

Translating Others, Discovering Himself: Beckett as Translator

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Samuel Beckett's translation work both confirms and confounds the normalised environment in which translation is discussed and theorised. He was not only an original writer in English, but was also multilingual, and an original writer in his second language, French. Moreover, he occasionally translated his own work from English into French, and from French into English. In addition, he undertook the translation and adaptation of other writers' works originally written in French, German and Spanish.

Beckett's translated work, therefore, can be divided into two categories whose criteria are different: self-translation and translation of the works of others. My concern in this paper is solely with the latter field, and with exactly how, in early and mid-career, the style (and, in some cases, imagery and vocabulary) which he adopted in translating texts from French and Spanish, bears significant resemblance to the style which he later deployed to write his own original works in English. My aim is to explore thematic and acoustic resonance between works he translated and works he originated.

In their study of the processes of translation, Nida and Taber note that «[n]o two languages exhibit identical systems of organising symbols into meaningful expression. The basic principles of translation mean that no translation in a receptor language can be the equivalent of the model in the source language»¹. They also note that translation «will depend in very large measure upon the purpose to be accomplished by the translation in question»². So what was Beckett's purpose in translating? Mary Lydon offers an insight into why Beckett chose to translate so early in his career:

In Beckett's case [...] translation served initially as a 'pensum' (a word he favoured) that not only allowed him to perfect his French but to keep his pen moving even when he had no 'ideas'. By relieving him of the need to have 'ideas', translation freed him to concentrate on words [...]. Further, by leading him gradually to write directly in French, translation helped him to realise that he could both successfully blacken pages and continue surreptitiously to indulge his penchant for the 'shining phrase' simply by exploiting the vocabulary and idiom of the French language³.

Beckett's purpose in translating other writers' work, particularly in *Negro: An Anthology* (1934) and the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* (1958)⁴,

was, very often, to find his own literary voice. While one reason for his acceptance of the commission to translate for *Negro: An Anthology* was undoubtedly the £25 he was given⁵, another was his sense that his literary career was stalling, before it had properly begun. For example, Beckett felt at the time that he was at «one of the knots in my life teak. I can't write anything at all, can't imagine even the shape of a sentence, nor take notes [...] nor read with understanding, *gout* or *dégoût* [taste or distaste]»⁶. This graphic admission makes it indubitable that, at least in part, translation provided Beckett with the opportunity to find something important about his own voice, in English, through translating the voices of others. This is reinforced by C. M. Bowra's remarks in his introduction to the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*:

A mass of evidence shows that poetry is far less popular in western Europe and the United States than in countries like Persia or China or India, whose material civilisation is far less advanced but which have kept *a traditional taste for the beauty of words*⁷.

Beckett appears to have rediscovered his own passion for words and language in the act of translating.

Michael David Fox, in his essay *There's Our Catastrophe: Empathy, Sacrifice, and the Staging of Suffering in Beckett's Theatre*, suggests that part of our response to Beckett's drama is our awareness of the real suffering of the Beckett actor⁸. Similarly, an examination of his translations illustrates the very real 'presence' of the translator in the translations. For example, Beckett's alterations (including to the formal structure) of Eugenio Montale's poem *Delta*, translated in «This Quarter», provide one illustration. In 1969, George Kay translated a selection of Montale's poems, accompanied by the original Italian, among them *Delta*. Kay's translation remains faithful to the form and content of the original. Beckett's version, however, transforms the style and structure of the poem, inserting line numbers and line breaks clearly not present in the original:

1. To thee
2. I have willed the life drained
3. in secret transfusions, the life chained
4. in a coil of restlessness, unaware, self-angry⁹.

Whereas Kay maintains the structural integrity of the original, Beckett's more 'free' translation demonstrates the writer finding his own voice when freed from the need to give life to the creative act himself *ex nihilo*; and, when required by the necessities of translation, to engage in further *linguistic* exploration and experimentation.

