“A Matter of Fundamental Sounds”: Sonic Storytelling in Samuel Beckett’s Radio and Television Plays

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Abstract

In 1956, Samuel Beckett was approached by the BBC Third Programme to write a radio play; out of that commission emerged *All That Fall*. This first sortie into radio drama prompted Beckett's further exploration of sound in various media. This thesis tracks the chronological evolution of recorded sound in Beckett's radio, television, and adapted stage plays produced between 1957 and 1983. In each chapter, I describe the creation of Beckett's sounds, particularly those made in recording studios such as the Radiophonic Workshop at the BBC. I examine the historical and technical qualities of sound production in order to catalog and theorize the Beckettian soundscape with reference to sound studies. In all of his works, the concept of story or personal narrative is a recurring motif. In his radio and television plays in particular, characters can, for example, hear sounds in their heads and vocalize sound as stories. Beckett uses these sonic stories to explore the boundaries of recorded sound across his radio, television, and adapted works.

Chapter 1 examines Beckett's radio plays, with attention paid to the gradual decline in the number and variety of recorded sound effects over time. Chapter 2, focused on Beckett's writing for television, explores his use of recorded sound paired with visual cues and camerawork. Chapter 3 looks at three filmed adaptations of Beckett's stage plays, with reference to the transformation of sound and image that he learned by working in other media. Beckett's recorded and filmed works emphasize the centrality of sound in all of his writing and reveal a complex relationship between recorded sound and audience. The repetition of storytelling offers an intimate sonic exchange with the listener. The sounds in Beckett's stories draw attention to the construction and strained nature of personal narrative, while deliberate use of silence makes listeners more aware of their act of listening as part of the soundscape and story.

Résumé

En 1956, Samuel Beckett fut approché par le BBC Third Programme pour écrire une pièce radiophonique et de cette commission est advenue *All That Fall*. Cette première incursion dans le monde du feuilleton radiophonique a incité Beckett à explorer l'utilisation du son dans divers médias. Cette thèse suit donc l'évolution chronologique du son enregistré dans les œuvres qu'il a produites pour la radio, la télévision et le théâtre entre 1957 et 1983. Dans chaque chapitre, je décris la création des sons de Beckett, spécifiquement ceux réalisés dans des studios d'enregistrement comme le BBC Radiophonic Workshop. J'examine les qualités historiques et techniques de la production sonore pour cataloguer et théoriser le paysage sonore Beckettien, le tout informé par des études sur le son. Dans tous ses œuvres, le concept du récit ou de la narration personnelle est un motif récurrent. Dans ses pièces radiophoniques et télévisées en particulier, les personnages peuvent, par exemple, entendre des sons dans leur tête et articuler du son sous forme d'histoire. Beckett utilise ces histoires sonores pour explorer les frontières du son enregistré à travers ses œuvres radiophoniques, télévisées, et adaptées au théâtre.

Chapitre 1 examine les feuilletons radiophoniques de Beckett, avec une priorité donnée au déclin progressif du nombre et de la variété des effets sonores enregistrés au fil des années. Chapitre 2, axé sur les écrits de Beckett pour la télévision, explore son utilisation du son enregistré en combinaison avec des indices visuels et le travail de caméra. Chapitre 3 examine trois adaptations filmées des pièces de théâtre de Beckett abordées sous l'angle de la transformation du son et de l'image qu'il a apprise en travaillant dans d'autres médias. Les œuvres enregistrées et filmées de Beckett soulignent la centralité du son dans tous ses écrits et révèlent une relation complexe entre le son enregistré et le public. La répétition narrative offre un échange sonore intime avec l'écouteur. Les sons dans les histoires de Beckett mettent en

évidence la construction et la nature tendue du récit personnel, tandis que l'utilisation intentionnelle du silence rend les écouteurs plus conscients de leur acte d'écoute comme étant une partie intégrante du paysage sonore et du récit.

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Introduction

> "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended), made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin."
>
> —Samuel Beckett to Alan Schneider, 29 December 1957 (*Letters* 3: 82)

Writing to Alan Schneider in December 1957, Samuel Beckett preempts what has become a substantial body of scholarly writing aimed at the analysis and interpretation of his work. His phrase, "a matter of fundamental sounds," was later interpreted by Schneider as an intentional pun reflecting Beckett's firm yet comedic attitude toward his own work that distanced him from its narrative and philosophical content; Beckett's plays are not written "about things," but "are themselves things" (Schneider 181). Yet his emphasis on sound signifies a perspective that few scholars have fully explored, either in its fundamental sounds or in its overtones. Beckett is primarily regarded as a playwright and author, but even in his texts, he pays careful attention to the domain of non-verbal sound that underlies written language. In his work from 1957 to 1983, he focused particularly on creating audible works in the forms of radio, film, and television plays. Beckett's "fundamental sounds" emphasize *listening* rather than interpreting and thus provoke an engagement with his work that repeatedly returns listeners to the immediate sensory experience of sound.

Across all media, Beckett repeatedly focuses on the notion of storytelling not only through surface-level narrative, but through the narratives told by characters. His characters ruminate on solitude and existence while drawing attention to the act of storytelling. In the radio and television plays, an elderly male character either recounts or listens to his stories of the past

told with cracked, wavering voices that strain to tell the story correctly. Beckett is known for his desire to pare down language to its bare frame, or in other words, the desire to shed any and all ornament in an attempt to reach fundamental sounds. But is it possible to learn something about Beckett's use of storytelling by investigating the works in which sound is most explicitly realized, especially his radio, television, and filmed plays? Through a study of key sounds found in his works across these three mediums, I will define what I refer to as the Beckettian soundscape. In my study of these soundscapes, I argue that recording and manipulation of sounds are ways in which Beckett's work begins to complicate storytelling and the desire to listen to stories for semantic content rather than simply experience the story as a "thing" composed of "fundamental sounds."

R. Murray Schaffer's concept of the soundscape specifies that a soundscape is "any acoustic field of study" (Sterne 91). Qualifying this statement, Jonathan Sterne writes: "he clearly meant it as a total social concept to describe the field of sounds in a particular place, or an entire culture, 'a total appreciation of the sonic environment'" (Sterne 91). Other sound theorists, including Barry Blesser and Linda Ruth Salter, "use the term 'aural architecture' to denote 'the composite of numerous surfaces, objects and geometries in a complicated environment" (Sterne 92). I use the term soundscape to describe both the "sonic environment" and "aural architecture" of Beckett's works containing sounds that are not always easily definable. In a more literal sense, soundscapes must be actualized in physical space in order to be heard. Sterne writes:

> Space is the register in which sound can happen and sound can have meaning. But space is not a static thing. It is in constant formation, dissolution and reformation. According to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the refrain, sound is a means of territorialization: 'to

> draw a circle around that fragile center, to organize a limited space.' But it also de- and re-territorializes: 'one ventures from home on the thread of a tune.' (Sterne 91)

When we think of the space of a theater, the sounds heard inside are "territorializing" to the boundaries of the stage. In theater performance, the audience hears sound in its live, immediate presentation. Beckett's radio plays highlight an important distinction between radiogenic broadcast and live theatrical performance; radiogenic space complicates the ways in which sound is physically experienced, perhaps "de-territorializing" space by blurring its boundaries. The radio is the device that actualizes sound, but the sound exists inside another dimension of time and space; sound that is pre-recorded is perhaps "timeless" and without physical boundaries because it can be replayed over and over through radio waves. Television, like radio, brings recorded sound into the space of the household, but is also paired with images. Beckett's television images, however, challenge habitual ways of viewing television as they defy soundtracks and linger over long stretches of silence.

We might not necessarily think of silence as a "sound," but it functions as such in Beckett's soundscapes. Silence is just as audible as any sound effect in Beckett's works and has the power to alter the listener's experience. Salomé Voegelin writes: "In the quiet sounds of Silence the listener becomes audible to himself as a discrete member of an audience. Silence provides the condition to practise a signifying language that takes account of its sonic base: it embraces the body of the listener in its solitude, and invites him to listen to himself amidst the soundscape that he inhabits" (Voegelin xv). Silence alters listeners' engagement by promoting a self-awareness grounded in the passage of time. Moments of silence create self-reflexive scenarios in which listeners become more aware of time passing as well as the internal sound of their own inner thoughts that take over in the absence of outside sonic information.

A large part of this thesis will attend to the ways in which audiences receive and interpret sound in Beckett's radio, television, and adapted works. Each chapter will explore how Beckett's sounds pressure listeners to hear the properties of the sounds themselves, and not necessarily the messages they communicate: "Listening begins with the ordinary, by proximately working its way into what is as yet unheard" (Idhe 23). Voegelin distinguishes between listening and hearing:

> By contrast [to listening], hearing is full of doubt: phenomenological doubt of the listener about the heard and himself hearing it. Hearing does not offer a meta-position; there is no place where I am not simultaneous with the heard. However far its source, the sound sits in my ear. I cannot hear it if I am not immersed in its auditory object, which is not its source but sound as sound itself. Consequently, a philosophy of sound art must have at its core the principle of sharing time and space with the object or event under consideration. (Voegelin xii)

Voegelin is arguing for the listener's direct engagement with the sound itself in order to *listen* rather than *hear.* This form of engagement with sound echoes the fundamentals of what Michel Chion calls "reduced listening." Reduced listening is "the listening mode that focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning. Reduced listening takes the sound—verbal, played on an instrument, noises, or whatever—as itself the object to be observed instead of as a vehicle for something else" (Chion 50). Reduced listening is the third of three "listening modes" that Chion outlines; it is the mode that is most pertinent to audience engagement with Beckett's sounds. Chion argues that "a session of reduced listening is quite an instructive experience. Participants quickly realize that in speaking about sounds they shuttle constantly between a sound's actual content, its source, and its meaning" (Chion 50).

The first listening mode, casual listening, is the "most common" and "consists of listening to a sound in order to gather information about its cause (or source)" (Chion 48). Eruptions of noise outside the listener's visual field prompt an automatic desire to engage in casual listening in order to name the unknown sound. Chion continues: "When the cause is visible, sound can provide supplementary information about it; for example, the sound produced by an enclosed container when you tap it indicates how full it is. When we cannot see the sound's cause, sound can constitute our principal source of information about it" (Chion 48). Casual listening is practical, whereas the second mode of listening, semantic listening, delves deeper into the meanings of sound.

Semantic listening "refers to a code or a language to interpret a message: spoken language, of course, as well as Morse and other such codes" (Chion 50). To engage in semantic listening is not to listen to sounds purely for their "acoustical properties," but to seek meaning out of the sounds as they exist "as part of an entire system of oppositions and differences" (Chion 50). These three listening modes illuminate the listener's relationship with Beckett's changing use of sound and the ways in which his experimentation transforms the traditional act of listening to radio, television, and film. In Beckett's work, inexplicitly defined sounds pressure listeners to engage with them through Chion's third mode of listening—reduced listening. Just as Beckett's writing process involves elimination and paring down, sound-making in his radio, television, and stage plays is a process of reduction.

Chapter I of the thesis examines four of Beckett's main radio works written and broadcast for the BBC's Third Programme between 1957 and 1964. Before Beckett was even approached by the BBC, he had in fact had experience in writing for radio. At the end of the Second World War, Beckett had been working for the Irish Red Cross in St-Lô, France, and wrote a "report" of

his experiences and the state of the peoples in France and Ireland (Bénard 1). The report was supposed to be "broadcast and read by the writer himself in June 1946," but there is a debate about whether or not it was actually aired (Bénard 1). In 1956, John Morris, the Controller of the BBC's Third Programme, travelled to Paris to ask Beckett to write a play for radio (Chignell 5). The BBC's appeal to Beckett stemmed from an attempt to compete against the growing popularity of television in the mid 1950s. Reevaluating its strategy for promoting radio, the BBC outlined a new plan in which "Sound Drama" would "concentrate on work specially scripted for the microphone and making full use of radio's flexibility, intimacy and capacity for imaginative and evocative story-telling" (Chignell 5).

Around the same time John Morris sought out Beckett, the BBC endeavored to compete with television in another way through the creation of the Radiophonic Workshop, an effort that eventually revolutionized sound production in both radio and television. In a July 1957 broadcast that predates the official opening of the Radiophonic Workshop, producer Donald McWhinnie explained: "Properly used, radiophonic effects have no relationship with any existing sound. They're free of irrelevant associations. They have an emotional life of their own. And they could be a new and invaluable strand in the texture of radio and theatre and cinema and television" ("Early BBC Radiophonics" 00:02:11-00:02:26). In other words, the sound effects produced in the Radiophonic Workshop were entirely novel, and in the early years, they were all produced through a lengthy process of manipulating found sounds. Louis Neibur notes: "Following McWhinnie's idea that sound effect can act as storyteller, these new, more abstract sound effects worked in combination with dialogue to forge a rich atmospheric texture" (Neibur 13). According to Dick Mills, a composer who worked at the Radiophonic Workshop from 1958 to 1993, the sounds produced by the Workshop were not always well-received: **"**The Workshop, if

you believed all the letters in the back of the *Radio Times*, featured sounds that nobody liked for plays that no one could understand. It was a very alien art form. And because of the nature of the equipment we had, we were excellent at producing harsh, frightening, distorted sounds" ("Pioneers of Sound" 00:00:45-00:00:54). Dark, unnerving sounds proved to be perfect for Beckett's radio plays, and Martin Esslin contends that it was the need for such dreamlike sound effects in Beckett's production that directly led to the creation of the Radiophonic Workshop (Frost 370).

In Chapter I, I discuss sound effects in Beckett's first, somewhat conventional radio play, *All That Fall* (1957); the chapter then proceeds to his final commissioned radio work of the early 1960s, *Cascando* (1964). *All That Fall* is a straightforward radio drama centered around the voice of Maddy Rooney and a cast of several other characters. Two years later, *Embers* (1959) marked a significant departure from conventional radio drama. The pared-down narrative revolves around the voice of Henry and the presumed imaginary voice of his wife, Ada. The soundscape of *Embers* is marked by distortions of non-human sounds like the sea, horse hooves, and melancholy music, that, when combined, create a "skullscape" of sound (Perloff 250). The inclusion of non-verbal sound in *Embers* enhances semantic content, whether in feedback loops or silences or other acoustic effects. Sound in *Words and Music* (1962) functions similarly in that voice is assigned to non-human characters called "Music," "Words," and "Croak." Beckett's final radio play, *Cascando* (1964), combines human and non-human voice to explore the strained act of storytelling. In each play, radiogenic sound captures memory in a new sonic way while also affecting the characters' storytelling of the self. As a result, storytelling becomes increasingly obsessive, even as multiple recorded voices fracture identity and the listener's relationship, or access to the voices, becomes strained by added layers of sound.

The audience's reception of the radio plays was varied. Jody Berland notes, "We listen to radio, or rather, hear radio without always having to listen too closely (and in fact hear less and less) to keep from being depressed or isolated, to feel connected to something, to enfold ourselves in its envelope of pleasure, information, power" (42). Beckett's involvement with the Third Programme allowed him to reach a "high-brow" audience that his television plays would fail to reach; the common television viewer found Beckett's television productions too abstract. His radio plays challenge the listener to engage with a radiogenic sound that becomes increasingly disembodied as each play develops across time. The lack of direct connection between voices and bodies pressures listeners not simply to "hear" voices, but to engage in a form of listening that attempts to link sounds to their physical source. At the same time, the isolation and manipulation of such sounds ultimately draw the listener's focus to sound properties rather than messages communicated. As Beckett's radio and television works develop over time, the sounds of his stories become more austere, or they are replaced by music. In consequence, the foreignness of Beckett's new sounds disrupts the previous relationship of comfort between radiogenic sound and the listener.

Chapter II attends to Beckett's television plays written between 1966 and 1983, several of which were broadcast on the BBC2 network. Coupled with camerawork and displayed images, sound technology begins to work symbiotically alongside the visual. The relationship between sound and image affects the storytelling of Beckett's characters; the listener is forced to reconcile the stories told by disembodied voices with images of silent actors. Moreover, Beckett begins to include more pieces of music in his television plays as time goes on. Beckett was a lover of classical music, particularly "the classics (Haydn, Mozart, and especially Beethoven) and the romantics (Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, but above all Schubert)" (Debrock 69). In my

discussions of his radio, and especially his television work, we will see how Beckett uses samples from pieces by Beethoven and Schubert to create an atmosphere of sound that lends itself to longing and sorrow. Beckett's first television play, *Eh, Joe* (1966), displaces the storytelling onto an unnamed disembodied female voice, with the camera focusing on Joe as he silently sits and listens. *Ghost Trio* (1976) contains a disembodied voice not unlike the female voice in *Eh, Joe*, except the latter addresses Joe exclusively and the voice in the former addresses the audience directly. In *...but the clouds...* (1977), a male protagonist, a disembodied voice, and a female figure engage in a dialogue of memory and storytelling. *Quad* (1981) signals a shift in Beckett's teleplays with its colorful palette and echoing soundscape disintegrating into the soft shuffling of its grey-scale, cloaked characters' feet— an effect that marks a dramatic reduction in both the volume of sound and scale of the image. Beckett's final teleplay, *Nacht und Träume* (1983), is the quietest teleplay of them all, with soft music and singing sounding between the silent mimes of the play's central unnamed character.

