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PROBLEMS WITH REMAINDERS: ENGLISH, IRISH,
AND AMERICAN TRACES IN THE ENGLISH
TRANSLATIONS OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S *ELEUTHERIA*

This is a tale of two translations, one lauded by most critics, the other excoriated. Yet both translations offered valuable insight into the work of one of the twentieth century's greatest writers by introducing to the general public a fully realized, mature work, previously known only by a select few scholars. The two translations, one good, one supposedly bad, also raise some intriguing questions regarding the process of literary translation. This is the story of the translation of *Eleutheria*, a play written in French by Samuel Beckett, an Irishman whose native tongue was English, the Greek title of which means 'freedom'.

When the highly anticipated first English translation of *Eleutheria* was released by the American publisher Foxrock in June 1995, it was met by a critical community whose attitudes ranged from ambivalence to outright hostility. The last of Beckett's major works to reach print (seven years after the Nobel-winning author's death), it was the first full-length play Beckett had written. Having completed it in 1947, Beckett had been unsuccessful in his initial endeavours to get the three-act play produced in Parisian theatres. After his breakthrough with *En attendant Godot*, *Eleutheria* was set aside by Beckett for nearly half a century. Following Les Éditions de Minuit's publication of Beckett's original French script by a few months, Foxrock's English version of *Eleutheria* encountered a critical response that was directed primarily at the quality of the translation by the American author Michael Brodsky. Critical antagonism against the Foxrock edition was so widespread that the English publisher Faber and Faber commissioned its own translation by Barbara Wright, which was released a year later. Brodsky was justifiably taken to task for several glaring errors in interpretation. Many felt that the style was simply too far removed from that of Beckett's self-translations (Beckett himself had translated almost all of his work either from French into English or vice versa). One of the more interesting attacks made on Brodsky, by the Irish academic and theatre critic Gerry Dukes in his review of the translation for the *Irish Times*, was for Brodsky's attempts to 'inflect the English with a taste of Oirish'.¹ This raises the question of whether or not it is legitimate for a translator to inject a domestic remainder—cultural, historical, and ideological differences supplied by the target language of a translation—into a translation, particularly when that remainder emerges from a culture to which the translator does not belong. The issues surrounding the Brodsky and Wright

¹ Gerry Dukes, 'A Version that Makes Free with Beckett', *Irish Times*, 24 June 1995, Weekend Section, p. 8.

translations also raise some intriguing questions involving the possibility of future translations of Beckett's work.

To answer these questions, it will be necessary to examine the two competing published translations against each other, as well as against Beckett's original French version and the unpublished first full English translation of the play by the Beckett scholar Stanley Gontarski, in order to illuminate the plethora of choices available to anyone attempting to translate Beckett's work, and the challenges inherently contained in that task. It will also be instructive to consider not only Beckett's self-translation process, but also the translations Beckett had done of others' work.² Of particular interest is Beckett's English translation of the French playwright Robert Pinget's *La Manivelle*, which Beckett undertook as a favour in 1959. But first it will be beneficial briefly to examine the strange history of *Eleutheria* in order to understand why there was a need for outside translators in the first place.

'Not for publication'

Beckett composed *Eleutheria* in Paris between 18 January and 24 February 1947, about two years before beginning *En attendant Godot*.³ A three-act work that was considerably longer than the plays that were to follow, *Eleutheria* focuses on the desire of the main character, a young man named Victor Krap, to withdraw from life, along with all of the metaphysical ramifications implicit in such an aspiration. *Eleutheria* was 'released in 1947–49 for circulation among Paris theatre producers, first by Jacoba van Velde, who, [under the pseudonym] Toni Clerkx, acted for a time as Beckett's agent in France, and then by [his future wife] Suzanne Dumesnil'.⁴ After achieving international fame with *En attendant Godot* in 1953, Beckett decided to consign *Eleutheria* to 'the trunk', going so far as to write to Richard Seaver (at Grove Press) on 25 November 1970 that *Eleutheria* was 'Not for publication'.⁵

The play was relegated to the periphery of Beckett's work—unpublished but not unknown to the critical community. It remained tucked safely away until the spring of 1986, when Beckett presented a typescript of it to his former American publisher at Grove Press, Barney Rosset. The idea was for Rosset to publish *Eleutheria* independently in English in order to get back on his feet after being forced to resign from Grove following the sale of the

² Beckett undertook a number of professional translation projects in order to make ends meet as a young man.

³ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 328.

⁴ James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1980), p. 23.

⁵ Austin, TX, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC), Seaver Collection, Box 3, Folder 3, MS *Eleutheria* (typescript with author notes, unpublished, '1946' (recte 1947)).

publishing house a year earlier. Having promised *Eleutheria* to Rosset, Beckett 'withdrew to Ussy to take on the clearly distasteful task of translating the play into English'.⁶ Problems quickly arose owing to the fact that Beckett did not mean only to translate the work, which in itself was never a simple process. Beckett intended to give the play the comprehensive revision to which he referred in a letter of 23 April 1956 to Christian Ludvigsen, when he 'decided [*Eleutheria*] can neither be produced nor published as it stands. I may try to revise it some day, but I think this is unlikely'.⁷ A challenge that had seemed 'unlikely' for a Beckett at the pinnacle of his writing career quickly proved insurmountable for the octogenarian. In June 1986 he wrote to Rosset: 'I had completely forgotten *Eleutheria*. I have read it again. With loathing. I cannot translate it, let alone have it published. Another rash promise.'⁸ The project had to be suspended.

It was Gontarski, who had been present seven years earlier at the Bar Américain on the Boulevard du Montparnasse when Beckett had given Rosset *Eleutheria*, who reignited the process in 1993. As he recalls twenty years later: 'At some point, I came back to looking at that manuscript, and I thought: "Well, let me try my hand at translating it."' ⁹ A lot had transpired in the interim. The author died in December 1989, and Grove Press had changed hands again, signalling the possibility of Rosset independently publishing Beckett's work. Gontarski translated the play into English, and 'finally, I thought, Barney really should go ahead and publish this. So I sent it to him and said: "This may be the time."' ¹⁰

A protracted battle ensued between Rosset and Beckett's literary estate over the right to publish *Eleutheria*, which David Tucker, in his 2011 essay 'Posthumous Controversies', describes as a 'saga of legal brinkmanship among old friends'.¹¹ While the legal battle raged over whether or not *Eleutheria* could be published, les Éditions de Minuit rushed the original French version of the play to press, thereby avoiding the unusual situation of a translation pre-empting the original literary work. His publication of the play notwithstanding, Beckett's French publisher and literary executor, Jérôme Lindon, as he made clear in the letter in which he granted publication rights to Rosset, 'persist[ed] in thinking that Sam would not have wanted *Eleutheria* to be

⁶ S. E. Gontarski, 'Introduction' to Samuel Beckett, *Eleuthéria*, trans. by Michael Brodsky (New York: Foxrock, 1995), pp. vii–xxii (p. xv).

⁷ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1941–1956*, ed. by George Craig and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 616.

⁸ Samuel Beckett, quoted in Barney Rosset, 'The Subject Is Left Handed' (unpublished memoir, 2011).

⁹ Stanley Gontarski, personal interview by Stephen Graf, unpublished, 27 July 2012.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ David Tucker, 'Posthumous Controversies: The Publications of Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *Eleutheria*', in *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon (London: British Library, 2011), pp. 229–44 (p. 235).

published'.¹² Lindon fully articulated this position in a five-page 'Avertissement', dated 23 January 1995 and included as a preface to the French edition, asserting: 'Ce n'est pas le texte littéraire qu'on attend, c'est l'objet de scandale' ('This is not the literary text we might expect, it is the object of a scandal').¹³

Not 'literary enough'

Its initial publication in 1995 did not end the controversy surrounding *Eleutheria*, as evidenced by the fact that a second, competing English translation (Wright's) was released within a year. The proximity of the translations' production—the fact that Gontarski, Brodsky, and Wright all completed their translations within a few years of each other—yields interesting insights into the translation process. When comparing the various translations of *Eleutheria*, it is important to keep in mind the order in which they appeared. Gontarski's came first in 1993 and was, he admits, 'essentially a rough draft—a first draft—translation just to get something down and for Barney [Rosset] to have a sense of what he had'.¹⁴ Rosset took the translation to Beckett's heir and nephew in England, Edward Beckett, who rejected the translation for publication because, as Gontarski recalls, 'it wasn't literary enough'.¹⁵

Not being 'literary enough' seems a peculiar reason to reject a translation of a work by an author such as Beckett, who, in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, expressed admiration for French writers because they 'have no style, they write without style'.¹⁶ In a 1956 interview with Israel Shenker for the *New York Times*, Beckett had said of his writing: 'My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable—as something by definition incompatible with art'.¹⁷ Declining a translation merely on the basis of its not being 'literary enough' seems to be at odds with Beckett's own description of his work. It must be taken into consideration, however, that Beckett's aversion to self-promotion, and the humility he demonstrated upon ascending to the heights of the literary world, often caused him to oversimplify his work on the infrequent occasions he agreed to discuss it. For instance, in a letter of 29 December 1957 to the American theatre director Alan Schneider, Beckett famously claimed, 'My work is a

¹² New York, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Barney Rosset Papers (BRP), Box 56 (correspondence between Jérôme Lindon and Barney Rosset, 24 January 1995).

