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Beckett's Collaborative Translations in the 1950s

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In the 1950s, Samuel Beckett worked together with a number of writer-translators on English, French and German versions of his novels and plays. This article studies the material traces of these collaborations to analyse the collaborations as a crucial phase in a 4-step process toward a poetics of bilingualism, consisting of (1) writing in another language, (2) collaborating on the translations, (3) eventually giving preference to self-translation, and (4) finally presenting his work as a bilingual oeuvre. Beckett also appears to have played a greater part in his German translations than hitherto assumed, which calls for a reassessment of Beckett's "trilingual" engagement with his work in the development of a "bilingual" poetics.

Keywords: bilingualism (bilinguisme), self-translation (auto-traduction), Erich Franzen, Elmar Tophoven, Robert Pinget, Pierre Leyris, Daniel Mauroc

While the "frenzy of writing" (1945-1950) is often regarded as the high point of Beckett's career, producing some of the works he is most renowned for, the decade that followed is also crucial in that it marks the point when Beckett became his own translator, from French to English and vice versa, after trying out various alternatives.² Having rendered *Godot* into English by himself in 1953, to ward off a free adaptation by Thornton Wilder for the Harold L. Oram Group in New York, he decided not to translate his other French texts but to work with writer-translators instead. The first of these collaborations were *Molloy* with Patrick Bowles and 'The End' with Richard Seaver, but because they were so time-consuming, Beckett took matters into his own hands again for the translations of his work from French. In the mid-1950s, however, he started using English as a language of composition again, for the first time in almost ten years. *All That Fall*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Embers* created a demand for French versions of these new works, which he again outsourced to writer-translators at first, including Robert Pinget and Pierre Leyris. Because Beckett was required to intensively revise the result in each case, he again decided to deal with the matter himself, officially becoming his own self-translator in both directions at the end of the 1950s. This process is the subject of the present essay.

Beckett's wavering position with regard to self-translation is directly related to his ongoing uncertainty about bilingualism. Starting out as an English author living in Ireland, the move to France offered new creative possibilities as well as new markets. The first careful attempts at French composition in the late 1930s were accompanied by the first translations from English. Although the French version of *Murphy* was begun at Alfred Péron's insistence (Beckett 2009b, 589), and Beckett was forced to finish it on his own after playing a mere advisory role when his friend was called up for army duty, it does illustrate his openness to the idea of switching idioms. Composition in French took flight in 1945 but there is evidence that Beckett did not see this as a permanent switch. The second notebook with the original manuscript of *Molloy* contains a brief bio that Beckett drafted of himself, in which he states having written an essay on Proust, a book of stories (*More Pricks Than Kicks*), a poetry collection (*Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*) and a novel (*Murphy*) in English, but that he

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013)/ERC grant agreement n° 313609.

² Beckett would never work with a translator again for his English of French texts after the 1950s, except in the case of older work. In 1967 and 1968, he collaborated with Agnès and Ludovic Janvier on French translations of *From an Abandoned Work* (*D'un ouvrage abandonné*) and *Watt*, written in the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, but he soon decided to do *Mercier et Camier* on his own in 1970.

has been writing in French since 1945, crossing out the crucial adverb at the end of the sentence: “~~exclusivement~~” (BDMP4, FN2, 144v). This significant deletion shows Beckett's hesitance regarding the exclusivity of his language of composition and the possibility of his ever returning to English. The 1950s thus constitute an important decade in which Beckett was not only coming to terms with self-translation but also with bilingualism.

Matters become even more complex by the addition of a third language, one in which he was not formally schooled but self-taught. Beckett's first exposure to German language and culture occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s, during the frequent visits to his cousin Peggy Sinclair and her family in Kassel. The German tour that followed, from September 1936 until April 1937, when Beckett visited many art galleries and read widely in German, led to more sustained attempts at mastering the tongue and even writing in it, but they never fully developed into a third language of composition. In the 1950s, however, Beckett became heavily involved in the German translations of his work by Elmar (and later also Erika) Tophoven. More than just vetting their translations, Beckett would have long and recurrent sessions with the Tophovens, going over the entire text together, often with the help of declamation and tape recorders. In fact, their working methods are similar to those adopted for his English and French translations. Beckett disliked revising someone else's translation from a distance and preferred working on a text in the physical presence of the translator, to go over the draft together or even to translate on the spot. The methods through which the German versions came about are no different, proximity being an equally defining factor. Because the German texts are not just *authorized* by Beckett but also, to a certain extent, *authored* by him, and since it is the only language in which he continued collaborating on translations until the very end of his career, they deserve to be included in a survey of his collaborative translations.

In what follows, we will chronologically outline Beckett's collaborations of the 1950s, detailing his role in the translation process and presenting the German texts from this period as an important but neglected third strand that intersects his bilingual project, which eventually assimilated the act of self-translation as essential to writing.

