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The BBC and Beckett's Non-Radiogenic Plays in the 1950s

Dirk Van Hulle¹

The BBC has undeniably played a substantial part in Samuel Beckett's career, but it took a long time before it assumed this encouraging role. For several years, the Third Programme preferred to wait and see which way the wind was blowing, until it 'missed the boat' and suddenly started compensating for its initial lack of initiative. This development in the early years of the BBC's hesitant engagement with Beckett's work is closely connected to the development of Beckett's dramatic, non-radiogenic works of the 1950s. This essay investigates the BBC's role in Beckett's career as a playwright in the 1950s, from its 'culpably unenterprising' sidelining of *Waiting for Godot* to its being sidelined as a mere source of inspiration for *Krapp's Last Tape*, unsuitable for broadcast. It seems appropriate to let the three-part structure (1. *Waiting for Godot*; 2. *Endgame*; 3. *Krapp's Last Tape*) be preceded by a prelude, following the example of Beckett himself, who wrote an opening statement to precede the first broadcast of his work.

0. Prelude: A Radiogenic Opening Statement

The story of Beckett's non-radiogenic plays and the radio did not start with the BBC. The British Broadcasting Company was much slower to recognize the radio potential of Beckett's work than their French colleagues at RTF (Radiodiffusion-Télévision française). Actually, the adjective 'non-radiogenic' is perhaps not quite adequate, since the public life of Beckett's theatrical works paradoxically started on the radio. *En attendant Godot* (a selection of scenes from Act 1) was broadcast on 17 February 1952 (Knowlson 1996: 386), almost a year before the play's première on stage. The playwright Samuel Beckett thus made his entrance 'on the air', on Michel Polac's aptly called programme *Entrée des auteurs* (part of the RTF's Club d'Essai service, directed by Jean Tardieu) introducing new authors who had just received public grants for their first plays. Thanks to Roger Blin, Beckett's *En attendant Godot* had been awarded a government grant and was subsequently selected for the programme, which

¹ The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7 / 2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement no. 313609.

typically consisted of a few opening remarks by Polac, an introduction by an expert, a statement by the author himself, and finally a selection of scenes from the play, recorded before a live audience at the Club d'Essai studio at 37, rue de l'Université in Paris. Angela Moorjani has thoroughly investigated this radio première, which lasted 31 minutes and 35 seconds. Toward the end of the eight minutes preceding the performance of the selected scenes (the opening of the play until Estragon's dream [8'05''] and the Pozzo and Lucky scene until the end of Act 1 [15'40'']; see Moorjani 1998: 50), a short statement by the author was read, not by Beckett himself (who 'refused to be present'; Moorjani 1998: 50), but by Roger Blin.

En attendant Godot was not conceived as a play for the radio, yet it was paradoxically 'born' in this medium, albeit only partially or – in the words Beckett frequently borrowed from Jung – 'never entirely born' or 'never properly born' (see Melnyk 2005). The short statement that preceded its pre-première broadcast, however, was entirely and properly born to be broadcast, while its content relates to theatre: 'Je n'ai pas d'idées sur le théâtre. Je n'y connais rien. Je n'y vais pas.' ['I have no thoughts about the theatre. I know nothing about it. I don't go to the theatre.' (trans. Angela Moorjani)] At the same time, theatre seems to have been a pretext to use this statement as an opportunity for Beckett to officially formulate his poetics of ignorance and have it broadcast. The text consists of less than 30 sentences, organized in 13 short paragraphs, 4 of which open with the words 'Je ne sais pas':

Je ne sais pas plus sur cette pièce que celui qui arrive à la lire avec attention.

Je ne sais pas dans quel esprit je l'ai écrit[e].

Je ne sais pas plus sur les personnages que ce qu'ils disent, ce qu'ils font et ce qui leur arrive. De leur aspect j'ai dû indiquer le peu que j'ai pu entrevoir. [...]

Je ne sais pas qui est Godo. Je ne sais même pas[, surtout pas,] s'il existe. Et je ne sais pas s'ils y croient ou non, les deux qui l'attendent.

[I know no more about this play than someone who manages to read it attentively.

I don't know in what mood I wrote it.

I know no more about the characters than what they say, what they do, and what happens to them. About their appearance I must have shown the little I could glimpse.

[...]

