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FROM SAMUEL BECKETT TO NANCY HUSTON: A POETICS OF SELF-TRANSLATION

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Abstract

This article focuses on self-translation and bilingualism as an essential characteristic to understand Samuel Beckett's and Nancy Huston's works and their literary projects. This analysis leads us to think in terms of a broader perspective of the term translation, which psychoanalysis and contemporary literary studies have addressed. Beckett had a literary project, which included a subversion of language that he aimed at through the process of self-translation. More than an activity, the process of translation and the manipulation of two languages is part of his poetic inspiration. When Huston makes an explicit homage to Beckett and puts herself in the same experience of writing in a foreign language and translating her own texts, she gives a testimony, and also provides a key for reading Beckett from a contemporary perspective. Despite the remarkable differences between these two authors, we claim that self-translation is part of their literary project, and is more than a random event for both of them.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett; Nancy Huston; Self-Translation; Bilingualism; Identity

For a human being possessed of several native tongues and a sense of personal identity arrived at in the course of multilingual interior speech, the turn outward, the encounter of language with others and the world, would necessarily be very different, metaphysically, psychologically different, from that experienced by the user of a single mother tongue . . . In what language am I, suis-je, bin ich, when I am inmost? What is the tone of self? (Steiner, After Babel 125).

On Self-Translation: Huston after Beckett

If many multilingual writers have chosen a foreign language to write their texts and some have practiced self-translation—as Conrad, Nabokov, among others—

self-translation itself has not been of much interest by scholars until the extensive focus on the self-translator author Samuel Beckett. Rainier Grutman, who wrote the entry “self-translation” for the first edition (1998) of *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* claimed that: “[t]ranslation scholars themselves have paid little attention to the phenomenon, perhaps because they thought it to be more akin to bilingualism than to translating proper” (17). The interest in self-translation grew to such a high extent that in 2009, in the second edition, this passage cannot be found.

Integrated into the modern and post-war context, the Irish writer Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), who decided to move definitively to France in 1937 and

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never came back to his homeland, managed through his works to change the way that the world used to be seen and represented, questioning pre-established patterns, besides proposing new and inventive forms of expression. Critics have aligned him with existentialism, as well as the modernist *avant-garde* movement, in recognition of his innovative style. For a long time, however, Beckett's unique bilingualism¹ as well as his deliberate linguistic exile, which would mark his writing, have been ignored, until the publication of *Beckett Translating/ Translating Beckett*, edited by Allan Warren Friedman *et al*, in 1987.² In one of the articles that composes this book, "The Writer as Self-Translator", Raymond Federman, argues that,

... an urgent need exists for a solid thorough, definitive study of Beckett's bilingualism and his activity as a self-translator . . . not merely to note differences or variants, but to arrive at an "aesthetic" of bilingualism, or better yet to arrive at a "poetics" of such activities (to use Lori Chamberlain's term). (9, emphasis added).

Although most of the articles in the above mentioned book deal with a linguistic approach, a path is there to be followed in the direction of a poetics of self-translation that one could say was initiated by Beckett and his critics, but that we may extend to other writers as well, such as Nancy Huston.

Indeed, Beckett had been a translator since 1930, but we can speak of a bilingual oeuvre when he started publishing two versions of each text, around 1955. From 1946 onwards, Beckett began to translate his own books, most of them written first in French and then translated into English, as is the case of *First Love*, *Mercier and Camier*, the first of his novels written in French. The book *From an Abandoned Work* (1958) was the first one written directly into English since *Watt*, in 1945. Aside from his own translations, more than ten years had gone by without Beckett writing first in English. Beckett would return to writing in English, alternating with French, but never abandoned the use of the two languages.

Nancy Huston (1953-), an Anglophone Canadian writer, has been living in Paris since 1973. In the same

vein as Beckett, not only has she decided to live in exile and to write most of her books in French, but she also undertakes the very same effort of self-translating her works back into her mother tongue. Her first work was already written in French, *Les Variations Goldberg*, in 1981. She started to practice self-translation with *Cantiques des Plainnes* (1993)/ *Plainsong: a Novel* (2001) and, after that, almost all her books are self-translated into English, with very few exceptions, as in the case of her books for young readers, her essays and some other books, usually written with other artists.

