

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR



**Something Gone Wrong With the Silence: The Motif of Voice in
Samuel Beckett's *Embers*, *Eh Joe* and *That Time***

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Praha, srpen 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD., for his guidance, patience and many valuable suggestions which helped the improvement of this thesis. Further, I wish to kindly thank Bc. Linda Fořtová for both practical and intellectual advice and for her support, and Mgr. Zoya Kiryushina for technical and moral support.

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Abstract in English

The primary concern of this thesis lies in the investigation of the motif of voice, and its various forms and functions, in three selected plays by Samuel Beckett. One of his lifelong preoccupations, the motif of voice already pervades much of Beckett's early prosaic work finding its more suitable and sophisticated realization in the author's later dramatic works for radio, television and theatre. Throughout the author's entire oeuvre, the motif of voice is called for on many different occasions: voices are engaged in the creation of both characters and the external reality surrounding them; Beckett's narrators are concerned with the voices ceaselessly echoing within their heads; voices represent the characters' memories and past selves becoming, eventually, characters in their own right. *Embers*, *Eh Joe* and *That Time* were deliberately chosen for the investigation of the nature of such a motif on the basis of the correspondence of their contents, as well as of the difference in their realization involving three different media.

The introductory chapter foreshadows the origins of the motif of voice in Beckett's non-dramatic texts, as well as it attempts to outline several basic features of the motif in connection to its realization within the dramatist's work. The chapter briefly considers the role of language, and its aural realization in voice, in regards to its formative ability and its relation to the almost omnipresent question of the creator and the created. A brief discussion of the Beckettian paradox, mirrored in the insufficiency of language to express, while it is also regarded the sole means of expression, is presented in order to be explored in the following three chapters. Further, the said chapter touches upon the concept of duality between body and mind, physical existence and human consciousness, and the inability of the two to relate to each other. In Beckett, such discrepancy becomes manifest in the author's gradual inclination towards more distilled forms of expression, his turn to minimalism mirrored in the disruption of the common dramatic equilibrium between the visual and the aural elements.

The following three chapters form the major part of the thesis. They are each devoted to a more complex analysis of the three plays and to the specificities of the media in which they are primarily executed. Since all three pieces are concerned with similar themes, the

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realization of the previously established concept of voice, together with the thematic content it carries, is investigated in relation to the particularities of the three media. The concluding part of this thesis offers a summary of the themes discussed in connection to the notion of voice. It further provides a brief commentary on the individual plays, attempting to demonstrate how Beckett's perfectionism and constant pursuit of a better expression are mirrored in his endeavour to master the media.

Abstrakt v českém jazyce

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou motivu hlasu a jeho rozličnými formami a významy ve třech vybraných hrách Samuela Becketta. Vzhledem k tomu, že je téma slov a především hlasu jedním z autorových celoživotních zájmů, prostupuje tento motiv již jeho raným prozaickým dílem a nachází mnohdy více vyhovující a sofistikované vyjádření až v autorových pozdějších hrách pro rozhlas, televizní vysílání a divadlo. Hlas je vskutku často se vyskytujícím prvkem uplatňovaným v mnoha různých situacích: hlasy se aktivně účastní utváření jak postav, tak vnější reality, jejíž jsou tyto postavy součástí; mnozí z Beckettových vypravěčů jsou sužováni hlasy, které se jim neustále ozývají v hlavách; hlasy také představují vzpomínky a dřívější „já“ postav, které se nakonec transformují do velmi svérázné a samostatné postavy. Hry *Embers*, *Eh Joe* a *That Time* byly záměrně zvoleny pro rozbor motivu hlasu jak na základě jejich tématické podoby, tak i pro různorodost jejich realizace prostřednictvím tří různých médií.

Úvodní kapitola nastiňuje původ tématu hlasu v Beckettově nedramatickém díle a pokouší se zhruba vytyčit několik základních rysů tohoto motivu s ohledem na jeho uplatnění v autorových pozdějších dramatických hrách. Kapitola se krátce věnuje roli jazyka - a jeho auditivního protějšku - v souladu s jeho schopností vytvářet a s jeho vztahem k časté problematice tvůrce a díla. Dále krátce pojednává o takzvaném beckettovském paradoxu, spočívajícím v nedostatečnosti jazyka pro vyjádření skutečnosti, i když je shledáván jediným možným prostředkem komunikace. Stejná kapitola se taktéž zabývá konceptem duality mezi tělem a myslí - fyzickou existencí a lidským vědomím - a jejich neschopností navázat kontakt. V díle Samuela Becketta se tento rozpor projevuje ve vzrůstající inklinaci ke zhuštěnějším formám vyjádření, přičemž jeho obrat k minimalismu se odráží v narušení obecně přijímané dramatické rovnováhy mezi vizuální a auditivní složkou.

Následující tři kapitoly tvoří hlavní část této práce. Každá z nich je věnována podrobnější analýze jedné z her a média, ve kterém má být primárně realizována. Vzhledem k tomu, že se všechna tři dramata zabývají obdobnými tématy, realizace dříve zmiňovaného konceptu hlasu a obsahu, který s sebou nese, je nahlížena z pozice jejich shodnosti se specifiky daných médií. Závěrečná část práce se věnuje shrnutí témat probíraných v kontextu motivu hlasu a poskytuje krátký komentář k jednotlivým hrám. Tím se mimo jiné

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snaží poukázat na Beckettův perfekcionista styl a jeho neustálé úsilí dosáhnout lepšího vyjádření, které se odráží vedle dalších oblastí i v jeho zájmu o média.

Introduction

Samuel Beckett's work, a rather heterogeneous family of genres ranging from poetry and critical essays to radio and television plays, saw a gradual tendency towards minimalism predominantly since the 1950s. Although the author's style underwent a considerable transformation since his first published works, it is important to analyse some chief ideas that can be traced already in Beckett's early fiction, and that are further explored and perfected using different kinds of media with which the author experimented towards the end of his career. It is almost impossible to disregard the motif of voice and its various forms, among other recurrent themes pervading much of his work, as one of the most important principles engaged in the construction of Beckett's fictional work as well as in a multiplicity of his dramatic pieces. After all, as the narrator of *The Unnamable* informs us, '[i]t must not be forgotten (...) that all is a question of voices'¹.

Essentially, as Beckett experiments with his writing in prose, he gradually abandons the omniscient third-person narrative of his earliest texts, giving way to a succession of fundamentally subjective first-person narrative voices, making their prolonged fragmented testimonies almost resonate in the silence. Such utilization of the quasi-stream of consciousness technique then indeed leads to their identification with the notion of voice; the internal monologues of the confused and lost narrators of his novels are yet to develop into a hallmark of Beckett's style of the later works for theatre, radio and television. Consequently, the concept of the formative power of language and voice that first appeared in Beckett's prosaic work and enabled the actual existence of 'his people'² comes to bear even greater significance in dramatic works whose perception is primarily dependent on the viewer's or listener's direct participation.³

1 Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2009) 339. This source is referred to as 'TN' throughout. Additionally, Paul Davies notes in his essay 'Three Novels and Four "Novelles": 'To a correspondent's enquiry about the meaning of his work, Beckett's reply - that it is a matter of fundamental sounds - has become well-known.' Paul Davies, 'Three Novels and Four "Novelles"', *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 249.

2 In his book, H. Porter Abott accentuates the following fact: 'On the rare occasions when Beckett speaks about his characters, he calls them 'my people'. H. Porter Abott, *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996) 43.

3 In his article, Chris Ackerley makes a similar observation: 'The mystery of the voice is the paradox that

The employment of the strongly subjective narrative voice opens a new possibility for the narrator to create and shape the reality with the use of language. It is not surprising that the novelistic characters continuously doubt their actual purpose: apart from dying and engaging himself in storytelling while doing so, Malone is preoccupied with the question whether he is the creator or the created.⁴ Such contradictory feelings arising within Beckett's characters and, at the same time, his narrators, most likely stem from the fact that they too, just as the characters of their own narratives, are mere products of textuality. While the Unnamable ponders about the 'words pronouncing [him] alive'⁵, Malone is literally keeping himself alive by inventing narratives or, as Simon Critchley puts it, 'is an identity minimally held together by a series of stories'⁶; Rónán McDonald, commenting upon Beckett's novel *Watt*, has a similar view regarding the formative capability of language: '[t]he narrative is not "really" given by Watt – rather Watt is given by the narrative'⁷. Therefore, Descartes' notion of *cogito ergo sum* appears to be much at work here: the characters' existence is confirmed by their flowing internal monologues. In *Samuel Beckett*, John Pilling notices that 'it is as if the work writes itself'⁸ and the I-narrators indeed seem to *be*, 'at least for the duration of fictional work which calls them to existence'⁹. However, the widely accepted view of Beckett's times that language is a failed medium and insufficient even for its primary purpose of communication is in straight relation to the questionable identity of the self.¹⁰ The fact that the characters' identities are constructed by the language of the narrative on which they are thus dependent, and this language is barren and deprived of its elemental function of bearing any true meaning, stands at the very heart of the Beckettian paradox.¹¹ Furthermore, the disrupted and fragmentary voices of

drives Samuel Beckett's supreme fiction, the three novels that culminate in *L'Innommable*, and then manifests itself in the fiction (and ultimately the drama) that follows.' Chris Ackerley, 'The Uncertainty of Self: Samuel Beckett and the Location of the Voice', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 1 Sept. 2004: 39-51.

4 John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge, 1976) 60.

5 TN, 329.

6 Simon Critchley, 'Who Speaks in the Work of Samuel Beckett?', *Yale French Studies*, No. 93, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1998) 114-130.

7 Rónán McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 82.

8 Pilling, 44.

9 Pilling, 113.

10 John Pilling also notes that Beckett 'moved from the position of language being problematic to that of the whole of existence being problematic.' Pilling, 22.

