similarly, we can glimpse pure language in the moment of translating languages, between languages, where we can see the disjunctions between supposedly equivalent terms in languages; perfect equivalence is only possible in pure language.

A textual equivalent of Benjamin’s understanding of how to perceive messianic potential would be reading texts in connection with other texts, and reading for the gaps – looking for connections, but also the imperfection of those connections. This is the value of reading the text as part of a ‘text-in-afterlife,’ as described above. One model for the text-in-afterlife is as a textual equivalent of Benjamin’s historical ‘constellation.’ The text-in-afterlife draws connections between texts, relating a text (an ‘original’) to the now-time of another text (the ‘translation’) to “blast [them] out of the continuum of [literary] history” (‘History’ 395). Like the event in Benjamin’s historiography, the (‘original’) text would be wrenched from its historical context. Rather than be seen as part of literary history as homogenous empty time – one text after another – the text would be read in its dialogue with a particular ‘now’ – i.e., the ‘translation.’ Each text fits in various texts-in-afterlife; for Benjamin
the relationship between the elements of a constellation is ‘objective’ and definite, but there is nothing to suggest each event only fits into one constellation or relates to one ‘now.’ Within the terms of this study, the text-in-afterlife is also an extension of Derrida’s arguing for the translation as part of the original. It is also important to modify Benjamin’s constellation so that it can be used to recognise connections between several pasts (texts) and a present at once, rather than only a dialectic connection between a past and a present. Describing the text-in-afterlife in terms of the (modified) Benjaminian constellation emphasises the messianic potential of this model of textuality.

Combining Benjamin and Derrida’s understandings of messianicity, and transposing them onto the reading of texts, provides two contradictory reading practices – the tension between singularity and connectedness. We should simultaneously read texts as if they are unique, while knowing this is not the case, and understand texts as necessarily connected to other texts, but unpick the dissonances in these connections. These contradictions are the basis of deconstructive reading, but the model of reading developed here has a different emphasis from Derrida’s own deconstructive readings thanks to its focus on potentiality, messianicity and constant translation. Reading for messianic afterlife means reading texts between singularity and multiplicity, between exemplarity and difference – just as the Algerian Jewish community’s relationship to language, in Monolinguisme, is the measure by which all relationships to language must be judged, and simply one example among many. Every text is singular and part of a web of connections, and messianicity helps us to read within this paradox by stressing the significance of both contradictory elements. Reading for both singularity and connectedness helps us imagine the possibility of the language to come, the messianic end of history, and the text outside afterlife.

Messianic afterlife provides a model for reading: we should read texts as not singular and self-contained, but constantly in translation – within certain restrictions. Things must, as far as possible, remain fragmentary, but cannot be unique or fully discrete. To understand as fully as possible the immensity of the potential for translation within a text – its ‘messianicity’ – we must read it as both radically singular and totally contiguous to other texts. Every text contains the entirety of literature and something so singular that it is outside literature. To understand as fully as possible the immensity of the potential for translation within a text – its ‘messianicity’ – we must read it as both radically singular and totally contiguous to other texts. Every text contains the entirety of literature and something so singular that it is outside literature. Every text is singular and part of a web of connections, and messianicity helps us to read within this paradox by stressing the significance of both contradictory elements. Reading for both singularity and connectedness helps us imagine the possibility of the language to come, the messianic end of history, and the text outside afterlife.

A text lives only if it lives on [sur-vit], and it lives on only if it is at once translatable and untranslatable (always ‘at once…and…’: hama, at the ‘same’ time). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [langue]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. Thus triumphant translation

84 Mosès argues that a similar understanding of historical events as both “unique and archetypal” is implied by Benjamin’s conception of history, Mosès, p. 95-6.
is neither the life nor the death of the text, only or already its living on, its life after life, its life after death [...] It neither lives nor dies; it lives on (‘LO’ 82-3).

Reading texts between singularity and contiguity, while reading for the gaps between texts, and focussing at all points on potentiality, is what the next three chapters of this thesis aim to practise.
Chapter Two

“Neither first nor last nor only”:

_Ulysses_

An American tourist of the most typical variety leaned over my shoulder and sighed: “So many books! What is the definitive one? Is there any?” […] I almost replied “Yes, there are two of them, _Ulysses _and _Finnegans Wake_,” but I kept this yes to myself and smiled inanely like someone who does not understand the language (‘UG’ 265).

Each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter whereas he is always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one, each imagining himself to be the first, last, only and alone whereas, he is neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity.¹

The continual process of change that defines afterlife is empirically observable for _Ulysses_. For example, Sebastian Knowles writes that the ‘corrected’ 1984 edition by Hans Walter Gabler changes the text of the funeral notice where Leopold Bloom is called “L. Boom” in eleven ways (U 602).² It is fitting that the publishing history of _Ulysses _demonstrates the potential for polysemy that is a theme of the text itself.³ However, the focus of this chapter, in keeping with the model of reading this thesis develops and practises, will be _Ulysses _in relation to its translations, and the texts it translates. This is not for the purpose of constructing a reception history narrative, but to ask how _Ulysses _demonstrates the process of afterlife, and how it might shape our understanding of how to read.

Unlike _Une Tempête _and ‘Pierre Menard,’ _Ulysses _has not only been discussed in terms of one canonical forebear. Reading _Ulysses _in connection with the _Odyssey _has been a mainstay of _Ulysses _criticism since TS Eliot’s ‘_Ulysses, Order and Myth, _’ which argues that “Mr Joyce’s parallel use of the _Odyssey _[…] has the importance of a scientific discovery,” and Stuart Gilbert’s focus on the


³ On _Ulysses’ _publishing history, see _U _xxxviii-lvi and U 740-745. See also Knowles, pp. 31-37, for a discussion of spelling in different editions that Knowles connects to the idea of a continually changing text, although in a very different way from the concept of afterlife described here: Knowles links _Ulysses _and DNA coding.
importance of the *Odyssey* for *Ulysses*, prompted by Joyce’s own involvement with Gilbert’s book.\(^4\)

The *Odyssey*–*Ulysses* connection continues to be argued for; Declan Kiberd’s 2011 *Ulysses and Us*, apparently aimed at a popular audience and pressing for the ‘democratising’ of this novel that has become synonymous with ‘difficult’ literature, includes a chapter arguing for the importance of reading *Ulysses* with the *Odyssey*. Keri Elizabeth Ames, in a 2005 article on Joyce and Homer, lists nineteen scholars as merely exemplary of those who have “contribut[ed]” to “work on classical themes in Joyce.”\(^5\)

However, the *Odyssey* is far from the only text to be linked to *Ulysses*. *Hamlet* and the *Divina Commedia* are the most frequently cited, but *Ulysses* has also been read in connection to texts ranging from Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Sainte Antoine* to the ancient Irish *Lebor Gabála Érenn*. It seems difficult to pin down in which text-in-afterlife, or even texts-in-afterlife, *Ulysses* might participate. Reading *Ulysses* within the terms of afterlife, attempting to take account of all these claimed textual connections, thus prompts the question how it might be possible for a text to ‘translate’ more than one text at once – how *Ulysses* could demonstrate the afterlife of so many texts. This goes to the heart of this study’s concerns, problematising what ‘a translation’ and ‘translatability’ are, and how we might understand the concept of the text-in-afterlife. In apparently translating so many texts, *Ulysses* might appear unique, even coming close to the status of the text that could translate everything. However, as described in Chapter One, the concept of textuality’s messianic potential means that every text is ‘unique’ by virtue of being like every other. Reading *Ulysses* alongside its multiple claimed forebears allows us to see what this simultaneous uniqueness and similarity to all other texts means for our reading of individual, canonical texts, and helps demonstrate the value of reading using the text-in-afterlife concept.

Additionally, the approach taken to *Ulysses*’ various claimed ancestors here characterises the type of openness central to the model of reading this thesis encourages. Rather than attempt to ‘prove’ that certain texts are linked, reading texts as parts of texts-in-afterlife encourages a freedom that asks what happens if texts are read together – always attempting to open, rather than close off, discussion and potentiality. A fitting way into this type of reading and the question of *Ulysses*’ connection to other texts comes in the section of *Ulysses* that is linked to the most other texts, which also presents an apparent literary history itself. This chapter will therefore begin with a discussion of the ‘Oxen of the

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Sun’ section of *Ulysses* to demonstrate the impossibility of constructing a literary history based on ‘proving’ texts are linked to other texts.

**History**

The various styles of writing in the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode of *Ulysses* apparently offer a summary of Anglophone literary history through parodies of various writers and genres. Given that ‘Oxen’ is built of ‘new’ writing rather than quotations, unless we return to Joyce’s intention, recognition of the authors or styles apparently being parodied relies on the reader’s knowledge. There is nothing in the text itself, no ‘Aeolus’-like ‘headlines,’ to indicate the shift from ‘John Bunyan’ to ‘Samuel Pepys.’ While Anthony Burgess claimed ‘Oxen’ is “an author’s chapter” due to its stylistic variation, it is also a reader’s chapter, as the text means different things to readers with different knowledge. A reader who understands the different styles as parodies of different authors or genres may link the order in which the styles appear with authors’ biographies, or the historical period in which the genres being parodied arose, and understand the chapter as a condensed history of English prose styles. Although the text of ‘Oxen’ contains a succession of different styles of writing, it continues the narrative of Leopold and Stephen Dedalus, and the text does not state that the succession of styles has the additional aim of summarising the history of English literature. Nor does the text state that the succession of styles is chronological or that, even if ‘Oxen’ does constitute a history, that such a history is definitive. What ‘Oxen’ does show, if not explicitly claim, is the difficulty of constructing such histories at all. In demonstrating this difficulty, ‘Oxen’ provides a lesson in how to read *Ulysses* as a whole in terms of its claimed relationships with other texts – thus contributing to this study’s development of a model of reading. Let us begin, then, by asking to which texts ‘Oxen’ is apparently linked.

**English literature and Irish bulls**

Before examining how ‘Oxen’ constructs, or deconstructs, literary history, it is worth clarifying which writers’ styles are supposedly included in the chapter. Critics disagree. For example, Jeri Johnson’s editorial notes to the 1922 edition of *Ulysses* describe the section from page 370, line 20 to page 373, line 15 as imitating Thomas Malory, in agreement with Don Gifford’s description of the

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6 Critical convention will be followed in using ‘Homeric’ titles for *Ulysses*’ episodes, despite the question of how appropriate these are.

same section, but Johnson notes that Robert Janusko has argued that this section also includes imitations of John Bourchier, Lord Berners, Thomas More and Sir Thomas Elyot (U 909). The claimed attributions often lack precision: Johnson describes one section as being “after various 18th-Century essayists” including David Hume, while a later section, in the middle of a passage identified as ‘RB Sheridan,’ is “much disputed” (U 915). Johnson suggests that one sentence here “comes from” Walter Scott’s *In a Besieged Castle*: it is unclear what this means, given that the sentence in question is not a direct quotation. Gifford does not note Hume or Scott in connection to these passages (UA 428-9). ‘Proving’ that a passage mimicked another writer would require comparative lexical analysis of a kind few literary critics have the training to produce. Even then, this would only ‘prove’ similarity; assuming that this meant the passage of ‘Oxen’ was definitely an attempt to parody the style of an author would require deep faith in Joyce’s ability to mimic, and a belief in the recoverability of authorial intention.

A different kind of link to other authors would be that certain passages of ‘Oxen’ use phrases or references that are similar to titles or famous passages of other authors’ work. For example, the section beginning “An Irish bull in an English chinashop” is taken by Johnson and Gifford to be in the style of Johnathan Swift (U 381, 914; UA 424). Both Gifford and Johnson point to Swift due to his *Tale of a Tub*, which satirises “Catholicism’s recourse to papal bulls” (U 914). The references to cattle in the relevant section of ‘Oxen,’ meanwhile, “provide a different parodic account: Ireland’s history of exploitation at the hands of the Catholic Church and the English monarchy from the 2nd through the 16th cs” (U 914). There are numerous references to cows in the styles preceding the ‘Swift’ section, however, in the passages Gifford and Johnson take to be ‘Pepys’ and ‘Daniel Defoe’—for example, the reference to a “skittish heifer, big of her age and beef to the heel” (U 379), the mention of “Bullock harbour” (U 379), the “Kerry cows that are to be butchered along of the plague” (U 380), “Mort aux vaches” (U 380), and “the hoose and the timber tongue,” which Gifford glosses as colloquial names for cattle diseases (U 381; UA 340). At this point, the students and Leopold are discussing the foot-and-mouth epidemic occasionally referenced elsewhere in *Ulysses*, and so the puns and references to cattle are in keeping with the narrative, regardless of any parodic purpose. However, that these references are not entirely contained within the section ‘attributed’ to Swift shows the difficulty of dividing ‘Oxen’ into ‘sections’ that are not indicated as such by the text itself. The boundaries between each style are not clear or fixed, and only exist inasmuch as we see them.

Johnson and Gifford take the references to cattle to parody Swift while describing England’s exploitation of Ireland. Mention of “that same bull that was sent to our Ireland by farmer Nicholas” seems to suggest Nicholas Breakspear, the English Pope Adrian IV, who, writes Gifford, “granted the

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overlordship of Ireland to Henry II”; the phrase links the ideas of Papal Bulls and Anglo-Irish colonisation (U 381, 914; UA 424). However, “Irish bull” has another possible referent. An Irish bull, writes Gifford, is “a statement that makes logical sense to its innocent and wrongheaded speaker but that in objective and literal terms is nonsense” (UA 424). The phrase is used in the title of Richard and Maria Edgeworth’s 1802 Essay on Irish Bulls. This essay “aims to defend colloquial Irish speech from the patronizing calumny of the foreigner,” but also complicates what it would mean to call something ‘Irish’ – fitting considering the ‘Anglo-Irish’ position of the Edgeworth family themselves.9 Very few, if any, critics link the Edgeworths to this section of ‘Oxen.’ Indeed, it is a truism that no female writers appear in the chapter; Maud Ellman specifically writes, “there are no pastiches of Jane Austen or Maria Edgeworth or George Eliot” to describe how the section “exclud[es] any female authors.”10 Bruce Stewart mentions the Edgeworths’ Essay in an article on Joyce, and notes ‘Oxen’s punning on ‘papal bull,’ but stops short of describing a textual connection between the Essay and the ‘bulls’ section of ‘Oxen.’11 The section explicitly mentions ‘Irish bulls’ – “He’ll find himself on the horns of a dilemma if he meddles with a bull that’s Irish, says he. Irish by name and irish [sic] by nature, says Mr Stephen […] An Irish bull in an English chinashop” (U 381). There is also mention of “the lord Harry” buying “a grammar of the bull’s language,” linking the ‘Irish bull’ to language – the subject of the Edgeworths’ essay.

Such references may seem a tenuous link to the Edgeworths, but they are arguably no more tenuous than the claimed presence of Swift in a section that apparently discusses a different topic from Swift’s own. It is difficult to assert that any section definitively does, or does not, imitate a particular author. What can be found in the text is a question of what is looked for. For example, the ‘Defoe’ section apparently begins with the line “With this came up Lenehan,” but the paragraph before this mentions “Mrs Moll,” calling to mind Moll Flanders (U 379). A very different reference comes in the ‘Swift’ or ‘Edgeworth’ section: “and, says Mr Dixon, if ever he got scent of a cattleraider […] he run amok over half the countryside” (U 382). The most famous cattle raid in Irish literature is the Táin Bó Cúailgne (the Cattle Raid of Cooley), part of the Ulster Cycle. The myth describes the Connacht queen Medb attempting to steal Ulster’s cattle, and the hero Cú Chulainn’s fight against her forces. There is a parallel between this myth and the Odyssey episode purportedly linked to ‘Oxen of the Sun,’ as both tell of prize cattle being stolen. The link to the Táin in the ‘bull’ section of Ulysses in reinforced through a reference to “the finest strapping young ravisher in the four fields of all Ireland” – a

mention of a prize bull in the context of a traditional way of describing Ireland through reference to its four ancient kingdoms – Munster, Leinster, Ulster and Connacht (U 381; UA 424). This passing reference to ancient Ireland is reinforced by the mention of a “cattleraider in Roscommon or the wilds of Connemara or a husbandman in Sligo” (U 382). All these places fall in the boundaries of the old kingdom of Connacht, which led the cattle raid against Ulster.

If all these texts can be found in ‘Oxen,’ the chapter can act metonymically for thinking about Ulysses in general in terms of afterlife. If we are not simply to follow critical orthodoxy, ‘Oxen’ must be read with openness as to which authors are ‘actually’ represented in its parodies. What this requires is not attempting to ‘prove’ that certain texts are linked, but reading that arranges texts into constellations to ask what happens when they are configured in a certain way, and what potentialities might be revealed. How this model of reading texts together can affect our reading of Ulysses as a whole will be explored below, but in the case of ‘Oxen,’ what it means is examining what happens if we suppose that, as has been argued, certain authors’ styles are arranged to provide a narrative of literary history. The next section provides a hypothetical reading of ‘Oxen’ as if it were a literary history to see what potentialities this constellation reveals. In other words, we will see if ‘Oxen’ can be read as a literary history, and if not, why not.

‘Oxen of the Sun’ as history

A history of styles such as that apparently presented by ‘Oxen’ would necessarily create a selective narrative, unless somehow the entirety of English literature could be included. ‘Oxen’s selection problematises what ‘English’ literature might be. It appears not to mean only literature written by writers from England, given the apparent presence of ‘Anglo-Irish’ writers such as Swift, Sheridan and Lawrence Sterne – and possibly Maria Edgeworth. A history of ‘English’ literature excluding literature not composed by native English writers would exclude Ulysses itself, in any case. Yet it seems difficult to argue that ‘Oxen’ traces a history of the literature of the British Isles, or the Anglosphere, given the lack of any Scottish – the aforementioned debate over ‘Hume’ and ‘Scott’ notwithstanding – or Welsh ‘voices,’ or any from the USA.

The nationality suggested by ‘Oxen’ appears to be a particularly Irish understanding of English literary history. This is evidenced by the first three words of the episode: the Irish deiseal, meaning ‘turning to the right’ and spelled ‘phonetically,’ according to norms of English spelling, as ‘deshil,’ followed by the English placename ‘Holles’ – Holles Street being the address of the maternity

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12 According to Johnston, ‘Swift’ is U 381, line 8, to U 382, line 36; ‘Sterne’ is U 385, line 7, to U 386, line 27; and ‘Sheridan’ is U 388, line 31, to U 389, line 17 (U 914-5).
hospital – and the Latin *eamus*, ‘let us go’ (*U* 366, 908). The collision of Irish, English and Latin suggests the importance of these three languages – the languages of the ‘native,’ the coloniser and the Church – to Ireland.

The idea of ‘Oxen’ as a specifically Irish ‘English’ literary history is supported by the fact that the episode was apparently written after anthologies such as William Peacock’s 1903 *English Prose from Mandeville to Ruskin*, rather than from study of the works of the writers supposedly imitated. The ‘original’ is always missing in ‘Oxen’; the chapter is imitations of extracts, translation of translations. Such anthologies were, according to Kiberd, a cornerstone of colonial education; they were studied in India or Ireland “by native elites who might learn by imitating English masters how to assimilate themselves to the project of the British Empire.” ‘Oxen’ could be read as a history that tells of colonisation and a desire to control, mirroring Odysseus’ sailors who land on Helios’ island and become would-be conquerors as they slaughter the sacred cattle. Conquest seems central to the literary history ‘Oxen’ traces, as the first stylistic ‘imitation’ appears to mimic Roman historians such as Tacitus (*U* 366-7, 908). Beginning with Tacitus, the historian of the Roman conquest of (parts of) Britain, means that the literary history sketched by ‘Oxen’ begins with imperialism and conquest, again suggesting that this is a particularly Irish view of English literature, a tradition ‘imposed’ upon the Irish in which they have also participated.

However, Tacitus complicates ‘Oxen’s model of ‘English’ literature, in beginning it with Latin, or rather, English twisted to resemble a particular type of Latin; Gifford suggests “the manner of this passage suggests a literal translation, without Anglicisation of word usage and syntax” (*UA* 409). Tacitus seems an unusual place to begin a narrative of ‘English’ literature; English literature would then begin before there was a language called English. This bears witness to the fact that translation is originary, and unavoidable even within ‘one’ tradition. It also demonstrates, alongside the ‘Anglo-Irish’ writers, the impossibility of a ‘pure’ national literary history, entirely contained within one, easily-defined nation. It is only after the fact, when a narrative of history is being constructed – in this case, a hypothetical narrative reading ‘Oxen’ as history – that the ‘original’ can be placed within a narrative to serve as an origin, thanks to translation: Tacitus needs to be translated into English to begin ‘English’ literature. This is not to claim that Tacitus represents a pure origin that has been co-opted to serve as the origin of another narrative; the process of translation instituting its ‘original’ as such is an endless regress. To claim a particular point as an origin is always ideological.

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14 Kiberd, p. 212
Moreover, even within the construction of a single narrative of historical descent, ‘origin’ is always multiple. If ‘Oxen’ is read as a narrative of the development of English literature then, as in Genesis, the narrative begins twice. The unbroken chain from Latin literature to modern English is interrupted by the Anglo-Saxons, a second culture who invaded the British Isles and had little or no connection to Roman or Roman-British culture, despite beginning ‘English’ culture. Disrupting this history’s narrative form as well as nationalism, Tacitus and Aelfric must both be presented as beginnings of ‘English’ literature, despite the fact that only the latter wrote in ‘English.’ Alternatively, Tacitus, writing centuries before Aelfric, remains ‘the beginning,’ but ‘Oxen’ would then become a ‘narrative’ without clear links between each of the stages, where each period of history cannot be explained by previous events.

Such a disjointed ‘narrative’ would allow for the anachronism of ‘Oxen,’ inadmissible in a linear narrative history. The penultimate style in ‘Oxen,’ before the text dissolves into the medical students’ and Leopold’s drunken chatter, is identified by Johnson and Gifford as ‘Thomas Carlyle,’ whose major works were written in the middle of the nineteenth century (U 918; UA 439). Carlyle appears after Walter Pater and John Ruskin, whose major works were written after Carlyle’s. There is a further kind of anachronism at work in ‘Oxen,’ where styles from different historical periods are used to describe a narrative set in 1904. *Ulysses*’ characters therefore have knowledge inappropriate for the style of their speech and narration. For example, the passage Johnson identifies as “after various 18th-c. essayists” mentions “the late ingenious Mr Darwin” (U 915, 388). This means that, as Robert Spoo puts it, the passage “allude[s] to the death of a man who, in a sense, had not yet been born.”

Time is out of joint in ‘Oxen,’ which tells one narrative – about the students and Leopold in the maternity hospital – but appears to tell another, about literary history.

The historical ‘narrative’ in ‘Oxen’ is exaggeratedly arbitrary. Only one type of literature, prose, is represented, meaning that Chaucer, Shakespeare and the Romantic poets, to name only the most obvious examples, are absent. The ending of ‘Oxen’ is also oddly abrupt: Carlyle, who provides the final style before the students’ voices, died in 1881, and seems an unusual place to conclude a literary history in a text set in 1904. There is no Oscar Wilde or Joseph Conrad, for example – although Conrad’s inclusion would make the national boundaries of ‘English’ literature even fuzzier. In any case, ending with Carlyle renders ‘Oxen’ an incomplete history, not describing a continuous progression up to the ‘present day’ of *Ulysses*. The narrative history, such as it is, simply stops, as the drunken students ‘interrupt.’

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“All history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God,” Mr Deasy tells Stephen earlier in *Ulysses*, to which Stephen replies that God is “a shout in the street” (*U* 34). ‘Oxen’ indeed ends with shouting in the street, but if this is the telos towards which (literary) history moves, then it is not the perfection of literature but perhaps its destruction, as narrative collapses – all that happens is the students drunkenly shout at each other – and meaning all but disappears – “Stunned like seeing as how no shiners is acoming, Underconstumble? He’ve got the chink ad lib. Seed near free poun on un a spell ago a said war hisn” (*U* 404). Spoo suggests that teleology is key to ‘Oxen,’ as it parodies not only the format of literary anthologies, but also the models of history that such anthologies were designed to demonstrate, “ranging from teleological and imperialist notions to the biological, evolutionary paradigms that figured history as a developing organism.”16 Spoo argues that the characters’ discussion in ‘Oxen’ notes that the end of life’s ‘progress’ is death, and so “decay and death must be reckoned into the process” of any model that conflates history with individual lives.17 Yet ‘Oxen’ does more than this, showing through its structure the impossibility of constructing any progressivist narrative of literary history that could withstand scrutiny. There is no ‘progression’ in the styles of ‘Oxen,’ and no telos.

‘Oxen’ is only readable as a narrative history if we allow for multiple beginnings, anachronism or non-linear temporality, complete arbitrariness as to what is included, and a lack of conclusion. This episode is not really a narrative literary history, but simply a collection of styles of writing. The format of these styles is testament to the impossibility of building ‘a’ literary history as a single clear narrative. With reference to Benjamin and Derrida, the next section will explain why this impossibility is central to this thesis.

**History as fragments**

Kiberd, discussing ‘Oxen of the Sun,’ quotes Benjamin’s description of baroque literature “piling up fragments endlessly, without any strict idea of a goal.”18 The endless piling up of fragments is how Benjamin describes the ‘angel of history’s view of history in ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’ – a “single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage on wreckage” (*History* 392). If ‘Oxen’ is a literary history, it is a history made of fragments that do not constitute one narrative. For Benjamin, the attempt to reconstitute a whole is fruitless because, as exemplified by the ‘broken vessel’ described in ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,’ such a whole never existed. This applies to history as much as language. “The angel [of history] would like to stay […] and make whole what has been smashed,” writes Benjamin, but “the pile of debris before him grows towards the sky” (*History* 392). An attempt under present conditions to understand history as a whole would be merely a parodic version

16 Spoo, p. 139
17 Spoo, p. 146
18 Kiberd, p. 220
of the universal history that exists “only in the messianic realm” (‘P’ 404). Benjamin cautions that “universal history in the present-day sense is never more than a kind of Esperanto,” no more an all-encompassing history than Esperanto is ‘pure language’ (‘P’ 404). A history attempting to integrate many different parts into a whole would also be anti-deconstructive, performing the ‘reduction to the One’ that Derrida characterises as the operation of monolingualism.

A reading practice taking account of afterlife, following Benjamin and Derrida, cannot construct narratives of history, and ‘Oxen’ demonstrates one reason why. It is not merely that to read ‘Oxen’ as if it is a narrative history made into a ‘whole’ is to read it incorrectly, but that such a reading cannot be sustained. While the abrupt ending and apparent anachronism of ‘Oxen’ would mean that it was, at least, an unsatisfactory narrative of literary history, the difficulty of deciding which authors ‘Oxen’ includes, and its multiple beginnings, mean that it cannot be considered a narrative at all. Reading ‘Oxen’ as if it is a literary history demonstrates why the text-in-afterlife is not to be understood as a narrative of ‘descent.’ Any understanding of a text-in-afterlife is necessarily ‘incomplete,’ because it would be impossible to trace every line of ‘ancestry’ in a text and then read a continuous line of progression from there. Even if we try to construct these narratives, we produce, as ‘Oxen’ shows, polymorphous narratives with multiple beginnings, ambiguities and no clear end. This is why the model of reading developed here cannot produce ‘evolutionary’ genealogies or phylogenetic trees. Such trees would be impossible to draw, because, as Franco Moretti discusses in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, literature never grows from a single source; the ‘evolution’ of literature involves convergence as well as divergence.\(^{19}\) Texts-in-afterlife are not linear, but spread in multiple directions at once, with multiple centres.

In terms of its claimed links to other texts, ‘Oxen of the Sun’ can be read as representative of *Ulysses* as a whole. One way of understanding *Ulysses*’ being read alongside so many other texts is as an attempt to fit it into a unified literary history; for example, the *Odyssey* is ‘responsible’ for *Ulysses*’ existence. To attempt to read in such a way is to understand literary history as a ‘thread’ leading up to the present moment. ‘Oxen’ points out the futility of such an exercise, showing that such readings deconstruct themselves. Attempting to understand *Ulysses* by linking it to various ‘ancestors,’ in an attempt to integrate it into a single narrative of literary history, will only ever be partially successful.

For Benjamin, to avoid narrative history, historical fragments should be used to make constellations, “blast[ing] the specific era out of the homogenous course of history,” drawing new connections in the present to “blast open the continuum of history” (‘History’ 396). Understanding history in such a way is to establish “a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time”\(^{19}\)

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A history composed of fragments re-drawn as constellations allows for the suggestion of the true nature of history, and if realised perfectly, this would inaugurate messianic time.

Our task is to arrange literary fragments into similar constellations – texts-in-afterlife. What ‘Oxen of the Sun’ suggests, when read with Benjamin, is that *Ulysses*’ relationships with its claimed progenitor(s) should be understood not as narrative, but as sites of potential. If the relationship between a paragraph of ‘Oxen’ and, say, Swift cannot be ‘proved,’ then the relationship between *Ulysses* as a whole and the *Odyssey* is perhaps no more concrete. Reading ‘Oxen’ and Benjamin together provides a model of how to read texts’ relationships in afterlife. Texts remain fragmentary, and should be put together to ask what happens if we think of these texts as linked. In the case of ‘Oxen,’ for example, reading the text as if it is a literary history, as is often supposed, is not sustainable, and the hypothetical reading proves itself unproductive. However, links between texts can, following Benjamin, allow for the glimpse of messianic potentials. Let us now turn, then, to *Ulysses*’ relationship with its supposed ancestors. In reading *Ulysses* in its similarities and differences from the *Odyssey*, and other texts, it is Benjamin’s writings on language that prove most productive. Benjamin’s thoughts on the translation of *languages* allow us to develop a way to describe how texts demonstrate translation in afterlife, and how we should read to recognise this change.

**Language**

“The whole fabric of *Ulysses*, certainly, depends on the pun,” writes Knowles, and much of the plot of *Ulysses* revolves around polysemy. Leopold’s throwaway comment about throwing away his newspaper is taken as a tip for the Gold Cup (*U* 82); the anonymous note ‘U.P.: up’ is apparently seriously offensive (*U* 151); the mysterious man in the mackintosh becomes M’Intosh (*U* 108) and Leopold becomes “L. Boom” (*U* 602). While the misspelling of his name merely renders Leopold “nettled,” Barney Kiernan’s understanding of Leopold’s “I was just going to throw it away” as a betting tip means that Leopold is presumed to have won money; when he does not then buy everyone a drink in Kiernan’s pub, he is seen as miserly, leading to his suffering anti-Semitic abuse (*U* 602, 321). “I called you naughty boy because I do not like that other world,” writes Martha to ‘Henry Flower’ – Leopold by another name – and the apparent mistake reveals a greater truth: words are worlds in *Ulysses* (*U* 74). Rather than mistakes, such different spellings or unorthodox interpretations of words are testaments to translatability. Kiernan’s understanding of “throw it away” is not a

20 Knowles, p. 14
21 Some possible meanings of ‘U.P.’ are discussed in Knowles, p. 74-5.
misunderstanding but another understanding. One of the many things *Ulysses* is ‘about’ is the multiplicity of meanings that can be found even in apparently simple words or sentences. The potential for translation manifests everywhere in *Ulysses*.

Such potential for translation works on *Ulysses* itself as a whole, in the question of which texts *Ulysses* translates. The ways *Ulysses* may be said to translate, or not, its most frequently-cited forebears allows it to demonstrate something like a textual equivalent of Benjamin’s understanding of how pure language might be revealed. The text of *Ulysses*, in terms of translatability, exists like a “fragment of the greater language, just as shards are the fragments of a vessel.” 22 It is precisely this fragmentary incompleteness that makes *Ulysses* important for the model of textuality and reading developed here. To demonstrate this incompleteness in translation, let us explore how *Ulysses* translates its most famous claimed ancestors – if, indeed, it translates them at all.

