WRITING AND WRONGING: PREROGATIVES OF THE SELF-TRANSLATOR

Trask Roberts

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Supervisor of Dissertation

_____

Gerald Prince, Professor of Romance Languages

Graduate Group Chairperson

_____

Gerald Prince, Professor of Romance Languages

Dissertation Committee

Andrea Goulet, Professor of Romance Languages

Jean-Michel Rabaté, Professor of English and Comparative Literature

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ABSTRACT

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Trask Roberts

Gerald Prince

The impetus for this dissertation comes from a straightforward question: how does the act, or even the expectation, of translating influence original composition? To study this I focus on authors who translate their own texts and I search out traces left by translation in unexpected places. I argue that the influences of translation—whether in theme, structure, style, or inspiration—are latent in first compositions, and point not necessarily to the coming translation, but to a mode of writing. Bringing together an author's translation with the original allows for a kaleidoscopic reading: the overlay of lenses on the text allows for otherwise unobtainable vistas. This project investigates aspects of four authors' projects that are informed by and inextricable from their status as self-translators: Julien Green (selves-writings), Samuel Beckett (echo…Echo), Romain Gary (mythic autobiography), and Nancy Huston (translation as structure).

Through close readings of the many versions of a text, I engage questions of self-translation with larger themes, structures, and even genres of the works. I build on recent work by translation scholars who demonstrate the fruitfulness of centering writers' practice of self-translation in their oeuvre. This scholarship brings original and translation into dialogue, blurring the bounds between them. Echoing these earlier studies' call for understanding translation's fundamental role in these authors' creations, I posit that the criticism of said creations can benefit from a similar movement. Taking up recurring topics from scholarship on these authors and reconsidering them in light of the act of self-translation brings original perspectives to author specific studies as well as the broader fields of translation studies and literary composition.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One should allow the writer-as-self-translator some freedom, some room for play within his own work, if only for the sake of enriching that work. And of course, I allow myself such playfulness — often simply for the sake of playfulness, but also in an effort to make sense out of my own writing. But there is also a more important reason for wanting to translate one's work: since we know that language is what gets us where we want to go but at the same time prevents us from getting there [I am paraphrasing Samuel Beckett here], then by using another language, the other language in us, we may have a better chance of getting where we want to go, a better chance of saying what we wanted to say, or at least we have a second chance of succeeding. That is to say, we have the possibility of correcting the errors of the original text.

-Raymond Federman "A Voice Within a Voice"

As the author, critic, and self-translator Raymond Federman explains, the possibilities afforded to the author who translates their own texts are numerous. For Federman, this re-engagement with the text can function as play, but also a means to better understand the text, and, in the process, himself. But it is also a means to say again, to say better [I am parodying Samuel Beckett here]. For Federman, if *language* can impede us from saying what we want to say then *languages* might indeed be the solution. But this endeavor is not without its pitfalls. To take up anew a text that is, in some sense, complete undoes the finality it once had, akin to plucking away the final period of a novel and unraveling the whole text in the process. But it is through this undoing that Federman imagines he might correct "the errors" of the original text.

The title of this study, "Writing and Wronging: Prerogatives of the Self-translator," takes aim precisely at the question Federman raises when he evokes the possibility of correcting a text through translation. What are the potential "errors" an author might hope to rectify in translation? Are such errors the same that a reader would

identify? How precisely is ameliorating the original through translation better than simply editing it again in the same language? But most importantly, how might translation give us a "better chance of getting where we want to go"? In this study I consider the work of four self-translators whose destinations and modes of transport are varied. Not all believe that a text can be improved on in translation; not all believe that the second version of the text is a translation at all.

The meaning of "to wrong" a text, as I evoke in my title, should be understood in all its ambiguity. In translation, a text could be wronged in the sense of a misconstruing its meaning, or it could be treated harshly or unjustly. The latter does not necessarily result in the former, nor vice versa. Writing a wrong may indeed be of value for a writer looking to expand and densify the meaning of their work across languages. Consider this in terms of Philip Lewis' conception of "abusive fidelity," which**,** he explains, "values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies and plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own" (43). Such a manner of translation resists the target language (idiomatic usage, style, etc.) and thus interrogates the structure of its source, discovering new potential for meaning. It is thus an alternative form of fidelity crafted through abuse, a deliberate manner of translating against the grain. For most translators, this level of freedom is unattainable. "We rarely forgive such liberties," notes Federman, giving the example of Richard Howard's "unfaithful translation" of *Les Fleurs du mal* which received harsh criticism. And yet, for the self-translator no such stigma exists.

In the most common type of translation (allograph translation), individual(s) interpret the original, written by another, in order to write it in a new language. In the case of self-translation (or autotranslation), it is the author of the original work who crafts the resulting translation. Translation points to both the process of rendering meaning into a new medium as well as the product of this labor. Translation is cause and effect. Translation effects translations. Thus, the mechanism cannot be separated from its output. To study translation is, therefore, to focus on the in-betweenness of language, as well as the discrete iterations that result from the movement through this intermediary space. The conflict of languages, between which the allograph translator acts as a mediator for two parties, is an internal one for the author/translator. This configuration problematizes a number of assumptions easily taken for granted when considering allograph translations, notable among them: what, or which, is the original? Should we have recourse to a chronology of manuscripts to determine in which language the source text is written? What if the two versions of the text are written simultaneously? What if the translated text does not refer back to the printed original text but rather to the author's memory of it? These are just a sampling of questions to be explored in the pages that follow.

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In their introduction to the collection of essays titled *L'Autotraduction littéraire : Perspectives théoriques*, Alessandra Ferraro and Rainier Grutman begin, "De la même façon que l'autobiographie est le récit que l'on fait soi-même de sa propre vie, l'autotraduction peut être définie comme la traduction que l'on fait soi-même de sa propre oeuvre. Concrètement, le mot peut renvoyer à l'acte de traduire ses propres textes

dans une autre langue, ou au résultat de cette opération, à savoir le texte traduit par les soins de l'auteur de l'original" (7). We therefore understand that self-translation does not solve translation's confounding of process and product but rather seems only to bind them more tightly, while also appending this notion of "self." The self here acts as both creator and created through the interwoven processes of authorship and translation. For this reason, these scholars, in their very definition of the term, bring together the subject of autobiography with self-translation—one being the story told about one's life, the other the story told about a story told. Just as when I earlier claimed that to study translation is to study the in-betweenness of language, to study self-translation is to locate a subject in that in-betweenness—in a space where self and language are constantly reimagined.

But the implications of self-translation on the translations themselves, and on the original compositions, have until recently been largely left aside. This can be explained simply by the fact that we treat self-translators as if they were traditional authors (they are authors, after all, but not just). For this reason, the cover of your copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* (originally *Братья Карамазовы*) will read "translated by Constance Garnett," for example, but your *Malone Dies* (originally *Malone meurt*) by Samuel Beckett may not indicate that this Malone fellow will have been *mort* before he ever was dead. The result is that unless the readers do research outside the bounds of the printed volume, they can read in total ignorance of the fact that the novel came to be in translation. But even in the case where translation is noted in the paratext of a work, "translated by the author" reads like a comforting assurance to a reader trained to be on

guard against translations that might mischaracterize an original text's meaning, or read in a way that divulges that the text has been translated, i.e. written in "translatese." In these circumstances the perennial doubts over whether a translation is faithful (a term well-deserving of the scholarly problematization it has received) seem to dissipate—surely the author knows what they meant! The paradigm of authorial sovereignty has been such that it obscures the label of translator, even in the wake of poststructuralism's endless writing of obituaries for said figure. As Carolyn Shread quips, "the death of the author has not (quite) yet heralded the birth of the translator" (55). And though new modes of reading and scholarship have since emerged, either attempting to resuscitate the corpse or show that the pulse never truly faded, in the sphere of translation the belief that it is the author who holds the key to meaning has never lost its persuasive power. Indeed, we have always held up their translations as the authority and, typically, the only possibility.

Scholars, notably Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility*, have examined the pervasiveness of our preference in literary practices to turn a blind eye to translators and their work. We conceive of the ideal translation as one which passes for an original. To achieve the holy grail of compliments, "seamless," translators must disguise themselves to the best of their ability as the authors and write the text as though it were born originally in the target language of the translation. It is perhaps for this reason that self-translators are the best hidden of all. One's own face is a flawless, dare I say "seamless," disguise. And yet, as we shall see, these authors' translations often eschew norms and the ideal of the seamless. Indeed, certain self-translators delight in

tearing at these seams to see what falls out. We will explore, particularly in the chapter on Romain Gary, how self-translators take advantage of the translation to reimagine their texts and treat the original more as inspiration than gospel.

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The self-translators I have chosen to study here—Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Romain Gary, and Nancy Huston—all having written and translated between French and English, lived the majority of their lives in France, and born in the 20th century, comprise an atypical sample. Indeed, we might think that all self-translators are atypical, taking part in a rather unusual activity, reserved for the neurotic few with an abundance of time on their hands. But given some perspective, geographically and historically, the practice reveals itself to be quite common. Though hardly representative of the world of letters at large, it is notable that the Nobel Laureates in literature Frédéric Mistral (1904), Rabindranath Tagore (1913), Karl Adolph Gjellerup (1917), Luigi Pirandello (1934), Samuel Beckett (1969), Isaac Bashevis Singer (1978), Czeslaw Milosz (1980), Joseph Brodsky (1987), and Gao Xingjian (2000) all self-translated at least a portion of their corpuses—amounting to about one in every thirteen laureates (Grutman "Sociological Glance" 126). But this practice of self-translation is hardly an invention of the 20th century. As Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson explain in their study, *The Bilingual Text: History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation*,

> The tradition of the bilingual writer creating a single text in two languages, smoothly spanning different audiences, is a rich and venerable one, arising in Greco-Roman antiquity and thriving in the European Middle Ages and Renaissance. Self-translation was a common practice in the ambient translingual

> world of early modern Europe, when bilingualism was the norm, and writers increasingly translated between Latin and vernaculars. (1)

The monolingual writer is more of a modern invention than a historical legacy. Thinking back to the poets of the Pléiade and works like Joachim Du Bellay's *La Défense et illustration de la langue française*, the importance of translation as a legitimizing, and revitalizing force for the French language cannot be understated. But these poets did not just translate ancient texts but also their own, and the role self-translation played here should not be overlooked.[1] These poets nurtured and grew both the French language and their own creative practices at the same time.

Returning to our contemporary period, we can find similar themes where political and market forces greatly affect authors writing in so-called "minor languages." In many African countries, depending on the sociopolitical context, authors frequently compose directly in English or French and some self-translate into their native tongue—take Algerian poet and novelist Rachid Boudjedra for one, well-known, example. But these practices are not without their controversies. Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (a self-translator himself), among others, argue that for a literature to be called "African literature" it should be written in indigenous African languages. Some writers who go against this dictate feel the need to justify their choices; consider Chinua Achebe's essay "An Image of Africa" wherein he defends his use of the "language of the colonisers," or Assia Djebar referring to French as her *langue marâtre*, the step-mother tongue, in her

[1] For more on this see Forster and Leonard's 1970 work *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism and Literature*.

work *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Translation, and specifically self-translation, can be a source of revitalization and growth for a language. But it can also be a death-sentence. As the Scottish poet Christopher Whyte argues in an essay titled "Against Self-translation," "English is a language into which remarkably little gets translated. Why then is there all this hurry to get whatever is written in Gaelic published in English as soon as possible? In case I need to spell the answer out, what matters is to dispense with the Gaelic text, to render it superfluous" (65).[2] It seems that the price of a wider readership is the rendering superfluous of the original language, that this language in which the text is born must be sacrificed for its message to achieve notoriety. I bring this polemic to the fore to give the context in which most self-translation occurs, one in which there is an unequal power-dynamic between the two languages.

This absence of the conflict of minor/major language distinguishes my subjects, hence why earlier I termed this an atypical sample of self-translators. Though there are certainly imbalances in the relative capital which French and English possess, and perhaps this is even more striking in Francophone regions like Quebec, these four authors who work between French and English do so mostly from choice and not necessity.[3] In fact three of the four authors studied here (all but Romain Gary) have English—the current, undisputed dominant language in the West—as a mother-tongue and wrote or

[2] Echoing this concern, Corinna Krause writes, "If bilingual publication continues, one will still be left with the question, 'Why bother with the poem in Gaelic?', which inevitably implies, 'Why bother with Gaelic at all?'" (139).

[3] Returning to Grutman's list of self-translator Nobel laureates, it is interesting to note that over half self-translated their works into English, and the rest, French. The dominance of these two languages in cultural production over the course of the 20th century is undeniable.

translated into French anyway. But when answering the question, why self-translate? some have no response, others claim to have no response, and some give confusing or contradictory answers. All in all, they are a fickle group. In a letter to his publisher, Samuel Beckett claims, "I don't make a cent of additional income out of the translations, except that of Godot. I'm compelled to do it by a foolish feeling of protectiveness towards the work" (*Letters 1* 457). For Nancy Huston, "En effet c'est épouvantable, je n'aime pas le faire, je mets autant de temps sinon plus à traduire un livre qu'à l'écrire et, de la première à la dernière page, c'est une expérience fastidieuse et frustrante ... quand le livre prend enfin forme et réussit à exister dans l'autre langue, eh bien, là je me sens bien ... comme si ça prouvait qu'en fait je ne suis pas schizophrène, pas folle, puisque finalement la même personne dans les deux langues" ("Traduttore non è traditore" 158). Julien Green explains of his translingual ambitions, "My ambition was to be the good translator of a book I had not written, if I may say, a book which I might have written in French, and hadn't, a book which I wanted to think in English" ("My First Book" 222). For Romain Gary, translation afforded an opportunity to improve the text: "Je considère les versions françaises - ce ne sont pas des traductions, j'ai tout réécrit - comme supérieures aux originaux, parce que le temps m'a permis de mieux développer mes thèmes. Les 'translations' sont des martyres" (*La Nuit* 222).

Each response alludes to certain preoccupations held by each of these authors. Beckett admits to wanting to safeguard his text, presumably against what he would label a bad translation. This is an interesting response from a writer who notoriously refused to interpret his own texts, insisting that he had no special insight into these completed

works, since this stance is somewhat at odds with the practice of translation, one which cannot be separated from interpretation. Huston, taking it a step further, speaks of translation as a means to heal and integrate the two voices in her head. Green evokes a sort of pseudo-translation, a translation being birthed from an imaginary original. In other essays he insists on the different perspectives inherent in speaking a certain language. For him translating allows the subject to be treated with new eyes. And for Gary, the translations are improvements, relegating the original to the status of just one in a series of drafts.

Though all the authors I treat speak of translation with a certain amount of animosity—comparing it to getting their head beaten, inciting rage and/or nausea, etc.—they nevertheless undertake it. None holds the idea that translation is impossible, an idea moreover refuted by millennia of praxis, but they all acknowledge that in translation there are gains and losses. In self-translation these might even be amplified, higher highs and lower lows, at least as they are experienced by the author. But their persistence can be taken as proof of their overall positive appraisal, or at least a belief that there is some creative potential in the act of translation.

And yet, in the most banal sense, none of these authors *needs* to translate their work from either the French or the English. Their translations, from their own point of view, are completely superfluous. As George Steiner writes in *After Babel*, "The translator performs for others … a task no longer necessary or immediate to himself. But there is also a proprietary impulse. It is only when he 'brings home' the simulacrum of the original, when he recrosses the divide of language and community, that he feels

himself in authentic possession of his source" (380). An author does not translate their writing because they could not read the original. Nor, like a standard translator may, do they bring their text into a second language out of benevolence for an imagined reader. Remember Walter Benjamin's opening to his essay "The Task of the Translator," "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience" (253). This seems particularly true in the case of the self-translator whose focus on the text takes precedence over concerns for the reader. The typical care a translator takes to either make the reader feel at home, what translation theorists call a domesticating translation, or the care they take to uproot the reader, what theorists call a foreignizing translation, are instead turned inwards. Instead of safeguarding the reader's relationship to the text, attention is paid to the authorial relationship.

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Here it might be useful to ask a simple question: what does it mean "to translate"? The New Oxford American dictionary gives, "express the sense of (words or text) in another language". The Latin roots of the word (*trans* - across, *latus* - carry) would express something like "carrying over." Translation is just bringing across meaning from one form into another. But here we begin to spiral. If you spend any time discovering the expanding field of translation studies, you will quickly find yourself overwhelmed by the greediness for meaning of this simple verb. Translating is adapting. Translating is speaking. Translating is reading. Translating is listening. Translating is thinking. Bella Brodzki writes that translation today is seen to "underwrite all cultural transactions, from

the most benign to the most venal" (2). Once one begins to look for translation, one sees only that.

So we might then ask another question: what is untranslatable? What objects or forces exist that might resist the ever creeping influence of the verb "to translate"? This question received a fair amount of attention beginning in the early 2000s. Under the direction of the French philologist and philosopher Barbara Cassin, a sprawling work titled, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* : *dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, was published in 2004. It presents readers with over 400 entries, each consisting of a term that in some manner resists the movement from one language to another. The English translation, a project spearheaded by Emily Apter and published in 2014, reversed, to an enticing effect, the order of the titles, *The Dictionary of Untranslatables: a philosophical lexicon*, and expanded the text to include a more expansive overview of what, in the American context, would be called "theory." This dictionary of untranslatables has since been translated into over a dozen languages, a seeming reproach to its very existence. But Cassin, in her subsequent work *Eloge de la traduction*, elaborates, "Le dictionnaire des intraduisibles ne fournit pas la bonne traduction de quelque intraduisible que ce soit, il explicite les discordances, il met en présence et en réflexion, il est pluraliste et comparatif en un geste sans clôture, beaucoup plus borgésien ou oulipien que destinal et heideggérien" (54). The objective of the work is thus in no way a sort of sacralization or fetishization of words from foreign tongues with a focus on exoticizing, as one might encounter in a *Buzzfeed* listicle. It instead considers the movements of certain words across languages and the effects of this system of import/export. In the introduction to the

original work Cassin defines the untranslatable: “Parler d’intraduisibles n’implique nullement que les termes en question, ou les expressions, les tours syntaxiques et grammaticaux, ne soient pas traduits en ne puissant pas l’être - l’intraduisible, c’est plutôt ce qu’on ne cesse pas de (ne pas) traduire.” The untranslatable for Cassin is thus that which demands perpetual translation. The untranslatable is the infinitely translatable, but only tangentially so, as alluded to by the constrained negation in parentheses. This perhaps suitably responds to the question of why the word translation itself behaves like such a linguistic tyrant; it too is an untranslatable. And surely enough we find the entry for *traduire* nestled between those for *totalité* and *travail*. The entry highlights the historical twists and turns of the word *traduire*, which, of course, came into French as a translation itself.

The paradox of the untranslatable seems to me a useful departure point for considering the work of the authors under study here. Just as the words discussed in Cassin’s dictionary have proved irresistible to translators across time and languages, the works produced by the four authors in this study demanded their attention and care. The more difficult the translation the greater its attraction. As Cassin and her fellow contributors have done with various philosophical terms, I take the texts (originals, translations, writings, rewritings, doubles, versions, whichever term preferred) produced by these authors and overlay them in order to find the points at which they create friction. This is of particular relevance to self-translation precisely because of the liberty afforded to these writers, a sort of detethering of translation from original. The points at which the self-translations diverge the greatest are the most fruitful entryways into both the author’s

conceptions of translation as well as to the individual narrative themselves. That is to say, these divergences can illuminate what an author values most or to what a particular translator is most inclined to be faithful. But also, the importance of translation in an author's literary project reveals itself throughout the corpus and most notably where the texts diverge. The typical authority of an original text over its translation is subsumed by the hand of the author in the case of self-translation and thus, as they create versions of their texts, the question of what precisely is being translated becomes murky. Put another way, when Julien Green translates his autobiography *Memories of Happy Days* into *Souvenirs des jours heureux*, is he translating the text *Memories of Happy Days*, or is he simply translating his memories of happy days?

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As has been alluded to so far in this introduction, this thesis has two main objectives. The first is to identify how the practice of translation affects the writings (both original and translations) of these particular authors. As it relates to translation, this means better understanding its relationship to the original and how the fact of self-translation creates a dialogue unlike that of allophone translations and their originals. As it relates to the original, this means identifying the presence and effect of translation on a text that has yet to be, or might never be, translated by the author. The second main objective is to situate these writers' translation practices among the existing scholarship on their works. Though this might seem an obvious objective for a dissertation, perhaps one not even worth stating, it is in fact a thorny issue for self-translated corpuses. Oftentimes these bodies of work find their scholarship in siloes: one from a French

perspective, the other from the anglophone, and neither considering the other, nor the importance of translation on itself. Brian Fitch, writing precisely on this differing view of Samuel Beckett's work across the linguistic divide, explains, "To oversimplify the situation, one might say that the anglophone Existentialist writer and the francophone New Novelist are barely on speaking terms with one another!" (*Beckett and Babel* 16). This objective can thus be understood as accomplishing two goals: first, to put in clearer dialogue the scholarship in French and English on these authors, and second, to recenter questions of translation in the broader criticism. The four chapters, each dedicated to a single author, examine facets of selections of the corpuses where the role of translation may be easy to overlook, and where the scholarship focuses its gaze elsewhere. They are organized chronologically by author's birthdate: beginning with Julien Green in 1900, Samuel Beckett in 1906, Romain Gary in 1914, and finally Nancy Huston in 1953.

The first chapter, "Julien Green Translating His Self," takes for its subject the prolific and anguished figure of Julien Green. Born to American parents in Paris, Green was raised and educated bilingually. Though he wrote a great number of novels, plays, and essays, Green is today known best for having published one of the most extensive collections of self-writing (diaries, autobiography, and personal essays) in the history of French letters and having had the rare privilege of seeing their publication in the Pléiade editions during his lifetime. These writings tell the story of a strongly conflicted identity along lines of religion, sexuality, and nationality. He was a devoted diarist who carefully catalogued nearly every day of his life for seventy years, spanning nearly the entirety of the 20th century, while also writing fiction as a means to both escape the mundane and

tell his own story differently. Though Green remained loyal to his American roots and set many of his novels and plays in the American South, his language of choice was French.

My investigation of Green's work focuses on the intersection of Green's role as autobiographer and his role as self-translator in a broad sense. Given that he translated a relatively small proportion of his works, my focus in this chapter is on his autobiographical writing across languages. When enumerating Green's works one must take pains to be specific about his autobiographical works, precisely because of the complicated nature of his self-translation. He initially authored an autobiography in English, *Memories of Happy Days* (1942), and then four volumes of autobiography in French: *Partir avant le jour* (1963), *Mille Chemins ouverts* (1964)*, Terre lointaine* (1966), and *Jeunesse* (1974). Green's English volume and the first two volumes of his French texts cover roughly the same period of Green's early life. He would later translate *Memories of Happy Days* into French and it was published posthumously as *Souvenirs des jours heureux* (2007); he did not translate any of his French autobiography into English. We thus have six autobiographical texts, five in French and one in English, covering the same period of the young Green's life—a period in which he traveled between France and the United States just as he travels between English and French. He thus created a constellation of translations and rewritings of his early years which give his bilingual reader a rich and colorful portrait of both the young, aspiring writer and the memoirist looking back at his former self.

Bringing together studies on autobiography, notably those by Philippe Lejeune and Michael Sheringham, with those on translation, I analyze Green's choices of subject,

as well as how he translates these memories, to demonstrate that, to a certain extent, autobiography itself is an act of translation. I consider specific moments from Green's self-writings, also incorporating selections from his fiction, to shed light on how memory is a result of both language and choice.

In my second chapter, "Beckett Echoing in Translation," I examine selected texts from the work of Samuel Beckett and turn my attention away from the relationship of self-writing and self-translation towards the question of echo. The most well-known of my authors, Beckett, was born and raised in Ireland before taking up a permanent residence in Paris prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. For much of his career he composed in his adopted language of French and would later (or occasionally simultaneously) translate back into his native English. Though French into English comprises the majority of his self-translations, the reverse can also be found. There is a vast and growing amount of scholarship dedicated to Beckett's self-translation—more than the cumulative amount written on all other self-translators. In this chapter I engage this criticism on self-translation (in particular the works of Brian Fitch, Sinéad Mooney, and Daniel Katz) with the equally vibrant field of scholarship devoted to questions of orality in Beckett works (notably scholarship by Thomas Hunkeler). As many scholars have demonstrated, though the focus on orality presents most clearly in Beckett's theater, it can also be appreciated in his prose and their translations. Among the many possible avenues of inquiry I choose to focus on the question of echo and argue that it can be understood as the Beckettian ideal of translation: repetition with difference, but also distance.

Considering works across genres —theater: *Krapp's Last Tape*; novella: *Mercier and Camier*; and novels: *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*—this chapter focuses on the function of echoes within the narrative of the works while also considering the echolike relationship Beckett creates between his originals and translations. In the first section of the chapter I analyze the significance of the thirty-year-period between Beckett's original composition of *Mercier et Camier* and his English translation and I read his translation (and translating) of this text through the lens of his play *Krapp's Last Tape*, a piece in which an old man listens back to tapes (a sort of audio-diary) he recorded as a young man. The relationship Krapp has to his former self (and his relationship to his francophone self) mirrors that of Beckett-translator with Beckett-author in relationship to *Mercier and Camier*, running the gamut from indulgent to condescending, all the while trying to forge the possibility of an echo of these voices which once spoke and can again in translation. The theater is thus played out on the pages between original and translation.

Looking to Beckett's three novels (often referred to as his trilogy), I bring together studies of repetition with questions of echo and translation. I demonstrate that these six novels (three in English, three in French) are in constant dialogue with and through one another, creating echoes which reverberate across volume and language. I consider Leslie Hill's suggestion that we should understand, "the novels to be simultaneous, not sequential ... each recounting the same events or experiences from differing levels of consciousness," through the lens of echoing translations and demonstrate how Beckett insists on difference so as to create friction (and silence) in the

versions of the texts (58). I conclude this chapter with a note on the importance of the myth of Echo in Beckett's works and how it too figures in his practice of self-translation.

Chapter three, "The Many Lives of Roman Kacew," brings our focus back to questions of self-writing and self-translation within the works of Romain Gary. Romain Gary, who would go on to be a celebrated aviator during the Second World War, was born in present-day Lithuania and immigrated to France as a young teenager. A polyglot, he learned French at a young age and English as an adult, adding to his already deep linguistic arsenal of Russian, Polish, German, and Yiddish. He published in both French and English and self-translated in both directions—of the four authors studied, he is the only one to neither write nor translate from or into his native language. In his relatively short career, cut short by his untimely suicide, Gary published a number of novels and essays, as well as penned screenplays. Many of his works, and his translations, were published using various pseudonyms, the most famous of which, Émile Ajar, would go on to win him his second Prix Goncourt for the novel *La Vie devant soi*.

Several rigorous autobiographical studies of Gary have demonstrated the degree to which Gary took liberties with the facts of his past when representing them in his self-writings. In this chapter I engage these scholarly works detailing the creative truth-telling practices with Gary's self-translation project. I study how, in his translations between French and English, he adhered to a similar practice of allowing the source to act not as a strict authority but a loose inspiration for the version to follow. I analyze the texts of Gary that can be considered self-writings, whether in style or content: *La Promesse de l'aube* and its translation, *Promise at Dawn*; *Pseudo*; and *Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar*. I

begin by outlining Gary's practice of autobiography then go through a number of important differences in translation between *La Promesse de l'aube* and *Promise at Dawn*. In the later sections I move to *Pseudo* and conclude with *Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar*, both of which are written in the mode of autobiography but neither translated by Gary.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of Gary's early novels, *L'Éducation européenne* and *Les Racines du ciel*, to demonstrate how the author crafts his fictions around the central figure of a mythic hero. This practice of myth-making proves to be vital to Gary's self-writing and specifically the autobiographically inspired *La Promesse de l'aube*. Engaging with the work of Gary's biographers, I analyze the differences between the facts of Gary's life with his recounting of them, and then use *Promise at Dawn* as a third point of reference to better understand how Gary's choice of truth was impacted by his translation of it. This discussion also takes into account Gary's view of translation as an opportunity for revision, and argues that this process of revision is mirrored in the way he views his own past. Turning to the later works in Gary's career we see that the work of self-translations that he valued greatly tapered to nothing once the invented persona of Émile Ajar arrives on the scene. In the work *Pseudo*—a memoir that is ostensibly written by an author, not Gary, who has been using Émile Ajar as a pseudonym—Gary demonstrates how autobiography is a mode of writing that can be used to tell a story not one's own. Through analysis of this text, and Gary's final text, *Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar*, this chapter understands the creation of Émile Ajar as a replacement for the type of self-creation that self-translation previously afforded the author.

Finally, chapter four, "Nancy Huston's Unreadable Books," turns explicitly to questions of translation's impacts on narrative structure in original compositions. This chapter focuses on Franco-Canadian author Nancy Huston, whose production of self-translation, among the authors at study in this dissertation, is only second to Samuel Beckett's. Huston, a native English speaker, took up residency in Paris in her early twenties and began writing novels in her adopted French. To date, she has self-translated nearly all of her sixteen novels, from both French to English and the reverse. The title of my chapter, "Nancy Huston's unreadable books" is admittedly, slightly provocative. But unreadable can be defined in a number of ways and I am using it quite literally. By unreadable I refer to the prominent texts that exist in some form or another, usually within the fictional space of the novels, but that are not presented to the reader. The unreadable texts that will be my focus are those in Huston's novels that bear the brunt of the structural enterprise of the novel but are nevertheless absent from their pages and do not exist in reality.

These themes and structures are found throughout Huston's corpus. The two novels on which this chapter focuses are *Trois fois septembre* and *Cantique des plaines*. The former is one of the rare novels that Huston has never translated from its original French; the latter was originally written in English (*Plainsong*) and stirred some controversy when it was awarded the Governor General's Prize in the category for an original work in French. Huston defended the decision by asserting that her translations are rather rewritings and must therefore be considered originals in their own right.

The first novel studied, *Trois fois septembre*, recounts a mother-daughter weekend spent reading aloud the diary of the daughter's recently deceased best friend. Since the diary is written in English but the main character's mother is French, the text is a transcription of a spontaneous oral interpretation from English into French by the main character. The book is thus a novel *in* translation while also being a novel *about* translation. *Cantique des plaines* also takes the diary of a deceased character as its structuring force, this time that of the narrator's grandfather. This narrator, writing mostly in the second-person, addressing her grandfather, attempts to reconstruct the story of his life through the reading of the text he left behind. Just as in Huston's earlier novel, the reader has the impression of understanding the contents of the inaccessible diaries, while the narrator (and the author) always keep them at a distance. I argue that by closely reading these texts we can understand how Huston takes inspiration from the work of translation to compose her original texts. The translated text refers to a text outside of itself and when it has been done shrewdly, the two may be confused for each other, or act as stand-ins, rewritings even.

Though the authors under study in this thesis have much in common (language: French and English, time period: from 1900 to the present, place: Paris), their conceptions and practices of self-translation vary widely, as do the effects of said practice on their original compositions, and the criticism dedicated to them from scholars. The following chapters hope to contribute to this continuing exploration of these authors' works through the lens of self-translation. These studies, each focused on a different aspect of the self-translators' corpuses come together to demonstrate that self-translation

is never an ancillary activity for its practitioners, but rather an essential piece of their project, and key to understanding their works.

CHAPTER TWO: Julien Green Translating His Self

Sans être étranger nulle part, partout je suis double.

-Julien Green, *Souvenirs des jours heureux*

Julien Green, born Julian Green, was a singular, double character. He was singular in the remarkable body of work he left behind—one in which the ordinary and fantastic, pious and taboo, self and other, cross gazes in the mirror and leave the reader wondering, who is who. Green's corpus—which includes novels, theater, essays, journals, autobiography, short stories, and more—was born out of a need to explore the possibility of being more than himself, and more specifically, the possibility for doubleness. It was the intense contradictions of his character that gave Green the impression of being double and one need look no further than the titles of his collections of his collection of essays (*L'Homme et son ombre*, *Le langage et son double*), his novel (*Si j'étais vous…*), or the volume of his diaries (*Pourquoi suis-je moi*), to see that these questions of who might I have been, or, who are these different parts of me, were a lifelong fascination of Green.

Over the course of his nearly 98-year life (1900-1998), he wrestled with perpetually unresolved contradictions in his identity. He was a Catholic who grew up in a Protestant family. He was at times an American living in France and at times a Frenchman living in the United States. He was an anglophone who wrote in French and a francophone who wrote in English. Towards the end of his life he was still a child of the

American Civil War living in Paris during the days of the Minitel. He was a gay man living alternatively a life of tortured pleasure and pained chastity. He kept detailed diaries and wrote extensive autobiographies, the latter seemingly to fill in the gaps of the former.

Through his fiction, he found some relief in his ability to voyage among the psyches of his characters and imagine a life outside his own—a life in which he mastered desire rather than the reverse. Ironically for an author who is most well known for his expansive, published diaries, Green was most at ease when he could trace out the shape of his *je* on paper without the obligation to fill it in with himself. Counterintuitively, he claims in several diary entries that his most genuine autobiographical work is found on the pages of his novels: "Mes livres sont des livres de prisonnier qui rêve de liberté ... Mon vrai journal est dans mes romans" (2: 794), or later "Mon vrai journal se trouve enfoui dans ce que j'invente" (4: 660).[4] He had a need to imagine himself as someone else, to undertake voyages in the identities of others. In the original *avant-propos* to his novel *Si j'étais vous*, he writes "Je me rappelle très nettement qu'alors que je savais à peine tracer des bâtons sur une feuille de papier, je me demandais pourquoi j'étais moi-même et non une autre personne" (2: 1526). This line of questioning would become Green's lifelong pursuit, extending over thousands of pages in autobiography, novels, essays, plays, and short stories.

[4] All references to Julien Green's writing in French, and in English when possible, are found in the eight-volume Pléiade editions of his *œuvres complètes* published by Gallimard between 1972 and 1998.

His story begins in 1900 in Paris, where he was born to American parents who had emigrated from the southern United States three years prior for his father's position with the Southern Cotton Oil Company. Green's mother, born to a prominent family in Savannah, imbued pride for the Confederacy in her young son, one which he would hold onto despite spending relatively few of his 97 years living abroad**.** A three-year stint studying at the University of Virginia and his time spent in various locations on the East Coast in the United States during World War II constituted the bulk of his time outside France. Despite this, the Civil War-era American South is the setting for many of his novels and plays.

Over the course of his nearly seventy-year career, Green authored eighteen novels, five plays, fourteen volumes of diaries, several volumes of autobiography, six collections of essays and two works of non-fiction. In a profile done by the *New York Times* in 1996, asked how he was able to create such a massive corpus of texts, Green responds simply, "I am not prolific, I am just very old." But this large body of work remains relatively unknown in the United States. In France he is best known for his extensive journals that were published in the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* during his lifetime. Interest has been renewed in Green's corpus since the publication of the first three volumes of his *Journal intégral* (the most recent volume appearing in September 2021), which include previously excised entries and language from the Pléiade editions that range from reflections on members of his social circle to descriptions of his sexual experiences and desires. This trove of previously unpublished material sheds much light on Green's sexuality but also, and of particular importance to this study, on his

relationship to the United States and the role of English in his life.[5] Green holds the distinction of being the first foreign member elected to the *Académie française* since, despite being born in Paris and being offered French nationality in 1972 by then-President Georges Pompidou, he never became a French citizen.

Though Green remained loyal to his American passport, his language of choice was French. My investigation of Green's work focuses on the intersection of Green's roles as autobiographer, diarist, and self-translator. Given that he translated a relatively small proportion of his works, my focus in this chapter will be on his self-writings (*écritures de soi*) across languages.[6] When enumerating his works, rather than giving a specific figure I wrote that he penned *several* autobiographical works. I hesitate precisely because of the complicated nature of his self-translation. He initially authored an autobiography in English, *Memories of Happy Days* (1942), and then four volumes of autobiography in French: *Partir avant le jour* (1963), *Mille Chemins ouverts* (1964), *Terre lointaine* (1966), and *Jeunesse* (1974).[7] Green's English volume and the first two volumes of his French texts cover roughly the same period of Green's early life. He also translated *Memories of Happy Days* into French as *Souvenirs des jours heureux* shortly

[5] Oddly, sentences in which Green shows a preference for the US over France the sentences were often excised from the Pléiade publication. For example in an entry from 16 November 1934: "Beaucoup songé à l'Amérique. J'y regretterai la France mais moins qu'ici je ne regrette l'Amérique. J'appartiens à l'Amérique" (842).

[6] The only published works of fiction self-translated by Green are his short story "Christine" and his play *Sud*. His sister, Anne Green, was a collaborator on these and also independently translated a number of his other works into English.

[7] For ease of reference these works will from here on be named by the first word in their title: *Memories*, *Partir*, *Mille*, *Terre*, *Jeunesse*.

after completing the original but it was only published posthumously; he did not translate any of his French autobiography into English. Finally, to add to this palimpsestic rewriting of the same period, Green also wrote a short work titled *Quand nous habitions tous ensemble* (1944) which he claims is what he began writing in French when he first wanted to write *Memories of Happy Days*.

Lastly, a thorough summary of his autobiographical works would not be complete without mentioning his works *Fin de Jeunesse* (1968), *Ce qu'il faut d'amour à l'homme* (1978), and the preface to his novel *Le Visionnaire* (1934). These works did not originally figure into his four-volume autobiography in French but when these volumes were reprinted in a single edition as *Jeunes Années* (1985), both *Fin de Jeunesse* and *Quand nous habitions ensemble* were included. In total that makes ten works of autobiography in which a majority of the pages are dedicated to Green's younger years. Remarkably, though Green lived nearly 100 years, his autobiographical writings rarely give any account past age thirty. Some of these autobiographical works are supported and reinforced by entries from his journals, which, of course, are also published. However, what we glean from the diaries of Julien Green during the period in which he composed other self-writings is the work of autobiography and not the life portrayed within them. That is to say, during the early years of his life that comprise the grand majority of these volumes, Green did not keep a diary. It is not until after his studies at the University of Virginia, upon his return to France, that he makes journal writing an important part of his life. This coincides with the beginning of his professional writing career. Considering this, one might surmise that the autobiographical works were written in order to fill in the

gaps left in the records kept in his diary and to round out his life on the page. But whatever the reason, these amalgamated texts secure Green's place among the most productive writers of the self in the history of French letters.

Owing to the massive output of autobiography and diary volumes, scholars have been able to dissect and analyze Green's literary accomplishments through an extremely detailed biographical lens. These biographical criticisms have been able to convincingly connect his characters to their real-life inspirations while also locating the genesis for every text. Green detailed much of this information in his diary and even allowed these pages to be published during his lifetime, really only withholding the more prurient matters of his day-to-day life. Curious readers thus have an intimate view into his creative process and state of mind while composing.

Certainly the two most well-trodden fields of inquiry in Green's biography are his homosexuality and his religious faith and conversion.[8] Given that these two themes are the drivers of nearly every piece of his autobiographical writing, this should not surprise us. Through his own writings, Green primes the reader to see these themes played out across his corpus. He provides us with ample reflections on his personal experiences of sexuality and religion, as well as on the topics at large. In slightly more abstract terms, Enrico Guerini summarizes: "Le centre de ce récit autobiographique serait à la fois

[8] For some works on these topics see: Richard Foisy's *L'expérience de Dieu avec Julien Green* (Fides, 2000); Antony H. Newbury's *Julien Green : Religion and Sensuality* (Rodopi, 1986); Louis-Henri Parias' *Julien Green corps et âme* (Fayard, 1994); or Robert Ziegler's essays "Autobiographical Discourse in Julien Green's *L'Autre sommeil*" and "The Writer's Identity as Self-Dismantling Text in Julien Green's *Si j'étais vous. . .*"

représenté par le 'développement des passions', mais aussi par la 'lutte de l'instinct et de l'éducation'" (*L'Aveu* 157). Reading at the intersection of these themes, Walter Benjamin writes of Green's writings, "La souffrance est bien le sujet dominant, et peut-être même le seul sujet" ("Julien Green" 170).

The current state of the Green scholarship can be more or less divided into two areas: in the first, Green's fiction is understood in light of his self-writing in order to better understand the text; in the second, Green's corpus, fiction included, is read through an autobiographical lens in an attempt to better understand Green the man.[9] Both methods allow crucial insight into how Green's queerness and faith informed his writing as well as how both these facets of his identity were impacted by his writing. It would be impossible to engage in any meaningful criticism of Green's writing of the self without carefully taking into account these counterbalances in his life. Due to Green's lack of notoriety in the anglophone world, coupled with the imbalance of his French to English output, the studies of his self-writings rarely engage the English-language contributions and in some cases do not even include mention of their existence. This might be explained by a belief that Green's *Memories*, a much shorter work than its counterpart, contains only an abbreviated version of what he later writes in French and thus does not merit closer investigation.[10] This study attempts to correct this oversight and brings interlingual

[9] Here see, for example, Carole Auroy's *Hôtes du langage : Claudel, Mauriac, Bernanos*, *Green* (2015) or Hélène Dottin's *L'Écriture du moi dans l'œuvre romanesque de Julien Green, 1947-1987* (2000).
[10] In purely quantitative terms, Green's output in French to describe the same period of his life dwarfs that of his English. *Partir* and *Mille*, which correspond roughly to the timeline described in *Memories*, span 390 pages in the Pléiade edition; *Memories* barely breaks 200 pages in the Harper Bros version. Accounting for page layout, the French is therefore over double the length of the English.

translation, rewriting, and autobiography into conversation with one another. As mentioned earlier, I limit my scope of inquiry to Green's self-writings (autobiography, essay, diary) in order to provide a kaleidoscopic reading of Green's early years and self-formation. By kaleidoscopic reading I propose a layered reading of texts composed at different periods or in different languages but taking for subject the same period of his life, such as we find in the constellation of autobiography outlined above.

Green's autobiography cannot be understood meaningfully without engaging it across the languages in which he writes and the ways in which he rewrites it, even in the same language. He is therefore both an intralingual and interlingual translator, and, as we shall see, he often takes greater liberty in the former than the latter. These works offer us access to understanding about how writing defines self and how self can be translated across and through language. One way to understand Green's self-writing is as the description of what the author sees when glimpsing himself in the mirror.[11] The autobiographer attempts to integrate this otherness, innate to the gaze of the reflected subject, through the writing **process,** with the ostensible goal of creating a unified vision of the self. But in self-translation, it is as though the subject is himself replaced by the mirror into which he previously gazed. The reflections refract, becoming too scattered to bring together, and the subject itself fragments. But rather than reading this as a failure of Green's translingual autobiographical project, I propose instead that Green rejects the

[11] It is notable, as Guerini details, that there are dozens of moments in the French autobiographical volumes where the subject peers at himself in the mirror. I will return to this point in my conclusion.

synthesis (or creation) of meaning typically revered by the practice of autobiography and embraces the duality offered by translation.

More and more, the domain of translation studies has found new significance across traditional academic divides and the following pages hope to contribute to this expanding collaboration. To this end, in addition to analyzing Green's translation proper of his autobiographical text and essays, I will also examine how the work of autobiography is itself analogous to the work of translation—from lived experience to page—while also confronting certain tenets of narratology that cannot be ignored in the self-translation of autobiography. This undoubtedly requires an examination of how memory and autobiography interact and become interdependent while at the same time exposing the cracks of the convenient model of the subject represented by the first-person autobiographical narrator. Green's rich oeuvre facilitates this palimpsestic inquiry contrasting temporality, language, and models of self and otherness.

Self-Writing

In order to investigate how Green renders his life intelligible to himself and to his reader, it shall be useful to first briefly describe the contents of his autobiographical writings. As stated, Green's autobiography is principally interested in his early years. As hinted at in the title of *Memories of Happy Days*, Green had a comfortable childhood, the majority of which was spent in the 16th arrondissement of Paris. He was the family's youngest child and grew up with his four older sisters in a large Protestant household where his care was shared between his mother and a succession of French nannies. They

were his first contact with the language in which he would author the majority of his works. Whereas the nannies imparted language, his mother was the principal means by which his early faith was communicated. She would read aloud nightly from the King James Bible to her children and insisted on attending the local Protestant church. In his writings Green details a great fondness for his mother and characterizes her as both a moral guide and protector. Her early death, when Green was only 14, would leave him grief-stricken for many years to follow.

In the wake of her death, the young Green became captivated by the teachings of the Catholic Church. When he revealed this newfound devotion to his father, Green learned that he too had converted to Catholicism just a few months prior. His own conversion took place in the wake of his mother's death, plunging himself into a religious fervor perhaps as a means to grieve, or a distraction from it. Two years later, at the outbreak of World War I, he volunteered as an ambulance driver for the American Field Service. Once it was discovered that he was too young to be enlisted he returned home and would later join up with French forces towards the end of the war. He completed his training just shy of being able to contribute to the war efforts. It was at this time that when faced with the prospect of finding a career, Green began to seriously consider the arts, since he had always loved working on sketches. But shortly thereafter, at his father's urging, he shipped off to the United States to attend the University of Virginia. This departure from France greatly pained the young Green, who believed that to leave France was the worst possible fate. This was the first time he was able to experience a country that at once felt foreign and familiar. In *Terre* he describes waking up in Charlottesville

and looking out the window: “Si attaché que je fusse à la France, je me rendis compte qu’une partie de moi-même n’avait d’autre origine que la terre où je me trouvais maintenant” (5: 1047). He became acquainted with his American relatives and visited much of the American South, which his mother had so lovingly described to him as a child.

Though Green did not complete his degree at the university, it was there that he began seriously writing and would publish for the first time.[12] Though Green experienced varying degrees of same-sex attraction throughout his adolescence, his time in Virginia marked a turning point in which he began to see himself, at least privately, as a gay man. In one striking moment in *Terre*, Green describes his epiphany during a lecture on the Ancient Greeks where the professor describes same-sex practices of the period.

> J’eus peur de cette révélation qui me montrait pareil aux jeunes gens de l’Antiquité. La honte de l’Antiquité, je la portais donc en moi, je la portais en moi seul. Entre ces générations disparues depuis plus de vingt siècles et moi, il existait ce lien extraordinaire. Dans le monde moderne, j’étais seul à cause de cela … car l’invraisemblable de toute cette histoire était que je me croyais *seul* à éprouver cet amour inquiétant. (5: 1074)

Throughout his writing, the manner in which he idealized and described male bodies would reflect this connection to the ancient world, but little by little he came to find that he was indeed not *seul* in experiencing these types of feelings. It was on campus that he met a fellow student, referred to as Mark in the autobiographies, with whom he would

[12] His first publication was the short story titled “The Apprentice Psychiatrist,” published in *The University of Virginia Magazine* in 1920.

form a close friendship though he harbored a deep longing for a more intimate relationship. Once back in Paris, Green once again tried his hand at the arts in the hopes of becoming a painter, but not long afterwards, discouraged by the disconnect between the art he hoped to create and the art in vogue at the time, he instead took seriously to writing. Though never becoming a regular in the writing salons, he did frequent notable authors of the period—François Mauriac, Jean Cocteau, and André Gide among them—who guided and advised his writing while also acting as important interlocutors for Green's relationship with his faith and sexuality.

With the exception of Green's writing on his spiritual journey in *Ce qu'il faut d'amour à l'homme*, this is the final period of Green's life depicted in his autobiographical work. It covers the period from his earliest memories of childhood up to the age of twenty-seven. He allows his diary and fiction to tell the story of his 70 years following his début as a young writer in Paris. Of course, autobiography necessarily casts its gaze backward, but in the case of Green it never even came within ten years or so of the present. And interestingly, Green's long work of autobiography began as a bit of an accident. Just after the armistice was signed between France and Germany in 1940, Green sailed to the United States where he would remain until the end of the war and where he would write *Memories*. By this time he was already an accomplished novelist and felt the best way to dull the pain of France's defeat would be to immediately continue his writing. As he always had, he began this text in French, but soon after, believing it would be much easier to find a publisher for a work in English, he took these early pages as a starting point from which to continue in English. His original project was to write a

portrait of France in order to convey to his American readers what the country had meant to him. It was a way to keep the memory of France alive in his mind during his time abroad, but instead the work quickly slipped into the form of autobiography. As he explains in the foreword to *Memories*, "it occurred to me that I could best show what I owed to France by calling up the memories of all the happy days I had spent under her kindly and generous care; at the same time I thought it might perhaps be a suitable way of thanking that great and good person" (ix-x).

As a result, his first published autobiography was in English. But this work must have in some way felt unfinished since the first and second volumes in his French series recount the same period of his life. One might hypothesize that he simply wanted his French readers to have access to the entire autobiography, but if this were the case then he might have published the rather straightforward translation of *Memories* that he completed in the 1940s and then shelved. In any case, reading across these texts one seems to encounter a struggle to lay an authoritative claim to ownership of the stories. The style, as well as the content, of his French and English diverge, and one begins to have the impression that they were not written by the same hand. As Genevieve Waite explains, "Whereas in English, Green exhibits a conspicuous 'American identity' while presenting a meek and unassuming narrative voice, in French, he dramatically modifies his language to forge a distinct 'French' sense of identity while appearing to be more assertive, confident, and speculative" ("Julien Green" 362). Indeed, Green's voice in his French compositions overshadows that in his English. Remarking on this, Michael Sheringham writes that in Green's French works, "The narrator's presence in the text—

through hyperbole, prolepsis, the ecstatic celebration of past moments and their return in writing—could scarcely be more strongly marked" (124). These differences hardly went unnoticed by the author, who himself remarks in his diary, "Traduit sept ou huit pages de *Memories of Happy Days*, mais je ne sais si je continuerai. Certaines naïvetés passent en anglais qui ne sont pas supportables en français. C'est que je ne suis pas la même personne dans les deux langues" (4: 804).

As for the differences in what Green recounts of his life in the French and English versions of his autobiographies, the topic of his sexuality is most striking. In Green's English, in contrast to the French, there is nothing that we might today consider a "coming out." Rather it aligns with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of closetedness as "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). However, Enrico Guerini insists, too strongly in my opinion, that in *Memories*, "le thème de la sexualité n'est même pas effleuré, encore moins celui de l'attirance envers les personnes du même sexe ; c'est un des aspects qui différencie le plus *Memories of happy days* des textes réunis dans *Jeunes années*" ("'Il faut'" 58-9). Indeed, Green's exploration of his homosexuality is more explicit in the works collected in *Jeunes années*, but the manner in which Green's sexuality is obscured in English nevertheless marks its presence in the text. Whereas Green's French includes much greater discussion of physical desire, and veiled references to physical acts, the English gives a greater account of the emotional connection to certain of Green's friends, and notably his long-term partner Robert de Saint Jean.

Moreover, as we shall see, Green's sexuality is not the only subject that he treats differently across his French and English self-writings.

Since no one version of Green's autobiography can be taken as a definitive account, and thus no meaning attributed to any given event can really be taken as authoritative, this constellation of self-writings complicates our understanding of how autobiography functions. Typically this is a genre that defines itself precisely on its authority and uniqueness. Philippe Lejeune, the author of the most influential definition of the genre to date, nearly outright excludes the possibility of competing autobiographies:

> Enfin, on peut situer l'autobiographie… par rapport à elle-même : en principe, de même qu'un homme ne meurt qu'une fois, il n'écrit qu'une seule autobiographie. C'est ce qui rend particulièrement solennel et émouvant l'acte autobiographique, alors que le journal, au contraire, est fondé sur un perpétuel recommencement, et que l'essai peut également se refaire. Quand on commence à écrire sa vie, on sait que l'on va donner une forme définitive et un sens à tout ce qu'on avait jusque-là laissé de mouvant d'incertain dans son passé, et que ce récit une fois écrit, il sera difficile de le recomposer autrement. (*L'Autobiographie en France* 27)

Lejeune's argument makes intuitive sense, and mirrors the reality of a great majority of autobiographies, which, through their singularity, claim the status of the definitive account.[13] This is because autobiography is not just simply a collection of memories, but a structuring of experiences into a coherent narrative of selfhood. Therefore, this finely crafted and unique "self" is the product of an autobiography; one cannot rewrite the

[13] Lejeune makes exceptions for certain autobiographers, Michel Leiris, for example, who do not align with this vision of the genre, but not for reasons of translation.

autobiography without rewriting the self contained within and created by it. But Green's self-writings defy this model through their multiplicity. He writes, translates, writes, and rewrites not only without worry that this might fragment the conception of the self he creates but even with this as the express goal. Indeed, if we accept Lejeune's statement that "[l]e sujet profond de l'autobiographie c'est le nom propre," then perhaps it is unsurprising that Julian Green (the name he was born with) and Julien Green (the Gallicized version of his name suggested by his French editor) both needed to tell their own stories (33).

