

Fragmentation Echoes in Modern Translation Theory

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ABSTRACT

The paradox of the Tower of Babel and the underlying story behind the confusion of tongues are inextricably intertwined with various linguistic differences across the world. The tool of language, regardless of whether it is a gift of God, or a purely human artifact, or whatever one may choose to believe regarding its origins, is a tool that allows us to communicate with each other, thereby opening the door for dialogue with the ‘Other.’ As the myth of Babel began influencing several scholars in the twentieth century, linguistic theories inevitably elicited great interest among many acclaimed scholars, including Franz Kafka (1883–1924), Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). To that end, the fragmented mode of languages is a fundamental principle in their discourse on the *confusion of tongues*. In this article, I argue that Kafka’s writing, particularly the notion of the “piecemeal construction” in “The Great Wall of China,”¹ has influenced Benjamin’s theory of translation and echoed Derrida’s respective view thereof.

“From the origin of the original to be translated, there is fall and exile”

—Jacques Derrida

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the paradox behind the various tongues across the world has been linked to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, wherein languages were scattered around the world and became fragmented. However, the way to bridge the gaps between different tongues has been made possible through translation, and since then, translation has come to practice. Many thinkers have been influenced by the myth of Babel, and accordingly, they have taken great interest in linguistic theories, including Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Derrida. I argue that the conceptual structure of the fragmentary fashion in Kafka’s *architectural language* found in his story, “The Great Wall of China,” has inspired Benjamin’s theory of translation, especially his concept of *pure language*, and as such concepts resonate in Derrida’s thought in turn.

Undoubtedly, Benjamin marks a deep leverage in the contemporary linguistic and translation theories. His account is best reflected in his philosophical writing, particularly in “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man” (1916) and “The Task of the Translator” (1923). He postulates that

languages are historically related to each other while maintaining the fact that their essence/root is divine, insofar as they are related to a greater language. In fact, Benjamin found a great source of influence in Kafka’s fiction, particularly in his short story “The Great Wall of China.” This is perhaps best evidenced by Gershom Scholem, who states that Kafka’s thoughts on language are influenced that of Benjamin (Scholem 197). Indeed, Benjamin and Kafka share the belief that the origin of language lies in God and that all language therefore has the “same divine sparks” (Rosenzweig and Barbara 14). They also show a mutual preoccupation with the architectural language in their respective works. Thus, I intend to show how Benjamin’s view on translation is influenced by Kafka’s “piecemeal construction” of the Great Wall. That is, Kafka’s *architectural language* is inspired by the fragmentary nature of “The Great Wall of China,” which, in turn, foreshadows Benjamin’s understanding of translation, particularly in “The Task of the Translator.” Of equal importance, I also seek to address two relevant questions to my argument: How can translation as a mode of art and/or a mode of architectural design unify different languages into a universal language? And does *truth* survive in translation either through the artistic writing and/or the architectural design of language? Considering these questions are crucial, especially in addressing this topic from literary and philosophical perspectives.

The Linguistic Fall

Evidently, Kafka is profoundly interested in the Tower and its direct link to the fall of language. In this light, George Steiner (1960–2020) argues in *After Babel* that: “The foundation of the Tower preoccupy Kafka even more than edifice itself” (70). Furthermore, in his notebook, Kafka wrote: “We are digging the pit of Babel” (qtd. in Steiner 70). These statements entail an ascent and descent relationship, which in turn, implies construction, destruction, and reconstruction. As such, it reflects Kafka’s story. Specifically, Kafka directly addresses the Tower of Babel in “The Great Wall of China,” maintaining that the failure behind the Tower is “not because of the reasons universally advanced,” but rather, due to its weak foundation (166). Therefore, the fragmented structure of “The Great Wall of China” could be a strong base for building a new Tower of Babel. “The Great Wall alone would provide for the first time in the history of mankind a secure foundation for a new Tower of Babel. First the wall, therefore, and then the tower” (166). The implication is that the piecemeal design of the Great Wall should be the guiding principle in the construction of this new Tower of Babel. Here, Kafka alludes to the unity of language through completing the construction project, which, in turn, paves the way for a universal language that can be achieved through the architectural language.

