“CLOSE YOUR EYES AND LISTEN TO IT, WHAT WOULD YOU THINK IT WAS?”: A STUDY OF SOUND TECHNOLOGIES IN SAMUEL BECKETT’S *ALL THAT FALL, EMBERS, KRAPP’S LAST TAPE* AND *THAT TIME*

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout for the works of Samuel Beckett:

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Work Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>ATF</td>
<td><em>All That Fall</em></td>
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<td>D</td>
<td><em>Disjecta</em></td>
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<td>E</td>
<td><em>Embers</em></td>
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<td>KLT</td>
<td><em>Krapp’s Last Tape</em></td>
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<td>P</td>
<td><em>Proust</em></td>
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<td>TT</td>
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<td>WFG</td>
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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the creative impasse into which Samuel Beckett fell after completing three of his most important works: *Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot*, and his novel trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*). Particularly, this thesis examines Beckett’s foray into radio drama as the manner through which Beckett escaped impasse. Furthermore, this thesis argues that Beckett’s turn to radio was more than a solution to a period of creative stagnation; it was, rather, an integral part of his future creativity and production without which such plays as *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *That Time* may never have been generated. *All That Fall* and *Embers* are examined in terms of their aural aesthetic techniques and strategies and as learning experiences for Beckett, especially with regard to the manipulation of sound and the efficacy and immediate emotional power of the human voice. *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *That Time* are discussed in terms of their incorporations of techniques and technologies (namely, the tape recorder and stereophonic principle of sound design, respectively) which Beckett learned of through his experience in radio drama. The main focus of these examinations is placed on the emotional impact these heavily orchestrated aural experiences inflict upon audiences.
Enigmatic, perplexing, paradoxical, ambiguous, confounding, nihilistic, depressing, dark. These are the adjectives most often appended to the work of Samuel Beckett. The reasons for such a characterization are fairly obvious as his writing consistently exhibits the degradation of human mind and body in a universe cruelly provoking or coolly indifferent to that process of decay. And, as one moves through his canon, the works seem to get increasingly more difficult, as if to call out for critical elucidation. But, as any rudimentary research into Beckett studies reveals, even the critics cannot come to much of a unified agreement on anything beyond thematics and motifs; and the themes and motifs Beckett most frequently engages are subtended by his own personal philosophical and aesthetic concerns. In fact, the entire Beckett canon can be read as a series of iterations of the same theme, the same concern with aesthetic experience, confronting man with his own reality (albeit a ubiquitously dark, hopeless, meaningless reality).

Beckett has been dubbed “absurdist,” “existentialist,” “nihilist” among other titles. This is largely due to his long career and fairly consistent adherence to his own aesthetic philosophy. Hence, in order to understand any study of Beckett, one must first understand this aesthetic philosophy, cultivated by the author early in life and stubbornly adhered to throughout his writing career with minimal alteration.
Beckett has been claimed by the modernists, the postmodernists, the avant-garde, the existentialists, and the poststructuralists, among others, as a writer par excellence of the proposed school or movement. The variety owes to the time and place in history out of which Beckett developed his own philosophical conception of human existence and his own aesthetic theory. In the middle and late 1920s he was still a student and lecturer with Trinity College, Dublin, specializing in modern languages. It was during this time that Beckett met James Joyce and, under his tutelage, wrote and published his first critical essay, “Dante...Bruno..Vico..Joyce”. It was also during this time that he began a lectureship at the École-Normale Superieure, in Paris. Accordingly, the chapters of James Knowlson’s *Damned To Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, which correspond to this period of time are titled “The Growth of a Mind”, “Academic Success and Love”, “The Paris Years”, and “Academe: Return and Flight”. These titles accurately reflect Beckett’s early excellence in and ultimate turn away from academia--and a career respectable for a man from his upper-middle class lineage-- and towards the life of an artist.

Beckett’s wide reading throughout his rigorous schooling in Ireland, and as a young instructor at Trinity and the École-Normale, brought him into contact with a vast array of the great philosophical minds of the West. Along with his peers in these distinguished establishments, Beckett encountered the primacy of the Cartesian school of thought from its progenitor, Descartes and many of his followers, both celebrated and obscure. He read Locke, Malebranche, Bishop Berkeley, Geulincx, and Schopenhauer, this last philosopher becoming not only the source for an “intellectual justification of unhappiness” (Knowlson: 1996, 118) in preparation for his composition of *Proust*, but
also a philosophy which resonated with Beckett’s own. As John Calder puts it, “We can safely assume that he read or at least knew the ideas of all the major philosophers and many of the obscure ones” (Calder, 6). Knowlson points out that while at the École-Normale, Beckett’s young friend and instructor in philosophy, Jean Beaufret --an expert on Martin Heidegger-- introduced and discussed the Greek classical philosophers, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Zeno of Elea (Knowlson: 1996, 97) with Beckett whose early interest in Democritus would certainly have left him open to entertaining, and perhaps absorbing, these discussions. But Beckett’s philosophy was not just mere book-learning, he was also inspired by his sensitive and intensive study of the suffering which surrounded him-- something his upper-middle class childhood kept as out-of-sight as possible.

Beckett’s loss of faith in God and religion while still young--in Calder’s estimation “probably at about sixteen” (Calder, 106)-- centers on pain and suffering which is precisely from whence his philosophy comes. Knowlson is instructive as he notes, “it was on the key issues of pain, suffering and death that Beckett’s religious faith faltered and quickly foundered. This happened, according to him, when he was a student” (Knowlson: 1996, 67). The anecdote which shortly follows this statement points to what may well be seen as the proverbial nail-in-the-coffin:

One evening, he went with his father to All Saints Church at Blackrock to hear his father’s friend, Canon Dobbs, deliver a sermon about his pastoral visits to the sick, the suffering, the dying and the bereaved. “What gets me down,” said the minister, “is pain. The only thing I can tell them is that the crucifixion was only the beginning. You must contribute to the kitty.” Beckett was horrified by the logic of the cleric’s position: not merely an open admission of total failure to cope with the problem of apparently undeserved suffering and an overt acceptance of the fact that it is the human lot to suffer, but a grisly justification
for it. “When it’s morning, wish for evening,” Dobbs went on. “When it’s evening, wish for morning.” His sad litany of human suffering was close enough to Beckett’s own feelings at the time to strike a vibrant, if chilling chord in the young scholar who had recently read Voltaire’s story *Candide.*” (Knowlson: 1996, 67)

It is in this context that Beckett began to meld his view of the abounding presence of pain, suffering and death observed in the world around him and his Cartesian studies into a coherent philosophy.

What, then, are the salient features of this philosophy which posits man as unluckily born, doomed to suffer senselessly, then die, without hope for even respite, much less any kind of salvation? Put succinctly, Beckett’s philosophy is one which ultimately observes but rejects the dualism of the Cartesians in a particular view that combines Geulincx --with his view that the perfect existence consists in a complete withdrawal into the mind-- and Schopenhauer--with his emphasis on human Will--focusing on the unjustified (and irrational) suffering of man. Beckett adds to this a belief in ignorance in light of the inevitable failure and inadequacy of human knowledge and ratiocination to resolve suffering or save man. This last point, the inefficacy of human knowledge and a view towards irrationality in the chaos of the modern world, spurred him on towards art. It was through art that he felt man could at least be forced to confront his utterly hopeless situation in an aesthetic experience. This would force him to also recognize that situation in his fellow man, and meet that suffering (i.e. exercise the Will) with dignity and courage exemplified by an attempt at communal understanding of this inevitability. That is, he hoped by forcing the human world to confront its reality--pain and suffering in his view--and in so confronting it, develop a deep sense of community
thereby lessening that pain marginally. Calder states it even more clearly in his concluding remarks:

To Beckett life was the short straw of existence that those of us who are born are unlucky enough to draw. We live, as Vladimir says, until we die and are forgotten. If there is an answer to life, it must be in caritas, a human willingness to share, to comfort, to be a good companion. And, of course, we need two other things, and we find them both in Beckett: the courage of the stoics, who trained themselves to face without flinching that which is inevitable; and secondly, the wisdom to discard, not only the vanities of the world and the love of possessions, but our own sense of personal value...Beckett’s most important work shows us how to face and accept the inevitable and the importance of doing it with dignity...We know that we shall be nothing in the future, just as we were nothing in the past. We must also accept that we are nothing in the present...but that does not stop us from doing something, which may help others to endure their existence a little better, and through the realisation of their own nothingness, go on to help others in the same way.

(Calder, 142)

Hence, Beckett’s philosophical outlook holds up art and the artist as the primary vessel through which an effective forced confrontation with reality may be accomplished; and, so, it is no surprise that his aesthetic theory is distinctly colored by his philosophical concern.

While Beckett may never have written a self-proclaimed artistic manifesto in which he clearly set out his aesthetic theory, the early critical writings of his career have been used by many prominent Beckett scholars--from James Acheson to Ulrika Maude--to identify what has been called Beckett’s “aesthetics of failure.” It is, therefore, to two of his critical works, “Dante...Bruno..Vico..Joyce” and Three Dialogues, both published in the journal transition, that we may turn to wrest the foundations of Beckett’s aesthetic theory.
“Dante...Bruno..Vico..Joyce” is an essay Beckett composed in order to help publicize James Joyce’s then titled Work In Progress (known today as Finnegans Wake). The essay comprises a comparison of Joyce’s work to aspects of Dante’s Divine Comedy, Bruno’s concept of identified contraries, and Vico’s Nueva Scienzia. While ostensibly a discussion of Finnegans Wake, the essay contains some of Beckett’s own feelings about art and its function. The essay contains Beckett’s enthusiasm about Joyce’s work, applauding that in Finnegans Wake “form is content, content is form” (D, 27). He continues emphatically, “[Finnegans Wake] is not written at all. It is to be read-- or rather not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself” (D, 27).

The important point of this, for our purposes, is to recognize that Beckett’s entire essay takes up these great Italian figures in part to laud the “direct expression” (D, 26) he finds in Joyce’s Finnegans Wake. Beckett admires how, in Joyce’s writing, “When the sense is sleeping, the words go to sleep...When the sense is dancing, the words dance” (D, 27). He quotes a passage from Finnegans Wake to demonstrate: “‘To stir up love’s young fizz I tilt with this bridle’s cup champagne, dimming douce from her peepair of hide-seeks tight squeezed on my snowybreasted...’” Beckett concludes, “The language is drunk. The very words are tilted and effervescent” (D, 27). His favorable assessment of Finnegans Wake points to his admiration of what he later called Joyce’s “tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist” (Shenker, 129).

The tendency towards omniscience and omnipotence would seem to be manifest as a search for an answer to the question, whether there are any underlying principles of
order in the world at large. Beckett answers, “[Joyce] cannot tell you because he is not God Almighty, but in a thousand years he will” (D, 32). The statement is hyperbolic in that Joyce would never be able to tell you because, “the problems of assembling an infinite quantity of data about any given question and of interpreting it accurately are ultimately insoluble that we must say of the world not that it is either random or orderly, but that it is infinitely complex” (Acheson: 1997, 3).

Hence, from “Dante...Bruno..Vico..Joyce,” may be found the admiration for this “tendency towards omniscience” and that the artistic endeavor undertaken by Joyce was one which sought to face up its recipient with the “infinite complexity” of the world. But Beckett realized that his art could not simply follow Joyce in such an endeavor. As he puts it in an interview in 1956 with Israel Shenker of the *New York Times*,

> Joyce was a superb manipulator of material--perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. There isn't a syllable that's superfluous. The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past.

(Shenker, 129)

We must turn to Beckett’s *Three Dialogues* with Georges Duthuit to fully understand what he means when he says he’s “working with impotence, ignorance” in order to concretize an understanding of his aesthetics of failure.

*Three Dialogues* is a work which was published in *transition 49* but has now been preserved for posterity in Ruby Cohen’s *Disjecta*. Though Daniel Albright reads the dialogues as “not a stage play but a parody of a Platonic dialogue on aesthetics, in which a bankrupt Socrates not only knows that he knows nothing, but seems eager to know even
less” (Albright, 48), we find from Knowlson’s biography that the piece “represent[s] only part of a debate that went on between [Beckett and Georges Duthuit] in private and by letter over many months” (Knowlson: 1996, 371). Hence, the aesthetic statements found in that piece of work are in fact Beckett’s and do represent how he conceived art by 1949.

*Three Dialogues* is a group of three short dialogues conducted between the two interlocutors, B and D, on three contemporary painters, namely Pierre Tal Coat, André Masson, and Bram van Velde. In the first dialogue, on the subject of Pierre Tal Coat—an artist who has been seen as an abstract expressionist and/or Tachismist—Beckett reveals that he finds the abstract painting of Tal Coat to be just another iteration in the long line of painters seeking to represent the world around them: “All I wish to suggest is that the tendency and accomplishment of this painting are fundamentally those of previous painting, straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise” (D, 138). This statement amounts to a claim that the painting of Tal Coat is no more than an iteration in the line of painting which seeks to express on a plane already established by the history of painting. Duthuit is perplexed by this statement offering his objection, “But that which this painter discovers, orders, transmits is not in nature. What relation between one of these paintings and a landscape seen at a certain age, a certain season, a certain hour? Are we not on quite a different plane?” (D, 138) True, if looking at a Tal Coat one would be hard pressed to claim that he had seen something of the sort occurring naturally without the aid of a powerful hallucinogen. Beckett’s retort is that “[the paintings of Tal Coat] have
prodigious value, but a value cognate with those already accumulated.” He clarifies further that,

what we have to consider in the case of Italian painters is not that they surveyed the world with the eyes of building contractors, a means like any other, but that they never stirred from the field of the possible, however much they may have enlarged it. The only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is a certain order on the plane of the feasible.