In Kay's translation of *Delta*, the secrets of 'time' appear elusive, and heightened perception is momentary:

When time is thrusting against its dykes
 you harmonize your moment with that immense one,
 and drift up, memory, more revealed
 from that shadowy place where you descended
 as now, with the rain's end, green heightens new
 on the branches, on walls, their wash of red¹⁰.

Contrastingly, the emergence of time's secrets and memory are made more explicit in Beckett's translation, with access to time's «allconsciousness» more explicit than in Kay's more understated version. One other significant difference between the two translations is that in Beckett's version, 'time' is personified as male:

5. When time leans on his dykes
 6. then thine
 7. be his allconsciousness
 8. and memory flower forth in a flame
 9. rom the dark sanctuary, and shine
 10. more brightly, as now, the rain over, the dragon's blood
 11. on the walls and the green against the branches¹¹.

The «allconsciousness» of *Delta* (above) finds resonance later in the Unnamable's claims to have created, and known, all previous narrators in Beckett's work. Similarly, the image (above) of memory flowering forth in a momentary flame prefigures the «few images on and off», the brief moments of clarity, which form the narrative of a «life above in the light' in Beckett's *How It Is*¹². An examination, therefore, of Beckett's translations of the work of other writers, provides significant pre-echoes or foreshadows of ideas that emerge later in his own work.

1

Negro: An Anthology (1934)

Beckett's English-language translations from French for *Negro: An Anthology* are also illustrative of the writer originating in his translation work some of his key ideas and images of humanity. One such translation is that of Ernst Moerman's poem *Armstrong*¹³. Here Beckett's translation appears to reflect his desire to uncover an essence of humanity, a subject which later dominates his original work.

By comparison with the original by Moerman, Beckett adapts the line – and stanza – structures of the poem to suit his desired effect in English. The source text's opening four-line stanza is a case in point:

Un jour qu'Armstrong jouait au loto avec ses soeurs
 Il s'écria "C'est moi qui ai la viande crue".

Il s'en fit des lèvres et depuis ce jour,
Sa trompette a la nostalgie de leur premier baiser¹⁴.

A translation which follows Moerman's stanza form would read as follows:

One day when Armstrong was playing lotto with his sisters
He exclaimed "I'm the one who has the raw meat".
He made himself lips from it and since that day
His trumpet feels nostalgic for their first kiss¹⁵.

In Beckett's translation, this stanza is much more complex, and the effect more immediate:

[S]uddenly in the midst of a game of lotto with his sisters
Armstrong let a roar out of him that he had the raw meat
red wet flesh for Louis
and he up and he sliced him two rumplips
since when his trumpet bubbles
their fust buss¹⁶.

Beckett's translation of the poem, with broken, irregular lines suggesting syncopation and improvisation, appears to convey Armstrong's own passionate immersion in music, reflecting Schopenhauer's belief that music «depicts the true nature of the will, gives it a glowing account of its success and at the end expresses its satisfaction and contentment»¹⁷.

One problem, however, which emerges when examining Beckett's translations for *Negro: An Anthology*, the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* and also for various journals, is the lack of some of the original source texts from which he made his translations. This problem has been noted by Alan Warren Friedman in *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro* (1934):

As Cunard details in *These Were The Hours*, "at least three quarters of the material I used in *Negro*" was destroyed during World War II [...]. Of the seven extant French originals that I have been able to locate, six were in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center [*sic*]; the seventh, the only poem that Beckett translated for *Negro*, is Ernst Moerman's *Armstrong*, which was published in Moerman's collection, *Oeuvre poétique* (1970). Except for Feuilloley's, which is handwritten, the essays are all typed, but they contain corrections and changes of various kinds, and are obscure or uncertain in places. I reproduce here the author's final intentions to the extent I can discern them, ignoring material clearly meant to be deleted¹⁸.

The lack of originals from *Negro* (alongside the difficulty of deciding what was or was not intended for inclusion, as Friedman noted) and a similar lack of originals for the *Mexican Anthology* and the journal pieces, makes it impossible to fully assess Beckett's work as a translator.

