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Reference:

Verhulst Pim.- 'Just howls from time to time': dating Pochade radiophonique
Samuel Beckett today : an annual bilingual review - ISSN 1875-7405 - 27(2015), p. 147-162
To cite this reference: <http://hdl.handle.net/10067/1311800151162165141>

This is the authors's version of an article published in *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 27 ("Beginning of the murmur": Archival Pre-Texts and Other Sources), ed. Conor Carville and Mark Nixon, Brill, 2015, pp. 147 - 162. Please refer to the published version for correct citation and content. For more information see <http://www.brill.com/products/book/beginning-murmur>.

"JUST HOWLS FROM TIME TO TIME": Dating *Pochade radiophonique*

Pim Verhulst

Of Beckett's six radio plays, only the date of *Pochade radiophonique* (*Rough for Radio II*) is uncertain. All critics, following Beckett, have suggested an early 1960s origin, but this paper proposes a late 1958 dating, which situates the radio play just before *Comment c'est*. On the basis of related archival material, such as the Barbara Bray letters, the papers of Robert Pinget and the BBC Written Archives, it repositions *Pochade* as part of a creative process involving the work of the Marquis de Sade and Jean Racine, the radio medium, historical events and Beckett's growing sense of writer's block throughout the 1950s.

In the period between 1956 and 1962 Samuel Beckett wrote six radio plays, excluding his English adaptation of Robert Pinget's *La Manivelle* (1959) as *The Old Tune* (1960). Four of them – *All That Fall*, *Embers*, *Words and Music*, and *Cascando* – were published shortly after completion. The two remaining pieces did not appear until much later, as sketches, entitled *Esquisse radiophonique* and *Pochade radiophonique*. *Esquisse* was the first to be published, in *Minuit* 5 (September 1973), soon followed by *Pochade*, in *Minuit* 16 (November 1975). Beckett seemed unable to remember their exact dates of composition at the time, guessing "vers 1962-63?" for *Esquisse* (1973, 35) and "années 60?" for *Pochade* (1975, 12). In fact, the manuscript of *Esquisse* records two dates, 29 and 30 November 1961, situating its genesis roughly one week after *Words and Music* and one day before *Cascando*. Unfortunately, no holograph has been located for *Pochade* and the two surviving typescripts show no dates. Owing to this lack of material traces, Beckett's guess has become accepted.

Early 1960s Dating

All English publications of *Pochade* – as (*Rough for*) *Radio II* – have followed Beckett's early 1960s estimate, yet always dropping the crucial question mark of the French versions that underscores its

uncertainty. While French editions have always left open the possibility of an earlier date, English editions gradually abandoned it. As a result, the few critics who have tried to refine *Pochade*'s date of composition have concentrated exclusively on this period. Only Carola Veit (182) and Elissa Guralnick (202) propose 1960. At the other end of the spectrum we have two of *Pochade*'s earliest commentators, Richard Admussen (73) and John Fletcher (166), who both suggested "ca. 1962." They do not state their reasons for this dating but probably follow the sequence implied by the numbers in the English titles of the pieces – (*Rough for*) *Radio I* and *II* – as many critics later have. This is questionable, however, as Beckett did not number the scripts until their first publication in the 1970s, more than ten years after they were written. In one of the most recent monographs on the subject, Kevin Branigan still considers *Pochade* as the "final radio work," or rather "the end-point of Beckett's engagement in radio drama" (129).

The majority of critics, however, have opted for a middle ground, canonized by Ruby Cohn in her reference guide to Beckett's complete work. She appends the play to 1961, while admitting in a footnote that "[t]he date of *Pochade radiophonique* is problematic" (274).

Mauthner and January 1961

Discouraging as this outlook may seem, it has not deterred John Pilling from rising to the challenge. Although his first guess was "either late in 1961 [...] or early in 1962" (2006a, 158), he made a more refined proposition in his *Samuel Beckett Chronology*. In fact, he is the only critic to trace the origin of *Pochade* back to a specific month or event in Beckett's life. As Pilling notes, shortly after moving from his old apartment to the boulevard Saint-Jacques in January 1961, Beckett mentioned the Austro-Hungarian philosopher and language skeptic Fritz Mauthner to Anne Atik, the wife of artist Avigdor Arikha. Since Beckett also uses Mauthner's name in *Pochade* – the only time in his entire oeuvre – Pilling suspects he may have been working on the text in January 1961, so that "the second of the radio sketches (as numbered in their English versions) may have predated the first" (2006b, 153). Everett Frost adopted Pilling's alternate dating for the new Faber edition of Beckett's work for radio and screen: "begun January 1961(?), thus perhaps preceding *Rough for Radio I*" (qtd. in Beckett 2009a, 175). With this question mark the necessary caution of the Minuit journal and book publications of *Pochade* has returned to the attempts at dating the radio script. That Pilling made a persuasive case is proven

