



Justice for the “Illstarred Punster”:
Samuel Beckett and Alfred Péron’s
Revisions of “Anna Lyvia Pluratsel”

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Sam knows miles bettern me how to work the miracle. . . .
Illstarred punster, lipstering cowknucks. . . . Fond namer,
let me never see thee blame a kiss for shame a knee!

Finnegans Wake 467.18-468.19¹

Samuel Beckett’s habitual employment in the summer of 1930—the same summer he declared in *Proust*, “Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit”²—was translating Joyce’s “Anna Livia Plurabelle” into French. Though *Proust* is still considered a critical milestone, it obviously dissatisfied Beckett: “‘Too abstract’ indeed,” he wrote in the margins of his copy, “the use of mainly concrete nouns and active verbs instead of all this abstract jargon would have gone a long way to ‘clarifying’ the argument.”³ Beckett capped off his frustration with the words, as quoted by Nicholas Zurbrugg: “Dog Vomit” (103). If one spent all day translating phrases such as “Suchcaughtawan!” (FW 197.36) into “Ca c’est craché v’lan!” or “duddurdy devil!” (FW 196.15) into “le mymyserable!” one could understand how the use of concrete nouns would fall out of habit.⁴ Beckett, however, found similar dissatisfaction in his translation of ALP. Called “Anna Lyvia Pluratsel,” the translation was written in conjunction with Alfred Péron for publication in the avant-garde French review, *Bifur*. On the page proofs, in only one of numerous changes, Beckett’s pen cancels the draft title, reverting ALP to its English counterpart: “Anna Livia *Plurabelle*.” Current scholarship, following the lead of Joyce himself, as well as the testimonials of the French collaborators Joyce later chose to translate ALP, dismisses the Beckett-Péron translation.⁵ Furthermore, since its reprinting in France in 1985, “Anna Lyvia Pluratsel” has served as the scapegoat to contrast the presumed genius of Joyce’s method with the plodding literal translation that might have occurred had hacks like Beckett and Péron been permitted to finish the job. With the benefit of not only the page proofs of *Bifur* but also Péron’s subsequent typescripts at hand, I argue that the same writer who famously elucidated the means for

approaching *Finnegans Wake*—"Here form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all"⁶—established the method of translating *Finnegans Wake* that Joyce himself embraced in his subsequent translations.⁷ Why, then, did Beckett and Péron not finish the job? In the context of Beckett and Péron's revisions, I would like to suggest some new answers to that question.

I. "Traduttore—Traditore!"⁸

The composition of the French translation of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* culminated in a slap across the face at the séance arranged for its first public reading, an outraged misunderstanding that seems oddly appropriate given the disparate accounts of its authorship. According to lore about the "solemn, even reverential occasion" at which Joyce, surrounded by over two hundred people, heard his final French version read aloud, the following disruption occurred:

[Philippe] Soupault described the labor of translating *Anna Livia*. The record of Joyce reading it in English was then played, and after it Adrienne Monnier read the French translation. Joyce sat dignified and inert throughout, but Robert McAlmon, who reluctantly escorted a friend to the séance, was bored and irritated by the general tone of hushed veneration. He lifted his hands for a second in a gesture of prayer, and an old man rushed across the room and slapped him in the face. It was [Édouard] Dujardin, who had misinterpreted McAlmon's gesture; Madame Dujardin had large ankles and her husband thought McAlmon had looked at them and then put up his hands in mock horror. (*JIII* 637)⁹

Although Joyce apparently was entertained by "the comic interposition," McAlmon was not alone in his frustration with the event (*JIII* 637). According to James Knowlson, Beckett, too, who had hurried over at the last minute from Dublin, "keenly resented" the occasion, in particular Soupault's account of the history of the translation (128).

Apparently Soupault suggested at the time, and later repeated in print, that the contribution of Beckett and Péron to the final translation was minimal because "their translation was referred to as a 'premier essai' or 'first attempt' that had then been subject to further correction by Paul Léon, Ivan Goll, and Joyce himself" (128). In his published rendition, Soupault's emphasis on the rejection of the earlier version is very clear:

M. Léon lisait le texte anglais et je suivais la version française revue.
Paul Léon détachait une phrase du texte anglais, je lisais la traduction

de la phrase et nous discussions. Nous *rejetions* d'accord avec M. Joyce ce qui nous paraissait *contraire* au rythme, au sens, à la métamorphose des mots et nous essayions à notre tour de proposer une traduction. M. Joyce nous exposait les difficultés, nous cherchions d'un commun accord des équivalents, nous trouvions *une phrase mieux rythmée, un mot plus fort.* (73-74, my italics)¹⁰

Soupault implies that the later group read aloud the early version line by line and extracted material that was contrary to the rhythm, sense, and main idea of "linguistic metamorphosis" ("la métamorphose des mots") in the Beckett-Péron version. Because Soupault states that fifteen three-hour sessions were required to complete this part of the work, he implies that the majority of the translation needed fixing, given that the entire text of "Anna Livia Pluralsel" is only six-and-a-half pages long (74). Since Soupault was the one who had originally suggested that Beckett take on the translation for publication, his later public dismissal was all the more pointed.