There is also the 'problem' that when Beckett was translating, translation itself was not a theorised subject. Writing in 1992, Mona Baker, in her book *In Other Words: a Coursebook on Translation*, notes that:

[I]f translation is ever to become a profession in the full sense of the word, translators will need something other than the current mixture of intuition and practise to enable them to reflect on what they do and how they do it. They will need, above all, to acquire a sound knowledge of the raw material with which they work: to understand what language is and how it comes to function for its users¹⁹.

Beckett's lack of any specific training or theoretical impetus has led to the belief (professed, for example, by Roger Little) that his translation work is «unscholarly, lacking in value»²⁰. However, the latter part of Baker's statement (above) may explain many of the apparent inconsistencies noted by critics regarding Beckett's translations. If part of the translation process is an understanding of language, its functions and potentialities, then, Beckett's translations might be noteworthy precisely because they illustrate someone coming to terms with new or further possibilities opened by language/s; someone coming to translation because he found himself temporarily unable to work creatively with English²¹.

Beckett's translation work played a crucial role in the formation of the distinctive nature of his original works. Part of that is witnessed in his emphasis on defining an «essence of humanity» both in his translations and in his original work. For example, as part of his work on *Negro: An Anthology*, Beckett translated Raymond Michelet's essay '*Primitive*' *Life and Mentality*, in which we find a celebration of African life and culture emerging from under the veil of prejudiced and convenient assumptions which rendered Africa and Africans nothing more than an exploitable resource. Beckett's English in the translation of Michelet's essay is simultaneously scolding and filled with awe at the 'vision-restored' when the racial blinkers (which corrupt one's own humanity and hinder one's appreciation of the humanity of others) are removed:

It is now time to consider a sphere of native activity distinguished by a more profound, ample and precise perception of reality. It should be noted in the first place that this perception is undoubtedly promoted by senses and a physical and nervous organisation much more delicately receptive than ours and which, while atrophied or inoperative in white men, have been highly developed in the Negroes by the mere fact of their mode of life²².

The responsibility of communicating Michelet's essay and thereby attempting to correct a misconception, combines with Beckett's desire to understand precisely how other people perceive reality, a subject often revisited in his own subsequent work.

Beckett was to return to the idea of correcting a misconception in, for example, *The Capital of the Ruins*, a work originally intended for broadcast on radio. In *The Capital*, Beckett is seeking to change the perceptions of his intended listeners in Dublin, where press coverage of Saint-Lô (almost totally destroyed during the Battle of Normandy, 1944) had led to the view of the hospital there as inadequate, and the more general view of Saint-Lô's citizens as somehow less human due to their bombed-out living conditions in the aftermath of World War II. Beckett, however, provides a counterbalance to such views with that «smile at the human conditions [...] deriding, among other things, the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health»²³. These lines from *The Capital*, together with the «sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again»²⁴, reflect the «more profound [...] perception of reality» spoken of (above) in his translation of Michelet's *'Primitive' Life and Mentality*.

Yet, even while the communist ethos of the *Negro* project as designed by Nancy Cunard is inevitably reflected (to varying degrees) in many of Beckett's translations, the latter also move beyond mere ideological motivations. Beckett's translation, for example, of Robert Goffin's essay *The Best Negro Jazz Orchestra* offers language (including sound effects such as alliteration), dancing rhythms and shape-shifting imagery which strive to combine the essence of both the musicians and their music in a picture of human life which goes beyond the physical:

Oh you musicians of my life, prophets of my youth, splendid Negroes informed with fire, how shall I ever express my love for your saxophones writhing like orchids, your blazing trombones with their hairpin vents, your voices fragrant with all the breezes of home remembered and the breath of the bayous, your rhythm as inexorable as tom-toms beating in an African nostalgia!²⁵

The appeal of such translations lies in their 'vocalising', offering an incipient orality through which Beckett 'gives life' to the works, which largely avoid the tone of aggressive political messages, sustaining interest by drawing us in through imagination, emphasising our common humanity.

