Translating the Plural Text: Samuel Beckett in Persian

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Abstract: The process by which a literary text comes to be is among the understudied domains of translation studies. This article draws on my experience of translating Samuel Beckett's late prose works into Persian to explore how a convergence of translation studies and genetic criticism can affect and broaden the literary translator's choices. I outline a new way for literary translation to approach unstable source texts which consist of a set of drafts. I demonstrate how my translation of Beckett's late prose works into Persian consists of translating the differential space between the English and the French versions of Beckett's work, on the one hand, and between the variants of each version according to the variorum editions of his works, on the other.

Key words: Samuel Beckett, translation, *avant-textes*, variants, Persian

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Translation studies by and large presumes a one-to-one relation between the source and the target text. Typically, the final published text is regarded as the definitive source text. However, recent advances in genetic criticism have called into question the authority of the published text. In the course of the evolution of a text across its various drafts, the published text can be considered a remnant of an abandonment rather than the outcome of a determined closure. The increasing availability of drafts, *avant-textes*, and variorum editions of literary texts has enhanced our understanding of literary texts as unstable and perpetually in progress. The neologism "avant-texte" was coined by Jean Bellemin-Noël, in 1972, to designate the set of drafts, manuscripts, proofs, and variants that materially precede a published work.[2] In the course of studying the genesis of a literary work, "the totality of formulations that, as previous possibilities, have become part of a given work of writing,"[3] increasingly shapes our understanding of literary texts. Notwithstanding this development, translation studies has not paid sufficient critical attention to the interpretive possibilities that the textual history of a manuscript offers to its translator. Significantly, genetic

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[2] Jean Bellemin-Noël, *Le texte et l'avant-texte: les brouillons d'un poème de Milosz* (Paris: Larousse, 1972), 15.
[3] Jean Bellemin-Noël, "Psychoanalytic Reading and the Avant-texte," in Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden (eds.), *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-Textes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 31.

criticism has modified our perception of the original texts as processual and heterogeneous rather than as definite and unitary. The convergence of textual criticism and translation studies provides us with analytical tools to answer a number of questions: how can a text's genesis affect its translation? What translational relations can be established to an unstable source text? How can the textual pluralism of the original expand our understanding of literary translation as a creative and experimental process?

In this essay, I undertake to address these questions by drawing on my ongoing experience of translating Samuel Beckett's late prose works into Persian. From a translational point of view, Samuel Beckett's work offers many examples of unstable source texts. This is because, firstly, Beckett as a self-translator made most of his works available in both English and French originals;[4] secondly, the increasing availability of bilingual variorum editions of Beckett's works in the past decade provides a rich source of information about the evolution of these texts across their various manuscripts and typescripts.[5] Van Hulle has studied the nexus between genetic criticism and translation through examples drawn from Samuel Beckett's and James Joyce's manuscripts, and has shown that genetic criticism and translation can be mutually beneficial in different ways.[6] He argues in favour of this interdisciplinary conflation in view of its contribution to bringing about a more complete and definitive original text free from errors, finding the lost parts of the original,

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[4] For case studies of Beckett's work in translation, see Elmar Tophoven, "Translating Beckett," in *Beckett in the Theatre*, ed. Dougald McMillan, and Martha Fehsenfeld (London: John Calder, 1988), 317–324; Adriaan van der Weel and Ruud Hisgen, "Unheard Footfalls Only Sound. 'Neither' in Translation," in *Beckett in the 1990s*, ed. Marius Buning, and Lois Oppenheim (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi: 1993), 345– 364; Matías Battistón, "How I did not translate Beckett," *Translation Studies* 12:1 (2019): 109-123.

[5] See "Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project," for the advances in the research on Samuel Beckett's manuscripts at: https://www.beckettarchive.org/.

[6] Dirk Van Hulle, "Translation and genetic criticism: Genetic and editorial approaches to the 'untranslatable' in Joyce and Beckett," in *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies* 14: 40–53.

calling attention to the contingencies of the original, and resolving untranslatability in one draft by another variant from another draft.