¹³ Jérôme Lindon, 'Avertissement', in Samuel Beckett, *Eleutheria* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1995), pp. 7–11 (p. 10).

¹⁴ Gontarski, personal interview.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. by Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1992), p. 48. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* was written in English in 1932 but, like *Eleutheria*, was published posthumously.

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, quoted in Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters', *New York Times*, 5 May 1956, Section II, pp. 1, 3; repr. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge, 1979), pp. 146–49 (p. 148).

matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended), made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin.¹⁸ Ludovic Janvier, who worked with Beckett on the French translation of Beckett's novel *Watt*,¹⁹ affirms the importance of sound to Beckett in translating his work: 'you would see him counting on his fingers. Equivalent words were chosen almost more because of syllabic count than because of the meaning.'²⁰ Of course, if Beckett's work was merely 'a matter of fundamental sounds', then a translator's job would be rendered fairly straightforward—translating decisions would come down to basic questions of phonics and, as Janvier notes, counting syllables. But if Beckett's work really boiled down to nothing more than fundamental sounds, it is unlikely the work would have garnered the widespread fame and acclamation that it continues to receive to this day.²¹

Especially early in his career, Beckett took great pains to distinguish himself from his former mentor, James Joyce. For instance, in the Shenker interview Beckett asserts: 'With Joyce the difference is that Joyce is a superb manipulator of material—perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. There isn't a syllable that's superfluous. The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material.'²² Yet the description Beckett offers of Joyce's 'Work in Progress'²³ in his own first published work, the 1929 essay 'Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce', could just as easily apply to Beckett's writing: 'form is content, content is form [. . .] His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.'²⁴ Beckett would later affirm the importance of form to his own work in an October 1973 interview with Charles Juliet, remarking: 'You can't even talk about truth. That is part of the general distress. Paradoxically, it's through form that the artist can find a kind of solution—by giving form to what has none. It is perhaps only at that level that there may be an underlying affirmation.'²⁵ When discussing form in writing, one enters the realm of the esoteric. From a translator's perspective, trying to render literary form in a second language poses a number of difficulties.

¹⁸ *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, ed. by Maurice Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 24.

¹⁹ *Watt* was the last major work Beckett completed in English prior to beginning to write in French. Written during the Second World War, it was completed in 1944 and first published in English in 1953.

²⁰ Ludovic Janvier, quoted in Kathleen Shields, *Gained in Translation: Language, Poetry and Identity in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 191.

²¹ It has been estimated that Beckett is the second most written-about world author, exceeded only by William Shakespeare.

²² Beckett, quoted in Shenker, p. 148.

²³ The working title of what became known as *Finnegans Wake*.

²⁴ Samuel Beckett, 'Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce', in *Our Exagimination round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, ed. by Sylvia Beach (London: Faber, 1961), pp. 3–22 (p. 14).

²⁵ Samuel Beckett, quoted in Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, trans. by Janey Tucker (Leiden: Academic Press, 1995), pp. 148–49.

As Vladimir Nabokov, another bilingual writer, notes, "The problem, then, is a choice between rhyme and reason: can a translation while rendering with absolute fidelity the whole text, and nothing but the text, keep the form of the original, its rhythm and its rhyme?"²⁶ The answer to this question is: rarely. Retaining fidelity to the meaning of the text while also remaining faithful to its form is extraordinarily difficult. So difficult, in fact, that Beckett himself rarely achieved both in translating the work of others, as will be discussed shortly. And when self-translating, as Beckett admits in his letter of 3 December 1962 to the Israeli writer Matti Megged, 'I, when I can't translate, have the right to try and reinvent'.²⁷ Translators of the work of others are not permitted to take such liberties and therefore must try their best to strike a balance between word-for-word fidelity and fidelity of tone, feeling, and rhythm.

Returning to Gontarski's 'rough draft' of *Eleutheria*, it is possible that, in the eyes of Edward Beckett, the translation did not sufficiently embody the form—tone, feeling, and rhythm—of Beckett's other writings in English. That being the case, one can understand Edward Beckett's demurral. Edward Beckett had an idea in his mind of what a work by his uncle should look and sound like, and Gontarski's translation, while retaining word-for-word fidelity, nevertheless failed to meet these lofty expectations. Samuel Beckett himself suffered a similar rejection with a translation which he considered to be 'more than a first draft'.²⁸ In 1931 Joyce asked Beckett to translate the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' section of *Finnegans Wake* into French. Beckett undertook the commission (gratis, of course, as everything done for Joyce was) with Alfred Péron, a former student of Beckett's at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. Joyce himself, along with Paul Léon, according to Léon, 'rejected what they felt were inappropriate renderings' from what Léon later offhandedly dismissed as Beckett and Péron's 'premier essai'. As Léon reportedly told it, he and Joyce then 'worked hard to improve the text both in the rhythm and in its sense'.²⁹ In an interview with Beckett not long before the author's death, his biographer James Knowlson discovered that 'Almost sixty years later, [Beckett] still felt slighted by the way in which his version had been underestimated and discarded'.³⁰ It would seem that Beckett and Péron's French translation of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' was not 'literary enough' for Joyce.

When Gontarski's translation was rejected, Rosset turned to Albert Bermel, whom he would later describe to Lindon as 'an esteemed member of our New

²⁶ Vladimir Nabokov, 'Problems of Translation: "Onegin" in English', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 71–83 (p. 77).

²⁷ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957–1965*, ed. by George Craig and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 518.

²⁸ Knowlson, p. 130.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 643, n. 43.

York theatrical world'.³¹ An Englishman who emigrated to the United States in 1955, Bermel was an accomplished translator (particularly of French drama), had published a number of books and essays on European theatre, and had served as an associate professor of theatre at Columbia University and the City University of New York. Bermel's translation was eventually jettisoned for reasons that are not entirely clear. His son, Derek Bermel, recalls Rosset only saying that 'there was a problem with the estate'.³² Gontarski affirms that Edward Beckett passed on the Bermel translation after Rosset presented it to him.³³ Of his replacing Bermel as translator, Brodsky observes that Bermel 'didn't understand why. He felt sort of like a jilted lover who was dropped'.³⁴ For his part, Rosset never revealed to the public any rationale for deciding to abandon Bermel's translation, although he once brusquely asserted: 'We didn't like it.'³⁵ Bermel's translation has since been lost, with only a few brief excerpts remaining.

A 'writer rather than a translator'

Rosset turned to his partner in the Foxrock venture, John Oakes, former Grove editor and founder of Four Walls Eight Windows Press, for the third translator. Oakes suggested Brodsky, his star author at Four Walls. What made Brodsky an unusual choice was that while the author was fluent in French, he had never translated anything professionally. In selecting Brodsky, Rosset and Oakes may have wanted to mirror Beckett's choice of the South African author Patrick Bowles as co-translator of his novel *Molloy*. As Bowles later explained, Beckett 'wanted a writer rather than a translator'.³⁶ Working with Beckett, according to Bowles, 'was extremely taxing, to put it mildly'.³⁷ Bowles and Beckett would only succeed in getting through a few pages per day, 'debating virtually every word'.³⁸ Painstaking as it was, Bowles at least had Beckett to guide the translation process. Gontarski, Bermel, Brodsky, and Wright possessed no such luxury. The task presented to Brodsky was daunting, as he observes that Beckett 'took a fiendishly deadpan pleasure in incorporating phrases that were so uniquely idiomatic as to be unworkable

³¹ New York, BRP, Box 56 (correspondence between Jérôme Lindon and Barney Rosset, 7 April 1994).

³² Derek Bermel, personal interview by Stephen Graf, unpublished, 19 June 2012.

³³ Gontarski, personal interview.

³⁴ Michael Brodsky, personal interview by Stephen Graf, unpublished, 23 February 2012.