Chapter III synthesizes the qualities of Beckett's radio work and teleplays to examine filmed adaptations of his stage work produced during his career and after his death. Beckett had previously refused offers to adapt his stage work, especially if the work was to be combined with a different medium such as music. Later in his career Beckett agreed to adapt particular stage productions to film. Michel Chion notes that, within film, "causal listening is constantly manipulated by the audiovisual contract itself, especially through the phenomenon of synchresis. Most of the time we are dealing not with the real initial causes of the sounds, but causes that the film makes us believe in" (Chion 49). In Beckett's filmed adaptations, camerawork attaches "cause" to voices. I will explore this idea especially in the 1971 and 1972 filmed adaptations of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). I will then turn to the filming of the stage play *Rockaby* (1981). My

final discussion will be on a 1991 taped production of *Endgame* (1957), which was part of the "Beckett Directs Beckett" series first begun in the mid-1980s. Each of these adaptations uses image and sound to transform the way in which Beckett's voices are listened to on stage. The filmed versions of *Krapp's Last Tape* emphasize the essential pairing of recorded sound and image as Krapp listens to his voice of the past on a cassette tape. The filmed version of *Rockaby* encapsulates the Beckettian obsession with sound and self-narrativization: the camera focuses on an old woman rocking in her chair while listening to a disembodied recording of a female voice that fades in and out as it recounts the repeated events of the old woman's life. The taping of *Endgame* reveals the complications of adaptation and its effects on sound and image as translated from the stage to the camera.

In each of these works, sound effects determine the ways in which listeners receive information. Consequently, Beckett's sounds generate listeners who must remain engaged in order to parse the narratives of the soundscapes. This engagement is marked by recurring questions about the source of the sounds and the spaces they exist in: What is the sound, and where is it coming from? Even in the television plays, sound takes precedence over stilled images by speaking for the silent and static on screen. Silence, too, becomes a sound effect in its own right when paired with images. Ultimately, sound is responsible for the voicing of stories. Yet it is through its prerecording, disembodiment, and distortion that stories become manipulated by sound itself.

The sounds of Beckett's audible works foster a complicated relationship with the listener and viewer. On the one hand, listening to Beckett's work is an intimate experience; in both his radio and television plays, characters verbally address the audience, imploring them to engage with sounds and images. And in his early radio dramas, the sounds produced were entirely novel

insofar as they drew the listener's ear in to discern their curious qualities. Yet the complexity of Beckett's sounds can be alienating, confusing, and perhaps even frustrating, especially in instances of disembodied or layered sound that distort understanding. On the other hand, the sounds of voices urge listeners to attend to the obsessive act of storytelling, while distortion and manipulation of non-human sound effects pressure an engagement with the qualities of sound itself. All in all, the experience of listening to Beckett's soundscapes is a balancing act. The nuances of sound push and pull listeners in opposite directions at times, but this thesis will show that this is the beauty and intrigue of Beckett's sonic storytelling.

Chapter 1: "Listen to it!" – The Radio Plays

Beckett produced seven radio works, four of which will be the focus of this chapter: *All That Fall* (1957), *Embers* (1959), *Words and Music* (1962), and *Cascando* (1964). Acoustically, these four radio plays are grounded in both *musique concrète*, a postwar style in which recorded sound is the essential building block for music composition, and acousmatics. As Emilie Morin notes, "Beckett's radio and television plays remain engaged in a reflection on the dramatic potential of acousmatics—a concept defined by musique concrète composer Pierre Schaeffer, Beckett's contemporary, as 'a noise that one hears without seeing the causes from which it originates'" (Morin 1). While defining acousmatic sound, Schaeffer asserts that "In former times the device was a curtain; today, the radio and sound reproduction systems, using all forms of electroacoustic transformations, place us, modern listeners to an invisible voice, once more under the conditions of a similar experiment" (64). My main objective in this chapter will be to discuss the shifting, "invisible," acousmatic voices and sounds in Beckett's radio dramas that form a soundscape that enhances the sonic qualities of characters' inner stories.

In addition to mapping out the soundscapes of Beckett's radio plays, this chapter will also explore how *musique concrète* and acousmatics in Beckett's radio plays pressure listeners to engage in reduced listening, namely "the listening mode that focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of and cause and of its meaning. Reduced listening takes the sound—verbal, played on an instrument, noises, or whatever—as itself the object to be observed instead of as a vehicle for something else" (Chion 50). As the radio plays develop between 1957 to 1964, Beckett pares away narrative in a manner that resists interpretation and instead forces the listener to focus on the sound itself rather than the story being told. Moreover, the increasingly experimental nature of sound transforms the genre of radio drama into sound art; Beckett's radio

plays become sonic creations that transcend the boundaries of the genre.

In 1957, Donald McWhinnie described sound manipulation as "a sort of modern magic" that the BBC was interested in only for "its application to radio writing, dramatic or poetic, adding a new dimension. A form which is essentially radio" ("Early BBC radiophonics" 00:01:45-00:02:10). With the help of what Pierre Schaeffer referred to as "sound reproduction systems," such as new technology like the magnetic tape reel, sound could be transformed to possess a new emotional quality that the voices of human actors would not have been able to create on their own. The BBC's first radiophonic poem, "Private Dreams and Public Nightmares" ("an experiment" as Donald McWhinnie called it), was broadcast ten months after *All That Fall*, and has a remarkably similar soundscape to the latter ("Early BBC radiophonics" (00:00:14-00:00:15). The manipulated sounds are jarring, with varying volumes, pitches, echoes, and uncanny noises filling the radiogenic space with a nightmarish atmosphere. This broadcast, along with other early radio pieces aired on the Third Programme, was designed to jolt the listener by defamiliarizing acoustic space. As Louis Nieber puts it, the early radio dramas "were unified by an insistence on an anti-realist aesthetic, embracing sound techniques geared toward the odd, surreal, and distorted, and existing as a bridge between poetry or music and reality" (Niebur 8).

In the case of Beckett's *All That Fall*, "tape effects" were used only a few times but were nonetheless important to production. The majority of the effects came from electronic treatment of standard sound effects, such as footsteps, cars, bicycle wheels, train, and cart (Frost 270). Or, effects were recorded by Desmond Briscoe himself using an echo chamber (Niebur 20). Several of the voice actors in *All That Fall* became regulars in Beckett's work, especially Patrick Magee, who was cast as Music Master and Riding Master in *Embers*, Words in *Words and Music*, and

Voice in *Cascando*. Beckett wrote *Krapp's Last Tape* for Magee, who also starred as Krapp in the 1972 filmed adaptation of the play. Jack MacGowran was also a favorite actor of Beckett's; he played Henry in *Embers* and Joe in the 1966 television play *Eh, Joe*. Clearly, Beckett had a fondness for the sounds of certain voices, particularly those with raspy or strained timbres. As Billie Whitelaw once noted, if Beckett did not like the voice of his actors, "all was lost from the start" (West 110).

All That Fall

According to *Radio Times*, *All That Fall,* "a new play for broadcasting by Samuel Beckett," aired on Saturday, January 13, 1957, at 9:30 PM, between two orchestral concerts (*Radio Times*). During the production of *All That Fall*, Donald McWhinnie traveled to Paris several times and "was encouraged by Beckett's enthusiasm for sonic experimentation" (Niebur 20). In his biography of Beckett, James Knowlson supposes that "it was probably through thinking about sound in general, as distinct from voice in particular, that he had the idea for a play in which sound effects would play a vital role" (Knowlson 625). Beckett wrote to Nancy Cunard that he had "never thought about Radio play technique," but was inspired to write a radio play after imagining the sounds of what would become *All That Fall*: "but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something" (Knowlson 625).

Compared to the radio plays that would come after it, *All That Fall* contains a wider range of sound effects, from animals to the roar of a van, the humming of a hymn, shuffling, groans, and train sounds. "Rural sounds," which open the play, offer a brief overview of its sonic setting: "sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together" (Beckett 20). Yet on first listen, the

sounds are not quite "realistic" in the sense that they are perfect recreations of sounds made by such animals. McWhinnie and Beckett "both agreed that the sound should be treated surrealistically in order to evoke the inner life of Maddy Rooney" (Porter 440). McWhinnie stressed that the purpose of the human-made, animal-filled prelude was not to "evoke a visual picture" but to "stylize" the setting of the scene through sound which contains within itself "a pointer to the convention of the play: a mixture of realism and poetry, frustration and farce" (Porter 440). Not unintentional, the animal sounds correspond to the "four-in-a-bar metre of Mrs. Rooney's walk to the station and back, which is the percussive accompaniment to the play and which, in its later stages, becomes charged with emotional significance in itself" (Porter 440).

In this way, sound becomes a literary effect, not only marking the setting of the play, but also signaling the rhythm of movements inside the radiogenic space to help the listener visualize the movements of the characters. This can be heard in the "shuffling" of Mrs. Rooney's every step and the groans that accompany them, as well as the moment when Mrs. Rooney hears Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" coming from an old woman's house. As she walks past, the sound fades with the growing distance. This Doppler Effect is noted in several instances throughout the play in which sounds change in pitch according to Mrs. Rooney's movement, effects that reinforce her role as the subject who mediates sound for the audience. As also happens in *Embers*, "It is never made clear whether what the audience hears is 'reality' in fact, or reality heard through the filter of Rooney's mind, and from the first line of the play McWhinnie skews the listener's perception by re-creating the animals' sounds with human actors imitating the sound of animals" (Niebur 21).

Because many of the sound effects are purposely unrecognizable in their initial sounding and have close associations with human-made noises, listeners are forced to reevaluate the

source of the sound. This imposes a more carefully considered act of referential listening in which the listener instinctively attempts to connect the sound with its source using a catalog of previously heard sounds, a "casual history," or archive of sound memories, within the mind (Chion 49). The sound of horse hooves that capture Mrs. Rooney's attention at first sound like two slow echoing drops, almost mimicking the sound of dripping water. The sounds are not easily identified until the more conventional rhythmic "clop" of the hooves is heard on the road. Like the "moan" of the cow, and the "dripping" of the horse hooves, initial noise is distorted to confuse both Mrs. Rooney and the listener, forcing one to strain to listen again as the sound becomes clearer. When combined, these instances of acousmatic sound baffle the listener as to the location of reality. What is real? What is represented? What occurs in the mind or in the world?

When sounds become layered on top of one another, as in the case of the farm animals, the noise that is produced becomes so distorted that referential listening is impossible—nor can symbolic listening be employed, as there is no "meaning" to be had from a chaotic assemblage of sound with no direct source. Instead, an act of reduced listening is enjoined upon the listener. In other words, when the sound cannot be identified with the source, the listener is forced to dissect the sound, to notice and describe its sonic qualities in order to parse its meaning inside the story. Because radio places listeners in an "acousmatic situation" where they cannot see the sources of the sounds that they are hearing, listeners become more aware of the sound as the main object to be interpreted—and can only achieve an interpretation through describing its nuanced sonic qualities (Chion 52). Yet ordinary radio listeners do not possess adequate language to describe such sonic qualities that go beyond their own archive of familiar sounds to draw from. Instead, they are forced to abandon language, perhaps to experience the sound as an unexplainable object,

like viewing a piece of nonrepresentational art. What, then, can be said of Beckett's radiogenic nightmare moments, when the layering of sounds reaches a heightened state of madness? The "groan" that comes out at the end of the chaotic crescendo of rural sounds signals a confusion, the after-effect of an inability to attribute meaning to what has just been heard.

The first human sounds that follow the farm animals are indicated by the shuffling of Maddy Rooney's feet. Beckett often gives great attention to the human body, especially the slow, inhibited, or struggling body, and his radio plays are no exception to this principle. The body is often denigrated or disabled in some way, as is the case with Mrs. Rooney's nearly immobile, overweight body, Dan Rooney's "wound" that Maddy fears will reopen should he fall down the step, or Henry's "growths" that Ada points out as she warns him not to sit on the cold hard stone in *Embers*. In the radio plays, these pained invisible bodies—burdens to be dragged around in the dark—are brought alive by the constant labored shuffling sounds of the feet and soft groans that draw attention to their weightiness. In this way, sound allows Beckett to give shape to his characters' bodies in a way not possible in his texts or stage plays, and the listener of the radio play is granted more license to imagine the bodies as cued by the sound. Maddy Rooney's first lines heard in the play, however, create a schism between physical body and inner-mind. Everett Frost notes: "She comes into existence for the audience as an assemblage of the sounds she hears: rural sounds, labored footsteps, and then the distant strains of 'Death and the Maiden,' prompting the lyric association and contrast of herself with the 'poor woman'—the first words of the play, not uttered but *thought*" (Frost 367). Inner sound that is actualized puts the audience in the dark, "until the play progresses long enough for auditors to assemble her out of her own perceptions" (Frost 367).

In this way, Maddy Rooney mimics the same "blind" positionality of the listener as she

often strains to see properly, and when she does see, she addresses the listener's lack of sight. As the sound of horse hooves approach, Mrs. Rooney calls out, "Is that you, Christy?" to which he replies, "It is, ma'am," an affirmation of the presence of another body the listener cannot see (Beckett 21). Jeff Porter notes, "While the body is absent as a signifier in radio, it nevertheless haunts the non-space of the listener's imagination as a trace, for the originary body lingers on the margins of the sign" (Porter 431). The "originary body" that Porter points to is, again, contained within the listener's causal history activated by familiar sounds. The desire to listen and connect source with sound (referential or causal listening) is most closely related to the radiogenic body in Beckett's radio play and the desire to know who speaks, and to whom. In times of silence, Maddy Rooney also addresses listeners by pointing to their fundamental blindness that prevents them from knowing which characters are present in the scene, or who is visible. She reminds the listener that she is still there: "Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on" (Beckett 47). In another moment, Maddy gestures toward the darkness of the radiogenic space, pointing out how, like her husband Dan Rooney, the listener is blind to the details of the scene around her that is marked by hills, miles of white rails, red stands, and the wayside station. She pressures the listener to see through sound:

> …even you yourselves, yes, I mean it, and over all the clouding blue, I see it all, I stand here and see it all with eyes … [the voice breaks] … through eyes … oh if you had my eyes … you would understand … the things they have seen … and not looked away … this is nothing … nothing … what did I do with that handkerchief? (Beckett 48)

In moments of heightened self-reflexivity, Maddy Rooney not only draws attention to physical bodies, but the shaping of speech. She calls attention to her own voice, and the ways in which it is interpreted by listeners. She asks Christy, "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" (Beckett 22-23). The self-reflexivity of Maddy Rooney's voice is highly performative; she is aware not only of her voice, but of the character she is playing. "Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness" (Beckett 24). She gives into a brief allusive fixation of the past, calling out her dead daughter's name, "Minnie! Little Minnie!" and transitions into her character's desires of the past: "Love, that is all I asked, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection?" (Beckett 25).

In moments of this kind of questioning, sounds interrupt her thoughts, such as a loud, shrill sound not unlike a distorted telephone ring that breaks in upon her reminiscing. The first sound, like the others before it, is distorted, yet after a brief pause, silence is interrupted once again and makes itself more clearly heard as a bicycle bell. The initial distortion of the sound, followed by its more realistic depiction repeated several times over, unnerves Maddy Rooney and the listener and prompts them to make faulty associations with the initial sound only to be rapidly proven wrong once the second and third sounds register differently.

When many of the sounds seem deliberately to confuse the source of sound with the intended listener, Maddy Rooney acts as the bridge between the two: "In fact it is Maddy's capacity as a listener that mediates the relationship between spoken language and consciousness in the play. She is the acoustic centre of the play, both a maker of sound and its hearer and, as such, enjoys an unusual degree of agency for a Beckett character" (Porter 435). Volume of sound helps this agency. Lower volumes of speech in the play are manipulated to communicate the

traditional theater “aside” in which the character utters speech not meant to be heard by the other actors present. Mrs. Rooney does this when she asks Christy, “Why do you halt,” and, after a pause in the same line, addresses herself more quietly by asking “But why do I halt?” (Beckett 21).

