

# Wastes and wilds of the Third Text, a roving topos between Samuel Beckett's self-translations of *L'Innommable* and *The Unnamable*

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Reçu : 30.10.2016 – Accepté : 13.11.2016

## Titre / Título / Titolo

Déchets et terres sauvages du troisième texte  
Desechos y selvas del tercer texto  
Rifiuti e terre selvagge del terzo text

## Abstract / Résumé / Resumen / Riassunto

Using the theoretical tools of reflections on self-translation and the heritage of Deconstruction and Postcolonial thinking, this article strives to deform discourse surrounding a canonical author. It constructs a third text in-between the self-translation of Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* and *L'Innommable*. The third text is a performative space, where reading takes immediate form in its rewriting, its transformation. It creates new syntagms, figures, stories and themes in the transport routes shared by translation and metaphor. After a brief look at work on self-translation, specifically in Beckett, the article attempts to deconstruct theory with practice, reading (and thus rewriting) translations of the same, instances of self-allegory, and figures of displacement in time and space.

En utilisant les outils de réflexions sur l'auto-traduction et l'héritage de la déconstruction et de la pensée postcoloniale, le présent article vise à dé-former le discours qui entoure un auteur canonique. Il construit ainsi un tiers texte dans l'entre-deux de l'auto-traduction de *L'Innommable* et de *The Unnamable* de Samuel Beckett. Le tiers texte est un espace performatif dans lequel la lecture prend immédiatement forme dans sa réécriture, sa transformation. Il crée de nouveaux syntagmes, des figures, des histoires et des thèmes nouveaux sur les itinéraires de transport partagés par la traduction et la métaphore. Après un bref aperçu des travaux existants sur l'auto-traduction, en particulier chez Beckett, on tente de déconstruire la théorie par la pratique, en lisant (et donc en réécrivant) des traductions du même, des cas d'auto-allégorie et des figures de déplacement dans le temps et dans l'espace.

Utilizando los instrumentos para reflexionar sobre la autotraducción y la herencia de la deconstrucción y del pensamiento postcolonial, el presente

artículo busca de-formar el discurso que rodea a un autor canónico. De ese modo construye un tercer texto en el entre-dos de la autotraducción de *L'Innommable* y de *The Unnamable* que es un espacio performativo en el que la lectura toma inmediatamente forma en la reescritura, de transformación. Crea nuevos sintagmas, figuras, historia y temas nuevos sobre los itinerarios de transporte compartidos por la traducción y la metáfora. Tras un breve recorrido por los trabajos existentes sobre la autotraducción, en particular en Beckett, se intenta deconstruir la teoría por la práctica, leyendo (y, en consecuencia, reescribiendo) traducciones de lo mismo, casos de auto-alegoría y figuras de desplazamiento en el tiempo y en el espacio.

Utilizzando strumenti teorici di riflessione sull'auto-traduzione e l'eredità della decostruzione e del pensiero postcoloniale, l'articolo mira a de-formare il discorso intorno a un autore canonico. Costruisce un terzo testo tra l'autotraduzione di *L'innommable* e *The Unnamable* di Samuel Beckett. Il terzo testo è uno spazio performativo in cui la lettura diventa immediatamente riscrittura ed elaborazione. Crea nuovi sintagmi, figure, storie e nuovi temi sulle vie di comunicazione che la traduzione e la metafora compartono. Dopo una breve rassegna dei lavori esistenti sull'auto-traduzione, in particolare in Beckett, si tenta di smontare la teoria mediante la pratica, leggendo (e quindi riscrivendo) traduzioni dello stesso, casi di auto-allegoria e figure di spostamento nel tempo e nello spazio.

## Keywords / mots-clés / palabras clave / parole chiave

Self-translation, deconstruction, Beckett, *L'innommable*, *The Unnamable*

Auto-traduction, deconstruction, Beckett, *L'innommable*, *The Unnamable*

Auto-traducción, deconstrucción, Beckett, *L'innommable*, *The Unnamable*

Auto-traduzione, decostruzione, Beckett, *L'innommable*, *The Unnamable*

*L'Innommable* was written first in French and published in 1951. It was then self-translated into English, the authors' first language, as *The Unnamable* in 1953. The situation of the self-translated text, undecided between two creations, presents a host of questions about how one sets the boundaries for a work of literature and how to consider it in translation. Numerous scholars have situated self-translation in a problematic space of reading, where the original cannot be identified. This paper takes this work as a foundation upon which to build a practical, reading apparatus I call the third text. The third text is a creative, performative, perpetually self-renewing text emerging from the space between translations. It will be explored according to its deconstruction of sameness, the way it always makes an allegory of itself, and finally, according to problems locating the third text in time and space.

