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SAY IT:
THE PERFORMATIVE VOICE IN
THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF
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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations will be used to refer to works by Samuel Beckett. Dates of writing, translation, first publication and performance are included in a chronology on p.285.

- C *Company* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1982).
- CC *Comment c'est* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1961).
- CO *Compagnie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).
- CP *Collected Poems 1930-1978* (London: John Calder, 1986).
- CSP *Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).
- D *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983).
- DR *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (London and Paris: Calder Publications, 1993).
- E *Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).
- EAG *En attendant Godot* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1952).
- EL *Eleutheria*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).
- HD *Happy Days*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).
- HIS *How It Is* (London: John Calder Publisher, 1996).
- ISIS *Ill Seen Ill Said* (London: John Calder, 1981).
- L "Lessness", in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*.
- LI *L'Innommable* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1953).
- M "Molloy", in *The Beckett Trilogy*.
- MAC *Mercier and Camier* (London: John Calder, 1974).
- MD "Malone Dies", in *The Beckett Trilogy*.
- MUR *Murphy* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd, 1983).
- NTPR "*Nouvelles*" et "*Textes pour rien*" (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1958).
- PTD "*Proust*" and "*Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*" (London: John Calder, 1999).
- T *The Beckett Trilogy: "Molloy", "Malone Dies", "The Unnamable"*(London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd.,1979).
- TCSP *The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995)
- TFN "Texts for Nothing", in *The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995).
- U "The Unnamable", in *The Beckett Trilogy*.
- W *Watt* (London: John Calder, 1998).
- WFG *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).
- WH *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1999).

INTRODUCTION

The acts of speaking and listening are paramount in Beckett's dramatic works: seeing is not enough. As the stage play *Catastrophe*¹ both literally and visually illustrates, images must be said, and they must be heard to have been said.

DIRECTOR: How's the skull?

ASSISTANT: You've seen it.

DIRECTOR: I forget. Say it. (298)²

Given that *saying* is so central to Beckett's writing as a whole, it is the subject of his first published work of fiction, "Assumption" (1929), and his final poem, "What is the Word?" (1989)³, it is surprising how relatively little has been written about voice in his literature. The enigma of voice in his work, the mystery of its location and source, and his own literary voice in relation to twentieth century artistic practice, have been explored, but the performative nature of voice has so far received little critical attention.

The term 'performative voice' has been used by Enoch Brater in his critical study *The Drama in the Text: Beckett's Late Fiction* (1994), and more recently by Jeanette Leigh Callet in an essay entitled "The Performative Voice in Mallarmé's Poetic Reverie" (2004)⁴. Callet considers the relationship between literature and music in Stéphane Mallarmé's poetry, showing how voice acts

¹ *Catastrophe* (1982) was originally written in French and translated into English by SB (Samuel Beckett). Given that SB translated practically all of the French texts I will be making reference to, I will quote from the English translation throughout, including the original in footnotes in cases where there is a notable difference between the two versions. For example, see footnote 107 on p.42.

² "Catastrophe", in *Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984). Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for the dramatic works refer to this edition.

³ Originally written in French as "Comment dire" in 1988, translated into English by SB.

⁴ Jeanette Leigh Callet, "The Performative Voice in Mallarmé's Poetic Reverie", in *French Forum*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2003), pp. 41-58.

as a unifying force between music and poetry. While the relationship between voice, language and music is relevant to Beckett's work, and will be discussed in relation to his radio plays, it is Brater's rather than Callet's use of the term 'performative voice' that comes closest to my own. He argues that Beckett's language is 'performative' in the sense that it is seeking a voice to speak it: his prose demands to be read out loud. My own study will focus primarily on Beckett's dramatic works, and will extend Brater's use of the term to argue that the performative voice is not only language looking for a way into sound, but is also a force which is responsible for creating and sustaining drama in the plays.

The aim of my study is to find the performative voice in Beckett's dramatic works, show how it performs, and determine what role it plays in the drama. I have chosen to use the term 'performative' as it encapsulates the ideas of both the ambition and the capacity to perform⁵. Voice in Beckett's prose work has dramatic ambition, it "clamours" in the head of the Unnamable⁶ (T, 281), but it does not have the means to sound; it is trapped in print. When Beckett unleashes this voice in his drama, it has 'intentionality' (a will which drives it to speak) and 'materiality' (it exists in sound). In my discussion of Beckett's plays I will be considering both of these aspects of the performative voice, as well as probing the discrepancies that often exist between them. In addition, given that voices, once 'live', often strain away from spontaneous speech and back towards reading, recital, and the control of written forms, I will also be examining the performative voice in relation to spoken and written discourse.

⁵ My use of the term 'performative voice' is distinct from the philosopher J. L. Austin's term 'performative utterances'. Austin distinguishes 'constatives', sentences that are true or false, from 'performatives', utterances that not only say something, but also do something. Austin gives the following example of a performative utterance: "When I say 'I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth' I do not describe the christening ceremony, I actually perform the christening." J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (1990; 1961), p.235. Also see "Performatives and Constatives" in J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1990; 1962) pp.1-11.

⁶ The 'Unnamable' is the protagonist of *The Unnamable*, a novel originally written in French 1949-1950 under the title *L'Innommable* and translated into English by SB.

The voices I shall be treating may visibly issue from a body, or they may be ‘acousmatic’⁷, coming from an unknown source. The embodied voice in Beckett’s stage drama is frequently associated with characters that are compelled to speak, like the three talking heads sticking out of the tops of urns in *Play*, or Winnie buried in her mound in *Happy Days*. This voice is often ‘atopical’⁸, representing the intersection of the inner and outer self, the mind speaking through the voice, and in the case of the stage play *Not I*, quite literally through the mouth. The disembodied voice heard in the dramatic works is often listened to by a character-cum-auditor. This may belong to a character on stage, be extraneous to it, or exist as a personification in its own right. It could belong to a past self resuscitated by electronic means, like in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, or it might speak out directly from a character’s mind, ‘giving voice’ to thoughts and memories, as it does in the stage play *That Time*. Alternatively, its source may be elusive and detached, as in the radio and television plays *Cascando* and *Ghost Trio*, where it resembles a form of artificial intelligence more than it does a human voice. I will therefore be considering voices of dramatic characters, voices heard in the heads of dramatic characters, as well as ‘Voice’ as a character in its own right.

While I shall be focusing on voices that are spoken and heard in Beckett’s plays, I will also make reference to the prose works, as this is where the performative voice originates. Even before Beckett became a playwright the silent written voice of his early novels was already aspiring to public performance. The voice in *The Unnamable*, as S. E. Gontarski comments, is already “in need of an auditor, a spectator, an audience”⁹; it wants to be part of “the show”.

..well well, so there’s an audience, it’s a public show, you buy your seat and wait, perhaps it’s free, a free show, you take your seat and you wait for it to begin, or perhaps it’s compulsory, a compulsory show, you wait for the compulsory show to begin, it takes time, you hear a voice, perhaps

⁷ See “The Acousmatics of the Voice” in Mladen Dolar’s study of the theory of the voice, *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006), pp.60-71.

⁸ The ‘atopical voice’ is described in Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, p.84.

⁹ S. E. Gontarski, “Beckett and the Unnamable Voice of (European) Modernism”, in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 13, no.2 (2004), p.184.

it's a recitation, that's the show, someone reciting, selected passages, old favourites, a poetry matinée, or someone improvising, you can barely hear him, that's the show... (T, 351).

Not only does this voice anticipate the central role that Beckett would assign it in the plays that were to follow, but, as Enoch Brater argues, the language that it speaks already seems worthy of performance. Lines from the novel *Molloy*¹⁰ are memorable, he says, because they are “so wonderfully *speakable*: they are written for the performative voice, a resonant human voice, and they attain their full spontaneity only when spoken aloud”¹¹.

These two aspects of the voice already present in the prose works¹², voice as a dramatic entity and voice as a performer of language, will form an integral part of my study given their importance to Beckett as a dramatist. He paid special attention to the way a voice was staged or recorded, as this would determine its relationship to a character, as well as affecting audience perception. So meticulous was he about the verbal realisation of his written voices, that he was often closely involved with productions of his plays, providing detailed instructions and guidance in written correspondence¹³, attending rehearsals personally, or even directing productions himself¹⁴. While the technicalities involved in transmitting his dramatic voices were critical to him, the sound of their speech was even more so. I am using the word “speech” in the Saussurean sense, referring to a particular combination of words dependent on the will of the speaker, as well as “acts of phonation”, how the speaker executes the words, how they sound when pronounced¹⁵.

¹⁰ *Molloy*, written in French in 1947, was the first of three novels comprising *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* (Malone Dies) and *L'Innommable* (The Unnamable). *Molloy* was translated into English by Patrick Bowles in collaboration with SB, and *Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable* by SB.

¹¹ Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.4.

¹² I am referring specifically to the novels and stories written in French between 1946 and 1951.

¹³ Maurice Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (1998) is an invaluable source for detailed commentaries and stage directions for the American productions of SB's plays

¹⁴ The chapter “Beckett Directs” in Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theater* (1980), pp. 230-279, gives detailed accounts of how SB directed his own plays.

¹⁵ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Roy Harris (trans.), (1983), p. 19. Originally published as *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916.

The relationship between sound and sense in Beckett's plays is a very close one, as both the choice of language and the way words are pronounced carry meaning. For example, in *Happy Days* Winnie's speech has a linguistically uneven texture, it is a mixture of idle talk and self-righteous assertions, interspersed with partially remembered lines from Milton and Shakespeare¹⁶. These variations in idiom are important because they are consistent with Winnie's change of voice in the play. Beckett explained that she "had three main voices – a neutral prattle, high articulation to Willie, and childlike intimacy to herself"¹⁷. If the sound of Winnie's speech is altered, its meaning will inevitably change: "sound literally makes sense"¹⁸ in Beckett's literature.

It seems natural that Beckett chose to write for the voice, given the enormous importance he attached to the way his literature sounded. "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible", he said, "and I accept the responsibility for nothing else."¹⁹ His finely tuned ear informed his love of poetry and music²⁰ and he was able to recite verbatim from poems and verse plays, instinctively seeming to know how a poem should be read, where the pauses should go²¹. He claimed he never wrote a word without saying it out loud first²², and when James Knowlson asked him if he worked like Gustave Flaubert, who read his novels out loud in his *gueuloir*, Beckett replied, "I do"²³. When directing he would conduct his plays as if they were musical orchestrations, commenting that "drama is like

¹⁶ SB details these and other poetic references in the play in a letter to Alan Schneider 25.08.61, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, pp.96-98.

¹⁷ SB speaking to the actress Eva-Katharina Schultz. Cited in Cohn, *Just Play*, p.253.

¹⁸ Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.4.

¹⁹ A letter from SB to Alan Schneider dated 29.12.57, in which he presumably curtails further questions from critics about the meaning of *Endgame* prior to the American première. Cited in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.24.

²⁰ The role music played in SB's life and work is detailed in C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski's indispensable reader's guide entitled, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* (2004), pp.389-396.

²¹ There is an interesting section on SB and recitation in Anne Atik, *How It Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett* (2001), pp.40-88.

²² SB to Jean Reavey, cited in Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theater* (1988), p.16.

²³ John Haynes (photographs) and James Knowlson (text), *Images of Beckett* (2003), p.8.

following music”²⁴. He worked on all aspects of the voice: the speed and tone of utterance, as well as the positioning, stipulating the importance of knowing precisely in what direction a character was speaking²⁵.

Although I shall be concentrating on voice in Beckett’s drama, it does not stand alone in his plays, and is combined with visual imagery and/or music and movement. The interrelationships between voice and image, voice and music, and voice and movement will therefore also form part of my analysis of selected plays. I will be looking specifically at how Beckett separates or marries voice, image and movement in his earlier plays for stage and television, how he confronts voice and music in his radio plays, as well as how he experiments with all four elements in his later television work.

As Beckett took great care with both the writing and performance of voices in his plays, I have chosen to approach my subject through the close reading of his scripts, making reference to productions with which he was actively involved. While I will be drawing selectively on the plethora of studies available on Beckett’s literature, I do not intend to align his writing with a particular artistic movement or critical theory. Beckett was deeply sceptical of what he described as theoretical ‘pigeon-holing’, and spoke out against the practice in his first critical essay “Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce”²⁶ (1929).

Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? Literary criticism is not book-keeping. (D, 19).

Despite Beckett’s warning that “[t]he danger is in the neatness of identifications” (D, 19), attempts to fit Beckett’s work into an artistic or theoretical framework have been numerous. In 1990, in an introduction to a

²⁴ SB to Jean Reavey, cited in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theater*, p.16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ SB explained the punctuation between the names in the title indicated the ‘jump’ of centuries between each writer. Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p.123.

volume of critical essays, Lance Butler and Robin Davis listed the different 'Becketts' that critical studies had produced to date as follows: "Beckett...the quintessential *nouveau romancier*, Beckett the Cartesian, Beckett the Existentialist... Beckett the nihilist, Beckett the mystic... Beckett the dramatist of the Absurd and Beckett the explorer of the limitations of language"²⁷. As Daniel Katz pointed out in the introduction to his own critical study on Beckett, Butler and Davis "could easily have gone on to add Beckett the 'postmodernist' or Beckett the avant-gardist"²⁸, or, as John Fletcher has described him, Beckett the "postmodernly modern"²⁹.

From the late 1950's to the end of the 1990's, Beckett's work was considered in the light of structuralism, post-structuralism, feminist and psychoanalytic criticism, among others, but the main split among commentators was along modernist/postmodernist lines. As H. Porter Abbott has pointed out in *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Writer in the Autograph* (1996), the reason for this "turf war" is because "[u]nlike Virginia Woolf (modernist) or John Cage (postmodernist), Beckett has remained a categorical rift, giving the lie to categories."³⁰ Abbott provides a useful summary of this debate and an ample bibliography³¹, and Lois Oppenheim dedicates a chapter to what she calls "The Endgame of the Modernist/Postmodernist Controversy" in *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (2000)³². One of the most helpful guides through Beckett criticism, which also deals with the modern/postmodern debate, is David Pattie's *The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett* (2000)³³.

²⁷ Lance St. John Butler and Robin J. Davis (eds.), *Rethinking Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1990), p.x.

²⁸ Daniel Katz, *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett*, (1999), p.3.

²⁹ Cited in H. Porter Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (1996), note 7, p.25. Abbott is quoting from John Fletcher's essay, "Modernism and Samuel Beckett", in Janet Garton (ed.) *Facets of European Modernism* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1985), p.216.

³⁰ Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, p.23.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.23-51.

³² Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (2000), pp.3-27.

³³ David Pattie, *The Complete Critical Guide to Samuel Beckett* (2000), pp.103-202.

Ultimately, trying to place Beckett's work within a single theoretical framework seems unwise given that his writing, to quote Abbott, "reveals the semantic porousness of categories"³⁴. And the word "porous" seems particularly apt to describe Beckett's dramatic oeuvre as it consistently absorbs the arts of painting, music and mime into its structure. Recent critical volumes have been exploring this multi-media aspect of Beckett's work; notable examples being Lois Oppenheim's *Samuel Beckett and the Arts* (1999), Daniel Albright's *Beckett and Aesthetics* (2003), and Mary Bryden's *Samuel Beckett and Music* (1998). Other studies worthy of mention are Jonathan Kalb's *Beckett in Performance* (1989) and Lois Oppenheim's *Directing Beckett* (1997), which lead back towards textual and performance considerations and away from theoretical approaches which at times obfuscate more than they enlighten.

My analysis of the performative voice is divided into five main sections. The first chapter briefly considers the emergence of Beckett's own artistic voice, key influences, and artistic beliefs, in order to provide a context for discussion of the performative voice within his dramatic works. The second chapter traces the performative voice in Beckett's early prose fiction, given the influence these "voices voiceless"³⁵ had on the drama that was to follow. The third chapter examines Beckett's employment of embodied and acousmatic voices in the different media of theatre, radio and television. The plays selected, *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Embers* (1959) and *Eh Joe* (1967), are thematically linked, all being dramas in which the central character confronts, or is confronted with, his own memories in the form of a voice from the past. The fourth chapter considers how voice interacts with music, image and movement in Beckett's dramatic works. In the three plays analysed, *Cascando* (1963), *Not I* (1973) and *Ghost Trio* (1976), character in a traditional sense disappears, and voice becomes a dramatic entity in its own right. The

³⁴ Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, p.23, note 1.

³⁵ From the poem "What would I do without this world faceless incurious" (1948). Originally written in French as "Que ferais-je sans ce monde". Translated into English by SB. Both versions in *Collected Poems*, p.60-61.

final chapter looks at the “long shifting threshold”³⁶ between fictive and virtual space in Beckett’s drama. This section examines the dramatic reading of a text in *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), the dramatisation of the reader of a text and its listener in *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), and the controversial issue of genre shift in a discussion of the stage adaptation of the prose work *Company* (1980).

³⁶ From the poem “My way is in the sand flowing” (1948). Originally written in French as “Je suis ce cours de sable qui glisse”. Translated into English by SB. Both versions in *Collected Poems*, p.58-59.

1. A VOICE WITHIN AND BEYOND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

1. 1. FINDING A VOICE

Beckett began his writing career in 1929, but despite this early start, nearly twenty years passed before he incorporated his own artistic voice into a body of original prose fiction and drama. One of the reasons for this delay was the parenthesis of war. After having permanently settled in Paris in 1937, Beckett initially worked for the French Resistance before fleeing to Roussillon, where he stayed in hiding until 1945³⁷. A further reason why Beckett took so long to write the novels and plays that would make him famous was the influence of James Joyce.

Beckett first met Joyce in Paris in 1928 when he was *lecteur anglais* at the École Normale Supérieure. Despite the considerable age gap between them, Beckett was twenty-two and Joyce forty-six, the two Irishmen had a lot in common. They both had degrees in French and Italian, had a keen interest in words - their sounds, rhythms and etymologies - a fascination and scepticism of religion, and a shared love of Dante. Shortly after being introduced to Joyce, Beckett became part of an inner circle of friends, working as an unpaid researcher for “Work in Progress” (later *Finnegan’s Wake*), as well as carrying out other literary and translation tasks. Joyce, impressed with Beckett’s learning and quick mind, requested he wrote one of a series of essays intended to counter criticism of “Work in Progress”, which had been printed in serialised form. Beckett’s essay, “Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce” appeared in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*³⁸

³⁷ This period of Beckett’s life is detailed in the following Beckett biographies: James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (1997); Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (1990;1978); Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (1997); and Lois Gordon, *The World of Samuel Beckett* (1996).

³⁸ *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* was published by Sylvia Beach at Shakespeare and Company, May 1929.

and in Eugene Jolas' *avant-garde transition* magazine in 1929. In the same edition of *transition* Jolas, a close friend of Joyce's, also printed Beckett's first short story "Assumption", thus effectively beginning his career as both a literary critic and writer of fiction.

Joyce not only encouraged Beckett to start writing and helped him get published, but he also influenced his early writing and, indirectly, the aesthetic that he would adopt in his mature work. While Joyce's commitment to writing initially proved a source of inspiration to Beckett, the close association also led to emulation. The novels and stories that Beckett wrote up to the end of the Second World War were scattered with neologisms and arcane references and, as critics were quick to point out, had a distinctly Joycean flavour³⁹. For Beckett, as Pascale Casanova argues in *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution*, Joyce had become "an inimitable, unsurpassable model aesthetically and formally".⁴⁰

Much has been written about Beckett's post-war revelation that took place in his mother's room in Ireland in 1946⁴¹. According to Beckett, it was then that he realised how he differed from Joyce and what he needed to do in order to produce a body of writing of his own.

I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding.⁴²

In the future, as James Knowlson has commented, "his work would focus on poverty, failure, exile and loss; as he put it, on man as a 'non-knower' and as a 'non-can-er' [i.e. someone who cannot]"⁴³. While Beckett was compelled to

³⁹ See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.184.

⁴⁰ Pascale Casanova, *Samuel Beckett. Anatomy of a Literary Revolution* (trans. Gregory Elliott, 2006), p.55. First published as *Beckett l'abstracteur. Anatomie d'une révolution littéraire* (1997).

⁴¹ See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.351-353

⁴² SB interviewed by James Knowlson October 1989, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.352 [note 57, p.772].

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.353 [note 59, p.772].

rid himself of the Joycean style he had adopted in his work, he continued to revere him as a writer, and on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969, he commented that it should have gone to Joyce⁴⁴.

While Joyce's influence on Beckett's early writing is undeniable, as well as being self-acknowledged, Enoch Brater in *The Essential Samuel Beckett: An Illustrated Biography* (1989) remarks that Beckett's encounter with Joyce "can only be held partially responsible for his delay in finding his own voice"⁴⁵. In addition to pointing out that Beckett was "[n]ot an acolyte by temperament", Brater stresses that Beckett had been weighted down by "the echoes and influences" of his long academic training at Trinity College Dublin⁴⁶.

1.2. DEBT TO PAST AND PRESENT

As James Knowlson argues in his essay "Looking Back – but Leaping Forward", Beckett's work is influenced by his "massive debt to the past", as well as his keen awareness of contemporary literary and artistic movements.

Of all the twentieth century artists writing in English, largely as a result of his excellent command of English, French, Italian and German, Beckett was probably the most fully aware of the entire range of European artistic achievement, that of the ancient literary and artistic past and the radical literary and artistic movements of his own century: Surrealism, in which he displayed relatively little interest, at least in its painting form; Cubism, in which he took rather more interest; Futurism, which had too little to attract him and too much in its ideology and its associations to deter him; and German Expressionism, for which selectively, over quite a long period, he displayed enormous enthusiasm.⁴⁷

Knowlson comments that Beckett "always saw himself – his post-war, as well as his pre-war, self - as part of a continuum with the European literary and artistic past"⁴⁸, and believes such a vision was only made possible by his

⁴⁴ Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p.646 [note 10, p.746].

⁴⁵ Enoch Brater, *The Essential Samuel Beckett: An Illustrated Biography* (1989), p.39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ James Knowlson, "Looking Back – but Jumping Forward", in Engelberts, Matthijs *et al* (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, 'Poetry and Other Prose / Poésies et autres proses' (1999), pp.31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.33.

“fierce attachment to learning”⁴⁹. Erudition is undoubtedly a feature of Beckett’s literary oeuvre, but the way in which he assimilated knowledge into his work changed considerably as his writing career progressed.

In Beckett’s early work his reading was often directly absorbed into his writing. For example, his poem “Whoroscope” (1930), which won a poetry contest sponsored by novelist Richard Aldington and poet-publisher Nancy Cunard, drew on his recent reading of Descartes, and his study on Marcel Proust (*Proust*, 1931) for Dolphin Books at Chatto and Windus was informed by his reading of Schopenhauer⁵⁰. Beckett’s pre-war writing is full of philosophical, literary, psychoanalytic and biblical references, which James Acheson details in his very informative book, *Samuel Beckett’s Artistic Theory and Practice* (1997). Acheson uncovers Beckett’s frequent allusions to Dante, especially in his first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*⁵¹ and collection of short stories *More Kicks than Pricks* (1934), his reading of traditional metaphysics, most notably the ideas of Leibniz, Geulincx and Schopenhauer, which he worked into his second novel *Murphy* (1938), as well as his knowledge of the theories of Gestalt psychologists, which can be found in his novel *Watt* (1953). Beckett would continue to draw heavily on his erudition in his post-war writing, although references become less easy to spot as he incorporated them in ever more subtle and skilful ways.

Beckett’s attitude to naming the sources of literary quotations and other references in his creative work seems to have been ambivalent. When director Alan Schneider asked about Winnie’s misquotations in the stage play *Happy Days*, Beckett was forthcoming and gave precise line references for plays by Shakespeare and poems by Milton, Keats, Robert Browning, Thomas Grey,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ SB’s comparisons between Proust and Schopenhauer in *Proust* are treated in detail in James Acheson, *Samuel Beckett’s Artistic Theory and Practice* (1997), pp.7-14.

⁵¹ *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* was written 1931-1932 and published posthumously in 1992.

Omar Khayyam, Robert Herrick and Charles Wolfe⁵². However, not all attempts to ascribe lines in Beckett's work to literary sources have met with equal success. When James Knowlson questioned Beckett on the origin of lines in specific plays, his response was that he was unable to elucidate.

I simply know next to nothing about my work in this way, as little as a plumber of the history of hydraulics. There is nothing/nobody with me when I'm writing, only the hellish job in hand. The 'eye of the mind' in *Happy Days* does not refer to Yeats any more than the 'revels' in *Endgame* (refer) to *The Tempest*. They are just bits of pipe I happen to have with me. I suppose all is reminiscence from womb to tomb. All I can say is I have scant information concerning mine – alas!⁵³

Beckett's comment, made in the early 1970's, not only reveals the extent to which his knowledge from reading had become an inextricable part of his work, but it also shows his reticence to encourage critical excavations of his literature – a practice he put down to “academic madness”⁵⁴.

Beckett's debt to the present is perhaps even more difficult to assess than that to the past. One of the reasons for this is because of the time lapse that often took place between when something was experienced, seen, heard or read, and when it found its way into his work. For example, Surrealism was still very much in the air during Beckett's first two-year stay in Paris, André Breton's 1924 *Manifeste du Surréalisme* having been reprinted in 1929, and Beckett had translated poems by Paul Eluard in a Surrealist edition of the magazine *This Quarter*⁵⁵ in 1932. Despite this physical proximity to the Surrealist movement in the 1930's, Beckett did not fully exploit its imagery until the 1960's. As Enoch Brater has commented, Winnie stuck in the earth in *Happy Days* resembles the final frame of *Un chien andalou*, and Beckett would have been aware of the Buñuel-Dali film script given that it was printed

⁵² For exact references see SB's letter to Alan Schneider 25.08.61, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, pp.96-98.

⁵³ Letter from SB to James Knowlson 11.04.72, cited in James Knowlson, “Beckett's 'Bits of Pipe'”, in Morris Beja, S.E. Gontarski and Pierre Astier (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives* (1983), p.16.

⁵⁴ SB to Charles Juliet 29.10.73, in Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, (1995), p.157.

⁵⁵ See Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* p.572, for details of SB's contributions to the “Surrealist Number” of *This Quarter*.

in the same 1932 edition of *This Quarter* as his own contributions⁵⁶. Similarly, Beckett's interest in the early silent films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, which he saw in the 1920's⁵⁷, would also resurface later in his own screenplay *Film* (1967), which not only starred Buster Keaton, but was also set in "about 1929"

(164). As will become apparent in the analysis of Beckett's drama, he often worked with ideas, sounds or images which came from personal and artistic encounters that he stored and gestated for some time before reshaping them in his writing.

1.3. A WORKING 'AESTHETIC'

Shortly after Beckett's death the Irish novelist John Banville made the following comment about his literature in an obituary that appeared in *The Irish Times*.

The novels and plays make a sort of broken Ark of the Covenant, wherein we find preserved the jumbled remnants of our culture: a snatch of Schubert, a memory of Milton's cosmology, a night, temptuous and bright, such as Kaspar David Friedrich loved. This is the shattered song of our time.⁵⁸

The phrase "the shattered song of our time" seems a particularly good one to encapsulate the nature of Beckett's achievement. Not only does it convey the fragmented way that Beckett incorporated the past into a body of work that was highly innovative and experimental, but the word "shattered" suggests the idea of irreparable breakage. Beckett did not share the idea that art could give meaning and coherence to the malaise of modern life; from the outset of his writing career he stated categorically that "art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear" (D, 94)⁵⁹. Nor

⁵⁶ Brater, *The Essential Samuel Beckett*, p.100.

⁵⁷ See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* p.57, for details of the films that SB went to see in Dublin in the mid-1920's.

⁵⁸ John Banville, "Samuel Beckett dies in Paris", *The Irish Times*, 27.12.89.

⁵⁹ "Intercessions by Denis Devlin". Originally published as "Denis Devlin" in *transition* 27 (April-May 1938).

did he see the contemporary artist as part of a heroic mission to bring social and political change. A play like *Not I*, depicting a floating mouth spewing out incomprehensible words, may find sound and image parallels in Surrealism and Dadaism, but Beckett did not share their ideals or their group identity; he believed that the artist was alone, “With himself on behalf of himself. With his selves on behalf of his selves.” (D, 91)⁶⁰. For Beckett, as he pronounced in *Proust*, “art is the apotheosis of solitude” (PTD, 64).

Although Beckett did not associate himself with a particular artistic or literary movement, he held strong views on artistic practice that he expressed in critical essays on writers and painters spanning the period 1929-1954. These essays provide valuable insights into Beckett’s thinking on writing and art, especially given that he granted few interviews, and that a collected edition of his correspondence has yet to be published. Some commentators have argued that his critical work constitutes an articulation of an aesthetic that finds artistic representation in his poems, prose and plays. For example, Lawrence Harvey, in his informative early study of the reviews and essays, *Samuel Beckett Poet and Critic*⁶¹, finds Beckett proposing the need for an ontological enquiry through art, one that he would creatively explore in his later writing. Pascale Casanova stresses Beckett’s interest in artistic form, arguing that “painting became for him in the post-war years the occasion for drawing a parallel between problems in the plastic arts and literary questions”⁶² While recent studies are giving more attention to Beckett’s critical work in attempts to establish Beckett’s aesthetic position, Lois Oppenheim challenges the idea that his critical discourse *can* represent an ‘aesthetic’. In *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett’s Dialogue with Art* she argues for Beckett’s “*anaesthetic* point of view”⁶³, for his “nonconceptual approach to art”, which makes a folly of attempts to categorise it. “[T]he need for its definition”, she says, “is undone not only by the very inadequacy of expression Beckett continually

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See Lawrence H. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett Poet and Critic* (1970), pp.401-441.

⁶² Pascale Casanova, *Samuel Beckett. Anatomy of a Literary Revolution*, p.79.

⁶³ Lois Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett’s Dialogue with Art* (2000), p.67.

addresses...but by the futility of attempting to give form to what already is meant to exist as such.”⁶⁴ The latter part of her comment is reminiscent of Beckett’s own on Joyce’s writing in “Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce”: “His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*.” (D, 27)

What kind of aesthetic Beckett’s critical works precipitate, and if the ideas they contain can be properly termed an ‘aesthetic’ may be a bone of contention among commentators, but this early writing undoubtedly sheds light on key artistic concerns which Beckett would represent in his creative work. For example, “Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce” is of particular interest for Beckett’s comments on literary form and language. Speaking about Joyce’s “Work in Progress” he said, “[h]ere form *is* content, content *is* form”, and the form of Beckett’s own work, especially his dramatic works, would become of critical importance to him. He also applauded Joyce’s writing for its sound-sense relationships – “When the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep... When the sense is dancing, the words dance” (D, 27), and the sound of language would also become a prominent feature of his own writing. The way in which he claims Joyce had “desophisticated” English, a language that had been “abstracted to death” (D, 28), reveals Beckett’s early preoccupation with how meaningless language had become. His observations on Dante’s creation of “a synthetic language” (D, 30) in an attempt to create an uncorrupted form of expression, and Joyce’s “savage economy of hieroglyphics” (D, 28) as a way of breathing new life into words, also anticipate aspects of his own literary project to produce a form of “anti-literature”⁶⁵, or “literature of the unword” (D, 173)⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.93.

⁶⁵ Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (1967), p.30

⁶⁶ In a letter from SB to Axel Kaun 09.07.37. The original letter in German is printed in Cohn, *Disjecta*, pp.51-54. Martin Esslin’s English translation is printed on pp.170-173 of the same volume.

In *Proust* Beckett expresses his belief that any worthwhile artistic endeavour should be inward, and must reject the realist practice of transcribing the surface to penetrate the façade “behind which the Idea is prisoner” (PTD, 79).

The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn in to the core of the eddy. (PTD, 65-66)

In Beckett’s post-war literature he heeded the comments he made in *Proust* to build miniature worlds which favour the microcosm over the macrocosm, the mental over the physical, thus giving credence to his idea that “[t]he artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction” (PTD, 64).

In his art criticism of the late 1940’s, Beckett expresses his views on the impossible plight of the artist. One of the main problems he argues in “Peintures de l’empêchement” (1948), his second critique of the paintings of the Dutch brothers Bram and Geer van Velde, is that representation is no longer possible because of the absence of rapport between subject and object. The solution he proposes is to include into painting the problematics of the subject-object relationship: «Est peint ce qui empêche de peindre» (D, 136). The dehiscence of the subject-object relation is also central to “Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit” (1949), comprising conversations between Beckett and the art historian Georges Duthuit on the painters Pierre Tal Coat, André Masson, and Bram van Velde. It is during these talks⁶⁷ that Beckett announces what commentators have taken to constitute an artistic credo. He speaks in favour of an art brave enough to venture beyond “the field of the possible”, even if that attempt results in an ‘art of failure’⁶⁸.

⁶⁷ The stylised dialogues were drawn from actual conversations between SB and Georges Duthuit and were reworked for publication in *transition Forty-nine* 5 (December 1949), at Duthuit’s request.

⁶⁸ The term ‘art of failure’ was first used by Richard Coe in *Beckett* (1964), p.4. Cited in Acheson, *Samuel Beckett’s Artistic Theory and Practice*, p.96.

B: ...I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.

D: And preferring what?

B: The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (PTD, 103)

While speaking of painting, Beckett could equally have been talking about writing, as he had already begun to produce the prose and plays which would render this articulation of need and impotence in a creative form.

2. GENESIS OF THE PERFORMATIVE VOICE

2.1. PROSE INTO DRAMA

Just as Beckett worked out his ideas on artistic practice before materialising them in his post-war novels and stories, so his prose fiction similarly informed his dramatic works. For example, stage images may be described in prose long before they take a visual form. An instance of this is “the image of a vast cretinous mouth, red, blubber and slobbering, in solitary confinement” (T, 359) in *The Unnamable*, which bears striking resemblance to the mouth that Beckett was later to stage in *Not I*. Alternatively, entire plays could be based on earlier, often unfinished, works of fiction. Plays which have resulted from what S. E. Gontarski has referred to as “generic androgyny”⁶⁹ are *Waiting for Godot*⁷⁰, which drew heavily on the earlier novel *Mercier and Camier*⁷¹, and *Krapp’s Last Tape*, which was developed from the prose text *From an Abandoned Work*⁷². Beckett also tended to experiment with stylistic changes in his prose fiction before he introduced them into a dramatic form. For example, Voice’s internal monologue in the radio play *Cascando* is reminiscent of that used in *The Unnamable*, and the visual and poetic images of the minimalist theatre and television plays from the mid-1970’s can also be traced back to prose works written in the 1960’s. For example, the black, white and grey world of surface described in *Lessness*⁷³ bears similarities to the later television play *Ghost Trio*, and the description of a reader and

⁶⁹ S. E. Gontarski, “Company for Company: Androgyny and Theatricality in Samuel Beckett’s Prose” in James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company* (1987), p.193.

⁷⁰ Originally written in French as *En attendant Godot* (1952). Translated into English by SB.

⁷¹ Originally written in French as *Mercier et Camier* in 1946. It remained unfinished and unpublished until 1970, and was then subsequently translated into English by SB in 1974.

⁷² Gontarski, “Company for Company”, in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, p.193.

⁷³ Originally written in French as *Sans* and translated into English by SB. First published in 1969.

listener within a dark room in “Horn Came Always”⁷⁴, finds a visual parallel in the stage play *Ohio Impromptu*.

Given that Beckett often introduced ideas and techniques into his prose writing before reshaping them in his dramatic works, it seems expedient to briefly consider the way in which voice manifests itself in the pre-dramatic prose fiction⁷⁵ before examining the performative voice in his plays.

2.2. LOCUS OF THE VOICE

The characters in the three post-war novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* are plagued by the sound of voices, and their origin, as Molloy tells us, “is in the head” (T, 10). The head is at once the place the voice sounds and where it is heard: “It’s with your head you hear it, not your ears”, says Molloy (T, 39). The voice reverberates within the skull, and its auditory space is depicted as one of confinement, an “ivory dungeon”, as the narrator of *Texts for Nothing 2* describes it (106)⁷⁶. And it is not only the voice that is confined in the head, the listener seems to be trapped there too. In *Malone Dies*, Malone speaks of being physically encased within a head:

You may say it is all in my head, and indeed sometimes it seems to me I am in a head and that these eight, no six, these six planes that enclose me are of solid bone. (T, 203)

Likewise, the protagonist of *The Unnamable* seems to be all but entombed within a skull.

⁷⁴ Originally written in French as “Horn venait la nuit” in 1973. Translated into English by SB. *Fizzles* is the English title SB gave to a group of short prose texts written in French in the 1950’s and 1960’s, collectively called *Foirades*.

⁷⁵ The prose work I will be considering dates between 1929 and 1951. The only dramatic works written during this period were *Eleutheria*, completed in 1947 but neither performed nor published in SB’s lifetime, and *En attendant Godot* (Waiting for Godot), completed in 1949 but not performed until 1953.

⁷⁶ *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995). Unless otherwise indicated, line numbers for prose quotations refer to this edition. *Texts for Nothing* were originally written in French as *Textes pour rien* and translated into English by SB. The thirteen short texts were completed in 1951.

Yes, a head, but solid, solid bone, and you imbedded in it, like a fossil in the rock.” (T, 361-362)

This confining image of the skull can be traced back even further than Beckett’s prose work of the late 1940’s and early 1950’s to a poem entitled “The Vulture” written in 1935. In the image “skull shell of sky and earth” (CP, 9) the poet’s mind is represented as a microcosm of the world, and, as Martin Esslin has pointed out, the metaphor of a skull depicting an internal universe anticipates much of Beckett’s later writing⁷⁷.

The nature of Beckett’s literary enterprise was largely cerebral. His subject was, to quote Beckett himself, “ontospeleology”⁷⁸, and his task was to excavate the human mind. However, in order to tap the voices inside the heads of his characters, he was aware that he would also have to deal with the bodies in which they were housed. Beckett had sat, or, most probably lain down for many hours during an intensive two-year period of psychotherapy in London in the early 1930’s⁷⁹. This personal experience might partially account for the stilling, or stillness, of his character’s bodies in order to gain access to the movement of their minds, as well as the inclusion of an auditor in many of his plays.

In Beckett’s early novel *Murphy*, written while he was undergoing psychotherapy, the protagonist, a kind of Cartesian-cum-Buddhist⁸⁰, pictures himself as split into a body and mind (MUR, 64). As Murphy’s mind is a discrete entity, “a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe

⁷⁷ Martin Esslin, *Mediations. Essays on Brecht, Beckett and the Media* (1983), pp.113-15.

⁷⁸ Cited in James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (1979), p.xiii.

⁷⁹ Beckett’s two years of psychotherapy in London with Dr. Wilfred Ruprecht Bion is detailed in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.175-181, and Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, pp.59-61. Didier Anzieu’s essay, “Beckett and the Psychoanalyst” gives a summary of Beckett’s sessions of psychoanalysis, as well as tracing its influence in his novels from *Murphy* to *How It Is*. Thomas Cousineau’s translation is printed in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 4, no.1 (1994-1995), pp.23-34.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the influence of philosophical thought in *Murphy*, especially that of Descartes, Locke, Hume, Bishop Berkeley and Kant, see John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (2001), pp.18-28.

without" (MUR, 63), he must first release himself from his corporeal state in order to enter his mental world. This he achieves by tying himself to a rocking chair and setting it in motion until he reaches the nirvana-like state he is seeking: "Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free" (MUR, 9). Just as physical stillness allows Murphy to move among the "treasures" of his mind (MUR, 65), so immobility privileges the protagonists of Beckett's subsequent novels to be listeners of their own private auditory worlds. When Molloy hears "a distant music", he stops "the better to listen" (T, 21), and Beckett seems to give his prose characters the potential for being good listeners by limiting their powers of movement. They may be physically impaired like the "virtually one-legged" Molloy (T, 34), the impotent-bodied Malone, "[t]here is virtually nothing it can do" (T, 171), or the totally motionless Unnamable, "I do not move" (T, 268); or they may restrict themselves in some way, like Murphy tied to his chair, or Watt self-imprisoned in Mr. Knott's house.

The idea of physical impediment or psychological restraint is also carried over into Beckett's early dramas. In *Endgame*⁸¹ Hamm is bound in a wheelchair, Nagg and Nell are kept in dustbins, and Clov is unable to leave Hamm despite his repeated desire to do so. In *Waiting for Godot*, Lucky is secured on the end of Pozzo's rope, Pozzo becomes deaf, Lucky dumb, and Vladimir and Estragon are unable to move on from the country road as they are apparently "tied" by an obligation to wait for Godot (WFG, 20-21). What the early dramatic characters most yearn for is freedom, like Victor in Beckett's aptly named play *Eleutheria*⁸², "I have always wanted to be free" (EL, 147), and yet they are all physically or psychologically trapped in some way. In these plays the body, while unable or refusing to move, is still dominant, and makes its presence heard even when it is invisible. For example, Beckett's first radio play, *All That*

⁸¹ Originally written in French as *Fin de partie* (1957), translated into English by SB.

⁸² *Eleutheria* was written in French in 1947. It was published posthumously in 1995, in an English translation by Michael Brodsky.

Fall, is replete with the noise of “dragging feet” (12 *passim*), “panting”, “gasps” (30), and “sounds of effort” (18).

In the early plays in which the body is depicted as whole, still moving, albeit with difficulty, internal voices only make a quiet and fleeting appearance. Vladimir and Estragon talk of “dead voices” which “murmur” and “rustle” in *Waiting for Godot* (WFG, 62-63)⁸³, Hamm speaks of hearing splashes, “something dripping” in his head, in *Endgame* (E, 19, 35), and Maddy Rooney in *All That Fall* speaks of an inner “seething” in her skull (17). In Beckett’s subsequent plays, however, he gradually depopulates his dramas, reducing bodies and their actions to their “meremost minimum” (WH, 9), to create what Martin Esslin has described as a “theatre of stasis”⁸⁴. It is within these empty settings, of immobile, partially seen, or invisible bodies, that the voices in the head first sound. It is as though Beckett had to still bodies and eliminate forms of traditional dialogue in order to get at what Watt describes as those “other voices” (W, 27), the ones that sound in the head. In order to enact his dramas of the mind Beckett created “skullscapes”⁸⁵, hollow acoustic arenas in which voices could resound, and the blueprints for these “frescoes of the skull”⁸⁶ can be found in his early prose writing.

2.3. WHOSE VOICE ASKING THIS?⁸⁷

The question of the identity of the voices in Beckett’s literature must be broached, but lightly, as it is the subject of a study in its own right⁸⁸. Firstly,

⁸³ In *En attendant Godot* Estragon says «Elles murmurent» and Vladimir says «Elles bruissent», (EAG, 105). In SB’s English translation he reverses the order. Estragon says “They rustle” and Vladimir says “They murmur”. Presumably, SB repeated the word “rustle” rather than “murmur” for the sibillance it creates.

⁸⁴ Esslin, *Mediations*, pp.117-124.

⁸⁵ A term used by Linda Ben Zvi in a recorded discussion with Ruby Cohn following the production of *Embers* for *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*, at the BBC Studios, London, in 1988. Cited in Marjorie Perloff, “The Silence That Is Not Silence: Acoustic Art in Samuel Beckett’s *Embers*”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.267.

⁸⁶ Knowlson and Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p.xiii.

⁸⁷ “And whose voice asking this? Who asks, Whose voice asking this?” (C, 32).

⁸⁸ The identity of voice formed an essential part of my pre-doctoral research paper, *The Chameleon Narrator. A Study of Voice in Samuel Beckett’s ‘Not I’ and ‘Company’*, (2003).

it is important to establish that just as duality exists between the mind and the body in Beckett's work, the self is often presented as split, being made up of different voices. The narrating voice in Beckett's pre-dramatic prose writing exemplifies the slippery nature of the self: it is highly ambiguous, unstable, capable of splitting into different persons, as well as erasing itself altogether. Any attempt to pin down the voice leads to its multiplication and scattering: "What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking" (TFN3, 109). It often either denies that it is speaking - "this voice cannot be mine" (TFN4, 116) - or forms paradoxical utterances of acceptance and disavowal - "this voice that is not mine but can only be mine" (U, T, 281).

The characters seem to know they are alone, "I am of course alone. Alone", says the Unnamable, (T, 267), and yet they harbour the suspicion that they may have been taken over by another: "who's this disowning me, as though I had taken his place, usurped his life" (TFN12, 150), "am I to suppose I am inhabited" (U, T, 371). Despite the constant pleas for the speaking voice to name itself, "Who says this, saying it's me? Answer simply, someone answer simply" (TFN4, 114), the identity of the voices in Beckett's early prose work is far from straightforward given the rupture that often exists between the story and its teller. The difficulty experienced by Beckett's prose narrators seems to be primarily linguistic: they cannot collapse their being into a pronoun, "there is no name, for me, no pronoun for me" (U, T, 372). When the Unnamable tries to force himself to assume his own identity by pronouncing himself as 'I'⁸⁹ he remains totally unconvinced, "I, say, I. Unbelieving." (T, 267)

The problem of language seems to lie at the heart of the 'unnamability' of the narrating voice, "it's the fault of the pronouns", says the Unnamable (T, 331). Furthermore, this inability to put a name to the subject has the effect of putting into question its very existence.

⁸⁹ Following Emile Benveniste's claim that "the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language", he asserts that a subject only gains identity by using the pronoun 'I'. *Problems in General Linguistics* (1997; 1971), p.226. Originally published as *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (1966).

...no sense in bickering about pronouns and other parts of blather. The subject doesn't matter, there is none. (U, T, 331)

The multiple voices, comprising linguistically different 'persons', appear to deconstruct the self in Beckett's early prose work, thus making them ideal candidates for scrutiny in the light of poststructuralist theory⁹⁰. The narrating voice decentres and splits the self, it speaks of it as 'other', and even has the power to erase it altogether: "all you have to do is say you said nothing and so say nothing again" (TFN6, 124).

The fragmentary nature of being that Beckett introduces in his early prose work is carried over into his drama. The "schismatic self"⁹¹ is presented visually in the screenplay *Film*, with the perceiving self (E) pursuing the perceived self (O), but Beckett often favours a dramatic representation of the multi-faceted nature of the self achieved by subjecting his protagonists to the different sounds and voices that reside within their own psyches. The voices heard may be welcome, a form of company, as they are for Henry in the radio play *Embers*, or a voice may be invasive and resisted, as it is in the television play *Eh Joe*. What appears to be constant between the voices heard by the prose and dramatic characters, however, is a refusal to assume the voice as part of a unified self. This is most clearly seen in the stage play *Not I*, when Mouth vehemently denies she is telling her own story by refusing to use the first person, and in the radio play *Cascando*, when Opener denies that Voice and Music are products of his auditory hallucination. While I will be discussing the identity of the voices spoken and heard in the plays⁹², I will refrain from exhaustive inquiry into the 'namability' of the speaking voice in

⁹⁰ Poststructural readings of Beckett's prose work are discussed in Anthony Uhlmann, *Beckett and Poststructuralism* (1999), and Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World* (1990).

⁹¹ The term is used by Linda Ben-Zvi. Her essay, "The Schismatic Self in *A Piece of Monologue*", outlines the fragmented nature of the self in Beckett's literature. *Journal of Beckett Studies* 7, (1982), pp.7-17.

⁹² The question of the identity of the speaking voice will be treated in more detail in the analysis of *Not I* and *Company*, given that it forms a central part of the drama in each case.

the dramatic works, given that the subject is often unknowable, dispersed, or absent⁹³. Beckett says as much in a comment made to Charles Juliet in 1975.

In the end, you don't know who is speaking any more. The subject disappears completely. That's the end result of the identity crisis.⁹⁴

In the plays acousmatic voices may start out with names, like those of Ada and Addie in *Embers*, but Beckett later reduces them to descriptors such as, "Woman's voice", as he does in *Eh Joe*, or just "Voice", as he does in *Cascando*. In his dramatic works, with the exception of *Not I*, Beckett seems to be concerned less with establishing the actual identity of the voices, centring instead on what they want to tell, and, perhaps more importantly, how they want or are forced to tell it.

2.4. LEAVING STAINS AND TRACES

Speaking of "the weak old voice" in *Texts for Nothing 13*, the narrator says:

"A trace, it wants to leave a trace, yes, like air among the leaves, among the grass, among the sand" (152). The will behind this voice seems very similar to that which Beckett claimed pushed his writing forward.

I couldn't have done it otherwise. Gone on, I mean. I could not have gone through the awful wretched mess of life without having left a stain upon the silence⁹⁵.

In Beckett's literature, this "stain" seems to come from an inner voice which is never still for long, "there is always something to listen to", he said⁹⁶. And he seems to make his prose narrators the tympanum, providing the connection between inner and outer worlds, saying it as they hear it.

...I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either. (U,T, 352)

⁹³ Daniel Katz's *Saying I No More* provides a detailed study of subjectivity and consciousness in Beckett's prose works.

⁹⁴ Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, p.157.

⁹⁵ Cited in Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p.681.

⁹⁶ Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett*, p.155.

The voice that permeates the membrane is “impossible” (TFN9, 147), “ambiguous” (M, T, 121), being both “that far whisper” (M, T, 39) which consoles by keeping company, and that menacing presence that “plague[s] one in need of silence” (C, 11-12). The hearer likewise vacillates in response to it, longing for its continuance, whilst praying for its decease; “half hoping when the hour struck that the half-hour would not and half fearing that it would not”, as the narrator of Beckett’s late prose piece *Stirrings Still* puts it (260). At the beginning of the trilogy⁹⁷ this wilful voice is already ensconced in Molloy’s head, “I shall hear it always, no thunder can deliver me, until it stops” (T, 39). While Molloy cannot control the voice, “you can’t stop it”, he appears to be free to listen and speak of it as he wishes: “nothing compels me to speak of it, when it doesn’t suit me. And it doesn’t suit me, at the moment.”(T, 39). However, by the time *The Unnamable* is written, the voice seems to have gained ground. The nameless protagonist claims to be “possessed of nothing but my voice” (T, 285), and the words he speaks are no longer chosen by him: “I say what I am told to say” (T, 317).

This usurping voice which gains territory in the prose is insatiable. It feeds off words which must be spoken: “you must say words, as long as there are any”, (U, T, 381). However, the *Unnamable* tells us that the words are “blank” (T, 375) and the voice “meaningless” (T, 341), and here lies the conundrum that Beckett had earlier articulated in “Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit”: “there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express” (PTD, 102). While writing was visceral for Beckett, “[y]ou write in order to be able to breathe”, he told Charles Juliet⁹⁸ he was forced to use words that had lost their meaning. He believed

⁹⁷ I have worked with the 1979 Picador edition that gives the three novels “Molloy”, “Malone Dies” and “The Unnamable” the title, *The Beckett Trilogy*. However, it should be noted that SB did not authorise John Calder’s use of the term ‘trilogy’ to group these three works, and found Grove Press’ title, *Three Novels*, more acceptable. See Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p.578 and p.586

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.141.

that language had been corrupted by the central role it played in the Enlightenment project of erecting a world based on scientific truth and logic⁹⁹: he felt that words should not be vehicles for describing only the knowable, but must attempt to articulate the uncertain nature of existence. This is perhaps why the Unnamable sees language as ‘infecting’, “bubbling with the blessed pus of reason” (T, 325), and why he complains of having no alternative but to use “the wrong words” (T, 340), “others’ words” (T, 355), those that have been ‘infected’.

The paradox that underpins Beckett’s literary oeuvre is already present in his early prose work, and is described by the Unnamable.

Yes, in my life, since we must call it so there were three things, the inability to speak, the inability to be silent and solitude, that’s what I’ve had to make the best of (T, 365).

The need to speak seems to be a form of expiation for an unknown sin, perhaps that of being born¹⁰⁰, the impossibility of speech appears to stem from the failure of language to satisfactorily express anything, and silence and solitude are the states which are ambivalently sought and feared. Like Sisyphus, Beckett’s metaphor is a rock, and his destiny was to chip away at a cliff face. “I have to go on...”, he told Charles Juliet, “I am up against a cliff wall yet I have to go forward. It’s impossible, isn’t it? Advance a few more miserable millimetres”¹⁰¹. Beckett’s own sense of futile compulsion seems to be shared by his early literary creations. The Unnamable recognises he has “a pensum to perform” (T, 285), a “labour to accomplish” (T, 288), as well as acknowledging the pointlessness of his verbal assignment.

I know no more questions and they keep on pouring out of my mouth. I think I know what it is, it’s to prevent the discourse from coming to an end,

⁹⁹ Beckett’s preoccupation with the crisis of knowledge in post-Renaissance epistemological history is documented in Anna McMullan, “Samuel Beckett as Director: The Art of Mastering Failure”, *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, John Pilling (ed.), (1994), p.200.

¹⁰⁰ “The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his ‘socii malorum’, the sin of having been born. ‘Pues el delito mayor/ Del hombre es haber nacido’”. *Proust* (PTD, 67).

¹⁰¹ Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett*, p.141.

this futile discourse which is not credited to me and brings me not a syllable nearer silence (T, 282).

Beckett's dramatic characters also seem to be presented with similar infernal predicaments. All of them are portrayed as being caught up in an activity they do not fully control, which started before the play began and which will continue after it has come to an end. *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Embers* and *Happy Days* seem to present typical days in the lives of their characters, "one day like any other day", as Pozzo puts it (WFG, 89), whereas other later dramas, like *Play*, *Not I*, *Rockaby*, *Ghost Trio*, *A Piece of Monologue* and *Ohio Impromptu*, appear to represent no more than a watching / listening in on activities which loop round continuously on a Möbius strip.

The purpose of the voices in Beckett's early prose work therefore appears to be creative. They want to leave stains and traces, to entertain, comfort, or guide their listeners. Their powers of creativity, however, appear both enforced and limited in scope. Not only are the voices compelled to speak, they are also forced to use words which seem to have lost their power to convey meaning. The difficulty for readers is that they do not actually *hear* the voice that is described; they only have the narrator's hearsay to go on. The unheard voices are therefore listened to and interpreted by the narrator. It is only when Beckett materialises the voices in sound that an audience can judge for themselves what the intention of the voice might be. It is as though Beckett aimed to compensate the meaninglessness of the words voices are forced to speak in his prose works, by transmitting *meaningfulness* through the sound of voices and speech in his drama. For Beckett, language's salvation seemed to lie with finding a voice "with flesh and bones"¹⁰², and this was to comprise an important part of his dramatic enterprise. Beckett did not treat sound as "something ancillary, a material that language uses"¹⁰³; he turned it into a protagonist of the show.

¹⁰² Roman Jakobson. Cited in Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, p.19.

¹⁰³ Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, pp.116-117. *Ibid.*, p.18.

2.5. SOUND TRAITS

The voices in Beckett's early prose writing do not sound, but they are noisy none the less. Verbs, adjectives and adverbs for denoting speech and silence abound in his stories and novels, but, as opposed to his dramatic writing, it is the eye that must first receive the sounds before conveying them to the ear. Despite the muteness of the written voice, Beckett was painstaking in his description of its sound, and this "primacy of the ear"¹⁰⁴ is present from the onset of his writing career.

Beckett's first short story, "Assumption" (1929), treats the subject of utterance. The protagonist is torn between sound and silence, caught in what would become a familiar Beckettian paradox of being simultaneously able and unable to use one's voice: "He could have shouted and could not" (3). At first the protagonist whispers, then retreats from speech altogether to become "a flesh-locked sea of silence" (4). His voice is repressed within him, it is a "wild rebellious surge that aspire[s] violently towards realization in sound" (5), and when the "great storm of sound" is finally unleashed in sexual ecstasy, a kind of sonic 'Assumption' takes place.

Then it happened. While the woman was contemplating the face that she had overlaid with death, she was swept aside by a great storm of sound, shaking the very house with its prolonged, triumphant vehemence, climbing in a dizzy, bubbling scale, until, dispersed, it fused into the breath of the forest and the throbbing cry of the sea (7).

What is so striking about this story is the detailed way in which the voice is described.

He spoke little, and then almost huskily, with the low-voiced timidity of a man who shrinks from argument, who can reply confidently to Pawn to King's fourth, but whose faculties are frozen into bewildered suspension by Pawn to Rook's third, of the unhappy listener who will not face a clash with the vulgar, uncultivated, terribly clear and personal ideas of the unread

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Docherty outlines the postmodern tendency to focus on the ear and listening, as opposed to the specular which had dominated modernity from Descartes to the Frankfurt School in "Listening: Poisons in the Ear", in *After Theory. Postmodernism/Postmarxism* (1990), pp.145-172.

intelligenza. He indeed was not such a man, but his voice was of such a man..." (3).

Among this verbose "wordy-gurdy" (U, T, 367)¹⁰⁵, a style characteristic of Beckett's early writing, is an insistence on what the voice sounds like. The protagonist did not speak "huskily" but "almost huskily", "he was not such a man", but "his voice was of such a man"; what pains Beckett took to faithfully describe what the reader cannot hear! The adjectives mount as he tries to express the sound of that "caged" animal voice (4): it is a "splendid drunken scream" (4), a "rising, tossing soundlessness" (5). Likewise, when the woman enters the protagonist's room, rather than 'see' her, the reader first 'hears' her voice and the effect it produces: "From the door she spoke to him, and he winced at the regularity of her clear, steady speech" (5). We do not receive her words verbatim, but we know the movement of her voice as it "droned on, wavered, stopped" (45).

While Beckett honed down his descriptions in his prose writing of the late 1940's and early 1950's, he still took great care when describing sound and silence. In contrast to the still sibilant "no sound, no stir" (L, 197) silence of his later prose work, silence in his post-war writing is pregnant. Voices are dammed up, walled in, repressed, the narrator about to "burst with speechlessness" (TFN2, 107), "on the brink of shrieks" (TFN5, 118). Silence is a momentary lull before a raging storm of sound: "[a]n instant of silence, as when the conductor taps on his stand, raises his arms, before the unanswerable clamour" (M, T, 16). Voices, when they do sound, are often very different in kind. Firstly, there is the noisy disturbance of silence, a jabbering, rattling, clattering.

She jabbered away with a rattle of dentures and most of the time didn't realise what she was saying. Anyone but myself would have been lost in this clattering gabble... (M, T, 18).

¹⁰⁵ SB's neologism "wordy-gurdy" is his translation of «la chasse aux mots» in the French original (LI, 187).

And it is not only humans who create such dissonance, nature is noisy too: corncrakes “din” their rattles (M, T, 17), and tree trunks “groan” (MD, T, 189). These “rural sounds”, as Beckett was to describe them in *All That Fall*, were used in his first radio play to create “a primordial soundscape”¹⁰⁶, and perhaps there is also something “primordial” in the other sounds we ‘hear’ in the early prose. The voices are not always jarring, sometimes the pitch range is very limited. The voice is “monotonous” (M, T, 45), “murmuring” (M, T, 81), “buzzing” (M, T, 47), as if the sounds were sucked down into that primal mud through which the narrator of the novel *How It Is* would later have to crawl.

All is noise, unending suck of black sopping peat, surge of giant ferns,
heathery gulfs of quiet where the wind drowns, my life and its old jingles.
(TFN1, 102)¹⁰⁷

How can the sound traits of these early written voices be described? Explosive, repressed, quiet ... the adjectives go on and on, and Beckett would choose his words carefully in his stage directions for voice in the dramas which he went on to write. The sounds of fear, panic, bitterness and resignation, are first heard in the plays, but these had earlier been written into his prose works. It is as if Beckett were inverting the cry and its echo. Stories were always spoken before they were written down, but in Beckett’s oeuvre he writes voices to be read before he writes them to be spoken aloud. It is only in his dramatic works that voices become truly performative, but the blueprint for their sound lies in his early fiction.

¹⁰⁶ Clas Zilliacus, “*All That Fall* and Radio Language”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.300.

¹⁰⁷ In the original French version there is alliteration in the /ou/ sound which has been introduced in the previous sentence. «Tout est bruit, noire tourbe saturée qui doit boire encore, houle des fougères géantes, bruyère aux gouffres de calme où le vent se noie, ma vie et ses vieilles rengaines.» (NTPR, 130). In the English version SB accentuates the /s/ to create sibilance.