By the end of the radio play, sound returns to storytelling. Although Maddy Rooney is the acoustic center of the play, her husband, Dan Rooney is a true Beckettian storyteller along the lines of characters in the subsequent radio plays. He puts on a distinct “narrative tone” as he tells Maddy his story about the train station on their journey home and he switches from “narrative tone” to “normal tone” as he is pulled in and out of the story. Maddy interrupts at one point to offer her own story within a story about her experience listening to a lecture by a “new mind doctor” who told “the story of a little girl” who seemed to have “nothing wrong with her,” except that he could “see” that “she was dying” and died shortly after. Yet the real trouble was that “she had never really been born!” (Beckett 70-71). These two stories, unnerving in their somewhat nonsensical nature, serve as a build-up to the end of the play, in which Maddy finally figures out what kept the train from arriving on time: a small child (a reminder of her daughter, Minnie) was killed after falling from the carriage onto the tracks. This final revelation has the power of halting language, and the soundscape is filled with the sound of a sweeping sonic wind that fades into silence. In his next radio play, *Embers*, Beckett would focus more intently on storytelling while simultaneously creating an increasingly experimental soundscape.

Embers

In a letter to Barney Rosset dated 23 November 1958, Beckett reported that he originally wrote an unsatisfactory draft of *Embers* two years prior to sending the script to Donald

McWhinnie. The draft had been "thrown away, then recovered, but with a page missing," about which he could not remember anything and which he did not miss (Beckett *Letters* 3: 181-182). Even after sending McWhinnie a draft, Beckett was reluctant about the potential of this new radio work: "I gave an aborted radio script to McWhinnie, unbroadcastable as it stands, a kind of attempt to write for radio and not merely exploit its technical possibilities" (*Letters* 3: 181). Later, Beckett reflected that "EMBERS is a more specifically radio play than ALL THAT FALL. At least I tried to make it so" (*Letters* 3: 281).

Perhaps the treatment of sound makes *Embers* more radiogenic than *All That Fall*. *Embers* more readily interrogates sound, both imaginary and real, and, as a whole, consistently plays up its own radiogenic qualities, such as its non-visual features and its manipulation of sound to create noises not immediately identifiable. Henry, whose voice is the main vehicle for narrative throughout the play, frequently refers to sounds heard and not heard within the radiogenic space. Recorded sound effects are also used in his recounting of memories, which brings sonic life to the interior world of Henry as opposed to the exterior world that contained the sound effects in *All That Fall*.

In *Embers*, even more than in *All That Fall*, the blindness inherent in radio space is paired with dark, unnerving sounds. The first sound of the play is a low wavering vibration layered with the sound of the incoming tide of the sea, both amplified according to the water's movement onto a shore. The sea is the ultimate marker that defines the soundscape of the play. Its sound is defined by Beckett as "still faint, audible throughout what follows whenever pause indicated," and, as Clas Zilliacus notes, there are "more than two hundred pauses" marked in the text of *Embers*, making the sea a kind of "dramatis persona" whose presence menaces and proves inescapable in the mind of Henry (89). Zilliacus also contends that "If *Embers* were a stage play,

the monotone which provides its sound background would make up the heaviest décor anywhere in Beckett's dramatic canon" (89). Indeed, the sound is quite unlike any other heard in Beckett's radio or television plays. It evokes a vibrational quality not unlike the wavering electronic drone music produced by experimental composers of the late 1950s. Beckett actually "disliked" the "electronic drones" used to produce the sound, "and later gave instructions countering the BBC's approach" (Morin 5). The sound was produced by Desmond Briscoe in the Radiophonic Workshop, and "consists of a natural-sounding rustling of waves against pebbles, to which a clearly synthetic, organ-like note has been added ['Like my Hoover,' wrote a Third Programme panel member]" (Zilliacus 94). Richard J. Hand and Mary Traynor describe the sound as follows:

> The echo of a distant car passing seems to resonate with the rhythmic lapping of waves on a shingle beach. The strain of a car horn is reminiscent of a fog horn at sea; different pitches are layered and the sound is extended and dies away with the receding waves…The sound of a horse is created by coconut shells recorded in stark isolation. (53)

Yet the sound of the sea, in constant tension with Henry's vocalized stories, is only a "private nightmare" inside Henry's head, not truly "heard," no matter the six pleas to listeners uttered by Henry throughout the play—"Listen to it!" (Zilliacus 90).

Like Maddy Rooney, Henry often instructs listeners to close their eyes and listen, or he defines sounds for them. Katherine Weiss argues that Henry's first word of the play, "On," positions him as a radiophonic narrator who switches on sound channels (Weiss 75). Henry certainly makes himself out to be the "eyes" and authority of sound within the play. He immediately tells the listener, "That sound you hear is the sea. *[Pause. Louder.]* I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand" (Beckett 144-145). This direct speech to the listener draws attention to the artificiality of the sound of the sea, as if it is not quite "real"

enough for the listener to recognize. He goes on to say that he mentions the sea "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" (Beckett 145).

Henry continues his addresses to the listener throughout the play, and when he speaks to the listener in the line, "Close your eyes and listen to it, what would you think it was? [*Pause. Vehement.*] A drip! A drip! [*Sound of drip, rapidly amplified, suddenly cut off.*] Again! [*Drip again. Amplification begins*.] No! [*Drip cut off. Pause*]" (Beckett 149). Yet the first sound of the drip is distorted, like the unnerving quality of the sound effects heard in *All That Fall*. Henry tells us it is a "drip," but on first listen, the sound is not unlike that of a clock ticking. As the sound is amplified, the drip begins to more perceptibly sound like water. His imploring listeners to actively "listen" makes these sound distortions more obvious, in that the listener is more inclined to notice the qualities of the sounds more so than their meanings.

Henry tells not just one story, but several throughout the play. In his first story, he refers to the act of listening and seeing, much as Maddy Rooney does. In Henry's story about Bolton and Holloway, the phrase, "not a sound," is repeated throughout the initial fragment of the story that he offers, and "embers," the title of the play, acts as the bridge between silence and noise as well as light and darkness: "silence in the house, not a sound, only fire, no flames now, embers. [Pause.] Embers. [Pause.]" (Beckett 148). Martin Esslin points out that "Language can be just another sound effect, one of several elements in the larger sound picture that combine to convey the impression of 'a universe freed from the shackles of logic'" (Nieber 20). Henry asks listeners to "listen to the light now," an impossible task to fulfill. Richardson and Hale contend:

> From its paradoxical title—how can a radio play portray quietly fading coals?—to its contradictory ending— 'Not a sound'—followed by 'eighteen subjectively merciless

> seconds of Sea' in the first BBC production, embers plays from beginning to end with the capacity of radio to evoke one thing and its opposite: sounds and silence, images and darkness, reality and fantasy, life and death. (Richardson and Hale 278)

The logic of sound is further displaced, insofar as Henry reports that no matter how far he travels away from the sea, going even to landlocked Switzerland, he cannot escape its sound. He thus puts into question whether or not the sea that listeners hear is actually the sea, or if it is inside of Henry's mind (Beckett 140). "Embers is based on an ambiguity: is the character having a hallucination or is he in the presence of reality?" (Richardson and Hale 278). Listening, then, becomes a fantastical, other-worldly act fastened to the interior world of Henry's mind. Coupled with Henry's maniacal laughter and verbose outbursts of speech, listeners have to navigate this "skullscape" of intricately placed sounds, many of which Henry conjures by command. In one moment, he shouts for the sounds of hooves to repeat themselves. "Hooves! *[Sound of hooves walking on hard road. They die rapidly away. Pause.]* Again! *[Hooves as before. Pause. Excitedly.]*" (Beckett 152).

Given his ability to command sound, the performative quality of Henry's voice is one of the most striking features of his sonic stories. Before he begins voicing his story about Bolton and Holloway, he first cautions the reader, "I usen't to need anyone, just to myself, stories, there was one great one about an old fellow called Bolton, I never finished it, I never finished any of them, I never finished anything, everything always went on for ever" (Beckett 146). Throughout his story, he manipulates his own voice, assuming the different accents of his father, Bolton, Holloway, and his daughter's music master. He performs the lines of Bolton and Holloway in different tones of voices, while assuming his "regular" narrative voice when not inside his story. Moreover, he corrects himself along the way in attempt to get the story right, a kind of self-

conscious performance of his story to his audience. At the end of this first story, Ada's voice enters the soundscape and the listener begins to wonder whether she is real or not.

Henry conjures her into the soundscape by yelling "Ada!" twice as her "[*low remote voice throughout*]" answers "Yes." To counter Henry's verbosity, Ada's voice is monotone, controlled, and quiet, making her seem ever more phantom-like. Henry pressures Ada to listen to the sounds he hears, just as he asks the listener to do so. Ada, however, can answer Henry, and in one moment, she explains, "It is like an old sound I used to hear. [*Pause*.] It is like another time, in the same place. [*Pause*.]" (Beckett 154). Ada vocalizes sounds of the past. Beckett notes that one of her lines, "Don't! Don't!", is spoken "*twenty years earlier*, *imploring*," at which point the sound memory reaches a crescendo with "*Rough sea. Ada cries out. Cry and sea amplified*" (Beckett 158). In this example, Beckett is conscious of the challenge that radiogenic sound poses when depicting multiple temporalities. Recorded sound effects successfully transcend the boundaries of radiogenic sound and reach the listener in perplexing ways.

There are two other moments of amplification in the play, perhaps the most experimental in all of Beckett's radio plays, in which a roaring crescendo of layered sounds enter into the soundscape. These moments are prompted by memories about Henry's daughter, Addie, who was sent to horse riding and music lessons. The memory of Addie's voice signals an imperative to listen as a means of remembering. It transports the listener to another time and place with new voices to be heard; Henry conjures her voice so as to actualize a memory for the audience to hear in order to create a shared understanding about his past.

In the first recounting of the memory, Addie struggles to play the write note during her piano lesson and her music master screams at her, "[*frenziedly*] Eff! Eff! [*He hammers note*.] Eff! [*He hammers note.]* Eff! [*Hammered note, "Eff!" and Addie's wail amplified to paroxysm,*

then suddenly cut off. Pause.]" (Beckett 156). In the next memory, while Addie is riding her horse, the riding master repeatedly yells instructions at her until the sound of galloping is amplified in tandem with a great wail let out by Addie. The sounds reverberate on top of one another, again "amplified to paroxysm," in a wholly horrific amalgamation of sound (Beckett 157). The amassing of all these sounds creates a nightmare moment in which the narratives of the past, the voices, the memories, all tangle together to create one sonic boom of confusion and fear directed at Ada but also amplified in her radiophonic consciousness. This moment recalls the amassing of rural sounds in *All That Fall*, though in *Embers*, the nightmare is more palpably felt as the sounds are directly a part of Henry's personal archive of memory.

Henry's ability to conjure the sound of Ada dwindles into a futile monologue similar to Hamm's final monologue in which he can no longer summon Clov from his kitchen at the end of *Endgame*. Ada warns Henry, "The time will come when no one will speak to you at all, not even complete strangers. [Pause.] You will be quite alone with your voice, there will be no other voice in the world but yours. [Pause.] Do you hear me?" (Beckett 162). Ada's warning of impending silence is remarkably similar to Nagg's warning to Hamm in *Endgame*, signaling a preoccupation with silence on Beckett's part as the two plays were written closely together. Henry implores Ada repeatedly to "Keep on, keep on!" as she begins to become silent (Beckett 163). Yet his attempts are futile, she eventually leaves, and not even his cries for her—or the horse hooves—can summon sounds again. This silence is a remarkable signal of isolation and death, one that makes the listener palpably aware of Henry's aloneness that has been his reality for the entire play. His final line of the play, "Not a sound," leaves the listener with a sonic assertion that there is nothing more to listen to (and moreover, to make sense of), except for the soft drone of the sea and its waves washing onto the shore, until the listener is finally met with

inevitable silence (Beckett 168).

Words and Music

Words and Music (1962) was written in the winter of 1961 but recorded and broadcast on the Third Programme a year later on 16 November 1962. The play was written by Beckett in collaboration with his cousin, composer John Beckett, who obtained a commission from the BBC (as Everett Frost notes, it was not Samuel Beckett who obtained the commission, as Beckett "disliked the restriction of working to meet an externally imposed obligation") (Frost 371). Moreover, the play resulted in the 1968 launch of a new program "comingling" poetry and music on the BBC's Third Programme which was also called "Words and Music" (Chia 230). The soundscape of *Words and Music* is more rooted in voice and its interaction with musical sound rather than the abstract sound effects of *All That Fall* and *Embers* that derived from *musique concrète*.

The play begins with a battle between sounds: the sound of an orchestra tuning and the sound of Words's voice pleading "Please" against the music's noise. Music is brought to the forefront of this radio drama, which noticeably distinguishes *Words and Music* from the more traditionally narrative-driven settings of Beckett's first two radio plays. Once Music obeys and silences itself, the voice of Words acknowledges the "darkness" of the non-visual radiogenic space that veers us away from any inclination that they are on a stage: "How much longer put up here in the dark… with YOU?" (Beckett 98). The "you" he is stuck with points to the music that has begun the play, but also hints at the temporal relationship between the voice and the listeners. How much longer are we, too, stuck in the dark listening to this bodiless voice?

By giving character and voice to "Music," Beckett signals a significant shift in his

experimentation with sound after *Embers*. While Words offers fragments of a narrative pertaining to the theme assigned to him by Croak, music functions as what Guy Debrock refers to as a "gesture" that does not tell a story, but is guiding or "commanding" listeners "to react in some way" (80). The music is anthropomorphized at times in its "response" to Croak and Words; it plays itself in "humbled" and "rude" tones, as a person would. Croak repeatedly desires Words (story) and Music (gesture) to become one, to "be friends," but the process toward this is painstakingly forced at times as Croak levels threats at the two. There are curious moments of sonic punishment, in which Words is overcome by the sound of music and is heard crying out "protestations" such as pleading "No!", "Please!", and "Peace!" as if he is being disciplined (Beckett 202). This communication between Words and Music affects a sort of paradoxical silence; music cannot "speak," therefore the music we hear results in a sort of bewilderment or frustration at the lack of understanding of what is being "said" or communicated.

Thus the "darkness" of radiogenic space becomes more apparent in this play, especially due to the questionable setting. Unlike the sounds of the Irish countryside of *All That Fall* and seashore of *Embers*, the sounds of *Words and Music* are noticeably more detached from a physical setting; the only distinct sounds are two voices, the thumping of a club on a hard surface, a broom sweeping, and orchestral music comprised of flutes, piano, and strings. The three characters in the play, Croak, Music and Words, are notably more non-human in both their names and sonic qualities. The producer of the play, Malcolm Blackwell, described the characters in the following manner: "Croak, an aged tyrant, has two servants – Words and Music. He shouts at them themes—'love', 'age' etc., which they attempt to portray and which sharpen his memories of a woman once loved whose memory he cannot escape" (Zilliacus 100). The characters' dynamic is complicated by the struggle to be heard; Croak acts as the aged master

(described as “senile” in one of Beckett’s early drafts), commanding his servant Words to vocally explore themes that might assemble or allude to a narrative of Croak’s past (Zilliacus 100).

Coupled with the vague setting, the voices’ strained dynamic results in repeat interruptions of sound, making it notably more difficult to discern the two human voices from one another. Moreover, they each have alter-egos: Croak calls Words “Joe,” Words refers to Croak as “My Lord,” and they both call music “Bob,” all while speaking in a similar theatrical register. The latter tonal characteristic of the voices signals a tension between radiogenic space and theater space. The indiscriminate setting lends itself more toward a stage, especially with the performative vocal registers of Croak and Words and the orchestral quality of Music.

The theatrical self-reflexivity of Words’s performance is more striking in this play than in its predecessors. Words is given themes by Croak that prompt him to engage in theatrical monologues (that are verbalized sonic poems), about love, sloth, and age. When the performative voice is engaged, the volume and speed of the sound are amplified greatly. Subsequently, listeners engage in a mode of listening that is more consciously critical of the sounds. This mode of reduced listening, however, creates a sense of strain in the balancing act of listening to the characteristics of sound as well as parsing the narrative of the play.

It is not difficult to lose track of meaning when Words engages in his fast-paced speech. Moreover, his manipulations of his voice pressure the listener to not necessarily concern themselves with content, but more so to take in the overt performativity of the voice; the “story” being told in its fragments becomes unimportant to the actual experience of “understanding” the sounds of the radio play and how each of these three sound sources interact and collaborate with one another. Compared to *All That Fall* and *Embers*, *Words and Music* is more concerned with

sound overtaking a fragmented narrative and leaving the listener with an acousmatic space devoid of language that is capable of creating meaning.