We could say that no other author in literary history has written as many books in a foreign language, and also—or even simultaneously—translated them into the mother tongue, and the other way round, as Beckett did. After Beckett—and, we could say, even influenced by him—Huston is constructing her own bilingual oeuvre. The Canadian author also theorizes about her own practice as a self-translator of most of her books.

The connection between Samuel Beckett and Nancy Huston as bilingual self-translator authors is not simple to understand, but it is inevitably established when we discuss these writers' works. It is also a necessary study to be conducted given the relevance of their works and the scope of their original literary projects. Self-translation occupies an essential position in these authors' oeuvres, being part of their poetics, more than just the translation activity of transposing from one language to another. Huston states, in a reference to Beckett and his works and their strong connection, that "in literature, the consanguinity is immediate, the temporal distance does not exist. I read him, he is there with me, in me" (*Professeurs* 70).³

In interviews, Huston also mentions the influence of Samuel Beckett in her own work. This relation becomes even more explicit in *Limbes/'Limbo': Un Hommage à Samuel Beckett*, a book published in 1998. *Limbes/'Limbo'* is a self-translated bilingual work of prose-poetry in which she wrote two texts (in French and English) that mirror each other. As the texts were published side by side, there is no original first version, but instead a simultaneous bilingual text. This endeavor spawns many relevant discussions for the field of translation— such as the status of the so-called

original and the notion of fidelity and re-creation—as well as many issues concerning literary translation studies. If Huston's oeuvre can be seen as a testimony of a common experience for authors in the contemporary transnational world—of a self being built within a space in-between nations and languages—it also recuperates something that Beckett initiated and that we can refer to as a poetics of self-translation.

Although Huston refers to Beckett in an ironic and playful tone that is typical of her statements as one who often went through the painful process of making two versions of his books, it is worth remembering that she is the one who follows in his footsteps and uses the same procedure: She once said, at a talk (2003) at the University of Toronto, at Victoria College:

Do I take the same liberties with the French language as I do in English? No idea. Don't want to know. Want out of this dead end. . . . Yes, to tell the truth I'm going through a sort of crisis just now. The theme song is "I can't go on like this". Writing two versions of each book. Dying of boredom. Translating sentence after sentence after sentence, who else has endured this tedium? Beckett, but his books were usually shorter . . . God, how I long to say Okay, folks, enough of all this schtick. From now on, I'm gonna write all my books in... and choose one of the languages. But which one? *Handicapped in both, not happy, not satisfied, because if you've got two languages, you haven't really "got" any language at all.* (qtd. in Danby "The Space Between" 94-5, emphasis added)

Huston states above that not only is she aligned with Beckett in the process of self-translation, but also with his character's main crisis: "I can't go on like this," a quotation that is worth completing here with Beckett's well known sentence from his novel *The Unnamable*⁴: "you must go on, *I can't go on*, I'll go on" (414, emphasis added)⁵/ "Il faut continuer, je vais continuer" (*L'Innommable* 262).⁶ It is interesting to observe here the difference, which Huston is probably aware of, between the French (the first version) and the translation into English, in which "I can't go on" was added. The impasse is marked in the mother tongue with an explicit choice to "go on," to continue writing in a foreign language.

It is equally interesting to observe that Beckett will return to English later on in his career without having ever abandoned self-translation. Then he would often translate his books from English into French.

We would like to refer to another text by Huston to illustrate a similar issue. In *Losing North*, the translation of *Nord Perdu*, a series of essays, we can find the same questioning about the inevitability of self-translation: "Could it be that, even in my mother tongue, I can accept myself only as a 'foreigner'?" (*Losing North* 30). In the first French version, the passage appears in a different way: "Serait-ce que . . . y compris dans *ma propre langue* . . . je ne me supporte qu'étrangère, dotée d'un accent?" (*Nord Perdu* 42, emphasis added). We could think that "ma propre langue" here is the French, which she speaks with an English accent. Therefore, the mother tongue is as foreign as the foreign language—there is no other place for her and her identity, but in the process of in-between.