(D, 139)

It would seem that Beckett, from his statements about Tal Coat, objects to Tal Coat’s painting, on grounds which stem from a desire for painting to create on some plane other than the feasible. Duthuit calls Beckett out on this point, prompting Beckett to describe his conception of the history of painting: “I speak of an art turning from [the plane of the feasible] in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road” (D, 139). This would seem to be quite the dismissal: All of art from cave painting to this contemporary modern painting is nothing more than a “going a little further along a dreary road.” Duthuit rightly asks, in light of such an astounding claim, what art ought to prefer, to which Beckett gives a most illuminating personal theory of art. Art ought to be, “the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express” (D, 139).

The above, often quoted passage of Beckett’s does quite well to encapsulate his feelings about art. It is insufficient to merely “represent” the world in realistic/naturalistic terms, and it is an egregious affront to humanity to romanticize that same subject. In discussing the next artist in the three dialogues, André Masson, Beckett arrives at the
same point: “forgive me if I relapse, as when we spoke of the so different Tal Coat, into
my dream of an art unresentful of its insuperable indigence and too proud for the farce of
giving and receiving” (D, 141). The “giving and receiving” here refers to the
communication between a work of art and the subject which views, reads, hears, etc. that
work. Hence the claim is that the new order of art, what art ought to do and be, is an art
which understands itself as supremely incapable and which is unwilling to recede back
into the history of art as it has been developing, attempting to represent and communicate
what amount to unrepresentable and incommunicable conceptions within the artist’s
mind. As Calder states it, “Beckett dreams of an art that is purely imaginary, leaving
nothing for the viewer outside his own mind, in other words, no art at all” (Calder, 81).
But this leaves the question of art in nebulous territory. It is in the third dialogue,
concerning Bram van Velde, that Beckett makes his longest statement on aesthetics--and
his own aesthetic-- to which we must turn for resolution.

Beckett’s dialogue with Duthuit on the painting of Bram van Velde, a personal
friend of Beckett’s, contains an elongated passage which holds within it a direct statement
of Beckett’s commitment to an aesthetics of failure. The most pertinent portion is
reproduced below:

My case, since I am in the dock, is that van Velde is the first to desist from
estheticised automatism, the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence
of relation, in the absence of terms or, if you like, in the presence of
unavailable terms, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other
dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft,
good housekeeping, living...I...make this submission, this admission, this
fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new form of relation, and of the act
which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only
of itself, of the impossibility, of its obligation...
(D, 145)
Beckett’s statements about van Velde are clear indications as to what he hopes his own art will achieve: ironically, a failure of expression. Hence *Three Dialogues* comprise an extended statement that art does not “represent” anything; rather, art is an attempt at lifting the veil under which society functions in order to contend with the reality, which in his conception amounts to random, inexplicable, and unjustified pain and suffering in a vicious cycle of birth, maturation, and death comprised in (or comprising) generation. It is, thus, clear that this aesthetic of failure not only holds much affinity with Beckett’s philosophical concerns about Being and the limits of human knowledge, his philosophy and aesthetics are inextricable.

Beckett thus attempted to put into practice this philosophically informed aesthetic theory during World War II which he endured in France, eventually joining the Resistance (his participation in which garnered him France’s Croix de Guerre and Médaille de la Reconnaissance) while hiding out in Roussillon until the conclusion of the war. It was after these experiences and with his erudite study of art, literature, history and philosophy, that Beckett was able to write his novel trilogy, in what Knowlson calls “A Frenzy of Writing” between 1946 and 1953.

The Trilogy is comprised of *Molloy, Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*. Each book becomes progressively less comprehensible as grammar dissolves, clear narrative structure disappears, and characters degenerate. These novels have garnered a great deal of critical attention for their near perfect execution of Beckett’s desire for an art which expresses the artist’s simultaneous inability and obligation to express, unafraid, indeed completely unconcerned, with any notion of success, as failure is its ultimate guarantee.
This dense writing probes the depths of a disintegrating self in peril, attempting to stabilize itself and weather existence accordingly as rationale and good sense prove repeatedly insufficient in attaining any kind of resolution whatsoever. It is telling that Beckett met with enough mental stress during the composition of the prose trilogy that he felt the need to take a break in between *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. Ruby Cohn quotes Beckett in discussion with Colin Duckworth, with regards to the genesis of *Waiting for Godot*, the product of that “break”: “I began to write *Godot* as a relaxation, to get away from the awful prose I was writing at the time” (Cohn, 138). Hence, the production of his most famous drama was driven by his own feeling of being “fogged out” (ibid.) by his strenuous exertions in prose.

The completion of *Waiting for Godot* between October, 1948 and January, 1949, was followed by the completion of *The Unnamable* and Beckett’s final creative endeavor before sinking fully into a bitter creative impasse: *Endgame*. Each of these three works, especially *The Unnamable*, provide precisely the kind of impact with which Beckett wished to affront an audience. The creative impasse—a phrase I use to echo James Knowlson’s chapter title which covers this period of his life—into which Beckett sunk after the completion of these three works is precisely where this thesis seeks to pick up and explore the route Beckett took out of that impasse, a route provided for by a turn to alternative, technologically advanced media.

The first chapter of this thesis seeks to start from an understanding of the themes and motifs discussed above to examine the aesthetic strategy which afforded Beckett the ability to begin to create anew with those same themes and motifs given new voice. It
was Beckett’s turn to radio, in 1956, at the request of the BBC’s Third Programme Controller, John Morris, which provided him the first glimpses of a new way to address his desired philosophical and aesthetic concerns. Radio, it is shown, gave Beckett a proverbial “crash-course” in the art form growing around that medium as well as forcing a meditation on the limitations and possibilities of pure aural production. Furthermore, Beckett’s experience in radio will be revealed as a technological eye-opener, through which Beckett learned of contemporary audio recording techniques and technologies.

In this first chapter, two early radio dramas are explored: *All That Fall* and *Embers*. These plays reveal Beckett’s acquired understanding of the power and efficacy of sound (as distinct from music) to affect his audiences emotionally. Particularly, the sound of the human voice coupled with stylization techniques was found, by Beckett, to be near insuperable in its ability to resonate with an audience member’s own inner voice and thus assume an affective power commensurate with that of the inner voice, the conscious mind. This chapter shows that Beckett found a completely aural medium to be helpful in channeling his meditations on how to confront an audience with an experience of reality which cuts to the emotional core of that existence. It was these meditations, fostered by writing for radio drama, which coupled with his technological enlightenment (due to exposure to such devices and practices common to radio broadcasting as the tape recorder and the stereophonic principle of sound design) that not only ended his creative impasse, but also made possible his next steps of creative production in stage drama, indeed, made possible his continuation as a dramatist. Hence, *All That Fall* and *Embers*
are focused upon for their technique as evidence of Beckett’s development in thinking about sound, especially the sound of the human voice.

The second chapter of this thesis explores two plays which reveal Beckett’s incorporation of what he learned from radio. *Krapp’s Last Tape* is examined in terms of the aural experience orchestrated by that play’s incorporation of the tape recorder on stage (and its primary delivery in the veritable “medium of the human voice”) in order for Beckett to force an experience of the discontinuity and instability of the human subject over the course of time. It is suggested here that Beckett’s use of the tape recorder on stage is an attempt at foregrounding an embodied memory, thereby calling attention to the mutual deterioration of the entire subject (both mind and body) and his inability to appeal to memory to provide a stable, unified self. This discussion reveals apperception, self-perception or the recognition of the self as a conscious being, as the crux of the discontinuity/instability-of-self issue. By appeal to Beckett’s early monograph, *Proust* (1931), the notion is discussed that we are different subjects, different selves, from one year to the next (indeed, from one day to the next) meaning that memories of past selves are constructed upon apperceptions of those past selves which do not align. Hence memory can only reiterate a discontinuity by revealing a series of selves which imply a series of apperceptions each of which is different from the others but held, paradoxically, in the same memory. Memory is thereby obfuscated as a unifying function of the mind. Beckett pushes this idea even further with *That Time*, staging a play which he recognized to be at the frontier of possibility in theatre, and which further reveals the haphazard shifts of the consciousness which bar memory from anchoring the self.
That Time is investigated primarily in terms of the stereophonic principle on which the play relies for its success. The play is enacted through three spatially divided speakers which play “moments of one and the same voice A B C [relaying] one another without solution of continuity” (TT, 417). The result is an auditory tour de force which affronts an audience with a perplexing experience of Listener’s death bed attempt (and failure) to gain one solid, enduring image of self before he dies. This play is examined for the aural experience of the audience as their attempts at determining (interpreting) the action are continuously hindered by its aesthetic design. It reveals the final instability and discontinuity of existence, offering comment upon the concomitant degeneration of existence--both the body (the only image of the play is the floating head of Listener) and mind (which has by now been securely represented through sound). Beckett, in this drama, reveals an expertise in sound manipulation that effectively envelops an audience within Listener’s mind as well as translates or transposes his own internal anxiety into the minds of the audience. Hence, That Time, is a representation of the human consciousness in action which is transferred into the mind of anyone who witnesses it.

That Time also reveals that Beckett’s foray into radio was not just an experiment into which he desperately threw himself, as if striking out in the dark, hoping for something to rekindle his creative flame. The impasse into which he fell after completing Endgame, Waiting for Godot and the trilogy forced Beckett to find a new way to address his audience, to fulfill his obligation to express, with an experience of reality as Beckett understood it and felt was necessary for others to so understand themselves. For this reason, I focus largely on the technique, the aesthetic strategies, first learned of in radio,
that Beckett incorporates in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *That Time*. The chronological treatment of these texts (according to their order of production, not publication) has been used to emphasize the progressive aspect of the auditory technique involved in orchestrating these largely aural experiences. Such emphasis on the aural experiences and their aesthetic production sheds light on the strategy by which Beckett ended his impasse and returned, prolifically, to creative production.

This introduction has largely served to provide a sturdy foundation of Beckett’s overriding philosophical and aesthetic concerns on which the rest of the thesis is based. There is one more thematic aspect pertinent to a discussion of Beckett’s impasse and his way out, namely, sexuality. I point out the sexual motifs in *All That Fall* and make note of certain aspects of love throughout the thesis. The point of this, in the present analysis, is to align sexuality with Beckett’s understanding of the degenerative aspect of existence. Beckett views life as a consistent degeneration or decay from birth onwards toward death. Sex, for Beckett, is dangerous because it can spawn more existence, and hence engender more suffering for yet another being. Before the creative impasse, sex went almost undiscussed, in fact there were few opportunities to discuss it because of a lack of female characters in those early works. After the impasse it becomes a salient feature. Some may note the correlation of sexuality and creativity immediately, but this entire notion comprises a complex which takes us to many different aspects of Beckett studies. For example, the pre-impasse and post-impasse sexual content may relate to Beckett’s relationship with his mother, his own anxiety about turning away from academia in pursuit of a life less approved of by his stern, upper-middle class Protestant mother. There
is also a concern with Beckett’s own sexual life, his apparent open sexual relationship (to the point where one might call him a philanderer) with his eventual wife, Suzanne, and the influence that may have had on his writing. To be sure, there is some interplay between sexuality and creativity which was helpful for Beckett’s genesis of new material, helpful in ending his creative impasse. While this sexual motif was Beckett’s manner of expressing the end of his creative impasse, this has not been the focus of the present thesis; to be clear, the focus, instead, has been placed on his foray into radio drama, which afforded him experience with radio broadcasting. The various recording technologies and techniques offered new ways for Beckett to manipulate sound, thereby more efficaciously confronting audiences with an experience of their own realities. The sound technologies and techniques enabled Beckett to enact aesthetically, through predominantly aural experiences, his characteristic themes (discussed above) concerning the discontinuity and instability of subjectivity, decay, and unjustified, irrational suffering.
CHAPTER ONE

“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”
--Samuel Beckett to Alan Schneider, December 29, 1957

James Knowlson foreshadows how Beckett would end his creative impasse when he writes, “[Beckett’s] creative stagnation was relieved a little when, on a visit to Paris, Barney Rosset gave him what Beckett described as ‘a very handsome electrophone gramophone, with a pile of microgrooves’...[Beckett and Suzanne] were at their closest while they were sharing such moments of musical pleasure” (Knowlson: 1996, 425-6). It is by now a critical commonplace to discuss the musical influences and qualities on and of Beckett’s works. What is less often discussed is the “electrophone gramophone” aspect of the above quote. That is, the technological device for recording and reproducing sound is the very crux of the solution to Beckett’s impasse, incarnated in the form of radio broadcasting. Radio, thus, showed Beckett the way to resume creative production, and resume his artistic confrontation of audiences with his conceptions of subjectivity and existence.