Translating *Molloy* with Patrick Bowles (1952-55)

In late 1952 Alexander Trocchi, the editor in chief of the magazine *Merlin*, obtained permission from Beckett to publish extracts from his French works in English translation. Richard Seaver prepared a short sample from *Molloy*, which Beckett began revising in the “Tara MacGowran” notebook, but he disliked the result so much that it was abandoned after a dozen pages. In mid-1953, the project was resumed after Barney Rosset of Grove Press, New York, also expressed an interest to publish *Molloy* in English and teamed up with *Merlin* to this effect. Beckett eventually selected Patrick Bowles as his co-translator and the two began working together in Paris cafés. A first draft of Part I was finished in four months, in late November 1953, but the second part would take more than a year because Bowles largely withdrew from the project, to concentrate on his own work, and irregularly mailed in batches of the translation. This left Beckett with the feeling that he was rewriting rather than revising Bowles' translation, so that he decided to do the rest of the “trilogy” on his own. For a more detailed discussion of the collaboration, see Verhulst and Dillen 2014; O'Reilly, Van Hulle and Verhulst 2017.

***Godot* and the Beginning of the Collaboration with Elmar Tophoven (1953)**

Around the time when Beckett abandoned the early sample of *Molloy*, Jérôme Lindon (Les Éditions de Minuit) received a German translation of *En attendant Godot* on 17 February 1953.³ Elmar Tophoven had added a list with questions about difficult passages, but Lindon advised Beckett to meet with Tophoven in person. Beckett agreed. He was not impressed by the translation, as he told Lindon on 19 February: “I find the translation not very good. A fair number of blunders, not much style. But I do not want to disappoint the bloke. Just tell him, if you see him, that we shall have to go over it together. I think that there are ways of making something decent out of it. It will be a big job.” (Beckett 2011, 368) He wrote to Tophoven the same day and invited him to work on the text together

³ IMEC, Fonds Samuel Beckett, Boîte 1, Correspondance 1946-1953.

at his place: "I shall ask you, if you are willing, to come and work here." (Beckett 2011, 370) The number of times the German translator met with Beckett in Paris or Ussy to discuss his translations amounts to several dozens, starting in the Spring of 1953 (Tophoven 2011, 96). Tophoven describes their collaboration as intensive, agreeable and instructive and Beckett was very patient, according to Tophoven, drawing the translator's attention to repetitions or "echoes" (96). When Tophoven sent the first draft of his translation to Peter Suhrkamp, the publisher told him that the translation was quite accomplished in general, but that it lacked the lightness and the transparency of the original (DLA 15/7/53 PS to ET).⁴ Suhrkamp thought Tophoven's translation was good on paper, but too literary and he advised him to *listen* to his translation, to the way it sounded when it was read out. Tophoven was grateful to Suhrkamp for his advice, but he did not fail to point out that he had discussed his translation with Beckett and explained that it was not always easy to reconcile the author's wishes with the actors' requirements. They had compared the translation to the original and Beckett, according to Tophoven, had insisted especially on consistency in employing specific words and phrases that sometimes reappear in different dialogues. If some sentences sounded odd in the German translation, this was sometimes due to the French original, in which especially Vladimir, as an "intellectual tramp" ("einen 'intellektuellen' Clochard"), takes care not to make any grammatical mistakes – as in "c'est juste, qu'on – ne – s'y – soit – pendu" or in "Mais non, je veux dire que je t'aurais empêché de t'exposer à être battu" – which, as Tophoven duly points out, does not sound particularly fluent in French either (DLA 20/7/53 ET to PS). The same day, Jérôme Lindon told Beckett that Tophoven had just dropped by and wanted to see Beckett, for he did not want to make any of the changes suggested by Suhrkamp without having consulted the author (20 July 1953).⁵

Tophoven did take Suhrkamp's advice to heart.⁶ If necessary, Tophoven was even willing to postpone his trip to Germany in order to correct the proofs together with Beckett, because that was the author's wish (DLA 31/7/53 ET to PS). Tophoven's text was used for the German premiere of *Warten auf Godot* on 8 September 1953 at the Baadisches Staatstheater in Karlsruhe, directed by Carlheinz Caspari (see Beckett 2011, 391-392).

A month later (14 October 1953), Beckett wrote to the Dutch translator, Jacoba van Velde, advising her to take a look at Tophoven's translation, because "The German text, like the second impression of the French text, takes into account some changes and cuts made in rehearsal." (410-411) So, Beckett used his collaboration with Tophoven not just to revise the translation but also to partially rewrite the text. This first Suhrkamp edition of *Warten auf Godot* (monolingual) appeared in 1954, and is presented as translated by Elmar Tophoven, without any reference to Beckett's input.

