Introduction
Music and Silence in Beckett's Radio Plays

Radio broadcasting has been in existence since the late 1920s, a period when two competing mass media, television and talking pictures, were also in their infancy. Over the next twenty years, due to its relatively inexpensive nature, coupled with the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, radio became 'a millionaire before it was thirty'.[1] Alongside its obvious use as a propaganda tool for various regimes it was also often the only source of reliable information for furtive listeners in times of rigid censorship. Within a brief space of time, radio developed features which were unique to broadcasting. Musicians and singers developed new styles of performance which moved away from the acoustic demands of the music hall, to deliver a mellower, more intimate sound for listeners at home. In Britain, BBC features, documentaries and interviews opened the airways to ordinary citizens whose regional voices and everyday concerns provided a counterpoint to the clipped accents of newsreaders and more highbrow discussions of professional pundits.

Radio drama has also grown and developed since the 1920s. It has since its early years been utilised as a means of bringing theatre to the masses as well as providing popular soap opera drama. An example of this in Britain is the BBC soap opera, *The Archers*, a series broadcast worldwide in various languages which is an early example of info-tainment, providing storyline interest mixed with educational points on farming and gender issues.[2] Since the early 1930s certain playwrights have sought to develop drama which is uniquely radiophonic. With the virtual eclipse of radio by television after the Second World War, radio writers and producers were obliged to identify the qualities radio drama possessed over visual forms of drama.

1 Donald McWhinnie, *The Art of Radio* (London: Faber, 1959) 13.

2 Emma Brockes, 'A Long Way from Ambridge', *Guardian* 23 October 2001: G2 1–4.

Radio has provided a wide range of drama from comedy, melodrama and adaptations of stage classics to grand-scale manipulation of the gullible listener. Orson Welles's radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells is a fitting example of radio's ability to cause mass hysteria by incorporating news bulletins and newsflashes into the production.[3] The play's success is due to its identification of radio as an information medium in which a virtual reality of weather forecasts, documentaries, news items and sports is presented. Such realism in both radio features and drama requires technical ingenuity to guide the temporarily blinded listener. In turn, the listener's active imagination is indispensable in filling out the detail of any production. The non-visual character of radio also provides authors with the ideal dimension in which to present alternatives to realism. The author's words, operating as only one element alongside sound effects or *musique concrète* and music, offer the possibility of presenting fables, fantasies, parables, supernatural and psychological drama. They are no longer bound by the conventions of the stage.

This study is an analysis of the contribution made to radio drama by the Irish author, Samuel Beckett. In his plays for theatre, novels and poetry, Beckett is concerned with themes of human isolation and the frailty of memory and communication. He identified radio as an ideal medium for the presentation of these themes and the development of drama which could transcend the limitations of realism. He used music as an essential component of his radio output for a variety of purposes. In this analysis, I will argue that, while Beckett's radio plays are suffused with a bleak sense of disintegrating language, music offers a sense of optimism. Through music, Beckett intimates to the listener the possibility of communication outside intellectual discourse. I will be utilising a range of musical and performative perspectives which will permit a greater appreciation and understanding of these radio plays.

In this introduction and Chapter One, I make frequent reference to the Irish-born poet, Louis MacNeice, who was a key figure in the transformation of British radio drama from the 1930s to the 1960s, as

3 Dermot Rattigan, *Theatre of Sound: Radio and the Dramatic Imagination* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 39–65.

well as to a group of authors who share many aesthetic and thematic concerns with Samuel Beckett. Louis MacNeice worked at the BBC from 1941 until his untimely death in 1963. His output for radio is representative of the evolution of the art form in its infancy. His commentaries on radio drama sought acceptance from literary circles while also paying careful attention to the craft of the genre which was unknown to those writing outside the industry. Due to the wartime hostilities, MacNeice was publicly supportive of a populist content and format of radio. Privately, he was uncomfortable with the propagandist nature of the state corporation:

> I have just – with a certain amount of misgiving – signed on to the B.B.C. I guess this may prove rather cramping – though not so cramping as anything I might have been conscripted into – but at the same time, in spite of all the vulgarisation involved, the predominance of quantitative values, & the unhealth which goes with a machine that is largely propaganda (N.B. don't quote anything I say on this subject in public), it has its excitements & (what was less to be expected) its value.[4]

This discomfort with his new position, and the perceived constraints on his creativity, is also evident in his public reflections on radio drama during the War. Nevertheless, with the end of hostilities in 1945 and the creation of the Third Programme, a more specialised drama station within the BBC, MacNeice began to explore the creative and formal opportunities which radio presented. His subsequent material displays a consistently meticulous attention to the radio craft and sees MacNeice moving away from public to private expression. The increased sophistication of his radio work and the importance he placed on music is of relevance to this analysis.

Such growing awareness of radio drama was not restricted to British broadcasting. The avant-garde poet Antonin Artaud produced a work for Radio France in 1948 which marks the apotheosis of his Theatre of Cruelty which has its origins in the poetry of the *poètes maudits* and the Surrealist movement. Likewise, in Germany, Günter Eich utilised radio to raise painful themes in the post-war climate. His

4 Letter 30 May 1941, qtd. in Jon Stallworthy, *Louis MacNeice* (London: Faber, 1995) 297–298.

determination to be 'sand, not the oil, in the gears of the world'[5] exploits one half of the key strengths of radio drama as expressed by Martin Esslin, namely to portray 'private dreams and public nightmares'.[6] Esslin identifies radio as the ideal medium in which to present the intensely private world of a character. Throughout this analysis we note the tension between this strength of radio and the risk of confusing or alienating listeners who can turn off at any point in the broadcast.