By 1956 Beckett had lost his mother (1950) and his older brother, Frank (1954), and, with the completion of Endgame in early 1956, his creative light, too, had been waning. The last creative effort Beckett expended before his depression and impasse began outright (Knowlson dating it to May 1956) was to rework “[Endgame], changing it
most radically from two acts to one but also working to shape it into an intricate musical patterning of themes and variations” ([emphasis mine] Knowlson: 1996, 426). It is not so surprising, then, that a wholly aural medium, radio, provided the proverbial fodder to reignite Beckett’s creative flame, which was so clearly aligned with music.

As early as 1953, in the wake of the success of *Waiting for Godot*, the BBC had engaged in “animated discussions” (Knowlson: 1996, 427) concerning a possible Beckett broadcast. The hope was for allowance to be made for *Godot* to be played on the airwaves but this was unacceptable to Beckett who has been noted on numerous occasions for his intolerance for translating works written in one medium to another. By the end of June of 1956 the BBC’s correspondent in Paris, Celia Reeves, had, on the orders of John Morris, controller of the Third Programme at the BBC, contacted Beckett with the request for a radio piece. Reeves’ invitation must have seriously piqued Beckett’s interest as he was able to write to his friend, Nancy Cunard, just two weeks after Reeves’ contact: “Never thought about Radio play technique, 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” (qtd. in Knowlson: 1996, 428). He followed this letter the next day, with another, to Aidan Higgins: “Have been asked to write a radio play for the 3rd [BBC Third Programme] and am tempted,...cartwheels and imprecations from the Brighton Rd to Foxrock station and back, insentient old mares in foal being welted by the cottagers and the Devil tottered in the ditch -- boyhood memories” (qtd. in Knowlson: 1996, 428). Twelve days after writing this, John Morris went to Paris for a lunch meeting with Beckett which he describes in an enthusiastic letter
to Val Gielgud, Head of Radio Drama at the BBC: “[Beckett] is extremely keen to write an original work for the Third Programme and has, indeed, already done the first few pages of it. I got the impression that he has a very sound idea of the problems of writing for radio and I expect something pretty good” (qtd. in Zilliacus, 127). The few pages of which Morris wrote became Beckett’s first radio drama, All That Fall, and his official exit from impasse back into productivity.

All That Fall is a sixty-nine minute trudge through Boghill, a fictitious rendition of Beckett’s own Foxrock in the County Dublin, Ireland. The text is comprised of the aged Maddy Rooney’s belabored march from her home to the train station in order to meet and guide her blind husband, Dan, back home. Such a synopsis may strike one with its comprehensibility given the extreme difficulty with which one is met by Beckett’s immediately preceding works, The Unnamable, Waiting for Godot, and Endgame. The simplicity owes much to the particular care and consideration All That Fall required for its genesis. The new medium demanded Beckett to reconsider the aesthetic potentials and limitations of radio as an art form. Hence, in order to proceed to a discussion of Beckett’s radio dramas we must first discuss radio as an art form.

The primary aspect of radio art is (obviously) that it is wholly comprised of aural signs. Hwang isolates from Kowzan’s thirteen theatrical signs the four totally aural signs, parole (spoken word), ton (tone), musique (music), and bruitage (sound effects) as those which comprise radio drama. The radio artist must therefore “maximize the potentiality of these four signs in order to compensate for the lack of the others” (Hwang, 61). This
may tempt us to think of radio drama as drama played in a “blind medium” but Martin Esslin corrects us before this misstep:

For, far from being a blind medium, radio (pace Marshall McLuhan) is an intensely visual medium. The nature of man’s consciousness and sensory apparatus is predominantly visual, and inevitably compels him to think and imagine in visual images. Information that reaches him through other senses is instantly converted into visual terms. And aural experiences, which include the immense richness of language as well as musical and natural sound, are the most effective means of triggering visual images. These images, moreover, being generated by each individual listener, have the advantage of being completely satisfying to him.

(Esslin, 131-2)

Furthermore, there is the intensification of attention forced by listening to radio drama, as Marjorie Perloff notes, “one must...listen to radio more intensively than one does in the theater, where there is always something to look at as well” (Oppenheim, 249). Thus, not only is radio drama more effective in producing complete images (due to its reliance on “aural experience”), it also fosters the intense attitude of attention by its very situation as radio transmission. That is to say, the efficacy of the aural experience is near guaranteed by the listener’s automatic posture of attentiveness enforced by the medium itself.

Beckett takes advantage of this forced attentiveness in order to intensify the emotional impact of these aural experiences on audience members. This strategy is consistently incorporated from All That Fall onward throughout his radio pieces and later stage dramas.

Additionally, Stanley Richardson and Jane Alison Hale, in their “Working Wireless: Beckett’s Radio Writing” describe that “in radio drama characters and situations must be clearly established as soon as possible. The audience should be intrigued and drawn in within three minutes or you’re gone...the lines of development
must be strong and simple. It is very easy to lose your audience because of missed transitions” (Oppenheim, 273). Hence, as a corollary to extreme audience attentiveness they place “sound montage [as] an essential aspect of radio drama” (Oppenheim, 273).

Sharp punchy scenes, according to Richardson and Hale, which are technologically established by changed microphone positions in the studio, mark the height of radio drama. For this reason they find *All That Fall* somewhat jejune in comparison to the potential heights achievable by radio drama, as they call it “literally, a road picture for radio, with Mrs. Rooney trudging along (moving the microphone as she goes)” (Oppenheim, 276). They find that *All That Fall* “succeeds despite this fundamental technical flaw” which they call “word-painting,” a technique in which the language itself describes the motion occurring. Their claim is that “in experienced radio-dramatic writing “the ‘cheat’ of ‘moving along’ with language is rare” (Oppenheim, 276) and so *All That Fall* must have succeeded due to the conventionality--and hence an ease of audience reception-- of its other aural elements.

The aural signposting of *All That Fall* largely provides the listener with a coherent picture of Maddy’s movement through Boghill. Clas Zilliacus, in his *Beckett and Broadcasting* puts it concisely when he lays out the geographic route covered by the play: “ruinous house by the road -- laburnum -- ascent of station steps -- platform -- descent of steps -- laburnum -- ruinous house” (39). These are the veritable “signposts” received by the listener through either Maddy’s enunciation or perception thereof. The play opens with “*Rural sounds. Sheep, bird, cock, severally, then together. Silence. Mrs. Rooney advances along the country road towards railway station. Sound of her dragging feet.*
Music faint from house by way “Death and the Maiden.” The steps slow down, stop” (ATF, 157). Of all of this the listener can only perceive the “Rural sounds,” the “Sound of her dragging feet,” and the sound of “Death and the Maiden.” Hence Maddy’s first line: “Poor woman. All alone in that ruinous old house,” and the immediately proceeding sound direction, “[Music louder. Silence but for music playing. The steps resume]” (ATF, 157), establish the first aural sign posts: the shuffling sound of Maddy’s feet will now be associated with Maddy’s motion and the geographical location is outside the house constantly playing “Death and the Maiden.”

Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden” adds to the aural experience not only as geographic signpost for the “ruinous old house” but also as the dreary frame which first executes and then concludes the play, circumscribing the drama in a veritable funeral dirge. It signals to the attentive (and, today, erudite) listener the omnipresence of death, the inescapability of death, and the fact that death circumscribes both life and the proceeding drama. It, thus, functions as aural executor and concluder, ironically pointing to the fact that we needn’t have listened to the radio drama at all, for this is the song that always plays—not just on the old woman’s gramophone in the ruinous old house, but all around us, the audience. Hence it is a thematic aural signpost, along with its function as geographical signpost.

Each of Zilliacus’ aural signposts are identified in an order which falls within this cyclical frame: the laburnum is suggested early after Mrs. Rooney has a breakdown about her lost “little Minnie” and her desire for “fifty years of twice daily love” (ATF, 159). In the midst of this fit she says “There is that lovely laburnum again.” An oddity, indeed, in
the midst of a breakdown, but it is purposeful in establishing the laburnum as another geographical marker which recurs on Maddy and Dan’s return voyage from the station when she notes of the laburnum, “Poor thing it is losing all its tassels” (ATF, 185). The ascent to the platform is decried by Maddy as “worse than the Matterhorn” (ATF, 170), while her descent with Dan requires careful counting of the steps, which are, in fact, never accurately counted (ATF, 177). The platform itself is identified by “[Immediately exaggerated station sounds. Falling signals. Bells. Whistles. Crescendo of train whistle approaching. Sound of train rushing through the station.]...[up mail...enters station, pulls up with great hissing of steam and clashing of couplings. Noise of passengers descending, doors banging, Mr. Barrell shouting “Boghill! Boghill!” etc. Piercingly.]” (ATF, 174). This hectic culmination of Maddy’s progression through Boghill becomes fitting for Beckett’s thematics: the culmination is a hectic mess of sound. It is thus clear that Beckett was engaged heavily in that “word-painting” found more often in lower-brow radio drama in a move which maintains that cycle of entrapment within death.

Word-painting, though usually a somewhat ineffective use of the medium of radio, is paired with wordplay in All That Fall, which perhaps helps to render the play successful despite its clear technological “lack.” The wordplay is humorous but also largely sexual (hence, generative in subject matter) and so bittersweetly poignant for a play in which everything is in decay. The prime examples of this kind of wordplay occur between Maddy Rooney née Dunne and Mr. Slocum. I mention the names for their somewhat obvious sexual punning: Maddy Rooney who complains of, “childlessness” (ATF, 159), and “light old hands on [her] shoulders and other senseless
places” (ATF, 160), and scorns “A peck on the jaw at morning, near the ear, and another
at evening, peck peck, till you grow whiskers on you” (ATF, 159), and whose husband
refuses to kiss her in public, on the platform (175), refers to herself with maiden name,
‘née Dunne’ or “Nay Done,” when heard, as in “never done”—the sexual pun on “doing.”
Her counterpart in extended sexual wordplay, an “old admirer” (ATF, 163), is Mr.
Slocum, a name which may suggest impotence to some listeners.

The sexual humor is substantiated when hearing the scene in which Mr. Slocum
invites Mrs. Rooney into his car and she requires his assistance. On the page the scene is
translated thus:

Mr. Slocum  ...I’m as stiff as yourself.
Mrs. Rooney Stiff! Well I like that! And me heaving all over back and
front. [To herself:] The dry old reprobate!
Mr. Slocum [in position behind her] Now, Mrs. Rooney, how shall we
do
this?
Mrs. Rooney As if I were a bale, Mr. Slocum, don’t be afraid. [Pause.
Sounds of effort.] That’s the way! [Effort.] Lower! [Effort.] Wait! [Pause.] No, don’t let go! [Pause.] [...]  
Oh!...Lower!...Don’t be afraid!...We’re past the
Age when...There!...Now!...Get your shoulder
under it...Oh!...[Giggles.] Oh glory!...Up!
Up!...Ah!...
(ATF, 164)

The sexual joke for the listener seems clear with references to stiffness made aloud and
joked on by Mrs. Rooney which matches well with Maddy’s earlier speech about love
and her obvious obsession with the loss of her child (ATF, 159). On the page, though, the
transcription fails to exemplify the hilarity of hearing what sounds like two elderly people
attempting to have a sexual encounter in the back of a car. Mrs. Rooney’s earlier sudden
hysteria about her tight corset which prompts her to call out to Mr. Tyler as he rides away,
“Come back and unlace me behind the hedge! [She laughs wildly, ceases.]” (ATF, 163), makes it difficult not to hear this passage with its intended sexualized aural humor just as the sexual double entendre, which follows close on the heels of this encounter, cements the sexual humor for a listener by playing against his natural tendency to attempt to interpret what he hears.

Mrs. Rooney has just had a hole torn in her frock by Mr. Slocum’s slamming of the door after his immense efforts getting her into the car which comprise an elongated (pardon the pun) sexual joke for the listener. Maddy’s comment is a double entendre for the audience only executable in radio:

Mrs. Rooney  What will Dan say when he sees me?
Mr. Slocum  Has he then recovered his sight?
Mrs. Rooney  No, I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole?

(ATF, 164)

The joke is comprised for the listener on the double meaning of “know” as in “carnal knowledge.” She fears Dan will recognize her “extramarital affair” by “feeling the hole” hence making a sexual act between Dan and Maddy an instance of doubly “knowing” for Dan--an absurd fear, of course, because it plays on the earlier aural joke of the two having sex when she is merely getting into his car but one which is anchored in Maddy’s unnecessary statement that Mr. Slocum is a former admirer. The purpose is to concretize the previous aural experience (Mr. Slocum helping Maddy into the car) as humorous before requiring audience interpretation of the action. One hears what sounds like sex and begins to giggle, imagining the elderly couple struggling in the back seat of Slocum’s car. After laughing at that, this sexual double entendre is heard in the form of an Abbot and
Costello routine, playing on the word “know” which concretizes the sexual motif. This sexual motif pairs with the thematic concern of the pointlessness of existence which moves along the generation-decay spectrum from generation towards decay. The sexualized humor brings to the fore the concern that living is no more than a “tautological euphemism” for dying (Zilliacus, 40). Thereby, these instances of humor lend grave depth (forgive the pun) to the drama.

The depth of gravity of *All That Fall* is a Beckettian commonplace. Matched with humor so as to make his message of pain, suffering, failure, and nothingness more easily ingested, Beckett is very much at home, thematically, with *All That Fall*. What is important for this thesis, is to recognize that the above tactics were composed totally of sound and that sound, though diegetic and explicable, was completely subjective. That is, the sounds heard were intended to be heard through Maddy’s hearing. This is a play which deals with reality, but the reality of a single protagonist, a single, subjective being. It is for this reason that the sounds of *All That Fall* needed much consideration and required much stylization. The opening sequence of barnyard noises is a prime example—and a chronologically appropriate one—with which to begin.