Translating *Watt* with Daniel Mauroc (1953)

Soon following the German *Godot*, Beckett also embarked on a French version of *Watt* for the first time. Because the literary magazine *Merlin* was the first to publish *Watt* in English and Beckett did not yet have a UK publisher for his prose at this time, it held the Continental rights to the novel and tried to market a French translation. *Merlin* reached an agreement with Plon, but since Les Éditions de Minuit had the first option on all of Beckett's work in French—including the translations—Jérôme Lindon stipulated a few conditions, which Plon was unable to meet. As a result, Lindon prohibited the translation. However, since a translator had already been appointed and work was underway, Minuit finally agreed to publish the book and a contract was signed on 6 November 1953.⁷

Beckett had also started collaborating with the author-poet Daniel Mauroc, who was an ex BBC employee, former editor of the literary journal *Janus* and a translator of American literature,

⁴ Deutsches Literaturarchiv, SUA: Suhrkamp/Autorenkonv./Beckett, Samuel: Briefwechsel Tophoven, Elmar 1953-1959. Hereafter abbreviated as DLA.

⁵ IMEC, Fonds Samuel Beckett, Boîte 1, Correspondance 1946-1953.

⁶ Even after the revised draft had been sent off, Beckett and Tophoven kept discussing certain passages, deciding for instance that Pozzo's "Hören Sie endlich auf, mich mit den Fragen nach der Zeit verrückt zu machen?" should be: "Hören Sie endlich auf, mich mit Ihrer verdammten Zeit verrückt zu machen!" (DLA 31/7/53 ET to PS)

⁷ Collection Merlin Files, Samuel Beckett Collection, McMaster University, box 3, folder 16.

especially the “Beats” (Dussert 2005, 53). When exactly their first meeting took place is unclear, but on 27 October 1953 Beckett wrote to Pamela Mitchell: “Up to my eyes helping with translations. Molloy into English, Watt into French.” (2009b, 416n1) Their sessions ran parallel to the meetings with Patrick Bowles and took place regularly, judging from Beckett's letter to Mitchell of 31 October 1953: “Another fortnight of translating *Molloy* and *Watt*.” (413) By 20 November 1953, it had become “the wretched Watt,” (421) but the project was still ongoing when Beckett told Mitchell on 12 January 1954 that he had the “French translation of *Watt* to correct.” (416n1) A week later, however, Beckett complained to Lindon: “The idea of *Watt* already makes me go purple right down to the bones,” asking him to keep the French version for what he called his “*Merdes Posthumes*” or “*Posthumous Droppings*” (446). The translation appears to have been dropped at this point, since Beckett told Loly Rosset on 20 January 1954 that “*Watt* is something horrible in French,” and the first time it is mentioned again is on 19 October 1954, when he wrote to Maurice Nadeau: “*Watt* is worthless, and in French worth less. I regret having given it to a publisher, and cannot forgive myself for having let it be translated.” (509)

Beckett and Mauroc only worked on *Watt* for four months, but it seems the translation had been finished when the project was suspended in January 1954. In early 1967, Beckett embarked on a new French translation of the novel with Ludovic and Agnès Janvier (see Janvier 1990)—having also stopped a previous attempt by Edith Fournier in 1961 (Knowlson 1997, 807n20). When a short extract of the Janvier collaboration appeared in the journal *L'Éphémère* (no. 6, Spring 1968), Daniel Mauroc wrote to Beckett, expressing his surprise (Pilling 2006, 179). Mauroc's letter, dated 7 September 1968, is preserved in the archive of Les Éditions de Minuit at L'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine⁸ and sheds more light on their collaboration. Mauroc regrets that he was bypassed, especially since Beckett was so careful to revise his preliminary attempt. It appears the translation was far advanced, as Mauroc claims he reworked the text after Beckett's comments and even dictated the result to a secretary in order to improve its content and appearance. He wished Beckett had given him a second chance, now that he was more experienced and could no doubt produce a better result, and he also wanted to know what part his translation played in the text to be published in full. Beckett forwarded the letter to his publisher, asking him to reply in as friendly a manner as possible, which Lindon did on 11 September 1968 by telephone. Beckett also assured him, in a marginal annotation, that Mauroc's version was not used for the Janvier translation because he deemed it unusable, but he had no idea where it was now.

It has not been discovered so far, but three undated manuscript pages, removed from an exercise book and currently preserved in the Leonard L. Milberg Collection at Princeton University (box 1, folder 3), contain an early cancelled translation of the opening pages of the novel, written in Beckett's hand. When he gave the fragment to the book collector Alan Clodd in 1970, he told him it was probably made ten years ago (Knowlson 1971, 46), which would situate the draft at the time of Edith Fournier's French translation. However, without conclusive evidence, we cannot rule out that the fragment dates back to late 1953 or early 1954 and may represent an aborted revision of Mauroc's translation.