The creation, following the War, of the Third Programme, a BBC station devoted to the broadcasting of serious drama, enabled the Corporation to develop radio drama without undue concern about funding or audience reaction. Nevertheless, the Third Programme conducted a high level of audience research and self-censorship.[7] The establishment of the station was seen as a reward for what Giles Cooper described as 'the rather arrogant feeling that it [radio] had won the War'.[8] Its function was to identify the essence of radio which actually involves evading the information-rich diet which it generally provides:

> It seemed the duty of the B.B.C. to make experiments in this new means of communication in order to discover whether the wireless could become a medium for conveying complicated intellectual and aesthetic messages instead of just supplying easy information and entertainment.[9]

By the mid-1950s, the Third Programme had brought together a team of producers who were actively encouraging radio-specific drama from new and more established authors. Donald McWhinnie, Barbara Bray, Martin Esslin and sound technician Desmond Briscoe attracted both a European and home-grown input to the station. Giles

5 Günter Eich, qtd. in *Soundplay/Hörspiel Voices International* brochure (New York: Evergreen, 1991–1992) 6. Beckett Reading Archive MS 4732.

6 Martin Esslin, 'The Mind as Stage – Radio Drama', *Mediations* (London: Abacus, 1983) 179.

7 Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1976) 26.

8 Giles Cooper, [talking to Michael Billington] 'Radio Writing', *Plays and Players* December 1965: 10.

9 Harold Nicolson, 'Birthday of the Third Programme', *Listener* 7 October 1948: 526.

Cooper, Robert Bolt and Harold Pinter wrote their first successful plays for the Third Programme, while Bray translated radio works of Swiss author Robert Pinget and French author Marguerite Duras. McWhinnie and Esslin were assiduous in presenting on radio the integrity of the author's text and directions as well as calling on the technological innovation of Briscoe's experiments with sound recordings to produce stylised sounds which these texts might call for.

In 1956, Samuel Beckett was invited by Cecilia Reeves of the BBC to write a play for the Third Programme.[10] From the outset, Beckett was attracted to the evocative qualities of the medium. In a letter to Nancy Cunard, his embryonic ideas for radio are concerned, not with plot or script, but with sounds. As he wrote in a letter to Nancy Cunard:

> 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.[11]

Beckett's radio plays did not occur in a creative vacuum, but belong among the authors mentioned above who identified radio's capability to evoke individual worlds which were only as substantial as the words, sounds, music and noise that conjured them over the airwaves. The initial invitation to write for the Third Programme spawned an enduring working and critical relationship between the Paris-based author and McWhinnie, Bray and Esslin. It also resulted in creative friendships between Beckett and Pinget, Beckett and Pinter as well as between the author and Jack MacGowran and Patrick Magee. Magee played the part of Mr Slocum and MacGowran that of Tommy in Beckett's first radio production, *All That Fall*. Over the coming years, their voices would become synonymous with Beckett's work. Even more importantly, this first successful collaboration with these dedicated radio professionals whetted Beckett's appetite for broadcasting. As his compatriot MacNeice's work had developed in

10 Esslin, 'Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting', *Mediations* 126.

11 Letter to Nancy Cunard, 5 July 1956, H. Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, qtd. in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 428.

sophistication over the years, so each successive production for radio demonstrated Beckett's increasing confidence with the genre and an awareness of what would or would not work on radio.

The initial role of music in these radio plays is to give the reader clues by using musical structure, recurring motifs and a sonic accumulation in *All That Fall*. However, each successive play incorporates music more centrally in the work. In *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, music is a fully-fledged character within the *dramatis personae*. Music becomes the rising star of Beckett's radio work, at times at the expense of words. His preoccupation in the radio plays is to highlight the emptiness of words while still attempting to communicate with the listener in a less discursive and more emotive manner.

The purpose of this introduction is to locate Beckett's contribution to radio within a grouping of like-minded authors and sympathetic producers and interpreters. I have provisionally named this grouping the 'Mute Radio' authors. While in my first chapter, I refer to the contributions of MacNeice and William Trevor for comparative purposes, the above collective title is used to convey the shared aesthetics of authors such as Beckett, Pinget, Sarraute and Pinter who wrote specifically for radio from the late 1940s to the 1960s. In many of their plays silence is central to their artistic endeavours. A variety of mute characters are present (or absent), including the mute torturer, Dick, in Beckett's *Rough for Radio II* and the Matchseller in *A Slight Ache*. Characters such as these adopt either partial or absolute silence on air, despite radio's inability to sustain a prolonged vacuum of sound.

The muted or silent quality of these plays extends also to their aesthetic quality. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, words and sounds appear to be purified in silence; their musical or signifying value has increased as a result. Beckett's plays in particular increasingly seek to mute or dampen down sounds or voices. Silence, it appears, is the prized if unattainable objective of his radio work. Beckett's radio plays break with the conventions of the genre by divesting words of their supreme status within drama. He is as interested in the musicality of a word or a phrase as he is in its signifying or allusive power. Music and sound effects are equally important components which challenge the listener and critic to see beyond the

mere sense of speech and engage with these productions as an audience might react to a concert. The scope for emotional musical impact during such fleeting broadcasts is emphasised.