This debate over the possibility of multiple definitive versions of an autobiography calls to mind its analog in translation studies: that thorny notion of the "original." Indeed, in most cases determining the source text for a translation is quite simple. If the translator is, at the most fundamental level, "someone who reads in order to write," as Clive Scott argues, then we can locate what has been read and affix it with the status of the original (17). But in the case of Julian Green, and the other self-translators at study in this dissertation, finding such a text sometimes proves impossible. It may be tempting to consider his diary as a source text for his autobiography. But from these diaries we ascertain that, though he occasionally read through past entries, notably when preparing them for publication, they do not contain entries from the period covered in the autobiography. Therefore these rereadings would be of little use in establishing the facts

of his early years and cannot serve as a source text.[14] The first attempt at recording his recollections of his childhood and early years was in the form of a letter written to a young United States Marine named Ted, under whose spell the 23-year-old Green had fallen. He describes it in *Jeunesse*, "Je me proposai de faire une sorte de confession de ma vie entière… Cédant à un irrésistible penchant, j'entrepris de raconter ma vie secrète sans en cacher le moindre détail, et ce fut ma première autobiographie." Given the addressee of this letter, we can assume that this first autobiography, like *Memories*, was composed in English. But this first attempt at telling the story of his short life, as Green notes, "a disparu" (5: 1341). We learn from Green's diary that this autobiographical letter met the same fate as the fifth volume of his autobiography: flames.[15] According to Green's diary he burned this "lettre de trente pages" in 1940 (5: 288). Seeing as this was the same year he wrote *Memories*, we might assume that he reread the letter in preparation for this more sustained autobiographical project and that perhaps the letter inspired this text to a certain degree. Unfortunately, on these points one can only speculate. When Green begins his work on *Partir* (the first volume of the French autobiography), he makes reference in his journal to his earlier attempts at writing his

[14] See, for example, a contemporary entry to the composition of *Memories* (November 27, 1940): "Relu mon journal de 1928 à 1939, en quoi j'ai eu grand tort. Cela m'a attristé au-delà de ce qu'on pourrait croire" (4:545).

[15] This fifth volume, which covered the period from 1926-1950, was destroyed in 1996. Guerini argues, with support from the Green diaries, "Il est facilement imaginable qu'une partie des problèmes qui le poussent à détruire son texte soit liée au fait qu'il y est question de l'orientation sexuelle de certaines personnes qu'il connaît et fréquente" (*L'Aveu* 162).

life, including this letter, but neglects to mention *Memories* (5: 288). It is therefore unclear to what degree, if at all, he consulted *Memories* during the composition of his French autobiographies.

Given the many discrepancies, certain of which I shall outline, it seems more likely that he instead relied on his recollections of the past rather than his English text—his memories not his *Memories*. How then might we determine an original in such a context? Should we accord the status to the most complete version? The earliest version? To the version with the fewest factual errors? This would be a departure from any conception of a "source text" as has been previously theorized, but Green's web of self-writings pose a unique challenge to any neat definition we might have. His autobiographical project did not seek to claim authority nor did it hesitate to rewrite his own history from many different points in his own life.

One should be careful to understand that even though Green does not narrate the entirety of his lived experience up to the point of composition, his works are still not what one might term a memoir.[16] Memoirs, as defined by Lejeune, do not fulfill autobiography's function of recounting a "vie individuelle" or the "histoire d'une personnalité" since they recount a singular period from one's life and typically do so with

[16] Guerini argues of *Memories*, "Dans cette œuvre la dimension intime occupe toutefois un espace réduit. Cela est dû d'une part aux circonstances liées à la genèse, d'autre part au genre littéraire choisi, celui des Mémoires, qui par nature laisse plus d'espace à la ré-évocation des événements de l'histoire collective au détriment de l'histoire individuelle et intime" (*L'Aveu* 156). However, despite the fact that Green recounts his activities during such charged historical moments such as WWI and the lead up to WWII, the focus remains on his own personal development and relationships.

the aim of illustrating a broader, unifying historical moment (*Pacte* 15). In Green's case there is no unifying event, nor does he expend greater energy detailing the historical period in which he lives than on his own place within it. We can thus understand Green's writing within the confines of autobiography, defined by Lejeune in *Le Pacte autobiographique*, as a "récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (14). Autobiographies are thus stories of becoming and are distinct from journals, memoirs, and self-portraits, despite sharing many similar characteristics. Green's autobiographies conform both to Lejeune's definition of the genre as well as to the autobiographical pact he outlines in this same work: "Le pacte autobiographique, c'est l'affirmation dans le texte de cette identité, renvoyant en dernier ressort au nom de l'auteur sur la couverture… Le lecteur pourra chicaner sur la ressemblance, mais jamais sur l'identité. On sait trop combien chacun tient à son nom" (26). Another way of understanding this is that in each of Green's autobiographies there is a complete adhesion between author, narrator, and main character of the work. The reader of one of Green's volumes would have no motivation to doubt the unified nature of these entities(author/narrator/character), nor of the veracity of the stories told. **For** readers across Green's languages the same does not hold true.

And though Green, like most traditional autobiographers, presents his work as an amalgamation of memories in roughly chronological order, it is nevertheless a constructed narrative akin to those in novels and other works of fiction. One's life story is not somehow unique from all the other types of stories one might tell. One distinct

difference, however, is that the autobiographer typically knows the endpoint of their narrative. Oftentimes that diegetic endpoint coincides with the extradiegetic moment the author sets their pen to paper to create the text. Whereas authors of fiction might occasionally be surprised by how their story culminates, in relation to their initial idea, no writer is incredulous at finding their own hand holding the pen as they dot the final period of their autobiography. Lejeune explains that in autobiography, "le sens détermine les événements et non le contraire. Tous les récits sont construits à partir de la fin" (228). By this he is remarking on the fact that when an autobiography is written, the narrative depends less on chronological order of events, and even the events themselves, than on the conception the autobiographer has of themself at the time of composition. Events must be chosen, ordered, and explained so as to lead the reader, and the autobiographer, up to this present conception of self. Therefore, as Lejeune writes, "L'ordre du livre est celui d'une dialectique déguisée en suite narrative" (204). But we should not take any of these claims to mean that autobiographers work in bad faith—surely most believe that what they write is indeed everything just as it happened. The processes by which one's life story becomes coherent are not necessarily conscious. So what is at stake in autobiography is less the events which transpire and more the meaning assigned to them by the writer, heavily influenced by the way in which they are brought into language.

Critics, like Lejeune and others, have therefore effectively unmasked autobiography for the literary creation it is. But even accepting these works as such, the question of truth cannot be swept under the rug. Despite the fervent pretentions of some of its practitioners, autobiographies do not correspond perfectly to reality and their claims

to historical truth are often dubious. Green, aware of these flagrant abuses, takes pain to make his own self-writing different, more closely aligned to "truth," which is to say, to his memory. In his diary he critiques writers he suspects of knowingly misleading their reader by omitting the gravest of their offenses and distracting the reader with venial sins. He sardonically asks Rousseau, "Grand étalage de sincérité pour le vol d'un bout de ruban couleur feu, mais les autres fautes, celles que Dieu connaît, en parles-tu ?" (4: 828). Saint Augustin is not spared from similar reproaches.[17] Green disparages these forefathers of the genre for their reticence and holds himself to seemingly impossible high standards. He writes in the preface to *Fin de jeunesse*, "Je n'ai pas essayé de reconstituer de longues conversations dont je n'ai retenu que quelques mots. On voit souvent de ces conversations dans les mémoires et je reconnais qu'elles rendent parfois le son de la vérité, mais elles ne peuvent être littéralement exactes, et j'aime la vérité *littérale*" (6: 831-2). Even in the case of dialogue, in which readers accept and even expect inaccuracy on the part of the autobiographer, Green sets himself limits. He restricts himself to memories of events, feelings, and description, so as to moderate use of his imagination in rendering scenes. Language is too fleeting to be captured, folded away, and stored in the drawers of memory; when one attempts to withdraw it years later it has

[17] From a 1972 diary entry: "la vérité des confessions autobiographiques, celle de saint Augustin entre autres... Il me fait rire, l'Africain, avec son histoire de pomme volée dont il fait un péché monumental, un crime qui le dispense de nous avouer tout le reste" (6: 47).

either been devoured by moths or the folds have become as important to the structure as the seams.

And yet, it even goes without saying, language is essential to autobiography, both in its composition and in the life it aims to relate. This is uniquely true for a case like Green where his childhood is indelibly marked by experiences in both French and English, and by the experiences *of* French and English. And we might then be surprised to find the same writer who sets his sights on "vérité littérale" to freely render speech originally spoken in English into French, and vice versa. Green apparently believes that the act of translation does not grate against the desire for his recorded conversations to be "littéralement exactes," but he seems to ignore the importance, and determinism, that he himself attributes to language. Returning to the earlier quote from Lejeune, "le sens détermine les événements et non le contraire. Tous les récits sont construits à partir de la fin," we recognize that this autobiographical truism has its analog in translation (228). Indeed, if we reread Lejeune's sense of the functioning of autobiography as rather a description of translation, it seems completely fitting. In cases of literary translation, it is evident that the translator's work begins where the author's work ends. Consult any translation handbook and you will be instructed to first read the text thoroughly before attempting a translation of it.[18] But once more, the self-translator invites a new perspective onto this seemingly unequivocal approach. As we shall discuss, Samuel

[18] Even if we consider a situation like oral interpretation, for the interpreter to relay meaning they require a minimum of finality (perhaps as little as a clause) to ensure accuracy.

Beckett and Nancy Huston are both known to have composed and translated simultaneously, intermingling the two versions and blurring any distinction between original and translation. Recall too, for example, that Green began to translate *Memories* from an original French draft after just a few pages, well before the shape or the sense of the narrative had time to develop. And through his translating, both were radically altered. In an essay Green explains that after realizing it would be difficult to find a publisher for his French work, he set about to translate his autobiography into English.

> Alors je mis de côté ce que j'avais fait et recommençais le livre en anglais, mon intention étant de reprendre les mêmes mots, c'est-à-dire de me traduire moi-même … Là, l'inattendu arriva. Sachant très bien ce que je voulais dire, je commençai mon livre, écrivis une page et demie, mais en me relisant, je m'aperçus que j'écrivais un autre livre, un livre d'un ton si complètement différent du texte français que tout l'éclairage du sujet était transformé. En anglais j'étais devenu *quelqu'un* d'autre. Je continuai. De nouveaux trains de pensées démarrèrent dans mon esprit, de nouveaux convois d'idées se formèrent. La ressemblance entre ce que j'écrivais maintenant en anglais et ce que j'avais écrit en français était si petite qu'on aurait pu douter que ce fut du même auteur. (3: 1334)

For Green, the language of composition, more so than the underlying memories he was attempting to relate, was determinative. But not only was the language determinative for the ideas it engendered and the perceptions formed, Green felt himself to be a completely different being in English. "Pour Green, la langue est l'une des clefs de l'identité et la traduction de ses propres écrits représente non seulement un changement de forme, mais aussi, de fait, un changement de fond," writes Alessandra Ferraro ("'Traduit par l'auteur'" 126). What a strange experience it must be to embark on an autobiography to find that you are not telling the story you imagined, and thus you are not the person you thought. This Julian Green, in relation to his French counterpart Julien Green, is

undoubtedly formed by his experiences in English: his relationship to family in Paris and abroad, his experiences in the United States, his English compositions, his religious upbringing, etc. No bilingual's relationships to their languages are precisely the same, and Green is no exception to this.

Reading Green across the linguistic divide gives the reader slightly different conceptions of his relationship to language and its potential to represent reality. From these translingual self-writings we understand that for the young narrator, English begins as an impregnable mystery. As children typically become proficient in language at an age before they begin forming memories they will retain into adulthood, Green's descriptions of listening to his parents and sisters and understanding only nonsense are striking.[19] At times it is presented as an intense loneliness and in *Memories* Green describes inventing a secret tongue of his own so that he might share in the benefits afforded by language: "What has always struck me about childhood is its secrecy. A child seldom expresses what he feels … because he has no words at his command to convey his meaning … I had invented a language in which I had taken myself into confidence … I disclose the fact that it was merely an imitation of what my elders' conversation sounded to my ear" (12). Since the young Green was speaking in a language that nobody understood and was merely a rough imitation of what he heard from his parents, it can hardly be considered

[19] Of course any language learner can describe similar experiences, but the experience of hearing one's mother tongue (in the literal sense) as nonsense and random sounds is an altogether different matter. Green's experiences of English approach this.

any language at all. Based on the context of this story we can assume Green to be around six years old and thus was well of speaking age. Working backwards from what we learn later in this text, or reading across his self-writings, we come to understand that his secret language is an imitation of English; he would have already had a strong command of French. Recall that Green's principal interactions and language learning came from his French nannies, so this was the first language to imprint on Green the toddler. But in *Memories*, Green does not specify this and we must imagine that this false language as his only one. Following this account is a description of Green's first schooling and his experience learning to read. These events connect seamlessly in the second chapter, seemingly following a simple narrative arc of education overcoming obstacles. But, though he does not make it clear in *Memories*, these experiences at school are all in French. The reader has the impression that the secret language of the boy and his inability to communicate what he desires are appeased through education, but this is only partly true.

Though Green's English autobiography predates his French volumes, one has the sense that it is nevertheless engaged with the French text yet to be written. Early in *Memories*, Green muses about the dangerous reptiles that his mother had described to him which lived near where she grew up. "To us children America seemed so remote that I sometimes wondered, in a dreamy sort of way, if it wasn't a place my mother had made up for our entertainment … but in order to imagine what she meant I had to picture myself with my *bonne* Lina walking in the Bois de Boulogne" (9). This vignette sheds some light on the relationship between Green's self-writings across language. He

acquires his first taste of language from his childhood nanny—a woman from Normandy, "Jeanne Lepecheur, qui fut la première à me parler français. Grande est ma dette envers cette femme" (6: 817)—and it is her successor, Lina, who thus stands in for the place of the French language as the young Green attempts to navigate and understand an English universe. Considering the proliferation of reflection and metadiscourse in Green's French autobiography, as compared to *Memories*, Green's observation seems perfectly apt. He walks through his past, holding tightly to the hand of his French *bonne* who would help to make sense of everything.

And while it is his French nannies who introduce him to French, it is his mother's pious persistence that finally ushers him into the English world. One scene that Green faithfully recounts in nearly all his self-writings is the moment when he first understands an English phrase, emanating from the Bible as it is being read aloud by his mother. In this instant the floodgates of this language open. In *Memories* he describes it as such,

> She wanted all her children to be American, and loathed the thought that some of us had a decided French accent in English. Her task was a difficult one, but she was determined to succeed. Every day she read the Bible to us in the Authorized Version. I remember that even when I was too small to follow what she read, I used to sit at her feet and listen to her voice. I liked the sound of the English Bible, although it remained incomprehensible to me. One day, however, something new and exciting happened : my mother read a verse and I understood it, I understood it from beginning to end; it made sense. I tried to say something, but my mother told me to be quiet and went on with her reading. Since then, I have often made vigorous efforts to recall the first sentence out of the Bible which I was able to understand, but all in vain. Yet I still hope that, as I grow older and my memory goes back further, I shall find it gleaming in the dark.[20] (14)

[20] Green notes this moment as well in *Partir avant le jour* (5: 662), *Quand nous habitions tous ensemble* (6: 814), and in his journal May 10, 1937 (4: 428).

English comes as a sort of revelation, quite rightly in the biblical sense of the word. Through his mother's devotion to God, and thus her nightly Bible reading, Green's grotesque imitation of English is refined into actual communication.[21] These dual educations—one in French schooling and the other at his mother's feet—are collapsed in Green's English text into one narrative thread on language connecting incoherence to mastery via the mechanism of education.

Even though Green learns English as a child, he nevertheless has two distinct relationships with French and English. English shall remain connected to his mother and to the forgotten biblical verse which would be the first piece of the language he was able to understand. It is the language of family, but also of discomfort. This is notably true in terms of his accent, which his mother bemoaned during his childhood, and that even into young adulthood made him feel foreign in his mother('s) tongue. In *Memories* he writes that at the time he left France for college, "I was still very self-conscious when I spoke English, and my accent betrayed me; also it bored me to have to explain that I was American, and then to be told that I looked like a Frenchman" (135). Though the reader cannot parse the sounds of Green's words here, the French (or potentially British) flavor of the "it bored me" ("cela m'ennuyait"), in order to demonstrate a feeling of annoyance, nevertheless tinges the text with a distinctly un-American hue.

[21] Though it is Green's mother who instructs him in English. He notes that her French left something to be desired: "English was certainly my mother's best means of expressing herself, but, like Teddy Roosevelt, she spoke French with 'daring fluency.' Grammar was never known to have stopped her, and she disregarded genders with superb indifference, but she spoke as quickly as any French woman of her day and always made her meaning clear" (*Memories* 57-58).

But English is also the language of Green's budding sexuality, against the backdrop of the colonial facades of the University of Virginia. Earlier I described the connection he felt to ancient Greek culture after studying the subject in a course and the awakening it stirred in him. And it was also during this time that he developed many close relationships to fellow students, some of whom were decidedly more comfortable with their same-sex desires than Green. In fact one of the most explicit references Green makes to his own sexuality in his self-writings is done through reference to one of these friends, describing the young man as "tout aussi homosexuel que moi" (5: 1260). These acquaintances passed along books that opened Green's eyes to more contemporary sexual practices, notably the works of Havelock Ellis, which in *Memories* he describes reading "with astonished eyes" and then deems them works that "help us grow up" (144). Indeed Ellis' writings were influential on the young Green and both his autobiographies and journals are riddled with references to this early voice studying "inversion."[22] In this sense then, in terms of Green's sexuality, English is a language of theory (discussion, initiation, reading) whereas French would be, once he returns to France and explores the physical side of his sexuality, a language of practice.

Though Green does not comment specifically on the impact of language on his sexuality, he writes in multiple places of the ways in which his language and bilingualism

[22] Lejeune, in his work, *Autobiographie et homosexualité en France au XIXe siècle*, summarizes the term: "L'essentiel était que l'homosexualité n'apparaissait plus fatalement comme un vice, dont on était responsable, mais comme une donnée naturelle : certains individus étaient physiquement d'un sexe, mais psychiquement du sexe opposé" (82)

affected his writing and general manner of being. In general he finds that switching languages saddles him with new constraints while opening up new avenues of discovery but he always insisted that language was a lens through which we all see the same objective world. In an essay he published in 1941 titled "An Experiment in English," he explains,

> The French language interprets the universe in one way, the English language in another; it is the same universe seen from different angles. There is, I believe, a letter written by Keats in which the poet explains that some thoughts expressed in his poems were suggested to him by words [...] We may be tolerably certain that had Keats been born French he might have written a poem called *Endymion* but the contents of that poem would have been different. To put it in other words, a French translation of *Endymion* as we know it can in no wise represent what Keats would have written had he written in French instead of English because the mere sound of French words would have suggested an entirely different set of images. (6: 1338)

He brings to our attention the fact that a translation of any work should not be taken as what the original author would have written in the target language of the translation. There are too many counterfactuals at play in imagining any translation to feasibly be something like this. This is a process Green is of course intimately familiar with, having attempted to pen the same work (*Memories* and *Quand nous habitions ensemble*) in two languages and achieved two distinct results. But in what seems like a somewhat brazen claim, he writes that we can be "tolerably certain" that had Keats been born in France he would nevertheless have been a poet and even would have written poems of the same titles.[23] This claim might in fact be based on the personal experiences of Julien Green,

[23] Reading through Keats' letters Green may have understood that Keats would have found this a highly undesirable fate indeed: "While I was speaking about France it occurred to me to speak a few Words on

himself straddling two linguistic and cultural milieus and potentially imagining that had he been born in Savannah, his literary career would have still unfolded, just in English rather than French. These oeuvres would surely have been different and one reason he cites here for this divergence is the musicality of language and its ability to inspire and guide the poet. In doing so he is positioning himself somewhere between a belief in strict linguistic determinism (à la Sapir-Whorf) and the belief in the possibility of radical transparency in translation. That is to say, he does not believe language constricts or dictates our capacity to perceive the world as it is but he does believe that language has an uncanny ability to inspire, and thus in certain ways privilege certain narratives over others.

This view of language has a paradoxical relationship with the much favored view of translation as having the goal of transposing into a target language what the author would have composed directly. André Gide, who said as much directly to Green, describes this widely-shared belief in a letter to another acquaintance: "Il importe de ne pas traduire des mots, mais des phrases et d'exprimer, sans en rien perdre, pensée et émotion, comme l'auteur les eût exprimées s'il eût écrit directement en français, ce qui ne se peut que par une tricherie perpétuelle, par d'incessant détours et souvent en s'éloignant

their Language—it is perhaps the poorest one ever spoken since the jabbering in the Tower of Babel, and when you come to know that the real use and greatness of a Tongue is to be referred to its Literature—you will be astonished to find how very inferior it is to our native Speech.—I wish the Italian would supersede French in every school throughout the Country, for that is full of real Poetry and Romance…It seems that the only end to be gained in acquiring French is the immense accomplishment of speaking it—it is none at all—a most lamentable mistake indeed" (24).

de la simple littéralité" (qtd in Oustinoff *La Traduction* 82). In this conception of the practice, all traces of translation must be effaced in favor of presenting the text as though it were born into the target language sans midwife.[24] And though Gide allows that for this to be possible the translation may need to stray from "simple littéralité," it seems unlikely that this notion of translation would align with Green's complete rewriting as dictated by the language of composition. And yet, if we take Gide, and all those following this school of thought, seriously that the translation should read "comme l'auteur les eût exprimées s'il eût écrit directement en français," then it seems Green's vision of a completely alternative version of *Endymion* should fit the bill if that indeed is "what Keats would have written had he written in French."

Juli(e)(a)n Greens

In the following sections I identify a number of curious variations among the iterations of Green's self-writings that shed light on how he employs translation to present himself doubly.

Where to begin...

[24] Some term this theory of translation "cibliste." For a summation of this view see pages 55-58 of Oustinoff *La Traduction*.

To begin simply, I would like to first draw attention to the opening lines of *Memories* and *Partir*. They demonstrate two different conceptions of how one might tell the story of a life while also drawing attention to the ways in which language influences these narrative trajectories, all the while disrupting a synthesis of experience venerated by the genre. *Memories* begins in an unsurprising manner: "Both my parents were Southerners. My mother came from Savannah, Georgia, and my father from Prince William County, Virginia" (1). The corresponding lines in *Partir*, however, seem to open with a rejection of what Green previously wrote: "N'importe quoi… Écrire n'importe quoi est peut-être le meilleur moyen d'aborder les sujets qui comptent, d'aller au plus profond par le chemin le plus court" (5: 649). Even if we take the opening lines of *Quand nous habitions ensemble*, which, recall, is what Green began writing when he envisioned *Memories* but abandoned to switch to English, he begins, "je suis né dans une petite rue sombre du quartier des Ternes" (6: 810). At first we might be tempted to say that the principal difference in these texts is that Green imbues the French with a certain literariness, whereas the English is a straightforward account. But Green does not abandon his novelistic impulses in his English composition, though he does assert that he tries to "m'exprimer avec les mots les plus ordinaires" (3: 1436). In Green's essay, "My first book in English," as we have seen in other essays, he explains that trying to write the same book in two languages is impossible since the languages direct, to a certain extent, the story they want to tell. His experience with autobiography matches closely his imagined scenario of a French John Keats: "ce qui me frappa le plus était le peu de ressemblance entre ces pages anglaises et les pages françaises que j'avais écrites d'abord

sur le même sujet. Or j'avais pensé trouver, sinon une espèce de traduction inconsciente du français, du moins un équivalent assez proche, et ce que j'avais sous les yeux semblait presque d'une autre main que la mienne" (3: 1436). We thus understand that Green does not rely on his previous writings when retelling a story, rather he allows his memory of the event, and surely the memory of having already written it, to guide the new representation. The language is not a neutral medium.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Green begins his English text, aimed at an audience of Americans, by positioning himself as a compatriot, knowing his name was already strongly linked to France. But we should also note that of all the self-writing Green does, this English text is the only (though we cannot be sure of the beginning of the burned letter to Ted) where he begins immediately with his parents instead of a description of a Parisian locale, as he does in his first attempt writing the text (*Quand nous habitions ensemble*). To eschew Paris, in a text allegedly written as an **eloge** ***[??? praise of? homage to?]*** to France, should also indicate to us how strongly Green associates English to his parents—an association that no doubt many first-generation immigrants feel between their parents and native language. Beginning in English means family; beginning in French means place. This beginning of a purported retelling of his happy days immediately leads him to bringing up the American Civil War and the various

disagreements that occurred between his parents on the subject.[25] But he then quickly, as he does often in his French volumes, tells us that "I suppose, however, that I am going too fast and that I should start at the beginning" (1). The beginning of an autobiography is not easy to choose. One might presume that an autobiography begins with the birth of the author, or perhaps with his earliest memory as a sort of birth of consciousness. So Green's choice to follow his earlier phrase about starting at the beginning not with his birth, and not with his parents' births, but with their move to France, is curious: "Around 1895 my parents moved from Savannah, where they had been married, to Le Havre, in Normandy ... in 1898 they moved to Paris" (1). In the beginning, for Green, there was France **and,** more specifically, Paris. Thus we discover a tension in the beginning of this work: a compromise between beginning with war, France, and his lineage. It is not until the fourth paragraph that our author is born, after first giving an account of the furniture his parents had shipped from Georgia.

The beginning of *Partir*, in contrast, begins admittedly in a haphazard fashion. He continues the first paragraph by stating, "La mémoire nous livre tout en désordre, à tout moment du jour. On imitera ce désordre" (5: 649). To imitate disorder succinctly captures the project of these volumes since to imitate disorder is not necessarily to be in disorder. To imitate disorder is to place in an order preordained by previous chaos: disorder as

[25]This immediate reminder of war, not dissimilar from the reminder given in the original title of the work, *Before the Evil Days*, foreshadows the significant number of pages Green dedicates to discussing his time in the Field Service during the first World War.

disguise, disorder as theme, disorder as subject. All of these attempt to cast responsibility for the construction of the narrative onto an entity besides the conscious subjectivity of the author. Green trusts his memory immensely. But for him this has a unique meaning; he trusts his memory to both remember and to forget. Green trusts his memory to triage the past and hold up to him the most pertinent of images in the order of its choosing.[26] But this privileging of memory should also be read as a rejection of the narrative autobiography. Green is skeptical of the order that the genre imposes since, as Lejeune writes, "La mémoire n'est pas structurée comme une histoire, elle a une richesse et une complexité qu'un récit linéaire ne peut que trahir" (*L'Autobiographie en France* 55). By announcing from the outset that his French volumes will follow the dictates of memories as they come to him, Green adjusts the reader's expectations for an altogether more chaotic reading than what one experiences in the orderly *Memories*.

But then in contrast to this, Green's narrative intrusion is striking in his French volume, and even more so when compared to his English. Though he touts, as we shall see, that it is the boy he once was whose voice tells the story, which we can understand as Green saying he allows his memory to recount and structure the narrative, he makes his reader aware of his presence as scribe. He ends the first paragraph of *Partir* with "et c'est ainsi que je vois les choses aujourd'hui, 20 novembre 1959" (5: 649). This is a direct

[26] Despite his barbs aimed at Rousseau, they seem to be in agreement on this: "Rousseau has no need to decide what is essential, memory has already done this for him, and if he finds it necessary to fill in gaps by invention or conjecture this bears only, he claims, on what is inessential" (Sheringham 290).

anchoring of the text in the moment of composition, bringing it right to the specific time of day. There is a great juxtaposition here in relation to his alternative opening, "Écrire n'importe quoi."

Remembering Forgetting

Green's persistent glossing and contextualization of his memories roots the text in a specific moment of time and allows the reader to consider the distinction between holding onto one's childhood and holding onto an image of that childhood—remembering an event is an event in itself, but it is separate from the event remembered. In his French, Green pulls our attention to the work of remembering and even highlights its occasional impossibility: "j'ai beau mettre ma mémoire à la torture, je ne me souviens pas" (5: 905). Whereas it takes reading the French volumes to allow the reader to see the places in the English where Green omits details or events, the French volumes call attention to their own ellipses and the author's lapses of memories. Green makes us aware of the engagement between this work of memory on the part of the author and the act of writing. In an article on the presence of the narrator in *Partir*, Edith Perry writes, "L'originalité de l'autobiographie greenienne ne tient pas à ce 'n'importe quoi' provocateur qui s'inscrit au seuil de l'œuvre mais à ce qu'elle met en scène un narrateur dans ses principales activités, celle de la remémoration, de l'écriture et de l'interprétation" (164). In this study Perry examines the various ways Green the narrator signals his presence to the reader, echoing Jacques Petit, editor of Green's Pléiade editions, who writes, "Le passage d'une 'voix' à l'autre, de la voix de l'enfant, du jeune homme à celle

de l'homme qui écrit, du souvenir retrouvé à l'interprétation et au jugement, est ici essentiel." But Petit cautions that a strict analysis of these shifts might be problematic since "l'interprétation parfois se glisse dans le souvenir et celui-ci parfois l'emporte." He then concludes, "le récit nécessairement déborde l'interprétation qu'il [Green] en donne" (5: 1583). The shifting voices in Green's autobiography are more unpredictable than they may appear at first glance. And Petit is undoubtedly correct that we must not leave the task of exegesis to Green—it is after all a work of literature. However, that Green's style of narration in his French volumes diverges from *Memories* clearly merits examination. Perhaps one simple way to characterize this style is one of possession. Recall Waite's argument that Green's French is more assertive, confident, and speculative" than his English ("Julien Green" 362). In French, Green becomes a writer refusing to cede control of the narrative whereas in English the generation of meaning functions below the surface of the text.

Thinking back to Rousseau, we recall that in the preface to *Confessions* he promises to show his true nature—the good, the bad, and the ugly. But Green worries that perhaps his true nature, the essence of himself, may very well be hidden or forgotten. After all, it is easier to forget episodes in our lives that do not seem to support the type of person we believe ourselves to be, or seem quite irrelevant to our personal development. Green makes no sweeping statements, as Rousseau famously does in *Confessions*, that he will show all his vices no matter how damaging they might be, but instead he relates time and time again just how much of our past is irreparably lost. But what marks Green's work as different from other autobiographers' is that what is forgotten has a positive

rather than negative presence. In his French writings especially, Green attempts to master what has been forgotten by bringing it to the fore rather omitting what he cannot recall. He asks, for example, at one point, "Ma sœur Mary était-elle avec nous ? Je n'arrive pas à me souvenir." In another scene he ponders, "il s'absorbait dans la lecture d'un livre posé sur la table de la salle à manger. Quel livre ?" (5: 805). The reader would have never thought to question whether Mary is with him at this moment in the text, nor to have questioned whether Green remembered which book his father was reading. But the inclusion of these omissions of memory mark the reading. Though Green admits to forgetting, this actually reinforces his authority and bolsters the reader's trust. They function almost counterintuitively: Green telling us what he is forgetting gives us the sense that what he tells us he remembers is in fact truthful. Green harnesses forgetting as scaffolding to support what he deems essential to the story. He reminds us through his narrative that even though we forget, we need not mourn every lost moment. In defining and describing oneself, what one forgets is just as important as what one remembers.

Green's fascination with his own memory pervades his self-writings. In *Partir*, he explains, "j'ai l'impression de regarder ma vie passée à travers un télescope. L'image est petite, mais nette" (5: 712). He consistently acknowledges that there is a great distance between himself and the years he is describing but he nevertheless holds great confidence in his ability to recall these scenes and as he says, allow the boy he was to take his pen. But Green's discourse on this point might at times seem contradictory. Though he believes his memories to be unadulterated, he nevertheless writes from the perspective of a 68-year-old man claiming, "il m'a fallu attendre l'âge que j'ai aujourd'hui pour me

rendre compte du sens de certains faits, petits et grands, qui ont marqué mon enfance et ma jeunesse" (6: 832). There are no such claims made in *Memories*, which he wrote two decades prior. Are we as readers to suspend our disbelief that the way that he now interprets these events of his childhood has left their telling unaffected? Might the adolescent boy experiencing his first pangs of desire describe them in the same way as the man he will become decades later? Would the teenage boy lying in the bed his mother died in days earlier relate his emotions in the same way as the author who has mourned his lost parent for decades? Green wants us to believe so and to separate our reading of the event from his glosses.

But the meaning generation machine of autobiography is constituted only in part by the gloss and explanation of its author. There is explanation in content and there is explanation in form—the manner in which a writer weaves together events imbues meaning. To return to Sheringham's work, he explains of the ribbon incident in Rousseau's autobiography, "On the first model, rooted in casuality, and in the teleological aspect of narrative, the incident serves as a sponge which, as it soaks up virtual meanings flowing through the text, becomes itself saturated with meaning. Changing the metaphor, this approach turns the incident into a provisional point of anchorage where a cargo of meanings, in transit through the text as a whole, can be unloaded" (99). Whether sponge or boat, Sheringham's metaphor calls to our attention the meticulous way in which an autobiographer controls meaning through content and form. Green even goes so far as to signal to the reader the continuing threads he weaves throughout his writing. Hints like "de nouveau les mots de Pur et d'Impur voltigèrent sur

mes lèvres. Si je parle de ces choses qui peuvent sembler insignifiantes, c'est qu'avant la fin de cette année-là, elles prirent un sens extraordinaire" litter the autobiographical works (5: 804). Rather than foreshadowing events that will transpire, though he occasionally does that as well, Green prefers to foreshadow the meaning they will take on. Thus it becomes important to pay close attention to the order of events recounted. Green obsesses about the order of things and though he presents events largely in chronological order, within periods of time there is some mixing. This is even more significant between his French and English works. But Green believes his slightly out of chronological telling differentiates his volumes from standard autobiography. In *Partir* he writes, "Si je n'y mettais sans cesse bon ordre, ce livre tomberait dans l'autobiographie pure et simple. Or, c'est bien autre chose que je désire. Je me propose de regarder là où je n'ai jamais tourné les yeux que par hasard, je veux tâcher de voir clair dans cette partie de la conscience qui demeure si souvent obscure à mesure que nous nous éloignons de notre enfance" (5: 710). It is thus not a search for clarity of fact but clarity of conscience and, more specifically, innocence.

But as he progresses through his self-writings, he rarely makes it clear to his reader that his chronology is not precise. In fact he does quite the opposite by insisting on the fidelity of his memory. Green uses his gift for metaphor to illustrate with several distinct images how he believes his memory to function and his writing about distant events is striking in its detail. He goes from scene to scene with precision. As he explains, his memories are not blurred but either remembered or forgotten. He describes his memory in these binary terms and does not hesitate to tell us when he cannot recall

certain scenes or events that precede or follow. In his final volume, *Jeunesse*, he writes that "[m]a mémoire me fournit comme toujours une sorte de petit tableau entouré de vide. Tous mes souvenirs sont, en effet, comme des tableaux séparés par d'assez grands espaces, mais ils sont nets" (5: 1344).[27] He nearly always describes memory in visual terms, and even more specifically in terms of art. These visual representations of the past are not one continuous panorama but rather snapshots.[28] Furthermore, it is not that Green believes his memory contains a complete chronology of which some parts are less accessible than others, it is rather that what has been forgotten helps sharpen the edges of what remains. Indeed, for Green, the frames, just as the spaces between them, are just as important as the images they hold.

But oddly for a man quite attuned to language, he claims to have little recollection of the speech he heard and spoke, and, as we have seen, he leaves little room for dialogue in his self-writing as it distances him from *la vérité littérale* that he aspires to. One advantage to memory being a painting over a recording is its immediacy. When one views a painting there is no narrative unfurling—all you see is all there is. Thus for Green a photograph might be considered the apex of this sort of literal truth he strives for in his

[27] He makes a similar observation in *Fin de jeunesse*: "Mémoire… On m'a dit quelquefois, après la publication de *Partir avant le jour*, que je devais avoir une bonne mémoire pour me souvenir de tant de choses… Par ailleurs, il y a les "blancs" qui sont nombreux dans le premier volume de cette autobiographie et tout aussi nombreux dans le second. Je suis sans cesse obligé de dire que je ne me rappelle plus… Mais, mis bout à bout, ces souvenirs forment une sorte de continuité qui peut donner le change. Ce dont je me souviens est presque toujours d'une netteté quasi photographique, mais, encore une fois, ce sont des moments isolés et séparés par des intervalles que je n'arrive pas à meubler. J'ai comparé cela à une salle de musée ou les tableaux sont accrochés assez loin les uns des autres" (6: 832).

[28] Interestingly, Green also credits specific images with being the inspiration for his works of fiction. See for example the journal entry from 17 April 1932.

representation of memory. But autobiography requires narrative, which does not play by the same rules as painting.[29] Green's frustration with being unable to render his childhood as a painting on the wall can be felt in the way that he constantly needs to remind himself to slow down. He would like to splay out his memories, image by image in front of the viewer so they might see what he sees. And he is then overwhelmed, or at least performs being overwhelmed, by the speed at which his story unfolds: "Sans doute faudrait-il mettre un peu d'ordre dans ces souvenirs, mais je ne m'en sens pas capable. J'ai l'impression que tout se présente à moi en même temps, et la chronologie, dans tout cela, où la trouver ?" (5: 658); "Je m'aperçois cependant que je vais trop vite et qu'il me faut revenir en arrière de quelques semaines" (5: 900); "Mais je vais trop vite" (5: 652); and "I suppose, however, that I am going too fast" (*Memories* 1). Through this type of discourse, Green again is creating a seemingly transparent relationship with his reader as though the autobiography rests on a sort of stream of consciousness. That Green reminds himself to slow down makes us believe that we read the memories as they spill onto the page from his memory. But they may indeed rather signal to us the constructedness of the narrative evidenced by Green's desire to hit each point in order.

That is to say, if Green did not have a plan for which moments he wanted to discuss—as he seems to allege in the opening of *Partir*—then moving from event to event as the words take him would not pose any issue. For example, on page 900 when he indicates he is moving too quickly, it works as a narrative device to move seamlessly

[29] For more on this see Prince "On Narratology and Translation."

from a story about his father helping him to find an ambulance service willing to enroll Green to a story of receiving a medal of commendation that had occurred a couple weeks before. The structure of the commendation story works to reinforce its authenticity. Before recounting how an American officer announces to Green he was receiving a medal for bravery, Green writes, "ce récit est un peu une mise en accusation du jeune homme que je fus, mais il est écrit en réaction contre certaines autobiographies qui ne me semblent être autre chose que des mensonges" (5: 900). Thus he signals to the reader the juxtaposition between these unnamed false autobiographies and the authenticity of his own. He then tells the story of how the American, Mr. Ware, had come to his home in 1917 to announce that Green would receive a medal for his service as an ambulance driver. He modestly concludes the episode, "resté seul, je me dis qu'il aurait été un peu ridicule de me décorer étant donné que j'étais sûr de n'avoir rien fait qui le méritât, mais les États-Unis étaient en guerre depuis assez peu de temps et on cherchait des poitrines américaines où accrocher une médaille" (5: 901). It is thus unclear why Green wants to include this story of a medal of which he does not seem particularly proud. But the entire affair ends on the subtle admission that he had up until then kept the medal a secret: "mais par crainte qu'on se moquât de moi, je gardai secrète cette affaire de décoration" (5: 901). He then moves swiftly to the story he was about to tell about being in Milan before interrupting himself to slow down.

These digressions which Green deftly weaves into his narrative are impressive in their ability to at once stand out and blend in. Announcing them as though they should have already been stated gives us the impression that they are something fundamental to

the narrative. Thus they seem to be part of a natural progression that had just been momentarily overlooked. But at the same time, a digression like this breaks the flow of the chronology and severs the attachment between Green's father, mentioned just before, and the story which follows. In this way it functions much like the medal Green describes, pinned to a narrative in a purely symbolic fashion: "c'était ce qu'on appelle un geste et qui n'avait de sens que symbolique. Et tout cela dit, j'avoue que si l'on m'avait décoré, même injustement, j'en aurais crevé d'orgueil" (5: 901). The medal is pure surplus, neither earned nor desired. And yet, it oddly follows Green's avowal that his biography is a *mise en accusation* of the young man he was and that he writes in reaction to dishonest autobiographies written by his contemporaries. It sometimes seems as though Green is unable to paint himself in an unflattering light. Even when claiming to display his blemishes he is immediately reminded of a war medal he claims to have kept secret. In *Memories* this experience is elided completely and only the broad strokes from either side are recounted: "towards the end of that month, the Field Service was taken over by the American army, and I, being too young by one year, was discharged. I then joined the American Red Cross, still a private organization, which disregarded the fact that I was not eighteen and sent me to the Italian front" (120). This is especially an odd choice given that surely the American audience of the latter work would be more interested in medals given by the American military than the French readership of the former. But recall that *Memories* is a work that details what France gave to Green, not the reverse.

Whatever Green's motivation for disclosing his medal in *Mille*, its function in the narrative points to a disconnect between Green's self-writing in English and French. It is true that the number of anecdotes presented and the details given in order to relate them are greater in Green's French prose. There are few examples of anecdotes that Green gives in his English volumes that are not given in his French ones.[30] But perhaps even more striking, Green's English prose is stripped of—or more appropriately, never originally ornamented with since it was written first—the metadiscourse which figures so heavily in the French volumes. In Green's English he rarely needs to remind himself on the page to slow down. The speed remains steady and calculated. He makes no claims about the veracity of his story nor does he delve deeply into the mechanism of his memory. In some ways the French volume can feel like one is reading at once a retelling, a translation, and an annotation of Green's first autobiographical work. Green tells his life in *Memories* but he explains his life in the French volumes following.

A Crushing Scene

The reflections produced by Green's bilingual texts are, in many cases, not perfect resemblances. They illustrate Green's notion of the poem following the form of its language and the ways in which plumbing one's memory across languages and decades often produces varying results. To take another example, let us consider Green's memory

[30] As mentioned earlier, Green notably omits his long-term companion Robert Saint-Jean from the French volumes but writes fondly of him in *Memories*.

of accidentally sitting on his father's top hat in church. Green writes of it first in *Memories* and then takes it up again in *Partir*. After the accident, the young Green flees from his father to seek the protection of his mother, under whose bed he hides. In English Green writes of the event:

> Thereupon a dialogue ensued which sounded like the conversation between the ogre and his wife in Perrault's fairy tale:
>
> "Where is that boy?"
>
> "Why, Edward, what on earth is the matter?"
>
> "He is hiding in this room, I know it."
>
> "But what has he done?'" (49)

In French the dialogue is truncated.

> "Où est ce garçon ? Où est-il ? Je veux savoir !"
>
> Entre mon père et ma mère s'engagea alors un dialogue qui ressemblait à celui de l'Ogre et de sa femme dans le conte de Perrault. Maman voulait savoir ce que j'avais fait de si mal. (5: 668)

We know that the conversation between his parents would have occurred in English and this could potentially explain the more extensive dialogue in this language, though counter examples to this reasoning can be found in Green's writings. But in both versions, Green likens the conversation to dialogue from Perrault's *Le Petit Poucet*, which Green would have almost certainly read or heard in French, in which the children

hide under a woman's bed from her ogre husband who attempts to eat them.[31] Likely the strength of this image and thus this association would have remained in Green's memory and influenced the way he recalls two decades later a conversation he overheard from underneath a bed. We can hypothesize that Green's memory of the dialogue is as much influenced by Perrault as it is by the actual conversation which took place between his parents.

But interestingly, this anecdote ends somewhat differently in the two languages: one quite ambiguously and the other a deliberate omission of what follows. In *Memories* Green writes, "with a roar and a stamp, my father revealed the truth to my mother, who listened in shocked silence. When she had recovered she pleaded for me, but it was all useless, and this scene was brought to a painful climax over which I may be allowed to draw a veil" (49). We notice, and it will become even more clear when examining the scene leading up to the parents' dialogue, that there is a more violent language employed in Green's English. He underlines his father's aggression in both verbal and physical terms—the father's language devolves into roaring as he stomps the floorboards just a few feet from the boy's cowering head. The scene thus ends quite differently from Perrault's story, where the children are victorious over the ogre. Here the young Julian is punished in a painful fashion but one to which he prefers only allude.

[31] Some evidence for this is that Perrault's story was published in an 1864 edition accompanied by engravings by Gustave Doré and the young Green frequently spent time admiring Doré's illustration in books at their home. The books are not identified apart from Dante's *Comedy* (6: 820) but a collection of Perrault's tales perhaps figured among them.

In *Partir* the scene ends by the narrator claiming to have forgotten the climax: "Papa frappait le plancher du bout de sa canne et soutenait que j'étais caché dans la chambre. Je ne me rappelle plus du tout ce qu'il arriva ensuite, sinon que je fus puni, mais je n'ai pas souvenir que mon père m'ait battu" (5: 668). The details here have shifted slightly: Green's mother is not made aware of the boy's transgression, his father does not roar and stomp but instead hits the floor with his cane, and Green explicitly states that he does not remember being physically aggressed. Notice Green says he *no longer* remembers what happens next. Does this mean he did remember when he wrote the English version? Moreover, what does it mean to *not have a memory* of his father beating him? This ambiguous formulation could point to an affirmation that his father did not beat him, or an affirmation that he does not remember his father beating him (but that it did occur). This final sentence is an interesting commentary on memory and the language we have to describe it. The negative construction functions differently than would the more active phrasing of *forgetting*, or instead saying he remembers that he was not hit. Each clause of the sentence narrows the reader's interpretation of the event. First Green posits a void (I don't remember at all) then this complete absence is replaced by an event (except that I was punished) and then this open event is reduced (but I was not hit). But this final conclusion upends our readerly expectations. Green insists on the ominous presence of his father's cane, making us expect it to be the instrument of violence, four times in this short section, each one more menacing than the last: "prit sa canne," "la canne à la main," "sa canne qui heurtait furieusement," "Papa frappait le plancher du bout de sa canne" (5: 668). Though the English text alludes more strongly to the violence, the

canne figures much less prominently. In fact, Green uses the word "walking-stick" instead of cane, a much more benign choice of words. Cane may imply feebleness in English but it also wields the threat of the word in its verbal form (caning). Moreover, in *Memories*, Green's father does nothing more than hold this walking-stick. There is no beating it against the floor or using it to underline his anger. The violence implied in the English text emanates instead from the body of the boy's father—roaring and stamping of feet.

Why does Green's French rendering of the account insist on erasing the violence of his English? Given that *Partir* was written two decades after *Memories*, and therefore over forty years after the incident, it might be possible that Green really had forgotten what happened in the intervening years. And thus the fact that in his earlier recollection of the event he omitted the climax meant that he could have been purposefully tossing this memory into the void. When in his English he explains that he is drawing a veil, the reader understands that the narrator willingly withholds information in order to avoid the pain of recounting the incident. But from reading across Green's self-writing we understand that the veil is drawn not only to conceal from the reader, but even from the future author, and thus from the future reader. And therefore, as Green translates across language and time, the story becomes less emotionally charged. Consider the description of the scene given just after Julien's father notices that his hat has been sat upon. In *Memories* the narrator briefly sketches the scene in the third-person, "the next thing that stands out in my memory is a young boy being made to run alongside of a hatless and irate gentleman in a frock coat, down the rue Cortambert, then down the rue Guichard,

finally up the rue de Passy. Three little girls follow behind, trying to keep pace, which they no doubt find difficult as the gentleman appears to be in a great hurry" (48). Compare this to the same scene in *Partir*: "Que se passa-t-il ensuite ? Je l'ai un peu oublié. Nous quittâmes le temple, et vers la rue de la Tour, mon père me prit subitement par la main pour me faire aller plus vite, car il avait hâte de rentrer" (5: 668). In *Memories*, the memory "stands out" whereas in French it is "un peu oublié." And perhaps even more surprising is the style of narration adopted in the two.

It is a rare occurrence in Green's self-writings to narrate a scene in the third person and perhaps points to the traumatic undertones of the scene. The detachment created by third-person narration can be therapeutic. The author removes himself from the narration and reimagines himself as merely a character. However, I propose instead reading this narration analogously to the type of first-person, present tense narration Green adopts in other sections of his self-writings when he explores a scene from his past as though he were there in the moment of composition. That is to say, rather than Green explaining what he remembers, he is describing in the present what he sees as he replays the scene in his mind. In narratological terms, this can be understood as a confusion, or melding, of the narrated-I with the narrating-I.[32] Green has not reimagined the scene by

[32] As Helgo Schwalm explains, "At the heart of its [autobiography's] narrative logic lies the duality of the autobiographical person, divided into 'narrating I' and 'narrated I', marking the distance between the experiencing and the narrating subject. Whereas the 'narrated I' features as the protagonist, the 'narrating I', i.e. the 1st-person narrator, ultimately personifies the agent of focalization, the overall position from which the story is rendered, although the autobiographical narrator may temporarily step back to adopt an earlier perspective."

displacing himself from the first to third-person but instead insists that this is in fact the memory—remember that he insists this is what "stands out." The young boy formed the memory in exile from himself, seeking the comfort of an outside position to shield himself from the embarrassment and potential physical pain suffered at the hand of his father. But this use of third-person, as Green explains in his journal, is also a manner of seeing this more clearly. He writes, "Penser à soi à la troisième personne, comme font les enfants, est une expérience curieuse, instructive. À certains moments, il semble qu'elle permette de voir plus clair, de comprendre quelque chose" *(Journal intégral* 1244). This narration might thus be understood as a step towards better understanding, or step towards processing the memory. In *Partir*, though he claims to have mostly forgotten, there is a proliferation of details absent from the English as well as a first-person narrator: "mon père me prit subitement par la main pour me faire aller plus vite [...] Ne pouvant aller aussi vite, mais tenu d'une main très ferme, je sautais, je volais, bien malgré moi, j'étais hors d'haleine, pendant que les trois filles nous suivaient comme elles pouvaient, avec de terribles gloussements d'hilarité" (5: 668). Not only does Green narrate in first-person, but he insists on it, this final sentence repeating "je" three times. Green's English is more succinct, detached, and focuses on the itinerary instead of the boy. If it is indeed, as Green claims, this image of his young self being dragged down the rue Cortambert that Green's memory preserved, then it is in fact Green's French retelling which is a reimagination in first person. Having a bit more distance from the event and a foggier memory of it, allows Green to place himself back in the first person.

The Myth of I

In this final section I explore Green's narrative techniques across his bilingual oeuvre and consider Sheringham's argument of autobiography's creation of a mythic unity. We can demonstrate the ways in which Green's self-writings collapse distinctions of temporality and multivocal narration. To best understand this we should first return briefly to the role of memory in Green's work, which will illuminate the relationship between the first-person and forgetting.

In *Partir*, Green explains, "si je pouvais revoir et bien observer l'enfant que j'étais à huit ans, je comprendrais mieux l'homme que je suis devenu, mais ce voile qui se tisse entre nous et notre passé a sans doute sa raison d'être… l'oubli est un choix qui ne laisse subsister que l'essentiel" (5: 697). It is difficult to understand exactly what Green means by forgetting being a choice, but taking into account that he made near-nightly journal entries over many decades we can surmise that Green felt a certain amount of agency over his memories. His journaling might very well have been a way for him to curate his own memory and self-narrative—just as I proposed in my reading of the scenes of his father's hat. At times he even reproaches himself for keeping so many memories, perhaps more than he should, detailed in his diary: "J'en viens à me demander quelquefois, avec ces idées en tête, si conserver le registre de tout ce que nous faisons jour par jour n'est pas une erreur et s'il ne serait pas plus sage de permettre à l'oubli de faire son travail qui consiste à garder ceci et à enlever cela, tout cela" (5: 905). Given these doubts we might even surmise that Green prefers his autobiographical writings to

his diary entries. Though the diary is more thorough, it has not had the cleansing force of *oubli* that he finds important in his development. The facts and events he chooses to leave out of his diary are eventually lost to space and time and all that remains are the memories saved therein. Of course, this is not exactly true, some memories are so powerful they stay with us regardless of whether we put any effort into preserving them. But though it is only to a certain extent true for Green, it is absolutely **true in** the case of his reader. That is to say, a casual reader of Green's autobiography only has access to what is on the page. But, as I have mentioned, Green's autobiography covers almost exclusively the periods in his life which predate his regular diary entries. Thus the choice of which he writes is made less by his conscious self as a diarist than by an unconscious conception of self. Green understands that the period of his life pre-diary is fertile ground precisely because it has not been rigidly defined. He believes that forgetting is not a random process caused by certain weaknesses in his faculties but rather a deliberate process, even a strength. Forgetting for Green is a sort of distillation of character that functions much like how Lejeune describes autobiography: as a dialectic narrative disguised as chronology. In *Mille* Green alleges that

> Il y a souvent chez le romancier qui écrit ses mémoires (si le mot convient ici) la tentation d'établir dans la suite de ses souvenirs une cohérence plus forte que la sincérité ne lui permet, je veux dire qu'il s'accommode mal de tous les *blancs* qu'il découvre dans sa vie et qu'il essaie de combler. Pour ma part, je suis obligé de convenir que je n'ai retenu de ma jeunesse que des fragments isolés et que je ne parviens pas toujours à joindre bout à bout. Je n'écrivais pas mon journal. Beaucoup de choses m'ont fui, sauf, je l'espère, celles qui comptaient vraiment. Et qui me dit pourtant que l'essentiel, au contraire, n'est pas précisément ce qui m'est caché ? (5: 904)

Green claims that it is an impulse of the novelist to create a coherent narrative of one's life, perhaps one befitting of fiction. But as scholars of autobiography point out, this is rather a universal tendency among authors of autobiography, if not among us all. It is perhaps even the case that we judge whether an autobiography is a success or not based on this coherence founded perhaps more on imagination than on memory. Sheringham considers this in the case of Baudelaire: "Baudelairian memory deals in the momentary and the fragmentary, and we might, with some justice, link this to the failure of his autobiographical project which remained a collection of fragments. Is autobiography necessarily tied to a smoothing over of the disruptive, discontinuous work of memory, to the victory of unity, however mythic?" (293). Baudelaire's autobiographical project may have failed precisely because it was too Baudelairian—autobiography is not about being oneself. This is a lesson we shall once again learn in chapter three when analyzing the self-writings of Romain Gary.