Indeed, the paradoxical experience of bilingualism and of writing in a foreign language—metaphorically, the state of always being in exile—has a clear impact on Beckett's and Huston's writing. In addition, the constitution of an identity that has a mark of instability and that constitutes itself in-between languages is strongly related to the very act of translation. It is not irrelevant that Beckett has intentionally chosen to use two major languages (French and English)—without abandoning either of them—to subvert them both. It is also not irrelevant that Huston has recovered Beckett's insistence on writing in a foreign language, with no reason other than the literary act itself. Contextualized into a contemporary world, Huston also fictionalizes herself, mixing her own experience—the loss of her mother who abandoned her as a child, her move to Paris and her adaptation to a new language—with her characters, bringing together life and fiction.

To build himself through "no words but the words of others" (Beckett, *The Unnamable* 314)/ "rien que les paroles des autres" (*L'Innommable* 55), as the narrator of *The Unnamable* says, has been an experience that Beckett transformed into a theme. This "I" that insists on building an identity, who uses a language that seems always foreign, constantly fails to construct even a story

for himself or herself—or itself, as we cannot even say whether this character with no name, sometimes “Mahood” or “Worm,” is part of humankind at all. In the case of *The Unnamable*/ *L’Innommable*, the theme of the book coincides with its language structure, composed of an absence of paragraphs, punctuation and all rhetorical devices, such as the lack of pronouns, as we see at the beginning of the novel: “call that going, call that on” (*The Unnamable* 291)/ “Appeler ça aller, appeler ça de l’avant” (*L’Innommable* 7). These devices contribute to create this “failure” of communication, this nonattempt of an “I” to name his or her experience.

This subversion of language is a kind of aesthetic project that can be easily linked to the very act of translating—considering the well-known Italian adage: “traduttore, traditore” [translator, traitor] for all translation is in a sense a kind of treason. Moreover, the process of self-translation indeed allows for a kind of recreation usually denied to other forms of translations. It is possible to consider that translation here is an excuse, as well as an opportunity for Beckett to modify his own texts, to search for the most accurate word for his aesthetic project. In a “Letter to Axel Kaun,” in 1937, Beckett refers to a wider perspective that comes with one’s attempt to write in a foreign language:

It is indeed getting more and more difficult, even pointless, for me to write in formal English. And more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get those things (or nothingness) lying behind it . . . To drill one hole after another into it [language] until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through—I cannot imagine a higher goal for today’s writer . . . On the road toward this, for me, very desirable literature of the non-word, which some form of nominalistic irony can of course be a necessary phase. However, it does not suffice if the game loses some of its sacred solemnity. Let it cease altogether! . . . Word-storming in the name of beauty (518-20, emphasis added).

Therefore, Beckett’s choice to write in French and his submission to a continuous translating effort are aligned with stylistic purposes and, in a broader perspective, with a literary project. Following the

same path, Huston gives her testimony about the same experience and provides a continuation of one of Beckett’s main purposes: to create a literature outside the imposition of a mother tongue, as well as to publish a bilingual version of her works to represent this choice—that we also read as a literary one. This was actually one of Beckett’s projects, which has also been pursued by Huston.⁷

Huston also considers the translation process as a possibility of modifying and improving her text. It seems that writing in French as well as translating her own books into her mother tongue have an impact on the writing itself, despite the fact that the question of identity is even more central in her work than the manipulation of language, which is typical of the modernist Beckett. The use of translation and the experience of bilingualism bring to light questions on the nature of language and on the consolidation of identity that are often discussed in contemporary literary studies. Having moved to France as a child, Huston lost touch with her mother tongue in a way that neither the French language, nor the English language could be considered a comfort zone. Beckett also put himself in a situation of exile and distanced himself from his mother tongue—he only moved to France in his early twenties. In this sense, he anticipated a common contemporary experience: that of a self-positing in-between countries, languages and identities.