3. RE-ENACTING VOICES FROM THE PAST

3.1. REWINDING MEMORIES: *KRAPP'S LAST TAPE*

3.1.1. *LITTLE HEART OF AN ARTICHOKE*¹⁰⁸

Krapp's Last Tape was written in English in February 1958, and had its world première at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 28th October 1958, directed by George Devine. It was a play for which Beckett had a great fondness, claiming he felt “as clucky and beady and one-legged and bare-footed about this little text as an old hen with her last chick”¹⁰⁹, and it was the one with which he became most actively involved in terms of production¹¹⁰. *Krapp's Last Tape* is a very innovative play in its use of recorded sound on stage, and holds a unique place in Beckett's literary oeuvre. It is also a key work within my study of voice as it marks a clear shift in the way Beckett wrote for, produced, and directed voice on stage. Special reference will be made to the London 1958 production directed by Donald McWhinnie, whose rehearsals Beckett attended, as well as the 1969 Berlin *Das letzte Band*¹¹¹ and the 1975 Paris *La dernière bande*¹¹² productions, both of which were directed by Beckett¹¹³.

¹⁰⁸ “...it will be like the little heart of an artichoke served before the tripes with excrement of Hamm and Clov.” SB to Jacoba van Velde referring to the opening performance of *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Royal Court Theatre in October 1958, which was to be followed by a performance of *Endgame*. Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.445.

¹⁰⁹ SB in a letter to Barney Rosset 01.04.58, cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.445 [note 148, p.790].

¹¹⁰ See James Knowlson (ed.), *Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol. III: 'Krapp's Last Tape'*, (1992), p.xxvii.

¹¹¹ Beckett kept a detailed production notebook of his direction of *Das letzte Band* at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt in Berlin, performed on 05.10.69, with Martin Held playing Krapp. A facsimile of this notebook has been made available in James Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume III: Krapp's Last Tape*, pp.43-278.

¹¹² This production was performed at Théâtre d'Orsay, Petite Salle, in Paris 08.04.75, with Pierre Chabert as Krapp.

¹¹³ Ruby Cohn's article, “A Krapp Chronology”, provides a useful guide to productions of the play, centring on those with which Beckett was most actively involved. In *Modern Drama* 49, 4 (Winter 2006), pp.514-24.

3.1.2. ONE-SIDED DIALOGUE

Krapp's Last Tape was Beckett's first play to be written in first person monologue. *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, while containing passages of monologue and soliloquy, are principally characterised by dialogue, and *Act Without Words*¹¹⁴, as its title suggests, is a mime. The first person monologue was a form that he had employed in the *Nouvelles*¹¹⁵, as well as the trilogy, "Molloy", "Malone Dies" and "The Unnamable", but Beckett's theatrical work to date had been firmly based on dialogue. Beckett claimed to have started writing plays as "a diversion" to relieve himself of "the awful depression" that prose had led him into¹¹⁶, and he may well have turned from dramatic dialogue to monologue for a similar reason. *Waiting for Godot* had been written within the space of a few months in 1948-49, but *Endgame* was a play with a much more difficult birth. A first version was written in late 1954, but it took until spring of 1956 for the final "one-act howl"¹¹⁷ to be completed. After writing *The Unnamable* in 1949-50, Beckett felt he had reached an impasse in his prose writing, viewing the later *Texts for Nothing* as merely "the grisly afterbirth" of *The Unnamable*¹¹⁸. Likewise, when he finally finished *Endgame* he was concerned that his dramatic writing may have led him into a similar quagmire. Before the first production he commented, "I am panting to see the realisation and know if I am on some kind of road, and can stumble on, or in a swamp"¹¹⁹.

In fact, as the name suggests, *Endgame* did bring closure to Beckett's first stage of writing for the theatre, a change which was principally a formal one. The early plays are based on impossible dialogues. Dialogue is necessary, it

¹¹⁴ Originally written in French as *Acte sans paroles I* (1957), and translated into English by SB.

¹¹⁵ *Nouvelles* comprised "Premier Amour" ("First Love"), "L'Expulsé" ("The Expelled"), "Le Calmant" ("The Calmative"), and "La Fin" or "Suite" ("The End") which were written in 1945 and 1946. "Premier Amour" and "Le Calmant" were translated by SB and "L'Expulsé" and "La Fin" were translated by Richard Seaver in collaboration with SB.

¹¹⁶ Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p.383.

¹¹⁷ SB in a letter to Nancy Cunard 11.05.56, cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.426.

¹¹⁸ Cited in Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.9.

¹¹⁹ SB to Alan Schneider 15.10.56, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.12.

fills up the time while Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot, it prevents Clov from leaving Hamm, but it is painstaking, exchanges being difficult to keep going. When Vladimir poses his biblical teaser of why only one of the Evangelists spoke of a thief being saved, he has to goad Estragon into returning the ball.

VLADIMIR: The four of them were there – or thereabouts – and only one speaks of a thief being saved. [Pause.] Come on, Goggo, return the ball can't you, once in a way?

ESTRAGON: [with exaggerated enthusiasm]. I find this really most extraordinarily interesting. (WFG, 12-13)

And Hamm has to take over the arduous task of orchestrating both sides of the conversation in *Endgame*.

HAMM: I've got on with my story. [Pause.] I've got on with it well. [Pause. Irritably.] Ask me where I've got to.

CLOV: Oh, by the way, your story?

HAMM [Surprised]. What story?

CLOV: The one you've been telling yourself all your...days.

HAMM: Ah you mean my chronicle?

CLOV: That's the one. [Pause.]

HAMM: [Angrily.] Keep going, can't you, keep going! (E, 40)

In *Krapp's Last Tape* the nature of dialogue undergoes a radical change: there is still interplay of voices on stage, but, paradoxically, this stems from monologue. In *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* characters work in tandem: Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, Hamm and Clov, Nagg and Nell. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, while there is only one character on stage, there seems to be a pairing of a different kind, that of the voice. Even though both of the voices heard belong to the same protagonist, they are distinct in both sonority and their temporal position within Krapp's life. The younger voice is recorded and emitted by means of a tape recorder, and the other is *viva voce*, it is 'live', spoken by the older Krapp whom we can see on stage. So, although Beckett

originally wrote the play as a monologue, in production it is questionable if it can be accurately described as such. Not only does Krapp become auditor to the voice of his younger self, but he actually responds to the voices of his past selves. The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp comments on a recording of over a decade before, “Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice!” (58), and the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp does likewise after listening to himself speaking at thirty-nine: “Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that” (62). Although no dialogue can occur in real time - the voice on the tape cannot respond - the building up of layers of voices and auditors goes beyond the boundary of monologue.

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett therefore creates a sonorous presence, a resuscitated voice from the past, which makes it possible for a one-sided dialogue to take place. That is, the character on stage speaks of his recorded self and the recorded self can speak of a further recorded self, belonging to a separate point in time. Here Beckett effectively distances himself from what Jurij Lotman in *Structure of the Artistic Text* (1977) describes as “external dialogue”, spatial communication taking place between two different people, in favour of a one-sided dialogue with a past self. He has literally externalised “internal dialogue”, which Lotman describes as a temporal form of communication taking place within the same subject¹²⁰, making it possible for a character to listen and respond to his own voices from the past. This ingenious splitting of the self into different temporal voices was dramatically made possible through the use of recorded sound. Beckett's discovery of the tape recorder not only enabled him to mine the past and make it audible, it meant that he could conserve it in the form of a voice.

¹²⁰ In *Structure of the Artistic Text* (1977), Jurij Lotman distinguishes external dialogue which is spatial (A→B) from internal dialogue which is a temporal communication act (A→A), p.9

3.1.3. BECKETT, A VOICE AND A TAPE RECORDER

Krapp's Last Tape was not Beckett's first play to use recorded sound. A few years earlier in 1956, he had written the play *All That Fall* specifically for radio

at the request of the BBC's Third Programme¹²¹. From the outset the sound of the piece was of paramount importance to Beckett, he even conceived it as a series of noises: "in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting"¹²². When he sent the script to John Morris, the Controller of the Third Programme, Beckett commented that the play might need a special quality of sound, "bruitage"¹²³ as he called it, but his involvement with the way his first radio play would sound turned out to be relatively low. He was unable to attend the rehearsals and recording of *All That Fall*¹²⁴ in early January 1956 as he was still busy with theatre, working on what was intended to be the première of *Fin de partie* in Paris in mid January¹²⁵. The 'soundscape'¹²⁶ of the play was therefore engineered by the inventive technicians in the BBC's drama department, who experimented ceaselessly, treating sound effects electronically, adding echoes, cutting and reprocessing taped sound in order to create the stylised realism that the script seemed to call for¹²⁷. Although Beckett was clearly enthusiastic about the result¹²⁸, his immediate interest in recorded sound was to be

¹²¹ The BBC's interest in a radio play written by SB is related in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.427-428. Clas Zilliacus details the history of the BBC's Third Programme in *Beckett and Broadcasting*, pp.16-28.

¹²² Letter from SB to Nancy Cunard 05.07.56, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.428.

¹²³ See Esslin, *Mediations*, pp.127-128.

¹²⁴ The British Library has made available a set of four compact discs with the original BBC recordings of Beckett's radio plays, comprising: *All That Fall*, *Embers*, *Words and Music*, *Rough for Radio II* and *The Old Tune* (SB's English adaptation of Robert Pinget's radio play, *La Manivelle*). *Samuel Beckett Works for Radio: The Original Broadcasts* (2006).

¹²⁵ The production to be staged at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre was initially postponed until February, then, after the withdrawal of the director Lucien Beer, the French première was finally staged in London at the Royal Court Theatre on 03.04.57.

¹²⁶ By the term 'soundscape' I am referring to all the sound effects used in the play.

¹²⁷ The sound experiments carried out for the production of *All That Fall* led to the establishment of the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop. Martin Esslin details these experiments and concludes, "*All That Fall*... directly contributed to one of the most important technical advances in the art of radio (and the technique, and indeed technology, of radio in Britain)." Esslin, *Mediations*, p.129.

¹²⁸ For details of SB's response, see Esslin, *Mediations*, pp.129-30.

piqued in a slightly different way than the play's producer, Donald McWhinnie, had predicted.

My impression is that if he is to write at all in the near future it will be for the radio, which has captured his imagination.¹²⁹

While Beckett did write intensively for radio in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the script that directly followed *All That Fall* was written for theatre, not radio, although its origins are inextricably linked to recorded sound.

The idea for *Krapp's Last Tape* came from both aural and visual stimuli. Beckett wrote the play for one voice, a specific voice, that of the Irish actor Patrick Magee. Magee had played the part of Dan Rooney in the BBC production of *All That Fall* in January 1957, but Beckett only came to fully appreciate the special quality of his unusual voice after listening to his radio readings of *From an Abandoned Work*¹³⁰ and extracts from *Molloy*¹³¹. Beckett found Magee's performance "unforgettable"¹³², "very remarkable"¹³³, and he subsequently wrote a monologue for his voice entitled the "Magee Monologue", later to become *Krapp's Last Tape*¹³⁴. While Beckett's amended text describes the voice as "cracked" with "distinctive intonation" (55), the first holograph of the play was more explicit. The character of Krapp had "a wheezy ruined old voice with some characteristic accent"¹³⁵; this is the voice of Patrick Magee that Beckett heard through the interference on his radio, and this is the voice that was in Beckett's head when he wrote the monologue.

¹²⁹ Internal BBC memo, 21.02.57. Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.431.

¹³⁰ This reading of a duration of 23'33" was broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme on 14.12.57 under the title "An unpublished meditation 'From an Abandoned Work'", and was produced by Donald McWhinnie. See Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.148.

¹³¹ This reading of 59'14" was broadcast on 10.12.57 and the extract was taken from the end of part one of *Molloy*. Donald McWhinnie was the producer and special music was composed by Beckett's nephew, John Beckett. *Ibid.*, p.148.

¹³² SB to Donald McWhinnie 28.01.58, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.444, [note 144, p.790].

¹³³ SB to Alan Schneider 29.01.58, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.33.

¹³⁴ In 1972 the BBC made a filmed version of the play directed by Donald McWhinnie with Patrick Magee playing Krapp, which was transmitted on BBC2 television on 29.11.72. It can be viewed on video tape at the British Film Institute, National Archive, 21 Stephen Street, London, by prior appointment.

¹³⁵ Cited in James Knowlson, "'*Krapp's Last Tape*': The Evolution of a Play, 1958-75", in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 1 (1976), p.50.

Beckett first listened to Magee's BBC readings on the radio; this would influence the aural aspect of his future play. Then he listened to them in the Paris BBC studio in January 1958, and this experience most probably determined its visual conception. The readings were sent over from London on audiotape and played on a tape recorder. Beckett found himself sitting in a confined space listening to a voice articulating his own thoughts from the past, very much like Krapp in the play he was soon to write. This was the first time Beckett had seen a tape recorder being operated at such close quarters and he was quick to recognise its dramatic potential for representing different voices of the self, commenting to Alan Schneider that it had "endless possibilities"¹³⁶.

Why *Krapp's Last Tape* was written for the stage and not the radio may seem curious, given that it came in the middle of an intensive period of dramatic writing for radio. Indeed, it could be argued that the play would work well on radio given the notable difference between the older and younger Krapps' voices, and "the extraordinary sound" of high speed gabble produced as Krapp passes backwards and forwards across his recorded memories¹³⁷. However, it seems clear that while sound and voices are central to the play, the visual element was also equally important. Beckett wanted the audience to *see* the portable sound recording device as well as being able to hear Krapp's memories. New sound technology not only fascinated Beckett for its newness¹³⁸, but also because it represented a strikingly innovative stage image. Never before had a character been able to visually manipulate his memories on stage by means of a machine. The tape recorder could substitute

¹³⁶ In a letter from SB to Alan Schneider 17.03.58, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.42.

¹³⁷ In a letter to Alan Schneider 04.01.60 prior to the American première of *Krapp's Last Tape*, SB wrote: "When writing this piece if I had been more familiar with tape recorders I might have had Krapp wind back and forward *without* switching off for the sake of the extraordinary sound that can be had in this way". *Ibid.*, p.59.

¹³⁸ Everett Frost details the technical devices available for sound recording after the Second World War in his essay "Mediating On: Beckett, *Embers*, and Radio Theory", in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.313. N. Katherine Hayles also provides a helpful summary of audiotape and the cultural niche it occupied, in her essay, "Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity", in Adalaide Morris (ed.), *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, pp.75-79.

a person and Krapp treats it as such. He interrupts it, instructs it to go back, to go on, to pause, he curses it, speaks to it, listens to it, touches it, even caresses it¹³⁹. As Beckett mentions in his Schiller-Theater production notebook, Krapp's treatment of the tape recorder reflects the "[t]endency of a solitary person to enjoy affective relationships with objects"¹⁴⁰. The tapes themselves are also highly symbolic and, as Beckett told the German actor Martin Held, when Krapp stumbles over the spools scattered on the floor, he is literally "treading on his life".¹⁴¹

Whereas *All That Fall* "is a specifically radio play... for voices not bodies"¹⁴², *Krapp's Last Tape* is a stage play written for voices, a body and a tape recorder. *All That Fall* is about sound, the sound of human voices, the sound of words, the sound of animals, while *Krapp's Last Tape* is about aural and visual aspects of listening. The audience not only hears the sound of a voice, it watches the effect of that voice upon a listener. And here we can see a new dimension in Beckett's relationship with voices. In Beckett's previous prose works, especially the trilogy and *Texts for Nothing*, the protagonist describes the voice and the effect it has upon him. With *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett not only found a way of externalising voices from the past, he also created a scenario in which the subject could be viewed as he listens and responds to them.

3.1.4. THE DRAMA OF LISTENING

The drama of *Krapp's Last Tape* comprises an old man sitting listening to his memories on a portable tape recorder. Such a static image poses difficulties for a theatre director, as Pierre Chabert has pointed out. "How can a play that

¹³⁹ "Smiles, looks, reproaches, caresses, taps, exclamations", SB's "Krapp Berlin Werkstatt", p.79, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatrical Notebooks Vol. III*, p.205.

¹⁴⁰ SB's "Krapp Berlin Werkstatt", p.79, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatrical Notebooks Vol. III*, p.205.

¹⁴¹ SB's comment to Martin Held, in *Ibid.*, p.xvii.

¹⁴² In a letter from SB to Barney Rosset in 1957, cited in Zilliacus, "All That Fall and Radio Language", in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*. p.299.

is based on the act of listening be made to work in the theatre? How can the act of listening be dramatised?"¹⁴³ But, luckily for theatre, as Molloy observes, "[n]ot one person in a hundred knows how to be silent and listen" (T, 112), nor for that matter how to keep still, and Krapp is no exception. Casting a glance down the index of Beckett's 1969 Schiller-Theater production notebook, different listening states abound: "actions listening", "motionless listening", "agitation listening", "non-listening"¹⁴⁴. Krapp can be a bad listener and Beckett seems to make him so for a reason. Although we glean information about the older man through his decrepit unkempt appearance and his banana and booze indulgences, we learn very little about him from his abortive birthday recording for his sixty-ninth year: "Nothing to say, not a squeak" (62). The poignancy of Krapp's failure to write, to love, to reconcile conflicting spiritual and sensual forces within him, is not so much spoken in the play, as *seen* as he responds to his voice on the tape and what it relates. Here Beckett is giving centre stage to the visual aspect of listening to a voice, something that only the theatre, and later television, could offer him.

Watching Krapp as he begins to listen to the tape numbered "box 3 spool 5" (56) immediately gives us an insight into his character. No sooner has the tape begun, "Thirty-nine today, sound as a - ", than Krapp knocks one of the boxes off the table. We see how quick he is to anger as he "sweeps boxes and ledger violently to the ground" (57). Such violence is seen again when Krapp is making his own recording as he "suddenly bends over the machine, switches off, wrenches off the tape, throws it away"(63). His anger seems to come from contempt, for himself as he is now, as well as for his idealistic younger self materially present as a voice on the tape. When the tape reaches the moment of the "memorable equinox" (57), that moment of quasi-revelation which would inspire the writing of his "opus magnum" (58), which we later learn has

¹⁴³ Pierre Chabert, "Samuel Beckett as Director", in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook 1. Samuel Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape* (1980), p.95.

¹⁴⁴ Index to SB's "Krapp Berlin Werkstatt", in Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks Vol. III*, p.45.

sold “[s]eventeen copies...of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas” (62), Krapp’s irritation quickly turns to rage. He starts by switching off “impatiently”, hoping to skip over the episode, but when he switches back on he hears himself still in full swing: “great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse”. This is too much for him, the irony too painful, and he “curses”, forwards the tape again, only to be unlucky enough to cut into the climactic moment of the vision, “unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire”. He curses even louder, winds on, turns the tape on again and is immediately pacified as he listens to the episode of the girl in the punt (60).

These sudden rages akin to what beset the protagonist of the short prose text preceding *Krapp’s Last Tape, From an Abandoned Work*, “I suddenly flew into a most savage rage, really blinding” (157), are examples of what Donald McWhinnie described as “violence coming out of nowhere”¹⁴⁵. Beckett described Krapp as “a tiger in a cage”¹⁴⁶. When he hears himself speak of failed aspirations and resolutions the tiger starts to pace, Krapp’s listening becomes “agitated”¹⁴⁷, he laughs both at, and together with, his voice on the tape.

Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp! The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! [Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.] And the resolutions! [Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.] To drink less, in particular. [Brief laugh of KRAPP alone.] (58)

However, when confronted with his artistic failure in the form of a passionate idealistic outpouring from the past, the tiger lashes out from behind the bars.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Donald McWhinnie, in Knowlson, *Theatre Workbook 1*, p.48.

¹⁴⁶ Beckett’s comment to Rick Cluchey, who played Krapp in his English production of *Krapp’s Last Tape* in Berlin, 1977. Cited in Haynes and Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, p.104.

¹⁴⁷ This section and the equinox scene are listed under the heading “Agitation Listening” in SB’s “Krapp Berlin Werkstatt”, p.35, in Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks Vol. III*, p.117.

While Krapp's unwillingness or incapability to listen to unrealised ideals is shown through interruption, interjection, and violent movement, he shows his propensity to indulge in reminiscence, dream, and fantasy by keeping quiet and still. These shifts between passive and reactive listening are critical to both the meaning and dramatic effectiveness of the play¹⁴⁸: *Krapp's Last Tape* is about unresolved conflict and tension between opposites must be constant throughout. Indeed, Donald McWhinnie attributed the success of the first production of the play to Patrick Magee's capacity to intuit "the entire feeling of when to be still and tender and when to be violent"¹⁴⁹.

Krapp's "non-listening" states therefore hold dramatic interest because his lack of concentration interrupts the stillness and silence of listening. But Krapp *can* fulfil Molloy's criteria for the model listener and, when he does so, the stage grows still. The more intensely Krapp listens, the quieter his body becomes, but, for the drama of listening to be effective in the theatre, it must also be visual. To achieve this Beckett once again turns to the body, but whereas Krapp's movements are blatant in his "actions listening" and "non-listening" states, they are far subtler when he is actively listening.

Krapp's "listening posture" is static. He sits "leaning forward, elbows on table, hand cupping ear towards machine, face front" (57). To hold his, and the audience's attention, Krapp must "keep absolutely still, absolutely quiet, absolutely rigid"¹⁵⁰, but Krapp lacks stamina, and during stretches of motionless listening¹⁵¹ he loses concentration and drifts off into a trance. This transition from active listening to dream-like state is denoted by slight changes in the position of the head and eyes. For example, when Krapp hears the name "Bianca" (58) there is a "[f]aint head reaction", then, when her eyes

¹⁴⁸ In the Schiller-Theater production SB specifies that everything should be cut that "interferes with the sudden shift from immobility to movement or that slows this down." SB's "Krapp Berlin Werkstatt", p.13. *Ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Donald McWhinnie, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook 1*, p.48.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Patrick Magee. *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁵¹ SB indicates three broad sections under the title "Motionless Listening" in "Krapp Berlin Werkstatt", in Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks Vol. III*, p.85.

are mentioned “[v]ery warm”, there is a pause followed by the stage direction “[r]aises head and stares front”¹⁵². The same pattern of pausing, head movement and forward stare are repeated when the recorded voice mentions the “girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway platform”(58)¹⁵³, when Krapp tries to envisage the nursemaid’s eyes, “[l]ike...chrysolite!” (60), and once again on the first listening of the episode with the girl in the punt.

Although the listening posture that Beckett specifies for motionless listening is almost static, the audience is able to appreciate how the recorded memories affect Krapp by the slight movements he makes with his head and eyes. As Pierre Chabert observes, there seems to be a direct relationship between the two: “[Krapp’s] lost gaze controls his body, drawing it up and raising it as if he were pursuing some vision”¹⁵⁴. There is also a close link between the face and the voice: with the tension of listening, the immobile face, which is “maximally visible”¹⁵⁵, turns into a mask. The “slightly grimacing, pained, haunted” expression of the mask however, is not entirely fixed, and “slight nuances of emotion show through”. The voice is thus “inscribed, imprinted on the face”¹⁵⁶.

Beckett also marries the head and the hands. After Krapp has listened to the episode with the girl in the punt, his head moves gradually downward to rest on the table as his hands simultaneously move in to touch the base of the tape recorder¹⁵⁷, and, in some productions, he “steal[s] his arm round [the] machine”¹⁵⁸. The language of gesture is used with great control here to show

¹⁵² Revised text, in Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks Vol. III*, p.5.

¹⁵³ Here SB uses the elliptic stage direction, “Head up. Dream.” (revised text). *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁵⁴ Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook I*, p.97.

¹⁵⁵ “Throughout when listening to tape even if crouched down over machine he should have his face up and full front maximally visible, staring eyes etc. Lot to be done with eyes.” Letter from SB to Alan Schneider 04.01.60, Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.61.

¹⁵⁶ Pierre Chabert, “Samuel Beckett as Director”, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook I*, p.96.

¹⁵⁷ Annotated note at end of second hearing of the punt episode in revised text used for Beckett’s Schiller-Theater production, in Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Workbooks Vol. III*, p.8

¹⁵⁸ “At the end, towards close of third repeat of boat passage, he can steal his arm round machine and sink his head on table”. Letter from SB to Alan Schneider 04.01.60, Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.61.

Krapp's feelings of tenderness. This episode is central to the whole play, not only because of its repetition, but because it runs counter to what Krapp actually says about his former life: "Thank God that's all done with anyway. [Pause]. The eyes she had!...Yes! [Pause]. Let that go!"(62). His gentle gestures belie his words and perhaps it is this ambivalence which has led him to sadness. The most tragic aspect of Krapp's life may not be so much what he has failed to achieve as what he has pushed away or let go. Such a reading is not textual, but kinetic. We seem to learn more about the sixty-nine-year old Krapp from watching him listen than we do from listening to him speak: the seen undermining the said.

3.1.5. *THE VOICE. JESUS!*¹⁵⁹

Krapp's Last Tape opposes light and darkness¹⁶⁰, movement and immobility, speech and silence, and there is also a marked contrast in the two voices heard in the play. Beckett stated: "The text recorded should be spoken obviously in a much younger and stronger voice than Krapp's for his last tape"¹⁶¹. However, given that a voice is unique, like a fingerprint¹⁶², Beckett specifies that it must be "clearly Krapp's" (57), "unmistakably his"¹⁶³. The voices must therefore be notably different, yet recognisably the same.

The way in which Beckett achieved the like-unlikeness of the two voices is described by Pierre Chabert, who played Krapp in a production performed at Théâtre d'Orsay in Paris, 1975. The first stage of rehearsals centred on establishing a musical difference between the two voices. The older Krapp's

¹⁵⁹ *Krapp's Last Tape* (58).

¹⁶⁰ James Knowlson gives a detailed analysis of black and white oppositions in the play in "Krapp's Last Tape: The Evolution of a Play, 1958-75", in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 1 (1976), p.59-64.

¹⁶¹ Letter from SB to Alan Schneider 04.01.60, Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.59.

¹⁶² Mladon Dolar says: "We can almost unfailingly identify a person by the voice, the particular individual timbre, resonance, pitch, cadence, melody, the particular way of pronouncing certain sounds. The voice is like a fingerprint, instantly recognisable and identifiable." *A Voice and Nothing More*, p.22.

¹⁶³ In a letter from SB to Alan Schneider 04.01.60, Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.59.

“cracked voice” was achieved “by placing the voice at the back of the throat, and by combining this with a laborious, accentuated way of articulating. The “throaty voice” that resulted “sounded very different from the strong musical, resonant voice of the younger Krapp”. The timbre and slower tempo of the older Krapp’s voice are therefore sharply contrasted with the recorded voice, but the intonation had to be recognisable. “Beckett was very insistent that we should find a particular way of pronouncing certain words, of uttering certain turns of phrase, which are then repeated from one recording to another”. In this way both voices find “a strange echo” in each other¹⁶⁴. The way in which the voices alternated in the 1975 Paris production was also carefully orchestrated. Beckett specified the schema b-A-(b)-A-B-a, “A” being the recorded voice, and “B” denoting the live voice¹⁶⁵.

The whole play therefore seems to be structured upon the juxtaposition of the two voices. Not only does this alternation serve to keep the two voices in tension, it also has a musical role. Krapp’s voice heard at the beginning as he reads the ledger, “Mother... at rest at last”, “Memorable equinox”, “Farewell to love” (57), introduces the themes on the tape that the recorded voice will go on to develop. This musical element in the composition of the play is also extended to the way in which the voices are directed. In the Schiller-Theater production of *Endgame*, Beckett insisted that speech and action should be separated: “Never let your changes of position and voice come together. First comes (a) the bodily stance; after it, following a slight pause, comes (b) the corresponding utterance”¹⁶⁶. Even in his prose works Beckett separated movement and speech: “The one thing Mercier really hated was speaking and walking at the same time” (MAC, 50). In *Krapp’s Last Tape* the voice is abstracted from the body, and their separateness is evident in the way in which Beckett rehearses each in turn, as though they represented different

¹⁶⁴ Chabert, “Samuel Beckett as Director”, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook 1*, pp.89-90.

¹⁶⁵ Small and capital letters indicate the difference in the duration of the interventions made by the voice. The brackets around the lower case letters indicate a very short recall of the voice. *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹⁶⁶ SB advising the actors in a Schiller-Theater production of *Endgame*. See Haynes and Knowlson, *Images of Samuel Beckett*, p.115.

instruments. Chabert speaks of alternating between “the work on the text and the voice and that on the acting, the space and the body”¹⁶⁷.

In many respects Beckett’s *mise en scène* of *Krapp’s Last Tape* seems to come close to Antonin Artaud’s description of metaphysical theatre. Artaud saw the stage as “a concrete physical place which asks to be filled and to be given its own concrete language to speak”¹⁶⁸. Beckett’s direction insists on aspects of the theatre that appeal to the senses which seem to satisfy what Artaud refers to as “solidified, materialized language”, which he distinguishes from “the language of words”¹⁶⁹ addressed primarily to the mind. The detailed notes made in Beckett’s Schiller-Theater production notebook, as well as the testimonies of the actors and technicians that worked with him, all speak of the importance he gave to the aural, visual and kinetic aspects of the play. Pierre Chabert comments that “[a] musical and rhythmic function is conferred upon the human body and on objects and the noises that they make emphasise or punctuate the silences”¹⁷⁰. Voice in *Krapp’s Last Tape* therefore seems to form an integral part of Beckett’s “poetry of the senses”¹⁷¹, which he painstakingly constructs in the *mise en scène* of the play.

3.1.6. *THE HOUR OF INTONATIONS*¹⁷²

To make metaphysics out of a spoken language is to make the language express what it does not ordinarily express: to make use of it in a new, exceptional, and unaccustomed fashion; to reveal its possibilities for producing physical shock; to divide and distribute it actively in space; to deal with intonations in an absolutely concrete manner, restoring their power to shatter as well as really to manifest something; to turn against language and its basely utilitarian, one could say alimentary, sources, against its trapped-beast origins; and finally, to consider language as the form of Incantation.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Chabert, “Samuel Beckett as Director”, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook 1*, p.88.

¹⁶⁸ Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, (trans. Mary Caroline Richards), p.37. First published as *Le Théâtre et son Double* (1938).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁷⁰ Chabert, “Samuel Beckett as Director”, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook 1*, pp.101-102.

¹⁷¹ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.37.

¹⁷² In “The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)”, Artaud proclaimed: “This is the hour of intonations, of a word’s particular pronunciation”. *Ibid.*, pp.89-90.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.46.

Artaud's treatise on the need for a radical change in the way the spoken word was used in the theatre is not dissimilar to Beckett's early attack on the meaninglessness of language and the complacency of the written word.

...more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or Nothingness) behind it... Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?¹⁷⁴

The spirit of Modernism is instilled in both entreaties, the two writers totally rejecting the mundane use of language in favour of a more primitive and meaningful form. The main difference, however, is that while Artaud's promises a sudden and noisy overthrow, Beckett's suggests quiet and steady erosion. Such revolutionary spirit may seem out of place in a discussion of *Krapp's Last Tape*, a play that looks back more than it does forward, yet linguistically this short text represents a turning point in Beckett's dramatic work, one which Artaud would surely have applauded.

It was not just the sonority of the voice that interested Beckett, but the sound of speech, of words. In Artaud's manifesto on "The Theatre of Cruelty" he declares, "[t]his is the hour of intonations, of a word's particular pronunciation"¹⁷⁵, and this can certainly be found in *Krapp's Last Tape*¹⁷⁶. Words are made into a spectacle in the play: Krapp "revels" in pronouncing the word "spool" by lengthening the /u:/ sound. He enjoys physically uttering the word with his lips and tongue and listens "with relish" to the sibilant sound he produces, "spoooool!" (56 *passim*). Perhaps the isolation of this word and the way it is pronounced in an almost celebratory fashion by Krapp comes close to what Artaud was proposing in his manifesto. The word is

¹⁷⁴ SB in a letter to Axel Kaun 09.07.37, in Cohn (ed.), *Disjecta*, pp.171-172.

¹⁷⁵ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, pp.89-90.

¹⁷⁶ This enjoyment of the sound of a word is also found in the short prose piece *From an Abandoned Work*, written in English a few years prior to *Krapp's Last Tape*. "Over, over, there is a soft place in my heart for all that is over, no, for the being over, I love the word, words have been my only loves..." (162).

deformed, it loses its functional role, and merely pronouncing it has the power to affect the senses, bringing Krapp, as he ironically comments, the “[h]appiest moment of the past half million” (62).

Another word broken up from the phrase for close inspection is “viduity”. On hearing the word, Krapp is surprised, and goes back to listen to the word he had once known but which has since been ‘made strange’ through forgetting.

...there is of course the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying, in the late autumn, after her long viduity [Krapp gives a start] and the [Krapp switches off, words back tape a little, bends his ear closer to machine, switches on] -a-dying, after he long viduity, and the- [Krapp switches off...]
(58)

Here we have an example of Beckett separating the sound of the word from its sense: Krapp can hear and produce the syllables without being able to attribute meaning to them. There is also a further questioning of language in the play as Krapp reads aloud from his ledger:

The black ball...[He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.] Black ball? Memorable...what? [He peers closer.] Equinox, memorable equinox. [He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.] Memorable equinox?... [Pause. He shrugs his shoulders...]. (57)

Krapp’s problem here seems to be not so much that he does not understand the meaning of the individual words, but that the combination of words fails to bring back the memory that they had succinctly encapsulated thirty years before. The power of words to express meaning seems irretrievably linked to memory, the fading of the latter having weakened the former, leaving them bereft of meaning.

The questioning of words in the play has the effect of making language draw attention to itself and this self-consciousness can also be found in *All That Fall*. Maddy Rooney seems to feel alienated from her own way of speaking, but it is not the meaning of the words that perplexes her, it is the sound of her speech.

Do you find anything...bizarre about my way of speaking? (Pause.) I do not mean the voice. (Pause.) No, I mean the words. (Pause. More to herself.) I

use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very ...bizarre. (8)

Indeed, Maddy's language, like Winnie's in *Happy Days*, "runs the entire gamut from expletive and invective through nuanced soliloquising to the ornate rhetoric of public address"¹⁷⁷. Krapp's language is also multi-textured: it ranges from the vulgar, "[b]ony old ghost of a whore" (62), to the lyrical, "I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side" (61). Both plays are notable for their linguistic range, and it is significant that they also marked by Beckett's return to writing in English.

Beckett began to write in French precisely to rid himself of "Anglo-Irish exuberance and automatism". He wanted to "cut away the excess, to strip away the colour", and he claimed that it was easier to write in French "without style"¹⁷⁸. After a decade of what Roland Barthes described as "writing at the zero"¹⁷⁹, Beckett began to produce texts of a very different nature. In fact, *All That Fall* and *Krapp's Last Tape* seem full of the very kind of colourful idiom that made him flee from the language in the first place, but Beckett's control and use of language is very different from his pre-war novels.

One of the things Beckett disliked about his writing in English was its "lack of brakes"¹⁸⁰. When he wrote in English afresh his characters are constantly braking, interrupting their speech to question or marvel at their words: all language is subject to scrutiny, from Krapp's mundane idioms, "separating the grain from the husks.... The grain, now what I wonder do I mean by that..." (57), to Mrs Rooney's "bizarre" choice of words.

¹⁷⁷ Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.49.

¹⁷⁸ SB cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.357.

¹⁷⁹ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, (trans. Dr. Annette Lavers and Dr. Colin Smith), (1967), p.82. First published as *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953).

¹⁸⁰ SB's comment from 1957 is cited in Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.4.

MR ROONEY: I speak – and you listen to the wind.

MRS ROONEY: No, no, I am agog, tell me all, then we shall press on and never pause, never pause, till we come safe to haven.
[Pause.]

MR ROONEY: Never pause...safe to haven...Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language. (34)

Beckett's rediscovery of English seems to have been made possible through linguistic exile; words still come easily, but they sound strange, anachronistic, or their meaning turns opaque upon utterance. Language is questioned, checked, and yet it is varied and rich. The greater linguistic control that Beckett had gained from writing in another language, as well as translating back into English, seemed to have had a liberating effect when returning to write in his own native tongue. His use of language is more disciplined, he employs words deliberately to create harmony or dissonance. He juxtaposes different registers and probes complacent idioms by deforming them, as in Mr. Rooney's phrase "[n]ip some doom in the bud" (31)¹⁸¹. He 'misuses' words for comic effect, as in Mr Barrell's exclamation that "[a]ll traffic is retarded" (27)¹⁸², and even breathes new life into those given up for dead, as with the word "viduity"¹⁸³.

Krapp's Last Tape is not a play in which Beckett despairs of language. On the contrary, Krapp revels in the sound of words, becomes entranced by the lyricism of language. This linguistic enjoyment, however, seems to derive more from the music of words rather than their sense. When it comes to meaning, Beckett has language on a tight leash. He allows a little of English's colour to come through, but the moment speech becomes charged with similes and adjectives, as in the description of Krapp's revelation, "unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the

¹⁸¹ The idiom "to nip something in the bud", means to stop something from developing further, and is used for actions and ideas, not to describe people.

¹⁸² The word "retarded" plays on the French meaning of 'lateness', as well as suggesting that Mr. Barrell is a simple man.

¹⁸³ Christopher Ricks provides an original and in-depth analysis of Beckett's use of words from 'dead languages', and words of infrequent use, in *Beckett's Dying Words* (1993). See especially pp.96-153.

understanding and the fire” (60), it is instantly cut, quite literally switched off. While the sonority of words is celebrated in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Artaud would surely have found Beckett’s a very frugal feast.

3.1.7. ANOTHER STROLL IN THE CRYPT

You cultivate your memory till it’s passable, a treasure-bin, stroll in your crypt, unlit, return to the scenes, call back the old sounds (paramount), till you have the lot off pat and you all at a loss, head, nose, ears and the rest, what remains to snuff up, they all smell equally sweet, what old jingles to play back.¹⁸⁴

In Beckett’s literature memory is depicted as a virtual space in the mind: you can walk about in it. It is also sensory: you can see in the dark, hear in the silence, and conjure up smells. Plays such as *Embers*, *Play*, *Eh Joe*, *Not I* and *That Time*, are entirely constructed from a patchwork of memories, and it is a voice which relates them. Without that voice the stage plays would turn into static images, and the radio play *Embers* would comprise nothing but the sound of Henry’s boots on the shingle and the sound of the sea. And, without *Krapp’s Last Tape*, the dramatisation of the voice of memory would probably have had quite a different debut.

Krapp’s Last Tape is the play in which Beckett most overtly treats the subject of memory¹⁸⁵. His interest in the workings of memory was by no means a new one, the distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory having formed a central part of his critical essay *Proust*. In this study he explains how Proust little prized voluntary memory, believing that the conscious recall of past episodes failed to bring back anything real, as the feelings pertaining to the experiences were totally lacking. Involuntary memory is presented as the opposite of this. It comprises moments of inattention that are unconsciously stored and triggered by chance occurrences, as in the famous

¹⁸⁴ *Mercier and Camier* (108).

¹⁸⁵ Verna June MacDonald’s doctoral thesis, *Yesterday’s Deformities: A Discussion of the Role of Memory and Discourse in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, provides an original interpretation of the function of memory in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, pp.168-175. Available on-line: www.unisa.ac.za. (Last consulted 22.04.08.)

episode of the madeleine soaked in tea in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*). The recall of a past scene is unannounced and all-consuming, “an immediate, total and delicious deflagration”, as Proust put it (PTD, 33). This is memory in its purest form: the intensity of the feeling burning through “the mock reality of experience” to reveal “the real” (PTD, 33). The way in which Beckett paraphrases and elaborates on Proust’s ideas gives the impression that he fully supports them. However, when he revisits the terrain of time and memory in his own work, such a dualistic idea no longer seems to hold true for him. As with his return to writing in his native language, going back to the familiar subject of memory after a lapse of time not only led to reappraisal, but also an original new treatment.

Firstly, it is notable that the spoken memories in *Krapp’s Last Tape* are closely based on Beckett’s own past¹⁸⁶. The two preceding works, *From an Abandoned Work* and *All That Fall*, had also heavily drawn on autobiographical material, and were both set in local Irish landscapes¹⁸⁷, peopled with figures from Beckett’s childhood and include specific incidents from his earlier life¹⁸⁸. Beckett’s previous work had by no means been devoid of autobiographical reference, but these three texts stand out for the sheer abundance of personal details included in them. Whether Beckett’s return to writing in English had brought with it a train of images from his past, or whether the death of his influential mother¹⁸⁹ had lifted self-censorship on speaking about intimacies of his life is debatable, but the effect on his writing was one of release. There appears to be a certain truth in what Beckett wrote in *Proust* years before: “Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us,

¹⁸⁶ For biographical references in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.442-443.

¹⁸⁷ *From an Abandoned Work* is set against the backdrop of the Dublin coastline and Wicklow mountains, while the action in *All That Fall* takes place at a local station based on that in Foxrock, Beckett’s birthplace.

¹⁸⁸ In addition to Knowlson’s *Damned to Fame*, Eoin O’Brien’s *The Beckett Country* (1986) provides detailed accounts of biographical references in Beckett’s literature.

¹⁸⁹ May Beckett died in 1950. SB’s relationship with his mother is discussed at length in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*.

within us, heavy and dangerous” (PTD, 13). By writing out his past Beckett was ridding himself of “thronging memories”¹⁹⁰, or at least temporarily. They would return again “like the spokes of a turning wheel” (TFN7, 128), but he would refashion them and find new artistic forms in which to vent them.

Like Beckett, Krapp too is compelled to externalise his thoughts and memories, and the medium he chooses for this is speech. Rather than let his words vanish into air, Krapp records his voice on tape to construct a tangible verbal past as others might visually by taking photographs. Krapp’s recollections seem to constitute instances of voluntary memory as his recorded impressions are “consciously and intelligently formed” (PTD, 32), but when he plays them back he is left with much more than “merely a blurred and uniform projection”¹⁹¹. Magnetic tape preserves Krapp’s memories in tact and a tape recorder enables him to access them exactly as they were recorded. While this mechanisation of the storage and retrieval of memory may lead to a more faithful representation of the past, it does not necessarily follow that the recorded experiences will be any more re-liveable when played back. As Beckett said in *Proust*, “The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday’s ego, not for today’s” (PTD, 13): Krapp’s memories may have been frozen, but Krapp-present has been changed by the abrasive action of time.

By simultaneously staging Krapp-past in the form of a resuscitated voice and Krapp-present in flesh and blood, Beckett dramatically represents the unbridgeable gulf of time that separates what one is from what one was. Krapp’s attempt to hang on to his past seems to be futile, as most of the incidents he listens to are as distant and foreign and dead as the voice that describes them. There is, however, a notable exception in the play – the punt

¹⁹⁰ The idea of the sheer number of memories pressing in upon him conveyed by the word “thronging” in the English translation” is missing from the original French version, «Que de souvenirs» (NTPR, 12).

¹⁹¹ In his description of voluntary memory Beckett writes: “Its action has been compared by Proust to that of turning the leaves of an album of photographs. The material it furnishes contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism – that is to say, nothing”. (PTD, 32-33)

episode - on which the whole play pivots. Although it is not made explicit in the text, it is clear from Beckett's Schiller-Theater production notebook that the selection of the tape Krapp listens to is not accidental¹⁹², his choice is motivated by the experience with the girl in the boat.

At curtain up he is thinking of the story of the boat and trying to remember which year it was (how old he was). Doesn't succeed. Tries again during banana 1. (Reseated at table still tries to remember.) Remembers all of a sudden as he starts banana 2 (thanks to $39 = 13 \times 3$), which had struck him at the time) and hastens away to fetch the ledger that will allow him to identify box and tape.¹⁹³

Krapp listening to the detailed description of "farewell to love" (57) is as close as the play comes to representing the effect of involuntary memory. He becomes entranced, totally lost in the scene, the voice seemingly restoring "not merely the past object", but judging from Krapp's tender gestures, also "the Lazarus that it charmed or tortured" (PTD, 33). Involuntary memory, once described as "the unruly magician of the mind" (PTD, 33-34), seems to be a far less elusive animal than that which Beckett wrote about nearly thirty years before. In *Krapp's Last Tape* it has become slave to the machine as, not only can it be "importuned" (PTD, 34), but it can also be repeated at will: all Krapp has to do is rewind the tape and listen to the recorded voice anew.

The way Beckett represents memory in *Krapp's Last Tape* therefore gives a new slant to the ideas that Beckett expounded in *Proust*. Voluntary memory is no more memorable for being readily accessible for replay, and the epiphany-like moments of involuntary memory seem to lose none of their power to emotionally affect and transport the subject when "the time and place for the performance of its miracle" (PTD, 34) is mechanically determined. Beckett therefore presents Krapp's folly as two-fold: his attempt to hang on to his past is as futile as his wish to bury it. No matter how hard Krapp tries, he cannot harness suppressed desires; they will resurface in the act of listening or, as

¹⁹² Beckett heads the page "Choix Hasard" and crosses out "Hasard", as if he had made a decision on this point, which, until he had come to actually direct the play, had been left open-ended.

¹⁹³ "Krapp Berlin Werkstatt", p.1, in Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks Vol. III.*, p.49. The underlining is Beckett's.

with the “last fancies” he tries to “keep under”, they will invariably spill out into his voice. “Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. [Pause.] Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells... Be again, be again” (63).

While *Krapp’s Last Tape* closely parallels and, in some senses, parodies the Proustian vision¹⁹⁴, the play’s originality stems from the way in which Beckett forges memory and voice to create a new dramatic entity. Voice and memory had often been closely associated in Beckett’s prose works, “the old thoughts well up in me and over into my voice”, says the narrator of *From an Abandoned Work* (158), but in *Krapp’s Last Tape* they become inextricable. The process of technologically preserving, or “ossifying”¹⁹⁵ a spoken past, has the effect of disembodiment the voice, severing it from the subject that uttered it, thereby converting it into a presence in its own right. However, in *Krapp’s Last Tape* this ‘voice of memory’, while separate, is not autonomous, as Krapp mechanically determines when the voice should speak and when be silent. He can also revise what the voice relates by means of “post-mortems” (58), the ritual of starting a new recording by commenting upon a past one. Therefore, although the voices of his past selves have the power to affect him, Krapp has some degree of control over them. In Beckett’s subsequent plays, however, voices of memory gain ground on the subject, and their empowerment coincides with their relocation back inside the head.

¹⁹⁴ For example, Proust’s vases containing moments of our existence with accompanying colours, smells and sounds, can be seen to be replaced by spools of tape, and involuntary memory, presented as elusive and unruly by Proust, can be both summoned and shut off mechanically in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. The question of whether *Krapp’s Last Tape* is a parody of Proust’s conception of memory is considered in Arthur K. Oberg, “*Krapp’s Last Tape* and the Proustian Vision”, in Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook 1*, pp.151-157.

¹⁹⁵ In his essay “*Krapp’s Last Tape* and the Proustian Vision”, Oberg argues that Krapp’s tape serves to ossify rather than preserve the moments from Krapp’s past. *Ibid.*, p.153.

3.1.8. THE PERFORMATIVE VOICE

The voices heard in *Krapp's Last Tape* are certainly performative in the sense that their sound is intended for audition; ironically, the hearer is the narcissistic Krapp at a later date in time. Once the voice is recorded, however, it is 'dead' in terms of its intentionality. When the voice is 'resuscitated' by being played on the tape recorder, its performance is determined and unchanging: the way in which the voice affects the listener will depend on the listener, not on the will of the voice. Unlike the voice described in Beckett's pre-dramatic prose, the recorded voice heard in *Krapp's Last Tape* is tame, and yet there is the same sense of urgency that is conveyed in the pre-dramatic prose. Rather than coming from the need to speak, compulsion in this play comes from the need to listen: the central drama is contained within the act of listening to a voice.

In addition to foregrounding audition in *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett also draws attention to the materiality of voices heard in the play. He experiments with different textures of voice and speech, juxtaposing them to create comedy and pathos, although the materiality of voices does not *only* involve sound. The voices of Krapp's past selves also have a physical tangibility; they are recorded on tapes and stored on spools. Krapp can actually *touch* these silent voices¹⁹⁶. Krapp's voices from the past may not aspire to performance in the way that voices in the earlier prose works do, but their presence is both physical and visible: Krapp is surrounded by voices, voices which are technologically preserved and converted into material objects.

Krapp's Last Tape is in many respects a pioneering work for the exhaustive study that Beckett was to carry out on the relationship between a character and voice in his dramatic works. In this play Beckett's chief innovation was to disembody a voice and make it audible on stage through the use of recorded

¹⁹⁶ Beckett stages a cassette recorder in his later television play *Ghost Trio*. In this play the protagonist clutches the machine which is placed on his lap, although this time the machine is used to emit music and not voices.

sound¹⁹⁷. This voice cannot be properly described as acousmatic, given that the supposed source of the voice¹⁹⁸ can be seen by the audience, but Beckett had effectively dislocated a voice from the body that issues it, as Katherine N. Hayles argues, the image of Krapp listening “burns into consciousness the realization that body and voice no longer necessarily go together”¹⁹⁹. This use of new technology meant that he could defy temporal restraints by staging a character in the present listening to his own voice from the past. While Beckett was to go on to create another stage play based on the idea of a man listening to voices describing memories from his past, *That Time* was not written until the mid 1970’s.

Beckett’s close involvement with the first production of *Krapp’s Last Tape*²⁰⁰ may well have convinced him of the suitability of recorded sound for the dramatisation of memories, but it might also have drawn his attention to the limitations of staging a disembodied voice. The theatre had enabled Beckett to focus on the externalisation of thoughts and memories and the visual aspect of listening, and of voices, but his next play, *Embers*, written specifically for the radio medium, led him inwards again into the intimate space of a head. This play marks the beginning of what Martin Esslin and Shimon Levy have described as Beckett’s “theatre in a skull”²⁰¹, and it is the first drama in which the voices in a character’s head are materialised in sound.

¹⁹⁷ Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (eds.), *Wireless Imagination. Sound Radio and the Avant-garde*, provides a very informative collection of essays on audio art from the late nineteenth century to the 1960’s. While the volume makes reference to key figures in sound experimentation, such as, Marcel Duchamp, F. T. Marinetti, Antonin Artaud, John Cage and William Burroughs, curiously, Samuel Beckett’s name is not among them.

¹⁹⁸ A stage manager, off stage, controls the sound. However, in Alan Schneider’s 1960 American première of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, the actor playing Krapp, Donald Davis controlled the sound recording himself. See Randolph Goodman’s interview with Alan Schneider, in James Knowlson (ed.), *Theatre Workbook I*, p.54.

¹⁹⁹ “Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity”, in Adalaide Morris (ed.), *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies* (1997), p.78.

²⁰⁰ James Knowlson reports that “Beckett attended rehearsals throughout, offering helpful comments and suggestions.” In *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Vol. III*, p.xiii.

²⁰¹ Stanley Richardson and Jane Alison Hale, “Working Wireless: Beckett’s Radio Writing”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.286.

3.2. TALKING GHOSTS: *EMBERS*

3.2.1. RESERVATIONS AND RECOGNITION

Beckett wrote *Embers*²⁰² in 1957, although, according to S. E. Gontarski, “he had some hesitations about its quality” which delayed its dispatch to the BBC until February 1959²⁰³. Reservations mark Beckett’s attitude towards this radio script. In February 1958 Beckett told Donald McWhinnie that he intended to “return to the radio text and see if there is anything to be saved from that wreck”²⁰⁴, but, even when he had finished the play, he still appeared to be far from happy with it. He commented to Alan Schneider: “I have given an old half-baked radio script to the 3rd, perhaps just worth doing. I’ll be sending it along to Barney soon”²⁰⁵. The same guardedness is evident in his correspondence with his American literary agent, Barney Rosset, editor of Grove Press: “It’s not very satisfactory, but I think just worth doing”. “I think it just gets by for radio.”²⁰⁶

Embers was broadcast on the BBC’s Third Programme on 24th June 1959, directed by Donald McWhinnie, with the voices of Jack MacGowran, Patrick Magee, Kathleen Michael and Kathleen Helme, and music interpreted by Cicely Hoyle. The play’s duration was 44:38 minutes²⁰⁷. Beckett listened to the recording of *Embers* at the BBC studios in London, but what he heard did nothing to make him enthuse about the play. He praised the performances of Jack MacGowran and Kathleen Michael, but felt that the production had not

²⁰² The script that Beckett sent to the BBC in February 1958 bore the title *Ebb*. Beckett later changed this to *Embers*. Other titles that Beckett considered were: “The Water’s Edge”, “Why Life, Henry?”, “Not a Soul”, and “All Day All Night”. A detailed account on the play’s genesis can be found in Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, pp.169-70.

²⁰³ S. E. Gontarski, “Bowlderising Beckett: The BBC *Embers*”, in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. IX, no.1 (1999), p.129.

²⁰⁴ Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, note 1, p.790.

²⁰⁵ SB to Alan Schneider 27.01.59 in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.53.

²⁰⁶ Comments made by SB to Grove Press 20.03.59 and 05.05.59 respectively. Cited in Zilliaccus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.76.

²⁰⁷ The 1959 BBC version of the play has been made available on compact disc by the British Library Board. *Samuel Beckett Works for Radio: The Original Broadcasts* (2006).

“quite come off”²⁰⁸. Despite Beckett’s reservations, *Embers* won the *Radiotelevisione Italiana* prize in the 1959 Prix Italia contest.

3.2.2. *ESSE EST AUDIRI*

Beckett prefaced his 1963 *Film*²⁰⁹ script with a quotation from Bishop George Berkeley: “*Esse est percipi*” (163). In many respects, the radio play *Embers* might be considered as its earlier acoustic counterpart. In Beckett’s silent film²¹⁰ it is the eye that registers ‘being’ and the protagonist is both the perceiver and perceived. Following Beckett’s general notes accompanying the script, “the protagonist is sundered into object (O) and eye (E), the former in flight, the latter in pursuit” (163). Throughout the film O is at pains to avoid the gaze of others, passers-by, animals, reflections, photographic images, but no matter how hermetically he tries to seal himself away from view, he cannot make himself invisible to E. O’s compelling yet futile attempts to be unseen are succinctly described by Beckett as the “[s]earch of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception”(163).

Film centres on the primacy given to the eye: perception is visual, the image being the sole conveyor of meaning, feeling, and clue to sound. *Embers* is a radio play in which ‘being’ takes place in sound and is registered by the ear. Speaking about *All That Fall*, Enoch Brater commented, “[t]o be is quite literally to be heard”²¹¹, and this seems especially true of *Embers*. The protagonist’s precarious existence is materialised in sound alone²¹² and the

²⁰⁸ SB in a letter to Mary Manning Howe 21.07.59, cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.470

²⁰⁹ *Film* was directed by Alan Schneider, with Buster Keaton playing both ‘E’ and ‘O’. Beckett went to New York to be present for the shooting of *Film* in July 1964. Originally shot in black and white on 35mm. *Film* can be viewed on-line at: <http://www.ubu.com/film/beckett.html>. (Last consulted 22.04.08.)

²¹⁰ The film is silent except for a “soft ‘ssh’” uttered by the woman in the opening street sequence (165).

²¹¹ Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.14.

²¹² Everett Frost, in his essay “Mediating On” concurs with Brater’s view, arguing that “[o]ntologically speaking, in radio sound makes not only sense but *essence*”. In Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.316.

patchwork of monologues and dialogues that comprise the play are forged by the protagonist's need to hear and be heard. While O's paranoia centres on a pursuing eye, Henry (the protagonist of *Embers*) is obsessed with a sound, the "sucking" sound of the sea (101). Like O, Henry has attempted flight, "I once went to Switzerland to get away from the cursed thing" (94), but a locked room will no more shake off E than a land-locked country will silence the ebb and flow of the tide in Henry's head. O's efforts to break or avert all possible gazes involve an exhaustive process of expelling animals from the room, turning round mirrors, pulling down blinds, tearing up photos. Henry's own particular Sisyphean labour consists of calling forth a repertoire of voices (his own, remembered, and fictive), and finite rhythms (hooves, drips, thuds, and slams) in an attempt to drown out, or at least punctuate, the ceaseless sound: "Train it to mark time! Shoe it with steel and tie it up in the yard, have it stamp all day! [*Pause.*] A ten-ton mammoth back from the dead, shoe it with steel and have it tramp the world down!" (93).

If O in *Film* can remain within the 45° "angle of immunity" of E's gaze, he will not experience what Beckett refers to as an "anguish of perceivedness" (165-166)²¹³. Similarly, if Henry in *Embers* can interrupt the sound of the sea with his voices and noises, he will also ensure himself a certain audible immunity and dull his equivalent of O's existential "agony" (165). Only by keeping the sounds coming can he keep himself free of the "[l]ips and claws" (98) of the sonic beast in his head. His efforts have to be ongoing, as when he stops speaking or conjuring voices and sounds from his memory, or creating them imaginatively, it is the sound of the sea that fills the pauses, as Beckett's clearly indicates: "*Sea...audible throughout ... whenever pause indicated*" (93). Exigency therefore seems to lie behind the performance of the voices and sounds in *Embers*: the protagonist's existence would be unbearable without them, and there literally would be no radio play without them.

²¹³ While E can perceive O from behind and at an angle of 45°, if the angle is exceeded O is in perceivedness.

3.2.3. COMING OUT OF THE DARK

Before considering the nature of the voices in *Embers*, it seems important to establish the specificity of the medium that they were written for. While Beckett may have agreed to readings of his prose and theatrical works on the radio²¹⁴, he was adamant that his radio plays should not be staged. “There can be no question of transporting them to the theatre” he said. “One writes differently for it: words come out of the dark”²¹⁵. “One writes differently” for radio because the audience’s imaginative recreation of scenes and events is determined solely by the words and sounds they hear; there are no external visual prompts to meaning or character.

Listening to a radio play, as Martin Esslin has commented, is a solitary experience in which “the mind is turned inwards”²¹⁶ and the imagination is left to roam freely. Radio is a very intimate medium which penetrates the listener’s private space, making it ideal for confidences and confessions, and Beckett was quick to realise radio’s potential for releasing into sound all the “vociferations” of the mind (U, T, 299), a point made forcibly by Esslin. “Beckett’s preoccupation with the process of human consciousness as an incessant verbal flow (on which the trilogy and *Texts for Nothing* was based) here found its logical culmination, and one which only radio could provide”²¹⁷.

A form of interior discourse is already present in *All That Fall*, in the series of non-sequiturs which tumble from the mouth of Maddy Rooney, but her rants, laments, and wild laughter are contained within linear time against a

²¹⁴ The 1957 readings of *From and Abandoned Work* and the extract from *Molloy* broadcast on the BBC’s Third Programme were followed by readings from *Malone Dies* in June 1958, and *The Unnamable* in January 1959. In May 1957 a recorded studio performance of Roger Blin’s *Fin de Partie* was heard on the Third Programme, and *Waiting for Godot*, produced by Donald McWhinnie, was broadcast in April 1960, also on the Third Programme. See Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, pp.148-150.

²¹⁵ Cited in Richardson and Hale, “Working Wireless, in Oppenheim (ed.) *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.287.

²¹⁶ Esslin, *Mediations*, p.177.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.135.

naturalistic setting, and are often directed at real characters²¹⁸. In *Embers*, the world the listener is presented with is one of heightened subjectivity where reality shifts and lapses like the embers that Henry describes in his narration of the Bolton/Holloway story²¹⁹. Does the continual sea sound belong to a real place “the strand” (93), or is it purely figment? Henry mischievously casts doubt upon the veracity of the play’s setting from the very outset:

That sound you hear is the sea. [Pause louder.] I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. [Pause.] I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn’t see what it was you wouldn’t know what it was. (93)²²⁰

So, how do we, the listeners, know what and who is real in the play? We don’t. As Clas Zilliacus points out, “what is chiefly gained by the absence of a visual dimension is that no discernible limit is drawn between speaking characters that are ‘physically present’ and those ‘physically absent’”²²¹. All of the voices heard in the play may be equally present in sound, but they are not actually ‘physically present’ in the way we imagine the characters in *All That Fall* to be due to the way they are portrayed in sound.