As we have seen, Green writes in ways which also trouble our understanding of a typical first-person narration. In another example of this, from *Fin de Jeunesse*, Green's choice of narration allows him to align his narrative voice with his predilection for imagining his memories as physical spaces. He begins this work writing about the family's apartment on rue Cortambert, "de temps à autre, je me promène encore là-bas, dans les trois pièces en enfilade de la rue Cortambert, salle à manger, salon, et petit salon" (6: 834). Though Green does not continue this strategy of present tense narration at every point throughout the text, this beginning strikes the reader as a collapsing between the division of the man writing and the child dictating, on which Green insists.

As I have shown, careful reading of the later self-writings make us aware of the difference between narrating memory as memory and narrating memory as present. By putting his reflections in the present tense, Green is not collapsing past and present as we might be tempted to imagine but rather he offers his reader a glimpse into his present view of the past.

We are plunged not into the reality of the eight-year-old Green but into that of the 68-year-old writer viewing his memories. He justifies himself for this use of present tense later in this same text writing, "ce qu'un petit garçon de huit ans peut voir ... seul le romancier l'imagine – mais il n'imagine pas : il se souvient, il a de nouveau huit ans" (6: 855). Green believes the novelist to have a unique ability that is distinct from imagination. He demarcates a distinction between imagination and memory based mainly on his distrust of imagination for its seemingly deceptive attributes.

The events recounted in the autobiographies are necessarily limited in their scope by the ability of memory to recall them, as well as the significance attached to them. But in autobiography, these limitations are obscured and, in many ways, collapsed by the powerful presence of the *I*. The function of the pronoun *I* is, in grammatical terms, a placeholder. Though at first glance the observation may seem trite, for whomever one imagines the *I* to be holding a place (i.e. the speaker) influences greatly the reading of a text. In fiction, to a certain extent we take for granted the enigmatic nature of the first-person narrator and for this reason always qualify that author does not equal narrator. But in autobiography, the reader is much more willing to trust that this pronoun can be firmly affixed to a real person whom we could, with the help of moving distance and time, reach

out and touch. This is, in essence, the autobiographical pact that Lejeune outlines. But oftentimes in autobiography, the narrator can seem foreign even to its author. Green claims that his ambition while writing about his early years was to hand the pen to the boy he once was and allow him to write. In the final pages of his final volume, *Jeunesse*, he writes,

> On comprendrait mal les pages qu'on vient de lire si l'on n'admettait pas que dans ce genre d'écrit s'opère une sorte de substitution de personne, l'homme d'aujourd'hui cédant la plume au jeune homme d'hier. Cela se passe à peu près comme dans un roman dont l'auteur devient tous les personnages, et de même que les personnages font le roman ainsi le garçon de 1922 assume le rôle de mémorialiste et l'écrivain de 1973 travaille sous sa dictée. (5: 1466)

Being a novelist, Green understands his work as autobiographer in similar terms to his fiction because he views his past self as yet another character in the book. He understands that to write literature is to allow himself to be replaced by his character and also to renounce his authority. "Ce qui s'écrit livre celui qui doit écrire à une affirmation sur laquelle il est sans autorité," writes Maurice Blanchot (16).[33] The work thus disappears the writer, freeing them to be anything, or anywhere, else. In the preface to *Si j'étais vous* Green explains in similar terms, "le romancier, qui est à la fois tous les personnages de tous ses livres, se transforme, parfois à grand effort, en qui bon lui semble"(2: 1496). For Green, writing is always intimately linked to transformation and substitution whether it

[33] Guillaume Paugam's rich study, *Quand Je n'est pas un autre*, takes this writerly act of dispossession as a starting point for a reading of several well-known autobiographies. He argues, "si l'autobiographie appartient bien à la littérature, à ces questions et tant d'autres similaires les réponses, selon un paradigme que la critique du XXe siècle a décisivement emprunté au Proust du *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* se doivent trouver dans l'œuvre elle-même et non dans l'existence de leur auteur, quand bien même celle-ci s'avère l'objet de l'écrit en question" (14).

takes place through his fiction or self-writings. In his fiction, the possibilities for *en qui bon lui semble* are nearly infinite and only limited only by his imagination. In the case of autobiography, the character is a succession of younger selves and it is always this younger, purer version of himself for whom he searches. Green hopes that each event is narrated by the self who lived it and not the autobiographer. To the reader this seems intimately linked to the work of a diarist. Arguably the diary is the genre in which author and event are most closely linked in chronology.[34] But strangely Green instead makes the connection between writing the self and fiction. Of course, the central difference between the diary and autobiography is a temporal gap. The immediateness of the journal effectively unmasks the ambiguity of the first-person pronoun when read retrospectively. The *I* writing in the present tense ten years ago does not correspond to the *I* reading it today.

In her study of Green, *Julien Green: Le miroir en éclats*, Carole Auroy examines exactly this confusion of temporality in the autobiographical works of Green. To reread ourselves is to recognize that the mirror we believe to be looking into is in fact shattered. She writes, "L'acte par lequel le sujet s'atteste ouvre donc un dialogue avec le monde. Mais la confluence du temps cosmique et du temps intérieur laisse voir son étrangeté. La durée intime n'est pas simplement incluse dans le temps calendaire – au sens où la durée indéterminée du flux de conscience viendrait se ranger sous un mouvement réglé qui la

[34] Of course there are many types of diary entries and one in which the author considers a distant past would not apply here. Additionally, letter writing may rival the diary for this compact chronology.

déborde et la mesure" (19). Auroy supports her reading of Green with Paul Ricoeur's conception of conscious and natural time: the former being our subjective experience of the latter. As she writes, the use of the first person opens up a dialogue between the world and the subject, and, to a certain extent, this dialogue reveals the distinction between these chronological orders. The act of remembering, and even more so the act of writing down memories, engages the past with the present. This is a relationship which does not happen outside of subjective experience—our wristwatches are never nostalgic for the hours they have kept. Auroy writes that remembering is a way or re-living and thus the past can take on an "eternelle présence par la voie du souvenir" (39).

We can thus reformulate Lejeune's statements—"le sens détermine les événements et non le contraire. Tous les récits sont construits à partir de la fin"—to understand the crucial role that the ambiguity of the *I* plays. In this instance, *sens* can be replaced by the *I* of the author at the time of the composition, or I_c. That is to say, the personality of the author determines the events recounted and all the narration is constructed based upon this self-perception. When Green claims to be handing his pen to past selves, he attempts to undo Lejeune's argument that these past selves are constructed from the endpoint. But as we have seen from the differences between Green's English and French, and the ways in which he manipulates his memory, we must side with Lejeune. If we consider that all the past *I*'s spoken or written by the author at time n are represented as I_n then we can rewrite Lejeune's proposition as, "le I_c détermine les événements et non le contraire. Tous les I_n sont construits à partir du I_c." This manipulation succinctly demonstrates both how intimately entangled self and sense are,

and how inconspicuously the *I* masquerades as a single entity while incorporating multitudes, to paraphrase Walt Whitman.

Further troubling the murky waters of Green's first-person pronoun is the fact that they are doubled. But this plurality of first persons is not a collective *we*, but a separate *I* and *je*. His persistent rewriting of autobiography creates an intricate type of narrative and chronological folding which favors an exponential growth of selves over a quest for their genesis. If writing the past gives it an eternal presence, as Auroy writes, then rewriting creates layers of interaction between a present author, his past, and his past writings about that past. In his rewritings, Green is not only engaging his present self with his memories as he believes them to be, but also with his previous representations of them. He creates an intimate dialogue with himself across time and languages. If we cannot equate any two *I*'s then it would be equally nonsensical to equate Green's *I*'s with his *je*'s.

Conclusion

As Green's self-writings evolve over the course of his life, his style tends more towards immersion than reflection. But some scenes happen to be uniquely both. Consider how Green writes about being a young boy and looking into the reflections of glasses on the table and meeting the gaze of the boy looking back: "avec ces questions perpétuelles dans le regard: 'c'est toi, ce garçon ? Ces yeux immobiles, cette bouche qui ne dit rien… Comme c'est curieux d'être toi ! Me voudrais-tu différent ? M'aimes-tu tel que je suis ?'" (6: 835). This is just one of many scenes in the self-writings where the narrator puzzles over his reflection, wondering to what extent it is a true reflection of

himself and what relationship he has to this seemingly other being.[35] These moments illustrate this uncanny experience, described, for example, by Warren Motte: "[o]ur reflection constantly reminds us, we are both us and it, simultaneously one and other, same and different" (789). The use of the first and second-person pronouns imitates and brings into language the visual dilemma posed by the mirror; the mirror and language function analogously. Just as I can see myself, outside of myself, in the mirror, I can address myself as though I were not me via the second-person. This intradiegetic mirror gazing then gives the reader cause to consider to what extent Green uses his self-writings, and his translations and rewritings, as textual mirrors. We can imagine a range of different possibilities for the faces being reflected in this glass: young Green reflecting young Green, young Green reflecting older Green, older Green reflecting young Green (but given that the reflection comments on seeing a boy we can eliminate with some confidence this last possibility). In other words, what combination of narratorial and authorial gazes are being crossed in this scene? Whether Green is looking explicitly into the mirror or not, this is always the question the reader must be asking in these works.

In the case of Green, these reflections in the mirror must also be considered through the lens of linguistic difference and translation. The prevalence of the mirror gazing in Green's French volumes is in part the result of the volumes themselves acting as sorts of mirrors for the English texts and memories which they follow. Consider, for

[35] Curiously, these scenes abound in the French but are absent from the English.

example, how in Green's essay "An Experiment in English," he writes of English that, "as a child I could not bring myself to believe that English was a real language, rather did I take it to be a jumble of meaningless sounds which grown-ups made to pretend they were carrying on a conversation." He then further explains, "the real names of things were French; other names were fancy and unreal" (6: 1344). Though Green did, of course, quickly gain a mastery of English, these childhood beliefs no doubt impacted the resulting adult. Green translated this essay partly in 1943 but did not complete it until 1983, 42 years after its original composition. In this translation the sentence quoted above became, "enfin, je n'arrivais pas à croire que ce fût une langue réelle, mais plutôt un cliquetis de sons bizarres inventés par les grandes personnes pour faire semblant de tenir une conversation, en quelque sorte le langage de l'autre côté du miroir" (6: 1345). His English original functions equally as inspiration as it does source text. He finds new meaning and layers new metaphor onto his previous prose—here describing English as a language from the other side of the mirror. This urge to reimagine and rewrite, which he allows himself in his self-translations, is precisely the reason he refuses to translate his novels. As he writes in the preface to the translation of *The Apprentice Psychiatrist*, "traduire moi-même en français le récit qu'on va lire m'eût soumis à la tentation de le concevoir de nouveau et tout autrement" (15). Of course, other self-translators, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, feel no remorse for adapting their translations as they see fit. But Green only allows himself to be tempted by desire when the subject of the writing is himself. As this is a subject which constantly changes and evolves, its movement

across languages necessitated a certain amount of change, whereas his novels were treated as though they had a certain agency of their own.

To understand Green's claim about English coming from the other side of the mirror is to understand his bilingual self-writing. It is all at once a remark upon language's seemingly magical quality, its impossibility, and its uncanny resemblance to the world and the people we see. Green must look in the mirror in order to write his life and what he sees is a jumbled mass, a *miroir en éclat* as Auroy puts it. To write one's autobiography is to look into the mirror and present the reflected image to the best of language's capabilities. To self-translate one's self involves a leap of faith into the mirror. To translate one's autobiography requires the belief that if the man in the mirror were to return our gaze, this is what he would see and these are the words he would use. But from Green's self-writing in the two languages, describing a life of bilingualism, dual allegiances to the US and France, and the task of the novelist to become all characters at once, we can read the entirety of his self-writing, the originals, translations, and rewritings, as Green's attempt to show that the man in the mirror can speak for himself.

Green created a collection of self-writings that precisely through their existence constitutes a repudiation of the synthesis and "victory of unity" which autobiography typically venerates. Through his translations and retellings, Green welcomes a proliferation of first-person narrators: a playground of *je*'s and a spectacle of *I*'s. These various speaking subjects interact with Green's memory in subtly different manners and he even uses them to curate his memory in surprising ways which in turn allows certain *je*s to exist and certain others to vanish. But throughout Green's journey as writer and

translator, his fascination for becoming other through his fiction allowed him to find the ways in which he was already other through his self-writings. These individual texts each separately follow the rules of a typical autobiography though when taken together no longer allow for a cohesive reading. And yet, this formation of identities should not be taken as a failure of the project but a reinvention of it through a bilingual lens.

For the young Green, speaking in invented tongues, imagining that French was the only true language, and mispronouncing the English of his mother, language offered a way to see his world from many angles. But at the same time, it allowed him to create different worlds, each aligned with the experiences and requirements of its language. He was able to examine his inner machinations, feelings, and desires from the perspective of more than one self and thus create a space of autobiography which favored capaciousness over reductiveness. Through his rewriting and translation, Green reimagined a multiplicity of childhoods, but he did it through composing a collection of autobiography which in its heavy repetition and narrow focus of time and themes does not invite its reader to read cover to cover. For a reader interested in the general story of Green's younger years, one volume suffices. But for Green, and for the reader interested in an autobiographical subject discordant with its author, much needed to be written, rewritten, and translated. These snowballing texts bring past into present and present into past, allowing the writer's ink to serve as bond between himself and his former selves. The Julien Greens we find shaking hands with one another on the pages of these texts are held together by a name but forever divided by the question they pose, *et si j'étais vous*?

CHAPTER THREE: Samuel Beckett Echoing in Translation

On a brisk December evening in Paris' rue des Irlandais, a group of enthusiasts gather to commemorate two important Beckettian milestones: 50 years from his 1969 Nobel Prize and 30 years from his death in 1989. Following the opening remarks, Irish actress Clara Simpson takes the stage. Positioning herself in the center, she assumes an athletic stance: feet shoulder width apart, back straight, gaze focused in the middle distance, arms momentarily held behind her back as though bracing to salute. The only element seeming to dare refuse her control are the waves of red hair coiled precariously atop her head. Glancing downwards, she begins in a whisper: "monde… mis au monde… ce monde… petit bout de rien… avant l'heure… loin de –… quoi ?... femelle ?... oui… petit bout de femelle." Combatting her hushed tones are the creaks of fifty chairs as one hundred ears strain to drink the words Simpson trickles from behind the lectern. "Non… point d'amour… ni celui-là ni un autre… aucune sorte… ni alors ni après… histoire banale donc." Her words continue to stream forth from a rigid body as the minutes pass. But as she begins to crescendo, her tightlipped control begins to wane. The text's staccato notes elicit frenetic movements from her arms and head. Her hands grasp at empty space while her head jerks along with the questions her mouth poses. She feels these movements as though passive in her body. Later she will sheepishly admit to having scolded herself, "quit with all the fidgeting!" Finally, deftly angling her head away from the microphone, she screams. Wisps of auburn hair tumble from their perch, seemingly as

startled as the audience. A second scream. The monologue continues as the echo of a church bell begins to make its way through the walls. By the end of the piece Simpson is back to a whisper as her voice glides, a few words necessary to discern the change, from Beckett's *Pas moi* into his *Not I*: "visage dans l'herbe… seule au monde… avec les alouettes… reprendre là… repartir de – out...into this world… this world… tiny little thing… before its time… in a godfor–...what?... girl?...yes."

In Simpson's breathless passage from French to English there is an instant of betweenness, only recognizable after its passing; the threshold between the languages is only marked in retrospect. The concluding lines of the French prepare this transition ("reprendre là… repartir de") and ask the listener to consider whether the monologue is concluding, beginning anew, or simply picking up where it leaves off. The English echoes the French spoken moments earlier but the listener's relationship to the words, both the French and English, has changed. The words repeat in translation but are altered by the lingering presence of the French still reverberating in the room. In the same whisper, Beckett's words signal their belonging to, and distance from, one another.

In a New York City theater in 1972, Jessica Tandy first performed Beckett's short dramatic monologue *Not I*. The text is read at a breakneck speed ranging from breathless whispers to full out screams. In response to certain critiques of the play, Beckett stated that it should play on the nerves of the spectator not the intellect (Brater 200). This, of course, can be done in any language and the author's intention may just as well be served by presenting an English audience the French version, and vice versa. The piece is theater reduced to voice and its organ, thus reducing and accentuating the physicality of the

production. As was the case for much of his drama from this period (post *Godot* and the trilogy), Beckett originally composed *Not I* in English and for this piece he specifically had in mind the actress Billie Whitelaw (more specifically, her voice) with whom he had previously worked. It was not until three years later that *Pas moi*—brought into French by Beckett himself, as is the case with the majority of his writing—premiered in Paris. But unlike in Simpson's performance, it was rare in Beckett's lifetime for Mouth to meet Bouche. That is to say, contemporary productions of Beckett's dramatic works often play on the bilingual nature of his corpus but French and English audiences were for the most part kept apart under Beckett's watch.

This was true not only in his theater but also in his prose. As a consequence, the critical receptions of Beckett's works were sharply divided along linguistic lines well into the 1960s, if not later. Nadia Louar sketches out the supposed dueling Becketts thusly: "Deux profils d'auteur, l'un francophone, cérébral, abstrait et désaffilié ; l'autre anglophone, drôle, irrévérencieux et déraciné" (15).[36] Neither audience would admit, or even consider, that their Beckett was anything besides the authentic (read, original) Beckett, even if their version of the text was composed later. But perhaps they were right to resist. As seen in the introduction, Beckett's translations are rarely labeled as such and

[36] Marjorie Perloff also describes this cleavage in a book chapter "Une voix pas la mienne," juxtaposing studies written on Beckett by French thinkers Maurice Blanchot and George Bataille to those by English critics Donald Davies and Hugh Kenner.

instead simply list him as the author, effectively erasing the existence of any previous version of the text. As Sinéad Mooney points out in the introduction to her work *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation*, "Both versions, awkwardly, are equally authorized and equally valid; the claims for preferring the 'original' French are matched by the fact that the subsequent English version—written, moreover, in the author's native tongue—could be seen as constituting his second or final thoughts (though many of these were never subsequently incorporated into ensuing French editions)" (19). There is, of course, no correct answer to which Beckett is more Beckett-y and the question is no longer even posed by critics. Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing to today there has been a massive amount of scholarship dedicated to Beckett's bilingualism and translation practices and even those not working on these themes are nevertheless obliged to consider the dual versions of his texts.

Within this movement critics have moved from questions of comparison—in which language is Beckett funnier? (English) or in which language is he more vulgar? (French)[37]—towards a synthesis of his corpus, i.e. there is no English Beckett or French Beckett but rather just Beckett. This synthesis becomes inevitable for the bilingual reader since the closer one attends to Beckett's writing, the blurrier the distinctions appear. In her work *Samuel Beckett auto-traducteur ou l'art de "l'empêchement": Lecture bilingue*

[37] For a rebuttal of these conclusions on Beckett's relative humor and coarseness in his theater, see Cockerham's "Bilingual playwright" where, in regards to humor, he claims that there is little "justification for regarding either the French or the English versions of the plays as funnier" (150). As to Beckett's vulgarity, Cockerham explains that in translating, regardless of direction, "[Beckett] is careful at least to maintain if not increase the note of vulgarity" (151).

et génétique des textes courts auto-traduits (1946-1980), Pascale Sardin-Damestoy analyzes Beckett's shorter prose pieces and their subsequent translations and highlights just how unstable the notions of original and translation become under a genetic study. The work juxtaposes a self-translator like Beckett with a hypothetical standard translator. The latter cannot access the same resources as the original author: manuscripts, original inspiration, memories, notes, sketches, etc. They must work from the published text as it is given. Thus the translation retroactively grants the original its status as such. But, as Sardin-Damestoy points out, the same cannot be said of Beckett's work since he consistently brings to bear on his translation multiple drafts of the text in the original language. She brings our attention to moments in Beckett's *First Love* and *The Expelled* which correspond better to his preliminary drafts than to the published versions of *Premier Amour* and *L'Expulsé*. Other critics have excavated the Beckett archives and have reported similar findings. Louar, for one, considers how the translations are, in a way, regressive, writing, "Il ne s'agit donc pas pour l'auteur de simplement transposer dans une autre langue un texte précédemment écrit par lui, mais de régresser vers un état antérieur à sa formulation" (20). Many of these translations of the short texts therefore keep within them traces of the birth pangs of the original text.[38] Editorial practices,

[38] Brian Fitch also notes Beckett's tendency to stray from published original versions in his translations but does not rule out that the shift is unconscious. "Beckett does not, therefore, for his 'translations,' work simply from the final version of the original but on occasion takes as his source the earlier drafts of his original manuscript, either consciously referring to the latter or unconsciously reproducing them" (70).

however, rarely make room for this type of nuance. Dirk Van Hulle, co-editor of the *Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project*, writes, "In 1976 the French *Cahier de L'Herne* (number 31) published the ten draft stages of Beckett's short text *Bing*. Even in the tenth version, the text was still in flux (because Beckett made a few last-minute revisions). The English translation, called *Ping*, follows these ten versions of *Bing*… This way, the translation retroactively turns the tenth version into a 'texte définitif'" ("Bilingual Decomposition" 104). From these genetic studies of Beckett's work we come to appreciate the fact that no such "texte définitif" can exist under such conditions and that consideration of Beckett's translations must be approached from a different angle than one might a standard translator's work.

In the present study I attend to the moments in Beckett's writing, so well performed in Simpson's rendering of *Pas moi* and *Not I* when she glides from the French to the English text (though it could have very well been the reverse), where the reader gets a feel for the inbetweenness of the voice's language and the faint echo that the murmured words create. In order to best identify and understand these echoes, I will be using examples from texts spanning about thirty years of Beckett's career, beginning with the composition of *Mercier et Camier* in 1946 and ending with his published translation of it into English in 1974. First I will read *Mercier and Camier* alongside Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape* as a means of understanding self-translation as a literal performance piece and then will move on to an investigation of the so-called trilogy: *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*. Through these close readings of the texts I bring into focus the echolike nature of translation—at once hearing something again but at a certain

remove—as well as the kind of translation which occurs in an echo. In this reading of the trilogy I will highlight the ways we might understand the novels as a continuation in the narrative movement from *Molloy* to *L'Innommable* but also the ways in which Beckett's translations make such a movement impossible.

Before briefly outlining the timeline of Beckett's translations of these works, it is important to clarify here that, strictly speaking, a text cannot contain echoes, just as it cannot contain silence. Left to their own devices, texts *are* silent. Therefore, in this chapter I have selected works that, in some way or another, evoke the possibility of echo either through description (the case for the trilogy), dialogue (*Mercier et Camier*), or their performance (*Krapp's Last Tape*). In the case of the latter, the stage presents the opportunity for the written text to take visual and oral forms. This play focuses on the experience of listening, and of responding to what one hears.[39] In *Mercier et Camier*, as we shall see, Beckett plays with colloquial forms of speech that find themselves much more frequently in the air than on the page. In this sense, the novella acts as a sort of textual echo (a written record) for the speech Beckett was transcribing. Finally, the three novels comprising the trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Meurt*, *L'Innommable*), though all quite different, take great pains to describe the soundscapes in which their characters and narrators find themselves. It is therefore through these various engagements with echoes

[39] In one of Beckett's production notebooks for this play he notes, "[The] play [is] divided fairly equally between listening and non-listening" (qtd in Knowlson *Theatrical Notebooks* xix). The use of "non-listening," sometimes also known as talking, emphasizes the privileged place of listening in this work.

and silence that I analyze the possibility of reading translation as another manifestation of the echoes which Beckett so carefully includes throughout his corpus.

Beckett began seriously composing prose in French following the second World War.[40] Prior to this he had written his novels *Watt* and *Murphy* and had translated the two, with assistance, into French. His first endeavor to compose a longer prose work in French was *Mercier et Camier*, which he completed in 1946. Beckett was overall unhappy with the finished product and thus it went unpublished until 1970 when he could be convinced that it was not without merit. This marked the beginning of the period sometimes called the "siege in the room," a term coined by Beckett himself, in which he wrote, in order: *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, *En Attendant Godot*, and finally *L'Innommable*. Beckett's correspondence allows us to glimpse firsthand the anguish Beckett felt in the aftermath of this period, where his writing stalled and he believed himself to be in the same position as his narrator of *L'Innommable* lamenting, "I can't go on." He writes on February 8, 1952: "*L'Innommable* ... seems about the end of the jaunt as far as I am concerned, there being nobody left to utter and ... nothing left to utter about. ... I used to think all this work was an effort ... to express the nothing. It seems rather to have been a journey, irreversible, in gathering thinglessness, towards it. Or also. Or ergo" (2: 319). He sums up more succinctly his despair a week later, writing, "Je n'ai rien pu faire depuis *L'Innommable*, c'est la fin des haricots ... Si je pouvais me résoudre à abandonner, ça

[40] Earlier attempts at composition in French can be seen in Beckett's poetry published in Eugène Jolas' journal *Transitions*. For more on this see Roberts' " Samuel Beckett's Disruptive Translations of 'je voudrais que mon amour meure.'"

vaudrait mieux" (2: 320). In a piece Israel Shenker published in the *New York Times* he quotes Beckett on this subject: "In the last book *L'Innommable* there's complete disintegration. No 'I,' no 'have,' no 'being.' No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on. The very last thing I wrote - 'Textes pour rien' - was an attempt to get out of the attitude of disintegration, but it failed" (148). These short prose pieces were meant to bring Beckett out of the all-encompassing decay he creates but they seem to only continue along on this momentum. There is always more to undo, always more to disintegrate. As for the translations, Beckett is already in the beginning stages of translating *Molloy* and *Malone meurt* as he begins to compose *L'Innommable*. All three novels are translated with little lag time, unlike *Mercier et Camier* which he undertakes nearly three decades later. There is a marked difference in the later translations of these earlier works, a seemingly hostile attitude on the part of the later Beckett towards his earlier self—"briefer, drier, and somewhat impatient in tone" as Mooney argues—compared to the translations done in closer proximity to the originals (223). A temporal distance becomes reflected in the manner of translation as though time has deadened the echo of the original text.

Echoes in the Making

Though, to my knowledge, critics have not explored the notion of echo in Beckett's translations, as I undertake here, many have pointed out the importance of both

echo and Echo in his work.[41] That is to say, studies have considered the importance of both the phenomenon of an echo one can hear and the mythological character of Echo, from Ovid's retelling in book three of the *Metamorphoses*, who, due to Juno's curse, can only repeat back what has been said to her. Young Beckett found much inspiration in the figure of the young nymph who falls in love with Narcissus. In his earlier writings, he even alludes to her in the titles of a collection of poems, *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates,* and a novella, *Echo's Bones*, which he wrote as the capstone tale to his collection *More Pricks than Kicks*.[42] In the entry for "écho" in the *Dictionnaire Beckett*, Thomas Hunkeler explains that Beckett went so far as to copy down in a notebook the passages relating the story of Echo from Ovid. Beckett finds inspiration in Echo's tragic end:

> But still, though spurned, her love remains and grows on grief; her sleepless cares waste away her wretched form; she becomes gaunt and wrinkled and all moisture fades from her body into the air. Only her voice and her bones remain: then, only voice; for they say that her bones turned to stone. She hides in woods and is seen no more upon the mountain sides; but all may hear her, for voice, and voice alone, still lives within her. (qtd in Campbell 457)

Though Echo's voice began as her own, and as something belonging to her, the formless repetition she becomes now ostensibly lacks subjectivity. It is not her voice; she is voice. But she is always taken as someone else's voice and subsumed under the agency of the most recent speaker. Hunkeler contends that for Beckett "le mythe lui offre alors

[41] Mary Doll in her book, *Beckett and Myth*, gives a thorough account of various allusions to Narcissus and Echo in Beckett's oeuvre.Others, notably Thomas Hunkeler, have examined Ovidian influences in Beckett.
[42] Though deserving of study these texts were not translated by Beckett and thus I do not include them from the present analysis.

l'occasion de relier sa recherche d'un moyen d'expression authentique, dans lequel forme et fond renvoient l'un à l'autre, à la question du sujet et de l'énonciation." In doing so, Beckett spurns a conception of writing à la Narcissus, love letters to oneself, and favors instead a disembodied repetition which reduces meaning and distances language's signifiers from its signifieds. This view of writing acknowledges that all language necessarily repeats the words which are not our own. Hunkeler concludes, "Écho devient la figure d'un sujet dont le langage est à la fois la seule voie d'accès à lui-même et l'obstacle qui l'aliène" ("Echo" 379).

Beckett's writing is full of figures who, like Echo, are obligated to speak and, in some cases, obligated to repeat what they hear. They may protest and beg to let silence consume them, but the reader recognizes that any silence is unstable and will eventually be broken.[43] And while Beckett's later works, in contrast to those outlined above, did not contain explicit references to Echo, he at no point left her behind in his theater and prose. Julie Campbell catalogs instances of disembodied voices in Beckett's prose and describes Echo as a "stand in for repetition with a difference, an essential strategy of Beckett's intratextual play" (457). While agreeing with Campbell's assertion, I argue that this strategy of repetition with difference is not exclusively reserved for intratextual play but rather achieves its fullest effect in Beckett's intertextual relations and notably in his translations. Campbell notes that each narrator in the trilogy (Molloy, Moran, Malone,

[43] For more on Beckett's unstable silences, see Gould's *Silence in Modern Literature and Philosophy: Beckett, Barthes, Nancy, Stevens*.

and the narrator from *The Unnamable*) mentions hearing, and heeding, a voice with no apparent origin. Similar voices are then again heard in the 7th of the *Textes pour rien*, in *Comment c'est*, and finally once more in *Compagnie*. Campbell points out that one conclusion to draw here is that this mysterious voice reflects Beckett's conception of creation. As evidence she quotes a line of Beckett included in the Knowlson biography, "you hear it a certain way in your head" (459), that matches perfectly the narrator's claim in *Texts for Nothing*, "I say it as I hear it" (7). This ethereal voice is at the genesis of Beckett's writing.

But this muse is a brutal mistress, not one that hands the artist his paintbrush but instead one that chains him to the easel. Moreover, when we consider the act of repeating carried out by Beckett's narrators, it seems more a matter of re-creation than creation—closer to the typical view of translation than that of composition. This masked voice (I say masked as the reader's only access to it is through the narrator) annuls the originality of the telling and the told: form and content. But nonetheless, this voice drives the narrative forward, even if this direction leads towards disintegration. *L'Innommable* explores this paradox of there being nothing to say coupled with the impossibility of saying nothing: "Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak" (357). One might imagine a similar lament from a frustrated translator. Thomas Gould, writing on Beckett's strive towards silence muses that the stance of the narrator, "amount[s] to a radically modified version of the closing proposition of the *Tractatus* [Wittgenstein]: whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must not be silent" (64). Here too we are reminded of Echo, who, desiring to reveal her love to Narcissus, is obligated to

speak back his own words while being unable to craft her own expression: “O how often she wants to get close to him with seductive words, and call him with soft entreaties!” But of course, “her nature denies it.” It’s thus a dual obligation to speak but say nothing new, bringing to mind the published dialogue between Beckett and George Duthuit where, in a discussion of the artist Tal Coat, which critics often take as a veiled explanation of his own creative endeavor, Beckett laments, “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.” To which Beckett’s interlocutor responds, “but that is a violently extreme and personal point of view, of no help to us in the matter of Tal Coat” (103). Indeed, Beckett projects his ideal of expressionlessness onto Coat’s paintings in a similar way to how the mysterious voices force the hand of his narrators to speak when, like Bartleby, they would prefer not to. In a later dialogue on the painter Van Velde, Beckett again advances the proposal that this painting is inexpressive and is chided by Duthuit, “Try and bear in mind that the subject under discussion is not yourself” (123).

Echo’s Silence

While the presence of Ovid’s Echo cannot be overlooked in Beckett’s narrative voices, a more general consideration of the phenomenon of echoing must also be advanced. An echo, at its fundamental level, is nothing but a vibration that the ear perceives as the afterlife of a sound; the word in Greek simply means sound, keeping its mother’s name. But sound and echo have a fraught relationship. An echo, in order to be

recognized as such, is at once the same as the initial sound but also, again to be recognized as such, something different. For an echo to be produced, sound is a necessary but not sufficient condition; an echo must also signal distance. In nature this feature serves a practical function for animals like bats or dolphins who navigate their environments by using sound as a surrogate explorer that returns with information of how far it has traveled. Not to be excluded, man has harnessed the utility of echoes for everything from catching fish to waging war. Echoes are full of potential, but they are not inevitable. Every sound contains the latent possibility for an echo to form but it must be given the right conditions: the human ear requires 1/10th of a second to distinguish an echo from the original sound. Were our ears, and concomitant cognitive functions, more finely tuned we might hear nothing but echoes since all the sounds we perceive can arrive directly from the source but more often than not come to us after having first bounced off surfaces and obstacles. But the nature of our ear and the speed of sound are such that whether one whispers in our ear or speaks to us down a hallway, the minor temporal discrepancies of these sounds' arrivals are collapsed and perceived as a single utterance. The imprecision of our faculties allows for the perception of singularity, and thus, repetition. To disassemble the sound into discrete parts (sound and echo) a sufficient distance must be introduced. Another way of conceiving of this is that an echo depends on silence to come into being. Sound and silence act as progenitors in the conception and gestation of an echo. But in fact, the functionality of an echo, at least as far as dolphins or submarine commanders are concerned, is derived from the silence between sound and repetition.

This appreciation for silence plays no small role in Beckett's work. Even mentioning the theme of silence, one feels obligated to quote Beckett's letter to Axel Kaun: "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on the silence and nothingness" (1: 518). Beckett dreams of being able to puncture the spaces of his creation with silence, just as composers do in music. Thus his quest eventually led him to the medium perhaps best suited for silence, the theater. But just as in his prose, Beckett's theatrical silences are unstable and in the end impossible since his characters mishear, question, and repeat one another's words endlessly. Even the monologues introduce the possibility of mishearing—think back to *Pas moi* "what?...girl?" Thus, as spectators we are always hearing and rehearing a series of the same words and sounds, one after another. Beckett himself remarks that in *Fin de partie* "la pièce est pleine d'échos, tous se répondent" (qtd in Hunkeler *Échos de l'Ego* 379). But ironically, the theater space is physically constructed in order to eliminate the presence of echoes and reverberations, forcing Beckett to craft his texts to override such material considerations. One might wonder if poor acoustics might actually be a boon for such pieces—endless echoes!

It may be that the closest point at which Beckett approaches silence is the interstice within the space of sound and echo. The most useful silence, as attested to by sonar, is that which measures and reveals distance. All the while this silence reminds us of an original that has been deformed by its repetition. This is the type of silence found throughout, and between, Beckett's works. We might consider the echoes of phrases ("I can't go on" in *The Unnamable*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Texts for Nothing*, *Endgame*) or even echoes of characters' names (Molloy, Mercier, Moran, Malone, and others being spoken

about outside their proper narratives). The repetitions of these phrases and names create relationships between the texts that alter both. Steven Connor, in his book *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, writes that repetition "is the same as and yet different from the original utterance, an addition to and yet also a diminution of it" (94). His work builds on the arguments crafted by Gilles Deleuze in *Différence et répétition* and Jacques Derrida's *L'Écriture et la différence*, in which these thinkers articulate repetition not as a mechanical reproduction, nor as a derivative of an original, but existing on its own terms. It is the repetition that retroactively, like a translation does an original, grants status. The first occurrence comes into being at the outset of the recurrence. It does not seem to me, however, that the repetition is necessarily a diminution, as Connor writes. In fact the repetition creates the space for contemplation in the silence between. And this is precisely the type of silence found between original and translation. All translators, self or allophone, are obliged to listen and to repeat, despite the fact that the original utterance was completely comprehensible.

But what can be said of the difference between an echo and repetition? An echo is of course perceived as a repetition but the reverse is not necessarily true: echoes and their sounds share a genesis whereas a repetition can form independently. Recalling the etymology of the words proves useful here: echo is Greek for sound and repeat comes from the latin *repetere*, *re* for back and *petere* for seek. Echo is not only inherently oral but also inextricable from the sound that gave the illusion of producing it, whereas repetition evokes the reinitializing of a process. A repetition can take many forms and can be performed at any point—a rather liberal paradigm when compared to that of an echo

which is constrained temporally.[44] But it bears repeating that the difference between a sound and its echoes only exists in the ear of the perceiver. The independence of the sound of a tree falling in a valley from its echo depends only on the position of the ear on the ridge and not on the thump of the tree against the ground or its reverberations against the cliffs. These sounds are one and the same.

Making Echoes

We thus understand that from the perspective of the originator of a noise, there is no difference between creating sounds and creating echoes. To create an echo requires manipulating the environment more so than it does its provenance. Put another way, the act of screaming can be identical whether in a padded room or a cave but the two scenarios will create vastly different sonorous implications. However, this near impossibility of expressly creating echoes is not definitively dissuasive. In art and translation, as Beckett shows, echoes can be mimicked. In everyday speech we can point to echolalia, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "the meaningless repetition of words and phrases," and Dupriez defines as a "figure du discours" denoting the "répétition de la dernière syllabe d'un mot, en écho" (qtd in Gély-Ghedira 52).[45] Those engaging in echolalia, either by choice or pathologically, reenact Echo's curse of

[44] Consider, moreover, the fact that *répéter* in French also means to rehearse. In this sense, *répétition* is an attempt to perfect some type of act.

[45] Relatedly, lexilalia is the oral repetition of words read. For a consideration of lexilalia as a form of translation, see Apter's "Lexilalia: On Translating a Dictionary of Untranslatable Philosophical Terms."

repeating what is heard. The boundary between hearing and speech is ruptured, resulting in the seemingly passive process of listening necessarily leading to the active production of sound. Sound begets sound, but not necessarily sense.

Echolalia favors sound over meaning and does not seek to create an ordered output from its input. We might understand certain Beckett characters as imitating this disorder—recall the narrators discussed in Campbell's article, for example. But whereas echolalia privileges sound over sense, it also must be understood as an engagement with the Other. "L'écholalie ici n'est pas l'emprunt des mots, de la langue, ni du discours de l'autre, mais le surgissement d'un discours autre dans la langue du même, du sujet parlant," writes Gély-Ghedira. Beckett's narrators allow themselves to be the vocal instrument of another's discourse—"a mere ventriloquist's dummy," as the narrator of *The Unnamable* tells us (97). But this is not a simple, or mindless, repetition but rather an attempt at effacing the boundaries between the Other and the self, through the means of language. Gély-Ghedira notes the paradoxical nature of this act, writing, "Toute écholalie, au fond, porte la même tension entre le même et l'autre: dans le même mouvement où elle efface leur différence, elle la signale" (54). As I have argued above, the echo denotes distance while aping sameness and in the context of alterity we can recognize the same processes. To engage the Other through echo is a manner of forgetting, but also of defining, one's self.[46]

[46] Echolalia's aspect of forgetting is one highlighted by Daniel Heller-Roazen in his work *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*. Echolalia, he writes, is that "indistinct and immemorial babble that, in being lost, allowed all languages to be" (12).

But in no place is this abutting of self and Other through the medium of language more apparent than in translation. Though I am not claiming that the Beckettian narrators' intradiegetic echolalia is strictly translation, even if that argument could be made, these narrators all have their analogue in a French or English version of the text. Their echolalia exists in translation and thus the narrators' repeated words echo outside the boundaries of their proper texts—echolalia of echolalia. And yet, this pathology as a conceptualization of translation *should* prove impossible. As stated, it breaks the cardinal rule of translation by privileging sound over sense and resisting passive silence.[47] And yet, for an author like Beckett the analogy holds. As Gély-Ghedira writes of echolalia to allow otherness in one's own speech, Beckett's translations echo the other text while affirming their own existence.

In his essay, "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin writes, "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself at the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one" (175). This pastoral scene of translation, whether intentionally or not, brings us back to our figure of Echo and her resistant object of affection, Narcissus. Benjamin, perhaps counterintuitively, explains that translation, on the bounds of the forest, must call forth in order to receive an intelligible reverberation of the work. Echo must fully give herself to Narcissus in order for him to speak through her. In other words,

[47] Cockerham gives numerous examples of Beckett's choice to preserve sound over sense. See pp. 146-8.

translation, not the original, takes the defining step. The foreign language must engage with the work, allow itself to be reverberated within the forest of the text, and only then can it translate.

But, as noted, an echo, in the strictest of senses, cannot be created. Its potential to exist sneaks out undetected at the moment of its genesis and its proper existence can only come to be as a sort of afterlife of the sound, much like, as Benjamin explains, the possibility of translation within its original. He writes, "Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original - not so much from its life as from its afterlife" (172). Translation, he explains, issues forth from the afterlife of the original while at the same time altering the original. Moreover, translatability is an innate quality of the original and not necessarily dependent on external factors to the text: "the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them." This latent possibility of translation is analogous to that possibility of echo that I have argued for above. Both translation and echo can lie dormant in the original, biding their time before revealing themselves and thus modifying the system as a whole.

We can find a description of this in Beckett's early novel *Murphy*, where the narrator mentions in passing the crafting of an echo. On the first page of the novel we read, "somewhere a cuckoo-clock, having struck between twenty and thirty, became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew gave *Quid pro quo*! *Quid pro quo*!" (8). In *Beckett and Babel*, Fitch makes a point of highlighting the logical impossibility here: "One realizes that, logically speaking, it is impossible for anything to become the echo of

something else, for an echo is related to its origin as an effect is to its cause as an immediate result of the former, so that if one audible phenomenon is not already the actual echo of another, there is no way that it can retroactively acquire such a status" (48). He then goes on to examine the differences between Beckett's English and French rendering of this moment in the narrative, focusing on the effect of splitting the long sentence into two and the religious implications of the passage given its supposed geographical location in London. In French we read, "Quelque part un coucou, ayant sonné entre vingt et trente, devint l'écho d'un cri de marchand ambulant. L'écho se tut, le cri se rapprocha, entra dans l'impasse et Murphy entendit: *Quid pro quo*! *Quid pro quo*!" (2). Of most interest in terms of echo, there are two important elements to highlight: the doubling of the echo and the function of the phrase *quid pro quo*.

The cuckoo clock rings following the cries of a merchant yelling "quid pro quo," a Latin phrase literally meaning "something for something." The narrator interprets it as trying to pass itself off as an echo: cuckoo for street cry, sound for echo, something for something. We can see how in Beckett's French the word *écho* itself, like the phenomenon, is repeated, in contrast to the English, but is then given a definite lifespan from when the sound "devint l'écho" to when "l'écho se tut." This performative repetition in the text is at odds with echo's demarcation. The idea of an echo falling silent instantly seems as illogical as a clock becoming the echo of a noisy street. Echoes fade, haunting the silence which follows, but they are not abruptly muzzled. But in the French, the word echo, appearing twice, marks the birth and death of the echo, a duty typically reserved for silence. And interestingly the echo and sound seem to take on different

actions in the English considering that Beckett's use of ambiguous clauses make it unclear whether we are to understand that the echo, the cry, or both have entered the mew: "somewhere a cuckoo-clock, [...] became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew…" (8). Here the writer allows the echo to continue on, allowing it to resound within the English text and then in turn permeate the French text where it will be silenced definitively.

But it is worth pausing over the value of this *quid pro quo*. On the surface it rings simply as the cry of a merchant and we have already seen how Beckett's crafting of an echo fits into the schema provided by the expression of one thing for another. And yet the expression's form resists its meaning; there will be no exchange when Beckett brings the text from English to French. This Latin phrase does not belong properly to either Beckett's original English or French translation—its privileged status highlighted by its italicization—and thus is able to glide unaltered from original to translation. There is therefore already a certain hint of translation present, for both English and French readers, though not to a foreignizing degree since many Latin phrases of this order have been adopted into both languages. And yet it is precisely this false familiarity that creates tension between the texts. Beckett's *quid pro quo* echoes falsely in translation precisely because of the quibbling of these adoptive linguistic parents. The expression is commonly understood in anglophone contexts as an exchange but in French this meaning would be more readily understood if translated as *donnant-donnant*. *Quid pro quo*, ironically, may be taken as *quiproquo*, which in modern French usage signifies a

misunderstanding.[48] A French reading, taking the word to mean misunderstanding, will be misunderstanding. And thus even when heard correctly, echoes can be misleading and might even be taken for the original sound. The text demonstrates how an original sound or phrase, in this case the cry of a street seller, can become an echo in translation by demonstrating at once repetition and difference.

*Krapp's Last Tape / La Dernière Band*e

As I have stated, there is a minimum time span (1/10th of one second) necessary for a human ear to register an echo as distinct from the sound initially perceived, but at what point do we label a maximum span, over which we do not accept the sound as an echo but rather just a new, perhaps identical, sound?[49] This is the question which a reading of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Mercier et Camier* will help to interrogate.

Beckett composed *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1958, having originally named the work "Magee's Monologue," after the actor Patrick Magee whom Beckett had become quite fond of after having heard him read the short story *From an Abandoned Work* on BBC

[48] This difference revealed itself to be important during the United States House of Representatives' 2019 impeachment hearings centering on an alleged *quid pro quo* between Presidents Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky. French media outlets were obliged to reiterate that *quid pro quo* and *quiproquo* are not synonymous in common contemporary usage. As explained by an article from November 2019 in the newspaper *L'Obs*: "Mais attention, elle [quid pro quo] n'a rien à voir avec notre « quiproquo », popularisé notamment par les vaudevilles. Issu de la même locution latine, le quiproquo français est défini par *Le Petit Robert* comme une « méprise qui fait qu'on prend une personne ou une chose pour une autre », un « malentendu ». Rien à voir avec un quelconque « donnant-donnant »."

[49] The Guiness Book of World Records lists the longest echo at 112 seconds: the echo of a pistol firing a blank was observed in a decommissioned underground fuel depot built during World War II in the Scottish Highlands. See: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/now-weve-heard-it-all-acoustic-scientists-shatter-the-world-record-for-longest-ever-echo-9062134.html

radio. The distinctly Irish, yet cracked and worn quality of Magee's voice inspired Beckett to create stories for such a voice to tell. It is thus unsurprising that this play was written in English and features a sparse stage: a single actor, a desk, some miscellaneous objects, and a magnetophone. In the play the character Krapp, an old man, takes a stroll down memory lane, listening to old recordings of himself that act as a sort of voice diary of the past thirty years. His reactions to these memories (notably involving romantic mis/adventures), and to these past versions of himself, are varied: contempt, surprise, laughter, nostalgia, sadness, etc. The play effectively stages an intimate look at a subject's relationship to itself and all its iterations. The use of the voice recordings, a technology only somewhat recently available to a mass public, allows the spectator to view the engagement of a present character with the events which led to his own constitution, rather like a more stage-friendly version of watching someone reread their old diaries. Another way of reading the play is an interaction of grammatical tenses: present (Krapp is), past (Krapp was), past-perfect (Krapp had been), future-perfect (Krapp will have been). But the play excludes a vision of a future (Krapp never will be) since the very act of recording entombs Krapp and his memories prematurely. When we imagine Krapp's future we see him listening once again to the old tapes, and the tapes he records at present, soon to be old tapes themselves. We should also note that even when we say that Krapp is listening to his memories, our wording is imprecise. Krapp is in fact listening to memories of his memories: only his reflections are recorded in present tense, not the events themselves. Krapp's engagement with his past self(ves) is thus a snowballing mass of mediation. This brings the spectator's attention to the fact that a true

communion with past Krapp is impossible due to these layers of distance, but equally impossible is an unmediated perception of present Krapp since these spools of tapes seem to construct him in front of our eyes. But the temporal element of the play is in fact slightly more complex when considering that we the spectators are in fact the contemporaries of the recorded Krapp and not the man we see on stage. Beckett's opening to the play sets the scene as, "A late evening in the future" (3). This leaves open the possibility for the spectators to imagine themselves becoming this weary old man spending his life obsessing over a handful of memories so long past that really only memories of the memories remain.

It is the spectator's implication in the narrative that fills out the structure. As James Knowlson writes in the introduction to the theatrical notebooks of *Krapp's Last Tape*, "the spectator has become the active agent, listening, observing, and able himself to assess the width of the chasm that separates Krapp from his former self and judge the strength of his obsession with a portion of his own past that he had earlier rejected as being unworthy of him" (xx). It is this assessment of the "width of the chasm" between the multiple Krapps which makes this play a uniquely perverse sort of bildungsroman. Typically, we expect to see the progressive development of a character over the course of a narrative arc but Becketts supplants the narrative arc with a tape recorder and instead gives us the two endpoints of a character. We as spectators must then fill in the intervening decades, imagining how the changes and apparent discord so visible in this present juxtaposition came to be, given the events and reflections Krapp shares with us. This fractured nature might bring to mind the Wittgenstenian notion of translation

functioning akin to an opaque black box–i.e. we can view the inputs and the outputs easily but there is no readily identifiable mechanism to relate the two.[50] In the play Krapp's tape recorder functions like this black box, ingesting recordings in a perpetual present and releasing them later as an always already past. The translation of Krapp from young to old man takes place in a space inaccessible to the viewer or reader but the proliferation of iterative instances in the form of recordings allow the spectators to form their own versions of the events and mechanism of change.

But what Knowlson does not note in his acute observation about the spectator acting as the "active agent" is that while we are indeed obliged to judge the differences between the character before us and the manifestations of his previous self, we also must appreciate that though we recognize that Krapp's voice has aged it nevertheless is in continuity with the one on the recordings. This is not necessarily the case for Krapp. Just imagine the sound of your own voice in a recording. If you are like **most,** then you have a strong aversion to hearing these sounds that seem so foreign to your ear. The manner in which voices resound within a body means that soundwaves produced by one's own vocal cords produce materially different effects on the eardrums than when listening to sounds produced exteriorly. Put another way, our own voices echo quite literally through our bones before we perceive them. Therefore it is quite impossible, without replicating the impact of our skeletal constitutions, to play back a recording of a voice and have it

[50] For more on this see Wilson *Translation after Wittgenstein* and Tymoczko *Translation and Power*.

sound the same to the speaking subject.[51] All this is to say that while the differences we are able to observe as spectators to the play are in fact less defamiliarizing than they are for the subject on stage. Another way of framing this experience is process versus result. For the spectator, we are able to hear two voices and through their qualities and given the context we recognize them as one and the same. One replicates the other because we have had no hand in the production—i.e. the physical act of speaking these words literally alters their sound.

A number of critics have pointed out the aptness of *Krapp's Last Tape* as a metaphor for Beckett's self-translations. Dirk Van Hulle writes, "Krapp unremittingly tries to fix his 'self' by recording his voice, but the more versions of this self he produces, the more elusive it becomes. In a way, Beckett's self-translations can also be read as a translation of this idea" (100). This reading of the play puts Krapp in conversation with Beckett's other protagonists (Molloy, Moran, Mercier, to name a few) who are also engaged in a quest of some sort. But Krapp's quest is unlike their physical journeys and instead takes him inward on a quest towards self-knowledge. But this interiority gets turned outward through the use of these recordings as the mechanism through which he understands himself. Krapp must constantly filter his subjective thoughts and memories through the physical medium of the tapes in the spools. He carefully catalogues them in

[51] Another study by psychologists Holzman and Rousey, "The voice as a percept," argues that one reason people often dislike the sound of their recorded voice is due to how much it discloses about them. The extra-linguistic clues offered by the recording reveal to listeners aspects of the speaker's emotions (anger, sadness, anxiety, etc.) which speakers are unaware of conveying. This too should be considered for the character of Krapp, for whom the experience of listening reveals to him new information about his state at the time of the recording.

numbered boxes that are all meticulously recorded in a journal containing keywords of the contents. This archive continues to grow as Krapp ages. Van Hulle suggests that this proliferation of output mirrors Beckett's own production of multiple versions of his texts. The multiple versions may make a unity of meaning more elusive but they may very well work to highlight the division already present in the original text. That is to say, the existence of a single text may give the illusion of a unity of meaning that the translation can help to debunk. Examining the role of archive in the play, Daniel Katz quotes Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive*, "l'archivation produit autant qu'elle enregistre l'événement," and then goes on to explain that the play depicts both a repression of the archive, Krapp contemptuously dismissing his past selves, and the creation of an archive of repression (152). Krapp's recordings become an unbreakable cycle of engagement with past voices whose distance from the present makes them displeasing to him just as quickly as they are finished.