Eugene Jolas's version of events is less critical of the "premier essai," yet even more insistent upon the role of Joyce in its rejection. He writes, as quoted by Maria Jolas:

Samuel Beckett and his French poet friend, Alfred Peron [*sic*], had been working on a French version of the *Anna Livia Plurabelle* fragment which Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, then editor of the advance-guard French review, *Bifur*, was eager to publish. It had even been announced for appearance in a coming issue. I mentioned this fact to Joyce, who seemed disturbed. "The translation is not yet perfect," he said. "It should be withdrawn." To the great regret of our friend Ribemont-Dessaignes, this was done. In reality, this version was already quite remarkable, when one considers the almost insuperable difficulties involved. But Joyce wanted to simplify it. For this task an international committee was formed, composed of the following French, Irish, American and Russian writers: Philippe Soupault, Ivan Goll, Alfred Perron [*sic*], Samuel Beckett, Paul Léon, Adrienne Monnier and myself. (172)

Eugene Jolas, while lauding the work of Beckett and Péron as "quite remarkable," alleges that it was Joyce himself who found the earlier version in need of correction. Eugene Jolas's description, according to his wife, remarkably implies that the two young men sought to publish the translation without the final stamp of approval from "the *Maestro*" (173). This is difficult to believe, given that at this time Beckett was still much in awe of Joyce, even taking dictation from Joyce for days at a time because of Joyce's eye problems. While Eugene Jolas and Soupault disagree as to whether Beckett and Péron were even welcome as part of the later team, they do agree that Joyce's dissatisfaction with the early version led to its withdrawal from publication.

Furthermore, they highlight the important role Joyce himself played in the creation of the new translation.

In his biography of Beckett, *Damned to Fame*, Knowlson emphasizes the extent to which Beckett took the rejection of his translation to heart. After the séance reading, Joyce sent Beckett signed copies of the translation in Ireland. According to Knowlson, “[i]n thanking him, Beckett could not resist the comment that ‘it was impossible to read his text without understanding the futility of the translation,’ adding even more acidly to [Thomas] MacGreevy [*sic*], that he could not ‘believe that [Joyce] doesn’t see through the translation himself, its horrible quip atmosphere and vulgarity’” (128). Beckett hardly disguises his anger in suggesting that the text shows the “futility” of translation in the face of Joyce’s proclamation that ALP “must be one of the masterpieces of translation” (*Letters I* 302). Although Beckett was exercised enough to spurn the “Maestro” with his response, he was not so angry that he could hide his esteem for *Work in Progress*.¹¹ Knowlson comments that even as late as 1989, Beckett revealed that he “still felt slighted by the way in which his version had been underestimated and discarded” (128). But to what extent was his ire directed at the fact that, rather than being “underestimated and discarded,” his version was actually “underestimated” yet to a great extent retained?

Eager for Beckett scholars to take a new look at the “Pluratsself” text, Knowlson asserts that “[f]ortunately the Beckett-Péron version has been preserved and can be compared with the published text” (128), and in an article in Karen Lawrence’s *Transcultural Joyce*, Daniel Ferrer and Jacques Aubert do exactly that.¹² They state that “a minor crux has cropped up a few years ago with the discovery, or rediscovery, of a first-draft version of this translation,” and they similarly question Soupault’s dismissal of the text as merely a failed “premier essai,” asserting that “[t]he interesting point about this attempt is that it had not been considered such until then [when Soupault named it that]. Far from being a more or less rough draft, it had been carefully prepared for publication and had reached galley-proof stage for publication in *Bifur*, until Joyce withdrew it” (179).

Ferrer and Aubert posit that Joyce’s decision to pull “Anna Lyvia Pluratsself” from *Bifur* had much to do with “Joyce’s public-relations strategy,” which had “changed from an involvement in the avante-garde, to gradual approaches to more respectable, and above all better-established firms” like the *Nouvelle Revue Française* where “Anna Livia Plurabelle” did appear in print later that year (180). While making a compelling case for the reasons Joyce may have changed his mind, however, they simultaneously argue that the earlier translation itself is faulty and Joyce “was certainly actuated by deeper artistic motivations” (180). In highlighting the minor crux that the *Bifur* pages

exhibit, they ignore the fact that the corrected “Anna Lyvia Pluratselſ” is nearly identical to the published “Anna Livia Plurabelle.” The presence of the corrected *Bifur* pages, as well as the two carefully prepared typescripts by Péron and Beckett—the final version identical to the published version—thwarts the idea that “deeper artistic motivations” directed Joyce’s decisions.¹³

Ferrer and Aubert argue:

In the absence of a precise stenography of the séances [where the collaborative version changes were made], we have no way of discovering what were Joyce’s precise interventions, but we can assume that he gave at least passive authorization to all of the second version and, more specifically, that all the changes between the first and the second versions must have been explicitly discussed in his presence. In this respect, the two French texts, or rather their differences, constitute a “primary document,” valuable if difficult to interpret. (181)

In using “Anna Lyvia Pluratselſ” as a “primary document,” Ferrer and Aubert mirror the work of those doing genetic studies on *Finnegans Wake* who employ the “20 volumes of *Finnegans Wake* manuscripts and 16 volumes containing facsimiles of Joyce’s notebooks” to mine not only the sources Joyce used but “what he *failed* to use and . . . the way he *manipulated* the borrowed materials, inserting his own reactive annotations.”¹⁴ Both the heavily revised proof pages of “Anna Lyvia Pluratselſ” in the hands of Beckett and Péron and their subsequent typescripts, however, undermine this approach. Though the translation had to be “finally completed to Joyce’s satisfaction,” several of the changes that Ferrer and Aubert point to as “introduced under Joyce’s supervision” are, in fact, those introduced by Beckett and Péron, as Maria Jolas notes (173). Just as the polylingual *Finnegans Wake* sets all simple notions of translation into crisis, so also the multiple hands revising “Anna Livia Pluratselſ” complicate Ferrer and Aubert’s particular attempt at *critique génétique*. After all, it seems many of the decisions and alterations were made before Joyce himself was even actively involved in the process.

