Last Tape on Stage in Translation
Last Tape on Stage in Translation:
Unwinding Beckett’s Spool in Turkey

By

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Building a bridge: whether one takes this expression literally or metaphorically, the act itself suggests a painstaking activity. Even under such circumstances in which the gap to be bridged seems small, it goes without saying that in the course of the action, there is always more than meets the eye. More often than not, determining the location of the abutments and establishing the link between them appear to be merely the tip of the iceberg. What actually takes place during the course of construction, however, remains unknown to those who make use of that bridge in their daily lives. To a certain extent, the correlation between theatre criticism and translation criticism—precisely speaking, theatre-translation criticism—resembles the one between the substrata of a bridge—extremely close, yet incredibly distant. When this quasi-paradoxical is taken into account from an intellectual perspective, a possibility to shed light on the subject emerges: writing a book.

The driving force behind this book, then, is to build a bridge between theatre criticism and theatre-translation criticism in order to demonstrate how considering these two fields of studies in relation to each other can be for the benefit of both theatre criticism and theatre-translation criticism. The root proposition of the present study is plain enough: theatre-translation criticism and theatre criticism are not a far cry from one another in terms of the emphasis they place on the notion of performance. Without this focus on performance, theatre-translation criticism and theatre criticism would be extremely abstract and lacking in practical benefit. Conversely, taking into consideration the realities of stage inevitably enriches the theory of theatre-translation, and, by extension, the theory of translation. Thus, following the dictum that “theory without practice is sterile; practice without theory is blind”, this study lays emphasis on the significance of engaging in practical fields of theatre criticism and theatre-translation criticism. The importance of practice and the basic proposition of this book constitute the bases of the research question that this study seeks to answer: when analysing a performance of
a translated theatre work, what factors might a theatre-translation critic take into account?

In the light of this question, it becomes possible to start delving into the territories that have been left un(re)marked in Translation Studies and Theatre Studies respectively. A close glance at the dynamics of the two disciplines reveals an inclination to circumvent the key points that can strengthen the bonds between the above-mentioned (applied) subcategories of Translation Studies and Theatre Studies. On the face of it, as a counterpoint to the tendency to exile theatre from the realm of Translation Studies, Theatre Studies seems to attach little importance to the act of translation undertaken prior to and in the course of a given production of a foreign play. And it is this mutual neglect that gives rise to the quasi-paradoxical relationship between theatre criticism and theatre-translation criticism.

The problem is one of hierarchy. From Cicero onwards, poems and fictional prose writings occupied the centre of theories on literary translation. When scholars of the classics (such as Ancient Greek tragedies and comedies, Shakespeare, and the works of French classicism) did turn their attention to the study and practice of translation, they approached such texts as “dramatic poems”, owing to the fact that the majority of these texts were written in verse. One probable explanation for this propensity might be the dominant disparaging conception of spoken conversation “as a debased and unstable form of language” (Culpeper et al. 1998: 3). As a consequence of this conception, the theatrical aspects of play-texts, with all their affiliations with speech, were liable to be neglected by literary translation theory. To date, regardless of whether a play-text has been written in verse or prose, this distinction between dramatic texts and theatre texts and thus between drama translation and theatre translation, has prevailed: whilst the terms “dramatic text” and “drama translation” direct one’s attention to works composed for publication, “theatre text” and “theatre translation” refer to texts produced for performance on stage.

The distinction is a crucial one. On the one hand, it serves as a touchstone for determining whether the translated text under observation pertains to the literary system or the theatrical system of a target culture; and on the other, it discloses how relatively little research has been carried out within the domain of Translation Studies as regards to the function of a translated text in a given stage production. To some extent, these two significant facets stemming from this distinction affect each other. In spite of the fact that performance is one of the most important aspects of dramatic texts in general, the history of theatre is rife with closet dramas (such as the Senecan tragedies, Samson Agonistes of John Milton, some
plays of Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and so forth) which have never been intended for production. Therefore, determining the location of a translated text according to the systemic dynamics of a target culture is of primary importance. Nonetheless, for whatever reason, within Translation Studies play-texts are commonly studied in terms of their relationship to the literary system in question, but with no or little regard to their theatrical features. Apparently, “page” has an edge over the “stage” in Translation Studies. Hence, it is not surprising to observe how the bulk of scholarly work done on the translations of dramatic texts focuses on issues such as faithfulness and equivalence. Both these concepts have a notorious reputation within contemporary Translation Studies and they are arguably even less relevant when it comes to work of theatre translation. Clifford E. Landers’ book entitled *Literary Translation: A Practical Guide*, in which the scholar devotes just two and half pages out of 214 pages to theatre translation (2001: 104-106) illustrates the point well enough: theatre translation appears to be a controversial footnote to literary translation, and, by extension to Translation Studies.

