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Staging Beckett: A Production History of Samuel Beckett's  
Drama in London (1955 – 2010)

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Film, Theatre & Television

Matthew McFrederick

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## **Abstract**

This study presents the first performance history of Samuel Beckett's drama in London theatres. The study focuses on a selection of professional productions of Beckett's dramatic canon and assesses the impact these performances had on London and British theatre cultures between 1955 and 2010.

Since the British premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's *oeuvre* has been staged across a variety of London theatres and contexts, ranging from the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith to the Theatre Royal Stratford East. The performance histories of Beckett's plays represent a neglected facet of Beckett studies, but through research undertaken for the Staging Beckett Database – a searchable data model for Beckett performances staged in the UK and Ireland – a broad tradition of staging Beckett in the British Isles has been discovered. Through the support of these records, performance histories, theatre historiography and performance archives, the study shows how Beckett's drama featured in key London theatres during prominent moments in British theatre history in a series of landmark and lesser known productions and seasons. By means of a chronological structure, this account examines the factors that contributed to Beckett's role in metropolitan theatre cultures, discussing how his theatre was created and received and the legacies or significance of his drama on the city's theatrical landscape.

Beckett's evolving stature and the multifunctional role he played in London theatre cultures is reflected in the four chapters that investigate the history. Chapters one and two reveal the key partnerships he established in theatres such as the English Stage Company at the Royal Court and the National Theatre, and the eclectic range of performances from the international productions during the World Theatre Seasons to the multiple presentations of his drama for young theatregoers at the newly started Young Vic. Chapter three examines the

development of Beckett's practice through some of his last productions staged or rehearsed at the Royal Court, Riverside Studios and the National Theatre. The final chapter discusses performances post-Beckett, when his drama proliferated across London, from West End productions with star actors to Festivals celebrating his entire canon.

## **Declaration**

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Matthew McFrederick

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I feel blessed that over the past four years I have received the advice, encouragement and support of many wonderful scholars, practitioners, institutions, archives, family and friends.

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There are several individuals I have met or talked to concerning these histories and I am grateful for their assistance and their permission to use interviews, memoirs, correspondence and/or images. These include: William Gaskill, Donald Howarth, Frank Dunlop, Walter Asmus, David Gothard, Sophie Daneman, Harriet Devine, Selina Snow, Nicholas Wright, Sandra Lousada, John Devane, Alan Mandell, Rick Cluchey, Gregory Mosher and Ian Rickson. I would also like to give special mentions to David Gothard, Walter Asmus and Lisa Dwan for sharing their extended insights into all matters staging Beckett. The designs by Jocelyn Hebert have been included with permission from the Trustees of the Jocelyn Herbert Archive, housed at Wimbledon College of Art at the time of my research.

Finally, I must acknowledge my heartfelt thanks to my family and close friends who have so often kept my spirits high, alleviated any stress and encouraged me along the way. The loving support of Mum and Dad has been integral to these efforts and I am eternally

grateful for the opportunities they have given me in life. My final thank you goes to my girlfriend Kelly, who has been my rock, my ray of sunshine and my tough talking motivator throughout this journey. You rule! This thesis is dedicated to Mum, Dad, Kelly and Jess.

M.McF

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# **1. Introduction: Staging Beckett: A Production History of Samuel Beckett's Drama in London (1955 – 2010)**

## **1.1. Overview**

The status of Samuel Beckett's drama in British theatre today can be illustrated by the range of productions staged in 2015. The year began with a revival of *Happy Days* starring Juliet Stephenson at the Young Vic and the same play made its journey north in May as Karen Dunbar played Winnie at Glasgow's Tron Theatre. Earlier in April, the Old Red Lion Theatre in London produced a triple bill of short plays staging *Catastrophe*, *Act Without Words I* and *Rough for Theatre II*. However, Beckett's prominence was best reflected in the summer, as two major events were dedicated to the playwright. In June the Barbican Centre produced an International Beckett Season with productions from the UK, Ireland, America and Australia, while in Northern Ireland, the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival – a legacy project from the 2012 Cultural Olympiad – ran for its fourth consecutive year over two weekends in July and August, including *Warten auf Godot* by the Berliner Ensemble and Beckett-inspired performances such as *May B* from French choreographer, Maguy Marin. Indeed, the durability of *Godot* was not only evident from high profile productions by the Berliner Ensemble production in Enniskillen and the Sydney Theatre Company at the Barbican, but also through productions by the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh in September and the London Classic Theatre's twenty four venue UK tour. This overview indicates the wealth and versatility of Beckett productions or events staged in the UK in 2015, and also how perceptions of Beckett's drama have evolved since the initial reception of *Waiting for Godot* following its British premiere at the Arts Theatre in 1955. Over the intervening years Beckett's drama has established itself as a key programming element for

many British theatres and, as this history will testify, his improved reputation saw him become one of the most revered and staged writers in London theatres.

Although the interest in Beckett's work from theatre practitioners and scholars is demonstrated through the frequency and volume of performances and publications produced in recent years, as I will explore below, only a handful of performance histories have appeared on Beckett's drama to date. These histories have largely concentrated on *Godot* and, in particular, the impact of its English language premiere or of productions Beckett directed, supervised or collaborated on. Beyond these primary narratives lies a rich tradition of staging his work in British, Irish and international theatres waiting to be explored. This PhD will redress some of the gaps in these existing narratives by constructing a production history that focuses on Beckett's stage plays in London from 1955 to 2010. Beckett's drama has been staged in a wide range of London theatres, from the Roundhouse to the Battersea Arts Centre and from the Lyric Hammersmith to the Theatre Royal Stratford East, during many key phases in British theatre history with many noteworthy actors, directors and designers. However, many of these productions remain hidden or neglected in accounts of Beckettian performance histories and in Beckett scholarship more broadly. By using the research methods of theatre historiography, this study will investigate how preceding narratives of this history have been written and, through the support of extensive findings made in under-utilised performance archives, this thesis will chart the production histories of a selection of both key and lesser known professional productions of Beckett's drama staged across London's metropolitan theatres. For example, it has posed and will answer questions concerning the relationship between Beckett's drama and several London venues that have yet to be addressed, such as: why was Beckett staged so often at the Young Vic in the early 1970s? Or why did Beckett end his direct involvement in British theatres at Riverside Studios and what legacy did his presence have at the Hammersmith arts centre? This thesis will

examine the relationship between Beckett's drama and selected London theatres that have had a significant role in the history of British theatre, due to their progressive objectives and the pioneering contributions of key personnel on its wider development, such as George Devine with the English Stage Company and Peter Hall at the National Theatre. Due to the significance of these London theatres, productions of Beckett's drama shifted the expectations of metropolitan theatre cultures and its audiences. The recently published *Staging Beckett in Great Britain* expands upon Beckett's understated place in British theatre histories by examining performances staged at specific theatres or regions across Britain, such as the West Yorkshire Playhouse or Scotland, but this thesis represents the first extended examination of Beckett's production histories in London; a history that stretches across the geography of London and London venues, as epitomised in Figure 1.<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of the introduction I will outline some of the key areas that have contributed to the development of this history. I will begin by referring to the role of this PhD as part of the AHRC Staging Beckett project over its three-year lifespan. I will proceed to set out a number of research questions for the thesis, before discussing how the research methodologies of historiography and performance archive studies have structured the approaches used to conduct this research. I will then consider previous contributions to Beckett and performance histories and follow these discussions by suggesting how the thesis will offer an original perspective on this neglected strand of Beckett studies by examining Beckett's place in London theatre cultures. Finally, I will conclude this introduction by outlining the structure the thesis will follow, where I will also provide a chapter by chapter summary.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis benefits from the perspectives of a number of practitioners and producers, including Walter Asmus, Donald Howarth, Frank Dunlop, William Gaskill and David Gothard. I am also grateful for their correspondence and the e-mail exchanges I have had with Rick Cluchey and Alan Mandell.

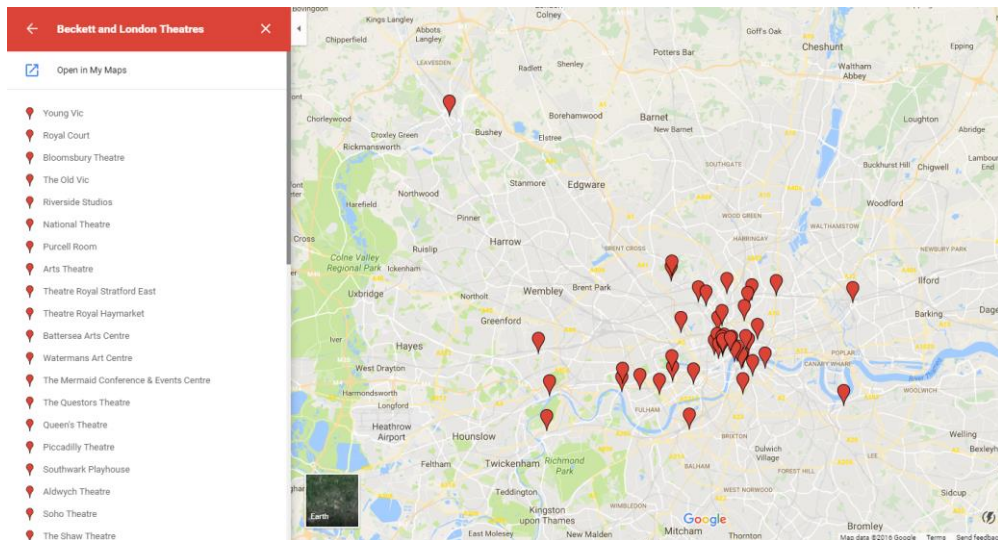


Figure 1 Venues in London where Samuel Beckett's drama has been staged from 1955 to 2015.

## 1.2. The Staging Beckett Project

The decision to focus on the London productions of Beckett's drama was determined by the plans and objectives of the AHRC-funded Staging Beckett project, under whose aegis this PhD was written. The three year Staging Beckett research project between the Universities of Reading and Chester, in collaboration with the Victoria and Albert Museum, brought together a team of researchers to explore, 'the impact of productions of Samuel Beckett's drama on theatre practice and cultures in the United Kingdom and Ireland (1955-2010)'.<sup>2</sup> The project set out to analyse landmark and lesser known professional productions of Beckett's drama and to evaluate whether a distinctive British or Irish tradition of staging Beckett's drama materialised over the course of these productions. Many of the project's early and later questions developed from the discoveries that materialised as a result of the project's emphasis on archival research – a matter I will return to later in this introduction – as the researchers consulted new and under exploited British and Irish archives. These findings would contribute to the project's creative and academic outputs, including the volumes

<sup>2</sup> The project involved a team of investigators from the Universities of Reading and Chester, including Principal Investigator – Anna McMullan, Co-Investigators – Graham Saunders and David Pattie and Post-doctoral researchers – Trish McTighe and David Tucker.

*Staging Beckett in Great Britain* and *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*<sup>3</sup>, special issues of the journals *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui*, focusing on international performances staged at the margins of theatre cultures, and *Contemporary Theatre Review* on Beckett and contemporary theatre and performance cultures<sup>4</sup>, and several exhibitions, such as 'Waiting for Godot at 60', which showcased selected archival materials from UK, Irish and international productions of *Godot*.<sup>5</sup> Many of these outputs were supported by a key project output – the Staging Beckett Database – a data model containing records for productions of Beckett's drama staged in the UK and Ireland since 1955 and a pilot scheme for the larger Performing Arts Database (formerly the National Performance Data Project), as illustrated in Figure 2.<sup>6</sup> The work undertaken for the Staging Beckett Database played a significant role in the development of the research questions, methodologies, scholarly context and structure that has shaped this thesis. In the following sections, I will proceed to focus on these key factors, by discussing their function in addressing the performance histories of Beckett's drama in London and I will now begin by raising some of the research questions which have guided this PhD.


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<sup>3</sup> See David Tucker and Trish McTighe, *Staging Samuel Beckett in Great Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2016) and McTighe and Tucker, *Staging Samuel Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Both special issue journals are scheduled to appear in late 2017.

<sup>5</sup> I curated 'Waiting for Godot at 60' alongside Professor Anna McMullan and Dr Mark Nixon. It was presented on two occasions: 1.) Minghella Building, University of Reading, as part of the Staging Beckett and Contemporary Theatre and Performance Cultures Conference, 9 – 11 April 2015. 2.) Clinton Centre, Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, as part of the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival, 23 July - 3 August 2015.

<sup>6</sup> The Performing Arts Database (PADB) can be accessed via <http://padb.k-int.com/performance/ui/search> [accessed 10 July 2016].



 **Waiting for Godot**

Drama, English


Work [En attendant Godot](#)

Production run date 03/08/1955 - 24/03/1956

Venues and dates

Start	End	Venue	Stage
03/08/1955	03/09/1955	<a href="#">Arts Theatre (West End)</a>	TBC 
12/09/1955	24/03/1956	<a href="#">Criterion Theatre (West End)</a>	TBC 

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Bibliographic, Archive and Web resources 

**Bibliographical resources**

Description: Book


Citation: Harmon, Maurice, *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1998)

**Archive resources and links**

Reference: BC MS 2883/1

Description: Programme and Reviews

Repository: University of Reading

Notes about this production 

**Production Note:**  
British and English Language Premiere of *Waiting for Godot*

**Creative and Crew**

Props [A. Robinson + Son](#)

Manager [Anne Jenkins](#)

Managing Director [Campbell Williams](#)

Carpenter/Scene Builder [Edward Gould](#)

Managing Director [G.E.A. Williams](#)

Box Office Manager [Geoffrey Sharp](#)

Press Rep [George Fearon](#)

Stage Manager [Howard Baker](#)

Stage Manager [John Lane](#)

Director [Peter Hall](#)

Set Design [Peter Snow](#)

Stage Director [Robert A. Baty](#)

Costume Design [W. May](#)

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**Cast**

Vladimir [Hugh Burden](#)

Boy [Leonard Cracknell](#)

Boy [Michael Walker](#)

Vladimir [Paul Daneman](#)

**Figure 2 Data Entry for *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts and Criterion Theatres in 1955-56 on the Staging Beckett Database. Credit: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/staging-beckett/Productions.aspx?p=production-3346111953> [accessed 10 January 2016].**

### 1.3. Research Questions: Beckettian Performance Histories

To date many existing histories on contemporary British theatre have recognised the contribution of Beckett's drama, but, as I will discuss in more detail shortly, his role in these accounts is largely limited to references concerning the London premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, his influence on British playwrights, such as Harold Pinter<sup>7</sup>, and the controversy that ensued over the staging of *Footfalls* at the Garrick Theatre in 1994 between Deborah Warner and the Beckett estate.<sup>8</sup> The research involved in this thesis has uncovered a broader performance tradition of staging Beckett from 1955 to 2010 than has previously been

<sup>7</sup> See Martin Esslin, 'Godot and His Children: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter' in *Modern British Dramatists: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Russell Brown (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 58-70.

<sup>8</sup> Aleks Sierz briefly references the controversy that materialised over this production. See Aleks Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting. The 1990s: Voices, Documents and New Interpretations* (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), p. 75.

recorded. With at least 151 known productions of his plays in London, this diverse performance history has seen a number of practitioners and theatres work together during important moments in London's theatre culture. The research into these productions has been guided by a number of key research questions that I will now outline, before addressing these questions over the course of the thesis.

In his introduction to *British Theatre Since 1955: A Reassessment* (1979), Ronald Hayman introduced his examination of this twenty four year period by asking: 'How much has been achieved in the British theatre since *Waiting for Godot* had its London premiere in 1955?'<sup>9</sup> Hayman's question suggests how the first performance of *Godot* was a landmark date in contemporary British drama and its originality and influence was evident in the years after the 1955 premiere. Thirty seven years since Hayman's question, I will consider how much Beckett's drama has achieved in London theatre cultures over a longer time period by asking and answering the questions that have shaped the development of this history. The primary research question I will ask of this performance history is: what role and impact have productions of Beckett's drama had on London theatre cultures since *Waiting for Godot's* premiere in 1955? In raising this research question I am not suggesting other Beckett productions stimulated the same cultural fascination as *Godot's* debut, but rather I will explore their achievements and consider to what extent Beckett's drama has been embraced by the city's theatre cultures and what contribution it has made to the artistic traditions of London theatres.

Many questions arise concerning the productions involved in this history and their place in London's evolving cultural structures. Due to the necessary limitations, I will only be able to ask a fraction of the questions I have been asking over the course of my research. Inevitably, the breadth and diversity of London and British theatre cultures meant this thesis

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<sup>9</sup> Ronald Hayman, *British Theatre Since 1955: A Reassessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 1.



needed to be selective concerning the broader historical and cultural circumstances it addressed regarding Beckett's relationship with London. As a result, this study will examine a selection of London productions as case studies of Beckett's drama staged in key cultural moments or contexts in terms of British theatre history, such as the Royal Court Theatre or Riverside Studios, and is thus unable to cover many performances staged in the city's fringe venues. Although I may raise questions concerning individual histories during my chapters, three key further questions have supported the content of this thesis. Before discussing an individual performance or cultural moment, it will be necessary to position the performance in the theatrical landscape of its time. With this in mind, I will ask: what theatrical contexts and cultures was Beckett's drama positioned in? Following on from this broader historical query, I will consider the development of Beckettian practice and the reception of these performances by examining: how was Beckett's theatre created and received by theatres, practitioners and audiences in London? Finally, the fact that this thesis is considering this history highlights the significance of Beckett's theatre today. Therefore, I will consider: what legacy or significance has Beckett's theatre had on the theatres his work has been produced in and London theatre cultures more broadly? Undoubtedly many of these questions have arisen through research in the performance archive and this thesis will set out to examine performances of Beckett's plays in London through these under-utilised collections, while also reconsidering his place in existing narratives on contemporary British theatre. Before addressing these queries in the main chapters of the thesis, I will continue this introduction by discussing the research methodologies that have shaped the questions I have outlined and the resulting thesis.

#### **1.4. Research Methods: Performance Histories, Theatre Historiography and Performance Archives**

Writing any history is a complex undertaking, as the active pursuit of truths about the past are conditioned by the historian's position in the present, a distant position that always limits the historian's ability to gain a full understanding of the past world. If writing a history about an event or historical moment presents several issues to the historian, perhaps writing a theatre history that focuses on performance is an area of even greater complexity. As W. B. Worthen has acknowledged of performance histories, 'all writing about performance must face its own impossibility: the event is gone, the records are always partial and suspect, and the only thing we know is that nothing we say happened actually took place in precisely that way.'<sup>10</sup> The complexity relates to the dualism between the main characteristics of both theatre and history as disciplines of study: the theatrical event is both live and transitory, while histories aim to study a past that can only partially be retrieved from a distanced point in time. Rebecca Schneider has articulated of this dualism: 'for historians, studying a medium in its liveness, its "nowness," may seem against the grain of the project of history – a project that, by most accounts, seeks to analyse the "then" in some distinction to the "now"'.<sup>11</sup> This thesis will retrace the live event, though it will not discuss these productions through the method of performance analysis as I have not seen the vast majority of the performances staged in this history. Instead, I will re-contextualise the production histories of Beckett's drama in London through methodological approaches relating to performance histories, performance archives and theatre historiography. These research methods have structured and are interwoven into the writing of this thesis and I will now introduce how these methods have guided the research.

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<sup>10</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Theatre & History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 3.

### 1.4.1. Performance Histories and Collecting Data

Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie have contended that historical research is ‘normally practiced [and] proceeds in two stages: the collection, organisation and description of data, selected on the basis of hypotheses or assumptions either conscious or unconscious: and interpretation of data at the level of “cultural-historical integration”.’<sup>12</sup> The research conducted for this thesis has investigated the performance histories of Beckett’s drama in a similar trajectory and has been guided by the two stages of research practice. The first stage of this research contributed to this thesis and the development of the Staging Beckett Database. Archival research in a number of UK and international repositories significantly aided the collection of data and highlighted many forgotten performances. Important research resources have included earlier attempts to preserve performance data, including the Theatre and Performance Card Index held at Victoria and Albert Museum<sup>13</sup>, *Theatre Record*<sup>14</sup> and the online theatre archive, UK Theatre Web (UKTW).<sup>15</sup> The data available through these sources enabled many forgotten performances to be uncovered and charted the breadth of the production history across the network of London theatres, though it demonstrated how collecting data on performances – an integral initial phase of the production history – was liable to gaps. Over the course of this research I have created individual entries for each production staged in London. Each record contains a varied amount of core data – depending on the information available in archives, books and journals – including what play was

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> The Theatre and Performance Card Index proved an integral resource for tracking many of the lesser known or forgotten early productions as they contained records of performances for each Beckett play, such as Date, Theatre and Director, from 1955 to 1997.

<sup>14</sup> *Theatre Record* is a fortnightly journal that reprints reviews and information on current productions, which has also produced an accumulated index from 1981.

<sup>15</sup> UKTW is an online production database that began in the late 1990s which has helped shape the Staging Beckett Database and many of these records have been merged with further information collated from the project’s archival research. UKTW is accessible via <http://www.uktw.co.uk/archive/> [accessed 3 May 2016].

performed, where and when it was staged and who contributed to the staging.<sup>16</sup> The Database has aimed to offer a comprehensive guide to these productions and many productions are well chronicled through large datasets, such as the first UK production of *Godot*. However, as my fellow researchers and I discovered, there are limits as to how comprehensive a project concerning historical data can be. Inevitably gaps have arisen in the data we have sought to record, though the living nature of the Database means these records can be updated as information becomes available. Just as Jacques Derrida writes of the ‘incompleteness of the archive’, perhaps a larger conundrum with this data model is that it is impossible to say that every production has been accounted for, despite the best intentions of such an undertaking.<sup>17</sup> However, this issue is representative of histories more broadly and the challenge for a historian who will continually encounter absences with historical moments or in the archive. Instead, it is best to think of the Database as an ever-evolving model of collected data that is inclusive of the information accessible or known up to a particular point in time.

To date I have managed to record 151 productions of Beckett’s drama in London, which have complemented the records of other performances staged across the UK and Ireland. These records have now been published online via the Staging Beckett Database and I have maintained core data of these records on a production list (See Appendix Item 1). After organising these records chronologically, I was able to identify trends and patterns from the Beckett performances and, by considering key historical moments over these years, it was noticeable when and where Beckett’s drama was staged more or less frequently. For example, when George Devine left the Royal Court in 1965, London theatres were initially less willing to stage Beckett’s drama; however when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969, his

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<sup>16</sup> The Database enabled researchers to record, where the sources were found and thus directs future scholars and practitioners back to the archive through its built-in referencing function. Further useful details can be recorded if available and relevant such as whether the play was staged as part of a festival and there was an option to make pertinent additional notes about a production if deemed appropriate, for example, if a performance was a world premiere.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 52.

popularity increased. This chronology enabled me to structure the thesis into time frames, which have guided the historical content that will be addressed in the chapters that follow.

#### **1.4.2. Theatre Historiography**

The interpretation of the data and the narration of the theatrical events in this history are supported by historiographical methods, which reflect the second stage of the research practices employed in the development of this thesis. In constructing these events there are a number of historiographical questions raised by the attempts to map or construct performance histories of Beckett's theatre in the UK and Ireland. The construction of these narratives has been led by the research undertaken for the Staging Beckett Database and supported by further archival evidence, interviews, as well as further reading. Historiography is a recent, but increasingly used methodological approach for theatre research which has informed my research,<sup>18</sup> though perhaps the most influential publication used in this thesis is *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* by Thomas Postlewait. Postlewait analyses and compares the different approaches through which theatre historiography can operate, including documentary history, cultural history, the historical event or the theatrical event. This thesis will concentrate on the theatrical event and will interpret a selection of past performances that benefit from Postlewait's approaches, as I will outline shortly.

The performance histories in this thesis will pursue many lines of enquiry, though the parameters of what can be addressed have already been established through the performance and the materials preserved from the theatrical events. Through these parameters, this history will strive to construct 'truths about the past within the conditions and constraints of possible

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<sup>18</sup> These approaches are outlined in: Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen, *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), Jim Davis, Katie Normington and Gilli Bush-Baily with Jackie Bratton, 'Researching Theatre History and Historiography' in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, eds. Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and Postlewait and McConachie, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*.

knowledge.’<sup>19</sup> In writing this history I recognise, as Jim Davis and colleagues stress, that for historians ‘there can be no ‘objective truth’ waiting to be uncovered when they delve into the theatrical past, but merely assessments and interpretations of the evidence available’.<sup>20</sup> I acknowledge that over the course of writing this thesis I will make ideological and subjective decisions over the productions and the evidence used relating to these performances, which will ultimately shape the direction of this thesis and the writing of this history. For each production discussed in this history, I will attempt to maintain a coherent structure by addressing a number of contributing factors that have shaped the theatrical event in terms of how it was created, received and the extent to which the surrounding context of the event influenced how it materialised.

Postlewait has identified four main contributing factors to the theatrical event in his model for historiographical research: world events, receptions, artistic heritage and agents.<sup>21</sup> While this useful framework attempts to cover many of the facets to consider when approaching a theatre historiography, I would like to adapt this model for the purposes of this history. Although I recognise world events frame all theatrical events, in practice it is often difficult to say how the global contexts have influenced a performance. Instead of concentrating on the contribution of world events as outlined by Postlewait, I will consider the legacies and significance of the theatrical event, which will reflect on the enduring influence and impact of these Beckett productions. Thus, the four contributing factors this history will refer to are: artistic heritage (and theatrical contexts), agents, receptions and legacies and significance. For each performance it will be necessary to assess and evaluate the relevance and restrictions of these contributing factors. Although some events may be

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<sup>19</sup> Postlewait, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Davis et al., p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Postlewait, p. 15. Similar models have been suggested by Ric Knowles in his materialist approach to reading the performance event. See Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) By using the term “agents”, Postlewait is referring to the people who were involved or contributed to the production.

discussed in relation to all four factors, for many of the productions examined it may not be beneficial or there may not be sufficient evidence available to suggest how a specific factor influenced a production. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that while these factors are influential on each event, they do not operate in isolation, as they are in tension and in dialogue with each other, in terms of how the event materialised and how I will narrate the events. Through these four contributing factors it will be possible to offer a more informed and evaluative history of each Beckett production and the broader sixty year history.

How the histories of these theatrical events are written will depend on the evidence available concerning the four contributing factors. If I discuss the reception of the production, as an example, it will be necessary to interpret how these performances have been read and to evaluate how these readings have been produced. Although thousands of audience members have attended the many events I will discuss, their opinions or responses to the productions have largely gone unrecorded and thus the major sources for evaluating the performance come from critics writing for national or international newspapers and magazines. As Postlewait asserts, ‘The reviews tell us what the event meant for a handful of influential people’.<sup>22</sup> I have tried to balance discussions on the reception of these performances by including the readings of a number of critics, as each performance deserves to have a broad range of responses in order to convey how different people interpreted the event. Furthermore, using a broader range of reviews allows a more informed reading of the performance to materialise, as reviews often do not reveal the factors that contributed to the opinion, for example, where the critic was sitting, whether they were feeling unwell or disgruntled during the performance or their ideological and theatrical preferences. It will be also necessary to discuss this factor in relation to the other evidence available for the theatrical event, as these factors are ‘in dialogue’ with each other, just as the historiographical

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<sup>22</sup> Postlewait, p. 7.

approaches of this thesis are in dialogue with the archival research that has contributed to it.<sup>23</sup>

Marvin Carlson's integral study, *The Haunted Stage*, has also helped to analyse the reception of many of the performances discussed in this thesis. Carlson explores how theatre recycles and reuses material in performance – both physical and narrative – and how the haunted text, body, production or space influences the reception of the theatrical event. In researching Beckett productions in London, it was evident that many critics would recall recently staged or well-defined memories of past productions to compare performances they were reviewing in the present, such was the strong residue of cultural memory associated with a specific play, performer or production. For example, when Albert Finney played Krapp at the Royal Court in 1973, many London critics were ghosted by the recent performance of Martin Held at the 1971 World Theatre Seasons, as his clear, subtle and poignant performance left a devastating mark on their reading of *Krapp's Last Tape*. Indeed, for many practitioners, critics and theatregoers the performance and reception of Beckett's drama in London has developed and engaged with its own unique 'repository of cultural memory', from the rekindling of popular performance techniques in *Godot* to the vivid and enduring performances of Beckett's plays, and the more recent convention of star actors staging Beckett, where their celebrity or recognisable past roles haunt the memories of audiences watching them in different circumstances.<sup>24</sup> As Carlson identifies, 'All reception is deeply involved with memory, because it is memory that supplies the codes and strategies that shape reception'.<sup>25</sup> By addressing factors and methods relating to theatre historiography and cultural memory, this study will be able to reconstruct and negotiate new readings into the histories of Beckettian performance in London theatres and theatre cultures.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 5.



### 1.4.3. Beckett and the performance archive

Beckett's life and work has been subject to many archival initiatives from the 1970s to the present day with several of the on-going or recent publications and projects in the field focusing on his manuscripts: these include the previously unpublished *Echo's Bones*, the Letters of Samuel Beckett and the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project. In a special issue of *Modernism/Modernity* (2012) dedicated to Beckett and archives that 'assays the value of the archive' in relation to his work, Peter Fifield argues Beckett is 'an archivist's author' through the way he has stored and maintained his proofs, drafts, diaries and notebooks. Although this excellent edition highlights the many approaches to Beckett's *oeuvre* through the various "remains" of Beckett's writing, it overlooks other Beckett archives that have contributed to this particular history.<sup>26</sup> This thesis benefits from access to Beckett's notebooks, letters and scripts, many of the archival discoveries that have guided this thesis have been drawn from a selection of other archives concerning Beckett's theatre in London in multiple, under-utilised UK and international repositories, as well as private collections.<sup>27</sup> Some of the core findings obtained for this thesis came from the valuable stage files at the University of Reading and Victoria and Albert Museum, which like all collections have been preserved with the future in mind, though this 'knowledge [has] remained suspended in the conditional' for longer than many collections containing some of Beckett's best known manuscripts.<sup>28</sup> These primary sources revealed many specific details of key productions and each stage file contained a range of sources from programmes to reviews. Programmes, for example, often highlighted the theatre culture of a given venue through advertisements for the theatre's season, the

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Fifield, 'Samuel Beckett: Out of the Archive: An Introduction', *Modernism/Modernity*, 18.4 (2011), 673-679 (pp. 673-679).

<sup>27</sup> These archives include the University of Reading's Beckett Collections, the Theatre and Performance Collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Library, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the National Theatre Archive and the Jocelyn Herbert Archive at the University of the Arts London (Wimbledon). I am grateful to Donald Howarth and David Gothard for allowing me to access sources from their private collections.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, p. 37.

venue's previous association with Beckett and the experience of the cast and creative team. Through further archival enquiry, it was evident that a significant range of materials from practitioners and theatres informed the creation of the event, though inevitably the "remains" available varied from performance to performance. Further ephemera consulted includes posters, tickets, cast lists, photographs, videos, DVDs, cassette recordings, interviews, letters, e-mails, set and costume designs, model boxes and websites. These archival fragments will support my 'recontextualization of the past'<sup>29</sup> and operate, 'as a literal substitute for the lost object, the unrecoverable past'.<sup>30</sup> Over the course of this thesis I will occasionally refer to the "remains", residue or fragments of the productions of Beckett's drama, to borrow a phrase from Rebecca Schneider, and by employing this terminology, I am referring to 'the material traces positioned as evidence' in archives that have been reframed or negotiated for the reconstruction of these past events in the present.<sup>31</sup> In attempting to reconstruct the past, Schneider argues 'that remaining is incomplete, fractured, partial – in the sense both [...] fragmentary and ongoing' and indeed as this thesis highlights these characteristics and truths have been experienced in the archive and the archival work contributing to this study.<sup>32</sup>

In writing this narrative I recognise it is impossible to describe or capture the history *as it was*, as with any history I am reading these events at a distance and with an insufficient understanding of the past. With respect to the archival documents I have accessed, it is important to recognise that archivists have chosen to preserve these materials, while it is unknown what other sources or productions they have chosen not to preserve. Helen

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<sup>29</sup> Helen Freshwater argues when analysing archival documents in a historical context, it is important to acknowledge that this is 'a recontextualization of the past rather than a reconstruction'. See Freshwater, 'The Allure of the Archive', *Poetics Today*, 24.4 (2003), 729 – 758 (p. 739).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 735.

<sup>31</sup> Schneider argues, 'If the past is never over, or never completed, "remains" might be understood not solely as object or document material, but also the immaterial labor of bodies engaged in and with that incomplete past [...]. Such acts of labor over and with the past might include a body sitting at a table in an archive, bent over an "original" manuscript or peering at a screen, interacting with history as material traces positioned as evidence.' Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Freshwater has contended of these circumstances: ‘The original decisions as to which materials are to be preserved and which are to be discarded, prior to public access, are often unavailable to the researcher. But the archive’s very existence indicates a priori value judgement decision concerning the worth of the documents or artefacts it contains.’<sup>33</sup> Throughout the process of this history many decisions have been made that are fundamental to how this history has unfolded and can be told. Just as prior decisions have been made about what documents to preserve from a production, as a theatre historian consulting these materials I have to decide from my reading of the resources, which specific details or opinions about the production will inform this research.

Due to the transitory nature of performance, the seductive qualities of performance archives can offer a heightened sense of attraction to the researcher. Several archives accessed for this thesis possessed a particular fascination as they represented distinguished moments in Beckettian performance histories. For example, in the V&A and the University of Reading’s Beckett collections I accessed Peter Snow’s set and costume designs for *Waiting for Godot*’s London premiere at the Arts Theatre. Viewing these designs I instantly recognised what Walter Benjamin refers to as the ‘aura’ of the object as I knew these were highly original artefacts that had not been referenced or reproduced through scans or images in prior publications.<sup>34</sup> These captivating items and indeed other items relating to this significant performance, such as the script I found in the Donald Albery Collection at the Harry Ransom Center, exuded what Helen Freshwater has described as ‘[t]he allure of the archive’.<sup>35</sup> The material qualities of these items, their ignorance of their present day consumption in the archive and – for many objects – their beauty, made them compelling to the uninvited reader from the present. Freshwater writes of the archive’s seductive hazards, ‘we are surely all vulnerable to this beguiling fantasy of self-effacement, which seems to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 740.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Freshwater, p. 732.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 731.

promise the recovery of lost time, the possibility of being reunited with the lost past, and the fulfilment of our deepest desires for wholeness and completion.’<sup>36</sup> With performance histories there is ‘an irrepressible desire to return to the origin’ and to understand how it was staged.<sup>37</sup> This *mal d’archive*, as Derrida puts it, stems from the ephemeral qualities of theatre, where its transitory nature makes it difficult to capture or preserve; a quality that thus heightens the desire to reconnect with the theatrical past. Through performance remains, this thesis will reconstruct and negotiate the past, though ultimately it can only depict an imagining or recontextualisation of how the performance was staged.

### **1.5. Scholarly Context: Beckett and Production Histories**

Scholarly approaches to Beckett’s life and *oeuvre* have shown both innovation and sustainability since the first critical studies of his work appeared six decades ago. Amidst this significant body of publications by scholars of different generations, performance histories of Beckett’s drama have remained an under-examined domain of Beckett Studies with many of the existing books on his theatre, such as Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld’s *Beckett in the Theatre* (1988), dominated by productions Beckett directed.<sup>38</sup> This section will analyse how existing stage histories have addressed this overlooked area of the field through a number of recent publications dedicated to the production histories of *Godot* and a selection of other relevant contributions on Beckett’s theatre.

Beckett criticism has more recently started to address this neglected strand of the field as more traditional production histories have appeared over the last fifteen years including David Bradby’s *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* (2001), *The Coming of Godot* (2005) by Jonathan

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 738.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, p. 91.

<sup>38</sup> See Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre: The Author as Practical Playwright and Director* (London: John Calder, 1988)

Croall and Mark and Juliette Taylor-Batty's *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot* (2008).<sup>39</sup> These studies examine selected UK, Irish and international performances of *Godot* in a number of different biographical, cultural, historical and political contexts. The productions discussed vary across these publications, though these histories have primarily chosen to address key performances, such as *Godot*'s premieres in Paris (1953), London (1955), Dublin (1955) and Miami (1956), Beckett's direction of *Warten auf Godot* for the Schiller Theater in Berlin in 1975, as well as performances staged by notable directors such as Walter Asmus, Ilan Ronen and Susan Sontag.<sup>40</sup> While I agree these particular performances warrant discussion, the attention given to these stagings in existing narratives means they have been frequently recycled in the public's cultural memory of the play and are thus fixed as landmark performances within these histories. By focusing on these presentations, it is inevitable that many other notable performances in a range of cultural locales have been neglected in the performance history of *Godot* and Beckett's canon more broadly. With this thesis in mind, these accounts do not place Beckett in London theatre cultures and only briefly address performances staged in London, despite the extensive performance history that has materialised. As a result, some key performances are less prominently narrated in these histories, although they arguably had a significant impact on London's theatregoers at the time, such as Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson's interpretation of Vladimir and Estragon at the Queen's Theatre in 1991. These narratives epitomise the role and restrictions of the historian, who is inevitably limited by what s/he can cover, the need to select, and is thus open to gaps. This history will also out of necessity need to select which productions to address, though in contrast to previous histories, this thesis will benefit from an awareness of

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<sup>39</sup> Christopher Murray has previously reflected on Beckett productions in Ireland, covering performances staged until 1983. See Murray, 'Beckett Productions in Ireland: A Survey', *Irish University Review* 14.1 (1984): 103–125.

<sup>40</sup> Further context-specific performance histories of *Waiting for Godot* have been written and documented by Susan Sontag and Paul Chan who directed productions staged in Sarajevo (1993) and New Orleans (2008) respectively. See Sontag, "Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo" *Performing Arts Journal* 16.2 (1994): 87–106 and Chan, *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans: A Field Guide* (New York: Creative Time, 2010)

the broad range of performances staged within a specific area thanks to the research undertaken for the Staging Beckett Database – a resource that will enable many lesser known performances in the production history to come to public’s attention. In addition to performance histories, these accounts provide different and detailed approaches to *Godot*. Bradby reflects on the previous performance cultures that influenced Beckett, Croall offers a rehearsal diary for Peter Hall’s 2005 Theatre Royal Bath production, while the Taylor-Battys’ study also charts Hall’s relationship with the play and provides suggestions for approaching *Godot* in workshops. The writing of this history has been influenced by these previous studies and while it will address performances examined by these existing histories, it will offer new insights into these performances and a greater selection of performances.

Many excellent studies on Beckett’s theatre have materialised from scholars of different generations, discussing his theatre from a range of theoretical or philosophical angles.<sup>41</sup> A number of other helpful wide-ranging, single or multiple play studies on Beckett’s theatre have also addressed performance histories including Jonathan Kalb’s *Beckett in Performance* (1989), James Knowlson’s *Krapp’s Last Tape: Theatre Workbook* (1980) and *Waiting for Godot and Happy Days* (1990) by Katharine Worth.<sup>42</sup> Kalb’s study represents one of the first examinations of Beckett’s early and late theatre for performance. Although Kalb does not intend his book to be read as a production history, it does discuss a number of American and international performances of Beckett’s drama and is more concerned with the challenges and practical considerations of directing and acting in Beckett’s *oeuvre* for performance. This book captures the spirit of Beckett in performance through its conversations with Beckett, interviews with practitioners such as Billie Whitelaw,

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theater* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1980), McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre* and Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Antonia Rodríguez-Gago has also discussed productions of Beckett’s drama from a Spanish context, though prior to the Staging Beckett project this had not been discussed in relation to performances in Britain, Ireland or London. See Antonia Rodríguez-Gago, ‘Staging Beckett in Spain: theater and politics’ in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

Asmus and Klaus Herm, and the personal experiences of Kalb himself. Unlike Kalb's study, this thesis will not offer approaches for actors or directors working on Beckett's drama, though it will enable scholars and practitioners to reconsider how his work was staged. Knowlson's study provides useful essays on the genesis of *Krapp's Last Tape* and its text, though more specifically to performance, it documents key productions from across this history featuring Patrick Magee, Martin Held and Max Wall through interviews with the performers or directors and reviews from a number of critics. While useful material is presented, it does not, as I do, reconstruct the productions or place the performances in their theatrical context. Worth examines *Godot* and *Happy Days* in terms of their text, situation, structure and use of tragicomedy, before addressing three specifically chosen productions for each play. Before discussing these performances, Worth explains how a stage history was not the purpose of her book, though by focusing on four British productions and two of Beckett's Schiller Theater directed performances, Worth is able to illuminate how these plays were interpreted and how several distinguished actors performed their respective roles. Once again, these existing studies have helpfully documented a number of key performances of Beckett's drama in London, but as well as advancing the historiographical methods used to understand these productions, this study has also been informed by more recent archival discoveries, and considers London productions of Beckett's drama in the context of the specific theatres and specific cultural moments these metropolitan performances were staged in; often theatres and moments that existing studies of Beckett's drama have yet to engage with.

Several integral publications have advanced my understanding of how Beckett staged his own productions of his plays, including the *Theatrical Notebook* editions, biographies of Beckett and published editions of Beckett's letters. While this history benefits from their documentation of Beckett's direction, the biographical context of these productions and his perspective on many performances, these books operate as historical texts of Beckett's

creative process rather than histories of the performances. These publications also highlight that a large proportion of existing literature on Beckett's theatre focuses on his own productions. Understandably, scholars and readers who are interested in a single author's work will initially be drawn to the dramatist's interpretation of his work in performance, where available. The interest in these productions was strengthened by the widespread acclaim they received and the publication of the *Theatrical Notebook* editions contributed to the revered position they occupy in international performance histories of his drama. For example, the *Theatrical Notebooks* provide a clear guide as to how Beckett "sees" his plays in the theatre' and his continuous creative process as a writer and director through the directorial decisions, excisions and alterations Beckett made on productions in the UK, Germany or France.<sup>43</sup> While Deirdre Bair's early biography (1978) could only discuss a limited number of performances, the biographies of both James Knowlson (1996) and Anthony Cronin (1996) have many merits in terms of their portrayal of production histories, but they focus on performances Beckett was directly involved in, they – for good reasons – have had to forego discussing performances staged by other practitioners, which have enriched the history I will proceed to discuss.<sup>44</sup> Although this thesis will provide new insights on performances Beckett supervised or directed, these performances have obscured the presence of other notable productions staged in London and, with this in mind, it will expand upon non-Beckett production histories, such as the multiple presentations at the Young Vic in the early 1970s or Katie Mitchell's 1996 production of *Endgame* at the Donmar Warehouse.

I have so far discussed many of the significant production histories or related publications concerning Beckettian performances and I would now like conclude this section by reflecting on some of the most recent and forthcoming publications in this field. Perhaps

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<sup>43</sup> James Knowlson, *Happy Days: The Production Notebook of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber, 1985), p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> See Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) and Anthony Cronin, *The Last Modernist* (London: HarperCollins, 1996)



the publication that has most consistently addressed productions of Beckett's drama is the *Journal of Beckett Studies* (1976 – 2016), which has published reviews on British, Irish and international productions of Beckett's work and interviews with selected practitioners over the forty years of its circulation. Despite the contributions this journal has made regarding productions, the recent 'The Performance Issue' (2014) edited by Jonathan Heron and Nicholas Johnson was the first time the journal had solely focused on performance. This far-ranging edition highlighted the new avenues within performance that scholars and practitioners are examining Beckett's work with essays on performance art, music and the practical discoveries of 'The Samuel Beckett Laboratory'<sup>45</sup>, as well as interviews with several notable practitioners. This edition also included the co-authored paper 'Staging Beckett: Constructing Histories of Performance' by Anna McMullan, Trish McTighe, David Pattie and David Tucker, which asks many pivotal questions and outlines many of the challenges involved in reconstructing performance histories.<sup>46</sup> This article acts as a precursor to the recent, forthcoming and future Staging Beckett-led outputs – in particular *Staging Beckett in Great Britain* and *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland* – that will supplement this developing strand of Beckett studies in the coming years. Just as these forthcoming books reconsider Beckett's place in British and Irish theatre histories and cultures, I will now discuss Beckett's role in previous national theatre narratives and highlight the breadth of theatres and practitioners who have created productions and developed a wide ranging performance tradition of his work in the UK.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The 'Samuel Beckett Laboratory' is a performance workshop group led by Johnson and Heron and held annually at the Trinity College Dublin's Beckett Summer School. In 2013 it engaged with unfinished Beckett manuscripts that have now been published as part of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (BDMP).

<sup>46</sup> Anna McMullan, Trish McTighe, David Pattie and David Tucker, 'Staging Beckett: Constructing Histories of Performance', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 23.1 (2014), pp. 11 – 33.

<sup>47</sup> Further outputs include: McMullan and McTighe, 'Samuel Beckett, the Gate Theatre Dublin, and the Contemporary Irish Independent Theater Sector: Fragments of Performance History', *Breac*, (2014) and David Tucker, *A Dream And Its Legacies* (Oxford: Colin Smythe, 2014).

## 1.6. Beckett in British theatre histories and cultures

Publications have examined Beckett's theatre from single play workbooks to production histories of *Godot*, but a common thread across these contributions is that they have not discussed Beckett in terms of British theatre history. Conversely, British theatre histories have also been reluctant to address productions of Beckett's drama. By examining the interactions between productions of Beckett's plays in key, specific London theatres and their contexts, I will add to *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*'s recent contribution to redressing the understated role of Beckett's drama in British theatre histories. However, I recognise – just as the efforts and qualities of this aforementioned publication have shown – the diversity of theatre in the UK means this single author study will not revise national theatre narratives, but provide a more informed account of Beckett's role within the contexts of specific metropolitan theatres that played an integral role in British theatre history. In this section I will reflect on how his work has been narrated from the perspective of British theatre histories and I will briefly establish the role Beckett's drama has played during other key moments in British theatre history. Through this thesis I will suggest how Beckett's drama offers a lens through which it is possible to tell a different story of British theatre and similarly through British theatre, a new reading of Beckett's theatre in performance can be evaluated and extracted.

In *Writing and Rewriting: National Theatre Histories*, S. E. Wilmer highlights that 'National theatre historians often have to negotiate assumptions (their own and those of others) about national identity and national character. [...] they have to decide what types of theatrical events to record, which artists to feature, and what method to use in telling the story.'<sup>48</sup> With respect to Beckett's place in British theatre histories, I would argue his role has often been overlooked, as he and his theatre challenged the assumptions of British identity

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<sup>48</sup> S. E. Wilmer, *Writing and Rewriting: National Theatre Histories* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2004), pp. ix – x.

and character for many historians – particularly as an Irish dramatist, who lived in France and wrote most of his early plays originally in French. To date, Beckett has not been read in terms of his relationship with British identity or national culture, yet although he does not feature prominently in the existing narratives on British theatre history or assumptions about national identity and culture, his work has been presented in major theatres in Britain, as it reflected the agendas and diverse programmes these theatres wanted to produce. Furthermore, his experimental style of drama set in nondescript locations with little comprehensible plot did not epitomise the content or locale associated with British drama. Beckett’s reputation was closely connected to France and French theatre from the beginning of his emergence in the UK. For many early British critics his plays did not conform to their expectations of drama, best suggested by the title of Cecil Wilson’s review, ‘The Left Bank Can Keep It’.<sup>49</sup> Other early efforts to stage Beckett’s drama also situated Beckett in a French context in London with the English Stage Company (ESC) presenting *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* as part of their French Fortnight programme in April 1957 – an event that uniquely saw a combination of ‘God Save The Queen’ and ‘La Marseillaise’ played before the curtain was raised for performance. Moreover, readings of Beckett’s drama were significantly shaped by the publication of *The Theatre of The Absurd* (1961) by Martin Esslin, which clearly marked Beckett as an Absurdist writer within a European tradition. As a result of these early, commonly held assumptions, I would argue Beckett occupied a detached position in terms of British identity, whereby his drama did not conform to the characteristics and traditions of British drama, and was thus adrift from the main narratives of national theatre histories in the UK, despite the consistent stagings of Beckett’s drama in British theatres.

Beckett’s influence on post-war British theatre has been highlighted by historians who have frequently referred to *Godot*’s English language premiere at the Arts Theatre (See

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<sup>49</sup> Cecil Wilson, ‘The Left Bank Can Keep It’, *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1955.

Figure 3), or have keenly debated its role alongside the premiere of *Look Back In Anger* (1956) by John Osborne, as the starting point of contemporary British theatre.<sup>50</sup> For example, in *Modern British Dramatists* (1968), John Russell Brown distinguishes this production as the first major theatrical event in his chronology of important events, while John Bull's article 'Looking Back at Godot' (2000) examines the arguments as to whether *Look Back in Anger* or *Godot* signalled the post-war revolution in British theatre, before arguing *Godot* was 'the real starting-point for the new wave of the 1950s'.<sup>51</sup> This study does not need to revisit this much debated topic, but it would like to advance discussions concerning the relationship between Beckett's drama and British theatre history. By reading the existing narratives on contemporary British theatre history, it is clear *Godot*'s first performance attained 'a definite and substantial identity'.<sup>52</sup> This established identity has obscured the visibility of other Beckett productions in national theatre narratives and this history will proceed to reconsider the role London productions of Beckett's drama have played in these narratives, where Beckett has arguably been a more influential writer than existing histories have credited.



**Figure 3 Peter Woodthorpe and Hugh Burden in *Waiting for Godot* at the Criterion Theatre in 1955. Credit: V&A Theatre and Performance Collections, Houston Rodgers Collection.**

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<sup>50</sup> See John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1962), Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All That: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London: Routledge, 1999) and David Pattie, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1950s* (London: Methuen, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> John Bull, 'Looking Back at Godot' in *British Theatre in the 1950s*, ed. by Dominic Shellard (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>52</sup> Postlewait, p. 249.

By reflecting on the productions staged in this history, it is possible to trace and identify many of the relationships and networks that contributed to the longevity of Beckett's drama in London. These links have been more visible through the data accumulated for the Staging Beckett Database that complements this study, as it has highlighted several lesser known connections. After emerging under club conditions at the Arts Theatre, world premieres of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* were staged during the formative years of the ESC at the Royal Court; the British premiere of *Play* was presented by the National Theatre (NT) at the Old Vic in the 1964, while revivals of his plays were celebrated in stagings during the early years of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the Young Vic. With many London theatres eager to offer a broader range of dramatic forms and cosmopolitan drama, as well as new writing, Beckett often fulfilled their wishes and was arguably seen as an accepted experimental playwright by some London theatres, though his drama has often been confined to the margins of narratives focusing on the NT and the RSC. As well as experiencing a number of significant moments in British theatre history and playing in many major London theatres, Beckett's theatre has been staged by several key British, Irish and international practitioners with many theatre-makers maintaining a consistent relationship with his work. For example, Beckett's dramatic vision was supported by the ESC at the Royal Court, which enabled him to establish several connections that would significantly influence the presentations of his plays. This was epitomised by his work with Donald McWhinnie, Jocelyn Herbert and Patrick Magee on *Krapp's Last Tape*. McWhinnie would go on to direct a number of Beckett's radio plays for the BBC and later direct Magee in *Endgame* for both the RSC (1964) and the Royal Court (1976), while Herbert would design the majority of Beckett's plays at the Royal Court, connect Beckett with Riverside Studios and design a later production of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Catastrophe* at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester. These and many other connections are revealed across this history, though undoubtedly these

earlier presentations stimulated a diffusion of productions during Beckett's lifetime. Following his death in 1989, Beckett's drama would broaden its reach across London as it was presented in single and multiple bill formats from fringe venues to the West End, as well as in major festivals at the Barbican Centre in 1999 and 2006. This thesis will explore the major changes, shifts and developments that have taken place within London theatre cultures and its personnel in connection to Beckett's drama, and their contribution to Beckett's own practice, thereby contributing to a much richer portrait of the impact of productions of Beckett's plays on British theatre histories and cultures. As a final section of this introduction, I will now outline the structure and remit this thesis will adhere to over the chapters that follow this introduction.

## **1.7. Structure**

The structure of this thesis has been guided by an accumulation of the core data obtained for the Staging Beckett Database, historiographical approaches and the many discoveries made through archival research. This thesis will be divided into four chapters, which reflect four important phases of Beckettian production histories in London and are entitled:

2. 'Getting known': Early Beckett Productions in London (1955 – 1964)
3. 'consider myself free': The Post-Devine Years (1965 – 1976)
4. Beckett's 'final bout' in London: Old and New Homes, Companies and Havens (1976 – 1989)
5. 'Beckettmania': Beckett post-Beckett (1990 – 2010)

I have organised each chapter according to carefully selected chronological timeframes and within each chapter I will examine themes or theatrical moments closely associated with Beckett's drama in London and their place within the British theatre culture of these periods. Although the length of time covered in each chapter varies, I have decided to conclude each

chapter in the year of a milestone event, as I believe these significant moments undoubtedly inform the events that follow. For example, George Devine's decision to step down as the Artistic Director of the Royal Court led to Beckett withdrawing his first option rights agreement with the theatre and allowed productions of his plays to disperse across London in the years that followed. By focusing on these four timeframes, I am also aware that Chapter 5 will in fact cover twice the length of time of the previous three chapters and over twice as many productions as these chapters combined. Although this imbalance is not ideal, in preparing this section of the history it was notable that more archival sources had supplemented my previous three chapters, partly because of Beckett's direct involvement, but also because many practitioners from the post-Beckett era have not released their performance archives. As many of the productions addressed in my fifth chapter are so recent, they are supported by collections with a limited scope in relation to these performances, particularly in comparison to many of the earliest stagings in this history.

I will now outline the shape of this thesis by briefly discussing the content of each chapter. Chapter 2 will examine the earliest performances of Beckett's drama staged during a key formative phase of his initiation into London theatre cultures. These years helped to establish his drama in London and this chapter will address the many merits and challenges of productions staged at the Arts Theatre, by the ESC at the Royal Court and at the National Theatre encountered during the most precarious period for Beckett's theatre in this history. It will discuss how these landmark productions were interpreted by their cast and creatives, their reception and the early support or – in the case of some individuals – the hostility Beckett received from these theatres. In Chapter 3 I will proceed to address several lesser known performance histories of Beckett's drama from 1965 to 1976. This eclectic phase of Beckett's London production history will cover notable foreign language productions of his drama staged as part of the RSC's World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre,

performances produced with young people in mind during the early years of the Young Vic and the presentation of several short Beckett plays in the Royal Court's diverse Come Together Festival. This chapter will also question and reconsider the narratives of well-known productions of Beckett's work at the Royal Court and NT in the 1970s, as both venues began to stage his plays with prominent actors such as Albert Finney, Billie Whitelaw and Peggy Ashcroft. Chapter 4 will focus on Beckett's links with three of his theatrical homes in London. It will discuss productions from the celebration of his *oeuvre* at the Royal Court's Samuel Beckett Season in 1976 to his new connections in West London with Riverside Studios and Billie Whitelaw's performance of *Rockaby* in the NT's Cottesloe Theatre, which were significant theatrical events that represented the diverse interest Beckett stimulated in London's theatre cultures. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will focus solely the post Beckett years from 1990 to 2010, which will discuss how his work has proliferated across London's stages and been staged and received since his death. This analysis will discuss a number of contributing factors that developed across this timeframe, including the network of practitioners connected to Beckett working on his drama post-Beckett, the increasing number of performances staged in the West End, his new association with innovative British practitioners and the growing propensity to festivalise his work.

