UNHEARD FOOTFALLS ONLY SOUND:
“neither” in Translation

neither
to and fro in shadow from inner to outer shadow
from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself
by way of neither

as between two lit refuges whose doors once neared
gently closed, once turned away from
gently part again
beckoned back and forth and turned away
heedless of the way, intent on the one gleam
or the other
unheard footfalls only sound
till at last halt for good, absent for good
from self and other
then no sound
then gently light unfading on that unheeded
neither
unspeakable home

For a translation workshop on Beckett’s “neither” eight participants
from six different language backgrounds each prepared a translation in
his or her own language, as well as a literal translation back into
English. Through a discussion of the problems each translator
encountered, the session became an exercise in close reading and
literary criticism as well as an opportunity to compare the linguistic and
cultural translating difficulties presented by various languages.

Erika Tophoven - Germany (Erika Tophoven-Schöninng and the late
Elmar Tophoven are the two authorized translators of Beckett’s work
into German): I started translating Beckett together with my husband in
1957. All That Fall was Beckett’s first text in English that we did.
Because my husband was not very good in English and I had just
finished my English studies, I helped him. The whole oeuvre has been
translated into German by us.

After my husband’s death I continued alone with Stirrings Still and Le
monde et le pantalon. I keep all the material (notes) and correspondence
for later study. My husband used to revise earlier translations, but now
that he is dead I feel I cannot change and revise them any more. I
considered the translation of *Worstward Ho* a help in understanding the original. Beckett read the first pages and said it sounded okay. He could not concentrate on the rest.

*Mariko Hori Tanaka* - Japan (Associate Professor at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo): I have been working as a translator for a few professional theatre companies in Tokyo. Most of Beckett’s plays and much of the fiction has been translated into Japanese and published by Hakusuisha Publishing Co., but everything except three volumes of selected plays is now out of print. There are two great translators, Ando Shinya and Takahashi Yasunari, who are also Beckett scholars.

*Antoni Libera* - Poland (Beckett translator, director, critic): Translating Beckett has been one of the tasks of my life — apart from directing. I often spoke to Beckett about translating because he was extremely interested in the art of translating. His suggestion was always to use the original version in which the work was written, but also sometimes the second version. If you prefer an expression from the second version, use it.

*Güven Turan* - Turkey (writer and translator): I am a poet, not a translator, but I do translate. I have just translated *Rockaby*. In Turkey Beckett is known as a French writer. There was one performance in the sixties of *Waiting for Godot*. It caused an outrage, and Beckett was banned in the dictatorial period. Forgotten. Now there is a “democratic” government. Beckett was rediscovered in the late eighties.

*Antonio Ballesteros González* - Spain (Associate Professor of English, Universidad Autónoma, Madrid): To me translating is a hobby. My favourite field is fantastic literature, and I’m now translating Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Beckett translations into Spanish don’t seem to have been very successful. There is quantity alright, but the translations have not been faithful enough. The only ones that deserve to be read are those of my fellow translator and colleague, Antonia Rodríguez-Gago. To translate Beckett you have to be half in love with the text.

*Shaheen Mahmood* - Bangladesh (Associate Professor of English, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka): I am not a professional translator, but I have translated Bengali poetry into English. My father translated *Waiting for Godot* from English in 1981. In 1984 it had twenty-two full-house performances. *Waiting for Godot* is the only Bengali Beckett translation. I didn’t find it all that difficult to translate “neither”. We have a precise language which retains all the musicality and rhythmicality. It was a very enjoyable experience.

*Antonia Rodríguez-Gago* - Spain (Associate Professor of English, Universidad Autónoma, Madrid): I translated “neither” in 1982. I wrote to Samuel Beckett for permission. After publication he sent me his