When Henry’s wife, Ada, converses with him sitting on the beach, her presence is ghostly. Firstly, her voice is inexpressive, it is described as “[l]ow remote” (97), and this quiet, colourless, voice stands in stark contrast to Henry’s. He raises his voice to make himself heard: “That sound you hear is

²¹⁸ As John Spurling points out in *Beckett the Playwright*, co-written with John Fletcher in 1972, “Whenever he makes the test of a new medium, Beckett always seems to take a few steps backward [toward naturalism]”. Cited in Jonathan Kalb’s essay, “The Mediated Quixote: The radio and television plays, and *Film*”, Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p126.

²¹⁹ “Embers. [Pause.] Shifting, lapsing, furtive like...” (95).

²²⁰ In the BBC 1959 production of *Embers* the sound of waves was treated electronically to make them sound unnatural. The listener therefore presumably hears the sea as Henry hears it. In Everett Frost’s production of *Embers* (1989), which formed part of *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*, the sound of the sea was realistic, having been recorded at Killiney Beach near Foxrock, Ireland, the place SB indicated he had in mind when he wrote the play. In discussions with Frost about the radio play project, SB expressed his wish for the sound of the sea in *Embers* to be given a “fresh approach”, not wanting the duplication of the electronic drone under the waves of the 1959 BBC production. See Everett Frost, “Fundamental Sounds: Recording Samuel Beckett’s Radio Plays”, in *Theatre Journal*, vol.43, no.3 (Oct, 1991), p.365

²²¹ Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.91.

the sea. [*Pause. Louder.*] I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand” (93); he raises it to summon sounds: “Hooves! [*Pause. Louder.*] Hooves!”(93). His voice carries emotion: he speaks “irritably” (102), “angrily” (103), “wildly” (100), “imploringly” (102), “confidentially” (101), “with solemn dignity” (96); his expression can be “violent” (96), “vehement” (95), “agitated” (95), “puzzled”(104). He imitates other voices: that of his father (96), his wife (100), and his daughter (96). He also makes noises with what Mladon Dolar describes as his “non-voice”²²²: he sighs (99,101) and laughs, both briefly, and long and horribly (98).

Henry’s voice is ‘alive’, it is noisy and expressive, and his moving body can also be heard. At the beginning of the play Henry’s footsteps are heard on the stones and there is a “slither of shingle” (93) as he sits. Not only is Ada’s voice ghostly, but the stage direction reads: “No sound as she sits” (97). Ada’s presence is registered by her voice alone. We cannot be sure if Ada is remembered or imagined by Henry, or, whether she is a visiting ghost. Just as Beckett’s decision to make *Krapp’s Last Tape* a stage play was probably influenced by an interest in showing Krapp manipulating and listening to a tape recorder, so his choice to make *Embers* a radio play is likely to have been motivated by what he did *not* wish to show. Beckett made it clear that the indeterminacy of the play was intentional and said: “*Embers* is based on an ambiguity: is the character having a hallucination or is he in the presence of reality?”²²³. The radio medium not only tolerates this blurring of reality, it actually creates and perpetuates it, and such “ambiguity” would be impossible to stage, or, as Beckett more laconically put it: “to *act* it is to kill it”²²⁴.

²²² Dolar describes the “non-voice” as “manifestations of the voice outside speech”. *A Voice and Nothing More*, p.23

²²³ Cited in Richardson and Hale, *Working Wireless*, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.278.

²²⁴ SB speaking about staging of *All That Fall* in a letter to his US publisher, Barney Rosset, 27.08.57, cited in Majorie Perloff, “The Silence That Is Not Silence”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.251

3.2.4. TRANSCENDENTAL VOICES

In *Krapp's Last Tape* sound technology had not only enabled Beckett to disembody a voice, it also allowed him to break up linear time by transporting Krapp's voice from an earlier period of his life into the present moment. In *Embers* sounds and voices also transcend linear time and space but on this occasion the protagonist needs no machine to summon his revenants. They are recalled from memory, as in the flashback scene between Henry and Ada twenty years earlier when they first made love, or, as Henry phrases it, "did it at last for the first time" (101). Alternatively, they are generated by Henry's imagination, as in the scenes between Addie (Henry's daughter) and her music and riding masters (98, 99), in which Henry is presumably absent. While Beckett could have exploited the radio medium to move seamlessly between past and present, real and imagined, he often does not do so. In fact, scene changes can be very noisy and affected: Addie's wails are "amplified to paroxysm, then suddenly cut off" (99), and the finite sounds of drips and hooves that Henry commands are similarly exaggerated, before being abruptly silenced (93, 95).

It is certainly notable that Beckett, once having found a medium in which he could transcend temporal and spatial limits effortlessly, should choose to do so laboriously. When naming the protagonists in Beckett's earlier novels, the "gallery of moribunds" as Molloy describes them (T, 126), the Unnamable says: "I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps, I don't remember, but it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist" (T, 320). A convincing argument as to why Beckett should wish the reader to "see the ventriloquist", or, in the case of *Embers*, the listener to *hear* the sound technician, is offered by Daniel Albright in *Beckett and Aesthetics*. He asserts that "Beckett's work is a calling-into-question of the medium in which the work occurs"²²⁵, and, in *Embers*, Beckett does seem to make the medium self-conscious in lines such as "listen to the light" (93). Not only can his father not

²²⁵ Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p.5.

see the light, he is dead and his imagined ghost is “blind” (93), but the radio audience cannot see the light. Is he drawing attention to the shortcoming of the medium, or is referring to the way in which the sound of words acts upon the imagination in absence of a visual element? Albright would certainly argue the former case as he believes that “Beckett...was less interested in what a medium could do than in what it couldn’t do – it’s areas of muteness, incompetence, non-feasance of transmission”²²⁶.

Albright claims that when Beckett wrote for radio, film and television he tended to “foreground the medium”, “to thrust it in the spectator’s face, by showing its inadequacy, its refusal to be wrenched to any good artistic purpose”²²⁷. To a certain extent, this “foregrounding of the medium” can be traced back to Beckett’s earliest literary creations. In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* he uses metafiction to comment on the fragmentary nature of the novel: “The only unity in this story is, please God, an involuntary unity” (DR, 133). And, in *Eleutheria*, Beckett gives a role to a Spectator who not only comments on the “stupefying” effect of the play (EL, 133), and indirectly play-going in general, but feels himself forced to intervene in order to bring the farce to an end.

It’s like when you’re watching a game of chess between two fifth-rate players. For three quarters of an hour neither of them has made a move, they’re sitting there like a couple of morons, yawning over the chess board, and you’re there too, even more of a moron than they are, rooted to the spot, disgusted, bored, tired, marvelling at so much stupidity. Until the moment when you can’t stand it any longer. So you tell them, but do this, do this, what are you waiting for? Do this and it’ll be over, we can go home to bed. (EL, 133)

Beckett’s readers, spectators, listeners, viewers, are rarely allowed to lose themselves in his plays: they are usually reminded in some way, often disconcertingly, of the artifice of what they are witnessing. It could also be argued that in the case of *Embers* it is particularly difficult for a listener to

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

become fully involved in the play because, according to John Pilling, it “seems to lack a real centre”²²⁸. The most probable centre is that of Henry’s consciousness, everything appears to emanate from there, even the sound of the sea, but the question which seems to beg itself is if this centre holds dramatically? Not only are listeners faced with the past and present voices of characters who are ambiguously present or absent, living or dead, but they must cope with two apparently unrelated stories: one enacted dramatically, and the other narrated as a fictional construct.

3.2.5. DRAMATIC AND NARRATIVE VOICES

Just as *Krapp’s Last Tape* is a transitional play in Beckett’s theatrical oeuvre, so *Embers* marks a turning point in his work for radio. *Krapp’s Last Tape* retains a conventional interior setting and *Embers* still has a “surface realism”²²⁹, as a quasi-realistic social, temporal and spatial context is maintained. In Beckett’s subsequent theatrical plays characters are dehumanised, either by being buried in mounds or stuck in urns, and the stage turns into a singular visual metaphor. Similarly, the radio plays that follow *Embers* break even further with what Beckett described in *Proust* as “the grotesque fallacy of a realistic art” (PTD, 76), to become spaceless, timeless constructs in which the sound of music and words are orchestrated with difficulty. And *difficulty* is already present in *Embers*, and perhaps it is its hybrid nature that accounts for this. The radio medium is good at tolerating ambiguity of time, of presence, of place, but the formal mix of dramatic and narrative voices does not make for easy, comfortable listening. By ‘dramatic voices’, I am referring to those made up of dialogue in the play, remembered or imagined, which pertain to Henry’s past life and current situation. By ‘narrative voices’, I am referring to those which tell a story which is apparently unrelated to Henry’s life. During the course of the play Henry

²²⁸ Cited in Paul Lawley’s essay, “*Embers: An Interpretation*”, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no.6 (Autumn 1980).

²²⁹ Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, (1962), p.250.

goes from being the protagonist of his own dramatic story to narrator of invented fiction, a switch which can be disconcerting and perplexing.

The narrated story of Bolton and Holloway does serve a dramatic function in the play. It is one of Henry's stories that he used to tell himself before he started to summon his ghosts. "I usen't to need anyone, just to myself, stories, there was a great one about an old fellow called Bolton" (94). When he feels his father's presence fade he imperatively calls for his story, he calls for the narrative voice which will take him away from dramatically recreating his own story. "[Pause.] Bolton! [Pause. Louder.] Bolton! [Pause.]" (94).

Historically, stories within plays served a functional purpose, as Albright points out. "If Euripides includes a substantial narrative of the sea-monster that mutilates Hippolytus, it's because sea-monsters are hard to put on stage; the story is simply a capsule version of a scene that might be dramatized, but isn't"²³⁰. If the dramatic function of the narrated Bolton/Holloway story is simply to be an illustrative example of one of Henry's stories why should it take up so much radio time, why should Henry go back to it three times during the course of the play?

The enigma of the Bolton/Holloway story is a critic's delight. An old man named Bolton calls another man to his house in the middle of a cold winter's night. The visitor, Holloway, also elderly, is a doctor, as well as being an old friend of Bolton's. When Holloway arrives at the house, Bolton pleads with him, but much to Holloway's irritation, he fails to express just what it is he wants Holloway to do for him. The story may seem simple enough, but what is its significance? Is Bolton Henry's alter ego, a fictive projection of self, or is he a father surrogate? Is the unspeakable need expressed by Bolton to Holloway representative of the child seeking to secure parental company (Bolton being, like Henry, an infantile adult)²³¹, or is he pleading for release from what Mrs. Rooney in *All That Fall* describes as "lingering dissolution" (15) in the form of

²³⁰ Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, pp.64-65.

²³¹ A Freudian interpretation favoured by David Alpaugh in his essay "Embers and the Sea: Beckettian Intimations of Mortality", *Modern Drama* 16 (1973), p.322.

euthanasia, or merely relief through anaesthesia? “If it’s an injection you want, Bolton, let down your trousers and I’ll give you one, I have a panhysterectomy at nine’, meaning of course the anaesthetic” (103). Interpretations of the meaning of the Bolton/Holloway story abound²³², but within the context of a study of the performative voice the most pressing questions are why Beckett should insert narrative into a dramatic framework, how the juxtaposition is effected, and what the two different elements sound like.

3.2.6. POST-STORYTELLING IN POST-THEATRE

Just as it is not the first time that Holloway has been called upon by Bolton to help him with his unspoken need, “[w]e’ve had this before, Bolton, don’t ask me to go through it again” (104), nor is it the first time that Beckett had inserted apparently unrelated narrative into a play. In *Endgame* Hamm relates an on-going story, which, as in *Embers*, may be thematically linked to the central drama²³³. Indeed, the fact that Hamm describes it as his “chronicle” suggests that there is some truth in it. In a discussion of *Endgame* as a “post-theatrical” play²³⁴, Albright argues that “narrative has usurped the place of drama since the drama can’t constitute itself properly – gazing at the lacuna where a play ought to be, the characters try to fill it by telling stories”²³⁵. What is interesting about the narrative in what he describes as a “post-theatrical” play is that it too might also be considered as ‘post’, giving

²³² For discussions of the significance of the Bolton/Holloway story, see Zilliagus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, pp.85-6; Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.28; Frost, “Mediating On”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, pp.324-5; Kalb, “The Mediated Quixote”, in Pilling.(ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, pp.129-30; Robert Wilcher, “Out of the Dark’: Beckett’s Texts for Radio”, in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, pp.10-11, and Rosemary Pountney, “*Embers*: An Interpretation”, in Marius Buning *et al* (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui* (2): ‘Beckett in the 1990’s’, p.271-72.

²³³ Daniel Albright suggests that it could serve as a prologue to the play explaining how Clov came to live in Hamm’s household. *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p.65.

²³⁴ He argues that “the domain of event... has contracted to a nutshell” and “the stage has lost its integrity”. *Ibid.*, pp.63-4.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.64.

credence to Walter Benjamin's observation in the 1930's that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end"²³⁶.

In "The Storyteller" Benjamin argued that "[m]ore and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed", and in *Endgame* there is considerable "embarrassment" when the wish to *tell* a story is expressed. Indeed, the only way that Hamm can secure an auditor for his story is by bribing his father with a sugarplum!

HAMM: It's time for my story. Do you want to listen to my story?

CLOV: No! [He goes to the door, turns.] I'll leave you.

HAMM: Ask my father if he wants to listen to my story. [Clov goes to bins, raises the lid of Nagg's, stoops, looks into it. Pause. He straightens up.]

CLOV: He's asleep.

HAMM: Wake him. [Clov stoops, wakes Nagg with the alarm. Unintelligible words. Clov straightens up.]

CLOV: He doesn't want to listen to your story.

HAMM: I'll give him a bon-bon. [Clov stoops. As before.]

CLOV: He wants a sugar-plum.

HAMM: He'll get a sugar-plum. [Clov stoops. As before.]

CLOV: It's a deal! (E, 34-35)

One of the reasons that Benjamin gives for the declining interest in listening to stories is the fact that fewer people are encountered "with the ability to tell a tale properly"²³⁷. And Hamm cannot tell the tale properly, his narrative method epitomising that of the moribund storyteller. He uses the rhetorical devices of the art (repetition for dramatic emphasis, rhetorical questions, summarising, the authorial aside, a special narrative tone) but he does so in such an amateurish fashion that the overall texture of the narrative is one of collage. The chopping and changing between direct speech and descriptive

²³⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller", Harry Zorn (trans.), in *Illuminations*, (1999), p.83. First published in *Orient und Okzident*, 1936.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.83.

language is comically unnatural, indeed, Hamm's inept story-telling seems to stand as a veritable parody of the art.

Come on, man, speak up, what is it you want from me, I have to put up my holly. [Pause.] Well to make it short it finally transpired that what he wanted from me was... bread for his brat. Bread? But I have no bread, it doesn't agree with me. Good. Then perhaps a little corn? [Pause. Normal tone.] That should do it. [Narrative tone.] Corn, yes, I have corn, it's true, in my granaries. But use your head. I give you corn, a pound, a pound and a half, you bring it back to your child and you make him – if he's still alive – a nice pot of porridge [NAGG reacts], a nice pot and a half of porridge, full of nourishment. Good. The colours come back into his little cheeks – perhaps. And then? [Pause.] I lost patience. [Violently.] Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! [Pause.] It was an exceedingly dry day, I remember, zero by the hygrometer. Ideal weather, for my lumbago. [Pause. Violently.] But what in God's name do you imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you? [Pause.] Gradually I cooled down, sufficiently at least to ask him how long he had taken on the way. Three whole days. Good. In what condition he had left the child. Deep in sleep. [Forcibly.] But deep in what sleep, deep in what sleep already? [Pause.] Well to make it short I finally offered to take him into my service. (E, 37)

While the insertion of stories into the drama of *Endgame* is self-conscious and awkward, ultimately, it does not seem to cause problematic structural or linguistic dislocation. In fact, these “bits and scraps” of narrative (HIS, 7), Hamm's “chronicle”, Nagg's “story of the tailor” (E, 21-22), fit in with the motley nature of the play as a whole. Within the context of a theatrical pot-pourri, in which poetic soliloquy is juxtaposed with slap-stick humour on a stage scattered with debris from “uncoordinated bits of business”²³⁸, Hamm's unfinished story is perhaps no more perplexing than his unfinished three-legged toy pomeranian (E, 30-31).

Like *Endgame*, *Embers* is a play made up of ‘bits and scraps’, it is a miscellany of assorted voices, noises, and fragmented stories. However, whereas the ‘bitty’ narratives seem to cohere to a general eclecticism in *Endgame*, the narrative sequences in *Embers* do not adhere so readily to the surrounding drama. One of the reasons for this sense of dislocation may be

²³⁸ Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p.64.

explained by the difference of medium: when narrative is included in a stage play the audience can visually witness the insertion, while a radio audience is swept up directly into the story. As Walter Ong has observed in his study of orality and literacy: “Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer”²³⁹. And in *Embers* the hearer is taken in seconds from the intimacy of Henry’s thoughts and memories and dumped in the no-man’s-land of a quite different fiction. The sense of having lost one’s bearings is partly caused by the difference of scenic location between the drama and the narrative. Henry transports the radio listener from an open seascape to a closed dark room. Hamm’s story also takes place in a very different setting, outdoors on “a glorious bright day” (E, 36), but the difference here is that all the while the audience is listening, they are simultaneously looking at the dimly lit interior from where Hamm is telling the story. In this sense the eye blinds the imagination.

While absence of a visual element invariably contributes to the disorientating split between drama and narrative in *Embers*, it is not perhaps the principal cause. What seems to confine the Bolton/Holloway story to a separate acoustic space is the *way* in which Henry relates the narrative. Unlike in *Endgame*, or *All That Fall*²⁴⁰, no tone is specified in the script, in fact, directions to the actor are minimal. They comprise the quoting of direct speech, indicated by quotation marks, the position and length of pauses, emphasis of the repeated word “PLEASE” (95), denoted by capitals, and one “long laugh” by Henry as an aside (98). The absence of information in the script about how the Bolton/Holloway story should be told is notable when compared with the adverbs and adjectives that abound in the rest of the script when Henry is speaking to, or summoning up, his revenants. There *is* movement in Henry’s voice when he is telling the Bolton/Holloway story but

²³⁹ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (1982), p.72.

²⁴⁰ The script specifies Mr. Rooney use a “narrative tone” when he is describing what happened in the railway carriage (32-34).

this is intrinsic in the language that he uses rather than conveyed by vocal timbre.

3.2.7. SOUND TABLEAUX

The Bolton/Holloway story is strongly rhythmical, its language being highly compressed and paratactic. A scene is created both visually and aurally in words, unit by unit, clause by clause: we can hear the storyteller constructing the place, characters and mood.

Holloway on the rug, fine old chap, six foot, burly, legs apart, hands behind his back holding up the tails of his old macfarlane, Bolton at the window, grand old figure in his old red dressing-gown, back against the hangings, hand stretched out widening the chink, looking out, white world, great trouble, not a sound, only the embers, sound of dying, dying glow, Holloway, Bolton, Bolton, Holloway, old men, great trouble, white world, not a sound. (95)

This verbal painting finds a striking parallel in the short prose work “One Evening”²⁴¹ in which a tableau is also painted in words.

He lay face downward and arms outspread. He wore a greatcoat in spite of the time of year. Hidden by the body a long row of buttons fastened it all the way down. Buttons of all shapes and sizes. Worn upright the skirts swept the ground. That seems to hang together. Near the head a hat lay askew on the ground. At once on its brim and crown. He lay inconspicuous in the greenish coat. (253)

The narrator creates images, posture, colour, phrase by phrase, just like Henry, just like the narrator of *How It Is*²⁴², a novel Beckett started work on shortly after writing *Embers*.

I look to be about sixteen and to crown all glorious weather egg-blue sky and scamper of little clouds I have my back turned to me and the girl too whom I hold who holds me by the hand the arse I have. (HIS, 31)

“[I]t’s a help to go like that piecemeal it helps me”, says the narrator of *How It Is* (HIS, 31), and Henry constructs the interior scene between Bolton and

²⁴¹ A short prose piece originally written in French in 1979 under the title “Un Soir”. Translated into English by SB.

²⁴² Originally written in French as *Comment c’est*. SB started the novel in 1958, completed it in 1960, and later translated it into English.

Holloway similarly, in dribblets of sound. Ironically, Henry's poetic language with its repetitions and regular stresses actually seems to emulate the sound it is meant to parry.

...white world, great trouble, not a sound, only the embers, sound of dying,
dying glow, Holloway, Bolton, Bolton, Holloway, old men, great trouble,
white world, not a sound.' (95)

Radio listeners cannot hear the sound of the embers, "[s]hifting, lapsing, furtive like, dreadful sound" (95), but they can hear the "strange" sound of the sea (93) in the pauses in the narrative and the hypnotic sound of Henry's language coming to them in waves. The incessant rhythm seems to be the result of "little blurts" and "midget grammar"²⁴³ (HIS, 84). Subjects, articles, and conjunctions are pushed out to give way to sequences of noun clauses, weighted with adjectives, punctuated with commas. "Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin, lashes gone, whole thing swimming, and the candle shaking over his head" (104). Bolton's urgency and distress seems to be inherent in the language itself: the "great trouble" (94 *passim*) is in the *sound* of the narrative.

3.2.8. AMBIVALENT TANDEM

What is perhaps so disconcerting about the Bolton/Holloway story, linguistically speaking, is the abruptness of the transition between dramatic dialogue and highly condensed poetic narrative. There is but a pause, "a bar's rest"²⁴⁴, between the two. It could be argued that this rude change of voice is even more perplexing for a listener than the relay between words and music in the preceding radio plays, *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. At least in these plays a central character conducts the two disparate elements; in *Embers* there is no mediator. Henry as dramatic protagonist-cum-fictional-narrator must effect the shift using his voice alone.

²⁴³ In the French original: «petits paquets grammaire d'oiseau» (CC, 120).

²⁴⁴ Beckett's *Textes pour rien* (*Texts for Nothing*) derived their title from the musical term 'mesure pour rien'.

While the scenic and linguistic transitions in the play are brusque and disruptive the dramatic and narrative voices in the play are not entirely discrete. As Henry tells us cryptically in confidential tone: “There is a levelling going on!” (101). He seems to be talking about the shingle on the beach, but he could equally be speaking about the two stories in the play. Towards the end of *Embers*, when Henry finishes Ada’s story of her first and last encounter with his father, Henry’s description becomes strongly rhythmical, paralleling the elliptic language used in the Bolton/Holloway narrative.

Stands watching you a moment then on down path to tram, up on open top and sits down in front. [Pause.] Sits down in front. [Pause.] Suddenly feels uneasy and gets down again, conductor: ‘Changed your mind, Miss?’, goes back up path, no sign of you. [Pause.] Very unhappy and uneasy, hangs round a bit, not a soul about, cold wind coming in off sea, goes back down path and takes tram home. [Pause.] Takes tram home. (103).

Likewise, Henry’s own story seems to invade the end of the Bolton/ Holloway story with the use of the second person pronoun, which he had only previously used to address his absent father.

Candle shaking and guttering all over the place, lower now, old arm tired takes it in the other hand and holds it high again, that’s it, that was always it, night and the embers cold, and the glim shaking in your old fist, saying, Please! Please! (104)

The two stories therefore seem to mingle linguistically, which has the effect of blurring the boundary between them, and this dissolving of time, person and place is not uncommon in Beckett’s work. In the late novel *Company* (1980), a memory beginning with a young boy together with his father in a summerhouse metamorphoses into a sexual encounter of late adolescence:

The ruby lips do not return your smile. Your gaze descends to the breasts. You do not remember them so big. To the abdomen. Same impression. Dissolve to your father’s straining against the unbuttoned waistband. Can it be she is with child without your having asked for as much as her hand? (C, 58)

Like Hamm in *Endgame*, there appears to be “something dripping” in Henry’s head (E, 19), “splash, splash” (E, 35), but it is not sufficient to merge the two stories. The listener is ultimately left with two distinct, if slightly distorted,

sound images. One is that of Henry's father viewed from a distance "sitting on a rock looking out to sea", completely immobile "as if he had been turned to stone" (102). The other is a "ghastly" flickering close-up of the two old men face to face in the candlelight: "fixes Holloway, eyes drowned, won't ask again, just the look" (104). As the stories near their climactic point, Henry is unable to collapse the still, hard, lonely image of his father with the evanescent, waxy-watery stare between Bolton and Holloway and he abandons them both. Ada turns her back on Henry's father to carry on down the path and take the tram home, and Holloway breaks Bolton's fixed stare by covering his face. Checkmate is called but the king is not taken. Denouement is imminent and yet it does not come. "It's time it ended", says Hamm, "and yet I hesitate to – [he yawns] – to end" (E, 12).

The tension between the dramatic and narrative elements in the play will not slacken until Henry is able to finish both stories, and, as he admits, this is precisely what he is unable to do. "I never finished any of them", he says. "I never finished anything, everything went on forever" (94). And so Henry is destined to retell his own story through the voices of his revenants and repeat his invented fictions *ad infinitum*. The distinctive formal strands of *Embers* therefore appear to work in ambivalent tandem underpinning the central theme of impasse in the play. When the two stories begin to linguistically seep into one another, Henry's repeated expletive "Christ" (103) halts the process of dissolution and effectively closes the sluice gate. Henry, like his father, opts for flight rather than confrontation: "Slam life shut like that!" (96). And it seems to be this inability to breakdown mental barriers which serves to condemn Henry's fictions to acoustic confinement. In *Embers* there is no confrontation between, or sustained effort to unite, the dramatic and narrative voices in the play. Their relationship seems to be one of ambivalence. They alternate discretely, seep into one another, then are walled round again. Like Maddy Rooney in *All That Fall*, they have a precarious

linguistic existence, vacillating in sound in a state of “abortive explosiveness”²⁴⁵.

3.2.9. ORALITY, WRITING AND VOICE

One of the most perplexing questions that *Embers* raises is *why* Beckett should insert such a long disjointed narrative into a radio play. Just when he had found an ideal way to unlock thoughts and memories from the printed page and release them into pure sound, why should he introduce the stricture of a narrative form? In order to broach what seems to be a blatant contradiction, it might be useful to consider the different textures in the play in terms of the “spokenness” of each, in other words, their “orality”.

In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Walter Ong makes a distinction between what he calls “primary” and “secondary orality”:

I style the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, ‘primary orality’. It is ‘primary’ by contrast with the ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print.²⁴⁶

Both the dramatic and narrative voices in *Embers* seem to come under Ong’s umbrella term “secondary orality”. They are performed orally, dependent on technology for their dissemination; and their composition, and, to a certain extent, direction, are determined by a written script. However, the narrative voice in the play *does* differ greatly from the dramatic voices in the play, the telling of the tale constantly pushing its way to the fore. In this sense, the Bolton/Holloway story seems to strain towards primary orality. The way in which Henry pieces together his narrative, revising it as he goes along, makes it seem as if he were trying to faithfully represent a story that he had been told long ago. Could it be that he is guided more by the sound of words than

²⁴⁵ SB used this phrase to describe Maddy Rooney in *All That Fall*. Cited in Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.15.

²⁴⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.11.

by their sense? Perhaps it is not so much that the image of “shutters” and “sitting” is wrong, but that the sound of the words themselves do not strike a cord in his aural memory?

Before the fire with all the shutters...no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn and the light, no light, only the light of the fire, sitting there in the...no, standing, standing there on the hearth-rug in the dark before the fire. (94)

Is Beckett attempting to connect with a more primary form of orality like the narrator of *How It Is* who says it as he hears it with “scraps of an ancient voice in me not mine” (*HIS*, 7)? As commentators have pointed out, radio as a form of oral literature, is a way of reconnecting with the tradition of recited poetry²⁴⁷. Or is he perhaps drawing attention to the artistic process of writing itself, the arduous task of finding the right word, of saying words out loud before committing them to writing?

While both possibilities involve articulated speech, the second emphasises the intrinsic role that sound plays in a written text. As Ong argues, “the basic orality of language is permanent”²⁴⁸, articulated sound still permeates reading and writing:

Reading a text means converting it to sound, aloud or in the imagination, syllable-by-syllable in slow reading or sketchily in the rapid reading common to high-technology cultures. Writing can never dispense with orality.²⁴⁹

Beckett certainly shared the view that writing did not dispense with orality. Writing in defence of Joyce’s *Work in Progress* in 1929 Beckett claimed, “It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to.”²⁵⁰ Joyce’s words are not prosaic: “They are alive. They elbow their way on to the page, and glow and blaze and fade and

²⁴⁷ A point made in Richardson and Hale, “Working Wireless”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.281.

²⁴⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.7.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

²⁵⁰ “Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce”, in Cohn, *Disjecta*, p.27.

disappear”²⁵¹. But to find such vibrancy and expression, slow, painstaking work must be done. Beckett saw this first hand when he worked as one of Joyce’s researchers for “Work in Progress” in the late 1920’s. At times he also acted as Joyce’s scribe and this would have made him acutely aware of the sound of the words as he wrote them down. Indeed, Henry’s paused corrected narrative bears a remarkable resemblance to dictated speech. Beckett went on to draw more explicit attention to the transformation of verbal to written language in *Rough for Radio II*²⁵². In this play, a character named Fox is tortured until he speaks, then his speech is immediately converted into literal transcript by a female character called Stenographer. In addition to the central dramatic situation of a tortured victim being submitted to an inquisition of unknown purpose - “we do not know... what exactly it is we are after, what sign or set of words” (122), says Animator, who controls the proceedings - there also seems to be a concurrent linguistic drama: that of sounded language as it is locked into writing.

As previously mentioned, central to Enoch Brater’s *The Drama in the Text* is an insistence on the performative nature of voice in Beckett’s prose and scripts: he believes that the memorability of passages from *Molloy* (T, 53 and 18) derive from the fact that they are so “speakable”²⁵³. However, as Daniel Albright has pointed out, whilst there may be drama in the text, the trilogy also self-consciously draws attention to its written status.

The premise of the trilogy is to place extreme stress on the writtenness of the text, from Molloy’s asylum notes to Malone’s Venus pencil to Moran’s report; but this emphasis sets up a counter-pressure: the text wishes to assert its status as oral speech, and so dislocated and unplaceable voices start to leak into the text from all directions.²⁵⁴

This “equivocation between the vocal and the written nature of language”²⁵⁵ in Beckett’s prose fiction also seems to be implicit in his drama. While voices in

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.28.

²⁵² *Rough for Radio II* was originally written in French in the early sixties and titled *Pochade radiophonique*. It was first broadcast as ‘Rough for Radio’ on BBC Radio 3, April 1976.

²⁵³ Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.4.

²⁵⁴ Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p.4.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the text are straining towards spoken utterance, those in the drama often take refuge in electronic or literal transcription. This oscillation between articulated speech and writing will be more fully treated in chapter four, “Voice from Page to Stage”, but a brief look at this disputed divide may help to shed light on the uncomfortable coexistence of the dramatic and narrative voices in *Embers*.

Using Ong’s definitions, the voices of Henry’s ghosts heard over the radio demonstrate secondary orality, but Richard Begam, in his essay “Beckett and Postfoundationalism, or, How Fundamental are those Fundamental Sounds?”²⁵⁶, would argue that they belong more to writing than they do to speech due to their reliance on the simulacral effects of the radio medium.

Radio broadcasts, as well as tape recordings, function as kinds of ‘writing’ insofar as they literally reconfigure the voice, transcribe it in such a way that it becomes a form of secondary representation. That transcription is made electronically rather than scriptively, technologically rather than manually, but it is a transcription nevertheless...²⁵⁷

In fact, both Ong and Begam agree that electronically produced voices are secondary representations, what they diverge on is whether these voices belong more to *parole* or *écriture*.

What does seem clear is that Henry’s revenants, including those imitated by Henry, speak their lines fluently. There are no false starts, erasures or substitutions. The words are either blurted out in short exclamations:

[Henry] “Run along now, Addie, and look at the lambs”. [Imitating Addie’s voice.] “No papa.” [Violent.] “Go on with you when you’re told and look at the lambs!” [Addie’s loud wail.] (96)

or, they come in a stream of speech:

[Ada] “You should see a doctor about your talking, it’s worse, what must it be like for Addie? [*Pause*.] Do you know what she said to me once, when she was still quite small, she said, Mummy, why does Daddy keep on

²⁵⁶ Richard Begam “Beckett and Postfoundationalism, or, How Fundamental are those Fundamental Sounds”, in Richard Lane (ed.), *Beckett and Philosophy* (2002), pp. 11-39.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.36, note 25.

talking all the time? She heard you in the lavatory. I didn't know what to say." (100).

In both instances speech propels itself, not just through sound and bursts of air, but by the will of the speaker. Dialogue may not be natural but it is spontaneous. In the Bolton/Holloway story, however, the narrative is crafted. Bolton's distress is communicated through carefully patterned language more akin to written or recited language than spontaneous speech.

In *Embers* the dialogue is released into the evanescence of sound²⁵⁸, but the repeated rhythmic phrases of the Bolton/Holloway story make it more enduring. Despite having found a medium which could turn thoughts, memories, and voices into sounded language, the desire to leave a "residue"²⁵⁹ of some kind is still present in the Bolton/Holloway narrative. The written voice "murmuring a trace" (TFN13, 152) in the prose fiction has become a spoken one which through its composition and relation vies to imprint itself on the aural memory.

The narrator in *Texts for Nothing 4* says that "once there is speech, no need of a story" (116). However, when Beckett turns from writing prose to drama, the stories do not cease. On the contrary, it would seem he interrupts dramatic dialogue to insert extraneous narrative as a way of providing a literal counter to the verbal. This switching between dramatic and narrative voices in *Embers* therefore appears to represent Beckett's preoccupation with the instability of spoken and written language, a concern which is further reflected in the way he subsequently alternated between writing for the page and the stage, radio and television.

²⁵⁸ "Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent". Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p.32.

²⁵⁹ "Written words are residue. Oral tradition has no such residue or deposit". *Ibid.*, p.11.

3.2.10. A MIXED PERFORMANCE

Voices in *Embers* are three-fold: there are those that Henry remembers and imagines from his past; there is Henry's voice, both in 'dialogue' with revenants and narrating the Bolton/Holloway fiction; and there is the sound or 'voice' of the sea. All the sounds and voices heard in the play are created by Henry, but the only one he can completely control is his own. Interestingly, the performative voice makes its debut in Beckett's drama not as a human voice, but as a sound. It is the 'voice' of the sea that is performative: it asserts itself as an autonomous sound in Henry's head. It is the *raison d'être* for all the other voices heard in the play; Henry would not need to call-up voices, talk to ghosts or tell himself stories if it was not there. Henry's voice is also performative in the sense that it prompts the other sounds and voices heard in the play; he summons them into being. The intentionality of the voices heard in Henry's mind, however, is more difficult to establish.

Firstly, not all of the ghosts speak in the play. Henry can imagine his father's presence, but he cannot re-enact his voice (93). Even in the flashback scene when Henry remembers their final encounter, he has to imitate his father's voice (96), he cannot sonorously recreate it. Here Beckett radiophonically airs a silent voice, a voice that refuses or is incapable of performing. Henry does manage to summon other sounds and voices, but he usually has to call them twice.

HENRY: Ada [Pause.] Ada. [Pause. Louder.] Ada!

ADA: [Low remote voice throughout.] Yes. (96-97)

The voices in Henry's mind seem to be performing reluctantly, or, as Ada suggests, like sound recordings, they are weary from being overplayed. Speaking of Henry's father Ada says:

I suppose you have worn him out. [Pause.] You wore him out living and now you are wearing him out dead. [Pause.] The time comes when one cannot speak to you any more. (102)

In *Krapp's Last Tape* voices play when the protagonist instructs them to do so, but in *Embers* Henry is experiencing difficulty in getting them to sound upon request. As it is unclear if Henry's ghosts refuse or are reluctant to speak, or whether they are tired from overuse, these voices are perhaps best described as performing and non-performing voices rather than performative ones. They are not autonomous, they only sound when Henry instructs them to do so, and yet their unruliness implies they have ambition. These voices of the dead have performative potential, one that Beckett would help them fulfil in his television play *Eh Joe*.

The sound of the different voices and noises in the play is very varied. In the 1959 BBC production of *Embers* the noise of the waves is created electronically to produce an artificial sound, one which matches Henry's description of being "so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was" (93). Ada's voice in her dialogue with Henry in the present is also marked by 'strangeness'. It is quiet, inexpressive, with flat intonation. This ghostly voice contrasts with the loud 'excited' voices of the flashback scenes. The tone of these voices is exaggerated, melodramatic, as in the lovemaking scene between Henry and Ada.

ADA: [Twenty years earlier, imploring.] Don't! Don't!

HENRY: [Ditto, urgent.] Darling!

ADA: [Ditto, more feebly.] Don't!

HENRY: [Ditto, exultantly!] Darling!

[Rough sea. ADA cries out. Cry and sea amplified, cut off. End of evocation.] (100)

The voices and noises heard in Henry's head are all unnatural-sounding and they encompass a tonal range of overperformance, underperformance, and, in the case of Henry's silent father, non-performance: these voices cry out or die out. Henry's voice also has an uneven sonorous texture. In the dramatic strands of the play, when he is speaking to his father and Ada and in the

flashback scenes, his speech is spontaneous and his voice is emotionally charged. When narrating the Bolton/Holloway story, however, the rhythm of Henry's speech is regular, the language is patterned and deliberate, as if it came from a written source or aspired to a written status. Likewise, the tonal variety in Henry's voice becomes more limited; it is stripped of its emotional 'colour'.

This experimentation with the sound of speech and voices in *Embers* directly informs the plays Beckett went on to write. He treats the different textures of spoken and written language more exhaustively in the dramas that he wrote at the end of the 1970's and early 1980's²⁶⁰, but his attempt to bleed the drama from a voice and instil it into the sound of speech was a more pressing interest. This he developed in the play *Eh Joe* through the audio-visual medium of television.

3.3. THE VOICE CLOSES IN: EH JOE

3.3.1. WRITING FOR THE BOX

After watching Donald McWhinnie's 1961 BBC television production of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett commented: "My play wasn't written for this box. My play was written for small men locked in a big space. Here you're all too big for the space."²⁶¹ As Linda Ben-Zvi observes in her essay "Samuel Beckett's Media Plays": "[c]ertain writers may create plays without anchoring them to particular forms, but Beckett is not such a writer"²⁶². He not only wrote with a specific medium in mind, but was also acutely aware of the possibilities and problems of each. Even before experimenting with television, Beckett commented on how ideally suited it was for detailed depiction of

²⁶⁰ Most notably, *A Piece of Monologue* and *Ohio Impromptu*, which will be discussed individually in chapter five, "From Page to Stage".

²⁶¹ Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.487-488.

²⁶² Linda Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett's Media Plays", *Modern Drama* 28, 1 (1985), p.23.

figures and objects. “[Y]ou could write a very good play for television about a woman knitting”, he said. “You’d go from the face to the knitting, from the knitting to the face”²⁶³. And Beckett’s first play for the small screen did indeed comprise a closely focused study; it was the familiar one of a seated figure listening to a voice from his past.

Eh Joe was written in English in the spring of 1965 and filmed in the BBC studios in London in early 1966. The first English version was produced for BBC2 and broadcast on 4th July 1966, directed by Alan Gibson and Beckett²⁶⁴, although Beckett was not credited. Jack MacGowran played Joe and Sian Phillips played Voice²⁶⁵. The length of this production was 18’30”. In fact, the BBC *Eh Joe* was not the first to be broadcast. The play was premiered on German television on April 13th 1966. He, Joe was filmed at Süddeutscher Rundfunk in Stuttgart, directed by Beckett, with Deryk Mendel as Joe and Nancy Illig as Voice. This was closely followed by an American production transmitted by PBS, WNDT-TV, New York, on 18th April 1966. The play was produced by Glenn Jordan, directed by Alan Schneider (who closely liaised with Beckett via written correspondence)²⁶⁶, George Rose played Joe, and Rosemary Harris played Voice

3.3.2. A FACE, A VOICE AND A CAMERA

As well as being a play specifically for television, *Eh Joe* was also written for a particular actor’s face. Just as Beckett had written *Krapp’s Last Tape* for Patrick Magee’s voice, so he created *Eh Joe* “with Jack MacGowran’s doleful, haunted eyes and expressive face in mind”²⁶⁷. Although Joe is silent and motionless (bar the initial sequence when he shuffles round the room to check

²⁶³ Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.488.

²⁶⁴ I have worked with this 1966 BBC production of *Eh Joe*, which I was able to view on video tape at the British Film Institute, National Archive, 21 Stephen Street, London.

²⁶⁵ For details of subsequent broadcasts, see Ackerley and Gontarski, *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p.162.

²⁶⁶ See Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, pp.190-204.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.534.

he is unperceived), his face reflects the psychological battle that is going on in his head. Joe cannot mechanically control voices as Krapp could, the source of the voice that taunts him is internal, and the only means he has of silencing it is by mentally “squeezing” it until it weakens and finally fades. This process of “mental thuggee”, “throttling the dead in his head” (203), is visible in the “intentness” of Joe’s listening, his face freezing when the voice sounds, relaxing when it relents²⁶⁸.

While the still face has to be as expressive as possible, the active female voice has to be “dead”, like Ada’s in *Embers*, bled of its distinctive sonorous features. In order to achieve the ‘colourlessness’ that Beckett specified in his directions, “[l]ow, distinct, remote, little colour, absolutely steady rhythm, slightly slower than normal” (201-202), Siân Phillips²⁶⁹ had to speak into a long slim microphone right up against her mouth, then high and low frequencies were subsequently filtered out²⁷⁰. Although toneless, the voice still had to contain “plenty of venom”²⁷¹, and the merciless nature of the voice’s attack was created by carefully controlling the speed and rhythm of the lines as well as the pauses between them. Rehearsing the text before the BBC recording, Siân Phillips describes how the relentless, mesmeric quality of the monologue was painstakingly achieved under Beckett’s direction.

It was explained to me that every punctuation mark had a precise value and I began metronoming my way through the text...gradually remembering that a full stop is not a colon is not a hyphen is not an exclamation mark is not a semi-colon. We worked like machines, beating time with our fingers.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Beckett’s directions for “face” are: “Practically motionless throughout, eyes unblinking during paragraphs, impassive except in so far as it reflects mounting tension of *listening*. Brief zones of relaxation between paragraphs when perhaps voice has relented for the evening and intentness may relax variously till restored by voice resuming” (202).

²⁶⁹ SB’s first choice was the actress Billie Whitelaw whom he had worked closely with in the 1964 London production of *Play*.

²⁷⁰ Zilliagus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.198.

²⁷¹ SB in a letter to Alan Schneider 11.02.66, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.198.

²⁷² Taken from an interview with James Knowlson in 1994, in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.538.

As Beckett explained to Alan Schneider, what the female voice does with her words is vicious, “[e]ach sentence a knife going in, pause for withdrawal, then in again”²⁷³, and pausing is crucial to this effect. Beckett specified that pauses could be lengthened within paragraphs for dramatic emphasis, specifically before “Imagine if you couldn’t”, “Imagine what in her mind” (sic), “That’s love for you”, and even within sentences such as, “Gets out...the Gillette”, “Gets out...the tablets”²⁷⁴. It is therefore not the tone of the voice that intensifies Joe’s pain, but the torturing hiatus before the words are delivered.

In *Eh Joe* the relationship between listening face and extraneous voice, which had been an experimental feature of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, is kept and a new element is included, that of the camera. The link between the voice and the camera is a close one; they appear to be working in tandem, first stalking their victim, before moving in for the kill. They follow a similar trajectory, moving both thematically and visually from the general to the particular, each of the nine camera-moves²⁷⁵ apparently facilitating Voice’s ever more personal attack on Joe. When Voice reaches the climax of her monologue describing “the green one’s” despair and consequent suicide (205-207), the camera is tightly focused in on a close-up of Joe’s face and eyes, providing a suffocating visual equivalent to Voice’s most poignant and sustained attack.

Although the camera clearly appears to be working in league with Voice, they are treated as separate entities throughout the play. At no point do voice and camera moves come together, the optical and aural pursuits remaining entirely discrete²⁷⁶. This deliberate separation has the effect of converting the camera into a quasi-character in the play, one which can encroach on Joe’s

²⁷³ SB in a letter to Alan Schneider 07.04.66, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.201.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ While the Faber and Faber text contains nine camera moves, Beckett added an additional one in the BBC production, when “Voice drops to a whisper” (206), making the actual number of camera moves amount to ten.

²⁷⁶ SB’s direction prefacing the script reads: “Each move is stopped by voice resuming, never camera move and voice together” (201).

physical space, in parallel to voice's psychological transgression. Similar to its function in *Film*, the camera seems to be acting as a perceiving eye that wishes to make its presence felt. It wants to be both obtrusive and influential, a point made by John L. Kundert-Gibbs in his essay on Beckett's film and television work, "Continued Perception".

By operating outside standard dramatic and narrative conventions, the camera becomes almost a third character, slipping the constraints of dramatic delimitation to which it is normally confined, acting instead as the unnameable (better, uncharacterizable) operand which influences the characters on stage in more profound ways than any traditional camera – or character, for that matter – possibly could.²⁷⁷

The camera therefore does not complement Voice by visually dramatising her narrative; rather it provides a further dimension to her attack: she can move through time but not physical space. The television camera is both a visual witness to Joe's torment, as well as a physical manifestation of Voice's psychological bating of Joe, the zoom-ins making her advance tangible.

This account of a two-pronged sensory attack on Joe by Voice and camera, while convincing, is perhaps not entirely complete. As Voice in the later television play *Ghost Trio* tells us, we must "[l]ook again" (248). Although the close-up of Joe's face coincides with the Voice's most hurtful and damning accusation, ironically, this is when Joe is at his strongest and Voice at her weakest, in terms of her "audibility"²⁷⁸. In the physical weakening of Voice a further relationship appears, that between Joe and the Camera: the more Joe battles with Voice, the closer the camera gets, and the closer the camera gets, the weaker Voice becomes. While, as Martin Esslin has commented, "the camera is in some way the source from which the voice proceeds – Joe's conscience is moving in on him"²⁷⁹, at the end of the play when Voice whispers her fragmented monologue with only "the odd word" (204) audible, the camera's allegiance becomes ambiguous. Is it allied with Voice,

²⁷⁷ John L. Kundert-Gibbs, "Continued Perception: Chaos Theory, the Camera, and Samuel Beckett's Film and Television Work", in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.366.

²⁷⁸ Beckett's direction note reads: "Voice drops to a whisper, almost inaudible except words in italics", (206).

²⁷⁹ Martin Esslin, "Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting", in *Mediations*, p.151.

intensifying the sense of suffocation as Joe listens to Voice's death pangs: "That's the worst...Isn't it, Joe?...Isn't that what you told me...Before we expire... The odd word...Straining to hear..." (204)? Or is it working 'in cahoots' with Joe to stifle Voice, focusing in ever more tightly on her source, Joe's head?

Ultimately, no matter in which ways Voice and camera relate to Joe or to each other, what is clear is that there is constant juxtaposition between aural and visual perception. Joe, as Daniel Albright observes, is "sundered into a visual image and a sound image, both pertinent to the deep interior, but not obviously connected to one another"²⁸⁰. The fact that camera movements and speech never coincide serves to create this sense of severance, as does the use of a female voice²⁸¹ instead of Joe's. Clas Zilliacus points out that "there is a convention of the medium that tells us that if a camera comes to rest on a silent figure, then an off-screen voice stands for that figure's thoughts"²⁸². By choosing a woman's voice to impersonate Joe's conscience, Beckett interferes with cinematic expectation and, by so doing, grants Voice a degree of autonomy from the "penny farthing hell" (202) of Joe's mind. Indeed, this 'empowerment' of aural and visual elements, personified by Voice and camera, is perhaps Beckett's chief innovation in *Eh Joe*. Beckett had experimented with using the camera as a pursuing 'eye' in *Film*, but in none of his previous dramatic works had he given an externalised interior voice such power over the protagonist, never before had he pitted the self so maliciously against itself.

²⁸⁰ Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p.129.

²⁸¹ Rosette Lamont argues in her essay "Beckett's *Eh Joe*: Lending an Ear to the Anima" that the female voice might be acting as Joe's anima, the woman figure of the anima being one of the archetypes of the collective unconscious described by C. J. Jung in his *Aion*. In Linda Ben-Zvi, *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, (1990), pp.228-235.

²⁸² Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.187.

3.3.3. BATTLING WITH VOICE

Scenes of torture are by no means rare in Beckett's dramatic repertoire. There are instances of external infliction: Nagg and Nell are kept in dark dustbins in *Endgame*, Winnie is buried in a mound under a blazing sun in *Happy Days*, and Fox is blind-folded, plugged, gagged and hit with a pizzle in *Rough for Radio II*. There are also cases of pathological self-inflicted torture; these are epitomised by May's incessant pacing and reeling in *Footfalls*, or Mouth's unstoppable verbal outpouring in *Not I*. Taken as a whole, Beckett's plays contain a high dose of sadomasochism, and voice often plays an important role in the torture, in its description, if not in its actual meting out.

Eh Joe might also be considered as sadomasochistic. The voice that attacks Joe, and the one he struggles to silence, is a product of his own psyche. He is therefore both creator and destroyer of the voice, both assailant and assailed. Here there is both a clear parallel and difference between *Embers* and *Eh Joe*. In *Embers* Henry uses remembered and imagined voices and his own invented stories to cover up the sound of the sea which emanates from his conscience, beckoning him to consider his own implication in his father's death. In *Eh Joe* the conscience speaks out in the form of a relentless voice which accuses Joe of provoking an ex-lover's suicide. This accusatory voice hounding a guilty subject is an insidious element in Beckett's earlier prose work, we see it clearly ensconced in the head of the Unnamable:

...it's an indictment, a dying voice accusing me, you must accuse someone, a culprit is indispensable, it speaks of my sins, it speaks of my head, it says it's mine, it says that I repent, that I want to be punished, better than I am, that I want to go, give myself up, a victim is essential... (T, 379)

The female voice in *Eh Joe* personifies this 'silent' recriminating voice and the attack is frontal, in the second person. The nearest equivalent to this voice is most probably voice 'C' in the stage play *That Time* (1976), as it too emanates from a visible subject, a floating head, which it belittles and scathes in the second person.

...never the same after that never quite the same but that was nothing new if it wasn't this it was that common occurrence something you could never be the same after crawling about year after year sunk in your lifelong mess muttering to yourself who else you'll never be the same after this you were never the same after that... (230)

The main difference in dynamic between subject and voice in *Eh Joe* and *That Time* is that we do not see Listener battling with the voice, he is motionless; resistance is not registered upon his face or by the voice. Joe, however, is not passive. We see the “mounting tension of listening” reflected in his face (202), and we can hear the effect of his mental battle in the voice itself.

When the play begins Voice has already been “squeezed down” (203): the sound of her voice, once “like flint glass” (203) is “remote” (201), her speech is no longer continuous, but punctuated by short, regular pauses, until it drops to a whisper and becomes almost inaudible as Joe triumphantly stifles her. During the course of the play we hear enacted the fate that Voice knows will befall her, as it has the voices that have preceded her.

Squeezed down to this... How much longer would you say?...Till the whisper...You know...When you can't hear the words...Just the odd one here and there...That's the worst...Isn't it Joe?...Isn't that what you told me...Before we expire...The odd word...Straining to hear...Brain tired squeezing...It stops in the end...You stop it in the end... (203-204)

Joe's final smile²⁸³ may signify his victory for the evening, but we know via Voice's monologue that these verbal attacks are recurrent. He has silenced voices before, his father's, his mother's, and “Others...All the others” (203), but he is unable to rid himself of them completely. “The passion of our Joe” (204), as Beckett confirmed, is “to kill the voices, which he cannot kill”²⁸⁴.

Joe's aural torture, like the sound of Henry's sucking sea, is the eagle clawing at his liver. There is no way out for Joe, or Henry, or any other of Beckett's

²⁸³ The smile is not included in the printed directions of the play, but was an addition that Beckett for the 1966 BBC production of the play.

²⁸⁴ SB in dialogue with the German critic Siegfried Melchinger, cited in Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.103.

dramatic “creatures”²⁸⁵ caught up in the ever-turning wheel of self-accusation and self-inflicted punishment. While *Eh Joe* in many ways is just a further staging of the incarceration of self, the sense of interrogation and resistance is perhaps greater than in any other play. The camera, with its power to focus right in on the ‘culprit’, acts as an even more powerful inquisitor than the spotlights used to interrogate the three figures imprisoned in urns, in the slightly earlier play entitled *Play* (1963). And whereas the man and women in *Play* immediately confess to the inquisitor “[t]he response to light is immediate” (147), Joe resists and even gains a personal victory over his torturer, earning himself temporary respite. A decade later in *That Time*, the victim of the self, Listener, appears defenceless and passive as memories, reproaches and accusations come at him from all sides. As voice ‘B’ relates, he has given up, given in, seemingly lost the will to resist.

...when you tried and tried and couldn't any more no words left to keep it
out so gave it up gave up there by the window in the dark or moonlight
gave up for good and let it in and nothing the worse a great shroud
billowing in all over you on top of you and little or nothing the worse little
or nothing. (234)

The only act of defiance left Listener in *That Time*, as he weathers the relentless verbal onslaught taking place in his mind, is a horrible smile, “toothless for preference” (235). In the mid-1960’s, however, Joe is still battling away, confessing to nothing.

3.3.4. VOICE AND IMAGINATION

The sound of the woman’s voice in *Eh Joe* is drawn from Joe’s memory, as are many of the scenes and exchanges referred to in the monologue. Voice, however, not only feeds from Joe’s memory, but from his imagination. He imagines her, not merely as a voice, or confined to the past, but as an all-pervasive presence watching him, looking into him.

²⁸⁵ The Unnamable speaks of the characters and voices that he invents as his “creatures”, (T, 275 *passim*).

Thought of everything? Forgotten nothing?...You're all right now, eh? No one can see you now...No one all right now...Why don't you put out that light?...There might be a louse watching you...Why don't you go to bed?...What's wrong with that bed, Joe?...You changed it, didn't you?...Made no difference?...Or is the heart already?...Crumbles when you lie down in the dark...Dry rotten at last...Eh Joe? (202)

When Voice really 'gets at' Joe, however, is not when she is gibing at him or quoting his words back at him, but when she narrates the story of the "green" girl's suicide – an incident he did not actually witness. It is here that Joe's conscience, through Voice, engages imagination to fill in the details of a death that still plagues him – a death, which like that of Henry's father, must be imaginatively re-enacted because it can never be known. And Joe, like Henry, guiltily shifts the responsibility of describing the suicide to another. It is Ada who takes Henry up on to the cliff to witness his statue-like father shortly before his death. Likewise, it is a female voice that leads Joe down to the water's edge where his jilted lover was to take her life. Voice tells Joe to "imagine" the girl's desperation, "Imagine what in her mind to make her do that...Imagine..." (206), and as her voice grows weaker the repetition of the word "imagine"²⁸⁶ almost becomes a refrain. Indeed, "imagine" together with "stone", "Joe", "lips", "solitaire", "breasts" and "hands" are the only words that remain audible.

[Voice drops to whisper, almost inaudible except words in italics.]
All right...You've had the best...Now imagine...Before she goes...Face in the cup...Lips on a stone...Taking Joe with her...Light gone...'Joe, Joe'...No sound...To the stones...Say it you now, no one'll hear you...Say 'Joe' it parts the lips...Imagine the hands...The solitaire...Against a stone...Imagine the eyes...Spiritlight...Month of June...What year of the Lord?...Breasts in the stones...And the hands...Before they go...Imagine the hands...What are they at...In the stones... (206-207)

Here the guilty voice of conscience seems to be using imagination to intensify and justify self-castigation. If Joe is to blame for the girl's suicide, he is also responsible, as a Roman Catholic, for her eternal damnation. Voice therefore acts as his accuser and as instrument of his punishment. She originates from

²⁸⁶ In S. E. Gontarski essay "The Anatomy of Beckett's 'Eh Joe'", he comments that "when [Beckett] revised Voice's dying whisper for the BBC production, he added the word *imagine* four times in a short space, and although he excised almost all the other concluding repetitions in Ts [typescript] 5, he retained the *imagines*. Printed in Lance St. John Butler (ed.), *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*. Critical Thought Series: 4. (1993), p.315.

Joe's conscience and appeals to his imagination as both witness and accomplice.

This attacking, judging, torturing voice in *Eh Joe* is generated by the protagonist and all but takes him over as it selects memories and creates imagined scenes inside his head. Moral, dogmatic and guilty voices run throughout Beckett's prose and plays of the 1950's and 1960's preaching their sermons and babbling their confessions. Indeed, they comprise a form of language, a language of voices which Gilles Deleuze, in his essay "The Exhausted"²⁸⁷, describes as "langue II".

Deleuze identifies three different languages in Beckett's oeuvre which have a rough, although not strict, chronological division. "Langue I" relates language to objects which can be enumerated and combined. This type of language culminated with *Watt*, although "the comedy of exhaustive enumeration"²⁸⁸ can still be seen in *Molloy* when the protagonist considers how to circulate his sixteen sucking stones between his two pockets in such a way that they all should be sucked evenly (M, 64-69). "Langue II" comprises voices and impregnates the different media Beckett worked with: it "traces its multiple routes through the novels (*The Unnamable*), suffuses the theatre [and] bursts out in the radio"²⁸⁹. And "langue III" is described by Deleuze as "that of images, sounding, coloring"²⁹⁰, and is characteristic of Beckett's minimalist prose works and late theatre and television plays. Indeed, Deleuze argues that

²⁸⁷ Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted", in *SubStance* 78 (1995), Anthony Uhlmann (trans.), p.7. First published as *L'Épuise* (1992).

²⁸⁸ Beckett uses this expression with reference to vaudeville in *Proust*, (PTD, 92). In his essay "Beckett and the Seventeenth Century Port-Royal Logic", Frederik N. Smith puts forward the idea that Beckett's complex reasoning, which he uses to comic effect in *Watt* and his preceding novels, was a result of his reading *La Logique ou L'Art de Penser* (1662), known as "The Port-Royal Logic" in English, by the Jansenist Antoine Arnauld. Smith argues that Beckett takes Arnauld's Cartesian logic and turns it into a form of twentieth century anti-logic. Arnauld warned against the dangers of "incomplete enumeration", not reasoning thoroughly enough. Beckett, on the other hand, employs what he describes as "exhaustive enumeration" which, while entertaining, does nothing to enlighten him. Originally printed in *The Journal of Modern Literature*, February 1976, pp.99-108, reprinted in *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, Lance St. John Butler (ed.), pp.216-226.

²⁸⁹ Deleuze, "The Exhausted", in *SubStance* 78, p.10.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.9.

“langue III” “finds the secret of its assemblage in television, a pre-recorded voice for an image that in each case is in the process of taking shape”²⁹¹. While Beckett’s subsequent work for television can be seen to fit into Deleuze’s poetic category of “langue III”, *Eh Joe* belongs to “langue II”, a language in which “imagination is sullied by memory”²⁹², that cruel voice still using the real and imaginary past to both rouse and spear the subject.

3.3.5. EXHAUSTING VOICES

Deleuze comments how Beckett “exhausts” language, and perhaps he does. Throughout Beckett’s literary oeuvre there is a sense of the wearing down of the word. The “reason-ridden” imagination (C, 45) is ridiculed in the early novels as myriad enumerations posit nothing. The dammed-up voices of the trilogy, which began their early whispers to Vladimir and Estragon, vent themselves over the following two decades until the memories and invented stories they relate blur into a practically unintelligible stream of sound. Concurrently, there is a new and “difficult music”²⁹³ emerging, in which voice imbues a word with sound, but not necessarily meaning, meaning coming from repeated motifs and refrains. Distanced from the wordiness of rational argument, and the rush of emotionally charged intentions, Beckett’s work mutates into a hushed world in which words precipitate poetic images.

When Beckett started writing *Eh Joe* in April 1965, he had already started to create the hermetic formalist worlds that he would present televisually over a decade later. The symmetrically structured scenarios of whites, blacks and greys, tightly patterned on mathematical and musical principles in *Ghost Trio*, *...but the clouds...*, *Quad* and *Nacht und Träume*, can be traced back to short prose texts that precede Beckett’s first play for television. Imagination Dead

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p.8.