³⁵ Barney Rosset, quoted in Marius Buning, 'Eleutheria Revisited: A Public Lecture Delivered at Teatro Quijano, Ciudad Real, Spain, Tuesday, 2 December 1997' <http://samuel-beckett.net/Eleutheria_Revisited.html> [accessed 26 October 2016].

³⁶ Patrick Bowles, 'How to Fail', *P. N. Review*, 96, 20.4 (March–April 1994), 24–38 (p. 24).

³⁷ Patrick Bowles, quoted in *Beckett Remembering, Remembering Beckett: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by James Knowlson and Elizabeth Knowlson (New York: Arcade, 2006), p. 110.

³⁸ Bowles, 'How to Fail', p. 24.

for the translator'.³⁹ Beckett was not unaware of the difficulty of translating his work. Regarding his self-translation of *Fin de partie* into *Endgame*, he had written to Rosset on 6 April 1957: 'Before going any further, let me prepare you for an unsatisfactory job. The French is at least 20% undecantable into English and will forfeit that much of whatever edge and tension it may have.'⁴⁰ What made Beckett's work so 'undecantable' from French into English was not merely that it was 'uniquely idiomatic'. Also at play was the fact that, according to the American translation theorist and historian Lawrence Venuti, 'the foreign context is irrevocably lost' through the process of translation, because '[t]ranslating detaches a foreign text from the literary traditions, the network of intertextual connections, that invest that text with significance for the readers of the foreign language who have read widely in it'.⁴¹ Beckett found that a fifth of the text from *Fin de partie* could not survive the conversion from French into English owing to the loss of both the 'foreign context' and the 'uniquely idiomatic'. Would it be fair to expect an outside translator to do any better with *Eleutheria*?

With regard to Bermel's translation, Brodsky admits: 'I took a look at it'; however, 'I definitely started from scratch. I didn't use his as a back-up'.⁴² Oakes remains adamant to this day that handing Brodsky the commission was 'absolutely the right decision', because Brodsky 'was first and foremost a *literary* writer and translator. He was not an academic. It would have been a *lot* easier for us if we had chosen one of these—somebody in the Beckett industry. It would have been a lot easier and a lot less interesting translation.'⁴³

A 'grand collection of howlers'

Many critics did not agree with Oakes's assessment that the choice of Brodsky as translator had been 'an act of genius'.⁴⁴ In a scathing review, Dukes, referencing some of the more obvious mistranslations, opines: 'There has not been such a grand collection of howlers since Dante visited the ninth circle of Hell.'⁴⁵ The Beckett estate subsequently sold British publication rights to the play to Faber, which tasked Wright, a professional translator specializing in French surrealist and existential writing, with translating it. Wright, who died in May 2009, was described in her obituary in *The Guardian*, written by the publisher John Calder, as 'one of the most brilliant, conscientious and original

³⁹ Brodsky, personal interview.

⁴⁰ Beckett, *Letters 1957–1965*, p. 38.

⁴¹ Lawrence Venuti, 'Translating Humour: Equivalence, Compensation, Discourse', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 7.2, Special Issue: *Translation* (2002), 6–16 (p. 7).

⁴² Brodsky, personal interview.

⁴³ John Oakes, personal interview by Stephen Graf, unpublished, 26 June 2012.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Dukes, 'A Version', p. 8.

translators of twentieth-century French literature'.⁴⁶ Dukes made no secret of his preference for Wright's translation in his review of it: 'What she has done is take a play generally held in low esteem, and post-Brodsky, in even lower esteem and transform it into an engaging [. . .] translation [that] gives the characters a feasible language to speak.'⁴⁷ Terence Killeen began his review of the Wright translation for the *Irish Times* by announcing: 'The appearance of this translation of *Eleutheria* means that an acceptable English version of Beckett's first full-length play is now available.'⁴⁸ The critical community sided with Dukes and Killeen, as is demonstrated by the fact that when *Eleutheria* is written about in English—which, in any event, is not very frequently—the translation quoted is invariably Wright's.

This wildly disparate reception of the two translations is somewhat perplexing. The handful of 'howlers' aside, both are very faithful to the original text in their own ways. Setting aside subjective matters such as personal taste, several explanations can be proffered regarding the discrepancy in critical attitudes. To begin with, since Brodsky's translation was the first to appear, expectations for it were naturally higher. As Dukes's review of Wright's translation makes clear, the bar was lowered after publication of Brodsky's translation. The conclusion should not immediately be drawn, however, that it was simply the poor quality of Brodsky's translation that lowered the bar. It is important to keep in mind that before Rosset ever brought Brodsky's translation to press, he had already tried and failed to get approval from the Beckett estate for the versions by Gontarski and Bermel. So the bar was in fact set quite high, and perhaps the disappointment which the critical community felt regarding Brodsky's translation made that same community more willing to overlook some of the flaws in Wright's work when it appeared a year later. Oakes has his own theory as to why Brodsky's translation was so poorly received by the academic community: 'This is my take on it. Brodsky was—and is—completely outside of the academic world.' The choice of an outsider, in Oakes's view, aggravated certain very isolated segments within Beckett Studies, 'who make themselves Exxon to Beckett's oil well'.⁴⁹ Oakes's opinions, it goes without saying, are naturally biased, and Wright, it should be noted, was not an academic either. Brodsky's translation was also seen by many of the critics hostile towards it as being too American, a point that will be discussed in greater detail later. Wright, a native of West Sussex, would not have shared this particular fault.

It is also possible that much of the negative reaction to Brodsky's translation

⁴⁶ John Calder, 'Barbara Wright: Leading Light in the Translation of Modern French Literature', *The Guardian*, 6 May 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books>> [accessed 15 June 2013].

⁴⁷ Gerry Dukes, 'The Second Englishing of *Eleutheria*', in *Beckett versus Beckett*, ed. by Marius Buning and others (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 75–80 (p. 79).

⁴⁸ Terence Killeen, 'A Rocky Road to Freedom', *Irish Times*, 28 December 1996, Supplement, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Oakes, personal interview.

may not have emanated from the translation, but rather the source material. Response to the play within the academic community has always been ambivalent. Long before its publication, the theatre scholar Ruby Cohn wrote of *Eleutheria*: 'It is not surprising that Beckett refuses to make public this play written in 1947, but rather that he ever considered publishing or staging it.' What was most surprising to Cohn was 'that Beckett should have written so relatively conventional a play shortly before creating *Godot*'.⁵⁰ Peter Boxall, in his 1998 essay 'Freedom and Cultural Location in *Eleutheria*', contends that the lack of critical engagement with *Eleutheria* is attributable to more than simply 'the general perception that it is not a very good play'.⁵¹ Rather, according to Boxall the play tends to be 'put to one side' by critics because 'it is not easily accommodated into the hermeneutic framework within which Beckett's writing is generally understood. In the developmental parabola that is conventionally grafted onto Beckett's oeuvre, *Eleutheria* is something of an anomaly.'⁵² This refusal to accept, or even acknowledge, *Eleutheria* as a mature, fully realized work by Samuel Beckett at least partially explains why critical reaction to any translation of it might be so negative. Since it appeared first, Brodsky's translation naturally bore the brunt of this critical antagonism.

Too French French

The appeal of Wright's translation for the average reader resides in language that is more direct and syntax that is much cleaner than that of Brodsky's version. While clarity in a text is certainly something that both publisher and reader may find desirable, it should be noted that this never appeared to be an objective of Beckett's as an author. Indeed, Beckett tacitly acknowledged the at times recondite nature of his work in his letter of 29 December 1957 to Schneider: 'But when it comes to these bastards of journalists I feel the only line is to refuse to be involved in exegesis of any kind. That's for those bastards of critics.'⁵³ Beckett made no more effort to be clear or easy in French than he did in his work originally composed in English. For instance, the French author Alfred Simon has remarked in his monograph *Beckett* that Beckett reduced French syntax to its most simple form, forcing it to move 'at a feeble, torturous and hesitant pace'.⁵⁴ Nabokov described Beckett's French as 'a schoolmaster's French, a preserved French', yet of Beckett's work in English Nabokov insists, 'you feel the moisture of verbal association and of

⁵⁰ Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 163.

⁵¹ Peter Boxall, 'Freedom and Cultural Location in *Eleutheria*', in *Beckett versus Beckett*, ed. by Buning and others, pp. 245–58 (p. 245).

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 245–46.

⁵³ *No Author Better Served*, p. 24.