The scope of this history has been conditioned by the remit of the Staging Beckett project, its duration, the length of this thesis and the availability of evidence for all productions. For these reasons, I will need to outline some of the parameters under which this thesis will work. I will be unable to discuss every production in this history and I will therefore concentrate on a selection of landmark and under-analysed productions from the London premiere of *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre in 1955 to its presentation at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in 2009 featuring Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart. This production history will concentrate its investigation on professional productions of Beckett's



nineteen plays for the stage. As a result I will not discuss the amateur productions staged at the Questors Theatre or the Tower Theatre, despite their sustained interest in presenting Beckett's plays over the duration of this history.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, I will not offer extended accounts of adaptations of Beckett's TV and radio dramas for the stage or adaptations of his prose work, as these performances would increase what is already an expansive history.<sup>54</sup> While many of these presentations have contributed to Beckett's legacy on London and international stages, such as Joe Chaikin's performance in *Texts* at Riverside Studios in 1981 or the Jermyn Street Theatre's 2012 production of *All That Fall*, it will be necessary for the purposes and parameters of this thesis to do as Beckett largely advocated and 'keep our genres more or less distinct'.<sup>55</sup>

On 20 April 2016 Beckett's association with London was formally recognised by the English Heritage as they unveiled a blue plaque in his honour outside 48 Paulton's Square where Beckett resided in 1934. This plaque, along with the one unveiled for the Nobel Prize winning physicist Patrick Blackett at the same house, were, according to Ronald Hutton, Chairman of the English Heritage Blue Plaques Panel, designed to 'celebrate their connection to London'.<sup>56</sup> The strength of Beckett's connection to London in terms of his stay at Paulton's Square may appear an unlikely relationship to celebrate, given he lived in this house for only seven months when he was receiving his well-documented psychotherapy

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<sup>53</sup> Although I will not discuss the work of these two amateur groups, I will reference it where appropriate and I have included their performances and those by drama schools, where available, in my data collection of productions for the benefit of future scholars. Both these theatre companies have recorded their performances online through their own innovative indexes of productions. See: <http://archive.questors.org.uk/> and <http://www.towertheatre.co/plays/list1973.htm#7315> [accessed 1 July 2016].

<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, I will not discuss productions that have used Beckett as a character on stage. This has already been well addressed by Hersh Zeifman. See Zeifman, 'Staging Sam: Beckett as Dramatic Character', in *Beckett at 100: Revolving It All*, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi and Angela Moorjani (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

<sup>55</sup> George Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 - 1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 64.

<sup>56</sup> See <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/search-news/samuel-beckett-plaque-release> [accessed 25 April 2016].

treatment from Wilfred Bion at the Tavistock Clinic.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, his experience of London led Beckett to writing *Murphy* (1938) and these years would prove integral for his growth as a writer, though it was not until the 1950s and *Godot*'s initial performances when Beckett's reputation as a writer started to grow. Although the Blue Plaque formally recognises Beckett's relationship with London in the 1930s, this thesis will proceed on the basis of a more sustained relationship between Beckett and London through the residency of his dramatic canon in London's theatres. Beckett may be more generally associated with Dublin and Paris, though I would argue the consistent staging of his drama in London – the world's largest metropolitan area for English language theatre – played a significant role in securing his reputation as a dramatist as well as developing his theatrical vision and his understanding of theatre practice through the notable practitioners he collaborated with. Over the course of this thesis I would like to discuss the under-examined production history of Beckett's drama in London and by reflecting on how London theatres have not only shaped Beckett's drama, but how Beckett's drama has contributed to London and British theatre cultures and practice.

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<sup>57</sup> Beckett stayed in 48 Paulton's Square for seven months and later at 34 Gertrude Street for fifteen months from 1934-35.

## 2. 'Getting known': Early Beckett Productions in London (1955 – 1964)

This chapter will discuss the integral role several of the earliest productions of Beckett's drama played in establishing his theatrical canon in London. These performances were staged in a number of key London theatres and played a pivotal role during what was an important transitional phase for the infrastructure of British theatres during the 1950s and 1960s. I will begin this chapter by addressing the first performance of *Waiting for Godot* staged at the Arts Theatre in 1955. The landmark status of this production has been discussed in several histories, including those by David Bradby, Jonathan Croall, Mark and Juliette Taylor-Batty and more recently by David Pattie and Sos Eltis.<sup>58</sup> I will briefly draw attention to the theatrical context surrounding this performance before contributing original findings concerning the production's casting difficulties and the neglected viewpoints of the play's first performers, discoveries that have not been covered in detail in the aforementioned publications. After offering a new perspective on a well-known production, I will proceed to reflect on the significant, but under-valued connection Beckett established with the English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court over the late 1950s. I will discuss Beckett's early relationship with the ESC under the artistic directorship of George Devine, particularly with respect to the support that was shown to his theatrical vision and the creative networks he was able to form at a theatre whose association with Beckett spans the duration of this performance history. This section will concentrate on the productions of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles*, which connects Beckett's Parisian partnerships with London, and the double bill of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* that saw many of Beckett's leading British

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<sup>58</sup> See David Bradby, *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Jonathan Croall, *The Coming of Godot: A Short History of a Masterpiece* (London: Oberon, 2005), Mark Taylor-Batty and Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot* (London: Continuum, 2010), and Tucker and McTighe, *Staging Samuel Beckett in Great Britain*.

collaborators work on his drama for the first time. The next two sections of this chapter will link these three aforementioned productions together by focusing on two different facets of their performance history that contributed to their presentation. Of these sections, I will consider how his theatre faced censorship in the UK by reflecting on the lesser known discussions between Beckett, his producers and the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Productions of his work were influenced by the powers of the Lord Chamberlain's Office until it was closed in 1968 and this section will assess its impact through their communications with Beckett in an early phase of Beckett's relationship with London theatres that highlight the many distinctive theatrical moments his drama encountered during its staged history in the UK. The following section will focus on the evolution of Beckettian scenography through the early designs by Peter Snow, Jacques Noël and Jocelyn Herbert; in what are the frequently overlooked visual and scenographic realisations of Beckett's drama. I will conclude this chapter with a fifth section examining the first performance of *Play* at the Old Vic in 1964; the first performance of a play from Beckett's canon that is considered part of his late theatrical *oeuvre* and his first connection with the National Theatre (NT). Through this early period of Beckett productions, I will address assumptions that were initially established about Beckett's work, and would influence how he was perceived in the national culture and the early reception of his drama. This section will consider a selection of the innovations and questions Beckett presented to London theatre cultures, from his aesthetic developments to the challenges he posed to the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and the way its diverse, metropolitan audiences experienced theatre.

### **2.1. Beckett's London debut: *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre**

The British premiere of *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre on 3 August 1955 represents one of the most discussed and referenced productions in contemporary British theatre history.

The date, venue and play are centrally placed in the main narratives of contemporary British theatre and the production histories of *Waiting for Godot*. These histories have familiarised two notable phases of the production's reception. Firstly, the initial walkouts and cat-calls from audience members and the negative criticism the production received from several daily newspapers. The second phase discusses how the Sunday reviews of Kenneth Tynan and Harold Hobson saved the production from closing and stimulated a fresh appraisal of Beckett's work, which in turn led to its transfer to the Criterion Theatre one month later. Although these narratives are well-worn representations of this history, David Pattie's recent contribution to the history of this production opens up questions as to whether the theatrical event was, borrowing a phrase from Astrid Erll, 'premediated'.<sup>59</sup> His argument references the dissatisfaction commentators such as Tynan and Hobson had with British theatre of the time and suggests that just as *Godot* arrived, 'there was a place for a text that posed, for a section of the British theatre audience, the right kind of formal and intellectual challenges.'<sup>60</sup> *Godot* represented one of the earliest post-war plays to possess these qualities and through the divisive opinions it stirred amongst British critics, the play combined the right public profile and intellectual and theatrical challenges to enable it to be considered one of the first plays to significantly engage with or mark a new era in contemporary British drama.

Rather than return to these existing narratives, I will concentrate on lesser known facets of this production I have discovered through neglected archival repositories, memoirs and private collections. Intriguingly, the importance of this production is signified through the extensive materials preserved from the event, as performance remains ranging from set designs to scripts have been stored in several major international institutes, including the British Library, the Harry Ransom Center and the Victoria Albert Museum, as well as the Beckett Collections at the University of Reading. Through these performance archives many

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<sup>59</sup> David Pattie, 'The arrival of Godot', in *Staging Samuel Beckett in Great Britain*, eds. Tucker and McTighe, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

absent records or facets from this production have been identified and traced across collections, and will be examined in further detail over the course of this section, in order to contribute new knowledge about this much discussed production. I will begin by situating the premiere in the performance cultures it was presented in, before discussing the initial delays the play encountered in its attempts to be staged that reveal specific characteristics of the theatrical context in terms of its casting and commercialism – strands of theatrical structures that respond differently to Beckett’s theatre through time. I will then explore the neglected perspectives of the production’s actors through a number of memoirs and interviews that have recently come to light, in order to offer a sense of the actors’ expectations and experiences of performing in the ground-breaking production. While these matters will conclude my discussions of Beckett’s London debut in this section, I will return to the Arts Theatre premiere in later sections of this chapter when I reflect on the challenges Peter Snow faced in designing Beckett in 1955 and I will also address the many dealings Beckett and the producer Donald Albery had with the Lord Chamberlain as they sought to attain a licence for the play. Through these under-examined areas of this history and with the support of many under-utilised sources, I will illustrate how the performance archive can continue to supplement existing theatre narratives, by reconsidering the early role this production played in assumptions about Beckett in the national culture and adding new perspectives on how practitioners approached his work in performance and how audiences responded to the early presentations of his drama.

### **2.1.1. Contextualising London theatres pre-*Godot***

Before examining some of the lesser known aspects of this much discussed first production, it is essential to contextualise the theatre culture Beckett and *Waiting for Godot* were set to emerge in. *Godot*’s first performance came at a time when the landscape of British theatre

was significantly different to today. It was staged before the ESC at the Royal Court led a call for new writing, or before the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and National Theatre (NT) – Britain’s two biggest subsidised theatres – were formed. London’s overcrowded stages provided few opportunities for new writing and despite some notable exceptions, British theatre was failing to develop ‘distinctive theatrical voices of its own’.<sup>61</sup> Of course, Beckett’s theatrical voice had been showcased in Paris, where it enjoyed an extended run at the Théâtre de Babylone. In the two and a half years that followed it would be staged in Germany, Holland and Spain before its first London outing, though even then, it was uncertain what impact this play with a continental reputation would stimulate in London audiences. Contrary to long-standing narratives of the post-war era, as Dan Rebellato has demonstrated in *1956 and All That* – his revisionary history of the 1950s – *Godot* was not the only play to arrive from the continent, although it received the most attention from reports at the time and from subsequent histories. Rebellato identified Jean Anouilh as ‘probably the most successful playwright in Britain’ during the early 1950s and furthermore London stages also presented the work of Jean Giraudoux, Jean Genet and Eugene Ionesco, as well as many other European dramatists.<sup>62</sup> Although the post-war infrastructure of London theatres was not established by the time of its premiere, *Godot* was one of a number of plays that were successfully staged in Europe and introduced to London’s theatre culture, but contrary to the performance histories of these other plays, the first production of *Godot* has had a more prominent role in narratives due to the fascination it generated in the national culture and audiences, and the more overt challenges the play presented in comparison to the conventions of British drama.

Prior to the formation of the UK’s many notable subsidised theatres, the pre and post war theatre industry in London was a commercial enterprise dominated by star actors and

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<sup>61</sup> Pattie, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1950s*, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Rebellato, p. 128. For a broader account of European drama in the UK, see *Ibid.*, pp. 127 – 154.

production companies, such as H. M. Tennent Ltd, managed by Hugh “Binkie” Beaumont. As Pattie has outlined, this industry faced ‘increased competition from cinema’ and was hampered by fewer theatres in the immediate post-war phase, which in turn meant ‘greater congestion, as long running productions refused to give way to new work’.<sup>63</sup> This was identified by many theatre makers and the Arts Council, with their secretary general, Bill Williams, remarking in a speech in Liverpool in 1953:

The theatre in London is dominated by show business organised on strict commercial lines. There are some specially obnoxious features about the London theatre. One is the profiteering in bricks and mortar by speculators ... The consequence ... is that any show which does not reveal immediate signs of a long run is whipped off at once. The twin mottoes of the London theatre are: long run or sudden death.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed it was this ideology that frustrated early attempts to have *Godot* staged. *Godot* was then a new, avant-garde product from the continent with an unknown cast staged in a conservative theatre culture that operated under commercial imperatives; a combination that offered little promise of a sustained relationship, but later altered and modified this supposedly rigid theatrical climate. I will now begin this examination of *Godot*’s London premiere by discussing the delays it encountered linked to the agendas of this theatrical market.

### **2.1.2. Waiting for the cast: ‘to hell with the stars’**

The plans to first stage *Godot* in London proved a long and protracted process and have been detailed in the collections of two largely unaccredited protagonists in this narrative: the English film and theatre director, Peter Glenville, and the theatre impresario, Donald Albery.

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<sup>63</sup> Pattie, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1950s*, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 32.



Glenville initiated talks with Beckett for a London premiere having seen the first Parisian performance and was sent a rushed translation by Beckett on 7 September 1953, after which he signed a joint contract with Albery for the play's English language performance rights. Both Albery and Glenville were keen to secure a West End opening and with these intentions in mind, they followed their entrepreneurial instincts and knowledge of London theatres by looking for a star cast to sell their product, seeking to perpetuate the star culture that had been so successfully employed by Beaumont in the West End from the 1930s to the 1950s. In attempting to make *Godot* a star vehicle they tried and failed to lure the passing interest of Ralph Richardson and Alec Guinness to play Vladimir and Estragon, with Carol King later arguing of Glenville's plans, 'his desire to stage the play using leading actors he was familiar with was misplaced, and motivated by his Beaumont training to assemble a cast that would draw in the crowds.'<sup>65</sup> Despite the illness of his brother Frank in Ireland, Beckett supported efforts to entice Richardson to play the role of Vladimir on a return trip from Ireland when he visited the actor's dressing room alongside Glenville at the Theatre Royal Haymarket. The meeting encapsulated the early obsession the play's meaning aroused in theatregoers and performers, as Richardson asked Beckett for 'the low-down on Pozzo, his home address and curriculum vitae'.<sup>66</sup> Beckett was reluctant to answer Richardson's queries in what was a difficult meeting and a fruitless one as Richardson was subsequently unable to do the play due to prioritising his film commitments.

Richardson's unavailability was later matched by Guinness, Cyril Cusack and others, though perhaps the most surprising withdrawal from the production came from Glenville as the play's director, despite his stake in the play. As Albery wrote to Beckett on 21 July 1954: 'I understand from Peter Glenville that he is still very keen to do "Godot" but he could not

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<sup>65</sup> Carol King, *Peter Glenville: The Elusive Director Who Charmed Hollywood and Triumphed on Broadway* (Los Angeles: Peter Glenville Foundation, 2010), p. 177.

<sup>66</sup> George Craig et al. eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 507.

undertake a definite agreement that it would be his next play as he feels – I think quite wrongly – that this is not a commercial play and that after “The Prisoner” he should do a more commercial play and then “Godot”.<sup>67</sup> This position suggests that although Glenville believed in the play, he did not believe such an obscure, experimental play would have the capacity for commercial success. However, given the play’s eight month West End run and the numerous revivals *Godot* has recently enjoyed in the commercial sector, Glenville’s attitude appears ironic today, but understandable at the time of these talks. These commitment issues proved a significant obstacle to the play’s staging, as Albery was trying to attract theatres to stage the play based on the names he was able to secure, but his desire to cast star actors and the lack of commitment from these actors meant his efforts to produce *Godot* were prolonged. Beckett referred to these delays as ‘shilly-shally’<sup>68</sup> and would articulate his frustration further by writing to Pamela Mitchell on 25 July 1954: ‘[I] have told them to get on with it with whatever people available and to hell with stars. If the play can’t get over with ordinarily competent producing and playing then it’s not worth doing at all.’<sup>69</sup> With this prelude, Albery advanced his efforts to find an interested and committed director, cast and theatre for London, but these difficulties would restrict attempts to stage *Godot* earlier in Ireland and America, including, to Beckett’s frustration, a proposed performance with Marlon Brando and Buster Keaton.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, these casting difficulties reveal the unpropitious, commercial climate the producers sought to stage *Godot* in, and the irony that a play about everyman figures was dependent on star actors.

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<sup>67</sup> Letter from Donald Albery to Samuel Beckett, 21 July 1954. Harry Ransom Center (HRC), The University of Texas at Austin, Peter Glenville Collection, 5.20. For further discussions about Glenville’s decision, see: King, pp. 175 – 178.

<sup>68</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 497.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490.

<sup>70</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, p. 413. Keaton was proposed to play Vladimir alongside Brando as Estragon.

### 2.1.3. Performing *Godot* first: ‘journeying in a new country’

While the Arts Theatre production of *Godot* was the first Beckett play staged in London, it is important to highlight the lesser stressed point that it was also the only major Beckett premiere in London that was not influenced by the playwright during its creative process. Instead, the opportunity to stage the play fell on the desk of an enthusiastic twenty four year old director in Peter Hall, who after several false dawns and rejections recruited an inexperienced cast to stage *Godot* at the Arts Theatre on Great Newport Street in a moment that would enhance Beckett’s career and change Hall’s life.<sup>71</sup>

Hall had been running the small, club theatre for a number of months and it had developed a reputation for enthusiastically staging new writing from the UK and Europe, with Hall directing the work of Eugene O’Neill, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Anouilh at the start of his tenure before initiating his association with Beckett.<sup>72</sup> His first significant challenge, as Glenville and Albery had previously experienced, was securing a cast for the production. In contrast to the ambitious attempts to attract some of the most notable star actors of the 1950s, the cast that would make *Godot* a conversation necessity and one of the most significant theatrical performances in British theatre history, were young and inexperienced. Although several histories have been written of this production, the perspectives of its cast have been unaccounted for, as their memoirs have remained in their private collections or in lesser known publications. Through these documents, I will examine

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<sup>71</sup> Sos Eltis has noted of Hall, ‘Harold Pinter and Tennessee Williams approached him to direct their plays; he was appointed the first director of the Royal Shakespeare Company; Leslie Carron asked him to direct her in *Gigi* – and he married her.’ See Eltis, ‘It’s all symbiosis’: Peter Hall Directing Beckett’, ed. by Tucker and McTighe, pp. 87 – 104 (p. 87).

<sup>72</sup> For example, Campbell Williams (the Administrator for the Arts Theatre) later wrote to J. L. Hodgkinson on 3 December 1956: ‘My policy for 1957 will remain unaltered, that is to produce nine or ten of (A) the very best European plays obtainable, (B) plays by new English authors, and (C) include one or two classic revivals.’ Letter from Campbell Williams to J. L. Hodgkinson, 3 December 1956, V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, ACGB/34/88.

their reflections of the creative process and reveal the many challenges these actors faced as they performed in the first production of a Beckett play in the UK.<sup>73</sup>

With respect to the cast Hall eventually assembled for the Arts Theatre premiere, Beckett's call to find 'whatever people available' was somewhat borne out. After *Godot* had been rejected by many other actors, Paul Daneman, Peter Bull, Peter Woodthorpe and Timothy Bateson accepted Hall's advances. Daneman, who played Vladimir, was a twenty nine year old jobbing actor, while Woodthorpe as Estragon was appearing in his first professional production aged twenty three and in the middle of a Biochemistry degree at Cambridge.<sup>74</sup> Bull and Bateson, both of whom were more familiar to the stage as character actors, were arguably the more experienced members of the cast as Pozzo and Lucky. Rehearsals started at the beginning of July in an upstairs room in the Arts Theatre with the cast and crew having to contend with the summer's heat wave as well as Beckett's unfamiliar play. During these early rehearsals, Hall revealed his limited understanding of *Godot* to the cast, as according to Bull he told them, '[I] [h]aven't really the foggiest idea what some of it means [...] but if we stop and discuss every line we'll never open. I think it may be dramatically effective but there's no hope of finding out till the first night.'<sup>75</sup> Hall and his cast admitted they did not foresee the impact *Godot* was set to have on the artistic heritage of British theatre and its practices. His honesty may have proved reassuring for the cast, as Daneman, Woodthorpe and Bull shared and admitted their inability to comprehend the script. Daneman, for instance, considered himself an informed reader of plays, yet, as he admitted: 'I had never, never, in all those years read anything like this', before he later argued, 'At first I

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<sup>73</sup> I am indebted to Sophie Daneman, who kindly sent me her father's unpublished memoir concerning this first production.

<sup>74</sup> Discovered playing *King Lear* at University, Woodthorpe was a talented actor in spite of his youthfulness and earned the acclaim of Beckett and an initially doubtful Peter Bull, who noted, 'It was infuriating in my case to find an amateur actor with more talent than oneself, acting one off the stage, and his seeming confidence and technique struck an impertinent note.' Peter Bull, *I know the face but...* (London: Peter Davies, 1959), p. 168.

<sup>75</sup> Bull, pp. 168-169. Peter Woodthorpe supports Bull's recollection in his memories of the production. See James and Elizabeth Knowlson, *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006), p. 122.

thought it was written by a lunatic. And by the end I still thought it was written by a lunatic; but a genuine lunatic, not a phoney'.<sup>76</sup> While several actors turned *Godot* down because of their own baffling and confused responses, the first cast accepted their roles predominantly to keep themselves in work, though also because they recognised its merits. Even Bull, whose account was flamboyantly critical of the play, contended, 'there was a hypnotic quality about the dialogue which could not be lightly dismissed.'<sup>77</sup> Indeed it was the obsession with its meaning that characterised many of *Godot*'s earliest reviews and the responses of its audiences and cast. This was contextualised in Daneman's memoir, as he reflected:

"what the hell does it mean?"

This was the question that everyone was to ask about this play; a question that no one would dream of asking today. Now we talk incessantly of what a play is 'about' [...] But in 1955 we still wanted to know what a play meant.<sup>78</sup>

This generic audience response reported by Daneman concerning the meaning of *Godot* highlights an important aspect of the play's reception and the largely guarded nature of London's metropolitan theatre culture. Prior to *Godot*'s arrival, the commercial and conservative climate of London theatres in the late 1940s and early 1950s was more accustomed to naturalism, well-made plays, the poetic drama of T. S. Eliot, the farces of Noel Coward and American musicals from Rodgers and Hammerstein, such as *Oklahoma!* Although club theatres at this time, such as the Arts, ensured London did welcome a steady stream of European drama from the likes of Jean Anouilh, London's theatre cultures were – despite the range of theatre it presented – 'unadventurous' and largely 'gravitated towards the

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<sup>76</sup> Paul Daneman, 'Godot Arrives'. Unpublished memoir, Private Collection of Paul Daneman, pp. 2 – 4.

<sup>77</sup> Bull, p. 167.

<sup>78</sup> Daneman, p. 4.

predictable, or the star-studded, or the commercially proven, or the opulent'.<sup>79</sup> As suggested by Daneman's anecdote, by deliberately evading a clearly defined and rational meaning, *Godot* challenged the dominant traits of many of London's mainstream theatres that plays should be logical and easily comprehensible. This first production of *Godot* established the precedent that Beckett plays would set for audiences, as they encountered a new way of experiencing or interpreting the drama they were watching that would be both challenging and ambiguous in its purpose and meaning. Indeed, the uncertainty of meaning presented by his texts has been reflected in the longevity of his work more broadly, as critics, academics and theatregoers continue to ponder his work in performance and in their verbal and written responses to his *oeuvre*.

Beyond such a line of enquiry were other demanding challenges ahead for the cast. While the play proved difficult for Hall and his cast to decipher, rehearsing and performing in *Godot* presented the actors with many unforeseen tests or developments as they created the play in performance. In his 1959 autobiography, Bull considered the rehearsals 'the most gruelling that I've ever experienced in all my puff. The lines were baffling enough, but the props that I was required to carry about my person made life intolerable.'<sup>80</sup> Although the other actors did not express similar complaints about the rehearsals, they did share a mutual difficulty in learning the lines, remembering their cues and pinning down their characters. For example, under Hall's direction there was a lot of trial and error for Daneman and Woodthorpe, as Didi and Gogo. Daneman charted the evolution of their roles in his memoir by noting of their initial efforts, 'Peter's plan was that we should be clowns – clowns of the patsy persuasion: outsize boots, baggy pants, blue chins, red noses and circumflex

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<sup>79</sup> Pattie, p. 41 and p. 45. For further information on London and British theatre cultures prior to *Godot*, see Pattie, pp. 27 – 53, or John Bull, *Stage Right: Crisis and Recovery in British Contemporary Mainstream Theatre* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 37 – 56.

<sup>80</sup> Bull, p. 169.

eyebrows.’<sup>81</sup> Despite these well intentioned endeavours, they realised their routines as a double act ‘didn’t seem to work’ before discovering that when they ‘reacted intuitively’ and were ‘more intimate and domestic’ in the scenes, their characters began to emerge.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, as Daneman continued, ‘A lot of the comic business dwindled and eventually disappeared, along with our concept of ourselves with red noses, fright wigs and big boots. We became – for want of a better description – just tramps.’<sup>83</sup> Given the new theatrical terrain *Godot* was entering when this performance was staged in London, Hall’s production was a matter of discovery for the actors, audiences and the director, of which he would later note, ‘I was journeying in a new country and finding my way.’<sup>84</sup>

Part of Hall’s journey saw him use his directing experience, as he proved in some respects to be a more suited director of Beckett’s work than he would be later credited. This was particularly evident through his willingness to confidently employ the silences and pauses outlined in Beckett’s text. He had first used silences when he directed Jean Giraudoux’s *The Enchanted* (1955) at the Oxford Playhouse, though undoubtedly this key feature in terms of dramatic rhythm enjoyed greater prominence through its frequent use in *Godot*. Many commentators have credited the use of silence in this production as a feature that helped to shape British theatre practice and future playwrights, including Harold Pinter. The impact of these silences stemmed from the fact that they were unexpected by British audiences in the 1950s, as Daneman contextualises, ‘at that time the pace of performance was much faster, particularly in the picking up of cues; actors were trained to prepare their minds and take breaths so that their first words would follow instantly on the previous actor’s last

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<sup>81</sup> Daneman, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6. Similarly, Woodthorpe admitted, ‘I didn’t understand the play but I know that I felt how to do it. Its poetry spoke to me and its humour. And once I got it, I never lost it. I played it by instinct and feeling.’ See Knowlson and Knowlson, p. 122.

<sup>83</sup> Daneman, p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Hall, ‘The Coming of *Godot*’, Programme for the Peter Hall Company production of *Waiting for Godot*, 1997. University of Reading (UoR), Knowlson Collection, JEK A/9/1/21.

ones.’<sup>85</sup> As the actor incorporating these silences into the performance, there were many questions as to the length of time they needed to be held for. Daneman recalled of his conversation with Hall:

‘How long?’ I asked.

‘Until they think you’ve dried, and start shuffling.’

‘And then?’

‘Go on till they start tittering.’

‘And then? Till when?’

‘Oh...until they start to sigh and the first seat bangs up. Should be fun.’<sup>86</sup>

Through Beckett’s envisaged silences and pauses, and Hall’s nerve to make his actors hold and exercise the silences, *Godot* represented one of the first significant theatre performances in Britain where audiences so notably experienced the use of silences on stage. This convention became intrinsic to Beckett’s theatrical canon and Hall’s later work as a director, but the legacy of the performance saw silences and pauses become an increasingly used aspect of performance in the British plays and theatres.

From the actors’ perspectives, their sense of discovering the play was most apparent through their lived experiences in performance. Ahead of the first performance, the anticipation was too much for some members of the cast with Peter Woodthorpe recalling of the chaotic and frenzied scenes backstage and on stage:

The nerves built up on the first night. I have never seen people so ill. Peter Bull was vomiting in basins and running to the loo. It was really panic. Then Peter came on and within two pages he jumped, in his nerves, eight pages.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Daneman, p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>87</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson, p. 122.



Bull admitted his own sense of panic in his memoir, as he articulated, ‘The first night was, I think, my most alarming experience on stage’.<sup>88</sup> As well as skipping eight pages of text, he was also nearly guilty of strangling Timothy Bateson who played Lucky, due to the dangerous placing of Lucky’s rope inside the sleeve of his coat. Although these practical matters added to the stress, undoubtedly the actors were more duly concerned with the audience. This was most evident during their initial performances, as Bull described, ‘Waves of hostility came whirling over the footlights, and the mass exodus, which was to form such a feature of the run of the piece, started quite soon after the curtain had risen.’<sup>89</sup> This tension intensified in the days following the publication of the negative daily newspaper reviews, as audience members booed, delivered cat-calls, walked out of the performance or did not return for the second act.<sup>90</sup> However, the atmosphere within the theatre largely changed following Hobson and Tynan’s Sunday reviews, as many audience members engaged with the play, asked questions on its content and laughed – in some cases hysterically – at the dialogue between the characters. Inevitably some theatregoers demonstrated their disapproval of the play at several times over the production’s life at the Arts, Criterion and on tour, though it was perhaps Bull who received the most bruising insult, as one drunken late-comer at the Criterion said mid-performance, ‘I do wish the fat one would go.’<sup>91</sup> Although the cast – and particularly Peter Bull – suffered in their efforts to stage *Godot*, from the numerous stories recorded in their memoirs, their lesser known accounts of the production highlight how *Godot* altered their approach to performance and the unusual experiences they faced at the hands of actors. These notes and anecdotes stress the importance of obtaining perspectives from performers to offer a first-hand account of how the production was staged and to

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<sup>88</sup> Bull, p. 171.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>90</sup> The production was subject to a variety of reactions over the course of its run and their accounts attest to a variety of cat-calls delivered in their direction by audiences, including ‘This is why we lost the colonies’, ‘Rubbish’ and ‘Take it off’. See Knowlson and Knowlson, p. 122 and Bull, p. 175.

<sup>91</sup> Bull, p. 175.

understand the variety of challenges actors faced when staging Beckett, challenges that vary across productions and eras.

Reflecting on the perspectives of the performers from this first production, I would argue one of the most intriguing features of their insights and experiences was their ignorance to *Godot*'s future status as a canonical work. Since this production, Beckett's *oeuvre* has been staged across the world, from studio spaces to commercial houses with leading actors playing Vladimir and Estragon. However, this would have been unthinkable when these actors first read their scripts and its "incomprehensible" plot. This innocence was best epitomised by Daneman's expectations for the play. After *Godot*'s turbulent, but ultimately successful first weeks, there were brief talks about a West End transfer, however both Hall and Daneman did not anticipate these rumours would materialise. As a result, Daneman signed a contract to perform in a show entitled *Punch Review* starting in September, the brainchild of *Punch*'s editor Malcolm Muggeridge, and was replaced in *Godot* by Hugh Burden. Of course, it transpired that *Godot* transferred to the Criterion Theatre and Daneman had to leave the cast due to his prior commitments at the Duke of York's, much to the annoyance of Albery. However, the irony of this decision was evident as *Godot* continued in London until March, while *Punch Review* closed with terrible reviews within a month. Daneman recognised the irony himself and concluded in his memoir, it 'prompted Harold Hobson to announce in his column that, while *Godot* [is] still running, I was now out of work, and that perhaps Mr Malcolm Muggeridge could explain the joke to me.'<sup>92</sup>

#### **2.1.4. Conclusion: Beckett's London debut: *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre**

Following the two hundredth and sixty third performance between the Arts and Criterion Theatres, the first production of *Godot* in London bid farewell to the capital as many of its

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<sup>92</sup> Daneman, p. 15.

original cast members embarked on a regional tour of the play.<sup>93</sup> This eight week tour saw the play travel to Blackpool, Birmingham and Bournemouth amongst many other towns and cities in England with many further amusing stories and anecdotes noted in Peter Bull's memoir. The tour concluded on 28 July 1956 nearly one year after its emergence at the Arts Theatre. At the end of its first week it was anticipated the production would have to close due to poor notices and average box office figures, but its ability to defy expectations and the ability of Beckett's drama to assume a popular identity was largely initiated by the unique circumstances of this first production. Woodthorpe said of *Godot*'s situation, 'for this little play to run, that half the world didn't understand – and booed at first – with no one in it, for months and months and months was a tremendous shock to the theatre establishment of the day.'<sup>94</sup> Despite its lengthy run in the West End, the interest it stirred with audiences and theatrical commentators, these positive signs were not reflected at the box office. As Campbell Williams, the Administrator of the Arts Theatre, reported, 'The productions which to the outsider would appear to have been successful financially but were only so from a prestige point of view were "Mourning Become Electra" which lost £2,000, "Waiting for Godot" which just broke even by the contribution from another non-profit distributing company and made £500 only at the Criterion'.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, the reverberations of this production and Beckett's drama more broadly would persist in the UK for sixty years, as its influence on theatre cultures, practice and writing continues to be felt and reflected upon. The early contribution of the Arts Theatre production saw pauses and silences employed more frequently on British stages in a production that challenged the expectations of audiences, a matter epitomised by the initial reaction and reception to the play in performance, from its divisive reception in the press to the catcalls and criticism of *Godot* in relation to British

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<sup>93</sup> The touring production was produced by Michael Wide, directed by Richard Scott and saw Robert Eddison play Vladimir in addition to the regular cast. See Bull, pp. 184 – 185.

<sup>94</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson, p. 124.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Campbell Williams to J. L. Hodgkinson, 3 December 1956, V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, ACGB/34/88.

identity. These factors became more accepted through time, but they also contributed to the cultural fascination with *Godot*'s first UK performance and signalled the beginning of a new dawn in British theatre, where conventions, values and the experience of theatre was more commonly tested. This was epitomised through Beckett's next productions with the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, as I will now proceed to now examine the role the Sloane Square theatre had in establishing and maintaining Beckett's drama in London theatres.

## **2.2. Beckett and the Royal Court: The George Devine Years**

In December 2013 the Royal Court Theatre presented *Gastronauts*, 'a theatre adventure with food and music', and *Let the Right One In* – Jack Thorne's adaptation of the film and novel – billed as 'an enchanting, brutal vampire myth and coming-of-age love story', in a co-production with the National Theatre of Scotland.<sup>96</sup> The start of 2014 saw *The Pass* by John Donnelly occupy the Theatre Upstairs discussing themes of sex, fame and football, while in the main auditorium a triptych of late Beckett plays, *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby*, were presented with the actress Lisa Dwan performing every role in each of the three plays. This period demonstrated the eclectic programming recently offered by the Royal Court's newly appointed Artistic director, Vicky Featherstone, and provided a snapshot of the diversity present in contemporary British theatre. As a new writing theatre, its decision to programme *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby* called to attention the theatre's links to its artistic heritage, as well as the broader interest in staging Beckett across London's metropolitan theatres today. However, given that the Royal Court only occasionally revives landmark plays to mark their history, the esteem the theatre holds Beckett in was reflected through its revivals of *Not I* in 2013 and *Krapp's Last Tape* in 2006.

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<sup>96</sup> See <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/gastronauts> and <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/let-the-right-one-in>. [accessed 18 August 2016].

These recent Royal Court productions are supported by a rich tradition of staging Beckett's drama that dates back to the origins of the English Stage Company (ESC) under its founding director, George Devine. He believed that the theatrical future 'lies somewhere in a triangle between Brecht, Beckett and Ionesco' and it was his 'desire to pursue three strands of work: European modernism, contemporary revivals of classics, and new plays.'<sup>97</sup> These beliefs were reflected in the early programming of the ESC, when it earned its reputation as a writer's theatre. At Sloane Square, Devine gave writers a home and a platform, whereby their voice could be heard and in Beckett's case this backing was evident through the support and care shown to the productions of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* (3 April 1957), *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* (28 October 1958), *Happy Days* (1 November 1962) and *Waiting for Godot* (30 December 1964) staged during Devine's tenure.<sup>98</sup> Beckett's drama contributed to the Royal Court's influence on British theatre, which also helped launch the careers of other significant playwrights including John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and Ann Jellicoe, in a cultural moment that is often credited for restoring 'the theatre to the forefront of British artistic life'.<sup>99</sup> This achievement was perhaps all the more remarkable given the numerous hurdles it faced at the time. New plays had to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain, who, as I will show later, was liable to cut, request alterations and challenge content. Meanwhile, the Royal Court also had to grow up on a limited, subsidised budget in a theatre culture dominated by the West End's commercial ethos, where the idea of the "star" actor still held sway. Despite being located away from London's fashionable and theatrical

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<sup>97</sup> Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin, *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out* (London: Oberon Books, 2007), p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> This production was directed by Anthony Page, who was Artistic Director from 1964-65 while Devine was absent through illness. Although technically this is not part of the Devine years at the Court, he was involved in the planning and as a revival of Beckett's work at the Court it offers a fascinating comparison with the other plays which premiered at the Court.

<sup>99</sup> Irving Wardle, *The Theatres of George Devine* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. xii.

centres of the 1950s, Devine hoped ‘out of the 9 million people in Greater London he would find 3,500 a week to fill the Court.’<sup>100</sup>

Several guiding narratives have been produced on the theatre’s history, including studies by Terry Browne (1975), Richard Findlater (1981), Philip Roberts (1986 and 1999) and Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin (2007). However, Beckett’s productions have only briefly been addressed within these histories.<sup>101</sup> This section will supplement these existing narratives on Beckett’s theatre at the Royal Court by examining two of its earliest productions: *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* in 1957 and *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* in 1958. It will discuss how Beckett’s relationship with the ESC was initiated and how Devine saw Beckett as a central part of his programming, giving his plays a home at a time when they did not conform to the conventional dramatic fare expected by UK audiences. I will examine how these productions were interpreted and presented by their respective practitioners and how this period enabled Beckett to establish connections with key collaborators, who would make notable contributions to performances of his drama in London and on international platforms.<sup>102</sup> These crucial collaborations materialised over these initial years and highlighted the early support Beckett was shown, in spite of the plays’ critical reception, which will conclude this section, whereby *Fin de Partie* and *Endgame* were branded as “boring”, “obscure” and “heavily stylised”, while *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last*

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<sup>100</sup> As Wardle contextualised, ‘‘Chelsea’ on headed writing paper was a good address, but it was a far from swinging area, immune even from the espresso bar boom in neighbouring South Kensington. The King’s Road abounded in antique shops, but not in good restaurants or shops of any other kind.’ Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>101</sup> See Terry Browne, *Playwrights’ Theatre: The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975), Richard Findlater, *At the Royal Court: 25 years of the English Stage Company* (London: Amber Lane Press, 1981), Philip Roberts, *The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Little and McLaughlin.

<sup>102</sup> Practitioners of Beckett’s drama during these years at the Court can be traced through the genealogy of Beckett’s production histories in the UK, Ireland and across Europe. These include key figures such as Roger Blin, Jean Martin, Deryk Mendel, Jack MacGowran, Jocelyn Herbert, Patrick Magee and Donald McWhinnie. Such collaborations and friendships stemmed from the Devine years at the Royal Court and this chapter will demonstrate how this period proved the genesis of many interconnected future performances (and retrospectively, performance histories) in relation to Beckett productions in the UK and across national boundaries.

*Tape* played to 40% of the theatre's box office capacity.<sup>103</sup> I will now examine how this early relationship between Beckett and the ESC came about by discussing the world premiere of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles*, before addressing further performances of Beckett's drama staged by the ESC.

### **2.2.1. *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* : Rescued by the omnipresent Devine**

Nine days before the ESC opened its inaugural season with *The Mulberry Bush* by August Wilson on 2 April 1956, *Waiting for Godot* concluded its extensive run of 263 performances at both the Arts and Criterion theatres, in a production that had arguably stirred more curiosity and debate amongst British theatregoers than any other new post-war play up to that date. By contrast, *The Mulberry Bush* did not represent a new dawn in British theatre, though nonetheless it offered a safe introduction to its first season, which also featured plays by Arthur Miller, Ronald Duncan, Bertolt Brecht and most notably John Osborne.<sup>104</sup> Beckett's return to London and the initiation of his connection with the Royal Court saw his work presented in French, as *Fin de Partie* and *Acte San Paroles* launched the ESC's second season with a gala performance on 2 April 1957.<sup>105</sup>

With the international success and notoriety *Godot* achieved following its premiere in 1953, it is perhaps surprising that the initial attempts to stage *Fin de Partie* in France saw a repeat of the efforts that had prolonged *Godot*'s premiere. The delayed staging reflected the state of French theatres during the 1950s, where they faced financial limitations and were less willing to risk money on plays without any external funding. Roger Blin suggested the financial pressures for theatre makers in France during the post-war period, as he noted, 'in

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<sup>103</sup> W.A. Darlington, 'Boring Lack of Humanity in 'End-Game'', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1958; Milton Shulman, 'The dust-bin play', *Evening Standard*, 4 April 1957; Unknown Author, 'End-Game Revived', *The Times*, 29 October 1958. For the box office figures of these Royal Court productions, see Findlater, p. 246.

<sup>104</sup> Devine's first season was partly inherited from Oscar Lewenstein's planning. His original plan of opening with *Cock-A-Doodle Dandy* (1949) by Sean O'Casey was declined by the Council. *The Mulberry Bush* had previously opened at the Old Vic in Bristol in 1955.

<sup>105</sup> The official "world premiere" according to ESC's records is 3 April 1957.

spite of the success of *Godot*, I couldn't find [a theatre] in Paris' with theatre owners often stating "Yes, it's good, but do you have any financial backing?"<sup>106</sup> Jean Martin, who would play the role of Clov, later suggested the success of *Godot* went against their production, as he argued, 'The directors, who always lacked money (and sometimes enthusiasm), did not believe the miracle of *Godot* could be repeated. Once, fine – twice, never.'<sup>107</sup> Although Blin, Martin and the rest of the company were in advanced rehearsals with Beckett, as Mark Taylor-Batty has charted, the Theatre de l'Oeuvre postponed *Fin de Partie* in favour of a more financially lucrative production.<sup>108</sup> They were inevitably disappointed at the way in which they had been treated and in several letters Beckett suggested they were left 'high, dry and theatreless'.<sup>109</sup> With many Parisian theatres occupied for the 1957 season, the possibility of a new venue in the short term looked bleak.

Although Beckett's career as a dramatist was launched in Paris, London arguably proved to be the city where his reputation was sustained and supported, particularly at key phases of its development or against external pressures, a matter most evident through the staging of Beckett's double bill in 1957. With very little notice, the ESC stepped in to host the French language performances of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* to a predominantly Anglophone audience at a time when French theatres were unable or not willing to. This act was indicative of the support Beckett and his drama received from Devine and it would prove much more than a token gesture, as the French double bill initiated a lengthy collaboration between Beckett and Devine that saw the artistic director collaborate with the playwright as

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<sup>106</sup> Lois Oppenheim, *Directing Beckett* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p.307.

<sup>107</sup> Jean Martin, 'Creating Godot' in *Beckett in Dublin*, ed. by S.E. Wilmer (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1992), p. 31.

<sup>108</sup> Beckett and Jean Martin were annoyed at the news the Theatre de l'Oeuvre were pulling out. Lucien Beer maintains they had deferred the production rather than cancelled it. No formal, bidding contract with an agreed production date had been signed. This production of *Fin de Partie* would eventually open in Paris later in April 1957 in the small Studio des Champs Elysées and Beer received a percentage of the box office, following the dispute. See Mark Taylor Batty, *Roger Blin: Collaborations and Methodologies* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

<sup>109</sup> Beckett wrote to Barney Rosset on 11 January 1956, 'The Oeuvre has suddenly backed out of its engagements. Reason given: on the verge of bankruptcy they had to choose between selling the theatre and signing for a play with two cinema stars and strong financial backing. [...] leaving us high, dry and theatreless. The rehearsals were well advanced. Blin and Martin are desolate. So it goes on this bitch of an earth.' Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 7.



an actor, director, lighting designer, producer and friend in a creative partnership that would significantly shape the first decade of Beckett productions in London.<sup>110</sup>

Devine initially tried to persuade Beckett – as early as 1956 – to translate *Fin de Partie*, so that he could present a fuller evening of Beckett’s work than *Acte Sans Paroles*, which was ready to be presented alongside the work of other writers. Many different programming combinations were debated, including the trio of ‘Ionesco – Mime – Yeats’, though Devine later decided it did not offer ‘as good a selling line as a “French Double Bill”’, when the opportunity to programme both plays for his second season eventually materialised.<sup>111</sup> Devine’s eagerness to hastily include Beckett at the start of the ESC’s second season left a strong impression, as he would fondly remember years later:

I had trouble finding a theatre in France for the first production of *Fin de Partie*, so I came to The Royal Court to do it. The atmosphere in the fifties and sixties was very good and everyone was extremely keen. George Devine was omnipresent, the whole heart of the theatre.<sup>112</sup>

*Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* were presented as part of the ESC’s “French Fortnight” in what was a celebration of French culture at the Royal Court where the plays were closely followed by performances of Jean Giraudoux’s *The Apollo de Bellac* and *The Chairs* by Eugene Ionesco. This two week celebration epitomised how Devine was keen to support a European strand within his programming and demonstrated his own Francophile interests, which stemmed from his childhood excursions to France, his fluency in French and his previous theatrical work with Michel Saint-Denis.<sup>113</sup> Devine wrote of his proposed

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<sup>110</sup> This partnership was initiated by a mutual friend in Mary Hutchinson, who was a prominent art patron in London and an early supporter of Beckett’s work.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from George Devine to Mary Hutchinson, 7 January 1957. Harry Ransom Center (HRC), The University of Texas at Austin, Mary Hutchinson Papers, 10.8.

<sup>112</sup> Cathy Courtney, *Jocelyn Herbert: A Theatrical Workbook* (London: Art Books International, 1993), p. 219.

<sup>113</sup> Devine’s Francophile tendencies were clearly at the forefront of his programming plans for the second season as he initially sought ‘one more item of 20 to 25 minutes’ ‘preferably from modern French drama’ to make a

programming and his admiration of French writers and culture that ‘it was our deliberate intention to promote this parallel influence in the choice of our repertoire.’<sup>114</sup> Beckett became a central part of these plans, which saw plays by Brecht, Ionesco, Sartre, Genet and Arrabal all performed at the Court. As Dan Rebellato suggests the ‘overlap’ of Beckett, Ionesco and ‘the movement inspired by *Look Back in Anger*’ stimulated within the London theatre landscape, ‘a brief moment of undifferentiation where the ideas of experiment and innovation seemed to cross boundaries of cultural identity.’<sup>115</sup> Here Rebellato identifies that European writers were crossing the boundaries of cultural identity in the UK, and while this is true, I would argue Beckett’s experiments have questioned the boundaries of national and cultural identity for a more sustained period of time, such was the frequency with which his work was produced in London. In addition to this development, Beckett was a writer who drew British theatre into European artistic currents through his innovations in theatrical styles that challenged the conventions of British writing and, in turn, influenced British writers as to how their work developed in terms of style, content and aesthetics.

### **2.2.2. Beckett’s hostile beginning at the ESC**

The French double bill ran at the Court for just six performances from 2 – 6 April 1957 and received a number of varied reviews. Beckett noted the ‘press was hostile’ except for ‘[a] fine article from Hobson’.<sup>116</sup> Indeed Hobson’s radiant review of *Fin de Partie* described its presentation as ‘among the greatest of the services that the English Stage Company has rendered to the British public.’<sup>117</sup> Although Hobson’s praise was noteworthy, its impact on

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complete show with *Les Chaises* and *Acte Sans Paroles*. See Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 3 December 1956. University of the Arts London (UAL), Wimbledon College of Arts, Jocelyn Herbert Archive JH/1/15. This archive subsequently moved to the National Theatre Archive.

<sup>114</sup> Wardle, p. 203.

<sup>115</sup> Rebellato, p. 145.

<sup>116</sup> Maurice Harmon, *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>117</sup> Harold Hobson, ‘Samuel Beckett’s New Play’, *The Sunday Times*, 7 April 1957.

the production was inconsequential as his review followed the end of the performance run. By contrast, the negative verdicts of several other London critics were printed after its opening night and would have diminished the potential of the play's box office takings, although these were by no means low at 69%.<sup>118</sup> His delayed verdict contrasted with the perspectives of many other critics, who Beckett noted to Alan Schneider 'were stupid and needlessly malevolent. Their ignorance of French explains the former, but hardly, or not entirely, the latter.'<sup>119</sup> Beckett was dissatisfied with the malevolent reviews the production generated, but many critics reported their negative impressions of the play through their considerations of the language, its message and their expectations of Beckett.

The manner in which *Fin de Partie* was postponed by the Theatre de l'Oeuvre meant Beckett had few options but to accept Devine's offer to stage its world premiere in London, despite the fact it would be fully understood by the majority of its Anglophone audience.<sup>120</sup> While Beckett recognised this in his correspondence, the success and infamy that surrounded *Godot* also brought greater attention and interest to *Fin de Partie* as Beckett's next play. This expectation was underlined in *Punch* magazine, where the reviewer surmised 'one admires Mr Beckett, and expects a lot from him', before saying that 'Fin de Partie, at the Royal Court with a French company for one week, is a sad disappointment.'<sup>121</sup> Kenneth Tynan, who had previously applauded *Godot*, added to the negative responses describing it as 'portentously stylised, piled on the agony until I thought my skull would split.'<sup>122</sup> Tynan concluded his criticism of the play by writing, '[f]or a short time, I am prepared to listen in any theatre to any message, however antipathetic. But when it is not only disagreeable but forced down my throat, I demur.'<sup>123</sup> The existential tone and atmosphere presented in *Fin de Partie* was

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<sup>118</sup> Findlater, p. 246.

<sup>119</sup> Harmon, p. 14.

<sup>120</sup> It has subsequently been the only time *Endgame* has been performed in French in London.

<sup>121</sup> Unknown Author, *Punch*, 10 April 1957.

<sup>122</sup> Kenneth Tynan, 'A Philosophy of Despair', *The Observer*, 7 April 1957.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

difficult for several critics to engage with and the combination of its unfamiliar images did not make it appear to be an appealing theatrical experience for several audience members. Odette Aslan affirms this by stating, ‘Today we are more accustomed to his work, but for the audience of 1957, even after *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* was a severe trial.’<sup>124</sup> With this in mind Devine’s decision to schedule Beckett’s drama demonstrates the faith he showed at a time when others were not so brave or questioned the worth of his *oeuvre*. While the images of Beckettian performance are now, through time, less unusual, Beckett’s movement towards a minimalist aesthetic would significantly influence the development of later British playwrights, from Edward Bond to Sarah Kane. Although this innovation was bold and difficult for audiences and critics to engage with, it proved a pivotal development in the aesthetic approaches to British drama from the late 1950s onwards.

### **2.2.3. *Acte Sans Paroles*: The forgotten mime**

During its brief run at the Court, *Fin de Partie* was followed by the mime *Acte Sans Paroles*. Although very little has been written or recorded on this particular play in production, it was in fact *Acte Sans Paroles* that first captured Devine’s interest in staging Beckett as he was scheduling his second season. He elucidated this initial admiration by writing, ‘We like ACTE SANS PAROLES immensely. I find it wonderful, poetic, comical and theatrical.’<sup>125</sup> However, nearly one year later Devine would retract the admiration he expressed as he did not consider the mime a worthy companion piece for *Endgame* in 1958.<sup>126</sup> On 10 December 1957 he wrote:

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<sup>124</sup> Odette Aslan, *Roger Blin and Twentieth Century Playwrights*, trans. by Ruby Cohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.45.

<sup>125</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 15 December 1956. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>126</sup> While the mime was also performed with *Fin de Partie* at the Champs Elysées Paris and in the Werkstatt Berlin, it was dropped for the English translation of *Endgame* at the Royal Court.

After very careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that it would be better not to present the Mime. Even if the technical difficulty of the orchestra were overcome by using a tape recording, I feel that it is has already been seen and reviewed here, and might detract from the great interest of the play in English.<sup>127</sup>

Beckett felt aggrieved that the mime was not granted a second outing akin to *Endgame* and as I will highlight later in the case study for the 1958 double bill, it would prove a testing moment in their relationship.

*Acte Sans Paroles* was written by Beckett after a Sadler's Wells trained-dancer Deryk Mendel wrote to him asking if he would write a scenario for him. He also wrote to Ionesco, Jacques Audiberti, Arthur Adamov and Georges Schehadé, though only Beckett's response offered potential. Prior to the mime, Mendel showed his range as a performer by playing in a clown number in a cabaret at the Fontaine des Quatre Saisons.<sup>128</sup> Besides warming to Mendel's enthusiasm, *Acte Sans Paroles* enabled Beckett to establish a familial link to his work as the performance allowed him to call on the skills of his cousin John, who composed the music to accompany Mendel's performance. The first staging of the mime was long in the planning with Beckett writing to Con Leventhal in November 1955 how its music was being developed:

John was over for a week and got down some good music. Mendel promises to do the job very well. We hope to have it done in the next musical at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, but it was too late.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 10 December 1957. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>128</sup> From an interview between James Knowlson and Deryk Mendel. University of Reading (UoR), Knowlson, JEK A/7/58. Mendel discusses how Beckett sent Jérôme Lindon and his wife Suzanne to watch him in performance, before he accepted Mendel's project.

<sup>129</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 572.

Although their Royal Court production did not materialise for some time later, they rehearsed in a studio space along the Boulevard de Clichy in Paris, where they worked on synchronising the music with the movements of the piece.<sup>130</sup> Beckett is believed to have had a limited involvement in the production's creative process and this is suggested by the few notes he offered on the piece. However, in an intriguing link to *Endgame*, he is supposed to have told Mendel that the figure in *Acte Sans Paroles* was "Clov thrown into the desert", though at what stage in the performance's development this note was given is unknown.<sup>131</sup> Their rehearsal process involved a lot of experimentation for the mime's movements and music, as John Beckett noted in an interview with James Knowlson, '[Mendel] used to make the sort of movements [...] that the script seemed to demand and I would jot down timings but approximate timings for them [...] I mean as far as Sam was concerned we were on our own.'<sup>132</sup> John Beckett would then write the music from these resulting rehearsals, which was then lengthened and shortened at specific points in later rehearsals. Overall John Beckett notes of the music which accompanied the performance, it was 'a kind of rumpus going on, and then the music which was all based on this kind of kaleidoscopic or variation of a small number of ideas, with the ring of the xylophone and the harsher side drums, it's all very brittle sounds'.<sup>133</sup> Mendel's movements and John Beckett's score played against a bare backdrop designed by Jacques Noël, as shown in Figure 4. This set demonstrated the minimalist aesthetic that would later epitomise Beckett's drama as it contained a tall, skeletal palm tree placed against a grey circular background. The drawing sees the man stand on the two boxes with light shining from the wings on his forehead; an image which suggests early similarities to the Protagonist standing on the plinth with a single beam of light on his head in

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<sup>130</sup> Although John Beckett notes Boulevard de Clignancourt, it is more than likely the Boulevard de Clichy which is in the Clignancourt area. This is near the Pigalle metro as Mendel references. John Beckett notes it was a large space '50 feet long and 20 feet wide.' See Interview between James Knowlson and John Beckett, August 1991 and July 1992. UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/7/9 and Interview between Knowlson and Mendel.