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I don't know who Godot is. I don't even know [above all not]² if he exists. And I don't know if they believe in him or not, the two who are waiting for him.' (trans. Angela Moorjani)]

The verb 'entrevoir' ['to glimpse'] is the same as in Beckett's last work, 'Comment dire' / 'what is the word': 'folie que de vouloir croire entrevoir – / quoi – / comment dire –' ['folly for to need to seem to glimpse – / what – / what is the word –'], but there are also echoes with Beckett's earlier works. As Angela Moorjani indicates, the 'cadenced protestations of unknowingness echo the opening paragraph of *Molloy*' (Moorjani 1998: 51). Although this is only a cursory remark in her discussion of Michel Polac's broadcast, it deserves some attention as it may offer us a key to an understanding of the tension between radio as a medium and the plays that were not written for this medium. The first-person narrator of *Molloy* opens by stating that he is in his mother's room: 'I don't know how I got there.' He claims that he works now, but '*I don't know how to work any more,*' and he does not work for money. For what then? '*I don't know. The truth is I don't know much.*' (Beckett 2009: 3) Although the rest of *Molloy*'s first part is also told by a first-person narrator, it is not impossible that it differs from the narrator of the opening paragraph (Moorjani 1982: 40-3). The rest of part I is announced as 'my beginning', whereas 'now [in the opening paragraph] it's nearly the end' (4).³ And to the question 'Is what I do now any better?' the narrator replies: '*I don't know.*' If this is the 'same' narrator, he is – not unlike Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape* – clearly aware of the distance in time between his present self and his earlier self or selves.

Against this background, Beckett's statement preceding the broadcast of the abridged *Godot* in February 1952, read by another voice than his own, becomes a statement by yet another narrator, who takes his distance from his creation. Knowing full well that this will be broadcast, the narrator talks about *En attendant Godot* as a text rather than a performance, presented as something to be *read*: 'I know no more about this play than someone who manages to *read* it attentively.' My suggestion is that radio may have been, for Beckett, a medium that facilitated precisely this kind of attentive reading. And this kind of attentive

² The words 'surtout pas' feature in Roger Blin's version of the text.

³ James Knowlson draws attention to a biographical correspondence, noting that Beckett 'wrote the greater part of [...] *Molloy*, which he had begun on 2 May, literally in "[his] mother's room" at New Place in Foxrock, although the very beginning of the novel seems to have been written last.' (1996: 367)

reading, such as Patrick Magee's reading of *Molloy*, was in its turn a stimulus for further writing.

1. *Waiting for Godot* and the 'culpably unenterprising' BBC

On 17 March 1953, relatively shortly after the première of *En attendant Godot*, the BBC's Paris representative Cecilia Reeves sent the play to the then Assistant Head of Drama, Donald McWhinnie, suggesting its potential for the Third Programme. On 8 April 1953, it was sent to E. J. King Bull, who – among many other things – notes that it would be 'culpably unenterprising not to undertake the project'.⁴ Interestingly (given Beckett's future career as a bilingual author and self-translator), King Bull signals potential problems with the translation. In the P.S. he even notes that asking Beckett to translate or adapt his play himself might be 'an embarrassing mistake', taking his work and 'present standing' into account. Because of these misgivings, the Controller of the Third Programme, John Morris, was 'reluctant to commit himself until he [knew] what complications [were] likely to arise in the making of an English version.' Explicitly 'without committing ourselves in any way at this stage', the BBC contacted the International Copyright Agency to ask for permission to make an English translation and radio adaption. In early August 1953, the BBC's Copyright Department received the message that it would be 'quite all right' to broadcast the play, but only in Beckett's own translation, which was sent to the BBC on 23 September. A week later (30 September), McWhinnie received a note from Helena Wood, who evaluated the text: 'This seems to me a perfectly workable translation although it has a few un-English turns of phrase and is slightly different in tone from Mr. King Bull's interpretation.' In spite of the rather slow bureaucracy, everything seemed to be going well.

But on 20 October, half a year after Cecilia Reeves first drew the BBC's attention to Beckett's play, the wind seemed to be turning. Suddenly, Val Gielgud personally intervened in the matter, denouncing the play with the then fashionable Caulfieldian term 'phoney': 'I am left with the impression of something that is basically "phoney".' His advice to John Morris was to 'drop' the project. Several months passed, until on 1 February 1954, J. Ormerod Greenwood wrote to McWhinnie, drawing attention again to the importance of the play. Two days later, McWhinnie replied, thanking Greenwood for his memo, but obediently repeating

⁴ All the passages from BBC correspondence in this essay are quoted from the BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham, scriptwriter folder, BECKETT, SAMUEL FILE 1953-1962. I owe a debt of gratitude to the editors of this volume for providing me with digital facsimiles of this correspondence.

