

UNCONDITIONAL TRANSLATION: DERRIDA'S ENLIGHTENMENT-TO-COME

Julie Candler Hayes

le 'XVIIIe siècle français' . . . si quelque chose de tel existe

De la grammatologie

la déconstruction, si quelque chose de tel existait

Voyous

It was never about the usual set of assumptions, scholarly and otherwise, that accompany notions of the eighteenth century: Age of Reason, Age of Sentiment, preromanticism, Revolution, *crise de conscience européenne*—or the best of times, the worst of times. Instead, Derrida pronounced the “eighteenth century” to be the site of a combat, a disturbing new and singular awareness of “the problem of writing.” From questions of the origins of language posed by Rousseau, Condillac, and others in *De la grammatologie*, to the relationship between the Molyneux problem and the history of phenomenology in *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, Derrida’s long engagement with eighteenth-century figures continues to provoke new readings and reflections on their work. If I were writing a history of the past quarter century of eighteenth-century studies, I would want to dissect the striking confluence in the late 1960s and early 70s of widely differing projects by Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, and Barthes—to name the most obvious—that foregrounded figures such as Rousseau, Leibniz, Condillac, the Encyclopedists, and Sade, or recast “the eighteenth century” with respect to the classical episteme. I

Julie Candler Hayes is Professor of French and Chair of the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. She is currently completing a book project titled *Translation, Subjectivity, and Culture in France and England, 1600–1800*.

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would also consider the extraordinary outpouring of scholarship on early modern language theory and on the eighteenth century's constructions of meaning, both literary and theoretical, that emerged in the wake of the theoretical work. Like an earlier generation of modernist composers, both philosophers and scholars found in their own "return to the eighteenth century" a powerful resource for questioning the totalizing frameworks—narrative, philosophical, and aesthetic—inherited from the nineteenth century.¹

My present task is more circumscribed: to look not at Derrida's relation to the world of texts produced between 1700 and 1799, but rather at his formulations and reformulations of a concept both rooted in and extending beyond the eighteenth century: Enlightenment. I initially thought that a comment on Derrida's late essay, "Le 'Monde' des Lumières à venir (Exception, calcul et souveraineté)" from *Voyous*, would be a relatively simple matter, if only for the brief, relatively self-contained format of the essay, and because I intended to focus on the single question of explicating the phrase "Enlightenment-to-come." It is hardly a "single question," however. The *Lumières à venir*—I hesitate between the English singular expression and the French plural—have a widely ramified genealogy that extends back at least to seminars in the late 1980s that would see print in *Spectres de Marx* (1993) and *Politiques de l'amitié* (1994), and other texts in which Derrida's engagement with both classical and contemporary political theory became increasingly explicit. I propose, first, to outline that genealogy in Derrida's works of the 1990s, then to look more closely at the place of Enlightenment in *Voyous*. In conclusion, I will consider Enlightenment's relationship with another longstanding theme in Derrida's work, translation.

The reference to Enlightenment arises in *Spectres de Marx* in the context of Derrida's distinction between two forms of Marxism, on the one hand as a "prétendue totalité systématique, métaphysique ou ontologique" [supposed systemic, metaphysical, or ontological totality], and on the other as "en principe et d'abord une critique radicale, à savoir une démarche prête à son autocritique" [in principle and first of all a radical critique, namely a procedure ready to undertake its self-critique] that represents the legacy of "un esprit des Lumières auquel il ne faut pas renoncer" [a spirit of the Enlightenment which must not be renounced].² The Enlightenment echo is all the stronger inasmuch as this distinction closely parallels that of the eighteenth century between a dogmatic *esprit de système* and an open-ended, critical *esprit systématique*. A few pages later, the idea of "interminable self-critique" takes on the ambitious shape of "the new International," not yet fully constituted, a call to resist dogmatism "au nom de nouvelles Lumières pour le siècle à venir" [in the name of a new Enlightenment for the century to come].³ Similarly, a short piece from the late 90s will call for "nouvelles Lumières" and "une résistance à jamais irrédentiste aux pouvoirs d'appropriation économique, médiatique, politique, aux dogmatismes de toute sorte" [a forever irredentist resistance to the powers of economic, media, and political appropriation, to dogmatism of every kind].⁴ *Politiques de l'amitié* ends with an invocation of "des Lumières d'une certaine *Aufklärung*" [the Enlightenment of a certain *Aufklärung*]; an Enlightenment that seeks not to "found" its claims, but rather to open itself to the future, *l'avenir*, or more precisely to the *viens*, the gesture of hospitality and, ultimately, of a promise.⁵ In both these works, the references are to Enlightenment as the "new

International” or “new Enlightenment”; the expression *Lumières à venir* has not yet emerged. The futurity implied in the references to *le siècle à venir* and even *venir*, however, prepares the way.