Most of the authors who are grouped alongside Beckett in this analysis of radio drama were outsiders of the industry yet enthused by the challenges of the new dimension. In the radio works of Artaud, Sarraute, Pinter, Pinget and Cooper, we find authors who are willing to break with conventions of narrative, characterisation, plot and the public function of radio. These authors' plays are peopled with outcasts, mutes, paranoiacs, dotards, drunks and lunatics. Each author sees in radio its capacity to construct worlds out of words while also noting that such worlds are as insubstantial as the words sounding on the airwaves. They may potentially satisfy the listener's need for guidance in this blind medium, but they are no more reliable than any other sound in the broadcast. Themes of memory, identity, power and loneliness pervade in this new style of radio drama. The fragility of communication and language drives each playwright to articulate a theme which is prevalent throughout Beckett's work:

> who may tell the tale
> of the old man?
> weigh absence in a scale?
> mete want with a span?
> the sum assess
> of the world's woes?
> nothingness
> in words enclose?[12]

Thus a new set of criteria is developed: radio, the most intimate of mass media, should be used to explore the personal crises of identity, reality and memory. While these issues are conventionally articulated through language, these writers question its ability to communicate the subconscious and emotional facets of man as much as his conscious and discursive character. The danger of this new radio drama is whether its very desire to reflect the crisis of the modern

12 Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (Paris: Olympia Press, 1953) 247.

Everyman, to alert the listener to the illusory nature of the broadcast, risks alienating the audience.

A striking illustration of such risk-taking on radio occurred in post-war France. *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*, by Antonin Artaud, was written in 1947 at the invitation of Radio France Director General Wladimir Porché. It was to be broadcast as part of a series called *La Voix des poètes*, produced by Francois Pouey. Artaud had spent a major part of his adult life in mental institutions. Artistically, his influences included the *poètes maudits*, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, as well as Gnostic writings, Balinese dance music and Mexican ritual.[13] He was a member of the Surrealist movement before their alignment with the Communist Party. During the 1930s, Artaud combined these strands of influence in what he called the Theatre of Cruelty. In theatre and cinema he attempted to restore the cathartic, spiritual and ritual aspects of older traditions in modern drama, with the hope of shaking the audience out of its complacency; the performance, marrying acting, lighting, music and words, would be the theatrical equivalent of electric shock treatment on the audience. Perhaps Artaud's theory was a radical variation of Wagner's total theatre or *Gesamtkunstwerk* which also sought a synthesis of the arts in opera. Artaud's intention was designed, however, not to entertain or manipulate the audience, but to disturb, to affect the theatregoer, to force the viewer to see his double in the performance.

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty enjoyed only minor success on the Paris stage in the 1930s. Following his release from Rodez mental institution in 1944, at the request of his fellow surrealist Robert Desnos, Artaud enjoyed a new-found celebrity in post-war Paris. This was a result of a series of lectures in which the artist himself became the sole subject. The subject of his radio production is a result of the same artistic preoccupation. Artaud, author, actor, producer, musician, is central to the radio piece. He is the medium through which Mexican ritual, gamelan music, Tibetan chant and parodic political discourse are channelled. The listener experiences all creation through Artaud.

13 Eric Sellin, *The Dramatic Concepts of Antonin Artaud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

This hyperconsciousness is similar to the state of Mind At Large which is described in Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception:*

> Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is to be practically useful.[14]

In Artaud's radio production, the author attempts to reveal a mind in which all creation is perceived simultaneously without the filtering devices mentioned above. It is a radical personalisation of the universe.

The effect of this performance is impressive, marking the crowning achievement of the Theatre of Cruelty. The voice of Artaud is heard alongside that of Roger Blin who was Beckett's first theatre director and interpreter of French versions of the radio plays. Artaud epitomises the type of character which is portrayed by the Mute Radio authors. He is the outsider, living on the edge of delirium and extreme lucidity. The listener, presented with such a radical vision, doubts its veracity. The author combines elements of self-accusation and self-affirmation in the conclusion.[15]

However, the mass media nature of radio and the disingenuous conduct of Porché were to militate against Artaud's production. On the eve of the work's broadcast, the Director General withdrew permission to air it. Despite a furore in the press, and the unanimous support for the work from a group of Paris intellectuals who were permitted to attend private hearings of the work, Porché ordered all copies of the production to be destroyed. Artaud died shortly after this, embittered by his treatment at Radiodiffusion France but confident about the importance if his production. Somehow, copies of the production have survived and the modern listener can now appreciate

14 Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (London: Granada, 1977) 19–20.

15 Antonin Artaud, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*, *Œuvres Complètes*, *XIII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 103. Henceforth referred to as *Œuvres*.

the incredible power of the production which was too controversial for broadcast in Artaud's lifetime. A similar production would certainly never have been considered for broadcast at the BBC. While the Third Programme had been created in order to encourage thought-provoking drama, there existed a high level of self-censorship with regard to material which might be in any way blasphemous, profane, political or overtly sexual. This is instanced in the station's internal memos:

> Unless there is some improvement in this matter there is danger of a flat prohibition on all oaths in all plays and this would be damaging to dramatic values, particularly in serious plays.[16]

The figure of the Lord Chamberlain, or 'Lord Chamberpot', as Beckett nicknamed the official British censor during his problems with the first staging of *Endgame* at the Royal Court Theatre, loomed in the background concerning stage and radio performance of this era.[17] Even in 1959, several phrases of *Embers* were omitted from broadcast as they were considered potentially rude or blasphemous.[18] This is unfortunate as the use of the omitted word 'Christ' by Henry is crucial to the understanding of the play.