**Ulysses as an Odyssey**

“*Epi oinopa ponton.* Ah, Dedalus, the Greeks. I must teach you. You must read them in the original,” Buck Mulligan says (U 5). 23 To read this at the beginning of *Ulysses* is to have the question of translation and what precisely this text’s relation is to its ‘original’ – assuming *Ulysses* does translate the *Odyssey* – foregrounded. Mulligan quotes one of the *Odyssey*’s most famous phrases, in (transliterated) Greek, and so to read *Ulysses* is literally to read (part of) the *Odyssey* “in the original.” However, reading *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey* together cannot be taken for granted. Although the episodes of *Ulysses* are conventionally known by ‘Homeric’ titles, these titles are not included in the text. The titles are derived from Joyce’s writing plans or ‘schemata,’ which he gave to Gilbert and Carlo Linati, and have only become used through critical convention. 24 Moreover, *Ulysses* is not strictly organised according to the *Odyssey*’s structure. Hermione de Almeida’s claim that “there is a chapter for each of Homer’s episodes” seems odd given that there are eighteen episodes in *Ulysses* and twenty-four books in the *Odyssey*. 25 There is no one-to-one correspondence of sections, as Odysseus’ crew’s stay with Circe is spread over several books of the *Odyssey*, while the encounters with the lotus eaters and Cyclops both happen in Book 9; each of these encounters has its own episode

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22 Niranjana, p. 137
23 Joyce, incidentally, almost certainly did not read “the Greeks” in the original, as discussed in Ames, especially pp. 15-24.
24 The schemata are reproduced in *U* 734-739. Leah Culligan Flack suggests that Joyce “prodded” Linati, Eliot and Gilbert to emphasise the Homeric parallels in the schemata to combat obscenity charges against *Ulysses*. Critical convention was thus established by a “tactical maneuver” [sic] “at the request of the author”; *Modernism and Homer: The Odysseys of HD, James Joyce, Osip Mandelstam, and Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 6-8. The schemata also list each episode’s ‘organ’, ‘colour’, ‘technic’, and ‘symbol’; the *Odyssey* is hardly alone in its supposed importance for the structure of the text.
Moreover, the Odyssey’s plot is rearranged in Ulysses: Circe advises Odysseus’ crew how to deal with the Sirens and Scylla, while Leopold and Stephen encounter their distinctly unhelpful ‘Circe’ just before their return home (O 157-68; U 408-565).

Ulysses differs from the Odyssey such that any attempt to establish firm parallels or correspondences will fail. Occasionally these differences manifest as jokes or puns, as does much of the action in Ulysses. For example, Odysseus is given moly, a magical herb, by Hermes, to resist Circe’s magic (O 132-33). Leopold’s wife, identified as both Calypso and Penelope by the conventional episode titles, is Molly. Rather than protecting him from the witch, Leopold’s mol(l)y is a witch, and the virtuous wife – except that Molly is not a perfect Penelope: she is unfaithful. Equally, Leopold is hardly the powerful hero that Odysseus is. Perhaps the clearest difference, however, can be seen in ‘Eumaeus.’ In the supposedly corresponding section of the Odyssey, Odysseus returns to Ithaca and is helped by the shepherd Eumaeus; Odysseus is eventually reunited with Telemachus before they plot to slaughter Penelope’s suitors. In Ulysses, Leopold and Stephen sit in a cabman’s shelter after leaving ‘Nighttown’; Leopold offers Stephen some coffee, and the two listen to stories from a drunken sailor, Murphy, who has circumnavigated a bit since I first joined on. I was in the Red Sea. I was in China and North America and South America. […] I seen Russia. Gospodi pomilooy. That’s how the Russian prays. […] I seen maneaters in Peru that eats corpses and the livers of horses (U 581).

Murphy also knows how to “keep them off” – “glass. That boggles ‘em. Glass” (U 581). Unlike Leopold’s experiences, wandering around Dublin for a day, Murphy’s do mirror those of Odysseus. He has not seen his “own true wife […] for seven years now” – as long as Odysseus spends with Calypso (U 580). He has travelled to many lands, encountered strange monsters and learned how to communicate with them and defeat them if necessary. Like Odysseus, he meets monstrous, anthropophagous humans – ‘Peruvians’ rather than Odysseus’ Lestrygonians or Cyclops. It is possible that Murphy is not telling the truth, just as it is for Odysseus when he recounts his journey at King Alcinous’ court; he certainly lies when he is first reunited with Eumaeus (O 110-68, 186-90). Murphy is Odysseus’ appearance in Ulysses: drunk and telling tall tales for part of one episode. Odysseus is relegated to a minor role, and we are shown what might have happened once he reached Ithaca; he became an Ancient Mariner, but without any wisdom to impart (U 612).

When it comes to Ulysses’ ‘Odysseus,’ Joyce’s ‘schemata’ actually undermine the idea of Ulysses as an Odyssey. The Gilbert schema’s only suggestions as to which character relates to Odysseus are “Ulysses: Socrates, Jesus, Shakespeare” in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ – meaning that Odysseus does not

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actually appear in this episode – and “Noman: I” in ‘Cyclops’, making the nameless narrator Odysseus, given that ‘no-one,’ outis, is what Odysseus tells Polyphemus his name is (U 734-5; O 119). For ‘Eumaeus,’ both the Gilbert and Linati schemata include ‘Ulysses Pseudangelos,’ whom the Gilbert schema links to “Sailor,” that is, Murphy (U 735). ‘Ulysses Pseudangelos,’ or ‘Ulysses the False Messenger,’ is a lost play mentioned in Aristotle’s Poetics. Since nothing is known about the play except its title, presumably the name alone is important for why Murphy is assigned this character. The attribution of Ulysses Pseudangelos to Murphy causes problems for a reading of Ulysses as a translation of the Odyssey. As well as including a version of Odysseus who does not actually appear in the Odyssey, there are then apparently two alternate Odysseuses at once: the Linati schema also names ‘Ulysses’ as a character in this episode, removing the idea of any strict convergence with the Odyssey.

None of this contributes to the standard interpretation of Ulysses-as-Odyssey, where Leopold is Odysseus. It is Leopold whom the narrative follows for most of the day, as he encounters communion wafer-eating ‘lotus eaters’ and a ‘cyclops’ who can only see one thing, nationalism. Yet in ‘Eumaeus’ and ‘Ithaca,’ it is Leopold who offers food and shelter to the traveller Stephen, who is at first mistrustful – “couldn’t” is Stephen’s reply to the suggestion that he eat a bread roll – but who eventually comes to trust Leopold and go (return?) to ‘Ithaca’ with him (U 589). If we are committed to reading this episode of Ulysses with the Odyssey, then Leopold is Eumaeus, and Stephen is Odysseus. This hardly seems satisfactory either, however, as for the first three episodes of Ulysses to correspond to the Odyssey, Stephen must be Telemachus, the young man setting out to find (the man he believes to be) his father. Stephen-as-Telemachus also helps Ulysses mirror the structure of the Odyssey more closely, as the narrative begins with Telemachus searching for Odysseus before focussing on Odysseus himself and his adventures; finally father and son are reunited. In the opening episode in the Martello Tower, if Stephen is Telemachus, Buck Mulligan appears to be Antinous. While his motives or the depth of his hostility towards Stephen are not as clear as those of Antinous towards Telemachus, Mulligan at least seems untrustworthy. Yet to understand Leopold’s homecoming as an inverted version of Odysseus’ nostos and slaying of the suitors, where the coarse, brash Antinous is among the first to be killed, Leopold must be Odysseus after all, and Blazes Boylan seems to play the role of an inverted Antinous who does have sex with Penelope/Molly. After all, Mulligan, called “Mercurial Malachi” and wearing “Mercury’s hat,” is already aligned with Hermes (U 17, 19).

Trying to find too rigid parallels between characters in Ulysses and their Odyssean counterparts is misguided because characters correspond to different characters at different parts of the narrative. Antinous is variously Mulligan and Boylan, while Leopold is Odysseus and Eumaeus, and Molly is both Calypso and Penelope. Correspondences between characters are not fixed. Even Ulysses’ own
characters’ identities seem unstable, since ‘Ithaca’ describes “substituting Stephen for Bloom” and “substituting Bloom for Stephen” to produce “Stoom” and “Blephen” (U 635). *Ulysses* diverges from the *Odyssey* as much as it follows it, and so it seems difficult to claim that *Ulysses* is a version of the *Odyssey*. However, *Ulysses* has not only been read alongside the *Odyssey*, but has also been claimed to translate *Hamlet* and the *Divina Commedia*. As will be seen, *Ulysses* is no more – or less – a translation of these works than of the *Odyssey*. Seen through the model of textuality developed here, *Ulysses* exists as a translation of all three – and none of them.

**Ulysses as Hamlet and the Commedia**

“I am the servant of two masters,” Stephen says in ‘Telemachus,’ “an English and an Italian […] and a third […] there is who wants me for odd jobs” (U 20). Although Stephen could be read as describing the British government, the Roman Catholic Church and Mother Ireland, he could also be describing his relationship, as part of *Ulysses*, with *Hamlet*, the *Divina Commedia* and the *Odyssey*. *Hamlet* is perhaps the most often named ur-text of *Ulysses* after the *Odyssey*.27 Jennifer Levine suggests imagining *Ulysses* retitled as *Hamlet* “to regain a sense of it as a text brought into deliberate collision with a powerful predecessor,” given that now “the name ‘Ulysses’ seems entirely Joycean.”28 Unlike the *Odyssey*, *Hamlet* is frequently referred to explicitly in *Ulysses*, most obviously in the discussion in ‘Scylla and Charybdis.’ *Ulysses* ‘translates’ *Hamlet* by offering a critical commentary on the play, whether or not the ideas are meant to be taken seriously – Stephen claims not to believe his own argument (U 205). In its ‘criticism,’ *Ulysses* translates *Hamlet* in much the same way Gilbert’s influential book translates *Ulysses*, particularly since, given the ‘myth’ of Joyce’s personal understanding of the *Odyssey* as key to reading *Ulysses*, the *Hamlet* argument is based around pseudo-biographical information about Shakespeare.29 Richard Peterson points out that Stephen playfully twists the details of Shakespeare’s biography and *Hamlet* to suit his own argument, meaning that Stephen rewrites or translates *Hamlet* in another way, at the same that *Hamlet* becomes *Ulysses*’ “own play within a play.”30

However, “*Ulysses* is so full of allusions to *Hamlet*, and echoes of its language […] that it is difficult to argue that Joyce makes any one use of *Hamlet,*” writes Martin Schofield.31 *Ulysses*’ major

28 Jennifer Levine, p. 122
29 Martin Schofield calls Stephen’s theory “limitably biographical,” while, ironically, describing the similarities between Stephen and Joyce to suggest that Stephen may be a mouthpiece for Joyce’s opinions; *The Ghosts of Hamlet: The Play and Modern Writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 72 and p. 60.
31 Schofield, p. 59
characters apparently perceive themselves in relation to *Hamlet*. Stephen’s discussion of the play is his attempt to demonstrate his intellectual potential to his peers. Johnson writes, building on Hugh Kenner, that “Stephen thinks he’s in a book called *Hamlet* and never discovers that it’s really called *Ulysses* and that he is a supporting actor, not the lead” (*U* 772). Leopold also thinks of *Hamlet*, inaccurately, several times, apparently in connection to his own relationships. After seeing an advert reminding him that Millicent Bandmann Palmer has played the prince the previous night, he links *Hamlet* to his own father’s suicide, thinking, “perhaps [Prince Hamlet] was a woman. Why Ophelia committed suicide? Poor papa!” (*U* 73) Later, he misquotes “Hamlet, I am thy father’s spirit/Doomed for a certain time to walk the earth”— implicitly naming himself, if Stephen is Prince Hamlet, as Stephen’s ‘father’ (*U* 146). Alexander Welsh argues that Stephen’s *Hamlet* theory shows Leopold to be a version of Hamlet’s Ghost and thus the Shakespeare who played the Ghost, since Leopold is cuckolded, as Stephen suggests Shakespeare/Hamlet’s Ghost was.\(^{32}\) *Ulysses* is then a translation of *Hamlet* within the terms described within *Ulysses* itself. Part of *Ulysses*—Stephen’s theory—describes a particular idea of *Hamlet*, and the rest of the text is a version of this understanding of *Hamlet*. *Ulysses* comments on itself commenting on *Hamlet*, or translates its own translation. Similarly, ‘Circe’ repeats many fragments of speech from earlier in *Ulysses*, allowing the text to comment on itself. Kiberd links this self-reflexivity to *Hamlet*, arguing that “the play-within-the-play is used by [Prince] Hamlet, and by Stephen in ‘Circe,’ to show how much is left unsaid.”\(^ {33}\)

However, as with the *Odyssey*, a reading of *Ulysses* as a ‘strict’ translation of *Hamlet* soon falls apart as different characters mean different things at different times. For example, Buck Mulligan, Stephen’s friend whom he calls “usurper,” is simultaneously Horatio and Claudius (*U* 23). *Ulysses* has enough similarities to *Hamlet* to be readable as translating this text, but enough differences for the attribution to seem problematic. Stephen is, like Prince Hamlet, more thought than action; Jennifer Levine compares Stephen’s quietness and Buck Mulligan’s bluster in ‘Telemachus’ with Prince Hamlet and the bombastic Claudius of *Hamlet’s* opening scenes.\(^ {34}\) Stephen does not need to avenge his father’s death, but is nevertheless distant from his father, “and all the other paternalistic authorities that surround him, the church, his teachers, the English [sic] government,” and so figures as at once Hamlet-like and different from him—a new, translated Prince of Denmark.\(^ {35}\) However, if Leopold is the ghost of King Hamlet, Stephen’s ‘father,’ as argued by Welsh, this troubles, rather than solidifies, an understanding of *Ulysses* as translating *Hamlet*.\(^ {36}\) Stephen-Hamlet would then not meet his father’s ghost until far later than Shakespeare’s Prince. It seems unproductive to argue for the adulterer Boylan, to whom Stephen has no obvious connection, Simon Dedalus, who is Stephen’s biological


\(^{33}\) Kiberd, p. 337

\(^{34}\) Jennifer Levine, p. 126

\(^{35}\) Schofield, p. 62

\(^{36}\) Welsh, p. 167
father, or Mulligan, who has no relationship to Leopold-King Hamlet, as Claudius figures. In any case, Stephen undergoes an inverted meeting with Hamlet’s Ghost when he sees his dead mother (U 539-42). Ulysses both is and is not a translation of Hamlet.

The third text that has been frequently linked with Ulysses is Dante Alighieri’s Divina Commedia. Unlike Hamlet, the Commedia is not discussed at all in Gilbert’s book – Dante’s name is mentioned once, in passing, in connection to terza rima, which Stephen thinks of in ‘Aeolus.’ The Ulysses-Commedia connection comes not from Joyce or Gilbert’s own suggestions, but has been developed in later critical writing. Dante’s writing has been linked to several of Joyce’s texts, but it is the Commedia and Ulysses that have most frequently been read together. As with the Odyssey and Hamlet, part of the connection is the relationship between the older and younger man; Leopold plays Virgil to Stephen’s Dante. However, Mary Reynolds also reads the Commedia as important for broader surrogate father-son relationships in Ulysses, discussing Leopold as a version of Virgil, John Eglinton and Stephen’s singing teacher Almidano Arifoni as versions of Dante’s teacher and “spiritual father” Brunetto Latini, and Leopold’s vision of his grandfather Virag as related to Dante’s meeting his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida. Piero Boitani even writes, without elaboration, that “there is even some ground for thinking that the most elusive, ever-recurring character in [Ulysses], Macintosh [sic] […] might be Dante himself.”

‘Circe’, ‘Eumaeus’ and ‘Ithaca’ can be read as a translated Commedia, with Leopold-Virgil guiding Stephen-Dante past sins such as the lust in Bella Cohen’s brothel (‘Circe’; the second circle of the Inferno), the avarice of the money-grasping Corley (U 572-4; fourth circle) and the deception, or tall tales, of Murphy (U 578-596; eighth circle) on the way. It is in the eighth circle that Dante meets Ulysses, who is markedly different from the Odysseus of Odyssey. As Reynolds writes, Odysseus “is a rover of the seas by necessity rather than choice,” while Dante’s Ulysses “allows no bond to hold him.”

Dante, the author, would not have known the Homeric Odyssey, since knowledge of the Greek

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37 Gilbert, p. 173. Hamlet is mentioned several times, at greatest length in the section on ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ (U 187-199).


39 Reynolds, pp. 33-78. Reynolds lists every line of Joyce’s writing that seemingly echoes a line of Dante’s; Ulysses is covered in pp. 272-301.

40 Boitani, p. 239

41 Reynolds, p. 186
texts did not re-enter Europe until Petrarch commissioned translations from Byzantine manuscripts.\(^{42}\) The *Commedia*’s Ulysses begins an alternate tradition including, for example, Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses.’\(^{43}\) This Ulysses is endlessly restless. His wanderlust exceeds any familial feeling –

neither the sweetness of a son, nor compassion for
my old father, nor the love owed to Penelope, which
should have made her glad,
could conquer within me the ardour that I had to
gain experience of the world and of human vices and
worth\(^{44}\)

The wandering sailor in *Ulysses*, Murphy, is nearer to the *Commedia*’s Ulysses than the *Odyssey*’s Odysseus. “Have you seen the Rock of Gibraltar? [...] Ah, you’ve been there too,” Leopold says to Murphy, drawing the parallel between *Inferno*’s Ulysses’ last voyage past “that narrow strait which Hercules marked with his warnings” – the Strait of Gibraltar – and Murphy’s travels (*U 585*).\(^{45}\) Like Ulysses, who sees “all the stars of the other pole,” Murphy has visited the southern hemisphere – Leopold sees that his postcard is from “Santiago, Chile” (*U 581*) and speculates that Murphy has been “floundering up and down the antipodes” (*U 585*).\(^{46}\) Murphy, like Ulysses, has a Greek crew – “fellow the name of Antonio done that. There he is himself, a Greek” – and while Murphy, unlike Ulysses, survives, Antonio is “gone [...] ate by sharks,” echoing Ulysses’ description of his shipwreck and death (*U 586-7*).

However, Murphy is not the only appearance of Dante’s Ulysses in *Ulysses*. Reynolds describes Stephen and Leopold as embodying the *Commedia*’s and *Odyssey*’s versions of supposedly the same character. Leopold, like Odysseus, is “irresistibly drawn home to wife, to connubial bed, to things known and familiar,” while, “like Dante’s Ulysses, Stephen represents the heterodox element in conflicts between orthodoxy and heresy, conservatism and progressivism.”\(^{47}\) Stephen, in a simultaneous inversion of Virgil leaving Dante and echo of the *Commedia*’s Ulysses, insists he must

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\(^{45}\) Dante, p. 403

\(^{46}\) Dante, p. 405

\(^{47}\) Reynolds, pp. 186-7
leave Leopold – “Was the proposal of asylum accepted?/Promptly […] it was declined” (U 648).

Stephen is a wanderer, always searching for new knowledge, like the continually-travelling Ulysses.

While it is questionable whether Leopold is “irresistibly drawn home to wife,” since he could return home much earlier than he does, Reynolds’ reading allows a different understanding of Ulysses’ title. It suggests the text is not simply a translation of the Odyssey, but a reworking of several disparate strands of the myth of Odysseus, as we are presented with three very different versions of that character – Leopold, Stephen and Murphy. These shifting character attributions suggest that, as with the Odyssey, Ulysses cannot be read as a ‘strict’ translation of the Commedia – not least because, for the vast majority of Ulysses, ‘Virgil’ and ‘Dante’ are not together, and the narrative largely follows ‘Virgil.’ Instead, as with the Odyssey and Hamlet, Ulysses’ differences from the Commedia seem more acute when the texts are read for their similarities. However, the value of thinking of Ulysses as a translation is precisely in this tension between similarity and difference. Following Benjamin’s thoughts on translation, it is the differences between supposed similarities that threaten to burst the fetters of language and reveal a messianic language. In its ‘translations,’ Ulysses can be read as something like a textual equivalent of this: both similar to, and radically different from, its ‘originals.’

Texts as fragments

Ulysses may seem to differ so much from the Odyssey, Hamlet and the Commedia that it is difficult to consider it as translating any of them at all. Benjamin writes, however, that the task of the translator is to ensure translations do differ from their originals:

> Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point – establishing, with this touch rather than with the point, the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity – a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux (‘TT’ 261).

Translations should only be similar to originals in a small way. JA Underwood’s translation – “at that vanishingly small point of sense” – captures the sense of movement, the fact that the point of sense is becoming ever more remote through the movement of afterlife; the translation “pursu[es] its own course.”48 For Benjamin, translation’s aim is not replicating the original’s ‘meaning,’ since translations and literary works are not concerned with ‘meaning’ any more than any other type of art – “no poem is intended for the reader” (‘TT’ 253). Instead, the translation should aim to replicate the original language’s “way of meaning” in the translating language, rather than reproduce “what is meant” (‘TT’ 257). This allows for a perception of a gap between languages, the better to begin to

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48 Walter Benjamin, One-Way Street and Other Writings, trans. by JA Underwood (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 43
understand the incompleteness of all human languages, and the nature of pure language, language as such. This ‘gap’ is best achieved, for Benjamin, through literal translation. This will not replicate meaning in the translating language, due to the differing implications and nuances of words in different languages. Indeed, it will, through differing grammar, remove any sense that the translation ‘means’ anything. The literal translation “reflects the greatest longing for linguistic complementation,” showing the translatability of the original (‘TT’ 260).

This may seem very different from Ulysses’ relationship with the Odyssey, Hamlet or the Commedia; Ulysses is emphatically not a literal translation of any of these texts. However, Ulysses does exemplify some of Benjamin’s recommendations for translations. For example, Ulysses does not replicate the meaning of the Odyssey; it seems unlikely that all the scenes of Ulysses have exact analogues, in terms of the way they are understood by readers of modern English, in the Archaic Greek of the Odyssey for its ancient audience. However, Ulysses does go some way towards translating the ‘way of meaning’ of the Odyssey, through a translation of historical setting as well as language. Ulysses includes no anthropophagic giants, but features the sorts of ‘monsters’ that might be met in Leopold’s day-to-day life: anti-Semites, extreme nationalists, adulterers. These people are as antithetical to Leopold living his life in the way he desires as Polyphemus is to Odysseus, and Leopold becomes heroic by ‘defeating’ them, although in a translated way appropriate to the ‘way of meaning’: not by killing or blinding them, but by arguing and reasoning. Leopold is not like Odysseus in that he does not violently slaughter people, but he is like Odysseus in that he is as much a ‘hero’ for 1904 Dublin as Odysseus was for the mythical Mediterranean. He is, perhaps, heroic because he does not kill Boylan, or blind the Citizen-Cyclops, but finds a way of living in the city successfully in spite of his difficulties, just as Odysseus overcomes his rather different problems.49 Ulysses goes about creating the same sorts of meaning to the Odyssey within a different language and setting. Just as the Benjaminian literal translation makes its ‘translatedness’ obvious through the disjuncture between the meaning of the translated text and original, despite the way of meaning being similar, Ulysses demonstrates its own ‘translatedness’ through its differences from, but also similarities to, the Odyssey.

Since Ulysses’ difference from the Odyssey functions at a level beyond language, in terms of the organisation of the text as a whole, it is not only the possibility of the language to come, but of the text to come, that can be glimpsed. For Benjamin, it is reading between the differences in individual languages that aids imagining the possibility of pure language, as we begin to recognise the innate “foreignness” of human languages (‘TT’ 257). Total realisation of this foreignness, recognising the

49 Leopold’s ‘heroism,’ and the moral lessons it might have for contemporary readers, makes up much of the argument of Kiberd’s Ulysses and Us. Leopold’s negotiation of the city through a non-violent, “self-reflexive, fugitive masculinity” is discussed in Scott McCracken, Masculinities, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 80-86.
nature of language, would be to experience pure language. “To regain pure language fully formed from the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation” for Benjamin (‘TT’ 261). However, the understanding of textuality developed in this thesis suggests that translation has another, equally tremendous capacity – regaining the textual analogue of pure language. Benjamin’s ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’ understands difference in translation to work at the level of individual words, while for this chapter’s reading of Ulysses, translation functions at the level of the text’s plot and characterisation in total. Although translation at the linguistic level is almost ever-present in Ulysses, in the text’s collision of languages as varied as Latin, Hungarian and Irish, the text also practises Benjamin’s recommendations in a manner more appropriate to the reading practice developed here than to Benjamin’s concerns about language. Ulysses’ differences from the Odyssey bring relationships between texts, rather than languages, to the forefront. This goes beyond Benjamin’s understanding of translation as being ultimately about revealing “the kinship of languages,” and moves towards a model that understands translation and translatability as central to textuality.

Reading for the differences in plot, characterisation and language between Ulysses and the Odyssey, reading between the continuum of texts rather than only between languages, suggests that no text nor language is complete in itself. Texts are ‘fragments’ just as languages are. Just as ‘Oxen’ shows that no literary history built around a text could ever be complete, reading between Ulysses and the Odyssey shows that no individual text is complete. A reading that foregrounds translation or afterlife is, to re-word Benjamin, as much a provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of texts as of languages. Recognising this ‘foreignness’ allows for a clearer understanding of afterlife, and the importance of making afterlife central to our reading. The differences between texts, and attempting to understand this difference as difference, allow us to imagine the ‘text to come,’ “achievable not by any single [text] but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other,” to paraphrase Benjamin (‘TT’ 257). Such a text could never be translated, as it would not be in any way incomplete, and so would not ‘call’ for translation. The text to come would be the messianic end of textual afterlife, much as the language to come is the messianic end of language. As messianic, the complete text could never actually come into existence, just as with the language to come or the messianic end of history.

One element of Ulysses’ importance to the model of textuality and reading developed here is that it helps us to imagine the possibility of the messianic, ‘complete’ text. However, critical discourse surrounding Ulysses seems to claim, implicitly, that it is itself the complete text. Before elaborating the concept of the ‘complete text,’ it is worth summarising some more of the ways in which Ulysses has been linked to other texts. The Odyssey, Hamlet and the Commedia are merely the first of Ulysses’ seemingly endless textual antecedents. It is this torrent of apparent ancestors that reveals
Ulysses’ specific manifestation of the tension of afterlife – singular, but necessarily connected to other texts – and shows Ulysses to be exemplary of texts within afterlife – both unique and representing the standard condition of textuality.

Textuality

Ulysses’ multiple translations

The Odyssey, Hamlet and the Commedia are far from the only texts Ulysses has been linked to. Scarlett Baron’s ‘Strandentwining Cable’: Joyce, Flaubert and Intertextuality, for example, argues for the importance of the French writer in Joyce’s texts, while James Ramey’s ‘Intertextual Metempsychosis in Ulysses’ stresses a connection to the Sinbad myth. However, Ulysses is rarely linked to only one other text, and is seen as apparently performing the simultaneous textual reworkings John Eglinton cautions against during the Hamlet discussion – “we should not now combine a Norse saga with an excerpt from a novel by George Meredith” (U 203). Many critics augment, rather than deny, the connection with the Odyssey. For example, Hugh Kenner, in ‘Joyce’s Ulysses: Homer and Hamlet,’ provides a table showing character correspondences between the Odyssey, Hamlet and Ulysses. The three plots are virtually interchangeable for Kenner – “Hamlet is […] simply the Odyssey narrated from the point of view of a tortured Telemachus,” while there is also “a Hamlet in the Odyssey, and a successful one”; these insights come through identifying Stephen Dedalus with Telemachus and Prince Hamlet. Reynolds insists on Dante’s importance for Ulysses by describing him as “first in the triad with Shakespeare and Homer.” Similarly, Boitani understands Joyce’s aim to have been “deliberately trying to rewrite the Odyssey in the shape and with the scope of a Divine Comedy.” Kiberd’s Ulysses and Us includes chapters on connections between Ulysses and the Odyssey, Hamlet, the Commedia and the New Testament, while de Almeida’s Byron and Joyce through Homer links Ulysses to Don Quijote, Tristram Shandy and the writings of Rabelais as well as the Odyssey, and discusses Don Juan and Ulysses in such a way as to all but conflate them.

52 Reynolds, p. 3 and p. 8
53 Boitani, p. 239
54 Kiberd, pp. 277-345; de Almeida, pp. 41-54
Arguably, the idea that *Ulysses* must be understood through the *Odyssey* and at least one other text again goes back to the beginning of Joyce criticism, in the ‘Dubliners – Vikings – Achaeans’ chapter of Gilbert’s 1930 book, which draws links between the Norse colonisation of Ireland, the Greek origin of mythical proto-Irish tribes, and Victor Bérard’s arguments for the Phoenician origins of the *Odyssey*.\(^{55}\) In linking Odysseus’ warriors to Vikings, Gilbert all but suggests *Ulysses* could be read as a Norse saga as much as an *Odyssey*. Some threads of ‘Dubliners – Vikings – Achaeans’ are revived in Maria Tymoczko’s *The Irish Ulysses*, which suggests connections between *Ulysses* and early Irish literature. Tymoczko argues for connections ranging from *Ulysses*’ three major characters, ‘Jewish’ Leopold, ‘Greek’ Stephen and ‘Spanish’ Molly, mirroring the origins of the various ‘Irish’ tribes mentioned in the *Lebor Gabála Érenn (Book of Invasions)*, to Molly’s menstruation echoing Queen Medb’s in the *Táin*.\(^{56}\) For Tymoczko, there are four texts that significantly contribute to the architectonics of *Ulysses* – the *Odyssey*, the *Commedia*, *Hamlet* and the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*.

“*Ulysses* is a roman à clef, although no one key fits it exactly,” writes Tymoczko, asserting that the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* “unlock[s] many of its textual puzzles, its mode of signification, its meaning.”\(^{57}\)

Viewing *Ulysses* as a roman à clef means the right ur-text ‘key’ would finally, completely, clarify the text. Such an approach is demonstrated by Barbara Hardy, who writes that what is “important [in *Ulysses*] is Joyce’s desire to record, however mutedly, significant details in Homer’s text.”\(^{58}\) Hardy argues that, for example, the “blind stripling” Leopold helps cross the road in ‘Lestrygonians’ is a version of Demodocus, the blind bard who sings in King Alcinous’ court.\(^{59}\) Whatever the relationship between the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses* may be, the attempt to understand everything in the latter in terms of the former seems unhelpful. Simply arguing that an aspect of *Ulysses* is or is not like a certain feature of the *Odyssey*, or any other text, does little in itself. Whether or not Joyce intended the “blind stripling” to be an analogue of Demodocus is unknowable; even if it were not, the question would remain what the relationship between Demodocus and the ‘stripling’ tells us about *Ulysses*, the *Odyssey* or both. This type of ‘translation,’ attempting to extract all the ‘meaning’ from a text – of which the epitome is books such as *Ulysses Annotated*, attempting to catalogue a text’s every possible reference – obfuscates what is unique or important about *Ulysses*. As Benjamin writes, the “essential quality” of literature is “not communication or the imparting of information,” but “that which lies beyond communication […] the unfathomable, the mysterious, the ‘poetic’”; hence “any translation that intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but […] something

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57 Tymoczko, p. 36
59 Hardy, pp. 175-7
inessential” (‘TT’ 253). Criticism that reads *Ulysses* as a translation to understand the ‘information’ in *Ulysses* is not, essentially, *reading Ulysses*.