Some references to *les Lumières* are clearly historical or indicate the dual use of “Enlightenment” as historical and as conceptual. In a 1997 talk on “Le Livre à venir” given at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Derrida reflects on the “desacralization” of the book as part of an “interminable histoire des Lumières ou de la Raison (avant et au-delà de l’*Aufklärung*)” [interminable history of Enlightenment or Reason (before and beyond the *Aufklärung*)].⁶ In *L’Université sans condition* (2001), where “nothing is sheltered from questioning,” the “New Humanities” are described as coming in a direct line of descent from a historically located age of Enlightenment, invoked in multiple languages—“*Aufklärung, Enlightenment, Illuminismo, Ilustración, Iluminismo*”—as fundamental to humanity.⁷ *Lumières* continues to be associated throughout with self-critique, not only as a legacy from a specific past moment, but also and increasingly as an injunction for the future. Nearly all the references to Enlightenment, whether historical or not, are closely associated with one of the most pregnant phrases of Derrida’s writings since the late 80s, the “democracy-to-come.” Derrida’s writing on democracy and on democracy-to-come in particular have been the subject of much commentary in recent years—in particular at the 2002 Cerisy conference on “La Démocratie à venir (autour de Jacques Derrida)” at which the first of the two essays in *Voyous*, “La Raison du plus fort (Y a-t-il des Etats voyous?)” [The Reason of the Strongest (Are There Rogue States?)], was originally presented.

It thus seems clear that in the decade following the publication of *Spectres*, the “democracy-to-come” exercised a gravitational pull on the “New Enlightenment,” shifting the focus from the historical, however idealized Enlightenment, that might be renewed or continue to inspire action in the present, to an ahistorical Enlightenment situated in the never-fully-present *à-venir*, even as it continues to bear the trace of the historical moment. In the conclusion to *Politiques de l’amitié*, Derrida speaks of “opening democracy to the future,” *ouvrir à l’avenir*, then modulates the expression by insisting on its relation to *viens*, “come,” expressed as an invitation: “au ‘viens’ d’une certaine démocratie” (339). He goes on to say that

la démocratie reste à venir, c’est là son essence en tant qu’elle reste: non seulement elle restera indéfiniment perfectible, donc toujours insuffisante & future mais, appartenant au temps de la promesse, elle restera toujours, en chacun de ses temps futurs, à venir: même quand il y a la démocratie, celle-ci n’existe jamais, elle n’est jamais présente, elle reste le thème d’un concept non présentable. (*Politiques de l’amitié*, 339)

For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept. (*Politics of Friendship*, 306)

In a recent article, Alex Thompson glosses the phrase “democracy to come” as “a pledge of faith in something attested to in democracy, in both the history of the concept and in the democracies of the contemporary world.”⁸ As he notes, its

appearance beginning in the late 1980s suggests that it also arose in response to “the demand for deconstruction’s political secret.” Clearly, though, the “to-come” bespeaks an effort to walk between the lines of historical locatedness and idealizing abstraction. Derrida further underscores democracy’s “promise” in an interview given in 2000, observing that democracy’s simultaneous “historicity” and “infinite (and essentially aporetic) perfectibility” and its originary link to “a promise” make of it “une chose à-venir.”⁹ The openness suggested by the invitation “viens” is further borne out by the link between democracy-to-come and what is called “public space” in the published English version (or, in what might be a more apt translation, “public sphere,” *l’espace public* being the usual French translation of Habermas’s *Öffentlichkeit*). In the “unconditional university,” *l’espace public* provides the link between the “new Humanities” and the historical Enlightenment, *l’époque des Lumières*.¹⁰

Readers need not hunt unaided for the trail of the democracy-to-come in Derrida’s earlier work, however, because he offers his own genealogy and extensive elaboration of the expression in *Voyous*. He tells us that he used the expression for the first time in *Du droit à la philosophie* (1990) and goes on to trace its usage through the works of the succeeding decade.¹¹ This is far from the only recapitulatory moment in *Voyous*. Beginning with a passage in the preface in which he retraces the concept of *Khôra* through his works from the 1990s,¹² a series of *renvois*, clarifications, and even settling of accounts, often carried out in the footnotes, gives both essays in the volume what can only seem now a certain valedictory tone. Take, for example, a “passing” comment in the midst of the explication of *démocratie à venir* that there was simply no such thing as a “political turn” or “ethical turn” (both expressions appear in English in the French text) in deconstruction in the 1980s and 90s. Instead, Derrida insists on reinscribing democracy to come in some of the earliest terminology associated with his work:

Si tout renvoi est différentiel, et si la trace est un synonyme pour ce renvoi, alors il y a toujours de la trace de démocratie, toute trace est trace de démocratie. De démocratie il ne saurait y avoir que trace. C’est dans cette direction que plus tard je tenterai une relecture du syntagme “démocratie à venir.” (*Voyous*, 64)