<sup>131</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 65.

<sup>132</sup> Interview between Knowlson and John Beckett.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

the final act of *Catastrophe* (1982). Both plays utilise the theatrical form given to the idea of their lone figures being subject to enigmatic external forces – a matter Beckett sought to experiment with on stage as he developed his theatrical canon.



Figure 4 Jacques Noël set design for *Acte Sans Paroles* at the Royal Court Theatre, London, 1957. Credit: <http://art.asso.free.fr/jacques-noel/theatre/resultat-jacques-noel.php?recordID=60&titre=Actes%20Sans%20Paroles> [accessed 22 February 2014].

Beyond this overview of the mime's genesis, rejection and practical details, little is known of this particular performance due to the fact that the vast majority of critics overlooked the mime in their reviews of the double bill. The twenty minute piece did receive a brief positive note at the end of Harold Hobson's elaborate review of *Fin de Partie* where he stated 'Acted by Deryk Mendel with blank desperation, its last thirty seconds are especially fine.'<sup>134</sup> Although this performance did not garner the attention that other productions would receive, Mendel's performance strengthened his rapport and ties to Beckett and his drama, as the performance genealogies of Beckett's drama on international

<sup>134</sup> Harold Hobson, 'Samuel Beckett's New Play', *The Sunday Times*, 7 April 1957.

stages suggested through Mendel's later direction of prominent German productions of his plays.<sup>135</sup> Despite the fact *Acte Sans Paroles* was overlooked by the ESC, one year later memories of the double bill were recalled by *The Times*, who praised the ESC for its inspired programming as 'the marauder of frontiers' on the London stage.<sup>136</sup> They surmised, '[b]etween the extremes of Beckett in French and Olivier in vaudeville [performing in Osborne's *The Entertainer*] there has been a steady output of sophisticated cosmopolitan drama'.<sup>137</sup> The vibrant Royal Court programme suggested the theatre's potential to the British public, but this early moment also highlighted the contribution Beckett's plays would have on British theatre culture. Such early references to his work as 'cosmopolitan' epitomised how his work was neither exclusively Irish, French or British, but a sophisticated brand of international drama that crossed the borders of national identity. This reception supported Devine's decision to programme the next Beckett double bill of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* and it is this production that I will now discuss.

#### **2.2.4. The genesis of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*: Frustration, annoyance and creativity**

Plans to translate *Fin de Partie* were in motion as early as January 1957, when Beckett agreed to translate the play in return for having Blin's production staged at the Royal Court three months later. However, translating the play was by no means a straightforward task for Beckett. Devine was alerted to this difficulty by Mary Hutchinson and he wrote to Beckett if he was 'seriously doubtful whether FIN DE PARTI[E] can be rendered into English.'<sup>138</sup> The

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<sup>135</sup> Following this experience, Mendel later worked on Beckett's drama in Germany directing the world premiere of *Spiel* in Ulm in 1963 and a troublesome production of *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller Theater in 1965, which would stimulate a relationship between Beckett and the Berlin theatre. He would also introduce Frank Dunlop to Beckett's drama, who would later become Artistic Director of the Nottingham Playhouse, the Young Vic and the Edinburgh Festival, where Beckett's work was frequently staged.

<sup>136</sup> Roberts, *The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage*, p. 64.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett on 9 January 1957. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.



translation proved an onerous job for Beckett and he expressed these sentiments to Thomas MacGreevy, as he wrote, 'I find it dreadful in English, all the sharpness gone, and the rhythms. If I were not bound by contract to the Royal Court I wouldn't allow it in English at all.'<sup>139</sup> Despite expressing difficulties with the translation, Beckett would always persist for the sake of his friendships and his work at the Royal Court, as he managed to produce the translation by the middle of August as he had originally promised to Devine.

The 1958 production saw *Endgame* share the bill with the world premiere of *Krapp's Last Tape*. Ahead of confirming this programme, it became clear that Devine was less interested in re-staging *Acte Sans Paroles*. Indeed, this matter tested their early working relationship. Devine wrote of plans to present the play at the 'beginning of March [1958], in repertory, with two other plays', which included proposals to complete the evening with 'a "reading" of *All That Fall* and suggestions that N.F Simpson's *A Resounding Tinkle* 'would make an admirable partner for "End Game"'.<sup>140</sup> The latter proposal left Beckett 'extremely surprised' and Devine's decision not to present *Act Without Words* clearly frustrated Beckett, who thought their agreement covered 'the spectacle we brought over from Paris last April.'<sup>141</sup> He concluded his disgruntled reply by writing, 'I suggest you couple The Resounding Tinkle with something less unsociable and forget about me until I can offer you a short piece of my own to go with *Endgame*.'<sup>142</sup> Despite the annoyance Beckett conveyed in his letter, it is possible to conceive that Beckett's desire to see his drama presented as part of its own programme encouraged him to write *Krapp's Last Tape*. This episode tested Devine and Beckett's working relationship for the first time and while it showed Devine was willing to abide by Beckett's wishes on the programming of his plays, it highlighted how he could also

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<sup>139</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 438. Beckett would complete the initial text on 12 August 1957.

<sup>140</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 10 December 1957. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15. This letter also reveals intentions for the 'repertory [to go] on tour for four weeks later in the Spring to some "appropriate" towns.'

<sup>141</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 14 December 1957. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

be firm on such matters when he needed to be. For example, with respect to the involvement of *Act Without Words*, Devine did later articulate to Beckett that he thought ‘the Mime would weaken the Show.’<sup>143</sup>

*Endgame*’s need for a partner piece was assisted by the lengthy discussions between the Royal Court and the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. Beckett offered his reassurance concerning the delays to a frustrated Devine, who had expended considerable energies in attempting to see *Endgame* staged. Beckett noted, ‘Do not let yourself feel rushed for time. As far as I am concerned you may have as many extensions of your option as you need.’<sup>144</sup> During this time Beckett managed to conceive and finish *Krapp’s Last Tape*, previously titled “Magee Monologue”; a combination of Devine’s suggestion to write a monologue for the stage and the lasting impression Patrick Magee’s reading of *From An Abandoned Work* had left on Beckett.<sup>145</sup> The play excited Beckett’s theatrical intuitions, and as I will now discuss, it was one he was eager to work on in rehearsals.

### **2.2.5. Creating *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*: Beckett’s London collaborators**

Although *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* were on the same bill, the plays were created independently in rehearsals which Beckett attended and offered advice on. The rehearsals were significant as they marked Beckett’s first time collaborations with several practitioners who played an important role in establishing and maintaining his theatrical vision. With *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Beckett had more concrete ideas of how the play would be staged. As he noted to Barney Rosset:

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<sup>143</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 21 December 1957. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>144</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 19 February 1958. HRC, Texas, The English Stage Company Correspondence, 1.2.

<sup>145</sup> Beckett began writing *Krapp’s Last Tape* as the “Magee Monologue”. This is shown on his Été 56 Notebook. University of Reading, Beckett Collection, MS 1227/7/7/1.

I see the whole thing so clearly (appart [sic] from the changes of Krapp's white face as he listens) and realize that this does not mean I have stated it clearly [...] I'd hate it to be made a balls of at the outset and that's why I question it's [sic] being let out to small groups beyond our control [for control] before we get it done more or less right and set a standard of fidelity at least.<sup>146</sup>

Here, Beckett signalled his determination for his latest play to be performed to what he considered an acceptable standard. This statement also suggests his dissatisfaction with previous productions of his plays. As he had written the piece with Patrick Magee in mind, the play was easily cast with his preferred actor and having Donald McWhinnie as director was a 'great security' for Beckett after their previous work together on BBC radio.<sup>147</sup> This production was the first time Beckett had written an original drama in English and marked the beginning of McWhinnie and Magee's collaborations with Beckett's theatre. Undoubtedly, the production benefitted from the greater care, consideration and preparation Beckett and the practitioners offered to the play's performance. Beckett exchanged regular letters with Magee and McWhinnie about the play ahead of their rehearsals and they also met up in Paris so Beckett could go through the script in greater detail. For example, Beckett's advanced efforts for Krapp were accentuated in a letter as early as April 1958, when he answered Magee's queries on movement, voice and the meaning behind some of the terms Beckett employed in the text.<sup>148</sup>

The time Beckett spent in rehearsals for *Krapp's Last Tape* saw the play undergo many exciting practical developments. As he told Alan Schneider, 'I am extremely pleased with the result and find it hard to imagine a better performance than that given by Magee both

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<sup>146</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 123.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>148</sup> See Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 129.

in his recording and his stage performance.’<sup>149</sup> It was through Beckett’s work with Magee and the ‘admirable’ direction of McWhinnie in rehearsals that they ‘established a certain amount of business which is not indicated in the script and which now seems [...] indispensable.’<sup>150</sup> The ‘business’ McWhinnie refers to were in fact discoveries and images, which made *Krapp’s Last Tape* such an intimate monologue and can be traced through the memory of the play’s performance history. For example, his rehearsals with Magee saw Krapp develop a personal relationship with the machine by having his arm hug the tape recorder, while their experiments on the play’s finale discovered that the red light of the recorder continued to burn as the stage fell into darkness.<sup>151</sup> Meanwhile, in terms of Krapp’s movements, Magee found slipping on a banana a difficult slapstick moment to execute though he did develop a walk, which he thought should be ‘quite extreme’ whereby as Krapp he used his left hand ‘as if he were holding onto some invisible rail or rope all the way round – as if there were something there supporting him.’<sup>152</sup> In contrast to Krapp’s walk, Magee and McWhinnie acknowledged that other scenes required him ‘to keep absolutely still, absolutely quiet, absolutely rigid to hold the audience’s concentration as well as his own.’<sup>153</sup> Magee supported the physical demands of his performance with his distinctive crackled voice, which ensured Krapp remained strong spirited, as Beckett ‘was very insistent that ‘not with the fire in me now’ should be firmly delivered, with the emphasis on ‘fire’.’<sup>154</sup> Overall, Beckett was very satisfied with the positive collaborations he had with McWhinnie, Magee and Herbert on

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<sup>149</sup> Harmon, p. 50. Beckett arrived in London for rehearsals on 21 October 1958.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>151</sup> Beckett notes many specific details to Alan Schneider in this important letter on 21 November 1958. See Harmon, p. 50.

<sup>152</sup> James Knowlson, *Samuel Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape: A Theatre Workbook* (London: Brutus Books Ltd, 1980), p. 44.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

*Krapp's Last Tape*; a fact indicated by his desire to work with each practitioner on future productions of his work.<sup>155</sup>

While Beckett fulfilled more of a consultancy role during rehearsals of *Krapp's Last Tape*, his services were required to a greater extent in the preparations for *Endgame*. *Endgame* may have presented further challenges in performance, though the production's demands on Beckett's involvement owed a lot to Devine's numerous commitments, as he was directing the production, playing Hamm and running the theatre during these weeks. Nonetheless, it is fair to say without Devine's efforts the production would not have happened. When Beckett did discuss *Endgame* in his published correspondence, he was very frank about the performance, as he noted to Rosset of his planned work in London, 'My intention was to concern myself only with Krapp, but on arrival I found Endgame in such a state that I had to take it on too.'<sup>156</sup>

*Endgame* was the first Beckett play Devine had an active involvement in as a practitioner, which was evident in his approach to the text in performance. His instinct on the performance saw him and MacGowran work on extracting the comedy from their Hamm-Clov relationship. This approach did not meet the approval of Beckett, who asked the cast to attain the 'toneless voice' he wanted, shortly after his first visit to the play's rehearsals. Of these demands, Irving Wardle suggested '[o]ne cannot say that the production would have been 'better' without Beckett's assistance, though perhaps it might have been more popular.'<sup>157</sup> Devine appreciated Beckett's advice in rehearsals and allowed Beckett to sit in on his future productions of *Happy Days* (1962) and *Play* (1964). His respect for Beckett was signified during rehearsals for *Endgame*, as he in effect passed control of the production over to the playwright, thus demonstrating Beckett's authority in their working relationship. As

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<sup>155</sup> For example, Beckett wrote to Ethna MacCarthy-Leventhal, 'Very exciting working with Magee and McWhinnie. I want no other director henceforward.' See Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 193.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>157</sup> Wardle, p. 205.

Wardle suggests, ‘their relationship differed from that of the other author-director teams. Beckett was always the senior partner.’<sup>158</sup> Beckett may have assumed the authority in their practical working relationship, but the experience of directing *Endgame* with Beckett’s perspective to hand would influence Devine’s approach to his later works. Although he worked tirelessly to ensure *Endgame* made it onto the Royal Court stage, Devine was also ‘exceptionally nervous of his responsibilities towards it’ as both an actor and director.<sup>159</sup> Combining both roles was problematic, particularly since his black glasses made him effectively blind and unable at times to offer a director’s perspective on the performances taking place around him. Several reflections of this performance emphasise how nervous Devine was in the role of Hamm, as when he had the handkerchief placed over his face, he could be seen shaking with terror in his seat.<sup>160</sup> Despite Devine’s admirable efforts in getting *Endgame* staged and his overall commitment to the project, his production required more attention and reflection in rehearsals than his many other commitments would allow him. Nevertheless, he continued to support Beckett’s drama and was keen to make amends through his future direction of *Happy Days* and *Play*.

#### **2.2.6. Reception of *Endgame* and *Krapp’s Last Tape***

Critical accounts of *Endgame* in 1958 are varied and by no means flattering. Reviews of the performance referred to *Fin de Partie* the previous year and while Devine’s work was ‘freer in manner’ it was also perceived to be ‘inadequately acted’.<sup>161</sup> Devine’s direction put ‘spasms of vigour into the acting’ which Beckett tried to reduce at the later stages of rehearsal as they attempted to explore the play’s humour.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately, many critics felt Devine and MacGowran did not build a rapport as Hamm and Clov and indeed MacGowran thought

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.206.

<sup>160</sup> See Wardle, p. 206 and Courtney, p. 28.

<sup>161</sup> J. W. Lambert, ‘Pawns in an Old Game’, *The Sunday Times*, 2 November 1958.

<sup>162</sup> W. A. Darlington, ‘Boring Lack of Humanity in ‘End-Game’’, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1958.

Devine was wrongly cast as Hamm describing him as “too avuncular”; however he recognised his performance as Clov needed to develop a fuller understanding of his character.<sup>163</sup> Nonetheless from MacGowran’s perspective it was a valuable experience as it introduced him to Beckett and prepared him for his future portrayal of Clov at the Aldwych Theatre in London, where he performed alongside Magee as Hamm. Part of the irritation from the reviewer’s perspective was that Beckett’s drama did not conform to the conventions of the drama they were used to in the UK at the time. For example, W. A. Darlington noted, ‘these exchanges go on and on without bringing them any development of character.’<sup>164</sup> Darlington’s comments are in one sense true, as Hamm and Clov talk incessantly without a resolution to their conversation, but on the other hand, he misses that their existential musings and talk is also the point of Beckett’s dialogue – a stylistic decision many critics found difficult to understand or engage with when seeing *Endgame* performed for the first time.

*Krapp’s Last Tape* was the first Beckett play to premiere in English and the first Beckett production in London that did not encounter difficulties with respect to casting or finding a director.<sup>165</sup> Beckett encountered many frustrations watching *Endgame* though in contrast he responded favourably to *Krapp’s Last Tape*; a view shared by the written press in the UK. *The Times* declared Magee’s performance was ‘a brilliant *tour de force*, as strong in imagination as in execution.’<sup>166</sup> While Kenneth Tynan wrote his own parody in the form of review entitled “Slamm’s Last Knock” that he claimed was inspired by ‘another dose of nightmare gibberish from the so-called author of “Waiting for Godot...”’<sup>167</sup> His parody often negatively represents Beckett’s play, though he did refer to Magee’s performance as

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<sup>163</sup> Jordan R. Young, *The Beckett Actor: Jack MacGowran, Beginning to End* (Beverly Hills: Moonstone, 1987), p. 59.

<sup>164</sup> Darlington, 29 November 1958.

<sup>165</sup> For example, with *Endgame* in 1958 Alec Guinness was tipped for the role of Hamm before Devine played the role. Beckett said of Guinness to Barney Rosset, ‘wot a ope’. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 455.

<sup>166</sup> Unknown Author, ‘End-Game Revived’, *The Times*, 29 October 1958.

<sup>167</sup> Kenneth Tynan, ‘Krapp’s Last Tape’, *The Observer*, 2 November 1958.

‘probably perfect’ and ‘fine throughout’.<sup>168</sup> Beckett’s own personal enthusiasm for *Krapp’s Last Tape* lauded the work of his actor-director duo. For example, in a letter to Mary Manning he was full of praise for the production: ‘Terrific performance by Magee...pitilessly directed by McWhinnie. Best experience in the theatre ever.’<sup>169</sup> In many ways this double bill encapsulated Beckett’s productions during the Devine years at the Royal Court. These collaborations brought about many highs and lows for Beckett and Devine, though both men were keen to continue presenting his work in Sloane Square. The positive atmosphere of the Court and the positive partnerships that were developing would see *Happy Days* and *Waiting for Godot* follow the first two productions which would also add to the impressive legacy of Beckett’s work during Devine’s directorship.

### **2.2.7. Conclusion: Beckett and the Royal Court: The George Devine Years**

When *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* premiered at the Royal Court in 1957, Beckett was still in his formative years as a playwright, despite the international success of *Waiting for Godot*. His new plays were considered experimental when compared with the majority of other dramas of the period and represented a bold proposition for most theatres. Nonetheless Devine was willing to endorse Beckett’s brand of theatre, which epitomised the new writing ethos at his up-and-coming writer’s theatre in Sloane Square. The continuity of Beckett performances at the Royal Court has been largely maintained from Devine’s early support to the present day, where Beckett’s *oeuvre* is now presented as a canonised writer in the theatre’s programming. Although his association with the Royal Court has been under-examined to date, it can be argued Devine was the most influential British practitioner in launching and endorsing Beckett’s theatre. As later chapters in this thesis will show, the Royal Court became synonymous with Beckett’s drama and the theatre has endured in the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 458.



spirit and inspiration of Devine by creating a legacy of pivotal Beckett productions. Productions of Beckett's drama at the Royal Court have spanned eight artistic directorships; eleven of Beckett's nineteen plays for the stage have been performed in total, with the Royal Court staging five world premieres and two British premieres of his works.<sup>170</sup> Since the English language premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in 1955, no other London theatre has programmed productions of Beckett's plays as consistently as the Royal Court. Through Devine's early foresight, Beckett's theatre was given a London home he could trust during a pivotal period of his career as a playwright. Before Beckett was able to develop his theatrical intuitions and foster the practical relationships that would help shape many of the most enduring images of his drama, his work had to overcome a number of stumbling blocks in its efforts to reach the stage. In the next section of this chapter, I will examine the objections *Godot*, *Fin de Partie* and *Endgame* faced from the Lord Chamberlain's Office in what was one of Beckett's earliest introductions to the legislation of the London stage at the time. As I will now discuss, these experiences highlighted the loyalty and patience his drama would receive from his producers during a phase that made a notable contribution to the rich performance history of his drama in London.

### **2.3. Beckett and the Lord Chamberlain**

If the early casting difficulties Beckett's drama encountered proved draining on his producers and Beckett himself, a more frustrating obstacle his drama faced that shaped early productions of his theatre was the Lord Chamberlain. Up until September 1968 every new play put forward for performance in a public theatre in the UK was required by law to obtain a licence from the Lord Chamberlain's Office since the introduction of the Theatre Licensing

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<sup>170</sup> His plays were performed twenty times as part of fourteen productions, with four of his plays performed in a foreign language; a rarity for any playwright in the history of the Royal Court or indeed any non-language specific theatrical institution in the UK. This included *Fin de Partie* (1957), *Acte Sans Paroles* (1957), *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (1969) and *Warten auf Godot* (1976).

Laws of 1737.<sup>171</sup> Dominic Shellard notes that drama presented in Britain from this point ‘was shaped in no small degree by the Office of the Lord Chamberlain’.<sup>172</sup> This included many of the earliest productions of Beckett’s plays as his work – with the exception of *Godot’s* one month run under club conditions at the Arts Theatre – was informed by the objections of his Office, which demanded Beckett abide by cuts or offer alternative words for sections deemed inappropriate. This case study will discuss the history between Beckett’s drama and the Lord Chamberlain’s Office and analyse the ways in which censorship shaped his drama for the earliest audiences of his plays in London. It will examine the alterations requested by the Lord Chamberlain, the reaction of Beckett and his producers to these requests and how Beckett’s drama was perceived by the readers appointed by the Lord Chamberlain.

The decision to focus on the role of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office in the history of Beckett’s drama in London has been stimulated from archival research in the Peter Glenville, Donald Albery and English Stage Company Collections at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. Several narratives exist on the relationship between Beckett and the Lord Chamberlain including those by James Knowlson (1997), Dominic Shellard and Steve Nicholson (2004), and again Nicholson (2011).<sup>173</sup> These histories discuss the debacle surrounding the Lord Chamberlain’s interdictions for *Godot* and *Endgame* from different perspectives: Knowlson has offered the most detailed account from a biographical perspective, Shellard and Nicholson briefly mention Beckett in their history of the Lord Chamberlain’s role in British theatre, and Nicholson leads this narrative into new territory through his three volume study of the decisions and operations of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. This section will explore the influence British theatre censorship had on Beckett’s

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<sup>171</sup> The Theatres’ Act of 1843 also defined some of the legislation until 1968.

<sup>172</sup> Dominic Shellard and Steve Nicholson, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets...A History of British Theatre Censorship* (London: British Library, 2004), p. ix.

<sup>173</sup> See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*; Shellard and Nicholson, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets...A History of British Theatre Censorship*; Nicholson, *The Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968: Volume III* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011).

drama from the perspective of Beckett and his producers when his early plays first emerged on the London stage. The correspondence held in these Collections between Beckett and his producers has not been included in previous accounts of this history; letters which offer an insight into the reactions and deliberations to the Lord Chamberlain's objections and alterations of Beckett's dramatic texts.

This section has also benefitted from further archival research in the British Library's Lord Chamberlain Plays and Correspondence Collections, which was prompted after reading Nicholson (2011). This significant archive holds the original licensed typescripts for the earliest productions of Beckett's drama staged until 1968, as well as reader's reports, internal correspondence, correspondence between the Office and the theatres and letters from the general public. Nicholson's industrious scholarship utilises this archive to offer an original perspective on the work carried out within St James Palace and its responses to Beckett's plays. Although his history focuses on *Godot* and *Endgame*, Nicholson highlights how *Fin de Partie* and *Krapp's Last Tape* were also subject to objections from the Lord Chamberlain; including details that were not mentioned in previous accounts. This section will primarily focus on the early productions of *Godot*, *Fin de Partie* and *Endgame*. However, it is important to highlight that other Beckett plays were subject to interventions by the Lord Chamberlain, including *Happy Days* (1962), *Act Without Words II* (1964), *Play* (1964), *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (1965) and *Come and Go* (1966), while two further attempts to license unexpurgated versions of *Waiting for Godot* were submitted in 1964 and 1965.<sup>174</sup> This history will begin by examining the Lord Chamberlain's responses to *Waiting for Godot* and will continue chronologically.

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<sup>174</sup> *Eh Joe* was also submitted.

### 2.3.1. *Waiting for Godot* and the Lord Chamberlain

*Waiting for Godot* was Beckett's first encounter with censorship in the UK, though he was not unaccustomed to having his work censored; for instance, his prose works *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) and *Watt* (1953) had been banned in Ireland. It did however represent his first experience with theatre censorship and while *Godot* was later banned in Spain and Holland, British theatres would prove difficult terrain for his drama to emerge in. Legislation dictated that although similar mediums such as the music hall, film, broadcasting and publishing were not restricted by governing powers, the theatre remained one of the last sections of British society controlled by censorship. Furthermore, Beckett's previous experiences with *Godot* in France and Germany saw the play performed without the influence of censors. Such factors would have added to the frustrated sentiments Beckett had towards the restrictions the Lord Chamberlain's powers imposed on his texts, something which for dramatists working in Britain until 1968 had proved a regular difficulty to contend with as they prepared to stage their theatrical vision. As a foreign dramatist working in Britain, Nicholson suggests Beckett would be 'less prone to instinctive self-censorship than most British playwrights' and 'less inclined to accede so willingly to official demands.'<sup>175</sup> Correspondence between Beckett and the Lord Chamberlain continued for months before the play was officially licensed, as its producer Donald Albery had other hindrances delaying the production, from the unavailability of actors and directors to finding a suitable and willing theatre to stage the performance.

Through hindsight it is well known that *Godot*'s London debut was staged in the Arts Theatre, which operated under club conditions at the time, whereby plays did not require a performance licence. Before discussing the issues Beckett faced with the Lord Chamberlain's Office and with this fact in mind, it is worth asking: why was a performance licence sought

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<sup>175</sup> Nicholson, *The Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968: Volume III*, p. 46

for a play that was staged in a club theatre? The answer to this question highlights the ambition its producers had for the first UK performance of *Godot*. Although Albery and Glenville had secured its UK performance rights, they had difficulties in securing the “star” cast they desired and subsequently had not roused the interest of a theatre with a proposed production. As their early plans for the play included a straight West End production, Albery acted quickly in his attempts to attain a performance licence in advance of securing an interested theatre and cast. This ambition was the driving factor behind the correspondence that developed between Beckett, Albery and the Lord Chamberlain’s Office and although their efforts for a performance licence would not influence its premiere at the Arts Theatre, they would prove useful when the play earned a West End transfer to the Criterion Theatre.

Dialogue over the licensing of *Godot* began on 31 March 1954 with the assistant comptroller Norman Gwatkin, noting twelve objections regarding Beckett’s original English text to Donald Albery:

1. Act 1, page 2, “(pointing) You might button it all the same”. “True” (he buttons his fly)”.
  2. Page 3, “his hand pressed to his pubis”.
  3. Page 9, from, “It’d give us an erection”, down to “Did you not know that?” on page 10.
  4. Page 27, “on his arse”.
  5. Page 40, alter the lines from “Given the existence as uttered forth” down to “and who can doubt if it will fire the firmament”.
- Omit “Fartov”.
6. Page 52, omit from “But you can’t go barefoot” down to “and they crucified quick”.
  7. Act 11, page 3, omit “you see, you piss better when I’m not there”.

8. Page 16, “(he resumes his foetal posture)”
9. Page 20, “Gonococcus! Spirochaete”.
10. Page 30 “Who farted?”
11. Page 38, “and the privates”.
12. Page 54, Estragon must be well covered when his trousers fall.<sup>176</sup>

As many of these objections suggest, the Lord Chamberlain’s issues were based on the play’s sexual, religious and lavatorial references. Furthermore, these decisions were often arbitrary; a matter accentuated by Albery’s suggestions to Beckett regarding the aforementioned objections. Albery proposed submitting ‘alternative dialogue if an omission matters to the play’ adding ‘it is surprising how near and how strong you can make the alternative. The fact that you have agreed to alter something seems to be more important than the alteration itself.’<sup>177</sup> Albery’s comments indicate the uncertain parameters by which the Lord Chamberlain’s Office functioned in objecting and accepting words or phrases. In contrast, as an artist who judiciously chose his words, Beckett responded by stating it was with ‘the greatest reluctance’ he was ‘prepared to try and give satisfaction to the Lord Chamberlain’s Office’ on ten of the twelve disagreements, as he offered alternatives to these objected words.<sup>178</sup> Of these disputed sections, Beckett questioned the issues surrounding items five and six arguing, ‘their interdiction[s] [were] wholly unreasonable’, they were ‘vital to the play’ and could ‘neither be suppressed nor changed’.<sup>179</sup>

Beckett’s correspondence with publishers, producers, collaborators and confidants reveal his sentiments towards the role of the Office and the exemptions that were made with his text. These letters range in tone depending on the correspondent, his mood at the play’s particular stage in the licensing process and the Lord Chamberlain’s objections, but it is easy

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<sup>176</sup> Letter from Norman Gwatkin to Donald Albery, 31 March 1954. HRC, Texas, Glenville, 5.20.

<sup>177</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 481.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

to surmise Beckett did not appreciate his work being deemed offensive or requiring amendment. For example, Beckett voiced his indignation to his American publisher Barney Rosset saying:

We were all set for a London West End performance until the Lord Chamberlain got going. His incriminations are so preposterous that I'm afraid the whole thing is off. He listed 12 passages for omission! The things I had expected and which I was half prepared to amend (reluctantly), but also passages that are vital to the play (first 15 lines of Lucky's tirade and the passage [at the] end of Act II from 'But you can't go barefoot' to 'And they crucified quick') and impossible either to alter or suppress.<sup>180</sup>

Here Beckett suggests the Lord Chamberlain's interdictions may have been responsible for *Godot* not making its UK premiere on the West End. While in the immediacy of the event, Beckett was baffled by the Lord Chamberlain's demands and frustrated that his intrusion cost the play a West End debut, the way in which the events of this production panned out were also intrinsic to its success. Had this first production premiered on the West End would it have been afforded such a long initial run and established such curiosity and interest with the public and national press? While these ideas represent speculative questions from a distanced historical moment, it is fair to note that the Lord Chamberlain's role in the backstory to this first production shaped this landmark theatrical event with respect to where and when the performance was staged. While Albery and Beckett's correspondence reveals their thoughts regarding the Lord Chamberlain's position and his decisions, the perspective of Lord Chamberlain and his staff towards the play are provided by their reader's reports. *Godot* was read by St Vincent Troubridge, who outlined the issues he felt needed to be changed within the text. Beyond his suggested alterations, it was clear that both Beckett and Troubridge held reservations about their respective work. This was indicated by Troubridge in his reader's

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<sup>180</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Barney Rosset, 21 April 1954. Quoted in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p.412.

report for *Godot*, where he concluded his analysis of the play by questioning whether it warranted Albery's efforts: 'Why the shrewdest of our young managers should contemplate the production of so bitter, dark and obscure an allegory is almost as mysterious as the play itself.'<sup>181</sup> Indeed this mystery would continue at the Criterion Theatre for a further seven months, as Albery was determined to stage *Godot* in the West End, after its successful emergence at the Arts Theatre.

The expurgated text most likely used at the Criterion Theatre would have omitted many sections of the text that would generally be considered today as the play's humorous segments. For example, one notable cut outlined by Norman Gwatkin, for example, was Vladimir and Estragon's duologue about hanging themselves; dialogue that epitomises the tragicomic elements of *Godot*, as their contemplation of suicide is quickly overshadowed by the prospect of an erection. I would argue this dialogue represents one of the play's key comic lines, which triggers laughter from audience members during performance. What is ironic about this alteration is that the Lord Chamberlain felt the suicidal undertones of this dialogue were more appropriate for audiences to hear than humour concerning sexual arousal. As a result the dialogue was replaced by whispering and a flat response to a tragic question.<sup>182</sup>

ESTRAGON What about hanging ourselves?

VLADIMIR ~~Hmm. It'd give us an erection.~~

~~ESTRAGON (Highly excited) An erection!~~ [Vladimir whispers to Estragon.

Estragon highly excited.]

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<sup>181</sup> Shellard and Nicholson, p. 150.

<sup>182</sup> Elsewhere in Europe, *Godot* was nearly banned in the municipality of Arnhem, Holland, following criticism from the Roman Catholic press who saw the play as a homosexual work because Estragon says to Vladimir "Tu vois tu pisses mieux quand je ne suis pas là" ("You see, you piss better when I am not there"). See Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, pp. 521 – 522. Further censorship issues were experienced in Madrid, as Antonia Rodriguez-Gago reports that a production by Trino Martinez Trives was "refused a license by the censors" but performed in May 1955. See *Ibid.*, pp. 534 – 535 and Ruby Cohn, *Waiting for Godot: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 45.



VLADIMIR With all that ~~ensues~~ follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you tear them up. Did you not know that?<sup>183</sup>

By concealing Vladimir's joke, the Lord Chamberlain's Office highlighted the conservative nature of the British theatre culture in the 1950s, and deprived audiences and the actor playing Vladimir of one of *Godot's* most recognisably comedic lines.

The twelve objections the Lord Chamberlain's Office expressed about *Godot* were overcome through the use of alternative phrases, though also through the aid of a rehearsed reading which was organised by Albery and observed by the Office's Senior Examiner Charles D. Heriot.<sup>184</sup> Albery noted the changes to both Beckett and Gwatkin, with the latter agreeing on the points outlined with the exception of point number 10, as the Lord Chamberlain did not permit any reference to the breaking of wind. Although the majority of the issues were now resolved, Beckett returned his proposed alterations to Albery one further time:

1. Replace fly by coat. The rest unchanged.

2. Replace pubis by stomach.

3. Read:

Estragon What about hanging ourselves?

Vladimir Humm...

(He whispers to Estragon)

Estragon No!

Vladimir With all that ensues, etc.

4. Replace arse by backside.

5. Replace Fartov by Popov.

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<sup>183</sup> Revised typescript of *Waiting for Godot*, 1954. HRC, Texas, Donald Albery Collection, 145.1.

<sup>184</sup> Knowlson notes the reading was given by the cast of *I Am a Camera* (1955) in a dressing room of the New Theatre with Dorothy Tutin reading the part of the boy. See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 412.

7. Replace pu by do it.
8. Replace foetal by crouching.
10. Replace farted by belched. (This passage, leading up to Estragon's fausse sortie top of p. 31 cannot simply be deleted.)
11. Replace privates by guts.<sup>185</sup>

As far as the Collections contributing to this research suggest, Beckett's notes on these alterations represented the text that was finally deemed permissible for London theatres. With these changes, much to Albery's relief, Beckett's text was finally prepared to have a London debut, despite the censorial powers his work had to contend against.

After these protracted discussions and delays, *Godot* was eventually granted a licence, which enabled it to be staged in the Criterion Theatre. Beckett saw the production in the West End and while he had issues with the performances, its direction and design, many of his frustrations lay with the text used in the performance. Furthermore, the confusion over Beckett's two English texts led to the expurgated text being the first edition of *Godot* published by Faber and Faber in 1956. Beckett was quick to sardonically voice his dissatisfaction on the matter to its Editor, Charles Monteith, writing: 'It is good news your *Godot* is doing well. My only regret is that it is not complete. Some passages are quite meaningless because of the holes. They could have been bridges with a little rewriting. Well, there it is.'<sup>186</sup> Beckett's annoyance with the matter would continue until 1965 when the text was finally changed and in the meantime he referred friends and practitioners to the Grove Press edition. While this issue was eventually rectified, fresh efforts to stage his preferred version of *Godot* proved unsuccessful. When he observed Anthony Page's Royal Court production in 1964, Page tried to use Beckett's intended text, but the Office replied with the

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<sup>185</sup> Craig et al (eds.), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 483. Beckett did not include issues 6 and 9 as the Lord Chamberlain withdrew his objection, while for issue 12, it was agreed Estragon would be well covered when his trousers fall at the end of Act II.

<sup>186</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 603.

same stipulations to the agreed text for the 1955 production.<sup>187</sup> These decisions suggest how the Lord Chamberlain's Office could be consistent in their decision making, though these decisions may also reflect how the Office had learned lessons from their troubled dealings with Beckett's drama over the intervening years. As the next two sections will demonstrate, the Office's dealings over productions of his plays at the Royal Court would challenge their role and responsibility in relation to theatre in the UK.

### **2.3.2. *Fin de Partie* and the Lord Chamberlain**

Following the problems with *Godot*, Beckett next encountered the Lord Chamberlain under the auspices of the ESC at the Royal Court and as a result it was the responsibility of George Devine and his staff to co-ordinate the required cuts or edits from the Lord Chamberlain and Beckett's to suggest any alterations. As a new writing theatre, the ESC was familiar even in its second year of existence with the Lord Chamberlain's interdictions. *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* were the next Beckett plays to experience the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction and although they proved a less taxing set of dramas to warrant licences, specific words were objected to. Narratives surrounding Beckett and British censorship have previously overlooked the minor changes the Lord Chamberlain requested over *Fin de Partie*, as they have focused on prolonged disputes concerning *Endgame*. I would argue the portrayal of these factual details was deliberately overlooked in order to highlight the arbitrary nature of the decisions made by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Devine saw the fact that the Lord Chamberlain had more issues with *Endgame* as his opportunity to rouse a debate about theatre censorship in the national press. I will return to discuss the concerns that materialised over *Endgame* shortly, though I will first offer further context to this infamous debacle by contextualising *Fin de Partie*'s place in these narratives.

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<sup>187</sup> A further attempt was submitted by the Hertford College Dramatic Society for a performance at the Oxford Playhouse, though this request again received the same response. See: British Library, Lord Chamberlain Plays Collection, LCP 1964/51 and LCP 1965/47.

As *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* were presented by Roger Blin's company of French actors, the ESC dealt with any direct correspondence concerning the play's licensing and sent any objections from the Lord Chamberlain's Office to Beckett for further consideration. Due to the late programming of this double bill, Devine sought a performance licence just one month before the plays were staged. Archival sources show Devine sent a telegram to Beckett outlining the Lord Chamberlain's response to *Fin de Partie*: 'CHAMBERLAIN IN GENERAL AGREEMENT SOME SEX SLANG POSSIBLY QUERIED BUT PROBABLY NOT CRUCIAL'.<sup>188</sup> What is revealing from the demands of the Lord Chamberlain concerning the French and English texts of *Endgame* is that when the play was translated and performed in English, it was subject to more interdictions than the French text. This may be attributed to the Office's limited understanding of French, though this discrepancy suggested the inconsistent decisions made by the Lord Chamberlain on the same play; an inconsistency Devine was very keen to emphasise in the media. With *Fin de Partie*, the Lord Chamberlain in fact requested the omission or changing of one word, leaving Beckett to mull over replacing the word "conneries" with either "bêtises" or "âneries".<sup>189</sup> Nonetheless even though this was Beckett's second experience of dealing with the Lord Chamberlain he wrote to Devine of his 'great relief at having been let off so lightly by His NIBS'.<sup>190</sup> Although *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* ran for only six performances and had minimal interference from the Lord Chamberlain these details contextualise the longer issues that would await Beckett's next encounter with British censorship.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Telegram from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 5 March 1957. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2.

<sup>189</sup> Letters from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 8 and 11 March 1957. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2. "Conneries" (bullshit) would have obviously failed to pass the Lord Chamberlain's scrutiny.

<sup>190</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 8 March 1957. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2.

<sup>191</sup> *Acte Sans Paroles* was accidentally omitted from the original licence returned to the ESC and subsequently the Lord Chamberlain's Office asked for the licence to be returned so they could amend the document.

### 2.3.3. *Endgame* and the Lord Chamberlain

The ease with which *Fin de Partie* was licensed was a great relief to those involved in the production. Perhaps, as a result Beckett was in a jovial mood ahead of *Endgame*'s submission, jesting to Devine, 'When does the fun with the LC begin?'<sup>192</sup> This sentiment, however, did not last long as *Endgame* represented Beckett's most difficult interaction with the British establishment. The lengthy correspondence and debate concerning *Endgame* called attention to the role of the Lord Chamberlain's Office and the manner by which theatre was censored in Britain.

After the relative ease at which *Fin de Partie* was licensed, by comparison *Endgame* was subject to five requested omissions:

1. Page 12, "balls".
2. Page 13, "I'd like to pee".
3. Page 18, "What about that pee?"
4. Page 28, from "Let us pray to God", down to "He doesn't exist?"
5. Page 42, "arses".<sup>193</sup>

Despite the few queries the Office had for *Endgame*, it would be over six months later before Gwatkin would confirm it had been approved for a licence. The reason for this lengthy delay is teased out in the correspondence between Beckett, Devine and the Lord Chamberlain. The central issue concerned the acceptance of the prayer passage in the performance with Devine pointing out 'it is certain the prayer passage will be severely fought' and he even suggested that they 'play the offending lines in French'.<sup>194</sup> Devine felt the 'absurdity' of the play's licensing in French might make the Lord Chamberlain 'relent' on his judgements concerning

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<sup>192</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Tony Richardson, 21 November 1957. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2.

<sup>193</sup> Letter from Norman Gwatkin to George Devine, 18 December 1957. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>194</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 21 December 1957. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

*Endgame*.<sup>195</sup> Beckett saw the prayer passage as ‘indispensable’ and the idea of playing the lines in French as ‘an omission, for nine tenths of the audience’; a riposte which may have recalled the difficulties *Fin de Partie* faced when it was first performed to a largely Anglophone audience eight months earlier.<sup>196</sup> Indeed Beckett’s frustration would continue as he questioned how blasphemous his prayer passage was in comparison to Psalms 22.1 which states: “My God, my god, why hast Thou forsaken me?”<sup>197</sup>

Through the surviving correspondence from this period it is possible to see how Beckett’s previous humour on the subject quickly turned to artistic frustration as his later letter to George Devine refused to accept the demands of the Chamberlain:

I am obliged to maintain the prayer passage as I wrote it.

I have shown that I am prepared to put up with minor damage, which God knows is bad enough in this kind of fragile writing. But no author can acquiesce in what he considers, rightly or wrongly, as grave injury to his work.

I am extremely sorry to have to take this stand and I can assure you I do not do so lightly. I can only hope that you will not think me unreasonable and that Lord Scarborough may perhaps be induced to reconsider his decision.<sup>198</sup>

For a writer who laboured over his texts and judiciously chose words and structured his writing, Beckett was pained to see his work modified by an outside party. While relatively inoffensive words such as “balls” and “pee” were replaced by the milder and blander “hames” and “relieve myself”, Beckett demonstrated the judicious nature of his writing, by arguing, ‘It is a pity to lose “arses” because of its consonance with “ashes”. “Rumps” I suppose would be the next best’.<sup>199</sup> This example illustrates how even in his use of coarse

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 81.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

language, his writing was attuned to its links and aural resonances with other words. While these trivialities epitomised the backward legislation around the British theatre, Beckett would continue to relay his frustrations through his sense of humour to friends. As he articulated to Alan Schneider, ‘In London the Lord Chamberpot demands inter alia the removal of the entire prayer scene! I’ve told him to Buckingham off.’<sup>200</sup>

From the series of correspondence between Beckett, the Royal Court and the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, I would argue Devine saw the disproportionate decisions from the Lord Chamberlain concerning *Endgame* in comparison to *Fin de Partie* as ridiculous and his opportunity ‘to create a scandal’ about theatre censorship.<sup>201</sup> After relaying Beckett’s desire not to alter the prayer passage to Gwatkin, Devine sought clarification regarding the licensing of *Endgame*, to which Gwatkin responded: ‘In the circumstances the Lord Chamberlain will not be able to grant a License for the public performance of this Play.’<sup>202</sup> This statement was arguably what Devine was seeking in order to develop a scandal that would see questions asked concerning the position of the Lord Chamberlain. Beckett knew of Devine’s desire to overcome censorship and noted to Donald McWhinnie, ‘He is very worked up about the LC’s attitude and seems intent on making a shindy about it in London.’<sup>203</sup> Devine recorded his actions and plans to Beckett one month later when he wrote:

I have no doubt that by now you will have heard at least some distant rumbling which has resulted from the announcement that the Lord Chamberlain had finally refused to grant us a license. The press today is full of the question, and the least perhaps we can hope is that this situation may be the final nail to close up this ridiculous coffin.

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<sup>200</sup> Harmon, p. 24.

<sup>201</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 98, n.3.

<sup>202</sup> Letter from Norman Gwatkin to Samuel Beckett, 8 January 1958. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2. This followed a letter on 7 January 1958 from George Devine to Gwatkin which stated: ‘I am assuming that in this case, the Lord Chamberlain will not grant a license for public performance of this play.’

<sup>203</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 97.

Nevertheless, I am very distressed about it, and am trying to get a plan ready for the play's presentation in some other way.<sup>204</sup>

Here Devine signifies how he plotted to overcome the adversity of the Lord Chamberlain's Office in staging new plays. His press release stimulated an inquisitive reaction from the national newspapers, who questioned the Lord Chamberlain's inconsistent approach to licensing Beckett's drama. For example, the *Evening Standard* noted:

In its French version the play was passed by the Lord Chamberlain's office ... Does this mean that the LC considers all people who understand French beyond hope – unredeemable atheists or agnostics who need not be protected from blasphemy? Or does he believe that knowledge of the French language bestows immunity from corruption?<sup>205</sup>

The key questions asked in this report and other articles demonstrated the subjective decision making process employed by the Lord Chamberlain and outlined the flaws in their licensing methods.

While Devine's efforts to stimulate a public debate regarding the censorship of British theatre did highlight the challenges new plays faced during these years, the Lord Chamberlain continued to govern the content of plays in the UK until 1968. Devine's next point of action was to consider his options on staging the play. He deliberated performing the play 'under the aegis of the [English Stage] Society', though this required him earning enough support through memberships and he considered the idea of having the play staged at the Arts Theatre, where the play could be performed under club conditions.<sup>206</sup> Ironically, as Devine's efforts continued, in America Alan Schneider had already presented the English language

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<sup>204</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 10 February 1958. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2.

<sup>205</sup> Unknown Author, 'Censor's Whim', *Evening Standard*, 11 February 1958, p. 4.

<sup>206</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 10 February 1958. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2.



premiere of *Endgame* without any outside forces governing the play's public performance.<sup>207</sup> This production, as well as further presentations of the play in France and Germany, added to the irony of *Endgame*'s licensing in Britain, where the conservative theatre culture was stifled by legislation that other theatre cultures were not restricted by.

Plans to present the play under club conditions at the Royal Court were agreed by the theatre's Council and Devine had scheduled to stage the play in May 1958. However, this plan was subject to the Alec Guinness's availability for the role of Hamm, who would once again decline a role in a Beckett production in favour of his film work. As a result of Guinness delaying the play's performance, a new date in the autumn was pencilled in, and by this time Beckett had developed *Krapp's Last Tape* into what Devine then saw as a good companion piece for *Endgame*. This led to renewed energies from Devine to see *Endgame* granted a licence and included a rehearsed reading in the presence of the Lieutenant-Colonel Sir St Vincent Troubridge on 4 July 1958. William Gaskill, who was then an Artistic Associate for the ESC, described this particular dealing with the Lord Chamberlain's Office in 1990 when he reviewed John Johnston's *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil*:

He sat in the middle of the stalls, with a few rows behind, the supporters, writers, directors, secretaries. George Devine, who read the part of Hamm, was very nervous. When he got to the offending line he underplayed it as much as he dared while we all scrutinized the back of Sir Vincent's neck for his reactions.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> The English language premiere of *Endgame* opened at the Cherry Lane Theatre, New York, on 28 January 1958.

<sup>208</sup> William Gaskill, 'An Enemy in Full Dress Uniform', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5-11 October 1990. Irving Wardle supports this account writing, 'Devine was giving the stage directions sotto voce, and when he reached the offending passage as he threw it away in the same undertone.' Wardle, *The Theatres of George Devine*, p. 205.

The reading would again highlight the discrepancies of the Lord Chamberlain's Office who six months after refusing a licence because of the prayer passage decided after a rehearsed reading that the issue 'boiled down to one word [...] "bastard".'<sup>209</sup>

Beckett's continued to express his perplexed point of view concerning the Lord Chamberlain through his sarcastic messages to friends, as he told Barbara Bray, 'I hear Devine is reduced to trying to get the LC to change his "mind". Sounds like statistical physics.'<sup>210</sup> Despite expressing his humour over the course of these tribulations, Beckett did not want to weaken his stance. After hearing about the Lord Chamberlain's new demands regarding the word 'bastard', he was also keen not to capitulate to these fresh orders even with this one line and potentially 'kill it'.<sup>211</sup> Following a holiday in Yugoslavia, Beckett voiced his frustrations to Devine concerning the need to exchange words in a process that saw his craft as a playwright examined and censored by the archaic role of the Lord Chamberlain. He wrote to Devine on 28 July 1958:

To be quite frank with you I am very tired, and you must be even more so, of all this bugging around with guardsmen, riflemen and hussars. There are no alternatives to "bastard" agreeable to me. Nevertheless I have offered them "swine" in its place. This is definitely and finally as far as I'll go. What is the point of my submitting two other terms of equal "virulence", as they would necessarily be? Even if I could think of them, and I can't. If "swine" is not acceptable, then there is nothing left but to have a club production or else call the whole thing off. I simply refuse to play along any further with these licensing grocers.<sup>212</sup>

Beckett's use of language here reflects his opinion of British theatre culture at the time. By referring to the Lord Chamberlain's Office as 'licensing grocers' he echoes the

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<sup>209</sup> Craig et al (eds.), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 158.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

words attributed to Napoleon when he described Britain as ‘a nation of shopkeepers’.<sup>213</sup> Here, Beckett suggests his disillusionment with the archaic state of British theatre and the nation’s status concerning the licensing of theatrical texts. With the substitution of “swine” for “bastard”, the Lord Chamberlain agreed to license *Endgame* for its English language premiere in Britain; over eight months since discussions had started and sixteen months since the same play was last performed in the same theatre in French. This prolonged dispute saw the 1958 production of *Endgame* labelled ‘the most controversial play produced here for many years’.<sup>214</sup> Understandably this lengthy process proved wearisome on Beckett’s spirits as a playwright. Indeed this was demonstrated by Beckett in the same letter as he offered his sincere appreciation to Devine for the loyalty and perseverance he showed *Endgame* throughout the debacle: ‘to mark in a small way my gratitude to you personally and to the Royal Court Theatre, that I undertake here and now to offer you the first option on UK rights of my next play, in the unlikely event of my ever writing another.’<sup>215</sup> Beckett’s unprecedented move regarding the rights of his plays reciprocated the loyalty Devine and the Royal Court had shown his drama, though the negative conclusion of this letter suggests the disillusionment he felt with the theatre following these prolonged negotiations with the Lord Chamberlain; a restrictive force towards his creative freedom that he did not wish to face again in a hurry.

#### **2.3.4. Conclusion: Beckett and the Lord Chamberlain**

This case study has broadened the narrative concerning Beckett’s dealings with the Lord Chamberlain and how it shaped the first productions of Beckett’s drama in the UK. It has not sought to argue that the alterations imposed by the Lord Chamberlain radically changed perceptions of his plays during the Fifties and Sixties. Rather it highlights the public and (in

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<sup>213</sup> Napoleon is believed to have said in French, ‘L’Angleterre est une nation de boutiquiers’.

<sup>214</sup> Our Theatre Reporter, ‘Beckett’s Play to be Licensed’, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1958.

<sup>215</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, pp. 165 – 166.

more detail) the private stand-off between Beckett, his collaborators and the Lord Chamberlain. It has highlighted the flaws and ironies of the arbitrary decisions made by the Office and the assumption that they protected the nation's morals and values, a matter that Beckett (and many theatregoers and commentators) could not relate to. For one of the largest theatre cultures in the world, it was a restrictive force in the development of British playwriting and for a theatrical environment that was looking to revive itself in the immediacy of the post-war moment. What is evident from the lengthy correspondence detailed in this history is that Beckett's drama received the fulsome support of its producers throughout these protracted licensing discussions; a matter demonstrated by the perseverance both Albery and Devine showed in seeing Beckett's drama licensed. While the delays with *Godot* frustrated Beckett and *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* provoked mixed reactions from the playwright, these formative London productions were undoubtedly most important for the Beckett networks they created. With Devine, in particular, he knew his work had a loyal and supportive producer in London, who was willing to stand up to the hindrance of censorship. In a letter to Devine at the end of 1958, he acknowledged his sentiments of these experiences, writing:

I want now to get right away from theatre and radio and back to another kind of writing. But some day I hope I may be with you again at the Royal Court where I have spent so many good hours and met with so much friendliness and understanding and support.<sup>216</sup>

While Beckett felt the need to take a short break from theatrical writing, it was clear that through these early performances at the Royal Court, a close bond was formed between Beckett, his drama, Devine and the Royal Court; a significant partnership with a legacy that would span his performance histories in London theatres.

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<sup>216</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 15 December 1958. HRC, Texas, ESC Correspondence, 1.2.

## **2.4. Early Beckettian design in London**

For the first three productions of Beckett's drama in London I have considered the theatrical contexts in which they emerged, the perspectives of those who created and produced the performances, their critical reception and the issues the plays faced under British theatre censorship. In a final close study of these performance histories I will now consider how theatre design shaped these productions and how Beckettian design developed over the early performances of these three key plays in London.

### **2.4.1. Designing *Godot*: Interpreting 'A country road. A tree. Evening'**

When Peter Hall sent a script of *Waiting for Godot* to the English artist and theatre designer Peter Snow on 23 May 1955, his accompanying letter was brief and purposeful. Hall was eager for Snow to design the play, however he was apprehensive about disclosing his interpretation of the play, writing: 'I won't say anything about the play because it is one of those plays which is heartily liked or heartily disliked.'<sup>217</sup> This statement may suggest the variety of reactions and rejections Hall received from other practitioners in his attempts to stage *Godot*, but nonetheless Snow's decision to accept Hall's proposal was a significant development for staging the production and one that shaped how early audiences encountered a Beckett play for the first time in the UK.

The familiar images of *Waiting for Godot*'s distinctive characters, setting and props are today preserved and recycled in the cultural memory of British theatre. Memories of recent productions may rekindle Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen's presence in a derelict theatre with a healthy tree growing amidst the rubble (2009) or Ben Kingsley and Alan Howard treading the polished wooden floorboards of John Gunter's abstract set (1996). To go

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<sup>217</sup> Letter from Peter Hall to Peter Snow, 23 May 1955. HRC, Texas, Peter Snow Collection, 1.1.

even further back, images of Beckett's Schiller Theater production, designed by Matias, suggests the clean, minimal aesthetic Beckett had envisaged for *Godot* in performance (1975 – 1977). These examples represent familiar images of Beckett's tragicomedy, but less is known about the appearance of the first British production of the play. Existing narratives on this performance have used a limited selection of photographs, while only Katharine Worth's *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys* offers an insight into how Snow designed this production.<sup>218</sup> This may reflect the hidden existence of these materials in archives or, in some cases, their only recent availability and acquisition by public collections. The limited use of these materials may also be for legitimate reasons as they are subject to copyright approval or the 'economics of publishing' may have deterred authors or publishers from using certain images.<sup>219</sup> By referring to lesser known visual remains discovered at the Victoria & Albert's Theatre and Performance archive and the University of Reading's Beckett collections, I will now begin discussing Snow's design for the first London production – as presented in Figure 5 – by referring to his interpretation of Beckett's setting, particularly in the context of British theatre from the 1950s, followed by a closer examination of his costume designs for Vladimir and Estragon.



Figure 5 Set for *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre in 1955 by Peter Snow. Credit: V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Houston Rodgers Collection.

<sup>218</sup> David Bradby only offers a brief description of the set in his extended account of the production. See Bradby, p.75.

<sup>219</sup> Worthen, p. 4.