The effort to ‘explain’ everything in a text is a desire for ‘total translatability,’ the possibility of ‘emptying’ all meaning and ambivalence from the text. The ultimate aim of this type of criticism would be carrying out every possible reading of a text, leaving the text no longer translatable, as all its potentialities would have been enacted. The ‘used up’ text would disappear as it disseminated into its multiple translations that gave every possible reading of the text. The ‘total translation’ would be, then, the messianic end of afterlife, a ‘text to come.’ However, the ‘totally translated’ text is paradoxically similar to its opposite – the text that translates all others. As we will see, it is *Ulysses*, and the way it has been discussed in criticism, that exemplifies and illustrates this tension. Before exploring this tension, however, it is necessary to elaborate the idea of the ‘text to come,’ as suggested by the model of textuality developed in Chapter One. The ‘text to come’ allows us to understand what messianic potential *Ulysses* contains, while also showing why *Ulysses* itself – indeed, any text – is not complete, and always subject to the conditions of afterlife.

**The text to come**

Afterlife, a process of continual translation, has two simultaneous, seemingly contradictory ends: total translatability and untranslatability. Translatability is predicated on the incompleteness of the text; the text is translatable because it is never “complete, total, identical to itself” (‘DT’ 121). Translation, as understood here, responds to a text’s “call” by enacting a potentiality contained within it, so as to bring into actuality currently latent aspects of the text (‘TT’ 254; ‘DT’ 121). Translation therefore moves towards completing texts. If a text did become complete, with its every potentiality actualised, it would cease to exist as a text. Following Derrida, texts must possess ‘iterability,’ the possibility of re-citation, (mis)understanding and multiple readings. Without iterability, a text would, in this study’s terms, contain no potentialities. The totally translated text would no longer be iterable: all its potentialities and possible readings or translations would be enacted and singularised in other texts. Every possible reading of it would already exist elsewhere, and the text would no longer have any signification within itself. If *Ulysses* became ‘totally translated,’ it would no longer be ‘a’ text, as it would only exist in its multiple translations.

The inverse of this ‘totally translated’ text would be an untranslatable text. This would be, paradoxically, a text that responded to a call from all other texts. Translating everything, such a text would actualise every potentiality contained within every other text. This text would not only contain every possible translation or reading of every other text, but would also enact those potentialities contained within itself; to be *totally* untranslatable, it would even have to contain every possible translation of itself within itself. This text would then contain no unfulfilled potential, and so would
be untranslatable. Since a necessary element of textuality is polysemy, the potential for being read in different ways, if a text already contained every reading of itself within itself, it could not be read. It would, therefore, not even be recognisable as a text. A text written in an ‘unknown’ language, such as the as-yet-untranslated Minoan Linear A, is still ‘readable,’ as it recognisably exists within the conditions of textuality. A genuinely untranslatable text would exceed the boundaries of readability and cease to be a text. If Ulysses responded to all other texts, to the point of even containing everything that could be said about itself, it would not be readable or recognisable as a text. While the totally translated text would be entirely ‘open,’ with no signification in itself, the untranslatable text would be an entire closed system, with signification only within itself.

Understanding the hypothetical ‘totally translated’ and ‘untranslatable’ texts in this way, according to the terms of afterlife, shows how all texts exist within translatability, the tension between the poles of ‘total translatability’ and ‘total untranslatability’ (‘LO’ 82). No text can achieve total translatability or untranslatability, or it would cease to exist as a text. Ulysses cannot be ‘totally translated’ through its links to other texts, nor can it be said to be a text that translates every other text, as this would make it untranslatable. As will be seen below, Ulysses has implicitly been claimed to be both totally translatable and untranslatable. A text that did achieve total translatability or untranslatability would be the ‘text to come,’ the messianic culmination of the translation process of afterlife. The text to come is the third messianic possibility promised by this study’s model of textuality that holds afterlife as central. Just as language contains the messianic possibility of the language to come, and history ‘promises’ messianic time, textuality contains the potential for the text to come. Like messianic time or the language to come, the complete text is always ‘to come,’ as its arrival cannot take place within the limits of what we currently understand as ‘textuality.’

Surprisingly, given that the above formulation draws on Derrida’s understanding of textuality and translatability, Derrida appears to discuss Ulysses and, to a lesser extent, Finnegans Wake as ‘complete’, untranslatable texts in ‘Ulysses Gramophone.’ He writes that “everything we can say about Ulysses […] has already been anticipated” (‘UG’ 281). Derrida’s essay includes various personal anecdotes alongside his reading of Ulysses to “demonstrate” that all this had its narrative paradigm and was already recounted in Ulysses. Everything that happened to me, including the narrative that I would attempt to make of it, was already predicted and pre-narrated […] within Ulysses, to say nothing of Finnegans Wake, by a

60 The Joyce-Derrida text-in-afterlife has generated almost as much criticism as the connections between Ulysses and Hamlet or the Commedia. See, for example, Alan Roughley, Reading Derrida Reading Joyce (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999); Christine van Boheemen, Joyce, Derrida, Lecan and the Trauma of History: Reading, Narrative and Postcolonialism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Peter Mahon, Imagining Joyce and Derrida: Between Finnegans Wake and Glas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); and Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts, ed. by Andrew Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).
hypermnesic machine capable of storing in an immense epic work Western memory and virtually all the languages of the world including traces of the future. Yes, everything has already happened to us with *Ulysses* (‘UG’ 281).

This hyperbolic passage appears to contradict some of Derrida’s most fundamental ideas about textuality. Derrida seemingly claims *Ulysses* is what this thesis would call the text to come. However, this passage does not describe Derrida’s reading of *Ulysses*, but Derrida’s reading of the way in which *Ulysses* has been imagined within ‘Joyce studies.’ Thinking of *Ulysses* as a ‘complete text’ is, Derrida argues, unsustainable.

For Joyce studies, “everything is integratable into the ‘this is my body’ of the corpus,” since *Ulysses* includes or could incorporate everything (‘UG’ 283). If *Ulysses* is encyclopaedic, *Ulysses* criticism is encyclopaedic; the Joyce expert is an ‘expert’ in everything, because everything can be discussed within the terms of *Ulysses*. However, if *Ulysses* is truly encyclopaedic, possessing an irreducible expansiveness and containing everything, it would be impossible to have anything like enough knowledge of it to be an ‘expert.’ No matter how much *Ulysses* knowledge one possessed, there would be an almost endless quantity of ignorance about *Ulysses* that remained. Therefore, if *Ulysses* is encyclopaedic and so complex that it can only be understood after great ‘training,’

(1) No truth can come from outside the Joycean community, and without the experience, the cunning, and the knowledge amassed by trained readers. But (2) inversely, or symmetrically, there is no model for ‘Joycean’ competence, no interiority and no closure possible for the concept of such a competence (‘UG’ 286).

To claim that *Ulysses* is encyclopaedic is to claim that only certain experts can pronounce upon it, while simultaneously implying that no expertise on it is possible. The claim for *Ulysses* as a uniquely encyclopaedic text is therefore Babelian, an attempt at monumentality, trying to “make a name” that will necessarily deconstruct itself (‘UG’ 268; see also ‘DT’).

The way through this paradox is to read ‘Ulysses Gramophone,’ and *Ulysses*, with an awareness of afterlife and translatability. The contradictory claims of ‘Joyce studies’ as described by Derrida – that everything can be known through expertise on *Ulysses*, and yet that *Ulysses* is so encyclopaedic as to be unknowable – essentially enact the dual, contradictory aims of the translating process. The contradictory desires to see *Ulysses* as all-encompassing, but masterable by experts, are wishes for the totally translated text, and the untranslatable text that includes everything. As the examples of Tymoczko’s use of the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* or Hardy’s use of the *Odyssey* show, linking *Ulysses* to other texts can be to attempt to ‘explain’ it fully. This, the claim to ‘expertise’ in Derrida’s terms, is the desire for total translation. If *Ulysses* were truly *fully* explained when put into dialogue with its ‘original,’ every signification of *Ulysses* would vanish. It would be totally translated, and cease to
exist as a text. However, paradoxically, *Ulysses* begins to seem like the untranslatable, all-encompassing text thanks to the same operation of linking it to multiple other texts. The cumulative effect of claims for multiple texts, as diverse as the *Táin* and *Hamlet*, as readable with *Ulysses* is that it begins to seem as though every text is merely a subset of *Ulysses*. *Ulysses* becomes the text to which all literary rivers flow, the apotheosis of translation. Nothing is beyond the scope of *Ulysses*, or, indeed, *Ulysses* criticism, making *Ulysses* the ‘complete text’ – itself untranslatable. *Ulysses* would be the end of literature. Although no individual critic – other than Derrida, parodically – has made this claim for *Ulysses*, this would appear to be the case if *Ulysses* can be linked to so many texts.

In being linked to multiple texts, *Ulysses* is able to show an important aspect of the nature of afterlife: that it works in two directions at once, meaning that ‘total translation’ and ‘untranslatability’ are, in fact, the same. The reason for this is the nature of the text-in-afterlife. For a text to exist is for a text to be moving away from itself, within afterlife. The translation does not change the original, but shows that the original is changing. This is why ‘original’ is an inadequate term: no text is ever a pure point of origin before which there was no change. It is therefore inaccurate, within the understanding of textuality developed here, to treat a translation as entirely separate from its original. The translation exists as “harmony, as a supplement to the language in which [the original] expresses itself” for Benjamin, and ‘supplement’ here can be understood in the sense Derrida uses the term in *De la Grammatologie* – that which is separate but necessary, excluded but integral (‘TT’ 260). “A translation will truly be a moment in the growth of the original, which will complete itself in enlarging itself,” Derrida writes (‘DT’ 121). The translation responds to a call from the original and enacts a potentiality contained within it, giving the ‘original’ something it lacked. The translation and original together form a more complete, greater text within the translation process that is afterlife – the text-in-afterlife. The text-in-afterlife concept means that texts are no longer thought of as discrete units, but as inherently fragmentary parts that can be connected in various ways.

A text and its translations form a text-in-afterlife. If a text were to become ‘totally translated,’ with its every potentiality actualised in other texts, its text-in-afterlife would be ‘complete.’ It would contain every possible reading of itself, and so would be *untranslatable* – nothing could be added to it. Understanding texts as parts of texts-in-afterlife collapses the distinction between total translatability and untranslatability. This is why afterlife seems to move towards two opposing goals, the totally translatable text and the untranslatable text – the two are, within the terms of the text-in-afterlife, essentially the same. Paradoxically, then, the more translatable a text is, the nearer it is to untranslatability. This shows the inescapability of afterlife: the nearer a text is to an ‘outside’ of translatability, the more it is entrenched within it. As the next two chapters demonstrate, something similar is true of language and history. However, as with language and history, it is the very
inescapability of the system that creates the conditions of the messianic promise of escaping from it—and it is *Ulysses* that helps us imagine this escape.

In being linked to so many other texts, *Ulysses* seems to be both the most translatable and most untranslatable of texts. *Ulysses*’ multiple linkages to other texts allow us to see its play within translatability, and the possibility of the text to come, perhaps more clearly than is the case for most texts. However, understanding textuality as messianic means that every text is ‘the most.’ It is to this messianicity, and its connection to translatability, that we will now turn. As we will see, *Ulysses*’ value for the model of textuality and reading developed here is that it is exceptional by virtue of being like all other texts. Turning to *Ulysses*’ manifestation of translatability also provides an answer to the underlying, unanswered question running throughout this chapter: which texts does *Ulysses* actually translate?

**Is *Ulysses* a translation?**

Texts cannot be finally ‘completed’ through translation, meaning that a text can always have more ‘descendants’ within a text-in-afterlife. If a translation entirely enacted all potentialities contained within the original, then the original would cease to be translatable—and would cease to exist as a text. The translation’s complementation of the original “does not amount to the summation of any worldly totality” (‘DT’ 131). No translation could ever complete a text, regardless of how many other translations precede it, due to the nature of textuality. No text-in-afterlife, therefore, is ever complete: no individual text is ever fully completed by translation, and no text-in-afterlife ever becomes a fully closed system. More texts can always become part of it. This means that texts can be translated many times and in different ways, as different ‘calls’ are answered. For example, the *Odyssey* is translated by Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* and Alexander Pope’s *Odyssey*.

*Ulysses*, however, seems to take part in several different texts-in-afterlife in the ‘reverse direction.’ That is, rather than being a single text translated by multiple texts, it is a single text translating multiple texts. The way the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode of *Ulysses* has been read in this chapter demonstrates how we might think of *Ulysses* in relation to its many supposed ancestors. Just as we cannot ‘prove’ that a particular paragraph of ‘Oxen’ is an imitation of Swift, we cannot prove that *Ulysses* is a translation of *Hamlet*. What can be done is to ask what might happen if we read *Ulysses* and *Hamlet* together, asking what potentialities might be revealed. If a particular configuration of texts proves to allow for productive readings, then we can think of them as forming a text-in-afterlife, with the texts involved translating each other.

A translation is a text that enacts a potential within another text, and so we might not recognise a text as translating another until the two are thought of as parts of a text-in-afterlife. For Benjamin, when
the “historian […] grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one,” “thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions” and “gives that constellation a shock.” This shock “establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (‘History’ 396-7). Understanding texts within texts-in-afterlife is similar: a certain linkage will allow particular potentialities to be revealed, and even help to show the possibility of a messianic ‘outside’ of textuality, language or history. The task of the critic reading within the terms developed in this thesis is not to ‘prove’ that certain texts translate others, but to test what happens if they are thought of as translations, and what this might allow us to say about the texts’ negotiation of translatability, language, history and textuality. This is the ‘open reading’ that this thesis attempts to practise.

_Ulysses_ may well be, then, a translation of the _Odyssey_, _Hamlet_, the _Commedia_ and more texts besides, not only one or the other of these. As ‘Oxen of the Sun’ shows, it is mistaken to attempt to read literary history as if each text simply follows its unique predecessor; origin is always multiple. There is no reason why a text should not be able to answer ‘calls’ from several texts at once, or partially fulfil the potentialities contained within several different texts. Texts-in-afterlife are not lines of descent, but are always multiple, working in several directions at once. The fact that _Ulysses_ has been linked to so many other texts by critics means that it is able to demonstrate that texts-in-afterlife can work in this way.

Understanding _Ulysses_ as participating in multiple texts-in-afterlife helps reveal its messianicity. As discussed above, the similarity to, and yet disjunction from, the _Odyssey_ in reading _Ulysses_ allows for an appreciation of the inherently fragmentary nature of textuality, and in this, allows for imagining the text to come. However, in light of elaborating the nature of the text to come, we can see that _Ulysses_ can help us recognise this messianic promise if it is read as simultaneously translating several texts. The differences in spite of similarity between _Ulysses_ and the _Odyssey_ open a ‘gap’ between texts, as with Benjamin’s ‘gap’ between languages in translation. However, if ‘Circe,’ ‘Eumaeus’ and ‘Ithaca’ are read as both a version of the _Odyssey_’s _nostos_, and as Virgil leading Dante through the _Inferno_, the differences between both of these texts and _Ulysses_ become ever more apparent. The more similar _Ulysses_ becomes to the _Odyssey_ and the _Commedia_, the more it is less like either. We are more easily able to realise the incompleteness of all texts, but also, through the similarities between _Ulysses_ and the several texts it translates, imagine the possibility of all texts’ “intentions supplementing each other” (‘TT’ 257). Reading between the original and translation opens a space in which we can imagine the possibility of the text to come. Reading between several originals, in their difference from each other, and the translation, in its similarity and difference from all its originals, opens a yet bigger space.
This is, once again, the paradox of simultaneous (un)translatability: the more like its multiple ur-texts it is, the less *Ulysses* is like any individual one. This is due to the way translatability works. The fact that *Ulysses* can be linked to so many other texts, and that so much can be said about *Ulysses*, shows that it is eminently translatable; there are innumerable possible readings of it, myriad potentialities contained within the text. Yet, simultaneously, the fact that *Ulysses* contains so much means that it seems nearer to untranslatability; the text almost seems to contain everything that could be said about it. *Ulysses* shows that the further a text moves in either direction – toward total translatability or untranslatability – the further it simultaneously moves in the opposite direction. The more a text is translated, the nearer to untranslatability it becomes; the nearer to untranslatability it is, the more that can be said about it and so the more translatable it is. Understanding *Ulysses* alongside the various texts it translates shows why translatability is the play between these two poles. *Ulysses’* translatability is messianic: it is constantly on the verge of being fully translated, collapsing in on itself and ceasing to exist as a text as all its polysemy is removed, while it is also continually about to engulf all other literature and cease to be simply ‘a’ text.

Sharpening this paradox is another paradox. *Ulysses* is uniquely well-placed to show us the possibility of the messianic end of textuality because *Ulysses* is *not* unique. If *Ulysses* demonstrates the condition of afterlife, it is an afterlife that applies to all texts. All texts are moving towards these two simultaneous, contradictory but identical goals – becoming totally translatable or untranslatable. The nature of the messianic promise is that its ‘centre’ is everywhere. If the possibility of total translatability or untranslatability exists within all texts – and it has only been possible to argue that this is the case for *Ulysses* because it is a condition of textuality *in general* – then no text has a closer relationship to the messianic than any other. This is reinforced by the idea that total translatability and untranslatability are identical: no text could actually be any nearer to one of these conditions than any other, because to be more untranslatable it would also be more translatable.

*Ulysses* plays a role much like the Algerian Jewish community or the autobiographical ‘Derrida’ figure in *Le Monolinguisme de l’Autre*: exemplary of texts’ relationship with translatability because it is both unique and not. It is ‘exemplary’ in both contradictory senses of the word. This state of being one among many, part of a multiplicity not reducible to ‘One,’ is the tension between singularity and connectedness that characterises this study’s understanding of texts. In seeming so near to being the ‘complete text,’ *Ulysses* demonstrates why no text can be such a thing. Its multiple claimed relationships to other texts are not unique, either, and in this, *Ulysses* can show us something about how to read texts as parts of texts-in-afterlife.

Texts are not to be understood as simply ‘translations’ of one other text, but are parts of texts-in-afterlife that have multiple connections to other texts. As readers, our task is to attempt to recognise
these connections, forming constellations and seeing what messianic possibilities are revealed. *Ulysses* can be productively read alongside many other texts; other texts will have different relationships within afterlife. Remaining open towards texts, however, welcoming whatever connections may seem appropriate and attempting to recognise points of potentiality, allows us to recognise textuality itself as messianic. Openness towards texts might afford us a glimpse of the possibility of the text to come.

While *Ulysses*’ multiple ‘forebears,’ ranging from the *Odyssey* to the *Commedia*, seem disparate, the antecedents of Aimé Césaire’s play *Une Tempête* include various versions of ‘the same’ text. That is to say, *Une Tempête* translates Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, and other translations of *The Tempest*. While *Ulysses* shows that texts can participate in multiple texts-in-afterlife, *Une Tempête* shows the anachrony in a ‘single’ text-in-afterlife, as it simultaneously interacts with multiple *Tempests*. As well as helping refine the theory of textuality this thesis develops, this anachrony, which forms part of *Une Tempête*’s setting and plot, points towards an ‘outside’ of history and language, just as *Ulysses* does for textuality. As the next chapter will argue, *Une Tempête* shows that, even without escaping textuality, history or language, the potential that exists within afterlife can never be entirely circumscribed.
Chapter Three

“Extraordinary possibilities”: Une Tempête

I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot […] extraordinary possibilities wiped out.¹

Nothing is, all becomes…²

Aimé Césaire’s 1969 play Une Tempête, d’après ‘La Tempête’ de Shakespeare: Adaptation pour un Théâtre Nègre was among his last works. The play completed the ‘colonial triptych’ of plays that also includes La Tragédie du Roi Christophe (1963), a play exploring the downfall of independent Haiti’s first king, and Une Saison au Congo (1966), dramatising the events leading up to the death of Patrice Lumumba, the rebel who fought for the independence of Congo-Léopoldville (the Democratic Republic of Congo).³ However, Une Tempête also answers to The Tempest and continues a tradition of Tempest translations. Une Tempête engages with the ‘original,’ The Tempest, and various other stages of The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife.

As a play, written for (re-)performance, Une Tempête necessarily raises different issues in relation to translatability and afterlife from other textual forms. While the specificity of Une Tempête’s form as a drama must be acknowledged, the play is read here similarly to other texts discussed in this thesis – with a focus on language, history and textuality; that is, its status as a text, not a work of performance.⁴ Une Tempête’s importance for the model of textuality developed here is that it demonstrates how a text can translate various predecessors, allowing multiple possibilities to coexist.

³ The description of the plays as a ‘triptych’ is Césaire’s own; quoted in Gregson Davies, Aimé Césaire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 156. Césaire’s earlier play Et les Chiens se Taisent (1956), based on a long poem from the collection Les Armes Miraculeuses, deals with similar themes to the ‘triptych’ but is more abstract; for example, the central character is simply called ‘the Rebel’. Et les Chiens has been staged far less frequently than the plays of the ‘triptych.’
and opening space for further possibilities. The play is merely ‘a’ tempest, one possibility, not the tempest – nor, indeed, The Tempest. Une Tempête shows the process of afterlife at work by showing that a translation does not replace an original, but exists alongside it. This is demonstrated both by Une Tempête’s own relationship with other parts of The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife, and through the action of the play. The play’s use of anachronous time periods both suggests its linkages to other texts, and points towards the possibility of alternative models of history. However, the play also underlines the impossibility of escaping history or language. Both history and language are shown to be not merely colonialist, but innately colonial – structured according to a colonising logic. Even as its signals the inescapability of colonial history or language, however, Une Tempête suggests the multiplicity of possibilities, including resistance, within these structures. What Une Tempête suggests in relation to language or history, it enacts in its own textuality – not escaping The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife, but working radically within it.

The dramatis personae of Une Tempête simply reads, “as in Shakespeare,” making the play’s status as a translation clear. There are two modifications to the characters – Ariel is “a mulatto slave,” while Caliban is “a black [nègre] slave” – and one addition – “ESHU, a black [nègre] devil-god (AT p. 13). Une Tempête begins with some Italian nobles being shipwrecked on an island inhabited by Prospero, the usurped Duke of Milan, his daughter Miranda, and Prospero’s slaves, Ariel and Caliban. One of the shipwrecked nobles, Ferdinand, the son of Alonso, King of Naples, is accused by Prospero of being a spy, and is set to work. The next scene sees Ariel and Caliban discuss their enslavement, and their differing approaches towards achieving freedom – unlike in The Tempest, where it is unclear whether Caliban ever knows Ariel exists. In the next scene, the Italians are presented with a feast, which Prospero has Ariel whisk away before they can eat; Prospero then forces them to eat, against their wishes. Alonso and Gonzalo fall asleep, allowing Antonio, Prospero’s usurping brother, and Sebastian the chance to try to kill them; Ariel arrives to save the sleepers, and tells them that Prospero is the cause of their salvation and that Ferdinand is alive. Ferdinand and Miranda are married, with a masque of Roman goddesses that is interrupted by the Yoruba god Eshu. The rest of the play follows Caliban, as he takes advantage of the drunken desire for power of Stephano and Trinculo, two servants from the wrecked ship, and attempts to kill Prospero. However, face-to-face with Prospero, who dares Caliban to kill him, Caliban declares himself not to be a murderer, and faces being Prospero’s slave once more. As the Italian nobles, with Ferdinand and Miranda, prepare to leave the island, Ariel is set free. Prospero decides he will stay on the island, declaring that only he can control the island and realise its potential. The final scene sees an older, increasingly manic Prospero calling after the unseen Caliban, whose shout of “Liberty, oh-ay! Liberty!” is the play’s last line.
Césaire’s play radically changes Shakespeare’s play in some respects while in others ‘faithfully’ clinging to it. To understand how Une Tempête performs similar manoeuvres with other Tempest translations, it is necessary first to explore some of the many translations of The Tempest.

### Textuality

#### Atlantic and Mediterranean Tempests

*The Tempest* is the centre of a web of texts that follow and precede it. There are many Tempest rewritings, and much research has focussed on *The Tempest*’s ‘sources.’ One outcome of this is source-hunting that, as far back as the late eighteenth century, the idea of *The Tempest* as Shakespeare’s ‘American play’ seems to have been enshrined in orthodoxy.⁵ The idea of the link between *The Tempest* and America has proved so longstanding that critics almost need no longer justify it. Among the documents most often recognised as important for *The Tempest* are Sir William Strachey’s account of the wreckage of *The Sea-Venture*, Antonio Piagafetta’s narrative of Ferdinand Magellan’s circumnavigation, and Montaigne’s essay ‘Des Cannibales.’ All of these have an American context: Strachey was shipwrecked off Bermuda, en route to Jamestown; Piagafetta’s description of a Patagonian native is argued to be the source of Caliban’s god ‘Setebos’; Montaigne described the Tupinamba people of what is now Brazil.⁶ The often striking similarities between the above texts and Shakespeare’s play have been enough to convince many scholars that Shakespeare was, at the very least, operating within the field of discourse concerning encounters with America. There are other connections between the history of *The Tempest* and America: it was the first Shakespeare play printed in the New World, for example.⁷

Once the connection between *The Tempest* and America had become common, it was perhaps inevitable that the ‘savage’ Caliban came to be seen, as Sidney Lee emphatically claimed in 1898, as

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Shakespeare’s representation of a Native American. As understandings of Caliban changed, along with attitudes towards European colonisation, Prospero was re-evaluated as a prototypical English colonial figure of authority. An ‘American’ reading of The Tempest is by no means synonymous with a (post)colonial reading, although the two have often been linked: George Washington, in a letter of 1778, described the British Army as Prospero, whose strategies were bound to vanish “like the baseless fabric of a vision” – making the rebelling colonists a victorious Caliban. This early American use of The Tempest is probably the inauguration of Caliban as a figure of anti-colonial resistance, linking The Tempest, America and resistance to European colonialism from a time before any of these – including The Tempest, due to the nature of afterlife – existed as we would understand them now.

The Tempest has become seen as perhaps the definitive literary depiction of early colonialism, while colonialism is often discussed in terms of The Tempest. The literary work has provided terms for our understanding of the concept, while changing attitudes towards the concept have fed into readings of the literary work. These changes have been brought to bear on criticism as well as stage productions of The Tempest. For example, as attitudes towards colonialism and the British Empire changed over the twentieth century, Caliban came to be seen less as a monster and more as an unjustly oppressed slave.

The linking of Shakespeare’s play with colonialism, however, is not beyond debate, given the historical context of The Tempest. America and its native peoples certainly were a source of fascination to Western Europeans in the early seventeenth century; in addition to European voyages to the Americas, a surprisingly large number of Americans visited England – and, according to Montaigne, France. However, English colonialism in the New World had not begun in earnest at this point, and did not extend to the ‘mastery’ of islands and enslavement of natives that Prospero seemingly demonstrates. It is therefore difficult to read Prospero as a straightforward ‘representation’ of an English colonist from 1612.

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8 Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 120
9 Hulme and Sherman,  p. 172
11 Vaughan and Vaughan, pp. 191-5
Seventeenth-century English colonial interests largely lay elsewhere. Jerry Brotton argues that the eastern Mediterranean, and Prospero’s native Italy’s role in separating ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ areas of the sea, are essential but neglected areas of historical interest when discussing nascent European expansionism at the time Shakespeare was writing. Broton argues for renewed attention to The Tempest’s Mediterranean geography to be integrated with politicised readings with an awareness of colonialism. He writes that reading The Tempest as a play at the crux of the Mediterranean-Atlantic divide – facing both east and west – allows for more precise and perceptive reading of the play in its historical context. After all, The Tempest is specific about its Mediterranean setting: the shipwrecked Italian crew are returning from a wedding in Tunis. Moreover, Brotton challenges the definitions of ‘colonialism’ used when discussing The Tempest, which he argues lack historical specificity. English ‘colonialism’ in the early seventeenth century, both in America and in the Mediterranean, was more focussed on trade than on accumulating land, in stark contrast to the Spanish model applied in the New World.

Re-centring The Tempest as a Mediterranean play suggests that, rather than its direct comment on (seventeenth-century) colonialism, it is perhaps The Tempest’s anxiety about the limits of Europe or ‘civilisation’ that have allowed it to be so frequently rewritten. It is points of uncertainty or anxiety, where definitive statements are lacking, that are the greatest sites of potentiality in texts, because something remains unsaid at these points. The Tempest is concerned with the limits of civilisation and what counts as ‘foreign.’ The play is set in the Mediterranean, the space between Europe, Africa and Asia, and begins with Clarabel marrying a prince of Tunis to form a cross-Mediterranean alliance. Sebastian tells Alonso that he “may thank [himself] for this great loss,/That would not bless our Europe with your daughter,/But rather loose [sic] her to an African”, and suggests this is “cause to wet the grief” on Alonso’s eye (T II.1, p. 49). Sebastian’s worry is not the loss of Alonso’s daughter, but the question of what Europe has lost to Africa. In the same scene, Gonzalo and Adrian argue whether Tunis is equivalent to Carthage (T II.1, pp. 46-8). This linkage highlights that a North African prince marrying an Italian princess evokes two founding myths of Europe, suggesting a reversed version of Aeneas’ journey and the Punic Wars. The narrative of ‘European’ history, and how it sets Europe’s boundaries, is as contested as the European present. Caliban, meanwhile, whether or not he is a figure of any specific non-European people, prompts the question whether there are ‘humans’ who are not as capable of rationality as Europeans – “born devil[s], on whose nature/Nurture can never stick,” as

14 On the use of Mediterranean discourse to describe the Atlantic and Caribbean during early English expansionism, see Hulme, Colonial Encounters, pp. 96-101; the relevance of such descriptions for Caliban is discussed on p. 108.
15 Brotton, pp. 25-8
17 Hulme, Colonial Encounters, pp. 109-112
Prospero describes Caliban (T IV.1, p. 106). His mother is from “Argier” – just beyond the boundaries of ‘civilised’ Europe (T I.2, p. 27). Prospero’s worry that his daughter should marry the European Ferdinand, not Caliban, forms a stark contrast with Ferdinand’s sister Clarabel’s marriage.

Areas of uncertainty, such as the play’s anxiety about the limits of ‘Europe,’ can provide starting points for rewriting The Tempest. While the play may not be explicitly ‘about’ colonialism, (anti-)colonial writing has frequently turned to The Tempest for its terms. Rather than proving that the play was always about colonialism, the many uses of The Tempest to discuss colonialism are the result of potentialities within the play, and are testament to its translatability. As the next section will show, many of The Tempest’s rewritings are perhaps as important for Une Tempête as The Tempest itself. By tracing some of the (anti-)colonial translations of The Tempest, we will see how Une Tempête simultaneously interacts with several of them, as well as The Tempest itself – showing how texts-in-afterlife are not linear. As will be discussed below, such non-linearity is mirrored in the ‘anachronous’ action of Une Tempête. In demonstrating the asynchronous nature of afterlife, Une Tempête contributes to our understanding of how to read texts within afterlife. Additionally, it shows how the text demonstrates the change that occurs in afterlife. Une Tempête works within The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife, drawing on multiple texts to demonstrate further potentialities, including for resistance, within the system. As the following sections will show, the play takes a similar approach towards colonial language and history.

The Tempest, (anti-)colonialism and Une Tempête

Although The Tempest may not be explicitly ‘about’ colonialism, its anxiety about the boundaries of Europe allows the play to be rewritten in light of colonial history. Colonialism changes borders, prompting further uncertainty as to limits of Europe. Many writers have read The Tempest and colonialism together, either to comment on Shakespeare’s play or to use the play to discuss another cultural situation. Several nineteenth-century writers used The Tempest and its ‘unteachable’ savage Caliban to justify colonialism, particularly in the wake of Darwinism. It is anti-colonial Tempests, however, which have proved most influential.