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the same phrasing of the official standpoint that there was something 'basically phoney' about the play and that they had accordingly 'dropped it'.

The sudden change of mind that partially caused Val Gielgud to condemn the piece was explained in a note from E.J. King Bull to Leslie Stokes, dated 24 May 1954. When he had read Beckett's own translation, he thought it was much less funny and racy than the French version. What's more, the British reviewer thought 'one might seriously say' that the author had had 'Irish inflections and idiom in his mind'. The slander in the note gradually builds up. King Bull knew from hearsay that Beckett was 'un sauvage'; collaboration with him would be 'out of the question', but the Paris representative might perhaps receive permission 'to tinker' with his translation.

In the midst of all this lukewarm halfheartedness, J. Ormerod Greenwood made another warm plea for the play on 1 June, four months after his previous note. This time he called it 'altogether a "must"'. But to no avail. Nothing happened, and on 5 May 1955 Barbara Bray, then Script Editor at the BBC 'Sound', returned the script of *En attendant Godot* to the Paris representative Cecilia Reeves. After the BBC's more than two years of hesitating, it had 'now finally been decided against'. On the same day, she also returned the English translation to the International Copyright Agency, stating quite clearly that 'the idea of producing it on Sound Radio has now been abandoned'. That was that: Beckett was effectively sidelined by means of a judgement, 'basically phoney', according to Caulfieldian criteria.

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
<i>Godot</i>								

Still, the BBC had not given up on Beckett entirely. An extract from *Watt* was broadcast on 9 September, and less than two weeks later (20 September 1955) – 1.5 months after the opening of Peter Hall's production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Centre in London and a week after its transfer to the Criterion Theatre (Pilling 2006: 128) – the Head of Drama, Val Gielgud received another plea to broadcast *Waiting for Godot*, this time from Helena Wood. Her concluding judgement is highlighted with a double pencil mark: 'there is so much significance, vitality and poetry in the dialogue and subtle music in the phrasing that it is obviously radio material. And the theme, though eternal, has a sharp immediacy. I feel this is a play we should be sorry not to have broadcast.'

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Val Gielgud subsequently gave instructions to Raymond Raikes to go and see *Waiting for Godot* at the Criterion Theatre on 28 September and report on his 'impressions of its suitability for radio', which he sent the next day. In his opinion 'it would be as vital in radio as it is on the stage.' After stressing that he 'would not advise a single cut', Raikes concludes that it was no less than a 'minor tragedy' that the BBC had not been more enterprising in 1953 and his advice is to 'record and broadcast this production as soon as possible lest it be said that the BBC has once again "missed the boat".' Subsequently, the copyright was cleared, but eventually, the audience of the Third Programme would still have to wait almost 5 years before the BBC finally broadcast *Waiting for Godot* (27 April 1960), seven years after Cecilia Reeves' initial suggestion:

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
<i>Godot</i>								...

2. *Fin de partie/Endgame*: 'quite unsuitable for broadcasting'

In the meantime, John Morris sent a cutting from the *Sunday Times* (17 June) to the Head of Drama, announcing two new plays by Beckett. The first work was the then still unnamed mime 'Act Without Words'. For obvious reasons, this mime was of no interest to the 'Sound' department of BBC Drama, unlike the announcement of the second work, which is marked in the margins. The future title *Fin de partie* of this work was not definitive yet. Underneath Morris's memo, Val Gielgud has penciled: 'We've asked Cecilia Reeves to get the script if she can.' Reeves reacted immediately. Although she called Beckett an 'elusive character', she apparently managed to persuade him to write something for radio – which is the beginning of a new chapter in Beckett's career, the genesis of the first of his radio plays. With regard to *Fin de partie*, Beckett wrote to her on 4 July 1956 that it seemed unlikely that his new – at that point still untitled play – would be performed at Marseille; that he did not wish to have it translated for some time; and that it was so visual that it was quite unsuitable for broadcasting. As Cecilia Reeves was on holiday, John Morris received a copy of Beckett's letter and was quick to let him know (11 July) he was '*extremely excited* to hear that you have had an idea which may lead to something in the Third Programme' (emphasis added). He asked to meet Beckett on Wednesday the 18th in Paris. That same day, Morris reported to the Head of Drama that Beckett had shown himself 'extremely keen to write an original work for the Third Programme'. And as to the possibility of broadcasting the 'non-radiogenic' play *Fin*