11 By this paradox I mean Beckett's belief that 'there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express' articulated in the *Three Dialogues* and later in much of his fictional and dramatic work. Logically,

the novels struggling with their identification with the “I” are most probably a product of the influence of Beckett's study of Cartesian dualism¹²: the disembodied voices of many of his characters, especially of those of the later period, struggling as they are questing for their self is one of the most recognisably Beckettian themes in the twentieth-century drama.¹³

Similarly, not only are the characters brought into being by the language employed in the narrative, but also the external world. The author's awareness of this can be illustrated on the example from *Watt* that is emphasized by Rubin Rabinowitz: after providing a description of a rather special kind of fish, the narrator becomes aware of the possible reaction of the reader and asks himself whether such fish actually exist. He immediately answers: 'Yes, such fish exist, now'¹⁴, implying that, as Rabinowitz notes, 'the zoology of the outside world is irrelevant, the fish exist in the world of the novel'.¹⁵ Such quality of language and human speech is what seems to have had an impact on Beckett's creative output of the later years, for his concern with 'the sound of the human voice and its power to evoke an entire world'¹⁶ became even more apparent after his first encounter with radio drama and generally with the possibility of recording speech and later reproducing it on stage.

Beckett's exploration of the possibilities of words and their incapacity of flawless and truthful depiction of both external and internal reality is perceivable in his intent to push the limits of language even further. Consequently, the author's preoccupation with the duality between body and mind, physical existence and human

the objects of the narratives are obliged to express, with constant flux of words, their own existence; but, for there is really nothing to express they become lost in their quest for self, creatures condemned by the very same means that are supposed to create them. (Samuel Beckett, *Proust: Three Dialogues* (London: Calder, 1987) 103.

12 The influence is discussed in John Pilling's *Samuel Beckett*. Pilling, 112-5. Many references to Beckett's preoccupation with Descartes and some later Cartesians are also made in James Knowlson's biography of the author: James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

13 For instance, the importance of the question of duality between body and mind for Beckett is discussed in Martin Esslin's *Meditations*, where he notes, in connection to the dramatist's late plays, that self 'should be the link between the body and the consciousness – but which, as the body is in constant change and the consciousness in constant flux, remains ever elusive.' Martin Esslin, *Meditations: Essays on Brecht, Beckett, and the Media* (London: Abacus, 1983) 124.

14 Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2009) 97.

15 Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984) 231.

16 Qtd. in Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 10.

consciousness becomes mirrored in his increasing inclination towards minimalism, which leads to deepening of the aural element at the expense of lessening the visual one. Voices are almost obsessively omnipresent throughout Samuel Beckett's work: voices create the characters in his prose as well as in the whole series of characters and soundscapes in radio drama; people are preoccupied with voices that constantly echo in their heads, whether they evoke and master these voices themselves or are tortured by their eternal presence; voices represent memories and past selves of characters, sometimes they even become rightful characters themselves.

The present essay will concentrate on the employment of the established concept of voice in three plays of the period after 1950, with special attention paid to different kinds of media and the advantages and disadvantages for the representation of the motif offered by each of them. A play for radio, *Embers* (1959), a play for television, *Eh Joe* (1965) and a late play for theatre, *That Time* (1975) were chosen to exemplify the most vital aspects of the researched topic. In all these works the characters are exposed to various kinds of voices, supposedly internal, with the epicentre inside their own heads. However, all of these plays pursue different methods of representation of such a motif: as a play intended for air, *Embers* seems to be the best candidate for conveying the essence of the concept of voice and voice in the head in particular; *Eh Joe* employs, on its part, a specific visual element complementing the 'invisible voice' and employs various techniques for its emphasis; the truly minimalistic dark theatre of *That Time* and its use of pre-recorded voice addressing a disembodied head has yet again a very different structure from the two aforementioned plays.

In his experimentation with minimalism, Beckett disrupts the common dramatic equilibrium between the visual and the aural.¹⁷ The creative ability of language, as it has been discussed with relation to Beckett's fiction in the opening part of this chapter, is also the principle upon which the author's late work stands. However eliminated the visual component is, the power of voice to recreate the ostensibly missing images is

17 In his preface to *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater*, Enoch Brater attempts to explain the title of his book in connection to the dramatist's mature work: 'Minimalism, an abstract and by some measure even a geometric art form, at best aims to do more and more with less and less. (...) Beckett's plays demonstrate an aesthetic which goes far beyond the limited and often dehumanized sphere we recognize in the chilling reticence of minimalist art.' Brater, x. Consequently, it indeed seems that the dramatist attempts to cross the boundaries of what we usually understand as 'minimalist'.

enormously effective. Since each medium has its advantages and disadvantages, they all offer different possibilities of communicating the foreshadowed notion of voice as a creative building principle, and thus shall be discussed accordingly.

Chapter I: *Embers*, a play for radio

Silence is, for Samuel Beckett, the very matter of which the universe is composed.¹ The direct opposite to this is man's constant, obsessive preoccupation with words. It has been outlined how the use of language as a tool for artistic creation is engaged in the formation of Beckett's fiction, with the voices of his 'vice-narrators'² blending together in a chorus of existence. Nevertheless, the pronounced dichotomy between the craved soundless void and the omnipresent murmur of voices only rarely finds its perfect realization on paper. And, since Beckett is an unyielding perfectionist, every nearly faultless realisation is merely another impulse to try for a better expression, to '[t]ry again, [f]ail again, [f]ail better.'³ The possibility of capturing human voice with sound recordings and the qualities of radio drama explored by the author since his first encounter with the medium offered satisfactory results, proving radio to be one of the best conductors for the transmission of internal monologues.⁴ Since a radio play is a continuum of sound⁵ on the background of silence, it can also be regarded as a powerful metaphor for all human existence in Beckettian terms. To him, '[e]very word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness,'⁶ as is human existence in general.

Embers, Beckett's second radio play, employs the concept of voice in the sense that it literally poses the listener inside the head of the main protagonist, Henry: '[i]n the madhouse of the skull and nowhere else'.⁷ As many other characters and narrators in

1 John Pilling notes that '[f]or Beckett, the universe is made of silence; silence existed before man came, and silence will supervene when he goes.' Pilling, 26.

2 A collective name for the narrators of Beckett's fictional works invented by the author himself, as quoted in e.g. Christopher Murray, *Samuel Beckett: Playwright & Poet*, (New York: Pegasus Books, 2009) 113.

3 Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On*, (Southampton: Camelot Press, Inc., 1991) 101.

4 Or streams of consciousness, as John Drakakis notes in *British Radio Drama*, adding that, together with montage effects, it has remained a 'structural [feature] of radio drama down to the present time.' John Drakakis, *British Radio Drama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 5. It is of note, however, that the term 'stream of consciousness' is indeed faulty as it is in no way accurate for the description of Beckett's disembodied narrators and dramatic characters on their constant quest for self. While the consciousness of human being as a whole is incessantly put to question, the term 'inner monologue' is perhaps the best alternative for naming the process preoccupying the speaking mind.

5 Esslin, 181.

6 Beckett's famous quote from an interview, qtd. e.g. in Mel Gussow, *Conversations With and About Beckett*, (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1996) 139.

7 *Nohow On*, 67. Or, as Hugh Kenner puts it, 'lock[s] us as it does in the word spinner's prison'. Qtd. in Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television* (ABO Akademi, 1976) 83.

Beckett, Henry is obsessed with stories: he constructs and reconstructs narratives either himself or with the help of voices that echo within his head. Thus his existence, like that of Malone, for instance, is tied together with strings of stories he tells himself in order to avoid the omnipresent dreadful sound.⁸ Like Molloy, who comes to the conclusion that '[w]hat [he] need[s] now is stories,'⁹ though not sure even of that, Henry never gives up inventing. Indeed, for him, the process of constant inventing and saying becomes even more crucial than for any of his predecessors. Practically, as Henry exists only in the medium of radio, he is nothing but a voice himself. His existence is exclusively determined by the existence of audible words during the transmission.¹⁰ 'Every syllable,' Henry says to his wife as he encourages her to keep talking, 'is a second gained,'¹¹ thus indicating his dependence on spoken language and the fact that he himself is merely a product of broadcasting. Consequently, like all the other characters inhabiting the soundscapes of the so-called plays of voices, Henry, too, seems to be '[c]orresponding to the spectrum between sound and silence, (...) located somewhere between life and death.'¹² In fact, the concern with telling of nearly all of Beckett's narrators is even more strongly felt in radio drama, for here, once a character ceases to exist verbally, he or she ceases to exist generally. For instance, Ada's voice dissipates back into thin air towards the end of the play, threatening never to come back, as well as Henry's own voice eventually drowns in the final silence filled with the sound of crashing waves. Thus, the situation created by radio as a medium reflects the dilemma of distinction between character/narrator and created/creator of Beckett's earlier works. While Henry as a character is created by the continuous flow of words he must produce in order to be perceived as actually existing by the listener, Henry as a narrator is the entity creating the whole play, the one upon whose subjectivity the listener becomes ultimately reliant.

In his *Meditations*, Martin Esslin highlights the advantages of the purely aural medium in comparison to those principally requiring the visual element such as

8 For Henry, the sound of sea; for Malone 'the sounds of his dying', as observed in John Fletcher and J. Spurling, *Beckett: A Study of His Plays*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 96.

9 TN, 9.

10 In this regard, *All That Fall*, Beckett's first audio drama, shows the characters to be even more aware of the fact that they do not exist beyond their voices: they feel a strong urge to comment upon this matter, reminding the listener of their actual presence. For instance, Mrs. Rooney's famous '[d]o not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on' (*All That Fall*, 23).