Donald McWhinnie, the first producer of the play for the BBC in 1957 who collaborated with Beckett intensely, has the following to say about the opening sounds: “the purpose of this prelude is not primarily to evoke a visual picture, and if it resolves itself into ‘farmyard noises’ it will in fact be pointless... It is a stylized form of scene-setting” (qtd. in Zilliacus, 68). The point of stylizing the scene is to point to the fact that the production is not supposed to be conceived as pure realism. We are to receive this
play through Maddy’s emotional and perceptual skewing, a reception of the world as a lived experience. Hence, McWhinnie continues that this opening contains a “pointer to the convention of the play: a mixture of realism and poetry, frustration and farce” (Zilliacus, 69) indicating that the drama presents feelings bound up with the frustration felt at the farcical nature of existence, specifically, Maddy’s existence.

McWhinnie speaks also of the rhythmic stylization required: “It also demands a strict rhythmic composition; a mere miscellany of animal sounds will not achieve the effect. The author specifies four animals; this corresponds exactly 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...becomes charged with emotional significance” (Zilliacus, 69). McWhinnie points, here, to the fact that such stylization is intimately bound up with Maddy because she is the focal lens through which the play must be delivered and with whom these sounds must correspond. Hence, McWhinnie addresses the manner through which stylization should be achieved: “it is impossible to use real animal sounds, since the actual sound of a cow mooing, a dog barking, [etc.], are complex structures, varying in duration and melodic shape; the way to deal with the problem seemed to be by complete stylization of each sound, that is to say, by having human beings to impersonate the exact sound required.” (qtd. in Zilliacus, 68-69)

McWhinnie’s emphasis on the need for stylization broaches the important point that the sounds of the play take on emotional charge, which corresponds to Maddy’s emotional states. In this way the “four-in-a-bar” shuffling of feet tends to bring a listener into the same decrepit, hobbling attitude of Maddy. Whenever we hear this, immediately
we are transported into this overweight woman’s plighted state. Furthermore, as the play progresses, background noises and tones of voice become more orchestrated and stylized as when Dan begins his “composition” explaining—or rather, failing to explain—why the train was late. On four separate occasions he switches between what is noted as “[Normal tone.]” and “[Narrative tone.]” indicating to the audience not only that it is a story they are hearing, but also that such a story could very well be fictitious (thus adding to the suspicion of Dan as culprit in the child’s death on the train tracks). And, even more stylization occurs for Maddy when she gives a chilling frame for Dan’s composition.

Mrs. Rooney  All is still. No living soul in sight. There is no one to ask. The world is feeding. The wind—[brief wind]—scarce ly stirs the leaves and the birds —[brief chirp]—are tired singing. The cows —[brief moo]— and sheep —[brief baa]— ruminate in silence. The dogs—[brief bark]—are hushed and the hens —[brief cackle]— sprawl torpid in the dust. We are alone. There is no one to ask.

[Silence]

(ATF, 180)

The question for whom there is “no one to ask” is whether Dan has reached 100 yet, as today is his birthday and he does not remember his age. This odd passage is ostensibly uttered to Dan by way of implying that Maddy, herself, has also forgotten Dan’s age and now there is no one around to ask. But, upon hearing it, the stylization of the sounds taken with their delivery as if on Maddy’s cue, stimulate the potential response that these sounds are being orchestrated by Maddy’s own ear. McWhinnie writes of the background noises that they are “only heard when we need to hear [them], that is when [they have] emotional validity” (qtd. in Zilliacus, 63). The effect is that the words might well have been spoken only in Maddy’s head—though we receive them
aloud as listeners. It is not far fetched when considering McWhinnie’s statements about Maddy’s opening lines, “Poor woman. All alone in that ruinous old house” (ATF, 157):

she doesn’t say it, rather she thinks it; the effect we want is of an unspoken thought, magically overheard, and the volume we require from the actress’s voice in this closest focus would be almost inaudible at the other side of the room in which you are sitting. Magnified by the microphone, it draws us into the mind of the character, it is almost as though it had been spoken in our own head.

(qtd. in Zilliacus, 58)

The original BBC recording of the 1957 production of All That Fall presents Maddy’s “soliloquy” or “aside” before Dan’s “composition” in much the same tone as her opening line. Taken with McWhinnie’s comments about the opening line, we might explain why the background sounds would be so perfectly on-cue: the lines are spoken in her mind. Hence, to the silence which both precedes and follows Maddy’s lines, Dan makes no response; he simply clears his throat and begins his narration. The background sounds, thus, are heard because they have “emotional validity” for Maddy. Thus, it should now be clear that the stylization of the sounds in this radio drama were so styled for the purpose of transmitting Maddy’s particular subjective experience so as to ally the listener’s aural perceptions with those of Maddy’s.

The aesthetic possibility for drawing a listener into the mind lies largely within the radio medium’s immateriality and potential for stylization of sounds. Beckett began in radio by thinking about sounds, (“dragging feet,” “cartwheels,” and “imprecations” (Knowlson: 1996, 428)). He learned also that sounds of breathing and, even more so, the human voice itself as sound-structure, resonate with listeners. They hear breathing as they breath and an innate link is forged between character and listener. Furthermore, stylizing those sounds and modulating the human voice aligns the voice
coming from the darkness of the radio speaker with the voice which resounds within the mind of the listener--the voice we often call the “inner voice.” This voice, which we may understand as the voice of consciousness itself, in the attentive act of listening, melds with the voice heard on the speaker. Hence, the immateriality and stylization of the heard voice transports the listener into the mind of the character, situating the listener’s real conscious mind as coextensive, coincident with the character’s conscious mind. Indeed, Beckett’s thematic concerns with the human consciousness would come out in extremely stylized sounds with his next radio drama, *Embers*.

Written and produced between 1957-9, *Embers* is a radio drama of a completely different kind than *All That Fall*. Where *All That Fall* is a rich tapestry of colloquial characters interacting with Maddy in a real, albeit subjectively presented, Irish town, *Embers*, on the other hand, is a play which takes place entirely within the mind of its protagonist, Henry. *Embers* indicates a clear and strong progression of Beckett’s facility with the radio medium, bending it to his purposes masterfully by incorporating and developing techniques and strategies learned from his first attempt.

*Embers* is a play which resists synopsis, not through complexity or obscurity, but because, as Zilliacus notes, “though the play can be retold in paraphrase, little is thereby revealed about the statement and impact made by the play as a whole when offered to a radio audience” (Zilliacus, 77). Alec Reid is further instructive: “Ambiguity, abstraction, these are the possibilities peculiar to sound radio which Beckett is exploiting here to the full. Thus we have impact, not argument” (qtd. in Zilliacus, 77). It is just this “impact” which is important for this thesis, but not why the impact is made, rather, how that impact
is orchestrated and delivered. It is my contention that *Embers* remains in the realm of ambiguity as a means for Beckett to transpose a listener directly into the subconscious of a tormented psyche, and there is no better mode for effecting such an impact as radio.

“Radio art is an ideal medium for representing the haphazard shifts of human consciousness. As Arnheim suggests, ‘the easy shift from place to place and through distances of time has increasingly favored themes totally free of spatial and temporal limitations’ such themes as the process of human memory in which the various phases of the past are linked in a haphazard way” (Hwang, 63). Hwang has hit upon the very strategy Beckett employs in *Embers*. The play is a melange of Henry’s memories, tinged with guilt and desire, delivered in a stylization which powerfully surpasses that of *All That Fall*. Here, the elements of stylization go well beyond sound effect alteration and changes in tone of voice.

The primary element of stylization is the sound of the ocean which is directed as “*audible throughout what follows wherever pause indicated*” (E, 197). The direction is telling when considering that there are 219 such pauses through the fourteen page text: the sound of the ocean is incessant despite its background status. It is something which queerly anchors a listener to the ostensible physical setting, “sitting on the strand” (E, 197) in an unspecified sea town; though, when one hears the steely, sucking sound, with the timbre of an accordion in the original production, such stylization draws a listener to the conclusion that the sound is transliminal: both inside Henry’s mind and present on the strand. There is a melding which takes place, not only for the listener, but, by implication, for Henry as well. The selection of such a sound which so promptly places a listener into
Henry’s mind is apt: it calls forth the metaphor adopted by Freud and his psychoanalytic followers for the subconscious. If we remember that Beckett, himself, was interested in--enough to attend one of Jung’s lectures in 1935--and underwent psychoanalysis in the 1930s, the connection seems all the more appropriate. But Beckett does not leave evidence for our situation within Henry’s mind as scarce as this one point.

There are a number of factors which exclude any reading/listening of *Embers* from classification as “naturalism” or “realism.” The content of the drama serves more to cement a listener into the mental soundscape than to perform any narrative function of plot progression. The very first lines of *Embers* establish that we are in Henry’s degenerating mind:

*Sea scarcely audible.*
*Henry’s boots on shingle. He halts.*
*Sea a little louder.*

**Henry**  
*As he goes.*] Stop. [*Boots on shingle. As he goes, louder.*] Stop!  
*[He halts. Sea a little louder.*] Down. [*Sea. Voice louder.*]  
Down! [*Slither of shingle as he sits...*] Who is beside me now? [*Pause.*] An old man, blind and foolish.  
*Pause.* My father, back from the dead, to be with me.  
*Pause.* As if he hadn’t died. [*Pause.*] No, simply back from the dead, to be with me, in this strange place.  
*Pause.* Can he hear me? [*Pause.*] Yes, he must hear me.  
*Pause.* To answer me? [*Pause.*] No, he doesn’t answer me.

(E, 197)

This is a puzzling opening, indeed. The inherent confusion is only amplified by its delivery in sound over the radio waves. The opening shingle-shuffling we hear could easily be the footsteps of two people, it is so indeterminate. This is not the rhythmic shuffle of *All That Fall*. But, as the lines begin Henry’s call and answer, we find the supposed man who has been commanded “On,” “Stop,” and “Down” is Henry himself.
The only other possible character for whom these directions could have meaning is Henry’s dead father who hears but does not answer. The effect for the shuffling of the shingle points to the fact that Henry must audibly demand the muscular functioning of his own legs. He must command *himself* onwards, when to stop, and when to sit down. And, furthermore, his commands are not automatically obeyed as they normally would be; rather, there is a veritable “communication breakdown” between mind and body. Hence, from the outset of this drama the audible is only audible within Henry’s mind. The listener occupies the space in Henry’s mind where inner voice and external sound meld.

To begin a play in such confusion would seem to directly contradict Hale and Richardson’s dictum that “the audience should be intrigued and drawn in within three minutes or you’re gone...the lines of development must be strong and simple” (Oppenheim, 273). But, on closer inspection, Beckett is taking advantage of the medium’s ability to “rivet the audience’s attention to the pure imagery of sound,” in order that “the flow of human consciousness can be grasped without being impeded” (Hwang, 62-3). It is a listener’s curiosity which is being played upon, his desire to “figure out” what is going on which renders him receptive to the deep plunge he is taking into a mind which is slowly degenerating.

Though it is Henry’s body which seems to have difficulty in complying with his mind’s desires, it is revealed that sounds in his mind may be conjured and then heard by the audience as well, as in when Henry summons the “[Sound of hooves walking on hard road]” by the same declarative yell he has just previously directed to his legs, “Hooves! [Pause. Louder.] Hooves!” (E, 197). These are the same hooves which “[die rapidly
away” (E, 202) and require strenuous exhortation for their summoning. Hence, even the conjurings of his mind are degenerating, as he reports a stoic “Not well.” to his wife, Ada’s question “Did you hear them?” (E, 202).

The ostensible reason for such degeneration of mind stems from Henry’s clear obsession with his father’s suicide and his own spawning of a family. This is a variation on the sexual motif found within All That Fall; the anxiety Henry feels is connected with his functioning (disapprovingly) within a family coupled with the “sin” of creating his own. Indeed, aurally the sounds of the hooves (passim), the beating of Addie’s music instructor’s ruler (E, 204), and Ada’s repetitive “Don’ts” (E, 205) have been seen as aural links to sex in their rhythmic composition and near background status—especially considering the relationship between the content of each instance (hooves, ruler, “don’ts”). This rhythmic pulsing in the background reiterates the very root of Henry’s, indeed all human, anxiety: his binding through sex and reproduction into the cycle of (de)generation which progresses through needless, unjustifiable suffering.

The drama spans forty-five minutes in which the only “real” action has been Henry’s sitting down on a shale beach. He explains that he talks to himself “oh just loud enough to drown” (E, 198) the constant sound of the sea that he hears. He claims he has gone as far as Switzerland to get away from the sucking sound of the ocean which he constantly hears and reveals that he “usen’t to need anyone, just to myself, stories, there was a 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” (E, 198). Hence

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1 See, for example, James Jesson: 2009, pp.53-6
he hears this ocean sound and resolves to tell unending stories in order to cover over that sound. He also reveals that these stories used to be sufficient to quell his anxiety, but now he needs people and so begins the drama with the conjuring of his dead father and dead wife, Ada.