Collaborating with Erich Franzen and Elmar Tophoven on the “Trilogy” (1954ff.)

On 5 January 1954, when Beckett was still working with Mauroc on *Watt*, Peter Suhrkamp told Elmar Tophoven that Erich Franzen had made an excellent translation of *Molloy*, but that after this enterprise he could not translate *Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable* (DLA 5/1/54 PS to ET). Suhrkamp therefore asked Elmar Tophoven if he could translate *Malone meurt*, to which Tophoven's immediate reflex was to ask Beckett first, adding in all honesty that he had never had such a difficult assignment before. But “in collaboration with Beckett,” he would be glad to try and make a sample translation of ten to twenty pages (DLA 7/1/54 ET to PS). He was also curious to see how Franzen had managed to find the right rhythm in German. Peter Suhrkamp did not even need to reply to the latter request, for Beckett himself contacted Tophoven (DLA 28/1/54 ET to PS) to help him with the questions Franzen

⁸ IMEC, Fonds Samuel Beckett, Boîte 4, Correspondance 1967-1968.

had sent him regarding the translation of *Molloy*.

On 19 January, Franzen had sent a list of difficult passages, about which Beckett wrote on the 23rd: "Some of these you have perfectly understood and finely translated. Others, the more obscure, perhaps not quite so well." (1984, 23) He made clear arrangements as to how he would respond to the queries and when he would compare the translation to the original, expressing his appreciation and gratitude for all the care and effort that Franzen had devoted to the translation. One sentence in the letter seems to suggest that Beckett would have liked (perhaps preferred) to discuss the translation *live* in Paris: "I was also greatly looking forward to meeting you in Paris."

In his (unpreserved) letter of 19 January, Franzen apparently also announced to Beckett that he could not translate *Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable*, to which Beckett replied that he was "disappointed to hear you are not taking on the other two books": "Is it reluctance to tarry in such a world? I can well understand that." (23) Less than a week later, on the same day that Tophoven told Suhrkamp that Beckett had asked him to help him with Franzen's questions, Beckett sent "his" (or his and Tophoven's) comments to Franzen. Often, Franzen's suggestions are changed into a more literal translation, for instance "la longue sonate des cadavres" (Franzen's suggestion: "eine lange Leichenparade") becomes "die lange Sonate der Leichen" in Beckett's list of comments (25). Other changes are motivated on grounds of their meaning, for example Beckett's revision of Franzen's "Gebiet" to "Gegend" as a translation for the French word "région". When Franzen opposed that "Gegend" sounded vague to him and would not make sense in German (27-28), Beckett countered that he preferred the word "precisely because it *is* vaguer (limits never determined by Molloy) and somehow less administrative", adding that "Gebiet is a Moran word, not a Molloy word" (28). Yet some matters exceeded authorial control and required familiarity with the sensitivities of German culture, for example Molloy's claim that "coenaesthetically speaking of course, I felt more or less the same as usual" (Beckett 2009a, 53). As Beckett told Franzen, citing the OED, the term denoted "the general sense of existence arising from the sum of bodily impressions", offering Wilhelm Wundt's "Gemeinempfindung" as a corresponding German philosophical term, in addition to "Coenesthesia" or "Gemeingefühl". Franzen, however, claimed that he could not possibly use "Gemeingefühl" or "Gemeinempfindung", in part because "nobody remembers Wundt's psychology", but much more importantly because "Hitler's propaganda monopolized the term": "if such terms which you intend to bear a special meaning, but which to Germans indicate something general (Hitler's Gemeingefühl), are used, the blame will be on the translator" (29).⁹ It is understandable that Beckett preferred to have someone knowledgeable about such matters nearby, making them much easier to deal with than in correspondence.

The importance of *live* meetings in collaborative translating is also recognized by Franzen. In his reply to Beckett's letters of 23 and 28 January, Franzen writes that one of the reasons why he cannot take on the assignment of translating *Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable* is that he would have to meet Beckett in person more frequently than his budget would allow him: "Regarding your other books, I simply think that I am not qualified for the translation. I would have to go to Paris and get your advice most of the time. In view of the usual translator's fee I receive that would seem to be too expensive." (26)

How important it was to Beckett to meet his (co-)translators in person is confirmed in a letter to Barney Rosset (22 January 1954), in which he writes: "I begin on Malone in German with the translator of Godot," adding explicitly "in Paris fortunately" (2011, 448) And a few weeks later (11 February), again in a letter to Rosset, he referred to Tophoven as "a very nice man who lives here" (456-457).

Tophoven took full advantage of living close to Beckett. On the 27th of January, he did not only help Beckett with Franzen's lists of queries, they also discussed the entire translation by reading it out. Tophoven gives Suhrkamp an elaborate account of the way this works: Tophoven had to slowly

⁹ In the published translation, Franzen opted for a paraphrase referring neither to Wundt nor to Hitler: "Um die Wahrheit zu gestehen, ging es mir, was die Einheit von Körper- und Lebensgefühl angeht, fast so wie immer" (Beckett 1954, 113).