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de partie, Beckett – according to Morris – did *not* think it was too visual for radio. On 27 September 1956, Beckett sent the script of *All That Fall* to Morris, and a few months later (13 January 1957) it was already broadcast. Morris congratulated Beckett on 15 January, and a week later the Paris Representative confirmed that Beckett 'intend[ed] to write another broadcast' for the BBC, calling him 'a most charming man'. Clearly, the atmosphere had changed, and so had Beckett's image at the BBC – from 'un sauvage' to an 'elusive character' to 'a most charming man'.

Beckett sent a copy of *Fin de partie* to Morris, who thanked him for it on 11 February 1957 and expressed his wish to broadcast it. But Beckett repeated his original objections. He thought *Fin de Partie* would be unsuitable for radio and was not sure that he would be able to translate. I would talk it over with Donald McWhinnie, whom he was going to meet the next Tuesday. After this meeting, McWhinnie reported to his boss, Val Gielgud (21 February): 'My impression is that if he is to write at all in the near future it will be for radio, which has captured his imagination.' With regard to the possibility of broadcasting *En attendant Godot* or *Fin de partie*, Beckett had been very clear: 'He is not in the least interested in "adaptation" and would much prefer to write something new for the medium than to adapt "Godot" or the new play.' Nonetheless, Val Gielgud directed Barbara Bray a few weeks later to do just that and make arrangements for an 'adaptation' of *Fin de partie* in English translation. Barbara Bray even translated a few samples. In the meantime, the original French version was broadcast on 2 May 1957.

While Beckett insisted that his plays were not radiogenic, he suggested that his prose, on the contrary, *was* quite suitable for radio. Five days after the broadcast of *Fin de partie*, it was Beckett himself who came up with the idea to use *Molloy* as a text for radio. And on 30 June, when he had just finished a rough translation of *Fin de partie*, he even suggested another prose text, *Malone Dies*, as a possibility for radio broadcast. McWhinnie seems to have felt the need to curb Beckett's enthusiasm, writing on 3 July: 'I think we had better stick to "Molloy" in the first instance. If it comes off there is no reason why we should not experiment with the others.' After McWhinnie's visit to Paris in November, the decision was made – in a very short period of time – to broadcast *From an Abandoned Work* (14 December) in the same week as *Molloy* (10 December).

On the last day of 1957, Donald McWhinnie wrote a long letter to Beckett, with all kinds of new suggestions, such as 'What about doing a section from 'Murphy' sometime?'

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McWhinnie expressed his concern about the Lord Chancellor's censorship of 'The bastard' in *Endgame*, but immediately saw another opportunity for the Third Programme: 'The news about "End Game" is very disturbing. If there is likely to be an indefinite theatrical postponement would you consider letting us do a broadcast.' Beckett had mentioned to McWhinnie that he was writing something in English, to which McWhinnie did not fail to respond encouragingly. While he was probably referring to an early draft of *Embers*, the context of this writing in English also includes not only the translation of *Fin de partie* (which had already been completed in August), but also the translation of *L'Innommable*. After a first aborted attempt in 1956, and a long period of abandonment, Beckett had taken up the translation again on 22 October 1957 (indicated by a horizontal line in the first of three notebooks of the English manuscript). The first page of the second notebook is dated 'November 1957'. On 22 November, he wrote to Ethna MacCarthy: 'I am supposed to be translating *L'Innommable*, which is impossible' (quoted in Knowlson 1996, 441); and on 11 December he told Mary Hutchinson that he had only managed to complete just over half of the first draft (see Pilling 2006: 137).