by Ulrika Maude's recent statement that "*Rough for Radio II* was in fact written between *Words and Music* and *Cascando*" (190). But as Pilling and Frost readily admit, their more refined dating may still not be definitive. The Mauthner connection is certainly a refreshing and important contribution to the debate, but it remains precarious ground for dating.

Linda Ben-Zvi outlines the main difficulty of trying to link Mauthner, and his principal work, the *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (1901-1902), to Beckett's writings in any temporal sense: "For over fifty years – from the composition of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in 1932 to the 1979 completion of *Company* – two Mauthner themes appear and reappear in Beckett's works: the impossibility of verification and the impossibility of proving this impossibility" (70). Ben-Zvi refers to the contentious truth value of all language, and the same issue is at play in *Pochade*. Fox is tortured and harassed by Animator, Dick and Stenographer, who try to extract from him one truthful word or phrase not tainted by the inherent falsity of language, and therefore able to set them all free at last. The "exhortations" (Beckett 2009a, 60) that Stenographer recites at the beginning of the text remind the team of the risks involved: "The least word let fall in solitude and thereby in danger, as Mauthner has shown, of being no longer needed, *may be it*" (60; emphasis in original). For this reason they need to carefully write down all of Fox's utterances, even if they have no means of recognizing the one word or phrase of deliverance. That *Pochade* is the only text in which Mauthner's name explicitly occurs is an important exception, but in Beckett's personal contacts it came up more frequently.

Seven years earlier, on 17 February 1954, Beckett had already named the philosopher in a letter to German translator Hans Naumann, who enquired about his major influences: "Among the books that I explored for Joyce there was *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* by Fritz Mauthner which greatly impressed me. I have often wanted to re-read it. But it seems impossible to find" (2011, 462). Thus, despite attempts to find it, it seems that Beckett had been unable to procure the work by 1954. Recent scholarship by Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon has revealed, however, that Beckett's personal library holds a copy of Mauthner's *Beiträge* with numerous pencil lines in the margins, adding up to more than seven hundred marked passages (158). In light of Pilling's suggested date for the radio play, it is very tempting indeed to presume that Beckett acquired the *Beiträge* at some point between

February 1954 and January 1961, with the reference to Mauthner in *Pochade* bearing testimony to a re-reading of the three heavy tomes. Unfortunately, Dirk Van Hulle concludes that "there is no explicit indication or conclusive evidence to corroborate the conjecture that the markings were made by Beckett. Unless more evidence is found, one cannot exclude the possibility that the marks were made by someone else" (236). Another possibility that we cannot exclude is that Beckett may have added the *Beiträge* much later to his bookshelves.

Anne Atik says in her memoir that Beckett talked about Fritz Mauthner on many other occasions besides January 1961: "Thereafter, whenever Mauthner's name came up, Sam would ask casually, but with evident curiosity, how Weiler was and if I still heard from him" (19). Atik knew Gershon Weiler, who later wrote *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (1970), one of the first extensive studies of his life and work. Perhaps Beckett's comments to Naumann and Atik merely confirm a lasting interest in the philosopher, rather than a hands-on rediscovery of his work, for as Van Hulle and Nixon note in their study of his personal library: "In order to insert the explicit yet enigmatic reference to Mauthner in the manuscripts of *Pochade radiophonique* [...], Beckett certainly would not have needed to reread the *Beiträge*" (163). In light of these considerations, it is difficult to consider the appearance of Mauthner in the radio play as conclusive, fixing the debate about its origin to January 1961. Beckett mentioned the philosopher well before and well after that period, which considerably widens the potential range. Because the reference to Mauthner is not enough to date the radio play, other considerations must be taken into account.