If every send-off is differential, and if the trace is a synonym for this send-off, then there is always some trace of democracy; indeed every trace is a trace of democracy. Of democracy there could only be but a trace. It is in this sense that I will later attempt a rereading of the syntagma “democracy to come.” (*Rogues*, 39)

While “trace,” “differance,” and “à-venir” have in common a reference to the fugitive linguistic flickering between now and then, presence and absence, as explored in Derrida’s early work, certainly the *renvoi* now restages that early work in the light of later preoccupations. The logic is both referential and differential: “democracy” and “trace” cannot be assumed under a single identity—both terms question and open up the notion of identity—but the act of re-reading allows them to resonate together across time.

A *renvoi* is not only a performative “send-off,” as Derrida’s translators have it, but also a simple scholarly reference or cross-reference. As such, it under-

scores a very specific sort of self-referential thread in *Voyous*: in addition to the self-consciousness that usually is taken to be a hallmark of his style, the writing is “referential” in the most classical scholarly sense, with passages offering the philosopher’s personal bibliography of when and where he developed certain topics or used certain terms. If “tout renvoi est différentiel,” then Derrida’s own retrospective survey, like any other, has the effect of changing the objects within its purview, setting them in new relationships to one another, bringing out features not previously recognized.

In a rather startlingly defensive note near the end of the second essay, Derrida responds witheringly to the unnamed author of a piece in a “pathetic Parisian tabloid” [affligeant tabloïd parisien], who had pronounced the notion of “unconditional hospitality” to be “absurd.” He goes on to give an extensive bibliography of his discussions of the subject, complete with page numbers, and enjoins his hapless critic to “read everything!”—“tout lire et au besoin relire!”¹³ One page later, another long footnote undertakes “quelques précisions” regarding the relationship between deconstruction and the concept of reason, through a series of numbered points, concluding on the affinity of deconstruction and critique: “La déconstruction ne cherche pas à discréditer la critique, elle en relégitime sans cesse la nécessité et l’héritage, mais elle ne renonce jamais à la généalogie de l’idée critique, non plus qu’à l’histoire de la question et du privilège supposé de la pensée interrogative” [Deconstruction does not seek to discredit critique; it in fact constantly relegitimizes its necessity and heritage, even though it never renounces either a genealogy of the critical idea or a history of the question and of the supposed privilege of interrogative thought].¹⁴ Here, the only reference to a specific work is to *De la grammatologie*, though as Derrida notes all his points have been the object of “numerous publications over the course of the last four decades.” While both essays in *Voyous* contain multiple references to a wide range of Derrida’s previous works in the main text, these extended self-referential footnotes in the second essay—particularly those that comment on “the last four decades”—resemble a sort of settling of accounts.

The settling of the past takes place alongside the unsettling of the future. *A-venir*, entangled as it is with *venir*, *devenir*, the invitation “*viens*,” the singularity of the “event” and the alterity inscribed in “invention,” extends beyond futurity or any form of predictability. As Derrida explains in the first of the two essays, the *à venir* of democracy-to-come “not only points to the promise but suggests that democracy will never exist, in the sense of present existence: not because it will be deferred, but because it will always remain aporetic in its structure.”¹⁵ We are told that *à venir* (or even the “à” of *à venir*) hesitates between “imperative injunction” and the “patient *perhaps*” of a nonperformative messianicity.¹⁶ As I have suggested, much of the conceptual work of democracy-to-come shifts, in the second of the two essays in *Voyous*, to Enlightenment-to-come. Let us turn to *Voyous*.

“Le ‘Monde’ des Lumières à venir” follows “La Raison du plus fort (Y a-t-il des Etats voyous?).” In the first piece, given at Cerisy in the summer of 2002 (which, of the two, has received the most critical attention so far), Derrida entwines an extended explication of the expression *démocratie à venir* with an elaboration of what might appear to be democracy’s others: on the one hand suicidal democracy, turning on itself, autoimmune, and on the other the “rogue states” denounced by

recent American administrations. Through the French translation of the English expression, *états voyous*, however, the subversive figure of the *voyou* comes to complicate the grand designs of “les plus forts” and to fissure the classical notion of unconditional sovereignty in the name of the democracy to come. Derrida’s one-word title reminds us of the hidden complexity in translation. Starting from an English expression literally translated into French (in what translators call a *calque*), the nuance created by the French term makes back translation—a translation of a translation—into English difficult. The English word “rogue,” with a history reaching back to the sixteenth century, connotations ranging from the abusive to the affectionate, and usages extending to botany and animal behavior, lacks the etymological and historical specificity of *voyou*. The French term is a nineteenth-century coinage stemming from *voie*, “public street,” and quickly calls to mind the Parisian underclass, youth violence, and popular uprisings. Though it bespeaks roughly the same historical and sociological phenomena as the word *gamin* (remember Victor Hugo’s Gavroche), its connotations are pejorative, even menacing.¹⁷