II. Plurabelles: Anna Lyvia Pluratselſ, Anna Lyvia Pluratselſ, Anna Livia Plurabelle, Anne Livie Plurabelle

There are at least four revised versions of the Beckett-Péron translation of “Anna Livia Plurabelle.” Beckett’s first typed version, the *Bifur* proof pages, and two typescripts labeled “Typescript of the second French translation by Beckett and Péron” are all gathered in a collection of Péron’s papers in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Beckett’s first typed version is accompanied by a signed note urging

that this “pauvre” version is not to be published in any way without the approval of Joyce. The *Bifur* proofs are extensively revised—in pen by Beckett and in pencil by Péron.¹⁵ The two typescripts are most likely, as their labels indicate, by Péron as well. The changes made in pencil on the proof pages (Péron’s revisions) are all incorporated into the typescripts, including changes that are later revised again, and both typescripts are from the same typewriter.¹⁶ The final typescript, labeled “Anne Livie Plurabelle,” includes a few pencil changes made in Joyce’s hand, most of which (like the revised title) failed to be incorporated into the final published version of the text.

The most likely chronology of the translation is as follows: Beckett’s first text was used for the *Bifur* page proofs, which were heavily revised by both Beckett and Péron. Péron incorporated these changes into his two typescripts that were at some later date shared with Joyce himself. Though these manuscripts present a number of conundrums—for example, when did Joyce read the second typescript and why were his own revisions never incorporated?—one thing is certain: a simple juxtaposition of “Anna Lyvia Pluratsel” with the published “Anna Livia Plurabelle” misrepresents Beckett and Péron’s contribution to the later version. In fact, a comparison of the four versions supports the following two conclusions. First, even Beckett’s earliest French version of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” demonstrates that, rather than literally translating *Finnegans Wake* into French, Beckett attempted to recreate the text in French, playing with French homophones, portmanteaux, and riddles and undermining signification in French just as Joyce did in English. Second, Joyce could not have dismissed Beckett and Péron as his principal translators because of the quality of their work: Beckett and Péron’s “second translation” is virtually interchangeable with the published version; it is merely shorter.

The section of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” that Beckett and Péron translated is *Finnegans Wake*, pages 196-201, up to line 21, which describes, as Joyce famously explained to an unconvinced Harriet Shaw Weaver, “a chattering dialogue across the river by two washerwomen who as night falls become a tree and a stone. The river is named Anna Liffey” (*Letters I* 213). In English, this was Joyce’s favorite part of the entire enterprise—“Either the end of Part I Δ [*Anna Livia Plurabelle*] is something or I am an imbecile in my judgment of language” (*SL* 318-19)—perhaps explaining why Soupault urged Beckett to translate this section.

In describing the filthy laundry of HCE (the “awful old reppe”), one washerwoman exclaims, “My wrists are wrusty rubbing the mouldaw stains” (*FW* 196.11, 17-18) and wonders what crime HCE has perpetrated: “What was it he did a tail at all on Animal Sendai?” (*FW* 196.18-19). The feast day, Animal Sendai, in earlier English

drafts, had been “Animal Sunday,” perhaps denoting a Catholic feast for the blessing of the animals. Demonstrating the tendency to “simplify,” Joyce preferred the verbal play and sound of dialect revealed by Sendai over the straightforward Sunday.¹⁷ Sendai perhaps invokes “Sinai,” the mountain on which Moses received his ten commandments, including “thou shalt not commit adultery” and “thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife,” admonitions that HCE apparently failed to heed.¹⁸ The French translation manifests similar mutations. In Beckett’s original typescript, the day is described as “le dimanche des Ramos” (*Pluratsself* 155), quite a close approximation to “Rameaux” or the French word for branch, which designates the feast day of Palm Sunday. Beckett’s earliest version, like Joyce’s final one, invokes the Bible; moreover, it implicitly highlights the sins of mankind. “Ramos” allows for the homophonic pun on “mots” so that words are disfigured within Palm Sunday, just as Jesus as God or the Word is soon to be disfigured by the sins of men like HCE.

On the *Bifur* proof pages, however, Péron has changed “le dimanche des Ramos” to “La fête fauver,” allowing for alternative puns.¹⁹ The native French speaker of the collaborating duo apparently preferred the sound of “fête fauver” to the Irishman’s “Ramos.” “Fête fauver” invokes “bête fauve” (wild beast), which returns the holiday to “animal Sunday.” Péron’s penciled version, therefore, more openly connects HCE’s actions back to a wild beast but loses the liturgical puns Beckett had invoked. In the typescripts, he revises the day once again, now to “La fete des fauves,” which is very close to the published version, “La fête Fauve” (*Pluratsself* 5).

“Fête fauve” is actually one of the “striking verbal inventions” that Ferrer and Aubert state is “introduced under Joyce’s supervision,” when they contrast the Beckett-Péron version to the Joyce-collaborator group (181). In fact, this is a change of Péron’s, made more likely in conjunction with Beckett than with any input from Joyce. Similarly, they compare the translations of the chastening sentence, “But toms will till. I know he well. Temp untamed will hist for no man. As you spring so shall you neap” (181—FW 196.22-23). The draft version is as follows: “Tout sera manafeste dans l’avonir, j’en suis sura. Le temps perdu ne se retrouve jamais. On récolte ce qu’on a semé” (*Pluratsself* 155). In contrast, the published version states, “Le tems le dira. Je suis sûr de lui. Le temps qu’on ne dompte n’attend pour personne. Tu sèmes l’avon, tu recoltes l’eaurage” (*Pluratsself* 5). The latter version includes a reference to the French proverb “Qui sème le vent récolte la tempête,” which Ferrer and Aubert suggest is a “nice culminating formula” introduced “under Joyce’s supervision” (182).²⁰ As with “fête fauve,” however, this change is indicated by Péron’s pencil, demonstrating that Péron and Beckett sought out French proverbs to replace those lost from the English, such as “as you sow, so shall you reap.”