The subject of self-censorship in everyday communication is the subject of Nathalie Sarraute's radio plays. The French author demonstrates a fascination with the undertow of communication which occurs beneath normal dialogue. Those tropisms are the speciality of her novels. 'Sarraute's fiction addresses aspects of behaviour which lie beneath rational thought or articulate language and which she famously calls tropisms'.[19] On air, Sarraute was interested in radio's capacity to micro-analyse what might be mere seconds of a conversation. *Elle est là* and *Le Silence* present a soundscape consisting

16 'Profanity in Plays', BBC Written Archives, Drama Policy File, 1947–1948, Acc 37311 (6 December 1948), qtd. in *British Radio Drama*, ed. John Drakakis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 13.

17 Letter from Samuel Beckett to Alan Schneider, 29 December 1957, *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, ed. Maurice Harmon (London: Harvard University Press, 1998) 24.

18 Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting* 95–96.

19 Emer O'Beirne, *Reading Nathalie Sarraute* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 10.

exclusively of words. These radio plays are capable of slowing down time. The crises of communication which they represent may occur within the split second of conversation in misunderstandings which are caused by a mixture of power play and the misinterpretation of silence and words:

> Ce qui dans mes romans aurait constitué l'action dramatique de la sous-conversation, du pré-dialogue, où les sensations, les impressions, le 'ressenti' sont communiqués au lecteur à l'aide d'images et de rythmes, ici se déployait dans le dialogue lui-même. Ainsi le dedans devenait le dehors et un critique, plus tard, a pu à juste titre, pour qualifier ce passage du roman à la pièce, parler de 'gant retourné'.[20]

The plays are micro-analyses of small groups – a family or friendly gathering – which feel offended or threatened by the silence, reticence or non-conformity of a character. For example, in *Elle est là*, *H2* is offended by *F*'s silence which he feels undermines his own stated opinions:

> *H2*: Elle a en elle son idée. Une idée est là. Cachée. Et la nôtre, notre idée à nous tout à l'heure… a été happée au passage… enfermée là-bas, livrée sans défense, étranglée en silence, dans le secret… Rien au-dehors… J'aurais dû intervenir …la forcer à la sortir, à la montrer au grand jour…qu'on la voie, sa belle idée qui a osé attaquer … qu'on la détruise…[21]

Again, in *Le Silence*, Jean-Pierre has the temerity to remain silent among the other characters who constantly discuss his behaviour. The sole cause for suspense is whether or not Jean-Pierre will break his silence. He speaks towards the end of the play, revealing that this supposed villain has nothing more remarkable to say than the other characters. Ironically, his enigmatic silence was much more potent. The radio plays of Sarraute reveal a world devoid of action, consisting of verbal power-play. It is significant that Sarraute identified radio as the ideal space in which to convey a weighty silence.

The perceived threat of a silent character is a recurrent theme in the radio words of Harold Pinter and Beckett. Silence itself is potent

20 Nathalie Sarraute, 'Le gant retourné', *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault* 89 (1975): 70.
21 Nathalie Sarraute, *Elle est là*, *Théâtre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 14–15.

within these plays as radio abhors a vacuum. This seems to be precisely what attracts these authors to insert such an array of silences, pauses and silent characters whose very muteness can become intolerable to speaking characters and unthinkable to the listener. *A Slight Ache*, written by Harold Pinter initially for radio, is one such example of a battle between a logorrhoeic character and his silent nemesis. It is also, like much of Pinter's radio plays, subversive of the unspoken rules of BBC radio drama which present thought-provoking themes firmly rooted in the conventions of the nineteenth-century English novel and drawing room drama.

Edward and Flora are a couple living in an English country estate surrounded by a country garden. Flora guides the listener at the outset as she describes and names the flowers of the garden. This visual picture painting is immediately undermined by Edward who is reluctant to accept the name which Flora has given the flower:

> Flora: Have you noticed the honeysuckle this morning?
> Edward: The what?
> Flora: The honeysuckle.
> Edward: Honeysuckle? Where?
> Flora: By the back gate, Edward.
> Edward: Is that honeysuckle? I thought it was … convolvulus, or something.[22]

This may be read as a parody of conventional scene setting in radio drama similar to that which opens Trevor's *Beyond the Pale*, which is discussed in Chapter One:

> Malseed: Well, well, well. A hundred thousand welcomes.
> Mrs Malseed: How very nice to see you all again.
> Milly: Oh, it *is* good to be back. What marvellous sweet-peas! I could bask in that scent for ever.[23]

Edward is not blind, but he does complain of an aching in his eyes. What's more, while not blind, he is perceptually disabled. The seemingly idyllic situation we find him in is turned upside down by

22 Harold Pinter, *A Slight Ache and Other Plays* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978) 9.
23 William Trevor, *Beyond The Pale*, *Best Radio Plays of 1980* (London: Eyre/Methuen/BBC Productions, 1981) 84.

the presence of a third character, The Matchseller. Apparently, he has been standing at the gate of the estate for several weeks. His presence, his function, his silence unsettles Edward. The listener too is unsettled, for we are unsure whether The Matchseller exists or not:

> The matchseller *is* as he seems to whoever perceives him; for his silence and passivity give consent to all perceptions. He corrects no misjudgments, ratifies no truths.[24]

This ambiguity of his presence is lost when the play is staged. The Matchseller is visible; thus, while he remains mute, communication is feasible between himself and the other characters. On radio, his absolute silence renders his form entirely mutable. He can be a bullock, a seducer or anarchist depending on the changing perceptions of Edward and Flora. The listener's desire for fixity of characters and verisimilitude is frustrated when it becomes increasingly obvious that Edward is uncertain of what he sees. His perceptual haziness is borne out by his description of The Matchseller as a bullock and his admission that the character looks different every time he sees him. Radio appears the ideal medium in which Pinter can dramatise his own conviction concerning the multiplicity of truths and realities:

> The desire for verification on the part of all of us, with regard to our own experience and the experience of others, is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. I suggest there can be no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.[25]

The fixity of language and character roles slides even further when Flora invites the old man into the house. This is ostensibly done so that Edward can give him a good talking-to and banish him from his field of vision. What happens instead is that Edward loses all control despite his verbal presence. Time and again the listener must

24 Elissa S. Guralnick, 'The Mind, Arthur Kopit's *Wings* and Harold Pinter's *A Slight Ache*', *Sight Unseen: Beckett, Pinter, Stoppard, and Other Contemporary Dramatists on Radio* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996) 115.