Late 1950s Dating

One remarkable aspect of the debate is that critics have regularly stressed the resemblance of *Pochade* to Beckett's later radio plays as proof of its early 1960s origin. For example, speaking of the two broadcasting "Roughs," Graley Herren states that "the pieces clearly belong to Beckett's radio phase of the early 1960s" (45). To Martin Esslin, it also seems "fairly evident" that "*Esquisse Radiophonique* and *Pochade Radiophonique* are intimately related to *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, and are, indeed, in the nature of preliminary sketches for them," although he voices significant doubts as well: "The *esquisse*, however, is much closer to both of these than the *pochade*" (100). James Knowlson expressed a similar reserve when describing the four "Roughs" in *Ends and Odds* (1976/1977) as "two aborted fragments of

theatre from the late 1950s and early 1960s and two short pieces of radio from roughly the same period" (618). Like the French editions, he does not rule out an earlier date for *Pochade* either.

What makes it thematically difficult to group *Pochade* together with the radio scripts of the early 1960s is that music has no place in it, whereas it is central to the others. Because *Pochade* continues the inward turn begun by *Embers*, and thematizes the creative process re-enacted in *Words and Music*, *Esquisse* and *Cascando*, it seems more logical to situate *Pochade* somewhere in the middle of this continuum, after *Embers* but before the later "text-music tandems." It is also important to stress that *Words and Music*, *Esquisse* and *Cascando* were all commissioned scripts for collaboration with a composer – John Beckett and Marcel Mihalovici – meaning there was no incentive in this period for Beckett to write a radio play that did not involve music. If it had not been for these requests, he may not have returned to radio at all in the 1960s.

What is more, as opposed to *Words and Music*, *Esquisse* and *Cascando*, *Pochade* is nowhere mentioned in Beckett's letters of the early 1960s. His letters of the 1950s, however, do contain what might be construed as an oblique reference to the radio play. On 17 November 1958, upon his return to Ussy from *Krapp* rehearsals in London, Beckett wrote to Barbara Bray: "Already the mouth opens to howl and closes as often as not without having done so, though none to hear. A personage for next time – says nothing, just howls from time to time" (2014, 174). This comment suggests he was already thinking along the lines of *Comment c'est*. But since the first notebook was not begun until a month later, on 17 December 1958, the hypothesis I wish to investigate in the remainder of this article is that the origin of *Pochade* may have to be sought in the second half of 1958. In other words, I suggest that Beckett did not work on *Pochade* during the long and fragmented genesis of *Comment c'est* (1958-1960), or when he translated the text into English as *How It Is* (1960-1963), but before that sustained period. In this alternative chronology, the radio play led to the prose text, not the other way around.

Torture, Sade and Writer's Block

The first matter to consider is the use of torture in *Pochade*. The theme is most extensively and most explicitly explored in *Comment c'est*, but the prose work actually revives an earlier, unpublished French fragment that Beckett abandoned in February 1952. "On le tortura bien," as it is

generally called, refers to the opening line of the text: "On le tortura bien, jusqu'à ce qu'il parlât [He was thoroughly tortured, until he spoke]" (Cohn, 205). There are three characters, Pat, Nat and Mat, who serve as torturer, notetaker and narrator. Cohn's summary highlights the peculiar narrative situation of the piece:

The victim is called "le narrateur" by the actual narrator of Beckett's story and [...] the torture takes place in a tent. Reluctant to witness cruelty, *our* narrator waits outside the tent after instructing Pat in the application of torture, while Nat records the utterances of the victim. "Je's" account then shifts away from that victim to the relationship between the three colleagues, for whom the nameless narrator's death (mentioned almost in passing) is a liberation.

(205)

This confusion between the narrator of the story and the victim tortured to speak in the tent makes it possible to read "On le tortura bien" as a metafictional representation of the writing process, especially because the fate of the individual characters depends on that of their narrator. While the narrative situation of the story closely resembles that of *Pochade* and *Comment c'est*, 1952 is of course far too early for this text to have had any direct bearing on the radio play, as Beckett did not start writing for the medium until mid-1956. But it shows that the thematic use of torture has its roots in the early 1950s. One important reason for the occurrence of the topic in "On le tortura bien" may have been Beckett's rediscovery of the Marquis de Sade's work around this time.