Though like most of Beckett's works, the voices in *Words and Music* are concerned with telling or explaining through monologues. The traditional "story" told by the characters of *Words and Music* is reduced to one fragment or aspect of story (theme), then transformed into a poem or song by Words that tells a short narrative about "her face," the recurring motif mentioned by Croak and Words. Yet Words cannot stick to one theme; he moves from one topic to the next at the urging of Croak or at the interruption of Music. Moreover, the sound of Words's "storytelling" (if we can call it that) is altered as he speaks; both the speed and tone become faster and more theatrical when he is performing his monologues. Subsequently, listeners engage in a mode of listening that is both more careful in its noticing of the sounds. This mode of reduced listening creates a sense of strain in the balancing act of listening to the characteristics while also parsing the narrative of the play.

In some explorations of themes, Words falters, failing to keep his fast-paced tempo and stutters to find the right words, which angers Croak. In these cases, Croak calls upon "Bob" (the music) to sound itself again, signaling a "do-over" of sorts. Whereas *All that Fall* and *Embers* maintain a "listen to find out the end of the story" quality, the interjection and re-starting of the orchestral music in *Words and Music* actually places the play's semblances of narrative in inertia. These "rehearsals" of Words's speech are supported by the tuning of the orchestra, as if both sources of sound are practicing their performance.

Words's culminating vocalization for Croak is a song about "the face" which more explicitly frames Croak's memory of his past lover. Words, "[*trying to sing, softly*]," begins his song by combining the theme of age with "the face" as a man is waiting for a woman to come "in

ashes" to place a pan in his bed, asserting again that she is "The face in the ashes" (Beckett 206). "The face" is one of the reasons why Croak reports he is "late" at the beginning, signaling the importance of an image of the past that the radiogenic listener does not have access to, yet emotionally consumes Croak throughout the play. This motif allows Words to narrativize in a way that deeply disturbs Croak and prompts him to "groan" repeatedly, until in agony he shouts the woman's name, "Lily!" (Beckett 208). Music joins in as Words describes the woman's face, culminating in a final attempt to sing the full song, leading Croak to drop his club and depart the radiogenic space (Beckett 211).

As in many of Beckett's plays, the past both interrupts and dictates the sounds of the present with speeches and songs devoted to characterizing Croak's past love. The sound of Words's song is too overwhelming for Croak in the end, and his silence signals his departure as Words is left with Music, whom he calls out to as "Bob!" and then more directly: "Music. [Imploring.] Music!" (Beckett 212). Music responds with a "brief rude retort" before playing itself as Words commands, until Words, with his newfound power to command, lets out the final sound of the play: a "*Deep sigh*" (Beckett 212). Ironically, only Words is left to tell the story, yet he closes the play with not words, but a non-verbal sound. The sigh also marks a sort of sonic release after the barrage of interruptions and sonic punishment. Silence, in the end, provides the only relief.

Cascando

From its title, *Cascando* connotates sound with its various Italian translations meaning "fall," "tumble," and "pitch." The play was written around the same time as *Words and Music* in the winter of 1961, but was broadcast first on French Culture in 1963, and then on BBC Radio 3 on

6 October1964. Like *Words and Music*, the setting of the play is not easily definable, except when inside Voice's story of Woburn, who seems to be journeying through a distinctly Irish landscape (Frost 375). This makes *Cascando* a perfect synthesis of recorded sound attached to a foundation of storytelling.

Significantly, there are no "extra" sound effects, such as the sound of a club or shuffling in *Words and Music*; there are simply two voices and flutters of orchestral music. The voiced subjects, again, are pared down, metonymic names such as "Opener," "Voice," and "Music." Beckett's characters are notorious for their exploration of the self, for their obsession with self-narrativization and storytelling of the past, but sound in *Cascando* offers a different take on this theme. Tom Vandevelde argues that there are many hints that lead him to believe Music, Voice, and Words are each a part of the same persona (261). Such a persona or identity is ruptured by sound; the three characters that make up this persona each have their own unique sonic qualities separating them from one another.

The play opens with the declaration of storytelling. Opener, like Croak, speaks quite slowly with verbose authority. More articulate than Croak, Opener speaks in full sentences and offers crucial insights into his role as "Opener," in an act of self-reflexive performance. The Opener is a "generative narrator," one who "narrates what is happening or will happen on stage and functions as a kind of stage director in deciding what will happen next" (Vandevelde 258). Opener sets the time of the scene in "the month of May," but in typical Beckettian fashion—his characters' thoughts are always undergoing processes of revision—pauses to assess this claim until he decides he is right and asserts, "Correct." Once the time is accurately established, Opener declares, "I open" (Beckett 214). These corrections mimic the mind's tendency to speak to itself, to engage in mental confirmations with oneself. While he is opening the play for the

listener—declaring himself separate from Voice—it also seems likely that Opener is in fact a part of Voice's identity, acting as the thoughts inside his head.

The Opener plunges us inside Voice's narrative, while Voice takes us out of the narrative as he actualizes it into sound. In this way, sound reflects both the interior and exterior worlds of creation: Opener verbalizes creative intent, while Voice vocalizes the story itself. At times, the Opener's sonic interruptions of Voice indicates that the story itself has taken him over and has manifested itself as an actualized force on the Voice's psyche, which we, the listener, can hear. This is not unlike the voice of Ada in *Embers*. In each of Beckett's radio plays, the listener seems to be granted a special ability to hear the voices going on inside the main characters, the ones whose voices dominate the soundscape.

By this technique, Beckett establishes recurring intimacy between unheard sound and the listener. The listener is granted access to hear what cannot actually be heard outside the radiogenic space, and is even personally addressed. Like Croak, Opener has the power to command sound. He not only directs Voice and Music, but also implores the listener to "Listen" (Beckett 220). He also stresses an outside "They" that passes judgements on the Opener:

> They say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head. They don't see me, they don't see what I do, they don't see what I have, and they say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it's in his head. I don't protest any more, I don't say any more, There is nothing in my head. I don't answer any more. I open and close. (Beckett 219)

Unlike Croak, Opener is more self-aware and even admits his fears of "opening": "I open. *Pause*. I'm afraid to open. But I must open. So I open" (Beckett 224). The act of "opening" may refer to the opening of curtains on a stage or the opening of Voice's mouth to speak his story. Either way, "opening" signals a theatrics similar to the thump of Croak's club in *Words and Music*.

Music eventually begins to play without the Opener's command, to at which point, he says in the middle of the music, "God," signaling distress at the loss of control—a major theme in both *Words and Music* and *Cascando*.

Like Words in *Words and Music*, Voice in *Cascando* speaks with urgency at many moments of his story. In the original production, Voice was played by Patrick Magee, lending an obvious similarity to Words. The sound of Voice is notably more strained, however, and less theatrically verbose compared to both Words's and Voice's counterpart, Opener. In Beckett's directions, it is a "*low, panting*" voice, and holds the accent of a commoner's voice or a struggling artist who is neurotically laboring at his story, longing to get it out, and begging for its verbalization. In the published version, Voice's speech is divided by numerous ellipses; most of what he says is fragmented and does not communicate a "whole" of something. The ellipses also indicate that this speech is not quite stream of consciousness, but is being filtered by Voice as he goes along, despite his speech being delivered in an accelerated manner.

Voice's speech is divided into two sections or modes of telling. Voice presents the first layer of his speech as an abstracted thing to be voiced; the beginning of the play starts in the middle of Voice's thoughts, "—story… if you could finish it… oh I know… the ones I've finished" (Beckett 214). He speaks to himself as two separate entities, referring to himself as "You" and then answering as "I." Halfway through this initial speech, the story begins, signaling the second mode of his telling: "I've got it… Woburn… I resume… a long life… already… say what you like… a few misfortunes… that's enough" (Beckett 214-215). The pauses between Voice's fragments activate the listener's need to piece together the story as it is haphazardly told; brief moments of silence beckon for listener involvement. Voice continues to speak inside and outside of his narrative, commenting on his own ability to create and then reentering into his

narration of Woburn's story. The structure of the story recalls the way in which Henry of *Embers* narrativizes the past, moving in and out of memories that he tells as stories.

Voice's story of Woburn begins in an attempt to summarize his whole "long life" (Beckett 215). Yet the pauses and stretches of silence between the sounds of Voice's speech make the attempt to narrativize more obvious than the storytelling of Henry; Voice is conscious of his role of creator. However, the listener is forced to strain even more so with Voice because the story of Woburn is choppy and fragmented. Voice's initial assertion that he is telling a "story" pressures the listener to grasp each fragment he offers in order to understand and sew together the narrative that he is trying to present. Yet there are various interruptions of Voice by Opener and Music that force him to redirect the fragments of his story. In consequence, these interruptions impede the listener's ability to parse the story.

The relationship between Voice and Opener overall puts a strain on listening comprehension. The Opener interrupts voice, changing the mood and tempo of the story that Voice tells. The interruptions of sound pressure the listener to engage in a more semantic listening, in which Voice's story becomes of sonic importance. The first interruption is signaled through brief overlapping of Voice's speech with Opener's. Voice's line of the story of Woburn: "he has only—" is layered with Opener's verbose line "And I close," followed by brief silence between the two (Beckett 215). Opener then declares "I open the other," and a harmony of flutes plays. In fact, the "other" is the music that Opener refers to (Beckett 215). The first sounds of music, though, are brief, and Opener silences them by declaiming, "And I close." After a brief silence, he utters "I open both," to which the voice and music both begin again at the same time.

Music plays a significant role in *Cascando*, not unlike the function of music in *Words and Music.* The flutes and plucks of strings take on a slightly ominous tone. Superimposed with

Voice's story, the music offers an emotional quality not unlike the "gesturing" of the music in *Words and Music*. Music in *Cascando* is less adversarial, assuming a more aesthetic role that functions symbiotically with Voice as an enhancement of Voice's performance. When narrating the story of Woburn, we hear Voice alone. His narrative is then followed by Music, who, as Everett Frost points out, "augments, follows, and counterpoints Voice's monologue with a 'monologue' (in musical form) of its own. It restates (or, at the end, anticipates and sets the pattern for) Voice in another, more abstract, language, but it does not have a name and does not take up a part in the dialogue" (371). When talking about the act of narration itself, Voice is supported by Music. The two are heard at the same time (Vandevelde 260).

By the end of the play, Voice struggles to finish the story, and, speaking synchronously with the music, reaches a stretch of narrative that seems to be "nearly" finished: "… finish… no more stories… sleep … we're there… nearly… just a few more... don't let go… Woburn… he clings… on…" These clauses echo the opening lines, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished," delivered by Clov in *Endgame* (Beckett 277). Voice's final lines, "come on… come on—… [*Silence.*]" are met with silence, not quite signaling an ending or triumph in his story, but suggesting that perhaps this cycle will repeat itself, joining the dashed "come on—" with the reappearance of the first line, "—story."

Conclusion

A close reading of four of Beckett's commissioned radio plays reveals how sound works with and against story. A major thread connecting each of Beckett's radio plays is the sonic actualization of the internal world expressed through human voice, sound effects, or music. Storytelling acts as a vehicle for this "internality" to be communicated—which serves to

verbalize characters' internal thoughts, ideas, and memories. While in some instances sound effects amplify storytelling, in others sound interrupts, is questioned, and placed under suspicion as if it is actually being heard. Characters adjust voice according to their awareness of their own performativity: Maddy Rooney questions her use of language; Henry adopts accents for other voices; Words assumes bravado while performing for Croak; and Voice accelerates the speed of his panicked storytelling. Each voice tries to command sound, obsessing over control until their powers fade, leaving them in silence.

In each of the plays, voices encourage us to "listen," sometimes forcefully, as if we are not listening in the ways that the plays or the characters want us to. Sound, then, seeks to transcend the narrative, to consciously appeal to the listener. In this way, Beckett intentionally uses sound as a bridge between the narrative work and listener. Sound actualizes narrative, brings Beckett's work to life, and thus enters into the listener's psyche in a manner wholly different than text or visual performance. Ultimately, the pared down soundscapes of the final two radio plays signal a desire for sonic disembodiment, for voices that float freely rather than attach or tether to the physical. In the next chapter, we will see how Beckett transitioned into writing television plays that were directly written with this sort of disembodied sound in mind.

Chapter 2: "Look Closer" – The Television Plays

Martin Esslin argues that Beckett's television plays "fulfill his program of reducing language to the point of zero. In them he has ... broken the terrible materiality of language and has produced a new kind of poetry—a poetry of moving images" (Kirkley 607). Unlike his entry into the world of radio, Beckett was not asked by the BBC or any other institution to try his hand at television. The 1965 script for *Eh, Joe* simply came "out of the blue" according to its BBC producer Michael Bakewell (Zilliacus 183). When Beckett wrote and produced his first short film, *Film*, two years prior to *Eh, Joe*, he noted that his novice knowledge about cinema "made things a little difficult" for the film crew (Zilliacus 183). Nonetheless, his venture into television work seemed like a natural progression after his radio work as the popularity of television rose; from 1957 when Beckett's first radio play aired to 1966 when *Eh, Joe* premiered, television ownership in private households in the United Kingdom rose from 44.3% to 86.52% (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board [BARB]).

Over the course of 15 years, Beckett produced five television plays: *Eh, Joe* (1966), *Ghost Trio* (1977), …*but the cloud*s… (1977), *Quad* (1981), and *Nacht und Träume* (1983). Each of the television plays produced in Britain "were recorded in television studios and were shot on film," except *Eh Joe*, "which was a videotape production" (Bignell 1). Whereas his last commissioned radio play, *Cascando*, ends with the union of bodiless voices and music, Beckett's move into television homes in on the body as visualized by the camera. More importantly, sound continues to take on disembodied forms, with four out of the five plays depicting cameras moving toward or watching stilled figures as a disembodied voice addresses both the figure and the viewer.

Visual presentation is the most obvious difference between the teleplays and the radio

plays. Beckett's teleplays are framed in particular ways that highlight the proportions of the television screen itself, a consciousness of the medium that creates a "world within world ever expanding—or receding" as Linda Ben-Zvi refers to it (Bignell "How to Watch Television?" 282). As Jonathan Bignell writes, "The audio-visual forms in Beckett's television plays have legitimated approaches that emphasize their reflexivity and their critical work on the television audience" ("How to Watch Television?" 282). The "rectangular shapes" that characterize the framing of Beckett's teleplays signal something mimetic to viewers, as if they are simultaneously aware of the room they are watching in yet are at the same time located within characteristic Beckettian spaces, such as the bedrooms in the teleplays *Eh, Joe* and *Ghost Trio* (Bignell "How to Watch Television?" 2). Bignell even goes as far as to say that this function of Beckett's teleplays is "pedagogical" in that "they explicitly prescribe ways of viewing and comprehension, and discipline their audience" ("How to Watch Television?" 3).

Unlike the roaming eye of the theater spectator, the television viewer's gaze is controlled by what the camera allows one to see. In other words, the radio limits the listener's ability to link sound with source, while the television play controls what the viewer is allowed to see. Both mediums demand a unique form of engagement from their audiences. Michel Chion stresses the influence of image over sound in visual media: "causal listening is constantly manipulated by the audiovisual contract itself, especially through the phenomenon of synchresis. Most of the time we are dealing not with the real initial causes of the sounds, but causes that the film makes us believe in" (Chion 49). Beckett's filmed images distort our understanding of sound and source, making us "believe" that there are bodiless voices sounding themselves as a silent figure listens.

In this chapter I will argue that the soundscapes of Beckett's teleplays follow a similar trajectory in sound development as Beckett's radio plays. Sound effects ebb and flow throughout

each production, with *Eh, Joe* and *Ghost Trio* containing more nuanced sounds than any of the other plays. In *Eh, Joe*, the only sounds are those of curtains being drawn, doors opening and shutting, and an unseen woman's voice speaking. *Ghost Trio* is marked by the voice of a woman as well, with the addition of music, the sound of a door creaking, and footsteps. In *...but the clouds…*, the sole sound is that of a man's voice recounting the memory of a woman's face. *Quad* and *Nacht und Träume* greatly reduce or erase the use of human sound; instead, music dominates the soundscape, albeit music juxtaposed with stark, long silences. Like radio, television as a vehicle for Beckett's dramas creates a sonic experience for listeners while also providing visuals that challenge the act of listening. When considered as a collection, the development of the teleplays paradoxically devolves in sound and image to produce an effect akin to the degradation of an audio tape.

