

“Confusion too is company up to a point”: Irony, Self-Translation and the Text of Samuel Beckett’s *Company/Compagnie*

With the translation of *Malloy*, Samuel Beckett’s first major prose text written in French, Beckett came to the conclusion that anything but self-translation was simply impractical. This decision was reportedly reached due to the extensive contributions he insisted on making to the project of translating this novel into his native English, a project begun by Patrick Bowles alone but finally credited to Bowles “in collaboration with the author.” Beginning with his next novel, *Malone meurt/Malone Dies*, Beckett translated almost all of his new works shortly after they were published in their “original” version – moving either from French into English or vice-versa – until his death. Being fluent in German as well, he even famously assisted in the German translation of *En attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot* that was used in his own Berlin production of the play; today the play is widely available in German-speaking countries in a trilingual paperback edition.

My interest, however, in Beckett’s self-translation is not merely on the act itself. I intend to examine the way the many slippages Beckett introduces between the two versions of his texts work to form a crucial part of the new text they create when both are considered together; I will describe this new text as ironic. Although Brian T. Fitch, whose work *Beckett and Babel* forms the most sustained and complete investigation of Beckett’s bilingual literary composition, argues that the English *Company* and the French *Compagnie* are so different as to require treatment as entirely distinct literary works (99), he ignores the possibility that Beckett saw his self-translation as yet another creative act that allows for reading the two versions together with and against each other. In the same way his famous Trilogy may be considered as a work of art in ways distinct from the way each component novel is treated alone, we may consider the two versions of the text *Company/Compagnie* together despite their differences. It seems, given Beckett’s own unwillingness to restrict himself to one language, to one text, that we may follow his lead.

From the beginning of Beckett’s self-translation, one sees slight differences introduced between the original (or first) version and the translated text. These normally consist of slight changes in details, the omission or inclusion of minor characters, and even the shifting of a negative statement to a positive one. I will examine the ironic structure of Beckett’s *Company/Compagnie* with an eye particularly on the role self-translation plays in this structure. Other aspects of the irony of this text include: statements that undercut narrative plausibility and consistency and outright contradictions. The text of *Company/Compagnie* maintains its ironic instability from the first words to the end, emerging as a type of what David Hayman has called an “impossible object” text, an ironic creation of impossible, unreal (and yet readable – which is to say, comprehensible) space. Hayman writes:

Readers of impossible object texts quickly become aware that they have entered an abashedly artificial realm predicated on the reliability of most fictional discourse. Using a device that might better be called a tactic and that can be applied to parts as well as wholes, a growing number of writers systematically represent experiences that more or less systematically annul themselves in the process of their presentation. (44)

Beckett uses such a tactic in *Company/Compagnie*, leaving the reader with a text that cannot be conceived to have any tenable connection to nonverbal reality and a textual universe that reverberates with irony and follows no rules, including its own. This poses, of course, a unique problem for the critic, as L. A. C. Dobrez has noted: “*Company* is not so much a text, as an act At any rate it is active, it resists objectification, it is, quite simply, alive. Like a patient immune to anaesthetic, it squirms during surgery ...” (83). Attempting, then, to avoid inflicting too much pain on my patient, I will attempt to describe the process of irony in this text, created as it is out of multiple, unresolved terms.

Prior to beginning an investigation of the ironic aspects of Beckett’s works, it is necessary to express briefly the understanding of irony that will govern my discussion. In *Irony’s Edge*, Linda Hutcheon enters into dialog with E. H. Gombrich’s view of the famous ambiguous image (or *Vexierbild*) of the rabbit or the duck (found in numerous early 20th-century psychological works as well as Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* and in popular magazines). Gombrich contends that when viewing this image our minds necessarily choose to see only one of the two potential images, the duck or the rabbit. Hutcheon argues, however:

While Gombrich says our eyes can’t experience both readings at the same time, I would suggest that, when it comes to the ducks and rabbits of ironic meaning, our minds almost can. In interpreting irony, we can and do oscillate very rapidly between the said and the unsaid. (59-60)

Hutcheon further argues that ironic meaning emerges on the one hand out of the simultaneity of two meanings (the said and the unsaid) and on the other out of their superimposition. Out of this "action and interaction ... the creation of a third – the actual ironic – meaning" emerges (60). Thus for Hutcheon irony is a new, hybrid form that allows us to have our cake, to eat it, and to have yet another (third) object, or perhaps experience: that of the simultaneity of eating the cake and yet keeping it whole. This vision of irony allows contradictions to remain such contradictions: unresolved, the two terms work together to create the ironic object. As we shall see, this dynamic view of irony will prove very fruitful in understanding particularly the dual-language existence of Beckett's works.