25 Harold Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre', *Plays: One* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976) 11.

reconfigure his mental picture of The Matchseller – is he young, old, wearing a balaclava, not wearing one, crying, laughing? Meanwhile, Flora engages in a sexual flirtation with him, shifting her affections from Edward to the silent figure:

> Flora: You're probably quite amusing in your own way. [*Seductively*.] Tell me all about love. Speak to me of love.
> [*Pause.*]
> God knows what you're saying at this very moment. It's quite disgusting.[26]

By the end of the play Edward has ceded control, Flora hands him the tray of matches and the two male characters have traded roles.

Pinter's early play displays a disregard for discursive drama which proposes a moral or message. He attempts rather to present language and dialogue as he hears it, full of non-sequiturs and misunderstandings. His dialogue is punctuated with pauses and silences which are filled with malice. These silences are pivotal in his dramas as they inject otherwise banal dialogue with menace or absurdity. He utilises a range of silences in his drama: '*Slight pause*, *Short pause*, *Long pause*, *Silence*, *Long silence* and *Silent pause*'.[27] As with audiences of Beckett's radio plays, listeners and critics react with a mixture of praise and bewilderment.

With each play emanating from this group of playwrights, the demands upon the radio audience grow greater; the listener may require a foreknowledge of such an author's work in theatre or prose; he may require an acute musical sensitivity, a wry sense of humour or a dogged determination to keep listening to the end of such plays which, despite their fleeting nature on the airwaves, demand a high degree of attention.

Two other authors in this group provide a lighter if no less demanding side to radio drama. Giles Cooper's *The Disagreeable Oyster*, produced by Desmond Briscoe, combines the technical playfulness of the pioneering sound technician with the manic imagination of the playwright. Cooper's literary fame springs mostly from his numerous radio works. Yet like the other authors of this grouping, he

26 Pinter, *A Slight Ache* 32.
27 Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting* 162–163.

demonstrates a sensitive understanding of the outsider in society. This play follows a day in the life of another Everyman, whose hunger for freedom is curtailed by societal conventions. In less than an hour of airplay, we keep company with Bundy Major and his inner voice Bundy Minor. As a machinist in a factory, Bundy is sent by his employer to a client's factory in the north of England to fix a machine. Along the way, he gets drunk, visits a prostitute, is set upon by a group of women, is stripped naked, seeks sanctuary in a nudist resort, and buys a loaf of bread for his wife. Such a picaresque comedy, which can jump with ease from scene to scene, finds its true home on radio.

In *The Disagreeable Oyster*, the listener is guided skilfully by Briscoe's sound effects, some of which have the auditory quality of Hitchcock's cinematic transitions. For example, the rapid change of scene from a bakery to a train station is signalled by the juxtaposition of the baker's doorbell with the shriek of a train whistle. Despite this guidance, the listener grows increasingly aware that his credulity is being pushed to the limits by the riotous excess of such scenes. The play is a fantasy in the mind of Bundy. Even the hero is convinced that what has just been heard never existed. The play is filled with such intimations to the audience, culminating in the baker's addressing both Bundies:

> Baker: The bread's baked. Here's your loaf.
> Bundy: How much?
> Baker: Nothing to pay. Share it between the two of you.
> Bundy: Thank you.
> Baker: If you want to catch your train, you'd better run.
> Bundy Minor: I'm tired.
> Baker: That's right, you want to go home.
> Bundy Minor: Oh yes!
> Bundy: Goodbye! [*Running feet*. *They stop*.]
> Bundy Minor: What did he mean by 'The two of you'? [*Distant train whistle*.]
> Bundy: No idea.[28]

28 Giles Cooper, 'The Disagreeable Oyster', BBC Third Programme, 15 August 1957. Audio recording at British Library. Call number P1030BW/02 02.

Cooper's play is refreshing in its ability to treat the topic of individual freedom and societal norms in a way which is both thought-provoking and hilarious. It extends the boundaries of verisimilitude on radio. It also remains coherent to the general listener. It requires no prior preparation by the audience, and only necessitates their attention for the duration of the broadcast.