Katz aptly points out the significance of the context in which Beckett was writing the play, the same period in which he was translating *L'Innommable* into *The Unnamable* and apparently working in parallel between the two projects.[52] Katz then argues, "dans ce sens, la pièce est sans aucun doute une mise en scène de *L'innommable*, dont le drame n'est rien d'autre que celui d'une voix absolument intime mais qui arrive à celui qui la

[52] The content of a letter dated February 26, 1958 may possibly contradict Katz's assertion that the two were written in parallel. The timing is nevertheless close and I do not believe it invalidates his arguments. Beckett writes, "I am just back from Ussy after a heavy bout of translating which has brought me to the end of L'Innommable, first draft. I have an exciting idea for a short monologue for Magee" (3: 111).

profère" (147). Krapp's creation of his archive allows him the possibility to be in constant conversation with himself, not unlike in the narrator's monologue from *L'Innommable*. Both narratives are driven by the interaction of voices and a perpetual negation and obfuscation of that which was just said. "If I have said anything to the contrary I was mistaken. If I say anything to the contrary again I shall be mistaken again. Unless I am mistaken now," muses the narrator of *The Unnamable* (393). But in contrast to Krapp, this narrator constantly evokes the problems familiar to Echo: "no words but the words of others," (288) and then later, "I'm in words, made of words but the words of others" (355). Though I take the point that language is a social construction with no sole architect, Krapp's problem nevertheless is materially opposite that of Beckett's other narrator. The voice Krapp hears from the recordings is his, telling his memories and using his words. We might expect him to modify the grievance, "no words but my own." And yet, he persists in creating new recordings, more fodder for a later Krapp to disapprove of.

Rather than considering *Krapp's Last Tape* a staging of *L'Innommable*, a more convincing reading would posit that it is a staging of the (re)composition of *The Unnamable*, if not more generally one of nearly any of Beckett's translations.[53] Krapp, going back over some of his early recordings remarks, "just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that" (9). In

[53] Though *L'Innommable* was the text translated nearest to the writing of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett had also just finished translating *Fin de partie* and for the remainder of his days his composition and translation overlapped perpetually.

a letter Beckett writes October 31, 1957 he has a similar reaction: "Je suis jusqu'à la calvitie mourante dans la traduction de L'Innommable. A crever de rage et de honte" (2: 69). It is not precisely clear what brings Beckett such rage and shame. It could be due, much like for Krapp, to his distaste for the text he had previously composed. But it could very well be rage and shame over his perceived inability to bring this text into French, i.e. the process of translation. Then again, it might be his dislike of the words he newly produced, i.e. the product of translation. In sum, is Beckett ashamed of *what* he translates, *how* he translates, or the translation itself? We cannot eliminate the possibility of all three together or perhaps a combination of two. And whereas it seems rather clear in the play that Krapp's dissatisfaction stems from the first proposition, dislike of what he's recorded, all three are nevertheless present in the play. The third is of course linked to the first, since whatever he produces he later despises. As for the second, the process of translation, this would be analogous to the recording process itself. Krapp does occasionally seem unable to express what he wants at the moment and these uncertainties are highlighted.

In the stage directions Beckett indicates the word "hesitates" seven times mid-sentence. All but one is found in the directions for the recording-Krapp and not the listening-Krapp, highlighting the anxiety of active production. The word "hesitates" is slightly overshadowed by "broods," which appears ten times, but both are dwarfed by Beckett's choice of "pause," indicated eighty times in this play comprising fewer than a dozen pages. Clearly this is not a play of action, but we should recognize that among "pause," "brood," and "hesitate," brood is the most active of the verbs. Indeed, it is

perhaps Krapp's most prized activity. But this brooding is one the audience can only observe in the present. Over and over again, as the stage directions indicate, "Krapp switches off, broods, switches on" (5). Twice he mistakenly includes his brooding in the archive: "Broods, realizes he is recording silence, switches off, broods" and shortly thereafter, "Broods. Realizes. Switches off" (9). Of course brooding is not an activity well captured by audio recordings, as elusive as, say, crying would be to writing—perhaps the paper could be moistened but it will dry in time and its trace will be as ambiguous as the silence left on a tape while its speaker brooded. Neither the tape nor the page can register these acts outside the scope of their mediums. It is perhaps for this reason that Beckett makes an odd choice when he translates the play by selecting the verb *rêvasser* to take the place of brood. In the article cited earlier, Katz argues that Beckett's brooding can be traced back to his Irish roots. He cites works by James Joyce and WB Yeats where men are often caught up in the activity but he offers no explanation for the translation (155). It does not seem to be the case that *rêvasser* has a particularly strong connection to the French literary tradition, which one might expect if the word was chosen in order to effect a domesticating translation. "Broods" would more literally be rendered as *ruminer* or *ressasser*; *rêvasser* is more akin to English's "daydream," which loses its prominent connotation of regret or anger. But the secondary definition of "brood" in English is one relating to procreation, as in a hen sitting on her eggs until they hatch. This acceptation of brood as a productive activity seems to distance the word even further from its translation, *rêvasser*. For an example of usage, *Le Petit Robert* gives a quotation from Gustave Flaubert: "nous menons une vie de fainéantise et de rêvasserie."

Fittingly, this pair of words conforms to the conceptions of translation, those avowed by Beckett in his correspondence and to those of writers at large, as an unproductive activity in the sense that it keeps one from composing originals. When Beckett broods, he hatches a play so that Patrick Magee might introduce an audience to something new. But when Beckett *rêvasse*, he is mulling over old ideas and re-producing a play already written and performed. Ironically, through this word choice pointing to the idle and *chimérique* nature (that *Le Petit Robert* gives as synonym for *rêvasserie*), Beckett has indeed produced something new. And yet, this is counteracted by the fact that Krapp so meticulously keeps his brooding from being recorded on the tape. It is as though the brooding was not lost in translation but rather hidden from it, not unlike Green's omission of memories in his autobiographies. In a performance of the play, a significant portion occurs in silence while Krapp pauses or broods while remaining immobile. But this silence is not transmitted and is thus excluded from the archive. Krapp does not listen back to recorded silence of the past, though this might have added another interesting dimension to the play. So when creating his translation, we can imagine that Beckett, rather than trying to generate a repetition of Krapp's evening listening to these spools of tape, instead crafted an echo of it, allowing the continuous engagements of past iterations to continue through and across into another language. *Krapp's Last Tape*, for *La dernière bande*, is akin to one of the old spools recounting something that is at once familiar and totally forgotten.

We can imagine the French Krapp listening to the tapes of the English Krapp (or vice versa) and puzzling over the strangeness of both the language and the memories. For

Katz, “la cassette représente l'intimité de son propre passé devenue aussi étrangère qu'une langue oubliée” (155). Krapp’s past at times appears confusing to him and he is obligated to interpret and at times even research what exactly he meant. The play depicts the fickle nature of memory. For example, at the beginning of the play Krapp reads over his ledger, searching for a particular entry but before he finds it he reads aloud, “Hm... Memorable... What? Equinox, memorable equinox. (*He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.*) Memorable equinox?... (*Pause. He shrugs his shoulders*...)” (4). Younger Krapp clearly mistook a moment which seemed memorable to him for one which would actually remain in his memory into the future. The comic effect is produced by the disconnect between past and present and perhaps also by the anxiety the moment produces by reminding spectators that they cannot be certain that anything is memorable. We recognize that as an event occurs it might be premature to deem it memorable, but if we extend the logic it must be acknowledged that even recognizing a past event as memorable we still cannot eliminate the future possibility of forgetting it. The best we can do is to say that something *had been* memorable, proven only by the fact that we have at least remembered it once. The word functions a bit like Krapp’s recordings in that it has no way of envisioning the future and can only look backwards. This recording plays on our conception of memory and at once brings the past into contact with the present while revealing how distant they are.

Krapp’s memory falters not only in its recollection of equinoxes but also in its relationship to language. In one memorable moment, if I may hazard the term, Krapp listens to himself describing the end of his mother’s life, “after her long viduity” (6).

Krapp gives signs of being baffled by this final word and he rewinds the tape to be sure he did not mishear. The stage directions read, “His lips move in the syllables of ‘viduity’. No sound” (6). This word he once employed has been lost to the sands of time. The silent imitation of the sound functions effectively to show that while the physical conditions of the word can be recognized (the sound and shapes of the syllables) it cannot actually be reproduced. He then goes offstage and returns with a large dictionary where he verifies the definition: “State - or condition - of being - or remaining - a widow - or widower” (6). While this moment in the play occurs completely in English, Beckett nonetheless is able to infuse it with the flavor of translation. The distance and strangeness of the man he once was is illustrated by the foreignness of his language, even if not literally foreign. The audience sees how over time words can become strange to us, and as we see here, this effect is heightened when we hear them come from our own mouths. The foreignness of the word overflows its bounds and pervades the subject itself, highlighting just how much distance there is between past and present.

Considering the biographical context of the composition, Katz argues that “bien que la pièce soit écrite en anglais, il remémore moins l'adieu à l'amour que l'adieu à cette langue, elle aussi délaissée par Beckett bien des années auparavant”(155). It is true that at this point in Beckett’s career he had for over a decade been writing primarily in French and had gained notoriety principally for this output. But then again, over this same period Beckett had translated all his works written during the “siege in the room” into English, visited the UK and Ireland several times, and kept in close contact with many anglophone friends, family, associates, and acquaintances both in Paris and abroad. He in no way was

alienated from his mother tongue and certainly had not done anything as drastic as bid English adieu. With that said, it is of course a relatively rare occurrence for a native anglophone writer to compose in a language not their own but it seems as though this theatrical piece plays more on the difference generated by time than necessarily that by language.

Supporting this conclusion is the recursive nature of the play, as I pointed out with Beckett's translation of broods by *rêvasser*. In the section of the play where Krapp forgets the word viduity, the translation again enters into a recursive function, a way of echoing the English with a slight difference and prolongation of its ring. When in *La dernière bande* Krapp opens his dictionary to read the definition of *viduité* he finds, "État - ou condition - de qui est - ou demeure - veuf - ou veuve" (20). To begin, one interesting note is that Beckett's definition of viduity comes from the *Oxford English Dictionary* but rather than choosing a definition of *viduité* from an equivalent French source, he translates the English dictionary. This is an unusual choice for a self-translator who was not against certain domesticating practices—consider for example how when translating a line from his play *Happy Days* in which the protagonist quotes Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* he substitutes a quotation from Racine's *Athalie* in *Oh les beaux jours* (Cockerham 153). Bypassing such a tactic in a way anchors the text in an English reality since what Krapp reads for *viduité* does not exist in any French dictionary**.** There are, strictly speaking, no translated dictionaries—e.g. a French dictionary whose first entry would be *oryctérope* (aardvark in English). It seems clear that Beckett wants to keep the English definition because it allows for the comic effect when after reading the definition, Krapp "looks up.

Puzzled" and then repeats "Being - or remaining?" (6). No equivalent humoristic reflection could be produced from *Le Petit Robert*'s definition: "état de veuve, de veuf." And yet, perhaps as a means to combat this authoritative stance of the English original, Krapp in French looks up a second word: (*Pause. Il se penche de nouveau sur le dictionnaire, tourne les pages.*) Veuf… veuve… veuvage…" (20). Whereas in English his curiosity was satisfied from the entry on viduity, in French Krapp also needs clarification for the word *widow*. The effect of the foreignness introduced by Krapp forgetting a word he once used is now doubled in the French where the character must enter down the rabbit hole of searching for definitions of definitions, as though this Krapp's French might somehow be less fluent than his English. *Veuf*, after all, is not typically a word a French speaker would need defined. The gag is built upon and expanded, creating difference from the original though taking its origin from the *OED* entry.

Read together with *Krapp's Last Tape*, *La dernière bande* allows us as readers to appreciate Beckett's ability to echo rather than simply repeat his original in a second language. The play is premised on a recursive engagement with past selves, who are in turn engaged with past versions of themselves. Krapp in conversation with himself at one moment is Krapp in conversation with himself at any moment. Beckett's self-translation pushes this engagement not only to transcend time but language. A bilingual reader or spectator of the play understands that reading the plays as separate from, or substitutes for, one another would be akin to reading the first and second halves of the play as separate pieces of theater. Even in the titles, this ambiguity of sound and echo is played

upon: does last (*dernière*) refer truly to the final tape or might it simply mean most recent?[54] Moreover, might we hear the translative echo of *Krapp's last tape* in *La Dernière bande*? (Krapp's last tape… last tape). The ambiguity exists and allows Krapp to live on indefinitely, never recording his last tape and always having the possibility of starting over again in the other language. This is also precisely the problem the narrator of *L'Innommable* faces, at every juncture the allure of stopping is there but inevitably "I resume, having no alternative" (335). And just as these characters had no choice but to continue in order to ward off some notion of finality, so too did Beckett as translator. Sardin-Damestoy remarks on this survival as a key element of Beckett's work, arguing, "le processus de 'l'accomplissement', ce 'néant' tant désiré des sujets beckettiens et en même temps sans cesse repoussé. La traduction de soi est un acte de répétition, de redite et, à ce titre, il retarde le moment de la fin" (84). Krapp gives us insight into the ways in which Beckett as author and translator views his task of prolonging his work and resisting finality. Krapp refuses to allow a definitive reflection on his memories or thoughts on his past relationships and thus continues to record and correct the record no matter how strange and distant his own past becomes to him. But this bias for the present is risible. The spectator hearing Krapp condescend to his past self, "hard to believe I was ever as bad as that," might wonder if indeed "as bad as that" might be preferable to this current character. Might it be better if Krapp really did let go and allow the archive to stand on its

[54] This polysemy is more apparent in the English "last" than the French "dernière" as typically the placement of the latter in relation to the noun clarifies its meaning: e.g. "la semaine dernière" v. "la dernière semaine."

own without further intervention? There is a constant suspicion in Beckett's work of making things worse and Beckett himself felt this same anxiety when crafting the translations.

Mercier and Camier / Mercier et Camier

Despite the fact that Beckett did not translate *Mercier et Camier* until about fifteen years after composing the play *Krapp's Last Tape*, and over thirty years after having composed the novella originally, this large gap has tempted some scholars to consider how Beckett approaching his aging text reflects Krapp listening to himself as a young man. Many years had passed and over this period Beckett's writing had changed significantly. The chatty, colloquial speech proffered by the likes of Mercier and Camier out on a journey through the countryside now seemed out of place amongst the texts like *Lessness* or *The Lost Ones*. As mentioned earlier, *Mercier et Camier* was just one of the early French texts Beckett translated belatedly and from his correspondence, coupled with the style in which he crafts these translations, we can conclude that it must have been a challenging and frustrating endeavor.[55] Michèle Praeger, writing an article titled "Self-translation as Self-confrontation," notes that the attitudes of Beckett and Krapp towards their past creations are "comparable," despite, of course, the fact that the play prefigures Beckett's translation of *Mercier et Camier* by over a decade. Sinéad Mooney later writes that "the difficulties of re-encountering past selves and past writings seem to

[55] In correspondence Beckett himself refers to these works as juvenilia (4: 221).

have inspired the confrontation between old and young selves of *Krapp's Last Tape* ... the impatience felt by the older Beckett at his younger self's writings makes itself felt in wryly 'worsened' self-translations that were often briefer, drier, and somewhat impatient in tone, making only sporadic efforts to maintain any kind of tonal equivalence to their originals" (223). Earlier in her book, with reference again to *Mercier et Camier*, she succinctly states, "Translation testifies eloquently to Beckett's impatience with elderly material" (102).

But what exactly was this "elderly" material? *Mercier et Camier* was, as we know, Beckett's first attempt at a longer piece of prose composed in French and he kept it unpublished for twenty-four years. It features two old men, potential precursors to Vladimir and Estragon or Hamm and Clov, attempting to start out on a voyage from their ostensibly Irish village but continually being thwarted in their efforts by rainy weather, incompetence, other characters' interventions, or some combination of these. This text is Beckett's French composition in its infancy, not in the sense of simplicity but rather in the sense that the text is like a sponge soaked in the everyday speech, colloquialisms, and vulgarity Beckett picked up from his time living in France. He wrote it as he heard it. It was not the more formal French employed in, say, Beckett's translation of *Watt* which Vladimir Nabokov described as "a schoolmaster's French, a preserved French" (qtd in Salisbury 83).[56] The French used in this short novel is also preserved, but in the sense that

[56] It should, however, be pointed out that Ludovic Janvier collaborated on this translation, so to attribute the style exclusively to Beckett would be somewhat misleading. However, this collaboration was not equitable. As Janvier explains of the process, "one does not translate Beckett, one provokes him to translate

it was plucked from the air in the streets of Roussillon and Paris and then put into the mouths of his characters, who, oddly enough, wandered an Irish countryside. But this sort of linguistic alienation from the text's topography functions effectively and Beckett's thinly-veiled Irish geographies continue to make appearances later in his texts. Writing on this disconnect as it occurs in Beckett's trilogy, Mooney argues, "there is no attempt to match the French language to an equivalent French worldview even in the 'original' texts, suggesting the possibility of an implausible putative English-language reality behind the original French text, or rather disconcertingly revealing the obviously heterogeneous mix of discourses that lurk behind the illusion of the unity of time and space, and the instrumentality of language, in realism" (137). This might bring to mind the "English-language reality" anchored and then subverted in *Krapp's Last Tape*– remember such choices as the translation of the *OED* into French. But in *Mercier et Camier* the effect is heightened since this narrative of a failed journey eventually reveals that the journey was a linguistic one. It is the story of a relationship between the two men and their relationship to the environment in which they are so anchored that the journey was doomed from the beginning. It is essentially a novel of banter, reminiscent of the vaudeville comic style so in vogue during the period, which shows how the (mis)communication between subjects precludes even a step towards the adventure.

himself… Our work was less one of translation than one of incitation and resonance" (qtd in Federman "The Writer as Self-Translator" 15)

Juliette Taylor-Batty, in her book *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* considers the importance of the fact that *Mercier et Camier* was the last prose work, besides *Le Dépeupleur*, which Beckett narrated in the third person and links this to his linguistic shift: "It is no coincidence that the turn to French is accompanied by a turn to writing in the first person" (151). Chiara Montini points out that the novel is a transition work for a number of reasons, citing the movement towards French, the representation of time and place which in later works disintegrates, as well as the movement towards a homodiegetic**,** first-person, narrator (*"Bataille du soliloque"* 92). But, of course, none of these were isolated changes in the Beckettian oeuvre and all played important roles influencing one another as the evolutions took place at their own speeds. Following *Mercier et Camier* came a massive output of French prose written in the first person: *les nouvelles*, the trilogy, *Texts for Nothing*, and many more short prose pieces. And even in *Mercier et Camier* there is a glimmer of this first-person narrator who will later come to dominate the prose production. Recall the first line which frames the story as one told to the reader by the travel companion of the two protagonists: "Le voyage de Mercier et Camier, je peux le raconter si je veux, car j'étais avec eux tout le temps" (7). And though this first-person narrator immediately flees after this first line there are nonetheless indications of him hanging about, even if his *je* remains elusive. For example, at one point Mercier describes the impression he has that they are not alone: "Comme la présence d'un tiers, dit Mercier. Elle nous enveloppe. Je l'ai senti depuis le premier jour. Je ne suis pourtant rien moins que spirite" (170). Finally, at another moment the *je* transforms into a *nous*, requesting the complicity of the reader in the narration and urging

us to stay on the heels of these two tramps: "Suivons-les attentivement, Mercier et Camier, ne nous en éloignons pas plus que de la hauteur d'un escalier, ou de l'épaisseur d'un mur. Qu'aucun souci d'ordonnance ou d'harmonie ne nous en détourne jamais, pour l'instant" (96). This mysterious presence in the novel announces itself from the outset as doubly capable. That is to say, that they are knowledgeable of the details since they were present and, perhaps more importantly, that they can tell the story if they so desire. As I have alluded to already, and will develop further, Beckett's narrators in the trilogy and in later works almost never have the good fortune to tell a tale, or even speak at all, simply because they have an interest in doing so—they are obliged to do it. In addition to the transitory elements Montini outlines, I would add therefore that the novel is a transition also between will and obligation.[57]

Taylor-Batty reminds us of the episode where Beckett is pestered by an editor to give a response to the question of why he has decided to write in French and Beckett answers, "pour faire remarquer moi" (*Transition 48* 147). This answer, decidedly tongue in cheek, plays on the flawed syntax of the phrase which would read in standard French, "pour me faire remarquer," and Taylor-Batty argues that this construction is performative, meaning the syntax helps push across the meaning as much as the content. Beckett's *moi* is ungrammatical and all the more effective for it since it allows us to consider how writing in a foreign language does indeed help distinguish the *moi* at a

[57] For more on Beckett's writing "nécessaires" versus "facultatifs" see Hunkeler 1997 pp. 107-113.

conceptual level. This is a *moi* that is not necessarily attached to a particular subject, at once personal and public. Taylor-Batty explains, echoing Roman Jakobson's earlier work, "though grammatically singular, the words *je/moi* by definition refer to a collective notion of individual subjectivity" (174). The first-person pronoun thus misses the mark of referring to a fixed subjective experience since it always refers back to a collective. In other works, perhaps most notably in *L'Innommable*, Beckett will exploit this paradox and explore how the *je* cannot name.

But even though Beckett claims to write in French "pour faire remarquer moi," that first-person *moi* makes itself equally visible, though in a different manner, in *Mercier and Camie*r as in the original. A staggering thirty percent of the text is excised in Beckett's translation, including, but not limited to, allusions to works by Dante, sections focused on wordplay, and much vaudevillesque dialogue. Though Beckett did not treat his originals as sacrosanct texts, such a heavy trimming of the novel is unique in his bilingual corpus and rather unheard of in any other self-translator's corpus. The cuts are so extensive that in 1987 editor and translator John Crombie published, with special permission, *MAC*, a companion to *Mercier and Camier* which contained his translations of all the material Beckett left on the translating room floor. Though it was only printed in a limited edition, Crombie considered it important for anglophone readers to have access to those passages omitted by Beckett. This is a moment when we can clearly appreciate the objective differences between a self-translation and one carried out by a standard translator. Crombie's intervention would have been strictly unnecessary if the translator of *Mercier and Camier* had been anyone but Samuel Beckett since no editor,

unless perhaps it were a question of censorship, would have allowed so many sections of the text to be left behind. And yet, Crombie's version of the novella had virtually no public appeal. Why buy a work in translation when you could buy the original? As Oustinoff writes, "Se traduire soi-même, c'est naturellement empêcher qu'une autre traduction soit faite par un autre, mais c'est également du même coup rendre caduque toute traduction passée et forclore toute traduction à venir du fait de l'auctorialité dont la traduction de la main de l'auteur est dès lors investie" (*Bilingue* 278).

This authorial attitude brings the fact that Beckett is translating out of the shadows and it confronts standard notions, like those outlined by Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility*, about how we typically idealize translations that disguise themselves as originals. The ideal of translation, at least conventionally, demands a seamlessness between original and target language that we do not expect between, say, mimesis and diegesis. By this I mean that narrators are not held to the same standard as translators, **i.e.,** that one should never notice the mechanisms of the storytelling or who is telling it, and narratorial intervention can range widely without necessarily compromising the quality or fluidity of a text in a way that an unpolished or foreignizing translation might be accused of doing. But in *Mercier et Camier* there is a tension between presence and absence of the narrator that destabilizes the reading of the novella in a way that might mirror what Mooney terms, "translatedness." Beckett's writing is thus doubly revealing; it brings our attention to both translator and narrator. Consider the lines quoted above, "suivons-les attentivement, Mercier et Camier, ne nous en éloignons pas plus que de la hauteur d'un escalier, ou de l'épaisseur d'un mur. Qu'aucun souci d'ordonnance ou

d'harmonie ne nous en détourne jamais, pour l'instant," where the narrator's presence is felt in the form of a tour guide to the story, taking us by the hand so as not to miss a moment of the adventure. In English Beckett removes these sentences from the translation and in doing so removes the only "we" allowed by the narrator in the text, and also negates the other function of these phrases. The narrator's insistence that we need to stay close behind the protagonists gives the impression that the story is told to us by the narrator just as it unfolds before him. Moreover, his claim against having any *souci d'ordonnance* asks us to believe that this narrative is without any trappings of the literary. This moment acts as a belated (nearly 100 pages in) pact between reader and narrator concerning the veracity of the tale, but the fact that such a pact is omitted in English is telling. It would seem that Beckett's English effectively hides the "we," guarding it even more strongly from the reader's eye than in the French. But then again we need also recognize that Beckett as translator, bound up across time and language with the narrator, is revealed through omission and ellipsis.

This is especially transparent when comparing both versions of the text, since in French, even though there are the occasional moments when the narrator's haunting presence is felt, the majority of the narrative provides so much dialogue and description that the readers feel as though they are given a full account without any narratorial intervention. Look, for example, to the scene which fills the entirety of page 45 in the French version where Mercier and Camier get into a verbal altercation concerning marzipan and an umbrella. We read in Beckett's truncated English version of this dispute: "Mercier called him back and an altercation ensued, too foolish to be recorded, so foolish

was it" (30). This is not a translation, or even a summary, but a judgment. Beckett, through his narrator, seems to be mirroring the fact that, much like in our own memories, arguments from years ago seem today to be of so little relevance that we might not even remember what caused them, so foolish were they. It is almost as though the narrator of *Mercier and Camier* is not a translation or reproduction of the narrator in *Mercier et Camier* but in fact one and the same, aged thirty years and no longer willing to indulge in clever word play or trivial issues, much in the same vein as Krapp's contempt in listening to the man he was. Another reading of this, "too foolish to be recorded," takes it as Beckett' own negative commentary on his original text. It was of course recorded, in French, but perhaps we might read between lines and understand the sentiment to have truly meant, "too foolish to *have been* recorded."[58]

Similarly to his translation of that argument, Beckett reduces down the following short dispute from the French—"Je te dois des esplications, dit Camier. Camier disait toujours esplications. Presque toujours. Je ne te demande pas d'eSplications, dit Mercier, je te demande de répondre oui ou non à ma question. Ce n'est pas le moment de couper les ponts, dit Camier, ni de brûler les étapes" (63)—to, "Camier mumbled something about burnt bridges and indecent haste" (41). Beckett's French text focuses more intently on the language, both the phonological aspects, as seen here with the mispronunciation of

[58] We might also think about this in terms of the classic debate in literature of "show" versus "tell." As Wayne Booth writes in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, "Since Flaubert, many authors and critics have been convinced that 'objective' or 'impersonal' or 'dramatic' modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. Sometimes … the complex issues in this shift have been reduced to a convenient distinction between 'showing,' which is artistic, and 'telling,' which is inartistic" (8).

explication, as well as its idiomatic usages. Here, like in several other moments of the texts, the reader has the impression that perhaps these characters' grasp of French is not that of a native speaker—indeed omitting the hard "K" preceding the "S" sound in *explication* could be the error of an anglophone speaking in French, perhaps one Beckett himself made. But all these acoustic possibilities are reduced down in English to something "murmured," as though this conversation were heard at a remove, either a spatial or temporal one. As for the expressions themselves, "couper les ponts" and "brûler les étapes," we might conjecture that the initial interest Beckett had in them is precisely that in English the verbs could be reversed to give equivalent expressions: "to burn bridges" for "couper les ponts" and "to cut corners" for "brûler les étapes." But an expression like "cutting corners," is ironically itself cut and replaced with the unidiomatic "indecent haste," perhaps as a nod to the translation's indecent haste and overzealous quest to just get on with it. No time for idiomatic expressions with so much time already past. And it is precisely through this intervention that the narrator's presence cannot be ignored by the reader. The fact that moments are glossed over and that there is a decision to omit them focuses our attention on the agent (narrator, author, or both) desiring such an omission. But from the perspective of the monolingual reader of *Mercier and Camier*, as compared to that of the bilingual reader of both works, the provenance of this excising force remains ambiguous: the former believes it to originate from the narrator and the latter from the translator. There is a difference between when Beckett eliminates from *Mercier et Camier* and leaves no trace in translation versus when attention is called to

these ellipses. The former refuses the imperative of a faithful translation whereas the latter allows meaning to gently echo without being repeated.

By the time Beckett comes back to translate his early novella, he can only hear faint echoes of this boisterous text completed thirty years prior. It is this deadened sound in the ear of the author that comes through in translation, as though one wanted to record a concert from the basement of the orchestra hall. He allows his perception of the text at the moment when he reencounters it to be passed on in translation rather than try to reproduce the sound of the original. In his correspondence he complains throughout the process, using a favorite of his metaphors for translation: digestive issues. Just as when writing about translating *Molloy* he described the translation, "an indigestion of old work with all the adventure gone." (2: 407), he writes of *Mercier and Camier* to a friend in June 1972, "typing out what I'd translated of M & C. Gastric trouble ever since" (4: 299). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Krapp also frequently complains of his gastrointestinal issues. His name is a sort of ideal, an act that his body cannot execute.[59] It would seem that the past proves nearly impossible to digest for Beckett and his protagonists. To borrow a fitting British expression, the past constantly repeats on them. This physical revolt of the body may be an effect of the revolt undertaken by Krapp as listener, the ghostly narrator of *Mercier and Camier* as storyteller, or Beckett as translator against the obligation of

[59] Beckett's characters often have suggestive names. Consider, for example, M(alone), or (Moll)oy. These evocative names, being proper nouns, are always left untranslated and thus prohibit any domesticizing practice.

Echo. None simply repeats what has been spoken to them but instead they create new meaning by embracing the difference created through distance. Krapp refuses to accept the accounts he gives from the past and constantly rerecords in order to correct the record, preferring what we might imagine as echoes of memory over the iterative recordings of memories given year after year. The narrator in *Mercier and Camier* refuses to repeat the squabbles and punning he once reveled in and instead asserts his authority as the curmudgeonly old man he has subsequently become since his birth in *Mercier et Camier*. And inspiring these figures, while taking inspiration himself from them, is Beckett the translator, inextricable from the characters themselves. While *Krapp's Last Tape* is a sort of staging of the author as translator, *Mercier and Camier* is in turn a sort of novelization of *Krapp's Last Tape*. Beckett's translations thus reverberate across texts and language and demonstrate how translation as echo allows for a sort of agency harnessing difference with repetition.

The Trilogy

In the preceding pages I have been making a link between translator and narrator in order to consider the effects of a translator-narrator or of a narrator-translator and how these roles can become entangled in the process of self-translation. Outside of Beckett's corpus there are of course more straightforward instances of a narrator-translator.[60]

[60] Consider, for example, Nicole Brossard's *Désert Mauve* or Nancy Huston's *Trois fois septembre*.

Novels featuring a translator are rarely translated by the original author—unsurprisingly, since few novels are. In contrast, the narrators of Beckett's novels, which are all more or less self-translated, are never explicitly labeled as translators. However, as Mooney contends, "all of his trilogy narrators could be conceived as translators" (132). From the first moment we encounter Molloy in his mother's room, to the final line of *L'Innommable* where the narrator states "je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer," each narrator is obsessed with the particularities of their language and with the question of ownership of said language (213). One of Moran's closing remarks at the end of *Molloy* reads as though spoken by an uncertain language learner: "I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one ... But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps" (199). These are concerns well known to those who spend their lives translating nuance from one language to another. But Beckett's narrators are perhaps the type of translator who would receive an unfavorable book review since they make little effort to smooth over the rough patches of languages, and indeed seem to delight in them. Mooney associates this pulling back the curtain on translation to exposing the structure of storytelling: "Beckett's English trilogy transgresses against representation and the conventional invisibility of the translator, which works in a way that is cognate to mimesis's effacement of its own processes, by drawing attention to its own language via inconsistencies, foreign words, and a refusal to conceal the fact of *translatedness*" (132). Mooney points out here that Beckett's style of writing fogs the

glass through which readers should be able to perceive the story and thus brings our attention to the fact that the glass, composed of narrative, in turn composed of language, is there in the first place. We have seen the ways in which styles of translation and narration mingle in works such as *Mercier and Camier* and create altogether new relations. But Beckett's translations of the three novels of the trilogy, though having similarities to that of *Mercier et Camier*, take a more gentle and empathetic approach than does later Beckett judging earlier Beckett; when contemporaries, translator-Beckett and author-Beckett appear on much better terms with each other. There is minimal cutting and time is taken to attend to all the vagaries of the prose.

Several critics have taken the position that the trilogy can be read as one continuous narrative and take for evidence the beginning of *Molloy* where the narrator muses, seemingly à propos of nothing, "this time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, then I think it'll be over" (4). Once, twice, three times and then it is over, just as in any trilogy.[61] While I agree that it is necessary to read the novels of the trilogy as being in conversation with one another, there does not seem to be a compelling reason to read them as three volumes of the same work. We must, however, attend to Beckett's inventive use of intra and intertextuality and the ways in which they generate echoes within each of the novels as well as across his French and English compositions. To this end, we might bring together the functions of quotation and translation**,** as Sardin-

[61] Fitch notes that if you count *Molloy* twice, since it is split it two, then you could consider that Beckett, or at least Molloy, never planned a trilogy.

Damestoy does, writing, “chez cet auteur [Beckett], la réécriture est inscrite dans l'écriture même. L'auto-traduction est un travail de (mal)-citation de soi prolongeant le travail intra- et intertextuel déjà inscrit dans une œuvre qui n'a de cesse de se citer d'un texte à l'autre” (217). She explains that Beckett’s intra and intertextuality are prolonged through the act of translating these texts and even allows for an even more intricate web of connections, citations, and allusions. Her sly use of “(mal)” implies that the fidelity of such citation does not impact the creation of the network but may in fact affect its structure. This sets up a conception of Beckett’s writing as existing within and creating a multi-planed, rhizomatic sort of structure where we might trace any element to another. But not all critics see this as an inherent property of the texts. H. Porter Abbott, for one, recognizes an important structuring progression through the trilogy’s movement from beginning to end. He argues, “though the trilogy is technically endless, it defined a progression which made, in retrospect, an arrow of meaning. It organized what went before and gave the various parts in their turn a kind of belonging.” He contrasts this with Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing* in which he sees a departure from this organization: “It is this sense of direction that is missing in the *Texts* and that gives it its radical newness” (110). In Abbott’s framework the reader needs to complete the entire trilogy to best find how each piece belongs and even to be able to recognize that such an organizing principle is absent from later prose. However, Abbott, in the piece cited, does not bring up the two versions of each of the novels (English and French), which might lead us to wonder if the bilingual nature of the trilogy might affect this arrow of meaning. If one were to read, for example, the trilogy in English first and then in French, would the arrow point in the

same direction as it would were the reading order reversed? Might reading each novel and then its corresponding translation before moving on make the reader question how the texts fit together?

The manner in which the novels of the trilogy seems to always be foreshadowing later writing, while also recalling past texts, gives the impression that the center of the text just happens to be wherever one's finger rests in the book. This proliferation of centers then negates the possibility for one at all. This sort of destabilization is accomplished through a use of citation only possible through a practice of translation that deconstructs the original/copy relationship and allows the citation to flow in both directions. The re-production of the text creates difference. Attempting to analyze this Beckettian paradigm, Brian Fitch coined the neologism "intra-intertextuality" which he defines as, "the multiple relationship between texts by the same author rather than that which obtains between a given text and texts by other writers (or intertextuality). For if the former relationship is intertextual with regard to the texts of the writer's other works, it is intratextual as far as the overall text represented by the writer's complete works is concerned" (23). Fitch points out that a self-translator like Beckett writes in relation to his entire corpus and thus no one piece could be neatly removed without altering the structure and stability of the writing project. The translations are thus not primarily functioning to clarify a preexisting meaning but to create meaning through their differences from one another.

As discussed earlier, the foreignizing geographic specificity created through description in novels like *Mercier et Camier* and *Molloy* coupled with francophone

characters creates friction in the narrative and distances the story from the realm of the possible. The proper nouns, either of places or people, and even the frequent description of the weather, reinforce these geographical descriptions and point the reader towards an Irish landscape. But these same proper nouns, unlike specific descriptions, are peppered throughout the trilogy, supporting a reading of these three novels as a trilogy and at the same time allowing for this linguistic friction. These intra-intertextual references reach beyond the characters of the trilogy and pick out characters from much earlier works. Moreover, the references to these other characters are not nostalgic reflections about lost friends but instead more akin to Krapp's impression of his past self, "that stupid bastard." Consider the reflection by the narrator of *L'Innommable* towards the beginning of the novel, "Ces Murphy, Molloy, et autres Malone, je n'en suis pas dupe. Ils m'ont fait perdre mon temps, rater ma peine, en me permettant de parler d'eux, quand il fallait parler seulement de moi, afin de pouvoir me taire" (28). This narrator speaks as though he is a frustrated writer of autobiography, tempting us to take narrator for author, and claims that the only way to become silent definitively is to tell one's own story. This same narrator makes a similar claim later on in the novel, "je crois que Murphy parlait de temps en temps, les autres aussi peut-être, je ne me rappelle pas, mais c'était mal fait, je voyais le ventriloque" (103). But it is this narrator who plays the role of the ventriloquist's ventriloquist, forced to speak through others by a mysterious other. And this has apparently been going on for much longer than just the length of the trilogy, as far back as Beckett's first published novel *Murphy*. What we find is that self-writing is not the exclusive property of flesh-and-bone writers. As Michael Wood writes in his

contribution to the volume *Modernism and Autobiography*, "Beckett does not write his life but his characters write theirs incessantly" (211). He is thus a sort of master of the autobiographical genre, one step removed. All these characters have been a distraction from the subject of the self, while at the same time speaking of very little else.

Malone similarly laments, "et si jamais je me tais c'est qu'il n'y aura plus rien à dire, même si tout n'est pas dit, même si rien n'a été dit. Mais laissons là ces questions morbides [...] A ce moment-là c'en sera fait des Murphy, Mercier, Molloy, Moran et autres Malone, à moins que ça ne continue dans l'outre-tombe" (103). Of course the narrator of *L'Innommable* cannot be named by the other narrators of the trilogy. This non-identifiability allows him to be the center of all these other voices; that which cannot be named is that which has the power to name. But interestingly for Malone, he names himself as though he were just another character in the corpus. He also names Mercier, who at the time that *Malone meurt* is published was still only to be found in a manuscript gathering dust in a trunk. This intra-intertextuality thus ignores the readers and can, at the time, only exist for the author himself—we would not consider, for example, an allusion to Freud's grocery list in the *Interpretation of Dreams* as intertextuality. But regardless of what readers at the time might have made of this confusing inclusion of the name Mercier, the continual citing of other characters places these texts in the same universe. And by the time the reader finishes *L'Innommable* it is understood that the characters do not so much speak amongst themselves but through one another, just as does Beckett in translation.

Leslie Hill, in his work *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*, considers the possibility that the desire to order the trilogy temporally might be misleading. He proposes instead imagining "the novels to be simultaneous, not sequential ... each recounting the same events or experiences from differing levels of consciousness" (58). This movement across various planes of consciousness and abstraction allows us to reconcile the ideas of narrative progression and rhizomatic fields of meaning in the trilogy. Moreover, Hill points to the function of repetition with difference—what I would conceive of as the story echoing across planes of meaning—as what allows for Beckett's work to come into being: "The unity of the trilogy lies not in its discovery of a universal idiom which can be expressed indifferently in French or in English, but in the movement of difference across and within languages which makes Beckett's work and his translations possible" (52). It is through a sort of specificity, in the form of geography and proper names, that the texts of the trilogy reveal that citation and repetition can at once bring texts together while refusing to become substitutes for one another. Consider simply the titles of the works for proof of this. Hill argues, "the effect of the name as a title, as *Molloy*, on the first page of a text written in French is something no other language can render" (53). The specific foreignizing feel created on the page, even when the same word is reproduced exactly in the English or German editions**,** cannot be replicated.

This is the power of echo which Beckett exploits in translation. Throughout the trilogy he takes advantage of this type of citation across languages allowing him to bring together and separate the two versions of his works. The idea that proper nouns function

slightly outside of the system of standard language and are thus untranslatable is rather intuitive but it can be the starting point to help us to understand the more nuanced question of unnameability, notably of the subject—i.e. that the title *Molloy* (in French) is no more a translation of *Molloy* (in English) than the first-person pronoun *I* is the translation of any other subject's *I*, or the subjective experience it purports to represent. As we saw in the previous chapter, this is what led to Julian Green and Julien Green writing separate autobiographies. There is a focus in Beckett's trilogy on pulling apart signifier and signified, announced early on in *Molloy* with what has now become a well-known Beckett dictum, "there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names" (31) or as he first penned it in French, "la condition de l'objet était d'être sans nom, et inversement" (49). In the more compact, latter formulation, the words strain under the heavier burden of meaning. Completing the phrase with "et inversement" forces the eye to repeat its path of travel in order to conceptualize the complementary phrase "le nom sans objet," whose existence is implied but not recorded in the text. Molloy's phrase both expands under the reader's gaze, which must double back for comprehension, while effacing itself when read in grammatical terms (recall that the French *nom* can be understood as both name and noun in English). Parsing the phrase, "l'objet était d'être sans nom," gives "l'objet" as the noun (*nom*) and "nom" as the object (*objet*). Its complement "le nom sans objet" re-equilibrates the lexical word with its syntactic equivalent: "nom" equals noun and "objet" equals object. Grammatically the written phrase performs its own failure since "l'objet" is indeed already identified as a noun through its very existence, meaning that in this formulation the object always

already exists as a “nom” and thus cannot be “sans nom.” The “nom” is not a supplement to be subtracted but a state of being. In the reverse, the impossibility is highlighted as well since “le nom” without “objet” is indeed with an object by the very fact of writing “sans objet,” but the impossibility is not overwritten as a dictate as it is when “object” must equal noun. That is to say, “le nom” written alone is indeed without an object and it is only through expressing the desire of being objectless, adding “sans objet,” that the possibility evaporates. Language is thus both the path toward and the obstacle to meaning.

In the translation, Beckett records the innate echo of his French formula by expanding it from a single clause into two, “no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names,” while at the same time silencing the grammatical ambiguity perhaps heard by only the stubborn few. English affords him the possibility of eliminating the necessity of the preposition *sans* by instead attaching the suffix “-less” to name and thing. This balances the formula with equal syllables and adheres to iambic meter, revealing a certain poetry he had managed to bury in the French. The word “less” when placed as a suffix, though a supplement to the word, acts to negate it. Its addition yields a reduction—more is less, so to speak. Beckett’s English reader, unlike their French counterpart, is not obliged to retrace their steps since no “et inversement” leads them back to the beginning. And in this limpid reformulation, the distance between sound and echo, original and translation, allows us to conceive of a scenario where impossibility is not written into the structure. Whereas “l’objet sans nom” has no stable existence as its syntax precludes its content and thus brings to the fore the question of language,

"nameless" and "thingless" pose no such problems and instead propose a path away from the stranglehold of grammar and lexicon by asking us to look beyond language.

Echoing Molloy's consideration of thingless names, the narrator of *L'Innommable* re-evokes the formulation. This time "thing" has been replaced by "image": "j'ai dû les mélanger, ces images sans nom que j'ai, ces noms sans images" (201). Language and world are being cleaved apart, not with the swiftness of a guillotine but through deliberate and tiresome sawing, all playing into the project of what Beckett describes as the "literature of the unword," which in the end shows the division present from the outset. In his translation of this return to the idea of namelessness in *The Unnamable*, Beckett again makes use of the convenient "-less" suffix: "I must have mixed them up, these nameless images I have, these imageless names" (468). One might understand the shift from thing to image as a sort of progression along the axis of materiality towards abstraction, as though the narrator has had some success in ridding himself of the things but they have left behind traces in the form of images. We might wonder if there could be an intermediary step of imageless things before we arrived at nameless images.

In an essay published in 1948, during the same period he composed *Molloy*, on the subject of Bram van Velde's painting, Beckett elaborates on the question of image and representation: "que reste-t-il de représentable si l'essence de l'objet est de se dérober à la representation ? Il reste à représenter les conditions de cette dérobade" (qtd in Guilbard, 504). Though Beckett's subject here is painting, we nevertheless glimpse his own art's furtive presence in the stakes of the discussion—recall George Duthuit's rebuke of Beckett in another discussion of Velde's painting: "Try and bear in mind that the

subject under discussion is not yourself." Beckett's concern with essence, object, and representation shows itself consistently throughout the trilogy and particularly in the subject at hand. His statement that essence evades image would make the formulation "essenceless image" a tautology and thus the sort of ideal conclusion, if one were possible, to the quest for nameless things or imageless names. As Beckett explains, what can be represented when the evasion of the subject is complete is the context for this evasion and this is precisely what *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable* appear to be taking aim at. From the time of their publications, critics, and even Beckett himself, have pointed out the disintegration that occurs over the course of the novels as the beginning of *L'Innommable* illustrates well: "Où maintenant ? Quand maintenant ? Qui maintenant ?" (7). However, this drive towards disintegration should not be understood as a drive towards deathly silence as absence. The "literature of the unword," to which these novels belong, "should never be mistaken for a thematics of silence," explains Carla Locatelli in the preface to *Unwording the World***,** as it is in fact "an active and lucid 'un-wording'"(x). This is thus a process and not a negation, an undoing rather than a repudiation.

Constructive Silence

Reconsidering Leslie Hill's possibility that the trilogy may contain a simultaneous narrative allows us to consider the role of Beckett's echoes and the silences that brings them into being. As mentioned, the silences between a sound successively reaching the perceiver is fundamental to the perception of an echo. This understanding of silence's

role reverses the traditional paradigm of silence being a passive state and brings it towards an active agent. This shall be a useful tool as we navigate further questions of un-wording and subject formation.

Throughout the trilogy, this reconception of silence as active rather than passive manifests in the narrators' intense focus on hearing silence just as if it were any other sound worthy of attention. In Beckett's writing, hearing silence is not equivalent to not hearing; one can listen to silence using full faculties. Indeed, silence is gathered up in the ears of these narrators who exploit hearing as their preferred sense. "Peut-être qu'il faudrait être aveugle, aveugle on entend mieux," states the narrator of *L'Innommable* (143). Consistently throughout the three novels, the narrators remark upon the silence they hear and the reader has the impression that this silence figures as a presence rather than an absence. For example, when Moran claims, "all was silent. I have an extremely sensitive ear" (143) and later when he says, "for an instant I fancied I heard the silence mentioned" (164). Later Molloy worries, "I heard a murmur, something gone wrong with the silence" (97). The narrator of *The Unnamable* notices that "[s]ilence once broken will never again be whole" (419). There is careful attention paid to silence and its incredible fragility in the face of noise and chaos. And it is through the effort of the perceiver, in this case these narrators, that silence can be appreciated as a presence and even a positive one—Molloy hearing a sound described it as "something gone wrong with the silence" and similarly *The Unnamable*'s narrator heard a sound "after a long period of immaculate silence" (336)—and not as a deficit, either of hearing ability or environmental noise. The attraction of silence is that of an ephemeral pleasure, something that can only be

temporary for these narrators who are all obligated to continue on speaking, writing, and echoing the words forced upon them. Moreover, silence brings information to the narrators, like when Molloy knew he was not at the beach because of the silence, or when the narrator of *The Unnamable* knew that time had passed because all had been quiet: "I resume, years later, meaning I suppose that I went silent" (351). And because silence is something to listen to, just as any other noise, the trouble comes when sounds cannot be differentiated, a typical effect of hearing loss. This is precisely the trouble encountered by Malone.

> What I mean is possibly this, that the noises of the world, so various in themselves and which I used to be so clever at distinguishing from one another, had been dinning at me for so long, always the same old noises, as gradually to have merged into a single noise, so that all I heard was one vast continuous buzzing. The volume of sound perceived remained no doubt the same, I had simply lost the faculty of decomposing it. (235)

This description of Malone's hearing difficulty troubles our conception of what a deterioration of hearing faculties might entail: volume being lowered or perhaps certain frequencies no longer received. Instead, volume remains unaltered but the issue lies in untangling sounds from one another. Or put another way, a radical loss of silence. For if silence has been conceived of hitherto as an active presence, it too can be disentangled and present in our hearing, existing on a sort of spectrum of sound rather than as a binary (non)existence. It is distinguishing silence that allows Beckett's narrators not only to listen for it, but to hear between it. It is in these interstices that they typically position themselves and their voices and, thus, without the presence of silence, their voices melt into the singular buzzing of the collective. Just as silence brings about the possibility of

echo, so too does it bring about the individuation of voice and puts Beckett's narrators on the path towards subject formation.

These many voices constructing their selves do so through the confrontation of many speaking *I*s. Indeed, Locatelli makes this argument convincingly for Beckett's post-trilogy prose writing, "the subject can perceive itself only thanks to this very discontinuity, and through the multiplicity of different, successive, specific images" (161) and later, "*Company* is structured and animated by a systematic refusal to reproduce the usual meaning of "I," a meaning that implies a unity which is actually never there" (162). A portion of Locatelli's book focuses on Beckett's 1979 novella *Company*. In this text, written first in English, a man is lying on his back in the dark, hearing a voice which may well be his own. But the seeds of this subject formation, which Locatelli notes, are undoubtedly planted in *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable* where we are tempted to read all four narrators (if not more) as iterations of a speaking subject attempting to perceive itself across temporal, linguistic, and narrative boundaries. Locatelli takes a cue from Roland Barthes' essay "La Mort de l'auteur," quoting the passage where he writes, "Linguistically, [...] I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject,' not a 'person,' and this subject, empty outside the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together,' suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it" (qtd 160). She concludes that, in Beckett's prose, this empty enunciation in the form of the first-person pronoun acts as a sort of surrogate for the self which can only perceive itself through relations: "The narrative shows that it is only through relations that the self can experience itself" (167). She argues that in Beckett's novella *Company*, the company

evoked by the title is indeed a proliferation of selves that seem to always be questioning their individual or collective loci. Thus the fundamental foundation for the self, discontinuity, is at odds with the continuity assumed of presence (161). That is to say, selves such as those found in Beckett's works do not move smoothly through the hours, as the minute hand on a clock, but rather they move through time like the grains of sand in an hourglass, fragmented and meaningful in the collective. This is even more evident in translation. Chiara Montini, nothing this fragmentation of the self through translation, writes "en ce sens, l'autotraduction participe d'une nouvelle identification du moi qui se sert de ses différentes langues pour constituer son identité fuyante, multiple, morcelée" ("Bilinguisme et autotraduction" 89). The multiple *I*s of the Beckettian narrators perceive themselves not only in relation to each other but also in relation to the *Je'*s who stake claims to their identity as well, neither one having a stronger claim on any sort of authentic self.

The topics broached in the previous two paragraphs, subject formation and silence, come together in the works by Beckett analyzed thus far to reinforce the importance of echo as a conceptual framework to understand his translation and narrative practices. In Beckett's writing, these echoes that I have described, like the selves Locatelli locates in the shorter prose, are fractured and cannot be pieced together to form an imaginary whole. Moreover, neither the self nor the echo is a natural byproduct of a sole referent but it is instead crafted through language. Locatelli highlights the onus of interpretation and readability for Beckett's subject: "The 'I' shown by Beckettian mimesis turns out to be the result of an interpretation; it does appear, but as an effect of

readability, not of a conceptual, abstract referentiality" (183). Beckett's subject was not fractured as the result of some pluralistic wrecking ball but instead only ever existed as fragments. Thus it can only be *read* as a subject and not pieced back together to form one. Similarly, there exists no primordial silence, or even absolute silence, that a Beckettian narrator might hope to one day achieve. As the narrator of *L'Innommable* describes, "car qui a dû écouter écoutera toujours, qu'il sache qu'il entendra jamais plus rien, ou qui il l'ignore. Autrement dit, ils aiment autrement dire, ça ne fait pas de doute, ça fait gagner du temps, le silence une fois rompu ne sera jamais plus entier" (132). Any silence we might perceive is broken without end.