Interestingly, Kafka’s “Great Wall of China” resembles the state of languages after what Benjamin terms ‘the linguistic fall,’ in which language “becomes a mere sign for something other than itself” (qtd. in Benjamin and Osborne 137). This suggests that language is a part of something bigger than itself, and therefore, the need for another language is called for. As such, it directly explains the diversity of languages. Evidently, Benjamin is inspired by Kafka’s idea of the Great Wall’s “piecemeal construction” to construct such a language. This claim perhaps is best evidenced by Kafka’s story when the narrator states, “The command deliberately chose *the system of piecemeal construction*” (Kafka 167 [italics added]). Thus, an unknown authority planned and intended to build the wall as a highly fragmented construction.² This can be interpreted as an implicit reference to the Tower of Babel and the present diversity of languages around the world. More importantly, language ultimately has its root in God. According to Benjamin, the creation of the world and revelation are inextricably related to the origin of languages, and the present diversity of languages explains the fall of the original language, which scatters into various tongues around the world.

In Kafka’s fictional story of “The Great Wall of China,” the relationship between the Tower and the Wall holds a crucial promise, inasmuch as they signify horizontal and vertical relations.³ For instance, the Tower is an attempt to conquer the heavens, whereas the Wall is an attempt to hold dominion over the earth (the wall and its shadow sketches the map of the earth). Typically, it is more or less a contrasting relationship—*ascent and fall dimensional connection* wherein the tower resembles the path or an attempt for one tongue, while the great wall resembles a collapse and thus confusion of tongues. Both signify a collapse and ascent relationships

and therefore of truth. In other words, the shattered languages can be viewed as a shadow for a higher language. The Tower denotes the fall of language (linguistic fall) while the wall—the remnant of the fragments of the wall signifies the difference of tongues—translation is a magical solution here to fix the difference between tongues into one tongue. In this light, Steiner notes, “A genuine translation evokes the shadowy yet unmistakable contours of the coherent design from which, after Babel, the jagged fragments of human speech broke off” (67). This implies that the shadow metaphor attests to the presence of the original and at the same time the possibility of translation. To that end, translation can be the only remedy that would recover and unify the languages into one universal language. This indicates that all languages belong to one a greater language: an Adamic or Prelapsarian tongue.

Willis Barnstone argues in *Poetics of Translation* that: “With the fall of Babel, God dispersed the word, gave us tongues and the solitude of difference, *and also the impossible but pleasurable duty to repair our separation*. After the destruction the deity implicitly challenged us to look up again and rebuild the tower of another Babel. The act of translation is the other Babel, that impossible tower” (3 [italics added]). Barnstone suggests that translation is undergirded the necessity of interacting and talking with each other, thereby opening the language of dialogue [universal language] regardless of differences in tongues. This is not to say that separation or difference of languages entails solitude; rather, it necessitates communication and thus dialogue. This is perhaps best illustrated by Emmanuel Levinas’s (1905–1997) *Totality and Infinity*: “Language as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient ‘I-Thou’ forgetful of the universe...the being it manifests or expresses would concern himself with justice; the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity” (213). Levinas suggests that language entails the entity of the face wherein he stresses that the face of the Other speaks to the self and thus invites a dialogue. Language necessarily involves an ethical responsibility, insofar as “The relation between the same and the other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as conversation [*discourse*], where the same, gathered up in its ipseity as an ‘I,’ as a particular existent unique and autochthonous, leaves itself” (39). This “leaving of the self” in conversation is, in fact, an ethical act—a “pouring out of the self” for the Other. Such is the essence of an ethical obligation. More importantly, truth will not prevail without ethical interaction. According to Levinas, truth is a mode of the relation that exists between the self and the Other. The Other speaks to the self regardless of the difference and separation. This is similar to Benjamin’s translation theory, as he pays great respect to other languages. He postulates that all languages belong to one “family,” thereby resisting the totalizing impulse to reduce this multiplicity of languages to sameness. Rather, his theory requires that languages must be brought together into dialogue in order to reach a higher truth. Thus, true translation refuses the reduction of the other language into the same—sameness, which parallels Levinas’s distinction between totality and infinity: whereas Totality,