Peter Snow's set designs for the first London production of *Godot* today provides a useful lens for viewing the state of British theatre in the 1950s. The brief setting Beckett outlined in *Godot* epitomises why he has been described as 'perhaps the most scenographically inventive playwright'<sup>220</sup>, but the full extent of these innovations were unknown to Snow approaching the play for the first time. His interpretation of Beckett's stage directions suggests the challenge posed by presenting a bare stage in London theatres during the 1950s. Snow's design was guilty of attempting to adhere to the climate of realism that dominated the British stage at the time, as his impression of the set added extra stones, reeds, an oil drum and a more elongated tree to Beckett's description. Through hindsight Peter Hall acknowledged that his set was over-burdened, though Katharine Worth has defended the rationale behind Snow's busier on-stage environment, by arguing his design considered 'the needs of the actors.'<sup>221</sup> *Godot* was already an obscure proposition for Hall's cast because of what was then considered an unconventional plot, its characterisation and props, as well as its lack of action and its heightened attention on the body, particularly in comparison to other plays. With this in mind, Worth believed Snow's additional scenery was used to make the actors feel 'more comfortable with something around them'.<sup>222</sup> For example, the reeds represented a nod to Estragon's line 'Pah! The wind in the reeds'<sup>223</sup> and were designed to help the actors 'meet the formidable challenge presented by a bare stage in 1955'.<sup>224</sup> Although Snow's set later received criticism from Hall, Beckett and some commentators for its additional scenery, it may be argued these embellishments supported how the first British actors and audiences understood *Godot* and enabled both parties time to transition into the minimal aesthetic his later work and performances would develop into.

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<sup>220</sup> Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 88.

<sup>221</sup> Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.28.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>223</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>224</sup> Worth, p.28.

Snow's set was the starting point for Beckettian design in the UK and although it has made significant advances since this production, his set offered the first impression for many London audiences viewing Beckett's work. When Beckett finally saw the production in early December 1955 he was unaware of the creative decisions that had influenced the performance, though he had formed a clear impression of the performance from his conversations and correspondence with a number of acquaintances. As he wrote to Jérôme Lindon on 24 September 1955 of Snow's set: 'The stage in particular, if my suspicions are correct, must look like a landscape by Salvator Rosa.'<sup>225</sup> Here, Beckett not only signifies his knowledge of painting, though also offers an apt comparison for Snow's design, as Rosa's paintings were renowned for their distinctive trees, overgrown vegetation and rugged scenes, akin to Snow's vision of Beckett's directions. Although he and later Hall recognised the stage was too cluttered, Snow's design was a significant stepping stone for the actors and British audiences, as it allowed them to absorb the apparent minimalism of the play's plot, characterisation and dialogue at this early stage through a naturalistic set rather than the added unfamiliarity of the minimalist setting that Beckett intended.

Viewing the photographs, designs and maquettes preserved in these archives epitomises what Walter Benjamin calls the 'aura'<sup>226</sup> of the object or what Helen Freshwater refers to as 'the allure of the archive', such is the great appeal of seeing these highly original and lesser known artefacts from this significant London production.<sup>227</sup> These materials offer important revelations as to how the production was staged, though it is important to approach these sources and current assumptions with caution and openness. Multiple questions arise from these performance remnants and I would suggest the production developed over time. For example, the two photographs below (in Figures 6 and 7) by Houston Rodgers highlight the cast changes involved with the role of Vladimir in the production.

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<sup>225</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II; 1941-1956*, pp. 547 – 548.

<sup>226</sup> Quoted in Freshwater, pp. 731 – 732.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 732.





Figure 6 Paul Daneman and Peter Woodthorpe in *Waiting for Godot*, Arts Theatre, London, 1955. Credit: V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Houston Rodgers Collection.



Figure 7 Hugh Burden and Peter Woodthorpe in *Waiting for Godot*, Criterion Theatre, London, 1955. Credit: V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Houston Rodgers Collection.



Figure 8 Figure of Vladimir in Peter Snow's model box for *Waiting for Godot*, Arts Theatre, 1955. UoR, MS 5531.



Figure 9 Peter Snow's costume and set design for Paul Daneman as Vladimir. Credit: UoR, MS 5531 D/1

Paul Daneman is often credited as the actor in both photographs, as he played the role first at the Arts Theatre, though the second photograph is of Hugh Burden, who played the role when *Godot* transferred to the Criterion. As well as Daneman and Burden, the role of Vladimir would also be played by Richard Dare, William Squire and, following the illness of Burden on Boxing Day, even the Stage Director.<sup>228</sup> Beyond the personnel changes, both photographic evidence and Daneman's memoir reveal there were integral developments that saw Vladimir and Estragon become 'just tramps', as reflected in the images Snow's costumes.<sup>229</sup> The image of two tramps dressed in old rags with bowler hats is today emblematic of *Godot*, though from a closer examination of these photographs it is unclear to what extent Daneman and Woodthorpe were portraying the familiar trope of the unkempt partnership. Here Daneman's Vladimir does not possess the stereotypical characteristics of a tramp, as he is clean and wears a well maintained black suit, waistcoat and bowler hat – perhaps more suitable as a butler or waiter than on a country road by a tree. By comparison, Woodthorpe's Estragon is slightly more dishevelled in a cut up, dirt patched black blazer and stained shirt, with striped trousers which seem too large for him and held up by a piece of rope. Consulting Snow's designs and his maquette model of Vladimir (See Figures 8 and 9) show how his designs reflect Rodgers's photographic still, thus eschewing assumptions that Vladimir and Estragon were always 'just tramps'. While it is unknown whether these photographs were used for publicity purposes, it is most likely these well-known characteristics developed over the run for the Arts Theatre production with the duo appearing one month later at the Criterion Theatre as recognisable tramps.

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<sup>228</sup> As the two Boxing Days performances were sold out, the production had to continue in spite of Burden's illness and the production's lack of an understudy. Bull recalls amusingly, 'The poor Stage Director, dressed as a tramp, was careering over the stage at whim, reading from what seemed to us a not absolutely up to date script. A strong note of hysteria swept through the actors, and poor Peter Woodthorpe took a terrible beating.' See Bull p. 180.

<sup>229</sup> Daneman, pp. 5-6.

#### 2.4.2. Designing *Fin de Partie*: ‘such indecent preoccupation with sorrow’

Although Hall believed later that Snow’s set was over-burdened – in light of further experience with the play – Snow’s designs represented an integral stepping stone for the trajectory of the earliest scenographic impressions of Beckett’s work. Another design that made a valuable, albeit an unheralded contribution to the development of Beckettian design was Jacques Noël’s 1957 set for *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* at the Royal Court. Despite its short run of six performances in Sloane Square, the memory of Noël’s set would undoubtedly influence how both Beckett and some of his key collaborators approached later productions of his work. This section will now examine Noël’s neglected designs for the 1957 double bill, discussing the reactions it stimulated and the lessons it offered ahead of future performances of *Endgame* in particular.

Before discussing Noël’s set for *Fin de Partie* (See Figure 10) and the criticism it received from several key figures, it is important to highlight that he was a highly respected and productive theatre designer in France. He had built his reputation in many of notable Parisian theatres during the 1950s and worked on numerous premieres of Ionesco’s drama. According to records, he would work on 190 productions throughout his career though the 1957 double bill proved to be the only time he designed Beckett’s plays.<sup>230</sup> Impressions of his designs have been thus far restricted to a very limited number of written accounts<sup>231</sup>, but this thesis has discovered the designs for this under-valued premiere have been digitised and are available online.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> For records of Noël’s production, see [http://www.lesarchivesduspectacle.net/?IDX\\_Personne=17280](http://www.lesarchivesduspectacle.net/?IDX_Personne=17280). [accessed 18 August 2016].

<sup>231</sup> See Courtney, pp. 27 – 28 and Taylor-Batty, *Roger Blin: Collaborations and Methodologies*, pp. 110 – 119.

<sup>232</sup> See <http://art.asso.free.fr/jacques-noel/theatre/resultat-jacques-noel.php?recordID=59&titre=Fin%20de%20Partie> [accessed 22 February 2014].

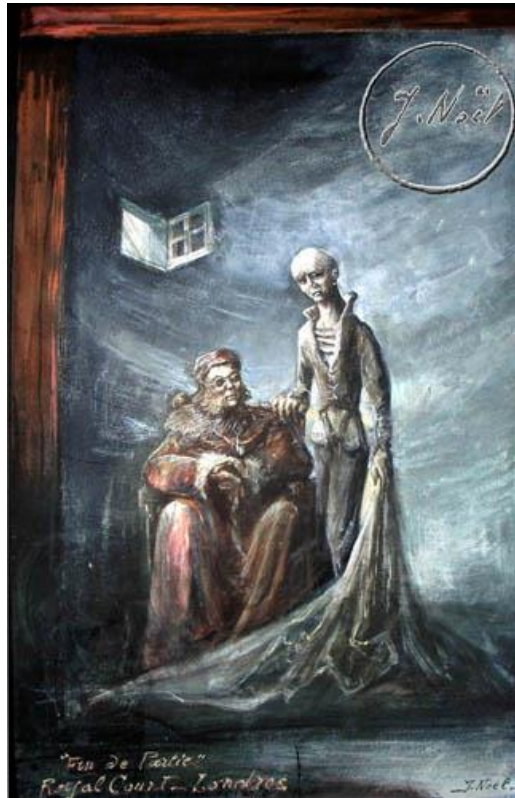


Figure 10 Jacques Noël set design for *Fin de Partie* at the Royal Court Theatre, London, 1957. Credit: <http://art.asso.free.fr/jacques-noel/theatre/resultat-jacques-noel.php?recordID=59&titre=Fin%20de%20Partie> [accessed 22 February 2014].

From these designs, it appears that Noël used high flats, which were painted dark grey and arranged in a rounded formation. The effect of its choice of colour, the shape of the set and its height arguably added to – rather than complemented – the intensity and bleakness of Beckett’s text and the performance. Mark Taylor-Batty has suggested the intentions behind the set were to ‘place Hamm more visibly in the centre of the world over which he ruled, also creating the impression of the interior of a human skull, with two windows like eye-sockets gazing out at the desolated land and coast’.<sup>233</sup> Although this theory supports Blin’s portrayal of Hamm, the combination of Noël’s bleak and intense set with the dark, uniformity of Beckett’s language in performance overwhelmed the production, as suggested by London’s critics and Beckett’s correspondence on the production.

From Beckett’s perspective, it is clear through his correspondence to friends and confidants that he had a number of issues with the 1957 performance. Firstly, he was disgruntled by the inability of the English audiences to understand his French language play.

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<sup>233</sup> Taylor Batty, p. 111.



Secondly, his own text and thirdly, Noël's set, believing these latter two issues negatively influenced the play's atmosphere and acting. While London's critics paid little attention to the set, Beckett revealed his thoughts on its influence a year and a half later; notably after he saw the play re-staged as *Endgame* alongside *Krapp's Last Tape* and designed by Jocelyn Herbert. In a letter to Barney Rosset he wrote, 'I realise now that what greatly damaged both Paris and London productions is Noël's set and I am determined, if there is ever a revival here, to get rid of it. This is my mistake as much as Noël's, or more.'<sup>234</sup> He shared a similar viewpoint with Alan Schneider, before adding, 'The hearts of oak were very sour and disapproving of such indecent preoccupation with sorrow'.<sup>235</sup> Beckett's reflections highlight how his perception of British conservatism informed his interpretation of his work's relationship with British theatre cultures. Indeed, these reflections suggest how Beckett had been considering the staging of *Fin de Partie* for a long period following its premiere and how he was thinking about the visual direction his work needed to move in, though his criticism is also admirable as although he recognises issues with the set, he is quick to claim his own responsibility in the collaboration towards the staging.

Another viewpoint of Noël's set was offered by Jocelyn Herbert, who worked as a scenic painter on this production and would later design the majority of Beckett productions at the Royal Court. She verified Beckett's account in her own descriptions of the set, noting, 'Noël's set was very dour, rather like a tower made of stone. [...] The French set was completely circular [...and] very much dark grey.'<sup>236</sup> Herbert's notes suggest how its dark colours overburdened the tone of the London performance. This lack of warmth, the play's obscure content and its performance in the French language did not make it digestible viewing on its first outing. From Beckett's viewpoint the early audiences in Britain were not

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<sup>234</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 181.

<sup>235</sup> Harmon, p. 52. Beckett wrote to Schneider, 'I felt very strongly in London how completely wrong and damaging to the play the Noël set is. Not his fault, mine. The hearts of oak were very sour and disapproving of such indecent preoccupation with sorrow'.

<sup>236</sup> Courtney, p. 28.

receptive to the bleak, sorrowful vision presented through Noël's set, and both he and Herbert would amend this concept. One year later, Herbert showed how she was attentive to what she saw as flaws in Noël's set with her designs offering a minimalist, less bleak visual realisation of Beckett's drama, which I will now investigate.

### **2.4.3. Designing *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*: The birth of Beckettian scenography**

Prior to the 1958 double bill of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, the designs of Peter Snow and Jacques Noël were criticised for being too cluttered or too bleak; however the 1958 production marked a key phase in the development of Beckettian design. It initiated a long and fruitful collaboration between Beckett and Jocelyn Herbert that saw her begin to shape, as Anna McMullan has argued, 'what we now think of as the visual or scenographic aesthetic of Beckett's theatre.'<sup>237</sup> I will continue this exploration of Beckettian design by focusing on Beckett's early collaborations with Herbert and how her discrete designs contributed to the Royal Court double bill.

Beckett and Herbert were familiar before the 1958 production as by this time she had become Devine's partner and they had also met at various parties and engagements in London and Paris. Their relationship would grow over the course of their collaborations and Beckett would later call her his 'closest friend in England'.<sup>238</sup> Before working on *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, Herbert was developing her scenographic practice, having previously designed non-naturalistic productions in Yeats's *Purgatory* (1957), *The Chairs* (1957) by Ionesco and *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (1958) by Ann Jellicoe for the ESC. Working other plays, in addition to her work on Noël's set the previous year, contributed to her designs

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<sup>237</sup> Anna McMullan, 'Samuel Beckett's Scenographic Collaboration with Jocelyn Herbert', *Degrés*, 149-150 (2012), 1-17 (p.1).

<sup>238</sup> Courtney, p. 219.

(preserved in the Jocelyn Herbert archive, as seen in Figure 11), where she established her own vision for the play.<sup>239</sup> As Herbert recalled:

When I came to do the play my design was more abstract [...]. I had tall walls that just went on going up, and there were some beams as I thought it were a kind of ruin. The bricks were a bit cubistic rather than naturalistic, although the chair and the dustbins looked real, and I used dun colours and greys [...].<sup>240</sup>

Indeed, Herbert's designs demonstrated how she used lighter colours and more distinctive shapes, which in turn complemented her emphasis on the play's furniture. Through these shapes, colours and the set's height, Herbert outlined how she strived to satisfy *Endgame*'s 'enclosed' and 'claustrophobic' attributes through its tall, curved walls.<sup>241</sup>



Figure 11 Jocelyn Herbert set design for *Endgame* at the Royal Court Theatre, London, 1958. Credit: UAL, Wimbledon, JH/4/8.

*Krapp's Last Tape* followed *Endgame* in the event's running order and the fact it was a world premiere presented Herbert with the privilege and added responsibility of designing a

<sup>239</sup> Programme for *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. UoR, Beckett, BC MS 3186.

<sup>240</sup> Courtney, p. 28.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

new Beckett play for the first time. While *Endgame* played upstage, *Krapp's Last Tape* was presented downstage and had a black curtain drawn before the *Endgame* set. Herbert noted 'the set has to be in blacks' or more specifically 'soft or framed black serge or velour which masks the acting area of the stage.'<sup>242</sup> In identifying the need for simplicity on stage, Herbert realised this was also necessary for the play's costume design. Beckett's text suggests Krapp's clown-like features through its reference to his 'purple nose' and this impression was reflected in Herbert's initial designs.<sup>243</sup> Several of her early interpretations of Krapp depicted the character's clown-like features by clearly visualising a red or purple nose and large white or blue boots. Herbert refined and developed this vision of Krapp, which she later described as 'an old man in raggedy clothes; he wasn't exactly a tramp, he had fairly normal clothes that had gone to seed, very shiny black trousers that didn't fit well, an old shirt and an old waistcoat.'<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, Magee noted how they reduced suggestions that Krapp may be a clown, saying, 'My hair was cut short and was combed forward. I left stubble on my face and used a pale grey make-up, with some slight reddening around the nose. Not as extreme as a big boozers'; and not 'purple'.<sup>245</sup> McWhinnie's account also contains the need to downplay the clown depictions of Krapp, noting, 'I felt when I first did it that the clown-like side was over-stated. And I think that Sam has felt that since too...he seemed more interested in putting a real person there than a clown.'<sup>246</sup> Beyond the performance's set and costume (See Figure 12), the 1958 production was complimented by simple, but purposeful lighting design that involved 'overhead lighting, with a bit of frontal lighting' which created 'a zone of light'<sup>247</sup> amidst the tight Royal Court stage and its black background, a setting that would

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>243</sup> Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 215.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>245</sup> Knowlson, *Samuel Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape: A Theatre Workbook*, p. 43.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 47.



give birth to Magee's Krapp and allow his character to maximise his understated entrances, exits and black outs.



Figure 12 Jocelyn Herbert costume design for *Krapp's Last Tape*, Royal Court Theatre, London, 1958. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/4/9.

As Beckett's correspondence suggested, *Krapp's Last Tape* represented his best early experience with theatre in London, as Magee's performance and McWhinnie's direction produced a staging that earned praise from both the playwright and London's critics. Herbert made a significant contribution to the performance through her understated design, which subtly enabled the actor's body and the play's relationship between light and dark to come to the fore. Her interpretation of Beckett's play succeeded through its sensitive influence on the play's atmosphere and dramatic characteristics, in a way that previous London designs had earned criticism. Although the 1958 double bill garnered a varied reception overall, it was an important event for the history more broadly, as it introduced several key collaborators to his theatre in performance. With the exception of McMullan's recent article on Herbert's scenography (2012), Herbert's creative partnership with Beckett has been an undervalued aspect of Beckettian performance. The significance of this initial collaboration saw Herbert

go on to design *Happy Days* (1962 and 1979), *Play* (1964), *Come and Go* (1970), *Not I* (1973 and 1975), *Footfalls* (1976) and *That Time* (1976), as well as two further productions of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1973 and 1989) and revealed the innovations of Beckettian scenography through many of the best known images of Beckettian performance.

## **2.5. Beckett's first "late" play in London**

One of the most notable years for Beckett's drama in London was unquestionably 1964, as it was a year that saw the playwright contribute to a number of London productions (as well as in Europe) and his work presented on a growing number of the city's stages. The year began with Beckett rehearsing *Endgame* in London with The English Theatre ahead of performances at the Studio des Champs-Élysées in Paris<sup>248</sup>, though it would be the three following productions he helped stage in London that would reflect his improving reputation in the context of British theatre at that time. By 1963 post-war British theatre had been invigorated through the formation of the Arts Council and its development was most evident through the establishment of three major subsidised theatres: the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. In 1964, only nine years after the premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's drama was staged at each of these three venues with *Play* at the Old Vic for the NT, *Endgame* by the RSC at the Aldwych Theatre and *Waiting for Godot* presented at the Royal Court Theatre. Although these theatres were only emerging, the presence of Beckett's drama at these venues could be read as early qualitative and quantitative recognition of the level of interest British theatres had in his theatre, as his drama was adopted as a foundational component in their early programming.

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<sup>248</sup> This production of *Endgame* opened on 17 February 1964. Director: Michael Blake, Designer: Matias. Cast: Patrick Magee as Hamm, Jack MacGowran as Clov, Sydney Bromley as Nagg, Elvi Hale as Nell. Knowlson records three rehearsal spaces they worked in: The Establishment nightclub, the clubroom of a pub-hotel off Euston Road and upstairs at the Royal Court Theatre. See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, pp. 512-513.

*Play*'s British premiere at the Old Vic represented the first performance of a Beckett drama considered to be among his "late" works for the stage. Although *Play* may not have had the impact other Beckett works initially or subsequently have had, this production was significant as it represented a number of first connections for Beckett's drama in Britain, it demonstrated how practitioners could stand up for his vision and it suggested the direction in which his next plays for the stage would progress towards in the following years. I would now like to explore these three facets in my analysis of this innovative production.

### **2.5.1. Old and new connections at the NT**

After many years of dreaming, the National Theatre under Laurence Olivier opened at the Old Vic beginning with *Hamlet* starring Peter O'Toole on 22 October 1963. This was soon followed by further classics such as *Saint Joan*, *Uncle Vanya* and *The Recruiting Officer*. Olivier's opening season suggested the literary tastes of the new NT and in one of the theatre's next productions, he and arguably Kenneth Tynan, who was Literary Manager, attempted to fuse the literary with the experimental, as the NT paired *Play* with Sophocles's *Philoctetes* (adapted by Keith Johnstone) in 1964. Of course, *Play*'s British debut occurred when the ESC held the first option rights for Beckett's drama in the UK, which Beckett had personally authorised to Devine. While renovations to the Royal Court meant *Play* could not be staged in Sloane Square, I would argue this potential hindrance proved an opportunity for Beckett's work to briefly spread across London to Waterloo for the first time. Just as Alan Simpson – the enthusiastic director of Dublin's Pike Theatre – brought *Godot* to the Theatre Royal Stratford East in 1961, Devine was responsible for building Beckett's connections in London and opening his work up to new stages by subletting *Play* to the NT.<sup>249</sup> Although the NT selectively staged Beckett's drama across its history, as this history will demonstrate in

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<sup>249</sup> The Royal Court was closed for six months in November 1963 for reconstruction which would have meant another delayed Beckett production at the Royal Court, though Devine was also approached by the National Theatre to direct the production, which was agreeable to Devine, Beckett and the ESC board.

later chapters their limited number of productions were significant and across these decades they often considered his work in their programmes that ultimately did not get produced.

*Play* received its world premiere as *Spiel* on 14 June 1963 at the Ulmer Theatre in Ulm, Germany in a production directed by Deryk Mendel.<sup>250</sup> Ten months later on 7 April 1964, *Play* made its UK debut under Devine's direction, although other proposals for its British premiere were made by other theatres, Beckett most likely preferred to influence the first impression of his newest play, particularly after previous experiences.<sup>251</sup> As this chapter has already noted Devine and Beckett had collaborated on *Endgame* and *Happy Days* prior to their experiences with *Play* and, yet again, Devine was keen to have Beckett's input in rehearsals, as according to Irving Wardle, he 'believed Beckett was the best guide to staging the plays.' However from his experiences with *Happy Days* two years earlier, Devine also knew Beckett's working methods could be intense.<sup>252</sup> With this understanding, Devine decided to work independently with his cast for a number of early rehearsals, before welcoming Beckett into rehearsals from 16 March 1964 onwards.<sup>253</sup> Beckett appreciated the fact that Devine was always open to his presence in the rehearsal room, even though Beckett could be critical of his direction. For example, Beckett offered a mixed review of what had been achieved in rehearsals prior to his involvement, writing to Barbara Bray: 'All wrong, but word perfect. Very keen and will I think be pleasant to work with. Got them pointing in right direction. Ken Tynan snooping around. Rehearsals morning with George, then individually

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<sup>250</sup> The cast included Nancy Illig (W1), Sigfrid Pfeiffer (W2) and Gerhard Winter (M).

<sup>251</sup> For example, early in 1963 John Calder proposed a possible production to Devine for the 1963 Edinburgh Festival by the newly formed Traverse Theatre Club. This production did not materialize as Devine relayed his concerns to Beckett over the plans outlined by the intended director, Terence Lane. He suggested two ways of staging the play. The first idea was to perform the play as noted in Beckett's text, but he felt this was 'not satisfactory', or secondly, his preferred option was to group the urns in a 'star formation', while playing to a traverse seated audience. See Letter from Terence Lane to George Devine, 8 February 1963. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15. Although Beckett's response to this idea has not been preserved, it is very likely Beckett would have dismissed this idea.

<sup>252</sup> Wardle, *The Theatres of George Devine*, p. 207.

<sup>253</sup> See Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 26 February 1964. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

with me afternoon.’<sup>254</sup> Despite its brevity, this note reveals a lot about the work towards this production, as it highlights that Beckett’s influence in rehearsals saw the company engage with his vision for the play. The right direction, according to Beckett, saw the cast offering a faster delivery of his text in performance, as his collaborations with Devine and Herbert led to him achieving a realisation of the text as he saw it.

By the mid-1960s, Devine was one of the most experienced British directors of Beckett’s work, though despite this familiarity with his drama, *Play* represented a completely new shift in terms of Beckett’s innovations in the theatre. Beckett’s experimentations with *Play* were well served in London, through the skills of his creative and technical team and its cast. It reconnected Beckett with the designer Herbert who, as I have previously discussed, prepared the sets and costume for *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Happy Days* at the Royal Court. After being disappointed by the fat and round urns presented in the Ulm production, Herbert demonstrated her understanding of designing Beckett’s plays and the intricate details she considered when approaching his work. As she would note years later:

The urns had to be high but not as high as the actors, who couldn’t really squat because their knees would have come out too far, so I built the urns up on a platform and the cast stood below it. [...] The actors were given something to hold onto during the performance. We chose dessicated [sic] wigs made as if they were the actors’ own hair, but thinning and gone to seed. We made make-up out of oatmeal mixed with water and a little glue – the kind you use to stick on moustaches – and put ordinary make-up first and then covered the actors’ faces with this mixture. Lastly, we added grey and white pancake.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: 1957 – 1965*, p. 596.

<sup>255</sup> Courtney, p. 98.

This effect made the actors blend seamlessly into the set as when flakes of the porridge broke off the actors' faces mid-performance, her design gave the impression that the actors were decaying, as suggested in Figure 13.



Figure 13 Make up drawing for Billie Whitelaw as W2 in *Play* at the Old Vic, National Theatre, London, 1964. UAL, Wimbledon, JH 4370.

Alongside Herbert's design, the onerous technical demands of *Play* were complemented by Devine's own skills as an accomplished lighting designer. In a letter to Beckett, Devine described how the lights were operated in the production, which involved the light bouncing off a mirror on a swivel 'operated by hand with 2 end stops and a groove in the middle' to ensure the light hit the three urns when necessary.<sup>256</sup> He continued to note the intricacies by stating 'The mirror operator has a dimmer controlled by him for intensities' with the three lights 'controlled by the main switchboard.'<sup>257</sup> Ultimately these rehearsals had a significant impact on Beckett's development as a playwright and theatre practitioner, as his close work

<sup>256</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 21 April 1964. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15. In the same letter he also highlighted the precision involved with the functions of this lighting plan by noting 'The end stops on the mirror must be adjustable, as the fine (?) setting can only be achieved once the actors are in the urns, and it is impossible to gauge this by calculation. There is a colour filter in all the lanterns – a Strand Bleelvie No 67 (??) – a bluish grey.'

<sup>257</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 21 April 1964. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

with Devine enabled him to gain a greater understanding of lighting, which would prove an influential grounding for his later experimentations on *Not I*, *That Time*, *Footfalls* and *Catastrophe*.

The visual and technical details of *Play* at the Old Vic were supported by a talented cast made up of actors from the National Theatre's Company, as Robert Stephens, Rosemary Harris and Billie Whitelaw all performed in a Beckett play for the first time.<sup>258</sup> Both Harris and Stephens were well utilised members of the National's company having performed in many of the theatre's earliest productions, including *Hamlet*. However, their new roles as M and W1 contrasted significantly with their previous performances at the NT, as their characters were unconventional given their bodies were restricted inside an urn and they had little or no action or interaction with the other actors on stage. Indeed, Harris thought the characters were 'dead and under interrogation'<sup>259</sup> and, according to Whitelaw, both Harris and Stephens 'wanted to know more about the characters they played [and] the meaning of the piece', which reflects the natural curiosity of these actors although also their background in Shakespearean or realistic styles of theatre and narrative.<sup>260</sup> For Whitelaw it was her first experience with the National, let alone a Beckett play and she arrived at the NT with a promising reputation from her performances at Theatre Workshop with Joan Littlewood and her other work for stage, film and television. *Play* was significant as it introduced the actress to Beckett and his drama for the first time; an association that will span the next two chapters of this thesis. Her connection with Beckett's drama is reflected in her autobiography, where she noted many of her realisations with *Play*. As she acknowledged of it in performance, 'The excitement would come from the musicality of the piece, rather than the story-telling. I

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<sup>258</sup> The lights for *Play* were operated by Anthony Ferris, who was given a credit by several critics for the skill and timing with which his role was executed.

<sup>259</sup> Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon, 2013), p. 81.

<sup>260</sup> Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw... Who He?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995) p. 76.

wasn't the least bothered by the lack of characterisation or psychology.'<sup>261</sup> Her account of *Play* suggests how her approach to the play was different to the work of her fellow actors Stephens and Harris. For example, Whitelaw wrote that as the rehearsals progressed 'Robert Stephens and Rosemary Harris felt it was all going much too fast' and, whether it was because she was the least experienced actor in the company or because she did not want to find herself in an argument, she told herself, 'Just keep out of this, Whitelaw'.<sup>262</sup> From the existing histories concerning this production, it is apparent Whitelaw kept out of this much discussed debate and instead, she offered her fulsome support to Beckett's vision.

In the next section of this case study on *Play*, I would like to discuss the arguments Whitelaw references in a connection that links Beckett with a key personality from earlier in this production history; Kenneth Tynan. Tynan's role in this history is twofold. He is celebrated alongside Harold Hobson for seeing the merits of *Waiting for Godot* when other commentators were quick to criticise the play at arguably the most important phase of Beckett's introduction to the London theatre scene. This praise was however followed by a series of scathing reviews for his Royal Court double bills in 1957 and 1958. This prelude reflects the divisive relationship the two protagonists shared and their conflicting opinions about theatre and performance were reflected through *Play*, which I will now address.

### **2.5.2. Tension at play: Beckett and Devine versus Tynan**

Previous narratives of this production have concentrated on the 'fierce arguments' that developed after rehearsals concerning *Play* in performance between Beckett and Devine on the one side and Kenneth Tynan and William Gaskill on the other.<sup>263</sup> In contrast to Beckett's summary of the rehearsals was indeed Tynan's perspective, which he charted in a letter to Devine (with Olivier and William Gaskill copied in):

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>263</sup> See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 517.



before Sam B. arrived at rehearsals, ‘Play’ was recognisably a work we all liked and were eager to do. The delivery of the lines was (rightly) puppet-like and mechanical, but not wholly dehumanised and stripped of all emphasis and inflections. On the strength of last weekend, it seems that Beckett’s advice on the production has changed all of that – the lines are chanted in a breakneck monotone with no inflections, and I’m not alone in fearing that many of them will be simply inaudible. I suspect Beckett is trying to treat English as if it were French – where that kind of rapid-fire monotony is customary.<sup>264</sup>

Although Tynan’s remarks are clearly intended to be critical of Beckett’s influence on the rehearsal proceedings, they reveal Beckett’s early intentions towards the delivery of his drama in performance. Tynan’s dissatisfaction with Beckett’s *Play* stresses his expectations and ideology towards the theatre in performance. As a Literary Manager in what was then a largely literary British theatre landscape, Tynan derogatorily implied Beckett’s intentions towards a theatrical experience through the play’s intelligibility was a language statement by a writer who predominantly writes and lives in France. Ironically, as Knowlson notes, by the end of the rehearsals, ‘Beckett took a tape-recording of the English version [...] to Paris to demonstrate to the French actors exactly how quickly he wanted the lines to go.’<sup>265</sup> Tynan’s protestations attempted to empathise and warm to Devine by blaming Beckett for his dissatisfaction with *Play*’s staging:

I trust the play completely, and I trust your production of it, - up to the advent of the author. What I don’t especially trust is Beckett as co-director. If you could see your

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<sup>264</sup> Kathleen Tynan and Garry O’Connor, *Kenneth Tynan Letters* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), p. 292.

<sup>265</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 517.

way to re-humanising the text a little, I'll bet that the actors and the audience will thank you – even if Beckett doesn't!<sup>266</sup>

Tynan's displeasure at Beckett's practical impact suggests how Tynan did not share the practical innovations advocated by Devine or Beckett. Tynan was unable to relate to the radical performative aspects of *Play*, as an obscure but highly innovative play written to be performed. Devine replied to Tynan's letter in full support of Beckett's intentions, writing:

The presence of Beckett was of great help to me, and to the actors...I assume you read the stage directions: 'voices toneless except where indicated. Rapid movement throughout.' It was always my intention to try and achieve this, as it is, in my opinion, the only way to perform the play as written. Any other interpretation is a distortion...You do not seem to realise that rehearsing a play is an organic process...To play the play as you indicate would be to demolish its dramatic purpose and turn it into literature...You'll have to have a bit more guts if you really want to do experimental works, which, nine times out of ten, only come off for a "minority" to begin with...I certainly would never have leased the play...if I had thought the intention was to turn it into something it isn't, to please the majority.<sup>267</sup>

This letter reflects Devine's need to qualify his artistic intentions to Tynan when working for the NT; something he needed to do to a lesser extent at the Royal Court. His evaluation suggests Devine's greater understanding of new writing and performance from his practical experiences at the Royal Court. He was aware of the risk involved with new writing and in particular with Beckett's experimentations and he stood by his 'right to fail' mantra even when working with another theatre, regardless of the public perception towards his drama. Despite Tynan's negative response and reports that Olivier and Gaskill both admitted their

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<sup>266</sup> Tynan and O'Connor, p. 293.

<sup>267</sup> Wardle, *The Theatres of George Devine*, p. 208. Rosenthal, pp. 81-82.

dissatisfaction with the production of *Play*, Olivier later supported Devine by admitting how he was ‘very sorry’ about the whole affair and how Devine had been ‘justifiably angry’.<sup>268</sup> Devine and Beckett continued their vision for *Play* with the cast delivering the text as ‘dramatic ammunition’ as Beckett wanted, despite the disapproval of Tynan and, to a lesser extent, Olivier. Devine arguably referred to the lack of understanding his producers greeted the play through his programme note to the production:

When we first see a new form of painting or listen to a new kind of music, we realise that we have to make an adjustment in ourselves and our attitude if we are to get the best out of the experience. So it is with the plays of Samuel Beckett. We have to surrender to the experience which the poet has prepared for us in order to enjoy ourselves or to criticise it.<sup>269</sup>

Here, Devine suggests the need for theatre-goers and critics to submit themselves to the experience before they can begin to criticise and I would argue this commentary was written with Tynan in mind.

Although Devine and Beckett did not accede to Tynan’s demands in the final performance, *Play* remained at the forefront of Tynan’s memory in two specific points within his National Theatre Memorandum. Firstly, he suggested the NT consider reducing their seat prices for ‘productions that are obviously non-commercial’, before stressing, ‘If ‘Play/Philoctetes’ had had this advantage, it would have played to many more people and lost no more money – probably it would have lost much less.’<sup>270</sup> His second criticism noted his personal list of errors for the season with the ‘direction of ‘Play’’ top of his list.<sup>271</sup> Following this list he added, in what appears to be a nod to *Play*, ‘I believe we would be more than justified in keeping an eye on all guest productions and if necessary insisting on changes

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<sup>268</sup> Rosenthal, p. 82.

<sup>269</sup> George Devine, Programme for *Play*, 1964. UoR, Beckett, BC Stage File/SHO-1964/1.

<sup>270</sup> Tynan and O’Connor, p. 307.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

when things are obviously going astray.’<sup>272</sup> Although Devine was busy returning to his directorship of the ESC, this disagreement would have influenced the fact that *Play* would also represent his only foray at the NT.

### 2.5.3. ‘How far can Beckett go?’

S. E. Gontarski has argued in a brief comparison of Beckett’s early and late theatre, ‘If *Godot* eliminated ‘action’ from the stage, *Play* all but eliminated motion. If *Godot* eliminated intelligible causality, *Play* all but eliminated intelligibility itself.’<sup>273</sup> By 1964 British audiences and critics had seen Beckett’s drama interrogate theatrical conventions in terms of plot, action, aesthetic and performance. *Play* challenged these conventions further, through its notable confinement of the body and rapid delivery of dialogue. Like so many of Beckett’s previous productions, while confusion reigned about the play’s content, the critics were still able to express their admiration for the performances they had seen. Despite comparisons to an auctioneer of cattle and its ‘depersonalised, staccato delivery, rather like a priest in a hurry to get through a particularly boring blessing’, critics such as John Higgins did note, ‘Rosemary Harris, Billie Whitelaw and Robert Stephens chant the patter trio brilliantly’.<sup>274</sup> Bamber Gascoigne surmised the expectations and status of Beckett’s drama by articulating, ‘It is usual after each Beckett play to say that this time he can really go no further. But there is still plenty to be done away with. The live actor will be the next victim’.<sup>275</sup> Indeed this assessment proved prophetic for Beckett’s future developments towards minimalism in *Breath* five years later. Further evaluations of the drama tried to describe what they had witnessed, with Philip Hope-Wallace attempting to offer a common point of comparison:

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> S. E. Gontarski, ‘I think this does call for a firm stand’: Beckett at the Royal Court’, in *Staging Samuel Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. by Tucker and McTighe (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2016), p. 30.

<sup>274</sup> John Higgins, ‘Play and Philoctetes’, *Financial Times*, 8 April 1964.

<sup>275</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, ‘How far can Beckett go?’, *The Observer*, 12 April 1964.

The heads, like a sample of the forty thieves in *Alibaba*, recite their own side of the cheap little matrimonial smash-up in the fractured splutter of Dickens' Mr Jingle. It is often wily funny and almost shamefully close to the kind of internal bickerings that do go on our heads from time to time – and will perhaps through all eternity?<sup>276</sup>

Many of the reviews for *Play* suggested their confusion at what they had witnessed with some critics 'puzzled'<sup>277</sup>, while others opinions suggesting 'the audience has already been virtually dismissed'<sup>278</sup> would not have helped the play's success at the box office. While Daniel Rosenthal notes, '*Play* and *Philoctetes* were a box-office catastrophe'<sup>279</sup>, it is difficult to assess to what extent the rather unusual combination of a new experimental drama and a classical Greek drama deterred theatre-goers from attending or which play was more off-putting. Although they shared the theatrical event, their individuality was expressed by the differing casts, directors and designers, which showed how their content and operations remained concentrated on their respective individual identity as part of the billing. While it is difficult to argue with Rosenthal's note on the double bill at the box office, letters from Devine to Beckett suggest there were later encouraging signs for the production. Following its opening Devine wrote of the play's positive reception within the NT stating that they were keen 'to make it part of their permanent repertoire', before adding that the order of the plays in the double bill had been reversed with *Play* later playing second in the billing, as 'his Lordship (Laurence Olivier) said that it makes a much stronger impact than the Sophocles.'<sup>280</sup> Through its divided reviews, its performance challenges and unfortunate box office figures, I would argue *Play* arrived before its time for London audiences. It signified the risks Beckett

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<sup>276</sup> Philip Hope-Wallace, 'Review', *The Guardian*, Unknown date.

<sup>277</sup> Herbert Kretzmer, 'The three faces of Beckett's contempt', *Daily Express*, Unknown date.

<sup>278</sup> Gascoigne, 'How far can Beckett go?'

<sup>279</sup> Rosenthal, p. 82.

<sup>280</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 29 May 1964. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

was willing to take and the new ground his work was entering in the theatre, as epitomised by the later plays in his *oeuvre*, such as *Come and Go*, *Not I* and *Footfalls*.

#### **2.5.4. Conclusion: Beckett's first "late" play in London**

As I have outlined, narratives of this production have focused on the friction that arose over the course of *Play*'s rehearsals between several protagonists who represented some of the most influential figures working in the British theatre in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the difficulties that arose, further evidence suggests these acrimonious conflicts did not deter the producers from maintaining their interest in Beckett as a dramatist. Less than four years later, Michael Hallifax, the NT's Executive Company Manager, wrote to John Perry at Curtis Brown, stating:

Sir Laurence Olivier has expressed great interest in presenting "All That Fall" on the stage as one half of a double bill to be put into the National Theatre's repertoire. [...] I would be grateful if you would contact Samuel Beckett letting him know what Sir Laurence has in mind and asking him if he would grant this Company the permission it requires.<sup>281</sup>

This expression of interest in adapting Beckett's radio play for the stage signifies how Olivier kept Beckett in mind in his programming for the National Theatre. Beckett declined Olivier's request most likely due to his preference for separating the genres for which his work was written.<sup>282</sup> While Olivier expressed his apologies to Devine concerning the debacle over *Play*'s performance, another early critic of the manner in which it was staged was William

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<sup>281</sup> Letter from Michael Hallifax (National Theatre) to John Perry (Curtis Brown), 30 January 1968. National Theatre Archive, Production folder for *Play*, 1964.

<sup>282</sup> It was the second time Beckett had declined a British theatre institution from staging *All That Fall* after Devine's request in 1957, though unusually a production was staged at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt in 1966. See UoR, Beckett Collection, BC Stage File/SHO-1966/1. *Alle, die da fallen* was performed alongside *Akt ohne Worte II, Kommen und Gehen* at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt, Berlin opening on 14 January 1966 and directed by Deryk Mendel.

Gaskill. He would also later record how his opinion of the performance had changed, as he wrote to Beckett, ‘The only contact that we have made was during the trouble over “Play” at the National Theatre. I felt that the excitement of the final results of your and George’s work more than compensated for the doubts we may have had during rehearsal.’<sup>283</sup> Gaskill had at this point taken over the artistic directorship of the Royal Court and ironically would direct *Play* five years later. He concluded this letter fulsome in his support for Beckett as a writer, stating, ‘I want our repertory to be representative of the contemporary theatre and it is unthinkable to do this without a play of yours.’<sup>284</sup>

The final example of reconciliation work from this production would most ironically come from Tynan, as he looked to include Beckett’s *Breath in Oh Calcutta!* – a theatrical revue he conceived four years later in response to the removal of the Lord Chamberlain’s powers. This performance featured full-frontal nudity and explicit material, unbeknownst to Beckett’s initial agreement; an added irony to Tynan’s misconceptions of *Play* in performance. Having heard of these details by the time *Oh! Calcutta!* was due to be staged at the Roundhouse, Beckett insisted that *Breath* was removed from the production. In what was once again a strained moment in their relationship over performance, undoubtedly *Play* and *Oh! Calcutta!* demonstrated how with Beckett and Tynan their relationship had significantly changed since Tynan declared himself a ‘godotista’ in one of the earliest moments of this history.<sup>285</sup> *Play*, undoubtedly, proved a testing time in Beckett’s relationship with these key figures in British theatre, as the play brought about heated responses concerning theatrical styles and attitudes. Beckett’s reluctance to comply with the changes argued for by Tynan and Olivier underlined his commitment to his dramatic innovations. While this was not

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<sup>283</sup> Letter from William Gaskill to Samuel Beckett, 23 April 1965. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Kenneth Tynan, ‘New Writing’, *The Observer*, 7 August 1955. For a detailed account of *Breath* and *Oh! Calcutta!*, see Graham Saunders, ‘Contracts, Clauses and Nudes: *Breath, Oh! Calcutta!* and the Freedom of Authorship’, in *Staging Samuel Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. by Tucker and McTighe (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2016), pp. 177 – 192.

warmly received by the British producers at the time, their later interest in programming or working with Beckett's drama shows that the arguments did not reduce their willingness to stage his work, and that they would endorse his work after *Play* had challenged their traditional theatrical values.

## **2.6. Conclusion: 'Getting known': Early Beckett Productions in London (1955 – 1964)**

The opening ten years of this history saw Beckett's drama encounter many challenges in its attempts to be staged in London. Conversely, it offered many challenges of its own to the rather calm waters of London and British theatres. Over this time producers, practitioners and theatregoers had to rethink many of their assertions about the theatre, particularly when experiencing the live theatrical event and considering plot, action, characterisation and performance. This ten year period saw *Godot*, *Act Without Words I (Acte Sans Paroles)*, *Endgame* (and *Fin de Partie*), *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, *Play* and *Act Without Words II* presented for the first time in London, while the interest in these plays saw several revivals mounted in a short space of time, amongst an impressive list of London theatres.<sup>286</sup> Beckett's early reception in London was divisive. Rejected by many of its stars before it began, others, such as Patrick Magee and Jack MacGowran, returned in numerous productions becoming London's front-running Beckett specialists. After difficulties in finding a theatre, Beckett's drama later had some of London's most iconic theatrical institutions embracing his work, though his reliable and supportive theatrical home was in Sloane Square. The early performances of his plays in London had demonstrated how his theatre was innovating theatrical practice through its approaches to dialogue, characterisation, silences, lighting and

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<sup>286</sup> As I have previously outlined, it has been necessary for this thesis to select a range of performances to examine in this history, which has meant I have been unable to discuss some important performances, such as Brenda Bruce's portrayal of Winnie in *Happy Days* at the Royal Court in 1962. In this instance, I felt this production had been well covered by Knowlson (1996) and the materials I found in the archive on this staging would not make the same contribution to knowledge that other performances of *Happy Days* or other performances around this era could.



scenographic minimalism. Through these practical experiments, Beckett had managed to redefine for many British audiences the conventional experience of watching a play, as he challenged the dominant forms of theatre that occupied London's theatres, such as, for example, naturalism, well-made plays, poetic dramas, farces and musicals. Although his work had only been subject to a handful of performances up to this point, the impact arising from Beckett's work was set to have a stronger influence as the number of productions of his work increased across the city.

The formative years of Beckett's drama in London saw his work play in major theatres, where he was able to establish vital connections with key collaborators who would continue to support his drama in the later stages of this history. As the next chapter of this thesis will discuss, the death of Devine in 1966 saw Beckett lose a dear friend, key collaborator and his most energetic producer in London. In the immediacy of saddening news, as records from the Staging Beckett Database suggest, Beckett's drama was less frequently staged in London. However, through time, as Chapter 3 will examine, the tradition of staging Beckett in London that Devine had championed in its earliest years would see new and familiar personalities endorse Beckett's *oeuvre* through a series of celebrated productions in a number of theatrical environments, as the next stage of Beckett performances in London evolved.

### 3. 'consider myself free': The Post-Devine Years (1965 – 1976)

I think my best course now is to consider myself free, as from next September when you leave the Court, as far as London productions are concerned.<sup>287</sup>

Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 29 March 1965

In her essay on Beckett's reception in Great Britain in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, Mary Bryden uses the symbolism of 'waves' to describe the ocean of Beckett criticism that has rippled, broken and been ridden by its surfers (academics and critics) over the years since *Waiting for Godot's* British premiere. She argues that 'Unlike the wave anticipated by the surfer, these are normally best seen in retrospect. The number, quality and significance of these waves vary according to the observer.'<sup>288</sup> Drawing on Bryden's imagery, I would argue that Beckett's drama in London has encountered a number of waves over the course of its performance history. If the emergence of *Waiting for Godot* and Beckett's presence in the formative years of major British theatre institutions represented the first waves of this history, this chapter will address the next decade of waves Beckett's drama experienced in London; a decade in which the earliest signs of his drama's versatility was shown, as his work opened up to new audiences, generations and emerged in new spaces. The structural basis for distinguishing and interpreting these waves has been informed by the chronological organisation of the primary data I collected for the Staging Beckett Database and in turn further historical inquiry. By organising this core data and considering the theatre cultures from which these productions emerged I have been able to identify unforeseen trends and explore neglected historical factors which have influenced this narrative. For example,

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<sup>287</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 29 March 1965. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>288</sup> Mary Bryden, 'Beckett's reception in Great Britain', in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon and Matthew Feldman. (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 40.

George Devine's departure from the Royal Court in 1965 signalled its break with Beckett's drama, 1968 was the year British censorship powers ended, and in 1969 Beckett won the Nobel Prize for Literature after which his drama was performed more frequently in a range of London theatres. Through an interweaving of these facts and factors, and further available evidence, I will re-contextualise the next decade of Beckettian performances in London through the theatres, practitioners and theatrical conditions that shaped these productions.<sup>289</sup>

As I have contended in my previous chapter, Devine played an integral, if somewhat under-heralded role in the emergence of Beckett's drama up until 1965. This chapter proposes to address a change in the tide of Beckett's London productions following Devine's departure from the Royal Court and the legacy that followed from his early support. Crucially, Devine's retirement meant that Beckett relinquished the exclusive partnership he established between his plays and the Royal Court and, although he would maintain a fondness and loyalty to the Sloane Square venue, Beckett allowed his drama to become "free [...] as far as London productions are concerned." In the immediate aftermath of this freedom, his plays were not produced regularly in London, although there was some interest. As Devine was departing, Peter Hall wrote to Beckett proposing his work form part of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) repertory programme, while Laurence Olivier followed Devine's instincts by enquiring about the possibility of adapting *All That Fall* for the National Theatre in 1968 and John Calder requested a new play (*Come and Go*) for his proposed new theatre in Soho. Despite these intentions, the three respective projects failed to materialise. Instead Beckett's 'freedom' would allow him to supervise and direct performances in France and Germany, as well as pursuing his interests in other media, such as the TV recording of *Eh Joe*. As the Staging Beckett Database records suggest, Beckett's productions in London entered a period of transition and relocation following the loss of its

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<sup>289</sup> Helen Freshwater suggests archival research should lead to 'a recontextualization of the past rather than a reconstruction.' Freshwater, p. 739.

energetic producer in Devine, whereby Beckett's growing reputation enabled his work to branch out across London.

This chapter will discuss the next eleven years of the history of staging Beckett in London, covering performances from 1965 to 1976. It is broken into four sections that reveal how Beckett's drama was present during further key moments in British theatre history. Through a chronological structure I will begin by examining the significant international productions of Beckett's drama brought to the UK as part of the RSC's World Theatre Seasons organised by Peter Daubeny. The second section will consider the first productions of Beckett's drama following his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 and will explore presentations of his plays intended for younger audiences at the margins of London's mainstream theatre landscape, as his work became a staple of the early years of the Young Vic prior to the gentrification of Waterloo and its surrounding districts. Following these sojourns to other theatres in London, this history will return to Beckett's association with the Royal Court, when his drama reappeared for the first time in the post-Devine era. The final section in this chapter will epitomise the rising stature of Beckett's drama in the context of British theatre, as Peggy Ashcroft played Winnie in *Happy Days* at the Old Vic and later at the newly opened Lyttelton Theatre in a production directed by the theatre's newly appointed artistic director, Peter Hall, two of the most esteemed figures in the British theatre working on the main stages of the nation's theatres. Through these four sections I will chart how Beckett's plays were staged during a diverse phase of this performance history where productions were diffused across the landscape of London theatres and first highlighted the versatile role they could play in London performance cultures.

### 3.1. International Beckett: The World Theatre Seasons

As Chapter Two discussed, Beckett's drama represented several significant moments in the formative years of major British theatres, particularly through its performances at the Royal Court and the NT. Beckett's association with major British theatre institutions was also apparent through the RSC, who were eager to produce his work. Following successful productions of *Endgame* and *Act Without Words II* at the Aldwych Theatre in 1964, Peter Hall – then Artistic Director of the RSC – wrote to Beckett expressing his desire 'to build up a selection of your work in our repertory' and that if he 'would bless such a project it would be a great strength and hope for our company.'<sup>290</sup> Beckett gave a great deal of thought to Hall's proposal and was obviously torn between the loyalty Devine had shown him at the Royal Court and the enticing offer of a regular platform for his theatre in the UK. He consulted Devine about the matter, who felt 'it would be a pity if you were to give Hall an exclusive right to produce your plays here. [...] He doesn't always do what he says he will do and I personally feel that there should be a chance for other theatres to do them as well.'<sup>291</sup> Furthermore, Devine was keen to stress he did not want to pressurise Beckett into continuing to present his work at the Royal Court after his departure, but rather that his 'work should always be well presented'.<sup>292</sup> By the end of March and after serious contemplation, Beckett decided 'I think my best course now is to consider myself free, as from next September when you leave the Court, as far as London productions are concerned.'<sup>293</sup> This decision marked a significant moment in this performance history, as, although his relationship with the Royal Court had offered Beckett support and security at a crucial phase of his relationship with theatre in London, his 'freedom' would open his drama up to other theatrical homes, practitioners and audiences across London who were interested in staging and seeing his

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<sup>290</sup> Letter from Peter Hall to Samuel Beckett, 2 March 1965. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>291</sup> Letter from George Devine to Samuel Beckett, 17 March 1965. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Devine, 29 March 1965. UAL, Wimbledon, JH/1/15.

work for the first time. Although this decision may have disappointed Hall, it did not deter the RSC from staging his work. In 1968 they produced *Waiting for Godot* as part of their outreach programme, Theatreground, which initially played at the Aldwych Theatre before touring alongside other plays to colleges in Staffordshire and Leicestershire. While this production helped broaden Beckett's reach in the UK, I will instead discuss a significant, but often neglected strand of the Royal Shakespeare Company's programming: the international and foreign language productions of Beckett's drama staged as part of the World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre in London; productions that demonstrated how Beckett's drama was both in and outside British theatre cultures.

Of course, as I have highlighted in Chapter 2, it was not the first time London had welcomed foreign language productions of Beckett's drama. In 1957 the ESC had previously pioneered French language premieres of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles*, but nonetheless, the presentation of German and French Beckett productions as part of the World Theatre Seasons of the mid-1960s and early-1970s was a novel concept albeit a financial risk. Over these years Beckett's drama was represented with *Oh Les Beaux Jours* from the Théâtre de France (in 1965) and the Schiller Theater's Beckett-directed *Endspiel* (in 1971) and *Das Letzte Band* (in 1970 and 1971) staged in seasons organised by Peter Daubeny. The emergence of these seasons occurred when the climate of London theatres was shifting, in terms of theatrical content, but also through the developing infrastructure of subsidised theatres. Daubeny's seasons in the mid-1960s were widely credited – as highlighted in Jen Harvie's *Staging the UK* – for doing 'much to break down the parochialism of the West End', and playing 'a crucial role opening up the West End stage to world theatre'.<sup>294</sup> The seasons brought regular cultural vitality to London's theatrical landscape during the summer months from 1964 to 1973 in what was one of the first sustained programming commitments to

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<sup>294</sup> Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 121.

international theatre in London. The “World Theatre” that Daubeny sought to showcase was, as Harvie argues, ‘unquestionably Eurocentric’, epitomised by the Western European origins of the Beckett productions staged, though it did also feature performances from ‘the USA, the Middle East (Israel), and East Asia (Japan).’<sup>295</sup> Nonetheless, Daubeny’s achievements in organising these seasons in the 1960s were remarkable considering the numerous complications involved in producing international theatre at that time with issues concerning its limited budget, communications with touring companies, the transportation of sets, the Lord Chamberlain and audience translations.