²⁹³ In *Murphy*, Celia likens the experience of listening to Murphy’s speech to “difficult music heard for the first time.” (MUR, 27)

Imagine (1965)²⁹⁴ is short and stark, in terms of its language and length, as well as the imaginary world that it presents. Two white bodies placed back to back occupy a skull-like white rotunda. The narrator's descriptions of sound, colour, movement, time, temperature and light, at first glance appear detailed and factual, reading like an inspection report – “inspection” being a word used (184). But what the ‘inspector’ actually perceives is a world of great indeterminacy in which rhythms are “countless” (183), sources of light and heat are unknown, and the movement between the states of freezing black to hot white, while repeated, is temporally unpredictable, and therefore unmeasurable.

Wait, more or less long, light and heat come back, all grows white and hot together, ground, wall, vault, bodies, say twenty seconds, all the greys, till the initial level is reached whence the fall began. More or less long, for there may intervene, experience shows, between end of fall and beginning of rise, pauses of varying length, from the fraction of the second to what would have seemed, in other times, other places, an eternity. (183)

Rather than depriving the imagination of sustenance, this strange text describing an alien experience serves to both tease and challenge it. As Enoch Brater comments, “[c]oncentrating on an image drawn, abstracted, and then metamorphosed from nature, the voice ironically celebrates an imaginative vision that is concrete and sensual and anything but dead”²⁹⁵. Similarly, despite its pretension to inspect and describe, the language used by the narrating voice is not without emotion. The intermediate lights are described as “feverish greys” (183), the “piercing pale blue” of the left eyes of the bodies are described as “striking”, as is the contrast between the “absolute stillness” of the bodies and the “convulsive light” (184). Even the resonance from a literary world seeps into the text in the line, “Hold a mirror to their lips, it mists” (184)²⁹⁶.

²⁹⁴ Originally written in French as *Imagination morte imaginez*, translated into English by SB. It was based on Beckett's earlier work *All Strange Away*, which was written in English and remained unpublished until 1976.

²⁹⁵ Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.87.

²⁹⁶ This line echoes that of Shakespeare's *King Lear*: “Lend me a looking-glass;/ If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,/ Why, then she lives (V. iii, 262-264). Kenneth Muir (ed.), *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: King Lear* (1972), p.202.

Imagination Dead Imagine is sensory, literary, but what is noticeably absent from the prose is a voice telling a story. Beckett still seems to be working with the skull, the white rotunda when rapped having “the ring of bone” (182), but his attention is turned towards human anatomy rather than psychology. It is the body, its position, colour and length of hair, colour of eyes and gaze that are described, not thoughts. Here “langue I” meets “langue III”: the narrator is still trying to name and nail down an unknowable realm in words, while the words have created images, sounds and colours of their own.

Still on the ground, bent in three, the head against the wall at B, the arse against the wall at A, the knees against the wall between B and C, the feet against the wall between C and A, that is to say inscribed in the semicircle ACB, merging in the white ground were it not for the long hair of strangely imperfect whiteness, the white body of a woman finally. (184)

“[T]he strangely imperfect whiteness” seems to slip out of the net of rational argument to become the predominant visual image. The exception that disrupts the pattern trying to lay itself down, introduced by “were it not for” or “but for”, is indeed “striking”.

Sweat and mirror notwithstanding they might well pass for inanimate but for the left eyes which at incalculable intervals suddenly open wide and gaze in unblinking exposure long beyond what is humanly possible. Piercing pale blue the effect is striking. (184)

The narrating voice which set out to wipe out imagination, “[i]slands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. Till all whiteness in the white rotunda” (182) has therefore achieved no such thing. This voice evokes images, colours, shapes, sensations, and it does so in a factual, disinterested language. Only at the end of the description does the initial destructive tone creep in, introducing uncertainty and putting the imaginary construct in peril.

Leave them there, sweating and icy, there is better elsewhere. No, life ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere, and no question now of ever finding again that white speck lost in whiteness, to see if they still lie still in the stress of that storm, or of a worse storm, or in the black dark for good, or the great whiteness unchanging, and if not what they are doing. (185)

There is similarity between this short text and *Eh Joe* in that there is a destructive element in both. In *Eh Joe* Voice intensifies Joe's sense of paranoia, pushing him further towards psychological breakdown, and in *Imagination Dead Imagine* the narrator creates an imaginary world which, once created, becomes highly unstable, if not totally lost. The tone of the narrating voice in both pieces, however, is very different. The narrating voice in the prose text is calm and rational, if finally a little weary, but Voice in *Eh Joe* is "a voicy sort of voice"²⁹⁷, subjective, both involved and personally implicated in her narrative. But the spiteful, wilful voice, characteristic of Beckett's work from the late 1940's to the mid 1970's, while still having power to affect, is clearly on the wane in *Eh Joe*. Ada's voice was stripped of colour, and Voice has lost her fluency, her words coming in waves of sound punctuated by silence. As Voice reaches exhaustion point at the end of the play, both the stream and volume of her speech become so diminished that all that remains are syntactically dislocated words floating alone as sound images. While Beckett may still be far away from creating "a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence" (D, 172), Voice's paused speech, like that of the narrator of *How It Is*, certainly has gaping holes in it. And making holes in language is exactly what Beckett spoke of doing in his letter to Axel Kaun.

"To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today." (D, 172)

Beckett's early aspiration to perforate language is therefore achieved in *Eh Joe*, and, along with it, he succeeded in further squeezing down, although not fully squeezing out, that menacing, grudging, judging voice from the psyche which imbues his work with attitudes and intentions. And, if *Eh Joe* can be seen as a play of mental and artistic excavation, then the camera is Beckett's chief tool. Indeed, it acts like a drill as it focuses in ever tighter on Joe's face to the point it would bore a hole in his skull.

²⁹⁷ Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p.134.

3.3.6. VOICE AS CAMERA

Due to Beckett's limited use of the camera, critics have commented that *Eh Joe* is like a radio play with an unnecessary visual component²⁹⁸, one Munich reviewer noting that "a radio apparatus would have sufficed, a couple of facial expressions on the picture tube were just an extravagance"²⁹⁹. *Eh Joe* is often treated separately from Beckett's subsequent television plays, and perhaps this is because, as Deleuze has pointed out, they appear to be expressed in different languages: *Eh Joe* being expressed in "langue II" and the television plays of the 1970's and 1980's, belonging to "langue III". What is particularly interesting about *Eh Joe*, however, is the way in which Beckett's experimentation with the camera in film and then television subsequently influences his work in other media.

There is a very close relationship between camera and voice in *Eh Joe*, not only as ambiguously related torturers, but in the sense that camera's increased magnification of Joe is paralleled by more tightly focused narration. As the camera moves in, so Voice moves from the general to specific, and when the camera is right up against the face, so Voice describes the suicide scene in grainy detail. There is nothing new in Beckett's descriptive 'zoom-ins', *Krapp's Last Tape* is full of them, as is *Embers*, but in Beckett's short prose texts which followed Beckett's initial experimentation with film and television³⁰⁰, the narrating voice appears to be acting like a camera. It can view and describe objects from different angles, as it does in *The Lost Ones*³⁰¹.

Seen from below the wall presents an unbroken surface all the way round
and up to the ceiling. (220)

²⁹⁸ In his essay, "Mediating On", Everett C. Frost comments that "[w]atching Beckett's television plays such as *Eh Joe*, it sometimes feels as if one were observing the protagonist hearing a radio program going on in his head". In Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.315.

²⁹⁹ Cited in Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, p.130.

³⁰⁰ Notably, *Imagination Dead Imagine* (*Imagination mort imaginez*), *Ping* (*Bing*) and *The Lost Ones* (*Le Dépeupleur*). All of these prose texts were translated into English by SB.

³⁰¹ Originally written in French as *Le Dépeupleur*. Begun in 1965 but not finished and published until 1970.

It also has spatial mobility and can observe the lighting, shading and fading of an image, all within a temporal context, as it does in *Imagination Dead Imagine*.

Go back out, move back, the little fabric vanishes, ascend, it vanishes, all white in the whiteness, descend, go back in. Emptiness, silence, heat, whiteness, wait, the light goes down, all grows dark together, ground, wall, vault, bodies, say twenty seconds, all the greys, the light goes out, all vanishes. (182)

The narrator's sensory field goes beyond that of a camera lens, as sound and sensation are also described, but the attention to size, position in space, as well as the lighting and framing of figures and objects, is remarkably televisual.

Although Beckett's work for film and television almost certainly had a considerable influence on his prose writing of the mid and late 1960's, it is equally true that his preoccupation with the description of visual perception predated his work for television. As early as the mid-1950's Beckett seems to be painting scenes with words, as in the following passage from "The Image"³⁰².

...we are on a racecourse heads thrown back we gaze I imagine before us still as statues save only the singing arms with hands clasped in my free hand or left an undefinable object and consequently in her right the extremity of a short leash leading to an ash coloured terrier of fair size askew on its hunkers its head sunk stillness of these hands and of corresponding arms question to know why a leash in this immensity of verdure and emergence little by little of grey and white spots which I promptly name lambs among their dams. (166)³⁰³.

While colour, shape, gesture, and movement, are described in these images, there is still very much a feeling of a two-dimensional world painted onto a canvas. In the following texts, however, spaces gain volume. The figure in *All Strange Away* occupies a sealed cube-like structure "[f]ive foot square, six high" with "six planes" (169). And even when a construct is spherical or

³⁰² "L'Image" is an excerpt from *Comment c'est*. It was first published in *X: A Quarterly Review* 1.1. (November 1959), and translated into English after SB's death by Edith Fournier as "The Image". See p.288 of the chronology for more information on the translation of this text.

³⁰³ This description is later reworked and included in *How It Is* (HIS, 31-32).

cylindrical, as in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, or *The Lost Ones*, there is insistence upon the three-dimensional nature of the space in the detailed descriptions of height, length and diameters. Interestingly, and perhaps perversely, Beckett seems to flatten the real and illusory cubic space of the theatre and television by focusing on flat images, whilst taking on a feat of engineering in his prose texts by creating virtual worlds of geometrical precision.

3.3.7. VERBAL USURPATION

In each of the three plays examined so far, Beckett fails to fully exploit the technology he has available; he either uses it clumsily or disables it in some way, and yet he seems to pay lip service to its potentiality in his prose work. Ironically, some of his short prose texts, like “Heard in the Dark I” and “Heard in the Dark II”³⁰⁴, seem to be more purely radiophonic than radio plays such as *Embers* or *Rough for Radio II*, which strain towards the written text. Similarly, in prose pieces such as *Imagination Dead Imagine* and *The Lost Ones*, Beckett envisions a world far more televisual than that created in his first television play. Beckett stated categorically to Alan Schneider, “I have a bee in my bonnet about mixing media”³⁰⁵, but his plays often seem to want to circumvent the formal constraint of the medium to which he has assigned them.

Central to this sense of ‘dislocation’, or challenging of the medium, is voice. In *Krapp’s Last Tape* a recorded voice emitted from a machine is not only more vociferous than the flesh and blood character seen on stage, but has an exuberance and vitality which cannot be matched by anything visually enacted in the play. In *Embers* internal monologue comprises of a patchwork

³⁰⁴ These short prose texts written in English in the late 1970’s are extracts from the novel *Company*, which SB was working on at the time. Both pieces describe sensuous tableaux to a figure that is lying on his back in the dark.

³⁰⁵ This comment was made in response to a request by Alan Schneider to stage the radio plays. In a letter from SB to Alan Schneider 14.09.74, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.320.

of memories and imaginatively recreated scenes is usurped by a narrating voice attempting to reconstruct a different fiction. And in *Eh Joe* it is a voice's descriptions that provide the visual stimulus that the television set's limited focus fails to deliver. In these three plays, voice is clearly still protagonist, but during the 1960's and 1970's Beckett's dramatic oeuvre becomes increasingly more metaphorical as he introduces the alternative languages of music, image and movement, which serve not only to complement and contend with voice, but at times silence it altogether.

3.3.8. BELLS, PAROXYSMS AND WHISPERS

The female voice in *Eh Joe* is a performative voice: it sounds in Joe's head against his will. This voice has a story to tell and battles to make itself heard. The struggle is represented visually by the camera movements and Joe's expression of mental concentration and effort, and aurally in the sound and fluency of the woman's speech. Voice in this drama of the mind has gained ground upon its subject; what were 'performing' voices in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Embers* become performative in *Eh Joe*.

In the three plays examined in this chapter an inverse relationship is forming between the intentionality and the materiality of the voices. In *Krapp's Last Tape* the recorded voice is totally dependent on Krapp, it has no will of its own, but, when played, it is a voice full of self-importance, "rather pompous", with a "strong" sound (57), ringing out like a bell. Like Krapp, Henry in *Embers* also manages to get voices and sounds to perform, but they are more recalcitrant, only playing upon Henry's repeated command. Their sound quality also differs from those on Krapp's high-fidelity recording. Just as the sound of the sea is "strange", so the voices and noises have a non-realistic quality. They are either distorted through amplification, blaring out till reaching wavering "paroxysm" (99), or, like Ada's voice, they are quiet and ethereal. In *Eh Joe* voice is full of intention: a voice of memory speaks out from Joe's conscience and pits its will against his. As in *Embers*, the

empowerment of voice leads to a corresponding impoverishment of its sound: the stronger its intention, the weaker it is materially. This female voice becomes so strong that it is reduced to a whisper. Ironically, the greater the will to speak, the quieter and more difficult to hear the voice becomes.

While I have been focusing on Beckett's dramatic representation of voice in three memory plays written between 1958 and 1965, from the early 1960's Beckett was also experimenting with ways of incorporating music, image and movement into his drama. The following chapter will show the way in which voice interacts with these different artistic elements and how this affects the evolution of the performative voice. The selected plays date from 1961 to 1975 and again span the different performance media of radio, stage and television.

4. VOICE AS PROTAGONIST

4.1. VOICE AND MUSIC: *CASCANDO*

4.1.1. RECORDINGS AND ERASURES

The radio play *Cascando* is a truly European affair. It was written in December 1961, and first broadcast in its original French version on October 13th 1963 on the France Culture service of the ORTF³⁰⁶. Roger Blin played “L’Oeuverer” (Opener), Jean Martin “La Voix” (Voice), and the part of “Musique” (Music) was composed by Marcel Mihalovici. The first English language production was broadcast on October 6th 1964 by the BBC’s Third Programme³⁰⁷. Donald McWhinnie directed Denys Hawthorne, who played Opener, and Patrick Magee, who played the role of Voice. Reference will be made to the 1964 BBC production, which has been made available on compact disc³⁰⁸, and a more recent recording directed by Everett Frost for the *Festival of Beckett Radio Plays* in 1988³⁰⁹, a project carried out with Beckett’s collaboration. Unfortunately, the first French version is no longer available for audition due to the fact that “the unique original tape was erased”³¹⁰ after it had been returned to Paris for transmission abroad.

4.1.2. VOICE AND MUSIC AS *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*

Cascando was fruit of a joint project between Beckett and the Romanian-born composer, Marcel Mihalovici. The French radio station RTF³¹¹ had commissioned a musical score for radio from Mihalovici, and he in turn had asked Beckett to write the accompanying French text. In fact, Mihalovici did

³⁰⁶ L’Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française.

³⁰⁷ The length of the productions varied considerably given the brevity of the play, the French version running for 28’00, the German only 19’00” and the English 21’09”.

³⁰⁸ British Library, *Samuel Beckett Works for Radio: The Original Broadcasts*.

³⁰⁹ Voices International, *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*.

³¹⁰ Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.144.

³¹¹ Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française.

not compose the music for the play until a year later, so when Beckett wrote the script in December 1961, he was working with the idea of music rather than an actual score. The radio play that Beckett had written in English for the BBC's Third Programme a month earlier, *Words and Music*, also took shape in a similar way. Beckett wrote the radiophonic text in November-December 1961 and then his nephew, John Beckett, subsequently composed the music³¹².

What is so innovative in *Words and Music* and *Cascando* is that words, voice, and music, are made autonomous members of the cast³¹³. In *Words and Music* the roles are specified as 'Words' and 'Music, referred to respectively by a third character, Croak, as 'Joe' and 'Bob', and in *Cascando* the roles are 'Voice' and 'Music'. True to his name, Words selects, arranges and enunciates lexis, whereas Voice uses words as a vehicle to tell a story. This idea for the dramatic personification of speech and music may have come to Beckett while he was working on an entirely different project, reminiscent of the manner in which he was most likely inspired to use a tape recorder on stage in *Krapp's Last Tape*. In 1960 Mihalovici finished a chamber opera based on Beckett's French translation of *Krapp's Last Tape*, *La dernière bande*³¹⁴. Subsequently, Beckett worked very closely with Mihalovici and the French actor, Roger Blin (who read the words), to adapt the text to accommodate the music or vice versa. James Knowlson comments that "*Words and Music* bears the imprint of these struggles to bring the two different elements together"³¹⁵: "My comforts! Be friends!" (127), Croak implores. *Cascando* does not involve such a "struggle", as Opener, the mediating third character, can combine Voice and

³¹² Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.497.

³¹³ Michael Bakewell, the BBC producer of the plays, "believed that they pioneered the role of music as an autonomous member of the cast of a play, quite different from its traditional role in radio drama as background music or as creator of mood or atmosphere". Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.496.

³¹⁴ The opera was for broadcast on RTF and the Städtische Bühnen in Bielefeld, Germany. When the music had been composed, SB and his German translator, Elmar Tophoven, worked with Mihalovici adapting the text to the music. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.466-467.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*,p.496.

Music “at will” (139), draw them together “[a]s though they had linked their arms” (143).

4.1.3. BECKETT, MUSIC AND VOICE

While *Words and Music* and *Cascando* are the first plays in which Beckett treats words, narrative, and music as different characters³¹⁶, he had been working with all three throughout his literary career. Music was very important to Beckett³¹⁷, not only did he play the piano, but he keenly appreciated music³¹⁸, admitting to André Bernold that if he had not been a writer, he would have spent his life listening to music³¹⁹. Melodies seeped into his work: Krapp sings Baring-Gould’s hymn “Now the day is over” (52, 59) in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Vladimir sings a nursery rhyme in *Waiting for Godot* (WFG, 57-58), and Winnie her “musical box tune” in *Happy Days* (57), which is the waltz duet from *The Merry Widow*. And when characters do not actually sing, they hear music. Molloy hears “a distant music” (T, 11), Maddy hears and murmurs the melody of “Death and the Maiden”³²⁰ in *All That Fall*, and music by Beethoven and Schubert forms an integral part of *Ghost Trio*³²¹ and *Nacht und Träume*³²², as well as giving the plays their title. But Beckett’s interest in music went further than incorporating snatches of songs and bars of music into his work, many of his plays and prose works actually resembling musical

³¹⁶ Beckett had introduced words and music in *Rough for Radio I*, which SB regarded as “something on the way to *Cascando*” and “superseded by it” (SB to Everett Frost 1988, cited in Brater’s *The Drama in the Text*, p.48). In *Rough for Radio I*, however, Voice had no script, and Music, no score, they were both “faint” sounds.

³¹⁷ SB’s relationship to music and how this is reflected in his literature is detailed in Everett Frost’s excellent essay “The Note Man on the Word Man: Morton Feldman on Composing the Music for Samuel Beckett’s *Words and Music* in *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*”, in Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and Music*, pp.47-55.

³¹⁸ Evenings spent with SB listening to classical music with Avigdor Arikha and Anne Atik are detailed in Atik, *How It Was*.

³¹⁹ Cited in H. Porter Abbott, “Samuel Beckett and the Arts of Time: Painting, Music, Narrative”, in Oppenheim, *Samuel Beckett and the Arts* (1999), p.8.

³²⁰ An extract from Schubert’s String Quartet no.14 is heard twice in the play, (12, 37).

³²¹ Excerpts from the Largo of Beethoven’s Fifth Piano Trio (*The Ghost*) are used.

³²² The last 7 bars of Schubert’s *Lied, Nacht und Träume* are heard.

compositions, as for example *Endgame* and *Play*, which he described as “a string quartet” and “a score for five pitches” respectively.³²³

Throughout Beckett’s literary oeuvre, words, language, and voice, are inextricably linked to musical principles. In Beckett’s prose work he carefully selects and orders words to create a certain cadence or mood, and employs punctuation to alternate between pausing and an uninterrupted gush of language. In his plays³²⁴ Beckett is able to treat voice more obviously as an instrument. Indeed, in *Rough for Radio II* the character Animator seems to conduct proceedings with his ruler, while the mute player Dick hits his instrument, Fox, in order to make him speak. In *Play* the conductor is the spotlight, the heads sticking out of urns only speaking when the light is placed upon them. In *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Krapp senior is the conductor of narrative, the tape recorder being his instrument. Even Henry in *Embers* has his instruments, his drips, thuds, and hooves, and the camera movements in *Eh Joe* could also be seen to conduct the direction of Voice’s increasingly personal attack on Joe. Dramatic voices are therefore often treated like instruments, and when Beckett was directing he rehearsed them very carefully, controlling tempo, tone and intonation. As Beckett’s favoured actress, Billie Whitelaw, said, it is essential to “play the right music”³²⁵. The quality of a voice was also of paramount importance to Beckett: “if he did not like the voice of an actor or actress all was lost from the start”³²⁶.

³²³ Cited in Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.103.

³²⁴ Elissa S. Guralnick comments that after *All That Fall* Beckett declined to use the word “play” for his radio work, preferring to use the word “pieces” which has a more musical connotation. *Sight Unseen: Beckett, Pinter, Stoppard and Other Contemporary Dramatists on Radio* (1996), p.77.

³²⁵ A comment made in the documentary accompanying the film of *Rockaby*, cited in Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.32 [note 51, p.182].

³²⁶ James Knowlson in Haynes and Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, p.114.

4.1.4. FROM ONE WORLD TO ANOTHER³²⁷

In *Words and Music* and *Cascando* Beckett includes the character of a ‘conductor’ to facilitate the movement between verbal and musical worlds. The earlier play is based on a master-servant relationship. Croak, whom Words addresses as “My Lord”, barks commands at Words and Music to play for his pleasure. He moves from one to the other, thumping his club on the floor and cursing them when their interpretations of his chosen themes of “love” and “age” fail to satisfy. In *Cascando*, the sounding of Voice and Music also seems to be dependent on an intermediary character, Opener, who ‘opens’ and ‘closes’ them “at will” (139). Here we see a sophistication of the technique used in the discarded radio play *Rough for Radio I*³²⁸, in which voice and music can be heard by the mechanical turning of two knobs. Jonathan Kalb views this “explicit association of mechanistic switching with the engagement of the imagination...one of the most fruitful metaphors of Beckett’s later career”³²⁹. Krapp ‘opened’ memories by switching on and off a recorded voice, Henry’s opening words in *Embers* consist of the command “On....On!” (93), and in the late theatrical play *What Where*³³⁰, Bam punctuates the dialogue with the phrases “I switch on” and “I switch off”³³¹. In the radio plays *Rough*

³²⁷ *Cascando* (141).

³²⁸ Originally written in French as *Esquisse radiophonique* 1961, translated into English by SB. SB commented to Everett Frost in the late eighties that it was “[u]nfinished and now unfinishable”, although a few recordings have been made for Israeli radio and a gallery installation in the United States. See Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.46. Details of a 1991 English version of the play, entitled *Radio I*, authorised by *The Estate of Samuel Beckett* after SB’s death, are given in a recent doctoral thesis by Luz Maria Sánchez Cardona, *Samuel Beckett y el arte radiofónico* (2007). Included as a sound appendix to the thesis is a CD recording of the play by the Dutch radio station, *Nederlandse Omroep Stichting* (NOS). Richard Rijnvos composed the music and directed the play, Michael Gough played the part of ‘He’, Joan Plowright played ‘She’, and ‘Voice’ comprised the recorded voice of the American composer, John Cage. For information about Richard Rijnvos’ production of the play, see his essay, “What is it Like Together? Genesis of the First Production of Beckett’s *Radio I*”, in Buning *et al* (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui* (2): ‘Beckett in the 1990’s’, pp.103-109.

³²⁹ Kalb, “The Radio and Television Plays, and *Film*”, Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p.131.

³³⁰ Originally written in French as *Quoi où* 1983. Translated into English by SB.

³³¹ Other instances of “mechanistic switching” in the dramatic works are: the spotlight in *Play*, which effectively turns the three voices on and off; the recorded voice in *That Time* that alternates between voices ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’, the rocking chair in *Rockaby*, whose movement controls the stopping and starting of the recorded voice; and Listener’s knock in *Ohio Impromptu*, which stops and starts the reading of a story.

for *Radio I*, *Words and Music*, and *Cascando*, voice, words, and music therefore seem to be dependent on an operator or controller, but, as is so often the case in Beckett's literature, what is heard in the play does not necessarily accord with the system that has been initially described or demonstrated.

In *Rough for Radio I* a male character called "He" tells a female character called "She" that Voice and Music are unaware of each other and cannot be "together".

SHE: They are not together?

HE: No.

SHE: They cannot see each other?

HE: No.

SHE: Hear each other?

HE: No. (108)

However, after She leaves, He tells Doctor MacGillyCuddy telephonically that the two channels have converged, "they're together...TOGETHER...the breathing...I don't know.... like...[*Hesitation.*]...one..." (101). At the end of the play the clicks of the knobs are no longer heard as Music and Voice fail to respect the rules of the operating system and the separate channels to which they were supposedly confined.

MUSIC: [Together, ending, breaking off together, resuming together

VOICE: more and more feebly.] (111)

In *Cascando* there is also a change in the relationship between Opener and the elements that he mediates. Initially Voice and Music only sound or cease when Opener verbally instructs them to do so, then they begin to alternate without Opener's apparent intervention.

VOICE: ...soon the dune...no more cover...not a soul...not-
[Silence.]

MUSIC:
[Silence.]

VOICE: [Together.] – rest...sleep...no more stories... (138-139)

MUSIC:

After Music and Voice cut off and Opener concludes, “So, at will” (139), it becomes ambiguous whose ‘will’ the sounds actually obey. Is it Opener’s, or like Words and Music, do Voice and Music have a will of their own? Indeed, when Opener says, “I’m afraid to open. But I must open. So I open” (142), he hardly seems to be acting out of freewill. Opener’s “cold” (137), master of ceremonies’ tone also changes during the play. As Voice and Music start to sound together, Opener, expresses his satisfaction, “Good” (147), he joins in with Voice’s entreaty, “Come on! Come on!” (142), he reacts to Music, “God”, “God God” (143). By the end of *Rough for Radio I* and *Cascando* the characters of He and Opener, who set out as both in control of the sounding of Voice and Music and apparently impervious to them, end up being neither. Voice and Music cannot be harnessed, nor can they fail to affect. Their situation is reminiscent of that of Krapp, who, while mechanically controlling his memories, cannot master the effect they have upon him.

In *Words and Music*, *Rough for Radio I* and *Cascando*, Beckett therefore conspicuously builds up two distinct worlds, one linguistic, the other musical. In all three plays there is a conductor of both elements, who is able to summon them singly or in unison, until a relationship appears to form between the two and the conductor is made redundant. When Croak shuffles away at the end of *Words and Music*, Words incites Music to play and Music obliges.

WORDS: Music. [Imploring.] Music!
[Pause.]

MUSIC: Rap of baton and statement.... (134).

Beckett seems to empower language and music in these plays. They start out as servants and then, by joining forces, appear to gain mastery. In each case the conductor, no matter how matter-of-fact initially, becomes emotionally

affected as Words, Voice, and Music sound together. He in *Rough for Radio I* becomes “very agitated” (110), “vehement” (111) he puts down the receiver “violently (110, 111); Croak becomes “anguished” (128 *passim*), he “groans” (128 *passim*) and then, overwhelmed by what he hears, leaves in silence (134); and Opener joins with Voice and Music “fervently” (144), as he is swept up into Voice’s musically assisted quest to finish his story to end all stories. There seems to be an inverse relationship between control and emotion: the elements play upon instruction, but the more they sound, the greater their power to affect, and the greater their power to affect, the weaker become the restraints that have been placed upon them.

4.1.5. DIALOGUES AND DUOS

Even though *Words and Music* and *Cascando* were written within a month of each other, and both plays have verbal and musical characters, the way in which the elements relate to each other varies considerably in each. In *Words and Music* there is blatant antagonism between the two elements: when Music plays, Words is heard to protest, “No. Please” (129, 132), and when Words appeals to Music, “Bob. [Pause.] Bob!” he receives a “[b]rief rude retort” (134). Beckett pits the two against each other in their attempts to impress Croak with their virtuoso performances, and, reportedly, Beckett’s intention was to make music victorious³³². The stage directions clearly make Music triumph. When Words and Music practise the Age sonnet, although Words sings the first line, Music immediately ‘improves’ on his effort and takes over the initiative to lead and rehearse Words.

WORDS: [Trying to sing.] Age is when...to a man...

MUSIC: Improvement of above.

WORDS: [Trying to sing this.] Age is when to a man...

MUSIC: Suggestion for the following.

WORDS: [Trying to sing this.] Huddled o’er...the ingle...

³³² SB to Theodor Adorno, cited in Kalb, “The Mediated Quixote”, in Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p.132.

[Pause. Violent thump. Trying to sing.] Waiting for the hag to put the...pan in the bed...

MUSIC: Improvement of above.

WORDS: [Trying to sing this.] Waiting for the hag to put the pan in the bed.

MUSIC: Suggestion for the following. (130)

As the play progresses, Music gains in both expressiveness and spontaneity. Music's interpretation of Lily's face is "warmly sentimental", while Words' description is "[d]isregarding, cold" (131). Unprompted by Croak, Music interrupts Words' oration with an "[i]rrepressible burst of spreading and subsiding music" (132), and at the end of play even Words recognises the superiority of Music's performance.

WORDS: Music. [Imploring.] Again!
[Pause.]

MUSIC: Rap of baton and statement with elements already used or wellhead alone.
[Pause.]

WORDS: Again. [Pause. Imploring.] Again!

MUSIC: As before or only very slightly varied.
[Pause.]

WORDS: Deep sigh. (134)

While it is clear that Beckett intended Music to be the most expressive and moving of the two characters, it is arguable as to whether this wish has actually been realised in the play. Jonathan Kalb is among the commentators who feel that it has not, saying that "far from proving the superiority of music as pure sound, liberated from rational ideas and references, the play confines it to a function very similar to that of a filmic signature score"³³³. The problem, as Kalb points out, may not lie so much with the composers who

³³³ Kalb, "The Mediated Quixote", in Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p.132.

failed to match their musical scores to Beckett's text and stage directions³³⁴, than the constraining nature of a script which insists on mimetic matching, verbal line for musical line. The complexity of placing words and music into dialogue with each other seems to necessarily compromise one of the two languages. Ultimately, Bob may upstage Joe, but it is verbal language that governs his music, literary themes that call his tune.

Beckett relaxes the stricture of a dialogic relationship between words and music in *Cascando*, he merely makes them audible by 'opening' them. Unlike *Words and Music*, *Cascando* does not aspire towards a finalised literary-musical piece, there is no such sense of rehearsal and performance, and the play's conductor-cum-audience does not come and go like Croak does. As in *Embers*, we seem to be hearing a day in the life inside a character's head. Like Henry, who lived with the sound of the sea and the voices of his talking ghosts, Opener lives with Voice and Music. His life seems to consist of amplifying and silencing the two streams of sound, which, as in *Rough for Radio I*, seem to go on all the time, "without cease". (107).

Rather than being based on dialogue, the play initially seems to resemble a tandem of verbal and musical 'monologues' controlled by Opener. The sense that the two elements are unaware of each other is strengthened when Voice and Music first play together in the section beginning, "-on...getting on...finish...don't give up...then rest..." (138). The urgency of Voice's story is not reflected in Music's playing, the two sound together but there is an absence of tension between them. As the play progresses, however, the elements begin to work more closely together. Interestingly, this is not indicated by Beckett in the stage directions; these are unusually stark with directions for Music comprising no more than a series of dots across the page,

³³⁴ In Kalb's opinion, John Beckett's original musical score "proved unable to communicate ideas specific enough to qualify as rational lines, much less repartee", and Morton Feldman, in his score for Everett Frost's 1988 production, also struggled in the words of Frost "in the face of imposed concisions". *Ibid.*

and those for Voice only the words of the text and the pauses³³⁵. However, in the 1964 BBC production, when Voice and Music sound together in the section beginning “-sleep...no further...no more searching...to find him...in the dark...to see him...to say him...” (141), Voice’s delivery becomes decidedly slower and Music matches the hypnotic rhythm of the words with pulse-like descending harmonies³³⁶. The sound of the combined elements is obsessive and repetitive: just as Voice fails to complete his phrases, so Music’s harmonies fail to culminate, and loop round again. Here Voice and Music’s combined efforts evoke a mood of suspension, stasis, and above all, inconclusiveness. Towards the end of the play Voice and Music ‘link arms’ anew in the section beginning, “-sleep...no more stories...come on...Woburn...it’s him...see him...say him...” (143). Here Music becomes picks up momentum and there is a sense of agitation in the highly rhythmic score which matches Voice’s breathless excitement as he goads himself and Woburn on to bring the story to a close.

While a relationship of sorts undoubtedly *does* form between Voice and Music in *Cascando*, there is not a sense that Music is being forced to interpret the mood of the narrative. Everett Frost has commented that “[t]he music augments, follows, and counterpoints Voice’s monologue with a ‘monologue’ (in musical form) of its own”³³⁷, it seems to illustrate and complete without compromising its individuality. Ironically, despite the fact that music and verse are naturally more compatible than narrative and music³³⁸, it is in *Cascando*, rather than in *Words and Music*, that the verbal and musical worlds are more harmonious. While *Words and Music* can give impressive solo

³³⁵ It should be noted, however, that SB, was fully involved in the first ORTF production. Mihalovici reported: “It was Beckett who supervised all the work at ORTF. He assisted both with the repetitions and the recording of my music”. Cited in Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.37.

³³⁶ The timings for this section are 12’43”-13’39”, “*Cascando*”, *Samuel Beckett Works for Radio: The Original Broadcasts*.

³³⁷ Frost, “Fundamental Sounds: Recording Samuel Beckett’s Radio Plays”, in *Theatre Journal*, vol.43, 3, (Oct, 1991), p.371.

³³⁸ Lawrence Kramer, in *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (1995), speaks of the incompatibility of music and narrative, arguing that “music can neither be nor perform a narrative”, p.99.

performances, when they are coerced into collaborating the result is strained, and in both the 1964 BBC and 1988 *Beckett Festival of Radio Plays* productions they sound as if they have been reluctantly yoked together.

Beckett's interest in the relationship, or lack of it, between music and narrative manifested itself as far back as 1932 when he wrote *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. In this novel he shows the folly of making narrative follow musical composition by having his narrator attempt to make his characters correspond to the twelve notes of the chromatic musical scale. Such a project turns out to be totally unworkable, the characters' failure to 'sound' in an ordered manner leading to a subsequent unravelling of the narrative.

Ah these liūs and liūs! How have they stated the course? Have they been doing their dope? The family, the Alba, the Polar Bear, Chas, that dear friend, and of course, Nemo, ranging always from his bridge, seem almost as good as new, so little have they been plucked and blown and bowed, so little struck with the little hammer.... We call the whole performance off, we call the book off, it tails off in a horrid manner. The whole fabric comes unstitched... The music comes to pieces. The notes fly about all over the place, a cyclone of electrons. (DR, 112-113)

While Beckett's main purpose here may have been to parody Schoenberg's system of twelve-tone composition³³⁹, his interest in combining the two forms had by no means been exhausted. When Beckett explicitly juxtaposes narrative and music in the sound-space of *Cascando*, his treatment diverges from the comic one employed in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, as well as that used traditionally in musicals and operas, in which songs and arias tend to create a pause in the action. Although Music cannot be seen to actually advance the narrative element of *Cascando*, it is able to co-exist and play simultaneously with Voice without being reduced to mere accompaniment.

Although characters that use verbal language outnumber Music in *Cascando*, Music is not governed by them in the same way as its counterpart in *Words and Music*. At one point in the play Opener cuts off Voice's narrative and

³³⁹ An idea suggested in Daniel Albright's essay "Beckett as Marsyas", Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*: pp.130-1.

Music comes in unprompted, extracting the exclamations “God”, then “God God”, from Opener (143). Clearly, here, as Enoch Brater comments, Music is “playing its own tune in its own measured time”³⁴⁰, it stamps its own distinctive character on the play, as an element existing in time not space, which is abstract not representational³⁴¹. So, while Music works alongside Voice in the play, it is not subordinated to verbal language. This is a critical achievement, given Beckett’s complaint in *Proust* of the tendency to interpret and explain music, soiling it with “teleological hypothesis”. He argued that the “essential quality of music is distorted by the listener who, being an impure subject, insists on giving a figure to that which is ideal and invisible, on incarnating the Idea in what he conceives to be an appropriate paradigm” (PTD, 92). Beckett may not be able to control his listeners in *Cascando*, but he does succeed in giving music a concrete and autonomous characterisation, one that can operate separately or as a complement to verbal language. This language of music also appears in his later television work where he uses it to complement and then replace speech in *Ghost Trio*, give sound to configurations of movement in *Quad*³⁴², and create pure mood in combination with image in *Nacht und Träume*.

4.1.6. AUDITORY ANTICS OF A SCHIZOID MIND

In *Cascando* a “cold” voice (137)³⁴³, expressing apparently rational thinking, speaks of the two ‘doors’ or ‘channels that he can open and close³⁴⁴. One channel emits a stream of rapid speech, the other, music played by different instruments³⁴⁵. The two channels seem to be different streams of

³⁴⁰ Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.43.

³⁴¹ In *Proust*, Beckett had argued that, distinct from other arts, “music is the Idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe, apprehended not in Space but in Time only, and consequently untouched by the teleological hypothesis” (PTD, 92).

³⁴² *Quad* is a “Ballet for four people” written for television in 1981. First broadcast as *Quadrat 1 + 2* by Süddeutscher Rundfunk 08.10.81.

³⁴³ This is the only adjective that Beckett uses to describe Voice in the directions in the script.

³⁴⁴ It is not explicitly stated in the play just what Opener opens and closes.

³⁴⁵ Michalovici’s music for the first ORTF, Stuttgart and BBC productions comprised clarinets, piano, celesta, harp, violin, cello and woodwind instruments.

consciousness, one verbal, one non-verbal, but Opener does not tell us what they are, their source remains a mystery, we only know that he has a certain degree of control over them. The only thing that he insists on is that these two streams do not exist within his own mind: “They say it’s in his head. No. I open...And I close” (139). Opener appears to be alone, isolated from the outside world, the only temporal reference being “the month of May”, but even this is left in question when he adds, “...for me” (137). His sustenance is auditory: he lives on sound.

They say, That is not his life, he does not live on that. They don’t see me,
they don’t see what my life is, they don’t see what I live on, and they say,
That is not his life, he does not live on that.
[Pause.]
I have lived on it... till I’m old.
Old enough.
Listen. (140)

Opener’s mind therefore seems to be split into a duality of inner sounds, which, as Martin Esslin has suggested, could be seen to represent “the non-verbal, non-articulated component of human consciousness, the flow of the emotions themselves”, and “an endless interior monologue”³⁴⁶. This division is further accentuated by the fact that Opener distances himself from Voice and Music, denying that they emanate from his own mind, foreshadowing Mouth’s denial that she is telling her own story in *Not I*.

The sense of division, or synapse, which is created between Opener and Voice and Music is paralleled in the narrative strand of the play. Voice tells Woburn’s story, describing his journey from his “shed” down to the sea, but he also speaks of himself and his own attempts to find and tell and finish the “right” story.

-on...getting on...finish...don’t give up...then rest...sleep...not before...
finish...this time...it’s the right one...you have it...you’ve got it...it’s
there...somewhere...you’ve got him...follow him...don’t lose him... Woburn
story...getting on...finish...then sleep... no more stories...no more words...
(138)

³⁴⁶ Esslin, *Mediations*, p.147.

Voice's narrative is therefore also split into two: it is both his fictional creation and a commentary on his effort to create and finish it. Indeed, as is evident from the manuscripts, these different strands within Voice's narrative were worked on separately by Beckett, described as "élément soi" and "élément histoire"³⁴⁷. Although both of these elements are included in the character of Voice, the sense of movement from one to the other is clearly felt in the play. In Voice's first intervention, both strands are introduced. First the narrator speaks of himself, referring to himself in the first and second person as though he were in dialogue with himself (or perhaps with Opener); then he moves to his story in the third person, the key word "Woborn" linking the two.

...this time...it's the right one...this time...you have it...and finished it...and not the right one...couldn't rest...straight away another ...but this one...it's different...I'll finish it...I've got it...Woburn...I resume...a long life...already...say what you like...a few misfortunes...that's enough...five years later...ten...I don't know...Woburn...he's changed...not enough...recognizable...in the shed...yet another...waiting for night...night to fall...to go out...go on... (137)

In Voice's subsequent interventions the narrator alternates between talking about the telling of his story and actually telling the Woburn story itself. While there are only two voices heard in the play, those of Opener and Voice, in a sense there are three, those of Opener, the narrator and the narrating voice. Roger Blin³⁴⁸ also spoke of their being "trois plans, ou trois échelons" in the play, identifying these as Opener, Mannu³⁴⁹, and Narrator³⁵⁰. Trios and triptychs reoccur throughout Beckett's drama of the sixties and seventies. There are three talking heads protruding from three urns in *Play*, three females interchange the secret information they have about each other in *Come and Go*, Listener's memories are split into three auditory strands in *That Time*, and, aptly, *Ghost Trio* comprises three acts. Even when there are

³⁴⁷ In *Beckett and Broadcasting* Clas Zilliacus gives a detailed account of the appearance and evolution of the 'élément soi' and 'élément histoire' in the original manuscripts, pp.129-132.

³⁴⁸ Roger Blin played Opener and co-directed the ORTF production with Jean Martin who played Voice. Beckett was also present at rehearsals.

³⁴⁹ Mannu was Woburn's counterpart in the original French text.

³⁵⁰ Cited in Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.130

only two characters, one of them is often split, like Mouth in *Not I* or May in *Footfalls*, speaking about themselves as of another.

A highly self-conscious narrative voice splitting itself into different persons is certainly not new. This is what the Unnamable is and does. In *Cascando*, however, Beckett is able to give a dramatic rendering to the Unnamable's predicament and separate out and combine the sounds and voices that assail him. There is a striking parallel between the Unnamable's state of limbo between a physical and mental world and Opener's border existence between two streams of sound.

...perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either (T, 352)

Opener, like the Unnamable, seems to act as some kind of buffer between worlds; he belongs exclusively to neither, yet embodies both. Opener, despite his apparent calmness, seems to be tormented by inner sounds and voices. His will to passivity is countered by a powerful superego, revealed in his admission:

I'm afraid to open.
But I must open.
So I open. (142)

Like the Unnamable, he is torn between the desire to give up and the obligation to go on. Opener could therefore be seen as a highly unstable schizoid being, suffering from delusion and auditory hallucinations. But his dual role as author of, and medium for, the sounds heard in the play, also points towards a process that is not purely psychological but also artistic.

4.1.7. CAPTURING VOICE

What seems to perplex Opener, as Catherine Worth has pointed out, is that he hardly has to exert himself to hear Voice and Music, he merely “opens” streams of sound that are going on all the time³⁵¹. This, of course, is the basic situation of radio. The voices and music it emits are omnipresent, they are there whether they are listened to or not. It is the mechanical, and now digital, moving of a knob or pressing of a button that tunes you into or out of this sound world. In *Cascando* Beckett seems not only to dramatically represent the mysterious workings of radio, but use it as a metaphor for something equally as enigmatic, the artistic process itself.

As Opener appears to be tuning into inner sounds and voices, he has been taken to represent Beckett. Indeed, shortly after the publication of *Cascando*, commentators overtly linked Opener to, if not Beckett, then to the figure of a writer or artist. In *Beckett and Broadcasting*, Clas Zilliacus cites Jean-Jacque Mayoux’s association, “Ouvreur, je suis tenté de dire Ouvreur-Beckett”, and Michael Robinson’s less guarded assertion that, “[f]or once, and only once, Beckett’s own presence enters directly into his mature work. This is the sole comment he has allowed himself on the nature of the stubborn enterprise he has been engaged on for almost half a century”.³⁵² More recently, H. Porter Abbott has spoken of *Cascando* as an instance of autography³⁵³, or self-writing³⁵⁴. Martin Esslin also makes a parallel between Opener and Beckett’s reported method of working. “He merely listened to the depths”, he said, “which he then tried to take down; afterwards he would apply his critical and shaping intelligence to the material thus obtained”³⁵⁵. Although it would be

³⁵¹ Katherine Worth, “Beckett and the Radio Medium”, in John Drakakis (ed.), *British Radio Drama*, (1981), p.211.

³⁵² Cited in Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.140.

³⁵³ “My working distinction between autography and autobiography is that autography is the larger field comprehending all self-writing and that autobiography is a subset of autography comprehending narrative self-writing and more specifically that most common narrative, the story of one’s life.” Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, p.2.

³⁵⁴ In an interview about *Cascando* for *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*. CD recording by Voices International, 1988.

³⁵⁵ Esslin, *Mediations*, p.147.

uncharacteristic of Beckett to use his literature as a platform to speak about his own relationship to writing, shortly after writing *Cascando* he did say, “[i]t does I suppose show in a way what passes for my mind and what passes for its work”³⁵⁶.

As well as the dramatic representation of the tuning into an inner - perhaps artistic - voice, the play also treats the preoccupation that runs throughout Beckett’s oeuvre: that of finding what to say and how to say it, in order to have said it. Voice needs to track down the protagonist of his narrative in order to “see him...say him” (143), “then rest... sleep...no more stories...no more words” (137). In *Cascando*, as Clas Zilliacus has observed, there is a desire “not merely to finish a story but to find that story which, when finished, and being the right one, would absolve its teller of the need to go on, and thus make peace possible”³⁵⁷. The acoustic silence that interrupts Voice and Music at the end of the play, however, is not the silence that both Opener and Voice seek. The story has not been finished, the elusive protagonist Woburn has not spoken, and as the Unnamable knows, “you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me” (T, 381). Like the tortured character Fox in *Rough for Radio II*, Voice has not yet hit upon whatever it is, a “sign or set of words” (122), “the one...thing” which remains “unsaid” in order to give him back his “darling solitudes” (121). Nor has the narrator in the short prose text “As the Story was Told”³⁵⁸ “seen” what the tortured man “would not or could not say” “in order to be pardoned”, although he assures us he would have “recognised it at once, yes, at a glance”, if he had *seen* it (256). Nor do the torturer-cum-tortured figures of Bom, Bim or Bem in the stage play *What Where* succeed in extracting the word[s] that Bam so tirelessly seeks.

³⁵⁶ SB in a letter to Herbert Myron 21.09.62, cited in Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.118.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.119.

³⁵⁸ A short prose work written in English in August 1973, dedicated to the Austrian poet Günter Eich (1907-72).

BAM: You gave him the works?
 BOM: Yes.
 BAM: And he didn't say it?
 BOM: No.
 BAM: He wept?
 BOM: Yes.
 BAM: Screamed?
 BOM: Yes.
 BAM: Begged for mercy?
 BOM: Yes.
 BAM: But didn't say it?
 BOM: No.
 BAM: Then why stop?
 BOM: He passed out.
 BAM: And you didn't revive him?
 BOM: I tried.
 BAM: Well?
 BOM: I couldn't.
 [Pause.]
 BAM: It's a lie. [Pause.] He said it to you. [Pause.] Confess he said it to you. [Pause.] You'll be given the works until you confess. (312-313)

When Fox fails to deliver he is gagged, when Bom, Bim and Bem fail in their respective mission they are tortured in turn, and when Voice is unable to “see him, say him” (143) in *Cascando* he is merely switched off. All of the voices will be back, whether breathlessly babbling, prattling, or with their laconic responses of “yes” and “no” in their attempt to “end yet again”³⁵⁹, in what Thomas Bishop has described as “the perpetual pursuit of the ability to say”³⁶⁰.

³⁵⁹ “For to End Yet Again” is the title of a short prose piece originally published in French as “Pour finir encore” in 1975.

³⁶⁰ A comment made in an interview for *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays* in 1988. CD recording by Voices International.

4.1.8. THE PLAYER AND THE HURDY-GURDY

The relationship between Opener and Music remains very much an enigmatic one, and this even seems to be the case for Opener himself.

OPENER: And that...
MUSIC: [Brief.].....
[Silence.]
OPENER: ...is that mine too? (142)

Commentators, however, have drawn a closer parallel between Opener and the story told by Voice³⁶¹. In particular, the image of Woburn's journey, which Voice is trying to bring to an end, has been seen to bear some resemblance to the generic one described by Opener.

There was a time I asked myself, What is it.
There were times I answered, It's the outing.
Two outings.
Then the return.
Where?
To the village.
To the inn.
Two outings, then at last the return, to the village, to the inn, by the only road that leads there.
An image, like any other. (143)

While the two outings may relate to Voice and Music, it is only Voice's story that can precipitate images in words. In his description of the outward journey, Voice complies with the Unnamable's narrative requisites of the "Where now? Who now? When now?" (T, 267). The place, the ubiquitous Dublin countryside of "valleys, loughs, plain and sea" (TFN1, 100); the person, yet another elusive anti-hero, "same old coat" (142), "same old broadbrim" (139). And the time, "waiting for night...night to fall" (137), as so often in Beckett's narrator's narratives, "It is evening. It will always be evening. When not night." (ISIS, 24) What is notably lacking from Voice's story, which is included in Opener's "image", however, is "the return". There seems to be no

³⁶¹ For example, Thomas Bishop emphasises the closeness between Opener and the story told by Voice, in an interview discussing *Cascando* for *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays*. CD recording by Voices International, 1988.

sign of Woburn's turning back as he heads out to "open sea...land gone" (142), nor for that matter does there seem any hope of him turning over. He is continually face down, "in the mud", "in the stones", "in the bilge", true to the play's title, Woburn is a 'faller', 'he goes down...falls.... falls again...' (140). And what is lacking from Opener's story is the darkness and sense of descent that is described in Voice's. In Opener's world it is "the month of May", "You know, the reawakening" (141), "the long days" (142). Here the year is not falling, or 'returning', on the contrary, it is waxing not waning, making Voice's longed for rest and desire for closure seem groundless and precipitate. And the sound of the voices, can they be seen to be related too? Opener would say not, "No resemblance" (142).

The tone of Opener's voice is "cold", emotion is checked, and the pauses and silences that punctuate his speech further this sense of self-control and authority. Voice's outpourings, however, consist of effortful bursts that come in rhythmic waves. If Opener is the player, Voice is the hurdy-gurdy, the barrel-organ that churns out a droning sound, a sonic stream the Unnamable dubbed as "wordy-gurdy" (T, 367). The player seems nonchalant, he has ceased to name his tunes and satisfy his audience's curiosity; he merely turns the handle.

..I don't answer any more.
And they don't say anything any more.
They have quit. (142)

And the player's indifference seems to affect the speed and volume of the sound his instrument produces. Voice is so tired he cannot keep his protagonist upright, when Woburn is not struggling he is falling, if not "flat out" (141). And in spite of Voice's continual efforts to goad his story forward, "come on", and Opener's command in response to his slackening, "[f]ull strength" (140), at times his narrative reduces to incantation, a weariness that is picked up in Music's slower tempo: "-sleep...no further...no more searching...to find him...in the dark...to see him...to say him...for whom...that's it...no matter...never him... never right...start again...in the

dark...done with that...this time...it's the right one...we're there...nearly...finish-“(141).

Ironically, while Voice (the wearied instrument) sounds more tired than Opener (the stalwart player), Gilles Deleuze would argue that Opener is the more exhausted of the two. In his essay “The Exhausted”, he argues that “[t]iredness affects action in all its states, whereas exhaustion only relates to the amnesic witness”³⁶². And, Opener would seem to fit the description of “the amnesic witness”, given that he can hear both Voice and Music, but denies any personal association. For Deleuze, the “tired” in Beckett’s literature “lies down, crawls or gets stuck” (Voice’s protagonist in *Cascando* does all of these things), and the exhausted “witness” is generally “seated”³⁶³ “on the look out for words, for voices, for sounds”³⁶⁴. We do not know if Opener is seated, or if in another posture, or if he has a physical presence at all. Opener’s exhaustion is only materially present in the sound of his voice and his words.

Opener’s ‘master of ceremonies’ voice in *Cascando*, which introduces, but is not involved in the ‘aural spectacle’, is a new phenomenon within Beckett’s drama. Croak had a personal relationship with Words and Music: they were his servants; and the sound of Voice and Music made He highly distraught in *Rough for Radio I*. Opener is the first dramatic entity in Beckett’s oeuvre that convincingly creates a distance between himself and what is going on in the play. Although he proves not to be as entirely disinterested as he claims, he nevertheless appears to be a blueprint for the colder, more ‘exhausted’ facilitators of voice in Beckett’s late television and stage dramas. In *Rockaby*, Woman’s live voice controls the narrative with a single imperative, “More”, and in *Ohio Impromptu* the facilitator, Listener, does away with words and voice altogether, stopping and starting the reading of the story with a knock on a

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p.6.

³⁶³ Deleuze distinguishes between Beckett’s *oeuvre couché* and the *oeuvre assis*, the former depicted tiredness, and the latter exhaustion. *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

table. In *Cascando* and *Rockaby* voice is carrying out the functions of a machine by controlling a flow of words, and in *Ohio Impromptu* the body does likewise. Beckett therefore seems to transpose the workings of radio into his theatrical works, with the voice or the body acting as the operating switch. Just as Beckett had personified the tape recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape*, and the camera in *Eh Joe*, so he seems to have increasingly mechanised the body and voice in his later drama.

4.1.9. STRANGE NEEDS AND ANARCHIC FORCES

In *Cascando* there are at least two performative 'voices': Voice, Music, and perhaps the unheard voice within Voice's head that does not allow him to rest until he has finished his story. Unlike the plays examined in the first chapter, in which voices of memory, voices of the dead, and voices of the psyche are all related to a protagonist who is visually or aurally present, in *Cascando* the relationship between a central character and voice changes. Firstly, Opener, rather than a 'protagonist', seems more accurately described as a controller or facilitator of sound. Contrary to Beckett's earlier dramas, the narrative element of the play does not elucidate Opener's situation. It may be clear what Voice's intention is, that of finishing his story in order to tell "no more stories", but it is not explicit exactly what Opener's is, nor how Voice's situation and narrative relate to Opener's: the "edges" between the two identities are fuzzy³⁶⁵. Opener and Voice are abstract, and further abstraction is introduced into the play through the non-verbal element of Music. The discreteness of each 'character', however, is gradually broken down and the play ends with Voice, Music and Opener sounding together. Just whose will breaks down the invisible barriers between the elements in the play remains unclear: does Opener 'allow' and condone Voice and Music's liaison, or is he overpowered by them and emotionally swept up into their verbal and musical

³⁶⁵ In Kim Connor's essay, "Beckett and Radio: The Radioactive Voice", she considers how Beckett blurs and interferes with the boundaries, or "edges", of different identities and times in his radio plays. Printed in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* (6) 'Samuel Beckett: Crossroads and Borderlines, L'oeuvre carrefour/L'oeuvre limite' (1997), pp.303-312.

streams? It was Malone who spoke about the “[s]trange need to know who people are, what they do for a living and what they want with you” (T, 249), and in *Cascando* the “strange need to know” who the characters are, why they are doing what they do, and what they want with each other is never fully satisfied.

While the intentionality of the performative elements in *Cascando* may be unknowable, there is a noticeable shift in the relationship between Opener and Voice and Music during the course of the play, and this change can be heard by listening carefully to Opener’s voice. When Opener ‘opens’ and ‘closes’ Voice and Music alternately, his own voice sounds neutral and controlled. After he has allowed Voice and Music to play together, however, his authority starts to wane. First the elements sound without his ordering them to do so, and then, when Opener begins to respond to them, his voice echoes the excitement of the music and narrative. Voice and Music seem to act as an anarchic force in the play, one that manifests itself in the sound of Opener’s voice. The tighter the control Opener exercises over the two channels, the ‘colder’ his voice is, and conversely, the freer Music and Voice’s performances are, the more emotionally-charged his exclamations become. While Voice and Music do not assail Opener in the way the female voice does Joe, they are insidious nonetheless. Their respective rhythms seduce Opener, sweeping him up into their fervour, and the result is a weakening of his function and a transformation of his voice.

4.1.10. VERBAL MUSIC

Cascando is a key play in Beckett’s exploration of the musical potentiality of language through the radio medium³⁶⁶. In *Embers* music and narrative are presented antithetically: Henry uses stories to block out the musical sound of the sea, and yet Henry’s narrative is intrinsically musical. The Bolton/Holloway story is strongly rhythmical and the patterns of repeated

³⁶⁶ A point made by Guralnick in *Sight Unseen*, p.77.

words and phrases are reminiscent of musical variations. In *Cascando* narrative and music are presented as discrete elements, although they can be compatible and harmonious. Once again, however, music seems to assert influence upon the narrative strand in the play. As Elissa S. Guralnick has observed, “Voice displays striking affinities to music. Self-reflective and inward in most of its statements, it recites its breathless comments at a pace that must discourage comprehension, redirecting the listener’s attention to sound, and sound alone.”³⁶⁷ As Clas Zilliacus comments in his study of the *Cascando* manuscripts, Beckett had intended Voice to deliver the narrative very fast, even quicker than Patrick Magee’s rapid speech in the 1964 BBC production³⁶⁸. The timings Beckett had in mind, he suggests, would not only “require a superhuman effort” on the part of the actor, but “[m]uch of the text would necessarily be lost”³⁶⁹.

After writing *Cascando* Beckett turned away from the radio medium, but went on to further experiment with techniques that he had developed in his radio plays. Voice as a member of the *dramatis personae* is a feature of *Eh Joe*, *That Time*, *Footfalls*, *Ghost Trio*, *Rockaby* and *What Where*. Breaking down speech into musical bursts by increasing the speed of delivery, even at the expense of intelligibility, was another characteristic Beckett took from his radio plays and applied to his stage and television dramas, most notably in *Play*, *Eh Joe* and *Not I*. After *Cascando* Beckett conducted speech as if it were music, voice being its instrument. With music temporarily subsumed into verbal language, Beckett was in need of a new accompanist for voice, one that he found in the visual world of images.

³⁶⁷ Guralnick, *Sight Unseen*, pp.92-93.

³⁶⁸ Beckett indicated timings for the two longest exposures for voice, Voix I and III, as 1’ and 40” respectively, while Patrick Magee needed 1’52” for I and 1’45” for III in the 1964 BBC production. Cited in Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.128.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

4.2. VOICE AND IMAGE: NOT I

4.2.1. A TENUOUS AND COMPLEX BEGINNING³⁷⁰

In a letter to Alan Schneider in 1963 Beckett commented, “that face play I told you about” “may take years”³⁷¹. “That face play” was the genesis of what would finally become *Not I*, a one-act drama written in English and, as Beckett predicted, it took nearly a decade to finally realise and stage. In his study “From ‘Kilcool’ to *Not I*”³⁷² in *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett’s Dramatic Texts* (1985), S. E. Gontarski examines the “Kilcool” manuscript³⁷³, the name Beckett gave to the monologue for a female voice which he worked on in August and December 1963. In this seven-page fragment Beckett recorded four outlines in an attempt to shape different descriptive episodes into a drama. There are striking similarities between “Kilcool” and *Not I* in both visual conception and narrative composition. Not only does Beckett describe a severed head image in “Kilcool”, which would be staged as a floating mouth in *Not I*, but the narrator also “tells of herself in the 3rd person”³⁷⁴ in a “breathless”³⁷⁵ voice, like the central character, Mouth, in the finalised play.

Gontarski suggests that the problem Beckett experienced with the “Kilcool” fragment centred on “insufficient erasure” of autobiography³⁷⁶. Central to his critical study is an insistence on the author’s method of literary composition, discernible from a close study of the manuscripts.