In this essay, I focus on several decisive moments in my own experience of literary translation when the tension between the unfinished and the finished, and between the draft and the final manuscript, could not be resolved towards any stability. I argue that a translational encounter with Beckett's *avant-textes* and textual variations can generate a better understanding of the de-compositional processes within these texts. By de-compositional processes, I mean refraction of the text through different languages and drafts, which releases potential interpretations by exposing the text to other languages in the process of translation.[7] In the bilingual variorum editions of Beckett's works, readers witness the prismatic refraction of what was previously read as a singular finalized text. Before their eyes, the authorized text begins to scatter into multiple finished and unfinished drafts, outlines, sketches, revisions, strikethroughs, omissions, insertions, hesitations, and decisions. With variorum editions, the text is transformed into a decision-making dynamics similar to what happens during translation. Also the transition of a text from one revision to the next is comparable to translation: each revision translates its previous draft towards a more accurate equivalent of the idea that the author has to shape, in the same way that a translation can be perceived as an approximation of an original idea (whether this original idea belongs to the text or belongs to the translator's interpretation of the text).

The intersection of translation and genetic criticism, in this sense, is concerned less with establishing the authority and authenticity of the original than with pointing to the diversity and plurality that constitutes the original. By reflecting on the translations I made of Beckett's works

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[7] For a prismatic conception of translation, see Matthew Reynolds (ed.), *Prismatic Translation* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2019).

into Persian from 2002-2019, I demonstrate how translation can proceed upon the differential spaces between English and French versions of a text, on the one hand, and between the textual variants on the other hand. Before examining this approach in detail, I will briefly describe the context in which Beckett's work is received and translated into Persian.

Beckett's Works in Persian

The translation of European literature into Persian has shaped Persian literary modernism (*tajaddod*) since its inception in the late nineteenth century. The long-standing dialogue between European literary norms and Iranian writers' desire for renovating their cultural field continues to present the Persian literary tradition with new styles, genres, and modes of experimentation with language. Samuel Beckett has been one of the most translated and one of the most widely read European writers in Iran. Since 1967, when the first translations of *Waiting for Godot* into Persian were published, [8] except for his collected essays and his collected poems, nearly all his plays, novels and short prose works have been translated at least once into Persian.[9] Translated books and articles about Beckett's work increasingly continue to appear, testifying to the popularity of Beckett's work for Iranian readers.

Since Davud Rashidi's production of *Waiting for Godot* (*Dar entezār-e godo*) in 1968, a decisive turning point in modern Iranian theatre, productions of Beckett's plays have continued to exert significant influence on modern Persian theatre. Najaf Daryabandari's translation of a selection of Beckett's plays, published in two volumes in 1977, played an important role in introducing Beckett's work to the Persian readers. However, the reception of Beckett's theatre was—and still is—considerably filtered through the label of "absurd," the label attached by Martin

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[8] These include Sirus Tahbaz's translation (Tehran: Khusheh, 1967) and Saʿid Imani's (Tehran: Ashrafi, 1967).
[9] *How It Is* has not been translated into Persian yet.

Esslin to the post-World War II European theatre in his ground-breaking study, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961). Esslin's concept of the absurd, usually translated as meaninglessness (*maʿnā-bākhtegi*), was used to justify the inconsistency and inaccuracy of many of the translations of Beckett's works into Persian.

Iranian novelist Hormoz Shahdadi (b. 1949) gives a brief account of the general Iranian encounter with Beckett's work and its destructive effects on modern Persian theatre in *The Night of Terror* (*Shab-e howl*), one of the most important modernist Persian novels, written in 1979. In the novel, one of the characters recounts how he was shocked to have read one of Beckett's works in an unintelligible Persian. He recounts how he found Beckett's original text by contrast quite intelligible. "By intelligible," he explains, "I mean that not only do the plays have a distinct form and structure, but also all the sentences are grammatically correct and meaningful" (153). He then confesses that, after comparing all of Beckett's translations into Persian with their originals, he realized that "the Persian Samuel Beckett had absolutely nothing to do with its English counterpart."[10] He blames incompetent translators for this fault and relates the emergence within Iran of an absurd theatre, rather than a theatre of the absurd, to young playwrights who took those translations seriously and began to write plays according to the impressions they received from those inaccurate translations: "the result has been a weird theatre in Persian: Weird characters utter nonsense and perform nonsense on the stage" (154).