His work on the translation was interrupted by what McWhinnie referred to as 'writing in English again'. On 18 December 1957, he wrote to Jacoba van Velde that he had started writing a radiophonic text in English, but that he was not doing it wholeheartedly. He clearly expressed his appreciation of Magee's readings – which he claimed would encourage him if he were encourageable.⁵ This negative attitude is typical of the correspondence with Jacoba van Velde, and tends to present an overly bleak picture. He does seem to have been both encourageable and effectively encouraged by the broadcasts. What he was writing in English was most probably the first draft of *Embers*, in a notebook preserved at Harvard University's Houghton Library. A note in the manuscript of his translation of *L'Innommable* indicates that Beckett resumed his work on the translation on 21 January 1958: 'Reprise 21.1.58 après échec de *Henry et Ada*' ['Taken up again 21.1.58 after failure of *Henry and Ada*'] (HRC MS SB 5/9/2, 23v; qtd in Van Hulle and Weller 2014, 40). This 'échec' was not exactly a 'failure', as it would eventually become *Embers*. Beckett told McWhinnie on 23 December that he preferred Magee's *Molloy* to his reading of *From an Abandoned Work*, and that he was trying to write in English (Pilling 2006: 138), which is most probably a reference to the draft in the Harvard notebook – a dialogue between Henry and Ada, referred to as 'He' and 'She', which

⁵ Correspondence Samuel Beckett – Jacoba van Velde, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 19794, 204 ff.

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opens without a title. The voice of 'She' is described as low and remote throughout (HU MS THR 70.3). In order to create these voices, Beckett had interrupted his translation of *L'Innommable*, only a few pages after he had written 'It must not be forgotten, sometimes I forget, that all is a question of voices'.⁶ If the Harvard manuscript is the trace of this 'échec de Henry et Ada' the writing of *Embers* does seem to have been going rather smoothly, at least initially. The first three pages of the sketch are written in a fairly legible hand and without too many cancellations. It also suggests that Beckett had a pretty good idea of the radio play's structure, for although some parts of *Embers* do not feature yet in this draft, Beckett did already indicate the places where he wanted to insert them – such as the opening monologue, Addie's music lesson and her riding lesson.

But Beckett apparently put the sketch aside a few days after he had started it. On Boxing Day, Beckett wrote to Barney Rosset: 'Excited by Magee's readings I have been trying to write another radio script for the Third. It is not coming off. There is something in my English writing that infuriates me and I can't get rid of it. A kind of lack of brakes [...]. I have laid it aside for the moment' (Beckett, qtd. in Zilliacus 1976, 149).

A chronology of the first years of Beckett's work for the BBC shows how long it took for the BBC to fully appreciate the radiophonic potential of Beckett's work. But once this happened, it led to a period of a concentrated succession of various works:

Waiting for Godot:

17 March 1953: production in consideration

5 May 1955: 'decided against'

20 September 1955: Idea taken up again in

27 April 1960: first BBC broadcast

Watt

9 September 1955: first BBC broadcast

All That Fall

27 September 1956: Script sent to John Morris

⁶ Beckett 2010, 59; HRC MS SB 5/9/2, 17r; Beckett Digital Manuscript Project, *L'Innommable / The Unnamable*, ed. Dirk Van Hulle, Shane Weller and Vincent Neyt, Brussels: University Press Antwerp, 2013, www.beckettarchive.org.

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13 January 1957: first BBC broadcast

Fin de partie / Endgame

11 February 1957: copy sent to Morris

2 May 1957: first BBC broadcast (French version)

22 May 1962: first BBC broadcast (English version)

Molloy

10 December 1957: first BBC broadcast

From an Abandoned Work

14 December 1957: first BBC broadcast

Malone Dies

18 June 1958: first BBC broadcast

The Unnamable

19 January 1959: first BBC broadcast

Embers

November-December 1957: first draft

21 January 1958: temporarily abandoned

24 June 1959: first BBC broadcast

It is remarkable how many things were happening more or less simultaneously in this short period of time, especially in the Winter of 1957-58, as the following table visualizes (the dots represent the months of preparatory work, the vertical lines represent the broadcasts):

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960
<i>Godot</i>								...
<i>Fin de P. Endgame</i>								

<i>ATFall</i>				...				
<i>Molloy</i>								
<i>FaAW</i>					.			
<i>Malone</i>					.			
<i>The Unn.</i>				..	...	.	...	
<i>Embers</i>					.			