Self-translation challenges traditional notions in thinking about translation such as "original" and "copy", but also, as a consequence, demands a fresh take on the text as unity. Is the first text the original and the second the copy? Or is the first a draft and the second a revision? Or does the text hover somewhere else, in an in-between space, above, below or beyond the text itself? Is it, as Ngugi wa Thiongo has suggested, a back and forth movement between texts (Ngugi, 20)?

We know that the strict barrier between translation and other forms of writing more or less coincides with the advent of authorial property in Europe, the consolidation of national identity through the vector of language standardization (Hokenson and Munson 2007, Berman, 1998), and the beginning of colonial expansion (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999). And also that up through the Early Modern period, self-translation in no way carried the odour of exceptionalism that it does today—although as Rainier Grutman has remarked (2013: 65), this exceptionalism may be more indicative of a romanticizing discourse on the impossibility of translation than of any literary count. One out of thirteen Nobel prize winners are self-translators after all (Grutman 2013: 70).

Moreover, theorists of self-translation (Lopez-Lopez Gay, 2006; Tanquero, 2007), have relied on self-transla-

tion to desacralize authorial intention, or to raise questions of the speaking subject's split, mobile identity (Kellman, 2000, Evangelista 2013). Indeed, the difference between translation and self-translation poses the question of the linguistic nature of the subject, and by extension positions itself in a story of language and being. Is the subject who says both "I" and "je" the same? If so, is a subject beyond language implied? And if not, is a subject entirely constructed through language, a subject whose body contours are the personal pronoun? To ask what distinguishes self-translation from translation is to ask what distinguishes an author from a translator: a self from another, same from different. In this paper, I will stretch this problematic tautly until holes tear in its fabric (*textus*). Consider the axiomatic proposition: if, in self-translation, writer and translator are one, and in translation, reader and writer are one, could self-translation become a place where reader rewrites (self-)translation?

### **"Wastes and wilds": Beckett's self-translation**

"I have nothing but wastes and wilds of self-translation before me for many miserable months to come", wrote Beckett in his April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1957 letter to Alan Schneider. Wastes and wilds are untranslatable landscapes, uncultivated, and indomitable, unruly zones within nation-states or beyond them, economical aporias. For Beckett, to self-translate was to travel through these lawless, unconquerable spaces. Can a reader (me) trespass there without leaving any footprints?

Maintaining that a reader does not rewrite a text to her liking as she reads it suggests that there is an essence to a text beyond what a reader chooses to do with it. It also poses a question of fidelity (as in translation), of remaining true to the author's initial intent. In self-translation, this very issue of fidelity meets its maker. According to Anthony Cordingly in his introduction to *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, "Research to date has shown that self-translators bestow upon themselves liberties of which regular trans-

lators would never dream” (2013: 2). Is this because the self of the author is sacredly inscribed into her words?

This liberty is not so much at stake in Beckett’s self-translations of *L’Innommable/The Unnamable*, where (although this is not the case in most of his plays) he translates as a translator would. Faithfully, more or less. In so doing, he takes himself as his own other. This also sets him apart from most other self-translators, who see the activity of self-translation as an occasion to blur the lines between translation and rewriting (Ngugi wa Thiongo, Julie/an Green or Giuseppe Ungaretti for example). In spite of being probably the most well known of all self-translators, Beckett should therefore not be taken as exemplary of self-translation as a global activity. Rainier Grutman makes the same point regarding Beckett’s position in the global hierarchy of languages. Beckett (Grutman cites Alexandra Kroh) is an “aristocrat of bilingualism”, meaning that he translates between two well-established languages of global domination, as a matter of choice rather than necessity (as for example, a writer in exile, or a writer whose marginalized language prevents their work from being read would do). And while the degree to which Beckett’s Irishness might have played into his choice of French perhaps complicates the matter of situating his English on the top of a global language hierarchy—specifically in Beckett’s relationship to canons of literature in French and English (see Perloff 1987: 38; Hokenson 2013: 40) this is not our question here.

Beckett scholars will appreciate the logic of Beckett being both the example and the exception in self-translation studies. And it is for this reason that Beckett turns out to be an advantageous place to undertake a reflection in the form of a practical experiment, as in a sense this reading is not a reading *of* Beckett, but a reading *around* Beckett. It opens up a relatively unproblematic space for me to practice my own kind of infidelity—of reading as rewriting.

