

**The *Reste* of Translation: Derrida  
and the *Remains***

**Joel Gilberthorpe**

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## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I, Joel Gilberthorpe, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1 – Deconstruction and Western Translation Theory</b> .....	23
Origin .....	25
Phonocentrism and Pneumatology.....	37
Presence of Meaning/The Metaphysics of Presence.....	46
<b>Chapter 2 – Derrida’s Remains</b> .....	68
Remains as Corpse.....	69
Remains as Corpus.....	74
Remains as Cinder .....	80
<b>Chapter 3 – Between Presence and Absence: The <i>Remains</i>, ‘the trace’ and iterability</b> .....	90
Différance .....	91
Iterability.....	96
Iterability and the <i>Remains</i> .....	110
<b>Chapter 4 – Survival and the <i>Remains</i></b> .....	116
Benjamin’s Pure Language and the Text’s Survival.....	122
Maurice Blanchot and ‘Living On’ .....	133
The Necessary Tension of the <i>Remains</i> .....	139
<b>Chapter 5 – The <i>Remains</i> as Ethical Trace: Forgetting and Remembering</b> <b>Translation as <i>Remains</i></b> .....	150
Ricoeur’s Linguistic Hospitality .....	154
Hospitality and Translation in Derrida .....	162
Differing Accounts of Hospitality and Forgiveness in Translation .....	165
Ethics Under Erasure and the <i>Remains</i> as Ethical Trace .....	171
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	177
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	185

## **Abstract**

When Derrida describes the act of translation as both possible and impossible, he articulates a theme that runs throughout much of his work and deconstruction in general. On the one hand, Derrida is arguing that there is a certain impossibility at the heart of the event or act of translation; a perfect or complete translation would rend the sign, the writing itself, irrelevant and the text would disappear into the perfect comprehension of the meaning. Yet, importantly, Derrida does not deny that translation is also possible, that language can and does communicate something. The tension between the two helps us to understand how language works, to see the potential signifieds in the sign and to attempt to transport, to convey them across into the new language. Yet it stops short the inherent violence in the act of translation: the attempt to capture that which is foreign or different, to welcome it in as guest and seek to homogenise the text and minimise difference and otherness.

The impossibility of translation is not an isolated part of the broader work of Derrida's oeuvre or deconstruction more generally. The movement of deconstruction as it solicits, shakes, and undermines the foundational understanding of the sign is that which also leads Derrida to conclude on the impossibility of translation. Derrida's numerous engagements with the concept of translation and the numerous works by other philosophers and academics reveal the importance of translation to Derrida's work and how his quasi-transcendentals impact and influence translation studies to this day.

Where this thesis departs from the field and makes an original contribution is through its examination of Derrida's use of *reste*, in particular how Derrida explores it throughout works such as *Cinders*. If translation is, at its heart, an attempt to use totalising force on the foreign, then the cinder is what remains after the violence, after the holocaust [all is burned]. Yet, translation is ultimately a route of passage where the foreign comes as a guest, making translation a site of hospitality. The dual bind of the possibility and impossibility of translation presents itself as a decision in the Derridean sense of an undecidable. Unable to capture the sign and allow it to retain its foreignness, I argue that 'the remains' is what escapes the ethical decision between the text as singular guest and the target language of the host as the universal.