The intensity of '*travail*' in this period is marked by diversity of the media and genres in which Beckett was working:

- While he was translating *L'Innommable* and writing *Embers* in the winter of 1957-58, passages from *Molloy* and *From an Abandoned Work* were being broadcast.
- The censored words in *Endgame* were constantly on his mind throughout the month of January.
- On 13 January 1958, two weeks after McWhinnie's New Year's letter, Beckett typed a rather long letter to McWhinnie, mentioning that Devine had suggested he write a stage monologue for Magee; that he preferred not to be commissioned; and that what he had been writing was 'with thought of' McWhinnie, Magee and the Third Programme.
- On 21 January, after the '*échec*' of *Embers*, Beckett resumed translating *L'Innommable*.
- On 15 February, Beckett could tell McWhinnie that he had 'almost finished first draft' of the translation (*The Unnamable*) and that he would 'return to the radio text [*Embers*] and see if there is anything to be saved from that wreck' once the translation of *L'Innommable* was completed (quoted in Knowlson 1996: 790 n. 1).
- On 20 February he started writing the Magee monologue (*Krapp's Last Tape*).⁷
- Three days later, Beckett finished his translation of *L'Innommable*. The end of the translation is marked in the manuscript: '23.2.1958 Ussy' (see Van Hulle and Weller 2014, 48).

In the meantime, at the BBC, the 'prayer passage' caused quite a fuss. The matter had to be examined by the 'Assistant Director of Sound Broadcasting', who wrote a page-long

⁷ For a more detailed chronology and account of the genesis, see Beckett Digital Manuscript Project, vol. 3, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015, forthcoming).

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report to the Director of Sound Broadcasting, L. Wellington on 29 January. The next day Wellington wrote a long note to the Director General. From the Director General it went to the Chairman of the BBC himself, who received a note on 3 February, to which he replied the same day: 'I think he [Beckett] should be asked to find alternative for the word'. From the top, the news trickled down again and on 12 February, the Controller of the Third Programme John Morris received a note from Wellington, saying that 'the Chairman feels obliged to object to the use of the word 'bastard' on page 37 – not to the play, or to the episode denying the existence of God, but to the word 'bastard'. Will you ask Beckett, when you see him in Paris, whether he would agree to change or omit the word for the purpose of broadcasting.' Possibly by way of compensation, the Third Programme picked up on the idea, suggested earlier by Beckett, to broadcast passages from *Malone Dies*. McWhinnie suggested to Morris on 18 February that he 'should like to ask John Beckett to write some music for the production of Samuel Beckett's 'Malone Dies''. He must have decided that it was easier to discuss the affair on the telephone, for two days later he wrote to Beckett that 'It was good to hear your voice again the other evening. I find the whole business of "End Game" extremely upsetting'. In the same letter, McWhinnie makes a few very concrete suggestions for sequences from *Malone Dies* to be read by Magee. The date of this letter is the same as the date of the first draft of *Krapp's Last Tape*.

3. *Krapp's Last Tape*: '(definitely non-radio)'

On 26 February, Beckett replied to Donald McWhinnie, making suggestions for a revised sequence of passages from *Malone Dies*. After mentioning that he has just finished the first draft of his translation of *L'Innommable*, Beckett is uncharacteristically enthusiastic about his work: 'I have an exciting idea for a short stage monologue for Magee', immediately adding a disclaimer: 'But I know my exciting ideas and how depressing they can become' (Beckett 2014, 111).

While he wrote the first draft of *Krapp's Last Tape*, he was still translating the last part of *L'Innommable* (until 23 February). And he had only recently been listening to the tapes with the broadcasts of *Molloy* and *From an Abandoned Work*. According to Michael Robinson 'It is almost certain that Beckett abandoned the novel in favour of the play' (Robinson 1969: 212). It seems unlikely that Beckett abandoned the piece of prose *in order to* write the play *Krapp's Last Tape*, since *From an Abandoned Work* was probably written in

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1954 (Pilling 2006: 122-3) and already published in *Trinity News* on 6 June 1956. But Robinson does have a point when he draws attention to the affinities, which according to him are 'too great to be dismissed as coincidence': for instance 'the same nostalgia for a lost past'; 'Krapp also thinks back to his mother, in his case to remember her death in an obsessional mixture of guilt and sorrow'; and while Krapp keeps coming back to the 'farewell to love'-scene, the protagonist of *From an Abandoned Work* suggests 'A good woman might have been the making of me' (Robinson 1969: 212). Perhaps Beckett did not abandon the prose work 'in favour of the play', but unearthing the text again and preparing it for the broadcast on 14 and the repeat on 19 December may explain some of the affinities with *Krapp's Last Tape*.