After his first direct contact with *Les 120 journées de Sodome* in 1938 (Knowlson, 293), Beckett returned to Sade's novel in late 1951 and early 1952, finding the experience "less staggering than the first time" (2011, 309-10). At some point in 1951, Beckett also "jotted down a handful of phrases" from Georges Bataille's preface to a limited edition of Sade's *Justine*, in the first of two notebooks containing the *Textes pour rien* (Pilling 2014, 123). In 1938, Pilling notes, Beckett did not yet know "what could be made of Sade" for his own writing (2014, 117), describing the effect of *Les 120 journées* as "a kind of metaphysical ecstasy" to Thomas MacGreevy (Beckett 2009c, 607). Fourteen years later, being less personally affected by the book and thus more capable of critical assessment, it was easier to grasp how Sade could be of use. One of the aspects that intrigued Beckett about

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Les 120 journées, Pilling concludes, was the idea of Sade as "the imprisoned man" (2014, 121). This image of captivity, together with the notion of a "violent silence" or "a language which is not a language" that Bataille contrasts with "the language of reason" in his preface to *Justine* (qtd. in Pilling 2014, 124), not only finds immediate resonance in the unfinished prose text "On le tortura bien," but also later in *Pochade*, where the imprisoned Fox answers Animator's plea to "be reasonable" (Beckett 2009a, 66) with silence, and only speaks when tortured.

Why Beckett employed sadism as a metaphor for writing, presented as a self-inflicted form of self-torture, may be connected to his growing sense of writer's block in the early 1950s, contrasting sharply with the "frenzy of writing" between 1945 and 1950. As Ruby Cohn's *A Beckett Canon* (2001) illustrates, he abandoned at least as many texts as he finished in the 1950s, the last dead end being *Fragment de théâtre II* in November 1958. The thirteen *Textes pour rien* chronicle Beckett's inability to "go on" after *L'Innommable*, a feeling that permeates his letters of the decade. While theatre and radio offered a relief from prose, resulting in *Fin de partie* (1954-1956), *All That Fall* (1956), *Embers* (1957-1958) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), by the end of 1958 his brief upsurge of creativity had ceased. Also, by mid-1958, most of Beckett's new post-war writing had been translated, which confronted him with the fact that he had not been able to finish any new substantial prose in eight years. His anxiety became most acute after finishing the English translation of *L'Innommable* in June 1958. In a letter to Barbara Bray of 29 November 1958, concerning selections from *The Unnamable* for broadcast on the BBC Third Programme, Beckett told her: "I am in acute crisis about my work (on the lines familiar to you by now) and have decided that I not merely can't but won't go on as I have been going more or less ever since the *Textes pour Rien*" (2014, 183-84).

Having come full circle, Beckett's situation now resembled the one at beginning of the decade, which may explain why torture as a metaphor for writing resurfaced in his work at this time. Since the 1960s were a more fruitful period, *Pochade* could have a vital role in his creative appropriation of Sade, starting in 1951 and culminating in *Comment c'est* at the end of the 1950s.

The Context of the Algerian War

Apart from Sade and writer's block, historical circumstances may also have precipitated the return of the topic of torture in late 1958. In a series of loose diary notes, preserved at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet in Paris, Robert Pinget recalls a meeting with friends at a café, on 8 August 1958, when they debated over such serious topics as the death sentence and torture (PNG-354-3). As Pinget remembers the conversation, Beckett was not entirely against the death penalty, depending on the circumstances, which drew violent reactions from the group. Next, Beckett asked if torture might not be justified in some cases. He gave the example of a situation in which a loved one was kidnapped, and torturing the *séquestrant* (sequester) proved to be the only means to set that person free. Opinions were divided on the matter. Pinget distinguished individual cases of torture – Beckett's example – from those undertaken by the state, but 'Michel' – probably Butor – objected to such a simple distinction because paratroopers must have tortured North Africans to help fellow soldiers. (PNG-354-3, 4r-4v).

This comment frames the entire conversation in the context of the French-Algerian war. As Knowlson pointed out, "an intellectual battle was being waged in France, particularly from the spring of 1957, in which the methods used by the French military both in Algeria and in France itself were condemned" and several books were published claiming that "torture had become institutionalised in the French army in its dealings with Algerians" (493). Butor signed "le Manifeste des 121," an open letter by French intellectuals condemning the Algerian war, published in the magazine *Vérité-Liberté* on 6 September 1960 (Lancry, 43). Beckett also took part by helping Jérôme Lindon stash a series of banned "Documents" that he had published about the Algerian incidents, the most important being *La Question* (1958) by Henri Alleg (Knowlson, 493-94). Since Beckett, Butor and Pinget were all authors from the Minit stable, some of them directly involved in the revolt against the state, it is not surprising that the topic animated their discussion on 4 August 1958.