In the specific context of work on Beckett, monolingual models have often been assigned as guardians of outmoded, structural models of text, translation and the thinking subject, and are discarded in favour of post-structural approaches. Specifically, Chiara Monti-

ni (2007) positions Beckett’s self-translation as a space for troubling linguistic and signifying relationships, in particular with recourse to authorial logos. This may be likewise connected to Raymond Federman’s deployment of Beckett’s self-translation as a way to read translation as a gain instead of a loss (1993), and to other attempts to challenge the authority of the original in relation to Beckett’s work (Bousquet, 2006). Brian T. Fitch (1988) proposes alternative reading models at the problematic intersection of “text” and “work”, in which the uniting of the two texts is both necessary and impossible. Lori Chamberlain (1985: 20) suggests that self-translation demands us to reconsider textual binaries such as “original” and “binary”, and further, “difference” and “similarity”. In Sussan Bassnet’s article on self-translation (2013), she invites us to take a more Borgesian vision of text itself in which “the notion of an original [is] a fluid rather than a fixed concept” (19). She uses this reflection to read two poems by Beckett, each of which “lead[s] the reader in other directions” (23).

Following Bassnet’s Borgesian model, I take scholarship on Beckett’s self-translation as a metaphorical topos from which to fractal out beyond authorial logos, original or even inscribed meaning, to create new meanings, authored instead by a reader (yours truly).

The philological link between translation and metaphor is well known—that *metapherein* is one old word for translation, and the morphemic resonances of bringing or carrying over to the other side, are as striking as a gong. In modern Greek, “μεταφορικό μέσο” [metaforikó mèsò] means “mode of transport”, and I like to think of both translation and metaphor as kinds of Mass Transits. What would happen if, taking self-translation as a metaphor, as we so often do with translation, as indeed the “nature” of the word may compel us to do, we pushed this issue of fidelity to an nth, performative degree. Could this cross-engendering relationship between metaphor and translation produce a signifying activity that takes us to another place beyond the textual binaries that scholars of Beckett’s bilingualism have claimed self-translation puts into question? Into the “wastes and wilds of self-translation”?

## Viral mêmes

Bassnett writes that “Borges would have loved the Internet” (16) for on the Internet, texts, and notions of originality gain fluid momentum, and become defined more by the richness of their transformation (their μεταφορικό μέσο, mode of transport) than their fixed unity. In a 2006 article on “The Performativity of Code”, Adrian MacKenzie claims that the practices of coding and programming have a performative dimension, insofar as it is circulation itself that *produces* meaning, rather than circulation merely transporting meaning from one place to another (or around in circles). He deploys Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma’s definition of performativity as a “self-reflexive use of reference that enacts the act that it represents” (2002:193).

Let’s take this now to my reading of Beckett’s self-translation. As the third text deconstructs theory with practice, it is better shown than told:

“Autre chose, mais dans le **même** ordre d’idées” (*L’Innomable*, 134)  
 “Another thing but of a **different** order.” (*The Unnamable*, 367)

This example, taken from Beckett’s self-translation of *L’Innomable* and *The Unnamable* translates the same (*le même*) as different—or, since “original” text cannot be identified in a self-translation—different translates as the same (*le même*). This could be taken as a commentary on translation, or on a theory of language read through translation: that the same may only be articulated through difference, that there is difference at the heart of the same. We see that reading in the third text, there is a strong temptation to *metaphorize*, or to produce metadiscourse, to carry meanings beyond their source. This is perhaps because there already is no source. I call this impulse to perpetual transformation the third text’s *performativity*. There is yet another dimension to this performativity (and another and another but I will come to that), in that the same order (*le même ordre*) and the “different order” are actually in the same order, syntactically speaking. This is usually not the case of course for adjective-noun formulations in English

and in French. So they are same and different in form as well as content.

Rachel Galvin, in her article “Poetry is Theft” (2014) uses what she calls the logic of “*copia*” to refer to “playful procedures of recombination, copying, plagiarism” (21). She deploys the notion according to both senses of the Latin root: “reproduction, transcription” but also “plenty, abundant” as in “copious”. She uses it to refer to poetic formulations mostly, which use these strategies to both contaminate and hybridize but also upset hierarchies, such as the one anchoring “source” text to authorial propriety. For Galvin, this is a profoundly politicized way of poeticking. The emphasis again is placed on fluid movement, on perpetual transformation rather than absolute point of origin. She associates *copia* with the “cannibalistic logic” of De Campos and De Andrade (Glissant and Borges also play a role), and is therefore heavily imbricated with post-colonial thinking. It is also deeply connected with both translation and infidelity.