⁵⁴ Alfred Simon, *Beckett* (Paris: Belfond, 1983), p. 22.

the spreading live roots of his prose'.⁵⁵ The French philosopher Alain Badiou, in his study *On Beckett*, has observed that Beckett's French 'is "too" French, just as Conrad's English is a much "too" mannered sort of English'.⁵⁶ This "'too" French' French presents the translator with some challenges. If a translator were to render Beckett's work too literally, the product could tend to be stilted, awkward, even sterile—certainly not the 'literary' production that Beckett's heir, Edward Beckett, expected the English translation of *Eleutheria* to be. Yet move too far in the other direction and the translator could be accused of taking liberties with the text.

While the general consensus of critical opinion holds that Wright's translation is the most faithful, Brodsky's often tends to mirror Beckett's grammar and syntax more accurately. For instance, in the third act Beckett's Spectateur addresses the Vitrier (Glazier) concerning Victor's servant Jacques, who entered earlier in the scene to inform Victor that his mother had been taken ill:

Spectateur: C'est cette histoire de valet qui nous a achevés. Votre comique, comment vous l'appellez?... (*il consulte son programme*) Victor, il fait semblant de vouloir nous parler et puis c'est dans les coulisses qu'il va raconter ses petites histoires à un crétin de larbin. Non, non, il y a des limites.⁵⁷

Wright renders this passage as:

Spectator: It's that business of the servant that finished us off. Your comic—what do you call him? (*He consults his programme.*) Victor, he pretends he wants to talk to us and then he goes and tells his life story *off-stage* to a half-wit of a lackey. No, no, there are limits.⁵⁸

Brodsky translates the speech thus:

Audience Member: It's this servant business that has done us in. Your comic, what do you call him—(He consults his program)—Victor, he makes a pretense of wanting to speak to us and then into the wings he goes to tell his paltry little tales to some numbskull flunkey. No, no, there's a limit.⁵⁹

Gontarski's version runs as follows:

SPECTATOR: But it's this valet's story that finished us. Your comic—what do you call him—(He consults his program)—Victor, he pretends to want to speak to us and then it's backstage he goes to tell his little tales to a cretinous flunkey. No, no, there are limits.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), p. 172.

⁵⁶ Alain Badiou, 'Author's Preface' to *On Beckett*, ed. by Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), pp. xxxv–xxxvi (p. xxxvi).

⁵⁷ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Barbara Wright (London: Faber, 1996), p. 134.

⁵⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Michael Brodsky (New York: Foxrock, 1995), p. 144.

⁶⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Stanley Gontarski (unpublished, 1993), p. 103.

While Wright's version is superior in terms of the clarity and comprehensibility of the text, as well as being more grammatically normative, the syntax and sentence structure of Brodsky's translation much more closely approximate the rhythm of Beckett's French prose. Where Wright and Gontarski use the active verb 'pretends' in the third sentence, Brodsky's more passive construction 'makes a pretense' comes closer to Beckett's 'il fait semblant', though Brodsky's text is much more cumbersome than the other versions. Brodsky renders Beckett's 'ses petites histoires' as 'his paltry little tales', and Gontarski gives 'his little tales'. While these are more literal interpretations of the text than Wright's 'tells his life story', Brodsky's and Gontarski's translations are also more vague and less descriptive. In the end, it is a question of what the translator chooses to emphasize in interpreting a work: the substance or the style. Nabokov clearly favoured the former: 'The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.'⁶¹ This is not an attack on Wright's fine translation, but simply to point out that from the perspective of syntax and grammar, Brodsky's is the more consistently faithful rendition.

[S]he never imposes herself on the original'

Where Wright's translation clearly surpasses Brodsky's is in its lack of 'howlers', as even Brodsky has come to designate his glaring mistakes. Discussing the translation, Brodsky returns repeatedly to two howlers. The first occurs in Act I, where Brodsky mistakenly arms an 'oarsman' with a 'knife' rather than stating that a 'boater' (hat) has a feather. This mistake has been well covered by both Dukes and Marius Buning, president of the Dutch Samuel Beckett Society and editor of *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, in their essays on the play. The second howler 'I still have problems with', Brodsky concedes, nearly eighteen years after the fact.⁶² Early in Act I, Mme Meck responds to Mme Piouk's query about her physical health in Beckett's original French: 'C'est le bas-ventre. Il tombe, paraît-il.'⁶³ Brodsky translated the line as: 'It's the lower belly. It's descending, so it appears.'⁶⁴ Brodsky's take on the line echoes Gontarski's earlier translation: 'It's the lower abdomen. It's dropping it seems.'⁶⁵ Regarding the way he chose to render that piece of dialogue, Brodsky laments:

I don't know what, after a certain point, I can say about that. I went to medical school for two years. My mother-in-law was a doctor—a *French* doctor—and I couldn't get

⁶¹ Nabokov, 'Problems of Translation', p. 71.

⁶² Brodsky, personal interview.

⁶³ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 27.

⁶⁴ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Brodsky, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Gontarski, p. 14.

much out of her. I've even done some Googling to track down a plausible identity of 'lower belly': The womb? The uterus? What exactly is falling? I could find almost nothing, so I'm still uncertain how to translate it.⁶⁶

Wright, not coincidentally the only female translator of the work, seems to have got the line right when she translated it as: 'It's my womb. It seems it's becoming prolapsed.'⁶⁷ Of course, it is important to keep in mind that Wright's translation followed Brodsky's by more than a year; she therefore had the opportunity to benefit from Brodsky's mistakes (although, as an award-winning translator of many decades, she probably did not need to).

Brodsky read and took to heart many of the reviews his translation received, particularly the negative ones. He wrote a ten-page response to the editor-in-chief of *The Recorder*, Christopher Cahill, regarding Dukes's review, and wrote a two-page letter to John Banville responding to Dukes's *Irish Times* review. Buning, writing in 1997, criticized Brodsky for lashing out: 'I must say in all objectivity, [Brodsky's response letters] are themselves incredibly offensive on a personal level. Regrettably, Brodsky will defend his translation by hook or by crook, never once admitting any possible errors, even the blatant ones.'⁶⁸ Oakes, discussing the controversy that Brodsky's translation stirred, said nearly twenty years later: 'I think that was a shame, and in a sense I feel guilty for having put it on Brodsky. Because, you know, it would have been easier to get a professional translator. Any one of these guys would have given their digits to translate this book.'⁶⁹ With the passing of time, Brodsky has become more sanguine over the situation. Although he does not offer it as an excuse, he does state that when handed the assignment, 'I wasn't given guidance. I was my own guide for better or worse. I think the product, the commodity, would have been better, would have been more of a "success" if I had sent it out, or if they had sent it out for comments.'⁷⁰ That did not occur, partly owing to Brodsky's temperament, but also because 'there was some kind of *heat* on; I don't remember why. All I remember was I was being pressured—"Did you finish it? Have you finished it?" I think it would have been to everyone's advantage, as much as it goes against my grain, to send it around.'⁷¹ As to whether or not there was pressure on Brodsky to complete the translation, Oakes notes that this is simply part of the business: 'First of all, it's the rare publisher who will allow an author as much time as he or she needs. It's the rare author who turns in a manuscript within the time he

⁶⁶ Brodsky, personal interview.

⁶⁷ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Wright, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Buning, 'Eleutheria Revisited'.

⁶⁹ Oakes, personal interview.

⁷⁰ Brodsky, personal interview.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

or she says he's going to turn it in.⁷² While Wright makes no mention of working against a deadline in her 'Translator's Note', it seems quite likely that she experienced similar pressures.

The handful of glaring mistakes aside, what makes Wright's translation preferable for Buning is that 'She manages to stay close to the original text and atmosphere; she keeps the punctuation marks and stage directions intact and—unlike Brodsky—she never imposes herself on the original.'⁷³ How Brodsky managed to impose himself on the original will be discussed shortly. The first point at which Wright's fidelity to the original can be observed is in the title itself. Given that *Eleutheria*⁷⁴ is literally the one word that does not need to be translated, one would think there would at least be agreement on it. Yet Brodsky's translation spells it '*Eleuthéria*' with an accent over the third *e*, whereas Wright's translation is entitled '*Eleutheria*' (no accents). Wright's seems to be the superior rendition as it is not only the spelling preferred by most dictionaries, but also accords with the title-page of Beckett's original typescript housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas.⁷⁵

Translating Relates a Domestic Remainder

The concept of remainders actually comes into play with the title. Translating, according to Venuti, 'is always ideological because it relates a domestic remainder, an inscription of values, beliefs, and representations linked to historical moments and social positions in the domestic culture.'⁷⁶ The 'domestic remainder' supplied by the target language of a translation has the function of offsetting 'the loss of the foreign-language differences which constituted that text'.⁷⁷ What makes Beckett an unusual case from a translational perspective is that many of his works composed in French already contain Irish remainders in the French originals.⁷⁸ For instance, in *Molloy*, the novel written immediately after *Eleutheria* in 1947, the names of the main characters, Molloy and Moran, are Irish, the town names, such as Ballyba, have a distinctly Irish ring

⁷² Oakes, personal interview.