like bad translation, appropriate the Other, reduces it to the Same, Infinity, as with true translation, makes a space for the other to be and to grow and to come in its own time. Hence, translation—especially as Benjamin conceives it—seems to imply a need for close collaboration and dialogue as well. The interaction between languages through intention reveals truth, which would remain hidden otherwise. In the same context, the eminent scholar of Kafka, Walter Herbert Sokel observes, “Language for Kafka should be the proper *adaequatio* for the activities and emotions that bind the members of the community together. Only in such a cohesive community can the speaker of the language be one with himself and with the partners of his discourse. Such wholeness for Kafka is a criterion of truth” (Sokel 371).

FRAGMENTATION STRUCTURE OF TRANSLATION AND THE NATURE OF LANGUAGES

Benjamin perceives translation as a mode of fragments, and therefore, the original and the translation belong to a greater language—ur-language. As he puts it, “*Thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel*” (Benjamin 78 [italics added]). This implies not only that translation is a fragment but also that the different tongues in the world are related to a greater language, a prelapsarian language—the language of truth. This notion of fragment goes all the way back to the main source—the Tower of Babel. Hence, translation constitutes of a fragment of the original language, and the act of translation is an act of construction, which can constitute a wholeness, but not as the original language—translation is always translation.⁴ In this vein, Paul De Man observes, “The translation is the fragment of a fragment” (De Man 91). Such a notion of fragmentation is in a resonance with Kafka’s idea of “piecemeal construction,” as is best illustrated in “The Great Wall of China.” The narrator recounts, “There remains, therefore, nothing but the conclusion that the commanders deliberately chose the system of piecemeal construction” (Kafka 167). The architectural apparatus of the piecemeal design of the great wall assimilates in Benjamin’s theoretical understanding/framework of translation as fragmentations, in specific, and the notion of construction as a whole.

Furthermore, the wall’s architectural design in the form of fragments suggests that the gaps in the wall make the illusion of unity possible, which itself implies the theoretical possibility of totality or wholeness.⁵ In other words, the illusion of unity gives impetus to the desire to attain unity between the gaps; such an intentional architectural design of the wall offers a primary stage or a theatre for dance wherein the movement of winds between the gaps echoes the call of unity of languages. Specifically, the instruction from high command to build the wall in a fashion of “piecemeal design” is analogous to the fragmenting of languages—that is, the fragmented structure of the Great Wall parallels Benjamin’s idea of language as being fragmented, and more fundamentally, the multiplicity of languages can be unified into one language. Remarkably, Benjamin and Kafka imply that fragments may

ultimately be united to construct a wholeness. Namely, the empty space between the fragments gives the illusion of unity, which is possible through construction. For that reason, Benjamin comes up with his key concept of *pure language*, illustrating the possibility of translation based on the historical kinship of language and the intention of translation. As he puts it, “all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole—an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language” (Benjamin 74). Here, language is capable of expressing the truth. A work of literature is therefore competent in conveying truth (Alhashmi 74). Such truth, however, is not only aesthetic qualities, but it also entails the ongoing life of the work in a question. Benjamin gives a metaphorical life of the original language in a scattered form of translation, emphasizing that truth is still conveyable even in fragmented constructions. As such, it is a quite visible in the architectural structure of the Kafka’s wall, which, in turn, juxtaposes with the fragmentation of languages; ultimately, they can be unified into one language: the language of truth. As explicitly stated by Kafka, “Unity! Unity! Shoulder to shoulder, a ring of brothers, a current of blood no longer confined within the narrow circulation of one body, but sweetly rolling and yet ever returning throughout the endless League of China” (Kafka 166). In this context, Kafka suggests the desirability of a universal language, which runs parallel in Benjamin’s conception of *pure language*.