Beckett's *Company/Compagnie* features two main impulses: metafictional discourse (of the sort one finds in Beckett's prose from *L'Innommable/The Unnamable* on), alternating with narrative sections displaying a (for Beckett) unexpectedly strong use of imagery and memories. The short text – running 48 pages in one British edition, 82 in the French—is divided into short blocks of text set apart from each other by a single blank line. The text features two main characters: an anonymous, disembodied voice and an anonymous "hearer," who is lying on his back in the dark. As the text progresses, the voice guides the hearer through memories which may or may not belong to him. Outside this system (to a degree) stands the narrator, who at times seems merely to present the scene, at others to create it, and at others yet to be a creation within it. Because the text remains indeterminate in naming its "characters," pronouns become crucial for the reader to understand about whom the text is speaking; thus the text claims to present a very precise system of pronominal references for the benefit of the reader. One reads: "Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third the cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot." (6) "Emploi de la deuxième personne est le fait de la voix. Celui de la troisième celui de l'autre. Si lui pouvait parler à qui et de qui parle la voix il y aurait une troisième. Mais il ne le peut pas. Il ne le fera pas." (8-9). Here the first difference between the two versions of the text is introduced. Where the English version calls the hearer (he who cannot speak but is spoken to and of) the potential "first," the French version calls him a "third." The English thus seems to continue the trend of speaking of the first, second and third person pronouns that appears when describing the voice; this action grants the hearer at least the potential of speaking or acting. The French text denies even this slim possibility by indicating the hearer simply as a third figure in the narrative, already excluded from even the chance of participating in discourse.

The text's system, once constructed, however, falls apart immediately

as one continues to read: "Apart from the voice and the faint sound of his breath there is no sound. None at least that he can hear" (6) "A part la voix et le faible bruit de son souffle nul bruit. Du moins qu'il puisse entendre. Le faible bruit de son souffle lui dit." (9). Already the "he" of the text has become unstable. For where the text only lines earlier had linked the use of the third person pronoun to the "cankrous other" – the narrator – when describing the hearer, it is here linked just as plausibly to a description of the narrator himself, also presented as alone in the dark with only the voice and his own breathing. This association of the third person pronoun with both the hearer and the narrator continues throughout the text. This wrench in the works of the textual universe represents but the first of its system-destroying twists of irony. It also tends to preclude certainty as to the identity and interchangeability of each of the text's participants, which in and of itself would not be ironic. This text, however, is both insistent on the rules of narrative space and careful delineation of narrative, yet it is reluctant to stick to these rules and delineations. Thus the confusion of pronouns evokes exactly the sort of unresolvable ironic structure Hutcheon describes.

Wolfgang Iser, one of the first commentators to note the preponderance of contradictory statements in Beckett's works, connects Beckett's contradictions to a refusal to grant the ability of language to refer successfully to the world outside language. In his analysis of the Trilogy he writes:

The sentence construction in this [*Molloy*] and in the subsequent novels is frequently composed of direct contradictions. A statement is followed by the immediate retraction of what has been stated. The degree of contradiction varies from modification or patent undermining right through to total negation ... This technique results in a total devaluation of language by accentuating the arbitrariness with which it is applied to the objects it seeks to grasp. (*Implied Reader* 164-65)

I would argue that this action of textual self-destruction becomes of key importance when a fictional universe is being evoked. The direct contradiction of statements results in the reader's being forced into accepting the potential for a narrative setting that quite literally makes no sense: despite the starkness of Beckett's descriptions, there occasionally appears a setting or a fictional space that may be imagined by the reader, especially in *Company/Compagnie*, with its vivid so-called autobiographical sections.¹ In this work, as in a number of Beckett's other late works, the attempt to imagine the

1 In regard to the autobiographical aspects of this text, see John Pilling, *Rev. of Company*, by Samuel Beckett, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 7 (1982): 127-31, and Jim Hicks, "Partial Interpretations and *Company*," Beckett, Foucault, et al. and the Author Question, *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 17 (1993): 309-23.

fictional world being described, one fundamental to the reading process, is made impossible by the contradictions within the versions of the text as well as those between them.