Or so it was. Even though, from the 1980s onwards, “page” enjoyed the lion’s share of research in Translation Studies, “stage” gradually became the centre of attraction for theatre translation scholars. The 1980s is important for Translation Studies since it was in this decade that the cultural turn in the discipline took place. In fact, this was a reflection of the changes in the dynamics of academia as a whole. “The cultural turn in Translation Studies”, writes Susan Bassnett, “can be seen as part of a cultural turn that was taking place in the humanities generally in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and has altered [sic] the shape of many traditional subjects” (2007: 16). Bassnett’s observation is noteworthy in the sense that it draws attention to the interdisciplinary nature of the study of translation. An examination of the literature with respect to theatre translation produced in the last three decades indicates how (re)thinking theatre translation from the perspective/s provided by Theatre Studies has/have proven to be a vast field of interdisciplinary research. The two volumes of anthologies edited by Ortrun Zuber-Skerrit, namely, *The Languages of Theatre: Problems in the Translation and Transposition of Drama* (1980) and *Page to Stage: Theatre as Translation* (1984); the Jerusalem Theatre Conference (1986) papers edited by Hanna Scolnicov and Peter Holland, and published as *The Play out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture* (1989); *Stages of Translation* (1996) edited by David Johnston; *Moving Target: Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation* (2000) edited by Carole-Anne Upton; the individual studies of Sirkku Aaltonen and Phyllis Zatlin, that is to say, *Time-Sharing on Stage* (2000) and
Introduction

Out of this literature emerged crucial notions, such as “performability”, “speakability”, as well as “readability” so as to be used in the analyses of translated theatre texts. While these concepts can provide one with a so-called yardstick during the course of examination, the hypothetical nature of the terms makes the theatre-translation analysis operate on a rather subjective level, depending on the analyst’s individual definition of the said terms, all of which are used synonymously within the field of theatre translation (cf. Espasa 2000: 50). As Bassnett maintains, “attempts to define the ‘performability’ inherent in a text never go further than generalized discussion about the need for fluent speech rhythms in the target text. What this amounts to in practice is that each translator decides on an entirely ad hoc basis what constitutes a speakable text for performers” (1991: 102). The lack of clarity with respect to the notion of “performability” on the part of the translator in the translation process, as well as the researcher’s alleged conception of the term in analysis can therefore be considered as one problematic aspect of the study and practice of theatre translation. Under those circumstances in which there is no consensus vis-à-vis the clear-cut definitions of the terms to be employed both in the translation process and its prospective analyses, the field of theatre-translation turns out to be a controversial one, liable to be questioned from a “scholarly” perspective. Within this context, Bassnett takes one step further and posits a critical question:

If the written text is merely a blueprint, a unit in a complex of sign systems including paralinguistic and kinesic signs, and if it contains some secret gestic code that needs to be realised in performance, then how can the translator be expected not only to decode those secret signs in the source language, but also to re-encode them in the target language? Such an expectation does not make sense. To do such a thing a translator would not only have to know both languages and theatrical systems intimately, but would also have to have experience of gestic readings and training as a performer or director in those two systems. (1998: 92)

Even though Bassnett considers any expectation of the theatre-translation critic from the translator in terms of creating a performance text as frivolous, her concluding comments in the above-quoted excerpt hints at the importance, as well as the necessity of being familiar with the actual theatrical practices of the target and source cultures. In fact, requesting from the “theatre” translator to have a considerable amount of knowledge
on the theatrical habits of the two cultures is not asking from the translator to do the “impossible”, as Bassnett would argue. As far as theatre translation is concerned, this (anticipated) familiarity with the practical field of theatre acquires a vital function. According to Patrice Pavis, “The translator is in the position of a reader and a dramaturge (in the technical sense): he [sic] makes choices from among the potential and possible indications in the text-to-be-translated. The translator is a dramaturge who must first of all effect a macrotextual translation, that is a dramaturgical analysis of the fiction conveyed by the text” (1992: emphasis in the original). Pavis’ comment is significant in the sense that it underscores the entailment of the exploration of the specific signs of “performance” inherent in the text. To a considerable degree, the dramaturgical analysis undertaken by the translator prior to the translation process can prove to be quite fruitful in acquiring a certain sense of the “performability” and rendering it in the target language.

Needless to say, a critical engagement with the practical dimensions of translation and theatre becomes central in terms of overcoming this problematic aspect of the study and practice of theatre translation. In this particular respect, the present book is an attempt to develop a descriptive approach to the role that a performance text stemming from a translated theatre text plays in a given stage production by focusing on a Turkish production of Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Within this context, moving play-texts from “page” to “stage” once again highlights the crucial distinction between dramatic texts and theatre texts. The connotations that the words “page” and “stage” carry arouse interest here. Hypothetically speaking, in the first place, page alludes to reading, whereas stage hints at watching. This distinction can thus be considered as a dividing line between the theoretical and practical fields of translation.