I would like to use Galvin’s notion of *copia* not as a writing strategy but as a reading strategy—although using it as a reading strategy immediately implicates the writing(-back) through which this reading strategy is expressed. Let’s apply this again to the example of sameness:

- 1) “ensemble” (21)  
 “one and the **same** time” (299)
- 2) “**même** n’importe comment” (35)  
 “even any old rubbish” (308)
- 3) “**même** si je le dis, et je ne le dirai pas” (64)  
 “I won’t say it” (325)
- 4) “Ils parlent la **même** langue, la seule qu’ils m’aient apprise.” (83)  
 “All solicit me in the **same** tongue, the only one they taught me.” (336-7)
- 5) Mais souvent ils parlent tous en **même** temps, ils disent tous en **même** temps la **même** chose précisément.” (116)  
 “But often they all speak at once, they all say simultaneously the **same** thing exactly.” (356)
- 6) “la locomotion elle-**même**” (162)  
 “locomotion **itself**” (384)

One could read this through a contrastive stylistics lens, noting that the French language's grammatical elasticity with the adverb and noun "*même*", opens out onto a lexical richness in the English. Indeed, a statistical analysis of word occurrences supports this claim: *L'Innommable* contains 204 uses of the word "*même*" compared to *The Unnamable's* mere 126 uses of the word "same."

However, the metaphor of self-translation and the logic of *copia* invite us to read this in yet another way, as performative language in the making, like Mireille Rosello's notion of performative encounters which she uses to work through the relationship between Algeria and France, wherein subject positions are created anew upon the encounter, rather than ontologically presupposing it: "A performative encounter must invent both the words for the thing and thing through the words" (2). In Rosello, a linguistic notion (Austin's performativity) is transmogrified to read cultural phenomena, as I will attempt to do when thinking about place later in this article.

In the above examples, the "same/*même*" is both fractured and splayed, bouncing back and forth across the texts like light reflected between hanging mirrors turning in a breeze: as "same" or "*même*" is translated as something different (or *différent*), it divides, prism-like, the internal coherence of the word in a single language, of the very concept of sameness, of a concept of sameness that adheres to a word. Perhaps the same sameness that makes a language (or a culture) cohere, defined by what it is not: a story that locates being, whole and preserved, before or after the word, or in the word. Instead, other stories are told in the "performative encounter" between "same" and "*même*" opening out into a rhizome of mobile, circulating differences:

In the first example, "one and the same time" is said, literally (performatively) all together "*ensemble*" in the French. In the second, "*même*" is "even" (not odd), lending it mathematical dimensions it might not have known it had. In the third, it is untranslated, or rather, it is translated that it is not translated: "I won't

say it" (read: I won't say "*même*", because it's not my language—but by not saying it, I say it, translate it). In the fourth, we see the fallout from the "same/*même*" leaking into all to what it applies, in this case, the "tongue", the "*langue*", the language. "*Langue*" here is not the "*même*", since it is both a body part and a language, a distinction that erupts in the space of the performative encounter in the third text (the differing effect of bi- or multi-lingual homophonies: homophonies that appear only when compared in translation). This mirrors metaphorically the problem of translating foreignness. "*Même*" and "same" do not have the "same" signifier, this is visible from the surface of the *graphè* or from the ring of the *phonè*, but this fourth example suggests that they may not "even" have the same signified. This "*même langue*" or the "same tongue", is it the "*même*" or the "same" as the one that surrounds it? the one in which it is written? The relationship of language to culture is written as that which "must invent both the words for the thing and the thing through the words."

In the fifth example, we see three different translations of "*même*", which remind us of the numerical inequivalence of the occurrences of "same" (126) and "*même*" (204). "*Même*" proliferates, either in number (three *mêmes* for one same) or in difference, in the variety of forms it may take ("at once", "simultaneously", "same"). Once again: to read is to copy, to transform and rewrite. This is the very impetus, the forward propulsion motion of the third text machine. In the final example (there are many more, indeed their reckless proliferation makes them incalculable), we see that this is taken back once again to our initial metaphor of the self, of self-translation, where "self" translates with "*même*" ("itself" and "elle-même"). Both the pronoun, and the self (*elle*) bend in the refracting beam of the third text. This means that the performative inclination likewise reapplies to the proposal that propelled it, and that any example read by the third text will also be an allegory for the notion of the third text *elle-même*.