For half a century, the reception of Beckett's work in Iran has been filtered through the assumption of absurdism underlying all of his work. Moreover, as was mentioned earlier, this assumption is itself underwritten by the translation—or the mistranslation—of the term "absurd" as meaninglessness (*bi-maʿnāyi*) or nihilist (*puch*) in Persian. The outdated existentialist Beckett

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[10] Hormoz Shahdadi, *Shab-e howl* (Night of Terror) (Tehran: Zaman, 1979), 151 [Translation mine].

of the earliest phase of Beckett studies in European universities still predominates in Iran, and Beckett is still popularly referred to as a hero of nihilism. For example, in her bilingual Persian-English glossary of literary terms, Dad proposes *te'ātr-e puch-nomā* or *te'ātr-e puchi* (both literally meaning "nihilistic theatre") for the term "theatre of the absurd."[11] Dad describes the language used in the theatre of the absurd as "tending to chaos and meaninglessness, actually lacking any sense of communicability" (175). By contrast, Iranian philosopher Daryush Shaygan (d. 2018) used a transliteration of the word and maintained that Persian words, *puchi* and *bihudegi* do not reflect what "absurd" really means.[12]

In the past decade, this existentialist understanding of the absurd has been countered by a Frankfurt School-driven anti-enlightenment reading of Beckett. In a footnote to his translation of A. Alvarez's *Samuel Beckett* (1973), Iranian critic Morad Farhadpour tried to dispel the misunderstandings of the term "absurd" and its implications for the general Iranian reception of Beckett's work by highlighting a post-enlightenment critique of unbridled instrumentalist rationality in Beckett's work. Farhadpour suggested that the best path to understanding absurdity passes through etymology, with the term being derived from the Latin *absurdus*, literally meaning "irrational," "incongruent," and "out of tune."[13] Farhadpour proposed that in order to grasp the absurdity of Beckett's work, one has to foreground linguistic and structural irrationality, which Farhadpour perceived in mathematical terms in the context of "irrational numbers." With irrational numbers in Persian called *gong* (meaning "dumb," "inarticulate"), it is the element of incommunicability rather than meaninglessness which is foregrounded in Beckett's writings. Although this was a modified perception of the newly imported term "the absurd" in the Persian

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[11] Sima Dad, *Glossary of Literary Terms* (*Farhang-e estelāhāt-e adabi*) (Tehran: Morvarid, 2006), 174.
[12] Daryush Shaygan, *Asia versus West* (*Āsiyā dar barābar-e gharb*) (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1977), 123.
[13] Morad Farhadpour (translator), *Samuel Beckett*, by A. Alvarez (Tehran: Tarh-e now, 1995), 24.

language, it could not save the Persian Beckett from the grips of nihilism with which his writing was popularly associated. However, affected by this philosophical approach that viewed Beckett's writing in opposition to the instrumental reasoning of European rationalism, more translators began to make Beckett's work hyper-meaningful through lengthy paratextual materials that clarified the text's multi-layered philosophical and historical intertexts.[14]

Translating Inexpression in Beckett's Work

Far from the debates over the translation of the meaningful or of the meaningless in Beckett, I turned my attention to the translation of the inexpressive in his work, that is, the extremely concise, fragmented language of Beckett's late prose narratives (such as *Nohow On* and "Ping") and late dramatic works (such as *Not I* and *Footfalls*), with minimal desire or power to express. Beckett best described this inexpressive language experience by the term "literature of unword [*Literatur des Unworts*]" that he had coined in his "German Letter" (1937). For Beckett, literature culminates in a point where language turns into a "sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through the whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence."[15] Beckett had famously projected this non-expressive mode of language in his dialogues with Duthuit as "the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."[16]

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[14] For example, *Nanāmidani*, Mehdi Navid's translation of *Unnameable* (Tehran: Cheshmeh, 2015), contains 170 pages of endnotes, the same length of the novel's text in Persian.

[15] Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1983), 173.

[16] Beckett, *Disjecta,* 139.