2

«This Quarter» (1932) and *Le bateau ivre/Drunken Boat* (1932)

In the early 1930s, seeking money and recognition, Beckett looked upon translation as a means of exploring his own creative impulses. To that end, the translations of poems and short prose pieces by André Breton and Paul Éluard for «This Quarter» (September 1932) and his translation of Arthur Rimbaud's *Le bateau ivre* appear to be part of his ongoing exploration of the possibilities of the English language with which he struggled to create originally.

Commissioned translations such as those of Breton's *Lethal Relief*⁶ and *The Free Union*²⁷ evidence Beckett's early encounters with surrealist literary thinking. Furthermore, his translations of Éluard's *A Life Uncovered or The Human Pyramid*²⁸ and *Invention*²⁹ prefigure Beckett's own musings on two of his particular preoccupations, the nature of the essential self and of artistic endeavour:

The art of living, liberal art, the art of dying well, the art of thinking, incoherent art, the art of smoking, the art of enjoying, the art of the Middle Ages, decorative art, the art of reasoning, the art of reasoning well, poetic art, mechanic art, erotic art, the art of being a grandfather, the art of the dance, the art of seeing, the art of being accomplished, the art of caressing, Japanese art, the art of playing, the art of living, the art of torturing³⁰.

Here Beckett's English-language translation points to life's variety, but ends with a sobering summation of life as «the art of torturing». Reflecting the torture associated later with both living and the arts in, for example, *The Unnamable*, the translation above also utilises the famous 'list' technique which Beckett deployed to great effect as a distraction-device in works such as *Mercier and Camier* and *Watt*.

Other images from Éluard, such as that of the «colourless sky from which clouds and birds are banished» in *A Life Uncovered*³¹, reappear in some of Beckett's own later work, as with the «birdless cloudless skies» of *Sedendo et Quiescendo* (1932)³². Examples such as this suggest that, whether he was conscious of it or not, Beckett's translations (including some which chimed with his own life-experiences or perceptions) later proved to be a source of inspiration, of images and actual combinations of words or phrases.

In *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, however, Lance Hewson and Jacky Martin also note that «translation is evidently concerned with cross-cultural communication. Conceptions had to be constructed for individuals in society to be able to conceive of what lay *outside* the confines of their cultural world»³³. Beckett in the early 1930s especially but also throughout his life was deeply interested in «cross-cultural communication», in conceiving of «what lay outside the confines» of himself (as a writer and individual) and of English-language culture to which he had automatic, first-language access. Thus, as with the contemporary Irish poet Ciarán Carson today, *one* language simply wasn't enough for Beckett, and so he communed via translation with other world writers, including Arthur Rimbaud.

Louise Varèse's translation of Rimbaud's *Le bateau ivre* opens as follows:

As I came down the impassible Rivers
I felt no more the bargemen's guiding hands,
Targets for yelling red-skins they were nailed
Naked to painted poles³⁴.

Beckett's translation of the same work differs slightly in wording and tone:

Downstream on impassive rivers suddenly
I felt the towline of the boatmen slacken.
Redskins had taken them in a scream and stripped them and
Skewered them to the glaring stakes for targets³⁵.

Hewson and Martin note «that there can be no definitive translation [...] since the Cultural Equation relating texts across the boundaries of languages is constantly changing, thus contributing to the diversification of cultural values»³⁶. That there can be no definitive translation is reflected in the disparity between the two translations cited above. Beckett's translation of the poem offers a tortured journey on the horizon between life and death:

I started awake to tempestuous hallowings.
Nine nights I danced like a cork on the billows, I danced
On the breakers, sacrificial, for ever and ever,
And the crass eye of the lanterns was expunged³⁷.