11 CSP, 102.

12 McDonald, 57.

television, film or theatre: 'it is through the ear that *words* are primarily communicated; and words communicate concepts, thought, information on a more abstract level than the images of the world the eye takes in'.¹³ He further notes that radio drama uses the listener's mind as a stage, for language and the information it carries is automatically translated into visual images; the great beneficial factor of such medium then lies in its power to activate our visual imagination.¹⁴ It is of no doubt that the dramatic works 'performed' in this manner are intensely subjective in their essence and, being heavily dependent on verbal expression, are the cause of much ambiguity. Due to the fact that the differentiation between external and internal reality becomes almost impossible, such plays provide another substantial advantage for the employment of Beckett's philosophy.¹⁵ As listeners, we are dependent on the guidance of a highly subjective narrator, with the majority of the play's action taking place inside his head as he remains seated motionlessly by the shore. This is one of the crucial differences between radio drama and theatre, and also the reason why most radio plays are on principle non-transferable to other media. All the voices except Henry's are quite inevitably ambiguous and the blinded listener has only several hints to rely upon when attempting to distinguish reality from fiction. For instance in *Embers*, Ada's voice is almost ghostly in its remoteness, and she does not make any audible sound as she sits down at the shingle. She is, as many other Beckett's audio characters, a personification of the ambiguity offered by the radio¹⁶: her vocal counterpart in *Eh Joe* is already quite clearly established as an aural hallucination.

13 Esslin, 171. Author's italics.

14 Esslin, 172. The author also agrees with Marshall McLuhan that 'far from being a blind medium, radio (...) is an intensely visual medium.' Esslin 131, 172.

15 Especially concerning the notion of extreme subjectivity of perception of reality which occupied Beckett so much throughout his entire career. As it has been emphasized many times in relation to Beckett's work, it is almost unfeasible to understand the subjective reality of other people. Commenting upon the form of the author's fictional writing, Rubin Rabinovitz notes that 'Beckett believes that third-person descriptions of mental processes are usually trivial or misleading. The intrinsic self of another person is unknowable,' adding that '[i]n their search for knowledge about the nature of reality, Beckett's characters (...) discover that ultimate answers are hard to come by.' Rabinovitz, 231. In *Three Dialogues*, when urged to provide his commentary on the art of van Velde, Beckett emphasizes that he is incapable of true understanding of the artist and his work since he is not him and can only say what he is 'pleased to fancy [van Velde] is, fancy [van Velde] does', resulting in the fact that most probably 'he is and does quite otherwise.' *Three Dialogues*, 123.

16 Zilliacus quotes Beckett in an interview: "*Cendres* repose sur une ambiguïté: le personnage a-t-il une hallucination ou est-il en présence de la réalité? La réalisation scénique détruirait l'ambiguïté." Zilliacus, 83.

Although Beckett adopted a rather dismissive stance later in his life toward his early attempts at writing poetry¹⁷, both his prosaic and dramatic texts bear many unique poetic features. For this reason, even his fictional works are best read aloud; their rhythmical patterns are carefully crafted in order to achieve the most desirable aural effect. As Martin Esslin rightly points out, radio drama generally comes very close to oral literature.¹⁸ It is curious to note that *Embers* is indeed reminiscent of poetry in its utilization of poetic devices such as frequent repetition, ellipses, distribution of stresses, as well as in the employment of a number of other figures of speech.¹⁹ For instance, as Henry dives into his narrative 'about an old fellow called Bolton'²⁰, he almost neurotically clings to the same words repeated several times in abrupt sentences, thus allowing the rhythm to intensify the overall dramatic effect of the speech:

'There before the fire. [*Pause.*] Before the fire with all the shutters... no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn and the light, no light, only the light of the fire, sitting there in the... no, standing, standing there (...)'²¹

Furthermore, McDonald also notices that the repeated scene of encounter between Bolton and Holloway is 'the most intensely visual in the play.'²² It is not only because of the employment of a great number of descriptive adjectives, but also thanks to another fairly common poetic device utilized in order to make the narrated action more vivid and overall 'real'. For example, the words 'bitter cold, white world, cedar boughs'²³ presented by Henry to describe the ghostly environment reveal his intention to, however unobtrusively, engage all of the listener's basic senses – taste, touch, sight, smell – in addition to hearing.

17 As quoted in *The Development of Samuel Beckett's fiction* by Rubin Rabinovitz: '[h]is poetry he considers "the work of a very young man with nothing to say and the itch to make."' Rubinovitz, 1.

18 Esslin, 179. Similarly, Clas Zilliacus perceives a connection between *Embers* and oral poetry. Zilliacus, 95.

19 Frequent in Beckett are for instance: asyndeton, polysyndeton, aposiopesis, assonance and consonance, neologisms, paralipsis, synaesthesia, usage of puns and near-rhymes etc. However, this specific feature of Beckett's writing will be further developed in the author's later works, as it is attempted to be shown in the chapters three and four of this thesis.

20 CSP, 94.

21 CSP, 94.

22 McDonald, 58.

23 CSP, 94.

Embers opens with the sound of sea 'scarcely audible'²⁴ which gradually becomes louder as the listener is introduced to what perhaps is the only convincing soundscape of the play: the seashore.²⁵ Henry actually tells us about the location straight at the beginning of the play: '[t]hat sound you hear is the sea, (...) we are sitting on the strand' to which he immediately adds, 'I mention it because the sound is so strange (...) that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was.'²⁶ Obviously, as the words 'sea' and 'see' receive the primary stress and the listener is therefore forced to make a connection between the two, their character as a pun is emphasized. Such effective juxtaposition of the two words accentuates the irony of the statement as the listener is, quite logically, deprived of the ability of visual perception. The elaboration of the strange instance of synaesthesia is perceivable in Henry's subsequent address to his father, '[l]isten to the light now', which seems, rather than a pure ironic commentary, an evidence of Beckett's brilliant handling of the medium and his awareness of its unique power to evoke images from mere words.

As a purely aural medium, radio relies to a great extent not only on voice, but also on other sounds as the accompanying principle which balances the absence of the visual component. Therefore, the relationship between the two aspects becomes of great importance: in radio drama, sound effects are only meaningful in the context of words. In *Meditations*, Martin Esslin draws his readers' attention to the following fact:

Curiously enough, so strong is the suggestive power of the word, that a hint in the dialogue often does more than the actual sound effect. It has happened to me that listeners have complimented me on the marvellous sound effects of the sea or the woods in a play I produced, when in fact I

24 CSP, 93.

25 This is, however, yet another subject for speculation and perhaps an exact embodiment of the ambiguity Beckett had had in mind. Some critics claim that the seashore is a real setting; some perceive it as another hallucination of Henry's. For instance, Johnathan Kalb makes it clear that it cannot be sure whether there actually is any external action taking place at the beach stating that 'Henry (...) may or may not be walking by the sea.' Jonathan Kalb, 'The Mediated Quixote: The Radio and Television Plays, and *Film*', *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 129. Similarly, Fletcher and Spurling suggest that even though we hear the sound of the sea and Henry's boots on shingle as the play opens, 'we soon discover that the sea blooms in Henry's head continually,' leaving the listener to question whether or not the sound of the sea is real. Fletcher, 95. Finally, Clas Zilliacus and Martin Esslin agree on the fact that the setting of the seashore is indeed external. Esslin, 135. Zilliacus, 82. This is perhaps the best interpretation if the actual storyline, however fragmentary, is considered.

26 CSP, 93.

had not used any sound effects at all, but the dialogue had referred to the roar of the waves or the song of the birds.²⁷

Indeed, Beckett's *Embers* is rather temperate in its use of various sound effects, limiting them to only those that seem absolutely indispensable; the rest is visualized with the help of voice. Of those sound effects, the sea is the most prominent one: it both indicates Henry's position within the quasi-realistic setting of the play, and the sound that, as he claims, ceaselessly resonates inside his head forcing him to tell stories 'just loud enough to drown it'²⁸. The sound of the sea, which is faintly audible throughout the whole play, is crucial in the sense that there would be no necessity for words at all if it were not there.²⁹ The sound of shingle is employed to indicate movement or, rather, its absence. In addition, as a handful of other characters of Beckett's radio plays³⁰, Henry seems to possess the ability of commanding a variety of sounds and voices into being. He conjures up the sound of hoofs several times by mentioning them aloud, makes the voice of his wife, Ada, materialize, as well as he does the other sounds and voices constituting his 'evocations'³¹. However, this ability is rather imperfect even at the beginning of the play when Henry admits to have been failing to summon his father's voice, and it further dissolves towards the end when, as McDonald notices, '[t]he relationship between his will, represented by language, and the ambiguous world surrounding him, represented by other sounds, has fissured'.³²

It has already been discussed in the introductory chapter that Beckett's preoccupation with the notion of duality is one of the themes that keep recurring throughout his work. It can be imagined that a radio play, in having disrupted the connection between the visually perceivable and palpable and the internal monologue coming 'out of the dark'³³, is probably the clearest manifestation of such a notion.³⁴

27 Esslin, 183.

28 CSP, 94.

29 Observed in Zilliacus, who also claims that such sound 'achieves the dignity of dramatis persona.' Zilliacus, 89.

30 For instance, Maddie Rooney in *All That Fall* or Opener in *Cascando*.

31 Beckett's term for Henry's flashbacks or aural hallucinations involving other voices accompanied by sound effects and music in attempt to realistically recreate such phenomena. CSP, 100.

32 McDonald, 56.

33 'La parole sort du noir', as qtd. in Zilliacus, 91.