But it is these fragments of silence that allow for difference, the absence of which made Malone hear only buzzing, and it is through this difference that repetition may turn to echo. Crafting these echoes allows Beckett a way out of the aporia described in *Molloy* as the desire for "finality without end" (124). Throughout his corpus there are characters stubbornly continuing on despite perpetual avowals to do just the opposite. Remember Estragon's final line of *En Attendant Godot*, "Allons-y" followed by the stage direction, "Ils ne bougent pas" (134). Just as Krapp was trapped in a cycle of listening and recording, Mercier and Camier attempted to complete a trip without being able to begin it, the narrators of the trilogy all, in some form or another, try to complete journeys only to begin anew, Beckett's writing adamantly rejects finality.[62] Mooney links this lack of

[62] Beckett's wording of "finality without end" should also evoke for us the third moment of Emmanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Noting the importance of this work, Jean-Michel Rabaté writes, "Beckett did not believe in abstraction as a universal key, and founded his sense of beauty in art on another Kantian

completeness to the obligation to express: "Language never commits suicide in Beckett's writing, so to speak; the 'obligation to express' means that his lifelong project is precisely premised on the impossibility of finishing" (214). But not only does this obligation seem to make finishing an impossibility, Beckett actively creates the context in which completion is impossible. He does this notably through his self-translation, which Mooney likens to "ghosting" his work: "Self-translation, ghosting one's own work, giving it an afterlife in translation—making the words go on, after the initial impulse to say has died—thereby contributes to Beckett's thematics of inconclusive ending, a refusal of the words to lie down and die gracefully" (210). Rewriting his works a second time is the process through which he refuses to let his words stand, but one effect of these rewritings is making, or perhaps revealing, that the original was always incomplete.[63] As Brian Fitch explains, "What was initially complete in itself and autonomous (*Company*) is now rendered retroactively incomplete" (107). As this study has shown, the manner in which Beckett translates his works always places them into dialogue with one another, as well as across his other works (recall Fitch's intra-intertextuality). The translations do not repeat but rather echo and allow us to hear that the original was never a pure sound but just one of many echoes.

notion, the notion of a finality without end" (35). But since, as Rabaté notes, Kant's notion of end and finality have also been translated as purpose and purposiveness, this question of beauty is a separate one from mine.

[63] Though this effect is heightened in self-translation it nevertheless is inherent to any translation. Moreover, as Paul de Man writes, translations "disarticulate, they undo the original, they reveal that the original was always already disarticulated. They reveal that their failure, which seems to be due to the fact that they are secondary in relation to the original, reveals an essential failure, an essential disarticulation which was already there in the original. They kill the original" (qtd Van Hulle 2007, 84)

These echoes allow Beckett's work to continue on without end and to destabilize our expectations of finality, like hearing an echo from a cliff and being unable to distinguish precisely the final word, since the ghost of the sound always seems to linger. One cannot be sure where the silence begins, or indeed if it does. Beckett's characters, and particularly his narrators in the trilogy, recognize their role in pushing away the boundary of finality and engaging with one another across texts and languages to continue sounding off. But in addition to reverberating sounds in narrative space, these narrators in translations, just as the mythical Echo herself, must listen. Beckett's translations, as discussed earlier, pay special attention not only to what might be considered final versions but also to the drafts that preceded them. Moreover, the translations themselves would occasionally effect changes in later publications of previously finalized editions. This is even the case for the final line of *L'Innommable* which was changed from "il faut continuer, je vais continuer" to "il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer" (Gontarski & Ackerley 253). Beckett's English, "You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on," led to the inclusion of an intermediary "je ne peux pas continuer," which professes something contradictory to what the act of revising suggests. Beckett did not view his role as a translator to memorialize and preserve the stories he penned, but instead to listen and speak back to them, harshly at times. The drive towards silence that many of his characters exhibit is also always a drive towards listening. As much as his narrators are storytellers, writers, or adventurers, they are also first and foremost listeners. And it is this active, generative act that propels along both the narrative by the narrator and the act of translation by the author. Thus the

listening/speaking subject and reading/writing author are positioned at the threshold of creation while unable to favor one action over another. We can witness this in many works: consider how Krapp continues to listen to his recordings while also insulting his past selves and rewriting his memories, or look towards the very end of the trilogy where the narrator of *L'Innommable* considers the fact that he perhaps cuts the world in two.

> Je l'aurai entendu hors de moi, puis aussitôt dans moi, c'est peut-être ça que je sens, qu'il y a un dehors et un dedans et moi au milieu, c'est peut-être ça que je suis, la chose qui divise le monde en deux, d'une part le dehors, de l'autre le dedans, ça peut être mince comme une lame, je ne suis ni d'un côté ni de l'autre, je suis au milieu, je suis la cloison, j'ai deux faces et pas d'épaisseur, c'est peut-être ça que je sens, je me sens qui vibre, je suis le tympan. (160)

The fact that this narrator, nearly at the end of the novel, acknowledges that he might in fact be the thin layer of membrane in the ear that allows us to hear is quite significant and contrasts rather strongly with the circular ending of *Molloy* where Moran sits down to write his report, or the end of *Malone meurt* with the invented Lemuel's killing spree. We take for granted that the trilogy is composed of narrators whose achievement, if one can use the word, is to record their stories and thus leave behind traces of themselves in writing, but we are less attuned to the undying commitment each has to listening even in the instances of speaking. At this moment towards the end of the novel the reader is invited to consider how hearing functions by allowing part of our ear to receive vibrations from the outside and then vibrate in turn, allowing the sound to enter us with a certain amount of complicity on our part. The narrator likens himself to this infinitely thin barrier between interior and exterior whose entire being trembles whether speaking or listening.

Beckett's narrators know that one cannot speak without having been spoken to. Words must first be gifted to us so that we may then pass them on. The voices which speak to us allow us in turn to speak back, whether they speak our mother tongue or a foreign one, just as Moran learns at the end of *Molloy*, "But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps" (199). It is thus this act of listening at the origin of the creative act that nevertheless could not exist without a voice. This moment from *L'Innommable* and *The Unnamable* quoted above captures this aporia, not in either *L'Innommable* or *The Unnamable* but in their converging echoes. Where we read in *L'Innommable* that "Je l'aurai *entendu* hors de moi, puis aussitôt dans moi," we read in *The Unnamable* that "I'll have *said* it inside me, then in the same breath outside me" (emphasis mine 439).[64] Strictly speaking, Beckett has not translated the narrator's reflection from French to English. Instead he highlights the dependence of the texts, the dependence of speaking on listening and vice versa. Though *L'Innommable* appears first on the page, it nevertheless listens to *The Unnamable*. The two narrators cannot be understood to exist in relation to each other on a temporal plane but having always spoken with and through one another. And in this English text the narrator points to the difference between the interior and exterior voice and the impossibility of recognizing our voice from the position of another. To speak is to hear, but to hear differently.

[64] For a richly detailed study of the variations between *The Unnamable* and *L'Innommable*, see Dirk van Hulle's and Shane Weller's *The Making of Samuel Beckett's L'Innommable/The Unnamable* (specifically pp. 190-254).

Through translation Beckett reinforces these meanings while at the same time dissociating it from either of the respective languages.

Conclusion

Before recounting the nymph Echo's untimely death and her disintegration into voice and bones, Ovid depicts for his reader her fleeting encounter with the boy she pines for, Narcissus.

> By chance, the boy, separated from his faithful band of followers, had called out "Is anyone here?" and "*Here*" Echo replied. He is astonished, and glances everywhere, and shouts in a loud voice "Come to me!" She calls as he calls. He looks back, and no one appearing behind, asks "Why do you run from me?" and receives the same words as he speaks. He stands still, and deceived by the likeness to an answering voice, says "Here, let us meet together". And, never answering to another sound more gladly, Echo replies "*Together*", and to assist her words comes out of the woods to put her arms around his neck, in longing. He runs from her, and running cries "Away with these encircling hands! May I die before what's mine is yours". She answers, only "*What's mine is yours!*"

In this pastoral scene, the fire of passion burns brightly in Echo but its heat and light are trapped within her, unable to be expressed in an avowal to the object of her affection. And as for Narcissus, his interest in Echo is mere curiosity for this voice which replicates his own speech. Foreshadowing his own end, Echo's seduction is only successful so far as it mirrors Narcissus' language and then completely fails when she reveals herself to be another entity entirely separate from him. And yet even upon hearing this utter rejection she nonetheless pledges herself to him in a final show of repetitive affection, "What's mine is yours!" Her words proved to be prescient as her fate will be to exist only as

voice, possessing only temporarily words taken from the mouths of others. Those words of hers are, in fact, yours.

And though perhaps the pathos of this scene alone justifies its inclusion at the end of this chapter, it also brilliantly illustrates how Echo is able to create meaning within the strict confines of her curse. Though she repeats verbatim the words Narcissus tosses into the forest, she nevertheless is able to communicate sufficiently to move through the evolution of a romantic encounter: curiosity, seduction, rejection. In fact, her error was in trying to "assist her words" by revealing herself. Prior to this, Echo repeats in a way that creates difference—she crafts echoes which nevertheless had meaning on their own merits and were quite literally able to speak back to the sound they echoed.

Whereas we might be skeptical to pronounce translation as a curse, in the same way that repeating was Echo's, Beckett would hardly hesitate to. The "wastes and wilds," as he described his translation work, were nevertheless his obligation to his writing and to his language(s). We might imagine him speaking the words of his narrator in *The Unnamable*, "let them put into my mouth at last the words that will save me, damn me, and no more talk about it, no more talk about anything. But this is my punishment, my crime is my punishment" (422). The punishment of rewriting will fit the crime of having written. Having spoken once, one must speak again. But, as I hope to have shown, we should not read Beckett's translation practice as a solely masochistic endeavor. It is an opening to the Other; it is, like Echo's, a language of love. Beckett's texts echo one another because they give themselves fully and create meaning through that act. As Hunkeler writes, "Préférer Écho à Narcisse, faire d'Écho et non de Narcisse la figure

emblématique de son écriture, c'est de la part de Beckett un acte à proprement parler révolutionnaire, dans la mesure où il ne produit pas seulement un retournement des hiérarchies traditionnelles, mais procède à une déconstruction des bases mêmes sur lesquelles cette tradition se fonde" (*Échos* 17). Beckett's affinity for echoes is not a rejection of Narcissus, of self-love, or of his originals. It is rather a love for the relationship between his texts, the one facilitated by the translation calling into the forest, as Benjamin writes, and of the meaning that exists in the inbetweenness.

Beckett was able to craft echoes which at once repeated and produced meanings, while distancing his English and French texts. Following Echo's lead, Beckett found a way to avoid contributing to the cacophony of sounds of which his characters often complained because an echo is not a new sound nor necessarily a continuation of an old sound. It is the same but different. An echo reveals something not immediately apparent. Beckett's echoes showed the richness already present, latent, in the sound already perceived. Taking advantage of just a sliver of silence, the words come again, but this time differently. Through his translations Beckett obeyed the imperative that regardless of who speaks it, Echo will have the last word.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Many Lives of Roman Kacew

Romain Gary was not an honest man, perhaps only moderately more so than his alter ego Émile Ajar, and perhaps on par with his partner (and family member) in the Ajar ruse, Paul Pavlowitch. But honesty was never his aim; when confronted between telling the truth or a good story, the choice was always clear. As he writes in his sprawling essay on the novel, *Pour Sganarelle*, "On ne peut pas être un homme tout à fait honnête et un grand écrivain" (119). At first glance, we may accept this as a simple truism, reminding us that fiction is, in a sense, fundamentally dishonest. But Gary's assertion goes beyond this and reaches into the life beyond his novels and into what we might term the space of autobiography. For Gary, honesty and artistry were not just uncomfortable bedfellows, but actually at odds with each other. His artistic project required deception—one achieved through language, and notably, as I will show, through translation. His multiplicity of identities was mirrored, bolstered, and even brought into being by his multiplicity of languages. This linguistic diversity allowed him to exist, and to exist differently, across his many languages. Gary was an immigrant, an aviator, an inveterate defender of the French Republic, a writer, a diplomat, a rewriter, a polyglot, a Jew, and a translator. Gary, as Walt Whitman's saying goes, contains multitudes, but these multitudes seem to want little to do with one another. Through his writing and translation Gary carved out and animated pieces of himself, often giving them new names, and pushed them to be independent wholes. He was on a quest for breadth of

identity, not necessarily depth, and thus rather than stacking up these facets of himself, he scattered them about on the same plane like so many breadcrumbs leaving a circuitous trail.

Gary often likened himself to a chameleon. One of his favorite anecdotes was about this small reptile who, like him, was constantly adapting to changing environments. He eagerly regaled acquaintances, and even on one occasion, Charles de Gaulle, with the anecdote of the chameleon who, when placed on a red cloth would become red, on green would become green, but when placed on tartan, would go mad.[65] To stave off this impending madness, Gary became a writer. His inventive writing style and seemingly tireless creativity allowed him to find himself at home in a number of genres, languages, and voices. So effectively he donned these masks that they came to suit him better than his own face. Perhaps the best example of his ability to hide in plain sight was his winning of the prix Goncourt, an award only granted once in an author's career, twice. The novel that brought his second win, *La vie devant soi*, appeared under the pseudonym Émile Ajar.[66] This "affaire Ajar," as it would come to be known, was just one of the many adventures in identity that Gary undertook during his time in the limelight—a time cut too short by his suicide in 1980.

[65] "Il y avait une fois un caméléon, on l'a mis sur du vert et il est devenu vert, on l'a mis sur du bleu et il est devenu bleu, on l'a mis sur du chocolat et il est devenu chocolat et puis on l'a mis sur un plaid écossais et le caméléon a éclaté" (*La Nuit sera calme* 204).

[66] This is just one pseudonym among others. He also published under Bogat, Deville, and Sinibaldi and experimented with other names while honing his craft as a young writer (see following footnote).

It must be noted that Romain Gary, though the most enduring pseudonym, is nevertheless the name chosen by the man born Roman Kacew. If we accept the account in Gary's loosely autobiographical novel, *La Promesse de l'aube*, it was Gary's mother who drove him to search out a pen name: "Il faut trouver un pseudonyme, dit-elle avec fermeté. Un grand écrivain français ne peut pas porter un nom russe. Si tu étais un virtuose violoniste, ce serait très bien, mais pour un titan de la littérature française, ça ne va pas" (1: 625).[67] Gary's mother—Mina Kacew but referred to as Nina in the book—understood the importance of a name and foresaw the challenges Gary would face in France's literary community as an outsider. From an early age Gary began trying on new names, changing them like clothes as he outgrew them or as the seasons required. He eventually landed on the name he would be remembered for by simply Gallicizing "Roman" and for his surname choosing Gary—its homophone, *Gari*, signifies the imperative in Russian "burn."[68] As he tells us in *La Nuit sera calme* about this imperative, "C'est un ordre auquel je ne me suis jamais dérobé, ni dans mon œuvre ni dans ma vie. Je veux donc faire ici la part du feu pour que mon 'je' brûle, pour qu'il flambe" (10). The collection of pseudonyms he leaves behind is vast, but is nevertheless dwarfed by his collection of writings, which includes no fewer than 34 novels, as well as essays, travel logs, movie scripts, short stories, and a considerable number of self-translations.

[67] Gary recalls his first attempts: Hubert de la Vallée and Romain de Ronceveaux (1: 625).
[68] Lucien Brûlard was another fiery pseudonym he once submitted on a manuscript to Gallimard that was refused.

Though his novels garnered considerable acclaim and sold well both during his lifetime and since his death, Gary nevertheless felt himself an outsider from the literary milieu established on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. Gary had little interaction with the spaces or publications dominated by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, or any of the so-called new novelists, whose aesthetics and ideologies he had little interest in engaging. In this environment Gary seemed out of place and time. Like Nina prophesies for her son time and time again in *La Promesse de l'aube*, "tu seras Victor Hugo, prix Nobel !" (1: 624). Following his mother's orders, Gary sought to fashion himself after the great novelists of the 19th century, which resulted in finding himself as out of touch with the mid-century Parisian literary scene as perhaps Hugo himself may have. Despite this disconnect with the Parisian literary elite, Gary's work had enormous popular success. As Gary biographer, David Bellos, reminds us, *La Vie devant soi* "is generally reckoned to have sold more copies than any other French novel in the history of the French book trade" (271). In light of this, Christopher Miller asks us to "consider that notion: more than *Les Misérables* (Emile Ajar's favorite book), more than *Madame Bovary*. And yet *La Vie devant soi* has virtually no academic status. How and why did this come to pass?" (107).

Recently there has been an uptick in interest for Gary's novels. In 2020 the Italian director Edoardo Ponti released a third cinematic remake of Gary's novel *La Vie devant soi*, bringing together Sophia Loren in her first film role in a decade with the precocious Ibrahima Gueye. Three years prior, the cinematic remake of *La Promesse de l'aube*,

starring Pierre Niney, garnered largely positive reviews.[69] In 2021 it was announced that a Hollywood biopic of the author, notably not another adaptation of his autobiography, is being produced—perhaps an indication that the lasting impact of Gary will be the memory of his life, not necessarily of his work. Off screen and on the page, the long awaited collection of Gary's writings was released in a two-volume Pléiade edition in 2019.[70] The edition is far from complete, though it does include his best-known works and offers helpful insights into the differences between the versions of Gary's texts which he revises in translation. It is hardly alone in struggling to unite the Gary corpus; as Bellos notes, there is no library in the world that holds a complete set of his works—the Library of Congress in Washington DC comes closest.

In terms of scholarly interest, it would seem that many agree with the critic Florence Noiville who summarized in *Le Monde*'s review of a Gary biography, "le chef d'oeuvre de Gary, c'est lui, c'est sa vie" (qtd in Killeen 348). That is to say, a majority of the scholarship on Gary is dedicated to his life: David Bellos' *Romain Gary: A Tall Story*, Myriam Anissimov's *Romain Gary, le caméléon*, and Ralph Schoolcraft's *Romain Gary: The Man Who Sold His Shadow*, are just three excellent examples, with telling subtitles, of the many volumes dedicated to separating fact from fiction in the life of Gary. Looking beyond the biographies proper, we find that even the Gary criticism focused on his novels

[69] The first cinematic adaptation was Jules Dassin's 1970 film. Gary took great offence to Dassin's depiction of Gary's relationship with Judaism.
[70] I cite these Pléiade volumes for those works included. All works in English, and those in French not included in the Pléiade, are signaled in my bibliography.

cannot seem to resist the pull of the author's aura. But in these works, rather than the biographical criticism we might expect, wherein the facts of his life are used to illuminate his texts, his literary works are used in the service of better understanding his life, as though the true intrigue was the story of Romain Gary and not Romain Gary's stories.[71] It is easy to see the appeal of this focus since his life was a series of adventures, romances, and even Hollywood glitz and glamor (he did at one point challenge Clint Eastwood to a fistfight). Of course, as is the case with any writer, it is impossible to separate flesh-and-bone Gary from the authorial persona(s) he cultivated. This is true despite the fact that his alleged goal of writing was to "se débarrasser de [lui]-même" (qtd in Gelas 65). These authorial paradoxes become all the more thorny in his autobiographically inspired writings where the subject is ostensibly the author, and infinitely more so in his autobiographically inspired texts about Émile Ajar wherein the subject is ostensibly a real man posing as the fictional author of a real text. Gary's "espace autobiographique," to borrow a term from Philippe Lejeune, was constantly expanding. In crafting his larger-than-life self-writings, Gary wrote outside the bounds of himself, leaving the possibility for us to read in the negative space where the authentic Gary, if such a thing exists, may have fit.

Rather than wade into the already deep waters of biographical Gary scholarship, I propose focusing on the engagement between Gary's self-translation and his self-writing.

[71] See, for example, Guy Amsellem's *Les métamorphoses de l'identité* or Valérie Mirarchi's Gary-Ajar, *un génie à double face*.

I argue that this project of crafting the myth of Gary cannot be separated from his work in translation, which was not an accessory to his writing, or moreover to his life, but an integral aspect of them. Gary's two languages of publication were French and English, and he effected a number of translations in both directions. To quote Bellos again: "There is a sense in which Gary's whole career - in real life as in writing - can be seen as an exercise in translation, carried out with unequalled inventiveness and passion" (163). Gary's translation manifested itself as a constant reinvention, and his unshakable belief in the power of fiction led him to always prioritize artistic truth over any other of its more concrete forms, including what translation theorists would call "linguistic equivalence." I aim to illustrate this in quite tangible ways—many of his texts passed through translation as a step in the revising process, and occasionally back again without verifying an equivalence between them (much as we saw earlier with Samuel Beckett)— and show how Gary's translations, and his choice of language, crafted both the form of his novels and his life. I focus on the texts which are in some sense autobiographical, whether in style or content: *La Promesse de l'aube* and its translation, *Pseudo*, and *Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar*. I begin by outlining Gary's practice of autobiography then go through a number of important differences in translation between *La Promesse de l'aube* and *Promise at Dawn*. In the later sections I move to *Pseudo* and conclude with *Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar*, both of which are written in the mode of autobiography and neither of which are translated by Gary, to show how the creation of Émile Ajar took the place of translation in Gary's self-writing.

These works span the final decades of Gary's corpus (from 1960-1980) and include the period in which he published under the name Ajar—which we must point out means both "slightly open" in English and "cinders" in Polish, as in what remains after the flame burns (*Gari*). Though there is a certain poetic beauty to reading Gary becoming Ajar, like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, we cannot overlook that Gary was able to keep two careers alive simultaneously. He published both under his own name (*A Quiet Night*, *The Way Out*, *Womanlight*, *The Kites*) as well as the novels attributed to Ajar (*Gros-Câlin*, *La Vie devant soi*, *Pseudo*, *Le Roi Salomon*). He did not rise from the ashes but rather turned up the heat of the flame and in doing so undoubtedly threw cold water on the possibility that he might be Ajar. However, the major change I would like to explore is how Gary's project of self-translation, as well as that of composing works in English, which was quite extensive, dried up following the birth of Ajar. Gary self-translated, though occasionally in collaboration, all his English novels to French (*Lady L* [*Lady L*], *The Ski Bum* [*Adieu Gary Cooper*], *White Dog* [*Chien blanc*], *The Talent Scout* [*Les mangeurs d'étoiles*]) as well, of course, as his autobiographical work, *La Promesse de l'aube*, from French into English, *Promise at Dawn*. It is as though the creation of this fictional author filled a void previously held by translation. Ultimately I argue that Gary employs translation and Émile Ajar as means to tell the story of his self without necessarily telling the story of himself.

A few notes on the course of Gary's life will be useful here, but we should caution, as does Bellos in the introduction to his Gary biography, that "[t]o tell the true story of Romain Gary is a decidedly problematic undertaking. The main difficulty in

pinning him down and making sense of the relationship between his life and his work is the awkward but unavoidable fact that he was, among other things, a skilful liar" (4). This said, the information in the following two paragraphs can be taken with some certainty. Roman Kacew (pronounced Cat-sef) was born in 1914 in Vilna, part of the Russian Empire in what is modern-day Vilnius, Lithuania. In many ways, the diversity of the city is mirrored in Gary—a constantly evolving landscape in terms of ethnic makeup, political power, and, of course, language. Yiddish, Polish, Russian, and occasionally Lithuanian were heard on the streets and little concern was had for where one language ended and another began. Gary's father—despite claims in *La Promesse de l'aube* that his true father was Russian film star Ivan Mosjoukine (1: 638)—was a fur merchant in Vilna and had deep roots in the city. His mother had a minor acting career in Moscow that she left behind to raise her son. Gary's father abandoned the family early and he was raised by his mother in Vilnius, then for some time in Warsaw, and, finally at the age of fourteen, in Nice. Here Gary's mother eventually landed the role of managing the pension Mermonts. Gary's mother, a devout Francophile, had always endeavored to immigrate with her son to France where he could fulfill the promise of becoming a statesman or great artist. France was a land of promise and particularly the promise of fame. Gary, after much dissuasion from his mother away from his interest in painting and magic, showed early promise in writing. He began penning stories from a young age and captured the attention of his teachers with this budding talent. Biding his time before his assured literary fame, he studied law in Aix-en-Provence and then in Paris. At the rumblings of a potential world war he enlisted and trained in the French Air Force. At the

outset of the Occupation he fled to Britain where he flew with the Lorraine squadron under the Royal Air Force. By all accounts, though rarely his own, Gary fought valiantly and selflessly as an aviator, receiving a number of commendations and bearing the literal and figurative scars of his battles for the rest of his life. His time as an aviator in London was particularly transformative. In between bombing raids, he faithfully kept to his writing and near the end of the war his first novel, *Éducation européenne*, was published. It was also during this period that he met his first wife, writer Lesley Blanch, who would accompany him at the close of the war on his first diplomatic posts in Eastern Europe, then later to the United Nations in New York, and later when he became the French General Consul in Los Angeles. Gary immersed himself fully in the world of LA and Hollywood, collaborating on films, directing adaptations of his own movies, and even turning down acting gigs proposed by director friends. In 1959 he met the young American actress Jean Seberg, a rising star in the French New Wave, and quickly fell in love. Following a hasty divorce from Blanch, Seberg and Gary were married, beginning a passionate but tumultuous relationship which resulted in Gary's only child, Diego Gary, born in 1962. They divorced in 1970. Throughout this time Gary continued producing novels at an exceptional rate under both his own name and invented pseudonyms. In August 1979 Seberg was found dead in her car in Paris. The police would rule the death suicide despite Gary's claims otherwise. Shortly thereafter, on the second of December 1980, Gary took his own life.

Gary had a gift for stories and for their telling. As Marie-Chantal Killeen has argued, he was a brilliant ventriloquist, able to tell a story that seemingly only someone

else should be able to tell. This gift is undoubtedly related to Gary's knack for languages. He is rare among writers, unique even among self-translators, to have composed his novels in two languages (French and English) of which neither was his mother tongue. Gary's first language was Russian, due to the fact that his parents were Russian and that at the time of his birth Vilnius was part of the Russian empire. But through his early education, travels, and relationships, he acquired Yiddish, French, German, Polish, and finally at the age of 30, English. Despite this amalgam of languages, French always held an important place for Gary. His mother insisted on him mastering the language and she sacrificed greatly to afford tutors to assure that he would have the linguistic tools necessary to fulfill her dream of him becoming the next Victor Hugo. His late acquisition of English was thanks in part to another important woman in his life, his first wife, British writer Lesley Blanch. Writing in his nonnative English and French was yet another reason Gary felt himself on the margin of the literary establishments. Despite having learned French at an early age, and completing all his studies from *lycée* through university in France, the fact of his being an immigrant provided fodder for certain critics to criticize his prose as insufficient, as bad French—a charge that was never leveled when Gary availed himself of a pseudonym. Regardless of these charges, none would allege that Gary's writing is any less inventive in one language or the other, and he seems to thus serve as a double counter example to the claim of translation theorist Friedrich Schleiermacher that true creation can only come from one's maternal tongue (Hokenson and Munson 3).

Gary himself, in an interview, alluded to the fatigue of translation and being exasperated by criticism of his French.

> La version française de chacun de mes romans anglais est au fond un peu un autre roman. J'ai avec la langue française un rapport tout à fait libre et j'ai souvent voulu la bousculer, lui faire prendre des tournures sciemment adoptées du russe ou du polonais, ou de l'anglais. Mais chaque fois, quelque cuistre pédant de critique me reprochait de ne pas savoir le français, alors j'y ai renoncé, un peu par fatigue. (qtd in Huston "*La Danse*" 35)

Three points should be addressed here. Firstly, since the revelation of Ajar being a pseudonym would not be made until after Gary's suicide, it could be strategic to craft excuses for no longer writing or translating in English to mask the potential truth that the fatigue of which he speaks is due more to his doubled creative output (Gary plus Ajar) than his critics' barbs. It can also be, as I argue, that the utility of translation in recreating oneself to present oneself anew was subsumed by the reimagining of Gary into Ajar. The second point, if we take this lament to be authentic, is that Gary feels constrained in his ability to play with the French language, infusing it with the flavors of Polish, Russian, English, etc., due to his role as an outsider—both from the literary establishment, as outlined earlier, but also as an immigrant and non-native francophone. Lastly, now taking Gary at his word, he points to translation, not his original compositions, as a space of linguistic innovation but one ill-received by critics. In revisiting his stories he feels compelled to write in a French that is not quite proper, letting the mask of translation slip ever so slightly down the face. This abandonment of translation, however, might instead be understood as a transformation, as Nancy Huston hints at in an essay on *La Danse de Gengis Cohn*, "Il n'y a renoncé, à vrai dire, que provisoirement : jusqu'à ce que

l'invention d'Émile Ajar lui permette de *thématiser* cette apparente maladresse vis-à-vis de la langue française correcte" (35). Huston alludes to the striking narrative voice of Momo in *La Vie devant soi*, the adolescent hero of this story whose memorable turns of phrases help to defamiliarize them even in the context of their own language: "Je me souviens très bien de ce moment dans ma vie parce qu'il était tout à fait comme les autres," for example (2: 745). Gary, through Ajar, speaks through a young boy to legitimize a style of language not his own, fulfilling, in a sense, his goals of translation without the exercise of translating.

Gary's early myths

Many themes recur throughout the Gary corpus—war, prostitution, orphanhood, to name just a few—but the figure of the mythic, and ironically absent, hero becomes an importance presence from Gary's early novels, notably *Éducation européenne* (1945) and *Les Racines du ciel* (1956), all the way through to Gary's final lines. *Éducation européenne* tells the story of a band of Polish resisters during the Second World War and centers on the struggle of an adolescent, orphaned protagonist named Janek Twardowski. The novel opens on Janek's father hiding him in the woods as Nazi troops roll in to occupy their hometown of Vilnius. The father promises the young boy that he will retrieve him soon. When Janek realizes the hollowness of his father's promise he joins up with a band of resistance fighters clandestinely sabotaging Nazi equipment and infrastructure. The first edition of the novel, written between bombing raids while Gary

was stationed in England, is divided into chapters alternating between Janek's struggles, vignettes of his fellow fighters, and Polish folk tales. Each tale is more tragic than the last and the forest holds little hope. Gary, uncertain he would return from the next raid, wrote these stories designed each to stand on its own feet in the event that he be unable to give them a conclusion. The tales' hopelessness fades slightly in the 1956 edition that Gary revises with the notable addition of the partisan Nadejda (a name meaning "hope" in Russian). He is an unusual hero and leader of the resistance movement, who the reader eventually understands is a figment of the collective imagination. As scholars like Ralph Schoolcraft and Catherine Douzou have noted, "C'est un ajout pour l'édition de 1956 qui bouleverse l'organisation et même le sens du texte" ("Éducation européenne" 142) This absent hero unified the resistance through his mythic absence. We read in the novel, "Leur héros était insaisissable, invincible, protégé par tout un peuple, et aucune puissance au monde, aucune force matérielle, ne pouvaient l'empêcher de continuer et de triompher" (1: 105). And while the addition of Nadejda plays an important role for the spirit of the novel's characters, we must also note that his presence, and absence, restructures the novel to give a more coherent narrative. To again quote Schoolcraft, "En effet, sans le personnage de Nadejda pour développer davantage l'intrigue principale, nous n'avons qu'une série de contes disparates insérée au cœur d'un premier récit aussi fantomatique que squelettique. Cela veut dire que les contes de la 'mise en abyme' prennent beaucoup plus d'importance, les activités des partisans servant alors de toile de fond" (22).

Schoolcraft, in his biography of the writer, goes on to argue that we should understand this figure as corresponding to "a specific understanding of de Gaulle's role in the French Resistance" (28). And while there is undoubtedly a relationship to France's absent leader, we must, as Mireille Sacotte notes, understand that this character "annonce aussi d'autres personnages du même genre ... Morel lui-même, omniprésent après sa disparition" (1: 1261). This character of Morel, the leader of an ecological band of resistance fighters in *Les Racines du ciel*, must have been on Gary's mind when creating Nadejda. This novel, Gary's first prix Goncourt winner, was published in 1956, the same year as the updated version of *Éducation européenne*.[72] In this, one of the first in the tradition of conservationist novels, Gary recounts the struggle of a Frenchman named Morel living in France's West African colonies in bringing awareness to the plight of the endangered African Elephant. Unlike Nadejda, Morel is not formed by the imagination of his peers, but the structure of the novel assures that he is never fully present for the reader. As Bellos notes, the novel makes use of the framing device in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: an adventurer hikes deep into the African bush to inquire about the mysterious Morel from a sage old African (239). The story is thus related to us through the voice of this storyteller, Saint-Denis, who masterfully narrates the twists and turns of the lengthy history of Morel while a campfire burns between him and the narratee. Morel,

[72] In fact this is no coincidence. Gallimard released the revised version to "refresh critics' memory of Gary's past promise" in the hopes that this new work would win the Goncourt (Schoolcraft *Romain Gary* 42).

often accused of turning his back on his own species, sabotages both colonial infrastructure and native tribes in an effort to protect the elephants from slaughter. He therefore finds himself on the lam and for the first two sections of the novel is only referenced through the hearsay of other characters. The power, and the intrigue, of Morel is that he could be anywhere or nowhere, anyone or no one. The strength of the myth lies in how firmly it is believed.

In *La Nuit sera calme*—Gary's 1974 book purporting to be an interview, though in fact written beginning to end by Gary himself—he reminds us that, "L'homme sans mythologie de l'homme, c'est de la barbaque" (271). And indeed, all evidence supports that Gary was a fervent believer in the power of myth. A hero can be powerful, but a myth is immortal. Apart from its utility as political strategy, it is also clear from Gary's early heroes (Morel and Nadejda) that he understood myth as a powerful narrative tool. The absence of these characters creates a vacuum that pulls together the other characters and their disparate storylines. Furthermore, the absence of these heroes generates a surplus of meaning, as endless speculation accumulates on the backs of these figures, not unlike what happened in the period when the world hunted for the true identity of Ajar. Gary, and his characters, understood that no one could ever be as great a man as the one we can imagine in his absence.

Gary was not content to leave the possibilities for creating a mythic hero on the pages of his novels and soon after *Les Racines du ciel* he turned these tools on himself. Indeed his need for literary creation is inseparable from his need for self-invention. Writing, for him, as for so many others, was a means of escaping from the constricting

confines of his own psyche and even his outward markers of identity. Consider what we read in *La Promesse de l'aube* after young Gary is supposedly instructed by his mother to create for himself a pseudonym: "l'ennui avec un pseudonyme, c'est qu'il ne peut jamais exprimer tout ce que vous sentez en vous. J'en arrivais presque à conclure qu'un pseudonyme ne suffisait pas, comme moyen d'expression littéraire, et qu'il fallait encore écrire des livres" (1: 625). Though clearly these comments from the narrator are partly tongue-in-cheek, just one example of many of Gary's effective use of humor in the text, the reader cannot ignore the explicit link created between pseudonym and literary creation, or rather pseudonym *as* literary creation. For Gary, the need to write was intimately linked with the need to create an identity, and then another, and another. The creation of the pseudonym is not simply the first step of the literary process, or a simple gag, but is fundamental to what will be created and what can be created. Gary's mother understood that the body of work that Romain Gary would go on to produce could not be done by Roman Kacew. I do not mean this uniquely in the sense of xenophobia or French chauvinism, though that is certainly at play; I mean that Gary's novels required Gary to not only invent his story, as all authors of fiction do, but to also invent the author from whole cloth. When Gary says that "un pseudonyme ne suffisait pas, comme moyen d'expression littéraire," we can understand it in the sense that, to complete this pseudonym, one needs to create the corresponding literature. Otherwise the name is merely an empty shell.

Gary's very process of imagining himself differently helped to bring about this difference. He explains in *Pour Sganarelle* that writing is "un besoin dévorant de me

diversifier par de nouvelles et multiples identités et de vivre à travers elles une expérience totale de ce qu'il me faut d'abord créer pour pouvoir ensuite le découvrir, sortant ainsi de l'habitude et de la claustrophobie d'un état individuel, de mon petit Royaume du Je" (12). This idea of the *royaume du je* is one to which Gary returns often in this essay in order to both delimit its borders and demonstrate the possibility of dismantling the kingdom's walls. Fleeing these walls is a desire born of great curiosity for otherness while at the same time being rooted in a deep dissatisfaction with the singularity of existence. The multiple identities he created and numerous roles he played in life drove his search for further expansion. The sampling of so many possibilities, rather than satisfying his hunger, only gave him a need to taste the impossible. He writes in his final book, *Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar*, one justification for creating the figure of Ajar: "J'étais las de n'être que moi-même" (1: 1434). But far from the creation of Ajar being an exceptional crisis of identity, Gary's entire oeuvre from the beginning tends towards this opening up towards new possibilities.

Gary understood the creative impulse as a dissatisfaction with reality and as a means of filling in this perceived lack of experience by using reality as a springboard. Fiction imbibes all of what is, in order to be what is not. Put another way, reality constructs the horizon, beyond which fiction allows us to see.[73] Writing for him is thus in

[73] For Gary this is intimately linked with his conception of what he calls the roman total: "L'oeuvre règne sournoisement par son mensonge romanesque aux allures de réalité, elle possède le monde et se possède totalement hors de toute soumission à ce qui l'a inspiré : c'est en ce sens que je parle ici et que je continuerai à parler d'un roman *total*" (*Sganarelle* 22).

conflict with the author, who is rooted in time and place. He explains "On écrit *contre* ce qu'on est" (*Pour Sganarelle* 17). But to write against oneself effects change; thus the process, though not circular, is endless. One writes against what one is, in order to then write against what one becomes, and on and on: "L'identité de mon personnage ne s'arrête jamais à elle-même : elle est en changement constant au gré des péripéties historiques, je ne peux plus concevoir de personnage *fini*" (159). The writing process is thus fundamental to an ever-shifting amalgam of identities in flux and indeed Gary's birth is inseparable from his writing career. An oft-quoted passage in Gary scholarship is the scene in *La Promesse de l'aube* where, following a bombing mission "particulièrement animée," he learns that his first novel, *Éducation européenne*, is set to be published: "[J]e trouvai le télégramme d'un éditeur anglais m'annonçant son intention de faire traduire mon roman et de le publier dans les plus brefs délais ... J'étais né" (1: 876). This figurative birth is positioned at the moment of becoming an author, pointing undoubtedly to the monumental importance of this new identity for the narrator. But it also directly follows the information that his book would be published in translation. Gary's "birth" is thus brought into being through the lens of translation—to put it another way, Gary is born in translation. And, as I have alluded to already, Gary's second birth was not his last.

Gary would go on to release an English version of *La Promesse de l'aube*, *Promise at Dawn***,** a year after the original. The cover credits the translator John Markham Beach. This same prodigious translator was also responsible for bringing Gary's *Les Mangeurs d'étoile*, among others, into English. The problem, of course, was that like many of Gary's close associates, Beach only existed in the paratextual world of his novels. John Markham Beach would join the long list of Gary's pseudonyms, but with the distinction of being his only fictional translator. But here I must clarify that Beach is not only a fictional translator but, in some cases, a fictional author. Gary pawned off the work of self-translation to a different self. That is to say, his novel *The Talent Scout* (the Wikipedia entry for which, as of the time of my writing, continues to list John Markham Beach as the translator) that was released as a translation, was, in fact, an original work. The French version of the text would subsequently be written when Beach handed off the baton to Gary, who would then go on to masquerade as the original author for a novel he translated.[74] It is dizzying to keep track of the layers of deception here, all playing out on the cover and title pages of the novel, rather than in the novel itself. But more than a trite ploy, the (non)existence of John Markham Beach pushes readers, certainly those interested in questions of translation, to consider the importance of translative visibility.

Returning to the importance of the moment where Gary is "born" after learning his book will be translated, I would like to pause over the subtle changes that Beach

[74] Credit is also due to Jean Rosenthal who did the initial translation that Gary subsequently reworked.

(Gary) makes in the English text. Recall that in French Gary writes, "[J]e trouvai le télégramme d'un éditeur anglais m'annonçant son intention de faire traduire mon roman et de le publier dans les plus brefs délais ... J'étais né" (1: 876). The linkage between the rebirth and the translation remains in the English, but the subject experiencing said rebirth is expanded. We read, "I found a glowing telegram from an English publisher: he was having my book translated and hoped to bring it out within five months ... We were born, at last" (321). The telegram has grown a bit warmer and the timeframe of the publication more precise. These slight precisions, however, pale in importance to the movement from "j'étais né" to "we were born, at last"—a striking movement from the first person to first-person plural that merits consideration. Who has Gary assembled under the umbrella of this newfound *we*? Might it be that his *je* and his *I*, rather than substitutions for one another, are instead combinative? Me, my je, and I, perhaps. Another possibility is that this *we* consists of the combination of Gary-author alongside Gary-character. As I have alluded to, and as many others have argued, Gary's autobiographical project endeavored to create a mythology of Gary rather than a simple account of the facts. Bellos, evaluating these tensions in *La Promesse de l'aube,* writes, "He was seeking to create a *character* called Romain Gary ... By giving the world an unforgettably charming and successful hero called 'Romain Gary', it left the ex-diplomat whose legal name was Romain Gary entirely free to be someone else" (293). The birth of Romain Gary the author coincided with the birth of this character, both made possible through the magic of words on the page. But most importantly it is in translation that the plurality of these identities is most fully realized and explicitly named as such.

One final facet of this movement from *je* to *we*, which cannot be overlooked, is the inclusion of Gary's mother.[75] Whatever changes exist between versions of the novel, they are both undoubtedly a love letter to his mother, and perhaps more broadly to all mothers. Gary, reflecting on mothers (his own and general motherhood), comments in *La Nuit sera calme*, "Elle est devenue 'exceptionnelle' parce que *La Promesse de l'aube* l'a tirée de l'oubli dans lequel tombent toutes les mères et 'l'a portée à la connaissance du public.' Il y a des quantités de mères 'extraordinaires' qui se perdent parce que leurs fils n'ont pas pu écrire *La Promesse de l'aube,* c'est tout" (13). In the paragraph following the news of his book's publication, Gary describes his instinct to relay the news to his mother. In the French, "Je m'empressai de télégraphier la nouvelle à ma mère, par la Suisse. J'attendis sa réaction avec impatience. J'avais le sentiment d'avoir enfin fait quelque chose pour elle et je savais avec quelle joie elle allait tourner les pages du livre dont elle était l'auteur" (1: 877). In English we read, "I lost no time in sending the news to her, via Switzerland, and waited impatiently for her reaction. I could imagine her turning the pages of her first novel, sniffing with delight" (321). We might assume then, that the English *we* is indeed referring to Gary coupled with his mother. The appearance of his first novel was a multigenerational birth. The lachrymose conclusion to this story, we learn at the end of the novel, is that Gary's mother had already died by the time he

[75] This possibility is noted by Denis Labouret concerning another ambiguous usage of *nous* found in *La Promesse de l'aube*: "on voit que cette confusion identitaire se manifeste dans l'emploi des pronoms personnels et adjectifs possessifs : le 'je' laisse bien souvent la place au 'nous', qu'il s'agisse de désigner le narrateur et sa mère, ou le narrateur et ses camarades d'escadrille" (1: 1343).[75]

sent his missive informing her of the novel's imminent publication. Gary's expectations of seeing "la joie et fierté de ma mère lorsqu'elle verrait son nom imprimé sur la couverture du livre," would go unrealized (1: 875). But then again, his mother's name, Mina Kacew, never figured on the cover of this work, nor, due to his choice of pseudonym, did she and Gary share a surname which could have helped her to partially share the limelight. Furthermore, the mother in the story is named Nina, the slightest of misdirects, which nevertheless means that her name figures nowhere on the cover or the pages of the novel. All this, however, must also be read in the light of the fact that the real Romain Gary, who was stationed on duty in Central Africa in the spring of 1941, received a letter from a friend in Nice that his mother had died from stomach cancer on February 16, 1941 (Anissimov 217). By the time *Éducation européenne* was accepted for publication he had been grieving his mother for two years.

This confusion of pronouns is also reflected, as Pierre Bayard notes in his work, *Il était deux fois Romain Gary*, in the construction of dialogue between mother and son in the work. He explains that Gary's extensive use of free indirect discourse "fait passer la voix de la mère à l'intérieur de celle de Romain, en les mêlant l'une et l'autre" (53). For Bayard, this stylistic game of speaking attribution creates a dominance by the maternal figure "où la mère s'empare de la voix et ne parle plus *avec* le fils mais, la médiation apportée par le langage s'effaçant pratiquement, *à travers lui* ; ou bien, avec toute la transitivité de la formule, *le* parle" (53). Perhaps the best example of this ventriloquism comes at a moment when Gary, slightly inebriated from the effects of red wine on an empty stomach, attempts a speech to rouse the morale of his fellow aviators and finds the

voice of his mother in the place of his own: "j'évoquai Guynemer, Jeanne d'Arc et Bayard, je gesticulai, je mis une main sur le coeur, je brandis le poing, je pris un air inspiré. Je crois vraiment que c'était la voix de ma mère qui s'était ainsi emparée de la mienne ... Je crois même que ma voix changea et qu'un fort accent russe se fit clairement entendre" (1: 821). Clearly the influence of Gary's mother creates a constant presence in his life that at times seems to possess him entirely. These telltale signs of his mother (the gestures, the clichés, the accent) overtake his body and speech while reminding the reader that Gary's *je* is always multiple.

Over the course of the story this fusion of mother and son is detailed, and in translation Gary builds on the necessity for the reader to always keep Nina in mind. We find evidence of this in the earlier quotations where Gary sends word to his mother: "Je m'empressai de télégraphier la nouvelle à ma mère" (1: 877) versus "I lost no time in sending the news to her" (321). The original French, intuitively, explicitly states that the telegram is destined for his mother, whereas the English indicates only the ambiguous "her"—whose antecedent must be found three paragraphs earlier. An analysis of the two texts does in fact bare out that Gary's French text includes almost 20% more instances of "mère" than the English text's "mother"—the English substituting the pronoun where the French did not, in stark contrast with the typical practices of the languages where we would expect to find the reverse. However, this practice of increased pronoun usage, rather than ceding the place of Gary's mother in the narrative to an ambiguous placeholder, in fact reinforces her presence in the mind of the reader. Gary's English reader, in order not to lose the thread of the narrative, is obliged to keep Nina in mind in

every paragraph, knowing that nearly every "she" and "her" must bring us back to her feet, as though Gary believes that by the second version of the text we readers should be more familiar with the story and its characters.

Translation & Autobiography

Translators are often cloaked in shadows. This, as we have seen in the case of Samuel Beckett, is not less so in the case for self-translators. The prevailing dogma stipulates that the more adept the translator, the more invisible they are and that the mortal sin of translation is to reveal itself as such.[76] The self-translators studied thus far, with some notable exceptions, like Julien Green in his essay collection *Le Langage et son double*, are not credited or listed as translators on the texts they bring into a second language.[77] The erasure of the translator here is complete; a reader armed only with the novel would never know that the story has already been told. Gary's invention of John Markham Beach reverses this erasure—through deception he reveals truth. Had Gary simply released *Promise at Dawn* without crediting a translator and listing himself as author, there would not be the mention on the cover page: "Translated from the French *La Promesse de l'aube* by John Markham Beach." Therefore, in concealing himself as

[76] As Lawrence Venuti explains, "A translated text… is judged acceptable … when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities make it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text — the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation but the 'original'" (*Translator's Invisibility* 1).

[77] In certain cases a novel may list the copyright information for the original work, providing a clue that a translation has been effected.

the translator, Gary reveals the existence of translation. This is thus one form of a highly visible translation, bucking the trend preferred by other self-translators who might only refer to their iterative versions as rewritings.

Though translation clearly became an important activity for Gary as his career progressed, it was there even from the start. As Bellos points out in his biography, Gary's first *oeuvre littéraire* was an adolescent translation of the poem "Rameau de Palestine," the result of which has been lost to the sands of time, which he translated from German into Polish. As literary mediums, Gary quickly left both these languages behind, eagerly beginning to pen his stories in French. *Éducation européenne*, his first published novel, was written in French but, due to limited publishing activity in France at the time, was first published in English translation as *Forest of Anger*. Gary's English at this point in time was still only rudimentary and the translation was done by English poet Viola Garvin. Before his work was published in French Gary made a number of changes and then, before the work was republished in English (this time as *Nothing Important Ever Dies*), he again made several substantial revisions, in addition to the addition of the partisan Nadejda. As Bellos explains, "Les diverses transformations du texte d'*Éducation européenne* servant non pas à le perfectionner d'un point de vue littéraire ou stylistique … mais à maintenir dans un état de parfaite lisibilité pour des publics différents son noyau central, qui est une leçon de morale" ("Le Malentendu" 165). Despite not being the

one to translate the text, he nevertheless had an acute interest in the reception of the text in French versus British society.[78]

Unlike in the case of self-translators, we do not have a record of Gary lamenting the task of translating—nothing akin to, for example, Beckett's notable complaint, "it has my soul steeped in vomit." For Gary, it was a natural extension of the creative impulse, but it was also part of his persistent desire to escape the *royaume du je*. Already in translating it as the "kingdom of 'I'," as he does in *Promise at Dawn* (137), there is a tentative freedom as the correspondence between one's *I* and one's *je* is close but not exact. The shift of linguistic contexts thus opens a new space for creativity and exploration, echoing in a sense Gary's assertion in *Pour Sganarelle* that fiction collects up all of what is in order to be what is not. We can glean an understanding of this by considering how Gary's novels often root themselves in his experience in order to then surpass them. Recall again, for example, the novel *Éducation européenne*, which tells a story close to Gary's heart of resistant fighters in World War II (doing just as he did) from Poland (where he spent years of his formative years). But Gary, being in England and out of contact with nearly everyone on the continent except for his mother, had no knowledge of how resistance was being organized in the forests of Poland. He tells a story to which he could not be a witness, in order to witness it. Or, as he writes in *La Nuit sera calme*, "Donc, en tant que romancier, j'écris pour connaître ce que je ne connais pas,

[78] For details on these changes see Mireille Sacotte's notice in the Pléiade volume I, pps.1251-66.

pour devenir celui que je ne suis pas, jouir d'une expérience, d'une vie qui m'échappent dans la réalité" (283). Gary harnessed both the potential of being a novelist as well as a translator in order to take advantage of a reality just beyond his grasp.

This, of course, is not necessarily anything new in literature. Fiction is by definition the story that did not happen, occasionally written by people who wish it had. It is well-worn advice to writers to write the stories they wish they could read. But what is striking in the case of Gary is how he adapts this creative impulse, this longing to witness the impossible, to his autobiographical project—writing the story he wished he could live. First, to be clear, *La Promesse de l'aube* is not and should not be read as a strict autobiography. As Gary wrote in the *Nouvelle Revue française*, "[C]e livre est d'inspiration autobiographique, mais ce n'est pas une autobiographie. Mon métier d'orfèvre, mon souci de l'art s'est à chaque instant glissé entre l'événement et son expression littéraire, entre la réalité et l'œuvre qui s'en réclamait. Sous la plume, sous le pinceau, sous le burin, toute vérité se réduit seulement à une vérité artistique" (1: 1328). But nor should it be understood as a kind of autofiction, that genre of the postmodern radicalization of the writing subject which would flourish in the years closely following *Promise at Dawn*.

The complication with Gary's autobiography, of which the major points are indeed true and the form is classically autobiographical, is that Gary appears to adhere to the autobiographical pact, as outlined by Lejeune and discussed in chapter one, but gives no indication that he has in fact deviated. Recall Lejeune's definition of autobiography: "récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle

met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (*Pacte* 14). That Gary's work seems to focus on the relationship between him and his mother hardly negates the autobiographical nature of the project; indeed, for him it would almost certainly be impossible to craft the narrative of his life without including such a formidable and structuring presence that clearly contributes to the history of his personality. Thus, the fact that Gary appears to be both the author, narrator, and object of *La Promesse de l'aube* seems sufficient for us to satisfy Lejeune's conditions. Indeed, Labouret notes in relation to this work that "[t]out auteur d'autobiographie s'interroge sur la forme qu'il pourra donner au désordre du vécu, Gary se tourne pour sa part vers un passé qui apparaît déjà, dès son enfance, comme modelé par un projet de composition formelle. *La Promesse de l'aube* n'est pas seulement la genèse d'une vocation d'écrivain, ce qui est assez banal. C'est le récit d'une existence qui a été pensée et voulue à la source comme œuvre d'art" (1: 1334). But as we have seen already in the case of his mother's death, the Gary in the novel, while quite similar to the author, is nevertheless divergent and undergoes experiences and relationships that do not map onto those of the author. The divergences from fact in the novel are not limited to Gary's own experiences but are generalized to those around him and this new fabricated web of experiences, both his own and others', allows for the telling of a "histoire de sa personnalité" that is not quite his own. It is instead the result of his inventiveness, an integral piece of his *personnalité*, which we could perhaps reason is the kernel of truth at the center of it all.

Gary's artistic rendering of his own life opens the door for readers to look for truth elsewhere, in Gary's fiction and other writings. Here we can turn to Lejeune's

notion of the *espace autobiographique* (which he originally conceived of in relation to the life and work of André Gide) as a helpful tool to think through the ways that Gary's writings have been taken up both by casual readers and scholars of his work. Françoise Simonet-Tenant explains of Lejeune's concept, "La notion s'applique particulièrement aux auteurs qui 'ont choisi de laisser leur autobiographie incomplète, fragmentée, trouée et ouverte' et qui conduisent ainsi 'leurs lecteurs à lire dans le registre autobiographique tout le reste de leur production narrative'"(313). But we must caution that this notion must be expanded to truly accommodate Gary's writing since it hardly strikes a reader of *La Promesse de l'aube* that the account is fragmented or incomplete. Indeed, the novelistic nature of the work gives the complete opposite effect—Gary's embellishments and inventions offer a sense of completeness. Recall how Julien Green worried that his experience as a novelist would result in an autobiography "too coherent," to the detriment of the fragmented project he envisioned. Gary, recognizing the same potential in his writing career, uses it exactly as the means to the end Green feared (Sheringham 117). It is thus not at the level of the narrative where we understand his autobiography to be "ouverte" but rather in a sort of post reconstruction of the events, an autopsy of the autobiography.