How is inexpression grasped if it is graspable, and how can it be presented through translation? These questions go beyond translating the meaningful and the meaningless in Beckett's work. The opening passage of *Worstward Ho*, "On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said somehow on,"[17] makes sense perfectly, though not easily. More than a plethora of deep metaphysical meanings about truth, being, life, world, and humanity, the passage sounds like a pure verbal performance that calls for being experienced rather than being interpreted. The Persian language did not provide me with an easy solution for translating the simple preposition, "on," which does and does not make sense at the same time. The Persian language did not provide me with a good number of monosyllabic words with which I could reproduce the beating rhythm of Beckett's prose. Language is referred to as meaningful or meaningless only within a framework that tasks language with communication. Within this framework, meaninglessness occurs when language fails to accomplish its communicative task. However, as Michel Foucault has shown, language possesses an exteriority which is not reducible to its expressive function. Foucault compared this inexpressive aspect of language to the proposition "I speak," which does not say anything, does not posit anything but itself, and is nothing but the taking place of language itself.[18] "If the only site for language is indeed the solitary sovereignty of 'I speak,'" Foucault asserts, "then in principle nothing can limit it—not the one to whom it is addressed, not the truth of what it says, not the values or systems of representation it utilizes. In short, it is no longer discourse and the communication of meaning, but a spreading forth of language in its raw state, an unfolding of pure exteriority" (11).

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[17] Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On* (London: John Calder, 1989), 101.
[18] Michel Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside*, tr. Jeffrey Mehlman and Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books), 1991.

However, to translate the unsaying of language—which is not to be mistaken with its meaninglessness or absurdity— turns out to be paradoxical task because translation as such is mimetic in its relation to an original. It is inconceivable to reconcile translation as representation with a mode of writing that refuses any expressive or communicative function. For Derrida, the inexpressive aspect of Beckett's writing is the result of a topical decomposition. In an interview with Derek Attridge, Derrida postulates that Beckett's texts are already self-deconstructive in such a way that nothing remains for a deconstructionist to do with his work, and that Beckett's aesthetics cannot be reduced to a simple opposition of nihilism and non-nihilism, or, the meaningless versus the meaningful. By contrast, he proposes that Beckett's work should be appreciated in "[t]he composition, the rhetoric, the construction and the rhythm of his work, even the ones that seem the most "decomposed," that's what "remains" finally the most "interesting," that's the work, that's the signature, this remainder which remains when the thematic is exhausted (and also exhausted, by others, for a long time now, in other modes)."[19] With this in mind, I decided that, in order to touch the inexpressive core of Beckett's writing, my translation should reproduce the moments in which his texts de-compose and de-construct themselves. In the next section, I demonstrate how I approached this task in my translation of Beckett's late prose work, *Nohow On*.[20]

Translating Double and Plural Source Texts

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[19] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 61.

[20] In my translations of Beckett's texts, I benefited from both French and English versions of his works (mostly translated by himself), and I have made use of the variorum editions of his texts (where available). The most important principle in my translations was to remain as faithful as possible to a literal rendering with the purpose of maintaining the surface arrangement of words. I have translated other works of Beckett, such as *Worstward Ho*, "Ping," "One Evening," *Not I* and *Footfalls* with the same approach, though with slightly different methods. My translation of *Nohow On* is forthcoming under the title *Se-late* (Tehran: Goman). "One Evening" was published under the title "Yek sar shab," *Shabaka Āftāb Magazine* 9 (2012): 120-121. The translations of *Not I* and *Footfalls* ("Man na" and "Pā," respectively in Persian) were intended for stage productions and have not been published. The translation of *"Ping"* was intended for a piano accompaniment and has not been published.

Company (1980), along with *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1983), forms a triptych of minimal representation characteristic of Beckett's late prose fiction, titled *Nohow On*. In fifty-nine paragraphs, *Company* narrates a figure lying in the dark and hearing a voice. The whole text can be summarized as the story of hearing voices in the dark: "A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine."[21] The voice the figure hears in the dark is nothing the voice in the figure's head, like the interior dialogue of one with oneself as other. The text either meticulously describes the present state of the figure lying in the dark—the figure is addressed by the pronoun "he" in these cases—or recounts the figure's past memories—he is addressed by the pronoun "you" in these parts. By these doubling strategies, Beckett deconstructs the opposition between dialogue and monologue, and reveals the dialogic elements of an interior monologue. Moreover, he creates a neutral space in the text for this deconstruction to take place: a liminal state between the representational and the performative. In the following, I give an example of this liminal state in the text, and explain how I tried to keep the balance between the performative and the declarative in my translation.

