What is Authorial Philology?

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4.5 Samuel Beckett’s *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot*

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Genetic Beckett studies have a long history that stretches far beyond the so-called ‘archival turn’ of the 1990s, although the accessibility of manuscripts was certainly an issue in the first decades of Beckett scholarship (1960s-70s). Things changed radically when he donated a large number of his manuscripts to the University of Reading’s archive (UoR) in 1971. Thanks to the efforts of scholars like James Knowlson, John Pilling and later Mark Nixon, the archive has grown throughout the years and now holds the world’s largest collection of Beckett manuscripts. Other large repositories are the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas (HRC) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Beckett’s alma mater.

Even this short list of the largest collections points to one of the biggest problems in genetic Beckett studies, namely the enormous geographical spread of archives and holding libraries. A number of important collections are kept in the United States: Washington University in St Louis (WU), Syracuse University in New York (SU), Indiana University (IU), Ohio State University (OSU), and The University of California, San Diego (UCSD). L’Institut Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine (IMEC) and the Bibliothèque National (BnF) are the two most important repositories in France, where the bilingual Irish author lived for most of his life. The scattered nature of Beckett’s legacy was one of the chief reasons, along with preservation, for the establishment of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (BDMP) in 2011 (https://www.beckettarchive.org/). The purpose of the BDMP is to reunite the manuscripts of Beckett’s works in a digital way, and to facilitate genetic research: by offering transcriptions of Beckett’s manuscripts, tools for bilingual and genetic version comparison, a search engine and an analysis of the textual genesis of his works.

As a digital resource, the BDMP uses the affordances of the digital medium to the fullest by foregrounding and visualizing Beckett’s rich and layered intertextuality. In this connection, the Beckett Digital Library (BDL) is a crucial feature. The module consists of the ‘extant’ library (the books that are still in Beckett’s apartment in Paris and in a few other collections) and the ‘virtual’ library (the books we know.
Beckett read, based on information in letters and reading notes, but which no longer survive). Both the extant and the virtual library contain links to relevant pages in the genetic editions, and — conversely — one can find references to source texts in the individual modules and enter the library from there (see example below).

Although the focus of the BDMP lies mostly on the endogenesis (the succession of draft versions) and exogenesis (the author’s use of external source texts), it also catalogues and collates different editions of Beckett’s works, for which the Bibliography feature, compiled by Breon Mitchell, provides exhaustive bibliographical information. In some cases, the publication history is marked by a complex epigenesis (the continuation of the genesis and revision after the first publication). The example discussed below — the genesis of Beckett’s most famous play En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot — is a case in point.

Samuel Beckett began writing Godot on 9 October 1948, finishing it some four months later on 29 January 1949. Together with 9 December 1948, these are the only three dates recorded in the squared ‘Avia’ notebook of the original manuscript, now held at the BnF in Paris. The play was completed in the middle of what Beckett referred to as a ‘frenzy of writing’ or ‘siege in the room’ to his biographer James Knowlson (1996), a sustained period of intense composition in French which yielded another play, four stories, a novella and three novels. Beckett began Godot ‘as a relaxation’, to get away from the ‘awful prose’ he was writing (Colin Duckworth, in Beckett 1966: xlv). The only other handwritten material in French are a few lines of dialogue in the ‘Tara MacGowran’ notebook (OSU). Two typescripts are mentioned in Beckett’s letters, but only an annotated playscript based on the second one survives (Morgan Library, New York), which was also used for a radio recording of the play for Michel Polac’sEntrée des auteurs on RTF’s Club d’Essai in 1952. Two ‘prompt’ copies of Minuit’s first edition (TCD; IMEC) were heavily used during rehearsals for the premiere at the Théâtre de Babylone in January 1953 and, lastly, a fair copy Beckett made for manuscripts dealer Jake Schwartz (HRC) in 1959 is largely identical to the published text.