While these productions are considered significant in the international performance histories of Beckett’s drama, their presence in London has been largely forgotten and merits analysis for a number of reasons. Beckett’s decision to end his first option agreement at the Royal Court coincided with his more active involvement in performances of his drama staged in France and Germany. Just as his work in London would be associated with the Royal Court, in Paris Beckett supervised productions of *En Attendant Godot* in 1961, *Oh Les Beaux Jours* in 1963 and *Comédie* and *Va et Vient* in 1966 at the Odéon Théâtre de France. Meanwhile, Beckett’s connection with the Schiller Theater in Berlin was established in 1965, following a plea from director Deryk Mendel to help his troubled production of *Warten auf Godot*. Beckett’s sizeable contribution to this production would arguably encourage him to undertake greater responsibilities for his plays in performance as a director and initiated a lengthy practical collaboration between Beckett and the Schiller Theater.<sup>296</sup> Having spent many years supervising and observing experienced directors such as Roger Blin, George Devine, Donald McWhinnie and Anthony Page, the Schiller production of *Endspiel* in 1967

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>296</sup> Beckett would go on to direct *Endspiel*, *Das Letzte Band*, *Glückliche Tage* (in 1971), *Warten auf Godot* (in 1975), *Damals* and *Tritte* (in 1976) and *Spiel* (in 1978) in performances staged at the Schiller Theater and Schiller Theater Werkstatt.

would mark the first time Beckett had taken full responsibility for directing his own drama.<sup>297</sup> This was followed by *Das Letzte Band* in 1969, which one year later as part of the World Theatre Season would mark the first time a Beckett directed play was staged in London. With the loss of Devine's energy as a producer, it transpired that fewer London productions of Beckett's *oeuvre* were staged during the mid to late 1960s, though instead, through Daubeny's knowledge of international theatre, the foremost European productions of his plays toured to London, in an exceptional moment for his drama's history in the UK.<sup>298</sup> Their inclusion in the World Theatre Seasons signified Beckett's growing international reputation and its prominence in two major European theatre companies. These productions would epitomise the poetry, clarity and beauty of Beckett's drama in performance, despite the language barrier presented for the majority of their British audience members. Significantly too, Beckett was actively involved in the original staging of each of these performances brought to the Aldwych, which of course helps to contextualise that while Beckett had a keen interest in performances of his work in London, he also maintained an awareness or active involvement in the international productions of his drama. Of course, the main reason why the presence of these three productions in London has been neglected is because of their very limited number of performances in the World Theatre Seasons. For example, the initial visit of *Oh Les Beaux Jours* was restricted to one Saturday matinee – a decision that led the theatre critic of *The Times* to write, 'one wishes that the experience had been offered to more than a single audience.'<sup>299</sup> However, despite these obvious limitations, the 1,200 seats in the Aldwych's auditorium meant that these performances could have had a sizeable attendance

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<sup>297</sup> Cohn, *Waiting for Godot: A Casebook* and James Knowlson, *Happy Days: The Production Notebook of Samuel Beckett*, identify *Va et Vient* at the Odéon Theatre in 1966 as Beckett's first full production, though Gontarski highlights that Beckett credited Jean-Marie Serreau with the direction, and therefore argues that *Endspiel* in 1967 was 'his first stage production acknowledged in a playbill.' See Gontarski, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 2: Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. xv.

<sup>298</sup> Besides the World Theatre Seasons I have found the following performances from 1965-1969: a performance of *Endgame* and *Act Without Words I* at St Martin's Theatre in 1966, which was presented by the winners of the National Student Drama Festival, *Play* at the Arts Theatre by Quipu Theatre Company and productions of *Happy Days* and *Play* by the amateur theatre company Questors in 1969.

<sup>299</sup> Our Drama Critic, 'Beckett Play Acted by French Company', *The Times*, 5 April 1965.



and furthermore the impact of these performances would also be evident in the reception of later performances, as they became the standard against which later productions would be compared by critics and audiences.

The original French premiere of *Oh Les Beaux Jours*, featuring Madeleine Renaud as Winnie and Jean-Louis-Barrault as Willie, was staged at the Odéon-Théâtre de France in Paris in October 1963, before it was the first Beckett play presented in the World Theatre Season in April 1965. It epitomised how Beckett, his drama and certain practitioners would have a long-standing history of collaboration as Renaud would perform *Oh Les Beaux Jours* and other Beckett dramas across three decades. Further creative partnerships were evident from this production as it was directed by Roger Blin, who had previously directed the world premieres of *En Attendant Godot* and *Fin de Partie*, and it was designed by French scenographer Matias who would work extensively with Beckett on productions in France and Germany. Blin had experience of cross-cultural Beckett productions from his previous tours of *En Attendant Godot* and *Fin de Partie* around Europe in the 1950s and his return to England for *Oh Les Beaux Jours* in 1965 would see the production encounter similar difficulties to those that *Fin de Partie* faced, when it premiered at the Royal Court in 1957. Once again the French language would present issues for a largely monolingual audience, though these issues were reduced by the simultaneous translation provided to patrons during the performance. Ironically, while the World Theatre Season sought to bring the best of world theatre to the UK, just as in the case of *Fin de Partie* at the Court in 1957, they had to abide by UK laws, and had to be granted a performance licence by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, even for its single scheduled performance. As was commonly the case with Beckett's drama and had been the case for *Happy Days*, *Oh Les Beaux Jours* was subject to the Lord Chamberlain's interdictions and queries. While three fragments of the text were questioned –

in another example of the restrictions theatrical performances faced over these years – *Oh Les Beaux Jours* was granted a licence on 12 March 1965.<sup>300</sup>

Despite these linguistic and legislative issues, the single performance of *Oh Les Beaux Jours* on 3 April 1965 did receive unanimous praise from its reviewers. As Philip Hope-Wallace surmised: ‘Everything sounded fresh and original: everything was lapidary, sharply chiselled. The house was full and hung on each syllable but I wish it could have been filled seven times over with aspiring students with an ear to learn how to turn a phrase.’<sup>301</sup> These descriptions characterised the discipline Blin strived towards in his direction of Renaud as Winnie with Blin noting:

Throughout rehearsals, I laid stress on the punctuation of the text. Beckett’s texts are stuffed with full-stops and these full-stops have to be played. ‘This will have been another day! (Pause.) After all. (Pause.) So far.’ In their very precise order, those phrases go from joy, to a diminished joy, to nothing.<sup>302</sup>

For many critics it offered a chance to compare Renaud with Brenda Bruce’s performance in the 1962 British premiere. Three years had passed since the positive reviews for Bruce’s interpretation; now Renaud’s performance was thought to have surpassed Bruce, with W.A. Darlington noting they were on a par after the first act, though Act 2 ‘gave Mme. Renaud the chance for a real tour de force of expressive acting.’<sup>303</sup> Hope-Wallace had strongly praised Bruce in 1962 writing ‘Admiration for Miss Bruce’s *tour de force* grows in my mind with

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<sup>300</sup> *Oh Les Beaux Jours*, British Library, Lord Chamberlain Plays 1965/13. Three passages in Beckett, *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minut, 1963) were questioned. On p. 58 a cross in blue pencil was marked against Winnie’s line: ‘ton vieux baise-en-ville bourré de caca en conserve.’ On p. 64 a question mark in blue pencil was written beside Willie’s line: ‘Cochon mâle châtre.’ On p. 79 a similar question mark was against Winnie’s line: ‘La tristesse au sortir des rapports sexuels intimes, celle-là nous est familière, certes. (Un temps.) Là dessus tu serais d’accord avec Aristotle, Willie, je pense.’

<sup>301</sup> Philip Hope-Wallace, ‘Oh Les Beaux Jours’, *The Guardian*, 5 April 1965.

<sup>302</sup> Taylor-Batty, *Roger Blin: Collaborations and Methodologies*, p. 123.

<sup>303</sup> W. A. Darlington, ‘Mme. Renaud triumphs in ‘Happy Days’’, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 1965.

every minute that separates me from the play itself'.<sup>304</sup> Ironically his praise for Bruce's performance had evidently escaped his memory by 1965, as he contended 'Renaud totally eclipsed for me the English and Irish creators of the role', adding 'She is an actress of perfectly controlled inflection and gesture.'<sup>305</sup> The impact of Renaud's acclaimed performance was restricted by its limited run, though interest in this production was signified by its return to London four years later for a further four performances as part of a Madeleine Renaud Season at the Royal Court, which ensured more London audiences would experience her portrayal of Winnie from its first outing at the 1965 World Theatre Season.<sup>306</sup>

Following Renaud's success with *Oh Les Beaux Jours*, the next Beckett production in the World Theatre Seasons was the Schiller Theater Berlin's staging of *Das Letzte Band* in April 1970, featuring Martin Held as Krapp in a performance that marked the first time a Beckett directed play was staged in London. The timing of this performance fell one year after Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, which reaffirmed his reputation as a writer and dramatist.<sup>307</sup> This time the production would have a limited run of two performances, though it would return one year later (perhaps a suggestion of the interest and acclaim of the performance), to be performed alongside Beckett's production of *Endspiel*. Daubeny had previously recognised the pedigree of the Schiller Theatre by programming their productions in 1964 and their return in 1970 saw *The Captain of Kopernick* and *Intrigue and Love* accompany *Das Letzte Band* in the season.<sup>308</sup> Despite the obvious language barriers again posed by these performances, British critics were fulsome in their praise, with Anthony

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<sup>304</sup> Hope-Wallace, 'Happy Days at the Royal Court, *The Guardian*, 2 November 1962.

<sup>305</sup> Hope-Wallace, 1965.

<sup>306</sup> *Oh Les Beaux Jours* was performed alongside *L'Amante Anglaise* by Marguerite Duras for the Madeleine Renaud Season. Renaud would continue performing *Oh Les Beaux Jours* until 1986. In 1969 her husband Jean-Louis Barrault would also perform in *Rabelais* at the National Theatre at the Old Vic.

<sup>307</sup> Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, "for his writing, which - in new forms for the novel and drama - in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation". Note on Samuel Beckett's Nobel Prize in Literature, 1969. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/) [accessed 31 August 2015].

<sup>308</sup> In the 1971 World Theatre Season *Yvonne, Princess of Burgundy* was also performed from the Schiller Theater repertory.

Curtis describing the performance as ‘a most rewarding experience to see it now bodied forth in the flesh by a master.’<sup>309</sup> Under Beckett’s direction, Held was able to extract a specific understanding of Krapp’s character, commenting, ‘Krapp is eaten up by dreams. But this is without sentimentality, there is no resignation in him. [...] He sees very clearly that he is finished with three things, with his opus, with love and also with religion’.<sup>310</sup> These carefully crafted traits were stimulated in his London performance with Irving Wardle suggesting Held ‘was less sympathetic towards the reclusive Krapp than some of his past interpreters have been.’<sup>311</sup> This sense of character was finely balanced with Held’s unpredictability as Krapp and Beckett’s meticulous detail as director, with Wardle noting, ‘It is a performance of superb timing and surprise, rivalling Olivier’s power to arouse expectations and then do something different.’<sup>312</sup> High praise was bestowed on *Das Letzte Band*, which was described at the time by both Wardle and John Barber as ‘definitive’, with this performance significantly shaping future experiences of the play through the strong imprint the performance left on the memories of audiences and critics.

Despite the limitations surrounding these performances, their inclusion in this narrative is warranted as they call attention to significant productions of Beckett’s drama being staged elsewhere in Europe during the 1960s. Their presence as part of the World Theatre Seasons highlights how Beckett’s drama was showcased at another notable phase of British theatre history. These performances represented a rare moment in the production history of his drama in London, where his plays were performed in a foreign language and in the West End. Like Devine before him, Daubeny had taken the risk of programming Beckett in French and for the first time in the UK, German, which, with some notable exceptions, has remained an uncommon feature of Beckett performances staged in the UK and Ireland, even

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<sup>309</sup> Anthony Curtis, ‘Solo Performers’, *Financial Times*, 30 April 1970.

<sup>310</sup> Knowlson, *Samuel Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape: A Theatre Workbook*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>311</sup> Irving Wardle, ‘Towards Extinction’, *The Times*, 30 April 1970.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

in the recent Beckett International Season at the Barbican.<sup>313</sup> Furthermore, it may be argued that the wider legacy and vision of the World Theatre Seasons continues to ripple across London's international theatre scene, where international seasons and companies have regularly occupied theatres and festivals such as, for example, the Barbican Centre, Riverside Studios and the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT), programming which would again feature Beckett's drama. While the World Theatre Seasons saw Beckett's drama presented for audiences keen to experience strong international theatre, this chapter will now proceed to discuss how Beckett's drama was produced with young people in mind during the early years of the Young Vic in the 1970s, when it began from a more marginalised position in the fabric of London theatres.

### **3.2. Beckett at the Young Vic: From the marginal to the major-marginal**

On 13 April 2015, Andrew Dickson wrote in *The Guardian*:

When the shortlist for this year's Olivier theatre awards was announced in early March, there was only one story in town: London's Young Vic. The theatre secured a remarkable 11 nominations, more than ever before, spanning nearly every major category. Powerhouses such as the National Theatre and the Royal Court were almost nowhere to be seen. [...] Fifteen years ago, some wondered whether the Young Vic could survive. Now it is impossible to imagine the British theatre scene without it.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Foreign language productions were notably absent from the Barbican International Beckett Season (2015), which was an English language season of his plays, despite the Barbican's history of staging foreign language performances. Beckett's production of *Warten auf Godot* would later be staged at the Royal Court Theatre in 1976. Luc Bondy's *En Attendant Godot* toured to the Southbank Centre in 2000 and more recently the Happy Days International Beckett Festival has presented Beckett's drama in Portuguese, Yiddish and German.

<sup>314</sup> Andrew Dickson, 'The director's cut: David Lan of the Young Vic', *The Guardian*, 11 April 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/apr/11/director-david-lan-young-vic-olivier-awards> [accessed 22 October 2015].

Dickson's commentary outlines the present day standing of the Young Vic; a theatre renowned for its recent array of celebrated, sell-out productions, glamorous casting and West End transfers. These have made the Young Vic the envy of many London theatres, where it currently holds an elevated reputation, holding its own against the city's major theatrical institutions and commercial theatre sector. Today the Young Vic does not spring to mind as a theatre at the margins, though it began at the margins through its cultural and social geographies, its inter-institutional dependence, and also through its intentions to offer a theatrical home for neglected audiences and dramas of the late 1960s. During these early years, Samuel Beckett's drama played an integral role in its programming and has subsequently been staged at key moments over the theatre's forty five year history.

### **3.2.1. Young Vic at the margins | Beckett at the margins**

Writing this history today highlights how the Young Vic and its surrounding areas have been transformed since its inception. As Jen Harvie asserts in *Theatre & the City*, 'cities are ever-changing geographical, architectural, political and social structures where most people live and work densely gathered in extremely complex social structures'.<sup>315</sup> Since 1970 the Young Vic has experienced the ever-changing aspects of urban life, through its home along The Cut, situated south of the Thames on the border of the Lambeth and Southwark boroughs. Despite proposals before it was founded for a building close to the Covent Garden Flower Market and London's central cultural districts, the Young Vic's separation from the mainstream was epitomised through its geographical position. The theatre was initially erected on The Cut as a temporary building around the shell of an old butcher shop on a former bombsite, in what was a largely marginalised quarter of London in 1970. It had not experienced regeneration after World War 2 and it suffered from high levels of deprivation, unemployment and crime,

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<sup>315</sup> Jen Harvie, *Theatre & the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. 6.

as well as poor educational standards. This once largely disregarded locale has since undergone a resurgence evolving into a vibrant, cultural quarter, with its emergence in South London preceding the rebirth of the nearby Southbank area through other cultural institutions such as the NT, the Tate Modern and the Globe Theatre.

When the Young Vic opened, it had a subsidiary relationship to the NT; then housed close by at the Old Vic and under the directorship of Laurence Olivier.<sup>316</sup> Plans for the theatre developed out of an absence of young theatregoers in London during the 1960s, as its major theatres operated with a commercial ethos staging mainstream plays or musicals. These shortcomings within the sector were recognised in the 1965 Arts Council's Young People's Theatre Enquiry (reported in 1966) led by Constance Cummings, which highlighted how young theatregoers were inadequately served by theatres offering expensive tickets for a largely older bourgeois audience. In the same year the report was announced, Olivier met an energetic theatre director called Frank Dunlop. Dunlop had previously founded the Piccolo Theatre in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester, in 1954 with Richard Negri and became Artistic Director of the Nottingham Playhouse before founding Pop Theatre, which initially ran during the Edinburgh Festival. It was through his work with Pop – a company that offered cheap tickets to younger audiences – that Dunlop captured the attention of Olivier, as its inaugural production, *The Winter's Tale*, travelled to Brighton, where they met with Joan Plowright, who suggested Dunlop would be 'the ideal man to [...] start a National Theatre for Children'.<sup>317</sup> Dunlop later joined the NT as an Associate Director and Administrator after Olivier promised him he could 'build a theatre for young people'.<sup>318</sup> Olivier recognised the need for this type of theatre following further internal assessments into the NT's operations,

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<sup>316</sup> The original 'Young Vic Company' was set up by George Devine following World War II under the provisions of the Old Vic Theatre School established by Devine, Michel St Denis and Glen Byam Shaw. It aimed to produce classics for young people aged from nine to fifteen. Ruth Little, *The Young Vic Book: Theatre Work and Play* (London: Methuen, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>317</sup> Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon, 2013), p. 159.

<sup>318</sup> An AHRC Staging Beckett interview between Frank Dunlop and Matthew McFrederick, Telephone Interview, 5 November 2015.

identifying three specific limitations in a letter to the Minister of the Arts Jennie Lee on 29 January 1969:

1. We are not paying nearly enough attention to young audiences. [...]
2. We have no room in our programmes, in our theatre, workshops or in our planning, for the proper consideration of experimental work that any National Theatre should have.
3. Lastly, and I think most importantly, I am [...] getting apprehensive regarding the continuance of the basic structure on which the whole idea of the National Theatre depends for its health and progression, namely the permanent ensemble.<sup>319</sup>

These candid assessments gained the support of the Arts Council and in 1970 the Young Vic was born with Dunlop as its first Artistic Director and founder. According to Dunlop, his intentions were for the theatre to cater for an overlooked audience, as he stated, ‘The Young Vic was created [...] to get back an audience that was missing, which was the late teens and early twenties.’<sup>320</sup>

A key part of Dunlop’s plans to attract this missing audience to the Young Vic was his diversified programming, which purposefully included Beckett’s drama. As he remarked, ‘Whilst we did some new things, the main things were first of all the great classics and revivals of recent top writers whose work was not being done and available for young people to see. And [...] the two top of my list were Shakespeare and Beckett.’<sup>321</sup> The Young Vic’s interest can be attributed to Dunlop, who remains an unrecognised figure in the performance histories of Beckett’s drama in the UK and internationally. Dunlop worked extensively as a producer and director in the UK and America, leading theatres and festivals such as the

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<sup>319</sup> Letter from Laurence Olivier to Jennie Lee, 29 January 1969. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, ACGB 34/74: 1/30.

<sup>320</sup> Interview between Matthew McFrederick and Frank Dunlop, 5 November 2015.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.



Nottingham Playhouse, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Edinburgh International Festival, with Beckett's drama in fact linking his programming at each of these organisations.<sup>322</sup> When reminded about the frequency with which the Young Vic staged Beckett, Dunlop jokingly responded 'Good god, we did go out on a limb', though he dismissed the idea that programming Beckett was a gamble: 'I didn't think it was a risk at all. I was absolutely sure it wasn't a risk. I knew my audience and I knew that they would come. They came.'<sup>323</sup> Just as Beckett's drama was programmed during the formative years of other post-war British theatres such as the Royal Court, the RSC and the NT, the Young Vic would present Beckett's drama to a new generation of theatregoers. Between 1970 and 1973, it staged eight Beckett plays in four separate theatrical productions, with *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days* built into the theatre's repertory. This chapter will now offer an overview of the performance histories of these three, frequently overlooked productions at the Young Vic.

### 3.2.2. Growing up with Beckett

The connection between Beckett's drama and the Young Vic, in fact pre-dates its longstanding home on The Cut, as *Godot*, an adaptation of Moliere's *Scapino* and *Timesneeze* by David Campton played in the opening Young Vic season on 25 February 1970 at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre in Holborn. This venue brought the Young Vic closer to the West End, but despite its geographical proximity to London's mainstream theatres, the Young Vic was removed from the West End's commercial ethos and its largely wealthy and middle-class patronage. *Godot* opened on 18 March and for the first time during its performance history in London it was deliberately produced with young people in mind. Firstly, ticketing for all

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<sup>322</sup> Dunlop was Artistic Director of the Nottingham Playhouse from 1961-1964. He ran Pop Theatre from 1966 to 1967, after which he joined the NT and founded the Young Vic in 1969. For further information on his tenure at the Nottingham Playhouse see: John Bailey, *A Theatre for All Seasons: Nottingham Playhouse The First Thirty Years 1948-1978* (London: Sutton Publishing, 1994)

<sup>323</sup> Interview between Matthew McFrederick and Frank Dunlop, 5 November 2015.

performances in this first season prioritised younger audiences. As the theatre's publicity material put it, 'Only a limited number of performances during the season are on sale to the general public' and performances were specifically offered to young people in 'schools [and] youth organisations' with few performances open to the general public.<sup>324</sup> It was clear that the Young Vic was implementing 'a vigorous new policy abroad of catching them young', by making theatre an affordable, less strenuous event to attend through low-priced seats and an easier advanced ticket system.<sup>325</sup> Furthermore, both at the Cochrane and the Young Vic, it was clear from their publicity leaflets that they aimed to break down traditional theatregoing conventions: 'The audience will sit or lie in the auditorium and on the stage and the action will take place all around. Places will not be individually reserved and first to arrive will have first choice of where they will be'.<sup>326</sup> Significantly, the Young Vic also removed the proscenium arch, making it one of the first UK theatres where *Godot* was performed and viewed without the proscenium frame.

*Godot* met the Young Vic objectives as it was an experimental performance for young people using actors from the NT's ensemble, and it is clear from the theatre's publicity leaflets that they were judiciously written to engage with a younger demographic. Dunlop acknowledged this approach, by recalling: 'Beckett, I thought, would appeal with young people once they thought he wasn't *avant garde* or for the upper classes or experimental. We never used the word experimental you see because that would put people off.'<sup>327</sup> The theatre achieved this by stressing *Godot*'s curious and comedic attributes, with one publicity leaflet noting that it was 'a difficult play to understand' before describing it as 'entertaining' and suggesting the influence of 'Buster Keaton's comedy films'.<sup>328</sup> Irving Wardle labelled the production as 'pop-Beckett', due to its comedic emphasis, its circus and vaudeville routines,

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<sup>324</sup> Leaflet for the 1970 Young Vic Season. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, ACGB 34/74: 2/30.

<sup>325</sup> Anthony Curtis, 'The Young Vic', *Financial Times*, 2 March 1970.

<sup>326</sup> Leaflet for the 1970 Young Vic Season. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, ACGB 34/74: 2/30.

<sup>327</sup> Interview between Matthew McFrederick and Frank Dunlop, 5 November 2015.

<sup>328</sup> Leaflet for the 1970 Young Vic Season. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, ACGB 34/74: 2/30.

‘bursts of circus music’ and its ‘laugh-a-line tramps’.<sup>329</sup> This exploration of humour was also reported in *The Sunday Times*, ‘The production opens too, with a burst of fairground music, and the tramps prance on like cringing comedians, while the play is punctuated from time to time for no clear reason with little bursts of street song. It doesn’t spoil things’.<sup>330</sup> Undoubtedly, producing Beckett for young people was a risk for the theatre, though this unconventional relationship was embraced by its audience with Ronald Bryden noting that Dunlop ‘proved his point that an audience of children can take ‘*Godot*’ in their stride much as they enjoy ‘*Alice*,’ without the worryings after symbolism and significance which busied their elders in the fifties. They listened, they giggled and let it happen.’<sup>331</sup> Although some commentators, including the theatre critic Felix Barker, questioned the appropriateness of *Godot* for younger audiences, Barker reported *Godot* had higher bookings than the other two productions.<sup>332</sup>

As well as attracting a youthful audience, the Young Vic was able to offer practical theatre experience to up-and-coming actors and directors. With the exception of his direction of *Happy Days*, Dunlop deliberately chose young directors to work on Beckett’s plays as he believed ‘they’d have a different attitude because they’d not necessarily seen them.’<sup>333</sup> By 1970 many of Beckett’s stage images were fixed in British cultural memory, though Dunlop’s suggestion that previous productions would not have influenced productions staged at the Young Vic emphasises how a new generation of spectators and practitioners perceived Beckett’s work afresh. For example, Dunlop believed their *Godot*, directed by Adrian Brine, ‘was much less sentimentalised’ than Peter Hall’s London premiere, saying of Brine’s staging:

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<sup>329</sup> Irving Wardle, ‘Vaudeville Beckett’, *The Times*, 19 March 1970.

<sup>330</sup> Unknown Author, ‘*Godot*’, *The Sunday Times*, 22 March 1970.

<sup>331</sup> Ronald Bryden, ‘*Godot* for children’, *The Observer*, 23 March 1970.

<sup>332</sup> Felix Barker, ‘Light years away from Peter Pan’, *Evening News*, 26 February 1970.

<sup>333</sup> Interview between Matthew McFrederick and Frank Dunlop, 5 November 2015.

It was very good and very, very simple but virtually in the round. Most of the stage was surrounded by audience and there was only one strip at the end where you could put your back to a wall. This production was done mainly down the stage on the middle of the audience.<sup>334</sup>

Following its successful introductory season in Holborn, *Godot* also played in the first Young Vic season when it officially opened along The Cut on 11 September 1970 with one Arts Council report writing of the performance and the theatre's ambiance:

Well known by now. Another young man's production, or at least a production for young people. These productions do seem to strike the right note. Most enjoyable, perhaps a shade light on thought provokingness. House full, mostly young people, and a beautiful queue outside hoping for returns. The spirit of the place develops well.<sup>335</sup>

*Godot's* positive audience figures and reception saw it added to the theatre's repertory and prompted the addition of *Endgame* and *Happy Days* to the 1971 programme. As a result Beckett gained a reputation as 'the most popular writer in the short history of the Young Vic'<sup>336</sup>, beating 'Shakespeare, Moliere and Sophocles to the top of the Young Vic's audience chart'.<sup>337</sup> Meanwhile at the Old Vic, established classics such as *The Beaux' Stratagem*, *Macbeth* and *Hedda Gabler* were staged, though the theatre proved more amenable to staging contemporary and experimental plays; presenting Fernando Arrabal's *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* in 1971 and *Jumpers* by Tom Stoppard in 1972 to much acclaim. Dunlop could not recall sharing a conversation with Olivier about staging Beckett at the Old Vic,

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Unknown author, memo to Arts Council Drama Panel, 25 October 1970. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, ACGB 34/74: 2/30.

<sup>336</sup> Unknown Author and Title, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 31 January 1971.

<sup>337</sup> Irving Wardle, 'Endgame', *The Times*, 2 February 1971.

though as history suggests, this interest continued at the Young Vic with *Endgame*, directed by Peter James in 1971, the first performance staged in the theatre's 100-seater studio space.

Although Beckett was programmed frequently at the Young Vic between 1970 and 1973, it would be misleading to believe these productions were unanimously well received. This was epitomised by *Endgame* in 1971. Intriguingly, as with *Godot* one year earlier, *Endgame*'s publicity stressed its comedic qualities in an effort to attract young patrons, stating, 'As usual with Beckett the patter of the music hall can be discerned – the joke, the funny story. [...] The result is [...] a riveting, hilarious, poetic drama which the author has taught us to expect of him'.<sup>338</sup> Despite this emphasis, the production's critical reception suggests that the play's subtle black comedy was not realised in performance. For example, John Barber 'congratulated [the Young Vic] on their able and reverent attempt' before describing their *Endgame* as 'far too solemn and portentous'.<sup>339</sup> B. A. Young supported these comments and would have 'preferred if this production had been played for laughs a little more'<sup>340</sup>, while J. C. Trewin doubted its suitability for younger play-goers questioning 'whether it would urge [...] any sustained love affair with the theatre'.<sup>341</sup> In contrast, other well respected reviewers including Harold Hobson lauded the production and the theatre: 'Dunlop is making a huge success of the Young Vic, and its latest production [...] is bound to increase its reputation'.<sup>342</sup> Contrary to Trewin's suggestions, it did have an impact on some of the young audience members in attendance, with the writer Kevin Jackson describing in 1994: 'the one cultural encounter which really burns in my memory without simultaneously making my cheeks burn is the evening I saw [...] *Endgame* at the Young Vic in 1971 [...] the first play I had gone to see voluntarily and alone. [...] I came out of the auditorium with claw

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<sup>338</sup> Publicity leaflet for *Endgame* at the Young Vic, 1971. See UoR, Beckett, BC MS 2884.

<sup>339</sup> John Barber, 'Endgame too solemn at Young Vic', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 February 1971.

<sup>340</sup> B. A. Young, 'Endgame', *Financial Times*, 2 February 1971.

<sup>341</sup> J.C. Trewin, 'The New Plays', *The Lady*, 18 February 1971.

<sup>342</sup> Harold Hobson, 'Blinded by lights', *The Sunday Times*, 7 February 1971.

marks across my post-pubescent psyche that have yet to fade.’<sup>343</sup> While many of the production’s critics may have seen *Endgame* before or been, as Marvin Carlson puts it, ‘ghosted by previous experiences’, Jackson’s reflections were of a youthful, inexperienced theatre-goer and suggest the pivotal impact the Young Vic had on a new generation of playgoers.<sup>344</sup>

Varied responses were also offered on the actors’ performances. Harold Innocent’s Hamm was praised by Wardle and Hobson who described his performance as a ‘tour de force’<sup>345</sup> and ‘impressive’<sup>346</sup>, though other depictions, from Nicholas de Jongh for instance, referred to his performance ‘as an impersonation of Michael MacLiammoir and Edith Evans delivering the role with ‘something unsuitably akin to hysteria.’<sup>347</sup> Desmond McNamara played Clov and was criticised for his delivery by Wardle who argued his portrayal suffered by failing to overcome ‘the old difficulty of conveying a state of grey listless despair without infecting the performance with those qualities’.<sup>348</sup> Nonetheless, other moments were praised for their tenderness, with Hobson writing of Nagg and Nell’s relationship:

What are immediately striking about this production are the performances of Sam Kelly as Nagg and Denise Coffey as Nell. The tenderness of these aged scarecrows in their dustbins is one of the most touching things in the contemporary theatre. “Will you still need me. Will you still feed me. When I’m sixty-four?” The poignancy of the answer given to this question at the Young Vic is quite extraordinary.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Kevin Jackson, ‘Something happened’, *The Independent*, 12 March 1994.

<sup>344</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>345</sup> Wardle, 1971.

<sup>346</sup> Hobson, 1971.

<sup>347</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, ‘Endgame’, *The Guardian*, 2 February 1971.

<sup>348</sup> Wardle, 1971. He continued by offering a comparative reading of other productions of *Endgame*, noting, ‘Peter James’s production differs from the Royal Court and Aldwych versions by taking the play out of a forlorn twilight environment and placing it under a hard white light. This suggestion is not of a derelict lighthouse or of the interior of the author’s skull; but of a well-equipped modern torture chamber.’

<sup>349</sup> Hobson, 1971.

While critics offered varied perspectives on the performance, many audience members applauded it, including Dunlop, who praised the company, director and production: ‘It was an amazing group of actors and it was the best thing that Peter ever did. I can still see it in my mind. I can just see it. It was so good.’<sup>350</sup> Despite the Young Vic’s notable absence from existing performance histories of Beckett’s drama, it is clear that the productions had a significant impact on the cultural memory of critics, practitioners and theatregoers, and in the case of *Endgame*, these enduring images remained vividly in the minds of its audiences.

Thanks to positive attendance figures for *Godot* and *Endgame* from largely young audiences, Dunlop quickly added *Happy Days* to the theatre’s programme in June 1971. Despite this sustained period of programming, existing performance histories of Beckett’s drama in London have neglected the Young Vic’s productions during the 1970s. Greater attention was afforded to the London productions Beckett worked on, such as Billie Whitelaw’s 1973 performance of *Not I* and the NT’s production of *Happy Days* with Peggy Ashcroft in 1975; two performances that will be discussed later in this chapter. Indeed Denise Coffey’s performance in *Happy Days* has been forgotten in the cultural narratives generated by the play, which have concentrated on Brenda Bruce, Renaud, Ashcroft and Whitelaw, despite many supportive responses to her interpretation.<sup>351</sup> Andrew Robertson joined Coffey as Willie, in a familiar cast of Beckett performers at the theatre, for a production that would also tour regional theatres, including the Nuffield Theatre in Southampton and the Harrogate Festival.<sup>352</sup> This production shared the Young Vic’s emphasis on comedy; a decision that divided commentators. While De Jongh thought it ‘robs us of the play’s concern with

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<sup>350</sup> Interview between Matthew McFrederick and Frank Dunlop, 5 November 2015.

<sup>351</sup> Michael Billington references Coffey as one of a number of actresses to play Winnie in his 1979 review of *Happy Days*. See Michael Billington, ‘Happy Days’, *The Guardian*, 9 June 1979, p. 13. Despite Beckett’s lack of involvement in Young Vic productions, James Knowlson notes her performance in relation to meeting Beckett in a Berlin café when a Young Vic tour of *The Taming of The Shrew* coincided with his rehearsals for *Glückliche Tage* with Eva-Katharina Schultz. See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 585.

<sup>352</sup> Both Coffey and Robertson performed in other Beckett productions at the Young Vic. Coffey played Nell in *Endgame* and later W1 in *Play*, while Robertson played Lucky in *Godot* before playing in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Dunlop is credited as directing *Happy Days* in Harrogate with Hugh Hastings playing Willie.

death'<sup>353</sup>, Garry O'Connor argued it 'tries to steer a new path; Denise Coffey emphasises the comic side of the tragi-comedy.'<sup>354</sup> This emphasis accompanied the circus-like atmosphere of Anusia Nieradzik's set, where balloons symbolised clouds against a blue backdrop, with a raked mound of scorched grass. As Rosemary Say said, 'With a predominantly young audience, Peter James has plumped for the humour rather than the underlying tragedy of the situation in his production. Denise Coffey faces up to her marathon role with a perky courage [...]. Such an interpretation, without fear or despair, may lose in depth of feeling but offers its own challenge. I found it perfectly valid.'<sup>355</sup> Coffey's interpretation epitomised the Young Vic's approach to Beckett in its early years. Their productions sought to balance their efforts to programme experimental drama with entertainment for younger audiences. By engaging with the popular performance techniques ranging from clowning to vaudeville, the Young Vic made Beckett's drama more accessible and, in turn, engaged a new generation of theatregoers with his work.

### 3.2.3. Beckett and the grown up Young Vic

The Young Vic's early commitment to Beckett concluded with a multiple bill of *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Act Without Words I*, *Act Without Words II*, *Come and Go* and *Play*. Dunlop's early seasons had introduced a new generation of theatregoers to a wide range of Beckett's dramatic canon and although later directorships of the Young Vic did not programme Beckett with the same frequency, a tradition of staging Beckett can be seen across the history of the Waterloo theatre. Its later productions saw several notable figures from Beckettian and British theatre histories work at the Young Vic across its history, including the San Quentin Drama Workshop (*Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, 1980), Ken Campbell (*Godot*, 1982),

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<sup>353</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, 'Happy Days', *The Guardian*, 3 June 1971.

<sup>354</sup> Garry O'Connor, 'Happy Days', *Financial Times*, 2 June 1971.

<sup>355</sup> Rosemary Say, 'Here Again', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 13 June 1971.



David Thacker (*Godot*, 1989), Peter Brook (*Fragments*, 2007 & 2008) and Juliet Stephenson and Natalie Abrahami (*Happy Days*, 2014 and 2015). The history of Beckett's drama at the Young Vic offers a snapshot of the theatre's forty five year existence. As a theatre it set out with the intentions – as a secondary venue to the NT – to offer inexpensive tickets for classic and experimental dramas to young playgoers. Beckett helped the theatre fulfil this remit, as the most popular playwright in the early years of the theatre. At a time when the theatre was uncertain of its longevity, Beckett's drama was presented and accepted by an overlooked and inexperienced section of spectators. Forty five years later, both Beckett and the Young Vic have grown in reputation, appealing to a wider demographic of theatre-goers in a continually competitive and commercial theatre landscape. This lesser known history has highlighted that by the early 1970s Beckett's drama was being independently produced by energetic companies and emerging theatres within London. The next two sections of this history will return to Beckett's direct involvement in two familiar theatres, however as this section has epitomised there was a growing appetite for Beckett's theatre across London and from experienced and inexperienced theatregoers.

### **3.3. Back to the Court: A striking partnership and a Beckettian mis-match**

As the previous section attests, Beckett's decision to end his UK first option rights agreement with the Royal Court following George Devine's departure was fortuitous in many respects as it allowed the dissemination of his drama to other venues across London. Beckett did however maintain a fondness for the Royal Court and privately spoke of his commitment to the ESC. Anthony Page's direction of *Waiting for Godot* in 1964 was the last Beckett production staged during Devine's era and the next performance following his death was fittingly – with the Francophile Devine in mind – *Oh Les Beaux Jours* in 1969 with Renaud returning to London for a further four performances, following her acclaimed interpretation

for the 1965 World Theatre Season, in a Madeleine Renaud Season at the Royal Court alongside *L'Amante Anglaise* by Marguerite Duras. One year later, the ESC would again programme Beckett's drama, this time under the artistic triumvirate of William Gaskill, Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page. In a production entitled 'Beckett/3', Gaskill and Roger Croucher directed three short Beckett plays, *Play*, *Come and Go* and *Cascando* in the Theatre Upstairs; a new space for Beckett's works at the Royal Court (although it had hosted rehearsals in the past) that was ideal for the intimacy these short pieces arguably demand. The combination would prove a useful prelude for the double bill of *Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape* three years later, with Michael Billington beginning his 1970 review: 'In theory one could hardly imagine anything bleaker than an evening of short plays in which the stage is almost permanently shrouded in darkness, physical movement is rationed to the barest minimum and everything is suggestive of penitential austerity.'<sup>356</sup> Ironically this bleak trio of plays returned in October 1970 for the Royal Court's Come Together Festival, which represented the ESC's intentions to open the Royal Court up to Britain's growing alternative theatre movement. Intriguingly, Gaskill described the aims of Come Together as "trying to create a really popular Festival".<sup>357</sup> This statement suggests that, by 1970, the Royal Court saw Beckett's drama and the Beckett/3 plays as popular, placing it in a Festival that included its first Pop Concert, new plays by Heathcote Williams and Howard Brenton, Ken Campbell's Road Show and the Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre. Impressed by the American influences of the late 60s, such as the Living Theater and Joe Chaikin's Open Theater, Gaskill opened up the Royal Court spaces by removing the stalls in the main theatre, occasionally playing in the round and also using the Theatre Upstairs to create a dynamic series of events within the theatre. He saw the Come Together Festival as an attempt "to

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<sup>356</sup> Michael Billington, 'Bracing darkness', *The Times*, 1 April 1970.

<sup>357</sup> Unknown Author, 'Pop Festival Season at the Royal Court', *The Stage*, 1 October 1970. The Come Together Festival ran from 21 October to 9 November 1970.

house a cross-section of the most interesting new artists under one roof.”<sup>358</sup> In an interview for the Staging Beckett Project he admitted he did not deliberately omit Beckett from his early years as artistic director, arguing, ‘I was very keen to continue working with those writers I had worked with in the earlier days. [...] The continuity of the Court was extraordinary. [...] I don’t think anything [from Beckett] was on offer in 1965.’<sup>359</sup> While *Oh Les Beaux Jours* in 1969 was a visiting company, Beckett/3 re-established the continuity between Beckett’s drama and the Royal Court. These revivals have often been overlooked in favour of original performances to which Beckett made practical contributions, though nonetheless they did show the ESC’s renewed interest in Beckett’s work in the early 1970s.

This context addresses the history of Beckett’s drama at the Royal Court in the intervening years from *Godot* in 1964 to Beckett’s next direct involvement in the theatre with the 1973 production of *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I*, which this section will now reflect upon. Preceding narratives have focused on *Not I* in this double bill and in this account I will re-evaluate both performances. Although *Not I* has received significant attention before, I will return to this performance of the monologue for a number of reasons: the fact that the performance was the first time it was performed in the UK, the few times the play has been staged in London (particularly in comparison with *Krapp’s Last Tape*), the working relationship it cemented between Beckett and Whitelaw and the greater impact this specific performance had on the cultural memory of Beckett in British theatre. Furthermore, the documentation relating to this production makes it one of the most archived performances in the history of Beckett’s drama in London, an archive which has recently been added to through the availability of the Billie Whitelaw Collection at the University of Reading. This case study will draw upon the Whitelaw Collection, as well as her perspective from

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> An AHRC Staging Beckett interview between William Gaskill, Graham Saunders and Matthew McFrederick, Kentish Town, London, 18 October 2013.

interviews and autobiography, and will also examine the role of key collaborators in this performance including Beckett, Anthony Page and Jocelyn Herbert.

*Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I* opened the 1973 Royal Court season on 16 January (previews began on 10 January), in a programme that featured Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*, *Savages* by Christopher Hampton and *The Farm* by David Storey. *Krapp's Last Tape* preceded *Not I* in the programming of the double bill, though whether this was an artistic decision due to the impact of each play or a billing-related decision with Albert Finney – the star of films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *Tom Jones* (1963) – prioritised over Whitelaw, remains unknown. Nonetheless Whitelaw's performance would dominate responses to the plays; a reception I would attribute to their pairings as plays in the double bill. *Krapp's Last Tape* was by 1973 familiar to audiences and critics with a number of revivals since its premiere in 1958, whereas the premiere of *Not I* would demonstrate how Beckett's technical and performative innovations in his later work would push theatre to its limits since earlier work such as *Krapp's Last Tape*. *Not I*'s solitary, spotlighted mouth immersed in darkness rapidly delivering a torrent of words represented one of the most striking and original stage experiences presented in the British theatre to that date. While *Krapp's Last Tape* also proves an intimate experience between Krapp and his watching audience, its slower pace and stiller stage image is a less visceral experience than *Not I*. Hence, I would argue, the experience and originality of *Not I*, as well as the power of Whitelaw's performance, contributed to its greater examination in the critical reviews and audience discourse that followed the performance.<sup>360</sup>

*Not I* arguably cemented Whitelaw's association with Beckett's drama as their friendship and loyalty strengthened with their close collaboration on the monologue, following their previous collaboration on *Play* in 1964. This friendship and mutual interest in

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<sup>360</sup> This was evident in the reviews for the double bill which largely began and concentrated on *Not I* with *Krapp's Last Tape* consigned to a final paragraph.

working together on Beckett's female plays saw Beckett direct and supervise Whitelaw on later productions of *Footfalls*, *Happy Days* and *Rockaby*; productions and images recycled in the dramas 'repository of cultural memory' which make the late plays synonymous with Whitelaw.<sup>361</sup> Since Whitelaw's two performances of *Not I* in 1973 and 1975, the play has had a limited number of productions in the UK and Ireland due to the demanding nature of the text in performance and arguably because of the 'residue of memory' associated with Whitelaw's performance.<sup>362</sup> Ironically, despite her enduring association with the role, Whitelaw reported she was not first choice to play the role, with suggestions that the director Anthony Page wanted Glenda Jackson to play the part. Whitelaw was however Beckett's first choice for the role<sup>363</sup>, and, as it would transpire, despite Page's uncertainty over casting, Whitelaw accepted the role following 'a mutual audition' between her and Page, even though she admitted afterwards that she hoped 'this was one audition I would fail.'<sup>364</sup>

Rehearsals for both plays began on 18 December 1972 under the direction of Page with Beckett's assistance. It was over nine years since Beckett had worked with Page and Whitelaw at the Royal Court and the NT respectively, and inevitably over these years their relationship would change as their personalities, egos, theatrical beliefs and understanding would alter through time. For example, Whitelaw admitted, she 'was not the same actress or indeed the same person who had puzzled over the script of *Play*.'<sup>365</sup> These rehearsals were the first time that Beckett was able to work practically with *Not I* and in many respects this first UK performance represented a theatrical breakthrough at the time.<sup>366</sup> Whitelaw suggested how Beckett's newest play was testing theatrical boundaries by commenting, 'I

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<sup>361</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine*, p. 2.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>363</sup> In a letter from Beckett to Alan Schneider of 5 November 1972, he suggests he did still not know who would play the role of Mouth. See Harmon, p. 287.

<sup>364</sup> Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw... Who He?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p. 116.

<sup>365</sup> Whitelaw, p. 101.

<sup>366</sup> The world premiere of *Not I* was directed by Alan Schneider with Jessica Tandy as Mouth at the Lincoln Center in New York, as part of a Samuel Beckett Festival on 22 November 1972. While Beckett corresponded with Schneider on the performance he did not work practically on the play.

still didn't know whether I'd be capable of doing it. There were no other speaking characters, no interruptions, no pauses, no cues, just this one uninterrupted monologue.<sup>367</sup> Rehearsals for *Not I* were initially led by Page with Beckett rehearsing privately with Whitelaw in the theatre and at her home, before he assumed greater control of the production as his interest in Finney's performance as Krapp waned. Beckett's practical guidance for the role of Mouth signalled the performance method he often advocated, epitomised through his much quoted note, 'Too much colour, no no, too much colour', which for Whitelaw meant 'For God's sake don't act.'<sup>368</sup> Through these instructions, the performance gained in honesty and impact, with Whitelaw believing of Beckett's direction:

He wanted to get to some unconscious centre. Yet the moment I started imposing myself on the text, the moment I became aware of playing the role I realised that I was making a comment on the piece, instead of allowing its essence to come through. I think I came to terms with this problem by simply concentrating on learning the lines. Then I thought, let what happens happen.<sup>369</sup>

Both Beckett and Whitelaw's practical approaches to *Not I* can be understood better from the Billie Whitelaw Collection, which contains a number of key annotated typescripts and holograph notes Beckett made concerning the play – notes that suggest its narrative and themes and highlight the practical signposts Beckett gave Whitelaw to make the play more comprehensible and learnable for an actress approaching such a dense text.<sup>370</sup> Evidently written during his stay in London at the Hyde Park Hotel (the notes are handwritten on the hotel's headed paper), Beckett saw the monologue divided into five acts:

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<sup>367</sup> Whitelaw, p. 119.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>370</sup> Letters retained in the Collection suggest Beckett and Whitelaw did not correspond before *Not I*, though this is dependent on what Whitelaw has preserved in her archive. Certainly their letters were infrequent (especially in comparison to other correspondents) with few notes concerning *Not I*.

1. Till incident in field ending “...found herself in the dark” (top of p. 2)
2. Till inset of words ending “...imagine...words were coming.” (top of p. 4)
3. Till false alarm of feeling coming back ending “...ha...so far” bottom of p. 4
4. Till thought perhaps something she had to tell ending “had to... tell...could that be it?...something she had to tell” ending p. 6 l. 17
5. Till end<sup>371</sup>

By breaking the play into acts, these notes suggest how Page, Whitelaw and Beckett may have structured rehearsals of the play and how Whitelaw may have been encouraged to learn her lines for the play, as for Whitelaw her ‘major problem’ was ‘learning the bloody thing’.<sup>372</sup> The difficulty posed by learning the lines would prove a recurring issue for Whitelaw, who recalled yelling at the end of one rehearsal, ‘This stuff is unlearnable. It’s just impossible to learn it and be precise. *And go at speed.*’<sup>373</sup>

As well as the challenges the text presented to Whitelaw, there were other performance issues to consider with the play. Contrary to recent interpretations of *Not I*, such as Lisa Dwan’s 2013 performance at the Royal Court, the 1973 and 1975 productions included the role of the Auditor which was played by Brian Miller and Melvyn Hastings respectively. The Auditor has proved to be a sometimes contentious invention by Beckett, partly due to the way it can distract from what Mouth is saying, its relationship to Mouth and the difficulty involved in lighting the figure on stage. Whitelaw said of this role, Beckett ‘couldn’t get what he had in his mind’s eye to work on the stage.’<sup>374</sup> Beckett somewhat agreed with this statement as he noted many of the intricacies involved with the figure: ‘There was a lot of trouble with the silent observer in the play who has to raise his arms. It’s

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<sup>371</sup> Beckett, Directorial notes for *Not I*, Undated [1972 – 73]. UoR, Billie Whitelaw Collection, BW A/2/3. Beckett’s notes for *Not I* divide the play into five separate acts. He begins by outlining the length of each act and follows by breaking down each section into more specific detail.

<sup>372</sup> Whitelaw, p. 120.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

very difficult to get the timing right.<sup>375</sup> Little written or visual evidence exists to contribute to the analysis of this role in the production, though set designs by Jocelyn Herbert characterise the difficulty involved in illuminating the Auditor, as the undeterminable figure was dressed in black djellabah (that appears slightly grey in Herbert's drawing in Figure 14), positioned downstage right on an invisible podium four foot high and faintly lit in a blacked out auditorium.



Figure 14 Jocelyn Herbert set design for *Not I*, Royal Court Theatre, London, 1973. Credit: UAL, Wimbledon, JH4390.

The part was largely overlooked in the play's critical reception and when the BBC filmed *Not I*, Beckett and its director, Tristram Powell, decided to omit the Auditor from the film. Despite the apparently simple demands of the role, Beckett worked dutifully in rehearsals with Brian Miller in 1973 as he tried to attain the image he had in mind. In 1975, when the role was recast, similar demands were expected, with the casting process leading to

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<sup>375</sup> Courtney, p. 87.



an unlikely and amusing introduction to Beckett's drama for the then Royal Court assistant director and later comedian and actor Mel Smith who recalled:

stage right there's this sort of cloaked figure who was so dimly lit that people often didn't even notice he was there [...] There were about 3 occasions during the play when he had to go like this. [*Smith moves his arms spread apart up and down*] Just about 2 or 3 times in the show like this. [*More similar movements*] And I was assistant director on the show and we spent the whole day, the *whole* day auditioning people for the guy in the cloak, it was unbelievable. In the audition we had a queue of quite good actors coming in and I used to sit stage left doing the whole monologue, you know [mumbles incomprehensibly] like that, while the actors used to stand there going [*Makes arm movements again*]. It was the most embarrassing thing I've ever done in my whole life.<sup>376</sup>

Although Smith's story offers an amusing anecdote on the role in retrospect, it was treated seriously by both creative and cast members of the company during performances of the play.

Despite the fact *Not I* showed one of the most minimal stage images ever presented in the theatre, many technical issues arose in order to achieve this concise, powerful image. Many of the demands the play placed on lighting, costume and set encapsulated the intricate facets of the play in performance. Both plays were designed by a team that included Herbert and lighting designers Rory Dempster and Jack Raby. Herbert was already an experienced designer of Beckett's drama having worked on *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Play* and *Come and Go* and as one of his best friends in Britain, she was someone he trusted entirely. As well as being a meticulous designer, she provided Whitelaw with vital support during difficult moments of her process and as her reflections in *Jocelyn Herbert: A Theatre Workbook*

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<sup>376</sup> 'Mel Smith: I've Sort of Done Things'. BBC2, 24 December 2013, 9.45pm. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMgMLLBvcjk> [accessed 22 September 2016].

highlight, *Not I* demanded careful negotiation between all performance elements in order for the play to achieve its dramatic effectiveness. For example, she noted of the difficulties in realising the play's visual demands, '*Not I* was really a technical problem to find a way to black Billie Whitelaw's face up and light her mouth since the whole point is to have the rest of the face and body invisible.'<sup>377</sup> Furthermore, she had an acute sense for the play's mutual design and performance rigours, encapsulated by her initial suggestion to Whitelaw that she sit when performing the piece. Whitelaw admitted opting to deliver the lines standing in pitched dark; a situation that gave her 'vertigo and sensory deprivation and [made her] hyperventilate'.<sup>378</sup> Following this experience it was decided that Whitelaw would deliver the monologue strapped and seated into what photographs show was akin to an execution style chair.<sup>379</sup> These images show her mouth was the only area of her body not covered in black as she wore a large black hooded cape with a mask over her eyes. As preparations towards the performance developed, it transpired that the play demanded a closer collaboration between the technical team and Whitelaw, as unforeseen problems arose with the play:

What was happening in performances was that my head started to shake; all the energy was going into the back of my head and neck. When I was building up speed [...] my head started to shake violently, my mouth was juddering in and out of Jack Raby's very precise lighting'.<sup>380</sup>

As a result of these unanticipated technical aspects, Herbert and Raby realised a number of specific performance facets required a greater attention to detail. Because Whitelaw moved in and out of Raby and Dempster's light during the delivery of the monologue, Herbert had to add two foam clamps either side of Whitelaw's head in order for

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<sup>377</sup> Courtney, p. 87.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>379</sup> These photographs were taken by John Haynes during rehearsals. See Ibid., pp. 90 – 91.

<sup>380</sup> Whitelaw, p. 125.

her mouth to be precisely lit throughout the delivery of Mouth's monologue. Whitelaw's mouth was lit by a miniature spotlight, which was focused on the mouth prior to every performance, as the presentation of the play hinged on the meticulousness of its technical details.

Many of the difficulties and resolutions that contributed to this production were only narrated years after the performance and in the play's immediate critical reception, these contributing technical factors were very often overlooked by critics as they sought to describe the play, performance and experience. Nine years had passed since *Play* divided the opinions of critics, attempting to comprehend the radical experimentation of Beckett's condensed playlet. In 1973 the common consensus for *Not I* was praise, with John Barber describing the play as 'extraordinary' before stating, 'The ultimate in dramatic attenuation must surely be a 12-minute monologue written for a speaking mouth.'<sup>381</sup> The startling stage image had a vivid effect on Billington who noted, 'this is one of those haunting Beckettian images that takes instant root in the imagination exactly like the open-mouthed scream of a Francis Bacon cardinal.'<sup>382</sup>

The positive reception *Not I* garnered and the subsequent perspectives produced meant Whitelaw's performance was established as part of the play's identity. These perceptions characterise Postlewait's argument that 'Often, because of the attention it receives at the time of its occurrence, the event achieves a definite and substantial identity, one that it then maintains in the future. It also, quite often, then serves to exclude other events from visibility and consideration.'<sup>383</sup> Whitelaw's performance in *Not I* has maintained its identity through film, its educational outreach and the recycling of images and perspectives on her performance in revivals of the play. As a result of *Not I*'s success, other Beckett performances in London during these years – recontextualised in this narrative – were less

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<sup>381</sup> John Barber, 'Beckett's two preludes to death', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 January 1973.

<sup>382</sup> Michael Billington, 'Beckett', *The Guardian*, 17 January 1973.

<sup>383</sup> Postlewait, p. 249

visible in subsequent histories addressing this era. *Krapp's Last Tape* partnered *Not I* in the Royal Court double bill and was an example of how the narratives constructed for *Not I* overshadowed other plays. The revival of *Krapp's Last Tape*, on the other hand, was only briefly discussed by critics and the absence of Finney's perspective on the play suggests the neglected and unloved status of this production.<sup>384</sup>

By 1973, Beckett had worked on two seminal productions of *Krapp's Last Tape* as a supervisor and director with two actors he greatly admired: Patrick Magee and Martin Held. From the beginning it would appear that Beckett and Finney's contrasting approaches to *Krapp* would leave their working relationship strained. Beckett thought Finney 'wasn't musical'<sup>385</sup> and in an interview with Ronald Hayman, Anthony Page outlined the further differences between the two practitioners: 'as Sam sees it the discipline is one of movement really, of being very very still and letting the intensity of the play come right through very simple ways of moving. Which is very alien to anything Albert's ever done'.<sup>386</sup> Finney was then a highly experienced actor and undoubtedly a key draw as part of the Royal Court's 1973 season, though it is clear from his rapport with Beckett and his approach to Beckett's drama, he was not "a Beckett actor". Whitelaw recalled her conversation with Finney over the difficulties he had with Beckett in her autobiography:

One night Albert rang me up: 'You seem to be getting on with this man [...] but I'm having problems. You know the way I work, I take all the different paints out of the cupboard, I mix the colours together. If they're not right, I shove them all back and take out a new lot.'<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Finney was partly responsible for this as he was reluctant to talk about the production. In a letter to James Knowlson on 21 March 1978, Finney wrote: 'I'm afraid I have to say no to your request, mainly because I get many such requests and always have to say no on principle. If I told you my feelings about Sam Beckett, I should have nothing to put in my Memoirs.' See UoR, Knowlson, Folder entitled Albert Finney, JEK B/4/8.