By honoring Beckett with a bilingual self-translated text, Huston seems to be aware of his project, as well as of the effect that self-translation could produce in the text. She then attempts to explore this effect in her own work, assuming this experience with a more emphatic perspective. She does not miss an opportunity to talk about it in interviews and even in her essays. She theorizes about her experience at the same time that she performs it in her own texts. Nicola Danby claims that “a result of this type of writing [referring to Huston] is that the translations—French and English counterparts—create a double reading or a combined meaning, which is greater than each of the meanings contained in the texts, if examined individually” (“The Space Between,” 84).

If equivalence from one language to another is a problematic issue in translation, Beckett’s and Huston’s

works lead us to think that no word is enough in either of the two languages they have used—or in any language at all, although these questions usually arise when one is dealing with a foreign language. As Lacan writes in “Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”: “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object” (247). The paradox or even the irony of such a statement is that dealing with a foreign language is a way of being detached from a self, at the same time that this is impossible and that language is foreign, whether in a strict sense or not.

The link between Huston and Beckett on the process of self-translation can be best observed in Huston’s two books, *Limbes/‘Limbo’* and *Fault Lines*, which show how she performs the project Beckett initiated, adding to this project a cultural and contemporary dimension to the field of literary translation theories.

Paying Homage: *Limbes/ ‘Limbo’*

In *Limbes/ ‘Limbo’: Un Hommage à Samuel Beckett*, Huston makes evident, through the process of self-translation, the theme of an identity that constitutes itself in-between languages. She also reveals important issues about Beckett’s oeuvre. This work written in two languages—sometimes she even uses other languages, such as Latin, Spanish or German— and it can hardly be identified as either simply an original or a translation, as we can see in this passage in which there is no translation at all: *Get it in Ing-lish. Shoved. Wedged. Lodged in the language like a bullet in the brain. Undelodgeable. Untranslatable*”/ ¡Caramba! Encore raté! (6/7). In the title we read *Limbes/‘Limbo’*, however, the English text ‘*Limbo*’ comes first and deceives the reader as it makes us believe that French is actually the translation and English the original. The paradox is not supposed to be resolved, as in the text it is unclear which one is actually the foreign language—or if both should be read as source/original, as well as target/foreign languages.

Bilingualism and translation are transformed into a theme in the same way that Beckett is turned into a character. This device makes it easier for the reader to understand part of the irony and references in this

bilingual book, in which a bilingual character tries to define himself in two languages in an attempt to create a story, but fails. The narrator says, “I have found my own language at last, a language comprehensible to myself alone”/ “J’ai enfin trouvé ma propre langue, c’est-à-dire une langue compréhensible pour moi seul” (30/31). Being all languages foreign, this “I” cannot be defined, as the “I” in *The Unnamable/ L’Innommable*, by Beckett.

The narrator of *Limbes/ ‘Limbo’* claims:

Beckett, my brother, my foot. At last I feel (ugly word, feel) close to you. At last your language is limpid to my what, brain, heart, foot. If there are two languages, there are any number of languages and—worse—the gaping gaps between the words . . . the absurd was invented by foreigners (24-26, emphasis added)/ Beckett, mon frère, mon pied. Me sentir enfin (mot mochissime, sentir) proche de vous. Enfin votre langue est devenue limpide à mon, quoi, mon cerveau, cœur, pied. S’il y a deux langues, il y a une infinité de langues, et, bien pire, mal pire, les béates béances entre les mots (25-27).

This book—being a bilingual edition—compels us to consider the translation and the original, even though it is difficult to establish which one is which. However, at the same time, this text, purposely edited in two different languages, requires a bilingual reading. As bilingualism is one of its themes, it is undeniable that the text works in-between the two languages. The narrator cannot find a word for “*feel/sentir*” in either of them. It seems to be a foreign word, “*ugly/mochissime*”, whatever the language the “I” uses. This is what is implicit when the narrator ironically says “*Beckett . . . At last I feel (ugly word, feel) close to you. At last your language is limpid to my . . .*” / “*Beckett . . . me sentir enfin (mot mochissime, sentir) proche de vous. Enfin votre langue est devenue limpide à mon . . .*” (24-25). After all, is being close to Beckett being close to English or French? The English version tells us (with an addition to the “original” French text that “*the absurd was invented by foreigners*” (26). There is no “limpid language”, then, for this “I” tied up in the limbo.