Following the play’s success in Paris, serious offers started coming in from the USA. Worried about the fate of his text in the hands of others,

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2 Unless otherwise stated, all the information in this section is taken from Van Hulle and Verhulst 2017, and the online genetic edition.
Beckett made his own English translation. Its original manuscript was likely thrown away, but a first typescript was sent to Harold L. Oram, the financial backer, and American publisher Barney Rosset (Grove Press, New York) in June 1953. Despite Beckett’s warning that it was only a rushed first draft, it was retyped, duplicated and disseminated for negotiations, but no copy of this playscript has yet come to light. Beckett also sent his first typescript to Britain, for theatre impresario Donald Albery and director Peter Glenville, who likewise had copies made. This playscript did survive, in four versions, all with different annotations — none in Beckett’s hand — and some with unique but probably unauthorized variants. The fourth copy was shown to the Lord Chamberlain’s office, who censored it for performance (British Library). To complicate matters even more, Alan Simpson wanted to stage Godot at the Pike Theatre in Dublin, asking Beckett for a text in November 1953. This time, he made sure to send a copy of his second, revised typescript, which makes it the only English draft to have survived, be it with missing pages (TCD). We know from Beckett’s letters to his American publisher that copies of the first and second typescript were given to the New York Public Library in 1961, but these went missing in 1970. Another fair copy manuscript of the English text was made for Schwartz in 1959 (HRC), but this was again based on a published edition, the American one.

Godot’s publication history, in both French and English, is long and complicated. The original French edition (1952) appeared before the play’s premiere, so it did not include any of the changes that were made for performance. A few small cuts and additions were implemented in the second impression (1953), which was further updated with substantial excisions for paperback and hardback reissues in 1970 and 1971. Another annotated copy that informed this revised edition was the one Beckett made for the Godot revival at the Odéon Théâtre in 1961, directed by Roger Blin and featuring the famous tree designed by Alberto Giacometti (IU). By this time, various English editions had appeared. The American version (1954), was based on Beckett’s second typescript of the translation and is thus more advanced than the French text. The British edition, however, published by Faber and Faber in 1956, was based on Beckett’s by now obsolete first typescript translation, as well as the various playscripts that were used for the play’s UK premiere. In addition to unauthorized variants, introduced by Glenville,
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Albery and set designer Peter Snow, it also printed the bowdlerized text. Since Beckett was very unhappy with this situation, a new edition was published in 1965. He had carefully marked up a copy of the American edition for this purpose (Columbia University), but instead of setting the text anew from this document, Faber just incorporated Beckett’s corrections into their original type, so that many of the old variants were left intact. It was therefore not the ‘definitive edition’ it claimed to be.

The editorial model we developed for the BDMP is based on a text-oriented approach to the transcriptions in XML, following the guidelines of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). The rationale behind this choice is that, since we also provide scans of the document, this text-oriented approach is complementary. The disadvantage of a topographic transcription (in a digital context) is that the transcription does not translate the facsimile image into a searchable text, but into another (unsearchable) image, produced by means of graphic software like Photoshop. In the French tradition of critique génétique (genetic criticism), this form of transcription would accord with the principle of donner à voir (made for looking), as opposed to the principle of donner à lire (made for reading). The latter approach (applied in the BDMP) considers it the role of the transcriber to provide a text that facilitates the reading and therefore tends to linearize the textual features of the manuscript. The linearized transcription still leaves open many possibilities to mark visual particularities as well. For instance, the difference between typed text and handwritten annotations can be rendered by means of different fonts. The line breaks are respected, and the blank space where Beckett did not immediately find the right word can just be marked as such. If the linearized transcription is presented in parallel with a (digital) facsimile, the combination (à voir + à lire) is greater than the sum of its parts, as it shows the translation of toposensitive facsimile into chronosensitive linearized sequence.

For genetic editions, one of the most powerful tools is the possibility for users to diachronically compare segments (<seg>) of the text across versions. To enable this type of genetic research, it is helpful to number the segments and it is up to the editor to decide what the size of these segments will be. The BDMP works with the sentence as a unit of comparison, broadly defined as a syntactic unit that ends with a full stop, an exclamation mark or a question mark. The first edition serves
as a ‘base-text’ (or ‘anchor text’) that determines the numbering of the sentences. In case a segment never made it into the published text, and therefore does not correspond with any sentence in the base-text, a solution for the numbering is to take the number of the preceding sentence that did make it in and add a vertical bar | followed by a second numbering. For instance, \([0014|001]\) means this is a segment that did not make it into the final text and is situated in this manuscript as the first segment after the segment corresponding to sentence 14, which did make it in.