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read out the French text, while Beckett read the German translation (DLA 28/1/54 ET to PS). From time to time, he asked Tophoven a question when something was unclear to him. Tophoven saw this as a preparation for his translation of *Malone meurt*. The next day (29 January 1954) they had planned another marathon meeting (from 5 p.m. till midnight) to read and correct the translation, and in the meantime Tophoven started translating *Malone meurt*, to which Beckett had given his consent. Without mentioning Tophoven's help to Franzen, Beckett estimated that the correction of Franzen's translation was going to take two weeks,¹⁰ and Tophoven indeed mentioned to Suhrkamp that he was now working together with Beckett almost on a daily basis (DLA 28/1/54 ET to PS). On 7 February 1954, Beckett told Lindon: "I'm working every day with Tophoven, correcting the German translation of *Molloy*. Utterly mind-numbing." (2011, 455) How tiresome the work with Franzen and Tophoven had been, appears in Beckett's letter to Barney Rosset of 21 April 1954: "With regard to translation I fear I have been very remiss. The revision of the German *Molloy* finished me." (480)

"La Fin" and the Collaboration with Richard Seaver (1954 and 1959)

Richard Seaver made a first draft of a translation of "La Fin" for publication in *Merlin* 3.2 (Summer-Fall 1954) and Beckett revised it word by word. Seaver later claimed that his own contribution to the endeavour had been "pitifully small", and when the story was prepared for publication by Grove Press (*Evergreen Review* 4.15, November-December 1960), Beckett made even more revisions. For a more detailed discussion, see Van Hulle 2011.

Translating *All That Fall* with Robert Pinget (1956-1957)

In mid-1956, at the instigation of the BBC, Beckett wrote his first radio play (*All That Fall*) directly in English, which necessitated a French translation. As with the English versions of his French texts, Beckett first tried working with a translator for the French versions of his new work in English. He approached Robert Pinget with the request in November 1956. According to Pinget's unpublished memoir "Notre ami Samuel Beckett"—preserved at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet in Paris (PNG 354-4)¹¹—Beckett found it extremely difficult to translate his own work and asked his friend to help so he could make himself useful, but it was more likely an attempt to further the career of Pinget. Indeed, he was glad to attach his name to Beckett's in the prestigious magazine *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, the editor of which, Maurice Nadeau, had agreed to publish the piece (PNG 354-4, 12r). On 23 November 1956 Beckett promised to send Pinget a typescript of the text, which he did on 9 December 1956, and he also invited him over for dinner on Wednesday 12 December (2011, 676). In order to prepare his friend for the task ahead, Beckett sketched a structural breakdown of the play in the form of a schematic, listing nine stops on Maddy Rooney's way up to the station (labelled A-I in black ink) and fourteen stops on the way back with her husband Dan (labelled A-N in red ink), as well as the number of intervals and their approximate duration.¹²

Over the following weeks, Pinget worked on his first draft, a typescript of which has been preserved (PNG 367-2) along with the English carbon copy that he used as the source text (PNG 367-1). This first draft of *Tous ceux qui tombent* carries very extensive revisions in blue and black ink, as well as grey pencil, in Pinget's hand, sometimes spilling into the margins or onto the back of a page. The many changes and occasional hiatus suggest it was a difficult exercise, which Pinget ascribes to his rudimentary knowledge of English at the time and the fact that he did not understand the reason

¹⁰ In his letter to Franzen of 28 January 1954, Beckett does not mention Tophoven's help, but he is very explicit about the way he is going to make corrections: "The complete text has arrived and I am reading it. Even a rapid collation with the original will take longer than I thought, at least a fortnight I am afraid. I am noting in red ink on the MS itself such variants as occur to me. I think you will agree this is the simplest method." (1984, 23)

¹¹ Martin Mégevand (2010) offers a more detailed analysis of Pinget's memoir and the complicated relationship with Beckett that emerges from it. See also Houppermans 2006 in this respect, especially the chapter entitled "Pinget et Beckett: Chutes Mortelles" (99-112).

¹² Beckett's list and two drawings, all written in French, are preserved in the Samuel Beckett Collection (box 11, folder 1) at Boston College, on three loose leaves torn from an exercise book. They are inscribed to Calvin and Joann Israel.

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for Maddy's archaic and faltering language, steeped in Irish reminiscences ("Sur le théâtre de Beckett", PNG-354-2-2). During one of several January visits to assist Pinget with the French translation (Knowlson 1997, 438n103; Pilling 2006, 134), Beckett clarified that Maddy's diction was deliberately skewed, so the French should not be too fluent, and Pinget recalls him sitting on a chair behind him, head in hands, trying to find "le mot juste" (PNG 354-4, 12r).