The second essay, “Le ‘Monde’ des Lumières à venir (Exception, calcul et souveraineté)” [The “World” of the Enlightenment-to-Come (Exception, Calculation, Sovereignty)], reworks the notion of *Lumières* that emerged in the course of Derrida’s work in the 1990s. Many of the questions from the first part of *Voyous* recur in various forms in the second, which was given a few weeks later at the conference of the Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française [Association of Societies for Philosophy in French] meeting in Nice in summer 2002. The maritime location, the mixed cultural heritage of the Mediterranean city (“une ville française au nom grec transi de guerre,” 168), and, especially, the focus on “philosophy in French” are all brought to bear on the effort to, in Kant’s phrase, “save the honor of reason.”

In a sense, the structure of the essay is contained in the terms of its title. The “world” of the Enlightenment to come is the “world” construed as Kantian regulatory Idea: systematic, unified, and unifying; it is also the *monde* of *mondialisation*—globalization as well as worlding, a world-in-progress whose trajectory cannot be neatly contained by any regulatory idea.¹⁸ Examining the tensions between various classical accounts of rationality (architectonics, teleology, paradigm, episteme) and the absolutely other, singular “event” that they seek to exclude, Derrida questions the totalizing mastery of the architectonic “world” in the name of multiple, heterogeneous “rationalities” (*Voyous*, 171; *Rogues*, 121). He recasts reason’s “grounding” as “running aground” both accidentally and on purpose, *échouement* and *échouage* (*Voyous*, 172–73; *Rogues*, 121–22), the former bespeaking the unplanned, uncalculated event and the latter, the deliberate choice to lose oneself (but save one’s honor) through self-destruction, autoimmunity. “World” thus expresses two very different concepts: both the architectonic forces that neutralize the event, and the arrival of the event that destabilizes the system. How are the “great transcendental and teleological rationalisms” able to “expose themselves” to make a place for “the event of what comes” (*Voyous*, 188; *Rogues*, 135)? The problem becomes how to align (*accorder*) the unforeseen unconditionality of the event with a form of reason unlike any described so far, whether classical reason, regulatory Idea, or unconditional sovereignty.

The second part of the essay seeks to save the honor of reason by dissociating sovereignty and unconditionality, or by deconstructing sovereignty “in the name of the Enlightenment to come” (*Voyous*, 196–97; *Rogues*, 142). Echoing his introductory citation of the words of the late philosopher Dominique Janicaud, “Saisir l’incalculable dans le règne du calcul” [To grasp the Incalculable within the general order of calculation] (*Voyous*, 165; *Rogues*, 117), Derrida considers ways in which the calculations of scientific reason and law are constantly exceeded by their own ethic: just as the drive for unconditional knowledge, *il faut le savoir*, is fundamentally in tension with any and all imperatives, including “il faut” (*Voyous*, 199; *Rogues*, 145), so too the call for unconditional justice exceeds law (*Voyous*, 205; *Rogues*, 149). The heterogeneity of justice and law—and the ongoing need of one for the other—enables us to conceive other forms of unconditionality without sovereignty that occupied much of Derrida’s late work, such as “unconditional hospitality,” the gift, and pardon, and opens a space for “the incalculable singularity of the other” (*Voyous*, 207; *Rogues*, 150) and “the unconditionality of the exception,” an “exception” being no longer determined by the “sovereign” (*Voyous*, 212; *Rogues*, 154). While seeking to delimit the claims of state sovereignty by calling on it to take the incalculable—here cast as the unconscious—into account, Derrida stakes out a middle way between the *raison d’état* of unconditional sovereignty and its equally unconditional—and “unreasonable”—opposition.

This middle ground is the Enlightenment-to-come. As I noted earlier, the expression *Lumières à venir* appears to take over from *démocratie à venir* in this second of the “two essays on reason” constituting *Voyous*. In addition to numerous invocations of the term throughout, near the essay’s end Derrida identifies the Enlightenment-to-come with the democracy-to-come, and indeed with his critique of unconditional sovereignty and the entire deconstructive project:

Car la déconstruction, si quelque chose de tel existait, cela resterait à mes yeux, avant tout, un rationalisme inconditionnel qui ne renonce jamais, précisément au nom des Lumières à venir, dans l’espace à ouvrir d’une démocratie à venir, à suspendre de façon argumentée, discutée, rationnelle, toutes les conditions, les hypothèses, les conventions et les présuppositions, à critiquer inconditionnellement toutes les conditionalités, y compris celles qui fondent encore l’idée critique. (*Voyous*, 197)