In addition to the puzzling out the reader must do in an effort to stabilize the pronominal references of the text, basic issues of narrative remain contradictory as well as indeterminate. One of the key elements of this indeterminacy of the narration is the difficulty the reader has in locating the source of many of the statements in the book. Already we have seen the text confuse the narrator and the hearer; throughout the text one often wonders whether the voice or the "cankerous" narrator is speaking. The voice seems to possess the most authority in the text, guiding and even insisting on the hearer's believing his words, and the narrator generally seems to offer the thoughts of the hearer, who cannot articulate them himself. Yet there is an entire discourse about the hearer's situation, physical attributes, and potential for coming (or perhaps returning) to language that is presented in ways difficult to associate with either the voice and his prescriptions of the hearer's world on the one hand or the "cankerous" narrator's presentation of his thoughts on the other. "If he were to utter after all? However feebly. What an addition to company that would be! You are on your back in the dark and one day you will utter again. One day! In the end. In the end you will utter again. Yes I remember. That was I. That was I then" (16-17) / "Et s'il parlait après tout. Si faiblement que ce soit. Quelle contribution à la compagnie ce serait. Tu es sur le dos dans le noir et un jour tu parleras à nouveau. Oui je me rappelle. Ce fut moi. Ce fut moi alors" (27). Again the pronominal system would suggest, due to the use of the third person, that the narrator is speaking, yet the subsequent use of the second person would indicate the voice's words. The possibility that the section mixes both voices cannot be ignored, of course, but it and others remain at best ambiguous. In this section, too, the French text conveys a slightly different effect than the English: the hearer is imagined to say, "Ce fut moi. Ce fut moi alors" (27). This is the *passé simple*, a literary (written) tense English is without that marks the hearer (at least for whomever is imagining his words) as a literary man, who speaks of his past as something out of literature, not experience.

The narrator and the voice also present themselves and their stories as highly fictional and inconsistent; this results from the constant undercutting of their statements. This element of the text leaves the reader with the impression that the narrator and voice have created their narrative worlds out of whole cloth while presenting them as the truth. Phrases such as "to a point," "for the time being," "leave it at that," "so much for," "as if," "be that as it may," "let ... be conceded," etc. dominate the text (to give only the prominent examples from the English version). In one particular example, the meticulous description of the size and shape of a metaphorical hemisphere

that has required a number of pages is deflated instantly with the words, "So much for form and dimension" (26) / "Voilà pour la forme et l'étendue" (44). Far from offering the final word on their subject matter, these voices claim authority yet speak carelessly and without concern for contradictions or completeness. The reader must simply accept both possibilities, since the text offers no secure connection to the outside world with which to judge the veracity of the statements.

A particularly striking way that the narrator and the voice subvert their authority is through the use of the conjunction "or," which is often used in the text to join two polar opposites. We first encounter this word as the narrator describes the manner in which the voice comes at the hearer, first faint and distant, then close, first speaking without cease, then hesitating for a long while before continuing. In both these instances the way in which the narrator, rather than presenting these situations as simply true, introduces the possibility of their opposites also being true in a manner that tends to forestall any disagreement from the reader: "or of course vice versa" (12) / "Ou évidement renversement" (19). Other such occurrences of the indeterminate conjunction "or" linking two possible, opposite options abound.² But before any of these examples occur in the text, it questions the very use of the conjunction, asking, "For why or? Why in another dark or the same?" (19) / "Car pourquoi ou? Pourquoi dans un autre noir ou dans le même?" (31). This philosophical consideration of the appropriateness of the use of the word "or" leads to a possible interpretation of this passage as arguing for the simultaneous presence of "another dark" and "the same": we are tempted to read in the text's questioning of "or" an urge to use "and" instead, as indeed it does elsewhere. The text here may thus argue in favor of an ironic fictional universe and ironic text much in the terms that I have outlined above.

Near the end of the text the voice even puts into question the entire enterprise of narration that has occurred: "Supine now you resume your fable where the act of lying cut it short" (51) / "Maintenant sur le dos tu reprends ta fable au point où l'acte d'allongement y a coupé court" (86). The pun (itself an ironic structure) in the English version on "lying" as both telling a lie and lying down introduces either further support for the text's highly fictional and inconsistent nature (an additional contradiction of being supine enabling something that lying prevented) or, more likely and ironically, both.