"The use of state-sponsored torture," Anthony Uhlmann notes, "is an issue that would have been very much before Beckett when he wrote both *Rough for Radio II* and *Rough for Theatre II*" (58). It is easy to see how the conversation about the death sentence, taking place two weeks before Beckett began working on *Théâtre II*, may have inspired the genesis of the play, in which A and B decide on the basis of confusing evidence and testimonies if C should commit suicide by jumping from a window. In view of this link between the death sentence and *Théâtre*

II, the co-occurrence of the death penalty with torture in the discussion above may imply that Beckett wrote *Pochade* shortly thereafter. The testimonies of military torture in Algeria and France may even have triggered a related memory from World War II. As Knowlson states, "Dick," the name of the silent character beating Fox in *Pochade*, was the resistance alias used by Alfred Péron, one of Beckett's closest friends in Paris. Péron was captured by the Nazis, imprisoned in a concentration camp and tortured for information (341-42). Even if Beckett detached the death penalty and torture from their original historical contexts, and reused the topics for his own artistic purposes, the circumstances of the late 1950s also make this period more likely for the origin of *Pochade* than the early 1960s.

Before we can understand the role of radio in this process, we must first turn to another literary influence of the decade, because it explains Beckett's dislike of theatre at this time.

Theatrical Disgust, Racine and the Mind

Beckett explained to Robert Pinget why *Théâtre II* had failed. Pinget took note of the comment in his unpublished memoir "Notre ami Sam" (PNG-354-4, 16r) – which George Craig partly translates in the third volume of the letters. Beckett spoke bitterly of the "ugly come-ons or wheedling [...] that you have to go in for when writing a play for performance," of taking into account "the reactions of the public." It made him feel a profound "disgust [...] for the theatre, where one doesn't say what one wants to, as in novels or poems" and provoked a "strong wish to give it up for good" (Beckett 2014, 167). A related remark made on 30 August 1958, also recorded by Pinget (PNG-354-3, 2r) and translated by Craig, is even more revealing about the shortcomings of *Théâtre II*: "The drama is resolved by an accident, an unforeseen event, which sets free the defendant. Beckett wants to do something of high seriousness, something Racinian. Can't manage it. Says that everything he comes up with is appallingly comical" (167). C is not actually set free in the published version of the sketch, but both comments illustrate that Beckett wanted to write serious, not comical theatre, and that Racine still served as a model in late 1958.

In the summer of 1956 Beckett re-read *Andromaque* (Beckett 2011, 624), which he found to be the "most terrible play of Racine" because it has "none of the gaiety of *Phèdre* and *Athalie*" (qtd. in Le Juez, 57). This experience was "significant," according to Shane Weller, "since it occurred at a moment when Beckett was finding it

impossible to proceed with the writing of what would eventually become *Fin de partie*" (103). The influence of *Andromaque* is apparent from Beckett's comment to Alan Schneider that the success of his play depended on "the power of the text to claw" and that it was deliberately "more inhuman than *Godot*," which relies mostly on comedy (2011, 628). Yet it was difficult to follow up on *Fin de partie*. The death sentence is certainly a serious premise, but the judicial setup of *Théâtre II* disintegrates into slapstick. Ironically, the fragment is much closer to Racine's only comedy, *Les Plaideurs* (1668), than to the tragedies Beckett so admired. If *Pochade* did follow *Théâtre II*, Beckett may have hoped that switching not only from the courtroom to the torture chamber, but also from stage to radio – where audience considerations mattered less directly – would protect him from relapsing into comedy, and better allow him to achieve that serious Racinian goal he envisioned. The somber *Embers* had already come close.