Eh, Joe

When directing *Eh, Joe* in 1966, Beckett focused on sound and image separately: "Asked by a visitor what he thought of Voice, Beckett replied 'today I'm concentrating on the picture'" (Cohn 153). *Eh, Joe* obscures the recurring Beckettian trope of an old man recounting life memories; the main character, Joe, is silent and unmoving as an unseen female's voice suddenly ruptures the silence with menacing stories of the past. Whereas Henry conjures the voice of his dead wife in *Embers*, the voice in *Eh, Joe* is an unwelcome visitor. Joe reacts to the voice's addresses with facial expressions rather than speech. Beckett's notes stress subtle relaxations of Joe's face in the short pauses between the woman's utterances, as if he thinks the voice "has relented for the evening," thus restoring the silence (Zilliacus 186). Like the torturous sounds of the sea, music, and narration in *Embers*, *Words and Music*, and *Cascando*, Beckett's method of

torture is “adopted for camera and voice” in *Eh, Joe* (Zilliacus 186). Beckett described the sound of the woman’s voice to director Alan Schneider as “Attacking. Each sentence a knife going in, pause for withdrawal, then in again” (Ackerley 137). In the BBC production, the voice of the woman is played by Sian Phillips, and was recorded “by a long, slim microphone” placed very close to her mouth; the sound was processed so as to cut off “high and low frequencies” to craft a voice with a “posthumous vocal colourlessness” (Zilliacus 198).

When paired with visual cues, sound in *Eh, Joe* affects the characteristic storytelling of Beckett’s characters. We hear various sounds in the beginning of the play as Joe moves about his room: doors opening, windows closing, shades being drawn. The setting is in line with the sparsity of Beckett’s language; the “chambers” he places his characters in are equally stripped of excess ornament. The surrounding silence highlights each sound individually. The most definitive sound of the play is, of course, the voice of Joe’s jilted lover. Beckett pairs the sound of the voice with visual effects: as soon as the sound of the voice fills the room, a light is fixed on Joe’s face. This light goes out each time the voice relents, and then returns when the voice resumes, a visual scrutiny of Joe’s face that intensifies as the voice’s story progresses.

While Beckett’s radio characters make sure that they are heard, Joe at the beginning of *Eh, Joe* performs in the opposite way; he draws the curtain over his window, locks his door and cupboard, and sits on the edge of the bed, “making sure that he is alone, unobserved” (Zilliacus 185). He is uncharacteristically silent for a male Beckettian character. Sound, however, is a disturbing force insofar as it interrupts not just Joe, but also the camera movement. Beckett notes: “Joe seen from front sitting on edge of bed, relaxed, eyes closed. Hold, then dolly slowly in to close-up of face. First word of text stops this movement” (Beckett 302). As Zilliacus states, “Voice and camera are never simultaneous,” an indication that sound has a curious sort of power

over the camera (186). Jean-Jacques Mayoux thinks of the camera as a "registering device" that "serves to intensify, by degrees, the effect exerted by the voice on the face which it registers" (Zilliacus 186-187). One might begin to think that the voice and the camera are one and the same, a "character" that moves toward Joe. In this regard, the camera acts as the female voice's body.

The viewer is consequently forced to take on the positionality of Joe's jilted lover, and we see what she sees as she moves closer, making her words ever the more powerful. In this way, the television plays are more about capturing subtle movements and changes in the body that reflect the internal noise of the mind as actualized through external sources. A question that is hallmark to the voices Henry hears in *Embers*—"I said the sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand"—is at the forefront of *Eh, Joe*: Is the voice a memory triggered inside Joe's head, or is it really an actualization of the supernatural, a "ghost" that sonically haunts him? Like Ada's voice in *Embers*, the woman's voice in *Eh, Joe* is "low, distinct, remote" with "little colour" and absolute "steady rhythm, slightly slower than normal" (Beckett 303). This is characteristic of Beckett's phantom voices. The sound of the past returns to the present as a female voice.

As in the other plays, the voice enters into the male figure's psyche, provokes him with old stories, and eventually dwindles away into a whisper: "the female Voice is in a position of power and dominance. She orchestrates the process Joe is undergoing, taking him, moment by moment, through the final hours of his jilted lover, and it is his body, his guilty conscience that are the spectacle" (McTighe 467). In the radio plays, the female figure of the past (a fixation for the male character) often remains at a distance or is silent altogether. The television plays reverse gender roles, relying on the female voice to tell the stories of the past while the male figures

remain silent. Clas Zilliacus thinks of the relationship between sound of the woman's voice and image of Joe's face as an "involvement-heightening device; it reinforces the close-up provided by the camera; it italicizes the present by stretching it" (189). This forces the viewer to bridge the "discrepancy between face and voice" (Zilliacus 189). While Jonathan Bignell believes the continuous long take reinforces viewers' concentration on Joe's reactions, I suggest that as the camera moves closer and closer to Joe's face, the visual field is constrained so much that the audience's attention is constricted and redirected to focus on the words of the female voice more than the setting of the room that is visually erased.

Like some of the rich (and necessary) descriptions of setting in the radio plays, the woman's voice sets the scene in the stories of the past in order to create a space separate from the camera's tight scrutiny of Joe and the bare room. While the visual field contracts and Joe's face fills the screen, the linguistic world presented by voice expands outward; her stories describe settings outside the room as she reflects on Joe's past lover, "the green one": "… Faint lap of sea through open window…. Gets up in the end and slips out as she is…. Moon…. Stock…. Down the garden and under the viaduct…. Sees from the seaweed the tide is flowing…." (Beckett 307). The female voice's story is remarkably similar to the stories of Henry in *Embers*, Words in *Words and Music*, or Voice in *Cascando*; they are all at some point told through fragments separated by ellipses, as if we are listening to the author craft a story in real time. The speaker pauses frequently to "get it right," while simultaneously leaving gaps that incline listeners to use their imaginations to fill them.

In this way, sound creates a separate space for the visual imagination as it does in the darkness of radio. In the teleplay, viewers are given visual clues, but then they are told to listen to a voice that suggests another place outside of what they are looking at. In this way, Beckett's

use of sound challenges his audience to balance observation with listening; the viewer's eye is drawn to the camera's intentional zooming in on Joe, while the voice pressures a listening that pulls viewers into worlds not seen on screen. Moreover, the use of long takes centered on Joe also pressure viewers to concentrate on Joe's reactions across time (Bignell 3). In the contest between sound and image, the final image of the teleplay reinforces the power of image over sound.

In the 1966 BBC production of *Eh, Joe*, Beckett asked Alan Schneider to ignore the "image fades" note for the final moment of the play, and replace it with a "faint smile" on Joe's face as he looks directly into the camera lens: "The change reflects a considerable formal complexity, as it helps create a sense of voice within a voice within Joe: Joe's struggle is not simply with his past but also with his creativity, the whispered words that assail him being equally the fountainhead of his inspiration" (Ackerley 142-43). The smile communicates something to the viewer that sound cannot. If we recall the discussion of *Embers* in Chapter 1, Henry tries to smile for Ada, which results in a moment of silence for the radio listener. Visuals give Beckett the ability to capture subtle expressions less through sound, and more through cautious camera movement.

Nevertheless, *Eh, Joe* did not capture the audience's attention in quite the way intended. A third of panel members in a report by Audience Research described "the broadcast as dreary and very dull to watch" (Zilliacus 198). They complained there was no visual appeal and the "cheerless" atmosphere affected viewers' concentration: "their attention was never held by Joe's supposed thoughts" (Zilliacus 198). Perhaps the long takes and particularly barren aesthetic of the play were too foreign to viewers accustomed to watching live theater, where the "long-take" that characterizes the non-stop, real time action creates a different effect of duration. As Bignell

claims, “Beckett’s television plays draw on aesthetic forms and production practices, and demand modes of viewing from their audience, that associate them with theatre and with early television drama” (Bignell 12).

Moreover, Jonathan Bignell notes that the rise in color television at the time resulted in audiences’ preference for more vivid televised productions. Beckett’s monochrome sets discouraged viewers and reduced their pleasure: “To make Beckett's plays at all, and especially if they were in monochrome, was hardly likely to encourage audiences to watch them for their visual pleasure” (Bignell 14). It is apt to say that Beckett’s audience who approved of his television plays was made up of viewers who were accustomed to the highbrow aesthetic of his minimalist work. The teleplays that follow *Eh, Joe* demand an even deeper focus in that Beckett goes to great lengths to craft a cerebral space on the screen that visually renders the internal voice.

Ghost Trio

By the mid-1970s, Beckett was tiring of both his stage work and the repetitive legacy of *Waiting for Godot* that followed him over the years (Herren 73). *Ghost Trio*, Beckett’s second television play, broadcast in 1977 eleven years after *Eh, Joe*, is inspired by sound, or more specifically, “Beethoven’s fifth piano trio, ‘Der Geist’ (Opus 70 #1), in D-minor; so-called because of its mysterious slow movement, Largo assai ed espressivo” (Ackerley 143). During its production, the teleplay was initially filmed without sound; the sound, split into three audio levels—sound effects, spoken text, and music—was recorded in the Süddeutscher Rundfunk’s synchronization studio on a multi-track tape and added to the production after its filming (Körte 107-108).

As in *Eh, Joe*, an unseen female in *Ghost Trio*, called V in the text, narrates from an unidentifiable location as the camera rests on an image of a silent male figure (called "Figure" in the text) sitting in a room with a cassette in his hands. While many of the radio plays were about listening, Linda Ben-Zvi argues that the manner in which V's recorded voice speaks to the viewer makes the play "about the act of seeing" (Bignell "How to Watch Television?" 282). V asks listeners to "kindly tune accordingly" as hers "is a faint voice," a directive that leads the viewer to suppose that the voice might be coming from the cassette tape as that is the only visible sound machine on screen (Beckett 351). This supposition points to a direct interrogation of perception. How can she see from inside the tape to tell us what the silent male figure will do next? Is the sonic space of Beckett's work not firmly *in the dark*? Can Figure hear her as we can?

Jonathan Bignell notes that the camera's movement affects the volume of sound coming from the cassette player; as the camera moves closer, the volume of the cassette's sound increases and decreases as the camera moves away ("Production" 49). He supposes

> that the music is diegetic and has a visible source. However, Figure does not operate the controls of the cassette player and there is no visual evidence that the machine is operating. The use of music in the play defies the conventions of both diegetic and non-diegetic music in television, since diegetic music is signified as such by the visible presence of a functioning playback device or some other evidence of its source. (49-50)

In other words, the viewer's casual listening is hampered by lack of visual cues that indicate the cassette player is working. Logically, the source is the cassette, but the relationship of sound and image to one another indicates otherwise.

Figure resembles Krapp, Joe, or Henry, all of whom are associated with a woman whose physical body is not near them but whose presence actualizes through sound. But, like Joe, he is

silent and rather passive, letting the female voice speak for him. Unlike the female voice of *Eh, Joe*, V is notably objective in her descriptions of his actions and directly addresses the viewer. She points to yet another of Beckett's "familiar chambers," but pressures the viewer to "look closer" at the recognizable details of windows and doors (Beckett 342). She leaves no room for ambiguity in her description of the space and is highly self-aware in her ability to "state the obvious" when stressing the importance of the "shades of the colour grey" in the room (Beckett 352-53). In *Eh, Joe*, the room is silently described by Joe's movements as he prepares it for his sleep, aided by the camera's gaze documenting those movements. On this point, it seems that Beckett preferred a more overtly explicit recorded voice for *Ghost Trio*. Perhaps, he wanted his audience to be even more aware of V's disembodiment and her taped quality.

Even more remarkable is the silent voice that V refers to. Figure reacts not to the voice of the woman, but to a voice we cannot hear that the female voice reports: "He will now think he hears her" as he "raises head sharply, turns still couched to door, fleeting face, tense pose. 5 seconds"; nonetheless, the voice asserts there is "No one" (Beckett 343). V, then, seems to be separate from the "her" she refers to, or perhaps she is referring to her own voice in the third person. The voice of V calls to mind Krapp's recordings on his own tape. V immediately calls attention to the artificiality of her sound in the first lines of the play, and not just any sound, but radiogenic sound from the tape that is manipulated by the listener. She delivers the following line twice: "Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly" as if her voice is automated and designed to repeat itself (Beckett 341). Emilie Morin supposes that

> the text foregrounds the reliance of the acousmatic situation upon technology; the acousmatic voice is granted the power to determine the orientation of the camera and the appearance of the image, and the opening prompt, 'Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune

> accordingly,' couches the problem of perception addressed in the play within yet another ghostly register, bringing to mind the faint secondary image that may be discerned on a television screen, commonly called a 'ghost.' (Morin 12)

The marriage of technology and the age-old literary trope of the "ghost" takes on a striking role not just in *Ghost Trio*, but in all Beckett's television plays. Listeners hear ghostly voices in the radio plays, but the teleplays sonically *and* visually capture the essence of the ghost in new ways.

To create a supernatural atmosphere, this teleplay uses camera techniques such as fades, cuts, and close-ups. Beckett notes that there are three main camera directions marked A, B, and C. A is "position general view," B "position medium shot" and C "position near shot of 5 and 1, 6, and 2, 7, and 3" (Beckett 351). The close-ups on static objects, such as the shots of the wall, floor, and of the "*whole door*," which Beckett describes as a "*smooth gray rectangle 0.70 x 2m. Imperceptibly ajar. No knob*," create eerie focalizations, especially due to the fact that this sort of shot is paired with "*faint music*." The next shot of a "*whole window*" that is also "*imperceptibly ajar*" and has "*no knob*,*"* undergoes the same treatment as the objects before it; this room seems to have no escape route. V moves from one object to the next, beckoning the viewer to "look closer" at these "familiar" objects, until the camera cuts to what she refers to as "Sole sign of life a seated figure" (Beckett 354).

V's call to "repeat" at the end of Act II indicates a consciousness of the medium used to actualize both the sound and movement of the characters on the television screen. More than any of the other teleplays, *Ghost Trio* points to its own construction, with the female voice directing each technical movement of the camera and its constructed image: "Repetition is necessarily a comment on the manipulation of time, both announcing the potential repeatability that videotape or film storage of sound and image can achieve, yet also alluding to the liveness that has

characterised television and the live performance of theatre" (Bignell 12). To this effect, a visual story is created and replayed with V's calls for repetition.

The third and final act of the play is notably silent as the action repeats itself and V's voice is replaced with the sound of music, Beethoven's Fifth Piano Trio (*The Ghost*), affecting another sort of silence with the replacement of non-human sound. Additional sound effects enter the soundscape as soon as the music pauses: the "crescendo creak of door slowly opening" repeats itself several times as well as "faint sound of steps approaching" and the "faint sound of knock on door" (Beckett 360). The creak of the door opening was produced with musique concrète methods. Konrad Körte, the sound engineer who worked on the production of *Ghost Trio*, notes: "The *Geräuschmeister* produced the creaking of the door and window by twisting a corkscrew into a piece of wood. We then used an electronic amplifier to boost up this still somewhat thin sound and adapt it to the room" (108). The overall volume of sound in the play is notably hushed, perhaps beckoning the viewer to listen more closely just as the voice has beckoned them to "look closely." This request mirrors that of Henry's command to the radio listener to "Listen to it!" in *Embers*; both place the viewer or listener in similar acousmatic situations.

The most striking ghostly image of the play is of the near shot of the "small boy full length in corridor before open door." He is "dressed in black oilskin with hood glistening with rain. White face raised to invisible F. 5 seconds. Boy shakes head faintly" (Beckett 360). The sound effect of the rain, produced by rubbing "crushed audiotapes gently together" mesmerized Beckett: "Finding it unbelievable, he returned repeatedly to the studio to see and listen to 'how rain is made.' In this way he was able to obtain a mild to heavy rainfall; we finally decided on a steady rainfall of medium intensity" (Körte 110). The small boy shakes his head once more, then

"turns and goes" with the camera paused for five seconds on the empty corridor. The movement and sound, both faint, dwindle into silence, until the camera cuts back to the male figure with his cassette on the stool. The slowness of the camera movement is exaggerated once again; the camera slowly moves in "to close-up of head bowed right down over cassette now held in arms and invisible," allowing a view of his face, "seen clearly for second time," and this time, for "ten seconds" (Beckett 361). The camera then moves back to its original position as a signal that the cycle is complete, and the image fades out.

The female voice, her eventual silence, and the turn to the camera to describe the final events all suggest that the latter half of the teleplay evokes a memory or dream sequence—or perhaps both. Memories are often the foundation for Beckett's characters' stories, so their domination of dreams is plausible as they take hold over the individual's unconscious. Beckett's television play *... but the clouds...* interchanges the female voice with the male, yet focuses on the same themes of memory and storytelling.

…but the clouds…

... but the clouds... was broadcast in 1977 alongside *Ghost Trio* in a televised BBC Lively Arts production called *Shade*s. The title of the play is a nod to the words of William Butler Yeats's poem "The Tower"—a notable departure from the musically inspired titles of the teleplays *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume.* Sidney Homan poses a sensory question in relation to Yeats's influence over the teleplay: "The painful, highly personal question raised by Yeats is: if the poet's physical powers fail, if his vision and hearing are impaired, can the memory of the sensory world serve as a basis for his poetry? Is memory alone capable of stimulating the creative act?" (Homan 67). The act of remembering is at the forefront of characters' acts of

storytelling, as I have noted in each of my readings of Beckett's radio and television plays. Memory is capable of stimulating the creative act, although memory is also the key factor in preventing the completion of the creative act.