This idea of translation as presupposing the fragmentation of an ur-language (a mode of fragment) influenced Derrida’s views on translation based on deconstructive thought. Derrida’s “Des Tours de Babel” (1985), argues, “The ‘tower of Babel’ does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics” (“Des Tours de Babel” 165). Among other things, Derrida believes that the ‘tower of Babel’ is more than a metaphor of confusion of tongues, it also entails a structure of architecture, which may or may not construct a new Babel by means of translation. Nonetheless, according to Derrida, Babel is more than idioms or lexicon; he states, it is “the myth of the origin of myth, the metaphor of metaphor ... the translation of translation” (165). Moreover, he postulates the possibility and the impossibility of translation. He argues that God “imposes and forbids translation ... translation then becomes necessary and impossible” (170). Here, he alludes to the issue of translatability and untranslatability. To illustrate this point further, Derrida uses the word “Babel” to show how it can be confusing, as it entails a proper noun and a common noun. While it is untranslatable when it refers to a proper name, it is translatable when it signifies a common noun (166). In addition, Derrida contends that translation entails a wide range of possibilities, which makes it more flexible than transferable—that is to say, an exhausting process.

While Derrida seems to be fascinated with Benjamin’s *pure language*, he goes further believing that the relationship

between the original and translation is more than a mode of intention or representation, inasmuch as truth remains untouched in Benjamin's treatment of pure language, which is beyond the act of translation—that is to say untransferable. For Derrida, "Truth would rather be the *pure language* in which the meaning and the letter no longer dissociate" (196). Even though Derrida takes a different stand than that of Benjamin regarding *pure language*, he goes in line with Benjamin's notion of translation as being composed of fragments of a larger language, "a holy tongue."

Additionally, Derrida is haunted by what he terms the *oath*, which, in turn, carries the promise of truth. The protocol of truth goes beyond language in a process wherein the oath, like an ambassador, travels through the gate of language to speak to divinity. According to Derrida, only by the oath can truth be achieved, insofar as truth will be hidden otherwise, inasmuch as language cannot reveal truth by itself because we, humans can never attain it because of our limitations, and language is incapable of expressing truth by itself. Derrida believes that the connection between the oath and the promise reveals truth.

THE REDEMPTION BEHIND THE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTION

Benjamin links the idea of translation to utopian and redemptive elements of language in his works. This idea of redemption of translation derives from "The Great Wall," wherein the architectural process of building the Wall itself is redemptive:

Accordingly, while they [the supervisors] were still exalted by the jubilant celebrations marking the completions of thousand yards of wall, they were sent far, far away, saw on their journey finished sections of the wall rising here and there, came past the quarters of the high command and were presented with badges of honor, and heard the rejoicings of new armies of labor streaming past from the depths of the land, saw foresting being cut down to become supports for wall, heard at the holy shrines hymns rising in which pious prayed for the completion of the wall. All this assuaged their impatience. The quiet life of their homes, where they rested some time, strengthened them; the humble credulity with which their reports were listened to, the confidence with which the simple and peaceful burgher believed in the eventual completion of the wall, all this tightened up again the cords of soul. Like eternally hopeful children they then said farewell to their homes; the desire once more to labor on the wall of the nation become irresistible. (Kafka 165–166)

The aforementioned passage reflects Benjamin's notion of redemption in his own work. As such, it cannot be attained by one language, but by calling of all languages into a synergistic relationship, each supplementing the others. As he puts it, "works of literature, critical judgments, will never communicate—for they remain dependent on translation; but in it, the languages themselves, supplemented and reconciled in their mode of signification, harmonize" (Benjamin 77). Benjamin emphasizes that the purpose of translation or any

literary work is *not* communication. If so, then, it is unnecessary, insofar as it produces insufficient translation. Benjamin proclaims that translation is not intended for communication, but, rather, for supplementing languages each other through their intention. Such an intention entails an interaction between two languages or more by supplementing the other. In this sense, translation can reveal the "ultimate meaning," through *pure language*. In turn, *pure language* stems from the kinship of languages, insofar as they emanate from greater language. Such a kinship is the key to unite or reconcile different languages into one language through translation, which makes translatability possible due to the affinity and relativity of languages. Benjamin posits that translation is a matter of representation as opposed to resemblance. Such a representation can reveal truth through intention, inasmuch as languages generate a common intention, without this act, truth would be lost in the act of resemblance.