## The third text is an allegory of itself

“ce serait la **même** vase” (185)

“always the **same** vessel” (397)

If the third text always reads itself, taking its own creations as metacritical allegories for itself, this “*même vase*”/ “same vessel” is shattered into fragments revealing the debris of its own genealogy, its library, its ideological debts. This *vase/vessel* can be reread in the third text (stratigraphically, without deleting other meanings) as the archetypal vase of translation studies, whence the author of this article derives her reflections. I am of course talking about Benjamin’s *Gefäß* from the famous “Task of the Translator”, which already between our two languages breaks into at least three fragments: “vessel” in Harry Zohn’s translation (1968), “*amphore*” in Maurice Gandillac’s translation (1971) and “*vase*” in Antoine Berman’s (2008). I will now look at the performativity of the third text in relation to deconstructions of Benjamin’s essay.

“Ah comme je voudrais me découvrir une voix dans ce **concert**.” (102)

“Ah if I could only find a voice of my own, in all this **babble**.” (348)

The sonic approximation of babble to Babel in this example takes us to Jacques Derrida’s “Tours de Babel” in which the translation of *Babel* is performative. It acts out its untranslatability, which is the condition of its translatability (its untranslatability is what gets translated in the translation). It is also a kind of Ur-metaphor of the type that keeps time in much deconstructive work: a metaphor of metaphor itself. Using Gandillac’s translation, Derrida also locates this in the *amphore*, or as he calls it, the *métamphore*, or *métamétamphore*, a metaphor for translation, or even for translation as metaphor. In De Man’s reading “the German word for translation *übersetzen*, means metaphor.”

This locus where translation and metaphor make a hall of mirrors, also happens to be the site of the de-

construction of the sign. It is the spot where the figure alliance of concordance (“concert”) and non-concordance (“babel”) are sewn together, the joint in the disjoint. When in “concert”, everything assembles, similarities, sameness and equivalence is achieved. Thrown into relief in the third text, it connects and disconnects, as we saw with “same” and “*même*” with all the sounds falling apart: “babble”. This simultaneous coming together and falling apart is (perpetually) renewed in the figural gesture of the third text which is always replaying itself, always starting again, as metaphor of metaphor (which does and does not come together), and metaphor of translation (which does and does not come together), where translation is also a metaphor. In Homi Bhabha’s third space likewise, translation is a “motif or trope as Benjamin suggests for the activity of displacement within the linguistic sign.” (Bhabha: 1990). This third space is where the third text is situated and indeed takes its name: the incalculable site of the performativity of the linguistic—and cultural—sign in translation.

The third text creates new stories and new figures, neither in one text nor the other, but in their stereoscope. In many cases, the figure that emerges is none other than translation itself:

1) “à moins que les deux ne se **confondent**” (40)

“unless of course the two are one and the **same**” (311)

2) “la **confusion** d’identités” (72)

“the **confusions** of identities” (330)

3) “Mais je **confonds** le tour et alentour” (95)

“But what’s all this **confusion** now?” (343)

4) “il faut éviter la **confusion**, en attendant que tout se **confonde**” (123)

“**confusion** is better avoided, pending the great **confounding**” (360)

5) “se **confondre** avec sa victime” (123) “léger **désarroi**” (176)

“get **mixed up with** his victim” (360) “slight **confusion**” (392)

6) “que cela est **confus**, quelqu’un parle de **confusion**,” (195)

“what **confusion**, someone mentions confusion” (403)

The first example here brings us back to the “same” question. One translation of “*Babel*” as Derrida reminds us is “confusion”—if indeed Babel can be translated (but of course, the untranslatable is what we translate). “*Confondre*” is one translation of “confusion”, as we see in the third example, as well as another translation of “same” in the first example. Yet another translation of “confusion” is “*confusion*”, but also “*désarroi*”, “*confus*”—the polyvalence is confounding. The definition of the term confusion is knotted across its own figuration. It is a *mise en abyme*, in the sense that Paul De Man uses in his reading of Benjamin, “the text itself becomes an example of what it exemplifies” (26). *Mettre en abyme* is a recurring activity of the third text.

