

## **The Status of the Second Version of the Beckettian Text: The Evidence of the *Bing/Ping* Manuscripts**

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My aim in this essay is to determine the status of the second version of Beckett's texts and their precise relationship to the original versions. For this purpose it will not suffice to compare the definitive versions of *Bing* and *Ping*, but what is required is to place side by side the whole sequence of manuscript drafts of each version leading up to the definitive text so as to define as precisely as possible the relationship between the two sequences of manuscripts. The object of the comparison will then be the historical evolution of each of the manuscripts or, in more contemporary terminology, the text as a diachronic phenomenon on the level of its production.

I am not concerned here with the evaluation of the second version (here the English text) as a translation. Nor am I attempting to establish the exact chronology of the whole of the manuscript material relating to *Bing/Ping* in its two versions since it is certainly not possible to do so at present, given the evidence available, and may indeed never be possible as very few of the manuscript drafts are dated by the author. All that one can be sure of is the chronology of the manuscript drafts, whether they be typed or hand-written, within each of the sequences: that of the drafts of the original French version and that of the drafts of the English second version. The precise temporal relationship between the two sequences of manuscript drafts remains unclear, which is one practical reason why I am concentrating solely on the comparison of the internal evolution of each version of the text as a sequence of drafts. Another no less important reason lies in my main objective here: to define the productive processes at work in the writing of the second version of the text and to see to what extent they reproduce the stages in the evolution of the original French or, on the contrary, depart from them and enjoy their own autonomy.

For this study I have had recourse to the following documents: In addition, obviously, to the definitive texts of *Bing*<sup>1</sup> (French) and *Ping*<sup>2</sup> (English), I have made use of the nine typed drafts of *Bing* first published as an appendix to the bibliographical study by Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics* and reprinted in *L'Herne*.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, Richard L. Admussen, in an appendix to his book *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study*,<sup>5</sup> published facsimiles of six hand-written drafts of *Bing* which, with the exception of the first two which come before the first typed draft, alternate with the various typed drafts. I have not chosen to refer to these handwritten drafts, moreover not easily decipherable in reduced facsimile form, given Beckett's practice of almost always typing up each hand-written draft and subsequently revising it before going on to draft a further version of the manuscript in question. Admussen is of the opinion that this precious run of manuscript drafts represents the complete manuscript of *Bing*. With regard to the English version, *Ping*, the situation is not nearly as satisfactory. Having been able to consult in the Beckett Collection<sup>6</sup> at the University of Reading (U.K.) two typed manuscript drafts, a hand-written draft and printers' proofs of *Ping* all in the form of photocopies of these documents held at Washington University (St. Louis, Missouri), material which, as Admussen points out, probably does not represent the totality of existent manuscript drafts of this work, I refer in these pages only to the typed manuscript draft that bears by far the greatest number of revisions (call no. 1542/3 in the catalogue of the Reading Beckett

Collection and p.77, B in Admussen). Since we cannot, therefore, trace the complete evolution of the English version of the text, this typed draft can only serve as a check to verify the more conclusive results of the comparison of the definitive text of the English “translation” with the different stages in the evolution of the French original. In fact, by referring to this predefinitive draft of the English text, I shall be able to qualify and develop certain of my hypotheses concerning Beckett’s practice as “self-translator.”

The definitive text of *Bing/Ping* consists of 70 sentences that I have numbered 1 to 70. Of these 70 sentences, 17 reveal a divergence in meaning between the French and English texts consisting of the addition or omission of a word or group of words or, in one case (sentence 35/34<sup>7</sup>), of both at the same time, that is to say, of the substitution of one sense-unit for another. It should be borne in mind that these are not necessarily the only divergences of meaning for others, no less important, can of course arise in the transition between the two languages during the translation process. However, the aforementioned divergences are the only ones that are quantifiable and materially verifiable being patently obvious to any reader of the texts. They are therefore the only ones that will concern me here. With the exception of sentence 35/34 where there is a substitution in the English, we only find two sentences (14/13 and 58/57) where an element of the French text is missing from the English text. All the other divergences are characterized by the fact that the English text reveals that something has been added to the original French. Another far from negligible detail is that there exist two whole sentences absent from both definitive versions which are to be found both in Text 9F and 1E<sup>8</sup> and which I shall number 57/56a and 59/58a. This undoubtedly suggests an analogous relationship between the penultimate and definitive versions of each text and hence a parallel evolution between the two. Whether this is confirmed or contradicted by the following analysis remains to be seen.