Finding Faults: *Lignes de Faille/ Fault Lines*

Fault Lines is an important book to be considered in any analysis of Huston's work, especially through this perspective of translation and bilingualism as a literary theme. In addition to having been a best seller in France, it won the *Prix Femina* in 2006 and was shortlisted for the Prix Goncourt, which confirms Huston's importance on the French literary scene. It was written in French and translated by the author into English, as most of her books are. Although it does not deal directly with bilingualism and translation, as *Limbes/Limbo* does, it can be interpreted as addressing these issues. We can begin with something one of the characters says: "The world isn't quite the same when everything in it has two different names; this is a weird idea to think about" (*Fault Lines* 121)/ "Le monde n'est pas exactement le même quand chaque objet a deux noms différents; c'est bizarre de penser ça" (*Lignes de Faille* 156).

This passage presents the way the character Randall has dealt with the foreign language, when his family move from New York to Haifa. Also Sol, his son, when he travels to Germany, states: "I don't like the road signs being in German, either. They feel like doors slamming in my face one after the other" (*Fault Lines* 63)/ "Moi non plus je n'aime pas que les panneaux soient allemand, c'est comme autant de portes qui me claquent à la figure les unes après les autres" (*Lignes de Faille* 88). The encounter with a foreign language—and of an "exiled-identity" as we may see in his encounter with Kristina—is recurrent in the book.

Fault Lines can be read as a family story or from a historian perspective, of World War II and its effects on people's lives over several generations. It is, interestingly, told in reverse chronological order, from 2004 to 1944, in the first person from four different perspectives, those of six-year-old children, each one the son or daughter of the previous. It begins with Sol, a monstrous and spoilt kid from New York, followed by Randall, his father and Sadie, his grandmother. The narrative in this reverse chronological order creates a suspense that is only revealed at the end, by Sol's great grandmother. Therefore, the *Fault Lines* date back to an origin, to Kristina, a Ukrainian girl who was taken from

her parents and raised as a German citizen—the victim of one of the Nazis' programs called *Lebensborn*.

The four children, with the exception of Kristina, are very articulate and seem to have total command of syntax and vocabulary—especially, Sol. Looking at this from the perspective proposed here of the importance of a self-translated text, this story, as with others from the same author, focuses heavily on language and translation. Therefore, the fact that a narrative is written in the first person through the voices of children which resemble adult's voices is surely not a fault or a mere detail. The adult tone of the voices, then, may rather be a choice that conveys seriousness—or even gravity—to what these children are narrating and the effect of the process of translating the world around them for the construction of their own identity.

Huston creates an atmosphere of a story traced from contemporary California to Nazi Germany. More than revealing family secrets, this narrative resorts to the unpredictability of experience and, why not, to translation. *Fault Lines*, that are fractures geologically speaking, traces, despite the fact that they have an origin, are the result of the earth's movement that began somewhere, but the path they follow extend and their effects are unpredictable. Metaphorically, in the book, although we find out that all the fractures have an origin in Kristina—that could actually be in her parents, if the narrative had continued back in time—, there is a displacement, a discontinuity between her and her great-grand-son Sol.

Despite the birthmark that all of them have—again, the trace is an important metaphor to be considered in the novel—, the way these children translate their reality is completely different. Randall interprets his mother's absence as a rejection, while she is seeking to discover, through scholarly research, what happened to her own mother during the Nazi period. Having been stolen from her original family and brought up by German parents is an experience of a radical exile—an exile from the self: "Everything in our papers is false", he tells me. "Our names, our ages, our places of birth" (*Fault Lines* 272)/ "Tout est faux dans nos papiers, dit Johann. Notre nom, notre âge, notre lieu de naissance" (*Lignes de Faille* 340). She—Kristina, Krystka, Erra?— even has

all these different names in different languages. Kristina says “I know I used to love them, but that was when I thought I belonged to this family and this language and this home” (*Fault Lines* 277)/ “Je sais que je les aimais autrefois mais c’était quand je le pensais faire partie de cette famille et de cette langue et de ce foyer” (*Lignes de Faille* 346). She even adds: “[I] learn to sing without words” (*Fault Lines* 278)/ “J’apprends à chanter sans paroles” (*Lignes de Faille* 347) as she cannot speak Polish at home, since she is “unhomed”.