The very first sentences bear traces of performativity. This performativity can be demonstrated on two intertwined levels: narratival and syntactical. The narratival performativity occurs in the opening sentence, "[a] voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine," which condenses the whole narrative. Moreover, the ending of the text, "the fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were. Alone" (52), confirms that little change has been made to the initial inactive state of the figure with the progression of the narrative. Raised in a culture rich with hagiographic stories, I tend to associate the act of hearing voices to *elhām* (inspiration) which is considered, in Islamicate-Persian poetics,

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[21] Beckett, *Nohow On*, 5.

the point of departure for any creative act. Many premodern Persian poets began their poems by addressing the conventional muses of Islamic poetics, that is, God, and Mohammad who received the Qur'ān, according to tradition, entirely through hearing a voice (*wahy*). Reading the first sentence as the microcosm of the whole text, I regard *Company* as a text, that by stopping on the moment of its birth, narrates its own genesis and exhausts its own creation up to the end of the story.[22]

The narratival performativity in question is constituted by the imperative "imagine" at the beginning of the text, which synchronizes the text and the reader. Given that it is the reader who is addressed by this imperative "imagine," then we can imagine, as readers, the voice throughout the text comes to "us," and that it is "us" who receive the text in the darkness of our heads. Thus, the "company" in the title refers also to the companionship of the reader and the text in the process of the reader's silent reading. McMullan regards this effect as the reproduction of the narrative "in the present moment of the narrative or performative utterance" (104).[23]

The conflation of the monologue and the dialogue in *Company* corresponds to the indistinguishability of self and other, which characterises the original voice. I call it "original" because narrativity of *Company* is solely premised on the existence of this voice. In most of the memory paragraphs (that is, the 15 paragraphs in which past memories are recounted in contrast to the forty-four paragraphs describing the figure's present situation in the dark), an eye is present that chases the "you" addressed in the memories: someone sees and says oneself from without and as an other: "You stand at the tip of the high board. High above the sea. In it your father's upturned face. Upturned to you. You look down to the loved trusted face. He calls to you to jump. He calls,

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[22] For a study on the allusions to the Book of Genesis, see Peter Shields, "Beckett's Labours Lost: *Company* and the Paradox of Creation," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 11 (2001): 475-85.
[23] Anna Mcmullan, "Irish/Postcolonial Beckett," in *Samuel Beckett Studies*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 89-109.

Be a brave boy. The red round face. The thick moustache. The greying hair. The swell sways it under and sways it up again. The far call again, Be a brave boy. Many eyes upon you. From the water and from the bathing place."[24]

The main outcome of the indistinguishability of self and other is the dissolution of "I" throughout *Company*. The first-person pronoun is not used in *Company* but negatively and privatively: "Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not" (6). The figure deprives himself of an "I" in *Company* because he has already torn himself apart, has turned himself into an other, in order to escape loneliness by maintaining a communication with his devised other. As he cannot claim to an "I," it is natural that sometimes he imagines himself as overhearing a communication between two others. The multiplication of this fissured alienated "I" intensifies the neutral deconstructive space in *Company*.

Echoing the fundamental undecidability in *Company*, this structural mitosis has also has a translational aspect. Using Krance's bilingual variorum edition of *Company/Compagnie*,[25] I was able to trace evolution of the text across the two languages. According to Knowlson, Beckett's notes in January 1977 formed a piece named "Verbatim" or "Voice" which constituted the ur-text of *Company*.[26] An examination of the changes the text has undergone across languages and across drafts shows us how in the course of its evolution, the text obtained specific linguistic features that symptomatize an aporetic state between translation and original. Beckett wrote *Company* first in English, translated it into French and then adapted and edited the English version according to the

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[24] Beckett, *Nohow On*, 14.
[25] Charles Krance (ed.), *Company/Compagnie: Bilingual Variorum Edition* (New York: Garland, 1993).
[26] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 194.