As any word in deconstruction, “confusion” is both a singularity and a multiplicity, a paradoxically lonely sign of its repetition. The tension that maintains this paradox resonates with a similar tension that De Man untangles in his reading of Benjamin, between *Wort* and *Sanz*, or grammar and meaning (1985: 29). This is another way of posing the question of poetics: that present material exists in paradox with absent meaning. Reading springs from this paradox. But let’s add the problem of translation (or in this case, self-translation). It is not a word or a meaning that we translate, but the phenomenon of resistance *between* singularity and multiplicity. And so the terms proliferate.

In the “confusion” example, likewise, the addition and subtraction model that we often find in translation rhetoric, is ejected in favour of a multiplication model, or, to go even farther, a model of bad or impossible math, the math of the supplement that “adds to without adding up” (Bhabha, 1994: 161). The third text favours incalculability over equivalence. Another example of this math of the supplement in the third text comes up when calculating the tension between singularity and multiplicity, between one and many. I cite Asja Szafraneic’s work on Beckett and Derrida here, for a formula on multiplicity:

Because repetitions across contexts are not identical repetitions, the repeated mark begins to differ from itself, becoming one of its many repetitions. Each of the latter can be taken as an example of the totality of the iterations of the mark. But

to be exemplary is to be both one of many and one standing for many-- and to stand for many is to be in possession of something that is common to many (i.e., it is equivalent to having acquired a certain generality). It is in this way that the singular acquires its claim to universality. (Szafraneic, 2007: 68)

What Szafraneic is describing here is the tension that exists in Derrida between the singularity of the mark, and the multiplicity of its iterability. In order to read or understand a text, there must be a play between these two. A text that is utterly singular, that does not bear the trace of repetition and the possibility of substitution, of translation—is incomprehensible. At the same time, a text that is overdetermined, too equivocal, standing for too many others, is not singular enough and also creates unreadability (why Joyce’s texts are often employed as the archetype of the untranslatable text in Derrida). To exemplify difference—to have meaning, and be readable—a mark or an utterance must be simultaneously singular and multiple, must be both one and representative of many. In this, an allegory of the self-translated text may be read:

“all sounds, there’s only one” (387)

“tous les bruits, il n’y en a qu’un, qu’un seul” (167)

How do we count the third text? This multiplicity of sounds, that make one, is repeated *again* in the third text—as though the third text sought to write its own iterability (and likewise its own universality) with a precarious repetition of its singularity across the two (versions of the) texts: this text that is one, two, and many all at once. Thus the paradox of singularity (only one) that is in fact three (*qu’un, qu’un seul*), in the third text incarnates both the paradox of the self-translated text and the condition of the third text. It’s the three, a faulty multiplication of two, that allows the expression of one. One splays across three, to make a multiplicity, one that is two and also three (only one), two that is one and also three (*qu’un, qu’un seul*), three that is also one (only one) and two (*qu’un, qu’un seul*), etc. This perpetual motion of constantly renewing allegorization creating new figures, is the third text’s performativity in full swing.

If the third text is always an allegory of itself, this kind of math also applies to the way we count and measure the texts. Non-contradiction, conclusion, definitive interpretation and fixed definitions are abandoned. In the third text, a unit of grammar (like a word or a phrase) or of rhetoric (like a metaphor, figure, trope) may very well mean two or many conflicting things all at once, or may add up to different sums, without one meaning or interpretation being privileged over another. Many accounts may coexist in a horizontal web, suspended between “right” and “wrong” readings. The reading, or the count proposed above is neither good nor bad, but something else entirely. Perversion of the text is not concomitant with its annihilation. The third text makes “intended mistakes” (Spivak, 2014 :35).

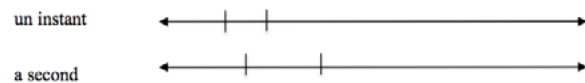
In work on the self-translation of Beckett, propositions resound to combine the two texts without erasing their difference. The difference here is that we apply this model not only to the text(s), but performatively to the theoretical apparatus employed to approach the text—to the practice of reading itself. Singularity and multiplicity are confused—a unique instance is taken as multiple, or a general meaning taken as a singular instance. *Wort* and *Sanx*, grammar and meaning, or even form and content, word and spirit, figurality and literality, language and discourse, may stand in one for the other (μεταφορικό μέσο). Form becomes metaphorical, taking on imaginative, figural meanings. Likewise, invisible meanings take on concrete form and act in the text as invented literal entities.