34 Beckett's experimentation in the field of radio drama had had an important effect on his later plays for theatre where the pre-recorded voice became one of the main components of Beckett's minimalist drama

Zilliacus emphasizes another fact that supports the idea of the 'incompatibility of mind with matter,'³⁵ one that is demonstrated straight with the first several words Henry utters:

'On. [*Sea. Voice Louder.*] On! [*He moves on. Boots on shingle. As he goes.*] Stop. [*Boots on shingle. As he goes, louder.*] Stop! [*He halts. Sea a little louder.*] Down. [*Sea. Voice louder.*] Down! [*Slither of shingle as he sits. (...)*]³⁶

As with his evocations, Henry has to address his body twice in order for it to obey, which is suggestive of a certain struggle between the will of Henry's mind and both the external reality and the internal one.³⁷ It indeed may seem that his mind is in control of everything. However, such connection made between his fading ability to conjure up voices and sounds only emphasises the fact that his ability to control his own declining and failing body is far from absolute and will soon disappear for good. And, since existence in Beckett is always equated with words, Henry can easily identify himself with the statement of his fellow narrator, Malone: '[m]y voice has gone dead, the rest will follow.'³⁸

Even though the importance of the Bolton-Holloway scene has already been discussed in connection to its formal characteristics, perhaps its largest significance for the play lies in what has been previously mentioned about the unreliability of language as the means for communication of one's vital personal matters. Guy Bernard sees such significance in the 'inability of one to communicate his mental trouble to the other'.³⁹ Paradoxically enough, both Henry's story and, in a larger scale, the whole play which comprises Henry and his story, rely almost exclusively on spoken language. Accordingly, the listener is located within Henry's head listening to his testimony consisting of words, attempting to understand what Henry is attempting to convey with

such is, for instance, *That Time* discussed in Chapter III.

35 Zilliacus, 91.

36 CSP, 93.

37 John Pilling observes that '[d]ualisms of self and world only give way to dualisms of self against self.' Pilling, 83.

38 TN, 263.

39 Guy C. Bernard, *Samuel Beckett: A New Approach* (London: J.M. Dent, 1970) 117.

those words while knowing that language as the means of communication of a person's internal reality is always doomed to failure. This is perhaps why, as Zilliacus observes in *Beckett and Broadcasting*, the fact that the play ends with Henry's immediate juxtaposition of the words 'waste' and 'words'⁴⁰ provides 'a lapidary summing-up of the play's content'⁴¹. The position of the two stressed words beginning with the same sound, each on one side of the indicated pause, automatically drives the listener's attention to their significance as a word pair: words are waste, and words are being wasted.

It must be noted that radio indeed proved a fruitful method for the conveyance of what Beckett had been attempting to portrait: a lonely mind engaged in an illusory dialogue with the voices of its own construct. Henry's urge to produce speech at any rate is what he shares with the majority of Beckett's narrators. Due to the nature of radio drama as such, the connection between utterance and existence becomes even more paradoxical: in order to prove their existence, the characters are almost solely dependent on their production of speech. However, this speech is always composed of words, yet these words become merely equated with waste. Therefore, Beckett's people are doomed by the paradox they all realize: 'nothing to express' clashes with 'nothing with which to express' and in the meantime with 'the obligation to express'.⁴²

40 CSP, 104.

41 Zilliacus, 78.

42 *Three Dialogues*, 103.

Chapter II: *Eh Joe*, a play for television

It has been discussed, in the previous chapter, that the encounter with the recording of the human voice helped Samuel Beckett in his pursuit of a more suitable and more precise way in which certain themes and motifs pervading his fiction could be carried out with greater satisfaction and success than the novel form had offered in the past. Since radio and recording generally provided a new possibility of preserving of what was to be a nearly-perfect performance, Beckett retained his interest in different kinds of media and attempted to further explore the advantages they might offer. *Eh Joe*, the author's first play intended for television broadcast, captures the progress in the way it deals with some of the central topics which have their origins in his early fiction. It is of note that a number of such themes and motifs already occurring in *Embers* are traceable in what seems to be a continuation of their study with the help of the small screen and the technical specificities of production pertaining to TV plays. Basically, while the author's attention rapidly shifts from one medium to another, the motif of voice still holds its principal and unquestioned position as one of the works' most important constructive elements.

One of the most prominent properties of television drama, as compared to its radio counterpart, is the duality of the visual and the aural it restores, bringing such plays closer, albeit not too close, to the more conventional theatre experience. Thus sound, and voice, the essential components of radio drama, become treated in a more complex way in television plays since they are compelled to cooperate with another crucial and rather indispensable aspect of the medium: the image. Such opposition of the two components is, however, an already well distinguishable mark of Beckett's style. In a similar fashion to radio drama, the voice in *Eh Joe* seems to be the more active participant of the two as it is the one carrying the principal information via language. Nevertheless, the mutual dependence of the two components on each other established by television is what constitutes *Eh Joe* and makes it a coherent whole. Voice, as a primarily expressive device, is not only supported by image and camera movement, but they indeed come to be mutually interconnected and affect each other. To use the example of *Embers*, where it is ultimately the sound of the sea that pollutes Henry's mind and urges him to produce narratives, it can be foreshadowed how

indispensable parts of one whole the two different components often are: if one ceases to exist, the other would not make much sense. If *Embers* lacked the sound element, all Henry's effort to drown it with his stories would be illogical. Similarly, if the visual component were taken away in *Eh Joe*, the voice's address would have no recipient whatsoever. For these reasons, as a play based on the ambiguity of the purely aural medium, *Embers* would in no way profit from its translation to a medium comprising the visual element. *Eh Joe* is, on its part, a play tailored especially for the small screen¹; its masterful and balanced employment of the two components is what makes it an excellent television play.

To further comment upon the mutual reliance of the two components, it should be noted that their relationship can be perceived on a few distinct levels. Firstly, the correspondence of the voice and the camera lies in their formation of the antagonist figure²: as parts of one whole, they cooperate in their villainous attempt to get into the mind of Joe, the protagonist reflected on the screen. The voice's escalating narrative correlates with the camera drawing nearer and nearer so that with each paragraph, as well as with each move forward, they also seem to be moving further inside Joe's tortured mind. Similarly, Zilliagus views their cooperation as a planned and persistent attack on the seated figure: 'the camera and the voice that goes with it (...) cut from rear to front view and bore their way into Joe's face in gradually intensified close-up'.³ These close-ups then concentrate on the image of Joe's face distorted in the laborious process of listening. His role as an auditor or listener, a common Beckettian prototype recurring in many of his other works, is established.⁴ The expressiveness of Joe's facial mimics 'coincides with the mounting aggressiveness of voice and camera'.⁵ As the narrative gradates to its sombre finale, the camera moves to the position wherefrom the viewer

1 As Knowlson and others claim, Beckett had thought of a television play based on close-ups even before the actual idea of *Eh Joe* as a whole came to him. Knowlson, 533. Zilliagus, 183. In addition, Martin Esslin notes that '[o]ther television plays could be enlarged to the proportions of the cinema screen without too great a loss of impact. Many of them can even be effectively broadcast on radio, so much are they principally verbal rather than usual. As a demonstration of what is specifically televisual *Eh Joe* is unique and masterpiece.' Esslin, 151-2.

2 As also observed in Jonathan Kalb's essay: 'Eh Joe (...) is a transitional piece in which Beckett is still using the camera as an antagonistic pursuer, as in Film'. Kalb, 137.

3 Zilliagus, 185.

4 Jonathan Kalb also notes that '[f]rom *All that fall* to *Ohio impromptu* [sic], Beckett worked from the premise that the act of listening holds inherent dramatic value.' Kalb, 138.

5 Zilliagus, 186.

has the finest point to observe the immense concentration on Joe's face, which for the time being becomes a stage for his internal monologue's narrative.

Secondly, the voice and camera image also seem to be merely two parts forming a whole, a 'total object, complete with missing parts'.⁶ As Jonathan Kalb suggests, 'Beckett's aesthetic of wholeness-in-fragmentariness is pursued on television by means of rectangular framing.'⁷ In a sense, the two are reminiscent of the previously discussed Beckettian notion of duality and are yet to be transferred onto, and further elaborated in, the theatre stage in the future. To accentuate such a notion in *Eh Joe*, Beckett makes a clear distinction between the speaking invisible voice and the almost motionless visual image of a man wordlessly seated on his bed. What further emphasises this difference is the chill of the monotonous pace of the constantly speaking voice and the vivacity of Joe's facial expressions mirroring the events that occupy his mind.⁸

Even though the two components are obviously dependent on one another, they never succeed to form a fully homogeneous whole and the crucial difference between them is emphasized. It is of note that the cooperation between the voice and the camera follows a certain pattern reminiscent of Beckett's earlier plays. For instance, as we have 'seen' with Henry of Embers,⁹ body and mind are two isolated entities that are always dealt with separately in Beckett's work, and the two become strictly differentiated in *Eh Joe* as well. It is indeed observable how rigorous the voice's unspoken dictate is: as a parallel to Henry's ability to predict sound and movement with his voice, the camera approaches Joe as the voice commands it to or, rather, as it falls into silence. In other words, just as other Beckett's characters speak only when they are not moving, and move when they are not speaking, any camera motion in *Eh Joe* pauses instantly whenever the voice utters its first syllables.

6 Three Dialogues, 101.

7 Kalb, 138.

8 Such instance of complementarity of the visual and aural elements seems to be yet another reflection of the constant attempt to express the inexpressible: since words do not suffice they search for an element with which such insufficiency could be equilibrated. In this case, the mimics.

9 Or with Dan Rooney of *All That Fall*, Beckett's first radio play. In *Embers*, it has been noted, Henry literally commands his body into movement. In *All That Fall*, Dan cries: 'Once and for all, do not ask me to speak and move me at the same time,' (ATF, 29) which, not so surprisingly, is exactly what happens in *Eh Joe*.