Likewise, the position of translation criticism within Translation Studies, and theatre-translation criticism in particular, is not unproblematic, located as these fields are in the grey zone between theory and practice. A brief look at the two major areas of the discipline, that is, pure translation studies and applied translation studies, a distinction introduced by James Holmes in the 1970s (1988: 67-80), and further discussed by Gideon Toury (1985: 34-37; 1995: 17-19), demonstrates that translation criticism falls within the scope of the applied field of Translation Studies. The location of translation criticism within the realm of Translation Studies attracts further attention. According to Theo Hermans, “the study of translation generally had to emancipate itself from its ancillary status with respect to translation criticism and translator training so as to be able to approach translation as a phenomenon worthy of attention in its own right”
It goes without saying that Hermans’ remark not only insinuates the prescriptive implications of translation criticism but also suggests that translation criticism and other fields of applied translation studies may be somewhat less “scholarly” than the pure branch of the discipline. It is, therefore, imperative to underscore the approach to be developed in this present study. Revealing the governing factors in the composition of a performance text derived from a foreign theatre text is crucial for the purposes of this book. For that reason, rather than debating whether a translation is “good”, “bad”, “correct”, or “wrong”, this book contends “to provide answers to such questions it should deal with the ‘hows’, the ‘whys and wherefores’” (van den Broeck, 1985: 58) of a translated theatre text. Hence, this study has neither normative nor prescriptive implications. In this regard, so as to avoid any ambiguities, it would be appropriate to call the approach that this work seeks to develop “descriptive translation criticism”. Nevertheless, as far as theatre-translation criticism is concerned, criticism on “page” to a considerable degree falls short of doing justice to the text in question unless it takes the staging aspects of the play into consideration. More to the point, any evaluation of a translated theatre play merely according to the literary values of the target language and source language is bound to overlook the raison d’etre of the text as a blueprint for production. It is at this point that theatre-translation criticism pleads for the perspectives provided by Theatre Studies.

Be that as it may, Theatre Studies, by its very nature, is a discipline devoted to the study and practice of dramatic genres, theatre movements, dramaturgy, historical and sociological aspects of theatre, acting, as well as performance. The role that translation played during the course of the evolution of most of these fields is unassailable. After all, by dint of the act of translation, Ancient Greek tragedies and comedies were revived on the Roman stage; by means of translation, the works of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov have been rendered into other languages and became the fundamental texts of modern drama. Yet, the extent to which Theatre Studies has honoured (and honours) its debt to translation is open to debate. In Theatre Studies, issues of theatricality and performance are the main foci of attention.

On the other hand, in theatre criticism, the actual final production of the play on stage is of central importance. Being a sub-discipline of Theatre Studies, theatre criticism concerns itself chiefly with the practical fields of theatre. Still, during the course of analysing a performance, the knowledge of the theatre critic in the aforementioned fields can indeed prove to be an invaluable resource. As Mark Fortier affirms, “theatre, of necessity, involves both doing and seeing, practice and contemplation”
In this context, theatre criticism can be regarded as a field of study in which theory and practice join forces to contribute to the analysis of a given performance in its entirety. Despite the fact that translation is one of the key components in the production of foreign theatre texts on stage, theatre criticism has paid only very scant attention to its role in the course of performance. Actually, from a broader perspective, it can be seen that not only in the course of the performance, but also in the entire course of moving play-texts from “page” to “stage”, theatre criticism tends to bypass the significance of the act of translation and translators. As Phyllis Zatlin ironically remarks, “even the role of Iago, the villain, is better than being totally out of the script: of being forgotten not only in the process but also in programme credits and play reviews” (2005: 4).

Although in his seminal work entitled *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995) Lawrence Venuti does not deal with theatre translations, the scholar’s concept of “invisibility” bears on the subordinate situation of translation and translators in the study and practice of theatre criticism.

What is more, it is startling to observe how Toury’s well-known statement which deems translations “facts of real life” (1995: 1) appears to be regarded as *a priori* by theatre criticism. Within the field of theatre criticism, translations, by and large, are taken for granted. There are reasons for that. In theatre criticism, as in the case of Translation Studies, the problem is one of hierarchy. Notwithstanding the pivotal position that the notion of “text” acquired within the scope of Theatre Studies throughout history, the attention paid to its function in the course of analysing a performance is on the wane. According to Hasibe Kalkan Kocabay, “the need to shift the theoretical works in theatre from text to staging can be explained by the gradual significance that visuality gained as an outcome of the proliferation of cinema and the emergence of television in the twentieth century, and the increase in the theoretical works on visual arts thereof” (2008: 10). In other words, the status of text has been sacrificed in favour of concentrating on the visual aspects of the staging activity, and consequently the study of dramatic texts has been relegated to the domain of dramaturgical studies. However, this sacrifice was not in vain; it was a step needed to highlight the importance of studying performances in their own right.