Furthermore, the earlier version once again contains verbal play that the latter version erases, as “*manafeste*” folds the Biblical homophonic “*manne*” within the “*manifeste*.” Beckett’s washerwomen imply that all will be revealed (*manifeste*) and also suggest, perhaps wryly, that it will be a celestial blessing (*manne-feste*) when HCE gets his due judgment. Tracing Beckett and Péron’s corrections of their own version makes it apparent that their revisions differ primarily in extent rather than in kind.

Even in comparing the *Pluratsself* version to the published version, it is risky to make assumptions about Beckett’s “strengths” as a “literal” translator. For example, Kim Allen asserts:

In general, it can be said that Beckett’s strengths lie in his keeping the translation fairly literal, which makes it easy to follow alongside Joyce’s text. He keeps proper names Irish, and also keeps the sounds of the original for the most part. His weakness is that he does not play as much with the French language as the reader might like and the text might require. (430)

The earliest text to a certain extent supports Allen’s argument, in particular in the tendency to leave proper names in Irish. Allen points out (432) that, for example, in Beckett’s earliest version, “New Hunshire” (FW 197.10) remains “New Hunshire” (*Pluratsself* 156), rather than the later word “L’Humi” (*Pluratsself* 7), and Grafton’s causeway remains “la chaussée de Grafton” (*Pluratsself* 158), rather than the later “chaussé d’antan” (“the causeway of yesteryear”—*Pluratsself* 13). However, the early version also invokes puns and distorts the French language where the later version does not. The title, for example, is a strident translation of Joyce’s own. When left untranslated, “Plurabelle,” Joyce’s selection, makes more sense in French than in the English original: the river and Anna Livia are both multifariously beautiful—pluri-belle. But Beckett and Péron chose to make the title strange and distant to French ears by inserting the English “self” to mirror the effect of the French “belle” to English speakers. Furthermore, they ignored a literal translation (“*pluribeauties*”? “*manibelles*”? or even “*pluribelles*”?) in favor of choosing the English word “self,” emphasizing the fragmented selves and multiple incarnations of ALP. Finally, “*Pluratsself*” is both startlingly cacophonous and visibly striking. It seems Beckett and Péron wanted to highlight the strangeness of the text the French reader was about to encounter by violently yoking together different languages and sounds in the title. In crossing out the title with his pen, Beckett demonstrates that at some point in the process he re-thought this manner of translating Joyce’s title. Therefore, even as Beckett and Péron’s earliest version occasionally provides insight into what Joyce possibly could have

“meant” in *Finnegans Wake* (in the way that C. K. Ogden’s “Basic English” translation sheds light on the *Wake*’s “plot”²¹), at other times, the distortions such as the title, or “bourger” (*Pluratsself* 155) for “bouger” (implying HCE is a “bourgeois” under lock and key), or expressions such as “Ca c’est craché v’lan!” (*Pluratsself* 156) for Joyce’s “Suchcaughtawan!” (*FW* 197.36) belong purely to Beckett and Péron, undermining the notion that their translation is “literal.”²²

In comparing the *Bifur* page-proof corrections to the published version, the startling fact comes to light that Joyce altered very few of Péron’s penciled changes. In the first twenty-five sentences of the translation, for example, there appear to be twenty-six changes between the “*Pluratsself*” and the published “*Plurabelle*.” However, of these changes, all except three (the title, “evidemment” for “bien sûr,” and “Paroker” for “par coeur”) were either written in Péron’s pencil or circled by him and appear in the typescripts. On the second typescript, even these two earlier changes are made, the first in Joyce’s hand. The most likely scenario appears to be that Péron and Beckett raced to make corrections on the *Bifur* proof pages, which Péron then typed up himself. Although Joyce refused to allow them to go to press, these pages were later sent to Joyce, who used Péron’s revised version, rather than the “*Anna Lyvia Pluratsself*” text, as a basis to begin the group’s collaborative translation.

While it is possible that Joyce had a hand in the revisions at an earlier date, it seems unlikely, primarily because Péron and Beckett’s *Bifur* corrections appear to have been made before they realized that the pages were not going to be published. They even corrected the way their names would appear. The corrections are scrawled and hurried, and a note from Paul Nizan, an editor at *Bifur*, written across the upper left hand corner asks, “Prière de faire vite, je vais t’écrire, Nizan.”²³ Such an informal note between Nizan and the two young men is not surprising; Nizan and Péron had shared a room at the École Normale Supérieure. It is highly unlikely that Joyce would have had the chance to contribute to these rushed revisions, especially if, as Jolas suggests, he was not even aware of the imminence of the publication. Further, these penciled revisions largely dictate the changes that occur on the following typescripts. If Joyce did contribute to the typescripts before the séance sessions, Péron and Beckett’s own revisions already indicated where and to a great extent how revisions were to be made.²⁴

The question that remains, then, is—if Péron’s second typescript is practically interchangeable with the published French version of “*Anna Livia Plurabelle*” (there are fewer than a dozen small changes), what were Joyce and his collaborators doing for forty-five hours? It may be that they were to a large extent completing the final forty-nine lines of the section, rather than revising. Though this may initially

seem preposterous, Fred Higginson notes that Joyce claimed to have spent sixteen hundred hours working on “Anna Livia Plurabelle” in English “between its inception and the *transition* version” (4). As Higginson explains, in *Anna Livia Plurabelle: The Making of A Chapter*, had Joyce spent the same amount of time working on every other section of *Finnegans Wake*, he would have had to spend thirty-two hours a day laboring for the seventeen years he needed to complete the book (4). In fact, for the final section, Joyce would have been completing approximately ten lines every nine hours with his collaborators, which is much faster than the twenty-three hours the same amount of text took him when he wrote ALP in English alone. Therefore, rather than methodically dissecting and rejecting the early version, it seems that Joyce mainly accepted and completed the version he was given. Why then did Joyce refuse to allow the Beckett-Péron revised version to be finished and published in *Bifur*? And why is there the historical account, fostered by Soupault and Jolas, that at séances led by the maestro, the international group of collaborators rejected and revised the early text?