Pinget also noted difficult words or quotes on a small card, presumably to ask Beckett for advice, which is also preserved ("Notes et dessins", PNG 354-5). Beckett did more than assist with the translation, however. As Pinget explains in his memoir, Beckett reworked the entire text, and very thoroughly so, judging from the second typescript preserved in the fonds Pinget. He began by revising in grey pencil but, possibly sensing how extensive the overhaul would be, Beckett started over again in a dark shade of blue ink. The lighter shade of blue which Pinget had used to correct his first draft also appears in places, but the vast majority of alterations are in Beckett's hand.¹³

While the texts published by *Les Lettres Nouvelles* and Minuit are virtually identical, they differ significantly in their acknowledgement of Pinget's role in the translation. The former correctly states "Traduit de l'anglais par Robert Pinget avec la collaboration de l'auteur," but the latter reads "Traduit de l'anglais par Robert Pinget". According to Pinget, Beckett insisted that his friend's name be listed as the sole translator (PNG-354-4, 12r), which is still how it appears in the Minuit edition today, but the drafts and Pinget's papers tell a different story.

Continued collaboration with Elmar and Erika Tophoven (1957ff.)

Beckett's decision to start writing directly in English again in the mid-1950s also affected his working relationship with Elmar Tophoven. Erika Schöningh, who later married Elmar Tophoven, took on some German translations of Beckett's work in English, starting with *All That Fall* for the NWDR in 1957. This division of labour was acknowledged in Suhrkamp's edition of *Endspiel und Allen die da fallen* (1957), which coupled the text with *Fin de partie*, translated by Elmar Tophoven. Her first meeting with Beckett took place in January 1957 (Tophoven 2011, 100). She remembers two meetings at the apartment in the rue des Favorites to discuss the translation of the radio play, during which she pointed out an "error" in the text (101). Since "periodicals" are a strange item for a blind man such as Dan to spend his money on, Beckett replaced "Illustrierte" with "Aspirin" in the German translation (102)—and later also in the English and French texts of the trilingual edition of his plays, so the collaboration again created textual variants.

In the second half of the 1950s, Beckett also continued to work with Elmar Tophoven on his German translations, for example *Der Namenlose*. In August 1957, Peter Suhrkamp asked Elmar Tophoven to translate *L'Innommable* (DLA 1/8/57), with which he started in January 1959. On 4 June of that year, he discussed the title with Siegfried Unseld, noting that according to his Larousse dictionary "L'innommable" could signify either (1) "qui ne peut pas être nommé" or (2) "vil, bas, dégoûtant"—which made him suggest the translation "Das Namenlose" (rather than the literal translation "Das Unnennbare"). He had already discussed this matter with Beckett (without finding a solution) and told Unseld he would call Beckett the next day. Four days later, he went to Beckett's apartment to further discuss the issue and Beckett decided against the neutral article "Das," choosing instead "Der Namenlose," as Tophoven reported to Unseld the next day (DLA 9/6/59).

In the early 1960s, Elmar Tophoven would usually go to Beckett alone (Tophoven 2011, 106) and introduced a new way of collaborating, shortly after the publication of *Krapp's Last Tape*, by recording the German recordings on tape. During their meetings, Tophoven would sit at Beckett's desk, operating the tape recorder, while Beckett listened to the translation, comparing it to the original or to his own translation (107).

Translating *Krapp's Last Tape* with Pierre Leyris (1958)

¹³ Régis Salado also confirms that "la traduction de *Tous ceux qui tombent* présente un très grand nombre de corrections de la main de Pinget et celle de Beckett," (Salado 2006, 33) although he assigns to Pinget a greater role in the pencil annotations on the second typescript than actually seems the case.

Whether or not the idea of working with a tape recorder during his sessions with the Tophovens was inspired by Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, the chronology certainly fits. The play was initially translated into French by Pierre Leyris. The title page of the typescript mentions him as the sole translator of the play, but in the course of the publication history his name disappeared from the title pages of later editions (Van Hulle 2015, 124). Federman and Fletcher contacted Jérôme Lindon, who "said that Beckett entirely reworked his translation but nevertheless insisted on Leyris receiving royalty payments for it." (1970, 42)

Little is known about this collaboration, but in 1998 Pascale Sardin managed to correspond with Pierre Leyris, who told her that he received the assignment to translate Beckett's play through a common friend. Again, the crucial moment in the collaboration was a *live* meeting: according to Leyris, he bought a stock of Guinness and Beckett came over. A few hours later, the floor of Leyris's apartment was littered with empty bottles and not much was left of the original translation, which Leyris described as "mon mauvais texte" ("my bad text") (qtd. in Sardin-Damestoy 2002, 231).