Whereas Joe's presence, and thus existence, is unarguable as it is proved by our vision, the voice's presence is illogical and somehow puzzling at first, since it is explicitly demonstrated that there is no visible source from which it could emerge. As Zilliacus observes, 'we know what manner of voice we are hearing only because there is a convention of the medium which tells us that if a camera comes to rest on a silent figure, then an off-screen voice stands for that figure's thoughts'.¹⁰ And, since the voice is directly addressing the silent figure, its nature as a narrator's commentary falls out of question. The viewer is therefore urged to relate the undoubtedly female voice to the image projected on the screen, thus presupposing that it is coming directly from Joe's head. This fact is emphasized by several things: for instance, the voice's commentary upon Joe's paranoid actions that the viewer had previously witnessed is more than accurate even though the visible source of the female voice remains absent. Additionally, the content of the voice's address to Joe proves to be almost astonishingly precise if both the facts of Joe's life and his thoughts at the time are concerned. The question arises, why would Beckett wish to have a woman speaking a man's internal monologue? Several answers to this can be assumed. Firstly, and clearly, a woman's voice serves the purpose of the storyline better. Zilliacus offers his commentary upon the matter relating it to the fact that the idea of the formal structure of the play had come to Beckett first and only later the need for a clear contrast between face and voice called for the adjustment of a theme involving certain erotic motifs.¹¹ Secondly, it seems that such an unforeseen employment of the other sex in the vocalisation of the internal narrative accentuates the disruption between body and mind since no explicit link of this kind can usually be established between a man's body and a woman's voice. Regarding this possibility, it is also curious to notice the words Joe uses for his practice of silencing the voices. 'Mental thuggee'¹², the strangulation of the voices that come plaguing his head after the person has died, is a murder which, when visualised, connotes with the smashing of one's neck, the place where the articulatory organs are located. And, to take this even further, the neck could be understood in its metaphorical

10 Zilliacus, 187.

11 Zilliacus, 187.

12 CSP, 203. Zilliacus also draws attention to the fact that '[t]he French version reads "serre-kiki mental," which unequivocally denotes strangulation'. Zilliacus, 188. Thus, the French term is undoubtedly more expressive than the English one.

sense as a meeting point between body and mind. Thus the association of voice with body rather than with mental processes is still strongly felt in *Eh Joe*.¹³

The voice, we know, is inside Joe's head and whatever form it takes, it is a construct of his own imagination, a fully imagined monologue. The paradoxical nature of Beckett's style can be traced in the fact that even though Joe is a serial killer of voices, he craves their presence and his existence is dependent on them. Once again in Beckett, existence is linked with voice. In Enoch Brater's words, '[as] the television set is transformed for a few minutes into a talking box, a voice is not only saying lines, but conveying life'.¹⁴ Thus the question of the creator and the created discussed earlier in relation to Beckett's fiction and radio drama arises anew. In the case of *Eh Joe*, Joe is the creator of words perceived by the viewers as an internal monologue carried out by Voice, just as Henry is the creator of all his aural evocations and narratives in *Embers*. Nevertheless, Joe's existence is not only reliant on voice, but also on the camera: while the latter justifies his existence by simply projecting his image on the television screen, the former is entrusted with telling the story of his existence. Such instance of linking the seemingly disembodied voice to an actually visible object becomes even more manifest in Beckett's later plays for theatre¹⁵.

Eh Joe, as many other works by Beckett, makes use of what has proved to be a convenient means for conveying the peculiarities of internal monologues: ellipses. Initially, they appear to be very plausible. Beckett's disapproval of the third-person narrator in his novels has its reflection in all of his later work: a credible I-narrator, at least in his internal monologues, should see no need for producing grammatically and syntactically accurate and otherwise linguistically full statements, for this is not, naturally, the way the human mind functions. In addition to this, the employment of ellipses arouses the viewers' attention by developing their curiosity. The mind is trained to look for missing information and fill in the gaps in knowledge intuitively. As we have seen in *Embers*, the internal monologue cryptically foreshadows the events by

13 This seems to be, for Beckett, one of the ways to make an emphasis on the discrepancy between the external and the internal reality. On the one hand, the previously mentioned failure of the attempt to interconnect bodily activity with that of mind and, on the other, the traditionally Beckettian motif of disembodied voices enclosed in various spaces.

14 Brater, 86.

15 Such as *That Time*, a play discussed in Chapter III of this thesis.

stating only certain facts that quite undoubtedly refer to specific situations: this triggers, in the viewer, the visualisation of images not explicitly mentioned in the text. It indeed seems that the less information is given, the more effective the process of its retrieval and subsequent visualisation is. In connection to the previously discussed paradox of language always being subjective and primarily failing in all its attempts to convey internal reality to other people, ellipses seem to offer an interesting solution. When language is eliminated to principal words and the rest of what it should convey is only suggested, it seems to suit better the position of the listener being in someone else's head. If the identification of the viewer with the figure whose thoughts are being conveyed ought to be successful, the acceptance of the words constituting Joe's internal monologue as our own should also be very credible. The viewer is thus presented with elliptical chunks of information similar to those his or her own mind would produce, also having to reconstruct the details in his or her own subjective way. In *Eh Joe*, the spectator is indeed being posed into Joe's position. This is essentially due to the intimacy of the television medium¹⁶ and the fact that the play is 'an insular, inward-referring work designed for a medium typically watched by supine viewers isolated in intimate spaces'¹⁷. Consequently, the impact on the viewers should be their immediate association of themselves with the person on the screen: what Joe hears is exactly what we hear, the echo of the accusing voice within his head sounds in our heads as well. As Voice drops to a whisper in the final paragraph, only the words with the greatest power to trigger the imagination become fully voiced. However, even though the voice is primarily directed to Joe, it is the spectator himself who is compelled to 'imagine' the horrid scene of the green girl's suicide. Zilliacus agrees with the purpose of the semi-whispered part: 'the final phrases do not constitute a sequence of thought but a number of words designed to trigger images, they are not primarily devised for rational, sequential comprehension.'¹⁸ Indeed, this part of the play involves perhaps the greatest manifestation of what has been suggested earlier about the employment of ellipses and their capability to make the viewer recreate his or her own subjective mental images of what is being insinuated, solving, even if only partially, the problem of the insufficiency of human speech.

16 Esslin, 151.

17 Kalb, 138.

18 Zilliacus, 194.

The question of the narrative voice is yet another important aspect to be considered in relation to *Eh Joe* and its employment of the motif of voice generally. The author's preoccupation with the inner reality of a person has been previously mentioned in connection with language as an expressive tool. 'Words are all we have'¹⁹ as humans and the insufficiency and inadequacy of such a device for conveying objective reality is repeatedly brought to question. The situation in *Eh Joe* has already been touched upon: Beckett quite deliberately chooses a woman's voice to reflect the inner reality of the male protagonist we see on the screen. At the beginning, the voice addresses Joe directly, posing various questions in a second-person narrative voice²⁰; as it progresses to the suicide story, it gradually shifts to a third-person narrative, occasionally turning back to Joe as if to check whether his attention has not fallen. The voice's position seems to be almost that of an omniscient narrator²¹. However, we know that its ostensible omniscience is only due to its essence as Joe's internal monologue. The voice not only attacks him with a too detailed knowledge of his life, but it also tells the story of the girl's suicide in a way Joe himself imagines it to be told.²² What happens here is that a highly subjective narrative voice mostly ascribed to the first-person singular has taken the form of another person, picturing the mind's self-torturing dialogue with itself. Such shifts in narrative person are, however, not uncommon in Beckett's work: for instance, the voice in *Not I*, a dramatic parallel to *The Unnamable*, is almost schizophrenic in its inability to acknowledge its story to be auto-reflective. Some of the possible reasons for this in *Eh Joe* have been outlined earlier: the emphasis of the discrepancy between image and voice, and thus also between body and mind, external and internal reality. In his commentary on the use of relative pronouns in Beckett's prose and drama, Paul Stewart observes the following:

The anger which the Unnamable feels at the impossibility of finding a proper pronoun for himself, becomes in (though not necessarily *for*) Mouth of *Not I* something closer to the panic of denial. The repeated phrase "What?... who?... no!... she!" suggests the presence and refutation of the first person

19 One of the famous quotations by Samuel Beckett. Qtd. in e.g. Patsy Rodenburg, *The Need for Words: Voice and the Text*, (London: Methurn Drama, 1993) 252.

20 A quite common Beckettian practice occurring also in other works by the author, e.g. in *Company*.

21 It is important to consider Zilliacus' commentary: 'As a narrator she seems omniscient, but this by no means involves the godlike distance often associated with omniscient narrating.' Zilliacus, 193.

22 As also observed in Zilliacus, 194.

pronoun, as if Mouth were attempting to distance herself from the events of the life she is relating. It is difficult to conceive of the play in any terms other than those of a denial of a traumatic life. This psychological model for *Not I* could come under threat if one were to note and consider the similar problem concerning pronouns in the play as in *The Unnamable*. The Unnamable denies the first person, I have suggested, as part for the narrative of non-being.²³

Thus, the shift in treatment of the theme of personal pronouns in fiction and drama already becomes apparent. *Eh Joe* stands much closer to the later play for theatre than to the novel in the sense that it is indeed elaborated around the theme of denial of the traumatic events that are being narrated. The paradoxical nature of the play is again repeated in the fact that Joe both desires to distance himself from the suicide he is responsible for, and uses the ostensibly unrelated monologue as a kind of admission which eventually turns against him. It is clear that the employment of the more distant second person for Joe's internal monologue is, if the facts in the narrative are concerned, much more dramatic and better suited for the play's content than any other. It is noticeable that the Unnamable is a much more fluid and independent existence created by the words he is uttering than are either Mouth or Joe. While indeed there is no other element in the novel than words, in the television play there is a visual image of a person to whom the voice can be ascribed, as well as in *Not I* there is an image of lips actually uttering the narrative. Stewart adds that 'to then identify the voice of Mouth with the figure and reported voice of the narrative remains a step beyond such textual processes and must remain in the realm of interpretative intuition or reason.²⁴ The connection to be made between a disembodied voice issuing from an unknown place or a bodiless mouth is then reliant particularly on the viewer's perception.