Varèse's version lacks the sacrificial imagery of Beckett's:

The tempest blessed my wakings on the sea.
Light as a cork I danced upon the waves,
Eternal rollers of the deep sunk dead,
Nor missed at night the lantern's idiot eyes!³⁸

Where Varèse's translation more closely reflects the tone of Rimbaud's original with the speaker at peace, welcoming the darkness («sans regretter l'œil ni ais des falots!»³⁹), Beckett's is a more explicit and deliberately originating translation process, of the kind that we are perhaps more accustomed to describe as 'free' translation or even 'adaptation'. This becomes clear in the translation of Rimbaud's line, «Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!»⁴⁰. Varèse's translation, «And sometimes I have seen what men have thought they saw»⁴¹, appears closer to Rimbaud's original than Beckett's «And my eyes have fixed phantasmagoria»⁴².

While some of his translations, notably those of Éluard and Breton, illustrate Beckett flirting with movements such as Surrealism, the rendering of Rimbaud's *Le bateau ivre* testifies to a growing independence emerging within the writer and his work. Thus, partly through experimentation with translation and other voices, Beckett creates a new path to tread in his works:

I want none of Europe's waters unless it be
The cold black puddle where a child, full of sadness,
Squatting, looses a boat as frail
As a moth into the fragrant evening⁴³.

In his own later work he followed his words here: abandoning Joyce's influence, and preferring to examine «impotence, ignorance [...] something by definition incompatible with art»⁴⁴. It is in translation work, however, that he literally began his abandonment of Europe, by turning to Africa, and then to Mexico and Mexican poetry. In his translation from Spanish of the Mexican anthology, there lies more evidence of Beckett's continued development of his own literary being through the medium of the English language.

3

Anthology of Mexican Poetry (1958)

In the introduction to the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, C.M. Bowra refers to the internationalism of poetry:

Though poetry cannot ever be so international as music or painting, it can exert a powerful influence in making men of different countries conscious that they have much to learn from one another because after all they are fashioned from the same clay and inspired by the same breath of life⁴⁵.

Reflecting the belief of Hewson and Martin that «the translator's objective is to diversify and motivate the possibilities of meaningful contacts between cultures»⁴⁶, Beckett's own later work is imbued with cross-cultural influences gained from his translation work, notably that of the Mexican anthology. Numerous motifs and concerns present in the translations for the Mexican anthology are later developed in his original work.

For example, in translating Matias de Bocanegra's *Song on Beholding an Enlightenment* Beckett presents us with a question about the issue of freedom:

In what law, Heaven, is it writ
that Stream, Rose, Fish and Bird,
born in servitude, shall enjoy
the liberty that never was their portion,
and I (absurdity!)
freeborn, not freely will?⁴⁷

The poem ends with the realisation that some freedoms bear many dangers:

If Stream, Fish, Bird and Rose,
for sake of freedom die,
by Fish, Bird, Stream and Rose,
'tis well thou shouldst be warned.

For if I captive live,
a willing prisoner I;

and scorn, if free I die,
such heedless liberty⁴⁸.

Similarly, Beckett's original work often explores the issue of freedom. He may have agreed about the dangers of 'heedless liberty', but his experiences both during and immediately after World War II, and his support for prisoners of conscience such as Václav Havel, show that some freedoms are too precious to relinquish.

In the Mexican anthology, Beckett's many translation-subjects include childhood, imagination, the search for an end to the need to express, and the human condition. However, it is worth noting the most marked of many distinct similarities between the works he translated in the anthology and those later produced with his own pen. In Joaquín Arcadio Pagaza's *The Crag*, for example, there is the following mountain-scene:

On the mountain's blind and rugged ridge
and dizzy pinnacle its throne is set;
its crown is laurel and its canopy
the clouds and the cerulean firmament.

Its fearful grasp is sceptered haughtily
with a green boulder of enormous mass;
the hills are subject to its majesty,
the far-flung valley is its empire.

It pours upon its awesome countenance,
its lofty port and dreadful attitude,
dark in the burnished crystal of the mere;

and its most sweet and pleasant music is
the flashing thunder and the desolate
screaming of the savage towering eagle⁴⁹.