A few years later, when Beckett took another look at the text of *La Dernière Bande* for a performance by Roger Blin, he still "thought it stank of translation."¹⁴ But that was in 1961. Towards the end of the 1950s, self-translation was not yet an integral part of Beckett's bilingual poetics, as his next collaborative translation illustrates.

Robert Pinget and the 'transliteration' of *Embers* (1959)

Even before *Embers* was broadcast on the Third Programme, the BBC decided to enter the radio play for the Italia Prize. As with *All That Fall*, a bilingual script was to be submitted, creating the need for a French version. Barbara Bray asked Beckett if the text had already been translated and, if not, whether the BBC could do their own version. On 22 May 1959, he replied there was only a German translation but that their translator ("your man") could go ahead, on the understanding that Beckett may later want to make his own translation of the script. His hesitation is palpable in the letter, as he first wrote "shall" but then crossed it out and replaced it with "may" (TCD-10948-1-32). The identity of the BBC's "man" is unknown, but eventually Robert Pinget was chosen, possibly because of his experience with *All That Fall*, but also because he lived close by.

Before Beckett left Paris for Ireland to receive an honorary degree from Trinity College Dublin, he met Pinget at the gare des Invalides at eight o'clock in the morning to go over the English text together. They sat at a table in the bar, next to the toilets, amid the travelling hubbub ("brouhaha des départs") while Beckett answered Pinget's queries. As he had done for *All That Fall*, Beckett also drew a sketch of the promontory ("croquis du promontoire") where the action took place, which was closely tied up with memories of Ireland (PNG-354-4, 19r). This drawing has not been found, but the BBC broadcasting script on which Pinget jotted Beckett's glosses and clarifications is preserved at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet (PNG 366-1). The vast majority of these annotations, amounting to more than one hundred and fifty, were adopted by Pinget in his version of *Cendres*, which is explicitly presented as a transliteration: "trad. littérale par Robert Pinget."¹⁵ It was only used as a *stand-in* version for the bilingual Italia Prize script.

Beckett decided to do his own translation after all. On 9 September 1959, he informed Bray that he would now have to get going on a French version of *Embers* (TCD-10948-1-44). While the turn of phrase implies that Beckett revised Pinget's translation independently, this does not seem to have been the case, as in late October he mentioned to Margaret McLaren of Curtis Brown that he was busy revising the text together with Pinget (2014, 251n2). A French typescript preserved at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas (box 3, folder 4) reveals that a new version of *Cendres* had been typed up for this purpose, with broad margins for comments, loosely based on

¹⁴ TCD 10948/1/071/1, SB to Barbara Bray, 18 February 1961 (qtd. in Van Hulle 2015, 234)

¹⁵ Pinget's translation survives in three typescripts—an original (PNG 366-3) and two carbons (PNG 366-2 and PNG 366-4)—lightly corrected in black and blue ink. While the black annotations on PNG 366-3 are all in Pinget's hand, some of the blue corrections on PNG 366-4 appear to be Beckett's, but if the revised text at this point, it was very superficially and locally. Régis Salado, too, believes that "la traduction de *Embers* porte également la trace de la collaboration entre les deux écrivains." (33)

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Pinget's preliminary draft but also taking many liberties from it. This typescript is riddled with annotations by both Beckett and Pinget, in blue ink, red ballpoint and grey pencil, many of which have been erased. Even if Beckett typed up this new version, he certainly revised it together with Pinget. After their collaboration, in late November (257), Beckett made the final draft—preserved at the University of Reading (UoR MS 2908)—which incorporated most of their changes and was then published by *Les Lettres Nouvelles* and Minuit. In both versions, the nature of the collaboration between author and translator was faithfully credited: "Traduit de l'anglais par Robert Pinget et l'auteur." Just after sending the text of *Cendres* to Lindon, on 1 December 1959, Beckett wrote to Bray: "Hate the sight of it in both languages. Understand it better." (2014, 260)

From Collaboration to Self-Translation

At the end of the 1950s, Beckett thus reached another crucial tipping point in his career. After almost a decade of collaborative translations and occasional self-translations, he definitively gave preference to self-translating. Moreover, self-translation even became a way of "going on" as a writer. A good example is the translation process of *L'Innommable*, the end of which coincides with the writing of the first draft of *Krapp's Last Tape*. So, eventually Barney Rosset was proven right when he told Beckett on 12 September 1954:

Samuel, don't you think that the translation work in itself is still a form of writing for you. If you go on, as you have said you will, with your own translation of the last two books, don't you think it possible that somewhere within them you will find a lead to another deposit. Who knows, maybe Godot will arrive.¹⁶

Godot did arrive, but in the form of Pim: in late 1958, after re-experiencing the "frenzy of writing" of the post-war period through the self-translation of *L'Innommable*, Beckett embarked on *Comment c'est*, which he translated into English as *How It Is*. But although he had made up his mind about self-translation, he remained ambivalent about his bilingualism and how it could be presented, or rather: how it might be perceived. The process toward a poetics of bilingualism consisted of several steps: after (1) writing in another language, (2) collaborating on the translations and (3) eventually giving preference to self-translation, Beckett still had to take a final step: (4) from writing a bilingual oeuvre to presenting it as such.