This doubled edged quality of metaphor in the third text, the jungling of form and content, becomes even more apparent when we tackle the rhetorical fields of time and space. We have attempted to count the third text, let’s now take a look at locating it, in time and space.

## 2. When is the third text?

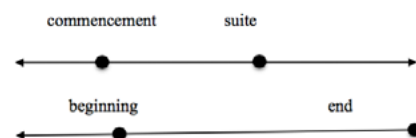
Linguistic material may be turned, in a poetics of language, into taking on metaphorical dimensions that are perhaps not “originally” inherent to it, similarly to

the way Bhabha treats translation in Benjamin as a trope. In both cases, translation functions as a metaphorical hinge in a theory that reads the sign as a place of difference. This theory or meaning of the word translation has a markedly temporal character, in particular as it is also a critique of the metaphysics of presence. Like the performance of the sign in Bhabha, it is always differed, splayed out across a time lapse, like jet lag, a temporal gap, in which presence exists in a “hither thither” time travel paradox with absence. This time disturbance manifested in the temporal displacement of the sign is performed quite visibly in the third text, for example when “*un instant*” (74) translates with “a second” (331). How can we measure this time that is both “*instant*” and “second”? Is it the same time, the same amount of time, starting and ending at the same points?



The incalculability of moments in the third text is thus part of the business of representing time: clocks, machines, stories, language. The sign (of time) has a timeline. Thinking about the sign then too has a timeline. Thinking about the sign, and thinking about time are confused in the third text, as form and content are. The sign becomes a time travel paradox within which the measure of time reveals itself to be differed, slippery like the performance of the mark. As in *Back to the Future* when Marty McFly plays “Johnny B. Good” and Marvin Berry calls Chuck Berry to have him hear the song: at what moment is the song composed and who is its author? (Wittenberg, 2013)

“j’avais eu un commencement et une suite” (78)  
 “I had a beginning and an end.” (333)





The third text is a time travel machine. But to say “the third text is a time travel machine” is about as exact as saying “the third text tells a story”. The third text is not a machine like the one found in Wells’s *Time Machine*. Rather it more resembles the disorientation of time in a Dick novel or in *Thrice Upon a Time* by James Hogan, in which the main characters try to send each other messages across a deregulated time (Wittenberg, 2013). Here the individual storylines in the two texts find themselves disrupted by a narrative that crosses between them: “produire un discours sur la séparation des temps implique de se tenir au lieu de leur conjonction, qui est la forme” (Samoyault, 2004 : 16) (to produce a discourse on the separation of time implies to situate oneself at their conjunction, which is their form). The more evident the disjunct, the more evident the creation of the third appears. A complete story (“end”) gets confused with an incomplete one (“suite”—following).

“Autrefois» (74)

“Not so long ago” (331)

Here this conjunction/separation (divorce) of time and time, which is the performance of text and text, is the performance of the time travel machine in operation. As in a time travel narrative, we are often both “now” and “not now”, characters may have two contradictory presents, pasts or futures. However, this example, as useful as it is to help us to imagine the time lag that regulates the time of the third text, is at base, merely an allegory for the lag found in the “present” moment, or even, in presence itself, in the third text.

“d’ici là” (123)

“In the meantime” (360)

The third text disassociates literal meaning from figural meanings, reappropriates, decontextualizes, and recirculates metaphors between language and text. “*D’ici là*” taken up in this game may thus be read literally as, “from here to there”, a figure of distance: *d’ici là*, from point A to point B. “In the meantime” is an expression of the time between two moments. Here, space and time are fused or confused, jumbled together, as in a theory of relativity. Which leads to our final question:

### 3. Where is the third text?

The problem of self-translation also harbours troubles of place and displacement. Nearly all work on Beckett’s self-translation have in common the instinct to eschew a selection of one “definitive” version over the other. The question then arises, where do we locate the text in self-translation. Outside? Beyond? Elsewhere? Bousquet, Chamberlain, Federman and Fitch have all used the problem of self-translation to open onto a thinking of the text as located in an “in-between space”. As the third text gains in materiality, this in-betweenness becomes a practical, if not a logistical and political one. A “politics of in-betweenness” (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999: 5) reveals the third text’s debt to post-colonial thinking, in Bhabha, Rosello and Galvin, but also in postcolonial translation (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999; Niranjana 1992; Suchet 2009)

To say that language is located somewhere, such as an in-between space, cannot help but bring up the notion that language takes place in a place, is tied to a territory, or even, a nation. It asks the question of where the third text is: at home or abroad? And where is “home”?