<sup>385</sup> Whitelaw, p. 121.

<sup>386</sup> Ronald Hayman, 'Working with Samuel Beckett', Unknown publication and date.

<sup>387</sup> Whitelaw, p. 121.

Whitelaw did not agree with Beckett's opinion of Finney as an actor, but Beckett's general dissatisfaction with his performance lay with his over-expressive portrayal of Krapp, a discontent raised by James Knowlson who referred to Beckett falling asleep during rehearsals.<sup>388</sup> Further negative comments are recorded by Beckett in his letters and while Beckett initially advised on the performance, he would later opt out of *Krapp's Last Tape* and concentrate on *Not I*; perhaps another reason why Whitelaw's performance garnered a greater emphasis in previous narratives with respect to the double bill. Knowlson argued the production was 'disastrous' arguing 'Finney tried too hard to compensate, drawing in vain on his entire palette of colours as an actor.'<sup>389</sup> Just as Knowlson supported Beckett's criticism of Finney, there is little evidence to be found praising Finney's performance, which was largely the subject of comparison with both Whitelaw and previous performances of *Krapp's Last Tape*. These comparisons suggested how the two plays offered contrasting impacts, both dramatically and performatively, with Robert Brustein highlighting, 'Finney is considerably less effective in the companion piece at the Court'.<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, the timing of this revival followed the recent performance of *Das Letzte Band* with Martin Held, as part of the aforementioned World Theatre Seasons, a performance which was recalled in the reviews of John Barber, Michael Billington and Irving Wardle; all of whom 'wouldn't put Albert Finney's Krapp in the same class as that of Martin Held' as they wrote their reviews.<sup>391</sup> Barber, for example commented, 'Finney plays Krapp as a petulant failure, unrecognisable under a grey wig and beneath a thick stubble. He extracts neither the comedy nor the tragedy that German actor Martin Held formed in the part.'<sup>392</sup> Indeed while these comparisons became a focal aspect of their review for *Krapp's Last Tape*, J. W. Lambert highlighted the

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<sup>388</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 596. Beckett even held up 'his little finger [and] announc[ed] that there was more poetry in his fingertip than there was in Finney's entire body.'

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 596.

<sup>390</sup> Robert Brustein, 'Masterpiece in Chelsea', Unknown Publication, Unknown date.

<sup>391</sup> Michael Billington, 'Beckett', *The Guardian*, 17 January 1973.

<sup>392</sup> John Barber, 'Beckett's two preludes to death', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 January 1973.

references by his colleagues before acknowledging, ‘I must apologise for the fact that much as I admired Herr Held from the outside, my modest German is not good enough to justify any such comparative assessment.’<sup>393</sup> Thus, while Finney’s performance as Krapp may have dissatisfied its playwright and London critics, the timing of this performance meant Finney was competing with an original work as part of the same theatrical event and against a strong residue of cultural memory from which comparisons would inevitably stem. As a result, Finney’s performance evoked strong memories of Held’s interpretation of the same role with many critics feeling the need to compare the two productions, working to the detriment of the reception of Finney’s performance.

Overall the general critical admiration for the double-bill was supported by its success at the box office, as it proved the most popular Beckett production in the Royal Court’s history up to that date and the highest grossing Royal Court production since the star-studded cast of *Uncle Vanya* in 1970. Quantitatively, the double bill played to 97% of the theatre’s capacity, which accounted for approximately 20% of the Royal Court’s box office for 1973.<sup>394</sup> Undoubtedly, the production owed its success to an accumulation of factors, including its positive critical reception (particularly in the case of *Not I*), its star casting, *Not I*’s British premiere, as well as the added interest in Beckett’s work following his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. This success arguably contributed to the Royal Court’s decision to re-stage *Not I* in 1975 – this time in a double bill with Athol Fugard’s *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immortality Act* – and perhaps contributed to the Royal Court’s decision to mark Beckett’s 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday with a season of his plays. Prior to this season – which I will discuss in my next chapter – Beckett would himself return to London for another major production of his drama, as the NT’s new artistic director Peter Hall would direct Peggy Ashcroft in *Happy Days*.

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<sup>393</sup> J. W. Lambert, ‘Faces of Humanity’, *Sunday Times*, 21 January 1973.

<sup>394</sup> Findlater, p. 251.

### 3.4. Back to the National: *Happy Days* with Peter and Peggy

By 1974 both the RSC and the NT were undergoing significant inter-institutional changes that would have a ripple effect across the landscape of London theatres. The NT was awaiting the completion of its three new auditoria on the Southbank and was in theory entering its final year at the Old Vic. Meanwhile, complications arose as to what would happen to the Young Vic with the National's move and whether the Young Vic's lease on The Cut would be renewed. These decisions would be influenced by an important change at management level with Hall appointed the NT's new artistic director in 1973. Hall's move from the Royal Shakespeare Company to the National left a complicated inter-institutional undercurrent, which would prove a contributing factor to Beckett's drama on the London stage. He authorised the independence of the Young Vic from the National, and brought *Happy Days* to the National at both the Old Vic and on the Southbank in a production he would direct himself. This original idea for staging *Happy Days* was planned for the Aldwych Theatre, as Beckett's letter to Alan Schneider on 28 May 1972 suggests, though as a result of Hall switching theatres he brought the idea to the Old Vic, where he would notably cast Dame Peggy Ashcroft – the renowned RSC actress and member of the RSC Directorate – in *Happy Days*.

The National Theatre's production of *Happy Days* represented another milestone in the history of Beckett's drama in London as it showed how his drama was being re-embraced by the largest subsidised theatre in London with a well-renowned actress and director duo at the height of their careers just over 20 years from when it was difficult for *Waiting for Godot* to attract actors and directors of a then similar pedigree. Plans to stage *Happy Days* at the National were discussed as early as June 1972, with Beckett writing to Jocelyn Herbert: 'Vague talk of Peggy Ashcroft in Happy Days directed by Hall.'<sup>395</sup> Very often, as I have

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<sup>395</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 12 June 1972. UoR, Beckett, HER/056.

previously discussed, Beckett would highlight to friends or collaborators the noteworthy actors linked to proposed productions of his drama, though on many occasions this “talk” remains in the archive as a “what might have been” moment in terms of theatre history. In this instance this ‘vague talk’ would materialise, however Ashcroft was upset in the aftermath of Hall’s decision to move theatres, described as ‘the one real crisis’ in their friendship with Ashcroft telling Hall “You can’t go and compete with the child you’ve created”.<sup>396</sup> After this initial disgruntlement and some convincing, Ashcroft would later accept Hall’s decision and work at the National herself, with the official position regarding her role as Winnie addressed in the play’s programme, ‘At present on loan to the National Theatre from the Royal Shakespeare Company, where she is an associate artist and director, her integrity is unchallenged. She is of the theatre and for the theatre.’<sup>397</sup> Beyond the inter-institutional politics, *Happy Days* was an important play for Ashcroft to be cast in, as beyond her classical work she had started to take a keen interest in contemporary drama performing in Harold Pinter’s *Landscape* (1969) and *A Slight Ache* (1973) and *A Delicate Balance* (1969) by Edward Albee. She remarked upon this importance in an interview with Katharine Worth, saying: ‘Playing Winnie [...] was a major event for me. I had always wanted to play the part; in fact, I was slightly miffed that George Devine didn’t ask me to do it when he directed the play at the Royal Court Theatre, the first British production.’<sup>398</sup> According to Billington’s biography, this was because he ‘didn’t think [Ashcroft] would want to.’<sup>399</sup> By 1974 Ashcroft was a *grand dame* of British theatre, the first actor honoured by the British government to

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<sup>396</sup> Michael Billington, *Peggy Ashcroft* (John Murray: London, 1988), p. 233.

<sup>397</sup> Programme for *Happy Days*, National Theatre, 1974. This programme also included an extract from *Proust*, of which Beckett wrote to Ben Duncan (Publications Editor at the National Theatre) on 22 March 1975: ‘I dislike that Proust extract extremely and would not have agreed to its conclusion if Calder and Boyars had consulted me. It is too late now, and in any case of little importance, so let us forget it.’ See UoR, Beckett, BC MS 4871.

<sup>398</sup> ‘Interview with Dame Peggy Ashcroft’ by Katharine Worth in *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>399</sup> Billington, p. 237.



perform in Beckett's plays and contrary to Devine's beliefs was "happy when the opportunity came [her] way."<sup>400</sup>

Hall was also interested in Beckett's work having gained his major theatre breakthrough directing the British premiere of *Waiting for Godot*. During his time at the RSC he had programmed *Endgame* and *Act Without Words II* in 1964, after which he would write to Beckett about the possibility of his plays forming part of the RSC's permanent repertory. Although this latter plan did not materialise, they were on better terms than their early correspondence suggests and by 1974 both Hall and Beckett were vastly more experienced in the theatre.<sup>401</sup> Beckett was enthusiastic at the prospect of Ashcroft taking on the role epitomised by his willingness to join Hall and Ashcroft for three weeks of rehearsals in London ahead of his rehearsals for *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller Theater in December.<sup>402</sup> His desire to contribute to the play's success was indeed characterised by the production notebook he made in preparation for the rehearsals where his presence proved both useful and, at the same time, a source of irritation for Ashcroft.<sup>403</sup> As was often the case when he revisited a play, his reflections prompted cuts and alterations, as he grew to dislike certain sections of the text, saw ways to improve its rhythm or found his stage directions had practical limitations for specific actors or technical demands. One major cut Beckett had in mind concerned the parasol catching fire, which annoyed both Ashcroft and Hall. Ashcroft saw this as an integral moment in the play and saying of this scenario, 'Peter Hall persuaded him not to [cut it], and I'm sure he was right. It would have been a terrible loss, not just to Winnie's part (though I would certainly have been sad to lose it) but to the whole play. It's such a wonderful moment of theatre when the parasol catches fire and burns up, so

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<sup>400</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 11.

<sup>401</sup> Craig, et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 575.

<sup>402</sup> Rehearsals for *Happy Days* took place from 13 October to 4 November 1974.

<sup>403</sup> In advance of attending rehearsals Beckett had spent the summer in Tangier preparing and reassessing *Happy Days* at the National and *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller.

unexpected and comical.’<sup>404</sup> Ashcroft’s comments reflect her interest in leaving the play as it was written, and were matched by Hall who professed his private dissatisfaction in his diary, writing:

This he said had never worked. [...] Sam has had trouble about that all over the world [...] He now asks that the parasol merely smokes and the material melts away like some kind of plastic under heat. He also surprisingly, wants to cut an entire page of dialogue relating to the parasol. This disturbed Peggy because it is good and she learnt it. And it also disturbed me because I think he’s only cutting it out of a memory of all the difficulties of the past.<sup>405</sup>

Despite these differences of opinion, Beckett’s suggested cuts were not adhered to in the performance. While these proposed cuts represent a less effective intervention from Beckett’s continuous creative process, he did make other useful contributions to rehearsals, which was why Hall and Ashcroft had requested his attendance. Hall wanted Beckett to go through Winnie’s physical routines which involved her taking possessions out of her handbag, including details such as ‘which hand she uses and what she does with her hat and glasses.’<sup>406</sup> Hall described how Beckett’s meticulous attention to detail aided their performance, by noting: ‘for a creative actor, and particularly for Peggy Ashcroft, it was a dreadful corseting. It was a terrifying experience but it gave us what was in Beckett’s head. It also gave Peggy a month after he was gone to make it her own and adjust it.’<sup>407</sup> As a result of this established choreography and subconscious understanding of these detailed movements, Ashcroft was free to intertwine Winnie’s many stage directions with her lengthy monologues.

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<sup>404</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 12.

<sup>405</sup> John Goodwin, *Peter Hall’s Diaries. The Story of a Dramatic Battle* (Hamish Hamilton: London, 1983), pp. 123-124.

<sup>406</sup> Billington, p. 238.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

The detailed preparations undertaken by Hall, Ashcroft and Beckett led to a performance that was positively received by London's critics and became part of the NT's repertory, touring the UK and Canada. However, as Ashcroft later admitted, 'I'm not sure if Beckett would have altogether approved of my interpretation.'<sup>408</sup> Despite his attendance at three weeks of rehearsals, Ashcroft believed Beckett would have disliked the "humanized" attributes she gave to Winnie, as she compared her version to the rhythmic and taut vocal demands he placed on Billie Whitelaw in the role in 1979.<sup>409</sup> For an actress like Ashcroft who was about to celebrate her half century on the stage, she 'felt a need to work in terms of character: why did Winnie use certain rhythms, what did it tell about her?' were some of the questions she sought to answer when engaged with the role.<sup>410</sup> Indeed, her inspiration for the accent she adopted as Winnie would stem from Beckett as she heard the voice with a distinctive Irish lilt, telling Beckett:

I know what Winnie's voice sounds like.

Oh, how?

Like you.

Oh I don't know about that.<sup>411</sup>

She found this decision was justified as she continued to develop her sensitivities towards Winnie's monologue and its delivery as she 'found there were all sorts of little turns of speech which seemed to come more easily in an Irish rhythm.'<sup>412</sup>

Ashcroft's Irish rhythm as Winnie played its part in the Old Vic's repertoire until the National Theatre moved to its new home at the Southbank. This move to the Southbank saw 'the culmination of a tragic-comic, 138-year-long campaign to establish such a building in

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<sup>408</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 12.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

London' and yet another landmark moment in the history of British theatre, which Beckett's drama was present in, as *Happy Days* was the first play performed in the Lyttelton Theatre.<sup>413</sup> This decision signified the respect Beckett's drama had established in London by the mid-1970s. As Billington poignantly surmised, he was struck by Ashcroft's 'buoyancy, optimism and musicality' in the role and saw it fitting that 'the National Theatre should begin its life not with some trumpeted gala event but with Britain's leading actress appearing in a play about survival against the odds by a great contemporary writer.'<sup>414</sup> Through this significant programming gesture, it was evident that Beckett's drama was more naturally accepted by British theatre cultures, as *Happy Days* signified how the nation's largest subsidised theatre was willing to endorse his drama at a key stage of its own development in a production starring one the UK's leading actresses and directed by its artistic director.

### **3.5. Conclusion: 'consider myself free': Beckett's drama in London from 1965-1976**

This chapter has shown the various waves of Beckett productions following his decision to end the formal partnership between his drama and the Royal Court. This newly discovered freedom proved a pivotal decision for the development of his plays in performance as it opened up his *oeuvre* to a greater range of theatres, directors, actors and audiences across London. By doing so I would argue Beckett enhanced his reputation, versatility and popularity as a dramatist by the mid-1970s, as productions of his drama ranged from foreign language performances to specific performances for young people with productions staged in venues from the West End to Waterloo. Furthermore, this chapter has re-contextualised the role Beckett's drama had during significant moments in British theatre history as his drama was present at the World Theatre Seasons, the advent of the Young Vic and the growth and progress of the National Theatre. His intentions to 'consider himself free' meant his work

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<sup>413</sup> Billington, *Peggy Ashcroft*, p. 244

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

underwent a transition period over these years, where new creative teams and actors interpreted his largely canonised work. However the legacies of his previous collaborations also continued, as he returned to the Royal Court where he would work again with Anthony Page, Jocelyn Herbert and Billie Whitelaw, while Peter Hall resumed his connection with Beckett's work, practitioners who contributed to many of the most salient images and performances associated with Beckett. Through the work of these practitioners it was possible to see Beckett's aesthetic development on the London stage. From the early uncertain and cluttered stagings to the bold, blacked out minimalism presented in *Not I*, it was evident how his diverse canon was redefining theatre for audiences in Britain and the way they received and experienced theatre.

If the years from 1965 to 1976 consolidated Beckett's reputation within London, I would argue the next phase of this history strengthened Beckett's standing in London theatres through the important productions and partnerships involving his drama. His plays continued diffusing across the city's theatres, as his work was performed from Chalk Farm to Hammersmith. These fourteen years saw new short Beckett plays premiere in London, celebrations of his *opus* – with 70<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> birthday seasons dedicated to his plays – and significant Beckett directed performances at the Royal Court and at his new alternative London theatre home, Riverside Studios. Chapter 4 will reflect on Beckett's final collaborations in three London theatres where his work was significantly staged between 1976 and 1989.

#### 4. Beckett's "final bout" in London: Old and New Homes, Companies and Havens (1976-1989)

From October 1974 to March 1975 Beckett was directly involved as a supervisor or director on three major productions of his work in London, Berlin and Paris: *Happy Days* at the National Theatre (NT) London, *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller Theater Berlin and *Pas Moi* and *La Dernière Bande* at the Théâtre d'Orsay Paris. Prior to the anticipated demands of these productions, he wrote to Alan Schneider, 'Far too much theatre for my liking. No doubt the final bout.'<sup>415</sup> Beckett's correspondence to friends and collaborators often revealed his growing disinclination with theatre, partly due to the energy he exerted in shaping his productions. However, if he felt these three performances would mark his final theatrical engagements, he would soon realise that his 'final bout' in the theatre would continue for much longer than anticipated, particularly as far as London theatres were concerned.

Beckett's apathetic attitude towards his future theatre activity contrasted with the enthusiasm of theatres, directors, practitioners, companies and audiences, who sought to stage, produce and see his drama afresh in the late 1970s and 1980s. As the Staging Beckett Database reveals, his drama was growing in popularity over this time as his work was staged in new and more familiar venues. Beckett may have suggested he was finished working in the theatre, though as this late phase attests, it was a highly productive and important period for the practical understanding of his work, which would have lasting legacies for his drama. London theatres played a prominent role in Beckett's late theatre activity, where familiar practical relationships were reignited, new bonds were established and seminal productions of his plays were staged. I would argue the impact of Beckett's drama on London theatre cultures over these years was most evident through his collaborations at the Royal Court,

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<sup>415</sup> Harmon., p. 320.

Riverside Studios and the NT. This chapter will concentrate on the Beckettian performance that unfolded at these three key venues, discussing their theatrical contexts of the time and the role Beckett played in their programming and heritage. I will explore how the performances were created and the reception and documentation of the events. As many of the events involved in this history proved notable cultural moments, it will also be important to examine the legacies that were stimulated as a result of Beckett's collaborations with the venue. While this chapter will concentrate on performances at these three venues, I acknowledge that there are other fascinating and lesser known productions, such as Donald Howarth's South African production of *Godot* at the Old Vic in 1981, that I will be unable to cover in detail from this period. Instead, I will conclude by reflecting on the rich fabric of performances that contributed to the broader performance tradition of staging Beckett in London over these years. I will now recommence this investigation by returning to Royal Court; the London theatre where Beckett's drama was most consistently staged during his lifetime.

#### **4.1. Beckett's continuity at the Court: Sustained partnerships**

During the mid-1970s the Royal Court experienced a significant phase of management instability as its directorship changed from Oscar Lewenstein (1972-1975) to the Artistic Directorship duo of Robert Kidd and Nicholas Wright (1975-1977) and then later to Stuart Burge (1977-1979). Despite the upheaval in leadership and the variability of its artistic programming, Beckett remained a sustained part of the Court's artistic vision in the 1970s. Following the programming of *Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape* and the revival of *Not I* in 1975, Beckett's drama returned to the Court in 1976 as both Kidd and Wright were conscious of Beckett's role in the artistic heritage of the Court and that 1976 coincided with his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday; an occasion they celebrated through an extended season of his works that suggested

his position as a canonised writer.<sup>416</sup> Wright and Kidd met Beckett in Paris in 1975 to discuss their plans for the season that would eventually include performances of *Warten auf Godot*, *Endgame*, *Play*, *Footfalls* and *That Time*, and, although certain aspects of the programme transpired five months prior to the season, in reflection it was exciting for a number of reasons. Firstly, the season included the world premieres of *Footfalls* and *That Time*; the first world premiere of his work in London since *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1958. Secondly, it showcased Beckett's international collaborations by including the celebrated Schiller Theater production of *Warten auf Godot* which Beckett directed in Berlin in 1975. And in addition to these highlights, the programme allowed Beckett to renew his collaborations with practitioners he had so successfully collaborated with in the past, such as Donald McWhinnie, Patrick Magee and Billie Whitelaw.

Many of the plays staged in this season merit discussion in this history due to the divergent programming, the practitioners involved and the impact these performances had on London theatre cultures, the traditions of the Royal Court and practical considerations towards Beckett's drama. In order to examine a wider range of specific plays, performances and practitioners in appropriate depth, as well as other venues and demographics in London later on in this chapter, this section will minimise its discussion of *Play* and *Endgame*, due to the greater attention given to these plays at earlier and later points in this thesis. Therefore, I will begin this section by focusing on the Schiller Theater production of *Warten auf Godot* which Beckett directed. This performance represents the best known foreign language production of Beckett's drama staged in London (following on from the lesser known performances of *Oh Les Beaux Jours*, *Das Letzte Band* and *Endspiel* as part of Peter Daubeny's World Theatre Seasons), in one of the best documented and celebrated realisations of *Godot*. Following this discussion, I will also evaluate the first productions of

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<sup>416</sup> Conversation between Matthew McFrederick and Nicholas Wright, 26 November 2014.



*Footfalls* and *That Time*, due to the originality of these plays in performance, Beckett's close collaborations with many of his favourite practitioners, as well as the limited performance histories that exist on this production and the limited number of times these two plays (in particular *That Time*) have been staged in London. In addition to analysing the 1976 Beckett season, I will address how Stuart Burge's directorship added to the legacy of Beckettian productions at the Court by reviving *Happy Days* in 1979; a revival directed by Beckett and featuring Whitelaw as Winnie in what would prove to be his final vision of the play and the final Royal Court production he was involved in.

#### **4.1.1. Beckett's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Season**

The Royal Court's dedication and interest in staging Beckett's drama was epitomised by its presentation of a season of Beckett plays in honour of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in conjunction with the theatre's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations during what was a difficult phase for the British theatre economy. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, more money was available to theatres across the country from the then Labour government, with the Royal Court benefitting from an increased Arts Council grant and from West End transfers, which, according to Wright, were subsequently 'built into the annual income of the Royal Court'.<sup>417</sup> In contrast, Kidd and Wright began their tenure at the end of 'the first year in which the West End income had failed [resulting in a deficit of £47,000]' and with a changing national economy.<sup>418</sup> Furthermore, they inherited the Court with higher expectations of economic success, as Lewenstein had overseen a number of financial successes with productions such as *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973) and *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1976). This success would raise the theatre's expectations and the financial difficulties that followed, amongst other issues, would contribute to their short tenure. On paper their seasons had the hallmarks of

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<sup>417</sup> Little and McLaughlin, p. 179.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

strong programming, though the plays did not have the mainstream appeal of the theatre's previous successes. These seasons included new work in association with Joint Stock with *Yesterday's News* (1976) and Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), as well as new plays by Edward Bond (*The Fool*, 1975), David Hare (*Teeth 'n' Smiles*, 1975), Christopher Hampton (*Treats*, 1975) and its Beckett season.<sup>419</sup> Although some productions offered much artistic merit and some financial success, Wright and Kidd's directorship suffered from disappointing box office returns, with plays, including *Small Change* (1976) by Peter Gill and *Devils' Island* (1977) by Tony Bicat, proving notable flops. Furthermore, staging Bond's *The Fool*, in particular, proved a financial mishap for a theatre of the Royal Court's size, as its 22 cast members and 70 costumes contributed to an outlay of £18,649 making it until that date 'the most expensive in the Court's history'.<sup>420</sup> Ultimately their directorship was short lived and attributed to 'a growing deficit, rising internal tensions, and pressure from the Arts Council and the ESC Council.'<sup>421</sup>

Despite the trouble the Royal Court experienced in this phase of its history, its 1976 Beckett season may be reflected upon as a significant event in this performance history of Beckett's drama in London, due to its originality and strong programming, not to mention Beckett's direct involvement with seminal practitioners connected to his *oeuvre*. Beckett's own Schiller Theater production of *Warten auf Godot* began the Royal Court's tribute on 22 April, nine days after Beckett's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. The decision to invite the Schiller Theater company was an unusual step given the Court's objectives towards new writing, though the performance was welcomed by those who saw it, despite accruing disappointing attendance

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<sup>419</sup> *Teeth n' Smiles* and *Treats* were later transferred to the Wyndham's Theatre and Mayfair Theatre, respectively, though with limited financial success.

<sup>420</sup> Little and McLaughlin, p. 182.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180. Wright surmised of their tenure, 'Perhaps it was a good thing that it fell apart. We didn't get on, and we irritated each other, which wasn't healthy at all. We spent too much money and kept having rows. It was an unhappy time.' *Ibid.*

figures of 53%.<sup>422</sup> The Schiller production of *Godot* occupies a revered position in the performance histories of Beckett's drama and many varied publications have contributed to its documentation, including a rehearsal diary by its assistant director Walter Asmus (1977), the McMillan and Knowlson edited *Theatrical Notebook* (1994) and David Bradby's *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* (2001). This account will concentrate on its staging at the Royal Court and its British reception rather than revisiting these important contributions to its history.



Figure 15 Samuel Beckett discusses *Warten auf Godot* with actors from the Schiller Theater Berlin during its tour to the Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976. Credit: V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Douglas Jeffrey Collection.

Plans to bring the Schiller Theater production to London were in place by 1975, and although Beckett agreed to its inclusion, he did raise reservations about the production transferring to the Royal Court with Kidd, Wright and Herbert, and even suggested to Herbert that they produce 'a new English Godot with some director uninfluenced by Berlin

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<sup>422</sup> This production opened at the Schiller Theatre on 8 March 1975. Box Office figures are taken from: Findlater, p. 252.

production.’<sup>423</sup> His scepticism was provoked by his knowledge of the Court’s theatre space, as he was aware that his open and expansive Schiller *Godot* contrasted with the compact stage at the Court. He expressed these doubts animatedly to Ruby Cohn, writing, ‘What Court stage will do to Godot I dread – dread! – to think – think!’<sup>424</sup> Beckett’s comments suggest how he cared for the Schiller production and the pride he had in a production that he directed with the utmost precision in Berlin. Intriguingly, when the production transferred to the Royal Court stage, the results, according to the production’s assistant director Walter Asmus were helpful rather than damaging. As Asmus commented about the tour:

Beckett once said, *Godot* wants a large stage, a lot of space around it and that was the case in the Schiller Theater. But I felt at the Royal Court, it gained in concentration and naturally it would speed up a little bit as the crossings were not so long. In the Schiller Theater to cross from the stone to the tree took much longer than at the Royal Court. From the stone to the tree at the Royal Court was five metres, and the Schiller Theater it was twelve metres. I liked it very much, it was more intimate and more condensed.<sup>425</sup>

Asmus’s commentary reveals the impact touring to the Court had on the production, though also the different permutations involved in touring theatrical performances, as inevitably each theatre will have different dimensions, a different relationship to the audience and different acoustics, which will change specific details of a performance. Furthermore, the change of stage and its space had a psychological effect on the members of the Company (pictured in Figure 15), as Asmus recalled, ‘Walking into the Royal Court – for the actors – at the first sight was a shock for them. [...] They said “Oh we can’t do it.”’<sup>426</sup> These protestations were later eased through their dress rehearsals and having watched a number of performances of

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<sup>423</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 30 June 1975. UoR, Beckett, HER/081.

<sup>424</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Ruby Cohn, 31 January 1976. UoR, Beckett, COH/117.

<sup>425</sup> Interview between Matthew McFrederick and Walter Asmus, Strand Hotel, London, 4 February 2014.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

the Royal Court run, Asmus was left with the ‘impression that it was gaining rather than losing.’<sup>427</sup>

With these gains and despite its performance in the German language to a largely Anglophone public, this touring production received many positive comments during its initial reception in the UK. This was first noted in stage manager Robert Hendry’s opening night show report, which recorded a ‘very good reception’ from the Royal Court audience for a relatively quick performance lasting 1 hour 52 minutes.<sup>428</sup> The performance subsequently received lavish praise in the UK press, from critics and practitioners. Peter Hall offered one of the most revealing perspectives on the Schiller performance, writing in his diary: ‘Absolute clarity, hardness. No sentimentality, no indulgence, no pretension.’<sup>429</sup> This evaluation encapsulates the vision of the play Beckett strived for in performance and also reflects how practical interpretations of the play had developed since Hall first staged it in London in 1955. As opposed to Hall’s cluttered stage with reeds, stones, an elongated tree and an oil drum, Beckett saw the play stripped back to its bare essentials. Working through his French designer Matias, Beckett’s production played on a stage with only a slim, grey tree (it sometimes appeared as a black silhouette through the stage lighting) that branched into three, and a stone present. The production’s clearly defined stage minimalism informed its actors in performance, though, as Katharine Worth argues, these characteristics did not overwhelm the performance: ‘along with these austere qualities went a sense of fun and tenderness, liable to break out at any minute like a sudden, unexpected smile.’<sup>430</sup>

Further acclaim was bestowed on the production by the British press, who were unanimous in their praise for Beckett’s direction and the performances of both sets of double acts in the play. For example, John Barber felt the play under Beckett’s direction ‘acquire[d]

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Show report for *Warten auf Godot*. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Royal Court Theatre Collection, Production Management File for The Beckett Season, 1976, GB71 THM/273/4/1/124.

<sup>429</sup> Peter Hall and John Goodwin (ed.), p.230.

<sup>430</sup> Katharine Worth, *Waiting for Godot and Happy Days* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1990), p. 58.

a luminous and austere beauty’, before contending that Horst Bollman and Stefan Wigger’s portrayal of Vladimir and Estragon ‘reminds one of a comedy ballet and sometimes of Laurel and Hardy exasperating each other out of all endurance.’<sup>431</sup> Many critics highlighted its clearly choreographed movements and its debt to popular performance, a feature of its reception that suggests how the physical comedy of the performance translated in a German language production. These language difficulties were largely overlooked by its British critics with John Peter contending of the performance, ‘There I was, spellbound by a play acted in German, a language of which I understand less than 50 words.’<sup>432</sup> Beckett’s interpretation of the play from his meticulous direction was clearly imprinted in the Schiller production and its widespread acclaim saw some commentators label the Schiller performance as the definitive production of *Godot*. Indeed while this viewpoint has been argued, Michael Billington offered a more nuanced position on such statements in the conclusion to his positive perception of the performance’s achievement, by contending, ‘It is part of this play’s greatness that no production can ever be definitive. But at least this spare, exact, marvellously clean production shows that *Godot* is infinitely more than either slapstick tragedy or awesome cultural monument.’<sup>433</sup> Billington’s comments on the versatility of *Godot* resonate with the diverse productions discussed in this history so far, and the performance I will proceed to discuss. The achievements of Beckett’s direction of the play would see it clearly retained in the play’s production history, which as Marvin Carlson articulates of illustrious (and not so illustrious) productions, ‘the revival of a familiar classic in a new interpretation inevitably and often quite consciously evokes the ghosts of previous interpretations.’<sup>434</sup> Inevitably, the ghosts of this illustrious *Godot* would haunt future revivals of the play in London and internationally as its 1976 presentation was recycled in the play’s cultural

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<sup>431</sup> John Barber, ‘Beckett’s skill plus superlative actors’, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 April 1976.

<sup>432</sup> John Peter, ‘St George for Shakespeare’, *The Sunday Times*, 25 April 1976.

<sup>433</sup> Michael Billington, ‘Waiting for *Godot*’, *The Guardian*, 23 April 1976.

<sup>434</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine*, p. 101.

memory through the photographs, notebooks, documents and memories of this landmark production, as well as arguably the future productions of *Godot* directed by Asmus, such was his close association with the performance.

After opening the Beckett season with *Godot*, the Royal Court continued their celebratory programme with a revival of *Endgame* before staging three of his late works, *Play*, *That Time* and *Footfalls*. *Endgame* saw Donald McWhinnie direct the first of three plays in the season, with Patrick Magee reprising the role of Hamm with fellow Northern Irish actor Stephen Rea as Clov.<sup>435</sup> The triple bill saw *Play* presented in conjunction with the Royal Court for the third time and the premieres of *Footfalls* and *That Time* in what was then arguably the most experimental Beckett evening staged in London. These three short plays were programmed late in the preparations for the celebratory season with the completion of *Footfalls* at the end of 1975 making it a late inclusion for the triple bill branded as “Play and Other Plays”; arguably an unusual branding decision by the new writing theatre, as its emphasis of the revived *Play*, in comparison to *Footfalls* and *That Time*, diminished their individual identity and their presence as world premieres.<sup>436</sup> Nonetheless, Beckett’s willingness to allow the Royal Court to stage the world premieres of these plays signified his reciprocal loyalty to a theatre that had consistently supported him since his early decisive years as a playwright.<sup>437</sup>

Each of the three plays had their own specific demands in an event that encapsulated how Beckett’s drama tested theatrical possibilities with respect to performance, scenography,

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<sup>435</sup> Magee had previously played Hamm alongside Jack MacGowran as Clov for the English Theatre in Paris and at the RSC in 1964.

<sup>436</sup> For the British premiere of *Play* in 1964, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court leased *Play* to the National Theatre. In 1970 *Play* was performed as part of Beckett/3 in the Come Together Festival.

<sup>437</sup> This agreement also happened when Beckett had also decided to release *Rough for Theatre I and II* for performance, though as he clarified to Herbert, ‘Better not throw them | now | into the Court works.’ See Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 23 November 1975. UoR, Beckett, HER/083.

lighting and theatre-going.<sup>438</sup> The challenging experiments of his plays were supported by a talented and trusted network of theatre makers and friends that Beckett had built up through his previous work at the theatre. While Beckett directed Whitelaw as May in *Footfalls*, McWhinnie directed both *Play* and *That Time* with Magee performing as the Listener and voices in the latter play. These plays were designed by Jocelyn Herbert and beyond this better known team of collaborators other lesser known figures involved in the production included the stage manager Robbie Hendry, lighting designer Jack Raby and Duncan Scott (who Beckett regularly socialised with in the evenings) operated the lights for *Play*. Without their patience, diligence and finesse these very precise pieces would not have obtained their striking theatrical qualities in what were some of the most identifiable images of Beckett's drama.

Of the three plays staged in this triple bill, the performance of *That Time* may represent the most curious presentation; because of its obscure place in Beckettian performance histories with this premiere marking one of the few significant performances of this rarely staged play in London.<sup>439</sup> Due to its lack of presence and impact, the examination of the play's 1976 Royal Court performance will prove to be the only extended discussion of this neglected play in this thesis. Ironically, in contrast to this downbeat introduction of the play, James Knowlson has highlighted in *Damned to Fame* how *That Time* 'was intended to be the star attraction' of the triple bill, albeit is now the least remembered short play of the three.<sup>440</sup> Beckett had finished a first draft of *That Time* in July 1974, though he returned to it intermittently until August 1975, because of 'misgivings over disproportion between image (listening face) and speech and much time lost in trying to devise ways of amplifying [the]

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<sup>438</sup> Following the performance of *Play* there was a 15 minute interval, which significantly meant audience members did not stay in the theatre for the entire programme. Thus they were offered relief from the intense experience of *Play* before viewing *Footfalls* and *That Time*.

<sup>439</sup> Records from the Staging Beckett Database suggest *That Time* did not return to London until the 1999 Gate Theatre Festival at the Barbican Centre with Niall Buggy playing Listener.

<sup>440</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 619.



former.<sup>441</sup> He went to great efforts changing and intercutting the configuration of the text's voices (A, B and C), as he described his understanding of play's genesis to Herbert: 'I was barking up a monkey-puzzle of my own making. The remoteness + stillness of listening face is part of the thing + not to be touched. I have simply rearranged the montage of A B C so that none is ever separated from its recurrence by more than 3.'<sup>442</sup> Beyond this puzzle, he was also adamant *That Time* should not be performed on the same billing as *Not I*, owing most likely to his awareness of their similar staging and technical specifications. *Not I* focuses on a spot lit Mouth surrounded in darkness and positioned eight feet above the stage, while in *That Time* only the Listener's face is visible amidst the darkness with the face located ten feet above the stage.



Figure 16 Set design for *That Time* by Jocelyn Herbert. Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976. UAL, Wimbledon, JH 4383.

While Beckett's numerous theatrical engagements in London, Paris and Berlin during the mid-70s diminished his enthusiasm for more theatre, the prospect of working on his newest play did re-engage his mind-set: 'Never want to see a theatre again myself but

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<sup>441</sup> Harmon, p. 328.

<sup>442</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 30 June 1975. UoR, Beckett, HER/081.

suppose I must come to London with That Time.<sup>443</sup> As his letters suggest, both the image and recorded voice would occupy Beckett's practical interest in the play during rehearsals. The development of the image would become easier through his collaborations with Jocelyn Herbert, whose previously unpublished drawings in Figure 16 reveal the play's fascination with facial expressions, Listener's eyes and his 'long flaring white hair'. Herbert achieved this image in performance by seating Magee on a chair ten feet above the stage – akin to the chair used to maintain Whitelaw's position for Mouth in *Not I* – where she could then arrange his outspread hair. The careful attention given to this image, as James Knowlson suggests in *Images of Beckett*, strived to form 'a close resemblance to William Blake's painting of God the Father or Job.'<sup>444</sup> While these archival remains help to reconstruct the stage image created, perhaps the most significant impression of the play can be formed through a recording for Magee's voices for A, B and C preserved on a cassette tape in the James and Elizabeth Knowlson Collection at the University of Reading. Given the desired effect involved in the performance's modulation, Magee's recording does not differentiate between the three voices or in its use of tone on tape, though the recording does characterise the highly disciplined, taut delivery of the speech, which typifies Beckett's direction of voice for theatre, film and television.<sup>445</sup> Listening to this recording on a timeworn cassette player offers a heightened sense of the production's materiality and an awareness of the level of technology available to theatre practitioners during this era, particularly with the need to rewind and fast forward the tape to unspecific points in the recording. Although the recording uses a now outdated (but functioning) piece of technology, part of the recording's interest must lie in the evidence of how it was implemented in performance, which offers a sense of Beckett's creative theatrical musings. As he noted of the sound's source and their specific modulation in

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<sup>443</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 1 November 1975. UoR, Beckett, HER/082.

<sup>444</sup> James Knowlson and John Haynes, *Images of Beckett* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 74.

<sup>445</sup> For the cassette tape of *That Time*, see UoR, Knowlson, JEK C/2/2/18.

the theatre, ‘dissimilar contexts and dislocation in space – one coming to him from left, a second from above, third from right – should be enough to do it.’<sup>446</sup> While this clearly reasoned concept was not accessible through the recording in the archive, the stress Beckett placed on the source of the play’s three voices demonstrates the advanced ideas Beckett’s late drama was testing in the theatre.

The reasons for *That Time*’s limited performance history since its premiere could be attributed to various factors, such as the play’s length. Although it did not gain the notoriety that other Beckett plays conjured in performance, it earned a respectable critical reception. Its fusion of a largely still, live actor and a recorded voice may suggest a more passive rather than active role for the audience in the performance, but in contrast to this assertion, Worth has described her participatory role as an audience member witnessing Magee’s performance:

The potentiality for hallucinogenic reactions was strong in the first production of *That Time* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1976. Everything was blotted out for the first twenty minutes or so of the performance except for the old man’s face with its streaming white hair high up in the stage darkness and the flow of his voice, coming from three different sources. The idiosyncratic, melodious tones of Patrick Magee heightened the hypnotic mood, but we had to be active, not passive, listening for the voices as they tracked around, catching minute changes: in listener’s breathing or the closing of the eyes at certain points; his smile at the end.<sup>447</sup>

Worth’s evaluation of the play signifies the almost immersive qualities Beckett’s technical specifications stimulated, as while the audience’s visual perception of the play was diminished, their auditory perception and sensory experience of the performance was heightened.

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<sup>446</sup> Harmon, p. 329.

<sup>447</sup> Worth, *Samuel Beckett’s Theatre: Life Journeys*, p. 45.

While *That Time* placed several demands on its creative team, one of the main challenges with respect to its run at the Royal Court involved the efforts of Magee, who repeatedly turned up to the theatre drunk. This was highlighted in Hendry's stage reports with one noting 'Mr Magee not getting on to[o] well with the pub next door. Went up on second show with a very fraught Mr Magee.'<sup>448</sup> And a later report describing, 'Mr Magee still in an unhappy state i.e. DRUNK'.<sup>449</sup> Although Hendry's show reports note Magee's condition, it is unknown whether his drunken state was detrimental to his performance. Magee's premiere production, drunk or not, has the added distinction of being one of the play's only major London performances. As records for the Staging Beckett Database reveal, its next significant performance in London saw Niall Buggy play Listener in the 1999 Beckett Festival produced by the Gate Theatre Dublin and the Barbican Centre.

Just as *Play* and *That Time* had plunged the Royal Court into darkness, with the only light emanating onto their precisely lit urns and heads, *Footfalls* concluded the highly experimental triple bill with the spectral figure of May emerging from and disappearing into darkness. Beckett finished writing *Footfalls* towards the end of 1975 with Whitelaw in mind after their positive collaborations on *Not I*. As he affectionately noted to the actress 'I have a little play for you that I'd like to put in your fair hand.'<sup>450</sup> Beckett wanted Whitelaw to continue working on his plays and their positive rapport was demonstrated by Beckett directing the short piece with Whitelaw's May in dialogue with Rose Hill as Mother. There was, however, some miscommunication between Beckett and Whitelaw over the play prior to its staging, with little commitment from Beckett for either directing the play or having it

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<sup>448</sup> Show report for *Play and Other Plays*, 12 June 1976, Performance 19. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Royal Court Theatre Collection, Production Management file for The Beckett Season (1976), GB 71 THM/273/4/1/124.

<sup>449</sup> Show report for *Play and Other Plays*, 19 June 1976, Performance 26. V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Royal Court Theatre Collection, Production Management file for The Beckett Season (1976), GB 71 THM/273/4/1/124.

<sup>450</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Billie Whitelaw, 3 November 1975, UoR, Whitelaw, BW B/1/6. Beckett's correspondence over *Rockaby* suggests that rather than writing the play for Whitelaw, it was written for Irene Worth.

included in the season. He relayed these points via Herbert on 26 December 1975, writing of the situation:

Billie has me all wrong. How she got all that from even my writing is beyond me.

1. The play is called Footfalls.
2. I said nothing about wanting to direct it in March. But simply that I would like, rather than send | it |, to hand it to her and talk with her about it. [...]
3. No thought in my mind of its inclusion in the Court season which is fine as planned.

So please put her mind at rest. No question of her doing it till she feels quite ready.

My only part in the Court productions would be to lend Pat + Donald a hindering hand with That Time.<sup>451</sup>

Although *Footfalls* was not written specifically for the Royal Court season, its inclusion and Beckett's direction – the first time he had exclusively directed a play staged in London – would prove an additional fillip for the season's programming. Beckett did not pressurise Whitelaw into performing *Footfalls*, as he was aware of the physical and emotional exertions *Not I* had caused the actress and instead awaited her approval of the project, writing, 'Herewith playlet. Yours only if you like it and want it. For inclusion in Court season only if agreeable to you.'<sup>452</sup>

Whitelaw agreed to play May and it was a role that she later felt challenged the art form, as she professed, 'I sometimes felt like a walking, talking Edvard Munch painting.'<sup>453</sup> Undoubtedly, *Footfalls* represents one of Beckett's most theatrically intricate later works in which the interplay between May and Mother demands a highly disciplined approach to its

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<sup>451</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 26 December 1975, UoR, Beckett, HER/084. Beckett wrote to Whitelaw on 29 December 1975, 'There was never any thought in my mind of performance in the near future, still less of its inclusion in the Royal Court season. No question of doing it till you are quite rested and ready.' See UoR, Whitelaw, BW A/1/7.

<sup>452</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Billie Whitelaw, 10 February 1976, UoR, Whitelaw, BW A/1/8.

<sup>453</sup> Whitelaw, p. 145.

theatrical specifications in relation to the body, choreography, lighting, voice and rhythm. Beckett himself pondered the appropriateness of his latest vision for the theatre, telling Whitelaw's husband, Robert Muller: 'I'm not quite sure whether the theatre is the right place for me anymore.'<sup>454</sup> Many of Beckett and Whitelaw's influences relating to the play have been addressed in *Images of Beckett* and *Samuel Beckett: A Passion for Paintings*, where scholars, such as Knowlson, have argued Beckett's inspiration for *Footfalls* drew upon his photographic memory of paintings from the many galleries he visited, including paintings such as Antonello de Messina's 'The Virgin of the Annunciation'. Some critics recognised Beckett's debt to art in their reaction to the performance; Worth, for example, identified the play's sculptural qualities, arguing:

Surrounded by darkness, in silence broken only by the sound of her own footfalls, she created one of Beckett's most overwhelming visual images; a sculptured figure of tragic grandeur, in her trailing robe, dimly grey in the dim light, painfully bowed, arms crossed over her breast, pacing her nine rhythmic steps (seven in the printed text) to and fro on the narrow strip of stage she is confined to.<sup>455</sup>

Whitelaw's stark, ghostly depiction of May's figure on stage materialised as a result of much moulding and fine-tuning from both author and actress. Both walked around the theatre experimenting with May's posture and the position of her arms as she paces along her strip. The attention given to May's physical demeanour is conveyed in Herbert's costume and set designs, which suggest how both Beckett and Whitelaw would have experimented with May's postures with one identifiable drawing capturing Beckett musing over the character with his arms crossed and his left hand by his neck. Herbert recalled his efforts in establishing this image, by stating, 'When I was talking to Sam [...] about what the character

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>455</sup> Katharine Worth, 'Beckett's fine shades' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 1 (Winter 1976), 75 – 78 (p. 78).

was like he kept crossing his arms over his chest and saying, “I think she’d be like this, she’d be shrinking back into herself and hiding away.” He used that gesture in the production.<sup>456</sup>

With its many ambiguities of character, place, time and narrative, *Footfalls* proved another difficult Beckett play for London’s critics to comprehend. As a result, this premiere was subject to a largely mixed reception with its many uncertainties encouraging attempts to surmise the play’s story line and discussions on the relationship between May and her mother. Furthermore, some reviewers admitted their own struggles in analysing the play. For example, Frank Marcus attempted to describe May’s situation before honestly admitting ‘I have read this play twice and seen it once, but its meaning remains impenetrable,’<sup>457</sup> while B. A. Young – arguably one of Beckett’s most receptive critics in London – found *Footfalls* ‘the least immediately attractive play of the three [...] though no doubt I shall grow to like it.’<sup>458</sup> Despite these honest admissions about the play, their reviews did suggest their admiration for the piece with Irving Wardle conveying an impression of the play’s accumulated physical, technical and visual intricacies:

Miss Whitelaw, bowed in rags, clutching herself with talon-like fingers, her features lit in shadowy profile to emphasize the sunken eye-sockets, maintains her seven-step walk, intoning the details of a small domestic argument with unearthly precision. [...] But simply in terms of stage imagery, and the sense of an indefinable, unassuageable grief, the impression is as potent as that Miss Whitelaw made in *Not I*.<sup>459</sup>

Although the play’s meaning baffled some critics, the descriptions and feelings of what they witnessed offer one of the most useful windows from which to form an impression of Beckett’s staging of *Footfalls*.

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<sup>456</sup> Courtney, p. 92.

<sup>457</sup> Frank Marcus, ‘Play, That Time, Footfalls’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 23 May 1976. This viewpoint was shared by Irving Wardle, who wrote in his review ‘I do not understand the play’. See Irving Wardle, ‘People in a timeless limbo’, *The Times*, 21 May 1976.

<sup>458</sup> B. A. Young, ‘Play and other plays’, *Financial Times*, 21 May 1976.

<sup>459</sup> Wardle, ‘People in a timeless limbo’.

Beckett's sense of theatrical invention brought together theatrical elements in a manner that suggests the experiential, phenomenological style of theatre he was developing, particularly through his late drama. Writing in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Worth's measured analysis of the production suggested the performance's experiential characteristics:

if our reliance on our senses was subtly undermined, it was also exercised: by being deprived of so much we were made to concentrate hard on what we had; words, cadences, the relation of things heard to things seen: we were brought to a state of hyper-sensitivity which made possible perception of an order rare in the theatre. There were some hazards in this condition; a creaking chair became a distraction, a cough a real horror; one began to wish for a concert hall discipline, all coughs and sneezes held back to the interval! We did in a way need to listen to music, to catch the fine nuances of sound that carried so much dramatic meaning; change of timbre, the length of a silence, the weight of a footfall.<sup>460</sup>

Worth's comments signify how spectators were subject to a theatrical event where there was a heightened significance with every sound and a greater awareness of the communal audience. The audience's heightened sense of spectatorship was established through Herbert's 'black as the tomb' scenic framework from which each of the three plays emerged.<sup>461</sup> The formidable visual effect of Herbert's design magnified the sculptural qualities of Whitelaw in May's tattered rags, as captured in John Haynes's photographs. A broader sense of the theatrical image achieved is depicted in Herbert's drawings for the play in Figure 17, as the black frame from which the stage image emerges captures the strip of floor which May is confined to and Beckett's desire for May to be lit most on her feet and

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<sup>460</sup> Worth, 'Beckett's fine shades', pp. 75-76.

<sup>461</sup> John Barber, 'New Beckett plays', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 May 1976.



less on her upper torso.<sup>462</sup> Worth's vivid account of the stage images realised in both *That Time* and *Footfalls* also noted, 'The two new plays kept the audience bound in darkness, concentrating on a single point or strip of light, listening hard to the voices that came so strangely out of the dark at a mysterious distance from just the visible beings on stage.'

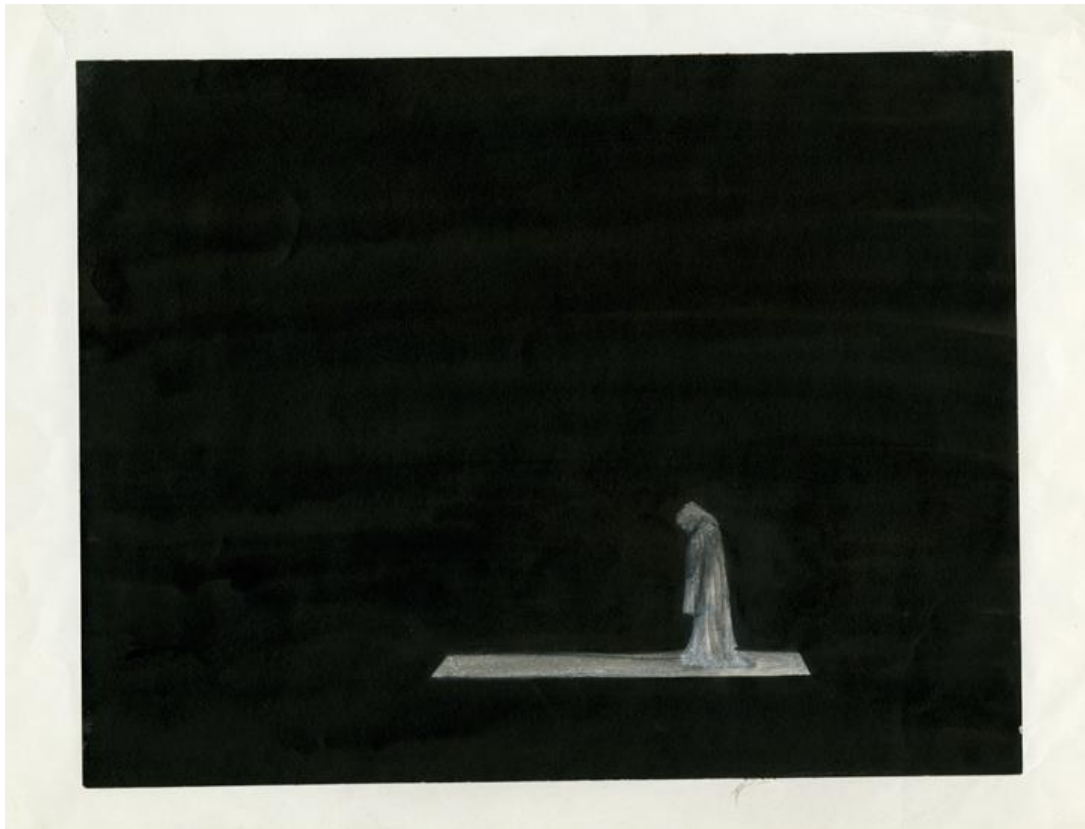


Figure 17 Set design for *Footfalls* by Jocelyn Herbert. Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976. Credit: UAL, Wimbledon, JH 4403.

The narrow visual focus, the pressure of the dark had a deeply disorientating effect.<sup>463</sup> As a result of the blacked out auditorium and the concentrated stage image, audience members encountered what may be described as an 'immersive' theatre experience, where even their habitual behaviour in the space became part of the theatrical experience for their fellow

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<sup>462</sup> See UAL, Wimbledon, JH 4403.

<sup>463</sup> Worth, 'Beckett's fine shades', p. 75.

spectators.<sup>464</sup> Furthermore, both Beckett and Herbert were keen for many of the specific details within *Footfalls* to work on the audience's aural senses and achieved this through Herbert's costume design for May. Herbert's dress resembled the 'tangle of tatters' Beckett implied in the text and she combined this feature with the aural quality of the dress, made apparent from May's constant pacing.<sup>465</sup> As Herbert described:

the swishing noise of the figures dress was very important so I made a taffeta petticoat. [...] I [...] bought a very old lace evening dress with long sleeves and a lot of lacy net curtains which I dyed different greys and shredded. I took the sleeves off the dress and left a bit at the top to rag and gradually imposed torn bits of net in layers on top. Originally the shoes were going to be noisy but in the end we left it as just the swishing of petticoats.<sup>466</sup>

Herbert's collaborations with Beckett and Whitelaw and her sensitivities with many of its minute design details, critically informed the development of Beckett's spectral play. *Footfalls* challenged the theatrical art form, its critics and its practitioners, as it demonstrated his inventive use of theatrical elements to create a play which asked many questions of theatre, meaning and practice, in order to offer a play for performance which characterised the ephemeral nature of the art form. Although *Footfalls* epitomised the haunting content associated with Beckett's work, both audiences and critics were more receptive of this play, which encapsulated how Beckett's drama considered and utilised the various elements of the theatrical medium in performance. The sustained history of his work in London's theatres, and the influence it had on British theatre cultures more broadly, meant audiences and critics were trained to receive and appreciate his work by this stage of his plays in performance.

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<sup>464</sup> Josephine Machon refers immersive performance, as work that 'engages audiences at an experiential level and within environments that prompt multisensory engagement'. See Josephine Machon, 'Watching, Attending, Sense-making: Spectatorship in Immersive Theatres', *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4.1 (2016): 34-48, (p. 34).

<sup>465</sup> Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 402.

<sup>466</sup> Courtney, p. 92.