By choosing the page as a division (<div>), it is also possible to link the XML transcription to the digital facsimile. In the BDMP, this coupling of text and image happens at the level of the ‘zone’, a flexible textual unit of about a half dozen lines (depending on the context). The content of the zone can be efficiently linked to the corresponding sentences in the XML transcription. An advantage of this unit’s size is that it facilitates the image/text visualization enabling the immediate comparison of the topography of the facsimile (document-oriented) with the linearized transcription (text-oriented). The image/text view is the most frequently used way of reading the transcriptions. The zone can be drawn on the facsimile with a simple, free software tool like ImageJ, and in the BDMP the four coordinates necessary to encode this rectangular selection in the XML are stored in a <div> element.

The transcription work focuses on the microgenesis of ‘intradocument variation’ (layers of writing within this one draft), while the macrogenesis opens up the scope across versions (‘interdocument variation’). Because segments are numbered, the digital architecture of the genetic edition can be designed in such a way that it retrieves all versions of one particular sentence and visualizes them in a ‘synoptic sentence view’. It allows users to compare versions, i.e. what Donald Reiman dubbed ‘versioning’ (1987: 167–80), but at the level of the sentence, which facilitates comparison. Since Beckett wrote in two languages and translated most of his own works, the edition offers the possibility of bilingual version comparison. In the synoptic sentence view, the sentences in the manuscript that did not make it into the final text, such as segment \([0014|001]\) above, are highlighted in bold type and linked to the preceding sentence that did (here segment [0014]). To turn this form of versioning into the equivalent of a critical
apparatus of textual variants, new developments in (semi-)automatic or computer-assisted collation (Juxta, CollateX, HyperCollate) enable editors to highlight variants. By integrating CollateX into the edition, the BDMP offers not only editors but also users the chance to compare differences between versions by means of a collation engine, even in the manuscripts (including cancellations and additions), in both the French and the English texts.

The following manuscript passage, edited according to the principles of authorial philology, illustrates how Beckett revised, cancelling and substituting fragments between the lines, sometimes using the facing verso for additions (both in superscript below). In the digital genetic edition of the play, passages in the manuscripts that refer to source texts in Beckett’s personal library are annotated and linked to the relevant pages in his books.³

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Lévy. Je me rappelle les cartes de la Terre Sainte. 0151
     En couleurs. 0152
     Très jolies. 0153
     La mer morte était bleu pâle. 0154
     J’avais soif qu’en la regardant. 0155
     Je me disais, c’est là que nous passerons notre lune de miel. 0156
     Nous serons heureux. 0158

Vlad. Tu aurais dû être poète. 0159

Lévy. Je l’ai été. 0160
     Ça ne se voit pas ? 0162

     ( Silence ). 0163

Vlad. Qu’est-ce que je disais.... 0164
     Comment va ton pied ? 0165

Lévy. Il enfle. 0166
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³ This passage is quoted from the French notebook of En attendant Godot, module no. 6 in the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (BDMP6, FN, 05r).
Vlad. Ah oui, cette histoire des larrons.
Tu t’en souviens ?

Lévy. Non.

Vlad. Tu sais où ça vient.

Vlad. Tu sais où ça vient.
(un instant)

Lévy. Ça sent l’Evangile.

Lévy. Quelle histoire ?

Vlad. Mais je viens de te le dire.
Des L’histoire des larrons.

Lévy. Quels larrons ?

Vlad. Les deux voleurs crucifiés en même temps que Jésus l’autre. L’un fut sauvé et l’autre (il cherche le contraire de sauvé) damné.

Lévy. Sauvé de quoi ?

Vlad. Des enfers ?

Lévy. Je n’ai jamais pu blairer l’Evangile.
PHILOLOGICAL NOTES:

0151 Estragon was still called ‘Lévy’ in the manuscript, which suggests a Jewish heritage or ancestry. The name’s potentially political motivation notwithstanding, the author may have decided to change it in order to avoid accusations of Jewish stereotyping in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust. Beckett was in Germany from 1936–1937, witnessing the rise of Nazism, and he later helped the Resistance from Paris and Rousillon after German forces invaded the city (see 0181-001 below).