The first drafts of *Krapp's Last Tape* were written in the so-called 'Eté 56' notebook. Apart from material for *Krapp's Last Tape*, this exercise book contains drafts of *Fin de partie*, *Comment c'est*, *All That Fall*, *Happy Days* and *Words and Music*. The notebook reflects the quasi-simultaneous development of various projects in the second half of the 1950s. The BBC's catalysing role in this period also helps us date some of the notes and drafts in this notebook more precisely. The notes on *Fin de partie* start with a 'Petit supplément' to the play, consisting of Nagg and Nell's dialogue regarding the sawdust or sand in their bins. The additions to *Fin de partie* are followed by 'Arsy-versy' and other notes for the radio play *All That Fall*, including the biblical verse from which the radio play's title derives: 'The Lord upholdeth all that fall and / raiseth up all those that be bowed down. / (Ps 145.15)'. Page 03r can be dated rather precisely thanks to the BBC archive, since the passage at the bottom is a draft of the typed letter Beckett sent to John Morris on 27 September 1956:

Dear Mr Morris,

Herewith the script we spoke of in Paris.

It calls for a rather special quality of bruitage, perhaps not quite clear from the text.

I can let you have a note on this if you are interested in the script for the Third Programme. (Beckett 2011, 656)

After a few other scenes for *Fin de partie*, such as the story of the tailor, Beckett wrote the first draft of *Krapp's Last Tape*, called 'Magee Monologue' (20 February 1958). He alternated between making typescripts and writing in this copybook. The manuscript versions

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of *Krapp's Last Tape* continue until page 21r. Again, it is thanks to the BBC archive that we can date this page rather precisely, because the facing verso (20v) contains the draft of a letter regarding a prospectus of a tape-recorder to be sent to Beckett in order for him to check up on the mechanics of it. This may be a draft of the letter to John Beckett, mentioned in Beckett's letter to Donald McWhinnie of 7 March 1958:

I have written a short stage monologue for Magee (definitely non-radio). It involves a tape-recorder with the mechanics of which I am unfamiliar. I can't release it until I check up on some points. I have asked John B. to send me a book of the words (instructions for use). If he delays in doing so I may have to ask you to help me. Indeed if you happen to have such a thing handy you might send it along straight away. The monologue is rather a s[e]ntimental affair in my best original English manner. Begin to understand why I write in French. (Beckett 2014, 115)

So, while Beckett had told McWhinnie in January that what he was writing was 'with thought of you and Magee and the Third' (see above), the thought of Magee had clearly gained the upper hand, and Beckett could not have been clearer about its unsuitability for broadcasting.

In conclusion, it seems fair to say that there is a sense of justice in Beckett's parenthesis '(definitely non-radio)': the BBC had been 'culpably unenterprising' by sidelining *Waiting for Godot* when Beckett could have used the publicity in the first half of the 1950s; now, towards the end of the 1950s, Beckett – even if it can hardly have been his conscious intention – effectively sidelined the BBC as a mere source of inspiration for the *non*-radio play *Krapp's Last Tape*. Many critics have drawn attention to the moment(s) of inspiration when Beckett heard his own characters on tape at the BBC's Paris studio on Avenue Hoche, but it is good to realize that the BBC and Magee's voice as direct sources of inspiration had a precursor in the RTF, notably the recorded moment Roger Blin read Beckett's words preceding the first broadcast of a scenes from *En attendant Godot*, lending a voice to this self-narrating author performing the role of someone who, like Krapp, is clearly aware of the distance in time between his present, unknowing self (claiming he 'know[s] no more about the characters than what they say') and his earlier self or selves (showing 'the little [he or they] could glimpse').

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In many ways, radio/the BBC seems to have been a catalyst for Beckett's work in the late 1950s. When he wrote to McWhinnie that he preferred not to be commissioned, Beckett seems to have been aware of the strange effect of the collaboration with the BBC on his creative production. What he was trying to write was 'with thought of' McWhinnie, Magee and the Third Programme, but he did not say he was writing 'for' the radio. The 'thought of' the radio and the people involved in the *broadcasting* of his *prose* works seems to have been a paradoxical way of moving on with his *drama* in a *non-radiogenic* direction.

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