Three Tempests have been particularly influential on anti-colonial rewritings of the play. French writer Ernest Renan’s drama Caliban: Suite de ‘La Tempête’ (1878) sees Caliban ‘return’ with Prospero to Europe to become king, while Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó’s essay Ariel (1900)

\[18\] However, Paul Brown argues for the importance of Ireland – an alternative, Atlantic-facing ‘edge of Europe’ – to Caliban’s characterisation; Paul Brown, pp. 55-63.


compares the unrefined ‘Yankees’ to Caliban, with the more literary, philosophical Latin American nations compared to Ariel. Most directly related to colonialism is French psychologist Dominique Octave Mannoni’s *Psychologie de la Colonisation* (1950), translated as *Prospero and Caliban*.

Mannoni argues that there are specific neuroses and behaviours to which people fulfilling the roles of ‘coloniser’ or ‘colonised’ always conform, and names these personality types ‘Prospero’ and ‘Caliban.’ While not the first to make the link, through naming these complexes thus, Mannoni’s book made colonialism and *The Tempest* synonymous.

*Psychologie de la Colonisation*’s main influence was as an adversary. Césaire, a former pupil of Mannoni, in *Discours sur la Colonialisme* (1955), and Frantz Fanon, in *Peau Noir, Masques Blancs* (1952), both vehemently reject Mannoni’s conclusions. The fact that Césaire’s and Fanon’s texts, foundational for modern anti-colonial and postcolonial theory, discuss ‘Prospero’ and ‘Caliban’ shows that even if *The Tempest* has not always been ‘about’ colonialism, anti-colonialism has always been about *The Tempest*.

Césaire and Fanon were both Martiniquais, and the Caribbean has been the area where the manifestations of *The Tempest*’s afterlife have been most varied. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the Caribbean’s geography and history allow for a combination of the ‘American hypothesis’ and the play’s usage as a source of (anti-)colonial metaphors. It is particularly appropriate that a Martiniquais writer such as Césaire should rewrite a play concerning the limits of Europe, given Martinique’s status as part of the French Republic and its location in the Caribbean Sea. Some details of the play’s plot also lend themselves to a Caribbean appropriation – most obviously, it is set on an island. Surprisingly, given the linguistic and cultural differences between the Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbeans, there has been an apparent common awareness of the different uses of *The Tempest*. Barbadian George Lamming’s discussion of *The Tempest* in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) uses a passage from Césaire’s *Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal* as an epigraph, prefiguring Césaire’s own *Une Tempête*. The Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar’s essay *Calibán* (1970) – a direct reply to Rodó’s *Ariel*, arguing for a mestizo America synonymous with Caliban, rather than the bourgeois and, by implication, European, Ariel – references Lamming and Césaire.

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The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife takes in the entire North-to-South range of America, Western and Mediterranean Europe, and both coasts of Africa. The afterlife of The Tempest demonstrates the play’s potential for living on in numerous different cultural and historical situations. In following the tradition of a connection between anti-colonialism and The Tempest, Une Tempête gestures toward several stages of The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife at once – demonstrating the mode of potentiality that characterises textuality, where multiple possibilities can exist simultaneously. Une Tempête’s dialogue remains in places virtually identical to Shakespeare’s, inasmuch as anything is ‘identical’ in translation. This invites the reader or audience to compare The Tempest and Une Tempête directly, and reflect on the characterisation in Shakespeare’s play as well as the changes made in Une Tempête. Additionally, the play has been read as a response to both Lamming and Renan. It also continues Césaire’s critique of Mannoni – not explicitly, as in Discourse, but Une Tempête’s Caliban, defiant to the last, is a rebuttal of Mannoni’s Caliban who ‘requires’ colonisation. In Une Tempête, multiple potentialities from various texts are enacted at once, in turn creating further possibilities.

In spite of these multiple linkages, Une Tempête has been discussed primarily in terms of its Shakespearean ancestor, or anti-colonialism or Négritude. For example, Robert Eric Livingston describes Césaire’s Tragedie du Roi Christophe, Une Saison au Congo and Une Tempête as “a trilogy on the subject of negritude,” and the back cover of Phillip Crispin’s translation of Une Tempête calls Césaire a “prophet of negritude.” This unwillingness to describe Césaire’s writing using any other vocabulary is perhaps linked to his identification, above all else, with his most famous work, Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal, which contains the first usage of the word ‘Négritude’ and many of the phrases that are repeatedly offered as definitions of the term.


27 Aside from engaging with colonialism, The Tempest has also been rewritten in other ways, particularly in relation to feminist critiques; for example, Michelle Cliff’s ‘Monster’, in Everything Is Now: New and Collected Stories (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 211-17. See Lisa Laframboise, “‘Maiden and Monster’: The Female Caliban in Canadian Tempests”, World Literature Written in English, 31:2 (1991), 36-49 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449859108589163>.


However, it is questionable whether Négritude is the most appropriate frame of reference for discussing Une Tempête. Conflating ‘Négritude’ and ‘anti-colonialism’ is inaccurate.\(^{30}\) Received ideas of Négritude are largely shaped by other thinkers’ appropriation of it. Fanon’s *Peau Noir, Masques Blanc* frequently quotes Césaire, but has little space for the unified, ancestral ‘African’ consciousness that Négritude supposedly proposed; Fanon repeatedly writes in *Peau Noir* that he is describing the situation in Martinique, and is categorically not describing Africans or African-Americans.\(^{31}\) Fanon’s response to Négritude comes after Jean-Paul Sartre’s essay ‘Orphée Noir,’ which, argues Stephen Howe, attempted to turn Négritude, primarily a literary movement, into a political philosophy or even ontology.\(^{32}\) Sartre’s essay paved the way for strains of thought that seized on the assertion of ‘absolute otherness’ while ignoring the humanist and universalist aims of Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor’s Négritude.\(^{33}\) By the late 1960s, Négritude via Fanon had given birth to such political movements as the Black Panthers in the USA – Panther leader Stokely Carmichael called Fanon “one of my patron saints.”\(^{34}\) The Haitian cultural movements of ‘Noirisme’ and ‘Indigenisme’ that had been both forebears and contemporaries of Négritude had been turned to the service of the dictator François Duvalier, a more terrifying figure than King Christophe had ever been.\(^{35}\) In the meantime, Fanon, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr had all died. The affirmatory possibilities of Négritude seemed, worldwide, to have devolved into separatism and militarism. Meanwhile, the limitations for Martinique of departmentalisation, for which Césaire had fought so hard, were becoming apparent by the late ‘60s – Césaire “concluded [that] Martinique remained unambiguously ‘une colonie.’”\(^{36}\) By 1969, when Une Tempête was written, Négritude and Martinique’s prospects were very different from thirty years earlier, when the first version of Césaire’s *Cahier* was published.

By this time, a separate, post-Négritude intellectual movement was becoming influential in Martinique. Edouard Glissant’s ‘Antillanité’ focussed on Caribbean identity, and encouraged dialogue between the different ‘Caribbeans.’\(^{37}\) Rather than unity between diasporic Africans – relevant only to part of Martinique’s population – Antillanité involves all Martiniquais as part of a larger, interlingual, geographically specific culture. Building on Antillanité, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and

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\(^{30}\) Howe, pp. 24-7

\(^{31}\) Aside from his discussion of Mannoni, all of Fanon’s examples are to do with ‘the Antilles’ or Martinique.


\(^{33}\) Howe, p. 27; Jane Hiddleston, *Decolonising the Intellectual: Politics, Culture, and Humanism and the End of the French Empire* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), pp. 38-110

\(^{34}\) Howe, p. 78

\(^{35}\) Howe, p. 84


\(^{37}\) Glissant briefly describes Caliban as representing the “true Caribbean problematic”; Glissant, pp. 118-9.
Raphaël Confiant’s *Éloge de la Créolité* (1989) understands all Martiniquais as definitively Créole. Yet these ‘post-Négritude’ ideas are, to some degree, also present in *Une Tempête*. As will be seen below, regardless of how aware Césaire was of Glissant, *Une Tempête*, rather than simply demonstrating the failure of Négritude, creates a space for discussion of the themes of Glissant’s and even the Créolists’ writing. To use *Éloge de la Créolité*’s memorable phrase, “Césaire, an anticréole? Non point, mais un ante-créole” [“Césaire, an anti-Créole? Not at all, rather an pre-Créole”].

*Une Tempête*, as a text, is a site of potentiality. The play constantly complicates its own apparent assertions, responding to uncertainties within previous elements of *The Tempest*’s text-in-afterlife, while also opening space for future translations by creating further potentialities at its own points of uncertainty. Many critics have discussed the play’s status as a translation, its presentation of history and its use of language in relation to the typically Césairean themes of colonialism and Négritude, but few have understood these factors as anything other than tools to aid discussion of colonialism and Négritude. *Une Tempête* undoubtedly does discuss colonialism, but not simplistically. The play’s critical intervention in complicating what ‘colonialism’ might mean is important for the model of textuality developed here. Equally important, however, is the way *Une Tempête* calls attention to its own position as a translation. The play allows us to see how texts demonstrate afterlife, through pointing to various other *Tempest* translations, and the way in which the play’s action dramatises the co-existence of multiple possibilities.

This section has traced some of the different themes of *Tempest* translations, and how *Une Tempête* participates in them. Rather than attempting to deny *The Tempest*’s long shadow over Caribbean and (anti-)colonial literature, *Une Tempête* works within *The Tempest*’s text-in-afterlife in a radical way, using various parts of the text-in-afterlife to show what potentials already exist within *The Tempest* and its translations, and to create further potentials. *Une Tempête* struggles within the system. Césaire’s play achieves something similar with history and language, demonstrating the potential inside these innately colonial systems. We will turn first to the play’s ambiguous historical setting, which mirrors the way the text itself interacts with various other parts of *The Tempest*’s text-in-afterlife. Through the co-existence of anachronous historical moments, *Une Tempête* enacts the way in which multiple iterations of a text may exist alongside each other in a text-in-afterlife. This

41 An exception is Marianne Wichmann Bailey’s idiosyncratic *The Ritual Theater of Aimé Césaire: Mythic Structures of the Dramatic Imagination* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1992), which sees Césaire’s plays as expressing timeless, ‘mythical,’ archetypal structures such as Nietzsche’s Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy.
‘multiple existence’ is embodied in the character of Eshu, a Yoruba god who irrupts into Une Tempête. By working within history, but distorting it, Une Tempête shows the multiplicity of possibilities available within history. However, in a messianic paradox, Une Tempête’s anachronous history affirms the inescapability of history itself, even as it shows the potential within it. Une Tempête’s use of anachrony shows that colonialism is, as argued in Chapter One, a structural condition of ‘history.’ Before addressing how Une Tempête suggests the colonial nature of history itself, however, we will see how the play shows that multiple forms of colonial control form the lived experience of all history. While denouncing European models of history as colonial, the play also uses those models to critique material colonialism – demonstrating that potential for critiquing the system exists within the system itself.

**History**

**History as critique of colonialism**

Superficially at least, Une Tempête takes the ‘American hypothesis’ surrounding The Tempest and makes it as explicit and exaggerated as possible. Here, it is not that The Tempest is a play written within the sphere of discourse surrounding incipient English New World colonialism; The Tempest becomes a play which is set in the Caribbean and is about colonialism. However, the first performance of the play did not feature a Caribbean setting; performed in Tunis, bringing together the beginning and an ending of The Tempest, the premiere used a “visual climate” suggesting the movie genre of the Western. Gregson Davies claims that Césaire intended the play to “reflect” the USA, while the other parts of his ‘colonial triptych’ had shown Africa (Une Saison au Congo) and the Caribbean (La Tragedie du Roi Christophe). If Une Tempête is a USA play, this would be an appropriate continuation of the idea of Shakespeare’s play’s ‘American-ness.’ However, the fact that Une Tempête is set on a tropical island makes an Antillean setting more likely. The setting of Césaire’s play is even more of a vexed issue than that of Shakespeare’s. However, while its geography may be ambiguous, Une Tempête’s relationship to its historical setting is even less clear. It is this ambiguity, however, that allows Une Tempête to discuss not a specific period of history, but

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42 Livingston, p. 192
43 Davies, p. 156
history in total, demonstrating both that colonialism manifests throughout history, and that history itself is colonial.

*Une Tempête*’s concern with multiple forms of colonial control, and history in total, can be seen through trying to pin down when the play is actually set. The fact that Ariel and Caliban are slaves suggests that the play must be set before 1848, the date of the abolition of slavery in France and the French colonies. However, Caliban appears to have stepped out of a different period of history. His first word on stage is “Uhuru!” (*AT* I.2, p. 22). This Kiswahili word may seem unusual, as there were few East African slaves in the Caribbean. However, the usage of Kiswahili, particularly ‘uhuru,’ has other historical resonances. The word and concept ‘uhuru’ were of great importance during the fight for Kenyan independence in the 1950s. As Steve Almquist has demonstrated, the Euro-American fascination with the anti-colonial fight in Kenya led to widespread awareness of the word ‘uhuru.’

The word became emblematic of the (violent) fight for independence, equated with loss for those who were viewed as ‘the enemy’ – including white Kenyans who, like Prospero, had come to understand the colony as a home, or those who, like Miranda, had never known another home. ‘Uhuru’ gained something of the pan-diasporic importance Négritude never quite achieved, cemented by the appropriation of the word, and Kiswahili more generally, by Black Power movements of the 1960s in the USA, particularly Maulana Karenga’s organisation US. This resonance of ‘uhuru’ in *Une Tempête* is emphasised by Caliban’s usage of the English phrase “Freedom now!” (*AT* II.1, p. 30). Caliban’s greeting ‘uhuru’ makes him not an out-of-place East African slave in the Caribbean, but an anachronistic Black Power fighter.

By aligning the 1960s civil rights movements of the USA with slaves in the Caribbean, *Une Tempête* may seem to suggest that the situation for black people in North America, from the plantation-era Caribbean to the modern USA, has not greatly changed. However, the apparent crossing of temporal borders is not limited to *Une Tempête*’s slaves. Near the play’s beginning we see Prospero reliving his appearance before “the Most Holy Inquisition,” which leads to Prospero and Miranda’s exile (*AT* I.2, p. 20). Among the charges against Prospero are his suggestions “concerning the shape of the Earth” and his usage “of Arabic calculations and necromancy in Hebrew, Syrian and other demonic tongues”

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45 Burton, p. 2
47 Almquist, p. 587
48 Césaire all but explicitly said that Ariel and Caliban’s differing methods for gaining freedom, as discussed in II.1, are modelled on Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, as underlined by Caliban’s command “Call me X” (*AT* I.2, p. 25). See Livingston, p. 192.
Whatever else he may be, Prospero is a Renaissance scholar, under suspicion for his education in matters other than “the Holy Scriptures” (AT I.2, p. 20).

The other Italian nobles are also, seemingly, from the same historical time as their Shakespearian equivalents: Antonio declares “I’m Duke of Milan” in II.3 (AT, p. 36). Yet the Italians simultaneously inhabit other times. In threatening his slave with the whip (“la trique”), Prospero becomes a plantation owner at the height of the slave trade.50 Antonio quotes Baudelaire’s ‘Parfum Exotique’ in II.2, bringing him further forward in time, while also signalling another part of Une Tempête’s text-in-afterlife (AT p. 32). Gonzalo’s plans for the island a few lines later potentially makes him contemporary:

[…] if the island is inhabited, as I believe it is, and if we colonise it, as is my wish, then we must shy away, as if from the plague, from importing here our defaults [défauts], yes, what we call civilisation. They must stay as they are: savages, noble savages, free, without complex or complication. Something like a pool of eternal youth where we would come at intervals to revive our drooping urban spirits (AT II.2, p. 32-3).

This pastiche of Shakespeare’s Gonzalo’s planned republic, itself a pastiche of Montaigne, encapsulates the way Une Tempête plays with various stages of its text-in-afterlife simultaneously.51 It also shows how the play collapses colonialism spatially and temporally, evoking parts of Europe, Africa and North America, and the Renaissance and the 1960s, at once. Gonzalo’s lines quoted above have enough similarity to the equivalent section of The Tempest to invite parallels between The Tempest and the context of its writing, and Une Tempête and the context of its writing. Shakespeare’s Gonzalo plans a utopia that takes no account of the island’s original inhabitants; the possibility of their existence is not mentioned. Césaire’s Gonzalo recognises the possibility of the island having prior inhabitants, but patronises or infantilises them, while also assuming the colonisation of the island as if it has already happened. The idea of a ‘tourist paradise’ is uniquely modern and particularly resonant for the Caribbean, but through the similarities of the two Gonzalos’ speeches, similarities are implied between tourism and earlier forms of colonialism. This is made more apparent through the phrase “noble savages,” evoking the nineteenth-century height of empire through the phrase that apparently suggested an alternative to the ideology of empire, yet remained just as founded on racial stereotypes.

49 On The Tempest’s ambivalence towards Prospero’s immersion in esoteric books, see Brotton, p. 29-31.
51 An extract of the relevant passage of Montaigne’s ‘Des Cannibales’, in the translation by John Florio that Shakespeare would have read, is given in T, pp. 145-7.
Une Tempête’s transhistorical frame of reference does not simply serve to draw comparisons between different manifestations of colonialism: it shows how intolerance and hierarchies of race or power have continually manifested themselves throughout time and space, albeit predominantly in the form of colonialism. These hierarchies do not necessarily take simplistic forms. Although Prospero remains literally centre stage by the end of the play, he appears to need Caliban. Prospero complains of cold, and says, “have to think about making a fire,” but simply shouts for Caliban repeatedly, apparently unable to do anything himself (AT III.5, p. 62). Meanwhile, Caliban can shout “Liberty, oh-ay! Liberty!”, but has not removed his oppressor. The play is not a “third world manifesto of decolonisation,” in Jyotsna Singh’s phrase, but an indictment of how colonialism affects every aspect of the colonised and coloniser’s thought, and how difficult it is to dismiss the terms of colonialism altogether.52 Colonialism is inescapable as it entirely affects everyone it involves in a ‘dehumanising’ process, as Césaire describes in 1955’s Discourse on Colonialism:

Colonization […] dehumanizes even the most civilised man […] the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal.53

In Une Tempête, ‘colonialism’ is not a simple ‘(white) A oppresses (black) B’ model. Trinculo and Stephano are both members of an underclass, compared to the nobles, and racist would-be colonisers of Caliban; Caliban is both a slave and a schemer who corrals Trinculo and Stephano for his own ends. Colonialism and intolerance work on and through every character in the play, including Caliban. His hatred of Prospero is at least partially based on race – Caliban tells Prospero “I’d vomit you up […] your white poison!” (AT III.5, p. 58). Near the beginning of the play Caliban tells Prospero that without him, he, Caliban, would be “king of the island” (AT I.2, p. 23). Removing the colonising power would result in Caliban becoming ruler.54 As in the other plays of Césaire’s ‘triplych,’ decolonisation would not bring universal freedom, merely a different model of oppression.55

Une Tempête also uses its form to critique colonialism and simplistic understandings of ‘anti-colonialism’ alike. The play begins with a prologue where a “Master of Ceremonies” instructs the actors walking onto the stage, “To each his character, and to each character his mask” (AT, p. 15). The ‘MC’ comments as the actors choose – “You, Prospero? Why not? […] You, Caliban? Well, well,

52 Singh, p. 196
53 Césaire, Discourse, p. 41
54 An intriguing point of comparison is a 1989 Old Vic production of Shakespeare’s Tempest where, after Prospero leaves, Ariel picks up Prospero’s staff and points it threateningly at the cowering Caliban; Vaughan and Vaughan, 197.
55 In La Tragédie du Roi Christophe (Paris: Présence Africain, 1970), the title character is a Macbeth figure who declares himself king and becomes increasingly tyrannical; in Une Saison au Congo (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1973), Patrice Lumumba is murdered and usurped by ‘Mokutu’ [sic], who has peaceful protestors gunned down in the play’s shockingly bleak ending.
that’s revealing” (*AT*, p. 15). The colonised could have been the coloniser, and vice versa. Since *Une Tempête* is subtitled *Adaptation pour un Théâtre Nègre* [‘Adaptation for a Negro Theatre’], the role of race in colonial oppression is also complicated, since ‘Prospero’ and ‘Caliban’ are both, in Césaire’s term, ‘nègres’ – literal black skin and white masks. From its beginning, the play underlines the potential for things to have been different, and to be different in future. The possibility of things being different is the very condition of anti-colonialism, but it is also – as Derrida suggests in *Spectres de Marx*, and Caliban’s rhetoric demonstrates in *Une Tempête* – the condition of a new form of colonialism (*SM* 34). The “boomerang effect of colonisation” means that the colonisers are themselves colonised by colonialism, while the colonised become would-be colonisers through the same logic.56

*Une Tempête*’s ‘collapsed history’ does more than draw comparisons between forms of colonialism throughout history; it suggests that multiple forms of colonialism are the experience of history. The play is ‘anti-colonial’ in showing that colonialism ‘dehumanises’ all involved. Rather than providing a model of anti-colonial resistance and eventual freedom, *Une Tempête* demonstrates how the ‘death throes’ of colonialism cause immense suffering for all involved. Rob Nixon notes that, since the 1970s, anti-colonial rewritings of *The Tempest* have become less common, as the play does not provide a model of what could happen once Prospero leaves the island, and what ‘independence’ would look like for Caliban.57 *Une Tempête*, written in 1969, sidesteps this uncertainty by never positing a moment of ‘post-coloniality.’ Even if Prospero no longer rules, he will not leave, and so an ersatz colonialism continues, with neither Prospero nor Caliban free or in a position of power.

*Une Tempête* articulates its critique of colonialism through its remodelling of history. Additionally, however, *Une Tempête* shows history itself as colonial. As we will see, in using history to critique history, *Une Tempête* takes part in the same strategy that Derrida’s *Monolinguisme* terms a ‘messianic call’ – recognising the impossibility of escaping a system, but imagining an escape through using that system against itself.

**Critique of history as colonialism**

*Une Tempête*’s time out of joint suggests that history is defined by colonialism. This colonialism extends beyond the events of the past to a certain European conception of ‘history’ itself. *Une Tempête* goes beyond this model of history to create a parodic version of something like Benjamin’s ‘universal history,’ revealing history itself to be colonial.

56 Césaire, *Discourse*, p. 41
57 Nixon, p. 577
In what Benjamin calls “homogenous empty time,” history is simply one thing after another (‘History’ 395). There is nothing that cannot be incorporated into this model of history, where history is synonymous with time itself and, as Benjamin points out, ‘progress’ (‘History’ 395). ‘Prehistory’ is not time outside history, merely time not yet incorporated into history, and so all of humanity can be described within ‘history.’ As Chakrabarty writes, this understanding of history means that,

independent of culture or consciousness, people exist in historical time. That is why it is always possible to discover ‘history’ (say, after European contact) even if you were not aware of its existence in the past. History is supposed to exist in the same way as the Earth (PE 74).

History is conceptualised as the only way to represent the past, and is continuous, constant and identical everywhere. This is not merely a colonialist idea; the idea itself operates through colonial logic, in its denial of any other mode of thought, and its capability to expand into and take over other conceptions of temporality.

*Une Tempête* complicates the idea of history as something that can be understood identically in any time or place.\(^{58}\) If history is understood as homogenous empty time, or a narrative of progress, then it is nonsensical to make Renaissance noblemen, the Caribbean slave trade, and the USA civil rights movement contemporaneous. However, Renaissance noblemen can be contemporaneous with Martin Luther King if it allows for a different model of history with different resonances for a specific part of the world. *Une Tempête* crystallises something like a Benjaminian constellation. For Benjamin, the constellation, putting historical events in dialogue, is a method of historiography that allows us to work towards “a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (‘History’ 397). *Une Tempête* enacts something similar by placing ‘anachronous’ moments next to each other to reveal the true nature of history. For Benjamin this ‘true nature’ is messianic; in *Une Tempête*, it is colonialist. Everything, in *Une Tempête*’s ‘history,’ reiterates colonialism and intolerance, albeit with different inflections.

*Une Tempête* presents a parody of what Benjamin would call ‘universal history,’ the messianic moment of all history happening at once. Benjamin’s constellation is a method of historiography, while *Une Tempète*’s ‘constellation’ is enacted. Historical events are not placed together by the ‘historical materialist’s writing, but actually happen, on the same stage at (almost) the same time in

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\(^{58}\) As a comparison, see Glissant’s argument that European conceptions of history cannot apply to the Caribbean: “the French Caribbean is the site of a history characterised by ruptures and that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade. Our historical consciousness could not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment”; Glissant, pp. 61-2. See also Paul Gilroy: “the history and expressive culture of the African diaspora, the practice of racial slavery, or the narratives of European imperial conquest may require all simple periodisations of the modern and the postmodern to be drastically rethought”; *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 42.
front of an audience. The nature of history is not something that must be read between gaps, as in 
Benjamin, but is ‘read’ by an audience as they watch history itself explode. What is revealed is not 
liberation, but the repetition of colonialism and intolerance in different, historically specific forms.
The sum total of history in Une Tempête is multiple manifestations of the same forms of control.

The play does not truly show all of history, however. In Benjamin’s terms, Une Tempête does not 
show messianic, universal history. Such a thing would be impossible because Une Tempête itself 
exists within history, and “nothing that is historical can relate itself, from its own ground, to anything 
messianic.”59 History can be used to critique history, but not to escape history. Moreover, the 
messianic event would explode history, simultaneously showing literally all of history and cancelling 
history. This can hardly be demonstrated in a theatrical play. Instead, Une Tempête shows a parodic 
version of so-called ‘universal’ history from the point of view of a Caribbean colonised by 
Europeans.60 As Benjamin writes,

[the notion of a universal history is bound up with the notion of progress and the notion of 
culture. In order for all the moments in the history of humanity to be incorporated in the 
chain of history, they must be reduced to a common denominator – ‘culture,’ ‘enlightenment’, ‘the objective spirit’, or whatever one wishes to call it (‘P’ 403).

History as homogenous empty time (incorrectly) presents itself as universal history by describing 
everything in the same terms. Une Tempête presents a Caribbean version of this ‘universal’ history. If 
a European pseudo-universal history sees progression, of which certain events in the Caribbean are an 
unfortunate casualty, then Une Tempête turns this Eurocentric history on its head by seeing the 
guiding ‘denominator’ of history as colonialism and exploitation. ‘Progress’ is nothing of the sort, as 
shown by collapsing history so that different events are simultaneous. Nothing progresses in the world 
of Une Tempête; colonialism simply reiterates itself in different forms. Indeed, since it is a play, 
designed for re-performance, literally the same oppressions will occur again and again in Une 
Tempête’s world.61 The entire history of the Caribbean, if not the world, as presented in Une Tempête, 
is endless colonialism, and involves no progress.

Benjamin would oppose the idea of a specifically ‘Caribbean history,’ since he writes that “the 
multiplicity of ‘histories’ is closely related, if not identical, to the multiplicity of languages. Universal

59 Benjamin, ‘Theological-Political Fragment’, p. 304
60 Susan Buck-Morss presents a different model of ‘universal history’ in Hegel, Haiti and Universal History 
(Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009). For Buck-Morss as for Césaire, the Haitian Revolution is a 
defining moment of world history.
61 A full discussion of the uncanny temporality of reperforming is outside the scope of this study’s focus on 
textual afterlife; see Rebecca Schneider, Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment 
(London: Routledge, 2011). The question of repetition and change in relation to textuality will be discussed in 
Chapter Four, below.
history in the present-day sense is never more than a kind of Esperanto” (‘P’ 404). The only correct version of history for Benjamin is a true universal history. However, Benjamin links history to language here, and language is necessarily fallen as a result of history, as Benjamin’s essay ‘Über Sprache Überhaupt…’ tells us. Language’s status as a language of judgement is inescapable; it is a necessary condition of the fallen world, and will not change until the messianic coming. Since Esperanto is nothing like ‘pure language,’ we are left with no choice but to speak multiple, fallen languages. If history “in the present-day sense” is like language, it follows that multiple histories are the only possible way to understand history in the fallen world. Such histories are, for Benjamin, incorrect, but true universal history is impossible under current conditions. We cannot write universal history – and so apparently must write separate histories.

Une Tempête shows the necessity of different ‘histories,’ by parodying Eurocentric history. However, the play does not propose an alternative model of history, like Glissant or Benjamin. The point is that history could be viewed differently. Une Tempête troubles supposedly monolithic categories. The European conception of temporality and the narrative of history are revealed as simply a temporality and a narrative. By reconfiguring historical events, Une Tempête critiques history and reveals its own positioning within history-as-colonialism. It does not escape history, but does not seek to. In suggesting that ‘history’ is merely multiple recurrences of colonialism, Une Tempête acknowledges that there is no escape from colonial or ‘historical’ logic. Caliban will never achieve true freedom by attempting simply to become king in Prospero’s place, just as Prospero will never fully defeat Caliban. Rejecting colonialism altogether is impossible; equally, colonialism will never fully dominate its subjects. It would be fruitless to attempt to escape history. It is possible, however, to suggest different potentialities within history. Rather than rejecting history altogether, Une Tempête shows an alternative vision of history where events usually thought of within different time periods become simultaneous.

Une Tempête struggles with colonial history by struggling within colonial history. In engaging with historical events, rather than denying them along with the structure of homogenous empty time, the play allows for the imagination of alternate possibilities. These possibilities seem all the more immanent due to the play’s engagement with European history and its relation to the Caribbean. The system is used to critique the system, simultaneously reaffirming the inescapability of the system and suggesting that other models might be possible. This is the paradox at the heart of the concept of messianicity. Reading Une Tempête with an awareness of messianicity, we can find messianic potential at the heart of its description of history, as in Derrida’s description of language in Monolinguidé. The importance of a multiplicity of possibilities is shown in Une Tempête’s one non-Shakespearian character, the Yoruba god Eshu. Eshu allows multiple states to exist simultaneously, a

62 Glissant, pp. 90-95
key idea in Une Tempête’s version of history and in the model of textuality described in this study. Rather than the Prospero-Caliban conflict, it may be Eshu’s appearance that is the central event of the play.

As with its relationship to The Tempest and to language, Une Tempête’s reworking of history shows that other possibilities are always present. Une Tempête affirms that history is structured by experiences of colonialism, and that the nature of history itself is colonial. However, in using ‘history’ to critique history, Une Tempête begins to reveal its messianic potential, which will be discussed in the next section in relation to Eshu.

The logic of Eshu

Eshu’s appearance in Une Tempête is brief but significant. He interrupts the masque of Roman goddesses Prospero organises to celebrate Miranda and Ferdinand’s wedding, and announces himself as “God to my friends, Devil to my enemies!” (AT III.3, p. 47). This encapsulates Eshu’s importance for Une Tempête: he is the god of multiple meanings. Eshu sings that “from disorder he makes order, from order disorder!”; he serves as the ultimate reminder that things could be different, to the point of allowing multiple possibilities to exist simultaneously (AT III.3, p. 48).

This simultaneity is demonstrated in one of the most widespread Eshu stories: two friends working on opposite sides of a road see Eshu ride past, wearing a hat white on one side and black on the other. The friends argue about the colour of Eshu’s hat, only for the god to reappear to reveal the true nature of his hat, and admonish the friends for not remembering him when they made their vows of friendship.63 As Henry Louis Gates points out, “neither of the friends is correct in his reading of the stranger’s hat; but neither is, strictly speaking, wrong either. They are simultaneously right and wrong.”64 This state where multiple possibilities coexist is Eshu’s importance for a reading of Une Tempête within the terms of afterlife.