While the title of the teleplay is an excerpt of Yeats's poem that refers to clouds of the sky, Beckett's isolation of the fragment "but the clouds" indicates a more ambiguous interpretation of "clouds," perhaps signaling a hazing-over or a veil, which would be an apt way of describing the aesthetics of the teleplay's visual effects. The fragment adds a softness to the title of play that contrasts with the darker titles of the other teleplays and even the radio plays. Moreover, the line "but the clouds" functions as a disruption of sound, as if it were an objection to something that had already been spoken. Sound and source are again portrayed through their hazy, disconnected relationship. Jonathan Bignell says of the separation between body and voice:

> The immobility of M makes it more difficult for the television viewer to attribute the voice to him, and the dislocation of voice-over from action in television is a conventional means of separating the voice from the action in time, thus raising further questions about whether M and V might be the same person at different times, one seen, one heard. ("Production" 19)

The question he raises is applicable to nearly all of Beckett's radio and television works that include audible voices. In *…but the clouds…*, however, the storytelling belongs to a male voice, unlike the female voice in the two teleplays that precede it.

Like many of Beckett's male narrators, M performatively revises his story throughout his monologue. His voice tells the story of the Self through the repetition of his past actions of "crouching" in his "little sanctum" where no one can see him as he begs a woman to "appear" (Beckett 367-368). In typical Beckettian fashion, this storytelling voice is concerned with getting

his story "right": "Let us now make sure we have got it right" (Beckett 367). When he speaks his first line—a description of himself in the past—he immediately corrects the validity of his statement. "When I thought of her it was always night. I came in—," he begins before sharply cutting himself off: "No—" (Beckett 366). In this instance, Beckett takes the self-correcting trope of his characters and pairs it with filmed images. As soon as the voice corrects itself, the image "dissolves" from the image of the male figure, M1, and returns to the image of M with his back turned bowed over a table. The dissolves happen repeatedly, moving between images every time the voice verbally exits from his story to make sure he is telling it the right way.

Like Henry in *Embers*, M's voice can only conjure a ghostly version of the woman he speaks of, with an image of her face appearing very close to the camera; Beckett notes that this shot should be a "close-up of woman's face reduced as far as possible to eyes and mouth. Same shot throughout" (Beckett 364). Richard Bruce Kirkley notes:

> The lost loved one (the woman) is no longer a voice to be squeezed out of thought and memory, but is instead an image—an apparition—intensely desired by the silent man. And in one of those few instances when the longed-for woman does appear, he implores her "Speak to me." But the woman remains silent: her lips move as if to speak, yet no sound issues forth. (610)

M's voice seems to have a better grasp on this memory story, however, than Henry does of his. There are few pauses and only a few instances of speech broken by ellipses. When the image of the woman speaking silently appears on screen, the notes for her silent speech, "…clouds… but the clouds… of the sky…," return to the characteristic form of speech uttered by so many of Beckett's storytellers. The voice struggles to speak these lines not as an act of creation, but as a recitation from Yeats's poem.

> To turn to more technical details of the play, as Sidney Homan notes,
>
> Any reading of ... *but the clouds* ... needs to acknowledge both the technical and aesthetic properties of the medium for which it was written. Alongside the work's highly suggestive dialogue exist some sixty directions, or segments, for the camera. Indeed, this copresence of the verbal and technical lies at the very "heart" of the work; for the director, it suggests the range of its potential effect upon an audience. (Homan 67)

Beckett's attention to camera movement evolves ten-fold from when he began with just nine movements of the camera in *Eh, Joe*. Dissolves and cuts accompany the story throughout the play. The setting, too, departs from the characteristic rectangular room of the previous television plays. The set is "circular, about 5 m diameter, surrounded by deep shadow" (Beckett 365). Here is a place for Beckett to actualize the metaphorical "shadows" of his work. Shadows, not clouds, dominate Beckett's final television plays written five years after *Ghost Trio* and *...but the clouds…*.

Quad **and** ***Nacht und Träume***

In these final two teleplays, Beckett's characters' "stories" become embodied in either physical movement or music rather than vocal narratives. I have paired these two final teleplays together because they exhibit a marked turn in his usage of recorded sound. *Quad*, directed by Beckett himself, was broadcast first on the German television channel Süddeutscher Rundfunk on October 8, 1981, then rebroadcast on BBC2 in December 1982. *Nacht und Träume* was written for Süddeutscher Rundfunk and broadcast on May 19, 1983, a year after the BBC2 broadcast of *Quad*. *Nacht und Träume* is, therefore, the only teleplay that was not broadcast by the BBC. Both plays dramatically reduce the use of spoken word, with no human voices in *Quad*

and only the humming and faint singing of a few lines of Schubert's lied "Nacht und Träume" in *Nacht und Träume.* Rather than reinforce a mode of sonic storytelling that dwindles down to a whisper, these final teleplays highlight the slowing of movement and sounds that eventually lead to silence.

Quad begins with a camera angled slightly above a square platform with four cloaked figures hurriedly rushing around in a precise pattern. Music, specifically "percussion, say drum, gong, triangle, woodblock," as Beckett notes, provides the sound for the play (Beckett 396). Moreover, sound is customized to each player "to sound when he enters, continue when he paces, cease when he exits" (Beckett 396). Even in regards to the sound of footsteps, "Each player has his particular sound" (396). Beckett stresses that the percussion must be "intermittent in all combinations to allow footsteps alone to be heard at intervals," evening the dynamic between the sounds produced by the players seen on the screen and the overall soundscape of percussion produced by percussionists "barely visible in shadow on raised podium at back of set" (396).

The main directional qualities of *Quad* lie in Beckett's "combinations" of color, light, sound, and movement that he marks in his notes. As Sidney Homan suggests, "Of all Beckett's works, *Quad* is perhaps the most difficult to visualize onstage from merely reading the text. It is also difficult to imagine in advance how it will sound. It is easy to underestimate just how significant the sound of the players' feet—*Quad*'s 'dialogue,' in effect—can be" (23). Sound functions according to tempo of movement. In "Quad I," Beckett notes a "fast tempo" alongside the rolling percussion. In "Quad II," a "slow tempo" is put into effect with no percussion, only the sounds of the players' slowed footsteps can be heard (Beckett 398).

Of Beckett's five teleplays, the original production of *Quad* is the only play to show

color, even if Beckett's customary monochrome gray replaces color by the end of the broadcast. The color gray is associated with the "sound" of silence throughout Beckett's works, as when the ricocheting sounds in *Quad* dwindle to nothing. Moreover, Beckett's original vision for the play that included each robed player to have his or her own colored light proved too complicated and was abandoned. Nonetheless, this vision signals "a broader use of production technologies for studio recording," as a demonstration of the newfound comfort exhibited by Beckett in his experiments with television production (Bignell "Production" 16).

In *Quad*, the "story" that we have been tracking across his works is told through sound, color, movement, and pattern. The information communicated is purely visual. Bignell proposes that *Quad* is able to convey temporal information through its technical qualities: "*Quad* can become a play 'about' time because of the manipulations of time and the uses of recording and reviewing technologies that the television studio made possible" ("Production" 31). Movements of the robed players flow steadily along with the rolling sound of the drums; the robed players never collide nor do they stop, and they enter and exit according to their prescribed order. The story is altered when the screen goes black—a moment which Beckett described as belonging to "a more distant fictional time than the implied present of the action seen in colour" (Bignell "Production" 8).

The dark screen affects a silence that is both sonic and visual. It is a pausing of the narrative, a manipulation of time akin to the way that Beckett attempts to sound voices of the past in his radio plays. The blackout lasts for only a few moments, until the next half of the play, "Quad II," reveals a monochrome gray screen. As previously mentioned, the robed players shuffle slowly around the quadrant with no percussion to guide them except for their footsteps. The story, decelerating, shifts into a mode of decay. The robed players lose their individuality;

they all wear “identical white gowns” as they move according to the “series 1” pattern of movement that began the play, making *Quad* yet another Beckettian work defined by its circularity (Beckett 408).

In *Nacht und Träume,* the film and editing techniques that are used to “tell” the silent story attest to Beckett’s comfort with technology and his keenness for editing. While his first television play, *Eh, Joe*, mimics theater with its long takes, *Nacht und Träume* relies on internal editing techniques to tell the story of a dream sequence. Yet the story of *Nacht und Träume* is communicated visually rather than orally as seen through the dream sequence of a bowed man, referred to as “Dreamer” or “A” in Beckett’s production notes. As in *Quad*, the camera is fixed at a particular position for the entirety of the play, only zooming in and pulling back twice. Visual shifts inside of the play are predominantly dictated by dissolves, which contribute to the overall slowness of the production and challenge the viewer’s patience and ability to focus on the image.

In the lower left of the screen, the Dreamer recalls the “bowed” over and grey-haired male figures in both *Ghost Trio* and *... but the clouds...* as he rests with his head over his folded hands, seemingly asleep. The faint sound of a male voice (perhaps the voice of the figure but it is not clear even in Beckett’s notes) hums the “last 7 bars of Schubert’s lied “Nacht und Träume” (Beckett 418). The image fades out as the male voice sings “softly” “with words” the “last 3 bars of life, beginning ‘Holde Träume…’” (Beckett 418). He begins to dream, and in the upper right-hand corner of the screen, a mirror image of his “dreamt self” (“B” as Beckett notes) is shown in a hazy circular spotlight whose image fades in and out—a technique aware of its own theatrics. These fades are slow to appear on screen and therefore control the rate at which the viewer sees the dream sequence. The stillness of the camera is offset by these fades; only the

music conjures a sense of movement and change.

The action of the play is broken up into thirty separate segments of directions, though it is inside the dream sequence that a mysterious story emerges. On the one hand, the teleplay tells the story of a man who dreams of himself. On the other hand, there is a story inside of this story: the story that occurs inside of the dream that becomes visually separate from the image of the dreamer as the camera zooms in. As the dreamer silently dreams, a disembodied hand slowly places itself upon his head. The hand disappears then reappears to raise a glass to his lips. The hand disappears once more only to return with a cloth used to wipe the dreamt self's brow before again disappearing into the shadows. The dreamt self then raises his head and extends his hand to touch the disembodied hand. Beckett notes, "Together hands sink to table and on them B's head" (Beckett 420). The movements are incredibly slow, perhaps the slowest movements included in any of Beckett's filmed works.

Somewhat miraculously, the dream sequence repeats twice, with a close-up of the dreamt self and hands replacing the dual image of the dreamer and the dreamt self. In this closeup of the dream, the viewer is essentially placed in the dream state. The repetition of the scenes recalls the repetition of action in *Ghost Trio*; it implies a certain fascination on Beckett's part for the capabilities of recorded sound and image, namely to manipulate images or sound on tape in a way that is impossible in live performance. The creator has more power, more command, over his work, something Beckett's storytellers consistently struggle to possess.

What could the story of this teleplay be? Does the story juxtapose isolation and the unconscious desire to touch, to grasp the hand of the Other? The lack of dialogue and ambiguity of the dream sequence transforms the teleplay into a puzzle of sorts. What clues do the lyrics of Schubert's "Nacht und Träume" give? They are sung when the dreamer is awake and statically

sitting, so they have no place in his dream world. The viewer is guided by silence to concentrate on the image of the dream sequence, yet when we are taken out of the dream, the static quality of the dreamer's body and the sound of the male figure's voice pressures us to listen. Beckett's reiteration of his "bowed over" "male" "grey haired" character's isolation in *Nacht und Träume* is perhaps just a thread linking itself to the other teleplays, that when thought of as one, tell a very strange story of recollecting the past inside Beckett's dimly lit, isolated dream world.

Conclusion

As television overshadowed radio in the early 1960s, Beckett tailored his characters' stories of neurosis to a visual medium paired with recorded sound. When compared to his radio works, Beckett's television works seem to tell a similar story of sonic degradation, but with an added dimension of slowing down the moving images. On the television screen, sounds become ghostly, especially when they are paired with images of silent figures. Beckett's sounds are repeatedly disconnected from their sources, and when paired with motionless images, interrogate the traditional space of television. One of the effects of Beckett's televisual images is to slow sound down. We repeatedly see tempo of sounds decelerate and lower in volume. The trajectory of Beckett's television plays is a prolonged journey to silence. Similarly, the visual gestures made in each teleplay slow down as well, whether through drawn-out physical movements as in *Nacht und Träume* or through the use of gradual dissolves and fades in each teleplay. But in typical fashion, Beckett is able to create a dialogue between sound and image, making the silence "speak" in a way that seems to achieve the same effect he aimed for when paring down written language. Beckett slows down the medium in an attempt to test the viewing habits of his audience who were accustomed to much livelier programming.

The soundscapes or “skullscapes” of the television plays become landscapes for phantoms; they equate the voices in characters’ conscious minds with ghosts. Visually, each setting of the teleplays is shrouded in darkness, whether it be the darkness of night or the deepness of shadows, isolating and cutting off the little rooms shown on screen from the real world. In this way, Beckett creates a mysticism within his work, an “in-between” state that lingers between the real and unreal. The stories, then, are ritualistic practices or routines, attempts to get closer to the truth, to “get it right” so as to reach an understanding that exists beyond the boundaries of language. For this reason, Beckett’s stories nearly always sonically dwindle into whispers that trail off into silence: there are no linguistic certainties or gestures of finality at the end of his narratives. Beckett maps key images, sounds, and modes of storytelling across his work; like his characters, he is merely trying to get it right, to beckon his listener to listen and look more closely at the narratives being repeated over and over again.

Chapter 3: "To 'Act' it is to Kill it" – Adaptations and Intermedial Works

Reluctant to adapt his works across mediums, Beckett wrote to Judith Schmidt of Grove Press in December of 1960 with a request: "Please, Judith, for the love of God, no further 'readings' or any other form of non-radio presentation of my plays for radio—it's sheer cruelty" (Zilliacus 172). In "Staging *Embers*: An Act of Killing?" Julie Campbell discusses the pitfalls of adapting radio work to the stage. Beckett once vehemently refused to allow a stage adaptation of *All That Fall*, on the grounds that it "is a specifically radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies… form of adaptation with a view to its conversion into 'theatre'. It is no more theatre than *End-Game* is radio and to 'act' it is to kill it" (Campbell 91).

Beckett was rigidly opposed to directors' modifying key details of his stage work—especially when they concerned sound—as when music was added to a 1985 production of *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Adding music to a carefully scripted, non-musical play was one of the worst offenses a director could commit, according to Beckett. Grove Press took legal action against the theater, but an agreement was reached out of court with the stipulation that the following insert be included in the program:

> 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. (McCarthy 102)

While Beckett was notoriously against adaptation, he did allow the BBC to adapt sections of his prose for radio. Everett C. Frost writes of this exception: "It is significant that Beckett's considerable reluctance to allow works written for one medium to be adapted to another probably

has been more often and more casually relaxed for radio than for any other medium, including stage. Perhaps this is because, as Enoch Brater has pointed out, there is a sense in which all of Beckett's readers are listeners" (Frost 361).

The first two chapters have explored the ways in which sound defines Beckett's storytelling through the medium he wrote for. This chapter will explore the effects of adaptation on Beckett's work, as well as Beckett's own tendency to recycle and adapt parts of his work that consequently blur the boundaries of media, such as in the case of *Krapp's Last Tape*: a play written for stage that utilizes a form of recorded radiogenic sound. Linda Hutcheon explains how various modes of adaptation

> relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew. Like parodies, adaptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts, usually revealingly called 'sources.' (Hutcheon 3)

Hutcheon contends that we can see adaptations as being "haunted all the time by their adapted texts," and, "If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly" (Hutcheon 6). It could be argued that adaptation accounts for a large part of Beckett's work and the "shadows" transposed across mediums haunt each of his works. This is especially true if we consider the transpositions of key motifs across his works; characters' storytelling, for example, is explored across his radio and television plays.

This chapter will focus on three of Beckett's stage plays that have been adapted to film. Discussion about the filmed versions of *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Endgame*, and *Rockaby* will show

how Beckett's experimentation in radio and television led him to permit the camera to replace the audience member as a spectator. Most importantly, the sounds in each of these particular stage works are adapted to video in a way that merges the acoustic environment of the theater with the virtual, often mysterious, space of film. Filmed adaptations of Beckett's stage plays allow readers into their soundscapes, which on the printed page remain silent. Two videotaped versions of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1959) produced in 1971 and 1972 are examples of how radio, stage, and film are melded together. With *Endgame* (1957), I will explore issues of adaptation and the hands-off approach that Beckett began to adopt as he allowed directors to interpret his work more freely across mediums, namely through his involvement with the "Beckett Directs Beckett" project that produced a filmed version of *Endgame* in 1991. I'll end with a discussion of the 1981 filming of *Rockaby*—an example of one of Beckett's final stage works that shows the lasting influence of recorded sound (radio) and filmed image (television) on his work.