Beckett’s process of composition usually follows broadly predictable lines,
simultaneously: after the initial image or incident is recorded (often straight

³⁷⁰ In a letter to Alan Schneider 25.08.63, speaking about an abandoned fragment which bears great similarity to *Not I*, SB said: “I have never undertaken anything so tenuous and at the same time so complex”. In Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, pp139-40.

³⁷¹ SB in a letter to Alan Schneider 25.08.63, Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, pp.139-140.

³⁷² S. E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett’s Dramatic Texts* (1985), pp.131-149.

³⁷³ The “Kilcool” manuscript is kept at Trinity College, Dublin, MS #4664, folios 10-17.

³⁷⁴ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.135.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.138.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.142.

from memory or the unconscious) what follows is a shaping process that includes: (1) deleting detail, explanation, and often connection, that is, the creation of absences; (2) rejecting, consciously destroying the systems of chronology and causality; and (3) creating an alternative arrangement or internal relationship that will emphasize *pattern* if not *order*.³⁷⁷

He conjectures that Beckett's difficulty with "Kilcool" "was not fundamentally different from Mouth's in *Not I*", and centred on the question of "how much to reveal?"³⁷⁸. He cites this as an example of Beckett's tendency to turn the problems he encountered while writing into the subject of the writing itself³⁷⁹. This hypothesis is certainly a convincing one, and can be borne out with numerous examples from Beckett's prose and dramatic works, such as Henry's laboured attempts to find the right word in his narration of the Bolton/Holloway story in *Embers*, or Voice's efforts to "see" and "say" Woburn as a way of putting an end to the need to speak in *Cascando*.

The "Kilcool" manuscript, while not an early version of *Not I*, certainly shares key dramatic and formal elements with the later play. The image that Beckett had in his mind from the outset, "Woman's face alone in constant light. Nothing but fixed lit face and speech"³⁸⁰, is close to that which he would later use in *Not I*. The distinctive themes and scenes that run throughout *Not I* can also be found in "Kilcool"³⁸¹, and, from the second version on, Beckett is already beginning to work on sound-meaning relations, specifying:

To each theme a certain pause
" " " a certain voice quality.³⁸²

The rhythm of speech, pausing, and the sonority of voice would also be key concerns in the conception and production of *Not I*. The theme of involuntary speech, so central to *Not I*, can likewise be found in the "Kilcool" fragment. In

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.142.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.148.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.135.

³⁸¹ Gontarski details the themes in the four versions in his analysis of the "Kilcool" manuscript. *Ibid.*, pp.135-40.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p.136.

the third version the narrator says “every word is mild torture[.] I would give all I have to stop”³⁸³, and this is precisely Mouth’s predicament in *Not I*, “something begging in the brain...begging the mouth to stop” (220).

As well as bearing a striking likeness to *Not I*, as Gontarski has persuasively argued, the “Kilcool” fragment also documents Beckett’s tendency to work from the principle of erasure as a way of distancing himself from material which might have initially been too personal, or realistic in detail³⁸⁴. His constant revisions seem to serve not only as a literary process of making language strange, what the Russian Formalists termed “defamiliarisation”, but also as a way of ‘estranging’ himself from overtly autobiographical material. Indeed, something like Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt*³⁸⁵, which prevents the audience from becoming fully involved in a drama, seems applicable to the relationship that Beckett painstakingly strived to create between himself and his writing.

4.2.2. IMAGES BEHIND THE STAGE IMAGE

When Beckett started to write *Not I* in March 1972 the two central images of the play, the floating Mouth surrounding by darkness, and the figure of the djellaba-clad Listener, were already clearly in his mind. The idea of a moving mouth was one that Beckett discussed with Ruby Cohn in the summer of 1971. “Can you stage a mouth?” he asked her, “Just a moving mouth, with the rest of the face in darkness?”³⁸⁶ Beckett’s idea was to develop further during a trip to Malta in autumn 1971 when he saw Caravaggio’s painting of *Decollazione di San Giovanni Battista*. He was greatly impressed by what he saw, commenting it was “a great painting, really tremendous”³⁸⁷, and in a

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.139.

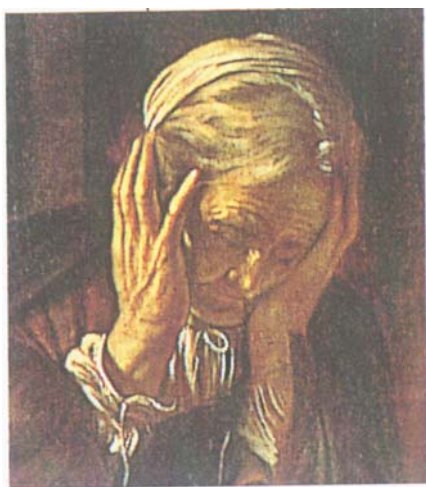
³⁸⁴ “It is finally a consciously literary process, which results in what the Russian formalists might call ‘defamiliarization’, or what Brecht, in *A Short Organum for the Theater* termed ‘estrangement’”. *Ibid.*, p.4.

³⁸⁵ Bertolt Brecht coined the term *verfremdungseffekt* (‘estrangement’) in 1936 to describe the aesthetics of Epic Theatre.

³⁸⁶ Cited in Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.132.

³⁸⁷ See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.588 [note 82, p.814].

letter to James Knowlson, he wrote: “Image of *Not I* in part suggested by Caravaggio’s *Decollation of St John the Baptist*”³⁸⁸. As well as the striking



Detail from Caravaggio's
Decollazione del Battista.

image of the partly disembodied head of John the Baptist, Knowlson suggests that the surrounding figures were also fixed upon by Beckett, in particular, the old woman standing to Salome's left. She is watching the decapitation with an expression of horror on her face with her hands raised to cover her ears. Knowlson associates the compassionate onlooker in Caravaggio's painting with a second visual source for the play, which Beckett saw in *El Jadida* when he was on

holiday in Morocco in early February 1972. Sitting in a café he observed “a solitary figure, completely covered in a djellaba, leaning against a wall”. He commented that the figure was “in a position of intense listening”³⁸⁹. This silent, listening figure coalescing with the compassionate witness in the Caravaggio painting gave Beckett the visual set for *Not I*: the severed head, which he had previously conceived as a speaking mouth, and the isolated witness represented by Auditor on stage.

The stage image of *Not I* is not the only one that Beckett attributes to the influence of a painting. He indicated that the source for the moonlight scene in *Waiting for Godot* was Casper David Friedrich's painting *Zwei Männer betrachten den Mond* (*Two Men Observing the Moon*), which he had seen in Gemäldegalerien in Dresden during an artistic pilgrimage to Germany in 1937³⁹⁰. While Beckett did not copy the posture of the two figures in the painting he attempted to recreate the atmosphere of the scene as well as the

³⁸⁸ SB to James Knowlson 28.04.73. *Ibid.*, p.588 [note 84, p.814]. The detail from the painting reproduced is in Rosa Giorgi, *Caravaggio: Una rivoluzione terribile e sublime* (1998), p.114.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.588.

³⁹⁰ A reproduction of this painting is printed in Haynes and Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, p.53.

painting's coloration in the greys, browns and blacks he used for the costumes and set. Other instances are the positioning of May's arms in *Footfalls*, modelled on Antonello da Messina's *Vergine Annunciata*³⁹¹ (1475-76), (*Virgin of the Annunciation*), and the positioning of the hat on the table in *Ohio Impromptu*, which, according to Avigador Arikha³⁹², was most probably taken from *Four Spanish Monks*³⁹³ by the Dutch painter, Gerard Terborch.

Beckett's interest in the painted image has recently generated a new wave of critical writing which stresses the importance of the visual in his work, as well as much speculation as to the sources which may consciously or unconsciously lay behind particular theatrical images. Some critics have also placed or connected Beckett's work with specific artistic movements. Daniel Albright, for example, claims that while "Beckett tried to remain both inside and outside of Surrealism", "his instincts were Surrealist":

...his instinct, when writing stage plays, to fracture the theatre into distinct planes, in which action and speech never coincide; his instinct, when writing for technological media, to isolate melos from lexis, lexis from opsis, as in *Words and Music* (1962) and *Cascando* (1963); his instinct to go against the grain of the medium, to force one medium to assume properties more readily available to some other medium, as in the television play *Eh Joe* (1966) in which the camera scarcely moves from the character's face, and the voice-over does all the work of imaging; indeed his very instinct to articulate his work by means of antitheses that never resolve.... an approach strictly in agreement with Breton's rigorous alogic, as expressed in the Surrealist maxim that opposites must not be perceived as contradictions.³⁹⁴

Just as Albright argues for the influence of Surrealist tendencies in Beckett's work, Jessica Prinz claims that Beckett's work is Expressionist, both in terms of the stage images he creates, especially in the late plays, as well as in the aesthetic belief he detailed in the 1937 letter to his German expressionist painter friend, Axel Kaun³⁹⁵. Other commentators see Beckett spanning the

³⁹¹ The painting is in Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Beckett had seen this painting in 1937. It is reproduced in Hayles and Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, p.74.

³⁹² See Atik, *How It Was*, p.6.

³⁹³ The painting is in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

³⁹⁴ Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*, pp.9-10 [note 24, p.158].

³⁹⁵ Jessica Prinz, "Resonant Images: Beckett and German Expressionism, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, pp.153-171.

artistic movements of his lifetime, whilst ascribing ideologically to none. Lois Oppenheim, for example, believes he was “an Expressionist, a Cubist, and a Surrealist – though never a Conceptual artist”³⁹⁶. Indeed, Beckett himself in a 1969 interview with John Gruen spoke of his attempt to turn towards an abstract language without the imposition of a further set of formal concepts.

I think I have freed myself from certain formal concepts. Perhaps like the composer Schoenberg or the painter Kandinsky, I have turned toward an abstract language. Unlike them, however, I have tried not to concretize the abstraction – not give it yet another formal context.³⁹⁷

What *does* seem clear is that Beckett had a highly developed visual culture and this inevitably influenced his work. In *How It Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett*, Anne Atik, wife of Beckett’s close artist friend Avigdor Arikha, claims that Beckett’s “visual memory was striking”. She comments that “he remembered paintings of Old Masters which he’d seen in his travels through museums in Germany, France and Italy, those in Ireland and England, their composition and colour; the impact each one had”³⁹⁸. He also made detailed annotations in exhibition catalogues and sometimes directly or indirectly referred to paintings in his dramatic work, and would position actors and actresses according to specific paintings. The testimonies of actors who worked with him also point to the importance Beckett gave to the visual conception of an image he had in his mind. Billie Whitelaw said that Beckett used the actor’s body to create a painting³⁹⁹, sometimes feeling like she “were modeling for a painter” or “being painted with light”⁴⁰⁰.

Many commentators on Beckett now stress the power of the image in Beckett’s late drama which, as Martin Esslin observes, “tends to override words”⁴⁰¹. Indeed, in his essay “Towards the Zero of Language”, Esslin argues

³⁹⁶ Oppenheim (ed.), *The Painted Word*, p.128.

³⁹⁷ Cited in Haynes and Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, pp.92-93.

³⁹⁸ Atik, *How It Was*, p.2.

³⁹⁹ Cited in Martin Esslin’s, “Towards the Zero of Language”, in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama* (1987), p.47.

⁴⁰⁰ Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw...Who He?* (1995), pp.144-45.

⁴⁰¹ Esslin, “Towards the Zero of Language”, p.35.

that the visual takes precedence over the verbal in Beckett's dramatic oeuvre right from his very first stage plays. What the audience remembers, he maintains, are the two figures waiting on a lonely road in *Waiting for Godot*, a blind master in the centre of his circular room with his aged parents peeping out of dustbins in *Endgame*, and an old man bent over a tape recorder straining to listen to his memories in *Krapp's Last Tape*⁴⁰². While it is undeniable that the image gains increasing weight when Beckett starts to still his dramatic figures, beginning in the 1960's with *Happy Days* and *Play* and running through to his television plays of the mid 1970's, it is not *only* an image that is imprinted on a spectator's memory: words too still ring in their ears. As Enoch Brater comments, "[e]ven when Beckett makes us 'see' in the theater an arresting visual image... our attention is before long being drawn 'elsewhere' by the mystery of a human voice as it recites the story it so much wants to tell"⁴⁰³.

4.2.3. *LESS THE EYE THAN THE EAR*⁴⁰⁴

When Beckett started writing *Not I* he turned his attention to the monologue and the structuring of the "life scenes"⁴⁰⁵ that Mouth would relate, rather than the set and staging of the play⁴⁰⁶. Just as the woman in Mouth's story, "practically speechless... all her days" (219), suddenly starts to produce a "stream of words" (220), Beckett, after nine years of gestating the themes of rejection, isolation and absence of love introduced in the "Kilcool" text, wrote out Mouth's monologue in less than a fortnight between 20th March and 1st

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*.

⁴⁰³ Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism* (1987), p.15.

⁴⁰⁴ *How It Is*, p.90.

⁴⁰⁵ Beckett groups the past experiences related by Mouth into different "Life scenes" which he details in a post-composition plot synopsis. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.146.

⁴⁰⁶ In S. E. Gontarski's study of the *Not I* holograph in *The Intent of Undoing* he comments: "The late attention to stage details may indicate some formal uncertainty and at least suggests that Beckett's attention through the early stages of the play was on neither the image of the speaking lips nor the silent, enigmatic listener, but on the monologue, on the arrangement, development, and balance of the incidents", pp.143-4.

April 1972⁴⁰⁷. Paralleling the visual staging of the play, Beckett also gave a specific source for the “mad stuff” (222) that comprises Mouth’s monologue.

I knew that woman in Ireland... I knew who she was – not ‘she’ specifically, one single woman, but there were so many of those old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And I heard ‘her’ saying what I wrote in *Not I*. I actually heard it.⁴⁰⁸

While there is little local geographic allusion in the play⁴⁰⁹, as Knowlson comments, “the entire monologue has the feel of old Ireland, evoking the life of an Irish ‘bag lady’”⁴¹⁰. Beckett’s acknowledged source may account for why he wrote the play in English, but, more interestingly, it points towards his recording of an inner voice in the early stages of the play’s composition: he actually *heard* it⁴¹¹. Although the stage image of the scarlet writhing mouth may be more readily retained by a spectator than the fragmented narrative that is spewed out at them - “like gobbets in a vomit” (T, 298), as the Unnamable so graphically puts it - ultimately the impetus for the writing of *Not I* seems to have come more from an inner voice which Beckett heard and wrote out.

4.2.4. BUZZES, BEAMS, FLASHES AND STREAMS

The aural, oral and visual are all represented in *Not I*: a silent Auditor hears, the audience sees, and Mouth speaks. These three elements are also protagonists in the story that Mouth tells. The old woman “coming up to seventy”, who “suddenly...gradually” (216) “found herself in the dark” experiences a “buzzing”, “in the ears” (217), “though of course actually...not in

⁴⁰⁷ The five-page holograph, typed versions, synopses, acting script and addenda are kept at the University of Reading in the UK. Manuscript references are given in Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.142.

⁴⁰⁸ SB in conversation with Deirdre Bair, cited in Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p.662 [note 59, p.748].

⁴⁰⁹ Mouth does mention “Crokers Acre” which refers to an area in the Dublin countryside where ‘Boss Croker’ (Richard Webster Croker) used to train his horses. Eoin O’Brien details the occurrence of this geographical reference in Beckett’s work in *The Beckett Country*, pp.45-50.

⁴¹⁰ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.590.

⁴¹¹ S. E. Gontarski discusses Beckett’s creative method, working from “some form of Jungian multiple unconscious” in *The Intent of Undoing*, pp.113-115, p132.

the ears at all...in the skull...dull roar in the skull' (218). She is also tormented by "a ray of light" which comes and goes, at first "always the same spot" (218), then "ferreting around" (221). She seems to attribute this flickering light, "now bright...now shrouded" to the involuntary movement of her eyes: "no part of her moving...that she could feel...just the eyelids...presumably...on and off...shut out the light...reflex they call it" (218). As well as "the beam...flickering on and off" (221), Mouth speaks of "flashes" which seem to be associated with thoughts and memories: "dragging up the past...flashes from all over" (220). The oral aspect is present in Mouth's description of the old crone's unstoppable gabble, "mouth on fire...stream of words" (220). She feels herself, as Mouth is literally, no more than a speaking apparatus, "the mouth alone", "whole body like gone...just the mouth...lips...cheeks...jaws... never...what? ...tongue?...yes...lips...cheeks...jaws ... tongue... never still a second..." (220).

The aural, visual, cerebral and oral faculties may belong to the same person and appear to be functioning simultaneously, but they have somehow been disconnected, something has gone wrong with the machine.

the brain...flickering away on its own...quick grab and on...nothing there...on to the next...bad as the voice...worse...as little sense all that together...can't-...what?...the buzzing?...yes...all the time the buzzing ...dull roar like falls...and the beam...flickering on and off...starting to move around...like moonbeam but not...all part of the same...keep an eye on that too...corner of the eye...all that together...can't go on...God is love...she'll be purged...back in the field...morning sun...April...sink face down in the grass...nothing but the larks...so on...grabbing at the straw ...straining to hear...the odd word...make some sense of it...whole body like gone...just the mouth...like maddened...and can't stop...no stopping it... (221)

The brain cannot make sense of the thoughts, the ear cannot catch what pours out through the mouth, and the head is a riot of sounds, lights, and words. Mouth is Beckett's supreme dramatic creation in his quest to give voice to the raging thoughts and flickering images in the head. She is also, perhaps, the protagonist who comes closest to telling her own story, despite her repeated denials.

4.2.5. GAPS AND HOLES

The actual story that Mouth narrates comprises two main strands. The first describes the past of a lonely unnamed woman, deserted by her parents at birth, “he...having vanished...thin air...no sooner buttoned up his breeches ...she similarly...eight months later” (216), and how she had remained “speechless all her days” (219), except for several occasions in her life when she felt the “sudden urge to...tell” and found herself gabbling to strangers in public places: “rush out stop the first she saw...nearest lavatory...start pouring it out...steady stream...mad stuff...half the vowels wrong...no one could follow”. After these outbursts she would “crawl back in” to her silent, loveless world and “die of shame” (222). The second situation Mouth relates is the position the old woman now finds herself in at the age of seventy. She tells how one April morning, when the woman “was wandering in a field” looking for cowslips, “all went out” (216). Suddenly she found herself motionless, practically insentient but for a “buzzing” in her ears and the perception of a “ray of light” which “came and went” (217). In this strange limbo state words come to her again, as they had on occasions in the past, in an incomprehensible, unstoppable flow, “stream of words...in her ear...practically in her ear...not catching the half ...not the quarter...no idea what she’s saying...imagine!...no idea what she’s saying!...and can’t stop...no stopping it” (220).

Although familiarity with the written text allows for a story summary to be constructed, the old woman’s past and present are not related in clearly definable narrative blocks. Mouth constantly shifts between the two so that the woman’s lonely past and anguished present mingle and become increasingly indistinguishable. But it is not just chronology that causes narrative mayhem, incoherence is built into the writing itself, as Enoch Brater comments.

The monologue of *Not I* is written in fits and starts, not sentences, but fragments and clauses, beginning and punctuated by ellipses and ending in

a dash. And each fragment or clause may be carefully fitted to refer to a multiplicity of possible confusions.⁴¹²

This is the disjointed “midget grammar” of *How It Is*, but, unlike Beckett’s novel, the *Not I* text is a script, to be spoken aloud, where the eye cannot look for visual clues and connections on the page. As Brater puts it, “in Beckett the strategy is always to demonstrate not the *certain* connections, but rather the appalling lack of them”⁴¹³. Indeed, in his instructions to the American director, Alan Schneider, concerning the staging of Mouth’s monologue, Beckett states that the audience “should in a sense *share her bewilderment*”⁴¹⁴. Katherine Weiss believes that in *Not I*, or “not eye” as Brater suggests⁴¹⁵, Beckett is actually challenging the audience’s dependency on sight by exposing them to “the automatic process of filling in holes to inscribe meaning”⁴¹⁶; these “holes” being created by the disjointed syntax of the monologue, as well as the image of a black hole inside the pulsating mouth.

The lack of “certain connections” in *Not I* is therefore caused by the fragmented nature of the script as well as gaps in the story itself. No explanation is offered as to what actually happened to the old woman in the field to result in her uncontrollable talking, or what she had done to have appeared in a courtroom, nor for that matter, what that ‘something’ is that she so compulsively “had to tell” (221). The text is full of other narrative teasers, “a system of electrically charged short-circuits”⁴¹⁷ says Brater, our questions remain unanswered as the repetitive monologue loops round upon itself, breathlessly skipping over the holes. As S. E. Gontarski has pointed

⁴¹² Brater, “Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of *Not I*”, in *Modern Drama* 18 (1975), p.57.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ In a letter from SB to Alan Schneider 16.10.72, Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.283.

⁴¹⁵ Brater, “Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of *Not I*”, in *Modern Drama* 18 (1975), p.50.

⁴¹⁶ Katherine Weiss, “Bits and Pieces: The Fragmented Body in Samuel Beckett’s *Not I* and *That Time*”, *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Volume 10, no.s.1 and 2, (2001), p.187.

⁴¹⁷ Brater, “Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of *Not I*”, in *Modern Drama* 18 (1975), p.57.

out, Beckett's intention was precisely to create synapses, absences, by destroying the systems of chronology and causality⁴¹⁸.

Unlike many Modernist artists who had tried to impose form as a way of unifying and giving meaning, Beckett took the view that artistic form should reflect the chaotic and fragmentary nature of experience. "To find a form that accommodates the mess", he said, "that is the task of the artist now"⁴¹⁹. It is therefore not surprising that Mouth was born into a "godforsaken hole" (216), or that Ada comments in *Embers* that "[t]he earth is full of holes" (101). Mouth, like many other Beckettian stage creations, is also "full of holes": her story, her speech and her stage presence all testify to this. But Mouth's short-circuiting narrative is not the only perplexing aspect of the play, there are also the other two of what Brater describes as "three dominant motifs of confusion"⁴²⁰. These are: what is the relationship between the play's narrator and her narrative exactly, and what is the nature of the duality that exists between the speaking Mouth and the silent Auditor?

4.2.6. *THE TELLER AND THE TOLD*⁴²¹

Although *Not I* appears to comprise the telling of a nameless woman's unhappy plight, as the play progresses it becomes increasingly obvious that the story being narrated in the third person is in fact Mouth's own. If this is the case, the anguish that she describes is being enacted before the audience's very eyes in the shape of the unstoppable mouth and ceaseless voice. As Enoch Brater observes; "Beckett establishes for the viewer of his work a visual horizon as well as an aural stimulus closely approximating the 'matter' of the monologue itself. The "buzzing" in the ears is in fact the strange

⁴¹⁸ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.17.

⁴¹⁹ Cited in Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine". Columbia University Forum 4, 3 (Summer 1961), pp.21-25.

⁴²⁰ Brater, "Dada, Surrealism and the Genesis of *Not I*", in *Modern Drama* 18 (1975), p.54.

⁴²¹ *The Unnamable* (T, 284).

buzzing in our ears; the spotlight on Mouth becomes the “ray or beam” we ourselves see.”⁴²²

There are four intentional pauses during the play during which Mouth is momentarily distracted from her monologue, when she seems to answer a question being addressed to her: “what?...who? ...no!...she!” (217, 219, 221, 222). As the title of the play suggests, during these parentheses Mouth is denying that the story she is narrating is hers, or to quote Beckett’s explicit stage direction, her reply is a “vehement refusal to relinquish third person” (215). Like the majority of Beckett’s protagonists in his skullscape plays of the 1960’s and 1970’s, Mouth is governed by duality. While she is adamant that she is not narrating her own story, an unheard voice, repeatedly suggests that she is. There is also a parallel ambivalence built into Mouth’s narrative. The old woman at first tries to convince herself that the voice she hears is not her own, “she began trying to...delude herself...it was not hers at all...not her voice at all” (219), then, “sudden flash”, she has a counter thought in which she has to “to give up...admit hers alone...her voice alone” (219). Interestingly, it is the institutionalised schizophrenic in Beckett’s literature, Mr. Endon in *Murphy*, who seems to live the most peacefully with his own duality: “His inner voice did not harangue him, it was unobtrusive and melodious” (MUR, 105). Mouth enjoys no such inner harmony, she *is* harangued by an inner voice, one which insists she should assume her identity in the autobiographical narrative by pronouncing herself as “I”.

The narrator in “Kilcool” also experienced conflicting forces within herself which Beckett noted as “Her thoughts” and “Her voice”⁴²³; the former vying for escape from life, the latter urging her to accept it and go on living. In this dialogue with the self, Beckett used the first and second person pronouns, but when writing *Not I* Beckett was uncertain whether to have Mouth speak in the first or third person; in the first holograph he wrote “she” and then

⁴²² Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.19.

⁴²³ See Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.136.

subsequently changed it to “I”⁴²⁴. Finally, it was this hesitancy over whether to use the autobiographical “I” or the more fictive “she” that provided Beckett with the principal conflict of the play. This is not the first time that linguistic subjectivity had played such a central role in his work, and, not surprisingly, when Beckett was quizzed further about the source for Mouth’s monologue, he referred questioners back to *The Unnamable*⁴²⁵.

Mouth and the Unnamable have much in common: both seem to indulge in “the alleviations of flight from self” (U, T, 338), appear to be possessed by a voice they cannot control, “I hear everything, every word they say, it’s the only sound, as if I were speaking, to myself, out loud, in the end you don’t know any more, a voice that never stops, where its coming from” (U, T, 339), and share the notion of guilt, “[p]erhaps one day I’ll know what I’m guilty of” (T, 339), says the Unnamable, “guilty or not guilty” (221), says Mouth. The two also entertain the idea that the unenviable predicaments they find themselves in might be a form of punishment. Mouth says, “first thought was... oh long after...sudden flash...she was being punished...for her sins” (217), and the Unnamable, “this is my punishment, my crime is my punishment, that’s what they judge me for, I expiate vilely, like a pig, dumb, uncomprehending, possessed of no utterance but theirs” (T, 339).

Both Mouth and the Unnamable seem to be at the mercy of language, rather than, as Mouth once believed, “a merciful...[*Brief laugh.*]...God ... [*Good laugh.*]” (217). The Unnamable claims there is “no sense in bickering about pronouns and other parts of blather” (T, 331), Mouth also happily skips over the repeated prompts for her to switch pronoun. But it is precisely the subject of language that seems to lie at the heart of the Unnamable’s and Mouth’s inability to assume an identity. The Unnamable, like Mouth, favours the third person pronoun, “I shall not say I again, ever again, it’s too farcical. I shall put in it’s place whenever I hear it, the third person, if I think of it” (T, 326).

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.145.

⁴²⁵ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.590 [note 93, p.815].

However, he can pronounce himself as “I”, even if his aim is to discredit or reject it, “I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me” (T. 267). Mouth, on the other hand, never pronounces herself as “I”, she adamantly refuses to collapse her inner and outer voices to make herself the subject of her own story. As Ruby Cohn comments, her fiction is her subterfuge for avoiding soliloquy⁴²⁶.

Mouth says she will “hit on it in the end” (222), whatever it is that she must tell to stop the words from coming, but, given the play’s title, Auditor’s gestures of “helpless compassion” (215), and the fact that Mouth is speaking before the curtain rises and continues after it has fallen, the suggestion is that her stream of words and constant denials will go on interminably. This is Beckett’s *Inferno* at its most furious, desperate and hopeless. As Hélène L. Baldwin observes, “Beckett has presented the drama of the *Purgatorio* or perhaps even the *Inferno* pared down to a twelve-minute recital of sin by a single mouth which refuses to admit personal guilt and responsibility”⁴²⁷. Mouth’s damnation, says Keir Elam, “lies in her very she-narration, which ends with the self-invitation, or condemnation, to start again”⁴²⁸. In *Play*, the whole play is repeated *da capo*; at the end of *Footfalls*, May’s mind is still revolving “It all [Pause.] It all” (243); and in *Not I* Mouth finishes on a similar note of return, “pick it up-“ (223).

4.2.7. SILENT DIALOGUES

I have been referring to Mouth’s narrative as a monologue, but this is perhaps misleading. In fact, *Not I* is a two-character play and it could be argued that there are distinct forms of dialogue implicit in it. Most obviously there is Auditor’s sympathy towards Mouth’s predicament, which is expressed in the

⁴²⁶ Cohn, *Just Play*, p.74.

⁴²⁷ Hélène L. Baldwin, *Samuel Beckett’s Real Silence*, (1981) p.142. Cited in Keir Elam’s essay “Dead Heads: Damnation-narration in the ‘Dramiticules’”, in Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p.153.

⁴²⁸ “Dead Heads: Damnation-narration in the ‘Dramiticules’”, in Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p.153.

four gestures of “helpless compassion” each time she fails to pronounce herself as “I”. This kind of one-sided dialogue is present in many of Beckett’s later plays in which, although there may be two characters present on stage, only one actually speaks. In *Ohio Impromptu* a ‘reader’ reads a tale out loud while a ‘listener’ sits silent and immobile, except for the knocks he makes on a table which signal for the reader to pause, repeat, or go on with the story. In *Rockaby* there is only one character on the stage, a woman in a chair, but there are two voices. The woman listens to the voice in silence until it comes to a halt, she then signals for it to continue by pronouncing the word “More” and the voice continues with its fragmented narrative.

The question seems to beg itself whether monologue exists at all in Beckett’s theatre. In an essay entitled “The Discourse of the Other in *Not I: A Confluence of Beckett and Lacan*”, Eileen Fischer puts forward this idea by citing Lacan’s belief that “there is no word without a reply provided it has an auditor”⁴²⁹. And the figure of the auditor does play a key role in Beckett’s drama. Winnie in *Happy Days* is not speaking to herself, her dialogue is conducted to her taciturn husband: “I say I used to think that I would learn to talk alone. (*Pause.*) By that I mean to myself, the wilderness. (*Smile.*) But no. (*Smile broader.*) No no. (*Smile off.*) Ergo you are there. (*Pause.*)” (HD, 37). Henry summons revenants to speak to in *Embers*, even Krapp’s recordings are deliberate performances for future audition⁴³⁰. In Beckett’s stage and television plays, the auditor may be a silent figure who is visually present, as in *Not I* and *Ohio Impromptu*, the self listening to a voice or voices of a former self, as in *Rockaby*, *That Time*, or *Krapp’s Last Tape*, or voices of others, as in *Embers* and *Eh Joe*. The exception is *A Piece of Monologue*, in which extensive monologue is not listened to by a stage presence. However, it is also notable that Beckett himself had some difficulty classifying the piece, telling actor David Warrilow, he was not sure if he had written a play or a piece of prose⁴³¹.

⁴²⁹ Cited in Eileen Fischer, “The Discourse of the Other in *Not I: A Confluence of Beckett and Lacan*”, *Theatre*, (Summer, 1979), pp.101-3, reprinted in Lance St. John Butler, *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, p.231.

⁴³⁰ A point made by Ruby Cohn in her study of soliloquy in Beckett’s plays in *Just Play*, p.64.

⁴³¹ Cited in Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.12.

While Auditor physically reacts to Mouth, she pays no attention to him. Her own silent dialogue takes place with a voice in her head that remains unheard by the audience. This voice interrupts Mouth's narrative to correct or prompt her, and she in turn acknowledges and pays heed to it.

...nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when...what?... seventy?...
good God!...coming up to seventy... (216)

The silent voice seems to be helping Mouth to piece together her story, and every time she says "what?", she accepts guidance from that other, with the sole exception of when it tries to get her to say "I". This is the only silent intervention that she blocks with a vehement denial.

...what?...not that?...nothing to do with that?...nothing she could tell?...all
right...nothing she could tell...try something else...sudden flash...not that
either...all right...something else again...so on...hit on it in the end ...think
everything keep on long enough...then forgiven...back in the-...what?...not
that either?...nothing to do with that either?...nothing she could think?...all
right...nothing she could tell...nothing she could think ...nothing she-
...what?...who?...no!..she!.. (222)

We do not hear the voice, it emanates from Mouth's head, possibly her unconscious⁴³², but judging from her responses, it seems clear that it addresses Mouth directly. In this unusual exchange Beckett has created a linguistic anomaly. While the pronouns 'I' and 'you' are implicit between Mouth and her inner voice, neither of them are actually uttered in the play. In *Not I* that "cursed first person" (T, 315) and its complement seem to have been finally displaced. Here, as Linda Ben-Zvi has observed, Beckett has succeeded in placing language at the heart of the drama, the heart of the action, it becomes "not merely a vehicle for thought but the source of the action itself"⁴³³. Creating such a revolutionary use of theatre space, however, required painstaking work and unerring commitment to realising Beckett's stage vision.

⁴³² See Eileen Fischer, "The Discourse of the Other in *Not I*: A Confluence of Beckett and Lacan", in Butler, *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, for a detailed discussion of this point.

⁴³³ Linda Ben-Zvi, "Not I: Through a Tube Starkly", in Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* (1990), p.244.

4.2.8. STAGING A MOUTH AND A VOICE

“Can you stage a mouth? Just a moving mouth, with the rest of the face in darkness?”⁴³⁴. The answer to Beckett’s question turned out to be affirmative, but the creation of such a torturous sound-image was neither painless nor straightforward. The first staging of the play fell to the American director Alan Schneider who needed a short play to accompany his production of *Krapp’s Last Tape*⁴³⁵. In a letter dated 7th July 1972, Beckett wrote, “[t]hink I may have what you need to go with *Krapp*”⁴³⁶, and subsequently sent a copy of the text on 25th July. Beckett corresponded closely with Schneider before the première of *Not I*⁴³⁷ and freely answered questions concerning the sound and speed of the text, but he characteristically refused to give further information concerning Mouth’s predicament. When Schneider asked:

We’re assuming he’s in some sort of limbo. Death? After-life? Whatever you want to call it. OK?⁴³⁸

Beckett’s response was,

I no more know where she is or why thus than she does. All I know is in the text. ‘She’ is purely a stage entity, part of a stage image and purveyor of a stage text.⁴³⁹

Rather than understand or interpret the text, the actress, Jessica Tandy, merely had to reproduce it. However, speaking the monologue in the manner in which Beckett specified was no mean feat. “I hear it breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without undue concern with intelligibility”,

⁴³⁴ SB to Ruby Cohn, cited in Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.132.

⁴³⁵ *Not I* was premiered in a double bill with *Krapp’s Last Tape* on 22.11.72 in the ‘Samuel Beckett Festival’, presented by The Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, New York. The two plays alternated with *Happy Days* and *Act Without Words* on separate evenings, and closed after 15 performances and 19 previews on 16.12.72.

⁴³⁶ SB to Alan Schneider 25.07.72, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, note 1, p.273.

⁴³⁷ SB had wanted the world première of *Not I* to be at the Royal Court in London so he could attend rehearsals, but delays put back rehearsal times and the première took place in New York. See Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p.663.

⁴³⁸ Alan Schneider to SB, 03[?].09.72, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.279. (The date is queried in Harmon.)

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.283.

he said, instructing that it be “[a]ddressed less to the understanding than to the nerves of the audience”⁴⁴⁰. These comments amounted to the actress’s brief. In fact, with the aid of a TelePrompTer in front of her, Jessica Tandy did not have to worry about forgetting her lines. “I didn’t have to think at all”, she said, “I only had to know the excruciating panic”⁴⁴¹, and this is precisely what Beckett seemed to have wanted. He commented to Alan Schneider that Mouth’s speech was “a purely buccal phenomenon without mental control or understanding, only half heard. Function running away with organ”⁴⁴². Although Jessica Tandy successfully materialised Beckett’s extreme sound-image, playing the role of Mouth held few pleasures for her, as she later admitted to James Knowlson.

I didn’t ever find it fun to do...I found the challenge exhilarating. But the nature of the piece was such, the panic so dreadful, that I didn’t enjoy it.⁴⁴³

Her distress not only came from the speed and content of the monologue, but was compounded by further physical and psychological discomfort inflicted by the set itself. She had to stand in a black box 8 feet above the ground holding onto two metal bars while keeping her head very still so as her mouth did not move outside the tightly focused spotlight. Although the first production of *Not I* presented Schneider with “technical problems galore”, especially the lighting of Mouth and Auditor, he reported to Beckett that it was “taut, theatrical and strongly arresting”⁴⁴⁴, “exactly as, I believe, you had seen in your own eye-of-the-mind”⁴⁴⁵. He also commented to him that Jessica Tandy’s performance “held that audience in a dramatic vice with your words and the entire image”⁴⁴⁶.

Beckett himself set to work on the voice and image of *Not I* when he attended rehearsals for a double bill of *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I* in

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.592.

⁴⁴² SB to Alan Schneider 16.10.72, in Harmon (ed.), in *No Author Better Served*, p.283.

⁴⁴³ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.592.

⁴⁴⁴ Alan Schneider to SB 30.11.72, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.292.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.290.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

December 1972. Anthony Page was to be director of both plays, but in the case of *Not I*, it was quite clear to actress Billie Whitelaw that she was working under Beckett's instruction⁴⁴⁷. Like Jessica Tandy, Billie Whitelaw



Billie Whitelaw on the set for *Not I* in Anthony Page's London production at the Royal Court Theatre in 1973.

suffered extreme physical and psychological duress playing the role of Mouth, unlike her, however, she accepted total immobility and blackout and relied on her visual memory to remember her lines. The traumatic situation described in Mouth's narrative seemed to have been matched by the conditions under which the actress had to perform⁴⁴⁸. She sat strapped into a chair on a tall podium, her body draped in black, her face covered with black gauze, her head clamped

between two pieces of sponge rubber. It is not surprising that Knowlson comments that it looked as if "she was being prepared for some medieval torture"⁴⁴⁹, or that Michael Billington, in his review of the play, likened the image of Mouth to the screams of a Francis Bacon cardinal⁴⁵⁰.

When Beckett first sent *Not I* to Alan Schneider he stated "the text must go very fast, no pause except for breath"⁴⁵¹. In the first productions of the play

⁴⁴⁷ As Martin Esslin comments, "it became more and more frequent that, although a director had signed for the production, Beckett himself had effectively been in charge", as was the case with the London production of *Not I*. "Towards the Zero of Language", in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, p.39.

⁴⁴⁸ Photograph reproduced in Brater, *The Essential Samuel Beckett: An Illustrated Biography*, p.111.

⁴⁴⁹ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.597.

⁴⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, 17.01.73.

⁴⁵¹ SB to AS 25.07.72, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.273.

Jessica Tandy was delivering the monologue in just under twenty minutes⁴⁵², Billie Whitelaw, however, reduced the running time further to fifteen minutes. Whitelaw worked tirelessly, practising verbal sprints and time trials, drilling lines endlessly in rehearsals, so that she could combine rapid delivery with verbal clarity to produce the rush of words and colourless voice that Beckett had been seeking. After watching a production of *Fin de partie* Beckett had commented, “It will never be the way I hear it”⁴⁵³, the sound of the words, the rhythm and speed of delivery being so critical for him. Perhaps, with the exception of the substitution of her northern English accent for Irish brogue⁴⁵⁴, Whitelaw’s performance of the monologue in *Not I* came a long way to approximating the voice that Beckett could hear in his head.

4.2.9. FIXING THE IMAGE

From the beginning, Beckett was unsure if *Not I* would work in the theatre and commented that he was anxious to “find out if the new piece is theatre in spite of all or can be coaxed into it”⁴⁵⁵. While Beckett’s close work with Billie Whitelaw and the *Not I* production team had shown him that the sound-image he had conceived *did* work on the stage, albeit “at the very edge of what was possible in the theatre”⁴⁵⁶, he was only too aware of the ephemeral nature of a stage image. When the BBC approached him about the recording of *Not I* he quickly assented, and producer Tristram Powell shot a filmed version of the play on 13th February 1973⁴⁵⁷. Even though Beckett did not like mixing media, the filmed version of *Not I* must have satisfied him on a number of levels. Firstly, the sound of the voice that Beckett and Whitelaw had strived to

⁴⁵² After the first season of the play, Beckett made slight revisions in the text and specified the running time should be eighteen minutes. Cited in Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.23.

⁴⁵³ A comment made by SB to Georges Pelorson, cited in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theater*, p.163.

⁴⁵⁴ See Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p.668.

⁴⁵⁵ SB to Kay Boyle 03.11.72, cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.591.

⁴⁵⁶ Speaking about *Not I*’s “brother”, *That Time*, Beckett commented to James Knowlson in May 1976 that it was “on the very edge of what was possible in the theatre”. *Ibid.*, p.602.

⁴⁵⁷ The televised broadcast of the play was delayed because of the lack of a suitable play to accompany it. *Not I* was first shown on BBC2 in April 1977 along with the television plays *Ghost Trio* and *...but the clouds....* The BBC production of *Not I* can be viewed on-line

attain would be recorded and gain a certain degree of permanence⁴⁵⁸. Secondly, the filmed version of *Not I* was not simply a replica of the stage performance, it was specially adapted for the small screen⁴⁵⁹. The Auditor was omitted so as not to make the mouth too small and this allowed for the camera to focus in on the rapidly moving lips and teeth so that the mouth filled the whole screen⁴⁶⁰. Whitelaw was amazed by the image describing it as “strangely sexual and glutinous, slimy and weird, like a crazed, oversexed jellyfish”⁴⁶¹, and Beckett after first viewing the recording simply said “miraculous”⁴⁶².

Beckett’s need to realise the visual and sound images he could see and hear in his mind as faithfully as possible led to his increasing involvement in the direction of his plays. As S. E. Gontarski has suggested, Beckett’s staging of his own work seemed to form part of a continuing artistic process, which, as well as being revisional, also helped him to refine his original image. Rather than publication being a definitive moment of severance between an author and his work, as far as Beckett’s drama is concerned, it was but an “interruption in the ongoing process of composition”⁴⁶³. Beckett was particularly eager to try out the late plays himself, most probably because they were so condensed, their visual-sound balance so delicate, and, of course, because he knew that he was testing the limits of the theatre.

at: www.ubu.com/film/beckett.html. (Last consulted 22.04.08.)

⁴⁵⁸ After the filming of *Not I*, which followed two seasons at the Royal Court, Billie Whitelaw said, “I will never do the play again. If I did I think I would lose my sanity”. Cited in Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.31 [note 27, p.182].

⁴⁵⁹ Tristram Powell commented in an interview in May 1976 that in the first run-through, Mouth and Auditor were reduced and cramped on the television screen, this led them to propose the omission of Auditor. Cited in Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.35 [note 33, p.182].

⁴⁶⁰ When SB’s friend and publisher, George Reavey, watched *Not I* as a member of an invited audience before the play’s première, he had commented on how televisual the image of Mouth was, telling Alan Schneider it “should be large blow up”. See letter from Alan Schneider to SB 22.10.72, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.285.

⁴⁶¹ Cited in Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p.552.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p.552.

⁴⁶³ S. E. Gontarski, “Revising Himself: Performance as Text in Samuel Beckett’s Theater”, cited in Oppenheim, *The Painted Word*, p.22.

Beckett was heavily involved in the two stage plays that followed *Not I, That Time* (1976) and *Footfalls* (1976). He worked closely with Donald McWhinnie who directed the first production of *That Time* and directed *Footfalls* himself, both of which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre on 20th May 1976 in a triple bill with *Play*. Patrick Magee played Listener in *That Time*, and Billie Whitelaw played the role of May, in a play that Beckett had intended to be acted by her⁴⁶⁴. In these plays, as James Knowlson comments, “pictorial”, and, in the case of *Footfalls*, “sculptural” qualities dominate. “In *Footfalls*”, wrote Billie Whitelaw, “I sometimes felt like a walking, talking Edvard Munch painting⁴⁶⁵”, indeed, photographs of the 1976 production show striking similarities between Whitelaw’s skeletal face, her mouth open in anguish⁴⁶⁶, and Munch’s *Skrik* (1893), (*The Scream*). May’s posture as she paced to and fro across the stage, with her arms tightly folded across her body, was carefully shaped to echo Antonello da Messina’s *Vergine Annunciata*, and Beckett also advised Donald McWhinnie directing *That Time* that Patrick Magee’s head, with a wig of long white outspread hair, should resemble William Blake’s paintings of God the Father or Job⁴⁶⁷. In the case of *Footfalls*, Beckett was literally fixing the image, Whitelaw speaks of Beckett being “a sculptor and I a piece of play”, “[h]e would endlessly move my arms and my head in a certain way, to get closer to the precise image in his mind”⁴⁶⁸.

The theatrical images that Beckett was working with in the 1976 productions of *That Time* and *Footfalls*, while becoming increasingly more precise, were, paradoxically, growing more and more unreal and ethereal. Auditor in *Not I* is a shady, cloaked, motionless figure, Mouth and Listener are dismembered from the face and body, and May has a ghostly presence and voice, she is “not [quite] there” (243). As Beckett’s stage images became increasing more

⁴⁶⁴ Although Beckett may not have had Billie Whitelaw in his mind initially, as he progressed with the play, he categorically stated he was “working on a pacing play for Billie”. See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.616-617.

⁴⁶⁵ Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw...Who He?*, p.145.

⁴⁶⁶ See the photograph reproduced in *The Essential Samuel Beckett*, p.112.

⁴⁶⁷ Haynes and Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, p.74.

⁴⁶⁸ *Billie Whitelaw...Who He?*, pp.144-145.

condensed and precise, so the rigor needed by actors and actresses, directors, costume and set designers and lighting technicians increased in order to get sound, image, movement and gesture 'right'. It is therefore not surprising that Beckett should move back to television as a performance medium perhaps better suited to the controlling and fixing of what Martin Esslin has described as his "poetry of moving images"⁴⁶⁹.

4.2.10. VOICE'S FINAL FURY

The performative voice in *Not I* rages in Mouth's head and vents itself through an orifice. It is a powerful force in the play, one that all but overruns the protagonist. Mouth has very limited control over her speech, she is used as a vessel through which thoughts must pass in order to make themselves heard; her only resistance is marked by a refusal to speak in the first person. This voice is not content with unnerving the protagonist from within the mind, as it does in *Embers* and *Eh Joe*. Nor does it seduce Mouth into speaking, as it does Opener in *Cascando*; it is not a matter of succumbing, her mouth and her voice are hi-jacked. This time verbal usurpation is not clumsily done, the ventriloquist cannot be seen: the mind takes over the whole speaking apparatus and runs the show. The inner voice that assailed, tormented and split the Unnamable finally spends its fury in *Not I*, or is in the process of spending it, given that Mouth's monologue shows no sign of abating.

The image of the furied mouth is fascinating to watch, especially in the television version, but it would not be nearly so arresting without the sound of Mouth's voice. This voice is meant to disturb. It is not simply a by-product of meaning, "a cast off of sense", that which "goes up in smoke in the meaning being produced"⁴⁷⁰, because the sounds it produces is largely unintelligible.

⁴⁶⁹ Martin Esslin, "Une poésie d'images mouvantes", in Pierre Chabert (ed.), *Revue d'esthétique: Samuel Beckett*, (Paris and Toulouse, 1986), pp.391-403, cited in Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.24.

⁴⁷⁰ In Mladon Dolar's discussion of the linguistics of the voice, he speaks of it as being "the material support of bringing about meaning", "it makes the utterance possible, but it disappears in it". *A Voice and Nothing More*, p.15

Instead of drawing attention to the meaning of utterance, the stream of words coming from Mouth puts the sound of language under the spotlight. This language is barely recognisable as speech, the sheer speed of delivery blurring the boundaries between words, making it difficult to process. The technique of using paused speech delivered at rapid speed,

with which Beckett had experimented in *Cascando*, is perfected in *Not I*. When watching the play the audience finds themselves very much like Sapo in *Malone Dies*, who “could make no meaning of the babel raging in his head, the doubts, desires, imaginings and dreads” (T, 177): in *Not I* Beckett makes the sound of language overrides its sense.

Not I is Beckett’s *tour de force* in the dramatic rendering of the performative voice. In his subsequent plays voices heard in the heads of protagonists continue to sound but they are neither as urgent nor as compulsive. The two plays that immediately follow *Not I*, *That Time* and *Footfalls*, also combine voice and image on stage, but the third, *Ghost Trio*, marks a new phase in Beckett’s writing for the voice. In this play Beckett extends the visual-aural stimuli to include voice, music, image and movement, and, characteristically, this change is marked by a switch of medium.

4.3. VOICE AND MOVEMENT: *GHOST TRIO*

4.3.1. FROM CONCEPTION TO PRODUCTION

The incubation period for *Ghost Trio* was a long one. The original idea for the TV play came to Beckett in January 1968, which he described as follows:

A man is waiting, reading a newspaper, looking out of the window, etc., seen at first at a distance, then in close-up, and the close-up forces a very intense kind of intimacy. His face, gestures, little sounds. Tired of waiting he ends up getting into bed. The close-up enters into the bed. No words or very few. Perhaps just a few minutes.⁴⁷¹

Seven years later when Beckett was in talks with the BBC concerning which other play should accompany the televised version of *Not I*, he intimated that he would rather postpone the screening and write a new play than adapt existing material which may not be to his liking⁴⁷². As had happened on previous occasions, and would happen again in the future, exigency led Beckett to rework and materialise an idea which he had conceived years before.

The exact dates of composition are difficult to determine as, in addition to the original idea, Ruby Cohn reports that he was already working on an idea involving musical quotations in early 1975⁴⁷³. The actual writing of the *Ghost Trio* script, however, seems to have taken place in 1976. In a letter to his friend A. J. Leventhal from Tangiers in January 1976, Beckett said he had “got down first corpse of TV piece”⁴⁷⁴. During this holiday Beckett visualised a strange “tryst”, a man waiting in a room for a woman, and while the man is waiting, he intermittently listens to the Largo of Beethoven’s 5th Piano Trio, Opus 70, N°1, often referred to as “The Ghost”. In fact, the first holograph of

⁴⁷¹ In a letter from SB to Josette Hayden 07.01.68, translated by James Knowlson. In Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.555 [note 50, p.808].

⁴⁷² Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.620 [note 62, p.819].

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.621 [note 63, p.819].

⁴⁷⁴ SB to A: J. Leventhal 15.01.76. *Ibid.*, p.621 [note 65, p.819].

the play bears the title “Tryst”, which Beckett later crossed through to give the final title *Ghost Trio*⁴⁷⁵.

In October 1976 Beckett attended the rehearsals of *Ghost Trio* at the Ealing film studios in London. Ronald Pickup played the “male figure”, Billie Whitelaw the “female voice”, and Donald McWhinnie was the director, although Beckett also gave advice on both the direction and production of the play. With the filming of *Ghost Trio*, the BBC version of *Not I* looked as if it could finally be screened. However, as Beckett was unhappy with the quality of the BBC’s film of the Royal Court Theatre’s *Play*, which was to accompany *Not I* and *Ghost Trio*, he was once again prompted by exigency, to set about writing another short television play. The resulting piece *...but the clouds...* takes its title from W. B. Yeats’ poem “The Tower” and Beckett felt that it shared some of the “same mood as G.T. [*Ghost Trio*]”⁴⁷⁶. The filming of *...but the clouds...* took place just before Christmas in the Ealing Studios, with the same actors and director as *Ghost Trio*. The three plays, *Ghost Trio*, *...but the clouds* and *Not I*, were shown under the collective title *Shades* on a BBC programme entitled “The Lively Arts”, presented by Melvyn Bragg on 17th April 1977⁴⁷⁷.

4.3.2. ALL THE GHOSTS

In his 1976 Tangier letter to A. J. Leventhal, Beckett said that his new play had “[a]ll the ghosts. *Godot* and *Eh Joe* over infinity”⁴⁷⁸. Indeed, the central situation of a figure waiting for someone who does not come parallels that in *Waiting for Godot*, and Beckett even includes the appearance of a boy bearing the message that the male figure (F) will not be receiving the visit he is hoping

⁴⁷⁵ The holograph is kept at the University of Reading MS 1519/1 along with the two typescripts of the play MSS 1519/2 and 1519/3.

⁴⁷⁶ In a letter from SB to Joselyn Herbert, 18.10.76, cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.634.

⁴⁷⁷ All three plays can be viewed on video tape at the British Film Institute, National Archive, 21 Stephen Street, London, by prior appointment.

⁴⁷⁸ In a letter from SB to A. J. Leventhal 15.01.76. *Ibid.*, p.621 [note 65, p.819].

for. The relationship between *Ghost Trio* and *Eh Joe* seems to be even closer. The central image of both plays is a seated male figure bowed over, both of them take a room with basic items of furniture as their set, both characters walk around the rooms, neither of the men speak, and a female voice either speaks to, or of them. In addition, both plays were written specifically for television, the camera zoom on the figure and objects is employed in both, and the spectrum of the colours used in the two plays is limited to black, white and greys.

While there are obvious parallels to be made with *Waiting for Godot* and *Eh Joe*, the ghosts of other Beckett plays are arguably also present in *Ghost Trio*. Most notably, there is the haunting feeling of the theatre play that directly preceded *Ghost Trio*, *Footfalls*. In neither play do we know if the figures that we witness, and the disembodied voices that we hear, emanate from the imagination, memory, or if we are in the presence of ghosts and spirits. Music, which had played such a prominent role in *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, also has a central part in *Ghost Trio*. This time, however, it is not in direct competition with the voice, although voice gives way to music in the third section of the play (Re-action), when, with the exception of knocks, creaks and steps, it becomes the sole sound element. The way in which the action in the third part of the play is a 're-action' of the second part, that is to say, a virtual repeat, is also reminiscent of the *da capo* structure used in *Play*. In addition, the detached distant tone of the voice in *Ghost Trio* brings to mind that of Opener in *Cascando*; the voice in the former seeming to control what is seen, while that in the latter determines what is heard.

As well as echoing Beckett's own dramatic oeuvre, *Ghost Trio* also contains other literary echoes, most notably that of *Macbeth*. Beckett was aware that while Beethoven was writing his trio in 1808, he was at the same time considering writing the music for a projected opera based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Beckett even wrote "Macbeth" on the first typescript of "Tryst"⁴⁷⁹.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.621.

Enoch Brater suggests that the fantastic nature of the play is not only carried by the music, but derives from numerous other literary allusions. He compares the apparition of the small boy in *Ghost Trio* to the ghost of Hamlet's father, draws parallels with Ibsen's *Ghosts* and Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* and *A Dream Play*. He further claims that *Ghost Trio* does not just allude to specific plays but "condenses an entire range of the ghosts of theater past, from the Eumenides of the Greek drama to Eliot's attempt to make them functional on the modern stage in *The Family Reunion*."⁴⁸⁰ *Ghost Trio* therefore makes pictorial and literary reference to Beckett's own work, as well as extending far beyond it. Rather than being retrospective, however, the new television play turned out to be highly innovative. Echoes of the past are presented in an entirely new way; they are re-edited, specially arranged for television, pre-recorded. The result is an experimental play for television, which has something strangely familiar about it.

4.3.3. ENTER VOICE AND HER OFF-STAGE GHOSTS

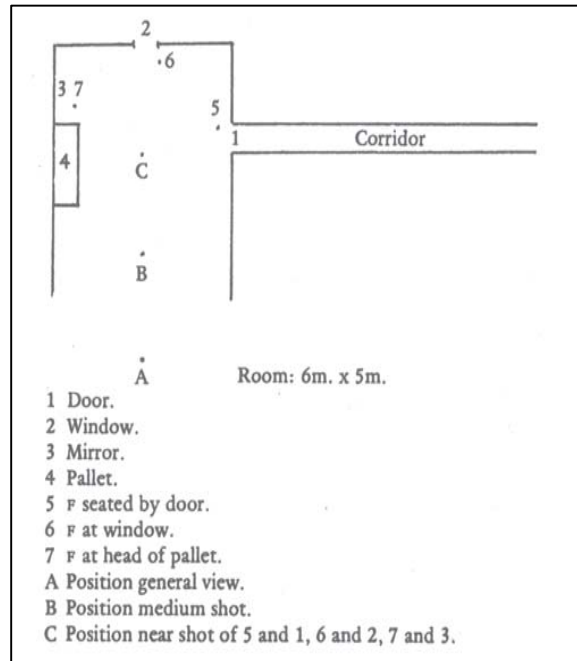
The character of voice, 'V', plays a central role in the play, but can only be heard in the first two sections, described by Beckett as "I Pre-action" and "II Action", she is silent in the final sequence, "III Re-action". V's function, while not immediately evident for the viewer, does, however, seem perfectly clear to her. From the outset the female voice appears to be following a very specific brief. Firstly, she formally greets, next she goes on to describe her sound possibilities, then repeats the two functions verbatim.

2. V: Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly.
[Pause.] Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly. [Pause.] It will not be raised, nor lowered, whatever happens. [Pause.] (248)

V's design here appears to be to give the hearer a few moments to adjust to her voice, to "tune accordingly", as she puts it, for, as she goes on to explain, the volume will not be altered. After this short exposition, in which she has

⁴⁸⁰ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, pp.95-96.

established the ground rules concerning sound, she commands us to use our eyes to look at the image set before us⁴⁸¹.



2. V: Look. [Long pause.] The familiar chamber. [Pause.] At the far end a window. [Pause.] On the right the indispensable door. [Pause.] On the left, against the wall, some kind of pallet. [Pause.] The light: faint, omnipresent. No visible source. As if all luminous. Faintly luminous. No shadow. [Pause.] No shadow. Colour: none. All grey. Shades of grey. [Pause.] The colour grey if you wish, shades of the colour grey. [Pause.] Forgive my stating the obvious. [Pause.] (248)

Here, V's role seems to be a descriptive one, even though what she is actually describing, as she admits herself, is self-evident. So, has voice been reduced to a mere verbal complement to the visual image? The answer, we quickly find, is "no", as her next comment puts the validity of her opening premise in doubt. She says, "[k]eep that sound down" (2., 248). Had she not said her voice could not be raised or lowered? Perplexing questions concerning the real nature of this voice and its purpose are already beginning to form.

⁴⁸¹ SB's diagram of the set (247).

Despite V's apparent contradiction, she nevertheless seems to wield a certain degree of power. On the command "look closer" (2., 248), the camera gives a close-up shot of the areas of the room that she names. Following Beckett's diagram of the "familiar chamber" as part of the set directions (247), the camera moves from a general view at point A to a close-up of the floor, the wall, the door, the window and the pallet. V then renames the objects in reverse order and the camera obediently delivers a series of close-up frames. The whole sequence seems gratuitously arbitrary. With the first object close-up of the door, V tells us "[h]aving seen that specimen of floor you have seen it all" (4., 248), and yet she orders the close-up shot a further two times in the Pre-action section of the play. V appears to control the camera, and therefore not only determines what is seen, but how it is seen. Ironically, it seems that the dramatic character or entity named "Voice" is operating the 'eye' of the camera. At the end of Pre-action, however, when V turns her attention to the male figure (F), "[s]ole sign of life a seated figure" (30., 249), the camera explores the image without instruction from V (31-35., 249). Camera is therefore able to move independently of the sound of the female voice, although her influence is present in the careful timing and sequencing of its movements. Perhaps V has trained the camera in the way that Henry in *Embers* so desperately wished to train a horse.

HENRY: Could a horse mark time?
[Pause.]

ADA: I'm not sure that I know what you mean.

HENRY: [Irritably.] Could a horse be trained to stand still and mark time with its four legs? (97).

Perhaps there is a parallel in Henry and V's desires. After all, they both seek repetition, a steady pattern, movement, but whereas Henry's adventures take place in sound, V's involve the visual image.

The Pre-action of *Ghost Trio* is therefore largely determined by the female voice. Camera appears to be at her service, it obeys her instructions and shows the picture that her words describe. It does show itself capable of

carrying out its own foray into the room, unaccompanied by V, yet the pattern of its movements seem to follow the previous sequence directed by her. The extent of V's power and camera's autonomy, as yet remain unclear. But Voice and camera are not the only unseen entities to feature in the Pre-action, there is a third, that of music. As the name of the play suggests, the "off-stage ghosts"⁴⁸² form a trio.

Unlike the camera, initially music operates independently of Voice, and appears to have a closer relationship with the camera. The music can be heard when there is a close-up of the door, presumably because the figure with the tape recorder is seated nearby. Although the music is not coming from the portable tape recorder that F is holding in his lap, the viewer is given this impression. The camera's proximity to the tape recorder seems to determine its volume. The music from B is "faint" (31., 249), from C it is "slightly louder" (32., 249) and from a close-up of F's head, hands and the cassette player, the music once again is "slightly louder" (33., 249). Not surprisingly, as the camera moves from close-up from C to B, Beckett's written direction reads '[m]usic progressively fainter till at level of B it ceases to be heard' (34., 249). Rather than being a static machine with a microphone, this television camera seems to have been personified. Not only does its eye zoom in and out, so do its ears.