Embers was also the first radio play in which Beckett explicitly explored the medium as a mindspace, which is related to another aspect that fascinated him about Racine. Beckett understood that "Racine's theatre is foremost psychological," Angela Moorjani explains, "with action taking place largely on an inner stage" (42). The result is what she calls a psychological "polylogue" or "interior poliloquy" that makes "an assault on the unitary subject" (47-48). It has now become a critical commonplace in Beckett studies that the stage in *Fin de partie* with its two eye-like windows resembles the inside of a skull, so that Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell can be regarded as different but related components of one fractured mind or psyche. Beckett used a similar setting for *Théâtre II* in late 1958, with C standing in front of a double window, and A and B sitting at tiny lamp-lit desks on opposite sides of the stage like quarreling hemispheres of the brain. The judgment of C by A and B can thus be read as the staging of a consciousness deliberating suicide. *Pochade*, too, re-enacts a cognitive activity. Martin Esslin first described the radio play as "a monodrama about the artistic process in which each of the characters represents one aspect of the artist's mind," Animator starring as the "Critical faculty," Fox (Lat. *vox*) as "the voice that emerges from the subconscious," Stenographer as the "recording faculty", and Dick as "the artist's determination to stimulate his subconscious by suffering" (101-02). As such, radio may have presented Beckett with an opportunity to merge the cruel and psychological elements of Racine's drama with a creative outlet for his

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sense of writer's block, through the metaphor of torture, in a new medium.

Another incentive for Beckett to pick up radio again in late 1958 for *Pochade* may have been his involvement in a broadcast of *Malone Dies* on the BBC Third Programme in July 1958.

The BBC Broadcast of *Malone Dies*

The selection of material from *Malone Dies* was made by letter in early 1958. Beckett eventually accepted McWhinnie's proposal to "run the first 23 pages straight through and then jump to a later passage" (qtd. in Feldman, 49). This later section, as Matthew Feldman points out (61), starts with the sentence: "What a misfortune, the pencil must have slipped from my fingers, for I have only just succeeded in recovering it after forty-eight hours (see above) of intermittent efforts" (Beckett 2010a, 49). It continues with a whimsically elaborate description of the pencil, as well as the "exercise-book" (50) in which the story is written while told. Malone's parenthesis "(see above)" refers to the broken off sentence at the end of the foregoing paragraph, which is followed by a blank line. This break in the novel's discourse was just the kind of "jump" McWhinnie needed to bridge the gap between the early Sapo pages and the later section he wanted to use, but this second passage was eventually cut.

Paul Stewart is right in claiming that McWhinnie's omission recalibrates the novel's writerly discourse towards the spoken medium of radio (n. p.). The announcement of the broadcast similarly downplayed this writerly characteristic by describing *Malone Dies* as the story of "an old man lying in bed close to death trying in his mind to evolve some sort of pattern from the world he lives in" (qtd. in Feldman, 50). Not only does it efface the metafictional self-awareness of Beckett's novel as a written construct, it also introduces a second re-calibration of the text by relocating it entirely inside the mind of the narrator, as some kind of geriatric *monologue intérieur*. The novel, in contrast, plays with the tension between Malone's thoughts and what he chooses to record of them. The reader does not have direct access to Malone's mind, only to the written reproduction of his thoughts, which is determined by material circumstances. For example, the tantalizing result of his lost pencil is "two unforgettable days of which nothing will ever be known" (2010a, 49). This dimension is lost in the BBC adaptation of *Malone Dies*, but the changes may have deepened Beckett's understanding of the radio medium. The passages about Malone's pencil and his exercise

book were part of Beckett's original selection of excerpts, which suggests he was at least interested in their effect. McWhinnie's excision may have urged Beckett to experiment with the apparently problematic combination of writing and speaking in the aural medium of radio as the premise for his next script.

Pochade explores exactly this tension between written and spoken discourse in a radio context, by having Stenographer take precise notes of everything Fox says. Even the aural aspect of writing is exploited when she uses her pencil and her eraser, or rummages through her paperwork. As opposed to the *Malone Dies* recording, such details emphasize the writerly character of *Pochade*. The tantalizing effect is now created by the spoken nature of the production, because it is impossible to check the accuracy or the reliability of Stenographer's notes on Fox. Listeners cannot pause or rewind the broadcast and there is no text to re-read. The only aid is their own memory of the spoken script – complicated by its many repetitions – or the team's (unreliable) version as they review their notes and try to make sense of them.

Beckett listened to a tape of *Malone Dies* at the BBC Paris studios in the Avenue Hoche on 7 July 1958 (Beckett 2014, 155). His reaction is unknown, but the experience may have put him on the path to *Pochade* in the closing months of 1958. Because writing in the traditional genres of theatre and prose had become so difficult by then, a radio play in French – the first – may have been a desperate attempt to lift his writer's block, before embarking on *Comment c'est*.