The text's dominant ambiguity may even be found in one of its opening words (in English the infinitive or command form "Imagine" (5), in French simply the infinitive "Imaginer" [7]), and is carried on via the play in the novel between notions of creation and remembering throughout. Imagination

2 See pages 20, 21, 22, 26, 29, 38, 39 and 40 of the English text and pages 34, 35, 37, 44, 49, 66, 68 and 71 of the French.

is directly related to creation by the text itself when the voice comments in the middle of one of the hearer's "reminiscences," "But there are no flies. Then why not let there be? The temptation is great. Let there be a fly for him to brush away" (22) / "Mais il n'y a pas de mouches. Alors qu'il y en ait. Pourquoi pas? La tentation est forte. Qu'il y ait une mouche" (37). The reader's suspicions about the voice's imaginative role in providing the details of the hearer's memories is confirmed pages later as the voice says, "Bloom of adulthood. Imagine a whiff of that. On your back in the dark you remember. Ah you you remember" [sic] (31) / "La fleur de l'âge. En imaginer un effluve spécimen. Sur le dos dans le noir tu te rapelles" (52). The hearer also remains reluctant to trust the memories the voice "reminds" him of (again, at least as he is presented by the narrator). The passivity of the hearer (including his name, highlighting his receptive qualities and only imagined speech) taken with this comment introduces irony into the imagination vs. memory question: we cannot state with certainty that the text takes either stance; once again it walks the thin line of irony.

Beyond questioning the nature, source and validity of the narration, however, one finds the very existence of the narrative universe and its characters questioned. The certainty of the truth of the words on the page is undermined from the beginning, which clears the way for the myriad contradictions that follow. The narrator states explicitly on the first page, "But by far the greater part of what is said cannot be verified" (5) / "Mais de loin la majeure partie de ce qui se dit ne peut se vérifier" (8). This statement places into doubt the space in which we perceive the text's "action"; additionally, the hearer is in no better a position: he, too, can confirm only what he physically senses and is to a large extent an analogy for the reader. The hearer never speaks, and the narrator or the voice seems to guide everything about him, even his thoughts and memories. Further, the narrator describes the hearer as wondering why the voice does not speak to him in means he can verify, concluding that it is to preserve "the faint uncertainty" (7) / "ce vague sentiment d'incertitude" (10) which he feels about his surroundings.

Moving further into the text, we find the narrator contradicting himself almost immediately in regard to the hearer and his faculties. This alone surely tips us off either that the narrator, our only guide in the text, is wildly unreliable or that the hearer lives in a world not based on rules we are accustomed to, but rather one that functions according to its own bizarre logic. The narrator explains:

So with what reason remains he reasons and reasons ill.... *It is clear therefore that if it is not to him the voice is speaking but to another it is not of him either but of that other and no other to that other. So with what reason remains he reasons ill.* (9, italics added)

Ainsi avec ce qu'il lui reste de raison il raisonne et raisonne faux.... *Il est donc évident que si ce n'est pas à lui que parle la voix mais à un autre ce n'est pas de lui non plus mais de cet autre et de nul autre. Ainsi avec ce qu'il lui reste de raison il raisonne faux.* (13-14, italics added)

The italicized portion, which credits the hearer with clarity, is couched between two statements of the limitations of the hearer's abilities, thus deflating the notion of his clarity altogether, one would think. The reader must think, "I have been told that the hearer reasons poorly, then that he has arrived at a clear and logical conclusion, but then again that he reasons poorly. He must be a poor reasoner." But as is apparent throughout the text, contradictions often remain unresolved.

This discourse on reason goes on throughout the text as well, each reference harkening back to the first explanation of the hearer's paradoxical limited abilities and yet skill in this vein. At one point the narrator posits that the hearer has a name and that there is no question that the hearer is listening ("overhearing"/"surprendre") and being spoken about. He then comments oddly on this statement, saying, "Though logically none in any case" (25) / "Quoique de toute évidence logiquement aucune" (42), that is, there is logically no question that the hearer is hearing and being spoken about. Here again an important difference emerges between the two versions, the French use of "imaginer" contrasting with the English use of "reason." Thus the two versions represent opposing trends of thought which, the text suggests, in their juxtaposition may amount to the same thing. Beckett's jokes continue as the voice proposes further imaginings "within reason" (25-26) / "sans rien imaginer" (43). In this vein the narrator also presents the hearer as questioning some numbers with the statement, "This strikes you for some reason as improbable" (32) / "Pour des raisons mystérieuses ce chiffre te paraît improbable..." (55). Here, the French version seems to offer some hope in its use of the phrase "des raisons mystérieuses," which suggests that reasons for doubt, though mysterious, do exist outside the text. The English version tosses off the phrase, "for some reason," which is often used not to posit a reason's existence, but rather to indicate the arbitrariness of a decision. In all these cases, reason and judgment enter the text ironically, for we know that the notion of the text's reasonableness has been put into question through its own rhetoric.