For deconstruction, if something of the sort exists, would remain above all, in my view, an unconditional rationalism that never renounces—and precisely in the name of the Enlightenment to come, in the space to be opened up of a democracy to come—the possibility of suspending in an argued, deliberated, rational fashion, all conditions, hypotheses, conventions, and presuppositions, and criticizing unconditionally all conditionalities, including those that still found the critical idea. (*Rogues*, 142)

Although it seems unlikely to have been a deliberate allusion, the echo from *De la grammatologie* (“le ‘XVIIIe siècle français’ . . . si quelque chose de tel existait”) reminds us that, like “the eighteenth century,” “deconstruction” also is construed from a range of assumptions and changing points of view: hence the need for careful definitions and a renewed commitment to “unconditional rationalism.” Derrida’s embrace of Enlightenment stands in contrast to Husserl’s avoidance of it in his 1935 warning of the “crisis of European thought.” In criticizing the forces

of “irrationalism,” Husserl sought to distance himself from “a certain rationalism, a certain Enlightenment,” a fetishized Enlightenment that he disparaged as the *Aufklärerei*—“*ce must des Lumières*,” as Derrida puts it. Husserl would rather avoid rehabilitating (saving the honor of) this “*Aufklärung de bon marché*” (*Voyous*, 181; *Rogues*, 129) and is thus caught in the ambiguous position of critiquing both rationalism and irrationalism. The present-day “crisis,” Derrida suggests, requires a new approach.

As we have seen in Derrida’s references to the historical Enlightenment or to the “new Enlightenment,” he shows no such ambivalence and no such willingness to identify Enlightenment with either totalizing or fetishizing forms of reason. As early as *Spectres de Marx*, the Enlightenment tradition is evoked as self-reflexive critique. But what distinguishes the Enlightenment-to-come, *Lumières à venir*, from either historical or “new” Enlightenment? Part of the answer lies in the shift elsewhere in Derrida’s terminology when the “new International” in *Spectres* is superseded by “democracy-to-come,” which pulls the other in its wake. If Enlightenment-to-come is to Enlightenment as democracy-to-come is to democracy, then, as Marie-Louise Mallet says of democracy-to-come,

pas plus que le droit n’est adéquat à la justice, aucune soi-disant démocratie de fait, aucune figure déterminée de la démocratie n’est adéquate à une certaine “idée” de la démocratie. . . . Cependant, malgré cette faillite ou cette inadéquation irréductible, il faut sans doute tenter de garder vivante la tradition ou l’héritage de ces noms, “démocratie,” “justice,” etc.

not any more than law is adequate to justice, no so-called democracy in existence, no specific figure of democracy is adequate to a certain “idea” of democracy. . . . Nevertheless, in spite of that failure or irreducible inadequation, one must without a doubt attempt to keep alive the tradition or legacy of these words “democracy,” “justice,” and so on.¹⁹

So too the “tradition or legacy” of the historical Enlightenment remains before us, its promise unfulfilled. As John Caputo puts it, *à venir* implies by definition that which does not come, as in certain rabbinic traditions in which the Messiah does not come, but remains forever expected, imminent, and incomplete; such is “la structure même de l’attente et de temps historique, de l’espérance et de la promesse, de la foi et du futur” [the very structure of expectation and of historical time, of hope and of promise, of faith and of the future].²⁰ Caputo goes on to ask whether, indeed, all the various forms of the *à venir*—not only democracy-to-come, but also hospitality-to-come, the gift-to-come—are ultimately the same? Do they converge at some future point? And yet the to-come is neither an idealizing abstraction nor a “datable future,” but rather “a demand, an expectation, a hope, a desire.”²¹ To remain forever “to come,” *à venir*, is to remain an “event”: singular, incalculable, ready to interrupt and transform the present. For all its eventual singularity, however, I would argue that each figure of the *à venir* remains recognizable, attached to a real exigency, a real practice or a historical moment. Enlightenment propels Enlightenment-to-come.

One of the distinguishing features of this particular figure of the *à venir* is its concern with language. Derrida refers more than once to the occasion of his lecture, the meeting of the Association of Societies for Philosophy in French, won-

dering, as he often has in the past,²² just what it means to be doing philosophy in French—and suggesting that his effort to “save the honor of reason” is not simply “in the French language,” but “in the name of the French language” (*Voyous*, 168; *Rogues*, 119). Part of what is at stake for Derrida as he lectures in Nice, on the edge of the Mediterranean contact zone, is to reflect on the crossroads of languages in the philosophical tradition, particularly French/Latin, Greek, and German. For example, observing that the Latin roots of French make visible the affiliations among event, *venir*, *devenir*, etc., he acknowledges the difficulty of translating the semantic network (*Voyous*, 197; *Rogues*, 143), and elsewhere the resonances among languages and philosophical traditions point toward the potential for conceptual confusion. Having shown the problems attendant on the idea—variously expressed by philosophers as different as Husserl and Descartes—that reason, like the sun shining on the earth, is “the one reason” (*Voyous*, 194; *Rogues*, 140)—he must now find a way for heterogeneous rationalities to speak to one another. Is translation ultimately possible?