Henry should clearly be recognized as a true Beckettian character whose storytelling imperative aligns him with other Beckett characters like Malone and the unnamable voice of *The Unnamable*. Beckett’s *Embers* functions beautifully in the realm of ambiguity which parallels the haphazard mental connections amongst and between Henry’s guilt about his father’s suicide and his own spawning of the little Addie. Hence, the vignettes are received as clues though their presentation as such is next to impossible to untangle in the course of hearing the play. Aided by the text we can comprehend the progression: Henry first imagines his father’s ghost, recounts some details of the tale of Bolton and Holloway, then comes a fragmented remembrance of Henry and his father’s last meeting:

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Henry ...Father![Pause.] You wouldn’t know me now, you’d be sorry You ever had me, but you were that already, a washout, that’s The last I heard from you. A washout. [Pause. Imitating Father’s voice.] “Are you coming for a dip?” “No.” “Come On, come on.” “No.” Glare, stump to door, turn, glare. “A Washout, that’s all you are, a washout!” [Violent slam of Door. Pause.] Again! [Slam. Pause.] Slam life shut like that! [Pause.] Washout. [Pause.] Wish to Christ she had.
(E, 201)
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Hearing this aloud, especially with the vocal modulation done by the actor of Henry’s part when the imitation of Henry’s father’s voice is required, is a confusing albeit powerful experience. Only from studying the text does it clearly emerge that this is the
scene just before that “once too often” (E, 198) bathe is taken by Henry’s father. It is apparent that Henry’s father considers Henry “a washout.” The door slamming is reiterated on Henry’s command, “Again!” But the turn away from the father to Henry’s own family comes linked to that very same word, “washout” which becomes Henry’s wish for his wife to have aborted the conception of their daughter, hence, “Washout. Wish to Christ she had.”

The design of the above exchange which instigates the appearance of Henry’s ghostly wife parallels how the mind works: it is just the simple word “washout” linked to the guilt from his father’s disapproval which produces the mental jump to his meditations on his own daughter’s conception, which he wishes had been avoided by a “washout.” This connection also manifests the encounter with Ada, whose voice is heard but none of her motions are.

Ada is called forth in the same way the hooves and later dripping sound effect are, namely, with a first demand, followed by a pause and then a more emphatic demand: “Ada. [Pause. Louder.] Ada!” (E, 201). There are two sound techniques used here which solidify (ironically) Ada’s immaterial presence: When she is asked to sit by Henry, whose own sitting was marked by the “[slithering of shingle]” (E, 197), her sitting is accompanied by “[No sound as she sits.]” (E, 202). Further Ada responds, “You are silent today” and “What are you thinking of? [Pause.] I was never taught, until it was too late. All my life I regretted it” (E, 204), to Henry’s imagination of his daughter’s piano lesson and riding lesson, respectively. Hence, she has access to the hearing of these things by virtue of her existence within Henry’s mind, and so, can respond that she regretted never
having such lessons. Ada exists for the listener in the same way these vignettes do, and
the vignettes are introduced as if they had arisen in Henry’s own mind—that is through
oblique connections only familiar to the mind in which such connections exist. The
“washout” linkage has been cited above but it is not isolated, as Henry’s imaginings of
Ada’s nagging, “don’t stand there thinking about it...don’t stand there staring...don’t wet
your good boots” (E, 205), link the “don’ts” with her own “don’ts” during the couple’s
first sexual encounter.

We hear Henry repeating “Don’t! Don’t...” after he has imagined the naggings of
his deceased wife (E, 205). This repetition then launches him twenty years prior to their
first sexual encounter in which Ada was screaming the “Don’ts” in response to Henry’s
“Darlings”. This oblique connection drawing is the mode for presenting mental
remembrances over which Henry has limited control. This convention is enacted to
engender our understanding of what we’re hearing as completely mental. The manner in
which the Bolton-Holloway story is told solidifies this understanding.

Henry has complete control over his stories, hence he chooses to never finish
them—a striking feature which unites Henry with the unnamable. He is also able to
present the stories in the process of their composition with his emending taking place as
the stories are told. For example, he begins the Bolton-Holloway story in the same way as
he calls forth memories:

“Bolton. [Pause. Louder.] Bolton! [Pause.] There before the fire. [Pause.] Before the fire
with all the shutters...no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn and the light, no
light, only the light of the fire, sitting there in the...no, standing, standing there...” (E,
James Jesson claims that this strategy of narrative “implies an effort to make his stories last forever by repeating them with variation” (Jesson, 56). Whatever Henry’s purposes for telling his stories to himself with such emendations, the effect on the listener is consistently (and persistently) to impede traveling any further down the rabbit-hole of Henry’s mind. By presenting the stories in this way, the listener cannot get totally sucked into the calming effect the stories must have for Henry himself; rather, the listener remains cognizant of the fact that these stories are heard in the mind of Henry. Though he may be speaking them aloud, it is an ambiguity of inner voice which is maintained by keeping a listener from becoming a mere witness to an old man’s ramblings on the strand. While the content of these stories is important for the internal coherence of the text, it must be remembered that the play is intended for the aural reception as Zilliacus aptly reminds, “The text of Embers is a carefully wrought short-hand version of a larger statement which exists in an aural dimension only” (Zilliacus, 94).

There is one aspect of Embers’ requisite aural nature which is always lost in textual analysis. The impermanence of the drama is one of its most powerful features as it forces the experience of perpetual termination in whoever listens to the production. The soundscape which envelops an audience only does so in immediately expiring waves of sound which parallels the omnipresent breathing which marks human existence, only fully stopping at life’s end. The powerful end of the play, with its slowly fading, stylized sucking ocean sounds, forces a listener into the same psychical pain, the same wish for
termination and silent nothingness, that plagues Henry. The power is located in the immaterial presentation through sound fully integrating with the immateriality of the listener’s inner voice, his conscious mind, in suspended apprehension of the aural experience he undergoes during *Embers*. Again, as with *All That Fall* and many of Beckett’s works, *Embers* is an effective approach to forcing a listener to confront the perpetual dying which marks his or her everyday existence, along with the ineffectuality of the mind (vis-a-vis rationalization) to rescue one from the suffering of that existence. *Embers* can only communicate Henry’s experience of painfully reexamining and reliving his memories, searching for salve through story telling which can only temporarily take the place of such imaginings. But, as Zilliacus’ reading suggests, if a mind persists too long in attempting to avoid such painful memories, the salving stories become imbued with the very pain they once assuaged. Hence, Zilliacus reads the Bolton story as Henry’s own wish for non-existence as he finds Bolton’s unspecified exhortation to Dr. Holloway, “Please! PLEASE!” (E, 200), a request for euthanasia:

Holloway is willing to administer an anesthetic from his bag, but that is not the kind of injection that Bolton wants, as Holloway well knows: ‘We’ve had this before, Bolton, don’t ask me to go through it again’ (210). Bolton’s object, it seems to me, is euthanasia. He begs for it both verbally, by saying “Please!”...and, more eloquently, he hopes, by showing Holloway the acute anguish in his eyes

(Zilliacus, 86)

To be sure, there is critical disagreement as to whether Henry is Bolton or has become Bolton by the end of the play. But this statement itself is misleading as Henry has always been Bolton and Holloway, and, for that matter, Ada, his own father, and even Addie, his daughter. In other words, Bolton may or may not become Henry’s conception of himself in the context of a story which once kept Henry from the oceanic guilt which
constantly plagues him. The ambiguity of the play is its key, as can be illustrated by Jesson’s reading of the Bolton-Holloway story as a need for companionship, while Zilliacus sees a desire for euthanasia, and Perloff finds the entire play, including the story, an expulsion of guilt for Beckett, himself, after losing his father and mother before they could know of his international success—as they died before that success was achieved.

What is important for our purposes is, again, that the radio medium opened up a new way of thinking about presenting an audience with the inner voice, the workings of the mind, which was once, after the Cartesians, the only realm of verifiable reality. Beckett effectively threw the cogito, ergo sum statement into a wildly unstable cogito, ergo cogito sum. Embers is but one instance of this dissolution of stability effected through listening. Furthermore, as Hwang notes, “listening overwhelms seeing. The act of listening parallels the act of recollecting memories” (Hwang, 63). This parallel is precisely what Beckett takes advantage of to effect the dissolution of both reality and self by presenting the subjective process of remembering through Henry in Embers. “As we concentrate to make sense out of the alternating strands of memory, we face the question Beckett had previously posed but now poses in another way: can listening to ourselves elicit a coherent image of our lives? Are we anything other than listeners to our own memories? (Brater, 158).

Bernard Beckerman’s above question from Enoch Brater’s compilation, Beckett at 80, is precisely the kind of question with which Beckett wishes us to grapple in listening to his radio drama. It is Beckett’s own pursuit of the reality and permanence of self which both led him into and brought him out of creative impasse. His experience with the radio
medium, as impermanent and immaterial as Being itself, provided him with nuanced
technical needs in order to convey such an experience to his audience. It prompted great
thought in how to address such concerns and take advantage of such a medium so
perfectly matched with those concerns. In addressing these concerns Beckett was
introduced to tape recording and speaker placement among other technological apparatus
and processes in the broadcasting industry. Radio was thus, not only developmental for
Beckett’s ways of thinking about his philosophical themes, it also provided what has been
noticed by many scholars and critics as the generating experience for the production of
Krapp’s Last Tape, namely, his first encounter with a tape recorder.

Richardson and Hale discuss the experience with tape recording in passing,
“Beckett saw a tape recorder in action for the first time in January of 1958 in a BBC
studio in Paris...The experience of hearing--and especially seeing--a tape recorder in
action was of course to have a profound effect on Beckett’s work and directly resulted in
his writing Krapp’s Last Tape” (Oppenheim, 277). The two go on to briefly praise the
stage drama but offer a dissatisfying question, “Why was [Krapp’s Last Tape] written as a
stage play in the middle of the period of intense radio productivity?” It would seem to me
that Beckett did not need to remain in radio simply because he had just produced All That
Fall; rather, his genius and acute aesthetic understanding recognized that Krapp’s Last
Tape is a stage play and could not be written otherwise, in the same way Embers is a
radio play and could not be written for another medium. Richardson and Hale answer
their own question with just as much dissatisfaction: “Among many possible answers is
the probability that Beckett simply wanted his audience to see this phenomenon, the tape
recorder, that had so impressed him” (Oppenheim, 278). To reduce *Krapp’s Last Tape* to a mere advertisement for a tape recorder borders on insult. The tape recorder, sound technologies, indeed everything Beckett learned from his experience in radio would be incorporated in his future writing because such writing could not have been produced without such elements. This is the precise point taken up in the next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

Pushing the Limits: Beckett’s Post-Impasse Aesthetic Reliance on Radio Techniques

In the previous chapter it was shown that Beckett’s creative impasse ended by a turn to radio drama, that this turn exposed Beckett to enticing sound technologies, and that he recognized that the particular efficacy for sound to align aesthetically with the inner voice is near insuperable by other representations. What I hope to demonstrate, now, through an analysis of the use of sound technologies in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *That Time*, is that Beckett seized upon that efficacy for sound to transport a listener directly into a character’s mind, and adds to it the component of embodiment by foregrounding embodiment through aesthetic incorporations of auditory technology. In *Krapp’s Last Tape* the incorporation of the tape recorder functions as an embodiment of human memory. *That Time* stresses embodiment in its visual element (the lone floating and blinking head of Listener) and couples this with an aural experience of infinite complexity generated by a sound orchestration based on the stereophonic principle. Hence, Beckett exploits the transportive capability of sound, taking advantage of the affinity between audience perception of sound and the inner voice, to move each audience member into an attitude of self-questioning and anxiety, which parallels that of his protagonists’ self-reflexive questioning in the act of remembering. Beckett takes advantage of the close interplay between memory and imagination within each individual’s mind to confront an audience member with his own instability and
discontinuity. And, Beckett does all of this while stressing the bodily presence and deterioration attendant with that psychic deterioration.

*Krapp’s Last Tape* marks Beckett’s return to the stage in 1958 with new insight from his experience composing *All That Fall* and the lion’s share of *Embers.* *Krapp’s Last Tape* began as a stage monologue inspired by Beckett’s listening to Pat Magee’s readings of the *Trilogy* which had been recorded by the BBC. Beckett had begun to learn the power and immediacy of the human voice from his work on *All That Fall.* The Magee recordings, listened to with this in mind, piqued Beckett’s creative interest:

Beckett was impressed and moved by the cracked quality of Magee’s distinctively Irish voice which seemed to capture a sense of deep world-weariness, sadness, ruination and regret...A few weeks later, he began to compose a dramatic monologue, which he first called the ‘Magee Monologue’, for a character who is described in the first draft as a ‘wearish old man’ with a ‘wheezy ruined old voice with some characteristic accent’  

(Knowlson: 1996, 444)

The characteristics he heard in Magee’s voice clearly align with the decay, loss, suffering, and death, which are the near-omnipresent thematic concerns Beckett seeks to address, and the situation par excellence of the Beckettian protagonist.