This description pre-figures the description of a childhood haunt found in *Company* and in the opening of the *Texts For Nothing*⁵⁰. A second interesting simulacrum of the same image-complex is found in Beckett's poem *The Vulture*:

[D]ragging his hunger through the sky
of my skull of sky and earth

stooping to the prone who must
soon take up their life and walk

mocked by a tissue that may not serve
till hunger earth and sky be offal [...] ⁵¹.

Noted by P.J. Murphy as «Beckett's most important model of the creative process»⁵², the vulture of this poem and the eagle in Pagaza's *The Crag* are more-than-coincidentally comparable statements of the literary creative process conveyed via a vast skyscape/landscape out of which the creative waters flow, and upon which the vulture/eagle is looking.

As in the African anthology and in Beckett's own *Company*, his translations for the Mexican anthology also examine child-perception and storytelling, with Vicente Riva Palacio's poem *To the Wind* contrasting child and adult perception:

When I was a child I lay in dread,
listening to you moaning at my door,
and fancying I heard the sorrowful
and grievous dirge of some unearthly being.

When I was a youth your tumult spoke
phrases with meaning that my mind divined;
and, blowing through the camp, in after years
your harsh voice kept on crying "Fatherland."⁵³

The vividness of child-perception and imagination disappears, however, in adulthood:

Now, in the dark nights, I hear you beating
against my incoercible prison-bars;
but my misfortunes have already told me

that you are wind, no more, when you complain,
wind when raging, wind when murmuring,
wind when you come and wind when you depart⁵⁴.

Such examples suggest that while translating poetry dating back to the seventeenth century, part of another nation's history, Beckett was simultaneously translating himself, doing so in someone else's name. The opening lines of Manuel José Othón's *A Steppe in the Nazas Country* is a case in point:

No trace of verdant hillside, nor of meadow.
There is nothing, nothing before my eyes,
nothing save the burning desiccated
endless plain where spring has never reigned⁵⁵.

The «zone of stones» from *Ill Seen Ill Said* may perhaps have had its genesis in Othón's poem quoted above:

White stones more plentiful every year. As well say every instant. In a fair way if they persist to bury all. First zone rather more extensive than at first sight

ill seen and every year rather more [...] the grass has receded from the chalky soil. In contemplation of this erosion the eye finds solace. Everywhere stone is gaining. Whiteness. More and more every year. As well say every instant. Everywhere every instant whiteness is gaining⁵⁶.

The «whiteness» of *Ill Seen Ill Said* mirrors «the burning desiccated/endless plain» of Othón's poem. In addition, Othón's landscape is comparable to the «sheer white blank planes» of *Lessness*⁵⁷ and the flat, arid landscape of *For to End Yet Again* which is described as «Grey cloudless sky grey sand as far as eye can see long desert to begin»⁵⁸.

Many of Beckett's texts from the 1960s and 70s adopt a view of human (including the artist's) nature which is encapsulated in his translation of the lines «his unquiet/pupil, boring out into the gloom, interprets/the secret book of the nocturnal still» from Enrique Gonzalez Martinez's *Wring the Swan's Neck*⁵⁹. Beckett texts such as *Still*, *All Strange Away*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* echo this sense of peering into the dark to find some illuminating knowledge of the inner essence of humanity and/or the storytelling imperative which is the core of all that he wrote.

In examining just some of Beckett's translations, my intention here has been to offer evidence of the early appearances and indications of themes and images that were to surface later in his original writings. Translation provided Beckett with an additional key to working in English, a language with which he struggled as he began his career, by allowing him to bypass the other major question which permeates his work – that of the authorial identity of both himself and the characters to whom he gives voice.

Endnotes

¹ E.A. Nida, C.R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1969, p. 27.

² Ivi, p. 33.

³ M. Lydon, *Beyond the Criterion of Genre: Samuel Beckett's Ars Poetica*, ed. by M. Buning et al., «Samuel Beckett Aujourd'hui: Revue Annuelle Bilingue», 8, 1999, p. 67.

⁴ N. Cunard (ed.), *Negro: An Anthology*, Wishart, London 1934; O. Paz (ed.), *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, Thames and Hudson, London 1958.