⁷³ Buning, '*Eleutheria Revisited*'.

⁷⁴ 'Ελευθερία.

⁷⁵ HRC, Seaver Collection, MS *Eleutheria*. The text published by Les Éditions de Minuit and Gontarski's original English translation are both also entitled *Eleutheria* (no accent). It should be noted that Beckett originally called the play '*Eleuthéria* or *Eleuthéromane*' in a letter of 14 May 1947 to George Reavey, though he dropped the acute accent in later correspondence (Beckett, *Letters 1941–1956*, p. 55).

⁷⁶ Lawrence Venuti, 'Translation, Community, Utopia', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Venuti, pp. 468–88 (p. 485).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

⁷⁸ Beckett wrote almost all of his first versions in French during a roughly ten-year period commencing in the mid-1940s, including, among others: *En attendant Godot*, *Fin de partie*, and the trilogy of novels *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*.

to them, and there are several allusions to Irish culture and customs in the original text.

Boxall pinpoints the distinctively English domestic remainder residing in the title: 'the connection of eleutheria with the defence of one's political liberty has determined its usage in the English language, where it has come to signify a transgressive desire for political liberty'.⁷⁹ Boxall then connects the association with transgressive ideological freedom to British colonial history, asserting that it 'informs the adoption of the word as a place name of one of the Bahaman Islands, which became an English colony in 1647'.⁸⁰ An Irish remainder is inscribed into the title as well. Beckett had employed the little-used English word 'eleutheromania' on one occasion, using it in his novel *Murphy* (1938) to refer to the lack of Irish political freedom.⁸¹ So, English and Irish domestic remainders—both relevant to each nation's varying concepts of political freedom, remainders not accessible to most French readers—can be found in the title alone. As the presence of foreign remainders residing in the source language of his original versions begins to illustrate, the topic of domestic remainders is extremely complicated when it comes to translating Beckett.

Indeed, the presence of Irish remainders in Beckett's work originally written in French is more prominent than many readers often realize because, as Andrew Gibson points out, '[t]he Irish detail in Beckett's work has doubtless been repeatedly underestimated'.⁸² The Irish presence in Beckett's French texts went deeper than details of scene or plot or characterization. It has always been assumed that Beckett adopted French as the medium for his work because, as noted above, 'they write without style'.⁸³ Yet, as Emile Morin points out in her study *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness*: 'In practice, however, Beckett's consideration of the necessity of stylelessness collapses entirely; his French remains heavily inflected with constructions that are inspired by English and that may not have occurred to a native French speaker'.⁸⁴ So it is not only his choice of vocabulary or subject matter that creates an Irish residue in Beckett's French-language originals, it is the English, and at times Hiberno-English, syntactical and grammatical structures.

Brodsky's attempts to inject a certain amount of Irish flavour into his

⁷⁹ Boxall, p. 250.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ The narrator in Beckett's *Murphy* comments that a lump of turf which refuses to ignite when Miss Counihan attempts to make a fire was 'truly Irish in its eleutheromania, it would not burn behind bars' (Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 75).

⁸² Andrew Gibson, 'Gibson, Afterword: "the skull the skull the skull in Connemara"'—Beckett, Ireland, and Elsewhere', in *Beckett and Ireland*, ed. by Sean Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 179–203 (p. 179).

⁸³ Beckett, *Dream*, p. 48.

⁸⁴ Emile Morin, *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 88.

translation, although ham-fisted at times,⁸⁵ do at least raise several intriguing questions. The first question to address is whether it is ever appropriate for a translator to insert a foreign remainder into the translation of a text that did not already at least hint at such remainders. In the case of the trilogy of novels (*Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*) that Beckett wrote in French shortly after completing *Eleutheria*, Beckett had already inscribed Irish remainders, as noted of *Molloy* above, into his original French versions. That is not the case with *Eleutheria*. Aside from matters of grammar or syntax, the play reads as a strictly French production—clearly set in France and peopled by distinctly French characters. Boxall believes that the use of a 'naturalistic Parisian locale' and the Krap family's 'naturalistically represented Parisian bourgeois salon', which are 'deemed by many [Beckett critics] to be "un-Beckettian"', help to explain the play's neglect by the Beckettian critical community.⁸⁶ The closest the play comes to an Irish remainder is at the opening of the third act, when Beckett slips the autobiographical recollection of his father teaching him to swim into Victor's fitful cries while sleeping. However, the Irishness of this recollection would be accessible only to the very slim segment of readers who are intimately familiar with Beckett's biography. Thus, it hardly qualifies as a true Irish remainder.

The most interesting substitution Brodsky makes occurs in the third act, when Victor, addressing the Glazier as well as the audience, cries out, 'Begrudgers!'⁸⁷ A sentiment that prevailed in epidemic proportions in mid-twentieth-century Ireland, according to an essay by Patrick Masterson, Irish sociologist and former president of University College Dublin, begrudgery is a virulent combination of jealousy, spite, and festering resentment.⁸⁸ The word is Brodsky's rendition of Beckett's French 'Jaloux!',⁸⁹ which would be most straightforwardly translated into English as 'jealous'. Brodsky explains the process his thinking went through in coming to 'Begrudgers!':

'You are Jealous'—I felt this would be a disservice, would be an easy way out, and would somehow castrate the compactness of the play. 'You're jealous' somehow dilutes the potency of 'Jaloux!' It just becomes sort of banal [. . .] I felt 'Jaloux' would be best translated as 'Envious one'. As this is not very conversational—very stilted—I resorted to 'Begrudger', which by its very unwieldiness had, for me, a certain conversational flavour—a certain tang—i.e., the word in its unwieldiness seemed to embody the very sentiment it conveyed.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Regarding these attempts, Dukes sniped at Brodsky 'we suspect that his grasp on English may be as shaky as that on French' ('A Version', p. 8).

⁸⁶ Boxall, pp. 245–46, 249.

⁸⁷ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Brodsky, p. 159.

⁸⁸ Patrick Masterson, 'The Concept of Resentment', *Studies*, 68 (1979), 157–72 (pp. 157–58).

⁸⁹ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 144.

⁹⁰ Brodsky, personal interview.

Wright chose to translate the line more conventionally: ‘You’re jealous!’⁹¹ Gontarski, perhaps with an eye to the ‘compactness’ to which Brodsky alludes, renders the line simply: ‘Jealous!’⁹² What makes Brodsky’s translation in this instance somewhat problematic is the fact that the word ‘begrudger’ does not appear once in Beckett’s writing—neither in his published works, nor in his unpublished journals and letters.⁹³

Brodsky’s other attempts to endow the script with a brogue,⁹⁴ literally in one instance, are less successful. For instance, in the second act the Glazier discusses how Victor broke a window: ‘Avec sa godasse.’⁹⁵ Where both Gontarski and Wright translate ‘godasse’ as ‘shoe’ (the most conventional translation), Brodsky chooses to render this line: ‘With one of his brogues.’⁹⁶ What makes this choice troubling is not simply that *brogue* does not appear in Beckett’s other writings, but that the term (*bróg* is Gaelic for ‘shoe’) was hopelessly antiquated as a general term for footwear in Ireland long before Beckett wrote the play in 1947. Brodsky admits today that ‘brogue’ was probably not the right choice: ‘I’m sure there is an equivalently clumsy archaic synonym for shoe—somewhere in cyberspace’, but he remains at a loss as to what it might be.⁹⁷

‘Gaelic “substratum”’

One factor that mitigates Brodsky’s use of an anachronistic term such as ‘brogue’ is that it mimics Beckett’s impulse to antique when translating the work of others. Kathleen Shields, in her study *Gained in Translation*, notes:

Beckett’s early translations, with the exception of his collaborative work on the *Anna Livia* fragment, are all remarkably similar in their recourse to stilted archaism [. . .]. Beckett rather bizarrely archaizes his contemporaries where there are no archaisms in the original.⁹⁸

It was not simply in his French-to-English translations that Beckett archaized. Shields notes that Beckett’s translations from Spanish to English in

⁹¹ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Wright, p. 145.

⁹² Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Gontarski, p. 111 .