“ça n’a jamais été le mien, cette mer sous ma fenêtre” (187)

“none was ever mine, that sea under my window” (399)

In this example, we can situate our character in a specific place: by a window overlooking a sea. But what sea? In the third text, signifieds become signifiers, gain in materiality and so we may presume the very real existence of this sea—but which sea? Where is it located? The sea is given no name, the reader is dependent on the language to determine the place. This is something like the backwards story of the consolidation of the nation through the vector of language (Rafael 1998; Sakai: 2010), the yardstick of empire that says that French belongs to France, and English to England. But the character written into the third text—this strange multi-national or extra-national space, where does this entity live? This character is two, two bodies, four eyes, looking down from two windows onto the sea. Could this sea be the Channel?

“je me voulais moi, je voulais mon pays, je me voulais dans mon pays, un petit moment, je ne voulais pas mourir en étranger” (184) “parmi des étrangers, un étranger chez moi, au milieu d’envahisseurs.”

“I wanted myself, in my own land, for a brief space, I didn’t want to die a stranger in the midst of strangers, a stranger in my own midst, surrounded by invaders.” (396)

Here, the poles of home and abroad are placed into a relationship much like the ones shown in the time travel examples: both here and there. Like a post-national or an extra-national, the speaker has two homes, at least, existing in a contradictory state of national belonging. The third text’s debt to Bhabha and Rosello, and likewise to the theoretical apparatuses of post-colonial translation and a “politics of in-betweenness” (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 5) here comes into high resolution. Or to translate Katrin Lievois’ words, “We know that the hybrid character of the post-colonial text blurs the distinction established between own and foreign. The same is true for the self-translated text.” (“On sait que le caractère hybride du texte postcolonial brouille la distinction établie entre le propre et l’étranger. Il en est de même pour l’autotraduction.”) (2007, 235).

1) “Rue Brancion, drôle d’île.” (94)  
“in the Rue Brancion, never heard of in my island **home**?” (343)

2) “rendu enfin” (120)  
“**home** at last” (359)

3) “promenades sentimentales et solitaires” (162)  
“jaunts and rambles, honeymoons at **home** and abroad and long solitary tramps in the rain” (384)

4) “je serais chez moi, je dirais comment c’est, chez moi” (187-88)  
“I’d be **home**, I’d say what it’s like, in my **home**” (399)

5) “ma demeure” (190)  
“my **home**” (401)

The roving, performative, linguistic sign, swiped from Beckett and transmogrified into a material fullness, winds up telling a story of a figure that has many meanings for

the word “home”. In these examples, the untranslatability of the word “home” is a creative force: the performative call of untranslatability to be translated again and anew. It also reads, metacritically, as a critique of origins in language, discourse *and* place. The third text is never quite at home to itself, always an “*étranger*” (foreigner and stranger), negotiating problematic or even paradoxical states of national belonging. One such model for the third text’s roving subject is Didier Coste’s “experimental cosmopolitans” who “do not treat any text as an authentic original of another, they build possible hometownness into each version and take care of its irreducible difference.” (6) In Coste’s sculpting of this figure (exemplified in Beckett, Djelal Kadir, Ulysses, the Wandering Jew), he relates this to the oscillating poles of translatability and untranslatability, on the one hand an impermeable sacredness of a singular form, on the other a totalized transparency of meaning in spite of multiplicities. However, as any translator—or anyone “living in translation” (Conley 2010)—knows, translation is “limited, difficult, hesitant, successive, delayed, insufficient and excessive” (Coste 2016: 4).

I would like to end by insisting again on the experimental nature of this reading practice I’ve been calling the third text. As it is an attempt to try something new, it might for that reason fail to enter into agreement with certain criteria of validity. On the other hand, the strategies of “writing back” that are the inspiration for this experiment, may at times pose a threat to criteria of validity: to the location of authority, to how the liaisons between representations and the real get established or judged, and by whom, between what is valued as “correct” or “incorrect” or “good” or “bad”. Most importantly, in this spirit, the third text model is an attempt, perhaps even a utopic dream, following a romantic and capitalist hunger, to seek out something new. On the same token however, it is not an injunction to abandon other models in favour of this one. What can we do with texts such as *The Unnamable/L’Innommable*, whose aura too often eclipses the intervention of other voices? We can haunt them, rewrite them, appropriate them, copy and eat them, jumble them together and misread them, and by so doing perhaps enter some newness into the world.

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