Once one becomes aware of the divergences from the original in these 17 sentences (constituting almost exactly a quarter of the text), the first hypothesis that comes to mind is that the English text represents a subsequent evolution in relation to the final French text, either because Beckett has seen fit to modify the latter in the meantime or because the modifications had come about in the very process of translation, in response to the syntactic demands of the English language for example. The fact that with the exception of the two cases mentioned, these modifications take the form of additions to the French text can only serve to encourage such an hypothesis. This would mean that the manuscript material of *Bing/Ping* would represent a continuous development in which the manuscript drafts of the English version would constitute at further stage in the same development following directly from the final draft of the French version.

This hypothesis is not, at first sight, refuted by the evidence of a fair number of the divergent sentences. In fact, nine of these sentences contain modifications which have at no time figured in any of the predefinitive drafts of the original French. The source of these changes is unclear but they are not based on any of the many stages the French manuscript has gone through. In other words, they have come into being during the drafting of the English version. Let me take sentence 20/19 as an example: “Pieds blancs invisibles talons joints angle droft” has added to it “toes joined like sewn” to give the English version: “White feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle invisible.” Similarly, “Eyes holes light blue almost white” is added to sentence 30/29, “Light blue almost white” to sentence 63/63, “light time” to sentence 66/66, the adjective “dim” is added to qualify “eye” in sentence 62/62, and the adjective “white” appears

twice in sentence 53 /52 while “blanc” appears only once in the original French. Sentences 24/23 and 25/24 represent a special case since not only is there an addition, but some sense-units are distributed differently between the two sentences. In all these examples, as in the only sentence revealing an omission in the English (sentence 58/57: “toujours la même”) there is no trace of the modifications in question in the various predefinitive drafts of the original.

However, I have to qualify my previous remarks about these additions. It is true that some of them appear to have been created *ex nihilo*, so to speak, at the moment the English version was written such as “white (scars)” (53/52), “toes joined like sewn” (20/19)--although one finds the expression “jambes collées comme cousues” in sentences 1/1, 15/14, 36/35 60/59 and 64/64--and “all white all known” (24/23)--although one finds the variant “tout su tout blanc” in sentences 1/1 and 69/69. Nonetheless, all of the other additions can be located elsewhere in the definitive French text. Hence, what has taken place during the drafting of the English version is a reorganization, a new distribution of the various sense-units either between sentences of the same text or on the level of the syntax of a single sentence.

Such is the hypothesis that emerges from the study of divergences of meaning in the nine sentences examined so far. The situation becomes more complicated, however, once one takes into account the predefinitive typed draft of the English version (Text 1E). In the case of all nine sentences without exception, Text 1E is identical to the final French version. The most striking example is that of sentences 24/23 and 25/24 where, it will be recalled, in addition to elements added to each sentence, Text 2E distributed the sense-units differently between the two sentences, whilst Text 1E, on the other hand, reproduces exactly both the syntax and the content of the two sentences in the original definitive French. Obviously then, according to this evidence, when working on the second version, Beckett must have begun by drafting an English version identical (with regards the material divergences defined earlier) to the definitive French text (Text 10F) before modifying the former in the manner we have just seen. Or at the very least (since we are not sure of having located all the drafts of the English manuscript), he must have gone through the stage of writing such a version. At all events, this means that the modifications noted could not have been introduced at the time of his initial ‘Translation’ from the French but must have intervened at a later stage when he was revising an already existent draft of the English manuscript, if not necessarily the very first draft of the latter.

So far we have only considered a little more than half the English sentences—nine out of seventeen--where there is a divergence of meaning in relation to the original. Unfortunately for my hypothesis, none of the divergences of the remaining eight sentences is absent from the predefinitive drafts of the French text. This means that contrary to the cases studied previously, the modifications involved in these eight other sentences do not represent an evolution, at either stage in relation to the final French text but a regression to an earlier stage of the French manuscript. When translating, Beckett does not, therefore, always work solely from the final French version as one might well assume, but sometimes goes back to the earlier drafts of the latter either by referring back to them or because he is able to recall them.