This tendency of Gary towards an opening up runs counter to the project of most autobiographical texts that attempt to wrest meaning from experiences in order to create a comprehensible narrative arc for the life detailed. Michael Sheringham notes this phenomenon as it relates to Rousseau's *Confessions* and understands it through the lens

of the mortality of the author.[79] Death will ultimately be the defining moment of life since it eliminates any further developments in the story of a life.[80] But the desire to pin down meaning can be upended by narrative. Sheringham writes, "As the vehicle of desire's ultimate object, the quiescence and resolution of death, narrative moves towards the definitive closure of meaning; but, just as desire can never achieve its aim, so narrative also provides a medium of diversion and postponement" (28). Autobiography thus often finds itself trapped in this push and pull between narrative prolongment and finality. Of course, all autobiographies, like all lives, have an end. And, in the end, it is narrative which must negotiate both the getting to the end, and the deferral of it. But the narrative's end (that of the autobiography) and the end of one's life are never one and the same. The all-elusive phrase "I am dead" cannot be truthfully uttered, nor written, and thus all autobiography must finish, to varying degrees, prematurely.[81] This creates a gap in which life continues but its textual narrative can no longer keep pace. This gap becomes crucial, not necessarily for the writer, but for the reader who gains an upper hand over the

[79] Gary plays with reference to this tradition of confessions in an earlier title idea for the work: "La Confession de Big Sur" (1: 1326).

[80] This does not mean, however, that new information cannot come to life after the death of an author. This occurs often and, of course, is a major part of the story of Romain Gary. But what is revealed after death relates to what occurred in life.

[81] Here, though slightly parallel to my argument, I would be remiss not to point to the disagreement between Derrida and Barthes centered on this very utterance, as it appears in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." Barthes argues for the impossibility of the utterance whereas Derrida rejects a categorical interdiction. Jean-Michel Rabaté explains that for Derrida, "there is no more a 'pure present' than a 'pure presence': historical time is always implied in the time of enunciation. Some form of writing, therefore of death, is always at play in any first-person discourse. When I repeat "I"—which is necessary for the constitution of subjectivity—I have been 'absented' from my speech, there is no experience of the radically singularly new and personally authentic that would not be attacked by such a primary repetition" (*Future of Theory* 44).

narrator. The privilege of the reader, if they care to do the research, is to know the ideal ending of the text, of which the text is often unaware.

It should, however, be noted that a keen reader of Gary's novel can recognize its fictions. Some of Gary's fabrications seem to tip beyond the pale (the list of items, including a rubber boot, he eats as a young boy in order to impress a girl may come to mind here[82]). Though these occasional instances might create some friction in the text that grates on the reader's ability to suspend disbelief, they are not sufficiently powerful to upend the overall structure and pact formed between author and reader. As social creatures we are accustomed to hearing recollections of the past taking on an extra layer of shine to better catch the eye. Oftentimes, the type of embellishments added can afford us just as much information about the character of the teller as do the bare facts. Fact and fiction are both excellent relayers of information. What is essential in these interactions is that both speaker and listener have tacitly agreed preliminarily that what is being relayed is fact. And as the receiver of these personal narratives, the listener gains information not only from what the story tells, but which story is told, and how the story is told (content, anecdote selection, narrative technique). Over the course of a relationship, or as is the case in our current study, over the course of an autobiography these facets amass even more meaning. Recall again Sheringham's mixed metaphors cited in chapter one, "On the first model, rooted in causality, and in the teleological aspect of narrative, the incident

[82] A cinephile such as Gary would surely have been aware of the scene, reminiscent of that in *Promise at Dawn*, in *The Gold Rush* where the character played by Charlie Chaplin cooks and eats a leather shoe.

serves as a sponge which, as it soaks up virtual meanings flowing through the text, becomes itself saturated with meaning. Changing the metaphor, this approach turns the incident into a provisional point of anchorage where a cargo of meanings, in transit through the text as a whole, can be unloaded" (99). He notes key moments from Rousseau's biography (the theft of the ribbon, the spanking) which themselves have become sort of synecdoches for the autobiography as a whole. Many autobiographies contain these flashpoints which stick in readers' minds long after the specific details or contexts have eroded in our memories. These moments are memorable because they elicit a strong response from the reader, but also because of how densely meaningful they are. Though they represent only a short moment in a life they seem to encapsulate it.

Gary, who, I have demonstrated, appreciated the importance and possibility of myth, no doubt also was a master of endowing certain moments of *La Promesse de l'aube* with an overflow of meaning. To mention just a few: consider the scene in the stairwell of the apartment building in Vilnius where his mother proclaimed to bemused neighbors that Gary would become the next Victor Hugo[83]; the scene where Gary narrowly escapes being in a plane that crashes, thanks to an unexpected call from his mother; the famous scene in which he eats a rubber boot to impress a girlfriend and ends up in the hospital; or the moment of realization that his mother's letters have been coming from beyond the grave. Each of these vignettes that Gary sketches for his reader

[83] For further analysis of this scene, see Carol Allamand's essay "L'auteur est dans l'escalier : Une relecture de *La Promesse de l'aube* de Romain Gary."

seems to indicate that the sum of the parts is much more than the whole, as though each could somehow be the story of the whole. They do the work, in Sheringham's terms, of both sponge and vessel of meaning. But what Gary understood about this project, is that these sponges of meaning need not necessarily be authentic. That is to say, the veracity of the episode does not increase or decrease its ability to soak up and then transport meaning through the text. Indeed, Gary's fabulations are often the most poignant and memorable and undoubtedly this is why he invents them.

Gary is able to take advantage of the genre of autobiography without necessarily feeling compelled to tell the truth, a central facet of it. He uses the genre as a tool to his own ends, hollowing it out in order to fill it with what he pleases. But the genre of autobiography must be understood not only from the point of view of author but also from that of the reader. As Marie-Chantal Killeen argues, in relation to Lejeune and *La Promesse de l'aube*, "L'autobiographie devient une question de pratique et non d'essence ; c'est tout autant, et même davantage, un mode de lecture qu'un type d'écriture" (351). As Killeen convincingly argues, autobiography engenders and requires a certain mode of reading that is distinct from that of novels precisely because of this implicit readerly trust. This is not to say that readers take everything given as fact, but they take what is given with the expectation that the author is asking them to believe the facts and events recounted. It is a trust in intention more so than a trust in truth.

What Gary understood better than most is that the relationship between reader and author is not fixed in the moment of composition or publication but evolves over time. To this end, *La Promesse de l'aube* is clearly written with his legacy in mind. He longed for

notoriety and it seems that his hope was that his textual corpus would long outlive his physical one. At several moments in *Promesse de l'aube* he seems to be speaking to us from beyond the grave. Recall how the book begins, for example, "C'est fini" (617). Gary nods to the fact that more readers will encounter his text after his death than ever did during his lifetime; this is the mark of an enduring text. It also should remind us of Nina's posthumous letters to her son, also written with the intent of speaking to a reader who exists beyond the reaches of the author. But these belated readers of Gary come to his work with a markedly different perception of him than did those who read during the course of Gary's life. The vision of Gary as a war hero, diplomat, and friend of de Gaulle, though in no way diminished in our contemporary moment, are nevertheless all overshadowed by the figure of Gary as trickster and rascal thanks to the "affaire Ajar."[84]

This shift has important implications for the way we read any author, and doubly so for the way we read the author of an autobiography. Readers rarely appreciate being duped and take a defensive position when the threat of deception materializes. We become attentive to allusions towards deceit and attach much more meaning to things like Gary's childhood fondness for sleight of hand and his desire to become an illusionist. But at the time he composed *La Promesse de l'aube*, Gary had likely not yet conceived of any plan to create his fictional alter ego Ajar. Regardless, he was already well along the mythic path he had trodden since his very first novel.

[84] Also useful to note is that, though Gary's fame, and his body of work, has endured in France, he has largely been forgotten in the United States where he was a rather prominent celebrity during his lifetime.

Broken Promise at Dawn

It should therefore be clear at this point that Gary is irreverent in the face of truth and that his autobiography, if we agree with Bellos, is perhaps just as easily read as a biography.[85] But this is only the case if we take Lejeune's generic definition to be sacrosanct. And recall what Lejeune writes in both *L'Autobiographie en France* and *Le Pacte autobiographique*: "Comment distinguer l'autobiographie du roman autobiographique ? Il faut bien l'avouer, si l'on reste sur le plan de l'analyse interne du texte, il n'y a *aucune différence*" (Pacte 26). Can we imagine that Gary, breaking Lejeune's autobiographical pact by not honoring the authenticity of the "nom propre," nevertheless wrote an autobiography-in-becoming? That is to say, can we not also argue that the compositional process is impactful, if not formative, on the life lived. Reflecting on these questions, and pushing back against Lejeune, Paul de Man writes in his essay "Autobiography as De-Facement," "We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus

[85] A useful parallel might be Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in which the author, in the guise of the autobiographical, embarks on her own adventure in mythmaking. As Timothy Dow Adams writes, the work is "an elaborate tall tale in which Gertrude Stein creates herself as a legendary figure, given to outrageous bragging and superhuman abilities" (37).

determined, in all aspects, by the resources of his medium?" (69). This line of thinking strikes directly at the heart of Gary's project. Though his life did provide the basis for *La Promesse de l'aube*, the book provides him the means and the medium to craft the character of Romain Gary, a continuation, as I have shown, of the mythic figures his work often included, beginning with the partisan Nadejda. Through the construction of this text, Gary fashions himself a mask. Though it is a mask which resembles him, it is nevertheless a layer between himself and reality. But what we see in his autobiographical text is that the process of creating a mask bears a great resemblance to that of creating a face. The text grants legitimacy to one just as well as the other. De Man points out this equivalence and signals that all autobiography is in the business of mask production: "Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, prosopon poien, to confer a mask or a face (prosopon). Prosopopeia is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name [...] is made as intelligible and memorable as a face" (76). The examples De Man uses in his essay come from Wordsworth and Milton, but these considerations are particularly apt for the complex relationship that we have mapped out between the name Romain Gary and the flesh-and-blood man. As I will later show, this relationship between face and mask, and author and avatar, also comes into play in translation, which disfigures in a slightly new way Gary's creation.

Gary's exaggerations, fabulations, and revisions are thus not merely in the service of keeping us turning the pages. His life story, even sticking to the verifiable facts, was a whirlwind of adventure, war, travel, and passion, and thus hardly needed help appearing

epic. Perhaps for this reason, many of the more novelistic creations are centered on his mother. In the book we are told that, as she lies dying, she writes Gary years' worth of letters and has them sent at regular intervals by a friend, allowing her to maintain a postmortem correspondence to maintain Gary's morale during his wartime activities under de Gaulle. Gary's translation pushes the envelope even further on this fabricated episode by appending to the book's final page a reproduction of one of these messages from his mother with the heading: "The last letter." It reads, in Gary's translation from the Russian, "My dear, my beloved Romouchka! I give you my blessing, and I swear to you that your departure did not sadden me. Just as you never saddened me but gave me only joy. Be tough, be strong. Mama" (337). This story is just one of the many that Gary's biographers have shown to be a creation. Bellos points to earlier examples of this trope in literature, such as in Balzac's *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine* where a daughter condemned to be hanged writes letters to her imprisoned mother detailing the progress of a disease so the mother may believe the death to have been natural (291). Anissimov also notes Nabokov's *Glory*, in which a man undertakes a daring adventure to the Soviet Union and writes a series of letters to be sent to his mother in the event he is killed (155). Anissimov's research demonstrates that the missive included at the end of *Promesse* is authentic and was written by Mina Kacew but was not, however, written as part of an elaborate ruse to mislead Gary about her death. It is undated so we cannot be sure at what point his mother actually gave it to Gary or how it was delivered. But the inclusion of this note illustrates an interesting relationship between the porous boundaries of Gary's fact and fiction. He makes use of an authentic material to bolster the

appearance of truthfulness in his work. Undoubtedly, the photo reproduction, as opposed to simply transcribing the content of the letter, contributes to this verisimilitude. But in addition to seeing the script which flowed from Mina's own hand, the fact that the letter must be translated for the reader no doubt also plays a role. The anglophone audience of *Promise at Dawn*, save for a select few who can both read Russian and decipher the scrawled message, is reminded that this story, and the strong figure of this mother, can only be relayed to us through the mechanism of translation—a translation within a translation. The novel's aim, enhanced in translation, is to sketch an alternative narrative for Gary's coming of age, and thus creates a sort of alternative fidelity to the source, an artistic truth. The inclusion of this note from his mother is true to who she was but not to what she did.

When looking into the specifics of Gary's movement from *La Promesse de l'aube* to *Promise at Dawn*, it is clear that Gary is prone to addition. Even outside his translations, the revised editions of his novels often included, for better or for worse, new chapters or sections. In the same vein, Gary's translation eschews revision and elimination for addition. Both Gary-translator and Gary-autobiographer are iconoclasts who refuse the authority of the past. In translation Gary locates new material, new fodder for his own myth, using the original text for inspiration, just as previously he had taken his own life for inspiration for the autobiography. Note how this differs from Julien Green's practice of allowing the language of composition to dictate which memories surface, and how they are manipulated and narrated. Gary, unlike Green, relies heavily on his past writings and supplements rather than rewrites them. For both, unlike for standard

translators, the source text is a mixture of a memory, invention, and to a lesser degree, the original. One example of this addition is in the English version of the text, where Gary inserts an entire additional chapter recounting the history of Mr. Zaremba, a Polish painter who enters into a relationship with Gary's mother but whom scholars are unable to locate in Gary's past. Gary even doubles down on this fabrication by discussing the fictional Mr. Zaremba in *La Nuit sera calme* (50-2). Though the original sees no trace of the artist, Gary translates the episode from English into French for the 1980 issue published by Gallimard. Gary's English version would also see the addition of a defense of French values (we can imagine it was aimed at the same American audience for whom Gary published an ode to de Gaulle in *Life Magazine* in the time between writing the French and English editions of *Promise at Dawn*) as well as a critique of psychoanalysis (a longer critique will later be found in his artistic manifesto *Pour Sganarelle*). These changes, unlike the episode with Mr. Zaremba, are not translated or included in the 1980 definitive French edition.

But why add these episodes and ideas only to later retract them? We might find a hint in the other modification Gary makes between French and English editions of the novel. In the first chapter Gary outlines the existence of three gods which his mother would often describe to him as a sort of cautionary fairy tale: Totoche, god of stupidity; Merzavka, god of absolute truth; and Filoche, god of mediocrity. His mother explained that these beings follow us our whole lives, waiting for a moment of weakness to seize us, and that it is the challenge of great men to defeat them. Gary explains that this book will be the story of his struggle against them: "We are old enemies, they and I, and it is of

my battle with them that I shall tell here" (6). Interestingly enough, in English, Gary includes a fourth god—Trembloche, god of acquiescence and servility—which he does not bring to the French definitive edition. Of course, we cannot know whether Gary's mother ever described Trembloche, or the others, but this god does seem to be precisely the one at work in the type of translation that Gary soundly rejects. Trembloche suffers a double defeat at the hands of Gary who first invents (demonstrating a lack of servility to the original) and then suppresses (showing no acquiescence to the English version) him. Perhaps this coup in translation led Gary to declare victory over this particular god, tossing him aside for all future tellings of his tale.

Looking beyond Gary's habit of appending in translation, we can consider some of the alterations he makes to his text when bringing it from French to English. There have been few studies that focus directly on Gary's translations; indeed, the majority focus solely on his French language texts. In his biography, Bellos remains attuned to these changes and includes his analysis where pertinent. Jean-Francois Hangouët's essay "Le don des langues" gives an account of some of Gary's additions and subtractions between versions of his novels, demonstrating a rather casual attitude to correspondence between the works. To my knowledge, the only essay on a specific translation is Nancy Huston's "Gary's *La Danse de Genghis Cohn*" in which she diligently notes the differences between the French and English versions and concludes that, "On peut dire que le souci dont témoigne Gary dans l'autotraduction est moins de perfection stylistique que de communication humaine. Dans ce sens, aucun écrivain n'a été plus "engagé" que

lui" (42).[86] Huston's use of "engagé" is a nod to Sartre's notion of *littérature engagée* with which Gary takes issue in *Pour Sgnarelle*. She notes that in this work published in 1967, Gary seems intent on relaying his humanistic message of fraternity—this work is a darkly comic text in which the ghost of a Jewish man killed in a concentration camp inhabits his German executioner—and, to this end, crafted what we might term a highly domesticating translation. He changes cultural references from French to American and takes care to adapt wordplay and humor, sometimes requiring complete rewriting, for a different reading public. But this domesticating tendency Gary adopted in 1967 for this work seems to be absent, or at the very least greatly diminished, in the passage from *La Promesse de l'aube* to *Promise at Dawn*.

French literary and historical references which may be unfamiliar to a non-French audience abound in *Promise at Dawn*, unchanged from the original: Guy de Maupassant, Roland de Roncevaux, Prosper Mérimée, Robespierre, just to name a few, all make appearances in the text. Gary's English will, on occasion, give context for an allusion, which is absent from the French. But even this contextualizing Gary seems to do with an eye more toward creating confusion than clarification. Recall, for example, the scene when he recounts trying to entertain a fellow aviator with grandiloquent pronouncements. The English reads, "Once, when I produced something equivalent to Hugo's 'mourir pour

[86] This essay is in a collection of essays compiled for a 2011 exposition of Gary's manuscripts at the Musée des Lettres et Manuscrits, which has since been shuttered as it was revealed to have been operating as an elaborate Ponzi scheme. The same manuscripts, all kept at the museum itself, were sold to multiple buyers. The fact that a number of wealthy patrons were hoodwinked into believing they were the sole owners of certain Gary manuscripts may have elicited a grin from the author himself.

la patrie est le sort le plus beau, le plus digne d'envie,' he gave a just perceptible nod of approval" (251-2). Gary's original simply omits the reference to Hugo, allowing the quotation to speak for itself. But in the English, though the mention of Hugo might help situate an unfamiliar reader, Gary nevertheless leaves the quote in the original French rather than substitute it with something more familiar to an anglophone audience, as we might expect in a domesticating translation. " I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country," for example, might have been used in a translation more like that of *La Danse de Genghis Cohn*. For a monolingual anglophone, whose eyes may gloss over the particulars of these French words, the quotation sits as an italicized, authenticating object on the page. It acts as a reminder to us that everything around this quotation has been translated, that it is not the odd player out but the only remaining piece of the original. The proper noun "Hugo" acts as a sort of lifeline, allowing a non-francophone reader to wade through the foreign with his head above water. All this, however, is counteracted if we take into account the reason that Gary omits the attribution to Hugo in the French—it has nothing to do with him. It in fact comes from the refrain of a 1792 Rouget de l'Isle song, of *La Marseillaise* fame, *Roland à Roncevaux*, which will be taken up by Alexandre Dumas and Auguste Maquet for their song, *Le Chant des Girondins*. This song, included in one of their plays, became the anthem for the Second Republic. It seems unlikely, given Gary's great affection for Victor Hugo and his penchant for French history, that this was simply an error born of ignorance. It may be, as I hypothesized above, Gary giving his reader a helpful, though mendacious, gloss. It may also be Gary rewriting history to better suit his, and his mother's, tastes. Recall how Nina describes to

the young narrator, "Victor Hugo, président de la République," which he in hindsight questions, "je ne sais où elle avait pris cette idée, mais elle y tenait" (630). For Nina, it was not enough that Hugo was a celebrated writer. Given her druthers, Hugo would have indeed been President of the Republic whose anthem Gary attributes to him. In translation this historical fantasy gets a little better footing as it brings together Hugo with this political symbol.

The narrator is unabashed in his willingness to bend the truth if it can bring a bit of pleasure to his mother, and he explicitly states this as it relates to his extratextual reality. Consider this confession we read near the end of the first section of the book:

> Ici, je dois faire un aveu. Je mens assez peu, car le mensonge a pour moi un goût douceâtre d'impuissance : il me laisse trop loin du but. Mais lorsqu'on me demande où, à Varsovie, j'ai fait mes études, je réponds toujours : au lycée français. C'est une question de principe. Ma mère avait fait de son mieux et je ne vois pas pourquoi je la priverais du fruit de son labeur. (701)

Gary wants to spare his mother the embarrassment of not being able to afford the tuition costs for the French school, instead enrolling her son in the public school where the language of instruction was Polish, so he admits to lying about attending this school. The use of the present tense, "lorsqu'on me demande," points to the fact that the narrator continues this lie despite the fact that his mother is long past, as a way of honoring her memory, but also taking away the possibility that he could be corrected. Despite this confession of past and continuing lies, we must be careful to note that the narrator does not admit to any diegetic lies, and in fact this admission seems to bolster our faith in the reliability of this narrator, acting rather similarly to Rousseau's opening gambit of *Les Confessions* where he pledges to "montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la

vérité de la nature ; et cet homme ce sera moi," or to Green's admissions of forgetting. By admitting his lies to others we gain a false sense of being in on the lie, and thus in a confidence we believe he would not betray.[87] At the same time, this admission should also put us on guard, a reminder that this narrator is capable of lies, especially as it pertains to the legacy of his mother. His fidelity to his own story, like his fidelity in translation, is not to what was, but what could have, or what should have, been.

Another event recounted in the book, which the reader may be wary of believing, shows the young narrator's commitment to another important woman in his life, the eight-year-old Valentine whom he attempts to woo by indulging her sadistic demands to ingest increasingly more repugnant, and even dangerous, objects. The original alarming list reads, "plusieurs poignées de vers de terre, un grand nombre de papillons, un kilo de cerises avec les noyaux, une souris, et, pour finir ... un soulier en caoutchouc" (1: 667). But even this seemingly straightforward list of items seems to subtly change in translation. In English he eats instead, "several handfuls of earthworms, her father's collection of rare butterflies, a mouse, a good many decaying leaves and, as a crowning achievement ... one of my rubber galoshes" (70). This, unlike perhaps the adding of a gloss as in the alleged Hugo quotation, would be hard to imagine being permitted to a standard translator and allows us some insight into Gary's goals of translation. The goal of the scene seems to be to elicit a reaction of disgust from the reader, hence upping the

[87] Here recall Green's critiques of Rousseau and Saint Augustine for precisely these tactics.

ante from a kilo of cherries to decaying leaves. Slightly more confusing is the change from simply “un grand nombre de papillons” to “her father’s collection of rare butterflies.” This we cannot classify as an intensification of disgust (a butterfly is a butterfly, no?) but rather of sentiment. It seems that, in translation, Gary wanted to extend Valentine’s depravity to include her father as another victim. Or might it be that in this simple change, Gary signals an object of cultural capital that separates his rather impoverished situation from that of Valentine’s, whose father apparently had the time and money for a butterfly collection. This subtle change in translation, making possible a certain class consciousness for the reader, allows us to see an additional aspect of the domination/submission present in this relationship.

A few paragraphs later, Gary rounds out his list of accomplishments: “Je ne demande donc à personne de me croire lorsque j’affirme que, pour ma bien-aimée, je consommai encore un éventail japonais, dix mètres de fil de coton, un kilo de noyaux de cerises ... et trois poissons rouges, que nous étions allés pêcher dans l’aquarium de son professeur de musique” (1: 668). Gary’s prefatory remark here acts again, similar to his confession about lying about where he studied in Warsaw, to bolster our confidence in the account. But oddly, this remark comes after the rubber boot, which seems to be, pardon the expression, the hardest to swallow for the reader. In typical fashion for Gary, the list grows in translation: “I do not, therefore, expect anyone to believe me when I say that, for my well-beloved, after a few pounds of cherries [the pits] ... I also consumed a Japanese fan, ten yards of cotton thread, a complete paperback novel called *Nat Pinkerton* and three goldfish we stole from her music teacher’s aquarium” (70). The

literal consumption of a novel seems like a detail that Gary would not have simply forgotten when composing his original text, leaving us to ask why it has been included in translation. We might imagine that this novel, *Nat Pinkerton*, is used to domesticate the translation and give American readers a familiar reference.[88] However, *Nat Pinkerton* is in fact a series of over 400 detective novels which originated in Germany at the turn of the 20th century. The eponymous protagonist of these tales is an American detective without equal in his zeal and ability to solve complex crimes. Though these serialized novels had enormous success in Germany, and even in translation in Russia, they were unknown in the United States. This reference would be as useful situating an American reader as, say, a reference to Pepé Le Pew would be for a French reader. But the protagonist in *Promise at Dawn* literally feeds off these fictional tales of an American hero. It is a specific nod to popular literature, in contrast to the highbrow references made nearly everywhere else in the text, especially those made by Nina. The bourgeois Valentine, with her music teacher and butterfly collections, has no need for low-class detective stories, and instead literally forces them down the throat of her young suitor. The addition of this novel, like the butterfly collection, adds a specificity to this vignette in English, as well as a materiality. The reader, holding a book already in hand, might

[88] The Pinkerton detective agency (named for its founding detective), and Pinkerton guards, are, or at least were, well-known in the United States from the mid 19th century onwards and were involved in everything from military contracting, to private law-enforcement, strike breaking and union infiltration.

consider the sensation of ripping out the pages one by one in order to ingest the book, leading to a newfound appreciation for the narrator's dedication.

This seemingly limitless ambition and perseverance is essential to the portrait Gary crafts of himself, or of the character Romain Gary he creates. Time and time again in the work we see examples of Gary pushing forward in the face of great obstacles, succeeding where others could not, and surviving where others perished. But the narrative is also one of limits, and of acknowledging that in the face of certain challenges no amount of courage or good will is sufficient to overcome them. This lesson is highlighted in one remarkable passage of the book where Gary recounts a childhood dream of becoming a world-class juggler like the great Rastelli (another ambitious Russian émigré). In the same period that Gary's ill-fated relationship with Valentine took place, he took up juggling, hoping it would be his ticket to fame and success but also, as he writes, "en pensant surtout à ma mère, et pour me faire pardonner mon manque d'autres talents" (1: 701). He would juggle everything he could get his hands on—oranges, plates, bottles, even brooms—but the need to do more was always present. Finally having mastered juggling six oranges he plateaued. We read, "La maîtrise se refusait toujours. Je tendais toute ma volonté [...] mais la septième balle à peine lancée, tout l'édifice s'écroulait." No amount of will or practice could help him to catch the seventh ball and he reflects solemnly, "Ce fut seulement aux abords de ma quarantième année, après avoir longuement erré parmi les chefs-d'œuvre que peu à peu la vérité se fit en moi, et que je compris que la dernière balle n'existait pas" (1: 702). The reader is thus made privy to the realization that took thirty years for Gary, that the last ball "n'existait

pas" because there would always be another to take its place. The "dernière balle" was unobtainable and thus inexistent—the mountain of ambition has no summit.

In Gary's French, he alternates narration of himself and his hero Rastelli (who is only named once, in passing, in translation). Gary's English, seemingly in the American tradition of great optimism, glosses over the more somber tone of his original and excludes the paragraph ending with Rastelli's death. In this deleted section, Gary describes his memory of seeing Rastelli perform at the very peak of his talent, better than anyone who had ever lived, but still unable to capture the eighth ball, described by Gary as, "la seule qui comptait pour lui" (1: 703). One's focus is always greatest on a perceived deficiency. But this does not stop the narrator from forging ahead. In a sort of Sisyphean persistence, the narrator rounds out this juggling episode by bringing the reader into the present day. In the original we read, "Il m'arrive encore de sortir de ma maison, sur ma colline, au-dessus de la baie de San Francisco, et là, en pleine vue, en pleine lumière, je jongle avec trois oranges, tout ce que je peux faire aujourd'hui" (1: 703). This resistance in the face of defeat is increased markedly in translation. Gary writes, "Every morning, I step out of my house on the hill above San Francisco and there, in the bright sunlight, into the face of the sky, I juggle defiantly and masterfully with three oranges, which is now as far as I can go ... I shall never stop trying" (114). Whereas this habit of juggling in Gary's French seemed rather desultory, and a bit passive (even in the grammatical sense - "il m'arrive"), Gary's English is a daily, active defiance: "Every morning, I step out." Notice also the adverbs, which are hardly innocent, are absent from his French: "Je jongle" versus "I juggle defiantly and masterfully." It is as though in

translation, Gary asserts a new dominance in this seemingly benign hobby. Though Gary's translation accepts his limit (three oranges) he now delights in his mastery of this simplified task. Rather than striving for breadth, he delights in the depth, all the while never ruling out the possibility for achieving the feats of his youth. This defiant conclusion ("I shall never stop trying"), which does not figure in the original, gestures toward a possibility which the French seems to close off.

If we accept Huston's readings of Gary's translations as domesticating and thus being primarily focused on adapting his prose for the reader's culture and context, then this conclusion that the juggling vignette has a seemingly cliché American happy ending seems apt. But as I have pointed out, there are numerous examples of Gary's *Promise at Dawn* pushing back against this paradigm of allowing the new reader to feel at home in this text. And here I offer the counter-reading that it is not Gary's *English* that ushers in a seemingly more optimistic take on ambition and achievement but rather Gary's *translation*—that is to say, the text's second chance. All throughout this scene where Gary takes us through his childhood obsession up through present day, there is a metanarrative forming. Just as Gary understands from juggling that repetition leads to mastery, so too can translation, perhaps notably self-translation, have the effect of a better, or novel, understanding of the original text. Consider what Gary writes in *La Nuit sera calme* about his translations, "Je considère les versions françaises - ce ne sont pas des traductions, j'ai tout réécrit - comme supérieures aux originaux, parce que le temps m'a permis de mieux développer mes thèmes. Les 'translations' sont des martyres. J'ai mis six semaines en anglais pour Lady L. et *neuf mois* pour la version française, cinq ans

plus tard" (222). But this improved comprehension of one's text, and of one's original ideas, does not necessarily lead to what we might believe to be the moral of Gary's "I shall never stop trying," namely that anything is possible; instead, it leads to a confirmation of the limits of possibility.

In terms of the "creation of the character Romain Gary," as Bellos terms it, I suggest that Gary's translation does not push the bounds or potential of this character, but shades it in to give a more complete and nuanced vision. To give an example of this, consider that in Gary's English, it is not the seventh ball that eludes the younger version of the narrator, but rather the fifth: "But there again, in spite of all my efforts, in spite of my devouring craving for mastery, the masterpiece always alluded me: I could never get beyond the fifth ball" (113). Countering the current flowing towards optimism I identified earlier, Gary's English makes an unmistakable choice to reduce the young narrator's juggling capacity by a single ball. Since both English and French versions undergo successive editions it seems unlikely that this is a simple oversight and again demonstrates the type of translation permitted to the author impossible for a standard translator. In translation, Gary reaches back into the pass and nicks a ball from his younger self. And beyond this empirical change, the reader should also note that in this moment Gary's English does not evoke the impossible ball, as does the French ("mais la septième balle à peine lancée, tout l'édifice s'écroulait") but gestures towards it by referring instead to the ball in hand. This instant, quite forgettable in the scheme of things, is a microcosm of Gary's translation, and autobiographical, project. In translation,

Gary evokes the impossible by detailing the possible. In writing the myth of himself, Gary details what is possible to create the impossible.

Though the example given here is juggling, we understand that what is at stake extends far beyond the reaches of the big top. In the vignette, Gary explicitly metaphorizes the juggling as it relates to writing. Following the realization that the seventh ball does not exist, he writes of his friend and author André Malraux: "Lorsque je vois Malraux, le plus grand de nous tous, jongler avec ses balles, comme peu d'hommes ont jonglé avant lui, mon cœur se serre devant sa tragédie, celle qu'il porte écrite sur son visage, au milieu de ses plus brillants exploits : la dernière balle est hors de sa portée, et toute son œuvre est faite de cette certitude angoissée" (706). It is for Gary as it is for Malraux**,** as it is for Rastelli: there is always the desire to catch one more ball than is possible. And though it is easy to imagine what failing to catch the last juggling ball looks like, it is not immediately clear to the reader what this translates to in the realm of writing. Does the number of balls in the air relate to a piece of prose's ability to bear the burden of substantial meaning, or perhaps of contradictory meaning? Regardless of its manifestation, it is nevertheless a "tragédie" and thus not a simple obstacle to the writing process. In evoking another author, Gary brings the reader's attention indirectly towards the process of writing the very text we have in hand. Failure is not simply the result of an aborted, or misguided, attempt at a goal but it is always present. Greatness is always achieved in the face of failure, in the face of what could have been. The final ball remains out of reach.

So far all the examples of translation given come from the comparison of *La Promesse de l'aube* with *Promise at Dawn*, rather than from within a single one of these two texts. That is to say, these are examples of literal translation rather than translation as theme, of which we find little in Gary's corpus. And indeed it is somewhat curious that Gary, who constantly shifted from language to language beginning in early childhood, spends hardly any time discussing what it is like to live between these languages and translate between them. There is, however, one pivotal scene where Gary's interpretive skills are at the forefront. While training at the airfield of Bordeaux-Mérignac, before relocating to England to continue his wartime activities, Gary is tasked with interpreting for the French instructors who were training the Polish pilots learning to maneuver the aircraft. It is, remember, thanks in part to Gary's mother's inability to pay the tuition at the French school in Poland that Gary was able to master Polish. It was during one of these test flights, and notably during this moment of translation, that Gary's nose was seriously damaged in the crash, becoming no longer the "chef-d'oeuvre incomparable qu'il était auparavant" and instead a permanent reminder of the danger of translation (1: 796). Gary describes being seated between the French instructor and the Polish pilot as the latter attempts to set the plane down for a landing. The pilot, descending too gradually, comes dangerously close to the end of the runway, prompting the French instructor to ask Gary to relay an abrupt warning to pull up or risk crashing into the trees: "Dis à ce veau qu'il va se vomir dans la nature. Qu'il remette les gaz !" The narrator affirms to the reader that, "[j]e traduis immédiatement. Je peux affirmer, la conscience tranquille, que je ne perdis pas une seconde en disant : Prosze dodac gazu bo za chwile

zamalimy sie w drzewa na koncu lotniska !" (1: 769). Gary leaves his Polish phrase untranslated in both the French and the English, leaving the reader with the choice of either trusting that this phrase is indeed a faithful translation of the French pilot's words or having recourse to translate the phrase. But the simple fact that Gary includes his own translation nudges the reader towards suspicion. Indeed, had the narrator left it simply, "Je traduis immédiatement," we would have no proof to the contrary. But Gary's phrasing instead makes us curious as to whether the narrator is being facetious. The note in the Pléiade edition gives the following translation: "S'il vous plaît, remettez les gaz, sinon dans un moment on va s'écraser dans les arbres au bout de la piste !" (1: 1365). As suspected, the narrator was indeed leaving us out of a joke, the punchline of which, for the non-Polish speakers, must be found 500 pages later in the back of the volume; for those reading other editions of the work, the punchline, if found at all, figures outsides the bounds of the text. The humor of this line is evidently in the discrepancy of the registers of language employed in the two utterances. The crassness of the French is highlighted by the extreme formality of the Polish, perhaps a reflection on Gary's Polish being acquired in the context of his education. But secondarily, we laugh not only because the translation is polite but because it is so long-winded as to render itself useless. This anecdote about the narrator's experience with oral interpretation makes the reader appreciate that translation needs to not only convey the underlying meaning of an utterance, but also take into account the context. That is to say, a faithful translation always has chosen to what to be faithful and in some cases, surely many more than we

might expect, translation can have life or death consequences. In the cases of oral interpretation, the question of temporality looms large on the effectiveness of translation.

In the only instance of this type of metatranslation in the work, Gary translates this scene of translation in *Promise at Dawn*. The narrator recounts that the French pilot told him, "tell the bloody fool to throttle full or he'll have us all in the ditch!" Gary then assures the reader, "I at once translated the message. Yes I can truthfully say, with a completely clear conscience, that I didn't lose a minute" (223). It would seem that in the French telling the translation occurred faster, not losing "une seconde" versus "a minute" in English. Moreover, the French pilot acquires a British air in translation, certainly for the American reader who would reserve the adjective "bloody" principally for something, coincidently, like the scene of a crash. But this colloquial translation nevertheless demonstrates that Gary, of course, is a masterful translator between French and English and recognizes the importance of register. This same phrase, uttered in panic by the French pilot, is thus translated twice, once immediately in Polish intradiegetically and then nearly two decades later in English for the reader. But Gary, as I alluded to earlier, keeps the exact unglossed phrasing of his Polish translation in both the French and English versions of his text. Indeed, these are some of the only sentences that appear verbatim in both texts, as though they are untranslatable, despite of course being translations in the first place. The translation uttered as the plane was crashing became fixed, unalterable precisely because of its failure. It also allows Gary and the Polish pilot to remain outside of translation in this vignette as neither of their direct discourse is altered from the French to English editions. This is true despite the fact that Gary is

ostensibly both the intra- and extra-diegetic translator of the scene. Ironically, Gary as character resists the project of self-translation whereas Gary as author undertakes it with great enthusiasm.

Just following the crash landing, we read another snippet of Polish, this time uttered by the pilot: "Za pozni mi pan przytlumaczyl." Again the reader receives no gloss in the narrative, nor from the author in the form of a note. The note in the Pléiade edition gives the ironic translation, "Vous m'avez traduit trop tard !" **(**1: 1365). It is almost an extradiegetic reproach from the pilot to the author. Since Gary would never translate the phrase, it is too late indeed. This temporal tension thus manifests again, even in the aftermath of the crash, on the planes of both translation and narrative. Following this phrase uttered by the pilot we read.

> -Il dit…" bégayai-je.
> Le sergent-chef, assez mal en point lui-même, eut le temps de nous souffler : "Merde !" avant de s'évanouir.
> Je traduisis fidèlement, après quoi, mon devoir accompli, je me laissai aller. (1: 796)

In English we notice subtle nuances in the rendering.

> "He says..." I began gallantly.
> The French pilot was not much better off, and had only just time to utter one word before he lost consciousness: "Merde!"
> I gave a faithful translation, after which, my duty done, I passed out. (224)

In both versions, there is some ambiguity about whether the narrator completes his translation of "Vous m'avez traduit trop tard !" before the French pilot loses consciousness. Gary's use of ellipsis makes this question especially fraught, allowing the reader to fill them in with an imagined translation, allowing them the task of lengthening

the narrative, or, conversely, imagining that they are simply the prelude to the interruption of the French pilot's outburst. In both cases, there are layers upon layers in which the fact of translating too late holds truth. He has translated too late to avoid the crash, too late for the French pilot to hear his apology, and too late for the reader to understand what has been said. And yet despite this, the narrator has nothing but praise for his translation, noting in the course of this scene both its speed and its fidelity while at the same time not equipping the readers to be able to make a judgement for themselves. All this while the carnage of his failure surrounds him.

This irony seems to only grow in translation. Notice for example Gary's change of dialogue markers from "bégayai-je" (I stuttered), ostensibly a nod towards humility, to "I began gallantly," a nod to anything but. It would be difficult to classify this as a translation at all, but again, not unlike the movement from the French to English in the juggling vignette, it seems to indicate an increased confidence on the part of the narrator. Furthermore, this change of dialogue markers confuses even further the question of whether the narrator completes the translation before the French pilot loses consciousness. It is easy to imagine the injured pilot interjecting "merde!", being short on time, frustrated by the stuttering narrator, before passing out. But it seems possible that the translator beginning "gallantly" might have the wherewithal to complete his task before the receiver succumbs to his injuries. The change thus may not only have an impact on the reader's perceived confidence of the narrator but also on the unfolding of the narrative itself.

In both versions the narrator again congratulates himself on a faithful translation, to which we do not have access, before passing out himself. Just as Gary does with the Polish, he leaves the French curse unglossed for the English reader. A strictly anglophone reader would be excluded from both the Polish and French utterances—in essence demonstrating the necessity for an interpreter in the first place. More likely, even a reader who has forgotten all their high school French remembers this key word: "merde." It thus functions differently—acting as an authentic object recalling the story's original context and giving a sort of self-satisfaction for reading outside the language of the narrative—than do the Polish utterances which are both burdensome in length and impenetrable in meaning for a speaker of French or English. They require either looking outside the text to do the work of translation, demonstrating the failure on the part of the narrator, or choosing to willfully ignore the content of these sentences and continue along the reading. In either case, the reader appreciates that this extradiegetic moment of translation, compared with the interpretation occurring in the plane, is relatively unimportant; no reader comes away with a broken nose for having misunderstood the Polish or French phrases left untranslated in *Promise at Dawn*. They are, however, left with a sense of incompleteness and slight frustration with the opaqueness of the foreign phrases.

This scene of translation thus generates meaning on several layers. The danger, humor, difficulty, (im)possibility, and great importance of translation are all woven together in this vignette. Gary-author puts forth a text that performs the asymmetric authority present in any scene of translation—the translator lends his voice to another,

while being voiceless himself, in order for the translatee, who otherwise has no recourse to the meaning, to understand. The figure of the translator, recalling perhaps the figure of Echo in the previous chapter, demonstrates the power of passivity.

Gary's translation thus offers him an essayistic style of writing in which he tries out new ideas and scenarios as though the movement from one language to another were transitory—one draft out of many. There can be no crafting of narrative, just as there can be no translation, without artistry. And it is perhaps in part thanks to Gary's many languages—recall that he spoke eight fluently—that he was able to harness language as a tool for detachment from strict adherence to fact. Each language acquired created the possibility for renewal, and few of Gary's acquaintances (perhaps only his mother) knew him in more than one of his languages. Thus it should not surprise us that the story he tells his English reader would not match perfectly that which he tells his fellow Frenchmen.

For the final example from *Promise at Dawn*, I return to Gary's insistence on myth, a fascination that long predates his writing of this autobiographical text. Readers with access to Gary's previous works (*Éducation européenne*, *Les Racines du ciel*) have an understanding of the narrative tacks he often takes to build his myths. Of course, crucial to these creations is absence, which in turn allows for the second important piece, imagination. Within the text of *Promesse de l'aube* we as readers, believing the author to be bound by the autobiographical pact outlined by Lejeune, are unwitting participants in Gary's own self-mythologization. But nevertheless, we see in the space of the text how Gary's mythmaking can begin to take form. I have already alluded to this as it pertains to

Nina, and notably to how her absence allowed space for Gary to create a larger-than-life figure that overwhelms the text. But other moments in the narrative show how Gary-narrator, just as Gary-author, tends towards mythologization in any situation with the potential for it. The banal, seen through the right lens, always has the potential for the epic. Consider the scene, for example, where the narrator, still on the base in Mérignac, sees an officer seated at a table writing a letter. Within reach sits a pistol atop a stack of papers. The scene is an apprenticeship for the reader in how Gary uses simple observations of ordinary moments to fashion exciting stories. The narrator tells us, "Je jetai un coup d'œil un peu étonné au revolver et soudain je compris ce qui se passait. Le général vaincu était en train d'écrire une note d'adieu, avant de se suicider. J'avoue que je me sentis ému et profondément reconnaissant ... Il y avait là une image de grandeur, un sens de la tragédie" (1: 813). The narrator, quickly grasping the sense of the scene, is moved immensely by what he sees as a man driven by honor and consumed by his defeat. The narrator's positive affirmation of the suicidal act can, of course, be read as a dark harbinger for the author's eventual death, one which also would be preceded by one last session at his writing table. Apart from this ominous foreshadowing, the scene also demonstrates how the narrator's storytelling and imagination closely mirrors those of Gary-author. Furthermore, the manner in which Gary elaborates on, exaggerates, and mythologizes those around him functions similarly to the way he does this for himself. The way we tell ourselves stories about others is not altogether different from how we tell ourselves stories about ourselves, or tell ourselves the story of ourselves.

On a more granular level, the structure of these sentences is important and merits a closer analysis. They can be delineated following the schema: I. Observation of lived experience (the narrator observes the revolver on the table); II. Interpretation and narrative creation (the defeated general is writing a suicide note); III. Emotional reaction to the imagined narrative (profoundly moved and grateful). Though this order seems intuitive, it must be noted that these steps do not occur chronologically. That is to say, the imagined narrative of the impending suicide influences the observation of the gun on the table and renders it crucially important. The underlying belief that suicide can be an honorable act in the face of defeat primes the narrator to receive cues in his environment which might make such an act come to fruition. These facts and observations do not work together to fabricate a myth but are partly produced by it.

But as the reader discovers, the narrator's assessment of the situation is completely false. The scene is one of banal correspondence; the pistol is merely a convenient paper weight. This realization robs the scene of its drama and "sens de la tragédie" while also allowing a convenient escape for the narrator who might otherwise need to answer for his complicity, or at least negligence, in a suicidal act. Instead he is able to lament not being witness to such an act of bravery, explaining, "Apparemment, on ne vivait pas dans le même univers, lui et moi. Je fus profondément dépité et découragé" (1: 814). It is an interesting turn of phrase Gary uses, "not living in the same universe," to describe the general and himself. The reader might suppose that the narrator is simply expressing that he has a more developed sense of tragedy and honor than this general, but if we push the reading a bit farther we can understand that this narrator is tracing instead

the limits of the mythic universe he inhabits, one set down in ink by Gary-author. This narrator, the character Romain Gary, indeed exists in a textual universe in which great tragedy and great honor exist. It is the universe in which truth that respects novelistic convention takes first billing over truth mirroring reality. Through the crafting of this narrative in the narrator's head, the importance of the story is in fact what did not take place—the most important story is that which never was.[89]

In many ways, the same can be said of the narrator and Gary himself—the former living in a universe created by the latter. The sleight of hand promised by autobiography is that these two universes are in fact one and the same; one is ostensibly a mere reflection of the other. But in this case, as the scholarship on Gary has shown, the divergence is too great. Consider again the scene of the general, imagined to be suicidal. One reading of *La Promesse de l'aube* is that it corrects the error the narrator imagines the general to have committed, the type made by a story favoring banality over tragedy. Gary's work is the realization of his imagination unconstrained by the type of follow-up done by the narrator when he attempts to confirm the general's suicide. That is not to say, however, that the work is pure fantasy. Indeed, as I affirmed earlier, the general trajectory and broad outlines are verifiably correct, just as is, say, the fact that the pistol sat on the

[89] We might consider this in terms of Gerald Prince's "disnarrated," defined as "cover[ing] all the events that do not happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (2). Gary's imagined scene of the suicide note appears to fulfill exactly the function of this narrative tactit: "The most important function of the disnarrated is a rhetorical/interpretive one ... When it pertains to the narrating one rather than the narrated, it ... signifies something like: 'This narrative is valuable because it follows a different and more interesting narrational strategy'" (5). However, this scenario in the text is not only a question of what might happen (the eventual suicide), but a mistaken perception of what is currently happening (i.e. the writing of the suicide note).

table within arm's length of the general. I do not believe that the narrator's profound disappointment over the general's non-attempted suicide is truly provoked by the gun not firing. Rather I read it as a disappointment with the worse story winning out, in spite, of course, of the obvious ethical troubles therein. It seems that Gary promises himself to never let such a story go to waste.

Pseudo

After *White Dog*, and *La Nuit sera calme*, which Gary acknowledges as autobiographically-inspired works, his next work written in the style of autobiography is *Pseudo*. *Pseudo* is not Romain Gary's autobiography, but Émile Ajar's. To understand the context of this work, some background on the "affaire Ajar" is necessary. Gary began work on his novel *Gros-Câlin* in the early 1970s and decided to once again create a new pseudonym as a way to, as Anissimov argues, "reprendre en secret le contrôle de son destin d'écrivain" (513). This new pseudonym was in response to Gary feeling boxed in by critics and the public to a certain kind of style and story. He thus "refusait de se laisser imposer son image par des critiques hostiles, parfois haineux" (Anissimov 513). But in contrast to Gary's earlier pseudonyms that were rather transparent masks through which Gary was largely visible, the circle of secrecy around Émile Ajar was kept incredibly tight. Only a handful of Gary's confidants were let in and he went so far as to have them sign non-disclosure agreements—that of his secretary reads in part, "Je me suis engagée à conserver le secret, M. Romain Gary voulant absolument empêcher que la véritable

identité de l'auteur soit connue" (qtd in Anissimov 516). *Gros-Câlin* is written in a style that would become known as signature Ajar: "une langue volontairement fautive, parsemée de calembours, d'anomalies de langage, d'incorrections délibérées, de mots employés pour d'autres ... syntaxe ... mise en pièces" (Anissimov 516). Gary, in a letter accompanying his manuscript delivered to Gallimard by a friend claiming that the author resided in Rio de Janeiro, makes it clear that the editors must "respecter les 'fautes' du manuscrit ... Les seules corrections d'épreuve à faire, c'est de vérifier la conformité typographique 'faute par faute' du manuscrit" (qtd in Anissimov 517). Gallimard sent the manuscript to four readers—one of whom, Raymond Queneau, noted that the writer was surely "un emmerdeur" but "le talent est certain." He ponders, "Qu'écrira-t-il ensuite ? La question se pose" (qtd in Annisimov 518). Not altogether convinced by its potential, Gallimard entrusted its eventual publication to Mercure de France in the fall of 1974. The novel sold well and generated some prize buzz, which Gary attempted to quash by relaying to his publisher, via intermediaries, that any prize would be refused. Critics immediately were skeptical of this "new" author and hypothesized about which well-known author might be behind the ruse—Louis Aragon and Raymond Queneau were oft-cited contenders—but no serious claims were founded. Michel Tournier famously rejected the hypothesis that Gary was Ajar, writing, "Cette 'supposition d'enfant' - aberrante si l'on compare le style et le ton des deux auteurs - se [justifia] plus ou moins par un lien de parenté" (343). In 1975 Gary had Ajar's second novel, *La Vie devant soi*, published and it became an immediate hit. The temperature mounted on the hunt for the identity of Émile Ajar and Gary asked Paul Pavlowitch, his cousin's son, to incarnate the

author in a meeting with Simone Gallimard, his publisher, and to do an interview with the critic Yvonne Baby, cultural editor for *Le Monde*. The hunt became even more frenzied following the novel's winning of the prix Goncourt, which, though Gary attempted to refuse it belatedly, the president of the committee, Hervé Bazin, noted is a prize which "ne peut ni s'accepter ni se refuser, pas plus que la naissance ou la mort" (qtd in Annisimov 559).

Once Paul Pavlowitch's relationship to Romain Gary was unearthed by the press, Gary began to feel the walls closing in on him. In a frenzy he decamped to Geneva where over the course of just ten days he penned Émile Ajar's third work, *Pseudo*, which recounts the invented life of Paul Pavlowitch, who, in the text, claims definitive ownership of the Ajar works. The narrator dismisses Gary as his distant and jealous "tonton Macoute." *Pseudo* was released in the winter of 1976 and Gary continued publishing works under his own name (*Au-delà de cette limite votre ticket n'est plus valable* in 1975 and *Claire de femme* in 1977). The ruse seemed to have had the effect of creating at least plausible deniability for Gary, while Pavlowitch luxuriated in newfound possibilities for a young, though allegedly deranged, celebrated author.

Pseudo purports to be the memoir of Paul Pavlowitch, writing under the name Émile Ajar, who is being treated for a bevy of mental disorders at a clinic in Copenhagen. It is, in fact, Romain Gary creating a fictional character named Paul Pavlowitch, who in turn is writing a memoir from the point of view of the fictional author Émile Ajar. Gary admits to having invented the contents of this memoir out of whole cloth, without consulting the real Paul Pavlowitch, who would go on later to write his own account of

the events in *L'Homme que l'on croyait*. Bellos summarizes the situation thusly: "Masquerading as the conscience of a schizophrenic pretending to be someone else in order to authenticate the real existence of a fictional author and the strictly autobiographical nature of his work, Gary can at last say what he means" (*Romain Gary* 110). But as I mentioned earlier, this work is written in the style of autobiography, two removes away from Gary. Despite this distance, as Anissimov points out, this work is "le plus autobiographique de Gary. Mais ce qui est raconté est exprimé dans un langage codé de telle sorte que le lecteur ne saisit que le premier degré de la narration, sans pouvoir atteindre les secrets qui sont pourtant portés des ténèbres au grand jour" (565). But whether or not one attempts a coded reading of the work, necessitating a comparison of this text with the known biographies of both Gary and Pavlowitch, which Gary makes use of for his fiction, the work is nevertheless important for its implied author. To return to the point that the narrator of *La Promesse de l'aube* makes, "un pseudonyme ne suffisait pas, comme moyen d'expression littéraire, et [il] fallait encore écrire des livres" (1: 625). By the time Gary crafts *Pseudo* he has created two memorable works of literature in *Gros-Câlin* and *La Vie devant soi*, as well as the seeds of the very memorable, if fictional, Émile Ajar. What he accomplishes next is to go back and fill in the pseudonym, creating a pseudonym so full the label no longer holds.