French version. If, as Krance suggests, Beckett's text is essentially hybrid, and that the French and English versions of *Company/Compagnie* are individually insufficient but mutually supplementary (xvi), then the best way to translate it would be to translate it simultaneously along both English and French versions. Similarly, Fitch has emphasized "the need for *both* versions, *both* texts, of his texts" in studying all of Beckett's bilingual works and has argued that "to take only one version of the work is to make a wholly arbitrary decision, for on what possible grounds one would one take one rather than the other? To take the first is to fail to recognize that it was followed by another version; and to take the second is to fail to recognize that another version preceded it."[27]

Thus, I projected a translation not from a single original text but from the differential space between the French and English versions, a translation that interiorizes the mutual incompleteness that takes place in the encounter between the two versions. So, if there were anything to be transferred through my translation, it would be found in the differences between the supplementary English and French versions of Beckett's text. From a Derridaean point of view, the idea of the supplement implies something which is not complete in itself for the reason that if it were already complete it had no need of a supplement. The fact that one can still add to the original means that it is possible to make the original more present, which speaks to an essential lack within the original.[28] By the same token, a translation is premised on the fundamental void at the heart of the original. Supplementarity of the English and French versions of Beckett's text opens up a void in the mutual insufficiency of the two versions. In other words, the two versions of Beckett's text do not complete each other but reveal each other's voids in their supplementariy.

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[27] Brian Fitch, *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of Bilingual Work* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988), 227.

[28] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 141-164.

An example of this mutual insufficiency is the following short opening paragraph in *Company/Compagnie,* which consists of two sentences: "A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine" in the English version, and "*Une voix parvient à quelqu'un dans le noir. Imaginer*," in the French version.[29] A comparison between the two versions reveals a grammatical ambiguity in the French version that does not exist in the English version: the shift from the clearly imperative verb "imagine" in the English version to the infinitive "imaginer" in the French version. The infinitive form can be used in French for signifying an imperative mood. In such usages, an exclamation mark would be clarifying. The absence of an exclamation mark, however, is justified in *Compagnie* in relation to the emphasis in the text on the monotony of the voice: "Another trait the flat tone. No life. Same flat tone at all times. For its affirmations. For its negations. For its interrogations. For its exclamations. For its imperations. Same flat tone."[30]

The undecidability between the infinitive and the imperative is significant in the French version. The ambiguity could be avoided by simply using "imagine" or "imaginez." From the vantage point of the hearer in French, the voice undergoes an undecidability between the homophones "imaginer" and "imaginez," and is unable to resolve this undecidability. However, the reader's eye can resolve this tension which Derrida calls *polylogue*: "This tension risked between writing and speech, this vibration of grammar in the voice, is one of the themes of the *polylogue*. And this *polylogue*, it seems, is destined for the eye; it corresponds only to an interior voice, an absolutely low voice."[31] By contrast, Beckett's polylogue that takes place on the word "imaginer" between the infinitive and imperative moods is not resolved, in the French version, through the shift from speech to writing, from reader's ears to their eyes. In order to be decided,

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[29] *Company/Compagnie: Bilingual Variorum Edition*, 2-3.
[30] *Nohow On*, 15-16.
[31] Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, tr. Ned Lukacher (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 22.

yet another passage is needed, from the French to the English version. One has to read the definitely imperative "imagine" in the English version to overcome the ambiguity of the French "imaginer." Now, the undecidability between the imperative and the affirmative shows a significant aspect of the narrative which is absent from the English version: that the whole narrative is indistinguishable, as was argued earlier, from the original command at its beginning. The identification between the imperative "imagine" and the infinitive "imagine" implies that the very commanding voice is imagined, and this enables the reader to appropriate the text/voice.

Therefore, instead of choosing an expected equivalent for the ambivalent "imagine," such as the imperative *khiyāl kon*, I opted for an extraordinary non-Persian word: *takhayyal*. The word is originally Arabic, and is the imperative form of the verb "to imagine." As a heteronym which means both "imagination" and "imagine," the word produces the same polylogue effect as in the French version. Moreover, the Persian language recognizes only the infinitive mood of the heteronym. While the word is not used in the imperative sense in the Persian language, it has a familiar ring to it for the Persian reader who might have encountered similar borrowed Arabic-inflected phrases in pre-modern Persian texts, as in the phrase "*fa-ta'mmal* [think]." The decision was made by prioritizing the polylogue effect that was not found in one (English or French) source text but in the differential space between the two versions. The undecidability of the word *takhayyal* between the Arabic and Persian, on the one hand, and between the infinitive ad the imperative, on the other hand, made it an appropriate translation for "imagine/imaginer" in the original, though inappropriate from the point of view of a translation that would priviledge fluency and that would render only the imperative mood (*khiyāl kon*).