Eshu serves to remind that no system is ever fully predictable. He does not destroy Prospero’s magic, but disrupts it. Eshu’s appearance causes Prospero to ask, “Could there be something grating in my magic?” – his one moment of self-doubt (AT III.3, p. 47). Eshu interrupts the masque, the point of Shakespeare’s play that Francis Barker and Peter Hulme see as the epitome of Prospero’s attempt to control the entirety of the action on the island.65 Although Eshu still appears within the terms of Prospero’s colonial power, within the masque, not every moment is completely circumscribed, just as it is not within history- or language-as-colonialism. The time and manner of Eshu’s appearance is

64 Gates, p. 35
unpredictable. He is always the first god or loa evoked in Vodou, Santería or Candomblé rituals, to attempt some control over his unpredictability.66 His appearance in Une Tempête is a reminder of difference. He appears in the play as a sexualised drinker – he asks “how about a drink?” and drinks “without waiting for a response,” before singing a song that culminates, “Eshu is a feisty lad/and with his penis he smites/He smites…” (AT III.3, pp. 47-8).67 Eshu appears in this guise to contrast with the stylised, formal ballet of Roman goddesses Prospero has organised; had the masque been different, Eshu would have appeared differently. His indeterminacy is such that he always appears as difference.

Eshu’s parallel existence becomes even more central to Une Tempête when it is understood as temporal as well as ‘physical.’ As Gates explains,

> The most fundamental absolute of the Yoruba is that there exist, simultaneously, three stages of existence: the past, the present and the unborn. Esu [sic] represents these stages, and makes their simultaneous existence possible, ‘without any contradiction,’ precisely because he is the principle of discourse both as messenger and as the god of communication. Discourse among three parallel phases of existence renders the notion of contradiction null.68

Eshu becomes an even more important figure for Une Tempête if he is understood as allowing for the past, present and “unborn” to exist simultaneously. The ‘unborn,’ like the ‘to come’ described in Spectres de Marx, is not ‘the future.’ The ‘future’ reduces unpredictability to the logic of presence and dateable events; the ‘to come’ and ‘unborn’ remain open to whatever is yet to come (SM 81).

Openness towards the yet-to-come is not the only link between Eshu’s multiple temporality and the model of reading developed here, however. Time is out of joint on Une Tempête’s island because Eshu allows it to be so, and this opens a space of possibility. In the text-in-afterlife, the past text – the text-to-be-translated – exists alongside the unpredictable text to come. The logic of afterlife means that a text always contains a latent text to come, while the ‘present’ text is always already in the past since it is constantly changing. The text within the process of afterlife exists in several different states and times at once. Crucially, these times exist simultaneously – as in the logic of Eshu.

A text contains multiple potentialities, many of which can be enacted at once. Une Tempête demonstrates this in two ways: thanks to the logic of Eshu, there is no linear chronological history within Une Tempête, while the play as a text also exemplifies the non-synchronous process called afterlife by translating several ‘ancestors’ at once. The action of Une Tempête features events from

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67 Eshu offers one of the few points at which gender is addressed in Une Tempête’s almost all-male world; Goldberg, pp. 98-9. See also Singh on Miranda’s virtual absence from Une Tempête, pp. 203-7.
68 Gates, p. 37
different historical periods existing simultaneously. This allows for a critique of history as colonialism, but also shows the possibility of different, apparently sequential events existing alongside each other. Europeans needed to colonise America before Africans could be brought there as slaves; without these events there would be no Black Power movements. In Une Tempête, these events are consecutive and simultaneous.

Something similar is true for translated texts – that is, all texts within afterlife. A text needs a predecessor, but the ‘original’ and ‘translation’ exist at the same time, as well as one following the other. The process of afterlife is such that the translation does not destroy the original, but adds to it. Multiple iterations or translations of the ‘same’ text exist at once – their simultaneous existence is a text-in-afterlife. In the case of Une Tempête, some of the various routes along which The Tempest has travelled have been brought into a play called Une Tempête, which in turn provides direction(s) for further translations of the ‘original’ – not superseding it, not closing it off, but drawing attention to the ‘to come,’ while simultaneously pointing towards the past. The text exists in translation, in several states at once. One potentiality being enacted – one particular translation of The Tempest – does not prevent other enactments of the same ‘original’ text’s potential. A text-in-afterlife can proceed in several directions at once, with various manifestations of it – multiple translations – coexisting. Eshu is the embodiment of this mode of potentiality, where several states can be enacted at once, in Une Tempête.

The figure of Eshu in Une Tempête allegorises what Une Tempête, and its place within The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife, can tell us about afterlife as the enactment of potentiality. However, Eshu also calls attention to another important aspect of translation and afterlife – language. As in translation, temporality and language are innately liked in Eshu: Gates writes that multiple times can exist through the discourse of Eshu.69 Eshu is the divine figure of translatio – ‘movement across’ – since he is the guardian of crossroads.70 He symbolises crossing oceans, important to the action of The Tempest and Une Tempête, and the movement that allows the English play to be rewritten by a Martiniquais author. As the figure of crossing all boundaries, Eshu also represents ‘translation’ as linguistic change or interpretation. He is the god who teaches the other gods, and certain privileged humans, how to interpret the symbols of divination; he is the divine translator.71 Eshu appears in Une Tempête as a reminder of the ‘translatedness’ of the play. He is the only character not in Shakespeare’s play, underlining Une Tempête’s difference from that play, while also embodying the logic of translation that allows Une Tempête to exist.

69 Gates, p. 37
71 Gates, pp. 14-15. Gates argues for even closer links between Eshu and literary criticism, writing that Eshu, as the interpreter of signs, provides an “indigenous black metaphor for the literary critic”; Gates, p. 9.
Eshu as a figure of translation introduces cultural and linguistic indeterminacy. Eshu’s appearance alongside Roman deities is an emphatic reminder that the Caribbean can never be understood solely in European terms. However, his irruption does not represent the “rediscove...72 Eshu is antithetical to ‘purity.’ His appearance alongside Juno and Ceres shows that the elements of African culture that have been translated to the New World must be understood alongside the European. Again, multiple pasts and multiple potentialities coexist. Eshu’s appearance complicates any sense of ‘authenticity,’ either ‘African’ or ‘European.’ This is not to say that Eshu exemplifies créolité; he troubles all boundaries, including between ‘créolité’ and ‘purity.’

*Une Tempête*’s ‘Eshu’ also introduces a sense of linguistic indeterminacy via his name. As with the other gods who survived the Middle Passage and were translated into various New World syncretic religions, the Eshu figure has a variety of names in different traditions: Eṣu-Elegbara, Exú, Legba, Echu-Elegua, Papa La Bas and so on. Yoruba and Yoruba-derived religions, such as Cuban Santería or Brazilian Ketu Candomblé, tend to use variations of the name Eshu, while the equivalent figure in cultures more influenced by the Fon, such as Haitian Vodou and French Antillean Quimbois, is named Legba. The name Eshu, if it refers to the Caribbean at all, gestures more towards Hispano-/Lusophone America than the Francophone world of Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe. The name given to the guardian of boundaries in *Une Tempête* disrupts any sense of place or linguistic identity more than fixes it, but calls attention to West Africa, the Caribbean as a whole, and the link between the two, while also placing this schema within a European/Caribbean context: a translation of *The Tempest*.

In his very name, Eshu signals the possibility of linguistic difference. Language is an important tool for signalling difference, as Caliban shows. However, Caliban also confronts the limits of what is possible in language, due to its inherent colonialism. Another important insight *Une Tempête* offers the model of textuality and reading developed here regards the nature of language as colonialism. Like any text, *Une Tempête* should be read in terms of its specific positioning within language-as-colonialism. However, like Derrida’s *Monolinguisme de l’Autre*, *Une Tempête* calls attention to the tension between the specificity of any struggle against colonialism, and the wider structures that show only specific instances of colonialism can be defeated – not colonialism, or language, itself. This play between singularity and multiplicity recalls the paradoxical nature of the text within afterlife.

This section explored how *Une Tempête* constructs an anachronous ‘history’ of multiple, simultaneous possibilities to struggle against history by turning ‘history’ against itself. The following section will show how *Une Tempête* uses language in a similar way, showing that language is

inescapable, but that this very inescapability creates the conditions for imagining an ‘outside’ of
colonial language. Before this, however, we will see how the play uses language, like history, to
challenge what might be meant by ‘colonialism.’

**Language**

**Redefining ‘colonialism’**

As with its engagement with history, *Une Tempête* uses language to complicate what ‘colonialism’
might mean. The play’s use of local references, and the characters that they apply to, complicate what
might be meant by ‘native’ – troubling Caliban’s claim to the island, and in turn, his ‘anti-
colonialism.’ The most specifically Antillean language in the play comes from a perhaps surprising
character. When Stephano discovers Caliban, he thinks of how to exhibit him at a fair, “between the
bearded lady and the performing fleas” (*AT* III.2, p. 42). As well as alluding to a similar passage in
*The Tempest*, Stephano makes a modern, geographically specific reference by calling Caliban “un
Zindien!”: ‘Zindien’ is Martiniquais slang for a worker from India (*UT* III.2, p. 59). In remaining so
similar to *The Tempest* but including a reference to modern Martinique, this passage questions how
little perceptions of exoticism have changed.

Stephano’s comments on the ‘Indian’ Caliban call to mind the relationship between European sailors
and Caribs in the seventeenth century, later European colonisers and black slaves – Caliban’s ‘actual’
ethnicity is irrelevant to Stephano; he is exotic regardless – or between present-day Martiniquais
people and the island’s South Asian minority. *Une Tempête* does not merely show that *European*
colonialism is ongoing; Stephano’s use of a specifically Martiniquais word implicates modern
Martiniquais people in the same discourse of racial stereotyping as Shakespeare’s Stephano. The word
also momentarily unsettles Caliban’s identity: it is unclear whether Stephano mistakes him for a Carib
or a South Asian. Almquist has written that Césaire could be accused of eliding the native Caribbean
– although Martinique’s ‘indigenous’ population has long since disappeared – in favour of a
Caribbean that is too ‘black and white.’ Stephano’s ambiguous phrasing cautions against
oversimplifying Caribbean colonial history, and current Caribbean societies’ ethnic complexity. By
suggesting both issues in one word, Stephano participates in the problematising of historicism that the
play undertakes, making multiple temporalities simultaneous.

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73 A. James Arnold, ‘Césaire and Shakespeare: Two Tempests’, *Comparative Literature*, 30.3 (1978), 236-248,
74 Almquist, p. 594
Stephano’s other usage of a word with particularly Martiniquais resonances, in the same scene, also links to race, by gesturing towards the Francophone Caribbean’s traditional social hierarchy. Stephano describes the noises he hears as night falls, and says that “toutes bêtes bê-kê-kêtent…” (UT III.2, p. 65). This onomatopoeic phrase evokes the word ‘béké,’ a member of the white Creole elite of Martinique and Guadeloupe – and Stephano uses the word after Caliban has suggested that he overthrow Prospero. There is a temptation to suggest a parallel between the power stratification of Une Tempête and that of modern Martinique, with the Italian nobles as ‘metropolitans’ (people from ‘mainland’ France who work on the island); Prospero, a man who has settled and commands the island, as a béké; Miranda, Stephano and Trinculo as lighter-skinned Creoles; Ariel as a darker-skinned Creole or ‘mulatto’; and Caliban as a member of a definitively black underclass. To cling to this structure too firmly would be to ignore the multiple indeterminacies thrown up by Une Tempête. Nevertheless, this hierarchy suggests that those characters in the ‘middle’ of the power structure – Miranda and the (white) servants Stephano and Trinculo – are Caribbean, Creole rather than part of the self-contained Italian/béké and metropolitan elite. No character, including Caliban, speaks in so specifically an Antillean manner as Stephano.

The idea of ‘the native’ is complicated by Stephano’s language. In Shakespeare’s Tempest, Caliban’s mother arrives on the island from “Argier”; whether or not Caliban was born on the island, his mother certainly was not (T I.2, p. 27). Since Une Tempête does not explain how Caliban came to be on the island, or how he became Prospero’s slave, we do not know if this Caliban is a ‘second-generation immigrant’ like his predecessor; he simply says that without Prospero, he would be “the king of my island I inherited from my mother, Sycorax” (AT I.2, p. 23). It is not even explicit that Caliban inhabited the island before Prospero, although this is probable given that Caliban says “I taught you the trees, the fruits…” (AT I.2, p. 24). He could be passing on information he has learned elsewhere, however, and does not claim the intimate knowledge of the island’s geography that Shakespeare’s Caliban does when he describes showing Prospero “barren place and fertile” (T I.2, p. 27).

Additionally, Stephano’s “un Zindien” calls attention to the Caribs who, if claims to land ownership are based on primacy, surely have a greater claim to the island than Caliban. It is questionable to what extent Caliban can embody his forebear’s claim, “this island’s mine,” when Stephano’s ‘Euro-Creole’ dialect is just as Antillean as Caliban’s ‘Afro-Creole’ worship of Shango (T I.2, p. 31). The concept of créolité denies primacy to any particular aspect of the métissage. Caliban’s nativist ‘anti-colonialism’ is problematised if he is no more ‘native’ than Stephano or even Prospero. Once again, linguistic details undermine homogenous, linear history.

75 “All creatures drone and hum and cry” in AT, p. 46.
76 Michel Giraud, ‘Dialectics of Descent and Phenotypes in Racial Classification in Martinique’, in French and West Indian, pp. 75-85. Ariel and Caliban are explicitly called “mulâtre” [mulatto] and “nègre” [negro] in Une Tempête’s dramatis personae; UT, p. 7.
77 For Stephano’s dialect, see, for example, UT II.1, p. 35; III.4, p. 75; III.5, p. 89.
Caliban may even seem to have less of a claim to autochthony than Stephano. Stephano uses specifically Antillean vocabulary, while Caliban’s religion is from West Africa, yet is also Caribbean; his greeting ‘uhuru!’ comes from east Africa but is also from the US. This Caliban demonstrates the sort of linguistic transnationalism present in the character’s name. ‘Caliban’ is often presumed to be an anagrammatic name from ‘cannibal,’ which came into English via Spanish from the word ‘Carib.’ However, Vaughan and Vaughan call attention to another possible source of Caliban’s name, citing Albert Kuyper’s claim that ‘cauliban’ is a variant of the Romani word for ‘black,’ although without specifying in which dialect. It is possible that Shakespeare drew on the Roma language to name his figure of the savage other; the Roma were relatively recent arrivals in Britain when Shakespeare was writing, and there was much debate as to whether such truly ‘foreign’ people could ever become part of British society. Either way, the name ‘Caliban’ encapsulates a sense of linguistic flexibility, as a name that gestures towards an irreducibly ‘foreign’ culture – Carib or Roma – is twisted and brought into English and then, through Une Tempête, into French. There is also an element of colonial appropriation within this process. In his very name Caliban, like Eshu, embodies linguistic indeterminacy, but also signals a history of having alternate meanings thrust upon him.

Une Tempête draws our attention to this history of imposed names when Caliban asks not to be called by that name any longer (AT I.2, p. 24). Prospero tells Caliban that “‘Cannibal’ would suit you well, but I’m sure you wouldn’t want it!” – suggesting Caliban is incapable of recognising his own nature (AT I.2, p. 25). Prospero is enacting what Benjamin would call language-as-judgement, through giving a name not based on the named thing’s own nature (‘OL’ 73). Prospero decides an appropriate alternative would be ‘Hannibal’ – “they all like historical names!” (AT I.2, p. 25). Prospero’s proposed alternative name forcibly brings Caliban into the ‘European’ tradition, though maintaining him as an outsider: Hannibal is part of the narrative of European history as an opponent of the Romans. The name is a partial attempt to ‘Europeanise’ someone who could never be brought fully into ‘Europe,’ as Prospero suggests by counting Caliban as one of ‘them’ – whoever “they” refers to. However, Prospero’s suggestion unwittingly gestures towards Caliban’s own history: Shakespeare’s Caliban, like Hannibal, is North African. Hannibal also haunts The Tempest through the argument about Carthage and Tunis in II.1. Une Tempête’s Prospero’s ‘Hannibal’ signals the anxiety about the limits of Europe that runs through The Tempest and its text-in-afterlife.

The play’s use of language complicates simple assignations of location, autochthony and even power structures. It is not clear whether Caliban really is an ‘oppressed native.’ The definition of ‘colonialism’ is further troubled in Une Tempête through the play’s demonstration that colonialism is not merely a material exercise of power, but also works through language. Indeed, reading Une

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78 Hulme, Colonial Encounters, p. 3
79 Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 33
80 Vaughan and Vaughan, pp. 34-6
Tempête alongside Derrida’s Monolingusme suggests that language is not merely part of colonialism, but is itself colonial. The most important figure in revealing this in Une Tempête is, once again, Caliban.

**Caliban’s monolingualism**

Caliban’s fight against Prospero seems to be centred on language almost as much as on Caliban’s actual freedom. Une Tempête suggests that language, like history, is not merely the instrument of colonialism, but itself operates as colonialism. However, similarly to what Derrida describes in Monolingusme, Caliban’s relation to language shows that this colonialism is defined by an inherent ambiguity, allowing some degree of resistance within the system, and even the messianic promise of an escape.

In addition to Caliban’s “uhuru!”, he uses a phrase in English, when he shouts “Freedom now!” (UT II.1, p. 36). He is the play’s most multilingual character: no other character speaks any non-French words. However, Almquist exaggerates in writing that Caliban “does have a language – Kiswahili” – he speaks one word of Kiswahili, at that a word widely known outside the area where Kiswahili is primarily spoken. Yet Caliban does, in some way, have his own language, so much so that Prospero cannot understand him: when Caliban shouts “Uhuru!”, Prospero has to ask, “What did you say?” (AT I.2, p. 22). Prospero, the scholar who claims to have taught Caliban how to speak, cannot understand Caliban, while Caliban can understand Prospero perfectly and reply in his language – if he chooses to.

Prospero, the representative of linguistic colonialism, attempts to foreclose any multiplicity. Prospero attempts to enact monolingualism, “to reduce language to the One” (MO 40).

Monolingualism, the condition of all language, aims for, and claims, a total unity of language and meaning, such that only one language is acceptable, and only one meaning is expressible. The claim to monolingualism is an essential part of any language’s claim to be a language: to claim to speak the same language as someone else requires implicitly agreeing on the intelligibility of that language. Language is not a mutual agreement between Caliban and Prospero, however. Language is colonial because it is “always for the other, from the other, kept by the other. Coming from the other, remaining with the other, and returning to the other” (MO 40). Language is an ‘outside’ force attempting to control meaning and reduce everything to its own terms, the “hegemony of the homogenous” (MO 40). Prospero is the figure of monolingualism in Une Tempête, attempting to dictate all action and all communication.

The conflation of language and colonialism can be seen in the play’s final scene. As Prospero becomes increasingly weak and psychotic, the stage directions tell us that “son langage a appauvri et

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81 Almquist, p. 597
stéréotypé” [“His language has become impoverished and stereotyped”] (UT III.5, p. 91). This scene sees Prospero more despotic than ever, shouting “I will defend civilisation!”; the stage directions state that “he fires in all directions” (AT III.5, p. 62). Prospero’s language is an indicator of the state of his power: he is more tyrannical but weaker than ever. However, just as material colonialism gradually affects the coloniser and the colonised – as Césaire writes, the coloniser “transform[s] himself into an animal” – linguistic alienation due to language’s colonialism affects all equally. As Derrida writes, “The master does not possess exclusively, and naturally, what he calls his language” (MO 23). While Prospero might use language in a more controlling way than Caliban, Prospero’s language does not belong to him any more than to Caliban: they are both subject to language’s colonialism. The final scene of Une Tempête shows how both are trapped by language and colonialism. Prospero’s colonial power/language has weakened almost to the point of collapse, but he has nowhere else to go, and so the dying but never dead colonialism/language is forced to continue. Caliban, meanwhile, continues to shout “liberty, oh-ay! Liberty!”, but shout is all he can do. He is not free – but still has enough freedom to shout ‘freedom!’

Paradoxically, it is language that allows Caliban to resist Prospero. Caliban’s language is not an essential element of his fight against Prospero; it is his fight against Prospero. Caliban does not attack Prospero physically, even when invited to do so (AT III.4, p. 54). However, through language, Caliban can speak in a way Prospero cannot understand and so hide things from him, or can persuade Stephano and Trinculo to conspire with him against Prospero. Through language Caliban can even invoke Shango, the god of storms, and conjure his own tempest. Caliban has learned Prospero’s language and his profit on’t is far more than learning how to curse (T I.2, p. 33).

However, Caliban can never fully escape Prospero’s language. He cannot fluently speak Kiswahili, Yoruba or Créole: he must always return to the language Prospero taught him. Just like the ‘Derrida’ figure of Monolinguisme, Caliban has no language in which to feel “the protection of a home of one’s own [un chez-soi]” (MO 52). Like the Franco-Maghrebian Jew, the only language in which Caliban can speak – ‘his’ language – is the language used to oppress him, the language of the coloniser. Although Prospero’s language is not ‘his own’ any more than Caliban’s, it is still the language of the

82 In AT p. 62, “his speech [is] weak and listless,” negating Prospero’s process of degradation.
83 Césaire, Discourse, p. 41
84 Caliban’s speaking only the ‘coloniser’s’ language makes him a key figure for the Hispanophone Caribbean, writes Fernández Retamar, p. 14. To claim that only the ‘coloniser’s’ language is available in Martinique overlooks Créole – as Césaire did. In a much-discussed interview, Césaire stated that “Les Martiniquais sont bilingues” [“The Martiniquais are bilingual”], but also that “je n’ai jamais imaginé […] que je pourrais écrire dans un autre langue [que français]” [“I’ve never thought that I could write in any other language than French”]. Some of Césaire’s comments in this interview have been read as suggesting that intellectual expression is not possible in Créole. See ‘Entretien avec Aimé Césaire (Paris, 1975)’ in Jacqueline Leiner, Aimé Césaire: Le Terreau Primordiale (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993), pp. 111-28, especially pp. 116-9. On Césaire’s relationship with Créole, see also the Introduction to Aimé Césaire, Notebook of a Return to My Native Land, trans. by Mireille Rosello with Annie Pritchard (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 1995), pp. 49-52, and Raphaël Confiant’s vitriolic Aimé Césaire: Un Traversée Paradoxale du Siècle (Paris: Stock, 1993).
coloniser, as with Derrida’s Francophone Jews having to speak French (MO 42-3, 84). Prospero at least has the claim of authority and ownership of the language due to his position as ruler. Caliban says that Prospero has taught him to “jabber away in” his, Prospero’s, language (AT I.2, p. 23). It is unclear whether Caliban is sarcastically parroting Prospero’s opinion or whether he genuinely feels that he cannot speak perfect French; either way, Prospero taught Caliban his language, now the only language in which Caliban can fully express himself. Unlike the Haitian peasants of Césaire’s Tragédie du Roi Christophe, Caliban cannot retreat into a community’s shared dialect, outside the standard language. Caliban does speak idiomatically and colloquially, but his “Faut s’attendre à tout avec un gaillard comme Prospero… Un de ses flics sans doute!” [“Need to be ready for everything with a guy like Prospero… One of his cops no doubt!”] is not as different from standard French in terms of grammar and vocabulary as the Haitian peasants’ “hé bé, c’est-i qu’on est pas l’armée, nous aut’?” [something like “oi, aren’t us lot in the army?”] (UT III.1, p. 56).

While Caliban can fight through (Prospero’s) language, he cannot fight against language, and so the fight against colonialism must be a struggle within language. The odd word of Kiswahili or English does not show Caliban’s freedom but rather his entrapment, as he can only escape Prospero’s language briefly, only to be obliged to return to it because it is ‘Caliban’s language’ too. There is no ‘outside French’ for Caliban to escape to. It would not matter if there were, because there is no outside of language. All language operates through innate colonialism. Yet in momentarily speaking another language, Caliban shows the possibility of things being different. He – very briefly – challenges the authority of Prospero’s language. In fact, Caliban’s few words of English or Kiswahili are perhaps more threatening than if he simply did speak his own language. Rather than rejecting Prospero’s language/law altogether and substituting another, Caliban demonstrates the possibility of an outside. In a conflict between two similar structures (languages), Prospero would probably win, and be able to consider himself the strongest among equals. Caliban’s momentary challenges, however, show the weakness of Prospero’s language-structure. Caliban proves that the system is not all-encompassing, and this fact alone is more threatening to Prospero, and more liberating for Caliban, than if Caliban were to attempt to replace Prospero’s system with another system that also claims to be all-encompassing.

Any alternative language Caliban could create would be just as ‘colonial’ as Prospero’s. As the play’s final scene makes clear, colonialism/language does not allow for the possibility of escape because no place to escape to can be imagined, for either Prospero or Caliban. What is possible, and what Caliban attempts, is resistance within the system. He cannot bring colonialism/Prospero’s language to an end, but he can imagine the possibility of an outside of it and gesture towards this, even if the shape of that ‘outside’ is necessarily inconceivable. Because of the limitations of human

85 Césaire, Christophe. ‘Intermède’ between Acts II and III, p. 110
language, all that Caliban can do is speak in other human languages, momentarily replacing Prospero’s structure with another structure. One language, ideology or structure must necessarily be replaced by another, and so there is no escape from the overall system. However, Caliban proves that no individual language can ever claim total supremacy. Caliban’s attempts to escape colonial language necessarily fail, but show the ‘impossible possibility’ of an ‘outside.’

_Ulysses_ forms a point of contrast. _Ulysses’_ characters frequently quote from multiple languages – English, Latin, Irish, Italian, Hebrew, Greek and more besides – yet like Caliban’s Kiswahili or English words, this is far from bursting through the boundaries of monolingualism. Caliban’s “Uhuru!”, Stephen’s “All’erta!” (_U 39_) or Leopold’s “Ja, ich weiss, papachi” (_U 416_) do not show even a temporary escape from language-as-colonialism, because breaking the bounds of one language merely necessitates inscription within another. It is not a language that is colonial, but language itself. However, Caliban’s occasional use of non-French words in _Une Tempête_ is figured as an act of resistance, a moment of temporary defiance to Prospero’s colonial rule/language. His two ‘escapes’ from French are the defiant assertions “Uhuru!” and “Freedom now!” _Ulysses_ seems to have little sympathy with the idea of using language as resistance to colonialism. “Sinn fein amhain [sic]!” [“We ourselves alone!”] is the aggressive, anti-Semitic toast of the ‘Citizen’ of ‘Cyclops,’ indicating that the resistance to one form of rule is the commitment to another, necessarily excluding others – in this instance, Leopold – as much as the previous ‘colonial’ system did (_U 293_). _Ulysses_’ other characters’ usage of non-English is rarely, if ever, figured as resistance. While Caliban’s temporary escape from French is not an escape from language altogether, it is nevertheless an act of defiance.

Caliban enacts something like the messianic call for a language to come that Derrida describes in _Monolinguisme_. In attempting to escape Prospero’s language, Caliban shows the possibility of imagining an outside of colonial language. In pointing outside the possibility of a non-colonial language to come, Caliban is calling for the language, even if nothing he – or anyone – does will actually bring that language closer. Like the failed autobiography that Bennington reads in _Monolinguisme_, in attempting to escape language, and failing, Caliban calls for the language to come. Every time he opens his mouth, he promises – and what is promised is the language to come (_MO 67_). The shape of this language is unimaginable, because a language entirely free of colonialism cannot exist, but Caliban gestures towards its _possibility_. This is the situation of _Une Tempête_’s final lines: Caliban is not free, and Prospero is as tyrannical as ever, but Caliban can still shout “liberty, oh-ay! Liberty!” – calling for freedom and imagining it, if not its form.

What allows Caliban some degree of freedom from language-as-colonialism is not that he speaks in another language, but that he moves between languages – he translates. It is irrelevant that Caliban says words in Kiswahili or English. The specifics of the languages are only specifics. Power is located
in the moment of Caliban speaking in any language that is ‘not-French,’ because then he is translating. It is in the moment of moving between languages that he finds, if not escape, then the possibility of difference. Translation, for Caliban as for Eshu, troubles fixed categories. In doing so he gestures towards the possibility of an alternative. Caliban does not find ‘pure language,’ but, following Benjamin, he uncovers the potential for pure language in the moment of translating.

This troubling of boundaries and raising of alternate possibilities is the importance of Une Tempête as a whole. Caliban’s translation does not escape language altogether, but suggests the possibility of an outside of it. Une Tempête as a text achieves something similar within the translating process that is afterlife, by working to destabilise. It asks questions about the possibility of a non-European conception of colonial history, or of history more generally, and it asks about the nature of language. Discussing these problems in a translation of a European play, in a European language, allows the play as a text to enact what it discusses.

In writing a play about Caribbean history, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to step entirely outside The Tempest, its rewritings and their engagement with (post)colonial American history. Better, then, to write another Tempest than pretend that Shakespeare’s play does not exist. As with Caliban’s language, it is precisely struggling within the system that allows for the imagining of alternate possibilities. Attempting to escape altogether only leads to becoming more entangled in the system. By engaging more directly with the all-encompassing system – reformulating history, reshaping language or adding to The Tempest’s text-in-afterlife – we are more alerted to a multiplicity of possibilities. Arguing that Césaire needs European language and concepts to think ‘outside Europe’ may seem politically suspect, as it denies the possibility of an ‘authentically’ Martiniquais literature or philosophy. However, the promise of a total rejection of colonialism is also politically suspect, as this allows the possibility of “‘the promise (for example of a democracy to come)” becoming “absorbed by, or mortgaged to, the phantom of its ontological fulfilment” (‘Tonguing’ 35). Claiming liberation or the Messiah has arrived closes off the messianic structure of promise. The Messiah’s actual arrival would either be unimaginable as it would completely change current structures, or else the arrived Messiah would not be so different from current structures after all, and would be subject to originary colonisation like everyone and everything else.

Une Tempête works, like all texts, within an interplay of singularity and connectedness. The play questions colonialism, history and language on its own terms, while engaging with The Tempest text-in-afterlife. In making a specifically Martiniquais, anti-colonial version of The Tempest, Une Tempête has not changed The Tempest for good but has calcified a reading of it, which allows us to read backwards towards Shakespeare’s play differently, but does not prohibit Shakespeare’s play travelling along a different trajectory in future. Une Tempête engages Shakespeare’s play, Eurocentric history
and the French language in a process of movement away from ‘the’ centre – which is revealed as simply a centre. It is not that *Une Tempête* has subverted ‘the original,’ or turned Shakespeare’s play against itself. Rather, it contributes to the textual equivalent of what Benjamin saw as the aim of translation, “the hallowed growth of languages” (‘TT’ 257). In revealing yet more potentialities within *The Tempest*, and setting the stage for more of its own potentialities to be enacted, *Une Tempête* moves towards the ultimate goal of afterlife, the complete text.

The tension between singularity and connectedness that defines afterlife is also explored in Borges’ fiction ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del *Quijote*.’ This fiction appears to describe a (fictional) text that exists outside literary history altogether, meaning that, unlike *Ulysses* and *Une Tempête*, it would not be linked to multiple other texts. However, the specific nature of this text – a version of *Don Quijote* apparently identical to the ‘original’ – means that it can only be read in connection to other texts, most obviously Cervantes’ *Quijote*. Like *Une Tempête*, ‘Pierre Menard’ shows the impossibility of understanding afterlife in terms of a linear progression. Unlike *Une Tempête*, however, this impossibility is most obviously due to a text’s similarity to, not difference from, its predecessor. Just as Césaire’s play stresses the radical translations possible even within colonial language or history, Borges’ fiction emphasises that, in spite of the restrictions on afterlife, texts – all texts – contain virtually endless potential for translation.
Chapter Four

“Rival of time”: ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote’

The concept of the ‘definitive text’ belongs only to religion or exhaustion (‘HV’ 69).