0155 Lévy’s comment that the very look of the Dead Sea’s pale blue colour made him thirsty, added on the facing verso page, may be inspired by similar maps of the Holy Land in the author’s personal library, for example in his Italian Bible (see Fig. 10).

0156 The author changes ‘nous passerons’ into the more colloquial ‘nous irons passer’. This revision also introduces an extra element of movement by adding the verb ‘aller’, which contrasts with the characters’ immobility. The English (self-)translation likewise makes use of the verb ‘to go’: ‘that’s where we’ll go for our honeymoon’ (Beckett 2010: 8).

0158 The sentence ‘nous serons heureux’ was added inline as an afterthought, which makes it seem more desperate and suggests they are not happy now.

0167 The correction of singular ‘du’ to plural ‘des larrons’ suggests the author was first thinking of using a different word, or perhaps just one thief instead of two, which would have made Vladimir seem even more unreliable (see 0180-0181 below).

0169-001-008 The author first deleted Vladimir’s question about the story of the two thieves’ source, as well as Estragon’s answer that it stinks of the Gospels, after a pause for thought. He then added the question again between the lines, but now Estragon answers with another question instead, a pattern that continues in the following exchange (see 0180-0181 below). The author’s revision of ‘Des larrons’ to ‘L’histoire des larrons’ also creates more repetition, another central theme in the play. Estragon’s deleted comment may connect to Beckett’s annotation of Luke 23:34 in his ‘schoolboy’ Bible, which mentions the crucifixion of the two thieves (see Fig. 11).
By obscuring Jesus as ‘the other’, the author seems to suggest that Vladimir does not remember his name, adding to the general breakdown of memory in the play, or is reluctant to name him. In the playscript and the published text, the term was replaced with ‘le Sauveur’ (FP, 07; 1952, 17), which emphasizes the biblical function of Christ rather than his name. Vladimir also refers to Godot as a saviour in the manuscript — ‘qui dit nous délivrer’ (FN, 04v) — but this explicit identification with Jesus was cut, possibly because it promoted a Christian reading, which the author discouraged.

Further emphasizing the characters’ failing recollection, as well as their lacking knowledge of the Bible or New Testament, in this facing-page addition the one forgets what the two thieves were saved from and the other guesses it was from hell, which gets them no closer to the truth. In the playscript and the published version, Vladimir sounds more assured and Bible savvy: ‘De l’enfer’ (FP, 07; 1952, 17).

Lévy’s Jewish-sounding name would have explained why he cannot stand the New Testament and the Gospels, since the Torah or Pentateuch only includes the first five books of the Old Testament. The fact that it was later changed to the more French-sounding name Estragon may be connected to the omission of this sentence from later drafts and versions, although the comment would still have retained blasphemous connotations.
Fig. 11 La Sacra Bibbia ossia L’Antico et il Nuovo Testamento: versione riveduta sui testi originali, Società Biblica Britannica e Forestiera, 1924 (n.p.), Beckett Digital Library, https://www.beckettarchive.org/library/SAC-BIB.html?page=map&zone
Christ's crucifixion.

ST. LUKE 24.

the death, and resurrection.

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.

43 For, behold, the days are coming in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.

44 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.

45 For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

46 And there were also two other malefactors, led with him to be put to death.

47 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

48 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

49 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

50 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar.

51 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

52 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

53 And one of the malefactors which were hanged said unto him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

54 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation;

55 And we indeed receive due reward for our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

56 Then said Jesus unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be in paradise.

57 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

58 And the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

59 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

60 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

61 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

62 And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.

63 And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor: and he was a good man, and just:

64 (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them.) He was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.

65 This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.

66 And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid.

67 And that day was a sabbath, and the sabbath was drawn on.

68 And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid.

69 And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath according to the commandment.

CHAPTER 24.

NOW upon the first day of the week, early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments;

5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered according to that which is written, and must be crucified, and the third day rise again.

8 And they remembered his words,