Both personally and politically, Joyce had reason to distance himself from the work of Beckett and Péron in 1930. On the personal level, Beckett and Joyce reached the low point of their relationship.²⁵ Beckett was not welcome in Joyce’s household after May of that year because he had spurned Lucia’s infatuation, coldly informing her that he visited the house only to see her father. The translation may have been Beckett’s effort to win back Joyce’s affection, and if so, Joyce’s refusal to allow it to be published shows that the effort failed. It was only when, Knowlson comments, “Joyce came to recognize how ill his daughter was and how impossible a true love affair with her would have been” (105) that the rift, which lasted almost a year, was able to be healed (*JJII* 649).

Politically, neither Beckett nor Péron could do much to publicize “Anna Livia Plurabelle” in France. Beckett, only twenty-four at the time, had to rush home to Ireland for his academic job. Nor did Péron carry much more clout; he, too, was young, and though he may have been “elegant, witty, and urbane,” he was merely a “new exchange lecteur” at the École Normale Supérieure, hardly a personality even to be invited to the séance reading, according to Knowlson (66). Furthermore, Péron, firmly associated with the radical left wing, was a close friend of both Nizan and Jean-Paul Sartre, and the former’s work, “Les chiens de garde,” published one year later,²⁶ was a “ferocious attack on more or less Marxist lines against academic French philosophy,” in Ferrer and Aubert’s words (185). Péron himself was to become an active member of the Resistance, whose group “l’Etoile” was betrayed “by a defrocked priest.”²⁷ Just as Joyce may have moved from *Bifur* to *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in order to reach

a larger, more conservative audience, so may he have performed a slightly Machiavellian gesture, as Ferrer and Aubert hypothesize, in order to ensure greater publicity (180).

At the same time that Joyce considered the translation, he was also involved in a heated lawsuit involving the value of his own name and intellectual-property rights.²⁸ This suit must have brought home to him the value of having his name attached to “Anna Livia Plurabelle.” Even though within *Finnegans Wake* Joyce disdains claims of genuine authorship, when he writes, “we must vaunt no idle dubiousity as to its genuine authorship and holusbolus authoritativeness,” he must have realized that the presence of his now infamous name on the title page of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” as both author and translator would certainly be a smart commercial move (FW 118.03-04). Joyce was already a literary celebrity in France, as the packed turnout at his séance and the reverential tone that so irritated McAlmon indicated. According to the only French contributor to *Our Exagmination*, Marcel Brion, who is quoted by Lernout, Joyce was surrounded in Paris by a group of people who were “a true cult, ardent, exclusive, not without fanaticism” (31).²⁹ In contrast, Beckett and Péron were unknowns. When “Anna Livia Plurabelle” was finally published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, the translators were listed as “Samuel Beckett, Alfred Perron [sic], Ivan Goll, Eugene Jolas, Paul L. Léon, Adrienne Monnier, and Philippe Soupault with the author.”³⁰ “Alfred Perron” was not even famous enough to have his name spelled correctly.

The fact that neither he nor Samuel Beckett took this slight easily is suggested by a letter to Sylvia Beach on 23 April 1931: “I hope that Don Leone has straightened out the tangle and that the Septante or Septuagint is now as seven as possible.”³¹ The “Septante” appears to be Joyce’s name for the seven translators, while Don Leone most likely refers to Paul Léon, Joyce’s close friend at this juncture. It seems likely to me that the member of the Septante who needed strong-arming into putting his name on the title page was Péron, whose collected typescripts undermine the notion that Joyce or anyone other than Beckett was a full-fledged co-author of the project. But what would it mean to author a translation of *Finnegans Wake* anyway?

III. “Sans l’auorisation”

Finnegans Wake è anche—tra tutti—il testo piú facile di tradurre.

Umberto Eco, “Introduzione,” *Pluratsself*³²

Finnegans Wake . . . resembles a too-powerful, outsize calculator incommensurable with any translating machine conceivable today.

Jacques Derrida, “Two Words for Joyce”

The very first translation of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" was written expressly without Joyce's final stamp of approval. In his cover note to Soupault, who was acting as a kind of agent for the translation in progress, Beckett warns: "Mais je ne voudrais pas publier cela, pas même un fragment, sans l'auorisation [sic] de Monsieur Joyce lui-même, qui pourrait tres bien trouver cela vraiment trop mal fait et trop éloigné de l'original. Plus j'y pense plus je trouve tout cela bien pauvre."³³ Knowlson mentions that there is such a note and infers from it that "it could well be that Beckett's own lack of conviction, or perhaps his modesty, affected the outcome" of his translation (728). In support of Beckett's lack of conviction stands his admitted frustration at the rate at which he and Péron needed to work on the translation. He wrote: "We are galloping through A. L. P. It has become comic now. I suppose that is the only attitude."³⁴ However, Beckett's misspelling on his note to Soupault is too telling, especially in a cover letter for a translation of *Finnegans Wake*, and invites further investigation. Did he really disfigure the "author" in "authorization" and fail to notice?

As the misspelling of "l'auorisation" suggests, rather than awaiting Joyce's authorization, Beckett is closer to hoping for his "l'aura" (in effect, his aura) or his "l'auerole-isation," the halo/nimbus or metonymic blessing that Joyce could bestow upon Beckett's own writing. Beckett's further claim that Joyce might find his version "trop éloigné de l'original" similarly implies that Beckett feels he has taken too many liberties in translating. But if the youthful Beckett really believes what he expresses elsewhere, in both *Our Exagmination and Proust*, it is not only that his translation of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" is too far from the original but also that, in fact, it is necessarily a completely new text of which he is the author. Fritz Senn argues:

We have come to accept as a truism that with Joyce form and content become one. If they really and completely did, translation, by its drastic change of form, would indeed be impossible. The more language approximates the condition expressed in Samuel Beckett's view of Joyce's later prose ("His writing is not *about* something; it is *that something itself*") the more it is put out of the translator's reach. . . . Fortunately (for the translator) this complete identification remains an ideal rather than an achievement.³⁵

However, when Beckett himself is both the translator and the author of the "truism" *identifying* form with content for *Finnegans Wake*, does "translation" truly become impossible? "The danger . . . in the neatness of identifications" applies to Beckett himself as translator ("Dante" 3).