With its roots in the Resistance of World War Two, the French publishing company, *Editions de Minuit* boasted among its authors the likes of Samuel Beckett, Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute and the final member of the Mute Radio group, Robert Pinget. This Swiss-born author's novels and radio plays had been translated for the Third Programme by Barbara Bray and involve a group of characters that pop up from one play to the next in detective-like scenarios which do not feature any strict narrative. Themes of identity, memory and veracity of events dominate and, as with Beckett's works, much of the material is self-referential, a closed world of similar characters and events. Beckett agreed to translate Pinget's *La Manivelle* into English for the BBC. Pinget in turn translated Beckett's *All That Fall* and *Embers* for the ORTF and for Editions de Minuit publishers. An example of the aesthetic similarities between these two authors can be seen in Pinget's poem *The Bird* in which Pinget displays a hunger for originality coupled with an acceptance that nothing new can be created:

> But the walk has not yet begun. The head baulks. Everything said about the landscape seems said before, the new is lacking. […] The walk must get under way. But who is taking it if not the hand that writes? Keep your head as it ponders in the paring down. What to do with this superabundance of signs?[29]

La Manivelle treats words as '[les] violations du silence'.[30] Barbara Bray's description of Pinget's work could as easily be applied to Beckett's radio work or that of the other authors in this group. Both

29 Robert Pinget, 'The Bird', trans. Robin Freeman, *Eonta – Arts Quarterly* 1991, 1.1: 13–14.

30 Barbara Bray, 'Un Kaléidoscope de Vérités', *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault* 53 (1966): 59.

authors see language as a necessary evil, and display a fascination for an ever-elusive silence:

> Le théâtre de Robert Pinget, c'est ce glissement de l'irréalité visible, audible, qui se représente et se parle sur la scène, vers l'espace et le silence où se situe *ce qui compte* […].[31]

Both authors appear to point to silence as the conveyor of truth; certainly language, the banal dialogue in this play, is redundant. The speakers are to be pitied or laughed at. The words are incapable of conveying truth, memory or simply communicating.

La Manivelle, or *The Old Tune*, while drawing from the characters and events of Pinget's *Lettre morte*, can be appreciated in isolation from this or other work by the author. Cream and Gorman are two doting old men who meet on a street corner while a worn-out barrel organ grinds out a tune without warmth or expression. The old men are at pains to recall a past which their faulty memories cannot corroborate. The play has a tragicomic effect, expressing ideas which Beckett had previously articulated humourlessly in his essay *Proust*:

> There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us. […] We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday.[32]

Cream and Gorman fail to retrieve the past, which gives us cause to laugh. The comedy is limited, however, as the listener may identify his double in these pathetic figures who, despite their senility, valiantly battle to make sense of their past. Such effort seeks to make a coherent and reliable whole of their lives. The radio medium plays against their efforts; like many of Beckett's radio works, the men's voices seem to sound in a vacuum, they are isolated from the surrounding sounds of the passers-by, motor cars and the barrel organ. Their identity, their perceived dialogue and memories are as flimsy and as worn as the organ music which frames the play. Beckett has

31 Olivier de Magny, 'Le Théâtre de Robert Pinget', *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault* 53 (1966): 54.

32 Samuel Beckett, *Proust, and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder, 1965) 13.

revealed in conversation and interviews his belief that the loss of our faculties both necessitates and enhances our need to create:

> It's a paradox, but with old age, the more the possibilities diminish, the better chance you have. With diminished concentration, loss of memory, obscured intelligence – what you, for example, might call 'brain damage' – the more chance there is for saying something closest to what one really is. Even though everything seems inexpressible, there remains the need to express. A child needs to make a sand castle even though it makes no sense. In old age, with only a few grains of sand, one has the greatest possibility.[33]

It is curious to hear and read Beckett's appropriation of this Pinget play into his own work. For, while Beckett was involved in translation of other artists since the 1920s, *The Old Tune* is a rare example of his claiming to have adapted rather than translated another's work. Taken out of the wider perspective of Pinget's work, the English, or Hiberno-English version is a light-hearted reflection on themes that recur in the translator's own radio work and that of the other authors mentioned here. We witness alongside the disintegration of language, a central role for music in terms of structure and content and a recognition that the sonic components of words, sound, music and silence which constitute radio can undermine as easily as enhance meaning. If language becomes redundant, characters become isolated; so too, if the playwright explores the private realm of radio, he or she risks alienating the baffled listener. Gorman and Cream speak within a buffer of silence. The passers-by are oblivious to them and the music of the organ grinder is separated from them by long pauses. It would appear that both authors believe that their unverifiable words and memories operate like 'a drum-beat in a vacuum' in the absence of an absolute Truth.[34]

Thus we find Beckett's radio output belonging to a style of radio drama which has identified the essence of the genre. The criterion for such a style is to isolate an individual, a small group or a crisis. These authors seek to magnify such individuals using the microphone,

33 Lawrence Shainberg, 'Exorcising Beckett', *The Paris Review* 29.104 (1987): 103.

34 Fritz Mauthner, *B*, II, 79, qtd. in Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 112.

presenting intimate portraits, even presenting a character's 'skull-scape', or internal mind.[35] In Artaud's work this has explosive power; in Beckett's plays, it can move from the boisterous hubbub of *All That Fall* to the weary, fading voices which sound in the psyche of Henry in *Embers*. This involves the contradictory humours of the personality being portrayed by means of multiple internal voices and the imaginative use of music. Beckett wrote seven plays for radio during the 1950s and 1960s. Each play displays the pivotal role of music as a means of structuring an exclusively aural genre. In radio, he found an ideal dimension in which to present themes such as the disintegration of language and the isolation of characters and of creative artists.

In *All That Fall*, Maddy Rooney struggles to Bogtown train station to collect her blind husband, Dan. Filled with hymns, music and country sounds, an emotional impact is delivered by the strong musical patterning of the first production, directed by Donald McWhinnie. If this is a highly populated and busy radio play, *Embers* is the complete opposite, a meditation on isolation or solipsism. Henry is alone on a pebble beach, recalling bitter memories from his past life in order to kill time. The demands on the vocal register of the actors demonstrate an increasing confidence by the author and a desire to develop a musical appreciation which is close to that of American composer John Cage. Both Cage and Beckett are pointing to the music or sounds which are largely ignored or which are dismissed by most people as noise.