Yet, studying performances in their own right entails one of the primary issues that is, actually, an indispensable element in any serious study of a theatrical work: the discussion of the interpretations undertaken in the course of a production. Indeed, whether the text being examined is a

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* Unless indicated, all translations are my own.
classic or contemporary one, the act of interpretation is immanent to any theatre performance. And in this respect, the text can provide a reference point for the theatre critic when examining the director’s attempts at breathing (new) life into the work of the dramatist in question. Even though, in the twentieth century, “the staging of plays became elevated to an artistic activity as the literary text of the play ceased to be the sole basis of performance” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 185), in some cases theatre critics do take particular heed of the interpretations of the text throughout the performance. Under those circumstances in which the performance to be analysed belongs to a playwright who has also been the director of his works, the theatre critic is particularly likely to give priority to the role of the text during the course of mise en scène. The reason for this is that, in such performances, the chief issue is the extent to which the status of the playwright as director resonates in staging approaches of subsequent directors of the same play. Lack of emphasis on the function of text in performance analysis, therefore, can be considered as a shortcoming in contemporary theatre criticism in terms of developing an integrated approach to the study of performances. Furthermore, this diminishing role that the notion of text plays within the domain of Theatre Studies has taken a heavy toll on the perception of the act of translation in a given performance.

Neither Translation Studies nor Theatre Studies is pure as the driven snow when it comes to the quasi-paradoxical relationship between theatre-translation criticism and theatre criticism. On the basis of what has been outlined hitherto, it can be seen that the approach towards theatre translations in Translation Studies is rather constructive and promising when compared to the a priori status of translation in Theatre Studies. Even so, the contribution to Theatre Studies of semiotics, with the emphasis it puts on the notion of text and the act of translation in performance, is indisputable. Indeed, in the words of Pavis, “reflection on translation confirms a fact well known to theatre semioticians: the text is only one of the elements of performance, and here, of translating activity, or, put in another way, the text is much more than a series of words: grafted on to it are ideological, ethnological and cultural dimensions” (1992: 149, emphasis in the original). In the light of Pavis’ observation, one can infer that theatre semiotics is cognisant of the raison d’être of the (translated) text as a blueprint for production. And it is precisely this fundamental characteristic of theatre texts that Translation Studies tended to bypass for so long. Despite the growing body of literature devoted to the study of translated theatre texts in Translation Studies, the repercussions of this tendency can still be observed in theatre-translation criticism.
In order to problematise this aspect of theatre-translation criticism, as well as the *a priori* status of translation in theatre criticism, the present book offers a case study of the Turkish translations of Beckett’s one-act play *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) and the Tiyatro-Z production (2007) of the work. The rationale behind the choice of working on Beckett derives from the playwright’s constant questioning of the constancy of his texts. Stanley Gontarski’s observation regarding the issue is worthy of notice: “As Beckett’s direct work in the theatre increased, he demonstrated a disregard for the sanctity of his plays as published—at least for his own productions. Beckett in the theatre has himself destabilized Beckett on the page” (1995: 193). Beckett’s transformation from playwright to theatrical artist not only offered him the chance to rewrite his dramatic works, which had become part of the Western theatrical canon, but also provided him with the opportunity to reinvent himself as a theatre director. This transformation, moreover, is striking in the sense that it indicates how much emphasis Beckett places on the interpretations of his plays on stage. As Michael Worton puts it, “he initially allows total freedom to directors, actors and critics, but then wishes to correct their interpretations. Although Beckett only once gave an official interview, his many letters and statements to friends and collaborators reveal a wish to control the performance—and therefore the reception—of his plays” (1994: 67). Growing less and less satisfied with the productions of his plays, and being totally aware of the *sine qua non* of a given theatre text as a blueprint for production, Beckett took the responsibility of staging his own plays with the purpose of underlining the priority that he himself assigned to “stage” over “page”. In this particular respect, the posthumous publication of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett* becomes quite important in the sense that they document the emphasis that Beckett lays on performance, as well as his concept of *mise en scène*.

At the same time as concretising his concept of *mise en scène* through rewriting and staging his own plays, Beckett also went to great lengths to monitor interpretations of his work. A striking example is the case of JoAnne Akalaitis’ production of *Endgame* in 1984. Here, Akalaitis chose to incorporate music by Philip Glass and change the setting to a derelict subway tunnel. Beckett himself strictly rejected this adaptation and instituted legal proceedings against the company. Eventually the matter was settled out of court, with the condition being that the following statement by Beckett be inserted into the program: “Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me. My play requires an empty room and two small windows. The American Repertory Theater production which dismisses my directions is
a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this” (McMullan 1994: 196). Yet, there have been occasions in which Beckett approved minor modifications undertaken by the directors themselves. A case in point is Antoni Libera’s Polish production of *Krapp’s Last Tape* where the playwright consented to Libera’s replacement of the Protestant hymn with a Catholic one. (cf. Libera 1997: 105). No doubt there have been other performances of *Krapp’s Last Tape* and other Beckett plays where directors took liberties for aesthetic reasons or in view of local cultural/political considerations, with or without the author’s consent. However, Tiyatro-Z could not be said to have engaged in any fundamental culturally-derived interpretations. For one thing, the company purported to base its interpretation of *Krapp’s Last Tape* on Beckett’s production notes for the play, in which the author himself cuts the hymn that Krapp sings in various parts of the play. As for the few other cultural *realia* of the piece, they are left unchanged.