 Appropriately, the action of the drama takes place largely within the voice responsible for the genesis of the play. That is, the action on stage is no more than an old man listening to his recorded memories on his sixty-ninth birthday, recalling and reflecting upon those memories, just as he has done (presumably) every year. Thus, the action which takes place on stage is that of listening and remembering; the play covers the span and gives an idea of the arc or trajectory of that life through only selected memories, almost vignettes, chosen by Krapp and delivered to the imaginations of the audience entirely by the voice on those tapes. Thus, we are given a fairly common
“memory play” in which an old man seeks to assess the life he has lived but with an ingenious twist: the memories are physically embodied in tapes which are manipulated in front of the audience as they are intently listened to, not only by Krapp, but also the audience.

Krapp’s appearance on stage is that of a clown: “Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him. Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious pockets. Heavy silver watch and chain. Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar. Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed. White face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair. Unshaven. Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing” (KLT, 221). He is a clown from his purple nose down to his quintessential oversized shoes, complete with parodic props. But if his appearance still leaves some in doubt, the banana peel act—a classic of the circus or silent film in which he comically slips on the peel of a banana he has just carelessly dropped in his own path of pacing-- he puts on at the opening before even speaking a word certainly confirms the clownish aspect within Krapp. The purpose of such a move is not only to add Beckett’s characteristic saving humor to a play which will unfold to reveal a deep sense of the pathetic in man, but also to establish the primacy of the body as S.E. Gontarski notes “with the addition of the banana sequence the focus of the play’s opening is on Krapp’s desire for physical sensation and sensual gratification” ([emphasis mine], Gontarski, 65). Hence the slapstick humor at the front end foregrounds that this is a play not only about memory, but the body which holds that memory as well--and the concomitant grotesqueness and decrepitude which is the destiny of that body.
The tape recorder functions as a further instrument of stressing the physical body in its physical presentation on stage. The audience watches the physical manipulations of this embodied memory as Krapp chooses which spool will be played, which part of the spool will be listened to or omitted, just as every person manipulates his own memory in the act of conscious, active remembering. Beckett is thereby launching into a new criticism of voluntary and involuntary memory which he had discussed in his critical essay, *Proust*, twenty-seven years prior.

In *Proust* Beckett had written that “voluntary memory...is of no value as an instrument of evocation, and provides an image as far removed from the real as the myth of our imagination” (P, 4). Though writing on Proust’s work, the critical response to *Proust* has largely identified that such statements apply equally to Beckett’s own conception of existence. But with *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Beckett is not offering an extended critique of Krapp as an indulger in voluntary memory and so necessarily disconnected from his “real” self. Rather, he is emphasizing the potential for experiential remembrance in Krapp just as imaginative experience is undergone by the audience as the aural perceptions emanating from the voice on the tape dictate. In order to fully understand this, we must turn to the memories as they are voiced.

Beckett gives Krapp a ledger in which Krapp has listed some terse identifying remarks next to each spool, which he catalogues by box number, assumedly chronologically. His present query at the opening of the play is for “Box....threee...spool five” which he identifies for himself and the audience by reading the ledger entry, “Mother at rest at last...Hm...The black ball...*[He raises his head, stares blankly front.]*
Puzzled. Black ball?...” (KLT, 223). Clearly the audience will not know to what the ledger entry is referring, but that Krapp does not recognize, much less recall, from the written description, made abundantly clear by his repetition, in a tone of questioning (e.g. “Black ball?” , “Memorable equinox?”) and his interspersed “Hm’s,” is something both unexpected and yet fitting. It is unexpected because these are precisely the kinds of notes we are all familiar with, whose purpose is to “jog the memory”. It is fitting because this begins to reveal the metaphorical relation between the triggering of the involuntary memory and the device of the tape recorder. That is, the tape recorder functions as a manipulable device capable of triggering emotional responses, recuperations of past emotional states, through the sounds it emits. In the same way, the involuntary memory triggers the recuperation of past selves via the perceptual content which comprise that experience in memory.

The ledger is ineffective in bringing back a memory of the black ball, as well as the memorable equinox. Hence we might consider the ledger an instance of voluntary memory, preserving the “unreal” in permanent language-on-the-page. It is necessary for the aural experience to produce within Krapp, not a first-hand involuntary memory of the event itself, but to transport him back to the point when he was first recording that retrospect. At that point in time, the recording process was an act of voluntary memory for the purpose of enabling a return to the emotion, which originally warranted that recollection to be worthy of recording. In other words, when Krapp has an experience worth remembering, he records it on the tape recorder so that he may always gain access to the experience at only one remove, permanently fixed in its position between the event
and its recapitulation in listening to it. As he says in Proust, “A second-hand climax is better than none” (P, 19).

The black ball does not make its reappearance until much later into the retrospect, but when it does reenter the scene, it does so multiperceptually. Just as the ledger briefly pointed out, this tape concerns Krapp’s mother’s death in a hospital which he waited for, outside of the hospital on a bench, playing fetch with a small white dog. The closing of the wooden blinds in his mother’s hospital room has served as a signal to Krapp that his mother has just died while he, “throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand...In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. [Pause.] I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day” (KLT, 226). Before, when it was merely a statement in the ledger, the phrase “the black ball” meant nothing to Krapp; it is hearing the description of the ball’s age, color, consistency, and weight in the hand, and the premonition that this all will be felt “until my dying day,” which puts the audience in an interesting position aligned with the sixty-nine year old Krapp listening on stage: The statements made in the tape by the thirty-nine year old Krapp suggest that the perceptual experience of playing with the dog and ball during the final breaths of his mother’s life was so consciously and concretely impressing on Krapp that his thirty-nine year old self believes it will be omnipresent in his tactile sense permanently. The audience has seen this to be clearly untrue, though, and so the suggestion is that only by listening to this tape can Krapp engage with and thus re-experience the ball and the attendant emotional
and psychological states into which he was plunged during the death of his mother. The ball occupies the same space as the “madeline steeped in an infusion of tea” which is heralded by Beckett in *Proust* as a beautiful evocation of involuntary memory, but it occupies this space only when heard, voiced on the tape; that is, perceptually experienced in sound.

Beckett has stated in *Proust* that we only truly “remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being” (P, 18). This “ultimate and inaccessible dungeon” is the involuntary memory which “will not be importuned,” (P, 20), and, in which is stored “the essence of ourselves, the best of our many selves and their concretions” (P, 18). Hence, the tape recorder, twenty seven years after these statements were written, may promise a manner of “importuning” the involuntary memory and thereby allow access to “the best of our many selves.” The result is a “second-hand climax,” though, because Krapp at sixty-nine can only access this emotional recuperation through thirty-nine year old Krapp’s enunciation. And, Krapp is only allowed momentary, thus unstable, access as he reverts to conscious, voluntary memory as the tape goes on towards even more taxing a memory, that of his “vision” on the jetty after his mother’s death.

As the spool plays on after the recounting of the death of his mother, Krapp at thirty-nine reveals that the year was marked by “profound gloom...until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten...the vision at last” (KLT, 226). It is this vision which Krapp-thirty-nine says is “what I have chiefly to record this evening...What I suddenly saw was this, that the belief I had been
going on all my life, namely—[Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again]” (KLT, 226). This is a masterful injection of suspense which Beckett has orchestrated in order that the withholding which is about to occur forces the appropriate response in the audience. For maximum effect he repeats the suspense routine of withholding twice, one following near-immediately on the next, such that an audience never gets any idea of what that vision was. The effect is that the audience witnesses Krapp at sixty-nine consciously eliding the vision so as to avoid a confrontation with that vision once more. And the interruption works doubly as it prevents the imagination of the listening audience member from conjuring any satisfying conclusion at the points at which Krapp fast-forwards. He enacts an omission that stabilizes his present self by denying part of his own reality; he functions habitually, as Beckett would say, voluntarily to avoid contact with the real, just as is his wont.

Krapp at sixty-nine prefers to listen to the end of spool five, box three, in which Krapp at thirty-nine tells of a woman drifting in a punt with him. The memory involves what appears to be the ending of a relationship between Krapp and an unnamed woman because Krapp “thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes” (KLT, 227). From the ledger we can safely deduce the referents of the notes: Mentioned above were the “black ball,” and the “Memorable equinox” which roughly correspond to the death of Krapp’s mother while he played with the black ball and white dog and his “vision” on the jetty, respectively. The final entry of the ledger, which carries to a proceeding page is “Farewell to--[he turns the page]--love” (KLT, 223). Hence, the closing of the tape recounts what Krapp at thirty-nine considers his
farewell to love, his ending of this relationship due to unspecified reasons concerning hopelessness.

The farewell to love is the most prominently presented memory in the play. Krapp plays the segment three times, the threefold repetition establishing the importance of the remembered experience for Krapp. But Beckett was careful in orchestrating the sound of this episode as Ulrika Maude points out, “Beckett, referring to the scene of the girl in the punt, once told James Knowlson that ‘if you take a single syllable out of those lines, you destroy the sound of the lapping of the water on the side of the boat’” (Maude, 61).

--upper lake, with the punt, bathed off the bank, then pushed out into the stream and drifted. She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and asked her how she came by it. Picking gooseberries, she said. I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. [Pause.] I asked her to look at me and after a few moments--[Pause.--after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. [Pause. Low.] Let me in. [Pause.] We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! [Pause.] I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

(KLT, 227)

The point of such rigorous aural orchestration, which incorporates pauses (like musical rests), sibilance, alliteration and assonance, even tonal adjustments to the voice, is to ensure the audience imagines an accurate scene in the same way as Krapp at sixty-nine experiences that scene in the listening.

It is this active listening which resonates throughout the play, but a listening which is grounded in the body and which activates bodily experience from memory. Krapp’s posture of listening is stressed throughout the play, as nearly every time the tape
must be stopped or fast-forwarded the direction is given that Krapp “[resumes listening posture]” which has previously been described at the beginning of the play as “leaning forward, elbows on table, hand cupping ear towards machine, facing front” (KLT 223). Being hard of hearing, cupping of the ear is somewhat natural for Krapp but in his clownish appearance it is particularly highlighted. The “listening posture,” thus, is the bodily indication to the audience that they, too, are to be engaged as intently; in other words it forces the audience’s focus to the tape and into the act of listening themselves.

Listening is not only important because the play takes place almost entirely in the sounds from the recorder, it also is important because, as Maude points out, “the sense of hearing, because sounds ‘penetrate us from all directions at all times,’ places the subject within a world rather than in front of one as vision does...our psychology is such that the auditor tends to construct a space to accommodate the sounds heard” (Maude, 51). Hence, it is this activity which breaks the fourth wall and places the audience directly within Krapp’s world, within Krapp’s memories. It is only when occupying this space that the audience can apprehend the discontinuity of self as it is presented for them through the retrospects.

The voice of Krapp at thirty-nine transforms the body of the tape recorder into the image of Krapp at thirty-nine sitting on stage with Krapp at sixty-nine, within the minds of the listeners. They witness first hand the sixty-nine year old Krapp’s manipulations of himself at an earlier age, even as Krapp at thirty-nine reduces yet an earlier Krapp to a “young whelp” (KLT, 224). Krapp on stage engages in the same derision of himself or his earlier self, rather, with the dismissive, “Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took
myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that” (KLT, 228). These judgments on past selves are somewhat normal in themselves, but their dramatic presentation through the device of the tape recorder calls into question the ability for memory to provide anything but a recognition in the remembering subject that “the individual is a succession of individuals” (P, 8). But, there is a tension here, because, “the play of continuity, discontinuity and loss is acted out in the voices, distinctly other while irreducibly connected” (Maude, 20).

Hence, what Beckett creates with the tape recorder is an experience of this friction between present self and past self which seem to be separated, as his tape recorder engenders the creation of multiple Krapps in the minds of the audience. They also witness the alteration of memory by the physical alterations of the tape recorder and thereby bear witness to the various instabilities initiated by the subject himself which supersede or prevent any stable unity within himself. Thus, Maude states, “Audiotapes, as Beckett acknowledged, function as an opportune trope for identity, because of their simultaneously permanent and mutable nature: they epitomise both the stative and active aspects of subjectivity” (Maude, 65). For Beckett, these tapes also provide his fundamental declamation of the inability for a memory of self-perception, apperception, to initiate and maintain a unified self. As we witness Krapp at sixty-nine criticizing Krapp at thirty-nine who in turn criticizes Krapp at twenty-nine, the audience is made aware of the friction between criticizer and criticized: “Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! [Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.] And the resolutions! [Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.] To drink less in particular. [Brief laugh of
“Krapp alone.” (KLT, 224). These derisions in laughter reveal the changes which have taken place, especially as we witness the erasure of the resolutions--Krapp continues to drink heavily throughout the evening of this session and comments that “Fanny...bony old ghost of a whore” (KLT, 228) had visited him several times, reversing the resolution to have a “less engrossing sexual life” (KLT, 224).

James Knowlson and John Piling offer an extremely convincing account of the discontinuity as Krapp’s struggle with what they call a “fundamental dualism”: “It is clear that for Krapp the central issue in his life is one of coming to terms with a fundamental dualism, either by attempted separation or by reconciliation” (Knowlson & Piling, 87). S.E. Gontarski adds to this that, “Beckett has recorded in his production notebook, Krapp’s consuming lifelong struggle has been to reconcile spirit and flesh, symbolically the light and dark sides of his nature” (Gontarski, 66). Knowlson and Piling explore the variety of dichotomies and the emphasis on the light-dark imagery and interplay throughout the text in order to reveal the source of the discontinuity but this seems somewhat incomplete. The piece which is missing is that this discontinuity developing out of the “light and dark sides” of Krapp’s nature would ultimately reveal a Krapp given over completely to his dark side. While foreboding and pessimistic, this giving over would, in fact, resolve any discontinuity by making Krapp wholly dark. The problem is that the memories persist, pointing to the persistence of past-existence, past self as extant within (and therefore experienceable by) Krapp himself. That the thirty-nine year old voice drones on at the end of the play with statements that could easily be issued from the mouth of staged Krapp, “Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a
chance of happiness. But I wouldn’t want them back” (KLT, 230) highlights the fact that the discontinuity persists in the very phrases combined with the stage image of the motionless Krapp.