We find in *Pseudo* a number of familiar ideas from both Gary's fiction and his essay *Pour Sgnarelle*. In fact, there may be no narrator better suited to portray Gary's ideas on the novel than one suffering from schizophrenia. This type of figure, in fact, was already put to use in *La Danse de Genghis Cohn*. But this time, rather than a former Nazi

wrestling with the ghosts of his past, *Pseudo* deals with an author attempting to speak with a voice not his, through a body not his own. We might imagine *Pseudo* as the textual manifestation of a ventriloquist speaking through the dummy which is sitting on the lap of the dummy sitting on his lap. It is a work interested in understanding fractured identity as well as language, and the constraints and possibilities the latter offers to unify and further divide the former. Unlike *La Promesse de l'aube*, and the other works I have noted, Gary does not translate *Pseudo*. As I mention, it may be just that the invention of Ajar scratched the itch previously satisfied by translation. But an alternate reading could be that translation for Gary was a sort of failure, in that it did not create enough difference. Even in translation he could not escape himself, that "dreaded kingdom of I." This is echoed by the narrator of *Pseudo*, who towards the beginning of the work tells us, "J'ai tout essayé pour me fuir. J'ai même commencé à apprendre le swahili, parce que ça devait quand même être très loin de moi. J'ai étudié, je me suis donné beaucoup de mal, mais pour rien, car même en swahili, je me comprenais, et c'était l'appartenance" (2: 960). At the root of this linguistic evasion is the impossibility underlined by the narrator of "me fuir." The difficulty of escaping oneself is precisely that the self always tags along on the escape. Just as Gary has done with translations and original compositions in English in order to lose himself in a foreign land, the narrator here attempts to learn Swahili specifically for its foreignness and the promise that perhaps in this new language he might finally not understand himself. He was searching for a schism that language, no matter how foreign, could not afford him.

In *Pseudo*, language and identity are intricately woven, despite the narrator's best efforts to unravel them. But what is novel in this work is not the highlighting of this relationship, which has a tradition as long as literature itself, but rather the attempt to disidentify from oneself using language as a tool. That is to say, the narrator does not describe his attempts to exist outside of language, or to cultivate a type of personal language in the Wittgensteinian sense, but rather his attempt to use a new language that might act as the crowbar to separate him into object and speaker. He returns to this question again a dozen or so pages later, realizing that Swahili is not sufficiently foreign since so many people already speak it. He explains, "J'ai fait des études de linguistique, afin d'inventer une langue qui m'eût été tout à fait étrangère" (2: 971). That the narrator has recourse to the field of linguistics shows that the goal is not to create a nonsense language, but a comprehensible one, just not so to him. But this too results in failure as he discovers that he cannot escape the "haute surveillance" of his own brain.

But while our poor narrator struggles to speak so as to not understand, the text seems to suggest that Gary's solution to this problem of disidentification is to write as though not oneself. As the narrator attempts to tell his story, Gary takes the opportunity to speak of himself, as though he were Paul Pavlowitch. The descriptions of Gary, nicknamed Tonton Macoute by the narrator, are hardly flattering, taking aim at both his war record (alleging that he bombed civilians), his personality, and his writing. To summarize, "Tonton Macoute est un salaud" (2: 960). But there nevertheless exists a certain kinship in the text between the narrator and Gary who are, for better or worse, both writers. They are unwell and are under the care of a Danish doctor with rather

unusual practices. Among other things, he pushes the narrator towards writing as a therapeutic exercise. The narrator explains the stringent regimen: "Le docteur Christianssen m'encourageait à écrire neuf à dix heures par jour, pour diminuer les doses de réalité en les évacuant. Il disait que la littérature était pour moi une défécation salutaire. Je l'ai fait et il arrêta peu à peu toute autre médication" (2: 1015). Writing thus takes the place of antipsychotics, both having the effect of rendering reality more digestible and less present in his system. The result of this therapy, as we are told, is the creation of the two novels preceding *Pseudo* signed Emile Ajar, *Gros-Câlin* and *La Vie devant soi*. The writing, which is a means of evacuating these doses of unpleasant reality, takes the form of fiction. Perhaps this is fitting, as we should remember that these doses of reality that the narrator describes are fictional themselves, created by Gary to set the fictional scene for the composition of his fictional works. While the narrator deals with his problems, he is under the impression that Tonton Macoute is attempting to break an addiction to cigars. But later he learns that he is in fact under the doctor's care for another reason: "C'était pour parvenir à ne plus écrire" (2: 1021). The narrator and Gary are thus diametrically opposed—one learning to write to exorcise his demons, the other finding writing to be precisely this demon. Writing, in *Pseudo*, is the proverbial pharmakon: antidote and poison. But what we find is that the writing cannot stop, so curing Gary of his writing habit requires Ajar to take the pen from his hand. Indeed, how could we read the book by an author who is cured of his writing addiction?

It is thus in this hall of mirrors constructed by *Pseudo* where we must try to understand how Gary's conception of autobiography evolved from the seemingly simple

bygone period of *La Promesse de l'aube*, when he simply wrote himself as a character-narrator rather than uncle of imagined version of Paul Pavlowitch pretending to be Ajar. As I have suggested, we can read *Pseudo* as the next step of this evolution, begun at the dawn of his career, towards the pursuit of the mythic. But in this work, Gary takes a step back from translation to test out a different attempt of speaking outside himself.

Vie et mort de Romain Gary

The final step of Gary's evolving autobiographic project is his final work, *Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar*, which was written in the immediate period before Gary's suicide in 1980 and published posthumously. Unsurprisingly, this work was also left untranslated. The "affaire Ajar" was apparently not one Gary desired to share with his anglophone audience. He leaves the following instructions with the manuscript: "La date à laquelle ces révélations seront faites sera déterminée par Robert et Claude Gallimard en accord avec mon fils." The timing of these revelations was complicated by Paul Pavlowitch, the real one, preempting Gary's posthumous publications with that of his own work, *L'homme que l'on croyait*. In this book he tells the "Affaire Ajar" from his own perspective. Not wanting to have all the revelations scooped, Gallimard rushed into print Gary's own version of the events.

Gary opens this final work with several pages reproducing manuscript pages from *Gros-Câlin*, *La Vie devant soi*, and *L'angoisse du roi Solomon*. Such an opening seems to assert that there is no better proof of authorship than these words as they appear spilled

from the author's pen. This is not the first time Gary includes manuscript reproductions in his work as markers of authenticity—recall for example the note written by his mother at the end of *Promise of Dawn*— and it points to the importance Gary places on physical evidence. He meticulously collected evidence of his authorship of these works that he signed as Ajar as though anticipating the possibility of someone claiming to be the true Ajar. Anissimov details the numerous affidavits Gary had signed by nearly every individual aware of the true identity of Émile Ajar. And while it would seem that the goal of these sworn statements was to prevent the deception being revealed—evidenced by the affidavit cited earlier by Gary's secretary, "Je me suis engagée à conserver le secret, M. Romain Gary voulant absolument empêcher que la véritable identité de l'auteur soit connue" (qtd in Anissimov 516)—it seems that Gary's true intent was quite the opposite.[90] What mattered most in these statements for Gary, was to have assurances that his name would, after his death, take precedence over that of Ajar. He wanted one final spectacle for the public—a last juggling ball tossed in the air before they all crashed down. The statements thus served this dual purpose of concealing and revealing.

Returning to the manuscript pages with which Gary begins this work, they too, like the affidavits, function in a somewhat paradoxical way. If we take manuscript pages

[90] Indeed, these statements had no enforcement mechanisms and the affair itself was in a rather gray area legally. Had Gary siphoned money from the sales of Ajar novels into separate holdings as a means of tax evasion then there would have been grounds for prosecution, but I hope it is clear by now that the creation of Émile Ajar was not a sophisticated financial scheme, and there did not appear to be any malfeasance in the management of the Ajar sales. But even if laws were broken, we can imagine **that, should** one sign a statement swearing to not reveal a crime, upholding the statement would lead to more dire consequences than the alternative.

as proof of authorship, we do so with the assumption that they take temporal primacy over all other forms of the text. This assumption, which held true nearly for the history of letters until the dawn of the computer era, was that an author would write out by hand the story before it passed into typed or printed form. But not all writers compose with a pen. Especially in the final decade of his life, this was the case for Gary, who often dictated his prose to his secretary who dutifully recorded his words on a typewriter. The earliest pages of the Ajar novels thus were fed into the paper bail before having the words meticulously stamped onto them letter by letter. Paul Pavlowitch reveals in his memoir that Gary would later take these typed pages and rewrite them by hand, editing along the way, but nevertheless rewriting each word: "il recopiait, le soir, sur un cahier noir, la version définitive de son travail, mettant ainsi noir sur blanc les preuves de sa paternité d'auteur. Créant un original manuscrit" (78). This somewhat bizarre editorial process finds its echo in *Pseudo*, where the narrator tells the reader how he begged his Tonton Macoute to copy out the pages he, the narrator, wrote: "Je voudrais que tu recopies de ta main le début de ma *Vie*. Le commencement, *l'origine*. La genèse de l'œuvre…" (2: 1012). His desire was for Gary to assume paternity of the narrator by assuming authorship of *La Vie devant soi*, the origin of Émile Ajar, which he describes as "L'origine de ce que je suis, de ce que je subis" (2: 1012). Tonton Macoute initially rebuffs the narrator, refusing to "encourager [s]es fantasmes," but eventually gives in, following a failed suicide attempt by the narrator and the encouragement of Doctor Christianssen. "Il recopia tout le début, dans un cahier noir" (2: 1012). This short episode is telling and, with the benefit of hindsight, can be read as a sort of coded history for the

"Affaire Ajar" as a whole: *La Vie devant soi* births the author of *Pseudo*; when there are doubts about the existence of said author, *Pseudo* is written and published as pseudo-proof of his existence; it will require the successful suicide, not just the attempt, of the true author of the works for Gary to posthumously claim paternity. This moment in the text of the narrator begging for Gary to recopy his words reveals the tension Gary felt, needing at once to keep a distance from these novels while at the same time needing them in his own hand as proof they were his.

Vie et mort d'Émile Ajar is not an apology for deception but rather an explanation of why it was necessary and what the experience brought to the author. The reasoning Gary provides, however, is hardly new to those familiar with his corpus : from his essay *Pour Sganarelle* we learned of his "'besoin dévorant de [se] diversifier par de nouvelles et multiples identités" (12); and as he explained in his faux-interview, *La Nuit sera calme*, "C'est tellement vrai que mon *je* ne me suffit pas comme vie, et c'est ce qui fait de moi un romancier, j'écris des romans pour aller chez les autres" (156). These culminate in what he writes in his final work, "La vérité est que j'ai été très profondément atteint par la plus vieille tentation protéenne de l'homme : celle de la multiplicité" (2: 1435). This temptation of multiplicity was strong, strong enough that it merited the vice of duplicity in its pursuit. But the ethics of Gary's ruse are not central to this analysis of Gary's translation and autobiography. And moreover, as Christopher Miller concludes of the affair Ajar in his book *Impostors*, this literary hoax, unlike other case studies in his work, does not seem to have any victims. So perhaps it was a harmless affair after all.

However, Miller does caution us not to forget that Gary, in the end, died by his own hand and we should not confuse this with a sort of apotheosis of his literary project, even if that may be the impression Gary attempts to give. Recall the final line of Gary's final published text, "Je me suis bien amusé. Au revoir et merci" (2: 1441) which portrays the image of Gary bowing before his audience as the curtain falls on his final act. Even in what we may assume to be the final line Gary's pens, that of his suicide note, he expresses a sort of satisfaction: "Je me suis enfin exprimé entièrement." But of course this conclusion, in his typical style, remains ambiguous. Does Gary believe his full expression was done through this note, or perhaps his collected works, or might the suicidal act itself be the full expression? Miller cautions, "If it is tempting to represent his suicide as the happy conclusion of a gloriously successful hoax, we should remind ourselves that depression, paranoia, and terror were also behind it" (111). Gary's suicide was not the glorious conclusion of a Greek tragedy, like the scene he envisioned for the general who was in fact writing his correspondence, but rather the culmination of an increasingly heavy weight he bore.

But what *Vie et Mort d'Émile Ajar* does accomplish is the fusing of Gary's multiplicities into a single signature, that of Romain Gary. Indeed, what Gary envisions when he claims "Je me suis enfin exprimé entièrement" is to have corralled his many selves into a single enclosure, and, through his death, revealed their commonality. Consider it almost as a sort of Schrödinger's cat scenario, where inside the box cohabitate Romain Garys, Sinibaldis, Émile Ajars, John Markham Beachs, and a host of others. In life each is distinct and able to stand apart, but posthumously the intertexts and the

archives reveal them to have the same source. Gary's myth of Romain Gary, not unlike his use of Nadejda in *Éducation européenne*, unified a fractured narrative.

Gary's self-translation and style of telling his own story pushes back against the dictum that translation, like autobiography, must begin where it ends. That is to say, to write my autobiography, I begin at the beginning, in order to find myself at the end just as I left me. In translation as well, I must take what has been made, in order to begin anew, hoping to eventually write my way back to where the text finished. Conventional wisdom tells us that to reject this is to be unfaithful, to spurn the fidelity at the heart of, and constitutive of, these enterprises. But, of course, this conception of translation and self-writing ignores the fundamental changes that take place in the course of writing. To tell my story is to change my story, just as to translate a text is to change that text. Self-translators often do this unabashedly, offering us an alternative model, a sort of blueprint out of the trap of fidelity. The freedom we permit the self-translator gives us a glimpse of the possibility for the rest of us of tossing aside these shackles and writing life anew, again. In the case of Romain Gary, *Promise at Dawn* offers the promise of a recurrent dawn, whether in life or on the page. It is a dawn that wrests control away from the end of the story, eliminating its ability to dictate the beginning. Perhaps the lasting effect of translation, of having translated, is newness, of understanding that renewal is not only possible but necessary, and that there is never truly a final draft to your story.

CHAPTER FIVE: Nancy Huston's Unreadable Books

Nancy Huston is hard to find. She innovates across genres—from the expected: novels, essays, theater, poetry; to the surprising: children's books, film, and music. As we observe across a burgeoning set of authors in contemporary literature, many of her works are combinations, located on generic thresholds or margins. The characters in these texts come from across the globe and span generations: from 17th-century French peasants to North American Millennials. Like Huston herself, many are immigrants and few are monolingual. In the library at my guest institution, the Université de Paris Diderot, her novel *Lignes de Faille* is classified as a "roman canadien de langue française" and as such is shelved with the work of other non-French writers *d'expression française*. In contrast, at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* the novel can be found sandwiched between the works of the undisputedly French authors Michel Houellebecq and Régis Jauffret, alongside the rest of the books by French "auteurs du XXIe siècle."[91] Neither institution possesses *Fault Lines*, the novel Huston wrote first, in its holdings. Huston herself delights in being the rope in this tug-o-war between those trying to claim her for their side. The tension created manifests itself in her characters who are at once incredibly place-specific and yet universalized through translation. Discussing this need

[91] It should be noted that Michel Houllebecq was born outside metropolitan France, on Reunion Island. This chapter will not consider the thorny implications of designating a novel "French," or the related questions of "belonging," which, coincidentally, figure so prominently in Houllebecq's corpus.

to place her in a box, in the chapter titled "Traduttore non è traditore" she contributed to *Pour une littérature-monde*, she writes, "C'est tellement drôle, au fond." She quotes Québécois writer Michel Tremblay who, after Huston received the *prix Femina* for *Lignes de Faille*, declared, "on le prend un peu pour nous !" and then cites the Quebecois novelist of Chinese origin, Ying Chen: "Si vous devez me mettre des étiquettes, de grâce, mettez-m'en le plus possible" (152).

Few of the labels affixed to Huston have stuck. Her ambivalent relationship to language and insistence on self-translation means that classifying even her individual texts can be as challenging as her oeuvre at large. She writes in both her native English and adopted French and in interviews and essays has insisted that she composes her originals in the languages her characters would naturally speak given their setting. In the chapter quoted earlier she writes, "J'écris dans la langue que veulent bien parler mes personnages, j'écris les histoires qu'ils veulent bien me raconter, je les traduis de mon mieux en mots, scènes, dialogues et intrigues ; en les lisant, chacun de mes lecteurs les traduit à nouveau dans sa langue ou plutôt ses langues à lui, celle qu'il reconnaît, celles qui l'aident à vivre et à comprendre ce qu'il vit" (155).[92] Translation is thus a central feature to her work though she occasionally prefers instead to employ the term rewriting, as was the case when she defended her novel *Cantique des plaines*'s winning the

[92] One might hear in this the final lines of Baudelaire's poem "Les Fenêtres": "Qu'importe ce que peut être la réalité placée hors de moi, si elle m'a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis ?" It is perhaps a nod to translation's role, like fiction's, in bringing about a better understanding of self and place.

Canadian Governor's General Award for best original novel in French, which she first wrote in English as *Plainsong* and which tells the story of an Anglophone family in Western Canada.

In Huston's corpus—as for Green, Beckett, and Gary—translation cannot be considered an ancillary practice to her original composition, but unlike for these other authors (Beckett slightly excepted) much, if not the majority, of the scholarly attention devoted to her writing focuses on the question of translation and bilingualism. Translation can be an external operation performed on a text (as is the standard case) and criticism of this necessarily includes engaging with multiple texts: translation(s) and original(s). But translation also figures importantly in many of Huston's works on a diegetic level in the form of translation as theme. Given the preponderance of bi or polylingual characters in her fiction, the need for translation often arises within her fictional worlds and functions within the story to create friction between characters or problematize individual identities. Though I engage with both of these aspects of Huston's writing, my focus here will be on a third (but not completely separate) manifestation of translation: translation as a structuring metaphor in the form of Huston's unreadable books.

Unreadable Books and their Translations

Admittedly, the term unreadable is slightly provocative. Unreadable can be defined in a number of ways ranging from connotations about the intelligibility of the

writing (this jargon is unreadable!) to the material conditions which permit the decipherment of language (this is chicken scratch!). Neither of these applies to Huston's writings and I could just as well have chosen the adjective inaccessible. Of course, this too would have created unwanted and unwarranted implications about her texts and so, since many of Huston's characters are readers themselves, I will persist with the choice of unreadable. By unreadable I will be referring to the prominent texts that exist in some form or another, usually within the fictional space of the novels, but that are not presented to the reader. The unreadable texts which will be my focus are those in Huston's novels which bear the brunt of the structural enterprise of the novel but are nevertheless absent from their pages and do not exist in reality.

At first glance this may seem like a vast category. Are works of criticism not books about texts that are not in the books?[93] That is to say, the primary source does not reappear in its entirety in a scholarly book. Yes, but the reader of Pierre Bourdieu's *Les Règles de l'art* can with little difficulty also attain and read Gustave Flaubert's *Éducation sentimentale*. Turning to fiction, we might also consider a work like Azar Nafisis' *Lolita in Tehran* or Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, which similarly focus on a preexisting novel or text with which readers likely are acquainted (Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and Aristotle's *Poetics* respectively). Works like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or

[93] There are, inevitably, exceptions to this in that they include the commented-upon texts within their pages. Roland Barthes' *S/Z* and Léon Bopp's *Commentaire sur Madame Bovary* are just two such examples. The category is further complicated by the status of critical editions. For a discussion of the latter see Jordan Stump's *The Other Book*.

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* may be said to be books about books, but in no way take one specific work as their genesis, nor does it really matter whether the books referenced in the novels are real or imagined. By this I mean that, of course, analyses of the intertextuality of these works are illuminating but whether the books referenced in such a text are named or not is not narratively destabilizing.

This category of the unreadable also does not include a diary novel, like Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*, nor is it a novel like Beckett's *Malone meurt* where the protagonist pens a story. In these works we have access to the written diary or the embedded text. Works like Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *La Sombra del viento*, Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's 2021 prix Goncourt-winning novel *La Plus secrète mémoire des hommes*, or Henry James' "The Figure in the Carpet" come closer to our subject since they tell the stories of central characters who become infatuated with books and their authors that do not exist outside the fictional space of the novel and that the reader cannot access within the fictional space. But these novels are more about the search for a novel (or for its meaning, in the case of the James short story) than about the novel itself. Closer yet would be a novel like Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, which includes a character writing a novel by the same name and forcing the reader to question the distinction between original and copy. But none of these precisely meet the criteria of fictional and unreadable.

Finally, we might also consider novels in the tradition of the "found manuscript," in which the author alleges to carry out the role of editor and/or commentator on texts they did not pen, for example Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* or Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Similarly, something like an *un*found manuscript, in which the author reconstructs a text

which has been lost, also provides interesting parallels—think of Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien,* in which the author writes a pseudo-memoir replacing a real memoir lost to the sands of time. Interestingly enough, perhaps the best analogues to Huston's unreadable books can be found in medieval traditions. Notions of authorship from these earlier periods differ greatly from our modern conceptions and thus the borderlines between original, copy, plagiarism, and revision are oftentimes impossible to draw distinctly. Indeed, there are many examples of writers—Marie de France writing *Les Lais* for example, or nearly any of the writers of the *chansons de geste* who claim simply to transcribe their writing from stories passed down in an oral tradition. This claim is sometimes dubious, called into question by modern scholars believing that the purported pre-text never existed and that the text is pure invention existing as a pseudo-transcription.[94]

The novels that this chapter will principally address are *Trois fois septembre* and *Cantique des plaines*. I have selected these two based upon their unreadable texts in the forms of diaries written by deceased characters. A tandem reading thus proves mutually beneficial. But before examining these novels I will first briefly outline them and the three other novels in Huston's corpus that contain unreadable books: *Instruments des ténèbres*, *Lignes de faille*, and *Danse noire*.[95] Each of these novels is built, at least partly,

[94] See for example Mary Franklin-Brown's chapter on Raymond Llul in her book *Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing of the Scholastic Age*.
[95] Huston's first novel, *Les Variations Goldberg*, also takes an external source as a fundamental structure: Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Though there is much to be said about this structuring principle and its interaction with her translation of the novel, since the external text (symphonic composition) is not fictional and can be accessed by the reader, this work does not figure into the current study.

on the structure of a work that does not exist in reality. *Trois fois septembre* recounts a mother-daughter weekend spent reading aloud the diary of the daughter's recently deceased best friend. As explained earlier, since the diary is written in English but the main character's mother is French, the text is a transcription of a spontaneous oral interpretation from English into French by the main character. The reader thus does not have access to the diary that is the basis for the novel. Our engagement with the text is triply mediated by the movement from (I) text to speech: written diary to reading aloud; (II) speech to text: spoken words transcribed as a novel; and (III) English to French. In *Cantique des plaines*, a granddaughter tells the story of her grandfather, mostly in the style of second-person narration, by making use of his incomplete and sometimes illegible diary. The immediacy of the unreadable text is diminished in this novel and the reader becomes aware of the greater liberty taken by the narrator to reconstruct the story. Winner of the *prix Femina*, *Lignes de faille* takes for subject four generations of a family, the first of which immigrated to North America. The book is divided into four parts, each narrated in the first person by a six-year-old from successive generations moving in reverse chronological order. The third narrator, therefore the grandmother of the first narrator, becomes an academic who writes a book about the Nazi program *Lebensborn*, a key event of the novel. The reader is far removed from this unreadable text since it is only discussed when her son narrates, since when she herself narrates it is twenty years before the book project begins and before she has any awareness of the importance of the *Lebensborn* in her family history. In Huston's *Danse noire* the unreadable text is a film in production. In a Montreal hospital bed our protagonist lies dying from complications of

AIDS while he and his partner, a famed director, sketch plans for a film that tells the stories of his life and of his immediate family. The reader is constantly aware that the narrative is constrained by the limits of a cinematic production (even the costs involved) as well as the little time the protagonist has left to participate in the project. Finally, *Instruments des ténèbres* weaves together the journal of a writer-narrator in present day New York in the process of composing a story taking place in 17th-century Berry, France. This novel does not contain exactly the type of unreadable book within the narrative that I have outlined above but is worth mentioning nevertheless. The narrator's writing is presented to the reader in alternating chapters along with her diary. It was composed originally in both French and English—the embedded narrative taking place in France written in French and the frame narrative of the writer in New York City written in English. Huston translated both halves for simultaneous publication in each language. Therefore, the unreadable book in this case is the bilingual original that the reader cannot access. The book, as it is sold and presented to the public, only exists half-translated. In addition to these novels I will also treat some of Huston's more autobiographical works: *Nord Perdu*, *Les Lettres parisiennes* (cowritten with Leïla Sebbar), *Bad Girl*, and *Lèvres de pierre*.

I contend that the proliferation of unreadable books within the texts composing Huston's corpus is no coincidence and relates directly to Huston's ardent commitment to self-translation. Three of these novels have been translated by the author herself either from French to English (*Danse noire* to *Black Dance*) or English to French (*Plainsong* to *Cantique des plaines* and *Fault Lines* to *Lignes de faille*). *Trois fois septembre*, which,

ironically, is a story of translation, has never been translated into English. As explained above, *Instruments des ténèbres* has a unique publication history. Though already a rich collection of self-translated writings, this corpus is only a sampling of Huston's large body of bilingual texts. Indeed she ranks highly among the most prolific writers working in both French and English and may soon top the list as the number of her translated texts continue to grow. The importance of translation in Huston's overall project comes across in myriad aspects (theme, character traits, stylistics) and her frequent inclusion of unreadable texts must be included and understood among them. It functions as an engagement with translation in the narratives and makes the reader confront the presence of a structuring force which remains absent from the page. For an author like Huston, whose writing career began in her non-native language and has since become inextricable from either her adopted French or native English, I believe we must not read all her texts, as she claims they are, as originals, but rather read each one as already in translation. Each text anticipates the encounter with the alterity of its other form and makes space for it within itself. I argue that these novels outlined above are constructed on the basis of an intradiegetic text functioning metonymically for Huston's self-translation. That is to say, these interior, fictional texts in her novels act as stand-ins for the act and effects of translation.

One of the most enduring distinctions in translation theory is that between what have come to be called practices of foreignization and domestication. In the seminal 1813 essay on this topic, "On the Different Methods of Translating" by German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, two methods to best unite foreign author and

domestic reader are outlined: "to bring together these two quite separate persons ... to acquire as correct and complete an understanding of and take as much pleasure in the writer as possible ... Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him" (49). The movement of reader towards author creates a foreignizing translation in which readers must confront a text containing a sort of palpable alterity which might manifest itself in unusual lexical or stylistic choices giving a flavor of the foreign. Translators rarely choose this method and instead opt for the latter movement, which we label domesticating. The goal of a domesticating translation, as we have seen in the letter from André Gide quoted in the first chapter, is to create a text "showing the author not as he himself would have translated but the way that he as a German would have written originally in German" (Schleiermacher 49). A perfect execution of this method would be undetectable as a translation and allows the reader to stay safe inside his domestic bubble.[96]

Huston pops this bubble. Reading her novels one frequently gets the sensation of not quite being at home, a sensation familiar to Huston. This is most apparent through her inclusion of cosmopolitan characters and the polylingualism appearing in so many of her texts either through direct inclusion of foreign words and phrases in the dialogue or through markers of non-native speech in character's utterances. Indeed the reader feels

[96] This once more points to the question of visibility as discussed in Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*.

displaced as a direct result of the characters' having been uprooted. Perhaps the best example of this can be found in Huston's 1998 novel *L'Empreinte de l'ange* which takes place in postwar Paris and features recent German and Hungarian immigrants who communicate in French. In both Huston's English and French versions of the novel, there is an abundance of linguistic intrusions in six languages: German, Hungarian, Latin, Italian, French, and English. But rather than overwhelm the readers, forcing them to lose the thread of the narrative, this polylingualism recreates the reality for these characters who navigate the world (*a világ*, *die Welt*, *le monde*, etc…) in precisely such a fashion.[97]

This polylingualism is just one of the foreignizing apparatuses Huston employs, but she is innovative in her quest to uproot the readers and create layers of mediation between them and the text. Another of her tools is translation, which makes its presence known both within and outside of the narrative space. In the novels at study here, the unreadable text creates an initial layer of distance by disallowing the reader access to the source text that the narrator puts forward as motivation for the narrative. Occasionally these source texts are intradiegetically translated (interlingual) in order for the reader to understand and engage with them. Other times they are adapted and transformed. But in each case, except for *Trois fois septembre*, the novel eventually exists in two versions penned by the same hand. And thus this external translation (occurring outside the narrative) builds a second mediating layer between reader and source text. Rather than

[97] For a detailed description of this aspect of the novel see Genevieve Waite's "Nancy Huston's Polyglot Texts: Linguistic Limits and Transgressions."

transparency, Huston valorizes distance and friction in her stories. She writes extensively about this preference, notably in her three collected volumes of essays: *Désirs et réalités: textes choisis 1978-1994*, *Âmes et corps: textes choisis 1981-2003*, and *Carnets de l'Incarnation: Textes choisis 2002-2015*, and relates it to her experiences being abroad and living in a foreign language. Some background will therefore be important before looking at the texts proper.

Huston was born in Calgary, Alberta in 1953. The great expanses of western Canada figure prominently into many of her works, especially some of her more recent endeavors to understand the ecological impact of oil production in the region—for example her novel *Le club des miracles relatifs* (2016) or her contribution to the essay collection *Brut* (2015). Huston has been criticized for some of her more provocative remarks about western Canada, notably that she comes from a place with no culture.[98] At six years old, her parents separated and her mother left to pursue a doctorate in psychology in the United States. Though Huston was unable to see her mother frequently during her childhood, the two maintained a regular epistolary correspondence. Her father was quickly remarried to a German woman with whom Huston, as a young girl, spent six months in Germany. This childhood exposure allowed her to acquire a strong command of German and was her first experience with a foreign language. At age 15 she moved with her family moved to New Hampshire where her father had accepted a teaching job

[98] She also writes, "Je trouve que vivre à l'étranger m'a civilisée" (*Lettres parisiennes* 25).

at a private high school which Huston would also attend. Upon graduation, she spent some time working odd jobs (secretary in a psychiatric practice, restaurant worker, nude model, one afternoon as a masseuse...) before attending Sarah Lawrence College. Her junior year was spent abroad in Paris where she became involved in politically-active student groups promoting Marxist ideals. She returned briefly to the US to complete her senior thesis, a Marxist critique of classical music, and then returned to France where she would complete a Master's thesis on curse words and cultural taboos under the tutelage of Roland Barthes. Her first entry into professional writing came through writing articles in feminist reviews (*Sorcières***,** *Histoires d'Elles*, *Les Cahiers du GRIF*). She describes this experience as liberating, both for the possibility of being able to have her thoughts shared with an audience as well as for the experience of writing in her non-native French. In her early years of writing nearly all her original compositions were done in French and she has lived permanently in Paris since the early 1970s. She published her first novel, *Les Variations Goldberg*, in 1981. To date she has published 16 novels, as well as many essays, plays, short stories, children's books, translations, and even two screenplays. Nearly all her novels and many essays were self-translated.

Though having accumulated a number of literary awards—mainly in France but also in Canada, as well as, unfortunately, the British "Bad Sex in Fiction" award given to *Infrarouge*—Huston's own output dwarfs the critical work analyzing her corpus. To date there has only been a single book-length study devoted to her, *Vision/Division* published in 2004, which collects a number of essays grouped into the categories of reception, identity, art/life, and form. In December 2018 the journal *Nottingham French Studies*

compiled a special issue devoted solely to Huston, encompassing a wide range of themes from motherhood to ecology. Apart from these longer studies, the most comprehensive look at Huston's corpus appears as a chapter in Sara Kippur's book *Writing It Twice: Self-translation and the making of a world literature in French*, which focuses on Huston's self-translations and translingualism. Kippur argues that Huston's work reflects a broader trend of making evident the effects of globalism in daily life and art: "The use of language itself becomes, in that sense, an identifiable and central topos–one that enables Huston to render modernist ideals accessible to a mainstream reading public sympathetic to the realities of multilingual identity in the contemporary world" (44). Though, as the earlier examples attest to, the situation has slightly improved, as recently as 2009 Carolyn Shread argued that "[Huston's] work still suffers from exclusion in the field of self-translation… even though her work [is] one of the most celebrated literary phenomena in France." She cites the fact that two recent works in the field of self-translation studies, Jan Hokenson and Marcella Munson's 2006 work *The Bilingual Text* and Michaël Oustinoff's *Bilingualisme d'écriture et auto-traduction*, make no mention of Huston despite the fact that the authors are scholars of French literature (56). I will not speculate on reasons for Huston's omission from these texts but I proffer as a sign of hope the collection *L'Autotraduction littéraire*, edited by Alessandra Ferraro and Rainier

Grutman, which includes mention of Huston in nearly every chapter. This perhaps signals the beginning of a correction to the overlooking of Huston's bilingual work.[99]

Though all quite unique formally and taking different geographical spaces for setting, Huston's novels nearly all center on a few themes for which biographical criticism can be convincingly explanatory. Huston's characters are often immigrants, many speak more than one language, and there are often mothers neglecting responsibility. These may all be understood as different manifestations of absence: missing (a) home, searching for the right word, and losing a mother. Huston's insistence on evoking absent figures in her narratives takes on even greater significance in her novels structured around an unreadable book. For example, the absent figures of the deceased who leave behind diaries make their presence felt only through evocations of their absence—we are made aware of them precisely where they are not. Understanding the role of these hidden texts within the novels can benefit from considering Jordan Stump's work, *The Other Book: Bewilderments of Fiction*, which examines this question of presence across various iterations of books. Stump takes Queneau's novel *Le Chiendent* as his case study for an examination of how we understood the delimiting factors of a book and what exactly we mean when we say that we have read such and

[99] It is also noteworthy that, of the twenty contributors to *Vision/Division* and the *NFS* issue, all but three are women. This could be read neutrally–scholarship by men of course does not validate an author's worth–but it may also signal that Huston suffers from the unfortunately common belief that writing focused on women interests only women. It may also be indicative of a broader trend of female authors being neglected regardless of the themes and types of writing they produce.

such novel. His book is divided into four sections: the manuscript, the translation, the copy, and the critical edition. Though each of these can be considered "the book," they are also something other. He explains in his introduction, "neither a manuscript nor a translation is precisely the same thing as the book itself, but each has a certain relationship with that book, all the same. The manuscript and the translation are both close to the book, and at the same time somewhat distant: just distant enough to create a kind of friction when the two are allowed to rub up against each other" (7). He further clarifies that he is not examining what Genette might call paratext since these "other" books stand in for the book itself and are not texts constituting and framing the book for a reader.

Stump explains that the genesis for his project was reading pieces of Queneau's manuscript that do not figure in the published version, an experiences he likens to spying on a good friend and seeing him do something unexpected. Whereas it might not change the relationship, it nevertheless has a certain effect. When examining in detail the diverse substitutes for *a* book (copy, translation, etc.), which we nevertheless collapse into a singular entity of *the* book, we are forced to confront questions of unknowability or completeness. In his conclusion, Stump offers us the following,

> But once books began to be printed— and particularly once copyright law was established— a story became conflated with the specific words used to narrate it. And with this conflation comes, paradoxically, a sort of scission: the book is now partly events or ideas and partly words, partly a force and partly an object, and— barring the (I dearly hope) unlikely possibility that print culture might one day vanish forever— there is no turning back. (258)

These stories, even those with which we are the most familiar, nevertheless are separated from their tellers and from their telling and can exist independently. Their iterations can masquerade as perfect substitutes for one another but upon closer examination are no such thing. Though Stump's conception of the "other book" does not align perfectly with my object of study for Huston's unreadable books, it nonetheless can be fruitfully applied. While the materially real "other books" Stump examines are stand-ins for a final, published book, Huston's published texts are in essence stand-ins for texts which do not exist–e.g. *Trois fois septembre* as a stand-in for the diary read aloud in it. As readers we are asked to believe that what we read has been called into being by another text within the narrative universe. There is thus a sort of fictional reversal taking place between the relationship which Stump identifies with these other books and the book, and what Huston's readers must accept.

Trois fois septembre

In my brief summary of Huston's novel *Trois fois septembre*, I underlined the importance of the unreadable diary in the narrative, but the complement to this unreadability for the reader is the diary's inherent readability for the main character.[100] Indeed the majority of the novel is a transcription of the words spoken and adeptly translated into French by the protagonist Solange but originally written in diary form by

[100] From here forward I will abbreviate the title as *Tfs*.

her friend Selena in English. Solange reads aloud in French for the benefit of her mother, Renée, who immigrated to New Hampshire from Paris with her daughter three years before the story, which begins in 1971. The purported goal of this marathon reading session, which takes place over the course of a weekend, is for the two women to better understand the circumstances and state of mind leading up to Selena's recent suicide. The bulk of the story details the two girls' friendship formed at the boarding school where Renée teaches French. There is a stark division between the bucolic setting of the school—newspapers and the like are not actually allowed on campus—and the turmoil in late 1960s American society and most notably the war in Vietnam. In her diary Selena details her romantic involvement with a classmate, the bright, young Jonathan. After graduation Selena and Solange move to Boston but Jonathan is drafted and sent to Vietnam. The pressures of an unstable family, an uncertain future, and the peril of war faced by her fiancé take a toll on Selena and she becomes obsessed with comparing herself to Solange, whose life seems so relatively simple and bright; Selena frequently highlights the connection between the words Solange and *soleil* (the connection between Selena's name and the Greek goddess of the moon is not made explicit). As Selena's mental health declines, the diary depicts her descent into delusional thoughts linking mundane events in her own life with the horrific events happening in Vietnam. She eventually convinces herself that Jonathan has died and in her grief hangs herself from a maple tree in Harvard Yard.

Exceptionally for Huston, she never translated this novel. This could be explained by her belief that, "le livre n'est pas bon; mon éditeur le rejette" (*Âmes* 26). But despite

the fact that the novel does not figure among Huston's best-known works, it nevertheless cannot be ignored when trying to understand Huston's relationship to translation. The linguistic premise of the novel is highly paradoxical. It is as much a novel about translation as it is about anything else and despite (or perhaps because of) this, the story approaches the limits of untranslatability while at the same time being a testament to the possibility of translation. Frequently throughout the story, on 21 separate occasions in fact, Solange and Renée bring our attention to the language and the practice of translation.[101] We understand that Solange, ostensibly owing to having immigrated at a younger age than her mother, has a much stronger command of idiomatic expressions and American slang. The novel highlights that certain of these are quite difficult to render in French, no doubt an issue Huston herself worked through in the very composition of the text. In a potential translation, the story would quickly become contrived. The characters commenting on the difficulty of rendering English words like "raunchy" into French would be without interest for a text already translated into French. Translation is the adventure of the story.[102] And yet, to render an analogous scenario, Huston would have to change nearly everything about setting and characters: two Americans living in France

[101] The metacommentaries on translation occur on the following pages and in parentheses I have indicated a keyword indicating the word or expression in question: 24 (interpret), 32 (misspelling), 39 (nutmeg), 42 (raunchy), 44 (floor), 78 (jews-harp), 80 (love lost), 94 (cup runneth over), 111 (break a leg), 118 (whippoorwill), 120 (leaf leaves), 138 (WASP), 140 (pound the pavements), 144 (psychiatrist), 145 (grunts), 165 (my rifle swung low), 167 (dildos), 176 (thunderstruck), 188 (French intrusion), 201 (hair), 202 (facts of life).

[102] This intradiegetic translation contrasts strongly with how the self-translators we have studied so far describe the practice. Beckett, for example, wrote that the translation of *Molloy* was, "an indigestion of old work with all the adventure gone" (2: 407).

reading aloud in English the diary of a French girl whose boyfriend has been sent to war, perhaps in Algeria? This would at once be the same story and a completely different one.

Despite the fact that *Tfs* is written in French and has only ever appeared in this format, Huston nevertheless characterizes it as a novel written in a period of transition. Her first novel to appear in English, *The Story of Omaya*, was written two years before *Tfs* and was a translation of her French novel, *Histoire d'Omaya*. Four years later, in 1993, Huston at last publishes a novel composed originally in English, *Plainsong*. But for Huston, *Tfs* allows for a reintroduction to her native language. In an interview published in 2001 she explains "c'est le roman de la transition. C'est-à-dire que l'on est déjà aux États-Unis ... Donc je l'ai écrit en français, mais c'est déjà un français pervers, si j'ose dire, car tout est censé être traduit au fur et à mesure. Je disais déjà que je vais vers la langue anglaise, n'est-ce pas ? Ce texte est « fictivement » en anglais, même si on le lit en français" (qtd in Merrigan 471). Huston's fictional English thus requires us to read as though the text were in translation and thus creates a sort of bridge between her French and English texts at the moment where she claims to be going "vers la langue anglaise." In an article examining *Tfs*, Marie-Claire Merrigan argues that Huston's readers should pay special attention to the pseudo-translation at play in Huston's text. These instances of pseudo-translation, a translation that only exists at a diegetic level as opposed to the quite literal translations Huston effects, appear throughout Huston's oeuvre but *Tfs* is undoubtedly its quintessential example. Merrigan concludes,

> La pseudo-traduction ne réfère donc plus à un cas de supercherie, mais à *une mise en scène du geste traductif* par une auteure désireuse de légitimer sa position changeante au sein du champ littéraire au moment où elle est passée du statut

> d'écrivaine monolingue, voire francophone, à celui d'écrivaine bilingue, voire auto-traductrice. Nous sommes donc confrontés à une *dramatisation* du passage d'une forme d'écriture à une autre, sous forme d 'un texte pseudo-traduit. (427)

Undoubtedly Huston's text dramatizes the act of translation and is thus in and of itself a performance of translation. And it is an incredible one at that, perhaps unbelievably so, in which Solange is able to not only continually read aloud during the course of an entire weekend (the characters only take brief naps aided by caffeine in various forms) but simultaneously interpret every word. Anyone who has ever fumbled over the words trying to spontaneously translate aloud just a paragraph of text can attest to the Herculean task accomplished in the novel. It is nevertheless unclear whether this represents Huston attempting a dramatization of her own transition from monolingual writer to bilingual writer.

In an essay in which Huston delineates periods of her writing career, she again evokes *Tfs* as a transition novel and yet again describes the language as perverse: "un retour vers les origines et vers la langue anglaise. Le livre incarne une position linguistique presque perverse" (*Âmes* 17). "Almost perverse" is a surprising turn of phrase to describe a linguistic homecoming but is apt since the novel remains in a self-imposed liminal space. In the essay quoted, Huston divides her career into different phases and places *Tfs* in the "quatrième phase: théorie et fiction en alternance bancale." In the chronology of her work *Tfs* needs to be understood not only as a novel written between English and French but also somewhere between fiction and theory. Having arrived as a young student in Paris in 1973, Huston initially dreamed of a career as a novelist but was rebuffed in her milieu for having bourgeois aspirations. Her début was

thus more politically and theoretically oriented and throughout the 70s and early 80s she was both a student and teacher of semiotics and feminist theory. Her first two books attest to this focus: *Jouer au papa et à l'amant* and *Dire et interdire : éléments du jurologie*. But her desire to write novels never subsided and she found such an engagement with theory to be untenable; in order to write fiction she needed freedom from its theorization. She explains, "s'il fallait résumer en une phrase ce phénomène de 'décristallisation' théorique, je le ferais ainsi: en fin de compte, à la différence des savants, je crois en l'existence de l'amour, et non seulement du 'discours amoureux'. A partir de là, je peux faire des romans" (27). She even represents this process of decrystallization in her fiction—for example in *Instruments des ténèbres* when the narrator, criticizing a former lover and his entourage, writes, "mais ce cerveau a absorbé tant de théorie française contemporaine (Lacan, Barthes, Derrida et alii) qu'il ne croit plus à la réalité : tout est Discours" (187). These theoreticians and academics make appearances throughout Huston's corpus and, unsurprisingly, they are rarely sympathetic figures and prize abstract concepts over human relationships.[103] Huston creates them to discredit them and make clear that their heady discourse has fundamentally different goals from those of her novels. She explains, "Il y a une divergence profonde, voire une incompatibilité radicale, entre écrire un roman et réfléchir sur les structures romanesques. Pour écrire un roman, il faut ne pas trop savoir ce qu'on fait" (31).

[103] Huston expounds further on this in her long essay with the evocative title, *Professeurs de désespoir*.

But this was of course not always Huston's stance. Huston's first novel, *Les Variations Goldberg*, appropriates the structure of Bach's Goldberg variations by changing the narrative viewpoint for each of the thirty variations (as well as the introductory and concluding arias). It is a novel focused on form and theory. Summarizing the novel, Huston writes, "il ne s'y passe rien et… tout" (*Âmes* 22). In her second novel, *Histoire d'Omaya*, Huston crafts the story of a young woman whom the reader assumes to have been sexually assaulted. The narrative is composed of pieces of testimony, intense descriptions, monologue and dialogue, all overlapping to create a sort of phantasmagoria of raw emotion that might remind readers of Samuel Beckett's *Pas moi*, the short theatrical piece which opens chapter two of this dissertation. *Tfs* is thus not only a bridge between languages but one between these more experimental texts and those considered more conventionally novelistic.[104]

But the question of language and form cannot be easily uncoupled and even Huston herself seems to conflate the two in her descriptions of *Tfs*. In the quotation cited above, she writes that *Tfs* is the "roman de la transition" and therefore "je l'ai écrit en français." She explains further that "ce texte est 'fictivement' en anglais." It seems clear that "le roman," the direct object in "je l'ai," and "ce texte" are all referring to the same entity, but a careful reader of the novel would have to disagree with such a

[104] This is a convenient distinction to make but not one altogether correct. Huston continues to write formally complex and genre-bending texts. As we will see, her 2014 work *Bad Girl* is an "intrauterine" autobiographical text, meaning that the narrator speaks to herself while still inside her mother.

characterization. *Tfs* is not "fictivement en anglais" at all since we understand the dialogue between daughter and mother, as well as the narration, occur in French. Moreover, Huston's novels are littered with anglophones speaking French, or vice versa, which we might understand as "fictivement en anglais," but here this is not the case. Rather it is Selena's diary which might better earn that description. This unreadable diary is not equivalent to Huston's very readable novel. But the fact that Huston confounds the two is quite telling and justifies an exploration to obtain a deeper understanding of the relationship between them.

Selena's diary begins with a short note addressed directly to Solange in French in which she tells her that she can do what she likes with these papers and that the order is of little importance. She concludes, "cela je te le dis dans ta langue à toi/langue de feu/mais à partir de maintenant/tu dois interpréter." Solange's mother expresses surprise at the use of the verb *interpréter* and Solange assures her, "elle doit vouloir dire traduire" (24). This short response sets the stage for the novel. The verb *interpréter*, according to *Le Petit Robert*, can mean "expliquer, rendre clair" or "traduire oralement en tant qu'interprète." Sara Kippur points to the latter definition and shows that Selena's use of the verb is in fact prescient since what Solange will do is an oral interpretation of the diary (35). While this is true, we should also notice the slight irony in the fact that Solange's interpretation (in the latter definition of the word) is of the word *interpret* itself. This short piece of text written in the diary is one of the rare occasions where we nearly access Selena's original words, since in this instance they are in the language Renée understands, and given the fact that this first interpretation is somewhat dubious

the reader should be cautioned that Solange's interpretation may not be completely trustworthy. But also of note is the last definition of *interpréter* given in the dictionary "jouer d'une manière personnelle," as in what an actor does for a role. This too seems apt for what is about to take place over the course of the weekend at Renée's home. The emotional toll of Selena's suicide coupled with the strain of 48 hours of simultaneous translation on little sleep put both Renée and Solange into altered states that allow for a closer connection to the diary, as Selena descends into her own state of madness. This overexerted state of consciousness apparently came from the circumstances of the composition of the novel. Huston remarks, "l'écriture de *Trois fois septembre* me plonge dans l'insomnie et les somnifères me conduisent au bord de l'effondrement mental" (*Âmes* 26). Ironically, Huston craved sleep while her characters did all they could to fight against it: "Tu m'as laissée dormir ! ... Oh ! Maman… pourquoi m'as-tu laissée dormir ?" (132). But in both cases the deprivation left them all teetering on the edge of sanity, peering over the ledge at where Selena would forever rest. This tridimensional mirroring of author (Huston), narrating voice (Solange), and narrating writer (Selena) seems almost like a sort of method acting. To get inside the psyche of the suicidal character both interpreters of her story, Huston and Solange, need to bring themselves to a desperate state of being.

Of course, the temporary deprivation of sleep does not have the same effects as a mental disorder which might cause one to commit suicide, but fiction requires both reader and writer to interpret their roles. Moreover, this playacting done by Huston and Solange does not exist aside from the translation but is rooted within it. The way in which Solange

takes Selena's words—written in a different time, place, and language—and speaks them herself brings to mind an actress reciting her text. A successful interpretation makes the audience forget that the text exists at all and that these spoken words are existing for the first time. But this is of course not the case for the reader of *Tfs*. The metacommentaries sprinkled throughout the text create enough friction between the unreadable diary and Solange's oral interpretation for the reader to be constantly aware of the setup. The novel is not Selena's story but a story about her story, a fact that becomes blurred when Huston speaks about the text being "fictivement en anglais." Thus the theatrical nature of the text is highly self-referential.

This type of play, both in the theatrical and recreational sense of the term, brings to mind Huston's writings on being an immigrant. She is acutely aware of the importance of theater in her life both as a woman (women are natural born actors, she says) and as an immigrant. In her autobiographical text, *Nord Perdu*, she writes, "choisir à l'âge adulte ... de quitter son pays ... c'est accepter de s'installer à tout jamais dans l'imitation, le faire-semblant, le théâtre" (30). She goes on to explain that it is rather easy to eat, dress, and even laugh in ways which hide your origins but the toughest aspect of this imitation game is the language. The tongue betrays. And thus the role played by the foreigner is made apparent through accented speech. And while this might be the bane of many a language learner's existence, Huston holds dearly to hers. In the epistolary text she cowrites with Leïla Sebbar, *Lettres Parisiennes : histoires d'exil*, she writes, "Mais mon accent, au fond, j'y tiens. Il traduit la friction entre moi-même et la société qui m'entoure, et cette friction m'est plus que précieuse, indispensable" (15). For Huston, her accent is what lets

slip the fact that she does not quite belong and allows her a slight distance, a bit of linguistic breathing room: "le fait de parler le français avec un accent, de 'jouer' la francophone, me donne une distance salutaire par rapport à tous mes autres 'rôles' dans l'existence" (38). But of course, Huston's largest audience as an author is comprised of readers not listeners and to communicate an accent through text is more of a challenge; the pen is a more effective mask than the tongue.[105] Despite Huston's fondness for her accent she concedes that she prefers writing since "là, au moins, j'ai droit au remords, à la biffure ou à l'incise. Là, de plus, mon accent ne s'entend pas" (38).

Considering Huston's relationship to her accent and the theater she believes to be engaged in when playing the role of the Francophone, we can see how *Tfs* truly is a *roman de transition* between her French and English. In it, Huston is delighting in the tension between the written, unreadable, English text and the spoken, translated, French speech—each unable to exist without the support of the other. She strives to create a novel that recreates the kind of friction of her own accent, which normally dissolves in the ink on the page, while at the same time exposing the theatricality inherent in translation. But what might escape the casual reader's attention is the novel's relationship

[105] Here we might be tempted to think about novels written in dialect (sometimes called eye dialect) like *Huckleberry Finn* or *Zazie dans le métro* or novels like Huston's *L'Empreinte de l'ange* in which certain characters make grammatical blunders revealing their discomfort with a foreign language (for more on this see Loraine Day's "Trauma and the bilingual subject in Nancy Huston's *L'Empreinte de l'ange*") but these are of course intentional displays of characters' manners of speaking and not the result of an author writing *naturally*. One does not write with an accent. Huston remarks humorously on this in a letter to Sebbar: "Il m'est arrivé d'entendre mes propres textes en français lus à haute voix par d'autres et d'être frappée de ce que ces mots que j'avais pensés et écrits avec un accent pouvaient être dits avec une prononciation impeccable… Ça ressemblait à du vrai français !" (15).

to the invisibility of translation. As Venuti outlines in his historical view of translation, what we typically prize above all else in translation is a notion of fluency, or an illusion of transparency, in which all traces of alterity or foreignness are erased with the ultimate goal of the translator being effectively invisible. This type of translation of course falls on the side of domestication as outlined by Schleiermacher. He advocates for bringing translators out of the shadows and appreciating the foreignness of the texts in order to have a more authentic, if not ethical, engagement with them (*Invisibility* 20). Since translators are always seen as playing a subservient role, the work they perform is undervalued both by the literary establishment and, as a result of this, by the reader as well.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, even in the case of self-translation, authors are effectively able to hide the fact that they are both translators and authors. This is apparent in publishing practices, but also in the way many self-translators view their work. Huston herself is quite laudatory of what translation can bring to her novels. She writes in an essay, "[J]e me suis aperçue que le fait de *traduire* mes livres, dans un sens ou dans l'autre, les améliorait" (*Âmes* 28). Like Gary, she claims that her translations often take just as long as the original composition and are no less cognitively engaging. The act of translating allows her to revisit her characters, see them from a new perspective, and hear them speak a new language. She returns to this notion of translation as bettering in her chapter in *Pour une littérature-monde* where she explains, "Je m'étais aperçue que traduire mes textes me permettait de les améliorer, et que c'était une grande *chance* de pouvoir ainsi passer la première version par les fourches caudines de la

traduction pour éliminer les scories" (157). Even though Huston finds translation a painful process—one of her favorite responses in interviews when asked about translation in interviews is to quote Samuel Beckett's quip "L'autotraduction, c'est tout ce que je connais en matière de torture politique"—she nevertheless recognizes that it is a privilege to be able to reconnect with her novels in such a manner. But what we can glean from Huston's remarks is that, similar to what we saw with Beckett, for her *améliorer* is principally an act of *éliminer*. And indeed Huston's novels are often slightly shorter in translation, regardless of direction, even though the norm for translation from English to French is an increase in wordcount (Polizzotti 77). But despite her praise of translation, she nevertheless prefers to call her translations rewritings or second originals. The debate concerning originals and translations provoked by Huston reached a boiling point when, as described earlier, she was awarded the *prix du Gouverneur général* for *Cantique des plaines* for best original novel written in French despite the fact it was first written in English. In interviews and writings Huston defended the choice saying that the second version was not a translation but a rewriting. This claim has left scholars with a slight dilemma. While the tide has turned in favor of the translator and the ever-growing field of translation studies works to revalorize the term, as Kippur points out, Huston's defense of her "originals" points to translation as lack.[106]

[106] For a more thorough discussion of this see Kippur's chapter on Huston, specifically pps. 28-30.