⁵ J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, Bloomsbury, London 1996, p. 137.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ C.M. Bowra, *Poetry and Tradition*, in O. Paz (ed.), *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 9 (italics mine).

⁸ See M. Fox, «There's Our Catastrophe»: *Empathy, Sacrifice, and the Staging of Suffering in Beckett's Theatre*, «New Theatre Quarterly», 68, 17, 2002, pp. 358-359.

⁹ E. Montale, *Delta*, trans. by S. Beckett, «This Quarter», 2, 4, April-June 1930, p. 630. Or. ed. in E. Montale, *Ossi di seppia* (1925), Mondadori, Milano 2003.

¹⁰ E. Montale, *Delta*, in Id., *Selected Poems of Eugenio Montale*, trans. and ed. by G. Kay, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1969, p. 47, lines 5-10.

¹¹ E. Montale, *Delta*, trans. by S. Beckett, cit., lines 5-11.

¹² S. Beckett, *How It Is*, Calder, London 1964, p. 8.

¹³ E. Moerman, *Armstrong*, in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington 2000, p. 186. Beckett's translation of the poem is to be found in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red*, cit., p. 11. For contrast, I also include (below) a more literal translation by Professor Richard York, School of Languages, University of Ulster. This helps to illustrate some of Beckett's alterations in his translation: «One day when Armstrong was playing lotto with his sisters / He exclaimed "I'm the one who has the raw meat". / He made himself lips from it and since that day / His trumpet feels nostalgic for their first kiss. // Black earth where the poppy grows, / Armstrong leads the flood, in bridal gown, to sleep. / Every time that, for me, "Some of these days" / Crosses twenty layers of silence, / I acquire a white hair / In a vertigo like a lift*. // "After you've gone" / Is a mirror in which suffering watches itself grow old. // "You're driving me crazy" is a trembling dawn / In which his trumpet with its dilated pupil / Walks without a balancing-pole on the strings** of the violin. // And "Confessing" gives unhappiness some appetite. // Song of impatience, your sleep-walking*** music / Spreads through my veins where everything catches fire. / Armstrong, little father Mississippi, / The lake fills with your voice / And the rain rises up again to the sky. // Towards**** what villages do your arrows arrive / After touching us? / Do they traverse wild horses / Before poisoning us? / The roots of your song mix in the earth / Following the furrows the thunderbolt has traced. / Harlem nights bear the print of your nails / And snow melts blackly, in the sun of your heart. // I walk, eyes closed, towards an abyss / That the glances of your female notes call me to / More disturbing than the call of the sea». Notes: *Lift in the sense of elevator. ** Strings is a pun: the same word is used for tightropes. ***Sleepwalking; also the name of a classic French vaudeville theatre. ****Towards: the preposition doesn't make literal sense in French either.

¹⁴ E. Moerman, *Armstrong*, in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, cit., p. 186, lines 1-4.

¹⁵ Trans. by Professor Richard York, School of Languages, University of Ulster. See n. 13, first four lines.

¹⁶ E. Moerman, *Armstrong*, in A.W. Friedman (ed.), *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, cit., p. 11, lines 1-6.

¹⁷ A. Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Representation, Volume 2*, trans. by E.F.J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York 1966, p. 457.

¹⁸ A.W. Friedman, *Appendix 3: Extant French Originals of the Beckett Translations*, in Id., *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, cit., p. 173.

¹⁹ M. Baker, *In Other Words: a Coursebook on Translation*, Routledge, London 1992, p. 4.

²⁰ R. Little, *Beckett's Poems and Verse Translations or: Beckett and the Limits of Poetry*, in J. Pilling (ed.), *Beckett Before Godot*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1997, p. 185.

²¹ J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, cit., p. 137.

²² R. Michelet, "Primitive" *Life and Mentality*, trans. by S. Beckett, in N. Cunard (ed.), *Negro: An Anthology*, cit., p. 739.