The tension in Krapp is largely a tension centering on apperception, the perception of self as conscious being, or self-consciousness itself. The memories of the self which have been played through the tape recorder indicate, retroactively, that an apperception took place which is different than the apperception which takes place on stage due to the difference in selves foregrounded aurally through the tape recorder. That is, in constructing different selves for representation in the bodies of Krapp at thirty-nine versus Krapp at sixty-nine and twenty-nine, one can surmise that the particular apperception made by each of those men would describe a different person with different judgments, desires, values, and beliefs. Thus, the ability for memory to unify the real self across time is undercut by apperception. The key here, is thus, the temporal differentiation enacted by the aural quality of the voices: the “wearish,” “cracked” voice of Krapp at sixty-nine contrasting with the young and vibrant voice of Krapp at thirty-nine. Sixteen years after writing *Krapp’s Last Tape* Beckett again addressed the issue, this time using the same voice only spatially differentiated in order to again display the instability and discontinuity of self with *That Time*.

*That Time: At the Frontier of the Possible*
That Time reveals Beckett’s deepened understanding and cultivation of the potential impact of the human voice on an audience—something he continually meditated upon after his experience with All That Fall. It is for this reason that he reduces the visual component of That Time, staging only the most expedient, necessary image to definitively foreground embodied experience. He then allows the human voice to do the vast majority of the thematic “work,” creating a dense, powerful, and complex aural experience. And, it is appropriate that the human voice be the predominant mode of representation, here, as the subject matter is the human self, attempting to perceive itself as a complete, unified, continuous self across time.

The play opens with “Stage in darkness. Fade up to Listener’s Face about 10 feet above stage level midstage off centre” (TT, 417). Listener, as Beckett has aptly named his protagonist for this play, has an “Old white face, long flaring hair as if seen from above outspread” (TT, 417) which situates the audience gazing down on Listener in what many critics have suggested is a death bead scene. James Knowlson and John Piling point out that in the manuscript notes the only change suggested for the composition of this image was whether to include a pillow as a framing device behind the head of Listener, and “by typescript five the decision [had] been made: no pillow” (Knowlson & Piling, 206). The lack of the pillow does not indicate the critics are wrong, though; rather, it merely keeps an audience in need of the voice to determine Listener’s situation as the man whose voice will be heard rehearsing choice fragments of memories, attempting to get a glimpse of himself before he breathes his last breath—an attempt which, predictably in a Beckettian text, fails.
Though the audience may be in doubt for the first few moments of the play, Beckett provides a “note” before the text of the play begins which describes the technical device to be employed in the drama which follows: “Moments of one and the same voice \( A \ B \ C \) relay one another without solution of continuity--apart from the two 10-second breaks. Yet the switch from one to another must be clearly faintly perceptible. If threefold source and context prove insufficient to produce this effect it should be assisted mechanically (e.g. Threefold pitch)” (TT, 417). Thus it was the stereophonic principle of differentiating sound by differentiating speaker location on which this play was based and on which it relies to elicit the desired response in the audience.

Separating the physical location of the three loudspeakers for voices \( A \), \( B \), and \( C \) allows an audience to experience the sound coming from the left, above, and right of Listener’s suspended head. Taking this with our visual cue it cannot be ignored that this strategy manifests the feeling of listening to voices from disparate regions of the head. That is, the audience can associate the same voice, coming from distinct locations in the auditorium, as resonating from different zones of the mind. Beckett has taken advantage sound’s ability to mimic the haphazard near irrational fluctuations and turns of a functioning human consciousness.

The three voices enunciate fragmented memories of Listener at three different stages in life. Beckett has stated that “The \( B \) story has to do with the young man, the \( C \) story is the story of the old man and the \( A \) story that of the man in middle-age” (qtd. in Knowlson & Piling, 207). \( A \) tells of a trip taken to a childhood haunt in a “ruin”; \( B \) tells of a youthful love affair; and \( C \) tells of Listener’s wanderings in old age through a city in
perpetual winter, as he goes from various public establishments to shelter from wind and rain. Beckett has these stories told in an interwoven fashion, following a complex pattern which divides the play into three parts, separated by two pauses during which Listener opens his eyes and continues to breath. As Piling and Knowlson note, “what needs to be stressed most of all is that...the different fragments are experienced sequentially, either in the theatre or on the printed page” (Knowlson & Piling, 210). It is important that any analysis of the text, then, remains cognizant of this woven structure.

The structure Beckett devised for *That Time* is as follows:

I  ACB  ACB  ACB  CBA  (Silence)
II CBA  CBA  CBA  BCA  (Silence)
III BAC  BAC  BAC  BAC  (Silence; toothless smile).

Much has been made of this pattern, some likening it to a musical score, others to “the combinatory art of some seventeenth-century mathematician” (Knowlson & Piling, 210). For our purposes it is necessary only to note that there is a play with continuity and discontinuity which emerges. Each stage ends with a disruption of the pattern which precedes it, excepting the final stage which retains its pattern. Hence the third stage disrupts the pattern of the first two, just as the final triad disrupts the pattern which has preceded it within each stage. What is more, though, throughout the utterances there is a certain triggering effect which takes place as one voice may seem to pick up where its predecessor left off, as in the opening lines where A finishes, “there where you hid as a child that last time not a tram left in the place only the old rails when was that” and C picks up, “when you went in out of the rain always winter then...” (TT, 417). Also, another form of triggering occurs throughout the pattern where a word or phrase spoken
by one voice will be picked up and mutated through the other two voices, as when C’s “a seat marble slab” becomes B’s “low stone like millstone” (TT, 418). Clearly, despite the formal structure, the voices are meant to swirl with one another the way memories inevitably do in any human consciousness. And, given that it is the same voice throughout, it is of little doubt that the statement made by such orchestration is one of the paradox of seeming continuity within the self, though disruption and thus discontinuity would seem the ultimate end.

It is difficult to assess whether such a formal constraint would really be picked up by a listening audience--especially one which had no familiarity with the text. However, whether the audience picks it up, or not, the thematic concern is certainly maintained formally. It is highly likely that most audience members will work hard enough to cultivate the appropriate attention to discern what is being said and so the recognition of a pattern is, more likely, a reward for the extremely attentive, a verification of the themes addressed in the content of the voices’ utterances.

Each voice traces an arc which moves from an initially stable memory to a finally questionable, unstable fiction, leaving the audience in a muddled, ambiguous, complex trying to sort the reality from the fabrication. A traces the middle-aged Listener’s pilgrimage to a childhood haunt in which he used to “hide there all day long on a stone among the nettles with your picture-book” (TT, 419). The reason for the pilgrimage remains unclear but James Acheson has suggested, in comparing the play to Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” that “Listener goes to the folly to escape his loneliness in the company of adults” (Acheson: 1987, 120). Regardless of his reason for the journey,
the moods traced by A’s telling of the memory span from the invigorated resoluteness with which Listener begins the trek, through the frustration caused by lack of transportation, to the ultimate abandonment of the journey and the bitter defeat which accompanies that abandonment.

After setting the scene with the first statement, A’s second statement reveals his vigor and determination to make his trip: “straight off the ferry and up with the nightbag to the hight street neither right nor left not a curse for the old scenes the old names straight up the rise from the wharf to the high street...” He doesn’t even stray right or left, much less to give a “curse for the old scenes the old names,” indeed, his one-mindedness is stressed. But at the mention of those old scenes for which he hasn’t a curse, there creeps into the memory the description of the rusty rails and lack of connection wire for the old tram: “...and there not a wire to be seen only the old rails all rust when was that” (TT, 418). This brings forth the near arbitrary question and answer as to whether his mother was alive at the time of this visit: “was your mother ah for God’s sake all gone long ago that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child someone’s folly” (TT, 418). So, already by A’s second statement the mood that Knowlson and Piling have called a “nostalgic evocation of a search for childhood experience” (Knowlson & Piling, 212), has begun to change.

A’s third and fourth statements serve to recount Foley’s Folly, the giant nettles among which the childhood Listener looked at his picture-book and talked “to yourself who else out loud imaginary conversations there was childhood for you ten or eleven on a stone among the giant nettles making it up now one voice now another till you were
hoarse and they all sounded the same” (TT, 419). Here it is revealed that this was no Wordsworthian communion with nature but rather a meditation with the self, attempting to gain greater certainty of that self, in solitude, “trying on” different voices until he would go hoarse. Hence, we find that this struggle with identity has been something which has gone on since childhood.

A’s journey is then remembered to have been stopped in its tracks as “the truth began to dawn” that the trams no longer run out to Foley’s Folly. Recognizing this, A marches all the way out to the station, “bowed half double” and finds it “all closed down and boarded up Doric terminus of the Great Southern and Eastern all closed down and the colonnade crumbling away” (TT, 420). He has made the vow “not another word to the living as long as you lived” and as a response to such difficulty in visiting the childhood scene, “gave it up gave up and sat down on the steps in the pale morning sun no those steps got no sun somewhere else then gave up and off somewhere else and down on a step in the pale sun a doorstep say someone’s doorstep”. Hence, we find a self-silenced Listener has completely reversed his vigor: he is now as anxious to “get to hell out of there no need sleep anywhere not a curse for the old scenes” as he was to embark on the journey. This utterance also marks the definitive move of fictionalization creeping in to memory. The strategy of revising in progress, the way an old man might self-edit a story he tells, is brought into this statement with “sat down on the steps in the pale morning sun no those steps got no sun...down on a step in the pale sun a doorstep say someone’s doorstep” (TT, 420).
The inclusion of that single, subtle, “say someone’s doorstep” [emphasis mine] coincides with the deterioration of Listener’s A memory’s ability to gain an accurate perception of self. His next statements have such phrases as “huddled on the doorstep in the old green greatcoat...not knowing where you were little by little not knowing where you were or when you were or what for place might have been uninhabited for all you knew” and “making it all up on the doorstep as you went along making yourself up all again for the millionth time” (TT, 422, 423). Statements like these are clear indications of an epistemological quandary of self bleeding outwards to the questioning of place and time as well. A devolves into one who doesn’t know when, where, or who he is, or “what for,” that is, why he exists. This is the exact experience Beckett wishes the audience to perceive for themselves.

A calls into question the reality of himself in a haunting devolution, but it must be remembered that this devolution is not happening in isolation. The memory has interpenetrated with and by the other two similarly devolving strains of B and C. And, what’s more, it is necessary to point out the use of the second person throughout these memories in order that the audience will recognize that the head of Listener is the locus of these voices. That is, by using the pronoun “you” throughout, the distancing effect this has refocuses an audience on the fact that it is self-reflexive, that Listener is also the speaker attempting to perceive himself through these memories, just as he did within the memories, “making it all up again for the millionth time.” Hence A penetrates B and C just as much as B penetrates A and C, B and A.
B’s story emphasizes the rural landscape, especially the stone on which the two lovers sit but allows that landscape to deteriorate as “bits of flotsam coming from behind and drifting on or caught in the reeds the dead rat it looked like came on you from behind and went on drifting” (TT, 420). Pollution and death in a stream that float from well behind and drift off “till you could see it no more” is clearly a metaphor for the decay and suffering in the stream of time that is man’s lot in life. The two lovers are seen “always parallel like on an axle-tree never turned to each other just blurs on the fringes of the field no touching or anything of that nature always space between if only an inch no pawing in the manner of flesh and blood...” (TT, 420-1). After the second breath the lover has completely vanished, “or alone in the same scenes making it up that way to keep it going keep it out on the stone” (TT, 422). The movement is one which traces the young man through that first love which is itself questioned by the end, transforming into the statement “she loved you hard to believe you even you made up that bit till the time came in the end” (TT, 423). He has fundamentally undercut, by degrees, that original statement of what could very well be a pure, unsullied love.

B makes the statement “or that time alone on your back in the sand and no vows to break the peace when was that an earlier time a later time before she came after she went or both before she came after she was gone and you back in the old scene wherever it might be might have been” (TT, 422). Taking this with the statements that the two lovers never touch, never paw each other “in the manner of flesh and blood,” and that they remain “blurs on the fringes of the field” serve to demonstrate the frailty of interpersonal connection for Listener. The love which ought to sustain his identity rather
fades into nothing more than a doubt as to whether this love actually ever even exists. In calling into question the facticity of the love, B follows A’s movement towards doubt of self-perception: recall, both of the figures in the memory remain blurs on the field, which is both the literal field as well as the field of vision--they remain peripheral and incompletely perceived, hence incompletely substantiated. The field accordingly metamorphoses into the towpath adding to B’s inability to recall whether the field or the towpath was before or after the love had faded only to leave him surmising that it most likely occurred before and after--that is, the one scene is no different than the other as the ultimate end is uncertainty of self and purpose.