Walter Benjamin, in his essay "The Task of the Translator," implies

that translation of a text such as *Finnegans Wake* may indeed be impossible; he states that the goal of translation

basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the effort of the latter is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at specific linguistic contextual aspects. Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in 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. . . . the aim of translation differ[s] from that of a literary work—it intends language as a whole.³⁶

Joyce's intention in *Finnegans Wake*, as Beckett well knew, was "language as a whole"; therefore, in Benjamin's terms, Joyce was already performing the "task of the translator." Beckett would have to admit that Joyce's text was a failure in order to translate it. Umberto Eco's recent introduction to the translation of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" basically makes such a claim when he asserts that ALP is not really written in the desired invented language but is "un testo plurilingue come potera pensarlo un anglofono."³⁷ Joyce aims at a truly polylingual text, but his accomplishment is limited by his English viewpoint.³⁸ Therefore, Eco claims, it is possible to translate *Finnegans Wake*, and the many different translations within his edition (French, Italian, Basic English) demonstrate that other writers agree with him. Yet in his assertion that it is "il testo piú facile da tradurre perche consente il massimo di liberta inventive,"³⁹ he comes close again to saying it is an impossible text to translate (xi). This maximum amount of liberty nearly equates translation with creation.

In *Proust*, as in *Our Exagmination*, Beckett himself highlights the inextricable unity between form and content. In "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," he famously argues that "[h]is writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*. . . . When the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep. (See the end of 'Anna Livia') When the sense is dancing, the words dance" ("Dante" 14). In explaining why "doubt" fails to "express a state of extreme uncertainty" revealed by the Wakean "twosome twiminds" (FW 188.14), Beckett calls out for "all the inevitable clarity of old inarticulation. . . . the savage economy of hieroglyphics" ("Dante" 15). Beckett, unlike Eco, insists that *Work in Progress* "is not written in English" ("Dante" 14); rather, it speaks a "hieroglyphic" early language. But if Beckett truly believes that the text at hand is not in a recognizable language but in "savage . . . hieroglyphics," then how on earth, two years later, can he believe he can translate it into French?

Beckett's essay on Proust sheds some light upon that decision. He

praises Proust for qualities similar to these he finds in Joyce: Proust "makes no attempt to dissociate form from content. The one is a concretion of the other. The revelation of the word" (*Proust* 67). Therefore for Beckett, Proust's writing bears the closest resemblance to music, because "music is the Idea itself" (*Proust* 71). Moreover, in this essay, written at the same time when he is translating "Anna Livia Plurabelle," he stridently points to the role of the translator, asserting that the "artistic" move is the perception of the idea, while the writing is merely the busywork: "The artist has acquired his text: the artisan translates it. 'The duty and the task of a writer (not an artist, a writer) are those of a translator'" (*Proust* 64). While ostensibly degrading the role of the writer to one of merely artisan, in fact, Beckett simultaneously raises the role of translator to that of writer.⁴⁰

Beckett's *Proust* suggests that anyone who understands the "Idea" could equally well translate it into language. Joyce himself asserted a similar claim with regard to *Finnegans Wake* when he stated that he would be willing to allow James Stephens to take over its creation (20 May 1927): "As regards that book itself and its future completion I have asked Miss Beach to get into closer relations with James Stephens. . . . If he consented to maintain three or four points which I consider essential and I showed him the threads he could finish the design. . . . It would be a great load off my mind" (*Letters I* 253-54). Fearing that his eyesight would make the writing of *Finnegans Wake* too taxing, Joyce allows that he could be willing to hand over his project. Furthermore, he observes that only "three or four points" would have to be agreed upon for Stephens to proceed. Even Joyce's friend Stuart Gilbert asserts that *Finnegans Wake* was a translation of a simple idea into complex language, fearing that "[w]hat he is doing is too easy to do and too hard to understand."⁴¹

Jean-Michel Rabaté cites this same letter to argue "that Joyce himself is ready to renounce complete control over a text considered as his property . . . a rare case of an author capable of renouncing his own intentionality" (76). I doubt it. Joyce was a master of publicity, and it was his idea to organize twelve writers to promote *Work in Progress* ten years before it was even finished. Indeed, Joyce's assertion to Nino Frank when they began the Italian translation of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" demonstrates that he continued to crave a firm hold over the translations even seven years after the French version: "We must do the job now before it is too late . . . ; for the moment there is at least one person, myself, who can understand what I am writing. I don't however guarantee that in two or three years I'll still be able to"

(*JJII* 700). For Joyce the professional writer—who, in fact, encouraged both Frank Budgen's and Gilbert's groundbreaking studies of his own works—the notion of truly “renouncing” control of his “property” would be highly uncharacteristic.⁴²

Nevertheless, Joyce's statement that only “three of four points” are the essence of *Finnegans Wake* appears a more substantial claim. Joyce's decision to publish Beckett and Péron's translation of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” with only negligible revisions demonstrates that he, too, knew that other writers could grasp the “Idea” behind the *Wake*. Moreover, it should not be surprising that Beckett co-authored a translation that Joyce tacitly accepted, since Beckett wrote out the “manafeste” explaining the method of *Finnegans Wake* at Joyce's own urging: “It was at his suggestion that I wrote ‘Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce’—because of my Italian” (100). Indeed, Beckett admitted that these writers were “new figures to me at the time,” and he recalled many years later that Joyce “must have had some talk” with him in order to clarify his thoughts.⁴³ Joyce himself wrote that he had managed the whole affair: “What you say about the Exag is right enough. I did stand behind those twelve Marshals more or less directing them” (*SL* 345). In a manner of speaking, Joyce's turning to Beckett to translate “Anna Livia Plurabelle” is a bit like Beckett's proverbial dog, though his choice resulted in the exuberant, hieroglyphic “tourasse de Babil” that is the French translation.