The Old Tune, Beckett's adaptation of Robert Pinget's *La Manivelle*, involves two senile characters, Cream and Gorman, who are isolated from the rest of humanity. Their muddled conversation is framed by a mechanised music which lacks human interpretation. Themes of isolation and music appear again in *Rough I* in which a man, *He*, is obsessed by two sounds emitting from a radio-like machine. Voice and Music are heard. They don't play together and the music appears to lack any linear or performative qualities. *Cascando*, the only Beckett radio play written specifically for a French radio station, is similar in ways to *Rough I.* A speaker called Opener opens and closes two separate sounds, one of music, the other a non-stop

35 Linda Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* (Boston: Twayne, 1986) 4.

stream of stories told by an agitated, almost incoherent voice. In *Words and Music*, music is actually a character in the *dramatis personae*, alongside Words. They are whipped into collaborative performance by a tyrannical club-wielding character called Croak. The final play, *Rough II* is faintly reminiscent of Artaud's final work, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*. Here we witness a torture session in which Fox is whipped by a mute character called Dick and sexually molested by a Stenographer at the suggestion of Animator. These two are convinced that Fox is withholding a vital secret which will liberate them from what appears to be an ever-recurring interrogation.

As I have mentioned, the purpose of this introduction is to locate Beckett's radio plays in the context of contemporary radio authors in Britain and France. My first chapter will refer again to the radio plays of Louis MacNeice whose output at the BBC from the 1930s to the 1960s is representative of the development of the genre from the realm of public to private expression and from a theatre-based style to one which was specifically radio-friendly. Trevor's *Beyond the Pale* will also be considered as an example of a more established style of radio drama in the early 1980s.

Chapter Two gives a more in-depth analysis of Beckett's radio plays, their musical and performative qualities. The unique capability for interiorisation which has its roots in earlier theatre from Japanese Noh drama to French Symbolists and the attempts to convey what Apollinaire described as '*une sorte de sur-réalisme*' will be explored.[36] The chapter centres around *Embers* which I believe is the key text amongst Beckett's radio works.

In spite of its realist veneer, *All That Fall* undercuts the certainties of language. Its musical structure is the subject of Chapter Three which also examines recurring imagery and allusions to older texts. Despite its lack of originality, the artist's duty is to individualise these echoes of older works, allowing them to resonate afresh. The musical influence of Franz Schubert is also analysed. The thematic and structural utilisation of the composer's music is arguably the only overt acknowledgement by Beckett of an influential precursor.

36 Guillaume Apollinaire, 'Programme de *Parade*, mai 1917', *Œuvres en prose complètes*, *Vol. II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991) 865.

In the non-visual dimension of radio drama, Beckett constantly attempts the impossible. He shares composer John Cage's fascination with silence and attunes the listener to the music and sounds within and surrounding silence. In Chapter Four, I consider Beckett's aesthetic of failure which seeks to convey sounds which are close neighbours of silence.

The Austrian philosopher Fritz Mauthner is the subject of Chapter Five. Beckett first read Mauthner's work in the late 1920s, at the suggestion of James Joyce and he wrote numerous passages from *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* in to his notebooks of the time.[37] While the notebook includes quotations from a wide variety of philosophers, Mauthner's reflections appear to have caught the young Beckett's attention the most. Mauthner suggests that language is incapable of communicating reality. This break with unproblematic realism influenced Beckett from the 1920s onwards. It finds its ideal expression in radio drama. Here words are no longer signifiers, representing physical reality. They assume a status equal to the other sounds, noises and sound effects of the drama. No longer obliged to hold referential meaning, they may chime as musical units. Such musical qualities might lead to a more intuitive form of communication on radio. Chapter Five examines how Beckett uses music in these radio plays to overcome the limitations of speech. Mauthner suggests that communication through language is impossible. If language cannot reliably reflect reality, Mauthner, agues, then memory, which is retained in language, is invalid. Mauthner argues also that an objective analysis of language is impossible as the tool used for such analysis is language itself. In the absence of true communication, he argues that language should be kept as simple as possible. His conclusion was that the best solution in the face of such a bleak outlook was silence and humour.

Radio presented Beckett with a unique dimension in which to present the listener with what Mauthner describes as the 'nebulous-

37 *Whoroscope* Notebook. MS 3000, 46–48, 50–59.

ness of words'.[38] Of course he does not attempt a simple dramatic presentation of Mauthner's nihilistic philosophy. Whereas Beckett expresses a feeling of having reached a creative dead-end in the disintegration of syntax and identity of his prose, radio provides the author with an alternative to such pessimism. If the characters presented are increasingly isolated and misinterpreted, Beckett is nevertheless opening up the possibility of other forms of communication and reality, as symbolised by music and performance in these plays. Increasingly in his late work, words display a musical as much as referential quality. Likewise the music inherent in these plays has an affective impact on the characters within the plays and on the radio listener. The intention of this cumulative impact is not to more effectively articulate a message or moral but to effectuate what Philip Glass identifies as a quickening or emotional epiphany; this is a non-intellectual reaction to the work which may or may not occur at various points in the play. This point of climax is specific to each individual listener:

> The invention, or innovation, of Beckett's *Play* is that it includes us, the audience, in a different way than does traditional theater. Instead of submitting us to an internal mechanism within the work, it allows us, by our presence, to relate to it, complete it and personalize it. The power of the work is directly proportional to the degree to which we succeed in personalizing it.[39]

Chapter Six is a comparative study between Artaud's *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* and Beckett's *Rough II*. Both represent the unswerving attempt by each author to evoke on radio a deeply personal world-view. This is achieved through an emission of sounds, noises and music in which discursive speech is parodied and other forms of communication and performance are proposed. Glossolalia implies the possibility of communicating a *sur-réalité* which exists beyond the realm of language. These productions risk confounding the listener due to the apparent self-absorption of each artist.