Within the Beckett canon, *Krapp’s Last Tape* acquires a vital position since the composition of this play marks a turning point in the author’s career. During the course of Beckett’s transformation from playwright to theatrical artist, “*Krapp’s Last Tape* seems to have been the watershed, as he realized that the creation of a dramatic text was not a process that could be divorced from performance, and that mounting a production brought to light recesses previously hidden, even from the author himself” (Gontarski 1998: 133). From *Krapp’s Last Tape* onwards, Beckett’s excessive preoccupation with the notions of theatricality and performance reached a climax, and after eight years of meditation on theatre, and at the same time diligently rewriting himself, he started to direct his own plays. The more Beckett discovered theatre, the more he revised his dramatic texts, most particularly *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Ruby Cohn’s words vis-à-vis Beckett’s keenness on the play at issue sustains the point: “Beckett continued to sharpen and simplify the play in other productions —in German, French and English, for he directed or advised *Krapp’s Last Tape* more often than any other of his plays” (2001: 241). In the present study, the leading motive behind working on *Krapp’s Last Tape*, as well as the Turkish translations of the play, derives from the fact that this text in question manifests Beckett as a theatrical director in the strictest sense of the word.

Moreover, the decision to focus on the Tiyatro-Z production of *Krapp’s Last Tape* in this book emerges from the intention to study the extent of the appreciation of Beckett’s directorial status in the Turkish theatrical system. As indicated earlier, the governing factors in the course of the composition of a performance text derived from a foreign theatre text are of central importance for the purposes of the present study. What
differentiates the Tiyatro-Z production of the play from the other productions of *Krapp’s Last Tape* in Turkey is the fact that the performance text of this production was composed by the actor Beyti Engin, who starred as Krapp in the said production, on the basis of one of the existing translations of the play as well as the revised text that Beckett provides in his *Theatrical Notebooks*. Within this context, the present study aspires to provide a critical glance at the Turkish translations of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, the translators being Hamdi Koç, Fatih Özugüven, and Uğur Ün respectively, with the purpose of revealing the reasons for the composition of a performance text. One additional and decisive aim of this book is to discover the extent to which the performance text in the Tiyatro-Z production of the play resonates with Beckett’s revised text in his *Theatrical Notebooks*. In this sense, the present study aims to develop a critical approach to the interpretations undertaken by the director of the play, namely, Cem Kenar.

At this point, it would be appropriate to provide an overview so as to give an idea of the theoretical framework and the methodology that is employed in this book. As it was previously mentioned, Beckett’s transformation from playwright to theatrical artist provides the rationale for working on the Turkish translations of his one-act play entitled *Krapp’s Last Tape* and its interpretations in the Turkish theatrical system. Nevertheless, this transformation, as Gontarski aptly points out, “is one of the seminal developments of late Modernist theatre and yet one slighted in the critical and historical discourse” (1998: 131). In order to underscore the significance of this transformation for Theatre Studies, and also to shed light on Beckett’s staging approach, Chapter 1 firstly contextualises *Krapp’s Last Tape* within the Beckett canon and then discusses the cuts and changes that the author introduced to the revised text of the play in his *Theatrical Notebooks*.

Chapter 2 tackles the interpretations of *Krapp’s Last Tape* within the Turkish theatrical system. Prior to the discussion of the productions of the play, however, this chapter examines the history and reception of

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1 At this point of discussion, it is important to point out that *Krapp’s Last Tape* was translated as *Son Band* by Feridun Altuna in the early 1960s, and the play was staged by the Istanbul State Theatre in the 1961-1962 season with the performance of Asuman Korad as Krapp (Taşkan 1983: 23). Then again, neither Altuna’s translation nor the contact information of the translator can be found in the State Theatre Archive in Ankara. What remains of this very first production of *Krapp’s Last Tape* in Turkey is just a photograph which is in the possession of the daughter of the actor, Selen Korad Birkiye, who is a dramaturge herself in Istanbul State Theatre now.
Beckett’s works in Turkey including the notable performances of his plays, with the aim of unearthing what position(s) the oeuvre and individual works of the author have occupied within the target theatrical system. This examination is obligatory in terms of shedding light on the evolution of Beckett’s theatre in Turkey from the systemic perspectives that Translation Studies provide. As this chapter emphasises, the systemic dynamics of a target culture can provide one with the preliminary information with respect to the translations of a given text. In this particular respect, a general glance at the other interpretations of the play in Turkey can become quite fruitful in terms of finding out which translation has been prioritised by the theatre practitioners who made use of the text in their production. A glance at the other productions of Krapp’s Last Tape in Turkey, furthermore, enables a more nuanced appreciation of the Tiyatro-Z production of the play in its systemic context.