⁹³ The argument could be made that Beckett does dramatize begrudgers in several of his works, the character Moran from *Molloy* being one possible example. For further discussion of this see Stephen Graf, ‘Beckett and Begrudgery: The Concept of Resentment in Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*’, *SAGE Open* (April–June 2015), 1–11.

⁹⁴ The ‘brogue’ being used here is the Anglicization of the Gaelic word (*bróg*)—referring to an Irish accent.

⁹⁵ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 91.

⁹⁶ Beckett, *Eleuthéria*, trans. by Brodsky., p. 90

⁹⁷ Brodsky, personal interview.

⁹⁸ Shields, p. 193.

the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry* are 'full of echoes of Shakespearian and Spenserian language'.⁹⁹ Indeed, Edith Greenburg of Indiana University Press expressed concern about this in a letter to Beckett regarding these translations (dated 18 October 1954), noting that there were 'a number of spots that seemed to us awkward or infelicitous or somewhat more florid than the Spanish seemed to require'.¹⁰⁰ Beckett would later brush off the Spanish translations in a letter of 21 June 1958 to Seaver as 'a purely alimentary job I was reduced to doing for UNESCO in 1950', going so far as to add: 'I was rather handicapped by my ignorance of Spanish.'¹⁰¹ Beckett's self-translation, according to Shields, demonstrates an analogous inclination to subvert the normal functioning of language by 'injecting the English language with foreign substance in order to immobilize it'.¹⁰² What made Beckett's use of archaisms particularly disruptive was the fact that, as Shields observes, 'they are not used systematically', the end result being that 'the text is neither old nor new, neither preserved in aspic, nor absolutely contemporary'.¹⁰³ In this light, Brodsky's employment of words such as 'begrudgers' and 'brogue' can be seen as serving a similarly disruptive purpose. Of course, that is entirely different from imbuing the translation with an Irish remainder.

Brodsky's occasional attempts to render sentences in Hiberno-English syntax also seem out of place. As an American, Brodsky would not have been attuned to the nuances of a spoken English language that had developed atop a 'Gaelic *stratum*'.¹⁰⁴ P. W. Joyce, in his seminal work *English as We Speak It in Ireland*, originally published in 1910, notes: '[t]he Irish language has influenced our Irish-English speech in several ways', including 'popular pronunciation',¹⁰⁵ vocabulary,¹⁰⁶ and the fact that the Irish who began speaking English were 'very conservative in retaining old customs and forms of speech'.¹⁰⁷ In her 1989 study *The Language of Irish Literature* Loreto Todd compares the impact of Irish Gaelic on the English spoken in Ireland to the 'way that African languages have influenced the English of the creole-speaking West Indians'.¹⁰⁸ The dialect that evolved came to be known as Hiberno-English, which, as T. P. Dolan explains, 'is a distinctive form of speech which reflects the centuries-old relationship between the two

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁰⁰ Beckett, *Letters 1941-1956*, p. 511, n. 2.

¹⁰¹ Beckett, *Letters 1957-1965*, pp. 153-54.

¹⁰² Shields, p. 187.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ P. W. Joyce, *English as We Speak It in Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Loreto Todd, *The Language of Irish Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 46.

languages of Irish and English in Ireland'.¹⁰⁹ While beginning as a strictly oral dialect, Hiberno-English eventually found its way into Irish literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The 'status of Hiberno-English' today 'has its roots in the ideas of writers such as Jonathan Swift, Thomas Sheridan, and Maria Edgeworth'.¹¹⁰ In a letter to the Irish playwright Sean O'Casey, the Irish author Flann O'Brien, himself a speaker of Irish, insisted that 'every Irish writer who uses the English language with resource and imagination owes an indirect debt to his native language, whether he has learned to speak it or not'.¹¹¹ Beckett did not speak Gaelic, and, like most Irish people of his social class and level of education, tended to favour what Martin Croghan refers to as 'British Standard English' in conversation and correspondence. Yet his letters to old Irish friends such as Ethna McCarthy-Leventhal and Thomas MacGreevey are often sprinkled with Hiberno-English colloquialisms.¹¹²

Beckett's work for the stage frequently followed this pattern.¹¹³ As Dolan points out, the English versions of most of Beckett's dramatic works, including those originally written in French, typically present dialogue, where it occurs, 'in standard colloquial English. Hibernicisms are rare and, when they are used, hit the mind of the audience or reader very forcibly'.¹¹⁴ This may explain why Brodsky's attempts at Hiberno-English were jarring to some readers, particularly members of the Irish reading public such as Dukes. One example of this is taken from a passage in Act II of the original, in which Mme Meck says to the Glazier: 'Ne vous occupez pas de nous'.¹¹⁵ Brodsky translates the line thus: 'Don't you be concerning yourself with us'.¹¹⁶ Beginning with the auxiliary 'Don't', the main verb is rendered in the distinctively Hiberno-English form of the present progressive tense, where the auxiliary 'be' remains in the infinitive. This relates to what Todd identifies as the Irish 'preference for the complex verbal constructions, often involving "would be" or "do . . . be"'.¹¹⁷ The patois Brodsky endeavours to embody with the above sentence is the present continuous tense of Hiberno-English often heard in the plays of

¹⁰⁹ T. P. Dolan, 'Beckett's Dramatic Use of Hiberno-English', *Irish University Review*, 14.1 (1984), 46–56 (p. 46).

¹¹⁰ Martin Croghan, 'Swift, Thomas Sheridan, Maria Edgeworth and the Evolution of Hiberno-English', *Irish University Review*, 20.1 (1990), 19–34 (p. 19).

¹¹¹ Kiberd, p. 16.

¹¹² An excellent example of this is a letter to the Irish writer Niall Montgomery, in which Beckett states that a letter from Montgomery had done Beckett's 'heart a power of good'. Beckett goes on to say, '[i]t's the quare times we'll be having' (Beckett, *Letters 1941–1956*, pp. 560, 561).

¹¹³ The signal exception to this rule was the radio play *All That Fall*. Of course, this was written for radio, not for the stage, and Beckett was adamant that it should not be adapted for the stage.

¹¹⁴ Dolan, p. 46.

¹¹⁵ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 75.

¹¹⁶ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Brodsky, p. 70.

¹¹⁷ Todd, p. 67.

J. M. Synge,¹¹⁸ O'Casey, and Brendan Behan. Yet this is a syntactical construct almost never seen in the English versions of Beckett's work for the stage. Most of Beckett's characters, even a couple of tramps such as Gogo and Didi in *Waiting for Godot*, speak, for the most part, in typical British Standard English. Gontarski's translation of the line: 'Don't pay attention to us',¹¹⁹ and Wright's: 'Stop meddling in our affairs',¹²⁰ are far more appropriate because they exploit a more standard, albeit less colourful, form of English. Lines such as the above, as well as Victor in Act II stating: 'You would be saying that I am no longer in your place and then I would be in the other room',¹²¹ illustrate that attempts by translators to insinuate alien remainders are rarely successful.

Of course, Beckett did just this in *The Old Tune*, adapted from Pinget's radio play *La Manivelle* for air on the BBC. In fact, the changes Beckett made to Pinget's script were much more radical than those that Brodsky wrought on *Eleutheria*. To begin with, Beckett transformed Toupin and Pommard, a pair of Parisians, into Cream and Gorman, ex-patriot Dubliners living in London. Dolan writes of *The Old Tune*: 'It is much more than a translation, it is a conscious adaptation of the original text into Hiberno-English, and demonstrates the acuteness and accuracy of Beckett's ear for the nuances, vocabulary, and syntax of Irish people speaking English.'¹²² In this free translation, Beckett's use of such Irishisms as 'Darling name', 'true for you', 'a power of', and 'Divil',¹²³ among others, illustrate what Dolan sees as Beckett's 'conscious attempt to hibernicize the language of his characters'.¹²⁴ The Irish literary critic Vivian Mercier sees the influence of James Joyce and O'Casey in 'a number of Dublin expressions' employed by Cream and Gorman.¹²⁵ Beckett himself, in a letter of 13 November 1959 to the BBC's Barbara Bray, admits to being 'a bit too free and Irish'. However, he justifies the changes, asserting that he 'couldn't get the rhythms any other way'.¹²⁶

Several important distinctions exist between Beckett's work on *La Manivelle* and Brodsky's rendition of *Eleutheria*. First of all, Beckett did not term *The Old Tune* a translation, but rather a 'transposition' ('rearrangement'),¹²⁷ as he noted in a letter to Pinget of 30 November 1959. This allowed for considerably more freedom in his interpretation of the text. Second, he made

¹¹⁸ Of Synge's influence on Beckett, Morin notes: 'Beckett was always unequivocal in presenting Synge as his dramatic precursor, despite his marked divergence from Synge's naturalism' (p. 38).