Let me now examine some of these examples beginning with the simplest situation. In sentence 14/13, the words “blanc sur blanc” become “white” in the English and when we examine the penultimate French draft (Text 9F) we find that the words “sur blanc” have been added by hand

to the typed text which had been identical to Text 8F. Therefore, since the predefinitive and final versions of the English are identical here, the latter must be based on either Text 8F or 9F (before its revision). The case of sentence 46/45 is analogous, the English version being based on Text 7F, 8F or 9F (before its revision). Sentence 60/59 provides a variation in that although Text 9F proves to be the source of the English version, Text 1 E is closer, syntactically speaking, to 9F than is the final English version. Sentence 68/68 is a more interesting variant. Here, as in sentence 61/60 & 61, Texts 1E and 2E are not the same, and it is the selfsame evolution between the two that is found in the predefinitive French drafts so that while Text 2E corresponds again to Text 9F, Text 1E relates back to Text 7F. This suggests that Beckett's recourse to the earlier drafts of the French when translating into English was more systematic. Having first followed the "model" provided by Text 7F, when he decided to modify the English version (Text 1E), he appears to have followed in his own footsteps but without going as far as the final French version, choosing rather the penultimate draft as his new model. He has thus remained faithful to the evolution of the original manuscript. Could this be out of respect for the genesis of the original? Or is this parallel evolution a result of an analogous yet autonomous creative process true to its own internal, intrinsic demands? This is the nub of the question to which I shall return later.

The other question that comes readily to mind is this: is there a single predefinitive French draft which is a common source for all the examples of this latter category of sentences? Let me list the drafts in question. Sentence 14/14 referred back either to Text 8F or 9F; sentence 46/45 to Text 7F, 8F or 9F; and sentence 60/60 & 61 and 68/68 to Text 9F. Text 9F does then constitute a common denominator among the possible sources of these four English sentences. We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that in the case of sentence 88/68, Beckett also used Text 7F in drafting Text 1E.

As was only to be expected, the evidence of the last four sentences that remain to be considered adds further complications to the extent of invalidating at first sight all the hypotheses formulated so far and threatening to thwart any attempt to arrive at one single convincing hypothesis that would take into account all the divergences of meaning between *Ping* and *Bing*.

What complicates matters in the case of sentences 28/27, 29/28, 31/30 and 35/34 is that the final Text 2E, while revealing once again a regression to a predefinitive stage of the French manuscript, reflects a further regression in relation to Text 1E, in other words, a regression taking the initial regression as its starting point. Contrary to the parallel evolution of two versions in sentence 68/68, here the evolution of the French manuscript is reversed in the composition of the English version. The final English version thus corresponds to a draft of the French manuscript that preceded the draft that served as a model for the predefinitive draft of the English. In the case of sentence 31/30, whereas Text 8F provides the source of the final English version, it is the final French version that is closest to the predefinitive English version (Text 1E). The same is true of sentence 29/28. However, I should point out that since Texts 10F and 9F are identical in both these cases, the latter could equally well have served as the original for the final English version. This would nonetheless not change the fact that the model for text 2E precedes that for text 1 E. Sentence 35/34 follows the same pattern except that Text 2E appears to reflect a stage in the French manuscript between Texts 7F and 8F, and Text 1E is again modeled on either Text 9F or 10F, both being identical. A more complex situation obtains in

sentence 28/27 where both English versions could have originated in Text 8F, although it is more likely that Text 7F was the model for Text 2E while texts 8F, 9F and/or 10F clearly furnished that of Text 1E.

For all the last four sentences, the predefinitive English version was conceivably based on Text 10F. Common sense would therefore suggest that there is no conceivable reason why Beckett would have gone back to manuscript drafts preceding the final French version if, as is the case, the former were indistinguishable from the printed text. This reasoning calls for a radical modification of my earlier hypothesis that an initial regression had been followed by a second, further regression, since, in all probability, there was no initial regression at the time of Beckett's writing of Text 1E if this first English version is based on the last French one. Hence a distinctly more plausible state of affairs. Rather than having first referred back to a predefinitive stage of the French manuscript for his "translation" and then, in the process of revising the latter, going back further to an even earlier draft of the French, Beckett only went back to a predefinitive draft of the original once he had already started to translate from the final printed French text and had subsequently become dissatisfied with the result. The advantage of this explanation is that it tallies completely with the hypothesis suggested by the evidence of the first category of examples, the first nine sentences examined earlier, where Text 1E proved to be identical to Text 10F. Moreover, if we consider the whole of the text *Bing/Ping*, there are only two cases of differences between Texts 1E and 2E where the predefinitive English version is not identical to the final French version (sentences 61/60 & 61 and 68/68).

