Samuel Beckett, the unlikely translator of Mexican poetry

Attempts at describing Samuel Beckett’s familiarity with the literatures written in Spanish are, to say the least, scant. We know, however, that the writer’s self-avowed slight acquaintance with the Spanish language did not prevent him from tackling the translation of a poem by the Chilean Gabriela Mistral, as well as a whole anthology of Mexican poetry. With the exception of the inclusion of twenty of these translations in Sean Lawlor’s and John Pilling’s edition of Beckett’s poems (2012), little attention is paid to this sideline in Beckett’s published career. Having dealt somewhere else with the manuscript notes taken by the Irishman in preparation for the second of these two UNESCO commissions, in this paper I aim at dissecting the project’s different components (original poems, translated versions, the Irishman’s mediation) with the intention of putting the spotlight, momentarily, on the seemingly worthless task that occupied the writer for the first months of 1950—when *L’Innommable* had just been completed.