¹¹⁹ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Gontarski, p. 54.

¹²⁰ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Wright, p. 70.

¹²¹ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Brodsky, p. 85.

¹²² Dolan, p. 47.

¹²³ Robert Pinget, *The Old Tune*, trans. by Samuel Beckett, in *Three Plays* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), pp. 1-17 (pp. 4, 6, 10).

¹²⁴ Dolan, p. 48.

¹²⁵ Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 42-43.

¹²⁶ Beckett, *Letters 1957-1965*, p. 254.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

the 'adaptation'¹²⁸ as a favour to the younger Pinget,¹²⁹ and Beckett gave Pinget 'mon impertinente traduction dernier état' ('my impertinent translation, final version')¹³⁰ for his approval prior to the script ever being produced or published. Finally, while Beckett may have spoken and written primarily in British Standard English, Hiberno-English was all around him during his formative years because, as Croghan points out, 'Hiberno-English has had not official existence in Ireland and yet, it is the real national language for the vast majority of Ireland'.¹³¹ Beckett's radio play *All That Fall*, originally written in English for the BBC in 1956, and set near Dublin, first demonstrated to the public that, when he wished to, Beckett could be fluent in Hiberno-English. On the other hand, Brodsky, as an American, possessed no such fluency.

'[H]ardly likely to improve matters' of comprehensibility

Brodsky further muddies the waters by mixing the occasional Americanism into his translation. In fact, this is one of the main points for which Dukes chides Brodsky. Brodsky's selection of terms such 'garbage cans' over 'ash-bins' (which Beckett employed in his self-translation of *Endgame*), 'buddies' over 'friend[s]' and 'scummy' over 'pig' (*Waiting for Godot*), or 'bastard' or even 'dirty brute' (*Endgame*), to cite just a few examples, added a perplexing American remainder to Brodsky's translation. Translating a work written in French into American English is not always inappropriate. For instance, Camus acknowledged, according to Venuti, that 'the peculiarities of style, plot, and characterization that distinguish [*L'Étranger*] were derived from American fiction during the early twentieth century, especially the writing of Ernest Hemingway'.¹³² That is why Matthew Ward's 1988 Americanized English translation of *The Stranger* is found to be more authentic than Stuart Gilbert's 1946 Anglicized version. Beckett acknowledged no such indebtedness. On the contrary, in a letter to Rosset of 1 September 1953 Beckett had flatly rejected the idea of Americanizing his and Bowles's translation of *Molloy* in order to make the novel more accessible to an American readership, explaining: 'the mere substitution here and there of the American term for the English term is hardly likely to improve matters' of comprehensibility.¹³³ Thus, the introduction of American slang and idiomatic language infuses the

¹²⁸ Another term Beckett used for his translation, according to Anthony Roche, 'The "Irish" Translation of Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot*', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 199–208 (p. 206).

¹²⁹ Beckett, *Letters 1957–1965*, p. 266, n. 2.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 292, 293.

¹³¹ Croghan, p. 32.

¹³² Venuti, 'Translation, Community, Utopia', p. 474.

¹³³ Beckett, *Letters 1941–1956*, p. 65.

text with an alien remainder in a manner that Beckett had expressly rejected for the translation of *Molloy*. Such liberties might at least be understandable, if not justifiable, if Rosset had intended Brodsky's translation of *Eleutheria* for a strictly American audience. Indeed, Venuti insists that a certain amount of 'domestic remainder' is inevitable when translating because it 'is the most visible sign of the domesticating process that always functions in translation, the assimilation of the foreign text to intelligibilities and interests that define the domestic cultural situation'.¹³⁴ However, Rosset's correspondence with Lindon and the Beckett estate suggests that Rosset had a more global readership, and perhaps viewership, in mind.¹³⁵

Where Brodsky incorporates the occasional Americanism, Wright at times resorts to English slang that has an equally incongruous feel. For instance, Dr Piouk shares with M. Krap the essential point of the play: 'En vous forçant un peu, vous arriveriez peut-être à amuser les badauds.'¹³⁶ 'Les badauds' literally translates as 'The gawkers', but Wright, Gontarski, and Brodsky all employ slang in their translations. Gontarski rendered the line: 'By forcing yourself a little you could perhaps amuse the *hicks*.'¹³⁷ Brodsky substitutes another Americanism for Gontarski's: 'forcing things a bit you might perhaps manage to amuse the *rubbernecks*.'¹³⁸ Brodsky appears to be following Bermel's lead here, as Buning cites Bermel's use of 'rubber-neckers' when he observes: 'Personally, I find Bermel's views quite interesting: he prefers to keep the "colloquial impulse" of Beckett's Irish English and wishes to preserve the "amusing and impudent" style of the original.'¹³⁹ Brodsky, who was given a copy of Bermel's translation by Rosset prior to undertaking his own, insists that he wrote his independently, but admits, 'I did remember certain things he said and wrote'.¹⁴⁰ Wright translates the line: 'If you make a little effort, you might manage to keep the *punters* amused.'¹⁴¹ Given its proximity to England and the long history between the two countries, it is not surprising that Ireland should share some of its sister island's slang—Beckett himself uses 'balloxed' in *Waiting for Godot*, and 'bloody' in *Endgame*. Still, 'punters' is a distinctively English concept. Beginning as a slang term for gamblers, 'punters' is now a generally accepted informal term for the patrons of any

¹³⁴ Venuti, 'Translating Humour', p. 8.

¹³⁵ Rosset requested that an addendum be included in his publication contract stipulating that for ten years following the appearance of his translation no stage production of the play should take place anywhere in the world without Rosset's prior consent. Edward Beckett rejected this proposal (New York, BRP, Box 56 (correspondence between Jérôme Lindon and Barney Rosset, 16 February 1995)).

¹³⁶ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 40.

¹³⁷ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Gontarski, p. 29, emphasis added.

¹³⁸ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Brodsky, pp. 30–31, emphasis added.

¹³⁹ Buning, 'Eleutheria Revisited'.

¹⁴⁰ Brodsky, personal interview.

¹⁴¹ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Wright, p. 33, emphasis added.

business. Another example occurs in the first act, when Mme Meck declares in Beckett's original script: 'Je serai pompette!'¹⁴² Gontarski and Brodsky both translate 'pompette' as the more universal 'tipsy', while Wright substitutes the English slang term 'tiddly'.¹⁴³ The general effect of this reliance on English slang is to create an English remainder in Wright's translation that is equally as alien to the French work created by the Irish Beckett as Brodsky's American remainder or his ill-advised attempts at Irish remainders.

[T]he queer kind of English that my queer French deserves'

In the end, neither Gontarski's, nor Bermel's, nor Brodsky's, nor even Wright's translation could ever be considered a complete success because each version would always be found wanting when compared with a translation that does not even exist—that of Beckett himself. Of course, any translation would fall short of such an idealized version, including Beckett's own self-translations of other works. Beckett was notoriously hypercritical of his own attempts at translating his work, never feeling completely satisfied with a translated version.¹⁴⁴ If he was dissatisfied with his self-translations, Beckett was still less patient with others' efforts to render his work. For instance, in a letter to Lindon of 19 February 1953 he had commented on Elmar Tophoven's German translation of *En attendant Godot*:¹⁴⁵ 'Je ne trouve pas la traduction trèsbonne. Pas mal de contresens, peu de style' ('I find the translation not very good. A fair number of blunders and not much style').¹⁴⁶ Beckett had been particularly doubtful about entrusting the task of translating his work into English to anyone other than himself, as he confided to Lindon in a letter of 5 February 1953: 'je sais que je ne supporterai pas mon travail traduit en anglais par un autre' ('I know that I shall not be able to bear my own work being

¹⁴² Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 33.

¹⁴³ Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Wright, p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ Just a few examples. After translating *Comment c'est* as *How It Is* in 1962, Beckett told Raymond Federman: 'I failed again. The English language resisted me' (quoted in Knowlson and Knowlson, p. 302). He described translating *Fin de partie* in a letter of 30 January 1957 to MacGreevy as a 'losing battle' (Trinity College Dublin, Samuel Beckett Manuscript Collection, Letters to Thomas MacGreevy, MS 10402), and he said of the same play in a letter of 30 April 1957 to the American director Alan Schneider that the English translation 'will inevitably be a poor substitute for the original' (*No Author Better Served*, p. 14). Finally, he said of his English translation of *En attendant Godot* in a letter to Barney Rosset of 1 September 1953, 'I do not myself consider it very satisfactory' (Beckett, *Letters 1941–1956*, p. 397). Beckett was equally critical of his efforts at self-translation from English to French, noting in a letter to MacGreevy (dated 24 November 1947), '*Murphy* is out in French, badly translated by me, and it is not worth reading' (Beckett, *Letters 1941–1956*, p. 65).

