

**Robert Pinget** *The Enemy*  
Translated by Barbara Wright  
New York, Red Dust 1991

Reviewed by Peter Broome in the International Fiction Review 1992  
Excerpts from his review

In the case of an author such as Pinget, for whom the “secret ear”- its murmurs, its undercurrents, its interferences- is of prime importance, the translator must be a sensitive receiver. Moving in the “space between,” the translator is more aware than most of the elusive tones, divergent claims, alternative versions... of recalcitrant language, ... In this, the translator is Pinget’s virtual twin: a shadowy double glimpsed in a mirror, at a distance, as through a glass darkly.

Barbara Wright is at ease ( or perhaps finely tuned unease?) with the shifting registers of *The Enemy*...

Pinget’s novel is an inquiry into its own malady. It sounds its own alienation and inadequacies. Its subject, perhaps its only subject, is the unfathomable text composing and decomposing....

What is left is a text floundering in its own time: with too many erasures and superimpositions ... (like the ancient portrait with its inviting, recognizable family traits and impenetrable patina)...

Who, indeed, in the textual act, is the reader? Lackey and master, transmitter and receiver, center and periphery, ... The reader becomes the crossroads which are absent from the obsolete and wrongly marked map of the district... He/she is pulled into the friction of the act of composition, indispensable to the writer’s project yet persistently cheated by “him” and left stranded...

“The precious substance to be purged of its dross resides in the chaos of the initial discourse”, Does such a precious substance... emerge... from the Pinget text?... And if the sought after painting mentioned at intervals never convinces one absolutely of its bona fide credentials,... then this is not the case with Pinget’s rare work of art. It sounds authentic, it rings true, despite the hollows, the chips, the patchings up, the hair-line fractures. It is the real thing however damaged. “We aren’t taken in,” says a voice at one point.

But emphatically, we are : we travel in their closest grain its lines of lack,  
explore the space between, to listen to the rustlings of its underworld, and be  
haunted by its mirages.