#### 4.1.2. *Happy Days*: Whitelaw's Winnie

The Royal Court's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday Beckett season acknowledged his growing canonical status; a far cry from the days when the script of *Waiting for Godot* was first passed around the city's many theatres in 1955. The celebratory season was successfully received by critics and audiences, while the productions brought together many experienced practitioners of Beckett's drama, which demonstrated how the playwright's theatrical imagination had developed through his canon of works. If 1976 showcased and celebrated Beckett's *opus* through established and original works in one of the first extended seasons of his theatre staged in London, his return for *Happy Days* in 1979 would mark his final act at his mainstay London theatre home. Beckett was clearly considered a fundamental part of the theatre's artistic heritage, as the Royal Court offered his dramatic vision support across six directorships. Beckett discussed the idea of directing Whitelaw in *Happy Days* after they had worked together closely on *Footfalls* and it was in fact because of Peggy Ashcroft's recent portrayal of Winnie at the NT in 1976 – a performance that Beckett supervised – that they delayed the performance until 1979, out of respect to Ashcroft. This respect was outlined in a letter Beckett wrote to Whitelaw on 25 April 1977: 'I agree that next year is a bit too soon for our H.D. I wd. not hurt Peggy for the world.'<sup>467</sup> This letter suggests both Beckett and Whitelaw had spoken about this potential staging at an earlier date, though the main obstacle to their endeavours, as far as reviving the play in London went, was the amount of time that had passed from its most recent performance.<sup>468</sup> Furthermore, Whitelaw was also aware of the cultural residue that would remain from Ashcroft's performance in *Happy Days* and was understandably wary of the comparisons that would develop with her own portrayal as Winnie. Beckett was respectful of Ashcroft's depiction, though also committed to the idea of

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<sup>467</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Billie Whitelaw, 25 April 1977. UoR, Whitelaw, BW A/1/10.

<sup>468</sup> James Knowlson suggests 'the idea was first mooted in 1976'. See Knowlson, *Happy Days: The Production Notebook of Samuel Beckett*, p. 15.

Whitelaw playing Winnie as he explained in his extended thoughts about a potential production:

As I think we agreed with Jocelyn next year is out, through consideration for Peggy.

The first thing to do is to fix as soon as possible an opening date for 79, preferably summer, convenient to you, Jocelyn and the Court. This would give us the period of 6 or 9 months during which no major production would be authorized in the London area. I suggested some time ago to Sue Freathy of Spokesman that she get going on this. But you do not seem to have heard from her.

[...]

We shall need at least 6 or 7 weeks rehearsal.

Would you get in touch with Jocelyn and try to work out the best time for us all in 79?

I shall keep myself free from May 1<sup>st</sup> onward.

I look forward immensely to this new adventure with you.<sup>469</sup>

In previous letters to friends and collaborators, Beckett had suggested he would finish his theatrical activity due to his tiredness from being involved in too many productions. In contrast, this letter shows his renewed energy and eagerness to see this particular production come to life. This was epitomised by his willingness to embargo other prospective productions of *Happy Days* in London. Furthermore, it may be argued the importance he attached to directing Whitelaw may be connected with frustrations that remained with him as a result of past productions of the play he was involved in. Although Beckett had worked with actresses who had each produced sterling performances as Winnie, such as Brenda Bruce, Madeleine Renaud, Eva-Katharina Schultz and Ashcroft, he was keen for Whitelaw,

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<sup>469</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Billie Whitelaw, 24 November 1977. UoR, Whitelaw, BW A/1/11. This letter also discusses plans for a recording of *Happy Days* with Tristram Powell at the BBC, of which as Beckett suggested, 'a film is possible, with little adaptation'.

an actress who had worked so dutifully with him in the past, to capture his precise vision of the play in English.

As Beckett and Whitelaw's plans to stage *Happy Days* started to take shape, the Court's unstable journey through the 1970s continued with both Wright and Kidd departing Sloane Square and Stuart Burge being appointed Artistic Director. Burge was considered something of an 'outsider' to the normally family-bound Court, though he did come to the theatre with a strong reputation following successful tenures in Hornchurch and at the Nottingham Playhouse. His tenure saw internal changes with the theatre's management structures and, in what may appear fortuitous with respect to Beckett and Whitelaw's plans, as a result of financial difficulties his programming was marked by significant revivals, including *Happy Days* and John Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence*, directed by Osborne and featuring Nicol Williamson.<sup>470</sup> The decision to stage *Happy Days* again meant it was the third time the theatre had shown the play since its 1962 British premiere and yet another reprisal of a play that had been frequently produced across London in recent years. This was duly noted in Michael Billington's commentary of the production, as he reported, 'Over the years it has been played in London by Peggy Ashcroft, Madeleine Renaud, Brenda Bruce, Denise Coffey and Marie Kean. And [...] I can think of more urgent tasks confronting the Royal Court than another revival'.<sup>471</sup> Although, in hindsight Billington's remarks represent a fair reflection on the artistic needs of the theatre, particularly in consideration of the frequent presentations of *Happy Days* in London, it did in fact prove to be a well-judged financial and artistic move. Staging *Happy Days* continued the Court's association with Beckett's drama, it facilitated a significant collaboration between author and actress, and alongside their surprise

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<sup>470</sup> Burge replaced the longstanding English Stage Company Council with a Board of Management.

<sup>471</sup> Michael Billington, 'Happy Days', *The Guardian*, 9 June 1979, p. 13.

hits that season, *Bent* and *Cloud Nine*, *Happy Days* proved to be one of the Court's most successful productions in 1979, filling 94% of seats.<sup>472</sup>

Billed at the time as Beckett's final production in the theatre, the performance once again utilised the talents of his loyal pool of theatre makers with Herbert, Raby and Hendry among the team.<sup>473</sup> With Whitelaw playing Winnie, the role of Willie was initially earmarked for Ronald Pickup, after he had impressed Beckett with his performance in *Play* at the Royal Court in 1976 and their collaborations on *...but the clouds...* and *Ghost Trio* in 1977.<sup>474</sup> However, his unavailability, much to his later disappointment, saw the role eventually played by another actor who would proceed to work on *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Stirrings Still*, Leonard Fenton.<sup>475</sup> These significant partnerships Beckett forged at the theatre would contribute and offer vital support to the energy both Beckett and Whitelaw exerted on the production. Ahead of their rehearsals, Beckett remarked how he was 'Deep in the play these past months, eyes and ears' and this level of scrutiny was evident through the detailed and meticulous notes he kept in his published production notebook on the play.<sup>476</sup> The level of engagement was also apparent in the disciplined work he and Whitelaw produced during their seven week rehearsal process. His work with Whitelaw characterised his intense working methods, which were driven by his desire to meet the vision of the play he had imprinted in his mind. *Happy Days* had perhaps proved the one play he found most difficult in meeting his expectations in performance and in one rehearsal he recalled releasing this

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<sup>472</sup> See Findlater, p. 253.

<sup>473</sup> His assistant director was Roger Michell, who would go on to have a successful career as a film director with films such as *Notting Hill*.

<sup>474</sup> Beckett wrote to Whitelaw: 'Do you think Ronald Pickup would accept the part of Willie?' See Letter from Samuel Beckett to Billie Whitelaw, 24 November 1977, UoR, Billie Whitelaw Collection, BW A/1/11. Pickup also read Beckett's translation of Rimbaud's *Le Bateau Ivre* (*The Drunken Boat*) for BBC Radio 3 in 1976, which Beckett may have heard.

<sup>475</sup> Ahead of the play's rehearsals the role of Willie remained uncast and at Beckett's request Roger Michell was asked to find actors suitable to play the role. Fenton was working at the Royal Court on another play called *Eclipse* by Leigh Jackson and following two auditions at the Irish Club in Eaton Square, where he read *Molloy* and latterly professed his love of Schubert's *Winterreise*, Beckett decided Fenton would play Willie. Interview between James Knowlson and Leonard Fenton. UoR, Knowlson Collection, JEK C/1/108.

<sup>476</sup> Harmon, p. 376.

frustration by lamenting, “I’m beginning to hate this play”; a comment Herbert ‘reproached’ him for saying in front of Whitelaw.<sup>477</sup>

Many rehearsals would concentrate on the pace, rhythm and stress Whitelaw afforded the text and Beckett would often give line readings, tolerated by Whitelaw because of their specific understanding towards the work. His emphasis on the voice in relation to *Happy Days* is signified in his production notebook which distinguishes the different voices Winnie uses throughout the play:

Winnie’s voices

Usual

To herself

“ Willie

Willie’s “I worship ..” whine

Showers’

Reason } says, tell me

Something } says, tell me

Description Dolly

Narrative (Mildred, Showers)

Quotes<sup>478</sup>

Beckett’s precisely identified vocal distinctions were not available to its audience, but some commentators noted how it was discernible in performance, with critics such as Peter Jenkins writing, ‘Whitelaw achieved an immense range of voice’.<sup>479</sup> The effect of this vocal range in performance was perhaps best described by Worth, who stated, ‘It was a mysterious tune that was being played through the actress, an expressive melody which allowed her many changes

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<sup>477</sup> Courtney, p. 55.

<sup>478</sup> Knowlson, *Happy Days: The Production Notebook of Samuel Beckett*, p. 31.

<sup>479</sup> Peter Jenkins, ‘Insights and hindsights’, *The Spectator*, 16 June 1979, p. 23.

of tone but always maintained a context of dreamlike strangeness. Billie Whitelaw's vocal modulations were timed with the exactness of an orchestral instrument.'<sup>480</sup> Beyond the musical quality of her vocal performance, another crucial aspect of the performance proved to be its use of emotional colour, which was a characteristic that changed noticeably between acts and arguably represented a development in Beckett's approach from his emphasis on 'no colour' with Whitelaw in *Not I*.<sup>481</sup> Whitelaw recognised of her interpretation, 'The second half of *Happy Days* has a sort of desperation to it. The colours are from a different part of the palette than those used in the first act. More grey and black.'<sup>482</sup> Whitelaw was able to draw from a wide range of colours in her interpretation of Winnie, which enabled a number of striking and original moments to develop. As Worth asserted,

There was also something wild, even manic, about this Winnie [...]. Her shriek as she concluded the Mildred story was a moment of real terror, something like the awful shriek through which the same actress expressed the trauma of Mouth [...]. It gave a force to the Mildred episode which took us deep into some unacknowledged hysteria of Winnie's.<sup>483</sup>

These emotional discoveries were confirmed by Knowlson, who also perceived how the trauma developed following the interval, 'The second act was a major triumph, more deeply sunk in terror than in previous productions and reaching at times towards the tones of *Not I*. It also shows how some critics, as well as a number of directors, have been very wrong in failing to recognise how crucial the internal contrasts between the two acts are to the power of the play.'<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Worth, *Waiting for Godot and Happy Days*, p. 97.

<sup>481</sup> Whitelaw, p. 120.

<sup>482</sup> Ben-Zvi, *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, p. 6.

<sup>483</sup> Worth, *Waiting for Godot and Happy Days*, p. 99.

<sup>484</sup> Knowlson, 'Happy Days', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, p. 143.



While the aforementioned reviews of Knowlson and Worth demonstrated the positive reception the play earned in Beckett-related publications, when the production was first staged on 7 June it experienced a somewhat indifferent initial public reception. This response owed a lot to the unfortunate timing of the production, which while not evident in the reviews, it was helpfully contextualised by Knowlson in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* later in 1979:

There was little by way of preliminary fanfare to herald Beckett's own first production in English of *Happy Days*. [...] the first night provoked a somewhat desultory critical response: several of the main London drama critics were already away on holiday; others preferred the 'sleak, smooth, slick' attractions of the musical, *Grease*.<sup>485</sup>

Only a small number of reviews appeared following its first night and while Billington was won over, Robert Cushman contended Beckett's production did 'not succeed in being different from anyone else's'.<sup>486</sup> Despite this initial indifference and later acclaim, perhaps Knowlson's intriguing conjecture helps to nuance commentaries on the production: 'Still one wonders how keen interest would have been in Germany in a production which had been unofficially announced as Beckett's last work as a director.'<sup>487</sup> Knowlson's comments suggest Beckett's work as a director in Britain had not reached the level of prominence that his work managed to achieve in Germany. On the other hand, it is conceivable to believe that the frequent presentations of *Happy Days*, in the years prior to the Royal Court performance, detracted from the significance of this event in Britain.

Beyond the production's critical reception, the committed efforts of both Whitelaw and Beckett were signified by the perfectionism shown by their self-critical reflections.

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<sup>485</sup> Knowlson, 'Happy Days', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, p. 141.

<sup>486</sup> Robert Cushman, 'Playing for kicks', *The Observer*, 10 June 1979, p. 15.

<sup>487</sup> Knowlson, 'Happy Days', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, p. 141.

Beckett admitted these sentiments towards the performance to Schneider writing, ‘Billie had difficulty with 1<sup>st</sup> act, but seems to have mistresssed it in the course of run. 2<sup>nd</sup> act very good.’<sup>488</sup> He was, however, grateful for her dedication and courage in the role, in spite of the demands he placed on her as an overly meticulous director. Whitelaw’s self-critical response to her own performance suggests her disappointment at not attaining the levels she had expected of herself, contending:

I wish to god I could have continued with Winnie. I was just about making that play my own, making Winnie my own, and then we came off. [...] Of all the plays I’ve done, that needed working. I needed time to work my way into it because Beckett had so many notes that he gave me, and just technically it was like me talking and trying to boil a pan of milk at the same time – movement and speech, speech and movement, and putting things down, not only on a word, putting things down, say putting the toothbrush or lipstick or the whatever down, on a syllable of a word.<sup>489</sup>

The demands Beckett placed on Whitelaw in his direction of *Happy Days* would mark the culmination of his work at the Court, bringing to an end a direct association spanning twenty three years. The loyalty Beckett showed to the Royal Court existed as a result of the support he was shown by Devine and subsequently each Artistic Director up to Burge maintained the tradition of programming his drama, thus suggesting the theatre’s sustained interest and commitment to his work. This relationship between Beckett and the Court, its staff, its practitioners and audiences would undoubtedly shape the most lasting impressions of Beckett’s theatre and Beckett the playwright for the British public. Although three efforts were made to stage some of his later plays during the tenure of Max Stafford-Clark, including a triple bill of *Catastrophe*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *What Where*, these productions did not

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<sup>488</sup> Harmon, p. 378.

<sup>489</sup> Ben-Zvi, pp. 4-5.

materialise much to the disappointment of both parties.<sup>490</sup> Over the passing years Beckett had experienced many similar disappointments, though these were considerably outweighed by the rich performance history of his drama that developed at the Royal Court as he expanded his canon of work that engaged practitioners, theatres and audiences to work on, stage and see his plays in performance. As the connection between the venue and the playwright has shown, seminal productions of his theatre were staged, interest in seeing Beckett performances grew and many significant collaborations were developed through their work together. The wider interest in Beckett's drama across London theatres could often be traced back to the Royal Court, as his drama branched out to other London venues. It has been suggested these connections were true of the next venue I will discuss: Riverside Studios. This chapter will now reflect on his unforeseen move to west London, when he worked on some of the final rehearsals of his lifetime at the Hammersmith-based Studios.

#### **4.2. Rehearsing Beckett: Beckett, San Quentin and Riverside Studios**

With the end of the 1970s seeing the conclusion of Beckett's direct association with the Royal Court, the start of the 1980s would mark the beginning of a notable new connection between Beckett and a London venue in a decade where his drama began to inhabit a range of alternative London homes. It was also the decade in which arguably the most significant events concerning Beckett's theatre in the UK were not performances, but rather two rehearsal periods he surveyed at Riverside Studios; the Hammersmith arts centre, that would become more frequently associated with his work. In what was a unique phase of this performance history, Beckett's well-documented work at Riverside Studios did not see lengthy runs of his plays staged in West London, but rather as this section will address, two

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<sup>490</sup> See Letter from Samuel Beckett to Max Stafford-Clark, 1 October 1983. V&A, Royal Court Theatre Collection, GB71 THM/273/4/15/9. A production of these plays directed by Alan Schneider was brought over to the Edinburgh Festival, by its then Artistic Director Frank Dunlop. Following their performances in Edinburgh, the plays were given their London premiere at the Donmar Warehouse in 1984.

rehearsal periods, where Beckett shaped his final directorial visions of *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* when he worked with the San Quentin Drama Workshop in 1980 and 1984 respectively. This section will reflect on how Beckett's presence at Riverside was portrayed in newspaper reports and artistic responses at the time, on the work undertaken there and innovations arising from the rehearsals, and finally it will analyse the legacies for Beckett's drama that were stimulated by his time at the Studios. Before discussing these various avenues by which I wish to examine Beckett's time at Riverside, it is worth contextualising his work at the theatre by answering a number of questions that have been omitted from accounts of these rehearsals so far: how did Beckett first learn about Riverside? Why, after working in theatres often considered amongst the pinnacles of the Western theatre tradition, would Beckett rehearse his final theatre productions in an arts centre in Hammersmith? And why was Beckett working with performers he had not handpicked?

Beckett first encountered Riverside in a working capacity with the rehearsals of *Endgame* on 7 May 1980, though he would have been familiar with the geographical area at least since his early years at the Royal Court having attended dinner parties at George Devine's house on the Lower Mall in Chiswick.<sup>491</sup> Indeed his later knowledge of Riverside most likely came from Devine's partner, his close friend and Royal Court scenographer, Jocelyn Herbert. Herbert was friendly with the then Riverside Programme Director and Administrator and later Artistic Director David Gothard, who suggests that Herbert may have recommended Riverside as an alternative venue for Beckett to use in London and that Beckett 'would have trusted her recommendation entirely'.<sup>492</sup> When and how much Beckett knew about Riverside in advance of his visit remains unclear, though his correspondence reveals

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<sup>491</sup> Riverside Studios is approximately 300 metres from Lower Mall, with Lower Mall on the west side of Hammersmith Bridge.

<sup>492</sup> Email from David Gothard to Matthew McFrederick, 24 April 2015.

that he was familiar with the Studios and its management structure.<sup>493</sup> Although one of his earliest references to the venue mistakenly calls it ‘Riversdale’, behind this confusion was an early endorsement for Riverside, with Beckett outlining that it was in contention with the Royal Court to stage *Happy Days* with Whitelaw in 1979.<sup>494</sup> While this production did not materialise at Riverside, just over one year later he would find himself working in West London.

At first glance, Riverside Studios may appear an unlikely place for Beckett to finish his practical work in the British theatre. However, to think this would be a disservice to the venue’s history, which deserves further examination.<sup>495</sup> A former BBC TV Studios where *Dr Who* and *Hancock’s Half Hour* were filmed, situated on the banks of the Thames in Hammersmith, Riverside is located at the margins of London’s theatrical and artistic centre.<sup>496</sup> Following the departure of the BBC in 1975, a charitable trust formed by Hammersmith and Fulham Council converted the buildings into two large multipurpose arts spaces before making Peter Gill the venue’s first Artistic Director in 1976. Gill’s opening seasons staged acclaimed productions of *The Cherry Orchard* (in 1978) and *The Changeling* (in 1979) before his departure to the National Theatre Studio. The reputation of the Studios continued to grow and in the early 1980s it became a hub of cultural activity that programmed major international artists including Tadeusz Kantor, Dario Fo, Joan Miró, David Hockney, as well as many others. It was eclectic and often visionary in terms of discovering ground-breaking artists such as choreographer Michael Clark. Furthermore, it

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<sup>493</sup> It is clear from a letter to Rick Cluchey of 30 July 1979 that Beckett knew Peter Gill was Artistic Director of Riverside Studios and David Gothard was its Programme Director and Administrator.

<sup>494</sup> Beckett wrote to Alan Schneider early to mid-May 1978: ‘Still hopes of *Happy Days* with Billie next summer, at Court or perhaps Riversdale Studios, but nothing firm so far’. See Harmon, p. 370. Beckett was obviously thinking of Riverside yet his mistake may be connected to the last home of W. B. Yeats.

<sup>495</sup> To date Riverside Studios has not been the subject of a published history, although the work of Dario Fo and Tadeusz Kantor at the Studios has been discussed in: Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka, *Kantor was here: Tadeusz Kantor in Great Britain* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011) and Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Theatre Workshops at Riverside Studios, London* (London: Red Notes, 1983).

<sup>496</sup> Riverside Studios is located five miles from where *Waiting for Godot* was first performed at the Arts Theatre and three and a half miles from Beckett’s consistent London home at the Royal Court.

proved to be a place of learning for many writers, actors, dancers and artists, as Hanif Kureishi, a former employee, stated: ‘Riverside was what a university should be: a place to learn and talk and work and meet your contemporaries. There was no other place like it in London.’<sup>497</sup> Under the artistic directorship of Gothard in the early 1980s it earned a reputation as ‘the Royal Court Theatre in exile’<sup>498</sup> with Emily Green arguing that it ‘made the Fringe look dowdy, the West End look taxidermied and the National Theatre a concrete maiden’.<sup>499</sup> Beckett’s presence at rehearsals was a fillip for the theatre and remains a celebrated part of the Studios’ history.



**Figure 18 Samuel Beckett directing Bud Thorpe and Rick Cluchey in *Endgame* at Riverside Studios, London, 1980.**  
Credit: Photograph by Chris Harris, Private Collection of David Gothard.

Beckett was in Hammersmith primarily because of his collaborations with the San Quentin Drama Workshop, which grew out of his friendship with the former San Quentin

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<sup>497</sup> Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 4.

<sup>498</sup> Jessica Wiesner, *Rehearsing/Samuel Beckett* (London: Chelsea Space, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>499</sup> Emily Green, ‘A very tough act to follow’, *The Independent*, 22 September 1994.

prisoner turned actor, Rick Cluchey, who first discovered Beckett's drama in the Californian penitentiary. By coincidence they would later meet in Paris, and corresponded over a number of years with Cluchey repeatedly proposing that Beckett attend a rehearsal. His persistence would lead to Beckett working with the San Quentin group on two occasions before Riverside; he directed Cluchey in *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, which opened on 27 September 1977, and their friendly collaborations continued one year later in Berlin when Beckett observed their rehearsals of *Endgame* at the Altkirche in the spare time he had from directing *Spiel* at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt. Beckett was unimpressed by what he saw with the *Endgame* production and even had the cast re-audition for their roles. Nonetheless he did see improvements, appreciated their enthusiasm and on 18 October 1978 the group travelled to London to perform *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* at the Open Space Theatre. Their Riverside rehearsals were again the fruition of Cluchey's persistence and although Beckett had attended San Quentin rehearsals in the past, his attendance in Hammersmith would prove a more remarkable and accessible event, particularly in light of the disillusionment he voiced regarding theatre work in general to friends before the rehearsals. Indeed seven months before directing *Endgame* in May 1980 (as shown in Figure 18), he stressed to Cluchey, 'Never felt so far from theatre since I first looked to it for comfort 30 years ago. Perhaps haven again some day before I go down'.<sup>500</sup> Across his career many of Beckett's most fruitful experiences were at venues, where he was presented with the right atmosphere and comfortable working conditions for him to develop his art, and Riverside Studios was proud to offer Beckett this mix in the latest years of his theatre work.

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<sup>500</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Rick Cluchey, 4 October 1979, UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/2/57. As well as Cluchey's persistence, news of the BBC's withdrawal from a proposed remake of *Eh Joe*, set to feature Whitelaw and Cluchey, led to Beckett offering his support to San Quentin's endeavors. Their tour was produced by Chicago's Goodman Theater and scheduled to start at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin. Dublin may have appeared as the most practical place to rehearse, though Beckett's refusal to return to Dublin or travel to Chicago meant a viable alternative space had to be found. San Quentin also toured to the Oxford Playhouse, the Young Vic and the Arts Theatre as part of their 1980 UK and Ireland tour.

#### 4.2.1. Documenting Beckett's rehearsals

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, Thomas Postlewait stresses how performance histories depend on 'the available documentation [...] to reconstruct the event'.<sup>501</sup> Documentation of rehearsals is normally limited to the notes and perspectives of the practitioners involved, as they usually signify the private and mysterious phase of a production's life, where only the cast and crew experience its creative spirit, its struggles and ecstasies. Prior to Riverside, Beckett's rehearsals were only attended by the cast, creative team, close friends or the occasional theatre employee. His Riverside rehearsals in 1980 and 1984 were more open than normal, certainly very open for someone popularly depicted as an exceptionally private man. In an unprecedented step they were also observed by artists, directors, journalists, photographers and academics, whereby the friendly, creative surroundings of Riverside made the rehearsals become an unintentional performance 'laboratory'.<sup>502</sup> This openness enabled more records to be produced than most rehearsals as those observing responded to the work in their respective mediums, and these materials have since been preserved in the University of Reading's Beckett Collection and other private collections.<sup>503</sup> Such documents, Postlewait suggests, act as 'windows through which we can observe the[se] past events'.<sup>504</sup> Indeed, reading these documents today reaffirms the assertions of Beckett's assistant director for *Endgame*, Gregory Mosher, who surmised 'two parallel events progressed – the production of *Endgame* and the tracking of a reclusive maestro'.<sup>505</sup>

Through the various accounts and archival traces of these rehearsals by journalists, photographers and artists, it is clear that Beckett's presence at Riverside generated an

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<sup>501</sup> Postlewait, p. 230.

<sup>502</sup> Jed Wheeler, 'Riverside Studios – London's Performance Center on the Line', *Alive*, November 1982, p. 39.

<sup>503</sup> David Gothard kindly gave me materials concerning Beckett's time at Riverside from his personal archive. These materials as well as his enthusiasm and energy have contributed to the detail of this chapter and his support is greatly appreciated.

<sup>504</sup> Postlewait, p. 239.

<sup>505</sup> Oppenheim, p. 132.



‘extraordinary fascination’ for those in attendance.<sup>506</sup> The responses epitomise how, as Postlewait notes, ‘certain events, at the time they occur, get characterized by participants and observers as significant’.<sup>507</sup> Part of this fascination was alluded to in the newspaper reports published, which also characterised the rehearsals as a significant event. Journalists such as Maeve Binchy and Brian Appleyard recorded their surprise at Beckett’s openness, which was typified in the conversations they shared with him, as he was known to rarely speak to journalists. Notably each journalist began their article by offering their own portrait of Beckett, whereby they would describe the author’s appearance almost as proof that they saw him. Before her transition to popular novelist, Binchy wrote a feature on Beckett in *The Irish Times*, which was reported to have angered Beckett as Binchy chose to focus on his appearance and memories of Dublin while neglecting the work on stage.<sup>508</sup> He later saw the need to mix his anger with comedy, as actors Alan Mandell and Bud Thorpe both recalled with much amusement Beckett’s response to Binchy’s article, referring to her as ‘Bitchy Binchy’<sup>509</sup>. Despite Beckett’s annoyance with Binchy in this instance, four years later he again allowed journalists into rehearsals for *Godot*, with Steve Grant offering another depiction of the playwright:

A 77-year-old man sits in the foyer of Riverside Studios all but ignored in the lunchtime buzz of rattling plates and conversation. He seems tired, occasionally rubbing his eyes, sipping at the half of Guinness in front of him on the scrubbed wooden bench. He is painfully thin, the quarter miler’s wiry frame having succumbed to stiffness in the last few years; the hair, neat and silvery, is stroked up from the lined

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<sup>506</sup> James Knowlson, ‘Beckett as Director: The Manuscript Production Notebooks and Critical Interpretation’, *Modern Drama*, 30.4 (Winter 1987), 451–65 (p. 451).

<sup>507</sup> Postlewait, p. 248.

<sup>508</sup> Maeve Binchy, ‘Beckett finally gets down to work – as the actors take a break’, *The Irish Times*, 14 May 1980, p. 7. Binchy began her article by asserting: ‘Beckett looks 54 not 74; he looks like a Frenchman, not an Irishman, and he certainly looks more like a man about to go off and do a day’s hard manual work rather than direct one of his own plays for a cast which looks like him as a messiah come to rehearsal.’

<sup>509</sup> Email from Alan Mandell to Matthew McFrederick, 9 September 2014.

forehead in a self supporting ridge. His voice is soft, almost a whisper, a Dublin voice, lilting, musical, despite the bearer's long residence in Paris.<sup>510</sup>

The written accounts of Beckett at Riverside suggest he appeared more open than usual to the presence of visitors during both the sets of rehearsals. Hugh Hebert referred to the mutual understanding that appeared to function between visitors and Beckett during rehearsals by reporting: '[Beckett] had accepted we should be there, the pretence was that we were not'.<sup>511</sup> Various people attended the rehearsals, each perceiving the events differently depending on their own relationship to the man, the work and their own discipline. It became a meeting space for Beckett and friends such as Whitelaw, Alan Schneider and Shivaun O'Casey, while other new faces and strangers came to the venue to catch a glimpse.<sup>512</sup> Beckett was largely able to overlook watchful eyes in the theatre space at the time, later jokingly referring to the events as a 'jamboree'.<sup>513</sup> Mandell – who played Nagg in the 1980 *Endgame* – noted of the visitors that 'Beckett didn't seem to mind all the drop ins'. However, Mandell 'was not used to allowing people in to observe the rehearsal period'.<sup>514</sup> Despite Mandell's understandable reservations as an actor, many of the stories from those attending ultimately helped publicise the San Quentin tours, while marking Riverside as a venue more closely associated with Beckett's drama.

As described above, Beckett's openness was 'a great surprise' for those who witnessed the rehearsals, including one writer, Lawrence Shainberg, who met Beckett at Riverside for the first time in 1980 and kept in contact with him over Beckett's latter years.<sup>515</sup> Shainberg described the rehearsals as a 'happy time' for Beckett, where he was 'relaxed in

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<sup>510</sup> Steve Grant, 'What makes Samuel run', *Time Out*, 15–21 March 1984, pp. 12–15.

<sup>511</sup> Hugh Hebert, 'Brief encounter with a stage Irishman', *The Guardian*, 17 May 1980: page number unknown.

<sup>512</sup> In an email to Matthew McFrederick on 24 April 2015, Rick Cluchey recalled one evening after rehearsals that Beckett also met Harold Pinter at Riverside and that Pinter had arranged for them to leave for dinner in a limousine.

<sup>513</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Alan Mandell, 21 March 1984, UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/2/191.

<sup>514</sup> Email from Alan Mandell to Matthew McFrederick, 30 September 2014.

<sup>515</sup> Lawrence Shainberg, 'Exorcising Beckett', *The Paris Review*, 104 (Fall 1987). <http://samuel-beckett.net/ShainExor1.html> [accessed 24 June 2015].

company' because of the rehearsal environment. Such sentiments saw new portraits of Beckett come to the fore, as Shainberg articulated in *The Paris Review*: 'Beckett's presence destroyed the Beckett myth for me, replacing it with something at once larger and more ordinary'.<sup>516</sup> Shainberg's assertions were supported by the striking photographs and drawings, which materialised as a result of Beckett's time in rehearsals. Some of the most iconic photographs were taken by John Minihan during these rehearsals, with his two publications *Samuel Beckett: Photographs* (1995) and *Samuel Beckett: Centenary Shadows* (2006) adding to the iconographic visual portraits of Beckett. Minihan's images are closely connected with the event and have been deposited and recycled in the venue's 'repository of cultural memory',<sup>517</sup> as a means of public interface through their later use in playbills, exhibitions and even at times as the Studios' Facebook profile picture. Further images of Beckett were taken in both the 1980 and 1984 rehearsals by Chris Harris and have recently come to light through the David Gothard Collection.<sup>518</sup> Harris's portraits also offer a new lens for viewing Beckett, which is, as Gothard suggests, 'unexpected [and] not familiar'.<sup>519</sup> Through Harris's images Beckett is captured unaware and displays a more liberated character in action, which suggests his directorial precision, concentration and rapport with the San Quentin cast.

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<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine*, p. 2.

<sup>518</sup> These photographs were exhibited as part of '#7 Rehearsing/Samuel Beckett', Chelsea Space, 16 John Islip Street, London, 25 March-29 April 2006.

<sup>519</sup> Wiesner, p. 15



Figure 19 Samuel Beckett in rehearsals of *Waiting for Godot* with the San Quentin Drama Workshop at Riverside Studios, London, 1984. Credit: Photograph by Chris Harris, Private Collection of David Gothard.



Figure 20 Drawing of Samuel Beckett by John Devane. Credit: John Devane.

As well as photographers, Beckett also became the study of two painters: Tom Phillips and John Devane (See Figure 20). Phillips's lithograph 'Samuel Beckett' (1984) has previously been displayed in London's National Portrait Gallery and emerged as a result of his sketches from the rehearsals. Phillips discussed his own approach to drawing Beckett by stating, 'At the beginning I did not know quite how to set about drawing him [...]. I gradually realized sitting behind, trying to form a strategy, the back of his head was as eloquent as the front, and as recognizable'.<sup>520</sup> Phillips's piece complements a similar photographic study of Beckett from Harris in Figure 19. Intriguingly, both artists identify and respond to Beckett's distinctive physical features from their perspective as voyeurs of these rehearsals watching both Beckett and the onstage drama that unfolded in front of him. Their portraits both construct and contribute to the aura and depictions of Beckett's presence in rehearsals, suggesting, as do the aforementioned reports and interviews, the number of ways in which Beckett has been or can be read or represented from his time at the Studios. Harris and Phillips visualise a recurring representation of Beckett's time at Riverside as they show (even without a trace of face) how portrayals of this rehearsal event staged Beckett in the foreground as much as the struggle of Lucky in the background. With this image of Beckett actually in the rehearsal space in mind, this section will now proceed to address his practical work with the San Quentin Drama Workshop in rehearsals.

#### **4.2.2. Rehearsing Beckett: *Endgame***

Before discussing Beckett's participation at Riverside, it is important to contextualise how both rehearsal periods were assisted by rehearsals or performances prior to his involvement. San Quentin had staged *Endgame* before and had been briefly observed by Beckett in Berlin,

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<sup>520</sup> Tom Phillips, 'Samuel Beckett', 2014. Available online: <http://www.tomphillips.co.uk/works/portraits/item/5434-samuel-beckett> [accessed 9 September 2014].

while *Godot* was initially directed by Walter Asmus for five weeks in Chicago. Beckett's involvement at Riverside shows how he was still working creatively with these texts as he fine-tuned these existing performances with revisions and cuts, while encouraging a greater emphasis on the work's shape, pace and rhythm ahead of their tours. Many of these decisions were shaped by Beckett's continuous directorial experience as he worked on his early and later plays in performance.<sup>521</sup>

The *Endgame* rehearsals ran from 7-22 May 1980, initially in Studio 2 as *The Biko Inquest* featuring Albert Finney was running in the main theatre. While Beckett could draw upon past productions, his collaborations with the San Quentin group enabled him to reread the play and develop a more structured and shaped vision of it in English. This was epitomised by how he envisaged the play's structure, as he began to see it with an eight scene structure in comparison to the sixteen he outlined in his Schiller Theater production. Both Schiller and Riverside rehearsals employed a greater emphasis on the play's patterning in performance; for example, Clov's inspection of the opening scene in a clockwise order (Hamm, bins, sea window, earth window) was followed by an anticlockwise arrangement as he unveiled the scene (earth window, sea window, bins, Hamm).<sup>522</sup> His direction demanded his actors intertwine these stage patterns with choreographic precision, something that was achieved by Thorpe's adherence to mathematical symmetry for Clov's movements in and out of the kitchen to his stage left. With this in mind Beckett would write in his notebook, for example, 'C's entrance identical-same number of steps to A, same half turn away'.<sup>523</sup> Beckett walked Thorpe through this choreography on stage (See Figure 21), just as he was likely to offer actors line readings when necessary, and often surprised the actors by his active

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<sup>521</sup> With *Endgame* for instance these rehearsals could draw on the practical experience he had of observing past productions at the Royal Court (1957, 1958 and 1976), Studio des Champs-Élysées (1964), the Royal Shakespeare Company (1964) and when he directed *Endspiel* at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt in 1967.

<sup>522</sup> For further details see S. E. Gontarski, ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: Endgame*, p. 144.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

participation during rehearsals. On one occasion, to the amazement of the actors, he performed the role of Nell alongside Mandell (in the absence of Teresita Garcia Suro), a character he described as ‘a whisper of life’.<sup>524</sup> In an interview with James Knowlson, Thorpe expressed his captivation with this moment, saying ‘the two of them, they could have done it [...] it was frighteningly beautiful’.<sup>525</sup>

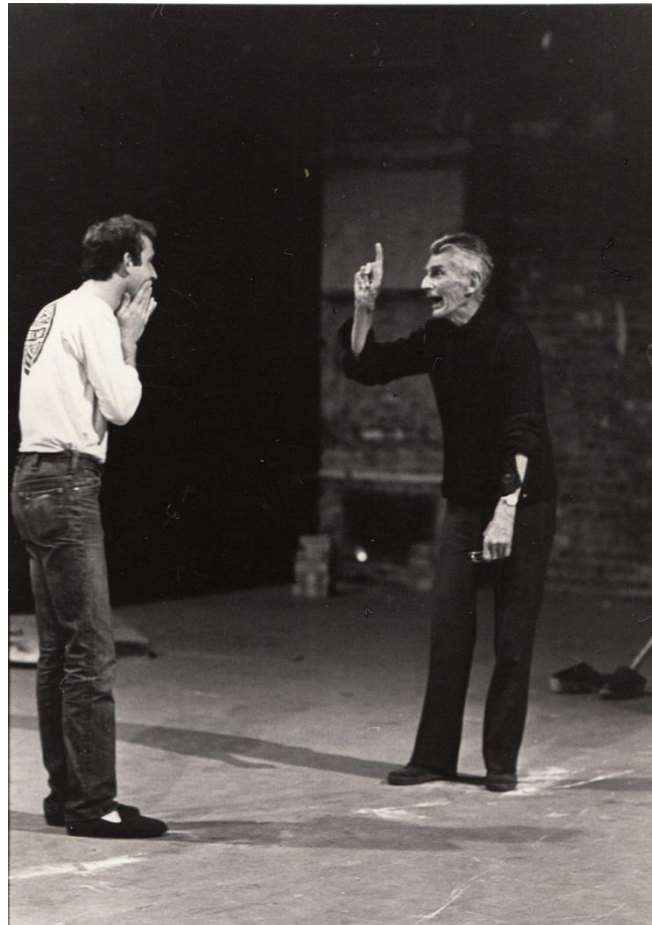


Figure 21 Bud Thorpe and Samuel Beckett in rehearsals for *Endgame* at Riverside Studios, London. Credit: Photograph by Chris Harris, Private Collection of David Gothard.

Rehearsals often saw Beckett critique his work, with Mandell recalling Beckett saying ‘There’s too much text’ in relation to lines such as Hamm’s ‘All is...all is...all is what? (*Violently*) All is what?’<sup>526</sup> Cuts, revisions and alterations characterised his direction with

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<sup>524</sup> Interview between James Knowlson and Bud Thorpe in 1993. UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/7/78.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> Gontarski, ed., *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: Endgame*, p. 56.

notable textual cuts made to the song scene and all references to the song. Excisions were also made when he decided there was too much clutter on the stage, such as the picture identified in the original editions of the text or with his descriptions of the characters when he chose for them not to have red faces. As he watched the play in performance, he saw the need for simplifications to moments such as Clov's observations with the telescope and his use of the ladder. By working practically Beckett also made justifications in light of the text, as he wrote in his production notebook, 'Windows not high' in order to legitimate Hamm's question 'Have you shrunk?'<sup>527</sup> These practical developments, the rapport he shared with what he called the 'San Quentinites'<sup>528</sup> and the ambiance of Riverside led to a largely positive rehearsal experience for Beckett, as Mandell noted:

Beckett more than enjoyed the rehearsals. He revelled in them. Well perhaps revelled is not quite the right description. At one point I was alone with him at our London digs. [...] He told me he would not be coming to Dublin for the opening. When I asked why he said 'They'd eat me up alive.' I told him what a joy the experience had been for me. He said, 'You've given me life.' He meant, I think, the whole rehearsal period and more.<sup>529</sup>

With these experiences in hand from Hammersmith, the cast and production team departed for Dublin without Beckett on the first stop of their Irish and British tour, with little idea that they would be back at Riverside to rehearse *Godot* with Beckett four years later.

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<sup>527</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>528</sup> Harmon, p. 372.

<sup>529</sup> Email from Alan Mandell to Matthew McFrederick, 30 September 2014.



#### 4.2.3. Rehearsing Beckett: *Waiting for Godot*

Original plans for San Quentin's *Godot* rehearsals suggested that they would take place in Paris, though Beckett showed his fondness for Riverside by writing to Cluchey, 'Try for Riverside again'.<sup>530</sup> Prior to the second rehearsals he had again strongly indicated that his directing days were over, though he relented and his participation in 1984 was ultimately for the Workshop's benefit, as Cluchey told him their tour to the Adelaide Festival (and subsequent Australian dates) hinged on his direct involvement. Beckett relayed a message to the production's director, Walter Asmus, stating that he agreed 'mostly to satisfy the Festival's insistence that I should "survey" (as Rick put it) the production'.<sup>531</sup> As further correspondence with Cluchey suggests, Beckett was keen to underline some rules and accentuate his physical condition in advance of rehearsals:

I need assurance on 2 counts:

1. That I shall not appear in any film of proceedings in London.
2. That the general title B. directs B. will be modified as requested.

Please understand the extent of my fatigue & do not ask too much of me.<sup>532</sup>

Although the tour was branded as 'Beckett directs Beckett', Beckett showed scepticism towards this title for the San Quentin triple bill, particularly in the case of *Godot*, where he was reluctant to be identified as the production's director due to his respect for Asmus, who was given the official credit.<sup>533</sup> Beckett wrote to Cluchey stating 'Your *Godot* should carry

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<sup>530</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Rick Cluchey, 23 September 1983. UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/2/57.

<sup>531</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Walter Asmus, 18 October 1983. UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/2/11.

<sup>532</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Rick Cluchey, 2 November 1983. UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/2/57.

<sup>533</sup> Beckett outlined his concern to Cluchey in a letter on 9 May 1984, stating: 'I regret – to put it mildly – that our understanding has not been observed. I.e. that the general description B. directs B. (as proclaimed on front of big program) should not include Godot but be modified in this case to some more accurate formula such as "Directed by W.A. in consultation with the author". Walter does not get the great credit he deserves for this production'. See Letter from Samuel Beckett to Rick Cluchey, 9 May 1984. HRC, Texas, Carlton Lake Collection, 17: 16-17.

the mention “in consultation with the author”<sup>534</sup>. In turn Asmus’s reflections suggest his own loyalty, as he admitted upon Beckett’s arrival in London, ‘I didn’t justify anything. [...] I just handed it over to him all together, I didn’t interfere at all, I took notes.’<sup>535</sup>

Rehearsals for *Godot* began on 20 February 1984, in what would be the final theatre production Beckett would work on in the UK. Asmus recalled Beckett’s condition when he arrived in London, he was too ‘tired to do the production [and] not really in command or the shape he had been in 10 years ago’<sup>536</sup>. Even though he made notes and changes to a 1981 Faber text of *Godot* prior to rehearsals, both Asmus and the cast have suggested that he felt unprepared, in comparison to past rehearsals, as he could no longer memorise the text. Nonetheless he still demonstrated a keen eye for the play’s symmetry on stage, an attentiveness that even caught out Asmus’s precise direction. For example, Asmus recalls his direction of specific entrances with Pozzo and Lucky entering audience right in Act One. In Act Two Beckett has them enter audience left, though Asmus admitted, to his own embarrassment, how he had them enter audience right again with Beckett quick to assert: ‘No! No, No! It’s all wrong, they enter from the other side’.<sup>537</sup>

The rehearsals proved to be another opportunity for Beckett to examine *Waiting for Godot* and make alterations to the play in performance and to the English text. Some of these changes took into consideration his work on *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller Theater, alongside further discussions with Asmus in relation to his 1978 Brooklyn Academy of Music production and his own reflections on reading the play in 1984. Some of these ideas were reaffirmed in the San Quentin production, such as the swapping of Vladimir and Estragon’s jackets and trousers after Act One and the tree was also modelled on Matias’s pale, thin Schiller design. Furthermore the concept of twelve *Wartestellen* developed in

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<sup>534</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Rick Cluchey, 23 September 1983. UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/2/57.

<sup>535</sup> Interview between Walter Asmus and Matthew McFrederick, 4 February 2014.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

Berlin was again used by Beckett and Asmus, as they saw this as a ‘major motif’ for the play’s ‘visual structure’.<sup>538</sup> The symbiotic parallels between each pairing also developed, as, for example, Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld noted: ‘Beckett concurred with J. Pat Miller’s incorporation of gestures in Lucky’s monologue similar to those of Pozzo in his to create a visual parallel between the two speeches’.<sup>539</sup> Inevitably this production would develop its own variations and modifications, as Beckett came to the play with more experience and practical knowledge of the theatre at a different stage in his own life, with different actors, and in different circumstances.

Each of the San Quentin actors expressed their fondness of the rehearsal experience. Lawrence Held played Estragon in this production and described how his process developed with and without Beckett:

the basic character was there and remained; but the levels on which that basic character worked were expanded considerably. There were moments that I felt very happy with, moments that were very amusing, that had been developed in Chicago, but suddenly they had the life taken right out of them. And that, initially, was a problem for me; but that is always an actor’s problem – having to accommodate the director’s wishes. And in this case, the director also happens to be the writer. It became very obvious to me that Beckett’s work is always in a state of flux and evolution, and that this was how he felt at this particular time, hence this is how he was going to direct it.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> Dougald McMillan and James Knowlson, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume III: Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 91.

<sup>539</sup> McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, p. 75

<sup>540</sup> Colin Duckworth, ‘Beckett’s New Godot’, in *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, ed. by J. Acheson and K. Arthur, (London: MacMillan, 1987), pp. 177-178.

Part of the evolutionary process saw, as Colin Duckworth highlights, a greater ‘contrast between the characters of Vladimir and Estragon’.<sup>541</sup> Further character-specific developments were made with some of the biggest changes incorporated for the role of Pozzo; substantial cuts were made to Pozzo’s speeches and much of his stage business, such as the use of his pipe. Performed by Cluchey, Beckett saw Pozzo’s relationship with Lucky as less violent in this production, and he cut his numerous jerks of the rope in favour of Pozzo simply ‘return[ing] to the end of the rope’ as he organises Lucky around the stage.<sup>542</sup>

Although significant cuts were made, additions were also integrated. Notably one segment of dialogue from the original French text was restored to the English text having been overlooked for 30 years. Beckett contemplated three different variations though it was eventually performed (and published) as follows:

ESTRAGON: Let’s go!

VLADIMIR: Where? (*Moves towards ESTRAGON. Seducingly*) Perhaps we’ll sleep tonight in his loft. All snug and dry, our bellies full, in the hay. That’s worth waiting for. No?

ESTRAGON: Not all night.

VLADIMIR: It’s still day.

(*Silence. Both look at the sky.*)<sup>543</sup>

Although this passage represents an addition to the text, Beckett more than often simplified the text and made the staging clearer when he could.

Time limitations once again determined the working parameters of this process, though as Cluchey asserted ‘if [Beckett] had had ten more days, I’m sure he would have cut,

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>542</sup> McMillan and Knowlson, p. 23.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

added, cut, orchestrated, rearranged, in an endless process'.<sup>544</sup> Beckett's rigour in rehearsals demonstrates how the writer would continue to shape and discover his play through performance, even in rehearsals that would prove to be his final production of *Waiting for Godot*, a process that challenges the idea that a performance could be definitive or complete. Beckett's tiredness after *Godot* surpassed his exhaustion after *Endgame*, though despite this it is evident he once again had a positive experience at Riverside and described the production he surveyed as 'very presentable'.<sup>545</sup> One of his highlights was the performance of J. Pat Miller as Lucky. Beckett told Miller 'he was the best Lucky he had ever seen' because of the 'overwhelming' and 'searing' way he delivered Lucky's speech.<sup>546</sup> Of one performance by Miller, Asmus recalled 'I could feel the vibrations beside me. Beckett was trembling beside me. Lucky's speech had moved him so much. I felt tears coming to my own eyes. This holy moment.'<sup>547</sup> Beckett would be glad he praised Miller, as Miller died of AIDS shortly after the conclusion of their Australian tour. The tour would prove the culmination of Beckett's two Riverside rehearsals where San Quentin would add their productions of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Godot* as part of their "Beckett directs Beckett" programme. As Beckett departed Riverside, his work and indeed this production remained for a few more days, with Gothard arranging for San Quentin to perform to local school children on 1 and 2 March 1984, which allowed Beckett's drama to reach a new generation.

#### **4.2.4. Beckett's Riverside Legacy**

Beckett's presence at Riverside proved a significant moment in the history of the West London arts centre, re-emphasising, at a time when the venue faced uncertainty over its future funding, that it was an environment where major international artists felt comfortable

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<sup>544</sup> Quoted in Duckworth, 'Beckett's New Godot', p. 179.

<sup>545</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 691.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Conversation between Walter Asmus and Matthew McFrederick, February 2014.

working. Through the publicity and images that materialised from Beckett's visits, Riverside was known as a theatre that the playwright himself endorsed and as a result became the London venue most associated with Beckett's work in the 1980s. As Marvin Carlson alludes to, these memories would be 'consciously utilized by the theatre culture', as future publicity materials and newspaper articles would feature images of Beckett at the venue.<sup>548</sup> Memories of Beckett at Riverside shaped its cultural imagination and actively stimulated its future programming, creating a legacy of his work at the Studios with renowned Beckettian performers such as Joe Chaikin in *Texts* (1981), Billie Whitelaw in *Rockaby*, *Enough* and *Footfalls* (1986) and Max Wall in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1986). While the rehearsals 'achieved a definite and substantial identity', events looked upon from this perspective can often 'exclude other events from visibility and consideration' from the cultural narratives generated.<sup>549</sup> This section will now reflect on the lesser known production histories and legacies of Beckett's drama at Riverside which were in fact initiated as a result of Beckett's presence in Hammersmith. Following San Quentin's *Endgame* rehearsals in 1980 the first example of their influence on Riverside came when its programming included the acclaimed American actor, director and former leader of the Open Theater, Joe Chaikin, performing *Texts* in 1981. *Texts* was an adaptation by Chaikin and director Stephen Kent which combined Beckett's prose works *Texts for Nothing* and extracts from *How It Is*.<sup>550</sup> Both Beckett and Chaikin were on friendly terms and corresponded as Chaikin sought advice and permission prior to staging *Texts*. Beckett initially offered thoughts on how he saw the material working on stage through an onstage Author whose speech was intermittently broken by a recorded voice,<sup>551</sup> though later in a note which signals how Beckett would

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<sup>548</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine*, p. 8.

<sup>549</sup> Postlewait, p. 249.

<sup>550</sup> Chaikin went on to direct *Waiting for Godot* at the Taper Too Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles (1990) and at Atlanta Seven Stages (1992) and a new production of *Texts for Nothing* with Bill Irwin at the Joseph Papp Public Theater, New York (1992).

<sup>551</sup> See Letter from Samuel Beckett to Joe Chaikin, 1 August 1980, UoR, Beckett, BC MS 4452.

occasionally make exceptions for his friends, he demonstrated faith in Chaikin by writing ‘I give you carte blanche to use the Texts as you please + end of How it is’.<sup>552</sup> Beckett maintained an active interest in the production’s development, as Chaikin and other friends updated him on its progress. When Chaikin performed at Riverside it was largely acclaimed, with critics such as Sarah Powell suggesting that *Texts* was an example of a production which overcame traditional assumptions about Beckett’s work: ‘If an evening with playwright Samuel Beckett spells gloom and doom, think again [...] *Texts* undermines the pessimism with a clown-comic lift’ (Powell 1981). Ned Chaillet added to the production’s positive reception in *The Times*, describing Chaikin as one of theatre’s ‘major innovators’ before stating ‘It is a tribute to Mr Chaikin and Mr Kent that [*Texts*] becomes mesmerising drama [...]. Mr Chaikin’s performance [...] demonstrates that superb acting can exist well outside the English tradition’.<sup>553</sup> Through performances such as *Texts* Riverside demonstrated how even though Beckett was not present, they could attract acclaimed performers of Beckett’s work capable of redefining assumptions attached to his *oeuvre*.

In the years that followed the 1984 rehearsals, Riverside’s artistic directorship and management structures changed<sup>554</sup>, though their commitment to Beckett’s work continued as they honoured his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1986 with a number of events across the year. This season began with Whitelaw performing *Rockaby*, *Footfalls* and *Enough*; performances previously staged individually at the Royal Court and at the NT (the latter of which I will discuss in the following section), where she had originally been directed by Beckett and Schneider, though restaged with the help of Robert Hendry and Rocky Greenberg. This triple bill was the first time Whitelaw had worked on Beckett’s plays without his direction or supervision since she

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<sup>552</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Joe Chaikin, 29 January 1981, UoR, Beckett, BC MS 4452.

<sup>553</sup> Ned Chaillet, ‘Beckett’s work explored’, *The Times*, 18 June 1981.

<sup>554</sup> According to records at Riverside Studios, David Gothard was its Artistic Director until August 1984. In October 1984, Graham Marchant assumed this role until February 1985 and, from November 1985 to November 1989, John Baraldi was Chief Executive of the Studios, followed by Jonathan Lamede until 1993. Riverside Studios Archive, Hammersmith, London, Uncatalogued Folder.

first performed in *Play* at the Old Vic in 1964. As well as featuring the foremost actress Beckett collaborated with, their programming would go on to showcase the next generation of Beckettian performers including Barry McGovern in his touring production of *I'll Go On* from the Gate Theatre in Dublin in July 1986.<sup>555</sup> McGovern was already an accomplished performer of Beckett's drama in Ireland, though he would later symbolise the Gate's developed interest in Beckett's drama through his multiple performances in their Beckett productions. After what was the Gate Theatre's first visit to London with a production of Beckett's work, the Irish theatre would go on to contribute numerous productions of Beckett's drama to the London theatre landscape over a 25-year period, with performances in the West End as well as their two Beckett Festivals in 1999 and 2006 at the Barbican Centre, which both staged all of Beckett's nineteen plays for the theatre.

Further Beckett performances and events were produced at Riverside during the 1980s including Max Wall in *Krapp's Last Tape*, as the venue continued to promote Beckett's work. As the decade drew to a close and Beckett's health deteriorated, several of his friends involved in his Hammersmith rehearsals planned a production to lift his spirits. This production of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Catastrophe* (See Figure 22) first staged at the Leicester Haymarket would bring together a number of his close friends and collaborators within the theatre. David Warrilow played both Krapp and the Protagonist in a production directed by Beckett's Polish translator Antoni Libera, designed by Herbert with Gothard, then an Artistic Associate of the Haymarket. The production also toured to Riverside and the timing of Beckett's death saw the first UK performances of Beckett's drama after his death take place in the Hammersmith arts centre. It was here in his alternative London theatrical home that the UK productions of Beckett's drama post-Beckett would start.

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<sup>555</sup> *I'll Go On* played at Riverside Studios from 22 July-10 August 1986.