NOTES

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¹ Debate rages over whether this “Sam” could possibly refer to Samuel Beckett because the passage without the “ill-starred punster” section was published before Joyce knew Beckett, in 1928 in *transition*. However, because the “ill-starred punster” line was added later, and Beckett was indeed the punmaker, ill-starred in his choice of translating ALP, I believe the tag refers to him. It may, however, be a moot point, as editors Phyllis Carey and Ed Jewinski comment, in their introduction to *Re: Joyce'n Beckett* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1992), p. xvi: “If Joyce, like many of his readers, noted that the passage could, by mere chance and circumstance, refer to Beckett, then so be it.” For a discussion of the question, see James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 722. Further references to the Knowlson work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

² Beckett, *Proust* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), p. 8. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *Proust*.

³ These annotations of Beckett's are described by Deirdre Bair in a letter to Nicholas Zurbrugg—see Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust* (Gerrards Cross:

Colin Smythe, 1988), p. 103. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Beckett's *Proust* also dissatisfies some critics who find it more illustrative of Beckett than of Marcel Proust or find that Beckett "does not much misrepresent Proust's insight into personality as give it a one-sided emphasis"—see John Pilling, "Beckett's Proust," *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 1 (Winter 1976), 8-29.

⁴ Samuel Beckett and Alfred Péron, trans., "Anna Lyvia Pluratselself," eventually published in *Cahier Joyce*, ed. Jacques Aubert (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1985), pp. 417-22, and again in *Anna Livia Plurabelle di James Joyce*, ed. Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1996), p. 156; "mymyserable," however, is a penciled correction on the proof pages of the manuscript held in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Gen MS 112, Box 5, Folder 103. Further references to the version in *Anna Livia Plurabelle di James Joyce* will be cited parenthetically in the text as *Pluratselself*.

⁵ See Philippe Soupault's *Souvenirs de James Joyce* (Paris: Éditions Edmond Charlot, 1945), pp. 73-74. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Soupault's version became the standard account of the translation procedure after it was translated and reprinted in Robert H. Deming, ed., *The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 2:413. For others who follow Soupault's history, see Kim Allen, "Beckett, Joyce, and Anna Livia: The Plurability of Translating *Finnegans Wake*," *Translation Perspectives XI: Beyond the Western Tradition*, ed. Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Research Translation, 2000); Geert Lernout, *The French Joyce* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1990); and W. V. Costanzo, "The French Version of *Finnegans Wake*: Translation, Adaptation, Recreation," *JJQ*, 9 (Winter 1971), 225. Further references to the Allen and Lernout essays will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁶ Beckett, "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of "Work in Progress"* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1929), p. 14. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Dante."

⁷ Richard Ellmann, for example, calls the translation "a triumph over seemingly impossible obstacles" (*JJII* 633).

⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), 8:34.

⁹ For Robert McAlmon's actual account, see *Being Geniuses Together* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1968), pp. 315-17.

¹⁰ Maria Jolas, in *A James Joyce Yearbook* (Paris: Transition Workshop, 1949), p. 172, provides a translation as follows: "Léon read aloud the English text and I followed the revised French version. Occasionally Léon would pause over a particular phrase, I would read out the translation, and a discussion would follow. With Mr. Joyce's approval, we rejected everything that seemed to us to be contrary to the rhythm, the meaning, or the word-metamorphosis, after which we tried to suggest a translation. Mr. Joyce would point out the difficulties and we would each look for equivalents until we found a better-balanced phrase or a stronger word." Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹¹ In 1938, Beckett was one of the first people to see the completed *Finnegans Wake*; he "read [the pages] on the way to the railroad station and

called [Joyce] up to say how much they moved him" (JJII 713).

¹² Daniel Ferrer and Aubert, "Anna Livia's French Bifurcations," *Transcultural Joyce*, ed. Karen Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 179-86. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹³ This oversight may be due to the fact that Aubert may not have had the chance to look at the actual *Bifur* pages. When he reprinted "Pluratsself" in 1985, he warned that "[u]n jeu de placards, corrigés au crayon par Alfred Péron et à l'encre par Samuel Beckett . . . est conservé dans une université américaine après avoir figuré dans les papiers personnels d'Alfred Péron, mais nous n'avons pu le consulter et avons du nous contenter de ce document non corrigé par ses auteurs" ("a set of proofs, corrected in pencil by Alfred Péron and ink by Samuel Beckett . . . is preserved in an American university having been part of Péron's private papers, but we could not consult them and had to be satisfied with a document not corrected by the authors")—see Aubert and Fritz Senn, eds., *James Joyce* (Paris: Éditions de L'Herne, 1985), pp. 417-18. Ferrer and Aubert point to the "printer's stamp of '15 October 1930'" to demonstrate that "Anna Lyvia Pluratsself" was being prepared for the "issue number 7, dated '10 décembre 1930'" (179). However, when examined under a magnifying glass, the date of the page proofs appears to be 16 October 1930. This minor point further supports the idea that Aubert and Ferrer relied on the Senn and Aubert book rather than on the *Bifur* pages.