Eh Joe as a play intended for the television screen proves to be immensely effective. Beckett's awareness of the specificities of the medium reflected in his masterly employment of both camera and the pre-recorded voice is crucial for the play as a whole. The form here meets the carefully crafted content, as does camera meet with

23 Paul Stewart, *Zone of Evaporation: Samuel Beckett's Disjunctions* (New York: Rodopi, 2006) 129.

24 Stewart, 129.

voice, in order to provoke in the viewer the sense of identification with the main protagonist and his tormented mind. Additionally, the intimacy of the television screen reflects the intimacy of Joe's mind which becomes, for the duration of the play, mirrored in our own.

Chapter III: *That Time*, a play for theatre

As Samuel Beckett returns more actively to the writing of plays for theatre at the beginning of the 1970s, the experience he had previously gained during his investigation of the possibilities offered by other media becomes more distinctively manifest. The author's pursuit of the motif of voice, one of his lifelong preoccupations, and his endeavour to examine various aspects of its realization while exploring the limits of spoken language saw some of its most interesting end results in theatre. In this regard, Beckett's dramatic pieces written after the year 1970 seem to be a more mature, as well as growingly minimalistic, analysis of the theme of internal monologue and voice with their relation to the self. Essentially, the absence of a logical source for voice or voices issuing literally from the darkness of Beckett's theatre combined with the 'lessness' of the visual component, is basically what constitutes the most important element in the dramatist's mature theatrical work.

Written only a year after Beckett's first radio play, *Krapp's Last Tape* was the author's earliest and highly successful attempt to incorporate a sound recording device in a stage drama. Even though the dramatist's interest then shifted more exclusively to the exploration of various media, many similarities can be traced between the aforementioned play and the late theatre plays that already actively employ the pre-recorded voice.¹ For the first time in *Krapp*, the recording of human speech reproduced on stage becomes almost a character on its own and gets further engaged in a dialogue with the actor actually present onstage. This voice, though apparently disembodied, still comes from a naturalistic device, a stage prop visible to the spectators. However, such notion of a mind in a dialogue with itself is still, in 1958, a theme yet to be thoroughly inspected and tested in Beckett's works for other media.

A 1975 play, *That Time*, deals with a much similar situation to the above mentioned *Krapp's Last Tape*. In both pieces, the character onstage is trying, to no avail, to grasp a fading memory he is simultaneously attempting to recreate with the use of words. While Krapp is tirelessly rewinding and forwarding the tape he made decades

1 Plays such as *That Time*, *Footfalls* or *Rockaby*.

earlier, the protagonist of *That Time* is attending to the voices retelling endlessly three different moments in his life. Krapp's talking tape recorder is already taken away in *That Time*; moreover, Krapp himself is removed, his existence as a classical stage character shrunk to a speechless head of an old man with white hair 'as if seen from above outspread' floating 'about 10 feet above stage level'². This Listener, as Beckett calls him, is depicted in the agony of listening³ to his own thoughts surrounding him, a threefold internal monologue of which he is both the creator and the perceiver. Once again we are, similarly to the listeners of *Embers* and viewers of *Eh Joe*, positioned right inside the skull, urged to listen to and envision 'the persistent dream and continual delirium'⁴ created by Listener's own voices. Equally to *Eh Joe*, where 'the question of shooting from different angles never arises [and] Joe's listening is best registered from front,'⁵ Listener is shown en face throughout the whole play. Furthermore, in his intention to make his spectators firmly believe that what they hear are indeed pieces of an internal monologue of the strange figure they see, Beckett is careful to adjust the aural element accordingly: "It should be spoken very quickly. (...) Since [the actor] can't physically manage to speak it without pauses, he should make pauses where it is necessary, which would then be cut out by the sound engineer."⁶ With the static head as the only visual element in the dark theatre, and the three chaotic monologues coming from the loudspeakers offstage as the origin of all action, Beckett's minimalist drama relying predominantly on voice is established.⁷ As Enoch Brater indicates, '[t]he lesson is not only one in economy, but in functionalism: how to make an open, empty space, the stage, into an arena of dramatic tension.'⁸ Indeed, ruining much of what constitutes the Aristotelian notion of drama, Beckett sets up his very own rules for theatre.

2 CSP, 228.

3 A process that the Unnamable defines as follows: '[I]stening hard, that what I call going silent . . . Hearing too little to be able to speak, that's my silence.' TN, 416.

4 Brater, 39.

5 Zilliacus, 196.

6 Enoch Brater quoting Samuel Beckett's address to Klaus Herm. Brater, 41.

7 It is indeed curious how precisely the Unnamable's words correspond to the structure of *That Time*: '(...)the voice begins again, it begins trying again, quick now before there is none left, no voice left, nothing left but the core of murmurs, distant cries, quick now and try again, with the words that remain, try what, I don't know, I've forgotten, it doesn't matter, I never knew, to have them carry me into my story, the words that remain, my old story, which I've forgotten, far from here, through the noise, through the door, into the silence (...). TN, 413.

8 Brater, 43.

As it has been previously discussed, each one of Beckett's plays is carefully structured for one medium or another. Consequently, as many other works by the author, *That Time* can be by no means flawlessly executed in any other medium except the theatre. Although heavily reliant on the sound of the three voices and their position on 'both sides and above'⁹ the bodiless head, the play is also partially dependant on the presence of the very entity located at the intersection of the three voices. Accordingly, it is apparent that as a radio play, *That Time* would lose as many of its strong points as it would as a play for television. Firstly, the radio medium would obviously fail to provide an adequate distinction between the three voices depending solely on their location as this is clearly problematic even in the theatre. Nevertheless, it has been noted that Beckett allowed for the alterations in the pitch of each of the voices, thus making the contrast between them more easily perceivable.¹⁰ In radio, such an improvement would bring satisfactory results: the three voices coming out of thin air and their fragmented stories unfolding within our own heads would form a direct metaphor for being 'clapped up in' someone's skull.¹¹ However, such an abrupt influx of unidentifiable voices would make little sense in radio; even though the visual element of *That Time* is indeed minimalistic, it plays an important role in the process of identification of the voices with the protagonist's erratic mind. Listener's occasional opening and closing of eyes followed by the final toothless grin are marginal in terms of their significance in forming the visual component, but are essential for the play's wholeness.

Staging *That Time* as a television play would be an equally faulty enterprise. The particularities of the television medium have already been pointed out in relation to *Eh Joe*, proving that a play based on close-ups can be a very successful one. Since television works with the position of the camera and different angles and perspectives, its lens merely utilized for capturing a static point midstage, as intended in the play for theatre, would ruin the expectations of a television play making the performance overall lifeless. Theatre experience is, in its essence, very different from that offered by a television play: a stage performance should provide a much more immediate collective experience than television which, as pointed out above, is an intimate medium taking

9 CSP, 228.

10 Brater quoting the "Note" to the English text: '(...) the switch from one [voice] to another must be clearly faintly perceptible. If threefold source and context prove insufficient to produce this effect it should be assisted mechanically (e.g. threefold pitch)' Brater, 41.

11 CSP, 231.

the action directly to the privacy of our own homes. Such directness is, therefore, mainly achieved by the fixed position of the stage image, its size and distance in particular; the inability of the spectator to immediately discuss the action he or she perceives is also given by the very nature of the theatre performance.¹²

The language of *That Time* comes very close to some of Beckett's earlier prose, especially to the idiosyncratic syntax of *The Unnamable*. The lack of punctuation in the written text reflected in the absence of pauses when articulated, and the chaotic interconnection of elliptic sentences with a great degree of repetition of certain images, are indeed reminiscent of a swift flow of words constituting an internal monologue. Quite importantly, and not unexpectedly in Beckett, the form and its precise rhythmical execution come very close to poetry. Here, the devices carefully employed for the overall satisfactory aural effect are even more prominent than in previously discussed *Embers*. In Brater's words,

'[i]n order to create through sound the clarity and symmetry that must ultimately result in visual realization, Beckett makes the facets of his stimuli, poetry and drama, into a unity of expression that gives his audience the sense of inevitability.'¹³

12 It might be worthwhile to comment upon a recent project *Beckett on Film*, which in itself is an attempt to film all of Samuel Beckett's nineteen theatre plays thus bringing them to broader public attention. It is therefore important to comment upon the fact how the transformation of the theatre play in question into a television play changes its overall intention. Though the project itself is much appreciated, Beckett's preference of the theatre medium for his plays is not adhered to and therefore the original effects become destroyed. As indeed it would be expected, camera moves from side to side with each of the voices' prescribed position. Listener's face is thus filmed from four different angles: right, left and top for different voices in addition to the front view of his face when breathing or in movement. Such treatment helps differentiate between the voices when pure aural distinction is not entirely achievable, but at the same time it does not allow the viewer to make the connection between the aural element and Listener's face which is, as in *Eh Joe*, best viewed from the front. Additionally, this production of *That Time* seems to ignore Beckett's intention to keep the visual element as minimal as possible: the actor in the adaptation, much like Joe in *Eh Joe*, uses facial mimics to reflect the action that is being narrated. This again is connected to the fact that television screen magnifies the actual image presented 'onstage': since in theatre, this image is quite distant from the spectators, only the basic mimics, such as opening and closing of eyes or the final grin, can have the desired dramatic effect. *Beckett on Film*, prod. Michael Colgan and Alan Maloney, dir. Anthony Minghella, et al., 2002, 647 min.

13 Brater, 43.

Indeed, the text is so poetical in its essence that if several lines were arranged into verses and recited accordingly, a poem would emerge.¹⁴ This fact is largely due to what has already been said about the language used in the Bolton-Holloway scene in *Embers*: the poetics of the three monologues owes much to the highly rhythmical structure of the text achieved by the alternation of stresses, alongside frequent repetitions and the employment of near-rhymes. Further, the images created predominantly with the words that receive stress and are continually repeated throughout the whole play have the ability to trigger mental connections between the individual paragraphs.