Interestingly, Benjamin appropriates Kafka's notion of harmonization in "The Task of The Translator." As an illustration, in Kafka's story, the narrator narrates, "Consider rather the river in spring. It rises until it grows mightier and nourishes more richly the soil on the long stretch of its banks, still maintaining its own course until it reaches the sea, where it is all more welcome because it is a worthier ally" (Kafka 168). Such a harmonic relationship resonates in Benjamin's writing, as he asserts, "a real translation is transparent; it doesn't cover the original, doesn't block its light, but allows the pure language as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original" (Benjamin 79). This means that true translation does not produce a verbatim version of the original work, but, instead, it is a process of "harmonization" and faithfulness of the original work, which permits the original language to grow by the true act of translation. It is only by "true complementarity" can a faithful translation be accomplished. Such a notion of harmonization echoes Derrida's view. To reiterate — Derrida's 'translation contract,' which is based on a rescue mission wherein it [the legal contract] binds the native language to write and obliged the translator to translate in order to continue the survival mission. "Translation promises a kingdom to the reconciliation of languages. This promise, a properly symbolic event adjoining, coupling, marrying two languages like two parts of a greater whole, appeals to a language of the truth" ("Des Tours de Babel" 200). Thus, it is a marriage contract between two different languages bound by translation wherein the author is the witness, and the translator is the one who authorizes the act of marriage—the legitimate guardian who, in turn, provides the license to get engaged and to marry. In this fashion, the languages will be saved, and the rescue mission will be achieved. Ideally, the intimate connection between the original and its translation is protected by a contract—translation. The marriage contract is the law of translation—and while the process requires at least two languages, "[the] language contract among several languages is absolutely singular" (185). The translation that results from the marriage contract "subsequently will authorize every sort of contract in the originary sense. The signature of this single contract needs no written document or record; it nevertheless takes

place as a trace or as trait" (185). All in all, translation arises by allowing the growth of the original language—which in itself, an act of liberation from alienation, as it were.

THINKING INSIDE ARCHITECTURE: THE AESTHETIC OF CONSTRUCTION

The prolific interaction between Benjamin and Kafka reflects a mutual interest in the architectural and the artistic dimensions of language and translation, which, in turn, inspired Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator." As argued by Barbara E. Galli in *Cultural Writings of Franz Rosenzweig*, Kafka's "The Great Wall of China" offers a parallel reading to both Rosenzweig's and Benjamin's theories of translation, particularly concerning the architectural language (Galli 15).

Artistically speaking, Kafka treats the Great Wall as an exemplary work of art. This artistic image of the Wall creates a fascinating horizon to the wall itself. For him, it is a form of architectural art, "especially that of masonry" (Kafka 164). Indeed, the mission of construction itself is an artistic task wherein "The art of building was required" (164). Alongside Art, the architectural knowledge is a priori. "Accordingly, the most scrupulous care in the building, the application of the architectural wisdom of all known ages and peoples, an unremitting sense of personal responsibility in the builders were indispensable prerequisites for the work" (164). This artistic style of construction provides symmetrical ideas to Benjamin's view of translation. According to Benjamin, translation is an artistic form of the original. This means that translation is a primary piece in the realm of art, as supposed to a secondary communicative product. Thus, Benjamin likewise Kafka's masonry⁶ wall design in which each stone in the wall is a piece of art, and each segment of the wall can stand by itself. Here, both authors stress the importance of aesthetics in their work as an indispensable factor to be considered as an autonomous art.