The search for a single predefinitive manuscript draft of the French that could have served as a model for all eight sentences where the divergence of meaning can be traced back to the earlier versions of the French manuscript produces even less conclusive results. If we list the possible antecedents of each sentence, we get the following: sentence 14/13--Texts 8F or 9F; sentence 47/46--Texts 7F, 8F or 9F; sentence 61/60 & 61--Text 9F; sentences 31/30 and 29/28--Text 8F; sentence 35/34--Texts 7F and/or 8F. Text 7F figures three times, Text 8F six times and Text 9F four times, all of which does not add up to very much by way of a conclusion. And yet, if we classify the common denominators, the result is more interesting. The four sentences constituting each of the second and third categories of examples examined have one common denominator: for the second of the categories (sentences 14/13, 46/45, 61/60 & 61, 68/68) it is text 9F and for the third and last category (sentences 31/30, 29/28, 28/27, 35/34) it is Text 8F. The very fact that where we had thought to perceive a certain relationship between the various divergences of meaning in certain sentences these divergences can be traced back to a common source in the form of a single manuscript draft makes for a plausible explanation. In all probability, Beckett made use of two predefinitive manuscript drafts of the original, Texts 8F and 9F. It is, moreover, conceivable that his recourse to each of these two drafts corresponded to two distinct stages in the writing of the final draft of his new manuscript in the second language.

Precisely what conclusions can we draw concerning Beckett's practice as self-translator? Is it possible to formulate one comprehensive hypothesis that would reconcile all those provisional hypotheses evoked during the course of this analysis and take into account all available evidence without exception? Given the complexity of the writing process-whether it involves the writing of an original work, a translation or a self-translation-it is hardly surprising to discover that all the hypotheses considered so far have proven far too restrictive. Paradoxically, the fact that

neither of my two initial hypotheses, that of a completely parallel and analogous evolution between the English text and the French, and its opposite, that of the English manuscript's having enjoyed a wholly autonomous evolution in relation to that of the original, has stood the test of this analysis can only be positive from a methodological point of view: it demonstrates that the outcome of this study has not been predetermined by a priori considerations but has been governed by the logic of its own development.

The first point that should be made is that there exist only two cases where the words constituting the divergence of meaning in the English are to be found neither in the predefinitive drafts of the French original nor elsewhere in the definitive French text. (These are the words "toes" in sentence 20/29 and "white" qualifying "scars" in sentence 53/52.) For obvious reasons concerning the filiation of the manuscripts and their variants, I have limited myself here almost exclusively to the presence of the words and expressions in question in the earlier versions of the French text. But let us remember that more than half of the divergent sentences studied contained modifications that were nowhere to be found in the predefinitive manuscript drafts of the French and could only have come from the larger, synchronic context of the rest of the final French version. The second point, not touched upon so far, is that what has been taken from an earlier draft of the original is far from always being a complete sentence, on the contrary, as we have seen. This means that the immediate context of the words in question was often not the same as that which was to be theirs in the English version. What is more, this last remark is even more to the point where the words of the English text constituting an addition or an omission are to be found elsewhere, in a different passage of the printed French text. Need I add that a change of context necessarily entails a change of meaning, albeit of varying degrees of significance? Therefore, although the same words may figure in a particular manuscript variant of the French and in the final English text, their immediate textual context is different. It follows that the way they function in their new context, cannot be the same. Which brings me to the main point of this essay.

There is virtually nothing new with regard to vocabulary or expressions in the final English text when compared to the totality of the manuscript drafts of the French original. But that does not mean that *Ping* is not a new text. And here I am leaving aside, as can only be done for the purposes of theoretical reflection, all linguistic distinctions between French and English. It would be quite false to maintain that the writer has merely "redone" in another language what he had already done previously in a first language. It is not a question of "redoing" (in the sense of "repeating"), but rather of "recasting" or "remaking," that is recasting an already existing textual matter from which a new text has emerged that happens to be in another language. (Or, to put it another way, this remaking of a text is accompanied by the passage between two languages entailed in the process of translation to which it is in no wise reducible.) This raw material of textual matter which the new textual system 9 will draw upon is constituted by the original text as both a synchronic and a diachronic phenomenon (the latter being understood here on the level of its production and not of its reception). I would insist on the fact that neither as a synchronic phenomenon (in its final published version) nor as a diachronic phenomenon (as a continuous sequence of manuscript drafts) are the arrangement, the organization of its constitutive elements and the formal shape of the original text respected in the activity of the author of the English text. I do not of course mean by that that there exists no formal similarity between the latter and the final French text, which would be absurd, but that at one moment or another in the writing of

the second version either the formal coherence of the original text or the evolutionary coherence of its manuscript drafts has been infringed. The activity the evidence of which I have been examining in these pages is essentially a process of reorganization, reformulation and restructuring having as its object the substance of what is already a text. Here the writer is accorded a certain freedom (if he were not the author of the original text as well, would we not say that he has taken certain liberties with the latter?) which for all its relativeness is nonetheless real.