The contradictory statements found in the novel extend even further, namely as far as the very existence of the hearer. In this sense the novel's ironic contradictions conform to what Michael Valdez Moses has called the "destructive parody" of narrative in Beckett's works, which includes the destabilization of the existence of the "continuity of character" (665). In the "same flat tone" the voice speaks to the hearer: "You were once. You were

never. Were you ever? Oh never to have been! Be again. Same flat tone" (16)/ "Tu fus jadis. Tu ne fus jamais. Fus-tu jamais? Oh n'avoir jamais été! Sois à nouveau. Même ton terne" (25). Since the hearer can confirm only what he hears (or so we have been told, how reliably we do not and cannot know), he himself is uncertain about what the voice tells him, but the point remains the same: the voice, as the dominant narrative construer of this text (the text uses the term "deviser" [37]/"inventeur" or "imaginant" [63]), creates an ontology that itself does not remain consistent. One potential reading of this passage would argue that the voice simply manipulates the hearer, but another would support the ironic reversal that transpires throughout the text: via these contradictory statements, the hearer both exists and does not exist at the same time; an impossible state of being is created by the voice's manipulation of language as irony creates a new (impossible) narrative being.

Even temporality, perhaps the hallmark of narrative, is disturbed through the contradictions in the work. Relatively early in the text and following quickly the voice's pronouncement to the hearer that he will say "That was I then," the voice exclaims, "As then there is no then so there is none now" (17)/"Comme alors il n'y avait pas d'avant de même il n'y en a pas maintenant" (28). Not only does this statement – at least in English, since the French version loses some of the confusion of the English – contradict itself, but it also disrupts the entire system of the novel, which again, is comprised of alternating narrative sections and metafictional commentary. For there to be no "then" undermines each of the stories, placing them into the odd state of non-narrative narratives: someone is clearly narrating – telling – but the true identity of the object of his narration is unclear and undermined. Rather than questioning the basis of narrative and leaving it at that, though, the word "then" appears several times throughout the text, creating a sense of constant irony as the text violates its own ground rules again and again. The first time "then" is used in the text in the standard manner (and thus the first time temporality enters into an intratextual ironic structure) is during the hearer's "reminiscence" about his hiding place. Occurring only two pages after the voice argues against the existence of a "then," the occurrence of the statement, "The light there was then. On your back the light there was then" (19)/"La lumière qu'il y avait alors. Sur ton dos dans le noir la lumière qu'il y avait alors" (32) surely creates an obvious ironic echo for most readers.

For my discussion of the ironic differences between the two versions of the work *Company/Compagnie*, I am indebted to Fitch's work *Beckett and Babel*. Rather than attempting to improve upon his solid analysis, I will rely on his conclusions about the differences between the "fictional universes" of the two versions of the text but draw my own conclusions as to their relationship to each other. Fitch argues that omissions in the French version of the text make the two versions too different to be considered the same text

in different languages. Since the differences have to do so fundamentally with the constitution of a fictional universe, this state of affairs makes reconciling them impossible, Fitch argues. He writes:

All the examples of omissions from the French text considered so far constitute elements of the fictive universe of *Company*, whether they be characters, objects and their attributes, or actions and events and their characteristics. The fact that these elements are wholly absent from the world of *Compagnie* means that we are here dealing with two different fictive worlds; certain mental images experienced by the reader of *Company* – visual, auditory, and so on – never enter the imagination of the reader of *Compagnie*. (99)

The differences, Fitch contends, are too great to be synthesized, so the reader of both is left with two different fictive universes. He continues, "In the final analysis, then, it is not possible to reconcile the two fictive universes in some coherent overall synthesis, and the problem of their incompatibility remains intact" (102).

This dichotomy, then, gives us yet another example of the ironic structures set up by the text. But whereas Fitch sees an impossibility when trying to find a middle ground between the two versions, I would argue (following Hutcheon and her notion of the third, ironic, text) that the few readers of Beckett willing and able to read both versions would have a rather developed literary sensibility and would also most likely be adept readers of Beckett. They might, therefore, be able to force their mind into the impossible situation of seeing the duck of the English version and the rabbit of the French one at the same time despite their differences (Beckett might say, or of course vice-versa). The fact that Beckett himself translated the English text into French makes the entire process very creative; one further creative step would be to introduce the irony of the differences between the two versions of the text, providing the bilingual reader with yet another level of confusion.