Publishing a Bilingual Oeuvre

When Beckett learned about Suhrkamp's plans in the 1960s to publish bilingual editions of his texts, starting with *Comment c'est / Wie es ist*—French original on the left, German translation on the right—he called it a "riche idée" in his letter to Jacoba van Velde of 20 May 1961 (2014, 414). The reason for this presentation, according to the back inside flap of the book, was that readers could appreciate how "untranslatable" ("unübersetzbar") *Comment c'est* was, in spite of the efforts made by Beckett and Tophoven. As opposed to the previous German translations, the paratext of this edition mentioned Beckett's collaboration explicitly, which marks a changed attitude in the appreciation of Beckett's capacity as a translator.

Printing the French source text next to the German translation to compensate for its faults was one thing. But publishing Beckett's English and French versions together was apparently another. This is exactly what Suhrkamp envisioned with their *Dramatische Dichtungen in drei Sprachen*, the first volume (1963) containing the works originally written in French (*En attendant Godot*, *Fin de partie*, *Acte sans paroles I & II* and *Cascando*), the second (1964) those originally composed in English (*All That Fall*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Embers*, *Play*, *Happy Days*, *Words and Music*). For both volumes, the principle would be the same: original text on the left, German translation on the right, with Beckett's self-translation included at the back. Beckett received the news with 'grand plaisir' (2014, 485-486) and was also actively involved in the project—especially the second volume—

¹⁶ Syracuse University, Grove Press Records, box 84; qtd. in Van Hulle and Verhulst 2017, 263.

diligently checking proofs and even making changes to the French and English texts, thus creating unique variants. At first sight the German translations seem to be of a different order in the sense that they did not directly contribute to Beckett's bilingual oeuvre but, paradoxically, the bilingualism of his work was made explicit for the first time in a trilingual edition, published by the German publishing house Suhrkamp.

However, when Minuit, Faber and Faber, John Calder and Grove Press joined forces to set up a similar project, Beckett showed reluctance. Calder was the initiator, wanting to start with a bilingual edition of *Comment c'est / How It Is*, but Beckett told Grove Press (in 1963) and Faber (in 1965) that he was "not keen" on bilingual editions of his novels or plays because it suggested "an open invitation to consider the work as a linguistic curiosity," which was an idea that did not appeal to him (2014, 665). Calder continued to pursue the project until 1969, attempting to publish bilingual versions of the "trilogy" together with Grove, but the plans were never realized. It is interesting to note that even though Calder was bent on presenting him as a bilingual or even a European writer, Beckett only endorsed Suhrkamp to consistently market his work in that sense. Part of the explanation may be that his own self-translations would be relegated to the back of the trilingual editions, so that only the original text and the German translation would be printed alongside each other—a setup Beckett had chosen himself (2014, 485-486). Yet in opposing multilingual editions of his work outside of Germany (in the 1960s), he was also actively trying to steer the perception of his work.

Until the 1970s at least, it seems that Beckett preferred to present himself as a French author of a monolingually French oeuvre in France, as an Irish author of a monolingually English oeuvre in the UK and the USA, and as a European author of multiple languages in Germany and the rest of the world. When he had to pick sides, he also tried to opt for a split representation, as appears from a letter to the aptly named Hungarian literary publisher Európa Könyvkiadó, dating from around 3 May 1964. Asked whether his work belonged in an anthology of French or English drama, Beckett proposed to include an English play in the British anthology and a French one in the French anthology, but if this was not possible, he would prefer to figure in the French anthology even though he had "no feeling of any national attachment" (2014, 602).

His stance softened in the 1970s, when multilingual editions of his work started to appear outside of Germany, the first being a bilingual version of *Words and Music / Paroles et musique, Play / Comédie* and *Eh Joe / Dis Joe* by Aubier-Flammarion in 1972, followed by a bilingual edition of *Happy Days / Oh les beaux jours* by Faber in 1978, edited by James Knowlson. In the 1980s, he also gave Charles Krance the permission to bring out bilingual genetic editions of his work, so it is clear that Beckett's position changed over the years—as it would on many other issues. Even though he initially felt hesitant about highlighting his work's bilingualism, he gradually sensed there was no longer any danger that this aspect of his writing would be construed as a linguistic curiosity. Through collaboration, also in German, Beckett not just earned, but eventually also accepted his place in the francophone literary canon, in the anglophone canon, and—which was more difficult—in both.

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