But to better understand Huston's relationship to translation it might be helpful to turn away from what she says about her own translations/rewritings and look instead to what she writes about others'. Her praise of translation in these cases is not problematized by discussions of rewriting or when a translation is really a translation. The two figures looming over Huston's self-translations are familiar to us: Samuel Beckett and Romain Gary. Huston has devoted short works to each writer where she describes their translation practice and the influence they have had on her: *Le Tombeau de Romain Gary* and *Limbes/Limbo : un hommage à Samuel Beckett*. Though I run the risk of oversimplifying these works, Huston seems to look to the former for lessons on identity and to the latter for lessons in language. In both these texts she writes in the second-person (*tu*), demonstrating the intimate relationship between her and these writers that she forms through her reading. But this narrative choice is where the similarities end. In the work dedicated to Gary she recounts to him the story of his life and writings, trying to dissect and unravel his identity which she calls "un véritable tissu de contradictions" (14). Huston links this enigmatic identity, abetted by the fact that, as we have seen, Gary often wrote under various pseudonyms, to the domesticating tendencies in his translations. While Gary was never at home, his reader always was.[107] Gary's insistence that he was a different writer in French and English resonated with Huston. In an article titled "Le Frère Littéraire," Jane Wilhelm explains Huston's affection for this chameleon-

[107] For more, see my discussion of Huston's essay on *La Danse de Genghis Cohn*, pp. 169-70.

like quality: “Romain Gary, que ce soit dans sa vie ou dans son œuvre, incarne pour Huston la mise en question de l'identité, une identité complexe et multiple, un nomadisme existentiel qui sape le mythe d'une identité pérenne, une et indivisible” (249). In another essay written for the collection, *Lectures de Romain Gary*, Huston explains that we can recognize with little difficulty “du Céline ou du Beckett” but never “du Gary” (89). It can be freeing to be fractured.

Huston’s homage to Beckett ironically seems to apply a Garyian sense of adaptation to the audience. This publication is Huston’s only bilingual edition, with opposing pages printed in English and French, and reads as a pastiche of Beckett. Unlike with Gary, she does not tell Beckett about himself but instead muses on language(s) and forces the reader to consider to what extent translation is even possible. In her view, though she does not state it as such, Beckett delights in foreignizing translations—it is of little importance for him whether his readers feel at home, indeed his characters rarely are. She believes that Beckett’s style is “dire exactement dans une seconde langue ce qu’il avait d’abord conçu dans la première” (“Traduttore non è traditore” 156). Much in the same way that Huston attempts to unite the parts of herself which are incongruent, she tries to balance her translative style between the poles of Beckett and Gary. In more than one instance Huston describes her experience of bilingualism and translation as a sort of schizophrenia. The act of translation is thus a cure and an attempt at synthesis of these discrete parts.

> En effet c’est épouvantable, je n’aime pas le faire, je mets autant de temps sinon plus à traduire un livre qu’à l’écrire et, de la première à la dernière page, c’est une expérience fastidieuse et frustrante, d’irritation contre les

> dictionnaires, contre mon propre cerveau, contre les langues elles-mêmes, d'être si rétives à coopérer et à se ressembler, de refuser obstinément de communiquer entre elles, de se fondre l'une dans l'autre, de se mêler et de se marier l'une à l'autre ... le livre prend enfin forme et réussit à exister dans l'autre langue, eh bien, là je me sens bien ... comme si ça prouvait qu'en fait je ne suis pas schizophrène, pas folle, puisque finalement la même personne dans les deux langues. ("Traduttore non è traditore" 160)

This immense frustration Huston feels seems to be nearly absent from *Tfs*. At first glance, it seems to sing the praises the translator and is one of just a handful of books that features a translator as the main character.[108] Solange seems to be able to nearly effortlessly interpret Selena's diary, letters, poems, and every drib and drab of text she left behind. At times Renée even interrupts to inquire about her craft: "Tiens ! comment dit-on 'atomes crochus' en anglais ? demanda Renée. Ça fait des années que j'en cherche l'équivalent" (80). At another point Solange herself, tongue-in-cheek, fishes for praise from her mother after correctly translating *dildo*: "'j'espère que tu es époustouflée par mes prouesses linguistiques.' 'Époustouflée est bien le mot qui convient, opina Renée" (168). The novel appears to be subverting typical expectations for author and translator by effecting a reversal. The translator has taken on the role of the creator whereas the diary's author, Selena, seems to fade into the background. But even though Huston places the figure of the translator at the center of her novel, we cannot forget that this is nevertheless a fictional translator and there is of course no flesh-and-blood translator at all to rework Selena's words into French.

[108] For analysis of other novels with translators as main characters see chapter one of Bella Brodzki's *Can these bones live?: Translation, Survival, and Cultural Memory*.

And yet, even this assertion must be problematized since the book does include a range of quotations—ranging from Goethe, Jimi Hendrix, and Henry David Thoreau, to name just a few. As a general rule, Solange does not attempt to translate song lyrics which Selena quotes but does translate other quotations. In certain instances Huston footnotes the source of the original text, presumably those still under copyright, like the poem by William Carlos Williams where she indicates "traduit par l'auteur," in this case the author being her (124). Here we have an example of Huston doing the work of translation while we as readers give credit to Solange. This could hardly be considered a case of the translator's invisibility since both on the diegetic level and within the *mise en page* attention is called to the translation. Though it is not made explicit with a footnote, it is probably also the case that Huston herself translates the quotation from Goethe, "Si je dis à l'instant qui passe : Arrête ! Tu me plais tant !" (95). This instance of translation is even more interesting since it would appear that Huston did not translate the line from an English translation of *Faust*, which typically has some variation of Luke David's 1987 translation: "If ever I to the moment shall say: Beautiful moment, do not pass away!" Her French looks rather more like she translated directly from the German original: "Werd ich zum Augenblicke sagen: Verweile doch! du bist so schön!" (lines 1698-99). Are we to believe that Selena cites *Faust* in German? That Solange translates from English and German? Or that the line was somehow already translated in the diary? Of course, there is no possibility for a satisfying answer here but it should pique our interest in just what language the unreadable diary is and whether the translator is really as visible as we believe.

In certain instances, the reader's trust is broken by the complete elision of a real translator. For example when Selena quotes Henry David Thoreau's journal and we believe that Solange, fed from Huston's pen, has spontaneously translated the line, "whether the flower looks better in the nosegay than in the meadow where it grew and we had to wet our feet to get it!" Though it is doubtful that a non-native (or native at that) English speaker would immediately recognize nosegay as *bouquet*, Solange translates seamlessly. Here Huston has used the translation of Thoreau's journal by R. Michaud et S. David first published in 1973: "Est-ce dans le bouquet que la fleur est plus belle, ou bien dans le pré où elle pousse, quand nous nous sommes mouillé les pieds pour aller la chercher ?" This is not the only instance of Solange's spontaneous translation matching perfectly with a previously published translation but it seems the most difficult one to believe in the narrative.[109] Solange thus stands in for not only the "fictional" translator, Huston, but also for all these real translators who have come before her.

But at other moments in the narrative the translation seems unstable due not to its implausible, instantaneous felicity but because the diary seems to exist contingently on its translation. The most striking example of this comes when we read Solange's translation of a letter by Jonathan which cites a poem by Selena. It is thus doubly mediated for the reader of the novel, first copied by Jonathan in his letter and then translated by Solange.

[109] See for example the Bible verse "my cup runneth over" on page 94 translated as "ma coupe est débordante" which matches the verse in the Bible printed by the *Association Épiscopale Liturgique pour les pays Francophones*. The quotation from *The Magic Flute* on page 112 is another example.

In his letter Jonathan explains that while deployed he prefers not to keep a photo of Selena in his wallet but instead a haiku she has written—"au lieu de ta surface, ta profondeur." The poem is thus preferred over a visual representation of Selena's body since it functions metonymically for her spirit. In this sense the poem in his possession already serves the purpose as a type of translation. The poem reads:

La feuille d'érable
Rouge tombant doucement comme
Un baiser de sang (145)

It is a somber foreshadowing of Selena's hanging herself from a maple tree and Jonathan's evocation of its *profondeur* may also relate the poem to the Orphic descent into the underworld and madness which Selena undertakes. But turning to the form, we know that the standard convention of a haiku dictates the lines follow a syllable count of five, seven, five. And yet here, given typical syllabification for French verse, the lines instead contain five, eight, five. It would be quite an impressive feat to translate poetry aloud and still nearly adhere to meter—one might even argue that depending on the pronunciation of *doucement* the line could be seven syllables and thus conform to convention. Huston's reader may assume that this slight inconsistency of form can be attributed to the difficulty of translation and therefore give a hint of credibility or verisimilitude to this act of translation. But interestingly enough, the poem may be closer to a haiku in translation than whatever it may have been in its fictional original. Three possibilities for the lines with their syllable count in parentheses are given below:

the maple leaf (4)	the leaf of maple (5)	the red maple leaf (5)
red falling slowly like (6)	red is falling like (5)	falling gently like (5)

a kiss of blood (4) a bloody kiss (4) A bloody embrace (5)

Of course, not all translations are equal and other possibilities could be proposed for other potential originals. But remarkably, no reasonable proposals approach the form necessary for a haiku as well as Solange's translation does. Thus within this novel purportedly relating the story of a stable, coherent diary we have a poem pulled from its pages which seemingly can only exist in translation. But here we begin to approach the delicate question of ontology in fiction and there will be no satisfactory answers about the 'real' poem in Selena's diary. Stump cautions us that reading a manuscript or translation does not give us a "deeper glimpse of their [the characters] existence" and then references L.C. Knights' essay "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth." He summarizes, "they have no existence outside the words of the text, and it is both idle and foolish to wonder, for instance, how a character of *Henry V* might have learned French" (4). Thus I want to make clear that my analysis should not be construed as an attempt to reconstruct Huston's unreadable text, which might be akin to sketching a portrait of Lady Macbeth's daughter, but rather as an attempt to signal its limits of plausibility. Within the diegesis of the novel, Selena's diary exists and propels the story forward while at the same time keeping a careful distance to remain outside the reader's line of sight.

Huston understands perfectly the type of distance created through writing and, in a sense, *Tfs* brings that experience to bear on the reader's experience. While we are accustomed to characters telling us stories in a novel (*Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, *One Thousand and One Nights*, etc.) we are much less familiar with characters reading to us (leave the reading to us!) and even less so with characters translating aloud. Solange

usurps our privileged position as the reader of what we believe to be the story and thus we are doubly removed: first as reader and second as the receiver of the translation. Thinking back to *Tfs* as a *roman de transition* we can see also how Huston may have felt that her remove from English could be narrowed through this pseudo-translation. In *Lettres Parisiennes* Huston explains that, in general, "écrire en français, c'était donc un double éloignement : d'abord écrire, ensuite en francais (ou plutôt l'inverse : d'abord en français, ensuite écrire)" (194). But with *Tfs* she allows herself the sensation of *d'abord en anglais*, despite the fact that this English text does not exist. The unreadable text in *Tfs* is always already translated from its fictive English into Solange's spoken French. And in this sense, Solange's performance, or her interpretation in the theatrical sense, succeeds. She so effectively plays her role as the translator that we believe that there is truly something to be translated.

Cantique des plaines / Plainsong

The transition to which *Tfs* belongs achieved completion with the publication of *Plainsong* in 1993. This is the first novel that Huston composed in English and she experienced it as a sort of homecoming. Writing in French allowed her to feel as though she was created from scratch, self-defined and rootless. She writes that she chose French to escape from her native language and that it gave the illusion of "n'avoir pas d'enfance, pas d'inconscient, pas de racines, pas de déterminisme" (156) And it is thus with *Plainsong* that she rediscovers these fundamental pieces of herself. ("Traduttore non è traditore" 156). As I have alluded to before, and as Sara Kippur details thoroughly,

Cantique des plaines remains Huston's most controversial work not for its content but for its reception and subsequent awards in Canada.[110] The awarding of the *prix du Gouverneur général* provoked a spirited debate over what constitutes an original versus a translation. The award, Canada's most prestigious literary prize, is annually awarded in seven categories to both works in English and French language. Though there is a category for English language fiction and even a category for translation, Huston was awarded the *prix du Gouverneur général du roman et nouvelle de langue française*. Critics of Huston's award objected on the basis that the novel is a translation and therefore ineligible. Supporters of Huston also allege that the prize's detractors acted as gatekeepers for a prize typically given only to Quebecois authors. In any case, the award committee was unmoved and believed that this novel was an original work as it was written by the original author. Huston herself supported this claim in interviews on Canadian radio and has since written in support of this double originality. In a letter to the prize committee she writes, "*Cantique des plaines* n'est cependant pas une simple traduction de *Plainsong* ; c'est une deuxième version originelle du même livre" (qtd in Kippur 29).[111] Interestingly Huston writes "version originelle" rather than "version

110 *Cantique des plaines* will be henceforth be referred to as *Cdp*.

[111] Among translation theorists there is some agreement with Huston's claim that self-translation is rewriting. Notably on this side are André Lefevere and Susan Bassnet, who makes this case in her chapter "The self-translator as rewriter" in *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* where she outlines the ways that the freedom afforded to self-translators allows them to transform their voice from language to language. She cites the poet Rabindranath Tagore's translations from his Bengali into English as an example of this, arguing that his English highlights an exotic, Oriental mysticism absent from his originals.

originale," as we would expect, and thus points to the shared origin of the texts rather than their dates of compositions. In any case, whereas *Cdp* brought Huston into the national spotlight in Canada, *Plainsong* had little fanfare and even had trouble finding a publisher. In an interview in the *Canadian Review of Books* Huston complains, "It was as if the prodigal son had come home and his father said to him, 'Go fuck yourself.' I, of course, had imagined something quite different."

As discussed in the previous section, *Trois fois septembre* tells the story of translation. The reception of *Cdp* shows why this story needs to be told and what kinds of stories about translation are told outside of the space of the novel. This controversy remains the most publicized period of Huston's career and has been analyzed by a number of scholars for its implications on Huston's work and for what it tells us about the politics of literature.[112] Indeed most scholarship about *Plainsong* and *Cdp* is analysis of the discourse surrounding the works. I will largely leave these considerations aside and focus instead on this chapter's second unreadable text, Paddon's diary.

The novel recounts the history of a family living in the plains of western Canada over the course of the 20th century. The narrator of the novel is a writer living in Montreal named Paula who has received the diary of her recently deceased grandfather, Paddon Sterling. Paula, writing directly to Paddon in the second-person, weaves together the story of his life, partly from his writings, partly from her memories, and partly from

[112] See in particular Frank Davey's chapter "Big, Bad, and Little Known: The Anglophone-Canadian Nancy Huston" in *Vision/Division*.

invention. As in *Tfs*, we have the sensation of trying to understand a narrative that we can never truly know since it is both written by a hand no longer living and mediated by a character in the novel. *Cdp* departs from the rigid adherence to the diary which structured *Tfs* and Paula does not explicitly translate Paddon's writing for the reader. Whereas *Tfs* adhered to the diary's chronology of daily entries, Paula moves fluidly through time and space. Temporality figures heavily in the novel, both in formal convention and content; as a philosophy student Paddon attempted for many years to write a book on the history of time. He never succeeded and made the young Paula promise to one day complete this work. The reader may infer that *Plainsong* is the fulfillment of this pledge and is then left to wonder if the story of time must also be the story of family.

The novel opens with a conjunction: "And here is how I visualize the moment of your death" (1). This act of combination continues throughout the course of the novel and takes precedence over any sort of search for continuity or causality. Put simply, the novel valorizes "and" over "then." This is true on a temporal level—the story jumps forwards and backwards—and thus upends readerly expectations for a novel that is ostensibly a family history. But it is also true in terms of form. Though Paula's writing occupies the overwhelming majority of the novel, there are also places where she includes fragments written in Paddon's own hand, transcribed dialogue with Paddon's lover, Miranda, and even some ephemera such as a pamphlet for the Calgary Stampede. Unlike *Trois fois septembre*'s pseudo-translation, this use of citation creates instead a sort of pseudo-polyphony where we must imagine distinct voices not emanating from Paula. Even on the sentence-level, Huston's use of paratactic construction to create this blending effect is

striking. The long, meandering phrases give the impression that Paula writes longhand, filling pages and pages to avoid the end of sentences which might at any point mean the end of her grandfather. Christine Klein-Lataud notes that original and translation do not differ in this respect and relates it to the landscape of Huston's home region and its history: "La syntaxe des deux textes est analogue, caractérisée par de longues phrases méandreuses, s'étirant parfois à l'infini, comme les Prairies qu'ils évoquent, comme l'histoire des peuples et des individus" (224). But this syntax and use of parataxis might also be considered in the relationship between the two texts. Huston's claim that both English and French are originals also valorizes the "and" over the "then."

Despite this framework, the reader is aware that the collaboration within the text between Paula and Paddon is heavily one-sided. Paula acts as narrator and guide to the reader who cannot access Paddon's manuscript, and even if they could she tells us that "most of the manuscript pages are indecipherable" (9). The diary urtext, upon which Huston was so reliant in *Trois fois septembre*, has been nearly destroyed in the English novel. Whereas in the earlier novel the diary was unreadable for Huston's reader, it is now nearly unreadable for Paddon's reader. Consequently, we accept that it will be Paula's voice telling the story of Paddon, relying on interpretation and imagination in the absence of a complete, legible account.

Looking back to the novel's first sentence, we recognize an uncomfortable voyeurism on the part of the narrator towards her subject: "And here is how I visualize the moment of your death" (1) becomes in French, "Et voici comment je m'imagine ton agonie" (9). The narrator did not in fact witness this death and this is just the first of

many events narrated based on conjecture. The sentence goes on to describe the world melting and finishes with "your mind sank deeper into the matter," as though Paddon finds himself enmeshed in the material of the text. Paula's writing acts to prolong this death just as it lengthens and completes the manuscript Paddon began. Evidence of this can be found even in the process of Huston translating the novel into French. Just as Paddon's diary inspires Paula's elongations in the narrative, the original English text plays a similar role for Huston. Consider, for example, the notable lexical choice in Huston's translation of "moment of death" as "agonie"—defined in French as "the moments, hours immediately preceding death." English too has this definition for the word "agony," albeit slightly archaic today, and thus Huston could very well have used it and been able to capture the implication in the French that this death was not painless. But instead, Huston chooses to protract "the moment" Paddon dies and transform it instead into the preceding moments or hours. Each iteration of the narrative—from Paula writing her book based on Paddon's diary to Huston translating *Plainsong* to *Cantique des plaines*—allows for expansion even without paraphrase or lengthening the text. Paula pushes back the final moments she will spend with her grandfather by writing her book, just as Huston's self-translation refuses any sort of semantic or narrative finality.

Just after describing her grandfather's funeral, Paula reveals to the reader the impetus of her writing: "Grandma mailed me a thick outspilling envelope labelled firmly in her hand *P's Book* and filled with ancient pages written in your hand, your many hands, ... okay so now it's mine. Now the responsibility is mine" (5). Later in the novel Paula describes being a young girl and promising her grandfather that she will one day

complete his book. In *Cantique des plaines* Paddon leaves one possible title for this work, though he qualifies it with question marks: "la page de titre contient cinquante titres provisoires, dont le seul non barré est suivi et précédé de points d'interrogation : *En temps normal*" (21). In contrast, no titles have been crossed out in *Plainsong*: "There are fifty tentative titles on the title page, the last the most tentative of all: *The Time Being*" (9). The two titles we assume to be Paddon's choices are hardly translations of each other. The English title, perhaps nudging the reader to recall Heidegger's *Being and Time*, highlights the ephemerality of conceptions of time as well as even the choice of title—it is the title for the time being. In stark contrast to this is the French "En temps normal*"* which would be most often translated as "normally." "Normally" does not evoke the temporary or impermanent and instead points towards contingent, temporal prolongation—under normal circumstances.

It is as though by translating Huston has rewritten not only her novel but the unseen diary within it. Given that Paula quotes little directly from Paddon, any changes or translations undergone by this ragged manuscript are unexpected. After all, why would Huston translate the words read by the narrator (Paddon's) rather than those read by the reader (Paula's)? It is as though we must either imagine two fictional manuscripts or a single one which has undergone a palimpsestic, bilingual rewriting for the purposes of *Cantiques des plaines*. We might imagine that Paddon's title page has been altered, all the tentative titles crossed out, and now below *"The Time Being"* we would read "*En temps normal*." Thus the sort of pseudo-translation Merrigan finds in *Trois fois septembre* exists in *Cantiques des plaines* alongside the actual translation of *Plainsong*.

But given the nature of Paddon's writing, this type of palimpsestic rewriting and translation seems quite apt, and at several points Paula herself comments on it: "I'm trying to read the manuscript. In the last – no, next-to-last – years of your life you scribbled and scratched and scraped away at the versions that had been sketched out in the fifties" (9). The reader understands that Paddon's manuscript never approached completion, and with every passing day Paddon's understanding of time seemed to negate the previous day's. Each time he set his pen to paper it was as much to repudiate the past as it was to add anything new. Paddon's perpetual dissatisfaction with the project resulted in a history of time which continually narrowed focus instead on the present, in direct contrast with Paula's resulting project of expansion and invention of the past.

For Huston, as for other self-translators, the translation intrinsic in every text is inseparable from the extrinsic operation performed afterwards to bring the work into a new language. On a diegetic level, the reader of *Plainsong* can appreciate the interdependent relationship between Paula's text and Paddon's manuscript. Towards the end of the novel Paula discusses her creative process, one which resonates with comments made by Huston in interviews about her own writing: "I sit here at my desk in Montreal day after day and close my eyes and strain to hear and then a voice bubbles up ... oh Paddon I can't exist without you, don't take these words from me ... We need each other, Paddon" (190). But Paula's confession contains layers of meaning: biologically a granddaughter could not exist without a grandfather; discursively Paula comes into being thanks to Paddon's fictional manuscript requiring an interpreter; but perhaps the reader's immediate interpretation paints Paula's reflection as a melodramatic lament in the style of

a heartbroken lover, “I can’t go on without you!” While all of these should be considered in this utterance, the second gives the best framing for Paula’s plea, “don’t take these words from me,” and most effectively highlights an original’s relationship to its translation.

But this manner of thinking represents a change in attitude for Paula, from the beginning of the novel where she seems to play a much more dominant role, seemingly reflecting the push and pull a translator might feel between creation and imitation. About a quarter of the way through the novel Paula writes, “And for me, Paddon, your *now* has also become a *then*, and like Miranda you can go on living only in my words—only here on the pages I keep mucking up with my tears and ashes” (50). At this stage Paula exerts her authority over Paddon and emphasizes that he lives in *her* words, on *her* pages, covered in *her* ashes, and *her* tears. A few pages earlier she describes her writing project to Paddon in terms of illusion or magic: “this gradual pulling of your existence from the void like coloured scarves from the hat of a magician” (39). She also relates the endeavor to that of a self-generating tightrope walker: “I’m like a tightrope-walker secreting, spiderlike, the rope on which she must continue to advance” (50). Paula imagines that each step she takes rests not on Paddon’s written words but rather on her previous creation—less like collaboration than sorcery. This vision of her process is a far cry from the plaintive tone on which she ends her tale.

Paula’s metacommentaries on her writing are further supported throughout the novel by her intrusions into Paddon’s story to make us acutely aware of the level of artistic liberty she takes with Paddon’s manuscript. In reference to one anecdote about

Paddon's father, Paula explains to Paddon, "il ne t'a jamais raconté cette histoire Paddon donc tu ne l'as pas racontée à Ruthie et elle ne me l'a pas racontée à moi, mais je suis à peu près certaine qu'elle a eu lieu" (27). But in instances like this we see that Paula's invention understands itself as having a certain amount of facticity—even before she claims to be *à peu près certaine* about the story she invents, she has already made an unverifiable claim that this story was not passed down from her great-grandfather to her own mother, Ruthie. Indeed, Paula seems to be much more certain of her ability to invent truth than she is of being able to extract it from Paddon's writing, which is often prefaced with some version of "tu as écrit, et je n'ai aucun moyen de savoir quand" (79).

But this confidence slowly erodes over the course of the novel. The beginning of this doubt comes at one of the more disturbing passages of the novel when the young Paddon witnesses, from behind his bedroom door, his father beating his mother in order to provoke a miscarriage. While narrating the event, Paula peppers Paddon with questions: "es-tu sûr d'être sorti de ton lit," "l'as-tu vu de tes yeux," and then twice "l'as-tu réellement vu Paddon?" Huston's French doubles the final question only found once in the English, as though her rewriting needs to expand everything, even doubt (70). But the origin of the doubt Paula injects into this passage is unclear. It must involve some combination of what occurred, what Paddon witnessed, what Paddon believed to have witnessed, and Paula's belief about those three premises: e.g. is Paula unsure that the event happened? Is Paula sure that it did but unsure if the young Paddon witnessed it? Etc. She concludes, "je veux dire peut-être l'as-tu simplement entendu et peut-être faisaient-ils tout simplement l'amour" (105). With this final suggestion the entire

traumatic resonance of the scene is upended. Life or death? Destruction or creation? And to whom does the attempt to discredit this scene of violence offer comfort? Narrator, narratee, reader?

One of the final scenes of the novel details the death of Paddon's mother and brings Paula's doubts about her invention to new heights. She writes, "pourquoi m'est-il plus difficile d'imaginer la mort de ta mère que n'importe quel autre événement dans ton existence ?" For whatever reason, Paula cannot seem to penetrate the psyche of her grandfather at this critical juncture despite, or perhaps due to, having the testimony from her own mother: "selon ma mère Ruthie, tu est resté impassible tout au long de la cérémonie et n'a versé aucune larme" (222). It is not until this point that the reader really comes to see the degree to which Paula's imputes an interiority to Paddon that might otherwise be unavailable, even if Paddon himself were the narrator of the novel. The scene of the dry-eyed son at his mother's funeral calls to mind Meursault, Camus' protagonist in *L'Etranger*, whose ostensible lack of interiority and emotion cost him his life.[113] In Meursault's first-person account of his mother's funeral it does not occur to him to mention that he does not shed a tear; rather he fixates on how uncomfortable others' crying makes him and it is only through other characters' interventions that we come to learn that he too did not shed a single tear (146). This potential evocation of

[113] Huston discusses the death of the mothers in Camus and Beckett's work in both her novel *Les Instrument des ténèbres* (188) and her study *Les Professeurs de désespoir* and she may have had these scenes in mind when describing Paddon's stoicism.

Meursault by Huston should focus the reader's attention on the importance of perspective for a character's interiority.

Following this scene is Paula's lament that she needs Paddon to exist, just as he does her. Counterintuitively, the more the story develops, the more impenetrable Paddon's psyche seems to become to Paula, as this scene at his mother's funeral implies. She becomes more and more aware of the fact that Paddon's manuscript cannot be truly rerendered into her own work. The reader understands that this unreadable text in the narrative, which has been interpreted throughout by Paula, perhaps is less readable, even for her, than previously believed. Similarly, as Huston sat down to bring *Plainsong* into French, Paula's doubts became her own.

Reading *Plainsong* alongside *Cantique des plaines*, I cannot help but see similarities between the connection Paula feels to Paddon and that between Huston-author and Huston-translator. The translator too can feel like a magician pulling scarves from a hat, or a tightrope walker who produces the rope. Just as Paddon bequeaths his pages to Paula, so too does Huston pass *Plainsong* to herself. Huston's translation of Paula's words, "Okay so now it's mine. Now the responsibility is mine" (5), may surprise the reader: "Tu m'as légué ces pages et maintenant il est à moi ton livre, la responsabilité est toute à moi" (16). In the French, Huston slightly expands on the commitment, reaffirming through repetition as though she is writing back to herself, a promise from translator to author. Just as Paula realizes that the way towards truth is through invention, Huston demonstrates that translation must involve imagination.

This might best be understood in the context of the music present in the text. As is the case in most of Huston's novels, the musical elements, evidenced already in the title, play an important role. As Huston writes, "dans l'écriture aussi, la musique deviendra profondément [ma] stratégie" (*Bad Girl* 167). Language is a sort of music, one that "se déploie dans le temps ... Le langage se précipite, tête la première, vers l'avenir. Les mots doivent être prononcés, leur prononciation exige du temps," as Paddon writes (22). Music and language are brought together as two modes of communication which are at once radically present but necessitating a past to be comprehensible. "Quelle était la quantité minimale de passé nécessaire à la production du sens ?" asks Paddon towards the middle of the novel (147). The novel includes reflections on the nature of music but it also features a number of lyrics from popular folk songs from the early part of the century. Given the setting of the novel, these songs are naturally in English and are incorporated seamlessly into *Plainsong*: "*Hit the Road Jack*–You never did manage to hit the road, Paddon" (9). But in translation Huston chooses, for the most part, to leave these lyrics in their original form, creating a foreignizing effect for the reader: "*Hit the road, Jack, and don't you come back no more*… Tu n'as jamais pris la route Paddon" (19). But at the same time that Huston foreignizes her translation (simply by refusing a translation), she always feels the responsibility to her original text to give enough context for the reader to follow along—a domesticating move. For the anglophone reader, the title of the song immediately evokes the lyrics following whereas in French this second verse must be given for the effect to be the same.

Later in the novel when Paddon's lover, Miranda, describes the effect of Canada's continental rail on the indigenous population, Paula cites, "I been workin' on the railroad/ All the livelong day I been workin' on the railroad/ Just to pass the time away" (47). In *Cdp* the English is again cited but it is followed by a translation: "Je travaille au chemin de fer, toute la sale journée, Je travaille au chemin de fer, Juste pour voir le temps passer" (74). A few pages later Huston does the same with *Home on the Range* (*Plainsong* 50, *Cdp* 78). In these instances we again see Huston trying to negotiate foreignizing and domesticating translation practices. However, the fact that the French verses are translations is not indicated through punctuation or formatting. This leaves open the possibility of reading these verses as though they simply belong to a bilingual song. Of course this is not the case, as the English original indicates, and it must be noted that these are therefore not translations at all. Huston has doubled these verses in the French forcing us to consider that she values equally the performance of the musical intrusion as well as the meaning of the lyrics themselves.

In his essay "Des Tours de Babel" Derrida considers this function of untranslated text within a translated text. He quotes Benjamin, who has in turn quoted Mallarmé and left the French untranslated in his German text. Commenting on the French in the text, Derrida writes that Benjamin "l'a laissé briller comme la médaille d'un nom propre," and then he goes on to argue, "l'effet de propriété intraduisible se lie moins à du nom ou à de la vérité d'adéquation qu'à l'unique événement d'une force performative." And thus Derrida asks us to consider whether translation cedes its ground when it can no longer be measured by the restitution of meaning**, i.e.,** what is given (177). This is precisely the

question confronted by both Paula and Huston in their works of composition and translation respectively. *Cdp* includes many instances, like in the Benjamin text, where the English "shines like a medal," and disrupts the smooth flow of the narrative. These are clear examples of where Huston eschews translative equivalency and chooses translative performance.

These moments of discord are almost always musical intrusions. Huston seems to accept that nearly all meaning can be brought into French—notice for example that Paddon's writings are never left in their original, fictive English—and even does things like translate the name of a specific church "Anton Methodist" (29) to a general "l'église methodiste" (49). But this is not the case for the music, as though the music remains so firmly rooted in its original language that it refuses translation—as was the case with the untranslated text for Derrida: **"le** sens ne se laisse pas transporter sans dommage dans un autre langage ou dans une autre langue" (176). And thus, the performative aspect Derrida highlights of untranslated text is equally present in the case of Huston's original, just with an alternate objective. *Plainsong* brings together a host of songs intimately familiar to a North American audience. They are the songs sung around campfires or among childhood friends on the playground. They unite generations, Paula's and Paddon's, and allow the musicality of a common cultural heritage to punctuate the story and thus perform the role of collapsing time and distance. Conversely, the untranslated lyrics in *Cdp* perform just the opposite function by bringing the reader's attention to the fact that this is neither his heritage nor his language. Huston's choice to sometimes translate the

lyrics but to always leave the original allows the reader to glimpse the content while retaining distance.

Of course, the lyrics are not the only citations included in *Plainsong* or *Cdp*. Citation is a means of introducing another voice into the text, which Paula does with music but also on occasion with Paddon's manuscript. In one instance of this she introduces a fragment of his by writing, "it took my breath away" (39). Huston improves on this in translation, writing, instead, "il m'a laissée sans voix" (63). Here she is able to capture Paula's astonishment at the piece of writing but also the way in which citing Paddon literally supplants the narrative voice. The act of translation makes Huston acutely aware of the limits of authorial voice and the structure of *Plainsong* makes the reader feel these limits as well when reflecting on Paula's position in the text. Paula is able to seize control of the narrative voice through her invention and by the dominating move of addressing Paddon in the second-person; this is your story but my telling. In translation, Huston appropriates the authority from *Plainsong* through reimagination.

Dear Dorrit

To conclude this chapter I would like to briefly examine two of Huston's latest works: *Bad Girl* (2014) and *Lèvres de pierre* (2018) Though neither of them fit into the framework I have created to understand her preference for including unreadable texts within her narratives, they mark a shift in her writing's trajectory that provides material for interesting extensions for the analyses of the structures of her earlier novels. In the

introduction to the *Nottingham French Studies* issue dedicated to Huston, Kate Averis writes, "the claim I made in 2014 that Huston has been reticent to consider her own personal experience in fictional form no longer holds true after the publication in the same year of *Bad Girl*" (231). And while I would not agree with this statement—*Trois fois septembre* and *Instruments des ténèbres* contain numerous autobiographical elements—it could be argued that these later works certainly show Huston moving towards much more explicitly autobiographical texts. In them she returns to the type of interpretive storytelling analyzed in *Trois fois septembre* and *Cantique des plaines*, but this time the focus is not on a deceased friend or relative but on herself. For the moment there are no translations of either text and it is unclear whether Huston has plans to bring them into English.

These two works, both difficult to categorize, tell the story of a young girl named Dorrit, the stand-in for Huston's younger self. In *Bad Girl*, Huston addresses her former self, Dorrit, in the second-person while Dorrit is still inside her mother's womb. Huston relates a narrative of the life that the narratee will live, while also glossing the significance of events. Huston's calls the text an "autobiographie intra-utérine." The text weaves together autobiography, discussions of her literary endeavors, and general reflections on society and gender. In *Lèvres de pierre* Huston splits her focus between the story of Dorrit (this time narrated in the third person) and the young man who will grow up to be Cambodian dictator Pol Pot (addressed in the second person). The book is divided into two sections: "Homme nuit" and "Mad Girl." They each tell the story of one of these characters as they navigate their early lives and eventually land in a Parisian,

Marxist intellectual milieu in their early twenties. Huston's guiding question is how did these two figures, who shared a certain intellectual radicalization, diverge in such striking ways.

What is remarkable about these two works is that the way Huston addresses herself, either as a *you* or a *she*, reminds us exactly of how Solange interpreted Selena or how Paula memorialized Paddon. In these later works it is as though Huston wielded anew the tools she used to structure these novels around an unreadable text in order to finally address herself directly, as though the unreadable text is an amalgamation of the life of letters she will come to create and embody. We have seen that Huston's unreadable texts functioned analogously to translation; they both propelled the narratives of her novels into being while also defining their limits. Unlike these fictional texts born of translation, the life lived will always be the *raison d'être* for any autobiographical text. However, typically the narrator, author, and main character all sign the text with the same signature.[114] This is precisely the case for Huston's earlier autobiographical work, *Nord Perdu*, and for her book of letters detailing her first decade living abroad, *Lettres parisiennes*. That Huston's later autobiographical works involve formal innovations should not be surprising given her penchant for such innovations in her novels, but the manner in which she creates a hierarchy of power between Huston-narrator and Huston-character should be read in light of her novels.

114 See the chapters on Green and Gary for more on this and Philippe Lejeune's *Pacte autobiographique*.

In both works, Huston performs an ambivalent maneuver in the naming of her character Dorrit. In *Lèvres de pierre* she opens the work with the journal she kept on a visit to Cambodia in 2008 and then goes on to explain that she will tell two stories, her own and Pol Pot's, but will avoid using her own name since "il se trouve que j'ai moi aussi un pseudonyme" just as the young Pol Pot was still named Saloth Sâr (19). The invented name, as well as the title being followed by *roman* on the cover, point towards fictionality but the direct justification given in journal form to the reader points towards veracity. In *Bad Girl*, Huston opens by writing, "*toi*, c'est toi, Dorrit. Celle qui écrit. Toi à tous les âges, et même avant d'avoir un âge, avant d'écrire, avant d'être un soi. Celle qui écrit et donc aussi, parfois, on espère, celui/celle qui lit. Un personnage" (11). Huston sets up a sort of mirror-like narrator/narratee relationship insisting that she who reads is she who writes, and vice versa. Huston even tries to complexify the composition process by claiming that she who writes is Dorrit at every age. The novel ends with the opening line from the autobiography of Huston's former mentor, Roland Barthes: "Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman" (259). Huston takes the opposite tack of the standard autobiographer who insists upfront that what follows is precisely what happened to them. And yet, while she begins and ends her work insisting on fiction the book's contents remain faithful to the facts of her own life.

In *Lèvres de pierre*, Huston begins the story of Dorrit in 1963, ten years after her birth and ten years before her move to Paris. The story ends abruptly in 1979 when Huston's first book is published. It thus details her life up to the moment of becoming an author, as though at this moment the character Dorrit would be capable of writing her

own story by inheriting the pen from the hand of the narrator. *Bad Girl* operates on slightly more complicated temporal planes: it begins at the moment of Dorrit's conception and ends with her birth, but the narrator uses the nine-month span to recount the life Dorrit will live as she ages into the role of the narrator. By manipulating chronology in different fashions, Huston puts the reader in a position to feel kinship to Dorrit, having access only to the narrative information available to the character. This represents a reversal of the position the reader occupied in *Tfs* and *Cdp*, who learned, little by little, Selena and Paddon's stories based on their writing and their interpreters', Solange and Paula, interventions. The unreadable books in these novels were written by characters who are analogous, in terms of narrative position, to Dorrit in *Bad Girl*.

It should be noted that this understanding of Huston's texts should not simply be conceived of as one manner to think about second-person narration, wherein the narrator necessarily holds the privileged position through the simple utterance of *I*. The structuring principle of the unreadable texts in her narratives privileges constraint just as much as control. Moreover, Huston's use of these diegetic diaries does not require the use of the second person, and of these four texts only two are narrated in the second person. In *Bad Girl*, Huston gives a possible justification for the type of third-person narration that we see in *Lèvres de pierre* by explaining the fascination the young Huston had with narrative perspective. The narrator explains to Dorrit, "tu entendras les voix des livres que tu lis ... tu te parleras à la troisième personne, transformant chacun de tes gestes en une scène, et ta vie quotidienne en un roman" (165). Daily life for Dorrit would be novelistic in the sense that there would always be a fictional, underlying text. But

conversely, the voices that sprang forth from her novels meant that her fiction also took on a reality of its own. The border between reality and fiction, as is not uncommon for children, is quite porous for Dorrit. But Huston retains this fluidity into adulthood and realizes her childhood dreams of novelizing her life in these autobiographical works.

Later in *Bad Girl*, the narrator explains Huston's penchant for second-person narration. When Huston's mother left her at age six, the only real contact they kept over the rest of her childhood was in the form of letters. The only intimacy she was thus able to have with her mother came in epistolary form. The narrator tells Dorrit, "ses lettres t'aideront à rester en vie, et quand, plus tard, tu te mettras à écrire des livres, la deuxième personne sera toujours celle que tu préfères, étant donné qu'il n'y a pas assez de place dans le monde pour *je*, et que *il* et *elle* mettraient trop de distance entre toi et tes personnages" (254). In Huston's non-fiction we see that she takes advantage of the second person to emphasize a connection she feels to certain subjects (e.g. Samuel Beckett or Romain Gary) and in her fiction she employs it similarly as a means of understanding and bringing together character and narrator (e.g. Paula and Paddon, "Huston" and Pol Pot).

But these later texts, which belong to borderline genres, must also be considered in relation to translation and to translations of the texts that might never come to be. There is the obvious consideration that any narration or dialogue in French for the early years of Huston's life can only exist in translation since she grew up in an anglophone environment. Therefore any discussion of things like her early love of wordplay and the examples given ("aller, à lait") are in translation (*Bad Girl* 165). But on a more

fundamental level, these fictional representations of her childhood in translation might also be a means of rooting herself in her adopted language—a novelistic reappropriation or doubling of infancy. In her early autobiography, *Nord Perdu*, she writes, "On peut conférer aux êtres d'origine étrangère la nationalité française ... Ils ne seront jamais français parce que personne ne peut leur donner une enfance française" (17). Childhood is an essential aspect of identity, one that she describes as the pit of a fruit: "le fruit, en grandissant, ne devient pas creux !" (18). And while this at first intrigued and even seduced Huston to be able to write in a language in which she had no past, with *Bad Girl* she has, in a certain sense, used fiction to create a childhood in translation.

These works are thus, in a very real sense, already in translation, but what is lacking are the original texts from which they came: the unreadable books. As Huston tells the story of herself to the fictional Dorrit, she must draw from her past and from her literary output to structure these narratives. She, like Solange, becomes the translator; she, like Paula, invents and expands upon the manuscript of memory, full of holes and erasures, to craft a comprehensible narrative. The narrator uses her cumulative experience of memory and text as though this were an unreadable text for Dorrit which must be interpreted, as though *Bad Girl* itself were the book which Dorrit cannot access, always too early in the temporal ordering. The narrator reveals, in dribs and drabs, the life that Dorrit will lead and slowly but surely, by translating and revealing the past/future which links them, she builds the bridge between narrator and character. Huston's unreadable books allow her the means to tell stories and to find herself in translation.

CONCLUSION

Translation is principally a question of substitution. One word becomes another, until one sentence becomes another, and so forth and so on until the original and its offspring no longer bear a resemblance. For us the readers, these exchanges occur outside our supervision, and in some cases, without our knowledge. This is not, however, the case for the translator, that diligent wordsmith who frets over each substitution, tirelessly seeking the version of "equivalence" to which they have chosen to remain faithful. They may curse the author, whose language and meaning are so deeply bound together that to extract the latter from the former feels as impossible as stealing the sugar from a cake. But for those translators in the (un)fortunate position of also being the authors of the texts, they can only curse at the mirror. The bed has been made and now they must lie in it. And lie they do.

In this dissertation, the four figures whose works have been the focus—Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Romain Gary, and Nancy Huston—stand in as substitutes for a multitude of other self-translators deserving of study. Though many pages have been devoted to these four authors and their works, I have remained silent on their fellow self-translators who, too, have raged against, toiled and delighted in, and remade themselves and their texts in self-translation. The figure of the self-translator dates back as far as language(s) and its allure (and necessity) promises that it will be here to stay. Raymond Federman, Vladimir Nabokov, Joseph Brodsky, Jorge Luis Borges, Elsa Triolet,

Rabindranath Tagore, Italo Calvino, André Brink, Karen Blixen, Rachid Boudjedra, José Semprun, and Milan Kundera are just a few of the writers whose works can shed further light onto the question that this study has asked: how, and where, can we read translation in original texts?

One of the more recent additions into this somewhat misfit group of self-translators is the Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri, who, in 2021, released her English translation, *Whereabouts*, of the novel she initially wrote in Italian, *Dove mi trovo*. This venture into self-translation follows a burgeoning, prize-winning career in English and a first book published in Italian, *In altre parole*, that explores her relationship to her adopted language. Her trajectory thus mirrors that of Gary (as well as many other self-translators) who gingerly move from the status of monolingual to bilingual author, and then take the leap into self-translation.[115] But Lahiri does not tell us, as Gary does, that her translation, "au fond," is, "un peu un autre roman."[116] Rather, for her the two "share the same vital organs. They are conjoined twins, though, on the surface, they bear no resemblance to one another." Nor does she lament, as Beckett does, "If there was a head and a rock I'd rather beat that against this than start the old fake stravaguing again in another proxy. It's hard to go on with everything loathed and repudiated as soon as formulated, and in the act of formulation, and before formulation" (*Letters 2* 457).

[115] Recall that Beckett's initial publications in English gained little traction and it was with his foray into French (in thanks partly to his relationship with Jérôme Lindon of Éditions de Minuit) that he gained renown. Huston's first English publication was a self-translation, which she then followed with an English language original. Green, being essentially bilingual, did not have the linguistic apprenticeship of these other authors.
[116] See p. 147.

Lahiri's description of the late stages of her translation is much more serene, describing a level of concentration reminiscent of "focusing purely on the quality and sensations of the water when one is swimming in the sea, as opposed to admiring elements that float through it or collect on the seabed." She focuses on the water in which she is suspended, rather than on the seabed's rocks, against which Beckett imagines thumping his skull.

But despite this tranquil description of the process of translation, Lahiri nevertheless recognizes that the sea is not home, and, after writing in Italian, returning to English "no longer represented the reassuring, essential act of coming up for air." She discovers, rather, like Huston did when she returned to English in *Plainsong*, "It was as if the prodigal son had come home and his father said to him, 'Go fuck yourself.'"[117] Lahiri, in milder terms, echoes this impossibility of a homecoming: "When an author migrates into another language, the subsequent crossing into the former language might be regarded, by some, as a crossing back, an act of return, a coming home. This idea is false, and it was also not my objective." Through the process of writing in their adopted languages, these authors are uprooted and exposed. Language is no longer the comfortable, familiar soil in which they can both grow and be buried.

Through the process of translation, they discover that these texts they composed, and these selves they imagined they were, are not the stable, grounded oaks they once believed. As we encountered in the chapter on Green, translation allows you to speak "le

[117] See p. 248.

langage de l'autre côté du miroir."[118] It was by looking into his reflection that Green saw his self fractured and recognized the possibility for multiplicity through speaking on both sides of this mirror. Lahiri, recognizing the mirror-like quality of translation, understands its destabilizing effect on her writing: "That original book, which now feels incomplete to me, stands in line behind its English-language counterpart. Like an image viewed in the mirror, it has turned into the simulacrum, and both is and is not the starting point for what rationally and irrationally followed." She, like the self-translators who have come before her, highlights how the translation has radically affected the original and threatens to usurp its privileged position as the unique vessel of meaning. The two versions must now face off in the mirror, unsure of whose gaze they are meeting.

Moreover, as this dissertation has demonstrated (especially in the case of Green and Gary), self-translation, as the name implies, cannot be disentangled from the self that produces it. Lahiri, too, admits that "[t]he author who wrote *Dove mi trovo* both is and is not the author who translated them. This split consciousness is, if nothing else, a bracing experience." In this we recognize echoes of Huston's use of translation to prove to herself that she was "pas schizophrène, pas folle" as well as Gary's pseudo-memoir of the schizophrenic, yet fictionalized, Paul Pavlowitch.[119] As I have argued, these experiences of self-translation allow the subject to recognize the degree to which the self is

[118] See p. 60.
[119] See p. 241 for Huston and pp. 201-4 for Gary.

constituted in language, as well as the possibility for this process to be replicated. Translating oneself opens one's eyes to the possibility of translating one's self.

Although, as I have shown, the relationships that Green, Beckett, Gary, Huston, and their fellow self-translators each have to their compositions and translations are varied and complex, there are nevertheless certain unavoidable facets of self-translation that, for better or worse, all must confront. One such inescapable reality is that language must be learned. In the case of native languages this fact is sometimes overlooked and it takes learning a second (or third, or fourth…) to correct the belief that words have a natural relationship to the things they purport to represent. Green and Huston both describe the frustrations and seeming impossibility of becoming fluent in a language where their accents betray them as outsiders. Language creates friction, not only between native and non-native speakers, but between languages themselves, since equivalence can only be inexact: "Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations" (Nida 141). But it is through this comparison of languages, that is to say, in translation, that the arbitrariness of the sign becomes apparent.

As Paul de Man writes in his response to Benjamin's concept of "pure language," "We think we are at ease in our own language, we feel a coziness, a familiarity, a shelter in the language we call our own, in which we think that we are not alienated. What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own

original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering" ("Conclusions" 37). Armed with this newfound knowledge, the writer can turn it back on language. Recall what Beckett writes, in his canonical letter, "Grammar and style! To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Biedermeier bathing suit or the imperturbability of a gentleman. A mask. It is to be hoped the time will come, thank God, in some circles it already has, when language is best used where it is most efficiently abused" (*Letters 1* 518). For Beckett, language had it coming. But even for the self-translator less inclined to violence, another truth that translation reveals is that language is not a neutral conveyer of meaning. Whether writing fact, fiction, or some intersection of them, the self-translator understands that saying the same thing twice is no more easily said than done. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, one need look no further than Barbara Cassin's *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* to appreciate the ways in which meaning and language cannot be separated out for the convenience of the translator. To translate is to remold meaning in a new medium, but it is also to create new meaning in the interstices created by translation and original.

One final reality that no self-translator can escape is that to translate oneself means to draw out the relationship to the original text. Translation resists finality; to go a

step further, translation eliminates finality.[120] Lahiri, reflecting on this in her work, writes, "Self-translation means prolonging your relationship to the book you've written. Time expands and the sun still shines when you expect things to go dark. This disorienting surplus of daylight feels unnatural, but it also feels advantageous, magical." And while not all self-translators share this sunny view of the prolonged relationship that translation affords them—think, "an indigestion of old work with all the adventure gone" (Beckett *Letters 2* 407)—they all have chosen, for one reason or another, to carry on writing, again, and in doing so they undo the existence of a definitive text. As we saw in each of the four chapters of this dissertation, the translative act affected not only the status of the original in a phenomenological sense but results in concrete changes that are issued in subsequent republications. Lahiri, joining the chorus of self-translators in this study, celebrates how "[t]he brutal act of self-translation frees oneself, once and for all, from the false myth of the definitive text." In this back and forth between languages, the writer cannot make one change that does not invariably lead to another, and on and on, until the work is (to paraphrase Valéry) abandoned, but not completed.

But for some, self-translation is not so much a desire to resist finality or to delight in an eternal work-in-progress, but to endeavor for completion. As Raymond Federman writes, "Even though finished, the book feels unfinished if it does not exist in the other

[120] An initial translation often opens the floodgates to retranslation; translation begets translation. For an in-depth study of this phenomenon see Sharon Deane-Cox's *Retranslation: Translation, Literature and Reinterpretation*, which explores Antoine Berman's "Retranslation Hypothesis."

language… I feel a sense of incompleteness" ("A Voice Within a Voice"). For the work that issues forth from certain bilingual subjects (as Federman was in French and English), a version in only one language can feel incomplete, only half expressed, mirroring the incompleteness felt by the writing subject. We might consider Huston to be another such example of this type of bilingual hoping to bridge their divides. And yet for others, notably authors like Green and Gary, the idea of a self-expression across languages is, in a sense, completely foreign. The writing in one language expresses the self conceived in and created by the language at hand. The self-translator's reader is rarely privy to these competing desires, or to which one motivated the creation of the book they hold in their hands. And yet, the realities of translation leave their prints on the pages we least suspect.

As this dissertation has shown, translation is not a first-responder who arrives on the scene after the action has passed, the plot **is** completed, in order to treat the victims and reconstruct the events. Rather, it is there from the beginning, whether at the forefront or in the background, a character or a setting, an aggressor or a victim. Whether translation allows a writer to express their selves across languages (Green), to create echoes and thus thicken meaning between texts (Beckett), create the myth of themself (Gary), or simply to write the stories of books that do not exist (Huston), its influence can be traced from draft to publication. The texts must confront a looming possibility of substitution that threatens to disarticulate the meaning they propose, while also allowing them the possibility of living on in a new form. The self-translator's text is thus inherently translatable: it cannot be otherwise. The object of this study has been this

forced obligation to be ready to mean anew, its impact across forms of writing, and the limits and possibilities it represents to the writers who translate them (and their) selves.

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