Firstly, the overall imagery created by the three voices is both contrastive in their juxtaposition and subject to influence of the neighbouring images. The almost idyllic, though nostalgic evocation of the scene with the two lovers, it has been suggested, is reminiscent of an impressionist painting¹⁵, with its images of sun, sunset, yellow field, blue waters and skies and a sandy beach. On the one hand, it is observable how, when the next voice emerges from the darkness, this idyllic moment of stillness dissipates in order to give way to the hurry of the voice A, whose attempt to discover the 'ruin (...) where you hid as a child'¹⁶ seems rather impotent. Knowlson and Pilling suggest that 'the images in the play are not static, they evolve as the situation in each story unfolds, changing their shape and their resonance as they come to be affected by other surrounding images'¹⁷. Noticing the specific juxtaposition of the alternating speeches, the authors also note that the nostalgia of a childhood memory and the stillness of the scene with the two lovers '[become] contaminated by contact with the surrounding memories of that 'other time' when 'it was always winter that time in the Portrait Gallery.'¹⁸ The structure of the play, with its abrupt shifts in patterns and rhythms after the two pauses and the voices' slightly altered paces and themes contrasting with each other, may indeed recall a process of breathing in which the Listener is engaged while his voices temporarily become silent.

14 Enoch Brater indeed rearranges B's story in the form of a poem, thus proving the poetics of the language employed in its construction. Brater, 42.

15 The semblance is suggested by Knowlson in *Damned to Fame*. Knowlson, 601.

16 CSP, 229.

17 Frescoes, 210.

18 Frescoes, 212.

Secondly, as Brater notes, 'Beckett writes specific objects into the narration which will connect the three voices to each other as well as the Listener to the past.'¹⁹ According to Brater, the images link together memories triggered by the preceding voices: 'A's rock evokes C's rock evokes B's rock.'²⁰ Indeed, such utilization of the repetition of phrases and words seems not only helpful in terms of the text's formal construction, but also serving as some kind of a refrain maintaining the poetic value of the piece. Thus, in the first four paragraphs, the phrase 'when was that' is repeated several times, presenting the spectator for the first time with the possibility to reconnect the three strange voices with one another and, further, with a single superordinate entity. Similarly, some of the words uttered by one of the voices seem to immediately initiate certain memories and emotions in the other. Therefore, as the play approaches its culmination, the effect on the vocabulary is that it seems to grow both sparse in terms of vocabulary and immensely dense in terms of repetition of the individual words. In the final five paragraphs, the phrases 'that time' and 'not a sound' become almost obsessively repeated until they eventually metamorphose into the final lines of the play that read 'come and gone come and gone no one come and gone in no time gone in no time'.²¹ Quite paradoxically, this is the very moment in the play when the visual and the aural elements are finally allowed to come together. As the words in all the three final paragraphs 'go dry' and fewer and fewer of them carry their independent meaning, with the final lines comprising merely a few repeated words, they seem to disintegrate into the dust of non-being, as does the fading image of the Listener in the end of the play.

Finally, to use the example of the B voice's story being likened to an impressionist painting, the words in *That Time* are indeed the individual dots on such a painting, the stains on the silence: overlapping, wandering beyond their boundaries, incomprehensible when viewed from close range, they come to form a beautifully effective whole when seen from a certain distance, becoming a 'total object complete with missing parts'²² that Beckett favours so much in art. The play's essence does not lie in catching and understanding every single word that swiftly issues from the speakers

19 Brater, 45.

20 Brater, 45.

21 CSP, 234-5.

22 *Three Dialogues*, 101.

off-stage, but to perceive the whole play as an aural counterpart to visual art. Nevertheless, we know, words are far from reliable in their ability to transfer, describe and evoke; the painting the spectator has painted in his mind falls apart as soon as do the failed attempts of the three voices to evoke the Listener's lost memories. Anna McMullan notes the following: 'The fact that the image is painted in words means that it has to be repeated constantly, as the words fade as soon as they are uttered and can never achieve the simultaneity of the visual object.'²³ Therefore, 'that time' becomes equated with 'not a sound'; the memories Listener had once lived disappear in silence when the words have all 'dried up'²⁴.

Even though the voices are threefold, each coming from a different location off-stage, they presumably are a product of a single mind, being merely a schizoid internal monologue. Formally, this monologue is very credible: indeed, the internalized speech of a person or, in this case, a mind, is never syntactically or semantically precise. The words appear in broken elliptical sentences; the utterance, which bears many personal connotations, is fragmented and does not pause for a single moment. It has been noted, in the opening part of this chapter, that Beckett chose to pre-record the actor's voice preferring it to live performance, which would have caused the undesired deceleration of speech.²⁵ Since words uttered with no pauses at all would be essentially impossible to understand for the audience, what we have in effect is a rather disconnected flow of words spoken with great swiftness. Therefore, it becomes rather clear that the whole play is taking place inside the disembodied head resting on the pillow of the dark theatre behind it. With the play constructed as it is, Beckett comes very close to a naturalistic depiction of a schizoid internal monologue attacking the Listener's mind. The almost obsessive thoughts form a frenzied flow and rarely halt: indeed no pauses normally assigned for respiration are needed for a voice inside the head.

As for the narrative voice, *That Time* adopts the already well known Beckettian model. During their speech, the voices address the Listener, a mind of which they themselves are a creation. The second person pronoun 'you' is used by each of the

23 Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama* (London: Routledge, 2003) 54.

24 CSP, 232.

25 "It should be spoken very quickly. (...) Since [the actor] can't physically manage to speak it without pauses, he should make pauses where it is necessary, which would then be cut out by the sound engineer." Enoch Brater quoting Samuel Beckett's address to Klaus Herm. Brater, 41.

voices to address the tortured mind: a similar strategy was employed earlier in *Eh Joe* and, to some extent, in *Embers*. In Brater's view, 'the "you" and the "you" and the "you" in the voices A, B, and C are distinct from one another in that each owes its existence, its shape, its desires, its very loneliness, to a different moment in time.'²⁶ The treatment of personal pronouns in theatre and prose narratives has been previously discussed in relation to *Not I*, a play for dark theatre Beckett indicated to be 'cut out of the same texture' as *That Time*.²⁷ Indeed, the identification of the voice of the narrator with his self becomes problematic since, on the model of both *Not I* and *Eh Joe*, he attempts to distance himself from the narrated events. The voice constantly avoids the usage of the first person singular by which he would equate the content of the narrative with his own self: 'did you ever say I to yourself in your life come on now'.²⁸ We have previously seen how, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the position of a disembodied voice can easily be shifted to that of an autonomous character; the words issuing from the tape recorder is Krapp's another self, a voice thirty years younger. In *That Time*, we are presented with a very similar issue, only the voices/selves are not one, but three.²⁹ As a small child the narrator, we are told, hid 'among the giant nettles making it up now one voice now another till you were hoarse and they all sounded the same'.³⁰ This seems to have graduated to the sense of lost identity in the later age, as C's account shows: 'not knowing who you were from Adam no notion who it was saying what you were saying whose skull you were clapped up in'.³¹ Nevertheless, this instance of substitution of a self's voice with the voices the narrator perceives is much reminiscent of what we have seen in the trilogy, where all the protagonists seem to be preoccupied with the controlling voices, the 'so-called imperative[s]',³² originating in an unknown place, for unknown reasons, to resonate unyieldingly in the narrators' heads.

26 Brater, 49.

27 As quoted in Brater, 37.

28 CSP, 230.

29 This second self in *Krapp's Last Tape*, whose voice is issuing from the tape recorder, is an entity purely based on language. While the Krapp on stage is still perceived by the audience as a living being of flesh and blood, the Krapp on tape is to a much greater extent a mere product of textuality. Regarding *That Time*, McMullan observes that '[t]he attempt to possess or perceive also ironically creates another level of difference – between the subject and the representations of his own existence in language, questioning the illusion of unity and identity suggested by the pronoun "I" (...)' . McMullan, 230.

30 CSP, 230.

31 CSP, 231.

32 TN, 81.

If the form of the play is taken into account, *That Time* comes perhaps the closest to *The Unnamable*; the content of the piece, however, seems to resemble closely its another prosaic predecessor, *Malone Dies*. Technically, Malone is, he tells us, lying on a bed in an institution, expecting the approaching death. The Listener of *That Time* is presented to the spectator as an 'old white face [with] long flaring hair as if seen from above outspread'³³. Malone is tied together by the series of stories he tells himself on his deathbed, while the Listener is an entity attending to the stories his inner voices are, in vain, attempting to both create and recreate. McMullan emphasizes the fact that, in *That Time*, 'the spatial and temporal contexts and conditions [of each story] are different and yet all three identities merge in the emphasis on invention, on the production of fictions/memories/speech'.³⁴ Since consciousness in Beckett is equated with constant speaking, the emphasis lies on the production of words, however failing the attempt might be in its essence. Many of Beckett's characters are preoccupied with the cyclical process of uttering and making things up in order to both keep the void of existence out and to justify their own being, to which the Listener is not an exception. He is, just like the Unnamable, '(...) in words, made of words, others' words (...)'³⁵. On many occasions, the voices tend to remind the spectators as well as the Listener himself that his existence is equated with the practice of creation of fictitious narratives³⁶: the voices are constantly 'muttering to [themselves] who else', 'or talking to [themselves] who else out loud imaginary conversations (...) making it up now one voice now another', producing 'just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud'³⁷, and finally admitting that '[they] went along making [themselves] all up again for the millionth time' until '[they] tried and tried and couldn't any more no words left to keep it out'³⁸. At this point, C tells us, 'the words dried up and the head dried up and the legs dried up'³⁹, drawing yet again a parallel to the previously mentioned inevitable truth the dying Malone articulates: '[m]y voice has gone dead, the rest will follow.'⁴⁰ And indeed, soon after the last of the voices disappears in darkness

33 CSP, 230.

34 McMullan, 56.

35 TN, 379.

36 Brater notes the following: 'An important motif in all three accounts is the attempt, even the need, to make up the Self, just as life itself comes to be equated with a prose fiction (...)' Brater, 215.