Everything hinges on this question, as Derrida makes quite clear at the outset of the lecture. Commenting on his own use of French, a Romance language “déjà surchargée de traductions” [already burdened with translations] he hints that the “experience of translation” will be shown to be key to “tout le destin de la raison, c’est-à-dire l’universalité mondiale à venir” [the entire destiny of reason, that is of the global universality to come] (*Voyous*, 168; *Rogues*, 119). Or a few pages later, a juxtaposition of German and Latin discourses on reason suggests not “transparent equivalency” but rather the “hypothetical and problematic universal translatability that is one of the fundamental stakes of reason” (*Voyous*, 172; *Rogues*, 122). In other words, the series of supposedly (but not entirely) congruent terms from different philosophical traditions reminds us both of the unarticulated assumption that such terms are completely reversible onto one another, and—by virtue of the juxtaposition—of their different semantic weight and the different conceptual schemes in which they arise. The “hypothesis” of universal translatability is no less necessary for being shown to be problematic. Translation is further thematized through the conscientious naming of the translators whose work Derrida cites²³ and through further juxtapositions of terms in French, English, German, Greek, and Latin. The semantic slipperiness of different linguistic and philosophical traditions is salutary: it aids our understanding by preventing us from fixing on individual terms, thereby proposing a “pedagogy” for thought (*Voyous*, 203; *Rogues*, 148).

Ultimately, this “essay on reason” offers us a rationality that should be “reasoned with” in order to become “reasonable.” The final question is one of translation:

Il reste à savoir, pour sauver l’honneur de la raison, comment *traduire*. Par exemple le mot “raisonnable.” Et comment saluer, au-delà de sa latinité, dans plus d’une langue, la différence fragile entre le *rationnel* et le *raisonnable*. (*Voyous*, 217)

It remains to be known, so as to save the honor of reason, how to *translate*. For example, the word “reasonable.” And how to pay one’s respects to, how to salute or greet [*saluer*], beyond its latinity, and in more than

one language, the fragile difference between the *rational* and the *reasonable*. (*Rogues*, 159)

Reason reasons, and this is the source of its identity, its sovereign self-sameness—but to make reason see reason, it must be “reasoned with”: questioned, subjected to ongoing critique, engaged in an ongoing dialogue with that which comes from without. “Une raison doit se laisser raisonner” [A reason must let itself be reasoned with].²⁴ Such is the imperative of the Enlightenment-to-come.

How to translate? Reading backwards from “The ‘World’ of the Enlightenment to Come,” with its foregrounding of translation as one of reason’s fundamental stakes, sets us on a different and much longer path from that which we followed in search of the antecedents of references to Enlightenment and democracy. To retrace the many steps of Derrida’s reflections on translation would take us to the early comments on the topic in *Positions*, the extended footnote-to-the-translator in the essay “Living On/ Borderlines,” the debates in *L’oreille de l’autre*, the analysis of Benjamin in “Des Tours de Babel,” the meditation on language and (non)belonging in *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre*, recent reflections on hospitality, on “welcoming the other in his or her language”²⁵—and to many other texts besides. The 1982 roundtable discussion on translation in *L’Oreille de l’autre*, in which a panel of critics engages Derrida on the relevance to translation of much of his work from the 1970s, is a strong reminder of the significance of Derrida’s writing prior to “Des Tours de Babel” for translation theory.²⁶ Other texts analyze entire discourses in terms of their own inherent structures of “translation”: psychoanalysis in “Moi—la psychanalyse” and philosophy in *Du droit à la philosophie*.²⁷

Leitmotivic references to translation occur throughout *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, with a series of questions concerning the French “translation” (literally and conceptually) of Husserl. As Derrida puts it, these are “problèmes de traduction qui ne sont pas seulement des ‘problèmes-de-traduction’” [translation problems that are not merely “translation-problems”].²⁸ In one of the final chapters, “translation” opens the door to all kinds of relations and passages-between: from questions of “transition et de transitivité, de transfert figural” to “le passage comme la Passion, l’Incarnation, la Transsubstantiation, le *hoc est enim corpus meum*,” and ultimately a reflection on and rewriting of Lévinas’s concept of “substitution.”²⁹ Speculating about the profound differences between languages in which “touch” functions as a sign for all the senses, and those in which it does not, Derrida concludes, “Le toucher: l’intraduisible.”³⁰ “Touch” is untranslatable on the one hand because of its dissimilar semantic fields in various languages, and on the other because, as Derrida’s painstaking explication of Nancy and the entire phenomenological tradition makes clear, “touch” both is and is not contact, carrying-over, union—it is also restraint, contiguity, separateness. As are words that call out to one another from different languages.