THE GIFT OF SURVIVAL

Translation gives the language a breath to live longer, and therefore, language lives through the act of translation, which is a healthy process. Notably, both Benjamin and Derrida believe that translation must allow the growth of the original as opposed to killing it. In this sense, translation can be seen as a historical gift. Benjamin stresses the importance of history in his translation theory, as he puts it, "Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express" (Benjamin 72). Benjamin alludes to the translatability of languages due to their ability to convey the truth as well as the historical kinship of languages. To that end, translation expands the life of the original to live longer and breathe the same air in another language. Nevertheless, the work of literature has nothing to do with the life or the death of the author who writes the original work; rather, it is about the work itself, which by remaining alive will preserve the name or the signature of the writer. The gift of survival carries a crucial promise—representation, not resemblance, the latter being merely a copy of original—renewal of an image, so to

speak. Similarly, Derrida notes: "For in its survival, which would not merit the name if it were not mutation and renewal of something living, the original is modified. Even for words that are solidified there is still a postmaturation" ("Des Tours de Babel" 183). The survival of the original takes a form of transformation—it is a mutation in a variant form—"a holy growth of language" (183). Derrida asserts, "A faithful representation of the original" (183). The task of the translator is to allow the language to grow and transform in order to continue its course of survival. "If the translator neither restitutes nor copies an original, it is because the original lives on and transforms itself" (188). More importantly, "Such survival gives more of life, more than a surviving. The work does not simply live longer, it lives more and better, beyond the means of its author" (177). It is as if the translator acts as a farmer, not only planting the seeds (language) but also irrigating them with water in order to grow—and so forth. The farmer metaphor clearly explains Derrida's notion of survival, which is similar to that of Benjamin. According to Benjamin, the task of the translator is to liberate the original from its prison; the original call for the translator and asks for freedom—translation. It is by the act of the translator that language can be freed and thereby survive. Hence, the mission of translation is more or less a rescue mission in which language survives by the act of translation. Derrida's offers his term, "translation contract," in which "translation espouses the original when two adjoined fragments ... complete each other so as to form a larger tongue in the course of a survival that changes them both ... it is ... hymen or marriage contract with the promise to produce a child whose seed will give rise to history and growth" (191).

Furthermore, true translation results in a transparent body that allows the voice of the original to echo in the translation. Namely, the original voice should be visible in the translated work. In this vein, Carol Jacob "The Monstrosity of Translation" argues, "The unfixable task of translation is to purify the original of meaning: only poor of translations seek to restore it" (Jacob 79). This differs somehow in Derrida's view. Derrida partly agrees with Benjamin in that the true translation is transparent; yet, Derrida conceives a true translation by a more holistic explanation than that of Benjamin. In Derrida's words, "'a true translation,' transparent and adequate interexpression, it is also a structure order, a coherence of construct" ("Des Tours de Babel" 166). He claims that a true translation is transparent and adequate interexpression, followed by a spontaneous structural order and a coherence of constructing (166). Moreover, Derrida relates a good translation to the relativity of language. For him, "a relevant translation [is] a 'good' translation, a translation that does what one expects of it, in short, a version that performs its mission, honors its debt and does its job or its duty" (What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" 177). Derrida seems to focus on the process of translation as a cohesive and coherent body built by construction.

THE WISDOM BEHIND THE NOTION OF FRAGMENTATIONS

For Benjamin, translation is more oriented into two-dimensional processes—good and bad translation—on the one

hand, good translation seeks to preserve the value of art and therefore history. On the other hand, bad translation seeks to transmit only information and no more; thus, it undermines art and consequently, it becomes a secondary product. Whereas, for Derrida, translation is an architectural mode—construction and deconstruction. Both concepts are interrelated in what they want to build and destroy, as to Kafka's "Great Wall of China" in which the wall signifies Derrida's concept of deconstruction inasmuch as it represents the remnants of the Tower of Babel (incomplete structure)—while the Tower of Babel, on the other hand, signifies construction, which reflects on Kafka's story—the Wall first and then the Tower (Kafka 166).