Translating from easy languages is no indication of talent or literary ability, any more than transcribing or copying a document on to another piece of paper is. By this I do not mean to say that the exercise of translation is not to be given any credit, because there are worse and less profitable things a man can do.1

Jorge Luis Borges’ writing is central to this study. His fascination with infinity and the limits of fictionality or textuality, not to mention his suggestions as to the nature of textuality or literary history in essays such as ‘Kafka y sus Precursors,’ mean that there is a huge amount that could be said about Borges in relation to textual afterlife.2 However, as with Joyce and Césaire, a specific text of Borges’ has been focused on, to ask how it might demonstrate the nature of afterlife – and, in turn, contribute to the model of textuality and reading developed here. In this case, that text is the fiction ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote,’ first published in 1938. However, Borges returned to Don Quijote so frequently that it is also necessary to consider briefly some of the other texts in which he demonstrates Quijote’s afterlife.

‘Pierre Menard’ is a text about a text. The fiction describes how Pierre Menard, a minor French essayist and poet, decides, in the 1930s, to write Don Quijote. Menard will not write his own version of Quijote, nor will he copy Miguel de Cervantes’ manuscript; instead, Menard aims to write Don Quijote itself, as if for the first time, using precisely the same words as the ‘original.’ Menard apparently succeeds in writing chapters nine and thirty-eight of Part I of Quijote, and part of chapter twenty-two. In the form of an obituary for Menard, the fiction’s narrator marvels at how different the equivalent sections of Menard’s and Cervantes’ texts are, despite their wording being seemingly identical. Pierre Menard has thus practised a type of translation of Quijote, or at least demonstrated a

manifestation of its afterlife, re-placing the text in a different time and place, even if the language apparently remains identical.

‘Pierre Menard’s significance for the model of textuality and reading developed here is that it allows for a juxtaposition of two apparently identical, yet nevertheless different, texts, Cervantes’ *Quijote* and Menard’s. In their difference, these two texts show the nature of the translation process that occurs in afterlife. ‘Pierre Menard,’ like *Quijote*, shows that translation and afterlife cannot be understood through narratives of ‘progress’ or ‘influence,’ since this model simply cannot account for the type of translation ‘Menard’ describes. In providing a model of how translation occurs in afterlife, ‘Menard’ also allows us to glimpse the possibility of what Benjamin calls pure language, language outside the limitations of human language. ‘Menard’ dramatises the tension between singularity and connectedness that all texts within afterlife inhabit by describing a text that seems, paradoxically, utterly singular and only understandable in relation to other texts. The *Quijote* that Menard writes sits outside any ‘progressive’ model of literary history, and appears unique. Simultaneously, however, because its words are identical to Cervantes’ *Quijote*, it can only be read in its connection to other texts – one of which is the fiction ‘Pierre Menard’ itself. Moreover, thanks to its nature as a text about a text – rather, a text about rewriting that is itself a rewriting of another text – ‘Pierre Menard’ is able to suggest the endless potential that is the messianicity this study argues is central to literature. ‘Menard’s final contribution to the model of reading developed here is an affirmation that an endless potential is present in all texts.

**Textuality**

**Borges and translation**

As argued by Efraín Kristal, Sergio Waisman and Suzanne Jill Levine, translation and translating, using the everyday definitions of those terms, are central to Borges’ writing.³ Borges wrote essays on translation and several fictions which feature translators as characters. He was himself a major translator, producing the first Spanish versions of texts by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner, amongst others.⁴ For the purposes of the current study, Borges’ writings on translation help situate his other texts, and show him to be as much a theorist of


⁴ Kristal, p. xii
translation as a writer whose works engage in literary afterlife. Although Borges used a very different idiom from Benjamin and Derrida, and “objected to […] limiting himself to any specific overarching methodology of translation,” he was as interested in the nature of textuality as either of them, while also being as concerned with the practice of translation (in the sense this study uses the term) as Joyce or Césaire. 

It is mistaken to read Borges as a ‘theorist’ – to seek an “overarching methodology” – since his essays and fictions are provocations. Borges’s writing is fascinated by potentiality, and his essays explore possibilities rather than attempt to provide clear philosophies. However, it is perhaps equally mistaken to think of Benjamin, for example, as a ‘theorist,’ given that his writing largely consists of short, often contradictory or fragmentary essays. In any case, as previous chapters have shown, texts are always fragmentary. In using the ideas of Borges, Benjamin, Césaire or Derrida’s writing, no claim is being made to the author’s authority as the creator of a unified thought-system. Rather, ideas and texts – by the same or different authors – are being put in dialogue, and possibilities emerge between them, in the interplay between singularity and connectedness that defines textuality.

In ‘Las Versiones Homericas’ (1932), the central argument is that translations are simply ‘versions’ of a text. “Translations are a partial and precious documentation of the changes the text suffers,” Borges writes, coming close to the terms of afterlife; translation does not change a text, but demonstrates that it has changed, and how (‘HV’ 69). Borges explains that considering the original text ‘definitive’ is merely a prejudice: “There is no good text that does not seem invariable and definitive if we have turned to it a sufficient number of times […] with famous books, the first time is actually the second, for we begin by already knowing them” (‘HV’ 69). Not knowing the language of the ‘original’ is an advantage for a reader, as it removes the prejudice of considering one version to be supreme, and allows for a simultaneous appreciation of many versions:

> Are not the many versions of the Iliad – from Chapman to Magnien – merely different perspectives on a mutable fact […]? (There is no essential necessity to change languages; this intentional game of attention is possible within a single literature.) To assume that every

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recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is to assume that draft nine is necessarily inferior to draft H – for there can only be drafts (‘HV’ 69).

The ‘original’ text holds no higher status than the translation; both are merely drafts. The original is not ‘definitive’ – no text could be. Borges’ concern here is rather different from this study’s claim that no text is ‘definitive.’ Within the terms of this thesis, no text is definitive as no text ever escapes the process of constant change that is afterlife; no text ever has its every potential fulfilled. Borges’ claim is that no iteration of a named text has higher precedence than any other; he would oppose Benjamin’s retention of the original/translation dichotomy (‘TT’ 256). Borges also suggests here one of the key themes of his writing, that writing, rewriting and translation are effectively synonymous – also true within the model of textuality sketched here.

‘Versiones’ prompts the question of how translations may be evaluated, if the original is no longer an ideal to be imitated as closely as possible, but merely one draft of many potential drafts. The concept of ‘fidelity’ is done away with, and the essential concept is difference. Naming the ‘drafts’ in question “draft nine” and “draft H” suggests incomparability, as the two are conceptualised via different systems; ‘I’ cannot stand in for ‘a’, as ‘α’ or ‘א’ might. For Borges, translations should be described and discussed according to their own terms. This is not a question of the differences between, for example, French and English translations of a Spanish text – the “game […] is possible within a single literature.” Differing translations within the same language are to be judged by differing standards. This, coupled with the idea that the original is merely another ‘draft,’ pre-empts ‘Pierre Menard’ by suggesting the possibility of a translation within the same language as the original. In ‘Versiones,’ the question is not pushed this far; instead, the essay demonstrates how we might compare differing translations of the same text, by quoting six different English translations of the same section of the Odyssey. Borges’ texts often include his own translations of translations, which are then discussed as if they were the originals (that is, the ‘original translations’). This was justifiable for Borges as “the features he wanted to underscore in his comparisons were not affected by the transfer of one language to another [sic].” This suggests, as Borges does elsewhere, that translation and rewriting are about more than simply changing the words of a text.

6 Kristal, p. xxi.
recovered as the past (‘HV’ 74). Were a contemporary of Homer’s to read any of these translations, that reader would find it ‘faithful’ – that is, making the Archaic Greek world knowable – as that reader would be able to recognise things in the translated text a modern-day reader could not. Again, there is here, in kernel form, an idea more fully explored in ‘Pierre Menard’ – that the text will mean different things to different readers in different contexts. If, however, ‘fidelity’ ‘refers to [Homer’s] intentions, then any one of the many [translations] would suffice,” Borges writes (‘HV’ 74). Either authorial intention is irrecoverable, or it is found in the element of texts that lives on in all translations, beyond the specifics of the words used. Either way, translations cannot be judged by how much they conform to ‘intention.’

Borges’ most sustained discussion of translation, ‘Los Traductores del 1001 Noches,’ suggests that the most effective translation is one that modifies the ‘original,’ particularly within the framework of the literary tradition of the translating language – while also allowing the translated text to bring something new into the target culture. This is similar to Benjamin’s argument, quoting Rudolf Pannwitz, in ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’ that translations should be “powerfully affected by the foreign tongue,” and that the best translations are those that differ from the original in terms of ‘meaning’ (‘TT’ 262). Benjamin’s focus is the movement towards pure language, while Borges is more concerned with national literatures in the Thousand and One Nights essay. The Nights essay compares French, English and German versions of the Nights, and the different languages form an important point of Borges’ argument, as the specifics of translation into each language prove not to be interchangeable.

Borges’ essay suggests that modification in translation is not only inevitable – “to translate the spirit is so enormous and phantasmal an intent that it may well be innocuous; to translate the letter, a requirement so extravagant that there is no risk of its ever being attempted” – but also desirable. The Thousand and One Nights is an appropriate example given that there is no fixed ‘original.’ For example, Antoine Galland’s version introduced tales to the Nights that “translators to come – [Galland’s] enemies – would not dare omit,” such as Ali Baba and Aladdin. Galland “established the canon” and so his translation became a new ‘original,’ a starting place for later translations (‘Translators’ 92). Again, Borges’ argument here runs counter to Benjamin’s assertion that, as Derrida paraphrases, “there is no translation of translation” (‘DT’ 126). Borges notes that the immense success of Galland’s text – read across Europe and translated itself, including into Hindi and Arabic – has little to do with the fact that “word for word, Galland’s version is the most poorly written of them all, the least faithful, and the weakest” (‘Translators’ 93). The survival of a text is due to more than the

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7 Jenckes argues that the irrecoverable nature of the past is a theme from Borges’ earliest poems; see Jenckes, p. 5.
actual words on the page, and is inextricable from modification in translation. For this thesis, such modification is survival – afterlife. Borges does not go this far, but is aware that texts do not live on because of their exact wording.

Richard Burton’s translation of the *Nights* is described as a supplement to Edward Lane’s previous translation into English; “what was missing [from Lane’s translation] was the erotic. Burton […] was rampantly capable of filling this gap” (‘Translators’ 100). The translations do not supersede each other, despite Borges writing that “Lane translated against Galland, Burton against Lane”; instead, each translation co-exists as an alternate version, offering something different from previous incarnations (‘Translators’ 92). This suggests that the translation is not only “a moment in the growth of the original, which will complete itself in enlarging itself,” as Derrida writes, but that differing translations of the same text work with and against each other in fulfilling this role (‘DT’ 121). Differing translations complement the original, and other translations, in various ways. Borges summarises that Enno Littman’s German translation “omits not a single word” and “refuses all local colour,” so Littman’s prose is “always lucid, readable, mediocre” (‘Translators’ 108). Burton or Joseph-Charles Mardrus’ translations “can only be conceived of in the wake of a literature” (‘Translators’ 108). In Littman, meanwhile, there is “nothing but the probity of Germany,” despite Germany “possess[ing] only a literature of the fantastic” (‘Translators’ 108). Here, Borges echoes TS Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent,’ where the great writer must have “the historical sense” that “compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer […] has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.” While the past is not recoverable as the past, it is never entirely passed, either, particularly not in relation to texts.

While a translation should, for Borges as for Benjamin, remake the language into which it is being translated, ‘Los Traductores’ also argues that the translating language should change the text – Littman’s *Nights* should be more ‘German.’ This seems to be virtually the entire reason for translation, to remake and redraft the text within the translating language’s tradition. Burton’s *Nights* reveals “the almost inexhaustible process of English […] Donne’s hard obscenity, the gigantic vocabulary of Shakespeare …”, while “In Mardrus’ laughing paragraphs, Salammbô and La Fontaine, the Mannequin d’osier and the ballets russes all coexist” (‘Translators’ 108). Borges seems to suggest here an text-in-afterlife-like setting of texts in dialogue with each other, viewing a text as not merely a straightforward ‘translation’ of another, but providing a focal point for various potentials contained within other texts to converge.

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Translation is also important as a motif in Borges’ fiction. Several of his characters are translators, for example, Jaromir Hladik in ‘El Milagro Secreto,’ but perhaps the most significant is the Averroes of ‘La Busca de Averroes,’ the search of and for Averroes. The fiction concerns the twelfth-century Andalusian philosopher’s attempts to write a commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics. Averroes’ difficulty is that he cannot understand the words ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’; none of his fellow scholars can help him, even as one unwittingly describes a play. The fiction concludes with the narrator admitting defeat at trying to depict Averroes, just as Averroes failed to understand Poetics. The fiction depicts the simultaneous failure and triumph of translation: it is only through translation that Averroes is aware of Aristotle, and the narrator of Averroes, at all. The narrator “tr[ies] to imagine Averroes yet with no more material than a few snatches from Renan, Lane and Asín Palacios.”

Reading Renan means that Borges was reading a French writer’s account of “Latin translations of Hebrew translations of a commentary made upon Arabic translations of Syriac translations of Greek originals.” While translation creates multiple versions of a text, allowing it to live on in different contexts, translations do not impart information about originals and are not representative – as is clear in the Nights and Homer essays. Averroes cannot ‘reach’ Aristotle, nor the narrator Averroes, through translation any more than George Chapman’s Iliad allows anyone to reach a “tenth-century Greek.” Borges seems to agree with Benjamin’s writing that “any translation that intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but communication” – not content or information, merely the fact of attempted, failed communication (‘TT’ 254).

As a translator or rewriter, the text whose afterlife Borges demonstrated the most frequently is probably Don Quijote. The anthology Cervantes y el Quijote collects sixteen fictions, essays, poems and prose poems of Borges’ that treat Quijote as their dominant theme, along with other essays of Borges’ that mention Cervantes or Quijote. The appendix, attempting to list every article, poem, essay or fiction in which Borges mentions Cervantes or Quijote, includes around 150 entries. Although Borges often returned to the same texts or themes, the frequency with which Quijote recurs in his oeuvre is unusual. One reason for the repeated reworking of Quijote in Borges is that Quijote already discusses ideas of rewriting and the limits of fiction or textuality, and so rewriting Quijote allows for discussion of these themes.

Two of Borges’ discussions of Quijote that will guide our reading of the Quijote-‘Menard’ text-in-afterlife are ‘La Supersticiosa Ética del Lector’ and ‘Una Problema.’ ‘Supersticiosa Ética’ argues that Quijote’s “greatest (and perhaps only irrefutable) worth may be its psychological acumen,” and that

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12 Jorge Luis Borges, Cervantes y el Quijote, ed. by Sara Luisa del Carril and Mercedes Rubio de Zocchi (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2005), pp. 169-178
“one need only review a few paragraphs of the Quixote to realize that Cervantes was not a stylist.” However, the stylistic poverty of Quijote proves to be important itself, as “the perfect page, the page in which no word can be altered without harm, is the most precarious of all.” Change is necessary for a text’s survival; indeed, as will be explored below, ‘Pierre Menard’ shows that change and survival are synonymous. The text that cannot change cannot survive. In Derrida’s terms, the totally untranslatable text “dies immediately” (‘LO’ 82). By contrast,

the page that becomes immortal can traverse the fire of typographical errors, approximate translations, and inattentive or erroneous readings without losing its soul in the process […] Don Quixote wins posthumous battles against his translators and survives each and every careless version. Heine, who never read it in Spanish, acclaimed it for eternity. The German, Scandinavian or Hindu ghost of the Quixote is more alive than the stylist’s anxious verbal artifices.

Bad translations do not damage the text’s reputation, as there is some “soul” that is present in each iteration of the text. As in the discussion of Galland’s Thousand and One Nights, the text’s survival is due to neither its flaws nor successes, and bad translations or misprinted texts are no more a barrier to the text’s living on than its own stylistic problems. A text’s continuation is about more than any element that contributes to that text as a physical artefact or piece of writing. Borges writes that this is true of “the page that becomes immortal.” Although ‘Supersticios Ética’ uses different terms, there is similarity here to the concept of the text that is not granted life by its translations, but whose translations demonstrate that it lives on. Again, the afterlife of a text is about more than any individual iteration of it. Those iterations are however important, as they show the text-in-afterlife constantly changing, and existing in multiple versions at once. Borges describes “German, Scandinavian or Hindu” Quijotes, which exist beyond any actual text that reveals them; they are “more alive” than any exercise of literary style. While Borges does not use precisely the terms of ‘afterlife’ described in this thesis, then, he writes that a text that ‘survives’ is more than simply ‘itself’ — and it is Quixote that helps demonstrate this.

‘Una Problema’ is Borges’ most explicit discussion of Quijote as a source of potentiality. ‘Problema’ supposes that a fragment by “the Cide Hamete Benengeli from whom Cervantes derived the Quixote” is discovered. The fragment describes Quijote discovering that he has really killed someone, and “at that point the fragment ends; the problem is to guess or conjecture how Don Quixote would react.” Three possibilities are proposed: that “nothing particular happens, because in the hallucinatory world

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14 Borges, ‘Superstitious Ethics’, p. 54
15 Borges, ‘Superstitious Ethics’, p. 54
of Don Quixote death is no less common than magic”; that “seeing death […] awakens [Quijote] from his pampered madness”; or that “Quixote cannot admit that this tremendous act is a product of delirium” and so he “will never emerge from his madness.”¹⁷ There is one final possibility discussed, alien to the Spanish orb and even to the orb of the Western world […] Don Quixote – who is no longer Don Quixote but a king of the cycles of Hindustan – senses, standing before the dead body of his enemy, that killing and engendering are divine or magical acts which notably transcend the human condition. He knows that the dead man is illusory, the same as the bloody sword weighing in his hand and himself and all his past life and the vast gods and the universe.¹⁸

The suggestion is not that Quijote has begun to read Advaita Vedānta philosophy rather than chivalric romances, but that Quijote allows for this possibility. The text contains the possibility of the initial ‘problem’ and at least four outcomes, even one “alien to the Spanish orb.” The text is not so much a text as a potential source of further texts. That is, Quijote, as translated in Borges, can only be read as a text-in-afterlife, a text within the process of translation continually revealing the potential for more texts and more translation.

It is no coincidence that Pierre Menard rewrites Quijote of all texts. For Borges, as for the model of textuality developed here, texts are sites of potentiality that are always multiple, allowing for rewritings, and Quijote exemplifies this. Additionally, the text of Quijote itself – in Cervantes’ version, as well as Pierre Menard’s – undercuts the very concept of ‘literary history.’ Before examining Borges’ and Pierre Menard’s own rewritings of Quijote in ‘Pierre Menard,’ the next section will summarise some of the multiple ways Don Quijote has been placed in literary history. Quijote has been largely been described in terms of two literary-historical narratives, but its ambiguous position within these narratives, and the text itself, argue against such narratives. As we will see, such a rejection of literary-historical narratives is also central to understanding Pierre Menard’s project, and the ‘Pierre Menard’ fiction itself.

**Don Quijote and literary history**

Several narratives have been drawn to situate Quijote’s influence. The most prominent such narratives are those that describe the influence of the title character on other fictional characters, Don Quijote’s place in the ‘rise of the novel,’ and, more recently, Quijote as a foundational text of Hispanophone America. An example of the first narrative can be seen in Alexander Welsh’s chapter ‘The Influence of Cervantes’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Cervantes*, describing characters who owe their being to the man from La Mancha, including Walter Shandy, Mr. Pickwick, Prince Myshkin

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¹⁷ Borges, ‘A Problem’, p. 280
¹⁸ Borges, ‘A Problem’, pp. 280-1
and even Stephen Daedalus.\textsuperscript{19} The genealogy traced by Welsh argues that within the lineage of European literature, and the way this lineage has been discussed by critics, Don Quijote as a character has proven the most influential aspect of \textit{Quijote}.\textsuperscript{20} A different narrative of \textit{Quijote}’s place in literary history has emerged over the last two decades, both in Europe and America. Cervantean critical focus has largely been directed at the links between Cervantes and America, as demonstrated by the existence, let alone contents, of works such as the bibliographic volume \textit{Cervantes y América/Cervantes en las Américas}, which lists material ranging from contemporary poetry to numerous subgenres of criticism.\textsuperscript{21} Cervantes’ biographical connection to the Americas – more definitive than that of Shakespeare and \textit{The Tempest} – has prompted some of the same sort of criticism as \textit{The Tempest}, with critics cataloguing every reference in Cervantes that may conceivably refer to the Americas.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Quijote} has a history of being reworked within America since 1607.\textsuperscript{23} According to Roberto González Echevarría, it is typical of more recent Hispanophone American reworkings of \textit{Quijote} to place Cervantes/the narrator(s) as central, while Quijote himself is the focus in Spain and, as discussed by Welsh, elsewhere in Europe. González Echevarría describes Julio Cortázar’s \textit{Rayuela}, Gabriel García Márquez’s \textit{Cien Años de Soledad}, Alejo Carpentier’s \textit{El Arpa y la Sombra} and ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del \textit{Quijote}’ as descendants of “the second most important character created by Cervantes in the \textit{Quijote}: not Sancho but the author – or authors – in the fiction.”\textsuperscript{24}

The Spanish writers Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset’s \textit{Del Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida} and \textit{Meditaciones del Quijote} form a contrast to this European/American dichotomy. As with the South American works of fiction named above, these philosophical texts use \textit{Quijote} as a structuring device, but using the character Quijote as a basis for metaphysical enquiry, rather than the narrator(s) of \textit{Quijote} as a means of discussing the nature of fiction. For González Echevarría, these ‘Spanish’ and ‘American’ manifestations of \textit{Quijote}’s afterlife are a result of the way it has been institutionalised as a quintessentially Spanish text – that is, belonging to the Iberian nation-state. The “process of canonization” for \textit{Quijote} “began in the eighteenth century,” and involved an

\textsuperscript{22} On Cervantes’ attempts to attain a post in the Indies, see the editor’s introduction to Miguel de Cervantes, \textit{Don Quixote}, trans. by Burton Raffel, ed. by Diana de Armas Wilson (New York: Norton, 1999), p. viii.
\textsuperscript{23} Riley, p. 107
identification of ‘Spanishness’ with the novel’s hero […] this is what made the Quijote a classic of the language and the founding of a nation […] The identification of the book with Spain climaxed in the Generation of ’98 [which included Unamuno], when the question of national identity reached a crisis […] As the last of the Spanish colonies in America were becoming independent [at least from Spain], the beatings suffered by proud Don Quijote became a national myth to help Spaniards bear their country’s valiant but unsuccessful battle with the new Knight of the White Moon: the modern, powerful, fully armed United States of America.25

The colonial dynamics at work here are striking, and call to mind the conflation of Quijote and the conquistadores – with the difference that the conquistadores ‘won.’26 Here, it is precisely Quijote’s defeat that makes him worthy of adulation. The same could not be true in America, where, according to González Echevarría, “Quijote was not part of any national mythmaking.”27 However, Robert Bayliss notes Venezuela’s ‘Operation Dulcinea,’ under which Hugo Chávez oversaw the free distribution of a million copies of Quijote. Presumably the implications of the project’s name – Dulcinea del Toboso is Quijote’s impossibly perfect, unattainable paramour – were not noticed. Bayliss quotes an unnamed Venezuelan minister saying that Venezuelans should know Quijote as “a symbol of the struggle for justice and the writing of wrongs.” This evocation of Quijote apparently echoes Fidel Castro’s similar usage of the character around fifty years earlier.28 The emphasis in these two examples is most certainly on Quijote, not Quijote, and proves that interest in the character as a nationalist symbol is by no means limited to Spain.

While the Cuban and Venezuelan examples are admittedly more recent than González Echevarría’s or Welsh’s examples of other uses of Quijote, they demonstrate that there is no definitive difference between ‘the European Quijote’ and ‘the American Quijote.’ The different narratives situating Quijote in European or American literary history are constructions with particular ideological ends. There is an irony in building narratives of literary history around Quijote given that Quijote discusses how such narratives develop. As Michael McKeon points out, Quijote’s structure pastiches “the more genealogical species of historical authority on which medieval romances often relied,” via Quijote’s narrator’s explanation that the book is based upon a manuscript found in a marketplace, written by an

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25 González Echevarría, p. 235
26 On links between Quijote and conquistadores, see Diana de Armas Wilson, Cervantes, the Novel and the New World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 109-117.
27 González Echevarría, p. 235
Arabic historian called Cide Hamete Benengeli, which is then translated for the narrator of Quijote by an unnamed Morisco.29

The inverse, complementary operation to establishing “genealogical […] authority” is rejection of another genealogy as false. Such a rejection also takes place in Part II of Quijote, as Quijote denies Avellaneda’s spurious sequel to Part I when characters recognise Quijote as the hero of that text, not Benengeli’s/Cervantes’ ‘authentic’ Quijote. A similar claim to authority can be seen in a recent edition of Quijote. Burton Raffel translates the Moorish historian’s name as Sidi Hamid Benengeli, “a name that readers familiar with Arabic will recognise as the best transcription available of the colloquial (Maghrebi) Arabic.” Raffel does not follow “Golden Age transcriptions of common Arabic names, a practice now widely rejected as forming part of colonialist discourse.”30 Given the structure of Quijote, supposedly copied from translations of Benengeli’s writing, there is some irony in modern translators striving for ‘accuracy’ with Benengeli’s name, as if seeking to undo Cervantes’ originary “colonialist discourse.” There is a suggestion of Borges’ Averroes’ search for Aristotle.

Raffel’s Quijote practises translation as Borges describes the translators of the Thousand and One Nights, “translating against” earlier translators, building a genealogy of false translations that can be rejected to render the current translation the most authentic. However, rather than seeing multiple translations as complementary, or viewing them as located within a particular cultural context, the claim appears to be that Raffel has been able to produce a superior translation to previous translators – he has used “the best transcription available.” Our understanding of the text improves as time passes. Such thinking demonstrates that, while history-as-progress has been attacked from positions as varied as those of Walter Benjamin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, it appears not to have been rejected in thought about literary history.

There are many examples of literary history being thought of as a narrative of progress. For example, Diana de Armas Wilson, in Cervantes, the Novel and the New World, a book with keen attention for some of postcolonial theory’s concerns, castigates Ian Watt’s Anglocentric narrative placing Defoe as central to the rise of the novel, while remaining within the same logic of literary-historical ‘progress’ by attempting simply to replace a monolingual narrative beginning with Defoe with a multilingual narrative beginning with Cervantes.31 Even radical poststructuralist critics have given credence to ‘progress’ in literary history, while those critics dismantle ideas of what a literary text is. Graham Allen explains how modernism was seen as radically new by both Kristeva and Barthes:

30 De Armas Wilson, ‘Editor’s Introduction’ in Don Quijote, p. xv
31 De Armas Wilson, Cervantes, the Novel and the New World, pp. 60-77
Barthes frequently confirms Kristeva’s sense of a break in literature and other signifying practices at the end of the nineteenth century [...] it would appear that for Barthes, as for Kristeva, only Modernist and Postmodernist literature gives us examples of the text; examples, that is, of texts which, because they self-consciously put into play the power of the signifier and writing, can be re-written, rather than simply read, by the reader.\textsuperscript{32}

Barthes goes even further by naming “Proust, Flaubert, Balzac, even – why not? – Alexandre Dumas” as authors from whom he is “cut off […] in the very moment their remoteness establishes my modernity.”\textsuperscript{33} If Marcel Proust can be grouped with Dumas, it is not clear when the modern ‘break’ occurred. It seems that, in any case, the past is simply the past, homogenous, and different from modernity, now. By valorising modernism as radically different from anything before and allowing for a new conception of textuality, Barthes and Kristeva are invoking ideas of progress – modern(ist) literature is in some way different, more complex than what had gone before. It is not merely that Barthes and Kristeva ironically return into a belief in progress even as ‘the text’ is redefined by them, but that a belief in progress is apparently essential to their redefinition of ‘text.’

A return to \textit{Quijote} could be instructive here. \textit{Quijote} is nothing if not self-conscious, and while it would be extreme to argue that there is \textit{no} difference between \textit{Quijote} and the modernist avant-garde, it seems equally unusual to exclude \textit{Quijote} from a progressive model of literary history heralding modernism as a sea-change for fiction’s ‘rewritability.’ Kristeva and Barthes are far from alone in such a model; for example, Patricia Waugh’s \textit{Metafiction}, a study of modern and postmodern ‘self-aware’ writing such as that of Donald Bartholome or John Fowles, mentions \textit{Quijote} once, in the same sentence as \textit{Tristram Shandy}, and the index includes no mention of Cervantes or \textit{Quijote}.\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Quijote} as a self-referential text has not been completely critically ignored; Robert Alter’s \textit{Partial Magic}, the title taken from Borges, discusses “the other great tradition,” the self-aware novel, in European literature, with Lawrence Sterne and Denis Diderot following in \textit{Quijote}’s wake.\textsuperscript{35} However, Borges’ ‘Magias Parciales del \textit{Quijote}’ draws attention to even older, non-European examples that trouble the boundaries of fictionality, such as the \textit{Thousand and One Nights} and the \textit{Ramāyana}.\textsuperscript{36}

Even if non-European examples are excluded from a literary history, \textit{Quijote} alone seems to give the lie to the idea that modernism inaugurates the particular innovation of self-consciously fictitious texts. A literary history that excludes any concept of pre-modern literary self-consciousness seems an attempt to differentiate the ‘us’ of modernity from the ‘them’ of history, a necessity of a model of

\textsuperscript{32} Allen, \textit{Intertextuality}, p. 67
\textsuperscript{36} Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Partial Magic in the \textit{Quixote}’, trans. by James Irby, in \textit{Labyrinths}, pp. 228-231
literary history that treats progress as its central theme. Moreover, such a model of European literature is attempting to create an understanding of European modernity. This is not to suggest that Kristeva and Barthes are reproducing colonialist discourses of history, but the different narratives of literary history *Quijote* has been part of, or excluded from, in Europe and America seem to imply that Europe, modernism and modernity are coterminous. The very different narrative of *Quijote’s* influence in South America may exist alongside a narrative of European literary history that stresses modernism as ‘new,’ but apparently cannot be integrated with it. The different narratives of literary history and *Quijote’s* place in it are, like all historical narratives, ideological.

Both in its content and its various claimed places within literary history, *Don Quijote* shows the contradictions of understanding literary history as a single narrative of ‘progression.’ A progress-centric model of literary history is antithetical to the concept of afterlife, which, in understanding the text as within a constant process of translation, rejects teleology; constant change never reaches a goal. The progress-led model of literary history is also rejected within Borges’ writing. If several, simultaneous translations of the *Thousand and One Nights* can be praised equally, and *Quijote* can be compared to the *Ramāyana*, teleology or periodisation are absent. As will be explored below, for Borges as for Benjamin, historical events and texts are not contiguous or embedded in a larger structure of history. One way the ‘Menard’ fiction itself acts as a translation of *Quijote* is that literary history-as-progress or -narrative are shown to be misguided beliefs by its description of Pierre Menard’s project. Menard resurrects *Quijote*, while simultaneously creating *Quijote* as new, three hundred years after it has already been written. There is no linear model of literary history that allows for such an event. The way in which Menard calls literary history into question links to the reading practice described in this thesis by arguing against narrative literary history, while also focussing on literature as a site of potential.