This freedom he enjoys mitigates the impression of subservience and servitude, of a secondary activity, created by the terms “reorganization,” “reformulation” and “restructuring.” It is circumscribed, as for any writer, by the aesthetic exigencies of his new creation. But is he not also subjected, it might be objected, to the constraint exercised upon his freedom by the original? Yes and no, for, in the words of Henri Meschonnic,<sup>10</sup> “To say that the writer goes from the real to the book, and the translator from one book to another, is to fail to recognize what we know today: that there have always been books between experience and the book.” Another way of putting this is to say that every new text takes its place within an intertextuality within which it will continue to evolve with the subsequent coming into being of new texts and without which it could not, itself, have seen the light of day. In this respect, the difference between *Ping* and the majority of other literary texts is not one of kind but of degree.

Without the slightest doubt, the most important conclusion arising from the study of the genesis of this short prose piece is that nobody other than Beckett—no translator—could have produced the text of *Ping*. And here the distinction made by James McFarlane between the two basic modes of translation is pertinent: “the semasiological mode, where... the act of translation consists in the hearers making that which is provoked in him the cause of a further utterance in a new linguistic medium; and the onomasiological, where... the act of translation consists in repeating the genesis of the utterance with the substitution of one linguistic medium for another.”<sup>11</sup> If, as we have seen, the composition of *Ping* clearly does not belong to the semasiological mode of translation, no more does it belong to the onomasiological mode since it respects neither the chronology of the genesis of the original nor the formal shape of the definitive original version. In short, with *Ping*, we have a text that cannot be classified under either of the recognized categories of translation. In the light of the present study, how can one conclude otherwise than by recognizing that self-translation truly represents a case apart and that the status of the text produced thereby enjoys a specificity that it shares with no other form of translation?

## NOTES

1. *Bing in Têtes-Mortes: D'Un Ouvrage abandonné—Assez—Imagination morte imaginez—Bing—Sans* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), pp. 59-66.
2. *Ping in Six Residua* (London: John Calder, 1978), pp. 39-44.
3. *Samuel Beckett. His Works and His Critics. An Essay in Bibliography* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1970).

4. “*Bing*. Dix Versions avec traduction anglaise du texte final,” *L’Herne*, “Samuel Beckett,” No.31 (1976), pp. 24-43.
5. *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts. A Study* (Boston, Mass.: G. K.Hall & Co., 1979).
6. I should like to thank Mr. J. Edwards, the Archivist of the Beckett Collection at the University of Reading, for allowing me to consult the manuscript material related to *Bing/Ping*.
7. Although *Ping* contains the same number of sentences as *Bing*, it should be noted that sentences 7 and 8 of the French text are both contained in sentence 7 of the English text and that sentence 61 of the French text becomes sentences 60 and 61 of the English text. For this reason, I shall give two figures in referring to a given sentence, the first corresponding to the French text and the second to the English.
8. In the following analysis, I shall follow the numbering of the drafts of *Bing* adopted by Fedarman/Fietcherand retained in *L’Herne* adding the letter F (for French version). They shall, therefore, be numbered from Text 1F to Text 10F, the latter corresponding to the draft that preceded the definitive version of the “translation” Text 1E (for English version) and the latter Text 2E.
9. Cf. Henri Meschonnic, *Pour la poétique II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 360. My translation from the French.
11. James McFarlane, “Modes of Translation,” *The Durham University Journal*, 45, No. 3 (June 1953), p. 90.
12. For the theoretical implications of this study, see my essays “L’Intra-intertextualité interlinguistique de Beckett: la problématique de la traduction de soi,” *Texte*, No. 2, 1983, pp. 85-100, and “The Status of Self-Translation” (*Texte*, No. 4, 1985, pp. 111-125). For its implications with regards the critical study of Beckett’s works, see my article “La Problématique de l’étude de l’oeuvre bilingue de Beckett,” *Symposium*, XXXVIII, No. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 91-112.