Considering the duality of the original, I prepared three drafts in three different rounds of translation: (A) translation from the original English; (B) translation from the original French; and

(C) comparative translation based on the differential space between the French and the English versions, prepared by moving back and forth, simultaneously, across the two versions. However, during my work on the draft C, I noticed another differential space in *Company* which could make the task of translation even more complicated. It is not only that Beckett's text is bifurcated between the English and the French versions—hence, it is best called *Company/Compagnie*; the original text in each of these languages was not one either. The original French and English versions were in turn sets of drafts and *avant-textes* according to the variorum edition. The various pre-textual states opened up another differential space which posed a challenge to translational decision-making.

In order to tackle this challenge, I projected another draft (D) that approached Beckett's texts on an intra-lingual plane. On this level, I assumed an interdisciplinary methodology at the intersection of translation studies and genetic textual criticism. The variorum editions of Beckett's works provided me with a detailed mapping of the evolution of these works across their various drafts in both languages. By tracing the author's decision-making process and adjusting my translatorial decisions accordingly, I assumed the role of an editor who draws textual variations into the sphere of the factors affecting his or her decision-making.

Unlike Lachmanian philology, which explores the variants of the text in order to ascertain a single definitive original, my translation project did not aim to reproduce Beckett's authentic intention in another language. Whereas a textual critic might be interested in establishing a definitive version of Beckett's texts free from errors, I did not consider the translation as a movement toward authenticity. A faithful reconstruction could only take place in the assumption of Beckett's published version — usually the last draft— as the closest version to the authorial intention.

While I agreed that "Beckett's writing strategy becomes visible in the material evidence of the writing process"[32] (1), I realized that I could not separate his authorial decisions from the capacities of the language in which he wrote, and which I was not able to imitate in Persian. In order to discover Beckett's writing strategy, a textual critic has to chase the drafts in their chronological order. The textual critic assumes an ultimate shape toward which the original idea is polished in each draft. From this point of view, the chain of consecutive variant of a work can be compared to a sequence of translations in which each draft translates (revises) the previous draft in more accurate terms. In the same way that the French and English versions of Beckett's texts speak to their mutual incompleteness, the variants reveal gaps that are to be covered in each revision. However, recognition of this movement toward perfection cannot always contribute effectively to the task of translation. While Beckett's ordered authorial decisions can reveal something of his writing strategy, at least hypothetically and interpretatively, this did not necessarily mean that I was able to perform the inferred authorial strategy in my translation because the target language (here, Persian) provided me with totally different capacities. In fact, Beckett's variants make sense to the translator only in a random way.

For my translation project, none of the previous versions of Beckett's work could be dismissed in favor of a superior final draft or the printed text. For me, all of the pre-texts could be considered original texts exactly for the reason that, as Agamben points out with respect to the drafts of a work, "[n]one of the various versions is the text."[33] The variants gave me different potentials of an evolving idea, which I could use eclectically in my translation. The final published text that I was translating from, the definitive original, was the remnant of a process of constant

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[32] Dirk Van Hulle, "Introduction: Genetic Beckett Studies," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 13: 2 (2004), 1-9.

[33] Giorgio Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, tr. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 89.

variation—"[r]epeatedly with only minor variants bygone,"[34] as the voice is described in *Company*. I proceeded in my translation with the assumption that the original text—which was already fissured between French and English—was as much the result of a completion as the remnant of an abandonment. "The caesura, which puts an end to the drafting of a work, does not confer on it a privileged status of completeness," Agamben asserts, "it only means that the work can be said to be finished when, through interruption or abandonment, it is constituted as a fragment of a potentially infinite creative process, with respect to which the so-called completed work is distinguished only accidentally." Analogously, from a translational point of view, the interruption into the process of the creation of the work does not negate any of the previous potential forms of the idea. This view posits the original not only as double, but as multiple.