And yet translation occurs, constantly, even as “l’intraduisible demeure,” in *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre*: while translation can never make restitution of the “singular event of the original,” taking its place so entirely that it is forgotten, it reminds us of our alienation from the language which we inhabit the most intimately.³¹ Translating into the language of *Voyous*, we might say that, just as justice exceeds law, so the unconditional exigency of translation exceeds the impossibility of translation. Translation thus reflects the same “aporetic structure” as democracy-

to-come, as Enlightenment-to-come. If language itself is likened to a “promise” in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*,³² so is translation in “Des Tours de Babel.” Reflecting on Benjamin’s notion of translation as a gesture towards the ultimate “reconciliation” of languages, Derrida observes that the reconciliation remains to some degree “untouchable” inasmuch as it is only promised—but concludes nevertheless that “une promesse n’est pas rien” [a promise is not nothing].³³

Derrida’s major statement on translation in the 1980s, “Des Tours de Babel,” offers another possible brief, glancing contact—“tangent” in the language of *Le Toucher*—between translation, on the one hand, and democracy and Enlightenment, on the other. Commenting on Benjamin’s discussion of texts that contain their translation, whether or not it is ever realized, Derrida speaks of the *à-traduire* of a text. Though rendered as “to-be-translated” by Joseph Graham,³⁴ the echo of Derrida’s later writing reveals the phrase as a figure or foreshadowing of the *à venir*. The *à-traduire* is one of Derrida’s renderings of Benjamin’s *Überleben*, *sur-vie*, living on or “afterlife” in Harry Zohn’s translation of “The Task of the Translator.” As he observes, Benjamin conceives that afterlife as both problematic—the translator capable of the task may never appear—and apodictic: absolutely necessary, a priori demonstrable, a structural desire for the other, a translator, that is intrinsic to original.³⁵ This relationship of the finitude of “life” to the exigency of “afterlife” will recur, as we have seen, with a shift in emphasis from the apodictic to the aporetic, in the relationship of justice to law, in the Enlightenment-to-come.

The promise implied in both *à-traduire* and *à-venir* is one of survival and future hope. As Derrida wrote (and James Hulbert translated) in his 1977 essay “Living On/ Borderlines,”

Übersetzung and “translation” overcome, equivocally, in the course of an equivocal combat, the loss of an object. A text lives *on* if it lives *on* [sur-vit], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable. . . . 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. The 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.³⁶

Derrida turned again to Benjamin in his last interview for *Le Monde* in August 2004, with further thoughts about *Überleben*, surviving a death, and *Fortleben*, living on, noting that, while the terms might take on a particular coloration for him at that moment, all of his work had been criss-crossed by both senses of “survival” in its structural dimension, independent of both life and death. Survival, he emphasizes, is not concerned with death or the past, but with life and with the future: “tout le temps, la déconstruction est du côté du *oui*, de l’affirmation de la vie” [at all times, deconstruction is on the side of *Yes*, of the affirmation of life].³⁷

Where does all this leave us, as we live on and continue to reflect on Enlightenment past and Enlightenment-to-come? What does it mean, “to learn to translate” in the context of unconditional critique? Translation seems so obviously “conditioned,” both by the existence of a prior text and by the world in which it circulates and to whose expectations it responds. Yet even that conditioning stems from what Derek Attridge calls “the inventive singularity” of the source text, which opens itself anew to each successive reader and incites new responses.³⁸ Un-

conditional translation takes place in the open-ended conversation between texts, beginning now, extending indefinitely. It is an offer of hospitality, allowing our language to be permeated with the discourse of another. The *à-traduire*—or as we might call it today, the translation-to-come—is a call for dialogue between our own language (which we never possess) and an “indefinitely perfectible” understanding, or reconciliation, in the future.

NOTES

I am grateful to Del McWhorter for her judicious comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. See Edward W. Said’s posthumous essay on the “eighteenth-century” operas of Britten, Weill, Stravinsky, and Strauss, “Return to the Eighteenth Century,” in *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 25–47.

2. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 145; *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88.

3. *Spectres*, 149; *Specters*, 90.

4. Jacques Derrida, “Mes ‘humanités’ de dimanche,” in *Papier machine* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 330; “My Sunday ‘Humanities,’” in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005), 107.

5. Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l’amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 339; *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 306.

6. Jacques Derrida, “Le Livre à venir,” in *Papier machine*, 24; “The Book to Come,” in *Paper Machine*, 12.

7. Jacques Derrida, *L’Université sans condition* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 12; “The University without Condition,” in *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), 203.