The Radio Medium and *Comment c'est*

There are many resemblances between *Pochade* and *Comment c'est*, especially in Part II "with Pim," though these do not support a 1958 dating for the radio play per se. They only emphasize the close affinity between the two texts.

One common trait that does mark *Pochade* and *Comment c'est* as works written in the late 1950s is their reference to moles, which were wreaking havoc on Beckett's lawn at his country retreat in late 1957 and early 1958. It was "so pitted with molehills," Knowlson explains, "that he now sometimes quoted his address as 'Ussy-sur-Moles' instead of 'Ussy-sur-Marne'" (447). Barney Rosset mailed him a drum of molebane from the USA, but the problem persisted. On 15 December 1958, Beckett complained to Barbara Bray that the moles in his garden were still very active because of the warm winter weather (TCD-10948-1-014). Édouard Magessa O'Reilly points out that "the earliest versions

of *How It Is* contain references to moles" but that Beckett "would later remove autobiographical details and dismantle chronological and causal relationships, replacing them with abstract forms that have a coherence of their own" (qtd. in Beckett 2009b, vii). The mole in *Pochade* has a much more integrated function. If Fox represents the artist's irrational side, the subconscious or the inner voice emerging from the deep, then his reference to the burrowing creature, and its complex network of underground tunnels, becomes an effective cognitive metaphor. Beckett even replaced the hedgehog from his childhood memories (Knowlson, 23), later repeated in *Company* (1980), with a mole for this purpose. The moles in the early drafts of *Comment c'est* may be a relic of *Pochade*, which Beckett subsequently undid, instead placing the entire setting of the novel underground, taking place "down here" and "in the mud." It is possible that the ongoing problem with moles at Ussy inspired Beckett to exploit them for his further exploration of radio as a mindspace with *Pochade*. Their occurrence in the earliest drafts of *Comment c'est* would then suggest a common late 1950s origin for the two texts.

Daniel Albright makes a different, medium-related, connection between *Pochade* and *Comment c'est*, reading the prose work as "a sort of meditation on radio," in which "the notion of phonic control exuberates far beyond a mere on/off switch" and "the human body simulates a whole electronic console or mixing board": "Each mud-crawler with his can opener treats the man in front of him as if he were a radio, making him speak or sing or cry out through a system of learned responses – there is even a protocol for volume control" (120). Lea Sinoimeri also situates the act of bodily inscription in the novel within a radiophonic context, stating that "Pim's body, the reading body which is inscribed, tortured and dehumanised, turns into a radiophonic medium capable of both recording and replaying speech" (328-29). Through the medium of radio, and its focus on aurality, *Comment c'est* elaborates the whipping of *Pochade* into a syntax of torture, using an array of fists, nails, blades, pestles and can openers to make the voice speak. Perhaps, working on *Pochade* in the closing months of 1958 made Beckett realize the potential of these mechanics for a long work of prose, reviving "On le tortura bien" by way of Sade's *Les 120 journées*. Later, in his letter to Patrick Magee of 26 February 1960 about a public reading of an extract from *How It Is*, Beckett described the work as "a microphone text, to be murmured" (2014, 306), also suggesting a radiophonic origin. Like Sinoimeri, Elsa

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Baroghel (n.p.) regards *Comment c'est* in general as the product of Beckett's experiments with radio in the late 1950s, and my suggestion would be that *Pochade* belongs to that period, not to the 1960s.

In this new chronology *Pochade* assumes the status of a pivotal work in two respects: between *All That Fall* and *Embers*, on the one hand, and *Words and Music*, *Esquisse radiophonique* and *Cascando* on the other. This repositioning makes it possible to study in more detail the general evolution of Beckett's radio drama, which has been troubled by dating uncertainties, especially the later scripts. Secondly, *Pochade* becomes a hinge between the English version of *L'Innommable* and *Comment c'est*, uniting traits of both, as well as a potential counterpart of *Théâtre II*, enabling new readings of these texts. It was prose that Beckett needed to get on with in the late 1950s, reducing *Pochade* to an intermediate piece that sparked more important developments. Fifteen years after the publication of *Comment c'est*, it was no longer tainted by that association. Beckett even forgot when it was written. Until we find the missing manuscript of *Pochade*, the late 1958 dating I have suggested in this article is only a working hypothesis. But as *The Unnamable* so wisely reminds us, "hypotheses are like everything else, they help you on" (2010b, 123).

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