One example of such eclecticism is the following paragraph in *Worstward Ho*:[35] "Dim light source unknown. Know minimum. Know nothing no. Too much to hope. At most mere minimum. Meremost minimum."[36] (Figure 1) I found it impossible to find an equally ungrammatical word for the coined "meremost," especially with regard to the fact that in the previous sentence "mere" and "most" are juxtaposed, though in reverse order. However, manuscript A provided me with a more normal-sounding alternative, "the merest minimum." In addition, the change from "at most the minimum," in typescript C to "at most mere minimum," in typescripts D and E show that the ambiguity of "at most mere minimum," —between "at most" and "most mere"— would be better resolved with "at most" enhancing the antithesis between the maximum and minimum, than with the chiasmic reversal of "most mere" and "meremost."

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[34] Beckett, *Nohow On*, 12.

[35] I cite the English version because the French translation has been made by Édith Fournier. Beckett once confessed he was quite incapable of translating this work. See James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 684-685.

[36] Beckett, *Nohow On*, 103.

A8

oa ~~Detail f~~<F>atal.

ob Such as ~~the~~ water-mattress.

3 ~~No nothing no.~~ Know nothing no
not now.

6 ~~Merely~~ the <merest> minimum.

B8

*[The text of what in the final version is
paragraph 8 is at B12; it is here printed out of
sequence.]*

C8

o ~~Too much. Nightlight too much.~~
*["?" in margin, probably referring to the
word "nightlight", which is under-
lined.]*

1 ~~Faint~~ <Dim> <Faint> <Dim>
light source unknown.

D8

[In margin: 8 and D (for Dim light)]

5 At most ~~a~~ <mere> minimum.

A8

° No detail above all. ᵒᵃ Fatal. ᵒᵇ Such as water-mattress. ᵒᶜ Any mattress too much.
ᵒᵈ Simply supine. ¹ Dim light source unknown. ² Know the minimum. ³ Know
nothing no not now. ⁴ Not here. Not yet. ⁵ The minimum. ⁶ The merest minimum.

B8

¹ *[-]* ² *[-]* ³ No nothing no. ⁴ Not yet. ⁵ At most the minimum. ⁶ The meremost minimum.

B8a

° All shadow.

C8

¹ Dim light source unknown. ² Know the minimum. ³ Know nothing no. ⁴ Not yet.
⁵ At most the minimum. ⁶ Meremost minimum.

D8

¹ Dim light source unknown. ² Know a minimum. ³ Know nothing no. ⁴ Not yet.
⁵ At most mere minimum. ⁶ Meremost minimum.

E8

¹ Dim light source unknown. ² Know minimum. ³ Know nothing no. ⁴ Too much to
hope. ⁵ At most mere minimum. ⁶ Meremost minimum.

Fig 1. *Worstward Ho*, variants of paragraph 8, in manuscripts A, B, and typescripts C, D, and E.[37]

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[37] The images reproduce Adriaan van der Weel and Ruud Hisgen, *The Silencing of the Sphinx*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Leiden University, 1998), 98-99.

My projected translation of Beckett's text was not primarily focused on rendering its meaning; rather, I focused on rendering the experience of its plurality. Roland Barthes assumes the plurality of texts when he contrasts the work to the text: "The text is plural. This does not mean only that it has several meanings but that it fulfils the very plurality of meaning: an irreducible (and not just acceptable) plurality. The text is not co-existence of meaning, but passage, traversal; hence, it depends not on an interpretation, however liberal, but on an explosion, on dissemination."[38] Thus, I collated an eclectic Persian translation of Beckett's *Company/Compagnie* by drawing upon multiple source texts, and by juxtaposing different variants that originally belonged to different drafts. In this way, the untranslatability of one variant— pertaining to different language capacities—could be resolved by another variant, even though the variant was rejected in the published version of *Company*.

My translation will be published in two versions. First, a version in which the definitive English and French texts have been consulted, and second, a version in which Beckett's text has been refracted, through my eclectic translation, into the multiplicity of potentials the text has undergone in the course of its formation. Whereas the first version aims for authenticity and authority, the second version points to the hybridity and refraction that constitutes the original text. While the first version refers to the original meaning as already made, the second remains faithful to Beckett's text as something yet to become and always in dispersion. Beckett's text gave me the opportunity to experiment with translation as a performance. I chose the Persian title, *Hamdami*, for my translation of *Company/Compagnie*. Literally meaning "to be of the same breath," *hamdami* resounded to me as though calling out to the reader for a shared experience of instability, rather

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[38] Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 59.

than generating an impression of having reached the bottom of meaningfulness or meaninglessness

of Beckett's text.

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