Before exploring how the Borges-*Quijote* text-in-afterlife discusses potentiality, however, it is useful to ask how Pierre Menard’s project of (re)writing *Quijote* may actually be described. Menard’s *Quijote* is at once similar to and different from Cervantes’. It is not a rewriting: Menard is not copying Cervantes, and insists that he is writing with only a vague recollection of *Quijote*. *Quijote*, as far as Menard is concerned, “can well equal the imprecise and prior image of a book not yet written,” much

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38 Barthes, ‘Discourse of History’
the same as any other idea that might prompt the writing of a book. Menard’s achievement is that he does not ‘rewrite’ Quijote, or write another Quijote; he writes Quijote, in words that happen to coincide exactly with Cervantes’. However, it is also difficult to state that Menard has written the Quijote, as Cervantes’ Quijote still exists, and is temporally prior to Menard’s. Menard’s text thus exists in a curious state of being both one thing and another, exactly the same as Cervantes’ text while also radically different. It is this duality that allows us to describe Menard’s project as translating Quijote.

As with Chapter One’s readings of Benjamin and Derrida, it is discussion of translation in ‘Menard’ that provides the opening for a larger discussion of language, history and textuality. Reading Pierre Menard’s project as a translation of Cervantes’ Quijote shows the impossibility of ‘fidelity’ in translation; change is inescapable. However, as Benjamin argues, it is that change in translation that allows for a glimpse of what he calls pure language. As we will see, Pierre Menard’s project is uniquely placed to offer a glimpse of pure language due to the paradoxical nature of its change. In appearing identical to its ‘original,’ yet nevertheless being different, Menard’s Quijote offers an insight into the precise nature of the translation process that defines all texts’ afterlife.

Language

Menard as translator

George Steiner has called ‘Menard’ “the most acute, most concentrated commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation.” Despite the fact that Menard does not use equivalent words from another language – ‘not-Spanish’ – when writing his Quijote, much else of Menard’s creative process seems similar to what we may think of as translating. Menard suggests this in his letter to the narrator. “My problem is a good bit more difficult than Cervantes’,” he explains. “I have taken on the mysterious duty of reconstructing literally his spontaneous work” (‘Menard’ 67-8). Like a translator, Menard is attempting to write something that has already been written.

Menard is not free, as he feels Cervantes was, to be “carried along by the inertias of language and invention”; Menard’s writing is already determined by someone else’s (‘Menard’ 68). It is not that

40 George Steiner, After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 70
Menard has no volition – he is not transcribing *Quijote*, and a translator may choose which words are used – but, equally, he is not an ‘original author,’ apparently free to write simply anything. Menard explains his restrictions as “two polar rules” that govern how he writes. “The first allows me to try out formal or psychological variants; the second forces me to sacrifice them to the ‘original’ text and to come, by irrefutable arguments, to those eradications…”[41] Menard is describing the issue of fidelity in translation, the choice between modifying the source text in translation so that the translation reads as a translation, and attempting to remain utterly ‘faithful’ to the source text. Although Menard calls both of these “artificial constraints,” the latter is presented as more artificial and difficult, as Menard must then justify why his text does not deviate at all from Cervantes’, when it would appear more likely that it should. As in the Homer or *Thousand and One Nights* essays, modification in translation is unavoidable, but also desirable.

Steiner calls Menard’s project “total translation.”[42] Menard has perfectly preserved the style and diction of the 1605 text, the goal of any translation working under the principle of the ‘invisible translator.’ His translation is so faithful to the original that it is identical. What Menard cannot do, however, is preserve the 1605 text’s meaning. Menard’s eulogist demonstrates this by quoting Cervantes’ phrase from Chapter Nine of *Quijote* – “…truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future’s counsellor.” “Written in the seventeenth century,” surmises Menard’s eulogist, “by the ‘lay genius’ Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history” (‘Menard’ 69). This phrase is itself not uncomplicated – it is unclear what “history” means here, and what it means to “praise” it. However, the narrator is astonished at the complexity of a verbally identical sentence in Menard’s text:

> History, the *mother* of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases – *exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future’s counsellor* – are brazenly pragmatic (‘Menard’ 69).

The exact same words cannot but mean differently in Menard’s translation of Cervantes. In part, ‘Pierre Menard’ is a demonstration of the untenability of faithfulness in translation.[43] In describing a perfectly faithful translation – a translation literally indistinguishable from the ‘original’ – the fiction suggests total faithfulness is not merely undesirable, but impossible. Even if the words are identical in translation and original, context and meaning can never be preserved. The most ‘faithful’ translation

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[41] Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’, in *Collected Fictions*, pp. 88-95, p. 93
[42] Steiner, p. 71
imaginable would, in fact, be unfaithful, as it would mean something entirely different from the ‘original’ text. An alternate version of utter fidelity would be a gloss on Cervantes’ text, explaining precisely what each phrase meant in 1604 – if such a thing were ever possible. ‘Faithfulness’ in translation appears to be a choice between “word for word” and “sense for sense” translation, as St. Jerome phrased it in one of the earliest and most influential texts of European translation theory.\textsuperscript{44} However, as ‘Menard’ shows, all translation exists in the tension between the two. To choose one over the other creates a translation as ‘unfaithful’ as any other.

Rather than evaluate translations as to whether or not change has occurred – change is inescapable – the question is what sort of change occurs, and how to describe it. This is the case for Pierre Menard’s \textit{Quijote} even if we read Menard’s project, as Steiner does, as ‘translation’ in the everyday sense of the word. Reading Menard as demonstrating ‘translation’ in the sense this study uses the term – afterlife – shows that change is not merely unavoidable, but inescapable; it is constantly happening. The ‘same’ text continually differs from itself in afterlife. This is, paradoxically, demonstrated by Menard’s \textit{Quijote} in the fact that it seems identical to the text it translates. As we will see, it is Menard’s \textit{Quijote}’s simultaneous similarity to and difference from its ‘original’ that offers an insight into the way all texts are continually translated within afterlife.

\textit{Don Quijote as translation}

Pierre Menard does not ‘translate’ in the usual sense of the word as he writes in the same language as the text he is ‘translating’ – indeed, he writes the precise same words. However, as the narrator of the fiction points out by quoting Cervantes and Menard together, those ‘identical’ words are not identical. The same words do not mean the same thing in the two \textit{Quijotes}. The \textit{Quijotes} are not identical, due to their situation within time. Even if the texts were identical – which they are not; Menard’s \textit{Quijote} consists of only a few chapters – they could not be said to be identical, as no text is ever identical to itself, and is constantly moving away from itself. This is afterlife.

Menard’s and Cervantes’ \textit{Quijotes} are not identical, due to their differing historical contexts. The context of Pierre Menard’s \textit{Quijote}, which Daniel Balderston dates to “the mid- to late 1930s,” was very different from that of Cervantes’ writing, and this necessarily changes the text.\textsuperscript{45} In describing “the debate on pacifism and militarism” in French intellectual circles “from 1914 to 1939,” and Menard’s contribution to it, Balderston wittily demonstrates why ‘Menard’s narrator is quite so amazed by Menard’s Quijote, “a contemporary of \textit{La Trahison des Clercs} and Bertrand Russell,”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Jerome, ‘Letter to Pammachius, #57’, trans. by Paul Caroll, in \textit{Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche}, ed. by Douglas Robinson (Manchester: St Jerome, 2002), pp. 23-30, p. 25
\end{itemize}
arguing in favour of arms over letters (‘Menard’ 68).46 The context in which we read a text as having been written determines how we understand it. Appropriately, ‘Menard’ demonstrates this through a quotation suggesting that ‘history’ orders what we already believe we know, rather than discovering absolute truths about the past.

We cannot disregard the context of a text’s production when we are reading it. Following Derrida, the context in which a text is produced or read necessarily influences meaning, since ‘meaning’ only arises between various signs. ‘Meaning’ is differance, and so context is part of the sign-network that creates meaning; signs do not operate in isolation from each other, pointing toward an ‘absolute,’ external referent. This is what Derrida means by “il n’y a pas d’hors-texte” – there is nothing but context, while equally there is nothing outside the text.47 ‘Context’ and ‘the text’ are inextricable. The narrator of ‘Pierre Menard’ understands the importance of context, recognising that texts do not have innate meaning, but meaning that is, in part, produced by texts’ contexts. As the last sentence of the fiction points out, imagining that a text was written by a different author, or at a different time, would change how we read it (‘Menard’ 71).

Re-placing a text within a different context changes it. Accepting this means that a text is necessarily translated simply through its existence within time. The starting point for this study’s development of a model of textuality and reading is the idea, drawn from Benjamin’s and Derrida’s writings on translation, that texts exist within a process of continual translation. Afterlife is the text’s constant translation, a process that fulfils some of the potentialities contained within a text and so expands it. As was argued in Chapter One, textuality, afterlife, translatability and the state of being in translation are inextricable. For a text to exist is for that text to be continually translated. As Benjamin’s model of history suggests, change occurs in the connection between the past and present. Therefore, readers approaching a text from ‘the past’ can only ever encounter it as translated. It is not that the text has ‘changed’ since its inception, and that the ‘original’ is unrecoverable; more than that, the text is always encountered as having changed, no matter how many times it is returned to. The context in which we encounter a text is always different, and so the text is always read as different. Effectively, texts can only be read as if they are constantly being translated, since it is impossible to read ‘the same’ text twice. A text is never identical to itself since it is constantly changing. ‘The same’ text is never any such thing; it cannot be. The text is constantly becoming multiple other texts, simultaneously changing in various ways in afterlife, as changes occur on top of changes.

‘Menard’ exemplifies this translation process by showing how the same text – the same sentence, even – is never identical to itself. The Don Quijote Cervantes published in 1605 no longer exists; it

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46 Balderston, Out of Context, pp. 23-33
47 Derrida, Grammatology, p. 158
stopped existing as it came into being, because it always differed from itself. As the text changes, change acts upon each ‘new’ version of *Quijote*, such that, as Manuel Durán and Fay Rogg put it, “the novel by Cervantes has split […] and has become thousands of novels […] one of these being by Pierre Menard.”48 Regardless of whether Cervantes or Menard physically wrote the words in question, ‘the same’ text has changed. In the terms of the ‘Pierre Menard’ fiction, the reader in 1938 cannot read “La verdad, cuya madre es la historia…” as Cervantes would have in 1605. Hence Menard rejects his first method of attempting to write *Quijote*, becoming identical to Cervantes. The fiction’s narrator grants that becoming Cervantes would be “impossible,” “but the undertaking [of writing *Quijote*] was impossible from the very beginning and of all the impossible ways of carrying it out, this was the least interesting” (‘Menard’ 66). To attempt to recover an always already lost ‘original,’ to recover the past ‘as it was,’ is less interesting, and more misguided, than the equally impossible task of trying to create a novelty identical to something from the past. Because the text and readers cannot escape history, the text can only be read as translated.

The movement of history also means that language itself changes. For Derrida, this is differance; language has never not ‘changed’ because no sign ever has a fixed meaning. Additionally, however, language changes in a more empirical way. Seventeenth-century Spanish is not identical to twentieth-century Spanish. Despite being composed of identical words, Cervantes’ and Menard’s *Quijotes* cannot be the same, since 300 years separates them. Pierre Menard’s “archaic style […] suffers from a certain affectation” while Cervantes “handles with ease the current Spanish of his time” (‘Menard’ 69). Benjamin insists that this change in language is not merely due to changes in peoples’ use of language; it occurs within texts, due to their situation within history and their ‘life’:

> There is a further maturing even of words already set down […] Seeking the essence of such changes (as well as those, similarly constant, affecting meaning) in the subjectivity of later generations rather than in the inmost life of language and its works would mean […] mixing up the reason for and the essence of a thing; speaking more strictly, however, it would mean denying one of the mightiest and most fruitful of historical processes […]49

Just as texts change in afterlife, the written language that makes up those texts itself changes in Benjamin’s conception of history. The same words become different from themselves. Translation is “far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages” because the words themselves change, in addition to their change in meaning (‘TT’ 256).

The ‘difference’ between Spanish and Spanish in ‘Menard,’ then, is the most literal kind. The most fundamental difference between Cervantes’ and Menard’s words is at the base of the words

48 Durán and Rogg, pp. 228-9  
49 Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, trans. by Underwood, p. 34
themselves. Just as Benjamin’s *Brot* and *pain* are resolutely not the same (‘TT’ 257), Cervantes’ “la verdad” is not the same as Menard’s “la verdad.” The difference is not only because Menard is “a contemporary of William James,” nor because the words have acquired different meanings between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. It is not that readers’ understanding of words has changed, either. All these changes may have occurred, but following Benjamin, Menard’s text, existing at a different point in history from Cervantes’ text, is *not* Cervantes’ text, and so every word of Menard’s text is different from Cervantes’. In and of themselves, each word of the two ‘identical’ texts is different. The artist’s intention does not ‘create’ the words as different from each other; nor is it a case of the reader of the texts choosing to ‘read’ difference or not. Rather, one set of words comprises Cervantes’ *Quijote*, and another set comprises Menard’s. These two sets of words being identical does not stop them being different. Just as texts change in afterlife, for Benjamin, the words that make up a text change too, as part of this movement of translation.

Menard’s *Quijote* shows how translation in afterlife works on texts – paradoxically, through its similarities to Cervantes’ *Quijote*, the text it translates. The words of Menard’s translation of *Quijote* may have changed, but they also remain ‘the same’ words as the original text. Menard’s *Quijote* therefore allows us to compare a translation to itself. Such a comparison, of simultaneous similarity and difference, means that Menard’s *Quijote*, when read in the terms of Benjamin’s writings on translation, is perhaps an exemplary translation. In conforming, in one form, to Benjamin’s vision for translations, Menard’s *Quijote*, when compared with Cervantes’, allows us to begin to work towards Benjamin’s ‘pure language.’

**Pure language**

Translation is, for Benjamin, a “provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” – foreignness between languages, and the foreignness of language *itself* (‘TT’ 257). Full realisation of the true nature of language would be the messianic attainment of pure language. For Benjamin, translation points towards pure language not through a translation’s similarity to its ‘original,’ but the gaps in meaning that are revealed in the translation process. The foreignness of language(s) is partially demonstrated through imperfect matches in “ways of meaning,” that is, the words used to signify a concept in a particular language (‘TT’ 257). The referents of words in different languages may be the same, but *how* those words mean is different. Translations, for Benjamin, should seek to create meaning in a similar way to originals, not attempt to ‘mean the same thing.’ Translating using a similar ‘way of meaning’ to the ‘original’ helps make the original and the translation “recognisable as the broken part of a greater language, just as fragments are broken parts of a vessel.”

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50 Jacobs, p. 762
‘fragments’ of pure language: incomplete, partial representations suggesting something larger. Following the translated language’s ‘way of meaning’ in the translating language helps us recognise the fragmentary nature of all languages – the “foreignness of languages.” By perceiving the differences between languages in translation, and viewing languages as supplements to each other, we can begin to glimpse pure language – the sum total of all languages.

To achieve this glimpse, it does not matter which languages are juxtaposed in translation. We are innately alienated from language, either because, as Benjamin argues in ‘Über Sprache Überhaupt,’ language is intrinsically judgemental, or because, as Derrida argues in Le Monolinguiisme de l’Autre, language is intrinsically colonial. Individual languages are merely symptomatic of the overall nature of language. Comparison of ‘languages’ to help realise the nature of language as such may, therefore, be possible within the same language.

Menard’s Quijote, when read as a translation of Cervantes’, allows us to juxtapose a language with itself. Spanish cannot remain identical to itself between the two texts; even the same words of Spanish change. In juxtaposing a ‘translation’ and original, and seeing the differences in ‘meaning’ even as the words – the ‘ways of meaning’ – are so similar as to be ‘identical,’ our attention is drawn to language’s uncanny, contingent nature. The differences in meaning, even of the ‘same’ words in the two Quijotes, show that no language is ever all-encompassing; there is always the possibility of change. In showing that language is never complete, even as it is inescapable, Menard’s translation can be read as pointing towards the possibility of the realisation of the true nature of language. In its apparently being identical to the text it translates, Menard’s Quijote can draw attention to the nature of language itself, and to the possibility of pure language, more clearly than most translations, which may confuse the issue by focussing on the differences between individual languages. Removing the idea of differences between languages highlights that such difference exists within all languages.

Menard’s project shows how little help Benjamin’s recommendations are to practising translators, if the ideal, pure language-suggesting translation is verbally identical – inasmuch as this is possible – to the original. The nearer we are to making the nature of pure language apparent, the more we are trapped within ‘one’ language. As Chapter Two showed, this is the state of tension in which afterlife occurs: the more a text becomes untranslatable, the nearer it is to being totally translatable; the nearer the messianic arrival is, the further away it is. This tension also informs the reading practice developed here, reading texts between singularity and connectedness. As we will see, ‘Pierre Menard’ makes this tension more apparent than many texts.

Reading between the two versions of Quijote, Menard’s and Cervantes’, allows a reader to perceive ‘gaps’ between language(s), which in this study’s reading of Benjamin help to imagine the possibility of pure language, language outside judgement. It is reading Menard’s Quijote in conjunction with
Cervantes’ *Quijote* that allows for this. Reading Menard’s *Quijote* as part of the same text-in-afterlife as Cervantes’ *Quijote* shows how a text cannot but differ from ‘itself,’ while contrasting the two *Quijotes* demonstrates Spanish differing from itself, and moves towards revealing the foreignness of language itself. Reading Pierre Menard’s *Quijote* as part of a text-in-afterlife, reading it in its connectedness to another text – whether Cervantes’ *Quijote*, Benjamin’s writings, or both – helps to reveal messianic possibilities.

Within the terms of afterlife, texts can only be read in connection to other texts, since texts continually differ from ‘themselves’ – reading a text as linked to its ‘original’ context is to read it in connection to another text, a former version of itself. We cannot do away with connections between texts altogether. To reiterate Derrida’s argument, no text entirely determines its own signification. This innate connectedness seems more apparent in the case of Menard’s *Quijote* than perhaps any other text, since it is apparently identical to ‘another’ text. However, Menard’s project is inherently contradictory. Reading ‘Menard’ through the lens of Benjamin’s and Borges’ models of history shows Menard’s *Quijote* to be perhaps as singular as a text can be. The ‘Pierre Menard’ fiction dramatises the difficulty of reading within this tension between singularity and connectedness. Additionally, in demonstrating two possibilities within the same text-in-afterlife – two possible versions of *Quijote*-in-afterlife – the fiction demonstrates the potentiality that exists within this contradictory state of singularity and connectedness. As we will see, ‘Menard’s ultimate importance for the models of textuality and reading developed here is to remind us that, in spite of the restrictions of textuality, language and history, all literature is charged with a virtually endless potential for change.

**History**

**Disrupting history**

This section will read ‘Pierre Menard’ in the terms of Benjamin’s understanding of history to show how the fiction enacts the tension between singularity and connectedness that defines textuality. The singularity of the event is key to both Borges and Benjamin’s models of history. For Benjamin, each historical event must be considered separately, removed from homogenous empty time. The historian’s task is to recognise the connection between a past event and a specific present. In recognising such connections, the character of history itself is partially realised, just as language partially realises pure language.
Borges, like Benjamin, rejects the idea that historical events take place within a larger structure, although he does not theorise what he considers a more appropriate way of conceptualising history. “Every instant is autonomous,” Borges writes in ‘Nueva Refutación del Tiempo.’ “Each moment we live exists, not the imaginary combination of these moments.” Although Borges’ concern here is time rather than history, history and the way it is conceptualised are linked. Borges writes that in August 1824, the Battle of Junín took place in Peru, and Thomas de Quincey wrote a “diatribe against Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.” “These deeds,” Borges asserts, “were not contemporaneous (they are now).” This suggests a Benjamin-like understanding that while events are not embedded in a larger structure, ‘history,’ we can, from the perspective of now, view past events simultaneously and relate them to the present day – we can understand them as historical.

As is often the case with Borges, ‘Neuva Refutación’ is at once a joke and deadly serious. We should not read the essay as a fully-formed ‘theory,’ nor understand it as the expression of the philosophy of the figure ‘Borges’ that we can then apply to all his texts. For example, ‘Nueva Refutación’ asks, “Are the enthusiasts who devote themselves to a line of Shakespeare not literally Shakespeare?” ‘Menard’ would seem to answer negatively; Pierre Menard devotes himself to a few lines of Cervantes and is emphatically not Cervantes. However, ‘Nueva Refutación’ and its similarities to Benjamin’s model of history show how reading Benjamin and Borges together enactment potentialities found in each of their texts. Much as ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’ rejects progressive narrative history that focusses on causality, ‘Pierre Menard’ seems to reject any progressive narrative of literary history.

Benjamin never systematically linked his conception of history to a conception of literary history. However, as Chapter One explored, essays such as ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’ and ‘Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft’ suggest that Benjamin understood literary history similarly to history more generally. Mosès writes that for Benjamin, works of art, including texts, are “essentially a-historic.” Mosès quotes a letter of 1923 in which Benjamin writes that

the specific historicity of works of art is not manifested in ‘the history of art’ but in their interpretations. This brings out correlations between the works which, while outside of time, are nevertheless not bereft of historical relevance.

As Mosès glosses this, “what Benjamin means by the ‘a-historicity’ of works of art is that they are not engendered by one another in a causal series.” This is echoed in Benjamin’s writing that “no

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52 Borges, ‘New Refutation’, p. 322
53 Borges, ‘New Refutation’, p. 323
state of affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical.” ‘Historical’ events are not so because they followed from or caused other ‘historical’ events. Rather, the event “became historical posthumously,” through the historian’s “grasp[ing] the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one” (‘History’ 397). Similarly, the “historicity” of artworks comes about in their “interpretations” – it is historiography that renders artworks “historical,” revealing their specific character and relation to a present. Following this idea of the text’s ‘a-historicity,’ literary history conceived of as a narrative or a sequence is not only an unethical or misguided model of history; it is simply incorrect, because artworks do not link to one another in the way narrative literary history presupposes. The present does not come from the past or link to the future. Instead, as Mosès writes, the artwork exists within “a zone of autonomous temporality”; the collation of all these zones “could neither add up to nor form a continuous evolution.”56 Not part of a chain of causality, texts are unique, entirely separate from a larger structure.

Pierre Menard, the author, can be read as an example of Benjamin’s ideal historian. Menard understands *Quijote* as an utterly singular ‘event.’ He completely separates the text from homogenous empty time, or history-as-progress. Menard does not try to understand the seventeenth-century text as a seventeenth-century text. It is just a text. Menard’s explicit rejection of attempting to write *Quijote* as a text from the past is shown when he decides against trying to “be Miguel de Cervantes” (‘Menard’ 66). The past as past cannot be recovered. As both Benjamin and Borges explain, this would compromise the singularity of the event. Menard’s attempting to write *Quijote* as if he were Cervantes would be to “forget the history of Europe” between the first decade of the seventeenth century and the third decade of the twentieth (‘Menard’ 66). Instead, Menard decides “to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quijote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard” (‘Menard’ 66). Neither Menard nor Benjamin want to forget the intervening years between the historical “monad” and the present day; they want to change thought about the past in total. Menard acknowledges the intervening period between his own and Cervantes’ *Quijotes* in a wonderful understatement – “it is not in vain that three hundred years have gone by, filled with exceedingly complex events” (‘Menard’ 67-8). Ignoring the past is easy. Attempting to recreate the past, as Menard realises, is impossible and even, following Benjamin, unethical, as it remains within the logic that valorises only history’s “victors” (‘History’ 391; see Section VII).

Menard seems to suggest that he appreciates *Quijote* more properly than those who place it within literary history. When *Quijote* is supposedly understood as a novel from ‘the past,’ placed within literary history-as-progress, it becomes “the occasion for patriotic toasts, grammatical insolence and obscene de luxe [sic] editions,” Menard disapprovingly notes (‘Menard’ 70). As with the historical

55 Mosès, p. 85
56 Mosès, p. 86
event, understanding the literary-historical ‘event,’ or text, as part of a narrative from the past to the present causes the true import of that text to be underappreciated. Even as it appears to be celebrated, in “de luxe editions,” the book becomes simply another ‘famous’ book, simply a text from the past. Menard would like *Quijote* to be recognised “above all” as “an entertaining book” (‘Menard’ 70) – recognising its idiosyncrasies and specificities, much as Benjamin would have us view the event. Menard’s seeming rejection of the influence or ‘historical importance’ of *Quijote* is, in fact, valuing it more highly than those who would argue about its influence, in recognising its uniqueness.

Separating *Quijote* from a place within literary history means that the text is understood in its singularity. As Benjamin writes, when the historical event is understood as utterly singular, the historian can “blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history; thus, he blasts a specific life out of the era, a specific work out of the lifework” (‘History’ 396). This is precisely what Menard does with *Quijote*. *Quijote* is radically separated from Cervantes, and in this, is removed from its historical status. *Quijote* is no longer part of a narrative of progress or literary influence that places it at the beginning of the ‘rise of the novel’ – for Menard’s *Quijote* to be described as such would be anachronistic. Instead, Menard’s *Quijote* exists alone, outside of a wider structure of literary history or ‘progress.’ The text is singular, cut off from any surrounding structure. Menard’s *Quijote*’s singularity is underlined in the narrator’s comment that it is surprising that Menard should write *Quijote* of all books, when he was “essentially a devoté of Poe, who engendered Baudelaire, who engendered Mallarmé, who engendered Valéry, who engendered Edmond Teste” (‘Menard’ 67). Borges mocks the idea that writers or texts should fit into pre-arranged lines of descent, both by listing a genealogy to which Menard’s *Quijote* definitively does not belong, and by including the fictional Edmond Teste and Menard alongside Baudelaire.57

It appears that Pierre Menard’s project simply cannot be integrated into literary history-as-progress. Menard’s *Quijote* does not follow any line of descent from Cervantes’; there is no narrative of progress that begins with the 1605 *Quijote* and ends with the verbally identical 1930s *Quijote*. Menard’s *Quijote*’s separation from history is so extreme that the text seems to bypass ‘progress’ completely. “Philosophers publish the intermediary stages of their labour in pleasant volumes and I have resolved to do away with those stages,” Menard writes to the narrator (‘Menard’ 66). There is no way to trace the process, or progress, of this *Quijote*’s creation – it simply appears, as if it sprung from nothing.

This apparently complete escape from process seems to show that ‘Menard,’ read via Benjamin’s model of history, disproves afterlife. If texts are to be understood as unique and outside any larger...

structure of history, not causally connected to any preceding or following texts, it seems difficult to argue that texts exist within a process of constant translation. However, Menard’s *Quijote* is in fact a clear demonstration of how this translation process works. As detailed above, the text can only ever be read as if it is constantly translated, as it has changed each time it is encountered. Whether the text has ‘really’ changed, or whether this change is causal or not, is irrelevant because it is unknowable.

Bound by textuality, language and history, we can only read texts as if they are continually translated. Rather than disprove afterlife, ‘Pierre Menard’ is in fact essential to a model of textuality and reading premised on afterlife, in demonstrating that afterlife is not a way to describe literary ‘influence.’ The reading practice developed here is interested in how texts live on outside of themselves, but is not concerned with drawing up genealogical narratives. Reading ‘Menard’ together with Benjamin demonstrates why. Far from disproving afterlife, ‘Menard’ in fact exemplifies the way the translating process of afterlife works, and shows why it cannot be thought of in terms of literary-historical narratives of descent.

Menard’s *Quijote* exists in a contradictory state. Through its links to Cervantes’ *Quijote*, it apparently demonstrates the constant translation process the text undergoes, and yet it exists as utterly singular, unconnected to any other text in history, and shows that literary history cannot be understood as progression. Menard’s *Quijote* is, therefore, perhaps the prime exemplar of the tension in which a text exists in afterlife. The pull between singularity and connectedness, between untranslatability and total translatability, is the state of textuality. Moreover, the tension between uniqueness and being situated within a larger structure is, in both Benjamin and Derrida, the site of messianic potential. Although ‘Pierre Menard’ may appear unconcerned with anything like messianicity, its focus on the nature of textuality means that the fiction is completely connected to this study’s focus on messianic afterlife. This is the case because, even leaving aside Pierre Menard’s paradoxical project, the fiction itself exists as part of the afterlife of *Don Quijote*. The fiction simultaneously demonstrates multiple aspects of *Quijote*’s afterlife, and so gestures towards the endless potential of literature. It is to ‘Menard’s demonstration of this potential that we will now turn.

**Singularity and connectedness**

Pierre Menard’s version of *Don Quijote* is paradoxical because it literally cannot be read as itself. Menard’s text could not be recognised as its own text without contextual information. That is, without knowing that Pierre Menard, rather than Miguel de Cervantes, wrote the words on the page, we could not recognise Menard’s *Quijote* as such. If Menard’s text is simply read by itself, unconnected to any other work and not situated within (literary) history, not only is its full significance not recognisable, it cannot even be recognised for what it is. In being completely cut off from the surrounding structure
of literary history, Menard’s *Quijote* simply vanishes; it is, as the narrator suggests, an ‘invisible work.’

In being verbally identical to another text, Menard’s *Quijote* is so near to being a complete translation that it is indistinguishable as a text in its own right. Menard’s *Quijote* embodies the contradiction Derrida describes in writing that “totally translatable, [a text] disappears as a text […] Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately” (‘LO’ 82). As discussed in Chapter Two, the two extremes of afterlife would be the text that could not participate in afterlife – the untranslatable text – or the culmination of afterlife, the text in which every potential had been fulfilled – the totally translated text. Menard’s *Quijote* exists perilously close to both of these extremes. If not the totally translated text, since it is verbally identical to only one other text, Menard’s *Quijote* nevertheless demonstrates how the totally translated text would be unrecognisable as a text in its own right. Conversely, and simultaneously, Menard’s *Quijote* is almost untranslatable; it is so removed from surrounding structures that give it meaning – its relation to other literary works – that it all but vanishes. Pierre Menard’s “most significant” work is almost unreadable (‘Menard’ 65).

Existing simultaneously at both extremes of the tension between untranslatability and translatability means that Menard’s *Quijote* is, even more than other texts, *only* readable in relation to other texts. The more singular a text is, the more it must be read in connection to other texts. Because Menard’s *Quijote* only exists as just over two chapters – disparate, non-consecutive chapters at that – the only way ‘Menard’s *Quijote*’ can be read is through reference to Cervantes’ *Quijote*. In fact, as Balderston points out, all that now remains of Menard’s *Quijote* is twenty-nine words quoted in ‘Pierre Menard,’ and so it is necessary for readers to use Cervantes’ *Quijote* to read Menard’s at all.

To read ‘Menard’s *Quijote*,’ a text-in-afterlife must be imagined, composing the fiction ‘Pierre Menard,’ which contains the fragments of Menard’s *Quijote*; Menard’s unrecoverable ‘whole’ *Quijote*; and Cervantes’ *Quijote*. When this text-in-afterlife is recognised, Cervantes’ *Quijote* is, via Menard’s text, engaged in the Hegelian Aufhebung that Benjamin describes in writing that, when a specific work is “blast[ed] […] out of the lifework,” “the lifework is both preserved and sublated in the work” (‘History’ 396). Menard’s *Quijote* destroys Cervantes’ – it is verbally identical but temporally later and so replaces the older *Quijote*; it preserves Cervantes’ *Quijote*, by demonstrating the afterlife that Cervantes’ *Quijote* is always within; and it elevates Cervantes’ *Quijote*: in spite of Menard specifically choosing *Quijote* as his masterwork because “it does not seem […] inevitable,”

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58 Menard’s readable texts are referred to as his “visible work”; ‘Menard’ 62.
59 Balderston, *Out of Context*, p. 145
Menard’s *Quijote* could not exist without Cervantes’, and so necessarily valorises Cervantes’ *Quijote* as its own predecessor, if nothing else (‘Menard’ 67).