According to Homi K. Bhabha “to be unhomed is not to be homeless” (*The Location* 9). Instead, it is this experience of being in-between, neither here nor there, which causes disorientation, a feeling of “displacement,” even though you are at home. Deriving from Freud “Des Unheimliche,” a problem of translation itself as it was translated as “The Uncanny,” but with a note suggesting “The Unhomely,” the strangeness has a straight connection with what is familiar, and that is why the translation into “uncanny” does not cover all its subtleties. Tracing the origins and meanings of the word itself, Freud explores the ambiguous meaning given to *heimliche*, which can coincide with its opposite—*unheimliche*, when meaning something obscure or hidden, like family secrets. One could say it is precisely at home that it is possible to feel “unhomed”. Literally, Kristina is in a “false” home, having a “false” identity and a different language from her mother tongue, despite feeling at home prior to knowing that. This character as well as this story also brings to light issues about translation, identity and the construction of a self between nations, spaces and languages.

Translating the Self

Fault Lines deals specifically with transmission from one generation to another and how unexpected it can be. We argue that transmission here can also be read as a kind of translation, in an extended meaning. Psychoanalysis is a field that has used the term to refer to memory or the psychic process. It is in psychoanalysis that Gayatri Spivak will purvey the argument to think about translation in a broader perspective, in “Translation as Culture”:

In this understanding of translation in Melanie Klein, therefore, *the word translation itself loses its literal sense . . .* Translation in this general sense is not under the control of the subject who is translating. Indeed the human subject is something that will have happened as this shuttling translation, from inside to outside, from violence to conscience: the production of the ethical subject. *This originary translation thus wrenches the sense of the English word translation outside of its making.* One look at the dictionary will tell you the word comes from a Latin past participle (of *transferre* = to transfer). It is a done deal, precisely not a future anterior, something that will have happened without our knowledge, particularly without our control, the subject coming into being (263, emphasis added)

Kristina, the stolen child in *Fault Lines*, is a radical example of this violence that is the construction of the subject. As Klein’s theory derives from Sigmund Freud, we will return to some important issues in his theory concerning translation. Freud’s use of metaphors as a means to explain his theory is widely known and translation occupies a special place in his work. In 1937, in “Constructions in Analysis,” he compares the psychoanalyst and the archeologist since they use the residuals of wreckage to recompose what was already buried (260); that is, under the ruins of a city once covered in ashes, as in the case of Pompeii, the essence is preserved. Therefore, in a way, nothing is lost in the psyche, even though it may be presented only as “memory traces” (“Letter 52” 207), as ruins. The memory that the patient recovers is not the same as the original, nor is it a new one. This process, which is quite similar to a translation, implies an inevitable loss as well as a gain, as new arrangements can always be constructed.

Therefore, the birthmark, literally a mark, can actually be read as a trace of the “true” identity of Kristina when she seeks her origins: “Who gave me my birthmark?” (*Fault Lines* 262)/ “Qui m’a donné mon grain de beauté?” (*Lignes de Faille* 329). In a way, she suspects that she does not belong to that family and her “real” identity and memories are actually being reconstructed by an “other”—through quotations marks, by her brother. The only proof she really has

is the birthmark, the trace and the inscription, which cannot be translated.

When Lacan discusses Freud's theory by giving an emphasizing to language, the relationship between the translation and the psychic process itself becomes even clearer. If we consider Lacan's notorious aphorism—which he developed through his entire theory—that “the unconscious is structured like a language” (“The Four Fundaments” 203), translation could be considered a part of the psychic process itself, rather than simply a metaphor for it. Although language is always foreign, in the sense that it existed before the unconscious was formed in each subject, the two coexist in an intrinsically interdependent relationship. When Lacan claims that the unconscious is structured “like”—*comme*—a language and not “by”—*par*—it, he goes far beyond that, even refuting the common sense interpretation that language constructs the unconscious. Therefore, instead of establishing a cause-and-effect relationship, Lacan creates a fundamental analogy between the two structures, emphasizing that they have the same mechanisms of operation.