¹⁴ David Hayman, "Genetic Criticism and Joyce: An Introduction," *European Joyce Studies 5: Probes: Genetic Studies in Joyce*, ed. Hayman and Sam Slote (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 1995), pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ Vincent Giroud, curator in charge of the Joyce Papers at the Beinecke Library, replied as follows to my questions about the manuscripts in an e-mail correspondence, 7 September 2001: "I am afraid I can't shed much light on the issue. Our description was presumably made at the time the material was acquired and based on the description we received then. The material was purchased in 1967 from the collection of Maurice Saillet. I assume that the identification of Péron's hand was also his. . . . Our Joyce collection, as you know, largely came from or through John Slocum, and it may also be that he and Herbert Cahoon are responsible for the description."

¹⁶ I deduce that the typewriter and typist are the same in the two typescripts from the following evidence: the punctuation demonstrates the same errors, mostly with mistakes around spacing at the end of sentences; the typist uses a "" plus a "." instead of an "!"; and the accent circonflexes are all slightly to the left.

¹⁷ See Fred H. Higginson, *Anna Livia Plurabelle: The Making of a Chapter* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1960), for a comparison of the many drafts of ALP. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text. For this particular change, see the proofs for the publication of ALP in *La Navire* (1 October 1925), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Gen MS 112, Box 5, Folder 100.

¹⁸ Exod. 19-20.

¹⁹ *Bifur* proof page, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Gen MS 112, Box 5, Folder 103.

²⁰ "They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind."

²¹ See C. K. Ogden, trans., "James Joyce's 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' in Basic English," *transition*, 21 (March 1932), 259-62, and see Susan Shaw Sailer,

"Universalizing Languages: *Finnegans Wake* Meets Basic English," *JJQ*, 36 (Summer 1999), 853-68.

²² See Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1923), and for a discussion of these issues, see Bosinelli, "A Proposito di Anna Livia Plurabelle," *Pluratsel* (pp. 33-86).

²³ "Please do it quickly, I'll write you, Nizan," Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Gen MS 112, Box 5, Folder 100.

²⁴ Other scenarios are possible, though they seem less probable. For example, Péron could have been the note-taker at the séance sessions. This seems wrong, not only because Jolas states that Léon "was the faithful recorder" (173) but also because Péron was not present at all the sessions. The penciled changes are all in the same hand.

²⁵ For an examination of the closeness of their relationship, see S. E. Gontarski, "Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's 'Illstarred Punster,'" *The Seventh of Joyce*, ed. Bernard Benstock (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 29-31.

²⁶ Paul Nizan, *Les chiens de garde* (Paris; Maspero, 1960).

²⁷ Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Summit Books, 1990), pp. 254-55. See also Simone de Beauvoir, *The Autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir*, trans. Richard Howard, vol. 2 (New York: Paragon House, 1992).

²⁸ The scandal involved a translation of a story by Michael Joyce, which was misprinted as written by James Joyce. Joyce was irate—see *Letters III* 227-29. He had withstood a similar scandal involving Samuel Roth's pirated republication of *Ulysses* in 1926-1927—see *JJII* 585-87.

²⁹ See Marcel Brion, "The Idea of Time in the Work of James Joyce," trans. Robert Sage, *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (pp. 23-33).

³⁰ Beckett et al., "Anna Livia Plurabelle," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 19 (May 1931), 637-46.

³¹ Melissa Banta and Oscar A. Silverman, eds., *James Joyce's Letters to Sylvia Beach, 1921-40* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), p. 167.

³² "*Finnegans Wake* is even—above all others—the easiest text to translate."

³³ "But I don't wish to publish this, not even a fragment, without the authorization of Mr. Joyce himself, who may well find this too badly done and too far off the original. The more I think about it, the more I find this unsatisfactory"—Letter from Beckett to Soupault, 7 May 1930, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Gen MS 112, Box 5, folder 102.

³⁴ Beckett, in a letter to Thomas McGreevy, undated, though most likely summer 1930; it is quoted in Knowlson (p. 726).

³⁵ Senn, *Joyce's Dislocations: Essays on Reading as Translation*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), p. 4.

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. 76.

³⁷ "a polylingual text as it would appear to an English speaker"—Umberto Eco, introduction to *Anna Livia Plurabelle di James Joyce* (p. vii). Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³⁸ Joyce, in this view, would have failed to achieve the "unfettered freedom" Stephen Dedalus set out to find in exile, rather remaining like the young Stephen trapped in a linguistic world ordered by the English logoi:

“God was God’s name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God’s name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said *Dieu* than God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world . . . still God remained always the same God and God’s real name was God” (P 246, 17).

³⁹ “the easiest text to translate because it allows for the greatest artistic license.”

⁴⁰ Beckett’s later translations of his own works similarly reject a strident division between translation and creation. See, for a discussion of this, Steven Connor, “Authorship, Authority, and Self-Reference in Joyce and Beckett,” *Re: Joyce’n Beckett* (pp. 147-59).

⁴¹ See Stuart Gilbert, *Reflections on James Joyce: Stuart Gilbert’s Paris Journal*, ed. Thomas F. Staley and Randolph Lewis (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1993), p. 21. This comment of Gilbert’s is quoted in Jean-Michel Rabaté, “Back to Beria! Genetic Joyce and Eco’s ‘Ideal Readers,’” *European Joyce Studies 5: Probes: Genetic Studies in Joyce* (p. 66). Further references to the Rabaté article will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴² See Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of “Ulysses” and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Hart (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), and Gilbert, *James Joyce’s “Ulysses”* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930). For a discussion of these issues, see Adaline Glasheen, *Third Census of “Finnegans Wake”* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977), p. xiv, and also compare Joyce’s publication strategy for the earliest editions of *Ulysses* in Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 64-65.

⁴³ Interview with Knowlson on 20 September 1989 and quoted in Knowlson (p. 100).