In the Pre-action of *Ghost Trio*, the 'protagonist' of the play, 'F', has not moved, nor can we see his face as his head is bowed. Instead, the unseen 'trio' of the play, voice, camera and music, show images and provide sound. There is interdependence between them, with voice controlling camera, and camera controlling music. 'Control' may seem an apt word here, but it should be qualified. Voice's tone is didactic and imperative, timing is precise, the camera shots are all 5 seconds, and the music is heard for 5 seconds at one volume, followed by a further 5 seconds at another. There are, however, slight deviations on this tight visual and sound patterning which call into question

⁴⁸² The term is Enoch Brater's, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.89.

the veracity of what we are being told and shown. Rather than the Pre-action acting as expository material to provide context for Action, the opening sequence examines the set and protagonist at close quarters, but offers no narrative. We receive an ‘eye-full’ of surfaces, of wall, floor, door and window, but no clue is given as to the identity or situation of the figure. The off-stage entities of voice, camera and music have all moved, and yet their performances have not informed the viewer about the silent, static and unseeing protagonist. Here Brater’s “ghosts of theatre’s past” seem to make their presence felt by their very absence.

4.3.4. LANGUAGE CONTROLLING MOVEMENT

Beckett terms the second part of the play “Action”. In this section the narrative of the play becomes clear: the male figure is waiting for a female visitor. F becomes animate, listens, looks, and moves about “the familiar chamber”. At first F’s movements seem to be dictated by V, and, once again, V insists on initial repetition.

1. V: He will now think he hears her.
2. F raises head sharply, turns still crouched to door, fleeting face, tense pose. 5 seconds.
3. V: No one.
4. F relapses into opening pose, bowed over cassette. 5 seconds.
5. V: Again.
6. F Same as 2. (250)

Immediately following V’s instructions, F goes to the door, opens it, looks out, goes to the window, opens it, looks out, then goes to the pallet. At this point F takes initiative and “looks at his face in mirror hanging on wall” (21., 250), to which V responds with a surprised “Ah!” (22., 251). When V says, “Now to door” (24., 251), F goes to the stool and “settles into opening pose, bowed over cassette” (25., 251). F remains static and the camera focuses in on him once again, following identical moves from the end of Pre-action, the music becoming louder and fainter accordingly. While V gives her instructions and F

follows them, he also deviates and introduces his own variations. The mischief is slight, provoking V's interest more than anger, but V's omniscience is mooted once again.

When V delivers her opening line, with the addition of "again", "He will now again think he hears her" (31., 251), F raises and lowers his head as before. Then, just as camera followed the movements initially described by V unprompted at the end of the Pre-action, so F carries out the subsequent move to the door without V's prior instruction. F returns to his stool, delivering no further surprises, but now it is music's turn to introduce a variation into the play. The whole sequence has been shot from point A, and, from the precedent in the Pre-action, we know that music ceases to be heard at distance B. At the end of this second sequence, however, the premise laid down in the first section is disproved or waived, as not only is "[f]aint music audible for first time at A', but it "grows louder" (35., 251). When V delivers the command "Stop" (36., 251), music does so, but like F, it has shown itself capable of deviating from an expected pattern. In this central section Voice ostensibly controls what happens in the play, and, turning a blind eye to F and music's minor transgressions, it is tempting to conclude that V's language controls vision, and, in turn, vision controls music. Such a precipitate thought, however, is totally dispelled in the final section of the play.

4.3.5. REVEALING CLOSE-UPS

In the third part of the play, the "Re-action", the female voice is unheard, although, arguably, F re-enacts his moves from II according to V's last instruction, "Repeat" (38., 251). While F's movements around the room follow the same sequence, the third part of the play is not simply a repeat of the second. There are new elements: it is raining and a boy arrives. One wonders, however, if it might not have been raining before, or if the boy had not been there all along. With the camera at A, so much goes unseen and, following the

premise in “Pre-action” that sight controls sound, would therefore also go unheard. Even with the camera at C the sound of the boy’s steps and his knock on the door are “faint” (29., 30., 253), presumably, with the camera ‘ear’ at A, his presence would have gone unnoticed. But with this highly regular, slightly irregular play, one cannot presume, merely observe very carefully.

The final part of the play, while roughly following the pattern of movements in ‘Action’, turns out to be visually different from it. Mainly comprised of close-ups and shots from point C, the camera reveals what it could not previously. Out of earshot of V, camera becomes empowered and probes beyond the rectangular room. Through the open door it shows us a narrow strip of corridor outside, and through the open window it spies “[r]ain falling in dim light” (16., 253). In these two instances what F sees and what the camera uncovers could be the same, the seeing subject is ambiguous. Beckett plays further with the question of with whose eyes we are looking in the shots of the mirror. When the camera cuts to a close-up of the mirror, it reflects “nothing”, it is but a “[s]mall grey rectangle (same dimensions as cassette) against larger rectangle of wall” (24., 253), but when F looks in the mirror, we see his image as he might see it. The viewer, however, is in fact three times removed from F, the image seen being that of a camera looking at a man who is looking at himself in the mirror. The illusory nature of television is literally reflected at the viewer as F bows his head, and, instead of our eyes following his to the floor, we are instead presented with the top of F’s head in the mirror.

As well as drawing attention to television’s watching eye, Beckett also represents music in a visual way. With the close-up shot of the cassette recorder in III, Linda Ben-Zvi comments that “Beckett seems to be exposing the artifice of background music, a muted adjunct in most television dramas, but one that affects visual responses albeit unacknowledged by the audience. In *Ghost Trio*, rather than having the music function as an ancillary agent in

the play, Beckett creates a work that offers a visualisation of the music.”⁴⁸³ Music’s role, like voice and camera’s, is deliberate. In this television play music is foregrounded, it is both audibly and visually present. The on-stage tape recorder, seemingly the source for the music, however, is but another instance of illusion. Beckett’s play, like Strindberg’s *The Ghost Sonata*, seems to concern itself with false appearances, but whereas Strindberg penetrated the elegant façade of an apartment building to reveal the hypocrisy and duplicity that lay behind it, Beckett enters “the familiar chamber” in order to defamiliarise it, to draw attention to the artifice of the television medium, and challenge the way in which we hear and see.

4.3.6. WAYS OF SEEING

V is noticeably different from the voices of Beckett’s preceding dramas in that her efforts do not centre on telling a story, but on dispelling visual complacency. In the Pre-action, after an initial description of the room accompanied by the image filmed at A to give “a general view”, V commands us to “look closer” (2., 248). What first appeared as a functional room of the most minimalist kind, is then further spliced into a series of close-ups of grey rectangles which appear on the screen like monotone Rothko paintings. So abstracted are the images that if V was not providing a verbal commentary, we would not know what they were. After seeing enlarged “specimens” of the floor and wall, we are ordered to “[l]ook again” (10, 248), as the camera returns to point A, giving a general view of the room. The close-up shots are repeated for the door, window and pallet, then V once again tells us to “[l]ook again” (28, 249), as the camera reverts to position A and the specimen rectangles are reabsorbed into the larger rectangular patterning of the room. Perhaps V is challenging the way we see things, training our eyes to focus in, like a camera, to examine surfaces and objects in greater detail. This idea seems to be borne out by the Action and Re-action sections of the play. In II, from point A, the viewer sees F move anti-clockwise around the room,

⁴⁸³ Linda Ben-Zvi, “Samuel Beckett’s Media Plays”, in *Modern Drama* 28, 1 (1985), p.35 .

examining objects named by V. In III, however, the camera focuses in, objects are larger, better defined, and we are able to see images previously excluded from our view.

Beckett's late prose works are filled with such close re-examination of familiar objects. In the novel *Ill Seen Ill Said*⁴⁸⁴ he depicts another sparsely furnished room with "a pallet and a ghostly chair" (ISIS, 14) inhabited by an old woman. "To the imaginary stranger", we are told, "the dwelling appears deserted" (ISIS, 12), but when a tear-filled eye "rivets" to the detail of a buttonhook on the woman's boots, a whole narrative appears.

Weeping over as weeping will see now the buttonhook larger than life. Of tarnished silver pisciform it hangs by its hook from a nail. It trembles faintly without cease. As if here without cease the earth faintly quaked. The oval handle is wrought to a semblance of scales. The shank a little bent leads up to the hook they eye so far still dry. A lifetime of hooking has lessened its curvature. To the point at certain moments of its seeming unfit for service. Child's play with a pliers to restore it. Was there once a time she did? Careful. Once once in a way. Till she could no more. No more bring the jaws together. Oh not for weakness. Since when it hangs useless from the nail. Trembling imperceptibly without cease. Silver shimmers some evenings when the skies are clear. Close-up then. In which in defiance of reason the nail prevails. Long this image till suddenly it blurs. (ISIS, 18-19)

While the falling into disuse of the object parallels that of its owner, "this old so dying woman" (ISIS, 20), the metaphor can be extended still further. The description comprises light, colour, movement, emotion and wonder: a world in a buttonhook. As the narrator says of the slates on the cabin roof, bought from a ruined mansion, "[w]hat tales had they tongues to tell"(ISIS, 43).

In *Ghost Trio* the female voice does not describe objects in detail, nor do her words or tone betray emotional involvement with her subject. She does, however, tell us to "look again", and with the help of camera, she shows us how to focus in on the most mundane of objects and reconsider them. It is tempting here to apply Beckett's question concerning the complacency of language to the visual image. Rather than dissolving "that terrible materiality

⁴⁸⁴ Originally written in French as *Mal vu mal dit* 1980-81, translated into English by SB.

of the word surface”⁴⁸⁵, the voice in *Ghost Trio* seems to be calling for a new way of seeing, based on looking and looking again. V, aided by camera, is effectively re-training our eye, showing us how different angles and perspectives precipitate new images.

Just as Beckett’s earlier work with film and television influenced his prose works of the 1960’s, so his further experimentation with the television medium informed his late fiction. Great attention is paid to colour, shape, form, lighting, and particularly this way of looking at a scene, from afar, then close-up, or vice versa, as one might view a painting. For example, in *Worstward Ho* the image of three bowed down figures is depicted within a void, “[b]lack hole agape on all” (WH, 45). Then, “[s]udden all far”, the image is reduced to, “[t]hree pins. One pinhole” (WH, 46), as if seen from a satellite. Indeed, it could very well be that Beckett applied the way he had learnt to look at paintings to his television work, and this trained eye in turn informed the narrative voice, “its drivelling scribe” (ISIS, 51).

4.3.7. A VOICE WITH NO STORY

By making a voice controller of the visual aspect in *Ghost Trio*, Beckett effectively strips voice of its narrative function. In many respects, this demotion of voice was long overdue. Beckett’s narrators always have a problem with their craft. They either could not start their stories, hovering somewhere on “the threshold”, like the Unnamable (T, 382), cannot finish them, like Henry in *Embers*, “I never finished any of them” (94), find they have “little” or “[n]othing left to tell” (288), like the Reader in *Ohio Impromptu*, or, like Voice in *Cascando*, they are so tormented by them that they desperately cry out mid-flow for “no more stories” (139). If Beckett had been working towards separating dramatic narrative from voice, he went a long way to succeeding it in *Ghost Trio*. V’s is the only voice heard in the play and yet her involvement in the narrative element is minimal. Her only function is to

⁴⁸⁵ SB’s 1937 German letter to Axel Kaun, in Cohn, *Disjecta*, p.172.

tell us that F thinks he “hears her” (II.3. 250, 251). This information is fundamental as it informs us that there is a ‘she’ involved, although we do not know if this ‘she’ is a woman, muse, ghost or V herself. With the exception of introducing the idea of the unseen female, V plays no further part in the story. When the boy arrives in III and shakes his head at F to indicate that ‘she’ will not be coming, V is neither audible nor has she anticipated these actions in II: her role in the narrative strand in the play is minimal.

When V falls silent, other non-verbal sounds can be heard. There are the atmospheric sound effects of falling rain, the boy’s footsteps and knocks on the door, the crescendo and decrescendo creaks of the window and door, and, most importantly, there is music. It is music, rather than voice, which sets the mood for the narrative and works in harmony with the action. Enoch Brater’s analysis of the play reveals that not only do five-second camera holds on the action coincide with five-second bars of music, but that important changes in the action are also accompanied by changes in the music.

As ghostly steps approach in the dark corridor and F stands by the door thinking he hears the long-awaited ‘her’, the music seems sombre and melancholy. But when the boy is finally seen, the music climaxes and changes to evoke surprise and mystery, reinforcing the shock we and the male figure undergo at the sight of such an unheralded visitor. ⁴⁸⁶

Music lends dramatic significance to objects in the play, foregrounding their importance in the action to come. Even before V mentions the “her” that F awaits, music has already intimated the importance of the door and the seated figure by sounding as the camera focuses upon them. V may monopolise the Pre-action and Action, but she is not responsible for creating the ghostly atmosphere or the melancholic strain in the play. These are evoked by the slow bars of the music from Beethoven’s trio, the tonal greyness and bareness of the room, the silence and grace of F’s movements, his bowed head, and the close-up images of his fingers clutching the cassette and his

⁴⁸⁶ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.92.

embracing it in his arms. Longing, one of Beckett's most recurrent themes, so movingly described in words in *Krapp's Last Tape*, finds its voiceless parallel here in *Ghost Trio*. The visual-sound image at the end of the play is pure "long vain longing" (WH, 36).

37. With growing music move in slowly to close-up of head bowed right down over cassette now held in arm and invisible. Hold till end of Largo. (III. 254)

The lasting impression of this play does not come from a voice telling a story, because V does not tell the story; she anticipates, describes, or precipitates ritualistic action. The drama is instilled into a few, slow, unearthly movements, frozen gestures, and the long haunting chords of Beethoven's 'ghost' trio.

4.3.8. TONES OF THE BUREAUCRATIC VOICE

In *Cascando* Opener went some way towards detaching himself from narrative responsibility, although, as he himself admits, the suspicion is that Woburn's story is in fact taking place in his own head. What was new in *Cascando* was Opener's tone of voice: neutral, unemotional, imperative. The voice is bureaucratic; it seems to derive from desks, reports, and surnames first. Facts, detachment, economy are its rule of thumb. This voice is Moran's in the second part of *Molloy*, it can record what is seen and heard, but not what is felt. It is the 'what' and not the 'why' that counts.

It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. I am calm. All is sleeping. Nevertheless I get up and go to my desk. I can't sleep. My lamp shed a soft and steady light. I have trimmed it. It will last till morning. I hear the eagle-owl. What terrible battlecry! Once I listened to it unmoved. My son is sleeping. Let him sleep. The night will come when he too, unable to sleep, will get up and go to his desk. I shall be forgotten. (T, 84)

Moran has relatives and they first appear in dramatic form in *Rough for Theatre II*⁴⁸⁷. These two suited officials going by the names of Bertrand and Morvan, sift through letters and documents pertaining to C. All the while C

⁴⁸⁷ First written in French in the late 1950's, translated into English by SB.

stands by an open window, from which, we are informed, he intends to jump. In this play we have all the trappings of bureaucracy; the briefcases, desks, lamps, and, above all, the laconic language and matter-of-fact tone immunising against emotional involvement.

B: Well!

A: Hsst! Switch off. [B. switches off. Long pause. Low.] What a night! [Long pause. Musing.] I still don't understand. [Pause.] Why he needs our services. [Pause.] A man like him. [Pause.] And why we give them free. [Pause.] Men like us. [Pause.] Mystery. [Pause.] Ah well... [Pause. He switches on.] Shall we go? [B switches on, rummages in his papers.] The crux. [B rummages.] We sum up and clear out. [B rummages.] Set to go?

B: Rearing.

A: We attend.

B: Let him jump.

A: When?

B: Now.

A: From where?

B: From here will do. Three to three and a half metres per floor say twenty-five in all. [Pause.]

A: I could have sworn we were only on the sixth. [Pause.] He runs no risk?

B: He has only to land on his arse, the way he lived. The spine snaps and the tripes explode. (77-78)

The dialogue between A and B, looks forward to that between Animator and Stenographer in *Rough for Radio II*, Director and Assistant in *Catastrophe*, and, Bam with Bem, Bim and Bom, respectively in *What Where*. This impervious tone is related to, and yet separated from, suffering. It acts like a layer of insulation between the sufferer and its torturer and/or witness.

In *Ghost Trio V* seems to have remnants of this bureaucratic tone. While one cannot accuse V of active cruelty, she is nevertheless witness to F's suffering. Along with her fellow bureaucrats, V's linguistic aloofness also seems to allow her moments of sardonic humour: "All grey. Shades of grey. [Pause.] The

colour grey if you wish, shades of the colour grey. [Pause.] Forgive my stating the obvious” (2., 248). Unlike her dramatic predecessors, however, V remains professional throughout, not allowing herself to be drawn into the scene that it is her function to describe. In *Rough for Radio II* Morvan’s composure cracks under pressure:

B: May I come to you? [Pause.] I need animal warmth. [Pause.]

A: [Coldly.] As you like. [B gets up and goes towards A.] With your files if you don’t mind. [B goes back for papers and briefcase, returns toward A, puts them on A’s table, remains standing. Pause.] Do you want me to take you on my knees?

[Pause. B goes back for his chair, returns towards A, stops before A’s table with the chair in his arms. Pause.]

B: [Shyly.] May I sit beside you? [They look at each other.] No? [Pause.] The opposite. [He sits down opposite A, looks at him. Pause.] Do we continue?

A: [Forcibly.] Let’s get it over and go to bed. (84)

Even Bertrand’s implacable front is challenged by the sight of a hungry bird.

B: They have no seed. [Pause.] No water. [Pointing.] What’s that there?

A: That? [Pause. Slow, toneless.] An old cuttle-bone.

B: Cuttle-bone?

A: Cuttle-bone.[He lets the cloth fall back. Pause.]

B: Come Bertrand, don’t, there’s nothing we can do. [A takes up the cage and goes with it upstage left. B puts down the lamp and hastens after him.] Give it here.

A: Leave it, leave it! [He advances to the corner, followed by B, and puts down the cage where he found it. He straightens up and moves back towards his table, still followed by B. (88-89)

In *Rough for Radio II*, Animator also ends up losing neutrality and projecting his own fantasy onto the factual recording of Fox’s testimony.

A: Don’t skip, miss, the text in its entirety if you please.

S: I skip nothing, sir. [Pause.] What have I skipped, sir?

A: [Emphatically.] ‘...between two kisses...’ [Sarcastic.] That mere trifle! [Angry.] How can we ever hope to get anywhere if you suppress gems of that magnitude?

S: But, sir, he never said anything of the kind.

A: [Angry.] ‘...Maud would say, between two kisses, etc.’ Amend. (124)

Even the voice of the automaton-like Opener in *Cascando* becomes “fervent”, as he wills Music and Voice towards crescendo.

By contrast, V in *Ghost Trio* has nerves of steel. When dramatic elements in the play occur outside her command, she initially reacts without vetoing, then leaves the scenario authoritatively with the command “Repeat”. V may wield power but she does not involve herself in the narrative, she does not bestow pity, or project anger; she remains impartial. The voice that emerges in *Ghost Trio* seems to be practically devoid of attitude, to have lost its human traits. It is true that a sardonic remark and an exclamation of surprise escapes her, but this “faint” voice is the most factual, non-emotional voice that Beckett has presented on stage. And this slightly impure voice of neutrality does not seem to be without aspirations. Not only is it disembodied, but it has also gone a long way towards disassociating itself from the wiles and weaknesses of the human mind.

4.3.9. MOVEMENTS OF ANOTHER WORLD

In addition to the changes in both the role and the tone of voice in *Ghost Trio*, there is also another notable development: Beckett reintroduces movement. Action in Beckett’s early one-man/one-woman dramas tended to follow certain patterns. From *Krapp’s Last Tape* to *Eh Joe*, the plays move from initial frenetic activity to inactivity. Krapp fiddles and shuffles before sitting still in his zone of light; Henry walks along the beach before settling on the stones; and Joe checks behind curtains, under his bed, before sitting inert. In these plays voice provides a verbal parallel to movement. Voice is quiet while the figure is moving, but once it sits a voice or voices start to sound. In the early 1960’s dramatic characters begin to emerge who could either not walk, like Winnie planted in her mound, and the figures in *Play* stuck in their urns,

or were limbless, no more than floating body parts, like Listener in *That Time* and Mouth in *Not I*. What little physical action there is in these plays is confined to a single area of stage space, and this reduction in physical movement is accompanied by voices delivering a barrage of words. In the plays from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *That Time* movement and voice appear to be incompatible, antithetical, the quietness and stillness of one encouraging sound or movement in the other. The general trend in Beckett's drama over this period is for voice to replace movement, although there is one short play that was written in 1965, *Come and Go*, in which voices and movement, alternate to create a symmetrical pattern of visual and sound images.

Come and Go is ahead of its time within Beckett's dramatic oeuvre and looks forward to the late plays, a period which started with *Ghost Trio*. Three women start the play seated, they each get up in turn, walk away, then return to their initial position. The stage movement in this play is regular and formalistic, comprising a trio of repeated actions and gestures. The harmony and grace of movement here is far removed from the asymmetrical, anti-social walkers of Beckett's earlier literature, in which wheelchairs, wooden legs, limbs, and generally bizarre forms of propulsion, like that of the narrator in the short story "The Expelled".

What a gait. Stiffness of the lower limbs, as if nature had denied me knees, extraordinary splaying of the feet to right and left of the line of march. The trunk, on the contrary, as if by the effect of a compensatory mechanism was as flabby as an old ragbag, tossing wildly to the unpredictable jolts of the pelvis. I have often tried to correct these defects, to stiffen my bust, flex my knees and walk with my feet in front of one another, for I had at least five or six, but it always ended in the same way, I mean by a loss of equilibrium, followed by a fall. (50)

The speech of *Come and Go* is likewise removed from the outpourings of the post-war novels and stories, and the 'skullscape' dramas. Language is patterned, the three exchanges between the characters containing only minor variations. The tone of the voices is calm and hushed, and there is indeterminacy in the ages of women⁴⁸⁸, their physical surroundings, as well

⁴⁸⁸ In the stage directions, SB specifies the characters' ages are "undeterminable" (193).

as the dramatic situation – all three women know of the unspeakable illness the other two are suffering, but remain unaware of their own. There are no sudden bursts of sound and activity in this play; the regularity of speech and movement is tightly controlled and non-naturalistic.

Slow ritualistic movement is also a feature of *Ghost Trio*, although music replaces speech as the sound complement. Like Flo, Ru and Vi in *Come and Go*, F is first seen seated, then gets up, walks, and returns to his opening position. F's movements require the maximum of lightness and grace, and in rehearsals Beckett referred the actor Ronald Pickup to Heinrich von Kleist's 1810 essay "Über das Marionettentheater" ("On the Marionette Theatre")⁴⁸⁹ to illustrate the kind of movement he was seeking⁴⁹⁰. F has a quiet air of purposefulness and the series of movements that take him towards determinate objects then back to his initial starting place have a graceful line of continuity. How far away we seem from Krapp's eventful journeys within his den, all that shuffling, skidding and human ungainliness. Indeed, F does not seem altogether human. His carefully measured movements, soundless steps, long hair and flowing gown, make him seem like a Druid, or a strange androgynous being from another world; human beings do not look or move like this.

The acousmatic voice, V, is also an non-naturalistic phenomenon, but her automaton tone is incongruous with the romantic situation of longing at the heart of the play. Inadequate or unwilling to follow the drama, voice cedes to music, and the elegiac mood absent from V's commentary is created through mime and string chords. Only poetry, perhaps, could provide a verbal parallel

⁴⁸⁹ In this essay a successful dancer claims he has perfected his art by observing dancing puppets. He attributes their grace to the skill of the operator in finding the centre of gravity in each movement, as, he maintains, when this is found, the limbs will follow along effortlessly. Humans, he argues, can never achieve such pure unbroken lines because of the body's weight and tendency towards inertia. I have worked with an English on-line version of the essay which was translated from German by Idris Parry, and printed in *Southern Cross Review* 56 (November-December 2007): <http://southern-cross-review.org/9/kleist.html>. (Last consulted 22.04.08.)

⁴⁹⁰ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.632.

to the slow, silent pattern of movements effected by F, and it is fitting that Beckett's next television play, *...but the clouds...*, takes lines from W. B. Yeat's poem "The Tower" as its sound complement.

4.3.10. METAMORPHOSIS OF VOICE

In *Ghost Trio* V starts out as the performative element. She dictates the action as well as the images that appear on the screen, but in the third section of the play she is silenced, or retreats, effectively being made redundant by music and mime. Voice in *Ghost Trio* is presented as an instrument of control, and, as in *Cascando* and *Not I*, is overrun. Just as Music and Voice in *Cascando* start to sound irrespectively of whether Opener formally switches them on and off, and Mouth rejects outright the corrective voice she can hear in her head, so image and music in *Ghost Trio* are empowered at the expense of voice. In the three plays examined in this chapter, when voice is used as an instrument of control or restraint, it is either silenced or won over. The victorious 'lawless' elements in *Cascando* are Voice and Music, in *Not I* they are voice and image, but in *Ghost Trio* voice is pushed out of the equation in favour of image, music and movement. The performative 'voices' in *Ghost Trio* are therefore plural and non-verbal.

Not only is the role of voice diminished in *Ghost Trio*, but the breathless inner voice of unmediated thought that panted intermittently through *Cascando* and spewed out words in *Not I* is also noticeably absent. The change in V's aspirations results in a change in her speech and voice. Unlike her earlier sound counterparts, V is set upon describing images rather than telling a story, and this change from narrative to description is accompanied by a precise choice of words which are delivered in a controlled and assertive way. "Say what you hear see what you say" (HIS, 90), says the narrator of the novel *How It Is*, and much of Beckett's dramatic writing prior to *Ghost Trio* had been based on saying what a protagonist could hear, and this is especially true of *Cascando* and *Not I*. In *Ghost Trio* the emphasis is on saying what can be seen

and this change results in a less emotionally charged voice which does not become involved with the scene it is describing. V is a commentator or facilitator more than she is a player. Ironically, however, her role is an entirely gratuitous one, given that her commentary describes images that the viewer can actually see. In *Ghost Trio* Beckett therefore transforms the function and sound of voice: it becomes superfluous, or else absent from the central drama, and V's speech is also decidedly undramatic, her language having an unnatural, rehearsed quality, as if she had committed a written commentary to heart.

In the plays following *Ghost Trio* Beckett draws on this metamorphosed voice and re-endows it with a functional role by minimising the stage image. In *A Piece of Monologue* Speaker's role is to describe images and scenes that are for the most part unseen by the audience, and in *Ohio Impromptu* Reader is given a narrative function, telling a story which is not enacted on stage. These characters are still motivated by a need to speak, but they appear to be far more in control of what they are saying than the compulsive speakers of the 'skullscape' dramas. The language is more concise, poetic, and rather than being the product of spontaneous speech, the careful composition of Speaker's monologue suggests heavy reliance on a written script, and Reader's elegantly expressed tale is taken straight from a book which he is staged before him. The speaking characters in *A Piece of Monologue*, *Ohio Impromptu*, and the voices heard in the stage adaptation of *Company*, all invent more than they vent: they describe images and scenes and tell stories which are not fully realised on stage. The composure of these 'new' voices, however, is not so much a result of catharsis after their verbal outpourings in plays such as *Cascando* and *Not I*, as Beckett's ever more exacting use of language, and even tighter control over dramatic speech.

5. FROM PAGE TO STAGE

5.1. SCRIPT OR TEXT?: *A PIECE OF MONOLOGUE*

5.1.1. WRITING AND PERFORMANCE

Beckett began writing *A Piece of Monologue* in English in August 1977 under the working title “Gone”⁴⁹¹. He began the text in response to a request by actor David Warrilow to write a solo piece for him to perform on the subject of death. In November Beckett seemed to abandon the text saying it was “becalmed in deep water and likely to founder”⁴⁹², until January 1979 when Martin Esslin asked him for an unpublished piece to appear in *The Kenyon Review*. Beckett mentioned the text he had been writing for Warrilow and promised to “dig” and “clean it up”⁴⁹³. It first appeared in print in the summer edition of *The Kenyon Review* in 1979⁴⁹⁴, and was performed by David Warrilow at La MaMa Theatre Club, New York, in December 1979.

5.1.2. DRAMA OR RECITATION?

On the page *A Piece of Monologue* resembles a piece of prose more than it does a theatre script. The monologue reads as a block of text uninterrupted by stage directions, and the directions that preface the play, like the “words” and “nights” mentioned in the monologue, are “few” (265). The only instructions for performance concern the position of the character on the stage, “[s]peaker stands well off centre”, his appearance, “[w]hite hair, white nightgown, white socks”, the props, “standard lamp skull-sized white glove, faintly lit” and “white foot of pallet bed”, and the light, “faint diffuse”, which is visible ten

⁴⁹¹ The manuscript is held at the University of Reading. See Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing* for comments on earliest holograph, pp.174-5.

⁴⁹² SB to James Knowlson 10.11.77, cited in *Damned to Fame*, p.650.

⁴⁹³ SB to Martin Esslin 29.01.79. *Ibid.*, p.651.

⁴⁹⁴ *The Kenyon Review*, NS1, no.3 (Summer 1979), pp.1-4.

seconds before and after the monologue and “begins to fail” thirty seconds before speech ends (316). No mention is made of Speaker’s voice, the tempo, tone and volume being left unspecified. And yet, apart from the standing figure, the pallet and the lamp in a faint light, there is nothing but a voice delivering a narrative. The ‘drama’ in *A Piece of Monologue*, is therefore confined to the stage image and the spoken words of the monologue. One cannot help feeling that Beckett’s commiseration for the actress that played Winnie in *Happy Days*, “[t]errible rôle, all evening alone on stage and for last 20 minutes without a gesture to help voice”⁴⁹⁵, could equally be extended to the actor playing *A Piece of Monologue*.

The questions that *A Piece of Monologue* raises invariably centre on genre. Is the audience listening to recitation or are they witnessing drama? Just what can a static spatial image and a monologue delivered in the third person amount to in the theatre? Perplexing questions in Beckett’s drama are often raised by voices, and their intent and attitude are suggested through the enunciation of their speech. The early plays are sprinkled with adjectives and adverbs to describe the delivery of lines, but *A Piece of Monologue* contains none, the ‘none’ being tentative here, given that the monologue categorically states twice that there is “[n]o such thing as none” (265, 266). Beckett merely presents a stage image, the words of a monologue and the voice which delivers it, as if to say, as the Voice in the stage play *What Where* was soon to do, “[m]ake sense who may” (316). In order to reach conclusions on the genre of *A Piece of Monologue*, the relationship between image, the spoken word, and theatre space, need to be examined more closely.

5.1.3. SEEING VERSUS HEARING

Ruby Cohn has commented that *A Piece of Monologue* is a *mise en abyme*, citing Lucien Dällenbach’s definition of the term as “any aspect enclosed

⁴⁹⁵ Letter from SB to Alan Schneider 01.02.61, in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.79.

within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it”⁴⁹⁶. As in *Not I*, there are very close parallels between the situation of the speaker, which the audience can witness, and what is actually recounted in the monologue. The figure described in the narrative wears socks and a nightgown and stands “stock still” in the faint light of a standard lamp (265), as Speaker does before the audience. The “[f]oot of pallet just visible” (267) can also be seen, as can be heard “the words falling from his mouth” (268). “[T]he light going now” (269) mentioned at the end of the monologue is likewise accompanied by a slow fading of stage lighting. Speaker does not associate the narrative with himself, although, as in *Not I*, the use of the third person is questioned: “Stands staring beyond half hearing what he’s saying. He?” (268). Whereas such probing of the identity of the character in the narrative totally unnerves Mouth, Speaker’s monologue runs on with no pauses, the “He?” seemingly just another of the “half-heard words” (269).

While Speaker maintains the third person pronoun throughout, *some* of the descriptions in the monologue *closely resemble* the image presented on stage. This association between spoken narrative and stage image cements the relationship between the two and the deduction is that Speaker is telling his own story in the third person. The beginning of the monologue seems to serve as an exposition of Speaker’s life up to the present moment, “this night”.

Birth was the death of him. Again. Words are few. Dying too. Birth was the death of him. Ghastly grinning ever since. Up at the lid to come. In cradle and crib. At suck first fiasco. With the first totters. From mammy to nanny and back. All the way. Banded back and forth. So ghastly grinning on. From funeral to funeral. To now. This night. (265)

What follows, however, does not treat “this night” as much as “every nightfall”.

This night. Up at nightfall. Every nightfall. Faint light in room. Whence unknown. None from window. No. Next to none. No such thing as none.

⁴⁹⁶ In the French original: «est mise en abyme tout miroir interne réfléchissant l’ensemble du récit par reduplication simple, répétée ou spéieuse». See Ruby Cohn, “Ghosting through Beckett”, in Buning *et al* (eds.), *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui* (2): ‘Beckett in the 1990’s’ (1993), p.1.

Gropes to window and stares out. Stands there staring out. Stock still staring out. Nothing stirring in that black vast. Gropes back in the end to where the lamp is standing. Was standing. When last went out. Loose matches in right-hand pocket. Strikes one on his buttock the way his father taught him. Takes off milk white globe and sets it down. Match goes out. Strikes a second as before. Takes off chimney. Smoke-clouded. Holds it in left hand. Match goes out. Strikes a third as before and sets it to wick. Puts back chimney. Match goes out. Puts back globe. Turns wick low. Backs away to edge of light and turns to face east. Blank wall. So nightly. Up. Socks. Nightgown. Window. Lamp. Backs away to edge of light and stands facing blank wall. (265)

It is tempting to view Speaker's nightly ritual as just another to add to a list comprising, Krapp's annual recordings, Henry's real or imaginary walks on the beach, and Words and Music's poetic and musical recitals. There is certainly the sense of witnessing something which has been going on, "[f]or hours, for days, for years, for centuries", as Alan Schneider described the situation in *Rockaby*⁴⁹⁷, although Speaker is far more precise when it comes to duration, calculating his life at "[t]hirty thousand nights", "[t]wo and a half billion seconds"(265).

What is particularly notable about the ritualistic behaviour in *A Piece of Monologue*, however, is the mismatch that exists between what is seen on stage and what is described in the monologue. Speaker's description of his nightly routine is full of minutely described actions, his speech is bristling with verbs, and even objects seem to have a dynamism, like the matches and the lamp, as they light and are lit. What the audience actually witnesses from this miniaturist description is the static and verbless: "Socks. Nightgown. Window. Lamp", but, even this is too much, for the window is both absent from the set and stage directions. *Some* of the descriptions in the monologue may *closely resemble* the image presented on stage but they are not the same, not quite, just as the actions carried out by Figure in *Ghost Trio* follow Voice's instructions, but not entirely.

⁴⁹⁷ From a transcript of sound tapes for the film version of *Rockaby*, in which Alan Schneider directed Billie Whitelaw for the 1981 production at the State University of New York. Printed in Oppenheim (ed.) *Directing Beckett*, 1994), p.15.

With these sight/sound discrepancies, Beckett seems to be pitting the word and image against each other; the voice either over-describes the image, as in *A Piece of Monologue*, or it under-describes, as is the case in *Ghost Trio*. Words do not accurately define the image, they misrepresent it. This tension between visual and verbal images therefore seems to rule out the idea that *A Piece of Monologue* is pure recitation. Instead, as S. E. Gontarski has commented it “creates a permanently unresolved and shifting set of relationships”⁴⁹⁸. The drama seems to spring from the disparity which exists between the eye and ear, a kind of ‘trompe-l’œil / trompe-l’oreille’. In order to achieve the synchronisation between viewing an image and hearing its description a visual medium is needed, and theatre is the only genre able to effect this in real time.

5.1.4. SURPASSING THEATRE’S BOUNDARIES

Beckett wavered over the genre of *A Piece of Monologue*, his doubt centring on if he had written a piece of prose or a play⁴⁹⁹, however, it could be argued that this short play aspires to being screened rather than staged. Speaker’s highly visual descriptions not only determine what we should imagine, but *how* it should be imagined, our vision being guided as if it were a television camera. Describing the image of “[u]mbrellas round a grave”, Speaker specifies the perspective, “[s]een from above”, he gives instruction as to timing, “[t]hirty seconds”, as well as lighting, “[t]hen fade”(268). Here there appears to be what Steven Connor describes as a “doubling of media”⁵⁰⁰, although this could be extended to a tripling or quadrupling. In *Endgame* and *Embers*, Hamm’s chronicle and Henry’s unfinished story introduce a written texture into the plays, which suspend the dramatic immediacy of the theatre and radio medium. Likewise, in *A Piece of Monologue*, the script alludes to other media. Speaker’s elliptic descriptions often sound like written stage directions read aloud, and his use of terms associated with film or television further distance

⁴⁹⁸ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.175.

⁴⁹⁹ See Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.12.

⁵⁰⁰ Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, (1988) p.148.

the audience from a theatrical experience. Oral storytelling is also given prominence in the play, Speaker actually mouthing what the protagonist of his narrative says.

Waits for first word always the same. It gathers in his mouth. Parts lips and thrusts tongue forward. Birth. (268)

If Beckett described *That Time* as being “on the very edge of what was possible in the theatre”⁵⁰¹, *A Piece of Monologue* may be seen to go over that edge. The play seems to self-question its performance medium: is this recited prose, a recounted story, or a stage play begging to be filmed?

While *A Piece of Monologue* seems to be chameleon-like, it does not adapt easily. Recently in the controversial filming of Beckett’s theatrical plays⁵⁰², Robin Lefèvre took on the task of directing *A Piece of Monologue*. This filmed version of the play is visually effective as it makes use of close-up shots of Speaker’s eyes when the emotional content of the monologue intensifies, as when he describes the remembered photographs of his family once pinned to the walls. The camera also zooms in on the mouth for Speaker’s utterance of the word “birth”, capturing the parting of the lips and the thrusting forward of the tongue visually as the word is pronounced. The director does not only change how Speaker is viewed, however, he also adds further visual and sound images which are not seen or heard in the original stage script. For example, in the opening shot, rain can be seen and heard through a window. The outlines of the photographs that have been torn down on the blank wall that Speaker faces are also zoomed in on, and, most notably, the second episode of lighting the lamp is shown in images timed to synchronise with Speaker’s words.

Eyes to the small pane gaze at that first night. Turn from it in the end to face the darkened room. There in the end slowly a faint hand. Holding aloft a lighted spill. In the light of spill faintly the hand and the milk white

⁵⁰¹ SB to James Knowlson in May 1976. Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.602.

⁵⁰² The 19 plays comprising the project *Beckett on Film* were filmed by Blue Angel Films / Tyrone Productions for Radio Teleís Éireann and Channel 4 in 2001, and are available as a set of 4 DVD’s.

globe. Then second hand. In light of spill. Takes off glove and disappears. Reappears empty. Takes off chimney. Two hands and chimney in light of spill. Spill to wick. Chimney back on. Hand with spill disappears. Second hand disappears. Chimney alone in gloom. Hand reappears with globe. Globe back on. Turns wick low. Disappears. Pale globe alone in gloom. Glimmer of brass bedrail. Fade. (267)

The whole scene comes out of the dark, lights black out prior to the evocation of the memory and, on the word “fade”, the bed with the brass bed rail dissolves to the pallet and Speaker can once again be seen facing the wall. The sequence provides visual interest as well as an illustrative instance of how “[d]ark ...parts” (268) and a visualised memory appears and disappears. The director is providing the image to accompany the description, and Beckett was certainly not averse to presenting images with commentaries; in the television plays *Ghost Trio* and *...but the clouds...*, the female and male voices describe the actions of F and M1 that we see on the screen. Indeed, *A Piece of Monologue*, may appear to be an ideal film or television play; at times, its language even apes the media, however, Beckett would probably have had reservations about adaptations of this monologue.

Firstly, there is the issue of including visual material where it is not specified in the script. While television can technically produce flashbacks, enact memories realistically, Beckett never chose to use the medium in this way. Even when a woman’s face materialises on the screen in *...but the clouds...*, the image is slightly blurred, ethereal, making it obvious that this apparition, or picture from memory, is precarious and not fully attainable. Secondly, it is important to remember that in *A Piece of Monologue* Beckett chose a staged voice as the vehicle for imaginative re-enactment of scenes from the past. By supplying a visual counterpart to the description in the script, Speaker’s words lose their evocative power; they define and complement the image, but they do not create it. In a staged version of the play, memories are evoked in circles of light and the audience is left with the surrounding dark in which to visualise them. In a filmed or televised version of the play, the original balance between real and imaginary space is inevitably changed.

5.1.5. VOICE, BODY AND STAGE SPACE

In theatre, voice, the body, and physical space are all closely linked: the natural origin of the voice is the body, and the body from which the voice issues usually occupies stage space. In many of Beckett's plays, however, this relationship between speech, physical presence, and three-dimensional space, is interfered with. When voices are live, as in *Play* or *Not I*, the bodies from which they issue are either hidden or absent. As Steven Connor observes in *Samuel Beckett: Repetition Theory and Text*, when a recorded voice is used, as in *That Time* and *Rockaby*, rather than emanating from a physical source, the voices of the characters seem to "come from some unlocatable point outside their actual bodies"⁵⁰³. In *A Piece of Monologue*, the voice is live, but the body it comes from is only faintly lit and Speaker's position on the stage, according to Beckett's directions, is "well off centre" (265). "To deny a solitary character the centre of the stage", argues Connor, "is to decentre the whole playing space, making it difficult to establish the actual middle or limits of the stage".⁵⁰⁴

In *Endgame*, the world is literally a stage, and Hamm explores its boundaries, but his 'place' is "[b]ang in the centre" (*E*, 24).

HAMM: Take me for a little turn. [Clv goes behind the chair and pushes it forward.] Not too fast! [Clv pushes chair.] Right round the world! [Clv pushes chair.] Hug the walls, then back to the centre again. (*E*, 23)

Hamm cannot see, but he needs to "feel" physically "right in the centre" of his world.

HAMM: I feel a little too far to the left. [Clv moves chair slightly.] Now I feel a little too far to the right. [Clv moves chair slightly.] I feel a little too far forward. [Clv moves chair slightly.] Now I feel a little too far back. [Clv moves chair slightly.] (*E*, 24)

⁵⁰³ Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, p.160.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.146.

In most of his later plays, however, Beckett provides few opportunities for his characters to explore the space they occupy, and, in the plays in which the viewing space is reduced to a head, face, or mouth, “we lose almost entirely the means of relating it to its stage environment”⁵⁰⁵. This uncertain relationship between a character and physical space is increased when he, she, or ‘it’ is positioned off-centre. In *Footfalls*, May paces in strip of light “a little off-centre” (239), Listener’s face in *That Time* floats “midstage off-centre” (228), and the rocking-chair in *Rockaby* is positioned “slightly off-centre” (275). Speaker seems to be the most physically displaced of Beckett’s protagonists, being placed “well off-centre” (265). By holding centre-stage, dramatic characters draw attention to their physical presence in space and time. Beckett’s ‘de-centred’ characters, however, are ‘faint’ and, like ghosts, their relation to the space and time they inhabit is not clearly delineated.

The dubious corporeality and temporality of Beckett’s characters in his late stage plays seems to be created by two main factors. Firstly, repeated mental and physical movements appear to trap them in a timeless space, impeding the advancement, or perhaps emergence, of a plot. Their mental and physical exertions of summoning memories, pacing the floorboards, rocking in a chair and delivering a monologue, like Henry’s stories, loop round and seem to go on forever. Secondly, the narrative delivered by the voices goes beyond what we see happening on the stage. For example, the three voices in *That Time* transport the audience to distinct geographical locations in three different periods of Listener’s life. Speaker’s monologue as well as describing actions which have taken place in the stage space at different points in time, and therefore not seen by the audience, takes us to the room of his birth, as well as various funerals of those he “almost” describes as “loved ones” (265 *passim*). Different times and places therefore mingle in these plays and universalise the figure and stage space we see before us. The real protagonist of these plays, corporeal only in the sense that it is vocalised by the body, is language. This is particularly true of *A Piece of Monologue* in which the action

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

of the play is confined to Speaker's words. In this play the 'de-centred' stage character, as Enoch Brater observes, is literally "upstaged by discourse"⁵⁰⁶.

5.1.6. THE MOVEMENT OF LANGUAGE

"In the theatre we normally expect the actor to move, but in this case the actor stands still, the better for Beckett's language to move."⁵⁰⁷ Enoch Brater's observation on *A Piece of Monologue*, could equally be extended to other late plays, such as *Ohio Impromptu* and *Rockaby*, in which a read or recorded text is dramatically staged. The main action of these stage plays comprises a bold, repeated movement, such as knocking or rocking, and the remaining drama is conveyed in the words of spoken texts, which are intermittently stopped and started by a stage figure. Speaker's monologue is not interrupted, his speech is practically continuous; the only time he falters is to check any expression of emotion.

Backs away to edge of light and stands facing blank wall. Covered with pictures once. Pictures of...he all but said of loved ones. Unframed. Unglazed. Pinned to wall with drawing-pins. All shapes and sizes. Down one after another. Gone. Torn to shreds and scattered. Strewn all over the floor. Not at one sweep. No sudden fit of...no word. (266)

Despite the highly emotive content of the monologue, centring as it does on birth and death, Speaker remains imperturbable. If there is violence, trouble, or pain in this monologue, it is contained within the words themselves, rather than in their delivery. The photos are "[r]ipped from the walls and torn to shreds", "scattered", "strewn", "some out with a wrench" (266). Standing round the open grave, rain is "pelting", umbrellas are "streaming", the black mud "bubbling" (268). When Henry tells the distressing story of Bolton and Holloway in *Embers*, his language is also highly descriptive, concentrating on the visual aspect of the sound tableau, but he also emotionally interprets the scene. He describes Bolton as "an old man in great trouble" (94), and we can

⁵⁰⁶ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.113.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.114.

hear this desperation in Henry's anguished rendering of Bolton's "Please! PLEASE!" (95).

In *A Piece of Monologue* Speaker talks about himself in the third person, as if he were another, but unlike in *Embers* and *Not I*, the telling of his own story is delivered neutrally. While the teller and told appear to be the same, the described figure tallying with what is visually presented on stage, Speaker maintains an emotional distance from his monologue, which is something Mouth is unable to attain. For example, Mouth does not just describe the old woman's incapacity to scream, she releases two piercing screams into her speech.

...couldn't make the sound...not any sound...no sound of any kind...no screaming for help for example...should she feel so inclined...scream...[Scream.]...then listen...[Silence.] ...scream again... [Screams again.]...then listen again...[Silence.]...no...spared that...all silent as the grave... (218)

Mouth's screams are shocking, dramatic, especially as her description of the woman's silent state does not call for them. Is she reacting to the unbearable situation of the incessant "buzzing", "dull roar in the skull" (218) inside the woman's head, or is she trying to disrupt her own 'maddened' stream of words? Speaker does not produce a scream, but he does describe a "cry", a cry, like a birth cry, which sets the protagonist uttering, "lips quivering to half-heard words" (269). His description is factual, scientific, linguistic: the cry is "stifled by nasal", "[s]nuffed with breath of nostrils" (269), the "[m]outh agape", "[c]losed with hiss of breath" (268). This 'cry' is a word, the "first word" of Speaker's, and his protagonist's, monologue. And not only does Speaker say the word "[b]irth", he describes how it is physically formed and released in the mouth.

Stands there staring beyond waiting for the first word. It gathers in his mouth. Birth. Parts lips and thrusts tongue between them. Tip of tongue. Feel soft touch of tongue on lips. Of lips on tongue. (268)

Speaker, while giving detailed descriptions of intimate moments in the life of his protagonist, does not pass comment on them. He does not appeal to his

audience's emotions, instead he feeds their senses; his words requiring an imaginative working of sight, sound and touch. Sometimes he even calls upon the audience to conceive what cannot be described in words, like sounds which are "[u]nutterably faint" (267), or the intangible "black vast" and "[e]mpty dark" (267).

The effect of Speaker's monologue is to produce a desolate account of life and impending death, Speaker's oxymoron "[b]irth was the death of him" (265) echoing Pozzo's bleak metaphor in *Waiting for Godot*, "[t]hey give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, than it's night once more" (WFG, 89). Speaker's monologue, however, does not reach the level of soliloquy, as Vladimir's speech does in *Waiting for Godot*.

Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (WFG, 90)

Speaker's 'piece' of monologue is affecting, but the emotional movement in this play does not come from soul-searching in the form of rhetorical questions, nor through the use of heroic language. The ghostly image of the dead and dying is left by the highly condensed poetic images that Speaker describes "[a]gain and again" (269).

5.1.7. THE FICKLE POET

If Henry's telling of the Bolton/Holloway story resembles the composition of a written prose text more than it does oral story-telling, Speaker's monologue could be seen to strain towards poetry. For example, the description of the figure looking out of his window into the dark, while written as a script, sounds like verse.

Stare beyond though rift in dark to other dark. Further dark. Sun long sunk behind the larches. Nothing stirring. Nothing faintly stirring. Stock still eyes glued to pane. As if looking his last. (269)

The language is concentrated and patterned, with its repetition of the words “dark”, “nothing”, “stirring”, and the insistence of the consonant sound /st/ in “staring”, “stirring”, “stock”, “still”, and its inversion in “last” and “first”. It is perhaps not surprising that Beckett’s next stage play, *Rockaby*, resembles a poem, both in the way in which it is written on the page, and in its paused delivery.

till in the end
the day came
in the end came
close of a long day
sitting at her window
quiet at her window
only window
facing other windows
other only windows
all blind down
never one up
hers alone up (278)

The main difference between *Rockaby* and *A Piece of Monologue* is that language in the former is synchronised with movement, and so precise is the co-ordination between rocking and language, that “[e]ach line of printed text ... coincides with one complete revolution made by the rocking chair’s arc-shaped course”⁵⁰⁸. Speaker’s language is evocative, at times lyrical, but unlike *Rockaby*, it is not a performance poem: linguistically, the texture of his monologue is not consistent.

In many ways the collage-like patterning of language in *A Piece of Monologue* resembles that of contemporaneous novel, or “long prose-poem”⁵⁰⁹ *Company*. This prose work comprises precise observations of a figure’s position and movements, which are interspersed with memory tableaux rendered in more poetic language. However, whereas *Company* is physically fractured on the page, split into different sections and voices, *A Piece of Monologue* maintains the unity of a continuous description, and a single voice, although this voice

⁵⁰⁸ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.170.

⁵⁰⁹ As categorised by Ackerley and Gontarski in *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p.106.

is not linguistically homogeneous. At times Speaker's descriptions comprise clipped, functional language resembling stage directions, as for example:

Loose matches in right-hand pocket. Strikes one on his buttock the way his father taught him. Takes off milk white globe and sets it down. Match goes out. Strikes a second as before. Takes off the chimney. Smoke-clouded. Holds it in left hand. Match goes out. Strikes a third as before and sets it to wick. Puts back chimney. Match goes out. Puts back globe. Turns wick low. Backs away to edge of light and turns to face east. (266)

A little further on, however, his language turns literary as he delivers beautifully cadenced lines echoing Shakespeare⁵¹⁰.

Rain some nights still slants against the panes. Or dropping gentle on the place beneath. (266)

So different are these languages that it seems unlikely that they should occur in the same monologue, and the question poses itself as to how they can adhere. Are they just forged together, or is there something else that cements them?

5.1.8. VERBAL PROCESSES

One of the most notable features of *A Piece of Monologue* is Speaker's use of verbal repetition. It is tempting to suggest that the different linguistic textures in the monologue are bonded by the repetition of images, words and refrains. Indeed, Ruby Cohn, in *Just Play: Beckett's Theater*, sees repetition as having a cohesive effect. In a chapter dedicated to the detailed study of various forms of verbal repetition in Beckett's drama from *Waiting for Godot* to *...but the clouds...*⁵¹¹, Cohn concludes that it acts as a weaving device, serving "as music, meaning, metaphor"⁵¹². Steven Connor has also written extensively on the effect of repetition in Beckett's work, and questions the idea that

⁵¹⁰ The source of these lines is Portia's speech in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1596-98). "The quality of mercy is not strain'd,/ It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/ Upon the place beneath." IV.1, 180-2. John Russell Brown (ed.), *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*, (1985; 1955), p.111.

⁵¹¹ Cohn, "The Churn of Stale Words: Repetitions", *Just Play*, pp.96-139.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p.139.

repetition precipitates unity. Instead, he gives importance to “the complexity of the displacements effected by repetition in Beckett’s work, the challenges which it proposes to notions of essential unity”⁵¹³. While neither Cohn nor Connor specifically treat verbal repetitions in *A Piece of Monologue*, their analyses both seem pertinent to the consideration of linguistic cohesion in this short play.

At the beginning of Speaker’s monologue he tells us that “[w]ords are few” (265), and yet his monologue runs to twenty minutes of performance time. Here we have yet another discrepancy between what we are told and shown in the play. In fact, Speaker has no shortage of words, they fall from his mouth in profusion. It is just that the range of his words is limited, and this is hardly surprising given the scarcity of incident it is his role to describe. His monologue consists of repeated descriptions of funerals, the lighting of a lamp, the enunciation of the word “birth”, and a motionless figure facing a blank wall or staring out of a window. The verbal rendition of these images, however, is not the same each time, and the words that are used to depict them are not necessarily ‘few’, at least not initially. What actually happens, as Enoch Brater points out, is that each time an incident is repeated it loses materiality “until mere allusion suffices to express previously substantial renditions”.

The first time the lamp is lit, the verbal action requires twenty-four lines; the second time, fourteen; and the third time Speaker elliptically murmurs merely ‘lights lamp as described.’ Such extreme economy of speech happens again when all three funerals are reduced to nothing more than an image: ‘bubbling black mud’.⁵¹⁴

Repetition seems to be acting as a process of distillation, a verbal image becoming capable of triggering a whole scene. This reductive tendency also works at a purely linguistic level in the play, as in this passage at the end of Speaker’s monologue.

⁵¹³ Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, p.12.

⁵¹⁴ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.115.

Treating of other matters. Trying to treat of other matters. Till half hears
there are no other matters. Never were other matters. Never two matters.
Never but the one matter. The dead and gone. The dying and the going.
From the word go. The word begone. (269)

Each phrase echoes the previous one, either lexically by reiteration of the word “treat” and “matters”, or semantically, “[t]he dead and the gone” referring back to “the one matter” of the preceding line. This game of repetition leaves a verbal residue, one word suffused with the meaning of “go” and yet phonetically linked to the word “begin”. “Begone” is not only a verbal paradox, suggesting presence and absence, it is also a distillation of Speaker’s opening phrase, “[b]irth was the death of him” (265). The repetition of words and images in *A Piece of Monologue*, as Ruby Cohn has persuasively argued, therefore does seem to give the play coherence, but it also condenses it; the compressed language and images turning to fossils under the weight of Speaker’s “[t]hirty thousand nights” (265).

In addition to its role of evoking visual scenes in the fewest possible words, repetition also serves another function in the play. In his discussion of repetition in Beckett’s texts, Steven Connor draws attention to Gilles Deleuze’s distinction between “naked” repetition, a faithful replica of the original, and “clothed” repetition, “which adds something to its original and seems to impart a difference to it”⁵¹⁵. Interestingly, as Cohn observes, Beckett himself also distinguishes between types of repetition, described in his director’s notebook of *Happy Days* as “Repetition Texts” and “Variation Texts”⁵¹⁶. In *A Piece of Monologue* these different types of repetition abound, although it is not always clear to which category they should be assigned. For example, “[b]lack vast” (265, 267) is repeated, but then at the end of the monologue the word “black” is combined in a number of different noun combinations, “[b]lack ditch”, “black mud”, “black beyond” (268-269). It is hard to know if we are dealing with “naked” or “clothed” repetition here, or both.

⁵¹⁵ Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, p.6.

⁵¹⁶ Cited in Cohn, *Just Play*, p.120.

Similarly, in the case of ‘refrains’, which Cohn helpfully describes as “[a] meaningful word or words often repeated during the course of a play, so that the audience grows aware of that repetition”⁵¹⁷, it is not always easy to decide which definition to assign them. For instance, the refrain running through the monologue referring to “loved ones” is reiterated word for word on three occasions as “he all but said of loved ones” (265, 266, 266), then is varied to, “he all but said which loved one?” (268), “he all but said which loved one’s?” and “he all but said ghost loved ones” (269). What *does* come across from looking at these repetitions in isolation is a very pleasing symmetry, there being three instances of “naked” repetition, followed by three of “clothed”. Likewise, there is symmetry within the variant refrain “[n]o such thing as”. It occurs twice as “[n]o such thing as none” (265, 266), once, pivotally, as “[n]o such thing as no light” (267), and twice as “[n]o such thing as whole” (268, 269). Double and triple repetitions run throughout the text and often seem to form a principle of progression from line to line.

Nothing there. Nothing stirring. That he can see. Hear. Dwells thus as if
unable to move again. Or no will left to move again. Not enough will left to
move again. (266)

With such a complex pattern of repeated words, phrases and refrains, it is not hard to see why Cohn viewed Beckett’s “churn of stale words” in musical terms. Perhaps this is how *A Piece of Monologue* is best heard, as a set of verbal variations on visual and sound motifs, which, like music, repeat, reformulate, then retreat: “Again and again. Again and again gone” (268, 269). How different Beckett’s first stage monologue from this, his last to be delivered by a ‘live’ voice. Krapp’s reflections on his past and present, like his voice, were “cracked”, his last tape being a disjointed verbal medley replete with interruption, hesitation, expletives, a shout, a cough and a burst of song. Speaker’s journey between times past, present and future is far less dissonant

⁵¹⁷ Cohn, *Just Play*, p.102.

and traumatic. Rarely does his voice waver as it takes his audience on a journey back and forth in time by means of what could be very well described as a process of verbal osmosis.

5.1.9. THE VOICE BEHIND THE MONOLOGUE

In many of Beckett's plays voice has been protagonist, if not star of the show. In *A Piece of Monologue* Speaker's voice could not be more central to the drama, given that the stage image and action are minimal, and yet its performance is far more modest than that of its predecessors. Rather than drawing attention to itself by being acousmatic or emotionally charged, this embodied, steadied voice foregrounds the language it delivers. Language is a creative multifaceted force in the play. It can determine the way a scene is visually evoked, informing the audience how objects should be imagined and from what angle they should be viewed. Language's technical, sensory function is also matched by the sensuousness of poetic passages, and the repetition of words and refrains provides a sound complement to the reoccurring visual images described in the monologue.

While language is protagonist in *A Piece of Monologue*, it is not solely responsible for the drama in the play. As S. E. Gontarski comments, the interest "rests not in parallels between sight and sound, stage and narrative, but in the slippage between"⁵¹⁸. There may be complementation between visual and sound images within Speaker's monologue, but spoken language and the stage image are asymmetrical. The drama in the play therefore seems to be carried by the mismatch between the seen and the said, but there is also a third element involved, one that the audience cannot hear but Speaker can. When Speaker tries "to treat of other matters", he "half hears there are no other matters" (269), his words apparently being guided by a silent yet insistent inner voice that brings any attempt to veer away from speaking

⁵¹⁸ Ackerley and Gontarski, *A Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p.437.

about death back to that “one matter”. Speaker’s monologue, like Mouth’s, is not entirely his own.

Behind Speaker’s words lies the performative voice, and, as in *Not I*, it must speak by proxy. The fact that this voice goes unheard by the audience, however, does not seem to divest it of its power. On the contrary, the precision of Speaker’s language in his detailed descriptions of scenes and images is indicative of the extent to which the voice governs the monologue. The untamed voice clamouring to make itself heard in the head of the Unnamable, now seems to be confidently ensconced in the director’s chair. In *A Piece of Monologue* the performative voice directs Speaker and prompts him when he veers away from the script. Speaker’s words are slave to the will of the voice. This tyranny is made visually explicit in *Ohio Impromptu* when a silent character, Listener, makes Reader speak the words that he has written. To make sure the Reader does not stray from the script, it is bound in a book and read on stage. In this play Beckett further explores the obligation to speak central to *Not I* and *A Piece of Monologue*, but rather than receiving instructions from a silent, inner voice, this time the command is heard on stage and the words are not recited but read.