37 CSP, 230.

38 CSP, 234.

39 CSP, 232.

40 TN, 263.

and is 'gone' permanently, the Listener's macabrely grinning face follows it seconds later.

The notion of dualism is once again brought into question in *That Time* as certain disruptions become apparent both in the structure of the play and in its content. 'The conflict,' Thomas Postlewait emphasizes, '(...) is between the disintegrating body and the questioning mind, both caught inexplicably in time while slowly moving toward death.'⁴¹ In *That Time*, this body is diminished to the image of a head, a place in which the voice is presumably located or, rather, captured.⁴² As Anna McMullan observes, '[t]he absence of body, apart from the head, and any other scenic information means that, as in *Not I*, images or memories of body and world are produced solely through the text.'⁴³ Obviously, and paradoxically, the only means for transmission of the narrator's inner monologue is the voice constituting of a highly subjective flow of words. Postlewait further observes that 'while we attend to both narrator and narrated, we become a prisoner (...) of the conflicting perspective of the narrator. We read the world through his voice as if we were sitting chained in Plato's famous cave.'⁴⁴ Words are all we have, except for the few minimalistic visual and gestural elements, though words are not enough for the expression of what is behind them.

The distinction between body and voice goes hand in hand with the distinction between the visual and the aural, as it has previously been observed in relation to *Embers* and *Eh Joe*. In *Embers*, we have seen, the movement of body is completely disjointed from the production of speech: Henry first has to command his limbs into movement, and starts moving only a moment afterwards. *Eh Joe* is much closer to *That Time* in its treatment of the notion of distortion of the unity between body and mind: in the television play, camera only moves when the voice grows silent, thus being a direct parallel to the stilled voices which, by their temporal inactivity, trigger the Listener's movements.⁴⁵ The head is only active when pauses are indicated, aside from the

41 Thomas Postlewait, 'Self-Performing Voices: Mind, Memory and Time in Beckett's Drama', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter, 1978) 473.

42 As Postlewait indicates, Beckett's 'self-reflective language [is] concerned as it is with (...) the body as prison, the mind as prisoner, and life as an unfulfilled quest for meaning to a mimetic mode.' Postlewait, 479. This indeed could summarize much of Samuel Beckett's work.

43 McMullan, 48.

44 Postlewait, 477.

45 Or vice versa. Beckett himself commented upon the ambiguity of the cause and effect here: "It is not decided whether he opens his eyes and the voice stops for that reason or whether the voice stops and

beginning and the close of the play, the reasoning behind which remains indeed ambiguous. It can be presumed that the movements are called-for in order to show that the Listener is alive; to reflect his reactions, however minimal, to the voices; and to transfer the message of the final grin, however undefined, onto the audience. Nevertheless, what can be logically assumed is the fact that the significance of such dramatic cooperation between the visual and the aural lies in the accentuation of the principle of duality as well as it does, quite undoubtedly, initiate certain emotions in the viewer.

Finally, several instances of dualism can be easily found also in the play's content. The text of the play features quite frequent examples of vocabulary related to human body and its parts, which probably finds its most prominent realization in B's story about the two lovers. The emphasis on what is non-bodily between the couple is very strong, posing body and mind into direct opposition: 'just a murmur not touching or anything of that nature'⁴⁶, 'no sight of the face or any other part never turned to her nor she to you always parallel (...) always space between if only an inch no pawing in the manner of flesh and blood'⁴⁷. The lovers are said to be 'vowing every now and then [they] lov[e] each other'⁴⁸ and the voice's concern is indeed with the fact that it is 'hard to believe harder and harder to believe you ever told anyone you loved them or anyone you'⁴⁹. It is indeed the vows and the words that the voice's concern lies with, not any act of physical closeness with his loved one.

Additionally, vocabulary connected with sight and visual perception is very frequent in the text: for instance, in the first paragraph uttered by B, we find the following phrases: 'as far as eye could see'⁵⁰, 'no looks', 'gazing at the wheat or eyes closed'⁵¹. Similarly, the paragraph depicting C's problem to identify with his own reflection in the glass, words for body parts appear as well: 'till you hoisted your head', 'there before your eyes', 'young prince or princess of the blood', 'a face appeared', 'who

therefore he opens his eyes.'" Qtd in Brater, 39.

46 CSP, 228.

47 CSP, 231.

48 CSP, 228.

49 CSP, 230.

50 Of course, utilized in such a manner the word can be a pun to the forbidden 'I' the voice dreads to pronounce.

51 CSP, 228.

it was there at your elbow⁵². Sight proves to be a fallacious device for it can only perceive the body, but is unable to relate the body with the words describing it. Thus, we attend to three voices presumably originating in a disembodied head with no limbs whatsoever; nonetheless, they seem to be aware of the existence of other body parts and admit a certain connection of those with the life they are narrating. The problem arises that the speaker is no longer able to relate his mental existence to that of the body.

As a late and already a rather mature stage play, *That Time* presents the themes and motifs related to the discussed concept of voice in a very sophisticated manner. Since this drama was intended for an almost dark theatre, *That Time* highlights the truly minimalistic element in Beckett's late work. The minimalist quality of such representation goes hand in hand with the distorted equilibrium between the visual and the aural, the play being an amalgam of the masterful handling of language, content of the voices' frenzied quest for remembrance, and the physical action eliminated as it is. It is observable how Beckett, after having gained much valuable experience during his exploration of the specificities of different media involving the recording of human voice, later succeeded in its transformation onto the stage of his late plays.

52 CSP, 229.

Conclusion

The chief aim of this essay has been to examine three selected plays by Samuel Beckett in their relation to the motif of voice, which has an undisputable relation to some of the author's prosaic work of the earlier period. It has been the essay's main focus to demonstrate how the possibilities, offered by the three different media in which each of the plays is primarily executed, are helpful in terms of translation of the fundamental themes and concerns carried by voice. I have endeavoured to demonstrate that Beckett's unyielding preoccupation with words and their aural realization in voice find their reflections not only in his novels but, more importantly, become an even stronger concern of his late dramatic works. The voice's prime position as one of the most important principles has been discussed in regards to its (in)capability to evoke and generally bring to existence both the narrator and the realities he is struggling to recount. The paradoxical nature of the author's style is primarily reflected in his belief that language is both the sole means of expression of the peculiarities of human existence and a fundamentally inadequate instrument initially doomed to failure. As, in Beckett, the existence becomes ultimately equated with the composition of narratives, the author's work bears some of the indispensable views on artistic creation, a topic which becomes permanently rearticulated by his characters and narrators. Their main concern always seems to be with what was previously proposed by Molloy: '[n]ot to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition.'¹

Furthermore, I attempted to analyze the individual plays' formal features, in addition to their content, in order to investigate the role played by the motif of voice. Although it is never an easy task to bring forth a single reading of a work, it has been attempted to relate both form and content of the plays to other works of Samuel Beckett, thus assuming possible interpretations. It is a well-known fact that certain concerns of Beckett's writing change only little in the course of his career as a writer, with some of the themes being incessantly employed, repeated and further elaborated. Thus, the problematics of the voice's identification with self, the growing degree of

1 TN, 23. Cf. *Three Dialogues*, 103.

disembodiment of the author's characters and the duality of body and mind have all been given special attention within the discussion of each individual play. Further, I attempted to demonstrate that all the three media, given their individual properties, treat the researched themes in a distinctive manner. *Embers*, *Eh Joe* and *That Time* were deliberately chosen on the basis of both their thematic correspondence and differences in their realization.

Embers, a play intended for radio, makes good use of the qualities of the purely aural medium. The play, being mostly reliant on the words carried out by voices, depicts a day in the life of a lonely old man tortured by the ever-present sound of waves that is said to echo constantly within his head. As the external and internal realities become blurred and thus ultimately ambiguous in radio, the medium offers an ideal realisation of the notion of a highly subjective internal monologue. By being indirectly positioned inside Henry's head, the listener's aural experience becomes linked with Henry's hallucinatory state of perceiving sounds and voices. Indeed, the ambiguity provided by radio proved to be the medium's biggest advantage in its relation to the motif of voice. *Eh Joe*, Beckett's first work for television, was written only after the main idea of a play based on close-ups had come to the dramatist's mind. As a transitory step between the experimentation with different kinds of media and the author's return to producing plays for the conventional theatre, *Eh Joe* already anticipates many specific features of Beckett's late drama. The disembodied voice of Joe's consciousness attacking the ageing protagonist in his near motionlessness shares many common aspects with the even more minimalist *That Time*. The Listener's scattered threefold interior monologue addressing his disembodied head in *That Time* already seems a mature manifestation of the author's style. In its masterful handling of the poetic language uttered relentlessly by the voices, and in the lessening of the visual element to its near minimum, Beckett's play approaches the status of an article of art.

As all the three plays are predominantly concerned with, and constructed around, the notion of voice, their relation to Beckett's prose is unquestioned and should be analyzed comparatively. Since the pages of a novel are not an ideal mode of representation of such a concept, Beckett's attempt to master other media in order to pursue the more precise execution of his lifelong preoccupations expressed already in

his fiction is more than understandable. The author's main concern seems to lay in his constant attempt to express, no matter how faulty such expression might prove. This thesis has attempted, on its part, to demonstrate how such concern with constant endeavour to both express and 'fail better' is reflected in the three different media.

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