Krapp's Last Tape

Krapp's Last Tape was written in 1958 specifically for the voice of Patrick Magee. Beckett "attributed the discovery of Magee's voice to poor wireless transmission specifically, explaining that he had 'always written for a voice,' and that 'Krapp's Last Tape was written for the voice of an actor [he] didn't know, heard on the radio'" (Morin 15). Despite its radiogenic origins, the play was actually written for stage. In fact, Emily Bloom describes the play as "a distinctively unradiogenic piece" (12). In a 1965 letter to Donald McWhinnie, Beckett specifies that the "short stage monologue for Magee" was "(definitely non-radio)" (*Letters* 3: 57). The piece "involves a tape-recorder with the mechanics of which I am unfamiliar. I can't release it until I check up on some points. I have asked John B. to send me a book of the words

(instructions for use)" (Beckett *Letters* 3: 115). Recorded sound, as in Beckett's radio works, is a powerful force in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Even the name Krapp, which James Knowlson describes as "harsh sounding," "with unpleasant excremental associations," is defined by the connotations of its sound (Knowlson 50). In the play, a study of sound across time, Krapp sits at his table with ledger and tape-recorder at hand.

Krapp's Last Tape was first performed on 28 October 1958 at the London Royal Court Theatre (Knowlson 51). In addition to its stage performance, a gramophone recording of the play was made, as well as two filmed versions—a 1971 videotaped version directed by Alan Schneider starring Jack MacGowran, and a 1972 BBC2 television version directed by Donald McWhinnie and starring Patrick Magee for the series called "Thirty Minute Theater" (Knowlson 65). According to Knowlson, "The BBC 2 television version in 1972, with Patrick Magee again playing the part of Krapp, was based upon a copy of the text amended by Beckett in the light of the earlier Berlin production; the BBC typed script represents, therefore, the first corrected version in English" (Knowlson 50). Despite Beckett's qualms about adaptations of his work, *Krapp's Last Tape* seems to have been adapted with considerable ease as both a recording and filmed production.

With adaptations comes the necessary need for modifications. Linda Hutcheon attributes the pleasure of adaptation to "repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change" (Hutcheon 4). James Knowlson, discussing Beckett's changes to the play across its different productions between 1958 and 1975, remarks that one particular change that had been incorporated and kept since 1969 leaves a definitive mark on audiences: "Instead of the curtain closing on a motionless Krapp, staring in front of him

with the tape running on in silence, Beckett had both the stage and the cubby-hole lights fade at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt, the Royal Court Theatre in 1973 and the Théâtre d'Orsay in 1975, leaving only the 'eye' of the tape-recorder illuminated" (Knowlson 55). The tape recorder, bathed in the light that Krapp says he returns to ("to return to myself"), replaces the identity of Krapp. "This change, 'originally an accident—heaven sent' Beckett wrote, accentuates a theme and contributes to an effect that is fundamental to this play and to much of Beckett's work" (Knowlson 55). The image of Krapp with his tape recorder is an indispensable part of the play's message. The gramophone recording may have been successful due to the adaptability of Krapp's monologue, but the taped versions of the play maintain its integrity as a stage production, as well as emphasize certain aspects of Krapp as a listener, eavesdropping on himself.

Krapp's Last Tape on video accentuates the physical act of listening that can only be communicated through the visual relationship between Krapp and his tape as captured by the camera. In the text of the play, Beckett notes: "*[He raises his head, broods, bends over machine, switches on and assumes listening posture, i.e. leaning forward, elbows on table, hand cupping ear towards machine, face front]*" (51). Each time Krapp leaves his place of listening, he assumes his "listening posture" before playing the next tape. In *The Sound Studies Reader*, Jonathan Sterne asserts that the act of listening is also part and parcel with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, a theory strongly linked to Beckett's emphasis on posture:

> Listening involves *will*, both conscious and unconscious—perhaps a better word than will would be *disposition* or even *feel*. Orientations toward and styles of listening are part of what sociologists and anthropologists have come to call *the habitus*. Following Pierre Bourdieu, *habitus* denotes a set of dispositions, what he calls *a feel for the game*. The

> habitus is socially conditioned subjectivity: it combines all those forms of informal knowledge that make up social life. Habitus is a mix of custom, bodily technique, social outlook, style, and orientation. (Sterne 92)

In the television plays discussed in Chapter 2, Beckett's characters comport their bodies in relation to sound; figures like Joe in *Eh, Joe* and the Male Figure (F) in *Ghost Trio* may appear silent, but their bodies are in dialogue with the sounds voiced around them. Rigidity, stillness, and facial expression all enter into dialogue with sound, so to speak, even when the characters remain silent.

Krapp's bodily positioning while listening is also a mode of reflection that adopts all the experiences of his past self. His inert body listens to the stories that have made deep impressions on him over the years—impressions that show in his appearance and in the sound of his voice. This listening posture is practical in the sense that Krapp must strain to listen because he is "hard of hearing" (Beckett 49). Yet the posture is also consciously performative; when Krapp drops boxes and becomes disturbed, he immediately straightens up again and "*resumes postur*e" as if he is conscious of the mode he is entering (Beckett 51). His listening is repeatedly interrupted and delayed by distractions of falling items, his own cursing, and his ability to stop the tape himself, but nonetheless, these impediments seem to part of his performative ritual. This listening posture also allows Krapp to engage in a form of self-narrativization provided by the tape insofar as his stories of the past play on repeat. Beckett's emphasis on the image of the cassette tape and its sound draws attention to the ability of recorded sound to immortalize Krapp's performance in a way that live theater cannot, and when adapted to video, solidifies the performance even more so. Sound, listening, performance, and narrative-making come together in this play, elements that are key to Beckett's work across time.

Despite its emphasis on voice and sound, the play begins in a silent comedic mime. Throughout the play, Krapp introduces silence by cutting the sound from the tape and silently "brooding" for a few moments between pauses. As with many of Beckett's characters, Krapp's recorded voice calls attention to sound, or lack thereof: "Extraordinary silence this evening, I strain my ears and do not hear a sound" (Beckett 52). One might go as far as to say that sound becomes a character in its own right. Beckett calls younger Krapp's voice "Tape," in the published text, allowing the object to assume a dramatic role. When Tape is marked as the subject speaking, we recognize that there are two audible characters in the play: Krapp and the Tape. The tape acts as an intermediary between Krapp in the present and Krapp in the past. The sound emitted from the tape, Krapp's own voice, fractures his identity. The tape's replaying of personal stories alters the nature of time in a way not explored in Beckett's other work; as he listens, he enters an in-between temporal state, or a state of inertia. His present self becomes one with his past self, especially in the moments when his laugh synchronizes with his voice on the tape, something that happens sonically in *Rockaby* as well.

In some moments, Krapp becomes confused by his own voice. Through his intense listening, he appraises his past voice as if it is not his own—in one moment, he has to stop the tape and fetch a dictionary from offstage to understand the word "viduity" that his younger self has used in a story about his mother (Beckett 53). Each time Krapp comes back to listen to his tape, he both remembers and misremembers certain aspects of what he hears. The act of listening, then, varies across time and identity. Pierre Schaeffer writes:

> Similarly, different listeners gathered round a tape recorder are listening to the same sound object. They do not, however, all hear the same thing; they do not choose and evaluate in the same way, and insofar as their mode of listening inclines them toward

> different aspects of the sound, it gives rise to different descriptions of the object. Nevertheless, the single sound object, which makes possible these many descriptions of it, persists in the form of a halo of perceptions, as it were, and the explicit descriptions implicitly refer back to it. (Schaeffer 82-83)

Krapp's fractured self seems to adopt multiple perspectives toward the sound of his voice across time as he repeats his listening sessions.

When he finally prepares a new tape to record himself, he reports: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that" (Beckett 56). This is another instance of Krapp's performance for the tape. Prior to this fit of self-loathing, he listens to an intimate story about a moment spent with a past lover, even rewinding the tape to replay certain parts of the scene while his body and face communicate a heightened sense of emotion. In other moments, he skips over specific parts that seem to disturb him, either because their content triggers boredom or because they evoke some unpleasant feeling that he prefers to avoid. Krapp's ability to stop and start the tape at leisure makes it clear that his listening is a ritual. Whereas Henry of *Embers* seems to be able to conjure sound in a supernatural manner, we are able to watch as Krapp controls his listening experience by physically winding the tape to rearrange sounds in order to control what he listens to and consequently command sound in a more physical manner. He edits the story as he edits the past. Should *Krapp's Last Tape* be experienced through gramophone recording or television, the listener shares the same power as Krapp to silence certain parts of the play. It is only through viewing the live stage performance that the audience member gives up such control, a dynamic that affects all the filmic adaptations of Beckett's works.

Filming a stage play is not without variation. The 1972 taped version of *Krapp's Last Tape* is noticeably brighter than Beckett's stage notes indicate. Krapp's room visibly stretches back into a hallway that Krapp can be seen walking down as he retreats into a back room for the various objects he retrieves. In line with the stage play, when Krapp switches off the tape recorder to exit, the camera in McWhinnie's televised version does not follow him; it stays hovering in front of Krapp's desk as Krapp, caught on audio, rummages in the background. We hear a cork popping, liquid filling a vessel, and Krapp breaking into a "brief burst of quavering song" (Beckett 53). Like Clov who retreats to his kitchen throughout *Endgame*, Krapp retreats "backstage into darkness," where ten seconds of silence follow the cork popping and his return to the stage.

These moments sonically transform the audience's experience of the play; the experience is similar to entering into a radiogenic space. Darkness shrouds the source of the cork popping, causing the audience to engage in casual listening—listening to connect the sound with source—then semantic listening once the sound of a cork popping from a bottle is recognized and the viewer must deduce that it is Krapp fetching himself a drink. Moreover, Alan Schneider indicates that even the slightest sound of a glass's "clink" backstage indicates to the viewer that the "clink of glass without the siphon is telling us that he's saying the hell with it here and taking the last shot straight up instead of with soda, as he should, to dilute the alcoholic content" (182).

Apart from the "table and immediately adjacent area in strong white light," the "rest of the stage" is supposed to be "in darkness" (Beckett 49). The setting of the 1971 version directed by Alan Schneider is more in line with Beckett's note: Krapp's desk is surrounded by pure darkness while the doorway adjacent to the table is illuminated in white light. The model and size of the tape recorder are different, too. Schneider's version includes a much bulkier tape

machine compared to McWhinnie's production. In both versions, the sound of Krapp's voice is indeed "cracked" with "distinctive intonation," and the voice inside the tape is notably younger and more confident in its cadence. Just as we watched a perfectly still Joe listening to the voice of a past lover, the camera rests on Krapp, then zooms in on his still face as he listens to his taped voice.

Emily Bloom argues that, along with *All That Fall* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* documents "the possibilities and limitations of the sound archive" (2). The growing obsolescence of radio in the 1950s led to a turn toward the archival in terms of preserving taped recordings (Bloom 2). *Krapp's Last Tape* seems to be conscious of this shift, as the play is set "*in the future*" with no distinct time period, yet Krapp is aged and becoming "hard of hearing" (Beckett 49). The degradation of tapes is implicitly at play; like tapes, memories undergo a process of decay. Krapp's forgetfulness indicates that no matter how often he listens to the tapes to preserve the story of his past, his voicings will eventually go silent—with both the tapes' mechanical degradation and his own body's death. Memory does not, in the end, fill the same function as the tape recorder. When joined with film, *Krapp's Last Tape* becomes even more intertwined in its technologies. As director Moloney notes, "…the camera can become a character as well. The camera doesn't just record the performance, it participates in it" (Sierz 145).

At the end of his notebook kept for an early draft of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett writes, "Endspiel is xxx, mise en scène x in Vienna the day after tomorrow. Suzanne is off there tomorrow. I stay here, with my noise in my little cloud" (*Krapp's Last Tape / La Dernière Bande:* a digital genetic edition). The x's supplied by the digital archive denote unidentifiable words; the archive reports that Beckett probably mistakenly wrote "noise" when he meant to

write “nose.” The error, however, is an intriguing endnote to a play filled with the noise of tapes and memories.

Rockaby

Rockaby (1981) was written for a festival and celebration of Samuel Beckett’s seventy-fifth birthday at SUNY Buffalo. The first performance of the play was filmed as part of a documentary (*Rockaby: The Documentary*). In a pre-rehearsal reading with director Alan Schneider, actress Billie Whitelaw tells the director: “I recognize bits of other plays I’ve done”—a realization that defines the very nature of Beckett’s oeuvre (7:45-7:50). Agreeing with Whitelaw, Schneider explains that “Every line of Beckett’s contains the whole of Beckett. He’s always choosing a different means—” to which Whitelaw completes the sentence, “—to say the same thing” (20:54-21:04). *Rockaby* builds on numerous themes and motifs featured in Beckett’s previous works, including the suspension of time, a fixation on the story of the past, and a tape recording of a disembodied female voice.

Billie Whitelaw, like Magee and MacGowran, worked with Beckett in numerous productions. *Footfalls*, notably, was written for her. Whitelaw plays the protagonist of *Rockaby*: an old woman rocking in a chair in her home shows no signs of moving from her position. Like Hamm in his chair and Krapp at his table, the old woman engages in a ritual that is simultaneously mental and physical. As she rocks, she replays the same thought processes over and over again. H. Porter Abbott points out that after the “quests” of Beckett’s trilogy, his characters in his dramatic works become more and more static (Oppenheim 14). *Rockaby* is another “still life” insofar as the old woman moves only by rocking, which was controlled by a

person from behind in the original production. *Rockaby*—along with *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame*—showcases a single character with limited mobility.

Because her body is stilled, Whitelaw's performative voice redirects the audience's attention away from the image and toward the sound. The voice of the woman is separated into two distinct audible modes. In the published text, Beckett differentiates between the old woman, W, and the recorded voice, V. Billie Whitelaw pointed out the powerful effect that recording of her character's voice had on her performance: "she felt the words spoken by an offstage, overheard voice as 'a tape in my head,'" meaning that, although the taped voice was her own, its disembodiment fractured her character's sense of self (Buning et al. 110). The filmed performance of the play begins with a tape recording of music, a detail that is left out of the published version of the play. Once the music stops, the only sounds heard in the rest of the play are the occasional faint rocking of the chair, the disembodied voice that dominates the soundscape, and the woman's voice that comes from her own mouth. Like Henry's plea "Again!" in *Embers* or Voice's plea "Come on" in *Cascando*, the old woman's first line is a pleading "More," which prompts her disembodied voice to sound itself (Beckett 272). Reiko Taniue calls this line a "mantra" or "magic spell" (91). Despite its feeble, weak delivery, the old woman's plea for "more" commands a new cycle of sound to begin from the recorded voice, as if she were conjuring something mystical or magical.

Hersh Zeifman refers to the voice and woman as a "pseudocouple"—a speaker and a listener—that are characteristic of Beckett's later plays. Sydney Homan thinks of the woman and the voice as a "single character" split into two. She "struggles with that most pervasive human dilemma as Beckett perceives it: to be alone, to be known by none, and yet to feel compelled to be heard by another" (Homan 209). Sarah West likens the voice to Voice in *Cascando*: "voice is

carrying out the functions of a machine by controlling a flow of words" (West 126-27). The speech of this disembodied voice signals yet another invisible entity in Beckett's work whose sound defies the logic of space. West wonders if "monologue exists at all in Beckett's theatre," with reference to the Lacanian belief that "'there is no word without reply provided it has an auditor'" (West 144). Yet Beckett's sounds themselves, let alone the category of "monologue," cannot logically exist through their modes of invisible representation; rather, sound becomes a mystical event in which sound waves are created outside of represented space.

It is unclear whether or not the old woman can hear the disembodied voice narrating the woman's story—a story which is grounded in the old woman's recollections of her dead mother. The story is told in four cyclical parts that vary as the voice proceeds with her narrative. Like Krapp and Hamm, the woman engages in the same behaviors over and over again. The line, "Time she stopped," repeated once in unison with the old woman's actual voice, is a form of repetition that paradoxically obstructs the flow of repetition. Rather than go on rocking and talking, it is time the woman ceases her routine once and for all. The line can be understood to mean that the old woman has stopped time, with time functioning as a direct object in the sentence. In either case, she is caught in a timeless domain, almost as if she enters eternity through the portal of her rocking. Sonically, the old woman's inner voice fades into a sort of echo as the same line is repeated over and over before fading out at the end—an effect only achieved through the use of recording techniques applied to live stage performance. Thus *Rockaby*, like *Krapp's Last Tape*, interrogates the relationship between live theater and recorded sound. Both were written for stage, yet both rely completely on recorded sound as the major supplier of dialogue. The old woman and Krapp are almost like the silent figures of the television

plays; their bodies are visible, but they seldom speak and are mostly over taken by recorded voice.