5.2. VOICE AND PERFORMATIVE TEXT: *OHIO IMPROMPTU*

5.2.1. A PLAY TO FIT THE BILL

Requests for plays by actors, friends and directors resulted in Beckett’s writing the three late stage plays, *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), *Rockaby* (1980)⁵¹⁹, and *Ohio Impromptu* (1980). In the case of *Ohio Impromptu*, S. E. Gontarski asked Beckett if he would write a dramatic piece for an

⁵¹⁹ Beckett wrote *Rockaby* for a mini-festival to celebrate his 75th birthday at the Buffalo campus of SUNY, at the request of Daniel Labeille, who was working closely with Alan Schneider. See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.662.

International Symposium planned for May 1981 in Ohio, to honour his seventy-fifth birthday. Despite Beckett's protests of how "unfitted" he was "to write to request"⁵²⁰, after a few false starts he produced *Ohio Impromptu* in late 1980. The world première took place at the Ohio conference on 9th May 1981, directed by Alan Schneider, with David Warrilow as Reader and Rand Mitchell as Listener⁵²¹.

5.2.2. WORDS AND WORLDS IN THE TITLE

Ohio Impromptu is a play full of puzzles and ambiguities, as if Beckett were goading the academic audience the play was written for. So teasing is it that we need go no further than the title to see the various literal and symbolic readings that it invites. S. E. Gontarski, whilst admitting there is "some playfulness", believes the name *Ohio Impromptu* "is also straightforwardly descriptive, marking occasion and genre – impromptus à la Molière and Giraudoux (which were metatheatrical or self-reflexive exercises) – or more like the intricate little solo pieces Schubert, Chopin, and Schumann called impromptus"⁵²². However, while the play may have been written for a specific occasion, it by no means has the air of improvisation. Firstly, it took Beckett nearly nine months to write, and secondly, as K. O. Gorman comments, the action of the play is very tightly controlled.

In promising an impromptu – a performance without preparation – the title of the play subverts its own promise when followed by a text which allows no extemporaneous composition, no improvisation on the part of the actors.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ SB to S. E. Gontarski, 02.03.80. *Ibid.*, p.664 [note 28, p.824].

⁵²¹ Written correspondence between SB and Alan Schneider concerning the première performance is printed in Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.396, pp.398-400, pp.403-406.

⁵²² Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.175.

⁵²³ Kathleen O'Gorman, "The Speech Act in Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*", in R. J. Davis and L. St. J. Butler (eds.), *'Make Sense Who May': Essays on Samuel Beckett's Later Work*, (1988), p.119.

Ironically, by the time Beckett had finished reworking his material, he ended up submitting not so much an impromptu, as “a play that was as stiff as a board”⁵²⁴.

H. Porter Abbott provides a further explanation of Beckett’s use of the word “impromptu” in the title by referring to a holograph fragment⁵²⁵ for the requested piece, which was one of two early false starts⁵²⁶. “So immediate and personal are these few lines”, he comments, “that they are conceivably the inspiration for the word ‘impromptu’ that wound up in the title”⁵²⁷. While Beckett jettisoned the idea behind the fragment (a ghost returns from the Underworld to speak at an academic conference⁵²⁸), S. E. Gontarski asserts that in the final version of *Ohio Impromptu* “Beckett is certainly meditating... on the play within the occasion, the artist speaking to his critics”⁵²⁹. H. Porter Abbott sees the play as being even more pointedly aimed at its Ohio audience. Commenting on the “two ancient white-haired men” scrutinising certain words and phrases from a book, he concludes “it is hard to overlook the caricature of the audience for which it was composed – scholars who spend their professional lives poring over texts and reading them to one another”⁵³⁰. *Ohio Impromptu* was therefore not only written for a particular occasion but makes reference to the event in its title and perhaps within the play itself.

While the words in the title are undoubtedly ironic, they are also noteworthy for their etymological and phonetic difference. “Ohio”, deriving from the Seneca⁵³¹ word *ohi:yo*, means “beautiful river”, and its pronunciation in

⁵²⁴ Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, p.177.

⁵²⁵ A transcription of the *Ohio Impromptu* holograph is printed in Morris Beja, S. E. Gontarski and Pierre Astier (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives* (1983), pp.191-196.

⁵²⁶ The other false start kept at the University of Reading (MS2930), concerns the difficulty experienced by the protagonist when threading a needle. As Knowlson comments, this piece reflects on Beckett’s own impediments, his defective eyesight and Dupuytren’s contracture of the hand. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.664 [note 30, p.824].

⁵²⁷ Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, p.175.

⁵²⁸ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.664.

⁵²⁹ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, p.177.

⁵³⁰ Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, p.170.

⁵³¹ The Seneca people were one of Six Nations of the Iroquois League in North America, speaking the indigenous Iroquoian language.

English is characterised by long open diphthongs. In contrast, "Impromptu" derives from the Latin *in promptu*, meaning "in readiness", and its English pronunciation is more clipped with short vowel sounds, its final long vowel being unstressed. The effect of combining these two very distinct words is puzzling, if not comic, and the incongruity of this pairing might reflect more than Beckett's sense of fun and his interest in the sound and etymology of words. It may also suggest his equivocal feelings towards the origins and performance of the play. Perhaps, "Ohio" refers to the "New World", mentioned in the holograph fragment⁵³², and the "old world", which appears in the play as "old world Latin Quarter hat" (286), is represented by the Latinate word "Impromptu". Beckett, firmly placed in the "old world", Europe, had visited America once when he shot *Film* but had no desire to return, "This is somehow not the right country for me", he was reported to have said⁵³³. Nor did he feel any affinity with the academic world. When Beckett was awarded an Honorary D. Litt from Trinity College Dublin in 1959, he accepted it, but the honour itself, plus the ceremony, both horrified and mystified him.

I don't underestimate it, nor pretend I am not greatly moved, but I have a holy horror of such things and it is not easy for me. If I were a scholar or a man of letters it might be different. But what in God's name have doctoracy and literature to do with work like mine?⁵³⁴

When he was trying to write a piece for the Ohio conference, it was also an event in his honour, and, judging from the holograph fragment, he felt the same mix of reticence and bewilderment addressing a group of academics in an unknown and faraway place.

Proceed straight to [Lima] the nearest campus, they said, and address them.
[Address] whom? I said.
The students, they said, and the professors.
Oh my God, I said, not that.⁵³⁵

⁵³² Beja *et al* (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, p.191.

⁵³³ Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.525 [note 65, p.803].

⁵³⁴ SB in a letter to A. J. Leventhal 03.02.59. *Ibid.*, p.465, [note 106, p.793].

⁵³⁵ Beja *et al* (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, p.191.

As well as an apparent juxtaposition of the new and old worlds within the title, Pierre Astier observes that a more obvious contrast could have been made within the play itself, in the description of the Isle of Swans, (*Allée des Cygnes*), in Paris.

Although few Parisians have ever set foot on it, they have all seen...its one and only tourist attraction standing high at the end of the "allée," at the downstream extremity of the islet: a much reduced but still quite imposing replica of one of Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi's most famous work, the Statue of Liberty. In other words, unless totally blind, nobody could ever miss it – nobody that is, except the character in the story within the play who, looking out from the single window of his single room on the far (right) bank, can see only that "downstream extremity of the Isle of Swans" but not the statue that *is* there, and who, in his daily slow walks on the islet itself, always pauses at the very place where it is supposed to stand without ever noticing it.⁵³⁶

Beckett does not include the Statue of Liberty in the story within the play but the spirit of freedom is still present. After all, the read text does situate the play in the heart of the French Republic. However, a sense of liberty is certainly *not* conveyed by the two staged figures who appear to be mutually dependent on each other, and whose physical movements are reduced to knocking on a table and page turning. And it is this very sense of the equivocal, of the unfamiliar within the familiar, which makes the title, story, and live drama disconcerting. The words "Ohio" and "Impromptu" are not unusual in themselves, but when juxtaposed they sound awkward and strange. Similarly, reading out loud from a book is not an extraordinary activity, but it becomes so when the recital comprises the dramatic action of a stage play.

5.2.3. READING AS A PERFORMATIVE ACT

The most striking aspect of *Ohio Impromptu* is that both dramatic speech and action centre on the act of reading and listening to a text. In *A Piece of Monologue*, Beckett staged a static figure delivering a monologue. In *Ohio*

⁵³⁶ Pierre Astier, "Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu: A View from the Isle of Swans*", in *Modern Drama* 25 (1982), p.337.

Impromptu Beckett stages two seated figures, one reading aloud from a book, the other listening and controlling the reading process by means of knocking on a table, an action he carries out six times during the course of the play. The stage action seems to be not so much scripted as ‘texted’. A character is quite literally transformed into a reader, a verbal vehicle for a printed text. Reader, like Speaker before him, appears to be instrumental. Enoch Brater, commenting on *A Piece of Monologue*, claims that “the figure who stands before us is the mask language wears to get itself recited on stage”⁵³⁷, perhaps Reader in *Ohio Impromptu* is the mask the printed text dons to get itself read on stage.

While Beckett had not used read material in such a blatant way before, this was not the first time that the act of reading had made its way into his plays. Although the emphasis in *Krapp’s Last Tape* is on listening, Krapp’s ledger and a dictionary are both read on stage, and Krapp refers to rereading Theodor Fontane’s novel *Effi Briest*, “[s]calded the eyes out of me reading *Effie* again, a page a day” (62), as well as his own unread “opus magnum” (62). In *Rough for Theatre II*⁵³⁸, contemporaneous with the drama written in the late 1950’s, the act of reading takes a much more central role and, in this sense, is the play that comes nearest to *Ohio Impromptu*.

In *Rough for Theatre II*, as in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, the responsibility for outlining the pitiful life of the protagonist, referred to in the stage directions as ‘C’, does not lie with him. Rather than employing technology to reproduce a first person testimony in the form of a recorded voice, C’s story comes from written letters and personal commentaries by friends and acquaintances which are read on stage by ‘B’ (Morvan) to his colleague ‘A’ (Bertrand). If this play had been performed in the late 1950’s⁵³⁹, C would have been Beckett’s first mute

⁵³⁷ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.112.

⁵³⁸ *Rough for Theatre II* was one of the “ancient bits and scraps of radio and theatre” that Beckett translated from French in 1975, see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.618.

⁵³⁹ *Rough for Theatre II* was one of the “ancient bits and scraps of radio and theatre” that Beckett translated from French in 1975, see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.618.

and motionless protagonist to get his story told on stage, and, in this respect, C appears as an early blueprint for the more sophisticated character of Listener in *Ohio Impromptu*. Like C, Listener manages to have his story read on stage without uttering a word, but his story comprises a first person version of events that he himself has written. While only a fragment of Listener's autobiographical tale is read, the events described are coherent, the writing clear and fluid. In the case of *Rough for Theatre II*, although some of the miscellaneous documents that B reads have a recognisable narrative thread, much of the material comprises baffling quotations pertaining to "bits and scraps" (82) of C's life.

I quote again: 'Of our national epos he remembered only the calamities, which did not prevent him from winning a minor scholarship in the subject.' Testimony of Mr Peaberry, market gardener in the Deeping Fens and lifelong friend. [Pause.] 'Not a tear was known to fall in our family, and God knows they did in torrents, that was not caught up and piously preserved in that inexhaustible reservoir of sorrow, with the date, the hour and the occasion, and not a joy, fortunately they were few, that was not on the contrary irrevocably dissolved, as by a corrosive. In that he took after me.' Testimony of the late Mrs Darcy-Crocker, woman of letters. (80)

Not only is C's story largely incomprehensible, it is often totally lost sight of due to the prominence given to the paraphernalia of reading. B is seen to turn pages, to 'rummage' in his papers, scatter sheets on the floor; the two reading lamps are also drawn attention to, as are the two tables on which the documents are placed.

In *Ohio Impromptu*, while the act of reading dominates the stage image, there is greater simplification in its presentation: the lamps are dispensed with, the two tables become one, the sheaf of papers is bound in a book⁵⁴⁰, and Reader is only seen to turn pages on two occasions. In *Rough for Theatre II*, there is also an insistence on the written nature of what is being said which finds a parallel in *Ohio Impromptu*. In the former, B insists on punctiliously detailing

⁵⁴⁰ SB was concerned about the staging of the book, as he commented to Alan Schneider in a letter dated 22.04.81. "I'm wondering how, in the *Impromptu*, to make the book visually effective. So far can only see the largish format & black binding & hear the faint thud of its being closed at the end." In Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served*, p.403.

the punctuation marks when reading from what is, presumably, a spoken testimony that has been noted down.

I quote: 'Questioned on this occasion? – open brackets – '(judicial separation)' – close brackets – 'regarding the deterioration of our relations, all he could adduce was the five or six miscarriages which clouded' – open brackets – '(oh through no act of mine!)' – close brackets – 'the early days of our union and the veto which in consequence I had finally to oppose' – open brackets – '(oh not for want of inclination!)' – close brackets – 'to anything remotely resembling the work of love... (79)

In the case of *Ohio Impromptu*, Reader draws attention to the fact he is actually reading when he pronounces an impromptu “yes”, which seems to serve as affirmation to himself that he has read an awkward grammatical construction correctly.

In this extremity his old terror of night laid hold on him again. After so long a lapse that as if never been. [Pause. Looks closer.] Yes, after so long a lapse that as if never been. (286)

The flow of the narrative is also interrupted when Reader starts to turn back pages, as instructed to do so by the written text.

Now with redoubled force the fearful symptoms described at length page forty paragraph four. [Starts to turn back the pages. Checked by L's hand. Resumes relinquished page.] (286)

A further break is caused by an untimely page break in the poetic line, “No sleep no braving sleep till- [turns page.] – dawn of day” (286), which has the effect of underlining how dependent Reader is on a text to provide him with speech. While the reminders of the written nature of what is being read are infinitely more subtle in *Ohio Impromptu* than in *Rough for Theatre II*, ultimately, their effect is similar: they foreground the fact that what is being performed is as much a reading as it is a drama.

Although *Rough for Theatre II* and *Ohio Impromptu* are the works that most obviously include performed readings, the texture of read material also seeps into *Footfalls*. In this play, although no actual text appears on the stage, towards the end of the play there is a marked change in May's narrative style which makes it seem as if she were reading from a book.

Old Mrs Winter, whom the reader will remember, old Mrs Winter, one late autumn Sunday afternoon, on sitting down to supper with her daughter after worship, after a few half-hearted mouthfuls laid down her knife and fork and bowed her head.(242)

By addressing “the reader”, May is echoing an intrusive technique used by nineteenth century novelists, which has the effect of turning writing into a kind of speaking⁵⁴¹. Here, Beckett seems to be parodying the literary device, as this is the first time that “old Mrs Winter” and “Amy – the daughter’s given name, as the reader will remember” have been mentioned in the play. Later in the monologue, May’s narration, rather than borrowing from the novel, self-consciously returns to drama, with May reading both parts of a dialogue, prefacing the utterances with the character’s name.

Amy did you observe anything...strange at Evensong? Amy: No, Mother, I did not. Mrs W: Perhaps it was just my fancy. Amy: Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy it was? [Pause.] Just what exactly, Mother, did you perhaps fancy this...strange thing was you observed? [Pause.] Mrs W: You yourself observed nothing...strange? Amy: No mother, I did not, to put it mildly. Mrs W: What do you mean, Amy, to put it mildly, what can you possibly mean, Amy, to put it mildly? (243)

One of the most interesting features of this melodramatic ‘text’ is the bracketed direction “pause”, which draws attention to its status as a script. Beckett has staged a monologue with embedded dialogue, dialogue that simultaneously belongs to a story which appears to be read or recited from a book. It is as if the audience was listening to a “sequel” - May uses the word herself (242) – from a novel being read on the radio.

While the effect of staging long passages of read material in *Rough for Theatre II* is ultimately comic, it almost certainly gave Beckett the opportunity to satirise convoluted language. This is exemplified in the play when B ‘undresses’ the written discourse, shedding conjunctions, qualifiers, subordinate clauses, verbal redundancy, in an attempt to find sense.

⁵⁴¹ David Lodge in his *The Art of Fiction* (1992) provides a useful account of the use of authorial intrusion in the nineteenth century novel, pp.9-12.

- B: [Hurriedly.] ‘...morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others at the time, I mean as often and for as long as they entered my awareness – ‘ What kind of Chinese is that?
- A: [Nervously.] Keep going, keep going!
- B: ‘...for as long as they entered my awareness, and that in either case, I mean whether such on the one hand as to give me pleasure or on the contrary on the other to cause me pain, and truth to tell – ‘ Shit! Where’s the verb?
- A: What verb?
- B: The main!
- A: I give up.
- B: Hold on till I find the verb and to hell with all this drivel in the middle. [Reading.] ‘...were I but...could I but...’ – Jesus!- ‘...though it be...be it but...’ - Christ! – ah! I have it- ‘...I was unfortunately incapable...’ Done it!
- A: How does it run now?
- B: [Solemnly.] ‘...morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others at the time...’ – drivel drivel drivel – ‘...I was unfortunately incapable-‘ (283)

Not surprisingly, after hacking up the discourse, what B is left with, although syntactically more acceptable, remains semantically nonsensical. The conclusion to be drawn here seems to be that spoken “drivel” produces written drivel and vice versa.

In Ohio Impromptu the effect of basing drama on read material does not result in comedy, nor does it in Footfalls. Rather than a satirical attack on language, the read narrative in Ohio Impromptu could be seen as a tribute to literary heritage, given the numerous literary derivations and allusions it contains⁵⁴². What the performed reading in Ohio Impromptu and the read texture of May’s speech in Footfalls seem to have in common, is that they create tension between the staged drama and the recited narrative.

By staging readings, or speech which mimics reading, Beckett totally upsets Alessandro Serpieri’s description of the theatrical event as the “mimesis of the

⁵⁴² Brater details literary allusions to Baudelaire, T. S. Eliot, Proust, Mallarmé and Shakespeare, in *Beyond Minimalism*, pp.133-34.

lived, not the detachment of the narrated”⁵⁴³. While many of Beckett’s plays are clearly anti-mimetic, comprising extended narratives, they are nevertheless presented in dramatic form and there is stage life, even if this is often reduced to a mere image. In a play such as *Ohio Impromptu*, where the action so blatantly depends on written narrative, the way in which the acts of reading and listening are performed and the way the stage image relates to the scripted text, become critical.

All the written and spoken meta-narratives which Beckett has inserted into his plays have led here, to *Ohio Impromptu*, a play which works at the interface of writing and speaking, drama and text. In this play he stages a process that fascinated him, that of the transference between the written and spoken word via the voice. The silent written voice gaining spoken resonance goes quite literally under the spotlight in *Ohio Impromptu* to form part of the live drama, drama that is created through a series of parallels and oppositions between scenic and verbal elements of the play.

5.2.4. TEXT AND STAGE IMAGE

As in many of Beckett’s plays, the curtain rises on a process nearing its end. Krapp was preparing to make his last tape, the female voice in *Eh Joe* was losing her strength and about to be ‘squeezed’ from Joe’s head, and Voice in *Cascando* claimed to be finishing his story. The first stage image we see in *Ohio Impromptu* is that of Reader turning a page of “a worn volume” (287), “open at the last pages” (285). He is finishing a “sad tale” which he is reading to Listener who is seated at a table with Reader⁵⁴⁴.

⁵⁴³ Cited in Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett’s Later Drama* (1993), p.3 [note 9, p.126].

⁵⁴⁴ Photograph printed in Brater, *The Essential Samuel Beckett*, p.120



Alan Schneider's production of *Ohio Impromptu* at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York, 1983. The same show premiered on 9th May, 1981 in the Stadium 2 Theater of the Drake Union at the Ohio State University of Columbus.

According to the parallel situation in the text, Reader appears to have visited Listener a number of times, always at night, and each time he reads “the sad tale through again”, before leaving “without a word” (287). While we are sure that Reader is coming to the end of the book, we do not know if this is his last reading. The text states that the man will not disappear after finishing the story for the last time, but will remain seated before pronouncing, “I have had word from – and here he named the dear name – that I shall not come again” (287). The audience is therefore listening to a reading which repeatedly insists on its finality, “the sad time a last time told” (287, 288), although it is unclear whether the story really is being told for the last time. Mischievously, at the end of the play, Beckett leaves this question open. Reader does remain seated and silent, implying that this *is* his final visit, but then Reader and Listener do something that has not been previously mentioned in the text: “Simultaneously they lower their right hands to table, raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless” (288). This departure from text and action is reminiscent of the discrepancy between voice and action in *Ghost Trio* - when Figure goes to look in the mirror without

Voice's prior instruction. As in *A Piece of Monologue*, the story contains a description of its stage image, but in *Ohio Impromptu* it actually extends beyond its own reading⁵⁴⁵ to describe the two figures at dawn, sitting in "[p]rofound of mind", "as though turned to stone" (288), an image the audience does not actually see.

While some commentators see a drawing together of the enacted drama and the read narrative at the end of the play, "[t]he stage image converges with the narrative, as the two 'raise their heads and look at each other'"⁵⁴⁶, in fact, there appears to be a divergence as, Elizabeth Klaver comments: "Unlike the stream related in the narrative whose 'two arms conflowed and flowed united on', the two texts diverge, converge, and diverge". The dramatic and narrative elements of the play cross but they do not merge, as, ultimately, they are "separate and divergent structures"⁵⁴⁷. The "sad tale" in *Ohio Impromptu* may therefore appear a simple one, but when considered in the light of the stage image, a more complex set of relationships begins to appear.

The storyline of the section of the book that Reader recites from is neatly summarised by James Knowlson as follows:

Reader reads from a book about a man who moves away from where he had lived 'so long alone together' with a companion, who has clearly left him, perhaps even died, and goes to live in a single room on the far bank of the river. From time to time, the man is visited by a stranger who is sent by his former love to comfort him. On each visit, the comforter spends the night reading the 'sad tale' to the man. Habitually he leaves at dawn.⁵⁴⁸

Not only is the read tale most probably Listener's autobiographical story, but it appears to make reference to Beckett's own life as well. He told James Knowlson that "the dear face" of the departed lover was Suzanne's⁵⁴⁹, and

⁵⁴⁵ This point is made by H. Porter Abbott in *Beckett Writing Beckett*, p.174.

⁵⁴⁶ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.665.

⁵⁴⁷ Elizabeth Klaver, "Samuel Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*, *Quad*, and *What Where: How It Is* in the Matrix of Text and Television", in *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 32, no. 3. (Autumn, 1991), p.371.

⁵⁴⁸ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.665

⁵⁴⁹ Beckett and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, met in 1929, became lovers in 1938, and married in March 1961.

although his wife was still alive when he wrote *Ohio Impromptu*, she was eighty years old and Beckett was clearly worried about her health. He said that he had “imagined her dead so many times. I’ve even imagined myself trudging out to her grave”⁵⁵⁰. The couple had spent over forty years together, and while they had shared so much, they had also come to live relatively separate lives. Beckett seems to allude to their relationship in “sad tale” with both tenderness and regret.

Could he not now turn back? Acknowledge his error and return to where they were once so long alone together. Alone together so much shared. No. What he had done alone could not be undone. Nothing he had ever done alone could ever be undone. By him alone. (286)

As Knowlson points out, the image of the “two arms” of the river is central to the memory of togetherness and the subsequent sense of loss and solitude⁵⁵¹.

At the tip he would always pause to dwell on the receding stream. How in joyous eddies its two arms conflowed and flowed united on. Then turn and his slow steps retrace. (286)

A more obvious autobiographical reference is present on both the stage and in the text in the form of the wide-brimmed black hat, such as James Joyce used to wear. The story specifically names the “Isle of Swans”, where Beckett used to walk with Joyce when he was a student in Paris in the 1930’s.

Day after day he could be seen slowly pacing the islet. Hour after hour. In his long black coat no matter what the weather and old world Latin Quarter hat. (286)

Is Reader “a disguised Beckett reading on the Left Bank to a blind James Joyce?”⁵⁵², or, indeed, is the whole structure of the play based on their working relationship? Not only was Beckett Joyce’s amanuensis, but he also used to read back what Joyce had dictated. Beckett even told Joyce’s biographer, Richard Ellmann, of an amusing incident when he did not hear a

⁵⁵⁰ Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.665, [note 35, p.824].

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.665.

⁵⁵² Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.126

knock on the door but, unquestioningly, wrote Joyce's response into his notes.

Joyce said, "Come in," and Beckett wrote it down. Afterwards he read back what he had written and Joyce said, "What's that 'Come in'?" "Yes, you said that," said Beckett. Joyce thought for a moment, then said, "Let it stand."⁵⁵³

The text, the stage image, and perhaps the structure of the play, contain references to Joyce, and, as Enoch Brater points out, Joyce's work is also echoed in the play. "Ohio, as Beckett would certainly have known, is a river mentioned by Joyce in *Finnegan's Wake*, and in the first chapter of *Ulysses* Buck Mulligan reminds Stephen Dedalus not to forget his own "Latin quarter hat"⁵⁵⁴. Brater also finds other possible autobiographical pointers in the play, linking "white nights" (286), a translation of the French *nuit blanche*, a sleepless night, with "White Knights", the location of the Beckett Archive at the University of Reading in the UK⁵⁵⁵. Reading, the city, while not a homophone for "reading", is a homograph, linking the action in this play both phonetically and graphically with a place the academic audience of Ohio would know only too well. "White nights" could also extend its autobiographical reference to Beckett's own insomnia and tendency to nightmare⁵⁵⁶.

As well as relating to Beckett's life, the text and stage image may also allude to his own writing. Brater comments that the protagonist in the read narrative pacing the islet from left to right, right to left, is like "[a] masculine complement to the figure in *Footfalls*"⁵⁵⁷. Reader's night visits to Listener are also strongly reminiscent of Horn's visits to the narrator of the "Fizzles" entitled "Horn Came Always". Like Reader, Horn is a night visitor, "Horn came always at night", and, although he does not read a text word for word, he consults

⁵⁵³ Interview with SB, 1954. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (1983; 1959) p.649.

⁵⁵⁴ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.126, [note 22, p.188].

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.132.

⁵⁵⁶ SB's insomnia and frequent nightmares are documented in Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, p.131.

⁵⁵⁷ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.132.

“his notes” by torch light, then speaks in the dark. Initially, the narrator sends Horn away “once his time is up”, then, like Reader, he goes “of his own accord”(229). The narrator also interrupts Horn, although interruptions seem to be unwelcome and infrequent, but when interrupted he finds the place in his speech and carries on.

He did not like one to interrupt him and I must confess I seldom had call to. Interrupting him one night I asked him to light his face. He did so, briefly, switched off and resumed the thread. (230)

Like Reader, Horn also responds obligingly to the narrator’s requests. The narrator does not knock as Listener does (although the narrator says, “I’ll call out, if there is a knock, Come in!” (229), but he will answer any queries by referring to his notes.

Were I to ask, for example, And her gown that day?, then he switched on, thumbed through his notes, found the particular, switched off and answered, for example, The yellow. (229-230)

The situation between Horn and the narrator, and Reader and Listener, therefore appears to be similar, but there is one important difference. The unseen Horn, while consulting notes, either improvises his speech or has memorised it, whereas the visible Reader recites his from a book. Ironically, Beckett makes the actor read his lines and the fictional character learn them by heart, creating a form of transvestism here between text and script.

The relationship between the text and stage image in *Ohio Impromptu* is therefore far from simple. The narrative contains autobiographical details of the silent stage character, and it is read by another visible character who is also seemingly mentioned in the text. Within this dramatic ‘fiction’, autobiographical references to the playwright’s life are also made, as well as allusions to the audience the play was written for. Finally, the play is also inter-textual, drawing on the staging and language of other literary works, including those within Beckett’s own oeuvre. While the dramatic and narrative strands seem to create a Chinese box structure of a story within a story within a story, they do not fit perfectly together; there may be close

parallels between the text and stage image but they do not fully coalesce. Like the two stage characters, they remain slightly asymmetrical.

5.2.5. VISUAL AND VOCAL DOUBLES

It is difficult to speak about Reader without Listener, and vice versa, as they seem to be embodiments of a split self. By creating another in his image, Listener effectively duplicates himself, like Hamm's "solitary child who turns himself into children" (E, 45), or the child alone in narrative strand 'A' of *That Time*, who speaks in different voices to keep himself company: "making up talk breaking up two or more talking to himself being together that way where none ever came" (233). The stage double also allows Listener to have his story told in the third person, thereby managing to evade that most unpopular of pronouns among Beckett's narrators, "the first personal" (C, 86).

Although Reader and Listener are "*as alike in appearance as possible*" (285), Reader is arguably *not* Listener's doppelgänger, as Enoch Brater perceptively comments.

...these two players as seen by the audience appear subtly different. Though both bow their heads, propping them up on the right hand, Listener sits facing front, Reader in profile. The image is counterfeit rather than a counterpart. What we see is a near-double instead of a doppelgänger.⁵⁵⁸

Beckett was not concerned that the audience would notice the difference in appearance between the two characters; on the contrary, he instructed Alan Schneider to angle the table slightly so that the audience could see the Reader's face⁵⁵⁹. This play on the similarity/non-similarity of Reader and Listener, both on stage, and their 'doubles' within the text, appears to be an important factor when choosing a cast for the play. In the 2001 Channel 4/ Tyrone Productions filmed version of *Ohio Impromptu*, director Charles

⁵⁵⁸ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.131.

⁵⁵⁹ Mentioned in Martha Fehsenfeld, "Beckett's Late Works : An Appraisal", *Modern Drama* 25 (1982), p.357.

Sturridge casts Jeremy Irons as both Listener and Reader. In *Ohio Impromptu* the choice of using look-alike actors seems a critical one as it provides a visual parallel to the doubling that occurs in the reading and rereading of the text. When Reader reads back the text in response to Listener's knock it is not exactly the same. Firstly, it is only partial, as only the final phrase of a section is reread, and, as Enoch Brater comments, the effect of the line is different, "it inevitably cuts deeper", "the same now offers us something more, something in the guise of a lyric refrain"⁵⁶⁰.

In *Ohio Impromptu* dramatic tension is therefore created between the text and the stage image, between the staged characters and their textual equivalents, and, most importantly, in the unusual dialogue that takes place between Listener and Reader. Communication between these enigmatic figures is based on sound; that of a voice reading a text and a hand knocking on a wooden table. In this performed communicative act, Beckett juxtaposes voice and gesture, speaking and listening, and the trinity his body of literature is built on: drama, poetry and prose. With such a complex series of relations, ambiguities abound in the written script, ambiguities which actors playing the characters of Reader and Listener invariably have to convey through voice and gesture.

5.2.6. VOICE AND THE COMMUNICATIVE ACT

Listener's knock as a means of communication is not a precedent in Beckett's literature. Croak thumped his club on the ground in *Words and Music* to bring his "dogs", Joe and Bob, to heel, and Molloy used a series of knocks as a way of 'getting through' to his deaf mother.

I got into communication with her by knocking on her skull. One knock meant yes, two, no three I don't know, four money, five goodbye. I was hard put to ram this code into her ruined and frantic understanding, but I did it, in the end. (T, 18)

⁵⁶⁰ Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, p.130.

Listener and Reader's system of knocks appears to be more effective, less aggressive, as well as tacitly understood. The first knock halts the narrative and calls for a repetition of the final words read, and the second knock instructs Reader to continue with the narrative. It is as if Listener were using Reader as his tape recorder, the first tap functioning as the 'stop' and 'rewind' button, the second, the 'play' button. The similarity between the static Krapp operating his tape recorder, listening and re-listening to autobiographical moments in his life, and Listener guiding Reader's recital of his own story is striking. Although Krapp reproduces voice electronically, and Listener does so through verbal repetition, the effect is the same in that speech is repeated word for word. What is particularly interesting about Listener's knocking system is how controlled and precise it is. Reader responds to the knock and appears to repeat the exact words that Listener wishes to hear. Krapp had no such control over his taped voice, as he failed to rewind far enough or interrupted a sequence mid-flow. In *Rockaby*, the play that directly preceded *Ohio Impromptu*⁵⁶¹, the woman is able to start the recording of her voice, which she does by pronouncing the word "more", but she does not appear to be able to stop the narrative. Her stillness always coincides with a natural break in the recording, suggesting it is the voice which controls the rocking movement of the chair, and not *vice versa*.⁵⁶²

In *Ohio Impromptu* Listener's interruptions do not follow natural breaks in the text, the narrative often being cut off mid-line. Listener's control over the reading process in *Ohio Impromptu* is quite unprecedented in Beckett's dramatic work. Lights and cameras have asserted influence over voice, as in *Play* and *Ghost Trio*, and silent voices heard by stage characters have attempted to guide narrative, as in *Not I* and *A Piece of Monologue*. In *Ohio Impromptu*, however, control over voice is not only both visual and aural – the

⁵⁶¹ *Rockaby* was first staged on 08.04.81, only a month before *Ohio Impromptu*, in Buffalo, New York.

⁵⁶² Pierre Chabert, in an interview with Lois Oppenheim, states that the fundamental idea in the play is that the woman is rocked by her voice, not that she rocks herself. See Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.68.

audience can both see and hear the knock – but it also appears to be absolute. Never before has a stage character had voice on such a tight rein.

Protagonists of the prose and drama alike struggle, often in vain, either to silence a voice, bring it under control, or defy it. Moran in *Molloy* is one of the few characters who obey the voice which gives him orders, and, like the communicative act between Reader and Listener, the language system used, while not specified, was one that Moran was initially unfamiliar with.

I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters. It told me to write the report. (T, 162)

And Listener, using his own personalised language system, is one of the few characters who appear to get voice to obey him. Like Moran, Reader understands Listener's language and acts upon it, he knows the significance of the knocks, as well as the touch of Listener's restraining hand which overrides the words of the text.

Now the fearful symptoms described at length page forty paragraph four. [Starts to turn back the pages. Checked by L's left hand. Resumes relinquished page.] (286)

Given the extreme control that Listener appears to exercise over Reader, Reader's voice might be expected to be cold or automaton-like, sharing the detached tone of Opener in *Cascando*, Voice in *Ghost Trio*, or the Voice of Bam in *What Where*. Interestingly, however, Beckett specified to actor David Warrilow, that he should read the text "calmly, soothingly, like a bedtime story"⁵⁶³. What we do not know, however, is if the tone of Reader's voice is a result of real feeling, or if it forms part of his brief. While Reader is invariably a servant, he serves the absent loved one by keeping Listener company, as

⁵⁶³ Letter from SB to David Warrilow, 1981, and Martha Fehsenfeld in conversation with Alan Schneider in rehearsals of *Ohio Impromptu*, April 1981. Fehsenfeld, "Beckett's Late Works: An Appraisal", *Modern Drama* 25, (1982), p.357.

well as Listener by reading and rereading a text as he is instructed, but the script does not specify Reader's attitude towards his duties. Does he read the text willingly, or does he do so grudgingly, against his will? What kind of relationship does he have with Listener? Is their communicative act one of complicity, or is it purely mechanical? These are the questions the actors playing Reader and Listener are invariably faced with, and they are crucial ones as they can affect the meaning and mood of the whole play. In his earlier dramas Beckett often specified the intention and tone of voices by providing detailed stage directions, but in his final plays he provides no textual direction for voice. Ultimately, the way in which voice is delivered and the communicative act is performed in *Ohio Impromptu* must therefore be determined by acting decisions rather than the script itself.

5.2.7. INTERPRETATION AND PERFORMANCE

Acting choices, rarely straightforward in Beckett's plays, seem even more complex in *Ohio Impromptu* as they are so limited. The script gives practically no clues as to how the text should be read, the stage directions focusing on the physical appearance of the seated characters, their positioning at the table, and the hat. Interestingly, this emphasis on props and aspects of the set also dominated preparations for the staging of the first performance of the play, as David Warrilow has commented. "A great deal of the work on that piece has to do with decisions about wigs, book, lights, make-up." In contrast, rehearsals of the play were relatively few, "[w]e had, I think, four or five, maybe a few more, of probably three hours"⁵⁶⁴. The chief reason why so little work was needed on rehearsals was probably because Alan Schneider and David Warrilow were veterans of Beckett's drama. In his review of *Ohio Impromptu*, S. E. Gontarski comments that after 25 years as Beckett's principal American director, Schneider "is probably as close to the Beckettian

⁵⁶⁴ Jonathan Kalb's interview with David Warrilow took place in New York on 18.05.86. Printed in Jonathan Kalb's, *Beckett in Performance*, pp.220-233; p.226.

ethos as any director”⁵⁶⁵, and Warrilow’s experience staging and performing Beckett’s later prose and drama “have helped him develop a discipline for and rapport with Beckett’s work”⁵⁶⁶. S. E. Gontarski’s view of the existence of a “Beckettian ethos” is not exaggerated, there *does* appear to be one, and it is recognised equally by those who adhere to it as well as those who reject it outright. The issue of interpretation and performance is key for a play like *Ohio Impromptu* as it can have different possible readings, and decisions concerning voice – the tone, speed, tempo – the length of pauses, gesture, and the delivery of the knocks, can all affect meaning.

In 1984 Jonathan Kalb had the opportunity to see two different actors playing Reader when Alvin Epstein replaced David Warrilow in Alan Schneider’s New York production of *Ohio Impromptu*⁵⁶⁷. In *Beckett in Performance* he interviews both actors about decisions they had to make in order to perform the part, and he comments on their different interpretations and what effect these had on the play as a whole. Both actors had considerable experience playing Beckett roles (Epstein principally in the 1950’s acting as Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* and Clov in *Endgame*, and Warrilow in the 1970’s as Listener in *That Time* and Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue*) but the way in which they played Reader in *Ohio Impromptu* was entirely different. Indeed, so great was the contrast between them that Kalb claims that “they seemed to stand as representatives of opposing schools of thought in Beckett acting, as if conducting an undeclared debate whose outcome would determine how the late works would subsequently be performed”⁵⁶⁸.

Warrilow and Epstein each give Reader a different personality, and this is principally conveyed by the way they interrupt and carry out the knock-repeat sequence with Listener. Warrilow’s Reader, remaining concentrated on the text throughout, is clearly being interrupted by the sequence of six knocks

⁵⁶⁵ S. E. Gontarski, “The World Première of *Ohio Impromptu*”, in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 8 (1982), p.133.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.135-36

⁵⁶⁷ Performed at the Harold Clurman Theater, 1984.

⁵⁶⁸ Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.50.

from Listener. “I always warn the actor”, he says, “I’m doing the piece with: ‘You know, if you don’t knock, I will be going on, because I will be into the next word’. So they really have to be on their marks. They cut me off. I would usually get to the first consonant”. He feels there is “[a] sense of present necessity”⁵⁶⁹ in both the knocking and rereading and this must come across in performance. Kalb comments that the knock-repeat sequence comes across as a rare opportunity to ‘express’ within incredibly constricting circumstances: “[i]t’s as if the characters cleverly steal brief moments of human contact while constrained to a physical situation which prohibits exchange.” He considers Warrilow’s breath before rereading a passage as “an eloquent counter-response to Listener’s interruption”, and this has the effect of maintaining a “live” tension between the characters throughout⁵⁷⁰.

Epstein’s interpretation of the communicative act gives Reader and Listener a very different relationship. According to Kalb, Epstein gives the impression that Reader has memorised the text, “he raises his eyes from the book while he reads, glancing about the stage, out at the audience”; he knows the cues for the knocks and “waits for them”. “None of the first knocks come as surprises; they are given by rote, as if completely planned, creating only the most minimal sense of connection or relationship between the characters. This Reader is simply eager to go on. The knock sequences are particularly bothersome parts of a compulsory business with which he became bored long ago.”⁵⁷¹

Both interpretations of the communicative act in the play seem very Beckettian, both equally plausible, but Kalb finds Epstein’s performance over-interpretative and theatrical, commenting that he gave Reader “a very specific personality – sarcastic, slightly affected, impatient, sententious – which sometimes substitutes itself for textual significance”⁵⁷². He clearly prefers

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.288.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.50.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.53.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

Warrilow's interpretation and, above all, praises him for the subtlety of his performance. He comments that the actor instils personality by making small changes in pauses before a repeated phrase, and this gives rise to a range of meanings, "good-natured patience at the beginning of the play to resigned exasperation near the end". Warrilow's interpretation of his role is personalised and yet he still manages to convey enigma and indeterminacy, leaving the play "open to several different interpretations"⁵⁷³. Kalb believes that it is this simultaneous "embracing of several positions" that results in Warrilow's Reader appearing "as both a metaphor and a personality"⁵⁷⁴.

Aptly, the actors that perhaps best maintain the ambiguities of script and dramatic situation in Beckett's plays, are often those who do not need to find answers to the perplexing questions that they pose. Warrilow speaks of the necessity to let go of the aspect of "understanding" in order to be able to perform. "I know that if an actor gets up onstage and starts to play the meaning of the thing it dies, it just dies."⁵⁷⁵. Like Billie Whitelaw, Warrilow's chief difficulties acting Beckett's work concern the sound and tempo of speech. For example, speaking about his experience acting in *What Where*, Warrilow says that his main challenge was to "maintain absolutely the same note and an absolutely identical rhythm throughout". It was picking up on the "right note" that caused him anxiety, not the meaning of the piece: "I didn't care what it meant. I didn't care. I really didn't. I mean, I *did not care* what the line, 'We are the last five,' means. I don't know what that means."⁵⁷⁶. Epstein, on the other hand, speaks of the need to "understand" and interpret the story before being able to play the role; questions must be answered in order to instil meaning. When Kalb asked him to what extent he felt it was important to answer questions and resolve ambiguities posed by the play, his position contrasted sharply with Warrilow's.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.52.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.53.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.229.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Some people won't even consider such questions as legitimate. They say Beckett is pure poetry and just music, and that you don't ask yourself these questions, but I think that's a load. Somewhere in themselves they had to have asked those questions, and they had to have answered them... No matter how abstract and disconnected you want to keep yourself from the meaning of the text, it still has meaning; it's not notes in music, where you can keep your distance. These are specific words, they say things, they have referential meaning, you relate to them in a different way than you relate to just sounds.⁵⁷⁷

These two different approaches to acting Beckett's late drama emphasise just how open to interpretation it is. In the case of *Ohio Impromptu*, it may seem fitting that Beckett wrote a deliberately teasing piece of theatre to give the academic audience it was written for something to ponder, but the creation and irresolution of ambiguities is also characteristic of the late plays as a whole. The geographical and temporal location of characters, what motivates their speech and actions may be intimated, but it is not made explicit. Staging ambiguity without attempting to resolve it through interpretation requires a fine balance, one which seems to be intimately connected with the theatricality of performance.

In her essay "Performance and Theatricality", Josette Féral splits the concept of 'theatricality' into component parts, and the two different strands that she identifies seem particularly relevant to a play like *Ohio Impromptu*.

Theatricality can be seen as composed of two different parts: one highlights performance and is made up of the realities of the imaginary; and the other highlights the theatrical and is made up of specific symbolic structures. The former originates within the subject and allows [his] desire to speak; the latter inscribes the subject in the law and in theatrical codes, which is to say, in the symbolic. Theatricality arises from the play between these two realities.⁵⁷⁸

What Beckett seems to do in this play is strip down what Féral terms "the realities of the imaginary" and emphasise "specific symbolic structures": the first is subsumed in the second. Motivations, feelings, temporal and

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.194.

⁵⁷⁸ Josette Féral, "Performance and Theatricality", Teresa Lyons (trans.), in *Modern Drama* XXV, 1 (1982), p.178.

geographical contexts are overshadowed by metaphor, ritual, and stage image. By making the medium the message, Beckett effectively puts interpretation and acting in a straitjacket. Recognising the stricture of the role he was playing, David Warrilow's acting decisions were minimal. He claims these were: "That I will read the text. And that I will read at a certain pace, using a certain kind of voice, and that there will be an intention"⁵⁷⁹. There is little leeway for the personality of an actor and interpretation in Beckett's drama. This was something that the actress Billie Whitelaw understood and accepted. When Beckett insisted on "[n]o colour, no emotion", she interpreted this as "[d]on't act for God's sake". It is also telling that one of the most frequently scribbled lines on her scripts of Beckett plays was "[j]ust say it"⁵⁸⁰. This decision of just how far to 'say it' and just how far to 'act it' is not only critical for the direction and performance of *Ohio Impromptu*, but it is also central to the role of the performative voice in the late plays.

5.2.8. WORDS AND KNOCKS

Who is speaking, and to whom, is a constant question in Beckett's drama. In some of the late plays this question may not appear difficult to answer as Beckett 're-embodies' voice⁵⁸¹, making it clear to which stage character the voice belongs. The difficulty in *A Piece of Monologue* and *Ohio Impromptu* is that while Speaker and Reader are the characters visibly speaking, their speech is not spontaneous, they are mouthpieces for another. In *A Piece of Monologue* the presence of a silent performative voice is detectable in Speaker's monologue; it sounds 'scripted', unspontaneous, and even contains self-correction. In *Ohio Impromptu* it is clear that Reader's voice conveys the words of another. Listener's thoughts are *literally scripted*, being bound in a book and spoken out loud by Reader. The performative voice in *Ohio Impromptu*, however, does not appear to comprise the written words as they

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.223.

⁵⁸⁰ Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.234.

⁵⁸¹ This occurs in *A Piece of Monologue*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *Catastrophe*. The voices in *Ghost Trio*, *...but the clouds...* and *Rockaby* are acousmatic, and *What Where* combines speaking stage characters with an acousmatic voice.

are converted into speech via Reader, rather it makes itself heard on stage via Listener's knock. Just as the performative voice 'revises' Speaker's words in *A Piece of Monologue*, so Listener's knock interrupts the flow of words in *Ohio Impromptu* to force repetition and create pausing.

The characters in Beckett's late plays may behave like automatons, but the performative voice continues to provide the dramas with a 'live' element. Even when Beckett imposes the stricture of writing and reading onto a stage play, the performative voice is still able to influence the drama, even if that drama is reduced to the sound and patterning of speech. If the driving force in *Ohio Impromptu* is provided by Listener's knock, it is essential that Reader's response be dependent on it. With such a fragile balance between gesture and voice, performance decisions become critical, as they can affect or totally alter meaning in the play. When adapting Beckett's prose works for the theatre, performance choices become even more controversial, and this is especially true for a stage adaptation of *Company*, a prose work entirely comprised of imagined voices.

5.3. TRANSFORMATION OF VOICE: *COMPANY*

5.3.1. TRANSFORMATION, TRANSLATION AND TRANSPOSITION

It is difficult to find an anchorage point for *Company* as it underwent a number of transformations between 1977, the year Beckett wrote the opening pages⁵⁸², 1979, when Beckett finished a first English version, and 1980, when the novel was published in English. During this period the working title "Verbatim" or "Voice" was changed to *Company*, the text was translated into

⁵⁸² See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.651.

French⁵⁸³, and the original was then subsequently revised before publication in light of the French version. What started out as an English prose text entitled “The Voice Verbatim”⁵⁸⁴ therefore first found its way into print in French under the title *Compagnie*⁵⁸⁵, but the transformations do not stop there. This short novel, or novella, later became the first part of a trilogy⁵⁸⁶, continuing with *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1983), as well as undergoing transposition for stage in 1983, after Beckett consented to an adaptation by Frederick Neumann of the Mabou Mines theatre company. Before discussing the transformation of voice from page to stage, I will first consider the far from straightforward issue of voice within the novel itself.

5.3.2. VOICES IN THE TEXT

Just as Beckett’s late drama often contains a description of its own stage image within the narrative element of the play, so *Company* begins by describing its own narrative method. The “voice” that “comes to one in the dark”(C, 7), we are told, is not singular. It splits itself into the second and third person: a process that is described and then demonstrated.

Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not.
(C, 9)⁵⁸⁷

During the course of the novel the narrative moves between these two voices, the voice speaking in the second person describing memories from the subject’s past, comprising life scenes from his childhood, adolescence and old

⁵⁸³ Brian T. Fitch provides a close analysis of the French and English versions in “The Relationship Between *Compagnie* and *Company*: One work, Two texts, Two Fictive Universes”, in Alan Warren Friedman, Charles Rossman, and Dina Sherzer, *Beckett Translating/ Translating Beckett* (1987), pp.25-35.

⁵⁸⁴ Charles Krance claims this was at one time a working title. See Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.10, [note 49, p.178].

⁵⁸⁵ *Compagnie* and *Company* were both published in 1980.

⁵⁸⁶ When Enoch Brater asked Beckett if *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho* constituted a trilogy, he replied, “I hadn’t thought of it as such, but I suppose so – more so than the other works called the Trilogy”. Cited in Brater, *The Drama in the Text*, p.12 [note 62, p.179].

⁵⁸⁷ In the French version “the cankerous other” is simply described as «l’autre» (CO, 9).

age, and the voice in the third person speaking of the subject's real and imaginary present. The effect of the switch between the two voices is fugal: the memory sections are interspersed within the imaginings described in the third person, each as apparently unaware of the other as the three figures stuck in the hellish urns in *Play*.

The purpose of these voices, we are told, is to keep the hearer company, to create, what Carla Locatelli calls, a “dialogue of selves”⁵⁸⁸. This need for company, to invent dispensable fictional characters, was described by the Unnamable long ago.

I shall not be alone, in the beginning. I am of course alone. Alone...I shall have company. In the beginning. A few puppets. Then I'll scatter them, to the winds, if I can. (T, 267)

In *Company* there is the same sense of solipsism, which is eclipsed by a proliferation of voices that can be dispelled as quickly as they can be imagined, to leave the subject as he always was, “Alone” (C, 89).

While both voices are imagined, “figments”, the subject and texture of their language is very different. The voice that speaks in the third person is described as “cankorous” (C, 9). ‘Canker’, bringing to mind infectious disease, ulcers and sores, evil doing and the spread of corruption: few words have more unpleasant connotations. The adjective is well chosen as it catches the insidious nature of the voice as it weaves its deceptions to create a precarious microcosmic sensory space for the imagined “one in the dark”. The voice's verbal constructions are built up dialectically but, as it warns us beforehand, all the arguments are fundamentally flawed. The imaginative source from where the language flows is affected by disease, it is “reason-ridden” (C, 45); that is perhaps why the voice says the subject “reasons ill” (C, 15), has “imagined ill” (C, 44). This fictive voice is quite open about its deceitful nature, it even demonstrates its workings, unveiling the complex process of ratiocination that it uses to posit its dubious truths.

⁵⁸⁸ Locatelli, *Unwording the World*, p.160.

The basis of its reasoning stems from an initial and apparently objective truth: “A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.” No sooner has this statement been delivered, however, than it is seized upon by the voice and reformulated to: “To one on his back in the dark.” With this modification the assumption has been made that the subject is on his back, although there has been no mention of a position in the opening statement, but our suspicions are dispersed by empirical evidence to support the assertion.

This he can tell by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again.
(C, 7)

Rather than offering a verification of his initial statement, the voice is in fact positing three further assumptions: that the subject is on his back, that he can move, and that he has some sort of mental awareness. Since the cankerous other admits that “by far the greater part of what is said cannot be verified” (C, 7-8), from the outset the reader and the hearer have no guarantee that what is being said has any solid basis. The narrative therefore propels itself forward in an osmotic fashion, whereby a verified statement lends factual status to an unverified one that might either precede or follow it. For example, when the statement “You first saw the light on such and such a day” joins with the verified “and now you are on your back in the dark”, “the incontrovertibly of the one” (the latter) is able to “win credence for the other” (the former) (C, 8). Thus, from the beginning the voice has described, even sanctioned, the narrative method it will use, whilst at the same time revealing the shaky foundations on which it is constructed.

This fictive voice, whilst unsavoury, with its penchant for dead rats (C, 36) and live flies (C 38), is certainly ingenious, having the dual capacity to ceaselessly create as well as subsequently deconstruct whatever it invents: everything that is said “can be later unsaid” (C, 60). It is also prudent and resourceful, as whenever a branch of logic breaks down and leads to momentary impasse, it always finds other jumping-off points from which to

conjecture. These it ensures by leaving possible alternatives suspended throughout the narrative, such as, “Reserve for a duller moment” (C, 70), “Leave it at that for the moment” (C, 42), and even apparent certainties derived from reasoned argument are qualified by disclaimers such as “Up to a point” (C, 15). On the few occasions in the text when the voice’s fictionalising unravels and is in danger of exposing the lone subject, the voice employs its last resort escape phrase, “Quick leave him” (C, 32, 64, 84). Like the players in the television play *Quad*, who continually move towards, skirt round, and move away from a central point, so the voice speaking in the third person conducts his verbal dance continually towards, round, and away from a danger zone which must be avoided at all costs: “The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I.” (C, 32)

Unlike the ‘cankorous other’, the voice that speaks in the second person does not use dialectic to propel its narrative forward. Its interventions are marked by descriptions of scenes from the hearer’s past which are not organised chronologically, and no more relate to each other than they adhere to the surrounding narrative. The voice’s function can be purely descriptive, as in the moving passage depicting the two lovers in the shade of an aspen (C, 66-67), or it can be interpretative, as in the passage depicting the subject’s encounter with a hedgehog (C, 38-41). When the boy revisits the animal he has stored in a box weeks before, the voice does not only describe what was found, it emphasises the lasting effect this moment of lost innocence still has upon the hearer.

You have never forgotten what you found then. You are on your back in the dark and have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench.
(C, 41)

The voice seems both capable of transporting the hearer to a scene in his past to be relived as a Proustian moment of involuntary memory, as in the diving episode (C, 23-24), or it can transform the subject into an observer of a scene, as in the description of the snowy walk across the pasture.

You lie in the dark with closed eyes and see the scene. As you could not at the time. (C, 52)

The voice that speaks in the second person therefore speaks to the hearer about his past, enabling him to vividly recall specific moments, perhaps even relive them, as well as selectively allowing him to revisit certain scenes with the faculty of hindsight.

Although the voices speaking in the second and third person appear to be distinct, both grammatically and thematically, their language is not always so different. As Susan Briezna comments, “*Company*’s voice speaks alternately as philosopher, mathematician, and poet”⁵⁸⁹. Although the cankerous other often speaks scientifically and the voice of memory poetically, neither of them stay within the confines of a particular language. For example, the following extracts in which the cankerous other contemplates the effect of company of a “faint voice” and “an odd sound” upon the hearer could stand as poetry if they were not written in continuous prose.

A faint voice at loudest. It slowly ebbs till almost out of hearing. Then slowly back to faint full. At each slow ebb hope slowly dawns that it is dying. He must know it will flow again. And yet at each slow ebb hope slowly dawns that it is dying. (C, 22)

In dark and silence to close as if to light the eyes and hear a sound. Some object moving from its place to its last place. Some soft thing softly stirring soon to stir no more. To darkness visible to close the eyes and hear if only that. Some soft thing softly stirring soon to stir no more. (C, 24)

Both passages contain literary devices such as refrains, repetition and paradox, which make the language overtly poetic. The voice speaking in the third person also shows himself to be erudite in his borrowings from literature: “shadowy light”⁵⁹⁰ (C, 25) and the oxymoron “darkness visible” (C, 24) are from Milton, while “bourneless dark” (C, 69), “labour lost” (C, 89), and the reference to a “girdle” round the earth (C, 85) are from Shakespeare⁵⁹¹. In the same way that the cankerous other can speak as a poet, so the voice of

⁵⁸⁹ Susan Briezna, *Samuel Beckett’s New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (1987), p.220.

⁵⁹⁰ In the French version «demi-jour» (CO, 25).

⁵⁹¹ Cited in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.653.

memory can turn to mental calculations to rationalise a vision his eyes fail to comprehend, as in the scene in the summerhouse.

Now this window being flush with your eyes from where you sit and the floor as near as no matter with the outer ground you cannot but wonder if she has not sunk to her knees. Knowing from experience that the height or length you have in common is the sum of equal segments. For when bolt upright or lying at full stretch you cleave face to face then your knees meet and your pubes and the hairs of your heads mingle. Does it follow from this that the loss of height for the body that sits is the same as for it that kneels? At this point assuming height of seat adjustable as in the case of certain piano stools you close your eyes the better with mental measure to measure and compare the first and second segments namely from sole to kneepad and thence to pelvic girdle. (C, 56-7)

While the impression is that the two voices in *Company* are separate entities, physically separated as they are by the white space between paragraphs on the page, in fact, they are not totally discrete. Firstly, they share the same origin, they are both created by the hearer. By having two voices the hearer can move between them: when one dries up he can turn to the other, a little like Henry in *Embers* as he moves between conjuring up voices and telling the Bolton/Holloway story. Secondly, although the cankerous other uses empiricism as his narrative method, and the voice of memory favours lyrical description, at times their speech crosses the linguistic divide that separates the two and they speak like one another. The voices in the text are therefore fictional constructs with distinctive functions and forms of speech within the narrative, but, as so often in Beckett's literature, the voices at times transgress, mutate, or seep into one another to reveal the author beneath struggling with the same question of old. That identified by the Unnamable as "a question of voices, of voices to keep going, in the right manner" (T, 308).

5.3.3. VOICES BEYOND THE TEXT

While there are two voices in the narrative strands of *Company*, there are also other voices inherent in the novel, the most obvious being the author's own. Although Beckett's literary oeuvre is scattered with autobiographical reference, *Company*, as John Pilling observes, "gravitates more openly towards

the genre of autobiography than anything before it”⁵⁹². The memory sequences overtly refer to people, places and incidents in Beckett’s life⁵⁹³, but, as he admitted to James Knowlson, real experiences are often heavily fictionalised. For example, Beckett’s father chuckling as he read *Punch* does seem to be an authentic reminiscence, but the summerhouse setting Beckett gave the scene in *Company* is fictional: “It did not happen there at all”⁵⁹⁴, he said. In some cases the scenes described in the novel have already literally been fictionalised as they are mentioned in Beckett’s previous literature. For instance, the scene describing the little boy walking with his mother and asking her questions about the sky also appears in “The End” and *Malone Dies*, although the mother’s answer is different in each case.

A small boy, stretching out his hands and looking up at the blue sky, asked his mother how such a thing was possible. Fuck off, she said. (81)

One day we were walking along the road, up a hill of extraordinary steepness, near home I imagine, my memory is full of hills, I get them confused. I said, The sky is further away then you think, is it not, mama? It was without malice, I was simply thinking of all the leagues that separated me from it. She replied, to me her son, It is precisely as far away as it appears to be. She was right. But at the time I was aghast. (T, 246)

In *Company*, while the insensitivity of the mother’s response is still conveyed, what she actually said is not stated.

For some reason you could never fathom this question must have angered her exceedingly. For she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten. (C, 11-12)

With different renderings of the same incident, the authentic memory is lost sight of, the real lost in layers of fiction. And it is not only memories that are buried in *Company*, there are also numerous allusions to Beckett’s previous works which provide the reader with “some rich archaeological find[s]”⁵⁹⁵. This excavation task is painstakingly carried out in Enoch Brater’s essay “The

⁵⁹² John Pilling, “*Company* by Samuel Beckett”, in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 7 (Spring 1982), p.127.

⁵⁹³ Autobiographical references are detailed in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp.651-2.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.652.

⁵⁹⁵ Enoch Brater, “The *Company* Beckett Keeps: The Shape of Memory and One Fablist’s Decay of Lying”, *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, p.157.

Company Beckett Keeps”⁵⁹⁶, in which repeated motifs and linguistic patterns are traced back to their original source, and John Pilling details instances of what he calls Beckett’s “self-plagiarism” in his review article of *Company*⁵⁹⁷.

Company therefore contains autobiographical reference to Beckett’s own life, it alludes to his own literature, and it also reiterates, if not demonstrates, Beckett’s ambivalent attitude towards creating fiction. As Susan Briezna comments, “[a] lone creature in the dark, falling, resting, and trying once more to crawl has become one of Beckett’s favorite images for the contemporary artist who attempts vainly to express, to grope toward a satisfying language”⁵⁹⁸. And this futile struggle between the simultaneous need to write and the need to question this need, so frequently present in Beckett’s literature, can be seen to be metaphorically presented in *Company*.