Kafka echoes Benjamin and the latter echoes Derrida in this philosophical chain of linguistic thought wherein all of them seem to be under the spell of the Tower of Babel. Derrida attempts to address the myth of "the confusion of tongues" by approaching it from a deconstructionist perspective. Language survives through a constant interplay, which can be generated by construction and deconstruction. Such an interplay has no limit; it cannot lead to a perfect state of language because it is simultaneously based on construction and deconstruction. For Derrida, translation can be treated as a form of architecture, insofar as it is a process of construction and reconstruction and as such never constitutes a totality. It is a "part for whole" relationship—Synecdoche. This suggests that fragments are a part of a greater language—*ur-language*. Translation cannot restore language completely, yet it can partly be recovered through translation. Here, the architecture language can recover language by the act of translation, which continues *ad infinitum* and can never be exhausted. Ideally, the architectural language is a rescue mission, saving the meaning as much as possible by the process of reconstitution and approximation the best possible.

In short, it is not a coincidence that Benjamin is inspired by the fictional landscapes of the architectural language in Kafka's story. The gaze towards the façade of Kafka's portrait of "The Great Wall of China" mirrors the diversity of languages across the globe. And the wisdom behind building the wall as a system of "piecemeal construction" reflects Benjamin's perspective about translation. Namely, the fragmentary nature of Kafka's constructional project, as portrayed in "The Great Wall of China" parallels Benjamin's concept of translation as being fragments. In turn, Benjamin echoes Derrida's thought, insofar as both treat translation as a mode of fragmentation—echoes from a greater language. Moreover, Benjamin and Derrida show great interest in *truth*. While Benjamin contends that truth is attainable by translation through the act of fidelity and intention, Derrida believes in truth only through *oath*, which surpasses human language. Equally significant, for them, the way to achieve unity is through a complementary process; Kafka's *architectural language*, Benjamin's *pure language*, and Derrida's *translation contract*. All of them are haunted by the myth of the Tower of Babel and implicitly consider translation as *the new tower of Babel*. In this sense, translation can be understood as a trace of the invisible tower—Babel. In my concluding remarks, I would say that *translation is more than*

a mystical story of Babel; it is also a historical event that breathes a breath of exile and an activity lives in a sense of trial. Thus, translation can be seen as an archeological pattern of a linguistic map and a historical trace, so to speak.

ENDNOTES

- 1 It is a short story written by Franz Kafka in 1918 but published seven years after his death in 1931. The story depicts an immense but fragmented masonry wall built by vast number of workers divided into several groups distributed in many directions. Each group of workers built a section of the wall; gaps appears in between every section. This plan, designed by the mysterious authority called the "high command," was intended to build the wall as a series of fragments. In the story, the wall's *raison d'être* was to protect the nation from barbarian invaders from the north; however, towards the end of the story it is revealed that there were no invaders at all, (even if there were they can enter, insofar as there is gap between the walls). Kafka's Parable, as we shall see, suggests that such piecemeal construction would serve as a strong foundation for the new Tower of Babel.
- 2 "The high command has existed from all eternity, and the decision to build the wall likewise" (Kafka 169).
- 3 In this vein, Steiner observes, "it is evident that Kafka saw in the Tower and its ruin a dramatic shorthand through which to convey certain exact, though not wholly articulate, intimations about man's linguistic condition and the relations of that condition to God" (68).
- 4 In this sense, Susan Crane asserts, "What the craftsmanship of the translator is capable of restoring: not an imperfect version of a previously perfect whole, but a new version of the former object. This new object, an object of vision as much as of meaning, is full of cracks, and the only thing holding it together is the fullness of the translator's vision" (73).
- 5 Expounding on Kafka's thought, Sokel aptly notes, "The idea of a purely allusive language establishes the otherness of language in regard to truth, not as a defect, but as the necessary condition for the fulfillment of a proper and essential function" (375)
- 6 "Masonry is bricks or pieces of stone which have been stuck together with cement as part of a wall or building" (Collins English Dictionary).

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