Although Freud does not have the linguistic support, and does not use these terms, Lacan's theory can be found in Freud's theory, in which the latter proposes a structural model of the psyche—what he called “psychic apparatus”. In “Letter 52” of 1897, one can find a sketch of this thought, in which Freud organizes the unconscious into different structures that keep traces, registers—visibly similar to linguistic signs—that would compose memory. He argues that “our psychical mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a *re-arrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances-to a *re-transcription*” (207). Hence, our memory and unconscious registers would not be ready-made, but constructed through an incessant process of translation. That is exactly the conclusion that Freud reaches in “Letter 46” of 1896, when he situates the origins of neurosis by the different periods in which the experiences—scenes—were marked as signs or traces that could be transposed into words. He even conceives the existence of a premature period in the psyche

during which these impressions have the essential characteristic of being “untranslatable” (187).⁸

The importance of these formulations and of this understanding of translation in a broader perspective is essential not only for psychoanalysis, but also, we claim, for the study of translation and the understanding of the construction of subjects in contemporaneity. Bhabha's theory of cultural translation also helps us understand how the term can be broadened. As Harish Trivedi observes in “Translating Culture vs Cultural Translation”: “What is nevertheless clear and indisputable in Bhabha's formulation of what he calls cultural translation is, firstly, that he does not at all by this term mean literary translation involving two texts from two different languages and cultures and, secondly, that what he means by translation instead is the process and condition of human migrancy” (283). Self-translation is a key concept that helps us broaden these perspectives, and we believe that if we go *from* we can also move *beyond* Beckett.⁹

Bilingualism and translation are closely connected with the contemporary experience of subjects and Huston has been exploring this experience in her work. Beckett helps us understand this connection between the experience of self-translation and its transposition into a literary theme. Huston goes further by problematizing the very act of translation, the role of the author as self-translator and its relevance for an aesthetic and literary project that she shares with Beckett. Contemplating translation from a broader perspective, as Huston does, helps us realize its relevant position for a multilingual author who deals specifically with issues of exile, language and identity.

Notes

1. Almost all Beckett's books after 1946 were self-translated, with the exception, most of them into French. Some works that were not previously written in French were recently translated by Édith Fournier.
2. See also Fitch, Brian T. *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 1988. Print. Romance Series; Montini, Chiara. *La Bataille du Soliloque: Genèse de la Poétique Bilingue de Samuel Beckett*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. Faux Titre. These are the main works, among many others, which consider the

- centrality of bilingualism and self-translation in Samuel Beckett's work.
 3. Our translation of: "*en littérature la consanguinité est immédiate, l'écart temporel n'existe pas. Je le lis, il est là avec moi, en moi*".
 4. *The Unnamable* is the third book in Beckett's trilogy, which includes *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*. All of them were translated into English by the author from the French version: *Molloy* (1951), *Malone meurt* (1951), *L'Innommable* (1953).
 5. All the translations into English are from the authors with few exceptions that will be mentioned. The books mentioned here were published first in French.
 6. All the references to Huston or Beckett's books will be in French and English, as our focus is on self-translation. The emphasis is on the importance of an interpretation across languages and how it brings out relevant material for interpreting these bilingual works—even though they are not always or hardly ever published in the same edition.
 7. Unfortunately, few books by Beckett have been published as bilingual editions, although this seems to have been Beckett's own wish, as one can see in the *Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project*, directed by Dirk Van Hulle. Initiated in 1986 by Charles Krance, with the permission and support of Samuel Beckett, the project provides a series of bilingual online editions with the intention of reuniting his manuscripts in a single source to facilitate research of all kinds.
 8. It has to be admitted that Freud did not maintain this chronological approach. The different nature of the traces is divided into some that can be transposed into words—translated—and others that cannot, even though these differences are not always based on chronology, that is, on the time that the experience occurred.
 9. See Grutman, Rainier. "Beckett and Beyond Putting Self-Translation in Perspective". *Orbis Litterarum*. Vol 68 Issue 3: Especial Issue on Self-translation, (june, 2013). 188-206. Web. 10 june 2016.
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