Crawls and falls. Lies. Lies in the dark with closed eyes resting from his crawl. Recovering. Physically and from his disappointment at having crawled again in vain. Perhaps saying to himself, Why crawl at all? Why not just lie in the dark with closed eyes and give up? Give up all. Have done with all. With bootless crawl and figments comfotless. But if on occasion so disheartened it is seldom for long. For little by little as he lies the craving for company revives. In which to escape from his own. The need to hear that voice again. (C, 76-77)

In addition, the voices in *Company* touch upon other life-long preoccupations of Beckett’s, most notably, his interest in the process of consciousness, the divisibility of the self, as well as his scepticism, if not total rejection of system-building, whether in philosophy, religion or the arts. “I can’t see any trace”, he was quoted as saying, “of system anywhere”⁵⁹⁹. Aptly, the cankerous other’s attempt to create certainty by means of philosophical discourse flounders, as do his endeavours to precipitate a single self pronouncing itself as ‘I’. As Carla Locatelli puts it, “*Company*, rather than being a search for an

⁵⁹⁶ Brater details *Company*’s echoing of earlier Beckett texts in “The *Company* Beckett Keeps” in *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, pp.158-162.

⁵⁹⁷ Pilling, “*Company* by Samuel Beckett”, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 7 (Spring 1982), p.129.

⁵⁹⁸ Briezna, *Samuel Beckett’s New Worlds*, p.227.

⁵⁹⁹ SB to Harold Hobson, cited in Knowlson and Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p.241.

unshakeable foundation of knowledge, questions and deconstructs the monolithic definition of the subject as ‘I’.⁶⁰⁰

It is perhaps not surprising that Beckett wrote such a self-referential work while Deirdre Bair was compiling his biography, a task he claimed he would “neither help nor hinder”⁶⁰¹. He may have felt that a non-chronological narrative comprised of various voices interrupting each other, speaking about fictionalised episodes from his past and earlier literature, could more faithfully represent his life and art than traditional biography ever could⁶⁰². The novel also gave him the opportunity to revisit and reformulate ideas on philosophical, artistic, and linguistic concerns which had run throughout both his fictional and critical writing, as well as inadvertently forcing him to re-confront the thorny issue of the dramatisation of his prose work.

5.3.4. JUMPING GENRES

Beckett clearly had very strong feelings about transpositions of his work to different genres, in practice, however, his position was not always consistent. He had allowed, even praised, readings of his prose fiction on radio as early as 1957⁶⁰³, had helped Jack MacGowran compile and stage a one-man-show comprising an anthology from the novels in 1962⁶⁰⁴, as well as assisting Shivaun O’Casey with a stage production of *From an Abandoned Work* in 1965⁶⁰⁵. When friendship or financial need were not directly involved, however, Beckett could be intransigent about adaptations of his work. His comment to his American publisher in 1957, concerning a filmed version of *Act Without Words* is categorical:

⁶⁰⁰ Locatelli, *Unwording the World*, p.166.

⁶⁰¹ Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, p.xi.

⁶⁰² John Pilling suggests that in view of Bair’s biography, Beckett wanted to “establish the proper conjunctions and disjunctions” between his life and his art. In “*Company* by Samuel Beckett”, *Journal of Beckett Studies* 7 (Spring 1982), p.127.

⁶⁰³ See 3.1.3. Beckett, *A Voice and a Tape Recorder*, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁴ *End of the Day* was performed in *New Arts Theatre* in London.

⁶⁰⁵ An extract from a letter from SB to Shivaun O’Casey dated 13.01.65 discussing this production is printed in Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, pp.614-615 .

I can't agree with the idea of Act Without Words as a film. It is not a film, not conceived in terms of cinema. If we can't keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are, we might as well go home and lie down.⁶⁰⁶

In later life Beckett became more tolerant of cross-genre adaptations of his work, although he tended to assess each proposal on a case-by-case basis. Even after Beckett's death adaptations of his work are staunchly resisted by many who take a very purist stance on transpositions of his work. Indeed, the ambitious *Beckett on Film* project, which entailed the filming of Beckett's nineteen stage plays in 1999-2000, met a mixed response. While actors and directors were meticulously chosen and their brief was to stay within Beckett's own strict stage directions, for some, such an undertaking amounted to no less than heresy. The producers of *Beckett on Film* believe that "the camera helps his work"⁶⁰⁷, that film "can get the context of a piece better"⁶⁰⁸. However, such claims are dismissed out of hand by those who oppose cross-genre performance. Literary journalist, Tom McGurk, interviewed in the documentary on filming the project, voices the objections to such adaptation as follows:

There is a fundamental difference between a theatrical production and production on film. In the theatre there is a subtle relationship with the member of the audience and the play. You are your own director. You are interpreting your own meaning. You are looking at things the way you want to see it. When you put a film camera between the audience and the play it is the director who is deciding the meaning, who is deciding what is most important, who is deciding levels of emphasis. In other words, Beckett's work is being interpreted by film directors, which is entirely contrary...because of the nature of his relationship with the audience. So now we have a situation where, not only is there no audience when these plays are being filmed, but the film camera is now interpreting for the non-existent audience, what's happening on the stage. Now...that can't be acceptable.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁶ SB to Barney Rosset 27.08.57, cited in Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.3.

⁶⁰⁷ Alan Moloney, producer of *Beckett on Film*, interviewed in the documentary "Check the Gate – Putting Beckett on Film", 2001 [DVD recording].

⁶⁰⁸ Michael Colgan, producer of *Beckett on Film*, interviewed in the documentary "Check the Gate – Putting Beckett on Film".

⁶⁰⁹ "Check the Gate – Putting Beckett on Film", *Beckett on Film*.

At times, Beckett specifically refused the filming of stage plays as the changed medium would simply go against the original conception and realisation of a piece, as he explained to Barney Rosset.

Act Without Words is primitive theatre, or meant to be, and moreover, in some obscure way, a codicil to *Endgame*, and as such requires that this last extremity of human meat – or bones – be there, thinking and stumbling and sweating, under our noses, like Clov about Hamm but gone from refuge.⁶¹⁰

However, as previously discussed, in the case of *Not I*, not only did Beckett give his consent to the filming of the play, but he also seemed to consider the BBC film as a definitive version⁶¹¹. While Beckett explained that he had a specific medium in mind when he was writing a play, that he actually visualised it on his “mental stage”⁶¹², occasionally the genre of a particular work may not have been clear until late on in the writing process as, for example, with *A Piece of Monologue* and *Not I*⁶¹³.

While the issue of transpositions of Beckett’s plays from one medium to another is far from straightforward, adaptations of his prose work for stage can be even more complex. As Jonathan Kalb argues in *Beckett and Performance*: “In choosing to stage a single work of prose fiction, a director saddles himself with the problem of how to dramatise events in that work, which may often take place in the mind and not be easily articulable in other terms”⁶¹⁴. In the case of *Company* this problem is particularly acute as everything in the text is imagined, and the inventing subject does not present himself as a single unified identity, but as a verbal construct comprising different voices. Indeed, the nature of the text’s indeterminacy of character, situ, and action, might be seen to defy tangible representation. The director’s task, according to Kalb, is therefore “doubly difficult”, “involving the risk both of illustration, which is invariably disappointing compared with what the

⁶¹⁰ SB to Barney Rosset 27.08.57, in Zilliaccus, *Beckett and Broadcasting*, p.3.

⁶¹¹ See 4.2.9. Fixing the Image, p. 161.

⁶¹² Kalb, *Beckett and Performance*, p.72.

⁶¹³ See S. E. Gontarski, “*Company* for Company”, in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, p.193.

⁶¹⁴ Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.119.

reader's imagination could provide, and of simplification, the choice to put some things onstage in lieu of others itself constituting a decision about priority of events, which is exactly the kind of choice Beckett's narrators are reluctant to make"⁶¹⁵. Leaving aside the thorny issue of whether Beckett's prose work *should* be adapted for the stage, the interesting question seems to be how *can* such a precarious work as *Company* be represented in the theatre?

5.3.5. THE STAGING OF FIGMENTS

In some senses, *Company* has the potential to work well in the theatre. S. E. Gontarski expresses the view that it "may be the most dramatic of Beckett's prose narratives", believing it can work "equally well on stage and page". The prose work, he argues, contains "a fundamental dramatic structure, a dichotomy between second- and third-person voices"⁶¹⁶. In addition to the potential for creating dramatic tension on the stage via the counterpoint of the different voices, the darkness of the mind from where the subject's imaginings originate are also arguably suited to a theatrical setting as actor/director Fred Neumann's pre-production conversation with Beckett indicates.

"I don't know Fred, what you could do with it. It all takes place in the dark."

"Like the theater in the dark."

"Touché."⁶¹⁷

Despite the drama implicit in the counterpoint of voices, and the suitability of the darkened stage to represent the workings of the mind, already exploited by Beckett in his earlier stage plays, decisions concerning the handling of the aural and visual elements of a theatrical adaptation remain highly complex.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.119.

⁶¹⁶ Gontarski, "Company for Company", in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, p.194.

⁶¹⁷ Cited in Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.119.

Interestingly, Beckett gave his consent for the first stage production of *Company*, directed⁶¹⁸ and acted by Fred Neumann in 1982⁶¹⁹, but this was not the production with which he was most actively involved. Beckett worked more closely with Pierre Chabert who directed *Compagnie* at the Théâtre du rond-point, Paris, in 1984, an English version of which was subsequently staged by S. E. Gontarski in 1985 at the Los Angeles Actors' Theatre's Half-stage. While all three productions remained textually faithful, the stage image, the action, the lighting and the voice(s) were often treated quite differently. Not surprisingly, the distinctive features of each production highlight the basic decisions a director must make when attempting to visually and aurally realise a work which continually undermines its own corporeality.

Perhaps the most fundamental decision for a director when staging *Company* is to determine the stage image. The voice in the second and third person speak to and of a subject, therefore a figure must be physically represented on stage. Neumann's opening stage image is of two dilapidated rocking chairs facing each other with a small table and lamp in between⁶²⁰. At the rear of the stage are three white, ten-foot parabolic disks, resembling radar transmitters which, as the piece begins, turn to face the stage. Neumann said he used the satellite dishes as a way of visually representing voices, as well as suggesting that the voices in the piece emanate from inside a skull.

With satellite dishes we sort of listen to space, to capture the voices of space, to 'see' them. That's why I had them listening to the emptiness, the void, the darkness. Nothing happening there, they turn in on themselves... forming sections of the inner surface of the skull.⁶²¹

As Neumann explained in an interview with Lois Oppenheim, the disks were also used to reflect light, as brilliant whiteness could be projected on them. When the lights were turned off quickly, the effect was to "leave them glowing,

⁶¹⁸ Co-directed by Fred Neumann's wife, Honora Ferguson, also a member of the Mabou Mines theatre group.

⁶¹⁹ The première took place at the New York Shakespeare Festival Theatre.

⁶²⁰ This description is based on Jonathan Kalb's viewing of a performance of the play at the Public Theater, New York in 1983. See *Beckett in Performance*, pp.122-126.

⁶²¹ From an interview with Jonathan Kalb in 1986. Printed in *Beckett and Performance*, p.210

blue and green and hazy as if they were portholes that looked out on the universe”⁶²². While Beckett considered the set explained to him as “elaborate”, Neumann saw it as “an evocation of the images in text”⁶²³. The character’s location, for example, may be suggested in the text by “one lying on the floor of a hemispherical chamber of generous diameter with ear dead centre” (C, 44), the vast black space beyond being evoked by the description of the hearing lying “In immeasurable dark. Contourless.”(C, 45) Although the set may have been born of the text, the initial position of the hearer was not. Rather than adopting a prone position, at the beginning of the play Neumann sits in one of the rocking chairs. A rocking chair, incidentally, although absent from the text, brings to mind other of Beckett’s texts in which the protagonist accesses the recesses of the mind through the action of rocking, as in *Murphy* and *Rockaby*. Whilst Neumann’s choice of using rocking chairs appears to be more inter-textual than textual, his dress, may be considered to be both. The old great coat, heavy boots, and battered hat are ubiquitous in Beckett’s work, and they are described in *Company* in the description of the walk along Ballygon Road: “Top coat once green stiff with age and grime from chin to insteps. Battered once buff block hat and quarter boots still a match” (C, 30-31), and the snowy walk across the pastures, “The quarter boots sunk to the tops. The skirts of the greatcoat resting on the snow.” (C, 52) Ruby Cohn also noticed something which may be considered more overtly autobiographical in Neumann’s appearance: “Although no one but me seemed to notice it, his full face, garnished with moustache, resembled pictures of Beckett’s father.”⁶²⁴

While Neumann is initially the only figure on stage, the idea of ‘another’ is suggested when the stage blackens on the line “Quick leave him” (C, 32), and he switches chairs. As the light rises, his huge shadow is cast onto one of the disks, as if it could represent another self keeping him company. The

⁶²² Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.33.

⁶²³ Fred Neumann interviewed by Lois Oppenheim, in Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.34.

⁶²⁴ Ruby Cohn, “The Becketts of Mabou Mines”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.230.

subject's sitting position changes about half way through when the furniture is removed and anecdotes in the text find a parallel in the stage action, although, as Kalb points out, the figure does not always illustrate what the narrating voice is describing.

Like Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue*, he acts out what he is saying partially or incorrectly, or acts in complete contradiction to his words: for instance during the line, "A dead rat. What an addition to company that would be! A rat long dead" (C, 36), he chases an imaginary rodent across the floor, swatting at it with a cane. Finally his actions begin to follow the words more precisely. He kneels on all fours during a description of crawling, moves his cane around in circles during a description of the second hand on a watch, and finally, resolving the obvious contradiction that has existed all along, lies down, on his back in the dark.⁶²⁵

Neumann's *mise en scène* of *Company* therefore includes elements which are not mentioned in the text, although some are arguably very Beckettian. Basic furniture, such as, chairs, tables and lamps often feature in the prose and drama, and the stark contrast between black and white and the play of shadows is equally common. One cannot help feeling that the different sitting positions adopted by the stage figure rather than merely suggesting the presence of another self, often have more to do with providing visual interest for the audience in a performance which initially lasted for an hour and three quarters⁶²⁶.

The stage image in Chabert and Gontarski's productions of *Company* varies considerably from Neumann's. While the figure also adopts a seated position, the staging does not illustrate the text literally, and neither does the neutral costume of grey pyjamas and a grey robe, suggested by Beckett. S. E.

⁶²⁵ Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.123.

⁶²⁶ The duration of the performance was later cut to ninety-five minutes. See Cohn, "The Becketts of Mabou Mines", in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, note 10, p.235.

Gontarski explains that it was decided not to enact scenes from the text as the figure and the voices are all figments.

The central figure in *Company*, the figure we see on stage, is imaginative, a figment, and ought to remain so in production. The vignettes of the second-person are, despite their obviously autobiographical roots, likewise imaginative renderings, and trying to dramatise them would alter their thematic function.⁶²⁷

Beckett favoured keeping the figure still as this would retain the maximum emphasis on language, and, as Gontarski points out, “the often baroque, inverted, elliptical, poetic phrasing of both voices, is as much a source of company as the actual hypothesising”⁶²⁸. The drama of the piece, as so often when Beckett plays a part in the direction, is therefore concentrated on voice and a virtually static stage image.

As the drama in the text principally manifests itself in the counterpoint between the voices speaking in the second and third person, logically, a stage adaptation of *Company* would exploit this fugal element, which, in a sense, represents a series of one-sided dialogues with the stage figure. While Neumann admits that *Company* has a lot to do with sound, with aural perception⁶²⁹, his adaptation includes sounds that are not actually mentioned in the text. For example, among the sound effects Neumann incorporates into the production is the sound of the sea. In fact, the only sounds described in the memory describing the diving incident are the repeated call of his father for him to jump: “Be a brave boy” (C, 23). The whole incident centres on looking down into the water in fear, seeing his father’s reflection looking up at him: even sound has a visual source.

You stand at the tip of the high board. High above the sea. In it your father’s upturned face. Upturned to you. You look down to the loved trusted face. He calls to you to jump. (C, 23)

⁶²⁷ Gontarski, “*Company* for Company”, in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, p.195.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.194.

⁶²⁹ Jonathan Kalb in conversation with Fred Neumann, in *Beckett in Performance*, p.209.

Neumann felt, however, that the sound of the ebb and flow of the sea was called for as it would add an aural element suggesting temporality and transience, “the coming and going of things that sets up a sense of time”⁶³⁰. With Beckett’s permission, he also included a string quartet specially composed by Philip Glass in his production of *Company*. Characteristically, just as Beckett had been careful not to let a character’s speech and movement come together in many of his stage plays, so he separated voice and music, telling Philip Glass that “the music would go in the interstices of the text”⁶³¹. As with the case of the visual effects that Neumann added into his stage version of *Company*, he probably felt that sound effects would add variety to the sound of his own voice, and clearly believed that music, especially that of Philip Glass, reflected the experience of hearing Beckett’s work.

“With Philip Glass, I often found, as one does find in reading Beckett, that not only does the mind keep churning but there is some kind of music, not quite words.”⁶³²

The music that so many of Beckett’s “creatures” claim to hear, if only, like Mouth, as a form of “buzzing”, and that so many commentators state is implicit in Beckett’s language, was therefore explicitly ‘staged’ in Neumann’s *Company*. This took the form of four movements of roughly two minutes each, inserted into the production, to use Beckett’s words, in “the proper interstices”⁶³³.

Before staging *Company*, Neumann performed the text as a reading⁶³⁴ and the staging, he said, “became a question of when to use this voice or that voice”⁶³⁵. The different voices obviously guided his staged performance of *Company*; at times the shift between voices being represented visually by the figure’s change of position, for example, by changing seats, and at times

⁶³⁰ Fred Neumann interviewed by Lois Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.34.

⁶³¹ Cited in Charles Krance, “Beckett Music”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.64, note 23.

⁶³² Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.32.

⁶³³ SB to Fred Neumann, cited in Cohn, “The Beckett of Mabou Mines”, in Oppenheim (ed.), *Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, p.229.

⁶³⁴ Performed at the Loeb Drama Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁶³⁵ Fred Neumann interviewed by Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.209.

tonally, the voice of the cankerous other being delivered as cynical and cantankerous⁶³⁶. What Beckett would certainly have objected to, had he seen this performance, however, is the lack of ambiguity concerning the source of the voice, an issue that proved extremely contentious in the Chabert production of *Compagnie*⁶³⁷. Although Neumann may do justice to the title of the novel, providing visual and aural representations of company in the form of sketches, shadows, a second on-stage figure⁶³⁸, and a variety of sound effects, ultimately, as Kalb comments, he fails to convey the idea that the character's identity is precarious⁶³⁹. This is a serious shortcoming given that uncertainty concerning the source and identity of voices lies at the heart of Beckett's literature. Without the ambiguity of the speaking voice, works such as *The Unnamable*, *Not I* and *Company* would simply not exist. The staging of voice in an adaptation of *Company* is therefore not so much a key issue, as *the* key issue.

5.3.6. THE STAGING OF VOICE

In Pierre Chabert's production of *Company* the issue of how to denote the shift between the voices speaking in the second and third person was a major consideration. Like Neumann, Chabert also favoured the idea of moving the figure when the voice changed, and in order to do this, he invented an elaborate machine that could wheel the figure about the stage. Beckett was initially intrigued by this idea, and had used mechanical contraptions to create dramatic effect in plays under his own direction, but once he saw how noisy and unwieldy the machine was in rehearsal, he advised Chabert to "throw the damn thing away"⁶⁴⁰. Chabert had favoured the idea of using the machine as it would move the figure rather than make the figure responsible

⁶³⁶ In Lois Oppenheim's interview with Fred Neumann, he claimed that for him "[c]antankerous and cankerous often seem interchangeable". *Directing Beckett*, p.38.

⁶³⁷ This is discussed in the following section, 5.3.6. The Staging of Voice.

⁶³⁸ In the summer house memory scene, Honora Ferguson appears on stage to represent the nameless 'she' in the passage. When she vanishes her shadow remains on the disk.

⁶³⁹ Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.123.

⁶⁴⁰ Cited in an interview with Lois Oppenheim, in Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.70.

for his own movement. He was clearly interested in what he calls “osmosis between movement and immobility, in which characters become the objects that are moved”. He had staged such a process earlier when he directed *Berceuse*⁶⁴¹. Together with stage designers, he came up with a simple mechanism using a pulley and cord to rock the chair. In this way, he maintains, he was able to respect the fundamental idea behind the play, which is that “the woman is rocked by the voice, by her own voice”⁶⁴².

Realising the machine had been monopolising rehearsal time and, as Chabert, admits, had turned into “a kind of monster”⁶⁴³, he simplified the stage image by keeping the figure immobile in an armchair, but used lighting to denote the shifts between the second and third person. Ironically, the lighting system, as well as the seated actor, was housed in the recently discarded machine, it was like “a miniature stage onstage”⁶⁴⁴, which had the advantage that the audience could not see where the lighting was coming from. In addition, it was decided that for the passages spoken in the second person, the face would be cut above the mouth by using lighting, so the audience would not be sure if it was the figure who was speaking. In addition, the voices were amplified using an invisible microphone and were moved through space by being fed through different speakers. Chabert was delighted with the effect, believing it dramatically represented the ambiguity in the text.

I found that this worked perfectly with the play, as the voice has an exteriority – because the character hears the voice, it’s a voice that speaks to him – but it’s also a voice that comes from within him.⁶⁴⁵

Beckett, however, was far from delighted and reproached Chabert for the staging of the voices. Beckett had specified that the voice had to be recorded, as they had been in plays such as *That Time* and *Rockaby*. Chabert had rejected this idea as the French actor, Pierre Dux, could not accept being the

⁶⁴¹ Chabert directed *Berceuse*, (the French version of *Rockaby*), *L’impromptu d’Ohio*, and *Catastrophe* in 1983 at the Théâtre du Rond-Point, Paris.

⁶⁴² Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.68.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.69.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

'listener' of the voice, he wanted to speak the lines on stage, a little like Neumann, who said of Beckett's language that he felt compelled "to speak it, interpret it, share its creative fire"⁶⁴⁶. What Beckett said to Chabert shortly before his death, however, seems to be critical for understanding how Beckett conceived voice and how it worked as a process of creation.

[T]he voice that I speak of so tenaciously in my work is a truly exterior voice. That voice is outside of me.⁶⁴⁷

Interestingly, although Beckett insisted that that Chabert's future productions of *Compagnie* should use a recorded voice, the director did not heed his words and continued to use a live voice. He maintained that "[i]t was not at all interesting for an actor to use a recorded voice", and he chose to use a microphone because he considered it to be "the best solution". He stood by this decision as he believed that faithfulness to the text was the key issue, and that he and the actor were able to decide how the voices could be most effectively staged. This was his final word on the issue:

I believe that a director also has the right to have ideas insofar as he remains absolutely faithful to the essence of the text, which I do.⁶⁴⁸

In S. E. Gontarski's production of *Company*, he put the issue of the staged voice to rights by taping the memory sections spoken in the second person. As well as being in line with Beckett's wishes, Gontarski claimed that the taped voice solved a number of production problems as well as opening up additional staging possibilities. The complex lighting system used to mask the actor's moving lips was dispensed with, and Figure was converted into both speaker and listener. This change opened up two separate modes of stage action that could be visually and aurally played off each other, described by Gontarski as follows:

⁶⁴⁶ Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, p.211.

⁶⁴⁷ Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.71.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.72.

In the hypothesising mode Figure could move and speak normally in his chair. Here he existed in real time. The listening mode, however, would be highly stylised. As listener, Figure would move in slow, balletic motion searching out the source of the voice, one source at each of the two far corners of the theatre and one directly above his head. The voice could be slow, deliberate, almost flat, and the effect generally would be to suggest that time too had slowed.⁶⁴⁹

Varying the amount of echo and reverberation on the taped segments not only had the effect of making the voice appear to come from different sources, but it also created the illusion that it came from varying distances, as contemplated in the text: “The voice comes to him now from one quarter and now from another. Now faint from afar and now a murmur in his ear” (C, 19). As in Chabert’s production, lighting also played an important role in the drama, and different kinds of lighting reinforced the division between the voices: the full light on the speaking head being countered by the varying chiaroscuro on the listening head. Lighting was also used to control the rhythm and pace of the drama, “punctuating each paragraph into discreet segments”⁶⁵⁰. The issue of how the breaks in the text would be dealt with on stage had been a concern for Beckett even before the play was staged, as Fred Neumann comments.

There are breaks in the paragraph, not necessarily in the subject matter, but there are breaks. And he would often ask about that and how I treated those.⁶⁵¹

Upon Beckett’s suggestion, Chabert and Gontarski exploited the “musical possibilities”⁶⁵² of lighting in their respective productions of *Company* to enhance the fugal quality between the voices, as well as convey changes of mood within a single section.

⁶⁴⁹ Gontarski, “*Company* for *Company*”, in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, p.196.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.197.

⁶⁵¹ Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett*, p.30

⁶⁵² Cited in Gontarski, “*Company* for *Company*”, in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, p.197.

The difference in the staging of voice between Chabert and Gontarski's stage productions of *Company* is not an easy one to judge. What Chabert seems to achieve by having one figure speaking both voices on-stage is to create ambiguity and uncertainty about where the voice in the second person is coming from: it may or may not be spoken by the stage figure. And it is precisely this creation of embarrassment and uncertainty that structures the novel:

If he is alone on his back in the dark why does the voice not say so? Why does it never say, for example, You saw the light on such and such a day and now you are alone on your back in the dark? Why? Perhaps for no other reason than to kindle in his mind this faint uncertainty and embarrassment. (C, 10)

This lack of certitude that plagues the figure in the novel, that provides him with company by giving him "a certain activity of mind" (C, 11), is therefore dramatically shared by the audience. This involvement of the audience in the problematic issue of identity seems to be a wise choice as it parallels the reader's position in relation to the written text. Not only is the source of the voice uncertain, the addressee is also ambiguous: the "You" in the text may be directed just as much at the reader as it is at the fictive character. Attempts to stage textual ambiguities therefore seem to make sense as they involve the audience in the quest for truth which, although futile, is what ultimately serves to propel the narrative forward.

Gontarski also worked with audience involvement in his production by changing the boundaries of traditional theatre space. The small intimate stage⁶⁵³ was converted into a black box whose limits were not distinguished from the area occupied by the audience, comprised of spaced out irregular seating. In this way, "[t]he audience shared Figure's space"⁶⁵⁴ and became physically part of the performance. In such a setting the irony of lines delivered in the second person would undoubtedly gain dramatic impact.

⁶⁵³ The Los Angeles Actors' Theater's Half-stage is a small intimate performance space, as its name suggests.

⁶⁵⁴ Gontarski, "Company for Company", in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, p.197.

Take, for example, the description of the father's refuge in his "DeDion Bouton" motorcar, away from "the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery" (C, 16). When the voice says, "You may imagine his thoughts as he sat there in the dark not knowing what to think" (C,17), a member of the audience might justifiably feel a degree of empathy which could never be paralleled by that experienced by a reader of the text.

The staging of *Company* therefore presents some very complex issues for a theatre director adapting the novel, ones which the directors of the productions discussed considered carefully before deciding the visual and aural shape of their stage creations. Despite the care taken to recreate a comparable dramatic experience for a member of the audience as for a reader of the text, for some critics, such a venture may never be acceptable.

5.3.7. WRITTEN AND SPOKEN VOICES

Eileen Fischer, in her review of Fred Neumann and Honora Fergusson's adaptation of the novel, asserts that the intended experience of *Company* "is decidedly silent, readerly, and solitary" and she believes that it should stay that way.

Beckett purposefully and knowingly chose the printed page rather than the stage for the words and pause-like white spaces of *Company*. Unlike *A Piece of Monologue* or *Rockaby*, *Company* does not require a specific set, precisely timed lights, or any props at all for its complete realization. And, most importantly, *Company* needs no spectators. In fact, *Company* demands to be left alone⁶⁵⁵.

Just as she believes that *Company* "demands" to be left in print, others who have staged the novel, clearly feel that the drama in the text is crying out to be staged. What would be interesting to know is if Fischer's verbal vetoing of stage adaptations of *Company* would still stand in the light of Chabert and Gontarski's respective dramatisations of the novel. My personal feeling is that

⁶⁵⁵ Eileen Fischer, "Redundant *Company*: A Mabou Mines Production at the Public Theatre, New York", in *Journal for Beckett Studies* 10 (1985), pp.165-166.

it might not. Firstly, Fischer is not against stage adaptations of Beckett's prose works *per se*, and concedes that they are not all "doomed from the generic start"⁶⁵⁶, and, secondly, many of the pitfalls in the Mabou Mines production she cites were not repeated in the later adaptations. For example, the "theatrical elements" and "directorial flourishes" and use of music⁶⁵⁷ are stripped from Chabert and Gontarski's productions; the "three poor judgements" she describes in the Mabou Mines performance are likewise missing from the subsequent adaptations.

...the Voice lacks the pensive sensitivity of recollected pain necessary along with a felt connection to his current words. And, most mistakenly, Neumann acknowledges the existence of the theatre audience, by self-consciously playing to us.⁶⁵⁸

Chabert and Gontarski's use of microphones and a recorded voice centres the drama on the subject and the voices, rather than the subject and the audience, and Gontarski speaks of the subject's resistance to the voice of memory because of the pain that it evokes⁶⁵⁹. What Fischer sees as a "purely theatrical vision of *Company*" which "excludes textual understanding"⁶⁶⁰, is to a large extent amended in Chabert and Gontarski's productions, under Beckett's instruction.

Just why Beckett continues to generate what film director, Neil Jordan, has described as a "strange reverence"⁶⁶¹ when it comes to directing his work, is probably due to his reputation for discrediting productions which made textual changes, or added theatrical elements extraneous to the work in question. This is what happened in the well-documented case of JoAnne Akalaitis' production of *Endgame* for the American Repertory Theater in 1984, when Beckett wanted to take out a legal injunction to stop the performance.

⁶⁵⁶ Fischer, "Redundant *Company*", in *Journal for Beckett Studies* 10 (1985), p.166.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.166.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.167.

⁶⁵⁹ Gontarski, "*Company* for *Company*", in Acheson and Arthur (eds.), *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, p.199.

⁶⁶⁰ Fischer, "Redundant *Company*", in *Journal for Beckett Studies* 10 (1985), p.167.

⁶⁶¹ Director of *Not I*, *Beckett on Film*. Interviewed in the documentary "Check the Gate – Putting Beckett on Film".

Finally, the dispute was settled out of court, but both parties presented their respective cases in a printed statement to the audience.

Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me. My play requires an empty room and two small windows. The American Repertory Theater production which dismisses my directions is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this.⁶⁶²

Like all works of theatre, productions of *Endgame* depend upon the collective contributions of directors, actors, and designers to realize them effectively, and normal rights of interpretation are essential in order to free the full energy and meaning of the play [...] Mr. Beckett's agents do no service either to theatrical art or to the great artist they represent by pursuing such rigorous controls.⁶⁶³

Beckett and Berstein's statements are illustrative of a debate about the adaptation and staging of Beckett's work which, even after the author's death, remains as heated as ever.

5.3.8. IMPOTENCE AND TYRANNY

It may seem paradoxical that a writer whose subject was that of failure and impotence should keep such a tight rein over his artistic work⁶⁶⁴, and it is. But it is a paradox that Beckett seemed very well aware of, and one that is inextricably linked with the way he viewed the form and content of his work.

In my work, there is consternation behind the form, not in the form [...] the form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates.⁶⁶⁵

In terms of content, Beckett's prose and drama does not precipitate order or certainty, it treats confusion and irresolution. The form in which the "chaos"

⁶⁶² SB, cited in Kalb, *Beckett and Performance*, p.79.

⁶⁶³ Robert Brustein of the American Repertory Theater. *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ H. Porter Abbott's essay, "Tyranny and Theatricality: The Example of Samuel Beckett", following Derrida, comments on the "inevitable inherence of tyranny in theatre" and considers Beckett's relationship to theatricality, tyranny and nothingness. Printed in *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 1. (March, 1988), pp.77-87.

⁶⁶⁵ SB, 1956, cited in Anna McMullan's essay, "Samuel Beckett as Director: The Art of Mastering Failure", in Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, p.200.

is presented in terms of language and staging, however, *is* very precise. Beckett clearly saw the fictive worlds that he created, irrespective of the media for which they were intended, as microcosms of order, and that order is imposed formally. This idea comes across in a comment made by Beckett during rehearsals of the 1975 Berlin *Godot*.

...it's no longer possible to know everything, the tie between the self and things no longer exists... one must make a world of one's own in order to satisfy one's need to know, to understand, one's need for order.⁶⁶⁶

The worlds Beckett created in his fiction and drama are extremely specific, tending to take the form of enclosed spaces with specific boundaries, like the shuttle inhabited by the survivors in *The Lost Ones*, or the oblong room paced by Figure in *Ghost Trio*, or comprise areas of darkness with no perceivable limits, as occupied by the 'protagonist' in *Company* or Listener in *That Time*. Characters' movements and speech are also very tightly patterned. If these Beckettian creations are significantly changed through adaptation or creative staging, the formal order that Beckett establishes in his work is inevitably interfered with. It was form, especially in the theatre, which enabled him to coherently structure his vision of the incoherence of contemporary experience.

One turns out a small world with its own laws, conducts the action as if upon a chessboard..Yes, even the game of chess is still too complex.⁶⁶⁷

Therefore it *is* ironic that the author who so consistently exposes and parodies power and the will to dominate in his literature should exercise such unremitting control over how his work is represented. And it is equally ironic for a 'nomadic' writer who continually moved between different genre to be so intolerant of transpositions of his work. However, given Beckett's conviction that an artist's task must be "[t]o find a form that accommodates the mess"⁶⁶⁸,

⁶⁶⁶ From Michael Haerdter's rehearsal diary. *Ibid.*, p.200.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.201.

⁶⁶⁸ Cited in Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine". *Columbia University Forum* 4, 3 (Summer 1961), pp.21-25.

rather than tackle “the mess” itself, it is also totally understandable why he should go to such great pains to guard the formal integrity of his work.

5.3.9. PRECARIOUS HYBRID STRUCTURES

From the late 1940's to mid-1950's Beckett alternated between fiction and stage drama, and went on to include radio, screen and television plays into his dramatic repertoire. As H. Porter Abbott has argued, the switching between prose and drama led to “an increasing hybridisation of Beckett's art”⁶⁶⁹. This ‘hybridisation’ surfaced in the novels of the late 1940's, in which Abbott finds instances of “textual theatre”⁶⁷⁰, and is also present in the early dramatic works which contain a medley of narratives with a written texture, as in *Endgame* and *Embers*. In the late plays of the 1980's Beckett gives prominence to the hybrid nature of his work by making the performance of scripts and texts constitute the drama in his plays. Although minimal, dramatic tension exists between script and stage image in *A Piece of Monologue*, as it does between text and stage image in *Ohio Impromptu*, and the force that creates the equivocation between the written and spoken in these plays is the performative voice. In *A Piece of Monologue* this voice is silent, but Speaker both hears and heeds it. In *Ohio Impromptu* it does not speak, but it is aurally present on stage: it drives Listener's knock, and this is the sound and gesture which not only controls the flow of Reader's speech, but also the material voice in the play.

Company is also a hybrid text; dramatic tension is inherent within its structure. The voices speaking in the second and third person are created and sustained by the subject in order to block out the performative voice: the voice that strives to collapse the voices into a single ‘I’, insisting that the hearer/creator is and always has been “Alone” (89). There may be drama in this text, but the transposition of these written voices into spoken ones is

⁶⁶⁹ Abbott, *Tyranny and Theatricality*, p.86.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.85.

complex. While the voices heard by the figure in *Company* are his own creations, they assert themselves as separate acousmatic entities. This is why Beckett insisted that the voice spoken in the second person be recorded and not spoken live by the stage figure. For *Company* to be effectively staged it is therefore essential to create and maintain the ambiguity of who is speaking and to whom. Voices may emanate from a single subject's mind, but they are heard as "exterior": the "one in the dark" is not just speaking to himself, he has created figments to speak of him and to him. If the voices are seen to be spoken by a single stage character the friction which exists between the hearer and the two voices in the prose work will not be recreated. *Company* may therefore appear to lend itself to dramatic representation, but stage adaptations must endeavour to preserve the ambiguous, precarious nature of its voices, if they are to convey the drama in the text.

CONCLUSION

The performative voice in Beckett's literature is a wilful force that insists on making itself heard. It may emanate from a single character's head, but it is perceived as an autonomous sound or voice. Prose narrators and dramatic characters are presented as being split into different voices and the tension that exists between them creates the polyphonic drama on which much of Beckett's writing is based.

The nature of the performative voice is established in Beckett's pre-dramatic prose work. In the three novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, and *Texts for Nothing* the voice is located in the protagonist's head, although it is heard as coming from an external source. Its purpose is far from clear and the narrators conjecture that it may be a punishment for a sin committed, a message, or a form of company, and their reaction to it varies accordingly; it is cursed, treated with curiosity, even welcomed. The sound and constancy of the voice is changeable: it can whisper from a distance or rattle nosily inside the skull; it might wax and wane or clamour continuously. The voice progressively gains power in these prose works as story, character and body disappear, until in the final text of *Texts for Nothing* all that remains is "a voice murmuring a trace" and "something compelled to hear" (TFN13, 152). The nature of the performative voice in the dramatic works does not differ greatly from that presented in the early prose. The change of genre, however, gave Beckett the opportunity to explore how this voice manifested itself, what it sounded like, and how it affected a character's behaviour, voice and speech. In his plays he could give visual, sound and spatial dimensions to the central drama already inherent in his prose writing: the need to speak and be heard.

In Beckett's first stage dramas *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* the protagonists can hear sounds and voices, but it was the play *Krapp's Last Tape* that provided him with the idea of how to dramatise voices in the head.

Not only did he find a way of separating a voice from a body by using recorded sound, but he also discovered that he could use voices to stage past and present selves simultaneously. This breakthrough meant that he could dramatically represent a character split into different voices, as well as being able to make voices protagonists in their own right. While the performative voice is absent from *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett's experimentation with new sound technology led to the materialisation of the voice of memory and the stage character of an auditor, innovations which would directly affect the way he went on to dramatise the performative voice in subsequent plays.

From the plays of the late 1950's to the end of Beckett's dramatic career in the early 1980's, the performative voice determines the drama in the plays. The sound of the sea generates the drama in *Embers* - Henry would not need to conjure remembered voices and tell stories if it was not there. Likewise, Listener's knock in *Ohio Impromptu* creates tension - without it the piece would lose the name of drama and be no more than a staged reading. While the performative voice remains a consistent feature of Beckett's dramatic works, it undergoes many changes. Firstly, there is a change in its function. The sounds and voices heard by the protagonists in the plays up to 1975 are moral in tone: they accuse in *Embers* and *Eh Joe*, tempt in *Cascando*, or vie for confession in *Not I*. In the later plays, however, the voice loses its judgmental role and directly controls characters' speech and actions; it turns from being inquisitorial to tyrannical. Secondly, the performative voice becomes increasingly more powerful as Beckett's dramatic oeuvre evolves. Initially, dramatic characters can counter or resist its sound by making noises, attempting to turn it on and off, mentally silencing or defying it, but the protagonists in the late plays heed its instructions, their only resistance comprising minor deviations and irregularities from patterned speech and movements. Curiously, the empowerment of the performative voice is accompanied by an increasingly silent and discreet manifestation in the plays. In *Embers*, *Cascando*, *Eh Joe* and *Ghost Trio* the performative voice has a material presence in the play, and can be heard as an autonomous sound

or voice. In *Not I, A Piece of Monologue* and *Ohio Impromptu*, however, it is silent, only being audible for the protagonist: it draws a verbal response from Mouth, causes Speaker to redirect his monologue and conducts Reader's words via a series of knocks. As the protagonists grow increasingly servile to the voice, so its presence diminishes within the drama, but not its power.

As the performative voice becomes ever more instrumental in the drama of the plays there is a corresponding change in the way in which emotion is conveyed. Initially, a character's voice is emotionally charged; like an instrument, Henry's voice carries the sound of anger, despair, excitement, and the movement from disinterest to full involvement is chartered in the sound of Opener's voice as it goes from being 'cold' to ecstatic. In both *Embers* and *Cascando*, however, Beckett counters the emotion carried by the tone of a voice with that of the rhythm and speed of speech. In *Embers* the rhythmical language of the Bolton/Holloway narrative is as disturbing as the amplified voices from memory and imagination in the dramatic strand of the play, and in *Cascando* the sound of Voice's broken speech affects the listener more than either the tone of his voice or the content of his story.

In the plays *Eh Joe* and *Not I* Beckett experiments further with making the sound of speech carry emotion rather than the sound of the voice itself: violence and despair are conveyed by verbal bursts, pauses, and words delivered at break-neck speed. The wave-like rhythms created in these plays are also a feature of Beckett's late dramas, although the sound emphasis shifts from speech to words. A character's speech is delivered more slowly and is less frenetic, words regain their intelligibility, and language is patterned, forming refrains that liken it to musical variation. Emotion is therefore filtered out of the voice into speech, then out of speech into words. These transformations might be seen to 'demote' voice from the source of emotion to its vehicle of transmission, but, for Beckett, it drew him nearer to a life-long goal. By converting voice into language's musical instrument, he not only furthered the dissolution of the "terrible materiality of the word's

surface”⁶⁷¹ by making words sound like notes, but converted this process into audible drama.

While the staging of voices is central to Beckett’s dramatic oeuvre, they are not treated singly, but combined with visual, kinetic or other sound elements in a range of performance media. On stage Beckett often creates startling tableaux by juxtaposing practically static images with a ‘moving’ voice, as he does in sections of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Not I*, *A Piece of Monologue* and *Ohio Impromptu*. In these four plays he turns the spotlight on the acts of listening and speaking: words not only have to be spoken out loud, they have to be *seen* to have been heard. In the radio plays voices are accompanied by other sounds: in *Embers* Beckett includes the sound effects of animals’ hooves, dripping water, waves breaking on a pebble beach, and in *Cascando* voice and music are given the status of characters and play in unison. The television plays use techniques that Beckett had experimented with in the other two media. In *Eh Joe* he focuses in on a static image using the camera zoom, and in *Ghost Trio* he incorporates music and movement. In the former the camera appears to be working with voice, being both intrusive and abusive, but in *Ghost Trio* music complements F’s slow haunting movements to create a supernatural mood which overrides Voice’s literal descriptions of the scene.

In addition to incorporating different artistic genres into his work and presenting them in distinct performance media, Beckett also puts the page on stage. Dramatic speech often has a written texture and characters in the plays are forever composing narratives which they either recite, read or write down. Beckett’s experimentation with different artistic forms led to an increasing hybridisation of his work as he combined image, sound and movement, and the cross-fertilisation between different performance media and his continual switching between written and spoken language also made his writing generically androgynous. This erosion of the boundaries between

⁶⁷¹ SB’s 1937 German letter to Axel Kaun, Cohn, *Disjecta*, p.172.

artistic disciplines and performance media resulted in Beckett's creation of precarious formal structures that mutate in front of an audience's eyes or ears.

The whole of Beckett's dramatic oeuvre is based on ambiguity. His aim was to dramatically present the conflict experienced by his tortured protagonists rather than to explain or resolve it: denouement does not exist in his dramas, words or actions are repeated *ad infinitum*. Beckett may have written "no symbols where none intended" (W, 255) at the end of *Watt*, perhaps his most complex and impenetrable novel, but producing, directing and acting dramas invariably involves interpretative decisions which are beyond the control of the playwright. However, Beckett meant what he said, and given that productions of his work did not match his precise visual and aural conception of a play, he had no choice but to become actively involved in the casting, production and directing of his dramas. While Beckett's close involvement with the performance of his plays meant that he could experiment with lighting, sound, and movement, in order to best approximate what he could hear and see on his 'mental stage', it also led to what have been considered as 'definitive' versions of his plays.

The difficulties experienced when performing Beckett's dramas are therefore manifold. The ambiguous situations presented in the plays leave them open to interpretation - interpretation that might suggest meanings that were not intended and may change or interfere with the central drama. The hybrid nature of Beckett's work has also led to, if not invited, adaptations and genre shifts. What seems important to bear in mind is that while Beckett was a formally innovative artist, his works are not eclectic. The precarious formal structures that his protagonists inhabit are meticulously constructed and may be genre specific, even when the form of a play appears to strain towards another performance medium. While *Speaker's* monologue may appear to be televisual in *A Piece of Monologue*, Beckett's concern in this play was not to show the images via a television or film camera, but for them to be

created verbally through Speaker's language. The unremitting control that Beckett exercised over his work may have blocked misrepresentations, but it has also led to a "strange reverence" verging on sycophancy which puts severe restrictions on new performances of Beckett's drama.

In order to represent Beckett's work with a degree of fidelity it seems essential for actors, directors and producers to know that text and form were sacrosanct to Beckett. His life's work was taken up selecting the right words, creating the appropriate literary form for their utterance, and, in the case of his drama, selecting the tone of a voice and the volume and rhythm of speech. It would be a mistake, however, to damn performances that stray from productions under Beckett's direction. The performative voice is the force that fuels and controls what is said and heard in the plays and its manifestation and effect upon protagonists should be respected. The need to speak and be heard lies at the heart of Beckett's drama. If this is conveyed, albeit in a different performance medium from that originally intended, then the living will behind his work will be preserved.

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CHRONOLOGY

The following list is restricted to works by Samuel Beckett made reference to in this doctoral thesis. Texts are ordered according to their date of publication, and appear alphabetically within the same year.

1929-1938

- “Assumption” Short story written in English. Appeared in *avant-garde* Paris-based literary magazine *transition* 16-17, June 1929. SB’s first story to be published.
- “Dante...Bruno.Vico.. Joyce” Critical essay written in English. First published in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* by Shakespeare and Company, Paris, May 1929 and reprinted in *transition* 16-17, June 1929.
- “Whoroscope” A long poem written in English based on the life of Descartes, which won a literary prize sponsored by novelist Richard Aldington and poet-publisher Nancy Cunard. First published by Hours Press, Paris, August 1930.
- Proust* Critical essay written in English in 1930 on Marcel Proust. First published by Dolphin Books, Chatto and Windus, London, 1931.
- More Pricks than Kicks* A collection of ten short stories written in English. First published by Chatto and Windus, London, May 1934.
- “The Vulture” First of thirteen poems written in English and published under title *Echo’s Bones and Other Precipitates* by George Reavey’s Europa Press, Paris, 1935.
- “Denis Devlin” A review of Denis Devlin’s *Intercessions*, a book of verse. First published in *transition* 27 (April-May 1938).
- Murphy* Novel written in English between August 1935 and May 1936. First published by Routledge, London, March 1938. Alfred Péron helped SB with French translation bearing the same title.

1945-1955

- “La Peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon”. A critique of paintings by Dutch brothers Bram and Geer van Velde, coinciding with exhibitions at the Galeries Mai and Maeght. Written in French in 1945. First published in *Cahiers d’Art* (1945-46).
- “L’Expulsé” Short story written in French in 1946. First published in *Fontaine: Revue mensuelle de la poésie et des lettres françaises*, ed. Max-Pol Fouchet, 10.57 (décembre 1946-janvier 1947). Later published in *Nouvelles et texts pour rien*, three stories (“L’Expulsé”, “Le Calmant”, and “La Fin”) and thirteen numbered texts. (Translated into English by Richard Seaver in collaboration with SB as “*The Expelled*”).
- “je suis ce cours de sable qui glisse” First of *Trois poèmes* translated by SB as “my way is in the sand flowing”. Both French and English versions published in *Transition Forty-eight* 2 (June 1948).
- “Peintres de l’empêchement” A critique of paintings by Dutch brothers Bram and Geer van Velde, written in French. First printed in *Derrière le mirrior* (juin 1948).
- “que ferais-je sans ce monde” Second of *Trois poèmes* translated by SB as “what would I do without this world”. Both French and English versions published in *Transition Forty-eight* 2 (June 1948). Third poem, “je voudrais que mon amour meure”, translated as “I would like my love to die”.
- “Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit” Three conversations about art and criticism between SB and art historian Georges Duthuit discussing Tal Coat, André Masson, and Bram van Velde. Published in English in *Transition Forty-Nine* 5, December 1949.
- Molloy* First of three French novels. Written in French between May and November 1947. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1951. Translated into English by Patrick Bowles in collaboration with SB under same title.
- Malone Meurt* Second of three French novels. Written in French between 1947 and 1948. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1951. Translated into English by SB under title *Malone Dies*.

- En attendant Godot* Stage play in two acts, written in French between October 1948 and January 1949. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1952. First performed at Théâtre Babylone, 5th January 1953. Translated into English by SB under title *Waiting for Godot*.
- L'Innommable* Last of three French novels. Written in French between March 1949 and January 1950. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1953. Translated into English by SB under title *The Unnamable*.
- Watt* Novel written in English during Second World War, completed in 1948. First published by Olympia Press, London, 1953.
- Textes pour rien* Collection of thirteen short texts written in French, completed in December 1951. Translated into English by SB under title *Texts for Nothing*. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, in 1955.
- 1956-1965
- From an Abandoned Work* Short prose piece written in English 1954-1955. SB's first text to be written in English since *Watt*. First printed in *Trinity News* 3.17, 7th June 1956. Translated into French by Ludovic and Agnès Janvier in collaboration with SB under title *D'un ouvrage abandonné*.
- Acte sans paroles I* Mime written in French in 1956 for dancer Deryk Mendel. Translated into English by SB as *Act Without Words I*. First performed at Royal Court Theatre, London, 3rd April 1957, with music by John Beckett. First published with *Fin de partie* by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1957.
- All That Fall* One-act radio play written in English in 1956. First broadcast by BBC's Third Programme, 13th January 1957. First published by Grove Press in 1957. Translated into French by Robert Pinget as *Tous ceux qui tombent*.
- Fin de Partie* One-act stage play written in French for Roger Blin between 1953 and 1957. First performed in French at Royal Court Theatre, 3rd April 1957. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1957, as *Fin*

- de partie suivi de Acte sans paroles*. Translated into English by SB as *Endgame*.
- Krapp's Last Tape* One-act stage play written in English in 1958. First performed at Royal Court Theatre, London, 28th October 1958. Translated into French by SB and Pierre Leyris as *La dernière bande*. First published in *Evergreen Review* 2.5. (summer 1958).
- Embers* One-act radio play written in English in 1957. First produced on BBC's Third Programme, 24th June 1959. Published in *Evergreen Review* 3.10 (November-December 1959). Translated into French by Robert Pinget as *Cendres*.
- "L'Image" Excerpt from French novel *Comment c'est*. Published in *X: A Quarterly Review* 1.1. (November 1959). Translated into English after SB's death by Edith Fournier as "The Image", after the authenticity of earlier translation, (supposedly by SB) printed by Calder, London, 1990, in *As the Story was Told*, had been seriously questioned by scholars.
- Comment c'est* Novel in three parts, written in French between 1958 and 1960. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1961. Translated into English by SB as *How It Is*.
- Happy Days* Stage play in two acts, written in English in 1960. Translated into French by SB as *Oh, les beaux jours*. First published by Grove Press, New York, 1961. First performed at Cherry Lane Theatre, New York, 17th September 1961.
- Words and Music* Radio play written in English November-December 1961. First broadcast on BBC's Third Programme, 13th November 1962. First published in *Evergreen Review* (Nov-Dec 1962).
- Cascando* Radio play written in French December 1961, with music by Marcel Mihalovici. First Broadcast on "France Culture", 13th October 1963. Published in *L'VII* 13 and 14, April 1963. Translated into English by SB under same title.
- Play* One-act stage play written in English in 1962-63. Translated into French by SB as *Comédie*. First production in German at Ulmer Theater, Ulm-Donau,

- 14th June 1963 under title *Spiel* (translated by Erika and Elmar Tophoven). First published in German in *Theater Heute* 4 (July 1963). First published in English by Faber and Faber, London, 1964.
- Imagination morte imaginez* Prose piece written in French in 1960's. First published in *Les Lettres nouvelles* 13 (octubre-novembre 1965). Translated into English by SB as *Imagination Dead Imagine*.
- 1966-1975
- Assez* Short prose piece written in French. First published in Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1966, in 662 numbered copies. Translated into English by SB as *Enough*.
- Come and Go* One-act stage play written in English January 1965, simultaneously translated into French as *Va et vient*. First produced in German under title *Kommen und Gehen* (trans. Elman Tophoven), at Schiller-Theater Werkstatt, Berlin, 14th January 1966. First published in French by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1966.
- Eh Joe* Television play written in English April-May 1965. First broadcast in German as *He, Joe*, 13th April 1966, filmed at Süddeutscher Rundfunk. First English version filmed at BBC studios in early 1966 but not broadcast until 4th July 1966. Written for Jack MacGowran who played Joe in BBC production. First published in English with *Act Without Words II and Film as Eh Joe and Other Writings*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967. First French version, translated by SB, appeared in *Comédie et actes divers*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1966.
- Film* SB's only screenplay. Commissioned by Barney Rosset of Grove Press. Written April-May 1963. Shot in New York 20th July 1964, occasioning SB's only visit to US. Directed by Alan Schneider, with Bustin Keaton playing part of 'O'. Film first shown at Venice Film Festival October 1965. First published in *Eh Joe and Other Writings*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967.
- Sans* Short prose text written in French. First published in *Quinzaine littéraire* 82 (1 novembre 1969). Translated into English by SB as *Lessness*.

<i>Le Dépeupleur</i>	Prose text written in French in 1965. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1970. Translated into English by SB as <i>The Lost Ones</i> .
<i>Mercier et Camier</i>	SB's first novel to be written in French. Written between July and October 1946. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1970. Translated into English by SB under title <i>Mercier and Camier</i> .
"As the Story Was Told"	Short prose work written in English August 1973 and dedicated to Austrian poet Günter Eich. First published by Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1973, in memorial edition under title <i>Günter Eich zum Gedächtnis</i> (ed. Siegfried Unseld) in original English version together with Siegfried and Wolfgang Hildesheimer's German translation. Published under title "As the Story Was Told" by Calder and Riverrun Press, 1990.
<i>Esquisse radiophonique</i>	"Sketch" of a radio play, written in French November 1961. First published in <i>Minuit 5</i> , September 1973. Translated into English by SB as <i>Rough for Radio I</i> .
"Horn venait la nuit"	Short prose piece written in French in 1950's. First published in <i>Minuit 2</i> , (janvier 1973). Collected with other short prose pieces from 1950's and 1960's, known as <i>Foirades</i> . Translated by SB into English as "Horn came always", collected with other <i>Fizzles</i> .
<i>Not I</i>	One-act stage monologue. Written in English March-April 1972. First performed at "Samuel Beckett Festival", by Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, New York, 22 nd November 1972. First published by Faber and Faber, London, 1973. Translated into French by SB as <i>Pas Moi</i> .
<i>Fragment de théâtre</i>	Sketch from late 1950's. First published in <i>Minuit 8</i> , March 1974. Translated into English by SB as <i>Rough for Theatre I</i> .

- Pochade Radiophonique* Radio play written in early 1960's. First published in *Minuit* 16 (novembre 1975). Translated into English by SB as *Rough for Radio II*. First broadcast under title "Rough for Radio" on BBC Radio 3, 13th April 1976.
- 1976-1992
- ...but the clouds...* Television play written in English, October-November 1976. Broadcast on BBC 2 17th April 1977 with *Ghost Trio* and *Not I* under collective title "Shades". First published by Faber and Faber, London, 1976. Translated into French by Edith Fournier as *...que nuages....*
- Footfalls* One-act stage play written in English for actress Billie Whitelaw between March and November 1975. First performed at Royal Court Theatre, London, 20th May 1976. First published by Grove Press, New York, 1976. Translated into French by SB as *Pas*.
- Fragment de théâtre II* Sketch from late 1950's, originally titled "Théâtre". First published in *L'Herne* in 1976. Translated into English by SB as *Rough for Theatre II*.
- Ghost Trio* Television play written in English in 1975. First broadcast on BBC 2 17th April 1977 together with *...but the clouds...* and *Not I* under collective title "Shades". First published by Grove Press, New York, 1976. Translated into French by SB as *Trio du fantôme*.
- "Pour finir encore" Short prose text written in French in mid 1970's, included with *Foirades*. First published in limited edition of 125 numbered copies by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1976, then as first item in 1976 trade edition, *Pour finir encore et autres foirades*. Translated into English by SB as "For to End Yet Again".
- That Time* One-act stage play written in English June-August 1975. First performed in London at the Royal Court Theatre, 20th May 1976. First published by Faber and Faber, London, 1976. Translated into French by SB as *Cette fois*.
- All Strange Away* Short prose text written in English in 1964. First published in 200 numbered copies with illustrations

by Edward Gorey in 1976, later published in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 3 (Summer 1978).

- A Piece of Monologue* Stage monologue written in English between October 1977 and April 1979. SB wrote text in response to a request from actor David Warrilow for a play on the subject of death. Warrilow premiered play in Annex at La Mana, ETC, New York, 14th December 1979. First published in *The Kenyon Review* 1.3., 1979.
- “Heard in the Dark II” Short prose extract from *Company*. First published in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 5, 1979.
- Company/Compagnie* Prose work written in English 1977-1979, subsequently transposed into French then retranslated into English. *Compagnie* first published by Minuit, Paris (1980), followed by *Company*, published by John Calder (Publishers) Ltd., London (1980).
- “Heard in the Dark I” Short prose extract from *Company*. First published in 1980 in *New Writing and Writers* 17.
- “Un Soir” Prose piece written in French in 1979. First published in *Minuit* 37, January 1980. Translated into English by SB as “One Evening”.
- Mal vu mal dit* Prose work written in French 1980-1981, translated immediately into English by SB as *Ill Seen Ill Said*. First published by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1981.
- Ohio Impromptu* One-act stage play written in English in 1980 for a symposium at Ohio State University to honour Beckett’s seventy-fifth birthday. First performed 9th May 1981 at Stadium II Theater. First published in *Rockaby and Other Short Pieces* by Grove Press, New York, 1981.
- Rockaby* One-act stage play written in English in 1980. First performed in Buffalo, New York, 8th April 1981. First published in *Rockaby and Other Short Pieces* by Grove Press, New York, 1981. Translated into French by SB as *Berceuse*.
- Catastrophe* One-act stage play written in French in 1982, translated into English by SB under the same title later in 1982. First performed in Avignon Festival 21st July 1982, as part of “Une Nuit pour Václav Havel”.

- Written for, and dedicated to, Czech playwright Václav Havel. First published in *Solo suivi de Catastrophe* by Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1982, in a limited edition of ninety-nine numbered copies, then in *Catastrophe et autres dramaticules* by Minuit, 1982.
- Worstward Ho* Prose work written in English between August 1981 and March 1982. Published by Calder, London, in 1983. Translated into French after SB's death by Edith Fournier as *Cap au pire*
- Nacht und Träume* Television play written in English in 1982. First broadcast by Süddeutscher Rundfunk on 19th May 1983. First published by Faber and Faber, London, 1984.
- Quad* "Ballet for four people" written for television in 1981. First broadcast as *Quadrat 1 + 2* by Süddeutscher Rundfunk on 8th October 1981. First published by Faber and Faber, London, 1984.
- Quoi où (What Where)* One-act stage play written in French between February and March 1983. Translated into English by SB as *What Where*. First performed in English at Harold Clurman Theater, 15th June 1983. First published by Faber and Faber, London, 1984.
- Stirrings Still* SB's last independent prose work, dedicated to Barney Rosset, written in English and French between 1983 and 1987. First published in *The Guardian*, 3rd March 1989.
- "Comment dire" A poem written in French in 1988 and translated into English by SB as "What is the Word". First published in English in SB's obituary in *Sunday Correspondent*, 31st December 1989.
- Dream of Fair to Middling Women* SB's first novel, written in English 1931-1932. First published posthumously by Black Cat Press, Dublin, 1992.
- Eleutheria* A three-act play, written in French in 1947. First published posthumously in English by Foxrock, translated by Michael Brodsky, 1995.