Chapter 3 strengthens the bonds between theatre criticism and theatre-translation criticism by proposing a model for the analysis of the performances of plays in translation. With respect to the methodology, this chapter makes use of Elaine Aston and George Savona’s notion of “radical text” (1991: 94), and foregrounds the radical features of Krapp’s Last Tape with the purpose of laying the groundwork for the comparative analysis of the Turkish translations of the play. Furthermore, the theatricality intrinsic to Krapp’s Last Tape, as well as the way the play is tailored for a performer to perform on stage, compels one to take the target text as a point of commencement in Raymond van den Broeck’s model for translation criticism (1985: 54-62). By developing a critical approach to the Turkish translations of Krapp’s Last Tape, this chapter reveals the factors that shaped the composition of a particular performance text. As stated earlier, the performance text of the production at issue was composed on the basis of one of the existing translations of the play, together with the revised text which Beckett provides in his Theatrical Notebooks. In this respect, the Tiyatro-Z production of Krapp’s Last Tape can be considered a significant step taken towards the appreciation of Beckett’s directorial status in the Turkish theatrical system. While significant, this step is at the same time a challenging one, since in the case of staging any Beckett play, the task of the director “is to make the plays new for new audiences and yet keep within the austere limits laid down in Beckett’s texts and meticulously precise directions” (Worth 2004: 212). The fact that the Tiyatro-Z production of the play claims to take Beckett’s revised text and his production notes as the reference point, compels one to analyse the performance at stake in relation to Beckett’s conception of
mise en scène. Hence, this chapter scrutinises primarily the extent to which the staging approach of the director reverberates with that of Beckett. What is more, in order to analyse the function of the performance text in the production, this chapter draws on the questions in the Pavis Questionnaire (Pavis 1985: 208-212) as regards to the notion of text, as well as the main features of the translation. In the course of performance analysis, use has been made of video-technology but only as a memory aid. By incorporating the insights gained from the preceding translation analyses into performance analysis, this chapter aims to substantiate the root proposition of the study, namely that theatre-translation criticism and theatre criticism are not a far cry from one another in terms of the emphasis they place on the notion of performance.

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2 At this juncture, it is worth underlining that basing one’s analysis entirely on a video-recording would entail being dependent on the interpretation of the person manipulating the camera. Still, video-technology can offer a reasonable degree of information about the most obvious features of a production and has thus been deployed in the discussion of the other productions of *Krapp’s Last Tape* in Turkey.
CHAPTER ONE

THE BECKETT CANON
AND KRAPP’S LAST TAPE

Samuel Beckett’s Oeuvre

A scene: a relatively small room with a relatively small bed. Various photographs and crumpled papers are scattered here and there on the floor. Next to the brittle wooden windows, a worn-out easy chair. No light in the room besides the glimmer of the candle on the table next to the easy chair. Night-time. The walls are naked apart from the painting facing the bed. In contrast with the desolation that pervades the room, a cosy atmosphere is depicted in great detail in the painting. A middle-aged man is lying on the bed with his eyes fixed on the painting, as if he is trying to make sense of the warm image evoked by the picture. Then again, it is apparent that he cannot find anything to express; not even with his cold eyes that freeze the warm image can he give voice to the painting. Out of the blue, a ferocious gust of wind lashes the flimsy windows and blows out the candle. Darkness.

Another scene: an empty closet with a chair in its centre. The dim light of the lamp dangling from the ceiling can barely illuminate the chair and its purlieus. At certain points during the movement of the lamp, a human body can be seen, but only fragmentarily. Although the body is seen partially, the dim light falling upon it reveals that the body is bereft of strength. Through a glimpse of the face of the body, it becomes obvious that it has neither the power nor the desire to express itself. The thin cord cannot carry the weight of the lamp anymore and it falls to the floor. The shattering of the lamp smashes the silence in the closet.

Yet another scene: a man wasted in a waste land. Midday. The weather is boiling hot. The man examines his ragged clothes and his surroundings for some time. After a brief stillness, he first paces back and forth for a while and then begins to walk around in circles. With each turn, he moves faster than the previous one. From the movements of the man, it can be understood that his mind is occupied by something, that is to say, by the obligation to express the void that prevails in the land.
These scenes, each of which is independent of the others, draw attention to a paradoxical situation that overwhelms each and every persona of the tableaux: they are obliged to express, yet they cannot express. And this paradoxical situation, in which the concept of silence plays a crucial role, can be the vital starting point when exploring the representative features of Samuel Beckett’s oeuvre in detail. The selection of the very word oeuvre is not an arbitrary one here and deserves a gloss. “Oeuvre” is likely to be read as suggesting that the present subsection is an attempt to elucidate the entire writings of Beckett. This, however, is not the case. The ultimate purpose of the subsection is to demonstrate how the notions of theatricality and performance acquire a distinct and decisive meaning when it comes to the works of Beckett. As George Steiner maintains, “in an œuvre, different genres—fiction, poetry, critical essays—take on a personal unity. The achievement argues as a whole, its sum greater and more coherent than any of the parts” (1998: 288, emphasis in the original). Actually, in Beckett’s case, all available genres for a given writer come to the fore: poetry, prose, critical essays, translation, self-translation, theatre plays, radio plays, television plays, not to mention cinema. Through a brief glance at these genres, moreover, it can be seen that the notions of theatricality and performance tip the scales of Beckett’s œuvre. Indeed, as Katharine Worth observes, “Beckett was a magnet for performers and artists—actors, musicians, painters, dancers—before criticism caught up with the idea of the work’s immense capacity for performance (the fiction as well as the plays proper)” (2001: 146). Worth’s observation is worthy of notice in the sense that it hints at the theatricality inherent even in the prose works of Beckett. Still, this is not an exceptional case since the history of literature is replete with novelists (such as Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Franz Kafka, and so on) whose works also possess theatrical qualities. Nevertheless, the majority of these novelists remained novelists throughout their careers. What makes Beckett’s case exceptional, in this respect, is the author’s skill in transforming the theatricality in his prose works into metatheatricality in his plays. This exceptional case, however, has received only scant attention within the realm of Theatre Studies, which concentrates chiefly on Beckett’s theatrical pieces.