¹⁴⁵ Tophoven, Gontarski has noted, 'is best known for the definitive German translations of most of [Samuel Beckett's] drama, poetry, and prose' (C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 584). Tophoven's role as Beckett translator began with *Warten auf Godot*.

¹⁴⁶ Beckett, *Letters 1941–1956*, pp. 367, 368.

translated into English by someone else').¹⁴⁷ Beckett had been dissatisfied with the final English translation of *Molloy* produced by Bowles, 'with whom', according to biographer Anthony Cronin, Beckett 'had lost touch for long periods towards the end of their joint effort'.¹⁴⁸ Beckett found it necessary to overhaul Bowles's translation completely before it could be published, which caused Beckett to conclude, in a letter to Rosset of 25 June 1953: 'I know from experience how much more difficult it is to revise a bad translation than to do the thing oneself.'¹⁴⁹ So when Cyril Lucas wrote to Beckett in November 1955 enquiring into the possibility of translating *Malone meurt* or *L'Innommable*, Beckett declined the offer in a letter of 4 January 1956: 'I am by no means a good translator, and my English is rusty, but I simply happen to be able still to write the queer kind of English that my queer French deserves.'¹⁵⁰

From this perspective, one can understand why Lindon and the Beckett literary estate were so adamantly opposed to *Eleutheria* being translated by anyone other than Beckett himself. Beckett's self-translation process bears brief examination at this point because the other interesting question raised by the Brodsky and Wright translations of *Eleutheria* is: will it ever be appropriate for works which Beckett self-translated into English, such as *En attendant Godot* and *Fin de partie*, to be retranslated into English by someone else? The question is not as absurd as it may appear on the surface given the fact that Beckett's approach to translating his own work was not unlike the 'transposition' he applied to Pinget's *La Manivelle*. Leslie Hill captures the critical consensus on the topic within Beckett scholarship when he asserts: 'Beckett's translations [are] *not* translations in any received sense of the word.'¹⁵¹ A case in point: the process of translating *Molloy* with Beckett, Bowles explains, 'was not a translation as that term is usually understood. It was not a mere matter of swapping counters, of substituting one word for another. It was as far apart from machine translation as one could imagine.' Instead, as Beckett repeatedly stressed to Bowles, 'what we were trying to do was to write the book again in another language—that is to say, write a new book'.¹⁵² If Beckett's English version was a 'new book', separate and distinct from the French original, is it unreasonable to wonder what a more literal translation might look like? What new insights might such a translation offer to non-French-speaking Beckett aficionados?

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 357, 358.

¹⁴⁸ Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), p. 435.

¹⁴⁹ Beckett, *Letters 1941–1956*, p. 385.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 592.

¹⁵¹ Leslie Hill, 'Beckett, Writing, Politics: Answering for Myself', in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 9: *Beckett and Religion: Beckett/Aesthetics/Politics*, ed. by Marius Buning and others (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 215–21 (p. 217).

¹⁵² Bowles, quoted in Knowlson and Knowlson, p. 109.

[T]here exists no “prime instance”

Beckett often made substantive alterations when self-translating from French into English. For instance, in the opening of the English version of *Molloy* the title character speaks of seeing two men whom he designates ‘A’ and ‘C’. Yet in the original French version Molloy refers to those same two figures as ‘A’ and ‘B’. The result of this one, seemingly minor yet thoroughly baffling, alteration, as Paul Stewart notes, is to ‘wrest originality away from the French version’. The reason for this is: ‘The A and C story is not and cannot be a mere copy of the A and B story.’¹⁵³ Differences in tone can also be detected between the French and English versions of *Molloy*: as Marjorie Perloff notes, ‘the English has a playful edge not present in the French’.¹⁵⁴ When rewriting his works in English, Beckett routinely made omissions both of whole sentences and of sections within sentences.¹⁵⁵ That a work should develop differently in English and in French should not be surprising, given the different possibilities and limitations imposed by each language. Another bilingual author, Rainer Maria Rilke, confided in a letter to Lou Andreas Salome: ‘Several times I attempted the same theme in French and German, and to my astonishment it developed on different lines in the two languages.’¹⁵⁶ As Beckett recreated his works from French into English, or from English into French, he found, like Rilke, that the works ‘developed on different lines’.

The net result of the comprehensive changes in character, theme, detail, and description brought about by the different lines of creation Beckett was forced to follow in the different languages, as Steven Connor notes, ‘is the loss of a single definitive work which can orientate and control the play of derived or secondary versions; with Beckett as both originator and translator, the two versions of his text both have an equal claim to be “definitive”’.¹⁵⁷ Or, as Lori Chamberlain put it, ‘Beckett challenges a conventional privileging of the “original”’.¹⁵⁸ Thus, if there exist for Beckett’s self-translated works essentially two original pieces—one in French and the other in English—then might there not be a place some day for an English translation of a French original text, or vice versa?

¹⁵³ Paul Stewart, *Zone of Evaporation: Samuel Beckett’s Disjunctions* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 99.

¹⁵⁴ Marjorie Perloff, ‘Une voix pas la mienne: French/English Beckett and the French/English Reader’, in *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, ed. by Alan Warren Friedman and others (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), pp. 36–48 (p. 47).

¹⁵⁵ Brian T. Fitch, ‘The Relationship between *Campagne* and *Company*: One Work, Two Texts, Two Fictive Universes’, in *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, ed. by Friedman and others pp. 25–35 (p. 26).

¹⁵⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, quoted in John McFarlane, ‘Modes of Translation’, *Durham University Journal*, 155.3 (1953), 77–93 (p. 91).

¹⁵⁷ Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 112.

¹⁵⁸ Lori Chamberlain, ‘“The Same Old Stories”: Beckett’s Poetics of Translation’, in *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, ed. by Friedman and others, pp. 17–24 (p. 20).

Another reason why future translations of Beckett's work should at least be considered is the nature of the translation process itself.¹⁵⁹ The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset has observed, 'it stands to reason that diverse translations are fitting for the same text'.¹⁶⁰ Might this not also be true with other works by Beckett, as seems to have been the case with *Eleutheria*? Even though Brodsky's version is almost universally considered to be inferior to Wright's, Oakes correctly points out that 'Brodsky came up with all sorts of things that nobody else had gotten [. . .] things like "taylorizing"'.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, any new English translation of *En attendant Godot* or *Fin de partie* might be regarded as a first translation, if one accepts the contention of the Beckett scholar Brian T. Fitch that 'in the case of Beckett's texts *there exists no "prime instance"*'.¹⁶²

Translation, as Walter Benjamin averred in 'The Task of the Translator', 'issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife'. As a result, 'translation marks their stage of continued life'.¹⁶³ Translation does not merely render a work in a different language: it also offers a work 'continued life' by adding new audiences and providing new interpretations of established works. At least twenty-six different English translations of Homer's *Odyssey* have been published over the years. No fewer than fifteen English versions of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*—four in the twenty-first century alone—have appeared since its original publication in Spanish in 1605. Should it therefore be unthinkable that some future translator might try his or her hand at *En attendant Godot*? This may be the most important question raised by the two published translations—both good and bad in their own ways—of one of the few works that Samuel Beckett did not translate into English himself, *Eleutheria*. Should it be surprising for such questions to arise from a play entitled 'Freedom'?

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¹⁵⁹ 'Future' here will be the fairly distant future, as one can safely assume that the Beckett literary estate will not permit such translations to occur prior to the lapse of copyright protection.

¹⁶⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, 'The Misery and the Splendor of Translation', trans. by Elizabeth Gamble Miller, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Venuti, pp. 49–63 (p. 62).

¹⁶¹ Oakes, personal interview. Brodsky's 'taylorizing sentimentality' (Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Brodsky, p. 147) was his take on Beckett's 'sensiblerie taylorisante' (Beckett, *Eleutheria*, p. 135), which Gontarski had translated in his rough draft as 'tailor-made' ('tailleur' being the French for 'tailor': Beckett, *Eleutheria*, trans. by Gontarski, p. 104). Wright substitutes 'Stakhanovite mawkishness' (Beckett, trans. by Wright, p. 135), referencing the Soviet application of Taylorist efficiencies.

¹⁶² Fitch, p. 140.

¹⁶³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', trans. by Harry Zohn, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Venuti, pp. 15–23 (p. 16).