8. Alex Thompson, “What’s to Become of ‘Democracy to Come?’” *Postmodern Culture* 15.3 (2005) sec.19.

9. Jacques Derrida, “Autrui est secret parce qu’il est autre,” *Papier machine*, 371; “Others are secret because they are Other,” *Paper machine*, 139. See also in the same volume “Non pas l’utopie, l’im-possible,” 359–60; “Not Utopia, the Im-possible,” 129–30.

10. *L’Université sans condition*, 16; “The University without Condition,” 205.

11. Jacques Derrida, *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), 120; *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005), 81–82.

12. *Voyous*, 14; *Rogues*, 163, n.8.

13. *Voyous*, 204–5n.; *Rogues*, 173, n.12.

14. *Voyous*, 207n.; *Rogues*, 174–75, n.14.

15. *Voyous*, 126; *Rogues*, 86.

16. *Voyous*, 132; *Rogues*, 91. Derrida’s notion of a messianism “without content and without identifiable messiah” goes back to *Spectres*, 56; *Specters*, 28.

17. Noting the continuities between nineteenth-century usage and contemporary urban realities—realities more visible in the world’s eyes than ever, since the events in the Parisian suburbs in the fall of 2005—Derrida observes, “Aujourd’hui, le voyou traîne parfois sur les voies et sur les voiries en voiture, quand il ne les vole pas ou ne les brûle pas, lesdites voitures.” *Voyous*, 97.

18. As Derrida notes elsewhere: “Je garde le mot français de ‘mondialisation’ pour ‘globalization’ ou ‘Globalisierung’ afin de maintenir la référence à un ‘monde’ (*world, Welt, mundus*) qui n’est ni le globe, ni le cosmos, ni l’univers.” *L’Université sans condition* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 12–13.

19. Marie-Louise Mallet, "Avant-propos," *La Démocratie à venir: Autour de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), 9. My translation.
20. John D. Caputo, "L'Idée même de l'à venir," in Mallet, ed., *La Démocratie à venir*, 300–301.
21. Caputo, 304. My translation.
22. As in Derrida's 1984 Toronto lectures on Descartes and "philosophy in its natural language," published as "Transfert ex cathedra: le langage et les institutions philosophiques," in *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 281–394; "Transfer ex cathedra: Institutions of Philosophy," in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. Jan Plug et al. (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 1–80.
23. While Derrida's first reference to a translator is maintained, presumably because he refers to the translator as a friend (*Voyous*, 182; *Rogues*, 130), his reference to the French translator of Plato whom he cites (*Voyous*, 192) is elided in the English version.
24. *Voyous*, 217; *Rogues*, 159.
25. Jacques Derrida, "De l'hospitalité" (interview), in *Sur parole: Instantanés philosophiques* (Paris: Editions de l'aube, 2005), 73. My translation.
26. That relevance continues to be apparent in a recent discussion of deconstruction and translation that gives as much space to the notion of *différance* as to "Des Tours de Babel." Edwin Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories*, 2nd ed. (Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters, 2001), 157–67. See also Kathleen Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* (Manchester, U.K.: St. Jerome Publishing, 2001).
27. Jacques Derrida, "Moi—la psychanalyse," in *Psyché: Invention de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 145–58; Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 48–53. In the latter, the discussion of the need for intralinguistic "translation" falls in the subchapter on "La Démocratie à venir," indicating an early connection between the two.
28. Jacques Derrida, *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 204n.; *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005), 350, n.13.
29. *Le Toucher*, 290–93; *On Touching*, 260–62
30. *Le Toucher*, 69; *On Touching*, 55.
31. Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), 100ff; *The Monolingualism of the Other*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998).
32. "Chaque fois que j'ouvre la bouche, chaque fois que je parle ou écris, je promets. . . . Le performatif de cette promesse n'est pas un speech act parmi d'autres. Il est impliqué par tout autre performatif; et cette promesse annonce l'unicité d'une langue à venir. C'est le 'il faut qu'il y ait une langue' [qui sous-entend nécessairement: 'car elle n'existe pas,' ou 'puisque'elle fait défaut'], 'je promets une langue,' 'une langue est promise' qui à la fois précède toute langue, appelle toute parole et appartient déjà à chaque langue comme à toute parole" (*Monolinguisme*, 126–27).
33. Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph Graham (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 235; "Des Tours de Babel," trans. Joseph Graham, in *Difference in Translation*, 191. (The essay later appeared in *Psyché*, 203–33.)
34. Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours" [French version], 224; "Des Tours" [English version], 180.
35. "Des Tours" [French], 225; "Des Tours" [English], 181.
36. Jacques Derrida, "Living On/ Borderlines," trans. James Hulbert, in Harold Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 102–103n. (The date 1977 is that given at the beginning of Derrida's extended "footnote," with a dedication to Jacques Ehrmann in recollection of Derrida's first visit to Yale.)
37. Jacques Derrida, "Je suis en guerre contre moi-même," interview by Jean Birnbaum, *Le Monde*, August 19, 2004.
38. Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 74.