²³ S. Beckett, *The Capital of the Ruins*, in S. Gontarski (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, Grove Press, New York 1995, p. 277. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *CSP 1929-89*.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 278.

²⁵ R. Goffin, *The Best Negro Jazz Orchestra*, trans. by S. Beckett, in N. Cunard (ed.), *Negro: An Anthology*, cit., p. 291.

²⁶ A. Breton, *Lethal Relief*, trans. by S. Beckett, «This Quarter», 5, 1, pp. 74-75.

²⁷ A. Breton, *The Free Union*, ivi, pp. 72-73.

²⁸ P. Éluard, *A Life Uncovered or The Human Pyramid*, trans. by S. Beckett, ivi, p. 89.

²⁹ P. Éluard, *Invention*, trans. by S. Beckett, ivi, pp. 87-88.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

- ³¹ P. Éluard, *A Life Uncovered or The Human Pyramid*, cit., p. 89.
- ³² S. Beckett, *Sedendo et Quiescendo*, in *CSP 1929-89*, pp. 13-14.
- ³³ L. Hewson, J. Martin, *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, Routledge, London 1991, p. 22 (italics mine).
- ³⁴ A. Rimbaud, *The Drunken Boat*, trans. by L. Varèse, in *A Season in Hell and The Drunken Boat*, New Directions Publishing, New York 1961, p. 93, lines 1-4.
- ³⁵ A. Rimbaud, *Drunken Boat*, trans. by S. Beckett, in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Poems 1930-1978*, Calder, London 1999, p. 127, lines 1-4.
- ³⁶ L. Hewson, J. Martin, *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, cit., p. 32.
- ³⁷ A. Rimbaud, *Drunken Boat*, trans. by S. Beckett, cit., p. 127, lines 13-16.
- ³⁸ A. Rimbaud, *The Drunken Boat*, trans. by L. Varèse, cit., p. 95, lines 13-16.
- ³⁹ A. Rimbaud, *Le bateau ivre*, in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Poems 1930-1978*, cit., p. 126, line 16.
- ⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 128, line 32.
- ⁴¹ A. Rimbaud, *The Drunken Boat*, trans. by L. Varèse, cit., line 32.
- ⁴² A. Rimbaud, *Drunken Boat*, trans. by S. Beckett, cit., p. 129, line 32.
- ⁴³ Ivi, p. 137, lines 93-96.
- ⁴⁴ J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, cit., p. 352 and p. 772, n. 57.
- ⁴⁵ C.M. Bowra, *Poetry and Tradition*, cit., pp. 19-20.
- ⁴⁶ L. Hewson, J. Martin, *Redefining Translation: The Variational Approach*, cit., p. 28.
- ⁴⁷ M. De Bocanegra, *Song on Beholding an Enlightenment*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 69, lines 177-182.
- ⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 72, lines 261-268.
- ⁴⁹ J.A. Pagaza, *The Crag*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 104.
- ⁵⁰ See S. Beckett, *Company*, Calder, London 1992, pp. 19-20, in which the narrator describes «a nook in the gorse». See also S. Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, in *CSP 1929-89*, cit., p. 100, where the narrator describes «a mountain, not a hill, but so wild, so wild».
- ⁵¹ S. Beckett, *The Vulture*, in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Poems*, cit., p. 9.
- ⁵² P.J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-London 1990, p. 65.
- ⁵³ V. Riva Palacio, *To The Wind*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 100, lines 1-8.
- ⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 100, lines 9-14.
- ⁵⁵ M.J. Othón, *A Steppe in the Nazas Country*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., p. 127, lines 1-4.
- ⁵⁶ S. Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, in *Nohow On*, Calder, London 1992, pp. 71-72.
- ⁵⁷ S. Beckett, *Lessness*, in *CSP 1929-89*, cit., p. 197.
- ⁵⁸ S. Beckett, *Figzle 8: For to end yet again*, in *CSP 1929-89*, cit., p. 243.
- ⁵⁹ E. González Martínez, *Wring the Swan's Neck*, in *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, cit., pp. 160-161, lines 1-14.

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