

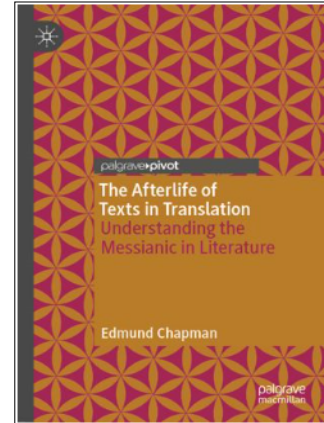
Edmund Chapman, **The Afterlife of Texts in Translation: Understanding the Messianic in Literature**, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 140 pp., \$59.99 (hardcover).

Reviewed by

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Because a translation comes later than the original, and because the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, translation marks their stage of continued life (Benjamin, 2000, p. 16). Therefore, translation is considered a significant step for the afterlife of the original. As such, the recent publication, **The Afterlife of Texts in Translation: Understanding the Messianic in Literature**, appears very timely and significant, as it yields some new insights into language, history, and textuality itself. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in translation studies, as it is very appropriate to review past writings on translation and, based on the common consideration, look forward to a discussion of translation and other issues facing us.



This book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 is devoted to a discussion of some key terms or concepts through reading Benjamin's and Derrida's writings on translation, such as afterlife and overliving, messianicity, and potential. This chapter then goes on to deal with the question of "translatability" and states that "texts effectively are constantly in translation" (p. 12). And it concludes by presenting the framework of this book.

Chapter 2 starts by deepening the reader's understanding of translatability, which is the focus of Benjamin's and Derrida's writing on translation. As stated in the book, "translatability, an essential quality of a text, is key, as translatability changes how we understand the essential structure or nature of a text—or of texts in general" (p. 16), this makes a probe into the issue of translatability. This chapter then leads the reader into the introduction of Benjamin's understanding of history, stating that "Benjamin's and Derrida's writings imply that texts are never stable, but are continually changing" (p. 26). Finally, the chapter's analysis of the relationships among life, survival, and overliving adds to the understanding of overliving.

Chapter 3 is equipped with a clear definition of overtext, which is "all the iterations of a particular text at various stages in the process of translation" (p. 41). It then considers the many translations of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* by giving special attention to the narratives of *Quijote*'s place in literary history to reveal the necessity of the overtext model. And it ends with an analysis of Jorge Luis Borges' multiple *Quijote* rewritings for an understanding of the multiplicity of the overtext and overliving as an experience of potential.

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"In addition to textuality itself, another parameter of translation is language" (p. 58). Therefore, chapter 4 draws our attention to the theories of language and gives a detailed description of Benjamin's language of judgement and Derrida's language-as-colonialism. In this description, although the difference exists between Benjamin's and Derrida's concept of language, the author argues that "the connections they draw between language's inescapable repressiveness and theology are in some ways surprisingly similar" (p. 70).

Chapter 5 devotes much space to the discussion of the messianic, which is composed of five sections. The first four sections respectively examine Benjamin's and Derrida's ideas of the messianic. The author's analysis reveals that textuality has messianic potential and highlights that the messianic potential is inherent to the structure of textuality. The fifth section turns its attention to messianic overliving and its implications. This chapter is rather enlightening for an understanding of the messianic based on Benjamin's and Derrida's writings on translation.

Chapter 6 initiates its discussion by introducing Menard's *Quijote* within the historical context of the text, which demonstrates a manifestation of overliving and reminds us of texts' historical translatability. "The movement of history means that not just texts, but also language itself changes" (p. 103). Therefore, this chapter then shifts its focus from overliving and history to overliving and language, aiming to invite readers to understand Benjamin's concept of "pure language." Later, the statement "Menard's *Quijote* exists in a contradictory state" (p. 106) helps to open up a more detailed discussion on the dual state of singularity and connectedness in light of Benjamin's model of history. It finally discusses the issue of endless potentiality, a further messianic dimension.

Chapter 7 highlights the concept of messianicity through the description of Levinas's "ethics" and Blanchot's "madness." The author states that messianicity means "every text is filled with potential for otherness, even the radical otherness that would exceed the boundaries of textuality" (p. 125). It can be seen that this chapter is still very theoretical and thus offers detailed explanations.

This book is thought provoking in that it succeeds in addressing the essential concern with regard to the afterlife of texts in translation. By touching on some issues that depend on Benjamin's and Derrida's writings on translation, language and history, the author comes up with some new understandings, which may enable a more in-depth reconsideration of the correlation among translation, language, and history. Importantly, we can become aware of the idea of textual "afterlife" and the "messianic" quality. However, the author seems to pay more attention to theoretical elaboration while failing to include more case analyses. If the author had offered more case analyses in some chapters, the book would have been more comprehensible and more lively and interesting. In addition, it's better to provide the further reading or website resources at the end of each chapter, which may consolidate readers' understanding of some theoretical notions and concepts. Also, some suggestions may be offered in chapter 7 for future research.

On the whole, this book creates awareness for a novel way of understanding what "a text" is and provides many stimulating ideas by reading Benjamin's and Derrida's writings on translation, which all readers can benefit from in the future. Therefore, it is an invaluable work, and is expected to be an important reference for students and scholars in the field of translation studies.

### **Reference**

Benjamin, W. (2000). The task of the translator. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (pp. 15–25). London, UK: Routledge.