38 Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge* 615-616, qtd. in Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Fritz Mauthner for Company', *Journal of Beckett Studies* 9 (1983): 67. Henceforth referred to as 'FMC'.

39 Philip Glass, *Music by Philip Glass* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 35.

The Dutch production of *Rough I* is an excellent example of an artist, Richard Rijnvos, working in a complementary art who achieves a creative dialogue with Beckett. He does not adopt a self-effacing role in his relationship with a superior *auteur* figure. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the Beckett text, noting its open-ended properties which require completion through such artistic collaboration.

Musical and poetic models from older forms are employed by Beckett in *Words and Music* and *Cascando* to explore the hermeneutic relationship which exists between the author, interpreters and the audience in radio drama. In Chapter Eight, I suggest that despite the physical separation between these units in the creative process, the listener is still pivotal in providing an immediate reaction to these fleeting broadcasts.

A number of significant works exist relating to the two strands of my research, which are Beckett's radio drama and music in Beckett's oeuvre. *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and Radio and Television*, published by Clas Zilliacus in 1976 is a comprehensive record of Beckett's contributions to these two mass media. His attention to Beckett's radio works includes reference to other radio productions of the author's work which were not written expressly for radio. Zilliacus pays particular attention to the history of British radio drama and of the BBC Third Programme. His analysis of audience research is particularly useful as it illustrates the high degree of attention which was paid to listeners' opinions despite the ever-diminishing audience figures for these productions. Zilliacus also sheds light on Beckett's creative process by comparing the final published texts with earlier drafts.

The critic and radio producer Martin Esslin's *Mediations*, *Essays on Brecht, Beckett and the Media*, includes the authoritative article 'Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting' which relates the history of Beckett's collaboration with the BBC Third Programme team. It gives us an insight into the level of care which was applied to these productions as well as describing how exacting Beckett could be about the execution of his work. I refer in particular to Esslin's use of the term *auteur* to describe the radio producer's duty to convey the playwright's text and directions with scrupulous care.

Donald McWhinnie, the producer of Beckett's first radio plays, also produced other Beckett broadcasts such as *From an Abandoned Work* and *Molloy*. His 1959 *The Art of Radio* is another indispensable account of radio in which the radio producer analyses *All That Fall* as a play which places new demands on production teams and the listener. He displays a particularly musical appreciation in this analysis. His micro-analysis of this first play also emphasises the pragmatic necessity for interpretation within the radio production team. An appropriate example illustrates the necessity to demand various vocal timbres from the actors. The directions in italics are McWhinnie's and exemplify the inevitable interpretation of the author's text by actors and directors:

> Mr Rooney: (*quite conversationally, this*) But why do we not sit down somewhere? Are we afraid we should never rise again?
> Mrs Rooney: (*matter-of-fact*) Sit down on what?
> Mr Rooney: (*matter-of-fact*) On a bench, for example.
> Mrs Rooney: (*long-suffering*) There is no bench.
> Mr Rooney: (*irritable*) Then on a bank, let us sink down upon a bank.
> Mrs Rooney: (*as to a child*) There is no bank.
> Mr Rooney: (*suddenly a child himself; simply, softly, naively*) Then we cannot.[40]

Mary Bryden's *Samuel Beckett and Music* is an invaluable addition to our understanding of music in Beckett's work. It includes contributions from major producers of Beckett's radio plays, including Katharine Worth and Everett Frost. There are also interviews with composers who have composed music for these plays including Morton Feldman, Marcel Mihalovici and Philip Glass. I believe this collection emphasises the variety of musical approaches which can be taken when interpreting a Beckett text. This is germane to my own research which highlights the author's willingness to consider numerous musical approaches rather than aligning himself with one musical school.

My understanding of the musicality of the radio works has been further enhanced by accessing recordings of the various productions.

40 McWhinnie 149.

Composer Richard Rijnvos has been kind enough to furnish me with a copy of his production of *Rough I* as well as valuable reaction to my observations on this unique English version. The American Public Radio versions of the plays, produced by Everett C. Frost, are publicly available. The remaining versions by the BBC may be heard at the British Library, London, while both French and English productions may also be heard at the Beckett Archive, Reading University.

As Beckett drew inspiration from a wide variety of musical models, my own research approaches these works through comparative analysis with other musical radio works, classical models and traditional ethnic models. My own musical formation is in Irish traditional music and unaccompanied singing. I believe that my comparison of some of Beckett's radio scenarios to ethnic models of composition allows the listener and reader to gain insights which enhance and potentially bypass theory-based or literary interpretations of these works. The musicality of Beckett's radio work has aroused my curiosity since reading these plays as an undergraduate. At this point also, I had read Beckett's 1937 letter to Axel Kaun in which he speaks of the 'unfathomable abysses of silence' which underlie Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*.[41] In my research I have investigated the paradox of how Beckett could identify so strongly with music while attaching such significance to its antithesis, silence.

41 Letter to Axel Kaun, 9 July 1937, trans. Martin Esslin, Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta*, *Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: Calder, 1983) 172.