Such an *Aufhebung* is the reason Benjamin wants historians to view events in their singularity – so that they can be re-placed as part of a constellation, to recognise the connection between a specific past and a specific ‘now.’ The historian should describe such connections to “establish a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (‘History’ 397). Although Benjamin does not say so explicitly, a similar process must take place in the “interpretation” of artworks that he calls for, “bring[ing] out the correlations” between works, to make those artworks’ “historicity” apparent. In the terms developed in this study, it is not merely the messianic overthrow of history that can be suggested by such a connection, but also of language and textuality. In existing simultaneously so near to, and far from, both extremes of translatability, Pierre Menard’s *Quijote* gestures towards the possibility of a messianic outside of afterlife or textuality. Menard’s *Quijote* is not messianic – far from it. It is as much a text as any other and is subject to the same limitations as any other text. However, as Derrida describes in *Monolinguisme*, it is precisely Menard’s *Quijote*’s failure to escape textuality that allows us to read it as a messianic call. ‘Failure’ does not imply that Pierre Menard is attempting to escape history, language or textuality, only that his text comes nowhere near doing so – as near as any other text.

The ‘Pierre Menard’ fiction, and the narrator’s attempts to understand just what Menard has achieved in his *Quijote*, dramatise the tension between singularity and connectedness that is reading a text within afterlife. The more a text is singular and cut off from any other structure, the more it becomes connected to other texts. Reading within this tension is what allows for a messianic understanding of literary potential. Like the Derrida of *Monolinguisme*, calling for the utterly singular imagines the possibility of a messianic overthrow of current structures while, as in Benjamin’s model of historiography, messianic potential is located at the connection between things. ‘Pierre Menard’ seems far removed from such concerns. However, reading ‘Menard’ between singularity and connectedness allows us to imagine such messianic possibilities. Juxtaposing the language of *Don Quijote* with ‘itself’ allows us to glimpse the possibility of pure language, the language to come. Reading Menard’s *Quijote* as at once entirely cut off from literary history, and as part of a text-in-afterlife with Cervantes’ *Quijote* and the ‘Pierre Menard’ fiction itself, points towards the possibility of a text entirely outside literary history or textuality.

It is this latter text that reveals a further messianic dimension at work here – endless potentiality. Pierre Menard’s writing of *Don Quijote* reveals how no text is ever complete, and that texts are always the source of potentiality. Menard writes precisely the same text as Cervantes’ 1605 text, and

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60 Mosès, p. 85
yet that text is still different. In writing his *Quijote*, Menard unwittingly demonstrates the immense potential for translation present within a text. Even a text whose words have apparently not changed at all has the potential to become different. The potential for translation is present at every point of a text, and our experience of encountering texts is such that this potential is, effectively, continually enacted – meaning that new potentials are continually revealed. Menard’s *Quijote* is just as capable of being rewritten as Cervantes’. The definitive *Don Quijote* can never exist.

However, the fiction ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del *Quijote*’ additionally demonstrates how limitless literary potential is through being a text about a text. The fiction ‘Pierre Menard’ is part of the *Don Quijote* text-in-afterlife. *Don Quijote*, a text concerned with the limits of fiction and the possibility of alternate stories, is rewritten as a short story about rewriting *Don Quijote*. The fiction ‘Pierre Menard’ enacts some potentialities contained within *Quijote*, in being a fiction concerned with rewriting and uncertainty as to the limits of fiction and literary history. Menard is also something of a Quixotic figure himself, a heroic failure, as Rosemary Arrojo has argued.61 ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del *Quijote*’ is itself a rewriting of *Don Quijote*.

Additionally, contained within ‘Pierre Menard’ as part of its narrative is the description of Menard’s fictitious version of *Don Quijote*. This rewriting of *Don Quijote*, verbally identical to and yet different from Cervantes’, demonstrates further potentials present within the text *Don Quijote*. Borges’ fiction demonstrates the afterlife of *Don Quijote* in two ways at once, by being a rewriting of *Don Quijote* about another rewriting of *Don Quijote*. Like Cervantes’ *Quijote* reading Avellaneda’s ‘false *Quijote*,’ two possible stories are told at once. We should not take the fiction ‘Pierre Menard’ any more or less seriously than the *Don Quijote* that Pierre Menard, the fictional character, writes. Even though all that remains of Menard’s *Quijote* is twenty-nine words, it exists as a text, and is subject to the same logic of textuality as the rest of the ‘Pierre Menard’ fiction that encompasses it. One reason for the importance of Borges’ writing for the theory of textuality developed here is the demonstration that multiple possibilities, or even multiple outcomes, can exist simultaneously.

“Menard (perhaps without wanting to) has enriched […] the halting and rudimentary art of reading,” the fiction’s narrator surmises. If Menard can write *Quijote*, readers can “go through the *Odyssey* as if it were posterior to the *Aeneid*” or “attribute the *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce” (‘Menard’ 71). Every text contains the potential for such rereadings and translations, and there is no limit to the number of translations possible – the applications of “this technique” are “infinite,” the narrator writes (‘Menard’ 71). Whether or not such readings rely on the creative power of the reader, texts contain the potential for such reworkings. Such an understanding of all texts as

61 Arrojo, ‘Borges, Menard, Whitman’, p. 40
sites of potentiality is messianic afterlife. Every text contains, if not an infinite potential, then an ‘inexhaustible’ potential.

Menard’s *Quijote*, and ‘Menard,’ show the multiplicity of potentials that exist in every text. While *Don Quijote*, as a text intimately concerned with rewriting and the possibility of multiple stories, is perhaps uniquely suitable for demonstrating such possibilities, the narrator of ‘Menard’ points out that this potential can be found in all texts. Every text is potentially inexhaustible. Every text, therefore, is charged with messianic potential – the possibility of containing the entirety of literature, or even the ‘text’ outside textuality. The fact that *every* text possesses this capability means that no one text has special status. To use a phrase Borges examines in ‘La Esfera de Pascal,’ the centre of literature’s potential is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere. This does not mean that literature’s potential is truly infinite; as we have seen, language, history and textuality itself are inescapable restrictions on literature’s translation. However, the ‘circumference,’ or limit, of literature’s potential for translation – afterlife – is ‘nowhere’ in the sense that there is no precise limit. As ‘Pierre Menard’ shows, even without escaping ‘history,’ literature’s translation within history is by no means predictable – to the extent that Menard’s *Quijote* almost appears indescribable in terms of ‘history.’ *Ulysses* and *Une Tempête* show that the same is true in respect to textuality and language. ‘Pierre Menard’ suggests the endless possibilities available even within the restrictions of afterlife, while its final lines remind us that this potential is not restricted to certain unique texts: it is present in all texts. Every text is unique, precisely because it has the same limits, and potential, as every other. The value of the model of textuality and reading developed here, and the importance of Borges’ writing for that theory, is to remind us that every text possesses these qualities – continually.

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62 Borges, ‘Sphere of Pascal’, pp. 224-7
Conclusion: The Afterlife of ‘Afterlife’

Literature as afterlife

This thesis developed from a close reading of Walter Benjamin’s and Jacques Derrida’s writings on translation. Benjamin, in ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,’ views translation as working towards revealing the true nature of language, while Derrida’s writings on translation are part of his larger inquiry into a deconstructive method of reading texts and questioning the boundaries of textuality. The current project has sought to read Benjamin and Derrida together in a deconstructive way, emphasising connections and points of tension between their texts – including connections within the bodies of texts called ‘Benjamin’ or ‘Derrida’ – that may not be immediately apparent. Following elements of Benjamin’s and Derrida’s arguments further than these writers did themselves has allowed for the development of ‘afterlife’ as a concept through which to understand textuality. ‘Afterlife’ suggests that textuality, translatability and translation are inextricable: for a text to exist is for a text to be within a state of potential for translation that is constantly enacted. This thesis has sought to develop a model of textuality and of how to read texts based on this starting point.

Given the differences between Benjamin’s and Derrida’s models of history – for Benjamin, historical events are discrete, while for Derrida every event is always ‘spectrally’ present but never fully present – it seems difficult to understand the claim that a text is within a continual process of change as following both thinkers. However, as ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote’ shows, regardless of whether or not a text is continually changing, it can only be read as if it is continually changing, as each reading encounters a ‘new’ text. This state of translatability, afterlife, is the condition of all texts; similarly to Derrida’s claims about iterability, afterlife is here understood as a necessary condition of textuality. Within afterlife, a text is within a state of potential – the potential for that text to be augmented, since, following Derrida, no text is ever entirely complete. Such augmentations are translations. We return, then, to the putative topic of the Benjamin and Derrida essays that began this thesis, but with redefined terms. In the terms of this study, a translation is any text that fulfils a potential present in another text, resituating it in relation to language, history or textuality.
Benjamin’s ‘Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers’ suggests that the ultimate, unreachable goal of translation is the revelation of ‘pure language,’ the nature of language itself. Reading ‘Aufgabe’ alongside Benjamin’s earlier essay ‘Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen’ suggests that ‘pure language’ would be language as such, language beyond human language. Benjamin writes in ‘Über Sprache überhaupt’ that human language is innately filled with judgement, which he explains with reference to the Fall. In ‘Aufgabe,’ translation can reveal the “foreignness of languages” – all language, including our own – and can therefore help us begin to understand the nature of pure language (‘TT’ 257). We will never fully realise pure language, however, as we cannot step outside human language. Derrida formulates something similar in his *Le Monolinguisme de l’Autre,* which describes the essential alienation that is the relation to our ‘own’ language. This alienation is due to language’s essentially colonial nature. Derrida suggests that translation can help reveal or characterise this alienation (*MO* 61). What is ‘promised’ within all language, for Derrida, is a language entirely of one’s own, a language outside colonialism – the ‘language to come’ (*MO* 67).

Such a language is, for Derrida, always ‘to come,’ as its arrival as a language would mean either that it was subject to the same conditions as all language, or it would necessitate a redefinition of ‘language.’ This state of tension, where a language is always about to arrive, yet never will arrive as a language, Derrida calls messianic. Translation can be understood then, following Derrida and Benjamin, as containing a messianic promise: translation constantly threatens to explode language, but never can. This study’s intervention, going beyond Benjamin and Derrida, is to argue that a similar tension exists within textuality. If texts are constantly changing and being augmented, the possibility seemingly exists of a text becoming ‘complete’ – reaching the point where it exceeded translatability, as its every potential had been realised. Such a complete text would be messianic, as it would either no longer be a text, or would require a redefinition of ‘text.’ Textual afterlife, constantly at work within texts, means that all texts are filled with the messianic potential of their own destruction, as they are continually on the verge of becoming ‘complete,’ but never will. Benjamin understands history similarly. “Every second [is] the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter,” and yet the Messiah never will arrive, as his arrival within history would either mean that the ‘Messiah’ were no such thing, or would require a redefinition of history: for Benjamin, messianic history simultaneously unites all history and destroys it (‘History’ 397). Textual afterlife is necessarily a movement through time, and so afterlife contains three messianic potentials: the complete text, the language to come, and the messianic end of history. Textuality, language and history are the inescapable conditions of texts, and yet texts are continually on the verge of escaping them – by virtue of being constrained by them.

This study does not seek to claim that translation or texts can reveal something greater about the nature of language, history or absolute, messianic alterity in themselves. Rather, this thesis
understands language, history and textuality as limited and limiting to allow us to read individual texts in a certain way. The understanding of textuality summarised above means that we read texts as sites of tension. Texts are read for their specific situation within language-as-colonialism or (literary) history, while also being read for moments that promise an overthrow of these constraints. Similarly, texts must be read within the tension of translatability, inextricable from textuality itself. The extremes of translatability would be the untranslatable text, so singular that it cannot even be read or recognised as a text, and the totally translated text, a text whose every potential has been fulfilled. Both the untranslatable or totally translated text would cease to exist as text, as they would exceed textuality. Readable texts exist in the tension between translatability and untranslatability, and are filled with the messianic potential to explode, or collapse, into one of these extremes. To read a text within the terms of the model of textuality described here, we should read for both singularity and connection to other texts, reading a text in its irreducible specificity while also reading for that text’s connections to other texts – the way in which it fulfils other texts’ potentials. In particular, we should aim to read ‘between’ texts, describing how reading texts as connected complicates both ‘original’ and ‘translation,’ and reveals aporias in both. As in Benjamin’s theory of translation between languages, it is in these gaps that messianic potential is nearest to being revealed.

The three texts or translations with chapters of this thesis devoted to them each demonstrate different aspects of this understanding of literary afterlife, but also complicate and modify it. *Ulysses* shows how a text can be read as part of a text-in-afterlife with multiple other texts. *Ulysses* is not merely a rewriting of the *Odyssey*, but also translates *Hamlet*, Dante’s *Commedia*, and, as many critics have claimed, many more texts besides. However, this does not mark *Ulysses* as a unique text, an ‘end of literature’ into which all other texts translate. Rather, *Ulysses* shows that afterlife is not a linear process where one text simply turns into another. Just as one text may have multiple translations, a text may translate multiple others. *Une Tempête* demonstrates something similar, by engaging with Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and multiple other translations of *The Tempest*. Translations exist simultaneously and do not supersede each other. *Une Tempête* also demonstrates the impossibility of escaping the system entirely – history, language or textuality – but also the value of struggling *within* these systems, as these struggles reveal messianic possibilities. ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del *Quijote*’ demonstrates the fact that texts can only be read as translated, and how this translation occurs. This text also dramatises the tension between singularity and connectedness, as Pierre Menard’s *Don Quijote* is both unique, cut off from any historical context, and only readable in its connection to other texts. The fiction ‘Pierre Menard’ also underlines the endless potential found in textuality, in being a rewriting of *Don Quijote* that is about writing *Don Quijote*, and in inviting further translations.

While the ideas explored in this thesis grew from and have been complicated by these specific texts, since they address larger concepts of textuality in general, they could, in future research, be developed
in relation to other texts. While afterlife is never predictable, as a gesture towards the necessarily incomplete – and incompletable – nature of this thesis, this conclusion will consider some possible manifestations of its model of reading’s own afterlife.

The afterlife of ‘afterlife’

The expanded definition of ‘translation’ used here refers to texts that fulfil a potentiality latent in another text, and this study has focussed on texts that can be considered ‘rewritings’ of other texts – that is, they either make explicit reference to another text, as in ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote,’ or they can be argued to refer to another text in terms of structure and/or content, as with Ulysses. Such rewritings are the points at which it is easiest to glimpse messianic potential, since their negotiation of the paradox of singularity and connectedness can be seen in the ways in which they build on and add to, while simultaneously critiquing and unravelling, the texts they rewrite; it is possible to read ‘between’ these texts and their antecedents. Although the arguments of this thesis have grown out of reading these rewritings, if messianic afterlife is a condition of textuality in general, then reading texts in terms of the ideas developed here need not be limited to texts that respond to other texts in this way.

A text’s position within the tension of translatability is not reducible to its obvious links to other texts. Texts’ explicit engagements with other texts are merely the simplest way to perceive the tension of translatability that is a condition of textuality as such. The model of textuality and reading described here may then be productively developed in future research by focussing on texts not traditionally read as ‘translations’ or rewritings. The texts that might most obviously be read productively in this way are those that, like Ulysses, Une Tempête and ‘Pierre Menard,’ highlight the tension between singularity and connectedness, or work to suggest an escape from language, history or textuality, while also showing that such escape is impossible – the paradox of messianicity. Such texts may include those by Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Maurice Blanchot, Paul Celan, Hugh MacDiarmid and Clarice Lispector. Texts such as Die Verwandlung, The Unnameable, La Folie du Jour, ‘Todesfuge,’ ‘On a Raised Beach’ and Água Viva suggest an unnameable and unreachable ‘beyond’ language and history; these texts’ specific engagement with this ‘beyond,’ and their situation within language, history and textuality would be their messianicity. The fact that these texts are not clear ‘rewritings’ in the way that, for example, Une Tempête is would mean that reading within the terms developed in this thesis would have to find other ways to describe these texts’ negotiation of translatability. Singularity and connectedness could be seen in, for example, Kafka’s writings creating the descriptor ‘Kafkaesque’;1 Beckett’s self-translation; La Folie du Jour’s troubling of what ‘telling a story’ might mean, and its cyclical structure; Água Viva’s various descriptions of itself as music, a

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1 Borges considers the category of the Kafkaesque in ‘Kafka and his Precursors’, pp. 363-365.
painting, and a text; or Celan’s and MacDiarmid’s relationship with ‘untranslatability’ due to their inventive use of language.

It is notable that all the above named writers, like the key writers of this study, exist between modernism and postmodernism. Modernism and modernity are central to Benjamin’s writing: he was fascinated by new technologies such as early cinema, with the passing away of older modes of thought in his writing on allegory, and Baudelaire as the ‘painter of modern life.’

Derrida, meanwhile, is one of the key figures of early postmodern philosophy. Ulysses is the apparent crowning achievement of Anglophone modernism, while Césaire and Borges as writers trouble modernism, sitting stylistically between modernism and postmodernism. Césaire’s Une Tempête responds to The Tempest, a play often considered to address early European contact with the New World – the beginnings of modernity – and ‘Pierre Menard’ rewrites Don Quijote, the ‘first novel’ and a founding text of modernity. Perhaps there is something specifically modernist or postmodern about the model of textuality developed here, since it has grown out of texts with a specific relation to modernism and modernity.

It would interesting, therefore, to explore how texts with different relationships to ‘modernity’ might be read in relation to the understanding of textuality developed here. An eighteenth-century rewriting of a medieval myth, for example, or a medieval rewriting of a Latin epic, would necessarily reveal a dimension of afterlife not discussed in depth in this study. The philosophical and stylistic context in which the text was situated would be different from that of the mid-twentieth century texts discussed here. Not only would the text conceptualise its own relationship with other texts differently, we would also need to describe that relationship differently. The text-in-afterlife drawn between Derrida and Benjamin, an eighteenth-century text and our own situation would involve an extra level of historical connection being drawn, not present in the same way when reading texts, such as by Benjamin, Joyce, Borges, Césaire and Derrida, which are almost contemporaneous.

However, an undercurrent of this thesis has been a critique of the concept of ‘modernity.’ Both Benjamin’s and Derrida’s models of history would reject the idea of modernity as a decisive break with the past. For Benjamin, the present becomes ‘now’ only through its linkage to a specific past, while in Derrida’s ‘hauntology,’ no moment is ever truly past nor fully present. Une Tempête disrupts neat periodisation of the past in making several stages of the past simultaneous, and suggesting that

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2 See, for example, the edited collections of Benjamin’s writings The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media, ed. by Michael Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Levin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008) and The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire, ed. by Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006).

3 Derrida is discussed in introductory guides to postmodernism, such as Madan Sarup, An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 32-57, and Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism (Cambridge: Icon, 2003), pp. 77-81, suggesting he is seen as a key figure.
colonialism is not a novelty of modernity, but structures history itself. ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote’ similarly troubles periodisation of history through Don Quijote ‘reappearing’ as a work of twentieth-century literature – drawing attention to the fact that the ‘original’ Don Quijote includes many of the devices, such as a self-aware narrator or characters who read their own story, associated with (post)modernism. Ulysses’ ‘Oxen of the Sun,’ meanwhile, makes clear the difficulty of understanding historical ‘periods,’ such as modernity, as fully discrete. Therefore, despite the fact that the model of textuality and reading described in this study has grown from texts with a specific relationship to (post)modernity and (post)modernism, there is no reason that texts from different historical contexts could not be read within this study’s understanding of afterlife and textuality. To assume that the model of textuality developed here, because it has grown from (post)modernist texts, is not an understanding of textuality but of (post)modernist textuality is to give credence to the idea that modernist literature represents a decisive break with all that went before it. This narrative of literary history, as discussed in Chapter Four, conforms to a model of progress that this thesis has sought to reject. Afterlife, a movement of continual change, removes any concept of modernity or historical ‘breaks.’ Pure novelty never enters (literary) history or language; this would be the messianic arrival. What would be required to account fully for pre-modernist or pre-modern texts’ different historical situations is close attention to the contexts of the texts concerned, and their specific relationship with other texts – but this is the case in every reading. The additional historical difference would be a nuancing of the attention to context(s) that is always necessary when reading within the terms developed here.

Another underlying theme of this thesis is colonialism. Although the theory developed in this thesis promotes resistance to any type of totalising structure – what Derrida calls ‘reduction to the One’ – Derrida characterises the specific action of language’s inherent ‘reduction’ as colonialist. History has also been understood here as colonialist, developing Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument that nothing is beyond the scope of history. Une Tempête’s use of anachrony develops a critique of history as colonialism; colonialism does not merely repeatedly recur throughout history, but is the structuring element of history itself. All of the major writers for this study inhabit ambiguous relationships to colonialism. Césaire, although a fiercely anti-colonial writer and one of the major influences on postcolonial criticism, benefited from a privileged metropolitan education, and argued for Martinique remaining a French department, not an independent nation.4 Derrida, Algerian by birth, spent his career in France and admits in Monolingusme that, despite having “never ceased calling into question the motif of ‘purity’ in all its forms,” “in French, insofar as the language is concerned, I cannot bear or admire anything other than pure French,” and that “I would very much prefer that no publication

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permit my ‘French Algerian’ to appear” (MO 45-6). Joyce had an ambiguous attitude towards Irish independence, and has been called ‘semicolonial’ in an edited collection on this theme. Aside from the debate as to the nature of Argentina or South America’s ‘postcoloniality,’ Borges had a contradictory approach to colonialism, critiquing imperialism in essays such as ‘La Penúltima Versión de la Realidad,’ while also valorising his grandfather, an “Indian fighter,” as Jean Franco euphemistically terms it. Benjamin’s own biography seemingly does not connect to colonialism, but the experience of European Jews before the Second World War has, in recent scholarship, been described using terms borrowed from postcolonial criticism. It is possible, then, that this thesis’ argument that colonialism is a structuring element of culture, which must constantly be struggled against but would only be escapable in the messianic event, is a product of the contexts of the texts this thesis discusses. The authors discussed here argued against colonialism but could never entirely reject it, either.

It would be interesting to see whether texts with different relationships to material colonialism complicated or reinforced the understanding of afterlife developed here, in relation to the inherent coloniality of language and history, and the concept of struggling within colonialism to reveal messianic possibilities. One example may be Mahasweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps*. Devi’s stories describe the continuing liberation struggles among Adiväsi (aboriginal) communities in India. Gayatri Spivak, who has a similar philosophical background to the key thinkers of this thesis, has translated Devi from Bengali into English. The understanding of ‘colonialism’ that might arise reading between the deconstructive postcolonial critic Spivak, and Devi’s description of ongoing material colonialism, within the terms of textuality developed here, may provide a different perspective on some of the ideas developed in this thesis. *Imaginary Maps* may provide a ‘bridge’ beyond this thesis: while linking to some of this study’s key concerns, the Devi-Spivak text-in-afterlife would also reach beyond the context of Euro-American (post)modernism. It would be interesting to see how messianic anti-colonial potentialities might be revealed in a translation from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘centre,’ as fiction about a Bengali underclass moves into English; the politics of this move are necessarily different from, for example, a Martiniquais rewriting of The Tempest.

A different perspective on afterlife and colonialism might be offered by a text-in-afterlife demonstrating a move from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘centre’ in a less self-conscious fashion than Spivak’s rendering of Devi. For example, Peter Brook and Jean-Paul Carrière’s drama *The Mahabharata* has been criticised for its elision of the philosophical and cultural context of the text it

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5 *Semicolonial Joyce*, ed. by Attridge and Howes
7 For example, Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).
translates. Reading between Brook’s *Mahabharata* and the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* would necessarily entail a different negotiation of language- and history-as-colonialism, and hence messianicity, from those seen in this study, since Brook and Carrière translate an ancient Indian text within the terms of a contemporary European understanding of ‘Shakespearean’ drama. The colonial, philosophical and historical dynamics at work within *The Mahabharata*’s text-in-afterlife would involve differences or disjunctures of a kind not discussed in this study. The Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* would be perhaps the ultimate exemplar of a text-in-afterlife: it frequently discusses the nature of its own existence as a text; there are multiple manuscript variations, meaning that there is no one ‘original,’ and the text only exists as ‘translations’; and it even claims to be the complete text—“What is not found here is to be found nowhere” (1.54). However, in coming from such a different cultural context from the other texts discussed here, and conceptualising its own textuality in such a different way, study of the *Mahābhārata* goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

If the model of textuality described here could be used as a way to discuss texts as disparate as ‘Pierre Menard’ and the *Mahābhārata*, it seems that there is the possibility of the theory dissipating into generalities about the nature of textuality. Let us return, then, to the specific intervention this thesis has sought to make: the development of a model of deconstructive reading that allows us to see how texts demonstrate the translation process of afterlife, and emphasises literary texts as sites of potentiality. Texts negotiate translatability and untranslatability, singularity and connectedness, within the confines of language, history and textuality. Texts are continually on the verge of exploding these confines, but never will. This thesis calls this tension messianicity, and uses this concept as a way of attempting to describe the incomprehensible potential of literature. Messianicity should be, this thesis has argued, central to our reading of literature. This conclusion suggests that the openness that is achieved through holding messianicity as central to literature is necessary, in allowing us to read texts on their own terms, and to see texts as constantly changing—meaning that we rediscover literature continually.

**Reading with openness**

Messianicity is not the only way to describe the idea that literature allows us to imagine the possibility of an unreachable, absolute alterity. For example, Maurice Blanchot writes that “the man who is ready to translate is in a constant, dangerous and admirable intimacy […] with the conviction that, in the end, translating is madness,” because of the sense of translation threatening to reveal an

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9 Jean-Paul Carrière, ‘The Bridge of Sand’, in *Peter Brook*, pp. 65-71; Maria Shevtsova, ‘Interaction-Interpretation’ in *Peter Brook*, pp. 206-225
incomprehensible alterity.\textsuperscript{11} Blanchot describes Hölderlin’s translations from Ancient Greek as the work of a man who believed himself to be “recklessly advancing toward […] a centre such that it would be able to give meaning, beyond all determined and limited meaning.”\textsuperscript{12} Hölderlin was, in Blanchot’s description, moving towards something like Benjamin’s pure language, or the logos itself – the ground of all meaning. Hölderlin did not reach this centre; his translations of Sophocles were his last work before spending the rest of his life in an asylum. Blanchot does not claim that translating made Hölderlin mad, nor that to attempt translation is mad. Translation is madness, in that it breaks with all norms, even if momentarily. The sought-after ‘pure language’ threatens to be an abyss contained within language and literature that could swallow up the translator. Indeed, Benjamin writes that in Hölderlin’s Sophocles, “meaning plunges from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language,” and that “the gates of a language thus expanded and modified may slam shut and enclose the translator in silence” (‘TT’ 262).

Elsewhere, Blanchot writes that literature’s function is to remind us that, at any moment, we can be “plunged into a nothingness in which there is no existence or presence […] language essentially signifies the possibility of this destruction.”\textsuperscript{13} Literature “would like to attain this absence absolutely in itself and for itself.”\textsuperscript{14} The absolute alterity that literature helps us partially realise is “real death.”\textsuperscript{15} While the understanding of textuality described in this thesis holds as central the possibility that literature could at any moment collapse into total untranslatability – the ‘death’ of literature – for Blanchot, literature threatens at every moment to reveal total death, a death with no corresponding inverse, as in this thesis’ argument that the untranslatable text and the ‘totally translated’ text are identical. Even if we accept that literature contains the possibility of absolute alterity, this is not necessarily equivalent to the understanding of messianicity developed in this thesis. However, understanding literature as filled with messianic potential is, this study argues, an inherently valuable and productive way of reading.

The value of messianicity is openness towards whatever is ‘to come.’ As Derrida stresses in \textit{Spectres de Marx}, it is important that messianicity is not reduced to messianism. Messianism would see the coming of the Messiah as a dateable future event – that is, within history. We would then simply await the Messiah, remaining within the concept of progress, which, as this thesis has argued following both Benjamin and Derrida, is dangerous. What is essential about messianicity is its insistence that we simply cannot know or comprehend the shape or date of the messianic coming. The event ‘to come’ is unknowable in every respect. The messianic coming is not necessarily equivalent to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Blanchot, ‘Translating’, p. 61
\item[13] Blanchot, ‘Right to Death’, p. 323
\item[14] Blanchot, ‘Right to Death’, p. 325
\item[15] Blanchot, ‘Right to Death’, p. 323
\end{footnotes}
‘liberation,’ then; it may well be something like the death Blanchot describes. Derrida admits that the spectral ‘time out of joint’ he proposes, understanding history as messianic, “can do harm or do evil, it is no doubt the very possibility of evil. But without the opening of this possibility there remains, perhaps, beyond good and evil, only the necessity of the worst” (SM 34). The messianic coming could be liberation or a new totalitarianism, but without messianicity, we remain within the logic where only oppression is possible.

Although Derrida is not explicit on this point in Spectres, we must then reject the possibility of a future, datable ‘liberation’. We should understand language as colonialism and history as a limiting and limited way of thinking about temporality. Paradoxically, these inescapable restrictions create the conditions of the possibility for messianicity – the suggestion that, at any moment, the structure could be destroyed. Relating this logic to literature necessitates consideration of a third category alongside language-as-colonialism and colonial history – textuality, which this study characterises as inextricable from afterlife. Texts cannot escape afterlife any more than language can burst the fetters of colonialism. This study’s innovation, following Derrida and Benjamin, is to suggest that accepting the limited and limiting nature of textuality, and rejecting progress in favour of openness towards whatever is to come, allows us to conceive textuality, like language and history, as having messianic potential. Every text could reveal the entirety of literature, or the end of literature – but never will. Messianicity means that every text is filled with potential for otherness, even the radical otherness that would exceed the boundaries of textuality. If we read texts with this in mind, we are practising something like Derrida’s understanding of ‘hospitality’ towards texts:

Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. 16

Reading texts does not involve the same political, ethical or theological implications as what Derrida describes here. As discussed in Chapter One, reading within the terms of messianic afterlife is not ‘ethical’ or a kind of ethical training. Total openness towards the text to come is not the same as openness towards a human, animal or divine subject to come. We are not attempting to grasp absolute alterity, but to become aware that literature contains the potential for a specific type of absolute alterity that comes about at the juncture of language, history and textuality. In reading within the terms of, for example, language-as-colonialism, this thesis has not attempted to argue that literature reveals a greater truth about the nature of all language, but that thinking of language in a certain way

16 Derrida, Of Hospitality, p. 77
helps us to understand the specific nature of literature as a site of potential. Conceiving language, history and textuality as limited and limiting systems allows for a messianic understanding of literature.

Reading with an awareness of literature’s messianicity is not ‘ethical,’ but is the most ‘hospitable’ way to read as it allows us to rediscover literature constantly. Texts to come will continually reveal difference upon difference, while even texts we already ‘know’ will be encountered as having changed each time they are reread. Reading texts as subject to messianic afterlife allows us to understand literature as able to surprise us constantly, and means that we never read a text assuming that we know what we will find. Every text contains a potential that is messianic, and although the messianic coming will never arrive, the messianic potential is constantly being demonstrated. Literature’s potential for translation is absolute, and reading with an awareness of this allows us to attempt the messianic project of recognising literature’s difference as difference – meaning that texts, or even a single text, will never cease to surprise us. As Borges writes, “Literature is not exhaustible, for the simple and sufficient reason that no single book is.”17

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