In his seminal article on Beckett’s prose works, Wolfgang Iser asserts that “negativity is the hallmark of the typical Beckett text. It is produced by a relentless process of negation, which in the novels applies even on the level of the individual sentences themselves, which follow another as a ceaseless rejection and denial of what has just been said” (1985: 126). In view of Iser’s remark, one can infer how a given Beckett text first and
foremost aims at undermining the act of communication and, by extension, the notion of language. Be that as it may, Beckett’s characters are haunted by the commitment to express even if they cannot express. More often than not, the crux of Beckett’s prose lies precisely in this paradoxical situation: in order to refrain from expressing themselves within the defective system of language, Beckett’s characters turn the tables on language as a whole by outtalking it; “and, as the prestige of language falls”, writes Susan Sontag, “that of silence rises” (2009a: 21). “That of silence soars,” one finds it tempting to add. To a certain extent, for a Beckett character such as Murphy, Molloy, Moran, Malone and the Unnameable, silence becomes a goal that is beyond reach. Still, Beckett’s characters are aware that the tools of language (the most notable ones being words, speech and discourse) provide them with the ammunition required to wreak havoc on the notion of language in its entirety. The Unnameable, for one, alludes to the necessity of the tools of language during the course of devastating the notion of language: “The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue” (Beckett 1970: 15). Beckett’s characters make considerable use of words, speech and discourse, but only in the Wittgensteinian sense of the word use: they use the tools of language as the steps of a ladder to reach silence.¹

Furthermore, in Beckett’s novels, the characters’ (futile) efforts at reaching silence constantly play upon the expectations of the reader. Most of the time, the reader of a Beckett novel—in a manner evoking Theseus’ unabated search for the Minotaur in the Labyrinth of Daedalus— unremittingly tries to find a way to grasp the language as it disintegrates. While Theseus prevails over the Minotaur, the Beckett reader succumbs to the so-called “nothingness” inherent in his labyrinthine work. At this instance, one could plausibly argue for the lack of communication between text and reader in Beckett’s prose writings. Nonetheless, the readers’ constant attempts at solving the (r)evolving puzzle of negation inevitably force them to establish a communication that permits them to discover the information that they are being prevented from acquiring. “Thus”, as Iser affirms, “negativity turns out to be a basic constituent of communication” (1985: 126) in Beckett’s prose. This communication between text and

¹ Cf. with the penultimate proposition of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he [sic] has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright” (2001: 89).
reader, however, is ill at ease. Ambiguity preponderates in this communication; even the harmlessness of the words is called into question. Malone warns his readers in advance: “I know those little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. Nothing is more real than nothing. They rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark” (Beckett 1956: 16, emphasis in the original). Throughout his oeuvre, Beckett’s “little phrases” drag readers into the darkness of language bit by bit and eventually prompt them to cast doubt even on the act of reading, and hence on their perception of reality. And when the text evokes a sense of reality in the mind of the reader, the notion of theatricality achieves one of its most essential emotional goals: the feeling of “here and now”.

Still, this feeling of “here and now” does not allow Beckett’s readers to “completely lose themselves in a comfortable imaginary world because that world undergoes eccentric shifts that periodically transfer interest to the tellers of the tales” (Kalb 1991: 142). Indeed, Beckett’s readers do not go entirely astray in the darkness of the protagonists’ never-ending tales. After a certain point, readers become aware that the attempt to grasp the supposedly secret information in the text is in vain and they alter their courses to discover the causes of the characters’ physical deformations, their ceaseless failures, as well as their obsessions with trivial details intrinsic to life. To a considerable degree, in Beckett’s oeuvre, every nook and cranny of quasi-“nothingness” is filled with the bleakness of life. In such a context, negativity takes the form of “an important agent of the interaction between text and reader, and at the same time it constitutes the point at which Beckett’s texts sink their roots into life itself” (Iser 1985: 127). Iser’s comment is quite significant in that it draws attention to an issue that preoccupied Beckett: the notion of reality and its representation in art. As Stanley Gontarski opines, “Beckett’s search is for a new form of representation, a form to imitate or to reflect or to contain the chaos of reality” (1985: 238). Notwithstanding the deliberate complexity inherent in his fiction, in one of the rare interviews that he gave, Beckett declared his aesthetic purposes in a relatively simple manner:

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. (2005: 243)
It is interesting to note that Beckett’s pursuit of a new form of representation implies the detachability of form from the notion of content, whereas most of the distinguished critics like Sontag (2009b: 20) lay emphasis on the harmony of the two. On the other hand, Beckett’s permanent search for a form within the range of the available genres, his increasing acquaintance with each and every medium that he treats, gradually takes the edge off the notion of content. “As reflection increases in scope and power,” observes Theodor Adorno, “content itself becomes ever more opaque” (2002: 27). Throughout his career, Beckett was content with moving content to the “zone of evaporation” (Stewart 2006: 62), and this movement towards ever higher levels of abstraction is, in the words of Gontarski, “his most persistent means of transcending the form/content dichotomy” (1985: 241).

A close glance at Beckett’s oeuvre indicates the pivotal role that theatre acquires during the course of this movement towards the extremes of minimalism. Prior to his engagement in playwriting, however, Beckett had already deployed theatrical means (the most striking ones being the structure of the monologue and of the tale-within-a tale) in his prose works. Juxtaposing his work with Kafka’s novels and protagonists, Beckett remarks how “the Kafka hero has a coherence of purpose. He’s lost but he’s not spiritually precarious, he’s not falling to bits. My people seem to be falling to bits” (2005: 162). In fact, Beckett’s protagonists literally do fall to bits. The author’s intention to reflect the chaos of reality by means of breaking his protagonists into pieces manifests itself even in the titles of his early and middle prose: from *Murphy* and *Molloy* to *Malone Dies* and *the Unnameable*; from proper nouns to physical deformations, and from physical deformations to ceaseless monologues that ceaselessly erode away the building stones of narration: “It told me to write the report. Does this mean I am freer now than I was? I do not know. I shall learn. Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining” (Beckett 1966: 189).

While Beckett’s fiction is laden with passages that have been “carefully calculated to deprave the cultivated reader” (Beckett 1963a: 83), his theatre abounds with scenes that pose serious challenges to the theatrical habits of the audience. In this particular respect, it becomes possible to “describe Beckett’s plays as being metatheatrical, in that they simultaneously are and comment upon theatre” (Worton 1994: 74, emphasis in the original). Even so, through a close look at the oeuvre, one can see how Beckett has planted the seeds of this aspect of metatheatricality as early as *Murphy*. Consider, for a moment, Murphy’s dying wish:
With regard to the disposal of these my body, mind and soul, I desire that they be burned and placed in a paper bag and brought to the Abbey Theatre, Sr. Abbey Street, Dublin, and without pause into what the great and good Lord Chesterfield calls the necessary house, where the happiest hours have been spent, on the right as one goes down into the pit, and I desire that the chain be there pulled upon them, if possible during the performance of a piece, the whole to be executed without ceremony or show of grief. (Beckett 1963a: 183)

Murphy’s epitaph invites special consideration from certain perspectives. Murphy, in the first place, regards his body, mind and soul as separate entities, which allows him to “bring himself back to an identifiable point” (Iser 1985: 129). What is more, in the course of his “wandering to find home” (Beckett 1963a: 7), Murphy uses his body as a medium; he ties his stark body to a rocking chair and rocks himself into a situation in which he would be “free in his mind” (ibid.: 6). In this context, Murphy can be considered as one of the harbingers of the striking characters of Beckett’s theatre, such as Winnie of Happy Days, Nagg and Nell of Endgame, all of whom have been either buried to the “waist in exact centre of mound” (Beckett 1961: 7), or planted into “two ashbins” (Beckett 1963b: 11). While traditional theatre makes use of the body as a means to depict the psychological states of the dramatis personae, in Beckett’s theatre the body is deprived of movement, thereby giving life to scenic entities.

In addition to demonstrating Beckett’s preoccupation with the implications of the body, Murphy’s last will is important in the sense that it includes an attack on one of the most influential venues which witnessed one of the most influential theatre movements of the twentieth century: the Abbey Theatre. Despite the fact that Murphy wants his ashes to be flushed down the toilet in the Abbey Theatre (preferably) during the performance of a piece, his dying wish cannot be fulfilled:

Some hours later Cooper took the packet of ash from his pocket, where earlier in the evening he had put it for greater security, and threw it angrily at a man who had given him great offence. It bounced, burst, off the wall on to the floor, where at once it became the object of much dribbling, passing, trapping, shooting, punching, heading, and even some recognition from the gentleman’s code. By closing time the body, mind and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon; and before another dayspring greened the earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit. (Beckett 1963a: 187)

Even though Beckett’s assault on the theatrical institution remains at the level of language in Murphy, in his plays he exploits theatre to