C’s story follows the same arc of disintegration, death and the ambiguity of self-perception as the old man’s memories of seeking shelter in the Portrait Gallery, Post-Office and Library end in dust: “not a sound only the old breath and the leaves turning and then suddenly this dust whole place suddenly full of dust when you opened your eyes from floor to ceiling nothing only dust” (TT, 424). C’s story has penetrated (and been penetrated by) the other two coming to the same conclusion pinned between reality and unreality, amounting to dust. Many critics bring up the connection to the Biblical images of man’s relationship to dust and ashes, but what is more important is to recognize that C’s arc maintains Listener’s isolation throughout. While the other two renounce other people within the telling of their stories, C begins going in to public places to seek shelter in old age. He repeats the phrases of the other two voices like “get to hell out of there,” “not a sound to be heard,” “muttering to yourself” and keeps the phrases floating through the other two. C’s is the voice of old age which functions from a fundamental isolation
which results in the contemplation of death as he looks at the portraits in the gallery and sees his own face reflected in the glass: “till you hoisted your head and there before your eyes when they opened a vast oil...black with age behind the glass where gradually as you peered trying to make it out gradually of all things a face appeared had you swivel on the slab to see who it was there at your elbow” (TT, 419). The implications of confronting himself and death simultaneously are made explicit as the next statement begins, “never the same after that never quite the same” (TT, 419).

C clearly begins at a stage much more fundamentally uncertain of himself and the purpose of his life than the A or B memories, which may suggest that C’s inability to know himself through self-perception, (“not knowing who you were from Adam trying how that would work for a change not knowing who you were...no notion who it was saying what you were saying whose skull you were clapped up in” (TT, 420)) is (paradoxically) a more concretized form of uncertainty precipitated by the experience of A and B. Remember, the presentation is sequential which reiterates that Listener’s experience which generated these memories was also sequential, temporally linear, meaning that the memories themselves not only commingle and disrupt one another, in their formations such disruption was already taking place. Before C could be uttered, A and B could both be uttered. Hence, B existed before the real experience of A and C and so is modulated by but also modulates them. It must be seen as somewhat natural for C to have begun in a fundamentally more unstable position than A or B, making him susceptible to the questioning of self in which he engages much earlier than A and B--though they, too, devolve thus.
Let us now turn our attention to the effect of this interpenetration on the image of self, both for Listener and for the audience. We have noted that the image is always referred to as “you” thereby adding a distancing effect and enabling an audience’s imagination to take up the narrative thread, watching, in their minds, as the scenes described transmute. Associating the proper aged Listener with the corresponding voice has been made easier by the stereophonic effect, but that image is never allowed to solidify. And, it is not just because the audience will pick up A’s phrase “away to hell out of there” in C’s “mouth” but also because such phrases, once commuted to other voices, become repeated by all the voices. Such repetitions of images like the stone --as it mutates in reference through station steps, ruins, library benches and door stoops--the green great coat, or the image of someone muttering to himself, all converge in dissonance. That is, the images never unify, they only establish a vague similarity, an ambiguous connection among the voices and Listener’s breathing head. At best we can conjecture that the scenes described have some degree of truth for Listener, but none provides a continuous, stable image of the man. The shroud of unrelenting sound in which the audience is enveloped, bombarded as they are from three disparate, yet continuously resounding speakers, posits the audience in that same complex, ambiguous, confusion in which Listener is held.

The aural experience with which the audience is confronted is the same experience Listener has throughout his life. The voices reveal his perturbed questionings of self; he first attempts love but without touching or perceiving otherwise his beloved, such a love is fundamentally questioned; without effectively regaining any concrete
experience of solitude and the safety it once engendered, exactly as it had been experienced on the slab “among the giant nettles” (passim), self is fundamentally questioned; By resigning to hide in the various public places available to him, and moving through the questioning of self, dust becomes the focus as the body resolves to dust in the library and all human existence is fundamentally questioned. Beckett has delivered a haunting critique of the ability for memories of the self to accurately recover that self, and unify it across time due to the location of memory in mind. That is, because memory is an aspect of the consciousness, it affects and is affected by the other faculties of that consciousness--hence the “making it up” or imaginative creativity of Listener’s voices, their interpenetration, and their triggering of further memories and disruptions thereof. That it is difficult, because of its aural presentation, to fully apprehend this experience is something of which Beckett was well aware as he stated the play lay “on the very edge of what was possible in the theatre” (qtd. in Knowlson & Piling, 219). Thus, the success of That Time lies precisely in its proximity to dramatic failure or impossibility: Beckett has orchestrated an aural experience that posits an audience member in the same uncertainty as the protagonist who has uttered, “never the same but the same as what for God’s sake did you ever say I to yourself in you life come on now [eyes close] could you ever say I to yourself in your life” (TT, 420). The audience member will find himself making just the same statement, as the sound penetrates his own consciousness and the voice becomes his own voice.

Both Krapp’s Last Tape and That Time fundamentally question apperception by foregrounding embodied memory as incapable of providing a unified self over time. In
Proust Beckett wrote, “we are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday” (P, 3). These plays take up showing how destabilizing that otherness of yesterday is. The sense we get from the aural experience of these plays is one which not only foregrounds the instability of our mental faculties, it also points out a fundamental instability in ourselves and thus, a concomitant impossibility of a meaningful, purposeful self. Beckett finds existence marked by decay, suffering, degeneration, all for no reason, but instead of telling us this, he forces us to confront it in ourselves through these plays. The plays under analysis, here, take advantage of the phenomenon of voice and the efficacy of sound to envelop us. Steven Connor is instructive on this point:

My voice defines me because it draws me into coincidence with myself, accomplishes me in a way which goes beyond mere belonging, association, or instrumental use. And yet my voice is also most essentially itself and my own in the ways in which it parts or passes from me. Nothing else about me defines me so intimately as my voice, precisely because there is no other feature of my self whose nature it is thus to move from me to the world, and to move me into the world. If my voice is mine because it comes from me, it can only be known as mine because it also goes from me. My voice is, literally, my way of taking leave of my senses. What I say goes.

(qtd. in Maude, 67)

The play between inside myself and outside myself is precisely the kind of penetration Beckett was interested in exploiting with the voice. A, B, and C, along with the voice of Krapp, should commingle with the inner voices of the audience members, taking over their thoughts and fundamentally affecting their selves in the same way the voices affect Listener.

The experience of Krapp’s Last Tape and the experience of That Time are by and large the more important aspects of those texts. That is, regardless of any reading,
criticism, or analysis, the point of the experience is not to philosophize but to interiorize the experience. To feel what it feels to be in a posture of extreme self-doubt, ambiguity, complexity. This is our lot, this is what Beckett wishes us to confront in the short time we spend in the theatre affronted by the images, aural and otherwise, foregrounded on the stage and in our minds. We should take a cue from Beckett’s refusals to answer questions about his work, denying that he knows any more beyond what is written on the page than anyone else: These plays are experiences more so than philosophical posturings, aesthetically rendered to delight the senses as they draw the mind, with some effort of listening and observing, to a confrontation of reality as Beckett understood it.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on the aural experiences Beckett orchestrates through his use of aesthetic techniques derived, largely, from his work in radio drama. I have sought to stress the emotional impact on audiences of the plays examined above, rather than reading philosophical statements into these plays, which is a common practice in Beckett criticism. I took this direction because Beckett has persistently claimed himself an artist in objection to descriptions of his work as philosophy or philosophical in nature.

In two separate interviews Beckett addressed philosophy with respect to his own writing. Gabriel D’Aubarede and Tom Driver both brought the topic up in interviews with Beckett in Paris, between spring and summer of 1961:

GD: Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?
SB: I never read philosophers.
GD: All the same, people have wondered if the existentialists’ problem of being may afford a key to your works.
SB: There’s no key or problem. I wouldn’t have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms
(Beckett to Gabriel D’Aubarede, Graver & Federman, 217)

One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess. When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don’t know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess
(Beckett to Tom Driver, Graver & Federman, 219)

Beckett’s claims about not being a philosopher, not reading contemporary philosophy, not understanding philosophical language, etc. are tantamount to a statement that he had dispensed with philosophy completely. These statements are clearly somewhat disingenuous because Beckett would refer to philosophical notes in his “Whoroscope
Notebook” as well as returning to reading favorite philosophers of the past. But, for our purposes, the statement, as a general dismissal of philosophy, signals the need for a closing discussion of the propriety for critical readings of Beckett through philosophical writing.

The dominant modes of criticism which hinge upon philosophical readings of Beckett are existential humanism and poststructuralism. Both poststructuralism and existential humanism ultimately meet with, or themselves engender, contradictory readings of Beckett. That paradox and complex contradictions are located as a central feature of Beckett’s writing suggests, as well, a fundamental lack in both dominant critical approaches, derived from their desires to resolve or explain away such paradoxes.

Feldman summarizes the issue:

Despite emphasizing fundamentally different aspects of Beckett's texts, poststructuralist and existential interpretations nevertheless share the same critical inconsistency. We are therefore faced with a repetition of the dilemma described earlier: critics loosely tied by a philosophic approach and methodology applying a system (however asystematic) to Beckett's texts in order to demonstrate that system's unclassifiability. Yet asserting what is not is still and assertion, and not having an essence is still locating an essence, albeit a negating one. As long as either group of commentators apply their readings to Beckett, they are frequently forced into the contradictory assertion that his writing is indeterminate, or at least cannot be adequately determined by criticism. But at the same time, both approaches find that there is much to recommend their readings in Beckett; that is, he illustrates their readings more effectively than they can describe his writings (Feldman: 2002, 224)

This evaluation that indeterminacy is the ultimate end in Beckett’s writing would seem to preempt the entire critical endeavor of elucidating any Beckett text.
Instead of pushing a critical system so far into inconsistency, though, it may be more profitable to keep James Acheson’s essay, “The Shape of Ideas” in mind. Acheson opens this essay with Beckett’s response, in a 1956 interview with Harold Hobson, to the question why, as a nonbeliever, he had incorporated so many references in *Waiting for Godot* to the two thieves crucified with Christ. Acheson writes, “Beckett replied: ‘I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine... ‘Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.’ That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters” (Acheson: 1987, 115). Taking this with Feldman’s deduction that Beckett was done with philosophy “full stop” by 1938 (Feldman: 2010, 14), it is perhaps best to approach any reading of Beckett through any lens—philosophical, religious, theoretical or otherwise—with some due caution.

This thesis, in an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of pushing such lenses too far, has sought to explore the aural experience orchestrated by Beckett first, in his radio drama, then in his inclusion of auditory technology in his late stage drama which followed directly from his experience in radio. The purpose of such an exploration has been to reveal that these aesthetic strategies afforded Beckett a new way to confront an audience with his concerns surrounding the modern notions of subjectivity and his characterization of human existence. Beckett had pushed his prose writing to the very limits of his avowed art of failure and, in order to satiate his “obligation to express,” it was shown that he turned to radio for a new way to approach his audience, more aptly and more directly confronting them with an experience rather than an expression. It has also been cautioned
that a critic must remain aware of the potential discordances, which may arise in his reading of Beckett through any school. Such vigilance will prevent any critic from pushing his reading too far, diminishing rather than enriching the text under critical investigation.

The very notion of critical interpretation of Beckett’s work is often troubled due to Beckett’s own avowed distaste for intellectualism, the “Acacacademey,” (WFG, 36) and indeed literary criticism itself. His note before “Dante...Bruno..Vico..Joyce” is telling on this point: “Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? Literary criticism is not book-keeping” (D, 19).

Referring to literary critics as “analogymongers” seems a fairly clear derision. Beckett is obviously against the kind of critical attempts at reading “meanings” into his work (or any text) by appeal through systems of philosophy etc. This puts any critic in an odd position when approaching Beckett’s work, for, as Feldman notes, it begs us “to wonder if ‘crrritics!’ --that most dirty of words in Waiting for Godot -- striving all too frequently to uncover the overarching 'meaning' in Beckett's text, are unwittingly trapped by a masterful ironist in their attempts at resolution” (Feldman: 2002, 217). But Beckett is not claiming literature ought never to be subjected to critical exegesis; rather, the form of that exegesis is of greater importance. In a 1967 letter, Beckett writes, “I simply do not feel the presence in my writings as a whole of the Proust & Joyce situations you evoke. If I were in the unenviable position of having to study my work my points of departure would be the ‘Naught is more real…’ and the ‘Ubi nihil vales.’ [Where you are worth nothing,
there you should want nothing] both already in Murphy and neither very rational” (qtd. in Feldman: 2002, 220). Feldman suggests that this statement indicates that Beckett, “despite fundamentally questioning the critical assumptions of reason and comprehensibility vis-à-vis Modernist art, nevertheless locates a role for textual exegesis in readings with personal empathy not detached evaluation, individual response not intellectual judgment, and most importantly, feeling not intellectualism” (Feldman: 2002, 220). Hence, it is the job of the critic to elucidate the experience of a Beckett text, rather than reading into that text potential rationalizations in order to usher in a resolution which has very carefully been avoided by the author. In focusing on the aural experiences created by All That Fall, Embers, Krapp’s Last Tape, and That Time I hope to have adhered more closely to Beckett’s own wishes for criticism, but not without leaving an opening for philosophically informed readings to enrich his texts, as they exist in the contemporary cultural milieu, and will forever modify and be modified by that same milieu.
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