The narrative turn near the end of the play is perhaps the most striking in all of Beckett's plays, and even more visceral when sonically manifested through Billie Whitelaw's voice. As the voice goes on with its cutting dialogue, it suddenly says, "fuck life," a statement so imperative in its appeal for degradation and horror as to seem not to be a line written by Beckett (Beckett 280). The line halts the "rhythmical stream" of the short, lyrical lines before it (Taniue 93). The routine cycle of speech is shattered by a sober recognition of reality: the old woman, rocking toward death, renounces life. At the same time, her renunciation is one last angry spasm of life. Director Alan Schneider describes the voice's speech as a kind of "sigh. It's a kind of acceptance. It's a coming down-to" (14:28-14:33). In the rehearsal for the play, Schneider and Billie Whitelaw faced difficulty achieving the right rhythm when pairing the old woman's speech with the voiceover track as well as with the rocking of the chair. Schneider said of the voice recording, "The good thing about tape is that it doesn't vary. The bad thing about tape is that is doesn't vary" (39:51-39:58).

While the tape recording affects the delivery of the lines, the camera limits the viewer's search for the source of the disembodied sound and forces attention on the old woman's unmoving face and lips firmly together. The sounds produced in the play come only from the narration of the voice rather than dramatization, making *Rockaby* more akin to what some have called Beckett's "non-plays" (Zeifman 140-141). While recording the voiceover track for the filmed version of the play, Whitelaw does not sit still as she does when playing the part of the woman. Rather, she moves her right hand in a shaking motion, as if commanding some invisible entity in front of her. She repeats this movement when rehearsing with Alan Schneider, but

notably stills her entire body in the final filmed version to adopt Beckett's vision for the character (26:07-26:08).

It is possible that Beckett wrote *Rockaby* with a camera in mind. In the published text, the notes for the multiple instances of fades in the lighting of the play correlate to camera fades. The fade-ups for the lights incidentally correlate with the camera movements in the video taping of *Rockaby*'s first performance. The camera moves closer to the old woman in some moments and pulls away in others, with cuts giving the viewer different vantage points of her in the rocking chair. These edits perhaps take away from the "still image" that so defines the quality of *Rockaby* and Beckett's later works, but nonetheless appeals visually to the viewer, creating a sense of movement that Beckett's television plays defy. At the end of the play, the camera moves very close to the old woman's head, so as to fill the screen with her bobbing head. Rather than focus on this image, the screen fades to the woman's hand resting on the arm of the chair before returning to the bobbing head again as the voice fades out with the line "rock her off." In the play's notes, Beckett describes a "slow fade out" of sound, rocking, and lighting that the camera captures as the woman's face tips forward before it is slowly engulfed by both shadow and silence (280).

Endgame

Elin F. Diamond writes that "*Krapp's Last Tape* urges our listening, but *Endgame* tortures our ears" (110). When *Endgame* premiered in 1957, Beckett was also writing for radio. As Katherine Weiss claims, radio induced a new awareness of sound, which influenced Beckett's writing of *Endgame*. Regarding *Endgame*, Beckett wrote to Alan Schneider "that the play was 'a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended), made as fully as possible, and I accept

responsibility for nothing else'" (Weiss 66). *Endgame* was performed solely on stage until 1989, when a television version directed by Tony Coe was released. Filming a stage play is not without complications, especially when the visual field is restricted to Beckett's pared-down settings. Aleks Sierz notes:

> The aesthetic advantages are clear: video recordings of live performances usually illustrate all that is lost in the transfer from one medium to another. A live event is defined by the experience of being there: in the deepest sense it is experiential, and video recordings only manage to suggest that liveness from the sidelines, where it looks rough, inert, distant, artificial, awkward—lost in translation. (141)

The issue of capturing the "liveliness" of a stage production on film is a major consideration when adapting stage plays like *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame*—two plays that focus intensely on particular images that show few variations in movement throughout.

Despite these challenges, *Endgame* became one of the plays selected by the San Quentin players to perform as part of a series of called "Beckett Directs Beckett." This series is an example of an attempt to adapt Beckett's stage plays to film that resulted in the over-marketing of the works. Their team asserted that under "contractual obligation to Mr. Beckett" they would make no changes to "the original Beckett productions" (Lifton *Beckett Directs Beckett*). However, the production team stipulates that Beckett, having done extensive work in the world of television, realized

> the constraints and demands of that medium, and the many significant differences between television and the stage. In mounting the television versions of these productions, therefore, we worked intimately with Beckett on these questions as they arose. Furthermore, Beckett asked that the taping take place in Paris so that, as he said, he

> could keep an eye on things. In short, Beckett's was the creative vision which moved the whole enterprise. Walter Asmus and Alan Mandell, the nominal television directors for the series, were perfectly content to act as the guarantors for Beckett's directorial vision. (Lifton *Beckett Directs Beckett*).

The group even stresses that during the taping of the television productions of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett made "textual changes on the telephone even as a given scene was being taped" (Lifton *Beckett Directs Beckett*). While adaptations of Beckett's stage work have their fair share of controversy, they nonetheless suggested that Beckett became laxer with interpretations of his work in the 1980s. Yet the "Beckett Directs Beckett" production of *Endgame* was not taped when Beckett was alive; it was filmed at "the Department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Maryland between August and September 1991," two years after Beckett's death (Gontarski 115).

S.E. Gontarski emphasizes that

> the marketing of the "Beckett Directs Beckett" series, a co-production of the Visual Press at the University of Maryland, College Park, the Smithsonian Institution Press, and the project's initiators and performers, the San Quentin Drama Workshop, has been so intense that it now seems inseparable from the productions themselves. Marketing has become part of the performance, and reviewing the one apart from the other now seems impossible. (Gontarski 115)

Gontarski further writes of the "Beckett Directs Beckett" project: "Beckett certainly did work intensively with the group, but the repeated suggestion that he had a single conception for his theater and that that version has been faithfully captured on these tapes threatens to belie the

group's claims to understanding Beckett's art or theater in general"; he thinks that the production team should be ashamed of "overselling" Beckett's work (115-118).

Despite the pit falls of marketing, one of the strengths of taping stage plays like *Endgame* is the ability to capture the precise facial expressions of characters. This is accomplished primarily through camera zooms and editing techniques that allow for different angled shots. Film also allows for multiple takes and post-production editing, strategies of filming which are integral to nailing down the nuances of sound in Beckett's scripts. Hamm's character, especially, is an excellent orator whose voice varies according to the story he performs. Beckett explained Hamm's story to Alan Schneider in terms of voice: "What more can I say about Hamm's story? Technically it is the most difficult thing in the play because of the number of vocal levels" (*Letters* 3: 72).

In the "Beckett Directs Beckett" production of *Endgame*, Rick Cluchey's Hamm plays up the drama of his voice. He referred to the dialogue in the play, especially between Nagg and Nell, as a "sonic duet" (Diamond 110). Even Nagg, Hamm's father, assumes different vocal registers as he tells his story about the tailor; he performs the voices of a raconteur, tailor, and customer (Beckett *Endgame* 29). Hamm's immobility and blindness force him to rely on sound to interact with the world (or lack thereof) around him. But it seems that Hamm desires an end to sound, with his outburst of "Silence!" occurring three times throughout the play. He even says, "If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with," or in other words, if he can keep his body still enough, if he can assume the right posture, the end, something akin to death, will come and routine will stop (Beckett 78).

Staying true to the stage plays, offstage space is not filmed. Like *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Endgame* references offstage space and the sounds that are contained in such invisible spaces. In

Krapp's Last Tape, the shuffling of Krapp and the popping of the cork define Krapp's exit into the offstage shadows. In *Endgame*, Clov's kitchen is a place of refuge and order that only he can access, where he goes to "watch" his "light" die. The audience, initially spectators, have to become listeners when Krapp and Clov leave the stage. Although Clov exits thirteen times throughout *Endgame*, there is only one instance that is noted when sound is heard offstage. When Clov retrieves the alarm clock from the kitchen, a "brief ring of alarm" is heard (Beckett *Endgame* 56). In the "Beckett Directs Beckett" production, there is no sound of the alarm clock at all from Clov's kitchen, an omission that makes the unseen space seem even less real than it is in the text or on a stage in front of a live audience. Filmed or taped productions of *Endgame* lose the unique tangibility of offstage space that theater affords.

Another notable detail in the 1991 production of *Endgame* that is lost is the specific nod to the spectator when Clov "picks up the telescope" and "turns it on auditorium," where he sees "…a multitude… in transports… of joy" (Beckett 36). In the taped production, the camera does not quite meet Clov's gaze through the telescope, but rests slightly to the side of his observing. In this instance, the camera is not quite the same as a theater audience. One of Gontarski's main complaints about the production concerns the acting itself and the overall tone of the play: "the colorless monotone Beckett struggled to achieve with these actors has long since vanished," and some acting, such as Nagg's cursing of Hamm, is "histrionic" (117).

With a nod to Beckett's reluctance to adapt his plays to different mediums, Gontarski congratulates actor Rick Cluchey "for getting Beckett to commit this production to tape at all" (118). Whatever its flaws, filmed stage work reaches a wider audience than live theater does and therefore allows for greater accessibility. Even Gontarski concedes that the production of *Endgame* filmed for "Beckett Directs Beckett" is better than nothing: "With all its faults it is still

the best we have" (118). Radio introduced listeners to Beckett in the late 1950s, but the lasting impact of film extends accessibility across time in a way that is unparalleled by other mediums.

Conclusion

The filming of Beckett's works highlights the limitations and freedoms that adaptation can impose. Despite his early disapprovals, Beckett began to accept adaptations of his plays in his later career. In the 1980s, especially, Beckett was receptive to new directors adapting his work. When rerecording Beckett's radio plays in the 80s, Everett Frost spoke with Beckett about his productions, and Beckett asked him to take "a 'fresh approach'" toward sound: "he asked that we use recordings of the animals specified for the rural sounds in *All That Fall*, not humans imitating them; that we not attempt an electronic drone under the waves in *Embers*; and that we not try to emulate the closing chamber door supplied by the BBC at the beginning of *Rough for Radio II*" (Frost 365).

The variations in sound design and filming in the productions that I have discussed in this chapter show that Beckett's works are wholly open to interpretation and cannot be compressed into a single image or sound. Depending on the actors cast in a particular production, sound fluctuates according to individual voices, which makes the "Beckettian character" difficult to pinpoint as one particular thing. With the recurring sounds, images, and stories that this thesis has discussed, it might be said that Beckett was simply adapting his own narrative or vision from one medium to another. In other words, plays like *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Rockaby*, and *Endgame*, all seem to exemplify the limits of medium they were written for, and their respective filmed versions reflect these limitations while also allotting a new accessibility and temporality to Beckett's work.

The most recent endeavor to film Beckett's stage plays was in 2001 with the *Beckett on Film* project. With the permission of the Beckett Estate, nineteen of Beckett's stage plays were adapted to film by Channel 4, RTE, and the Irish Film Board (Sierz 147). Somewhat inversely, in 2013, Dame Eileen Atkins and Sir Michael Gambon starred as Maddy and Dan Rooney in director Sir Trevor Nunn's stage adaptation of *All That Fall*, an adaptation that circumvented Beckett's specific instructions to not adapt the radio play to stage: "To 'act' it is to kill it" (Campbell 91). But it was Samuel Beckett's nephew acting on behalf of Beckett's Estate who gave Nunn the go-ahead to adapt the famous radio drama. This decision reflects the changing attitudes toward the legacy of Beckett's work, and what he would have permitted to be done to his work if alive today. Sean McCarthy writes: "Given Beckett's genius for accepting the challenges of new media, it is highly probable that if he were alive today he would be working in virtual environments" (115). As Beckett's Estate appears to be more open to adaptations of his work, it may not be too far into the future before we see Beckett's work transposed onto new mediums.

Conclusion

Whispers, echoes, cackles, moans, shuffling, panting, dripping, and silence—these are some of the defining sounds of Beckett's radio, television, and adapted stage works. In his experimentation with different mediums, whether print, stage, radio, television, or film, Beckett infuses each work with an amalgam of sounds that create a distinctly Beckettian soundscape. This thesis has attempted to formulate an understanding of the Beckettian soundscape's influence on storytelling, listener engagement, and the "paring down" of sounds to silence. The BBC's Radiophonic Workshop is responsible for altering the legibility of sounds in many of Beckett's radio plays through technical manipulations and the creation of novel sound effects. Through the usage of sound machines like the tape cassette or the gramophone, Beckett's characters repeat themselves over and over, suspending themselves in time as a result. Moreover, recorded sound allows disembodied voices to enter into Beckett's soundscapes, prompting the listener to doubt whether characters are alive—tape-playing could be posthumous—or if they are simply imagining voices. As sound obscures voice and message, Beckett's stories become more elusive in their meanings.

In the radio plays, for example, sound provides visual cues for listeners, by signaling the presence of bodies and objects inside the radiogenic space. The distortions of each initial sound effect heard in *All That Fall* purposely confuse meanings of sound to pressure a closer form of listening. Similarly, the low wavering tone acting as the sea in *Embers* consistently reminds the listener that they are not quite listening to a story told in a radiogenic space that is representative of the "real" world with realistic sounds, but are instead listening to a story told inside the "skullscape" of Henry's mind. The continual interruptions and tonal similarities of the voices in *Words and Music* obscure dialogue, forcing the listener to strain to understand the meaning of

Words's monologues. Likewise, in *Cascando*, the voice of Opener and the non-human sound of music interrupt and obscure meaning in Voice's story, affecting the overall soundscape of the play.

Beckett's television work allowed him to explore the boundaries of sound production. His sounds became increasingly disembodied despite being paired with images. While the radio plays give voice to his lonely, aging male characters, his television plays visualize them while silencing their voices. In this sense, Beckett experiments with how to tell their stories correctly, as if he was trying to work out his own creative writing process, just as his characters strain to create stories and make themselves heard. Beckett's characters love to orate. They cannot help themselves; they must tell their stories, and they do so in performative tones that almost seem aware of the audience listening to them.

"Every line of Beckett's contains the whole of Beckett," Alan Schneider states. As Beckett himself said, his work is made up of a conglomeration of "fundamental sounds," and nothing more. It is through Beckett's awareness of sound that his stories are actualized; they are not just heard but listened to by an audience that Beckett sought to challenge. According to Jonathan Bignell, "Beckett's plays for television and radio educate the audience about their means of production"; Bignell quotes Linda Ben-Zvi to the effect that "Beckett foregrounds the devices—radio sound effects, film and video camera positions—and forces the audience to acknowledge the presence of these usually hidden shapers of texts" (Bignell "How to Watch Television?" 4). Beckett's listeners hear voices of the present obsessed with the stories of the past, and when sound machines like the cassette tape are used as props inside the play's narrative (as in *Krapp's Last Tape*), recorded sounds propel themselves into the future, almost becoming

self-reflexive with the promise that they will be there to listen to again and again should one revisit them.

Despite the challenging form of listening his works demand, it is curious that Beckett repeatedly stressed the insignificance of finding meaning in them. Alan Schneider once wrote of his working relationship with Beckett, "Sam has never wanted to discuss with me (or anyone else) the metaphysical backgrounds or symbolic meanings of any of his plays" (Schneider 181). I have attempted to show how his work's intimate tangle of sounds and silence appeal to the listener in a way that downplays the importance of meaning and stresses an engaged experience of the work in present time. At the same time, recorded sound allows listeners to reengage with sounds again and again, unlike a live performance in which sounds are heard once and then disappear forever.

Ironically, it is Beckett's characters who obsess over their own meaning. They repeat stories of the past as a means to make sense of their personal narrative. This is one of the most miraculous features of Beckett's radio, television, and adapted works: the sonic actualization of repetition in his characters' straining for meaning. Why does Krapp listen to his tapes of his past self over and over again? Why does Henry conjure voices of the past, only to tell his story of Bolton and Holloway over and over? Why does Hamm perform his "chronicle" to Clov repeatedly? Why do the voices in *Words and Music* and *Cascando* strain to get their speech right, to tell the story in the correct way? Through repeated sounds, audiences can actually *hear* what it is like for Beckett's characters to engage in ritualized rumination. Hearing Beckett's sounds during a live stage performance is an experience in itself, but the use of recorded sound, sound effects, radiogenic space, and the pairing of camera techniques with images all test the

boundaries of sonic actualization—rendering many of the plays' sounds completely original—and uniquely Beckettian.

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