Taken together, the elements discussed above, from the significant contradictions in the text to the undermining of narrative stability and trustworthiness to the important discrepancies between the two versions, introduce tremendous doubts into the mind of the reader as to what he or she is reading. Surely this presents an odd proposition for the reader: unable to reconcile various portions of the work being read, he or she continues nonetheless, reading on unto the end and arriving better for it. Readers succeed in reading ironic texts like Beckett's, achieving something superior to a single, straightforward text.

Beckett's *Company/Compagnie*, through its extensive irony, creates a sort of *Vexierbild* – like the picture of the duck/rabbit – but in narrative form. Wolfgang Iser gives some insight into why readers might continue to engage such texts, writing in regard to Beckett's use of Sartrean "negativity,"

or the retention of what is rejected:

Negativity brings into being an endless potentiality, and it is this potentiality that forms the infrastructure of Beckett's writings. By negativity we mean the hidden motive for the many negations and deformations that condition the characters we meet in those works. It stimulates communicative and constitutive activities within us by showing us that something is being withheld and by challenging us to discover what it is. ("Pattern" 141)

Thus the ironic creation of an impossible imaginative object, something like what the text itself refers to as "Unformulable gropings of the mind" (18)/"Informulable soubresauts de l'esprit" (29) which they formulate as "Unstillable" (18)/"Inapaisables" (29), generates a difficult but rewarding challenge for readers, and enables them to look beyond the initial plausibility of any fiction and perhaps to question the very notion of narrative plausibility.

Thus the irony evoked in Beckett's parallel text *Company* and *Compagnie* develops in a creative manner that which may be called an impossible object text. This text works with the readers' fundamental ironic abilities, urging them to complete a contradictory and inconsistent picture of a fictional world that cannot even be said to follow its own rules, let alone those of our world. What initially seems to be merely a confusing text, Beckett's *Company/Compagnie* emerges from an ironic reading as a carefully constructed ironic edifice, playing with readerly expectations, generic demands and linguistic potentials. With greater accessibility than his other texts that feature similar critical moves, this text allows readers to begin to understand the goals of the mysterious void, anonymous voices and multiple contradictions that form so much of Beckett's work. Additionally an ironic reading enables readers to arrive at some sort of conclusion without their engaging in the impossible act of complete interpretation – readers may thus emerge with an understanding of the text as more than mere play.

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"better gift can no man make to a nation": Pound's Confucian Translations and the Internationalisation of *The Cantos*

There is a remarkable scene in Werner Herzog's film, *Aguirre, The Wrath of God*, that has for some time now struck me as an almost perfect allegory for the expressive dynamics of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Hopelessly lost in the jungle and floating down the Amazon River on a rapidly deteriorating raft, the mad and tyrannical visionary, Aguirre, and his band of conquistadors encounter an old jungle native, and they ask (actually, they demand) of him the location of El Dorado, the object of a quest for which they have all abandoned their order and thus become traitors against the Spanish crown. In their desire to find and ultimately conquer the mythical lost city of gold, Aguirre and his soldiers force one of their Native American slaves to translate for them as they attempt to communicate with the stranger who, they believe, possesses the knowledge that will both save and redeem them. But instead of Spanish, the slave made to perform this act of linguistic interchange translates the old man's words into crisp and ready German. And all the while, English sub-titles appear at the bottom of the screen to assist those viewers without Herzog's native language.

Each in their own way, all the elements of this cinematic moment appear in the unfolding of the particular epic quest narrative presented by *The Cantos*. From the famous opening lines of the poem – "And then went down to the ship/ Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and/ We set up mast and sail on that swart ship," (I, 3) – to the repeated use in the "Pisan Cantos" of the Greek word "periplum," which Pound earlier on defines as the view "not as the land looks on a map/ but as sea bord seen by men sailing" (LIX, 324), the theme of a journey by water flows throughout *The Cantos*. Similarly, Pound, too, had his El Dorado for which he sacrificed almost everything, though he conceived of its rewards in primarily and expressly political, rather than financial, terms, and called it by several different names, including "Ecbatan" (IV, 16) and "the city of Dioce whose terraces are the color of stars (LXXIV, 425). And, of course, the twin problems of madness and treason have loomed over the late *Cantos* like a pair of dark and