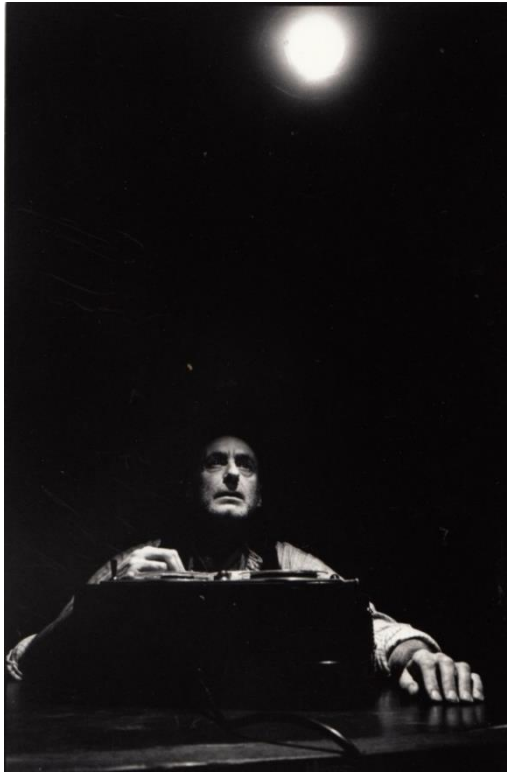


Figure 22 David Warrilow as Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape*, Riverside Studios, London, 1990.  
Credit: Photograph by Chris Harris, Private Collection of David Gothard.

As stated, Beckett's participation in rehearsals at Riverside initiated a legacy of further Beckett productions at the Hammersmith venue. However, the broader impact of these rehearsals on individuals working at Riverside or directly involved in these rehearsals remains less well known. Of the numerous people engaged in the theatre, Beckett's impact is perhaps best encapsulated by the career of the then Riverside Associate Director David Leveaux. Leveaux would go on to be a renowned Broadway director for his work on Eugene O'Neill and Pinter's plays and following his work at Riverside he would direct the first East German Beckett production with *Das Letzte Band* at the Theater im Palast, East Berlin in 1986, featuring Ekkehard Schall. Through distanced reflection it is possible to see the impact observing Beckett in rehearsals had on individuals who were present:

I had the great fortune to sit around and watch him direct in that distinctive and discreetly influential style that depended less on him saying anything than it did on the actors being aware to their nerve endings that he didn't miss a thing. Moreover, and here was the clue, there was nothing abstract about his advice to the actor. Not a

word about metaphors or meanings or themes, only the gently firm injunction to ‘look up there’ or to be clear on a word or a phrase.<sup>556</sup>

Leveaux’s comments offer a fitting reflection on Beckett’s time in rehearsals at Riverside. He suggests the distinct impression Beckett’s physical presence stimulated from those observing and the subtlety and conviction with which he envisaged his plays, though unmistakably he also highlights the education these rehearsals gave those in attendance.

To conclude this section, it is worth recalling Beckett’s disillusionment with the theatre generally in 1979 and his hopes for a theatre ‘haven’ before his death. By 1984, he was 77 and inevitably left Riverside tired from his exertions over rehearsals, though he enjoyed the work, the friendly atmosphere and the venue. As the theatre encountered funding difficulties with the Greater London Council (GLC), he signed a letter alongside several prominent artists to the editor of *The Times* describing Riverside as ‘a joyful building’.<sup>557</sup> In later years when funding difficulties meant Riverside closed for several months Beckett wittily referred to the GLC as the ‘G.L. Curmudgeons’ in a letter to Gothard, who had subsequently left Riverside.<sup>558</sup> Though perhaps more significantly Beckett stated succinctly, ‘Another haven closed’.<sup>559</sup> Although he was only present in Hammersmith for a number of weeks, he developed affection for the venue and the people who helped him. His drama would continue to be staged even when he was not directly involved, underlining his position in Riverside’s eclectic international programming during in the 1980s. Over these years Riverside established itself as the alternative home for Beckett’s drama in London, stimulated by rehearsals which proved a significant pedagogical and public moment; where well-worn

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<sup>556</sup> David Leveaux, “‘Waiting for Godot’ by Samuel Beckett”, 10 November 2014. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/read/waiting-for-godot-by-samuel-beckett-david-leveaux-107](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/waiting-for-godot-by-samuel-beckett-david-leveaux-107) [accessed 27 April 2015].

<sup>557</sup> Roberto Matta et al., ‘Riverside Studios’, *The Times*, 9 June.

<sup>558</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to David Gothard, 12 March 1985, Private Collection of David Gothard.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

portraits of Beckett were redefined and a new generation of practitioners, producers and devotees were educated and inspired.

### **4.3. A final fling with the National**

In between his two well publicised rehearsals at Riverside Studios, Beckett returned to London to oversee rehearsals of *Rockaby* and *Enough* at the NT in 1982, in an often forgotten theatrical engagement for the playwright. After directing Whitelaw in *Happy Days*, Beckett expected this production would conclude his theatrical activity, writing to Whitelaw in September 1979: ‘I don’t expect to direct any more in the theatre. Or to write for it again.’<sup>560</sup> However, as many of the declarations and events in this chapter have already highlighted, this suggested farewell to the theatre was to prove premature, particularly with respect to his work in London and his writing. Beckett had already written *A Piece of Monologue* for the actor David Warrilow (between 1977 and 1979<sup>561</sup>) by the time of his letter to Whitelaw, and would go on to write *Rockaby*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*, as the final contributions to his dramatic *oeuvre*. This section will concentrate on Beckett’s connection with the NT during the 1980s by discussing the London premiere of *Rockaby*, before briefly addressing the NT’s 1987 production of *Waiting for Godot* directed by Michael Rudman.

#### **4.3.1. *Rockaby*’s London premiere**

*Rockaby* received its London premiere on 9 December 1982 at the NT’s Cottesloe Theatre, where it was performed by Whitelaw in an early evening performance alongside a reading of Beckett’s short story *Enough*.<sup>562</sup> This performance, directed by Schneider, was a revival of the original production of *Rockaby* mounted in the Center Theatre at the State University of

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<sup>560</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Billie Whitelaw, 17 September 1979, UoR, Whitelaw, BW B/1/14.

<sup>561</sup> *A Piece of Monologue* opened at the La MaMa Theatre in New York in December 1979.

<sup>562</sup> *Enough* was included for performances at both the State University of New York at Buffalo and London. Its inclusion was made at the suggestion of producer Daniel Labeille, who felt *Rockaby* needed a companion piece, given that it lasted approximately 14 minutes.

New York at Buffalo. Beckett wrote *Rockaby* following a proposal from Daniel Labeille, a Professor of Theatre Studies at the University, to contribute to Labeille's event 'A Samuel Beckett Celebration', which included a number of academic and practitioner panels on Beckett's work and the idea of staging two short Beckett plays at the University. Part of the planning and finances that contributed to the programme and *Rockaby*'s premiere on 8 April 1981 was that the rehearsal process and performance would be filmed by D. A. Pennebaker – a renowned documentary film maker who had previously filmed Bob Dylan and David Bowie.<sup>563</sup>

Like many of Beckett's plays for women, *Whitelaw* has a strong association with *Rockaby* due to the distillation of her performance in the play's cultural memory through photographs by Nobby Clark and John Haynes, as well as in Pennebaker's film. However, as Beckett's correspondence to Labeille elucidates, her association with *Rockaby* nearly did not materialise as he originally wrote the play for Buffalo with Schneider and the actress Irene Worth both in mind.<sup>564</sup> Worth was subsequently cast in a movie and unavailable for the project with *Whitelaw* later offered the role; an outcome which pleased Beckett. While the manner in which the casting for *Rockaby* transpired to consolidate *Whitelaw*'s connection with Beckett's female stage roles, it was perhaps more surprising that *Rockaby*'s first appearance in London took place on the Cottesloe stage at the NT. As previous chapters and sections of this history have shown, Beckett and his drama had fruitful and enjoyable collaborations at the Royal Court and his most recent work with the San Quentin Drama Workshop had developed a relationship with Riverside Studios. In contrast, performances of his drama were intermittently staged at the NT, with both parties never fostering a sustained connection. An understanding of Beckett's perspective towards these partnerships can be

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<sup>563</sup> Schneider and *Whitelaw* rehearsed the play in London, recording the voice in Soho, before flying to Buffalo for a tight technical rehearsal schedule. For more information on the Buffalo performance. See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 662.

<sup>564</sup> See correspondence between Samuel Beckett and Daniel Labeille, UoR, Beckett, BC MS 5245. Knowlson traces Beckett's correspondence concerning *Rockaby*. See Knowlson, *Damed to Fame*, p. 663.

gained from a revealing letter he wrote to Jocelyn Herbert concerning the staging of *Rockaby* and other short plays in London where he reiterated his preferred London venues:

When approached by Spokesmen re production of recent shorts I said it should first be offered to the Court (loyalty) + failing there to Riverside. Asked for views on director + cast, I suggested Alan Schneider + none as to cast except of course Billie in Rockaby if available. Have heard nothing from | Court | nor from David. I like Riverside + but for old times wd. have given them first refusal.<sup>565</sup>

Beckett's letter demonstrates the loyalty and affection he held for the Royal Court, which dated back to the consistent support they offered him since the premieres of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte San Paroles*. Even though he established and later retracted his UK first option rights agreement with the Royal Court, in reality he always remembered his friendship with Devine and Herbert, their loyalty, and sought to return his gratitude by offering the theatre first refusal on his new plays in London. Beckett offered *Rockaby* to the Court's newly appointed Artistic Director, Max Stafford-Clark, who was initially interested in producing *Rockaby* as part of a double bill with *Ohio Impromptu*, however the Court's prior programming commitments meant it was unable to stage the play until early 1983.<sup>566</sup> With uncertainty over the Court's commitment to the project and brief protracted talks between Beckett and Stafford-Clark, an unexpected phone call between Schneider and Peter Hall saw the NT enter the frame to produce *Rockaby*. Again, even with Hall's proposal, Beckett reinforced his favouritism towards the Court by stating, 'I said that I felt a commitment to the Court & would be sorry if the London premiere of these plays were not to be given there.'<sup>567</sup> Despite this desire, the uncertainty over a production at the Court and the keenness of the other

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<sup>565</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 20 October 1981, UoR, Beckett, HER/104.

<sup>566</sup> Stafford-Clark also expressed a preference that one of the theatre's own actors would be cast in *Ohio Impromptu*.

<sup>567</sup> Harmon, p. 429.

parties involved to produce the play at the NT meant it welcomed *Rockaby* for its London premiere.

*Rockaby* marked the second Beckett performance staged in Hall's rapidly expanding NT programming, which 'had already produced more new shows in just four years on the South Bank than Laurence Olivier's NT Company staged in a decade.'<sup>568</sup> The 1980s were both a successful and controversial time for the NT as it presented several landmark productions, such as *The Oresteia* (1981), though it was also exposed to increased media attention as a result of prosecution proceedings from Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980). 1982 epitomised the NT's productivity which ranged from box successes such as *Guys and Dolls* (1982), *The Beggar's Opera* (1982) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1982) to productions that did not meet box office targets, including *Don Quixote* (1982) and *Jean Seberg* (1983). Hall's varied programming was also evident through the strong working relationships he forged with prominent writers of the decade such as Brenton, David Hare, Peter Shaffer and Christopher Hampton, and arguably his interest in staging *Rockaby* suggested his desire to add Beckett to his programming just as he had lured another Royal Court favourite – David Storey – with his play *Early Days* in 1980. *Rockaby* did however contrast significantly to the NT's large scale productions of 1982, as its staging simply required Whitelaw and her rocking chair, as well as a lectern for her reading of *Enough* (particularly in light of the 12 piece orchestra and 27 cast members for *Guys and Dolls*). *Rockaby* and *Enough* was limited to a short production run in the Cottesloe Theatre with seven early evening performances in total, however it did return with Whitelaw performing in a triple bill which also included *Footfalls* to Riverside Studios in 1986.

Beckett may have had an emotional attachment to the Royal Court, but he travelled to London to assist Schneider and Whitelaw with their preparations for the 1982 performance.

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<sup>568</sup> Rosenthal, p.336.

According to Anthony Cronin, Beckett said he ‘hobbled in on’ rehearsals and was supportive of Whitelaw’s performance describing her as ‘great as always’.<sup>569</sup> Rehearsals began in London one week prior to the performance with a significant proportion of their time focusing on the technical intricacies involved with Beckett making minor suggestions concerning its very specific lighting cues and levels, as well as its rocking movements. Knowlson highlights much time was saved by using the original recording from Buffalo for the Cottesloe performance, and although there were ‘a few minor things on the tape that he heard a little differently in his head’, overall Beckett was very satisfied with the performance.

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Since this production’s premiere in America and its later revivals, Whitelaw’s performance has been subject to extended commentaries in books such as Jonathan Kalb’s *Beckett in Performance*, her own perspective in *Billie Whitelaw... Who He?* and documented in Pennebaker’s short film. These sources inevitably concentrated on *Rockaby*’s first performance in Buffalo and only briefly highlighted its presence in London, where its impact was restricted by its limited number of performances and a brief, but favourable reception in the press. Staging *Rockaby* enabled the NT to meet the experimental strand of its programming, though its presentation as a platform performance was subject to criticism from Rosaline Asquith, who remarked that although the Cottesloe ‘was to have nurtured experimental work, [it] tends unfortunately to confine its spirit of adventure to [...] ‘platform performances.’”<sup>571</sup> Despite her criticism of the NT’s staging format, Asquith was complimentary of *Rockaby*, describing it as an example of ‘the master of the minimal at his most refined’.<sup>572</sup> Martin Esslin’s also critiqued the decision to present *Rockaby* as a platform

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<sup>569</sup> Cronin, p. 575.

<sup>570</sup> Knowlson, pp. 663-664.

<sup>571</sup> Rosaline Asquith, ‘Beckett and Billie’, *The Observer*, 12 December 1982.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*

piece, arguing that the performance he saw in London lost some of the finesse the same production had in Buffalo:

Having seen it at its first night I felt that the London performance lacked some of the impact of the original staging. The rocking chair here creaks a little too much – or did so during the first performance on December 9. The lighting was not quite as precise. But these flaws derived no doubt from the slightly improvised nature of platform performances at the National.<sup>573</sup>

Esslin's observations identify some of the weaknesses arising from *Rockaby*'s first London performance that were not raised by other reviewers, many of whom saw the play for the first time. While on the one hand, Esslin's comments could be read as a harsh critique of the performance from a second viewing, on the other hand, as his reflections represent the only review to identify these discrepancies in the performance, it may offer a fair insight into the performance and accentuate the exactness the play's technical specifications demand on the stage. Nonetheless, Whitelaw's performance earned praise from John Barber for its sensitive combination of oral and physical delivery, 'Miss Whitelaw's performance is appropriately cold and withdrawn, her recorded voice is fittingly rhythmic and distantly urgent.'<sup>574</sup> Meanwhile, Harold Hobson described Whitelaw's 'poignant and haunting performance [as] beautiful', before, in arguably one of his most misguided of reviews, he recalled his admiration for Madeleine Renaud's performance in *Oh Les Beaux Jours* and continued by expressing an odd visualisation of Renaud in the role, 'I do not know what exhilaration she would have released in *Rockaby*, but doubtless it would have had a sense of joyous rest after long and happy labours completed instead of stern and struggled-against

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<sup>573</sup> Martin Esslin, 'Rockaby', *Plays and Players*, February 1983.

<sup>574</sup> John Barber, 'Less from the master of lessness', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 December 1982.



command.<sup>575</sup> In contrast to Hobson's reflection and his earlier critique of the performance, Esslin concluded his review by offering a positive evaluation of *Rockaby's* lasting impression, which epitomises the impact of Beckett's late work, 'It is the image that carries the emotional impact; the image that remains in the mind. And images are the most concise tools of communication; they work well-nigh instantaneously.'<sup>576</sup> After presenting this vivid image, the NT's next Beckett project would return with a new twist on the most familiar image associated with Beckett's drama as they staged *Waiting for Godot* in 1987.

#### **4.3.2. *Waiting for Godot* on the national stage**

Given the impact *Waiting for Godot* had on post-war British theatre, the central position its first UK performance occupies in national theatre narratives and its extensive UK production history, it is perhaps surprising to realise that *Godot* has only been subject to one exclusive production at the NT and that this production only materialised late in Beckett's lifetime.<sup>577</sup> The irony of this historical fact was emphasised further when the NT carried out its well-publicised NT2000 survey to coincide with the millennium, where more than 800 playwrights, actors, directors, theatre professionals and arts journalists were asked to name ten English language plays that they considered significant. The results revealed *Godot* was the most selected play; an added indication of the respect with which it was held by key figures in the British theatre and its continued appreciation in the context of British theatre history. When the play was staged in 1987 under Michael Rudman's direction, its timing meant it followed a number of major productions of the play staged in the UK, which added to the expectations of a NT staging. Further burdens of its scheduling saw the performance

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<sup>575</sup> Harold Hobson, 'Chances of salvation', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 December 1982.

<sup>576</sup> Esslin.

<sup>577</sup> As highlighted in Chapter 3, *Godot* had been produced by the Young Vic when it was an off-shoot of the NT, though never in a main NT theatre. Rosenthal highlights that Howard Davies was planning to direct *Godot* in 2003 with Alex Jennings and Simon Russell Beale, though having re-read the play decided not to. See Rosenthal, p. 701.

face the added pressure of being the first British *Godot* to use the then unpublished revised text as outlined in McMillan and Knowlson's *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett* (revisions, cuts and additions based on productions at the Schiller Theater, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and by the San Quentin Drama Workshop rehearsals at Riverside Studios) and the need to establish its own identity from a text which was shaped by these productions staged by Beckett or with his support.

Ahead of his production, Rudman sought Beckett's advice and they discussed his plans for staging the play in Paris in 1987. Although their meeting was amicable, Rudman's notes on their discussions suggest how they shared different views and approaches as to how *Godot* should be staged. Rudman's background as a director was firmly based in naturalism and he argued, that 'only a production rooted in naturalism will work in Britain.'<sup>578</sup> While these comments reflect his directorial practices, they may also be understood as his reading of the play in relation to the theatre culture he was presenting it in, as he strived to make *Godot* more accessible to NT audiences. Naturalism remained the dominant theatrical style in British theatre cultures, but it was a less frequently employed style with regards to the artistic heritage of staging Beckett in Britain. Rudman's notes highlight that he discussed his proposed naturalistic staging to Beckett, as he remembered, 'he seems very resistant to any conversation about accepted theatre practices such as actors delving into the biography of characters, or costumes representing the history of characters...'<sup>579</sup> Beckett was of course at this stage in his career overfamiliar with questions concerning *Godot*, its characters and the meaning of the play, particularly from practitioners working in the English theatre with his earliest and most famous inquisitor, Ralph Richardson, memorably wanting to know Pozzo's CV, for example.<sup>580</sup> Ironically, in light of Rudman's notes of their meeting, his concept of the play would be juxtaposed by John Peter's positive commentary on the production's treatment

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<sup>578</sup> Michael Rudman, Programme Note, *Waiting for Godot*, NT, 1987. See UoR, Beckett, BC MS 3143.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 507.

of Beckett's text, as he commented, 'Rudman's unforgettable production of *Waiting for Godot* (Lyttelton) is not in the facile business of answering questions: Rudman knows I think, that for Beckett there are no answers.'<sup>581</sup> In contrast to Rudman's viewpoint, Beckett's perspective on their meeting suggests their different interpretations of the play in performance, as he was dismissive of the production (that he never saw) in a letter to Ruby Cohn, 'Never expected much from Rudman Godot so am not disappointed. Asmus was at rehearsals for a few days but could do nothing.'<sup>582</sup> This impression of the production would have been shaped by their meeting and by the relayed impressions of friends or collaborators familiar with the play from a Beckettian perspective. Nonetheless, its critical reception suggests that while an alternative interpretation of *Godot* was produced, it was positively received by many spectators and critics in attendance.

*Godot* was the final Beckett project staged at the NT during his lifetime and would in fact see Hall reaffirm his interest in the play that launched his career in his final NT season. Ahead of Richard Eyre's succession on 1 September 1988, *Godot* ran for 110 performances in the theatre's repertory system from 25 November 1987 to 19 July 1988. Although programming *Godot* in the final year of his NT tenure could be read as a nostalgic link to the start of Hall's career, the NT had acquired the rights for *Godot* towards the end of the 1970s with the intention of an all-star production. As Beckett wrote to Schneider on 13 November 1979, 'Godot at National at last coming Fall. No details. Vague talk of [Paul] Scofield.'<sup>583</sup> While this production did not come to fruition, its suggested casting of Scofield, the best actor Oscar winner for *A Man for All Seasons*, pre-empted the great number of celebrated actors who would go on to play Vladimir and Estragon, such as Steve Martin, Robin Williams, Ben Kingsley and Alan Howard. When the play was eventually staged in 1987, Rudman's cast featured John Alderton, Alec McCowen, Peter Wight and Colin Welland

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<sup>581</sup> John Peter, 'A richly-rewarded wait', *The Sunday Times*, 29 November 1987.

<sup>582</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Ruby Cohn, 26 December 1987, UoR, Beckett, COH/208.

<sup>583</sup> Harmon, p. 379.

(replaced by Terence Rigby following an injury) in a performance that also boasted Movement and Dance directors and the expertise of consultants close to Beckett, in Walter Asmus (Production Advisor) and James Knowlson (Text Consultant), amongst its production team. These roles highlight the wealth of resources the NT had at its disposal, though it may also suggest their desire to stage an acclaimed production of the play, having omitted *Godot* from their previous programmes. This viewpoint was outlined by Peter's who remarked with added praise, 'The National owed us this play: now look at how gloriously they have paid the debt.'<sup>584</sup> Despite similar positive responses to the performance, the production occupies a somewhat undervalued position in the play's performance history and in the history of the NT, with both David Bradby's *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* and Rosenthal's *The National Theatre Story* omitting the production from their extensive histories.

Another curious feature of Rudman's production was William Dudley's set, which represented an original stage image with respect to the scenographic interpretations of *Godot* on the British stage. Following Peter Snow's cluttered design at the Arts Theatre, other designers including Timothy O'Brien and Matias employed a minimalistic approach to the mise en scene, akin to work of Beckett's main UK scenographer Jocelyn Herbert (who incidentally never designed *Godot*). Both Rudman and Dudley quickly established they would incorporate 'a proper road, a delineated road' into their set and this idea would lead to a raked, tarmac road (rising from stage right to stage left) with white stripes occupying the upstage area of the Lyttelton stage.<sup>585</sup> Leading up to the road was an undulating embankment of scorched earth, from which a bare tree grew out at an angle. Dudley's set was neither cluttered nor minimalist, though as Worth highlights the emptiness of the stage was 'softened by the use of different levels'.<sup>586</sup> In her nuanced commentary on the set, Worth finished by arguing, 'Some saw this as an arresting scenic image, suggestive of moon craters; for others it

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<sup>584</sup> Peter, 'A richly-rewarded wait', *The Sunday Times*, 29 November 1987.

<sup>585</sup> 'The Company Talking...', *Times Educational Supplement*, 20 November 1987. Sheet 2.

<sup>586</sup> Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, p. 29

was a distraction. [...] it tended to shield actors and audience from what they should be exposed to: the terror of nothingness.’<sup>587</sup> Here, Worth considers two perspectives on Dudley’s design, which echo her argument concerning Peter Snow’s design of *Godot*’s London premiere raised in Chapter 2. Through Dudley’s set and Rudman’s direction, it may be argued that the NT production made *Godot* more accessible to audiences unfamiliar to the play. While these performance and scenographic approaches represented an uncommon approach to the play in the context of its UK production history, the staging at the National arguably contributed to Beckett’s broadening appeal and acceptance prior to his death, despite the criticism these approaches received from those closely connected to Beckett’s work.

The performance legacies of Beckett’s drama from these NT productions are perhaps more difficult to recognise than what materialised at Riverside Studios after Beckett’s visit. However, a closer examination of other Beckett productions and the theatrical context suggests that these performances were influential. Whitelaw later combined *Rockaby* and *Enough* with *Footfalls* which was performed at Riverside Studios in 1986 before an international tour; arguably an early precursor for the path Lisa Dwan would take with her touring trilogy of Beckett shorts twenty eight years later. Meanwhile, the NT *Godot* was another production of the play during the 1980s to be staged in a large theatre following productions at the Old Vic and Roundhouse. Although Steve Martin and Robin Williams suggested *Godot* was a play that could be a star vehicle through their Broadway performance, arguably the glut of *Godots* in London during this decade also highlighted that *Godot* had a broad appeal and could attract large audiences, ahead of its return to the West End with Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson in 1991. On reflection, despite Beckett’s reluctance to send *Rockaby* to the National and his doubts about Rudman’s *Godot*, the National showed that it

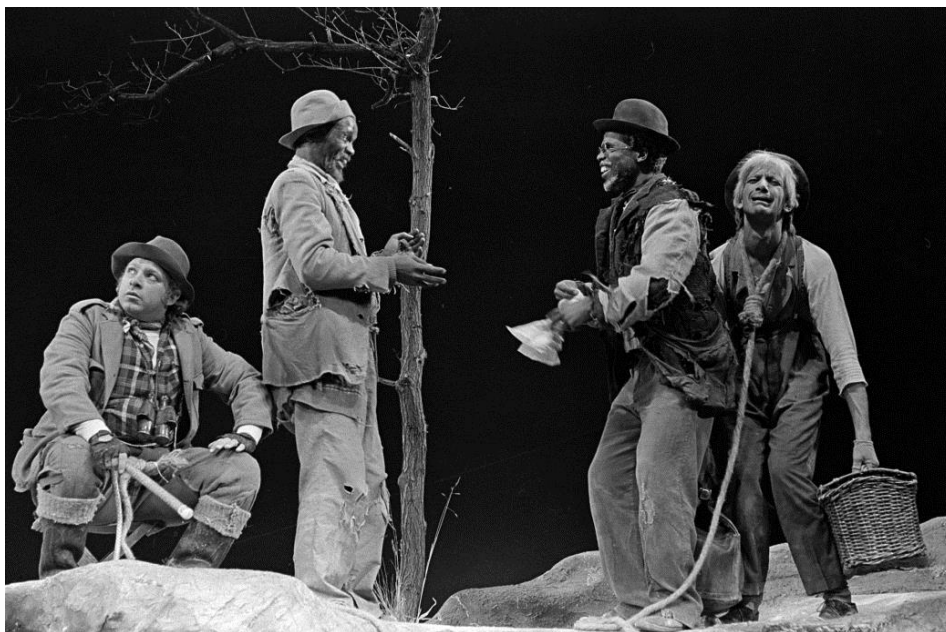
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<sup>587</sup> Ibid., p. 29

could support the development of Beckett's drama by mounting significant productions that suited its performance agendas.

#### **4.4. Conclusion: Beckett's "final bout" in London: Old and New Homes, Companies and Havens (1976-1989)**

This chapter has highlighted how the final years of Beckett's lifetime saw key theatrical events hosted at the Royal Court Theatre, Riverside Studios and the National Theatre in venues and on productions that he actively worked in and collaborated on. These productions have received greater attention because of Beckett's direct involvement, though also because of the wider impact these productions have had on Beckett's place in London's theatre cultures and their role in shaping performance practices of Beckett's drama. Elsewhere in London other notable productions were staged beyond these three venues, though their presence has largely remained hidden from Beckettian performance histories. These productions offered an early indication of how Beckett's texts were being interpreted in innovative ways.



**Figure 23** The Baxter Theatre (South Africa) production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Old Vic, London. Credit: V&A Theatre and Performance Collection, Douglas Jeffrey Collection.

For example, as shown in Figure 23, Donald Howarth's Baxter Theatre production of *Godot* set John Kani and Winston Ntshona as Didi and Gogo on the South African veldt<sup>588</sup>, Max Wall and Trevor Peacock played the same roles in the round at the Roundhouse in the same year, while the London premieres of *Catastrophe*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *What Where* were staged at the Donmar Warehouse featuring David Warrilow and Norman Beaton's 1988 Bloomsbury Theatre performance saw him become the first black actor to play Krapp. Furthermore, as these productions prove, Beckett's drama was no longer being staged in a limited number of London theatres, but rather his work was being staged in a range of geographically diverse theatres that showed how his drama began to diffuse across London during the 1980s, in a sense look forward to the broader histories that would develop after Beckett's death.<sup>589</sup> By the final years of his active involvement in this history, Beckett's drama had significantly contributed to the shape and legacies of British theatre cultures. Beckett had been accepted by a broad range of theatres, practitioners, companies and audiences, and influenced British theatre through his theatrical style, practical innovations and aesthetic development. His influence on British theatres was best epitomised by his contribution to the growing prominence and reputation of Riverside Studios, with Beckett easily fitting into the arts centre's international ethos. Beckett was international, but it was also increasingly natural to see his work presented in the British tradition where his work was a valued part of London's artistic heritage and future.

At the start of this chapter I referred to Beckett's letter to Alan Schneider in 1974, when he said three upcoming productions of his theatre in London, Paris and Berlin where Beckett expressed his tiredness with the theatre. His "final bout" with the theatre lasted

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<sup>588</sup> Howarth directed *Godot* in South Africa in 1980, though his theatrical career stretches back to his years as a playwright during the early years of the English Stage Company when George Devine produced his play *Sugar in the Morning* (1959).

<sup>589</sup> These theatres included, south of the Thames, the Old Vic, Young Vic and National Theatre; in the West, Riverside Studios and Questors Theatre; meanwhile productions were staged in the North of the city at the Roundhouse and Tricycle Theatre; and finally closer to central London both the Donmar Warehouse and the Bloomsbury Theatre. See Appendix Item 1 for more information.

longer than Beckett anticipated, undoubtedly because of the enjoyment he gained from the company and collaboration the art form brought him. The years 1976 to 1989 discussed in this chapter may conclude Beckett's active contribution towards productions of his drama in London and elsewhere, though his legacy and the ever evolving interest in his *oeuvre* was just starting to unfold, as the number of productions of Beckett's drama post-Beckett would rise across London in many shapes, sizes and contexts, as my final chapter will discuss.



## 5. 'Beckettmania': Beckett post-Beckett (1990-2010)

In his memoir concerning the first London production of *Waiting for Godot*, Paul Daneman, the first actor to play the role of Vladimir in Britain, recalled of the end of its opening week, 'In the bar on Saturday night Peter H confided in me gloomily that the advance was pretty negligible and he thought the notice would have to go up on Monday.'<sup>590</sup> Whether or not Beckett's career in London would have survived had this notice actually gone up is now a matter for speculation, though by reflecting on the histories of his theatre over sixty years later, it is clear that the reputation of Beckett's drama has significantly flourished since Hall and Daneman's conversation on that Saturday night. Today, Beckett's *opus* occupies a respected and popular position within the fabric of London theatres with recent productions and events showing the varied interpretations and the commercial appeal of his plays. For example, Dublin-based Company SJ presented their location-specific performances of *Act Without Words II* and *Rough for Theatre I* for the Barbican's International Beckett Season in June 2015, while the success of the Royal Court's trilogy – *Not I/ Footfalls/ Rockaby* – saw the sold out production transfer to the Duchess Theatre for an extended run that showed how even Beckett's short, late plays can today have a mainstream attraction. These and many more examples of Beckett's rich and diverse performance history developed after his death, which I will now discuss in this final chapter.

I have deliberately dedicated this chapter to performances following Beckett's death in 1989 to underline the enduring fascination London theatres, practitioners and audiences have shown his work even without his direct influence. As this thesis has already highlighted, Beckett was a widely known cultural figure and his drama was well-established in Britain's theatre culture through its extensive performance history in Britain, from his direct

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<sup>590</sup> Paul Daneman, 'Godot Arrives', p. 9.

collaborations with theatres and practitioners to the growing number of performances staged independently from his influence. Indeed the engaged and sustained presence of his work within the ecology of London theatres up to 1989 supported the upsurge in productions that would follow his passing from 1990 to 2010. This increased interest is reflected in the records compiled for the Staging Beckett Database, where a quantitative reading of the data highlights that of the 151 recorded Beckett performances staged in London across the timeframe of this history, 87 productions were staged after his death from 1990 to 2015, in comparison to the 24 performances staged between 1976 and 1989. While these statistics do not reflect the staggered nature of Beckett's dramatic output or that many of his plays were written during the later stages of his life, they do show that 22 more performances have been staged over a shorter period of time since his death, which suggests how performances of Beckett's drama proliferated post-Beckett.

Akin to the death of an artist commonly signifying an increase in their artwork's value, it may be argued that Beckett's drama was in a position to attain the theatrical equivalent. As Roman Kräussl has argued of the value of art, 'numerous [...] factors affect how prices perform posthumously, including overall market conditions, the artist's age at the time of death, how prolific he or she was, and announced plans to manage the estate. Exactly how the variables will interact to determine value is impossible to predict.'<sup>591</sup> By reading Kräussl's assertions in relation to Beckett's theatre, it is possible to gauge how similar contributing factors had an impact on London's growing number of Beckett productions after his death. Over these years, productions of his drama were simultaneously linked with dominant trends in British life and culture from 1990 onwards. For example, Beckett's drama developed a more popular appeal, which saw more regular performances on the commercial West End that were complicit with Britain's growing obsession with celebrity culture and its rising

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<sup>591</sup> Roman Kräussl, 'The Death Effect? Not so fast'. See [http://www.art-finance.com/AA\\_2013\\_June.pdf](http://www.art-finance.com/AA_2013_June.pdf) [accessed 26 February 2016].

propensity to festivalise culture, as his drama was packaged as a consumable product for theatregoers.<sup>592</sup> While the growing magnetism of his drama attracted star actors, it also enticed young British theatre makers with a reputation for bold and experimental theatre – akin to the rise of emerging British talent in other art forms such as the Young British Artists and musicians associated with Britpop – as well as prompting nostalgic links through practitioners connected to Beckett’s lifetime through directors such as Peter Hall and Walter Asmus. In a further link to Kräussl’s argument, the role of Beckett’s estate (the executor of which is Edward Beckett) has played an important, if somewhat divisive role, in overseeing the legacy of Beckett performances post-Beckett.

Within the structure of the thesis, this chapter will cover the longest timeframe and the most productions – more in fact than the previous three chapters combined – and by dedicating this chapter to performances materialising after Beckett’s death, it will be possible to gain a better understanding of these plays in performance beyond productions Beckett was actively involved in. In support of the quantitative findings made from the Staging Beckett Database, this chapter will proceed to discuss the rising interest and value associated with Beckett’s canon through a number of key societal and cultural conditions that influenced Britain in 1990s and 2000s. I will structure this analysis through sections that focus on the following key relationships developed over the post-Beckett London years:

- 1.) The Beckett network post-Beckett
- 2.) Beckett and West End celebrity
- 3.) Beckett and new wave British theatre directors
- 4.) Beckett and festivals

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<sup>592</sup> See Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor and Ian Woodward, *The Festivalization of Culture* (Farham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014)

In each of these four sections I will concentrate on at least two key productions, events or figures, which epitomise the relationship that emerged with his work over this era. These performances and events may be read as significant because of the interest they generated in the theatre culture, the practitioners involved or the influence they had on the cultural memory of Beckett's drama in performance. Although some of these performances have featured prominently in previous histories of Beckett's drama, this chapter will also address many lesser known productions that have contributed to the growth of Beckett's theatre and his reputation in London since his death.

### **5.1. The Beckett network post-Beckett**

When Samuel Beckett died on 22 December 1989 it was uncertain what future awaited his plays in performance and what appeal his drama would generate after his death. The post-Beckett era saw many actors, directors and designers drawn to his work for the first time, though this new phase also maintained its connections to Beckett's lifetime through practitioners who had worked directly with Beckett and were eager to continue their explorations of his *oeuvre*. One production that linked these two phases of this production history was the double bill of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Catastrophe* at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester, as shown in Figure 24. The production brought together a number of Beckett's friends and collaborators, who were aware of his growing frailty and mounted the production as a plan to 'cheer him up', including David Warrilow, the Polish director Antoni Libera, designer Jocelyn Herbert and Artistic Associate of the Haymarket David Gothard.<sup>593</sup> It originally opened in Leicester in October 1989 and unintentionally its scheduled tour to Riverside Studios on 8 January 1990 saw the first performance of Beckett's drama in London after his death produced at the last London venue he worked in. By the time the production

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<sup>593</sup> Conversation between David Gothard and Matthew McFrederick, 13 April 2016.

reached London, Beckett's death had inevitably altered the context of its presentation. As Benedict Nightingale suggested of the acclaimed production's tour to London, 'this is as much an occasion for celebration as for mourning'.<sup>594</sup> Significantly, the performance indicated how the networks Beckett had established during his lifetime would continue to support his work in the post-Beckett era.

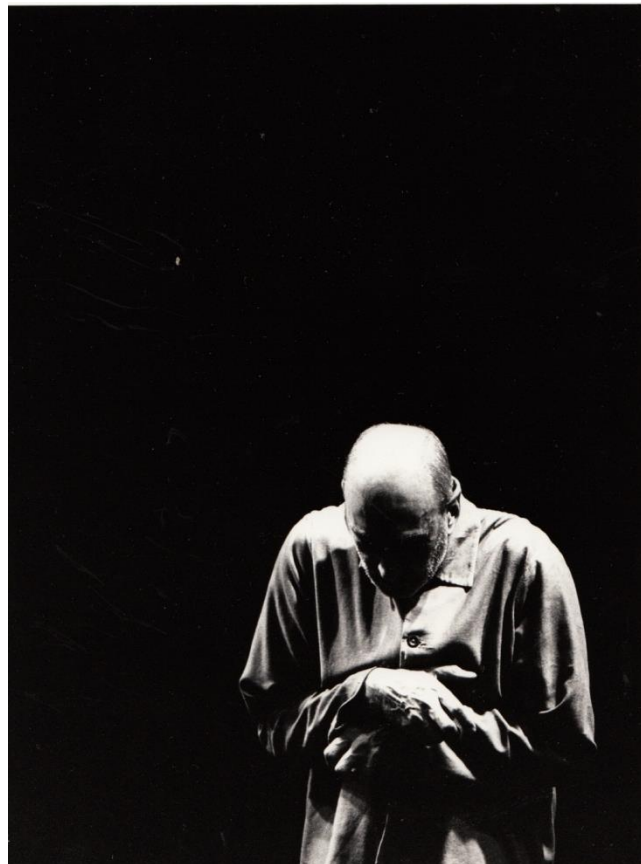


Figure 24 David Warrilow as the Protagonist in *Catastrophe*, Riverside Studios, London, 1990. Credit: Photograph by Chris Harris, Private Collection of David Gothard.

Beckett's contribution to theatre was formally marked by other London theatres associated with his work. The NT held a memorial in the Olivier Theatre entitled "A Celebration of the Life and Work of Samuel Beckett" – an indication of the esteem he was held in – in an event that included readings of his work by British, Irish and international

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<sup>594</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Built to last the human race', *The Times*, 13 January 1990.

Beckett actors, such as Jean Martin, Stephen Rea and Billie Whitelaw.<sup>595</sup> Meanwhile, the Royal Court attempted to continue its association with Beckett by staging a new production of *Endgame* in 1994 with familiar practitioners of Beckett's drama, however the project failed to materialise.<sup>596</sup> Nonetheless, as the Staging Database indicates, Beckett's *oeuvre* continued to be a source of inspiration for many significant, established practitioners previously connected with his work in the years following his death. During Beckett's lifetime, he interacted and corresponded with numerous celebrated theatre practitioners, such as Sir Peter Hall, Harold Pinter, Peter Brook and Walter Asmus, who would continue their association with his work after 1989 in performances of his plays that would sustain the legacy of his writing in London. Hall directed *Godot* three times (in 1997, 1998 and 2005), as well as *Happy Days* (in 2003), Pinter performed in *Krapp's Last Tape* (in 2006), Brook directed *Oh Les Beaux Jours* at Riverside Studios (in 1997) and returned to direct *Fragments* at the Young Vic (in 2007 and 2008), while Asmus directed the Gate Theatre Dublin's frequently revived *Godot* and *Not I/ Footfalls/ Rockaby* at the Royal Court (2013-2015). In this section I will focus on the post-Beckett productions that involved Hall and Pinter, due to their stronger connections to this London-based performance history, the importance of their previous collaborations with Beckett, their significant place within British theatre histories, as well as the integral role their productions played in promoting the legacy of Beckett's theatre within British theatre history after his death.

The decision to discuss Hall and Pinter in this section neatly links to their own collaborations on Pinter's drama, as Hall was responsible for directing the premieres of *The Homecoming* (1965), *Landscape* (1969), *Silence* (1969) and *Old Times* (1971) amongst his other plays. It could be argued that Hall's experiences with Beckett's drama informed his

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<sup>595</sup> "A Celebration of the Life and Work of Samuel Beckett" was presented on the Olivier Theatre at the NT on 1 April 1990.

<sup>596</sup> There were discussions about Libera directing a new production of *Endgame*, designed by Herbert and featuring Stephen Rea and Barry McGovern as Hamm and Clov.

work on Pinter's. Hall directed the English premiere of *Godot* at the Arts Theatre and developed his use of silences on stage that would later be frequently referenced as the 'Pinter pause'. Conversely, Pinter was inspired by Beckett's novels as he came across an extract of *Watt* when working in Ireland and famously 'borrowed' a library copy of *Murphy* that had not been loaned in over a decade.<sup>597</sup> Following these respective introductions both Pinter and Hall would build highly successful careers that would significantly shape the history of British theatre, all the while maintaining their individual associations with Beckett. As Artistic Director of the RSC Hall programmed *Endgame* and *Act Without Words II* in 1964 and wrote to Beckett about the possibility of staging a Beckett season at the RSC in 1965. After Hall moved to the NT he revisited his practical association when he directed Peggy Ashcroft in *Happy Days* with Beckett's assistance in 1974 – a performance that later opened the Lyttelton Theatre in 1976. Furthermore he also programmed *Rockaby* and in his final NT season he chose to revive *Waiting for Godot* (in 1987). Pinter's relationship with Beckett grew into a friendship as Beckett initially gave Pinter advice on his preliminary scripts, and they would often correspond and occasionally meet in Paris and London. Prior to performing in *Krapp's Last Tape* his only role in relation to Beckett's work was as one of six cast members for a BBC Radio adaptation of *Lessness* in 1971 and a reading of *The Unnamable* for the NT's celebration of Beckett's life in 1990. Both Pinter and Hall were central figures in British theatre cultures and its history, due to their prominent plays and productions at the RSC, the NT and other British theatres. Intriguingly, as the introductory context to this section has suggested both Pinter and Hall personal and professional relationship with Beckett had a notable influence on their careers with both figures owing a creative debt to Beckett's theatre. Having introduced their connections with Beckett during his lifetime, I will now examine their post-Beckett productions beginning with Hall.

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<sup>597</sup> David Tucker, 'That first last look in the shadows': Beckett's Legacies for Harold Pinter' in *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. by David Tucker and Trish McTighe, p. 194.

### 5.1.1. Revisiting the theatrical past: Hall staging Beckett

In the years that followed Beckett's death, Hall returned to stage Beckett's drama more prolifically than during his time at the RSC and NT, as under his own repertory company – The Peter Hall Company – he staged *Godot* in London on three occasions at the Old Vic (1997), the Piccadilly Theatre (1998) and the Ambassadors (2006) and in 2003 directed *Happy Days* at the venue where his association began, the Arts Theatre.<sup>598</sup> With *Godot* in particular, Hall may have felt an urge to redress many of the issues he saw in his first production through his later experience in the theatre and his admiration for Beckett's own Schiller production. Moreover, staging *Godot* again post-Beckett arguably also suited Hall artistically and personally. By the 1990s, it was a classical play that he knew would prove a popular addition to his theatre company's initial Old Vic season, though it would also be a chance for Hall to get the play right without the pressure of Beckett's gaze, as he may have been haunted by his criticism of the first production for which Beckett sent him extensive notes and afterwards Beckett favoured other British directors to work on his plays.<sup>599</sup> Nonetheless, his desire to programme Beckett as part of his own repertory company suggests his sustained interest in Beckett's drama, which can be traced from a club theatre onto major British theatre institutions, culminating in London's commercial theatre sector.

In advance of his 1997 Old Vic production, it was clear that the deep and complex relationship between the past experiences of his first *Godot* and its place in the cultural memory would come to the fore. With this process in mind, Carlson argues 'The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection.'<sup>600</sup> Hall's role in *Godot*'s British premiere was a key aspect in marketing this revival, as advertisements

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<sup>598</sup> Croall charts the production history of *Waiting for Godot*. It stresses Hall's association with the play and offers the perspectives of Hall and his cast for the 2005 Theatre Royal Bath production in the form of a rehearsal diary.

<sup>599</sup> See Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II; 1941-1956*, pp. 575-578.

<sup>600</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine*, p. 2.



acknowledged, ‘Hall returns to Beckett’s hardy existential perennial 42 years after he revealed it to the English speaking world’.<sup>601</sup> The ghosts of his previous experiences with the play surrounded this production and Hall played his part in recycling these memories, by writing an extensive programme note discussing his 1955 premiere. In this note, Hall criticised his own direction of the first production and suggested what he had learned in the intervening years:

What was my production like? Well, I know it had too much scenery; everything did then. The tree was too complicated and Vladimir and Estragon spent most of the evening sitting on an oil drum: it was all too naturalistic. I also blush when I remember that the play was introduced by a fragment of music (Bartok, no less) as the lights went down.<sup>602</sup>

Hall’s first production was emblematic of the performance culture it was performed in and as the play was explored in more depth and practitioners gained confidence, they realised the additional theatrical elements originally used to support the actors fears of a bare stage were surplus to the action, as Hall discovered when he experienced Beckett’s minimalist Schiller production.<sup>603</sup> The 1997 performance played on John Gunter’s sparse and abstract set – a stark contrast to the reeds, oil barrel and elongated tree that inhabited Peter Snow’s 1955 design – though intriguingly Gunter’s use of polished wooden floor boards, as opposed to ‘a country road’, echoed the original intentions portrayed in Snow’s “road in the room” model box held at the University of Reading.<sup>604</sup> Snow’s maquette suggests his uncertainty as to how *Godot* would be presented on stage in 1955, though in contrast, Gunter’s design reflects the transformation of British theatre over the passing decades, as his use of floorboards did not

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<sup>601</sup> Advertisement of theatre listings. UoR, Beckett, BC MS4464.

<sup>602</sup> Programme for *Waiting for Godot*, Old Vic Theatre, 1997, pp. 4-5. UoR, Knowlson, JEK A/9/1/21.

<sup>603</sup> Hall’s 1997 production was keen to highlight it was using Beckett’s own revisions and alterations through *The Theatrical Notebooks* revised edition of the text.

<sup>604</sup> The Peter Snow maquette for *Waiting for Godot* (1955) is on display in the Beckett Library at the Museum of English and Rural Life, Reading. See UoR, Beckett, BC MS 5531.

signal a room, but an abstract reading of Beckett's stage directions. Hall's productions of *Godot* post-Beckett would epitomise, as he identified himself, the Beckettian concept of 'less is more' through its design and performance attributes, and the removal of any further music to accompany the music of Beckett's text.<sup>605</sup>

In his review of Hall's 1997 production at the Old Vic, Paul Taylor reminded readers of the play's recent comedic and slapstick focused performances involving the double acts of Robin Williams and Steve Martin, and Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson, before suggesting the need for a shift in the play's emphasis, 'Wanted: a production that treats *Godot* as a work of art rather than a personality vehicle.'<sup>606</sup> Hall's production would answer Taylor's call for a more nuanced version of the play in a performance that for many commentators combined artistic integrity with star personalities. It cast two renowned actors in the leading roles: as Ben Kingsley, an Oscar winning actor for *Ghandi* (1982) and also an acclaimed performer in other films such as *Schindler's List* (1993), played Estragon, and Alan Howard, a prominent member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, partnered him as Vladimir.<sup>607</sup> Their much admired partnership helped Hall deliver an original interpretation forty two years after his first production of the play, which now reconsidered many of *Godot*'s intricacies concerning scenography, costume, performance, accent, rhythm and character. Taylor, for one, thought, 'His staging is beautifully alert to the changing moods and rhythms of the piece and consents to be moving as well as very funny'.<sup>608</sup> The production ran in The Peter Hall Company's repertory at the Old Vic for six months starting in June 1997 in a season that Hall claimed at the time was "getting the best business in London for a straight play by far".<sup>609</sup> *Godot*, in

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<sup>605</sup> Croall, p. 137.

<sup>606</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Theatre: Waiting for *Godot* Old Vic, London', *The Independent*, 29 June 1997. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-waiting-for-godot-old-vic-london-1258877.html> [accessed 6 March 2016].

<sup>607</sup> Both Kingsley and Howard had previously performed on stage together at the RSC in 1970, when they played Demetrius and Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Peter Brook.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Dalya Alberge, 'Hall questions motives behind sale of Old Vic', *The Times*, 18 August 1997.

particular, was according to Hall 100 per cent full. However, following Ed Mirvish's decision to sell the Old Vic, Hall's Company were forced to relocate to the Piccadilly Theatre in order to continue their London season in 1998. At the Piccadilly, *Godot* ran in tandem with Moliere's *The Misanthrope* for a two month season and this production would yet again see Hall rehearse the play with an entirely new cast comprised of Julian Glover, Alan Dobie, Terence Rigby, Struan Rodger, Sam Taylor and Jacob Neville (the latter two both alternate boys) as Beckett returned to the West End in another celebrated production.

As Hall approached his 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday he maintained his appetite for directing and his interest in producing Beckett's work. In November 2003 he directed the English actress Felicity Kendal in *Happy Days*. The production saw Hall return to the Arts Theatre, the Great Newport Street theatre he ran from the mid to late 1950s. As one critic noted it was 'an evening that reverberate[d] with theatrical memories' and beyond this homecoming for Hall – an occasion that was significantly different from his first experience with Beckett's drama – it was also the second time Hall had directed *Happy Days* in London having previously directed Peggy Ashcroft for the NT.<sup>610</sup> Kendal was a fascinating choice of actress to play Winnie, as she was considered to be one of the darlings of the English stage and screen. She was well known for her archetypal English roles in the situation comedy *The Good Life* (1975-78) and her professional and private association with another British playwright influenced by Beckett, Tom Stoppard, having performed in *The Real Thing* (1982), *Hapgood* (1988) and *Arcadia* (1993). In a nod to her perceived archetypal English rose image, Matt Wolf argued in *The New York Times* how Kendal playing Winnie was unexpected, calling it 'unlikely casting' before adding 'Felicity Kendal entombed in a mound of earth? The image defies belief'.<sup>611</sup> Portraying Winnie in a play often categorised for its high modernism may have

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<sup>610</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Happy Days', *The Independent*, 20 November 2003.

<sup>611</sup> Matt Wolf, 'Happy Days' happy return', *The New York Times*, 10 December 2003. See: [http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/10/style/10iht-lon10\\_ed3.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/10/style/10iht-lon10_ed3.html) [accessed 6 March 2016].

appeared unlikely in the context of Kendal's career, though nonetheless it was a highly commended performance by many of London's critics.

Akin to Hall's *Godot* at the Old Vic in 1997, this version of *Happy Days* had a number of surprising features for those familiar with Kendal or the play. Kendal's familiarity as an English actress was contradicted as Hall, in a similar approach to his late productions of *Godot*, had Kendal speak with an Irish accent. Despite this surprise, critics such as Paul Taylor noted this was an accomplished part of her performance: 'Kendal is a very English actress, but I'm delighted to report she very convincingly affects the Irish accent written into the speech rhythms of Winnie's near-monologue'.<sup>612</sup> Perhaps a bigger shock was in store for audiences familiar with *Happy Days*, as the symmetrical, low mound frequently associated with the play was reimagined by Hall's daughter and designer, Lucy Hall. As Billington explained 'it is disconcerting to find her at the centre of a tilting, scrub-coloured spiral: she seems to be trapped in a serpentine coil rather than earthily incarcerated'.<sup>613</sup> However, despite this unforeseen reading of the mound, it was a refreshing, new arrangement for Winnie's monologues. Once again, Hall had offered Beckett's plays a new vitality post-Beckett and while Billington echoed Wolf's doubts concerning Kendal's suitability for Winnie, in summarising the production he praised her and Hall for their collaboration:

Felicity Kendal might be thought a shade too winsome to play Beckett's Winnie. But she acquits herself excellently in Peter Hall's revelatory production, lending the part a genuine emotional reality: instead of a reverent revival about a heroine greeting living entombment with stoical cheer, it becomes a study of a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown.<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> Taylor, 'Happy Days', *The Independent*, 20 November 2003.

<sup>613</sup> Michael Billington, 'Happy Days', *The Guardian*, 19 November 2003. See <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/nov/19/theatre4> [accessed 6 March 2016].

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

Hall's final production of *Godot* has been well documented in Jonathan Croall's *The Coming of Godot*, which offers an inside perspective into rehearsals including interviews with Hall and the cast for the 2005 production at the Theatre Royal Bath. Although the production was due to have a nostalgic staging at the Arts Theatre to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the play's London premiere, it failed to materialise as its performance rights were held by the Gate Theatre, Dublin, who were staging *Godot* as part of their Beckett centenary celebrations at the Barbican Centre in 2006; a moment that signified how tensions and rivalries over staging Beckett were even developing post-Beckett. The Gate's unwillingness to release the rights versus Hall's desire to stage the play led to a public spat between Hall and the Gate's Artistic Director Michael Colgan. When interviewed about the issue, Hall said, "I'm very upset about it. They have refused to allow us to do it in September because they say it will upset their box office. It is outrageous. The Arts theatre only holds 320 people so it is hardly major competition. They wouldn't even have a meeting to discuss it."<sup>615</sup> While Colgan responded to the matter, saying, "He's coming on like a child with big tears coming out of his eyes, saying 'this is terrible, nothing is happening' – but what is happening is that he is trying to bully us. [... Beckett's] estate do not want two productions on at the same time. You can't just say I did the first production so I should be able to do it." Despite the nostalgia attached to an anniversary production, Colgan refused to recede and Hall's final *Godot* would be staged at the Ambassadors Theatre in 2006 with the same cast as in its Bath performance. While the public dispute offered an unsavoury prelude to this production, it supports Sos Eltis's argument that 'the heat generated by the dispute indicates how prominent Hall's status was – and is – as a director of Beckett.'<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Anthony Barnes, 'Godot will have to wait, theatre tells 'furious' Sir Peter Hall', *The Independent*, 7 August 2005, p.14.

<sup>616</sup> Sos Eltis, 'It's all symbiosis': Peter Hall Directing Beckett' in *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. by Tucker and McTighe, p. 108.

Hall has played an influential role in this performance history though his reputation as a director of Beckett has been diminished somewhat because of his relationship with Beckett. As Eltis has pointed out, ‘he was not, at least in the early decades of his career, the author’s preferred choice.’<sup>617</sup> This was reflected in Beckett’s criticism of his London premiere and Alan Schneider’s well-worn anecdote of Beckett referring to a particular line in the first production of *Godot* as “Ahl wrahng”.<sup>618</sup> Despite these discrepancies, it is difficult to think of a director who has had more of an impact on Beckett’s *oeuvre* from its infancy on the London stage to its evolution into a West End entity. Hall’s pedigree as a Beckett director was surmised by Taylor following his production of *Happy Days* in 2003, as he reported, ‘Nearly 50 years since he directed his first Beckett, Hall proves once again that there is no finer conductor of this playwright’s punctiliously precise verbal music and that no dramatist is as paradoxically life-affirming.’<sup>619</sup> Eltis would later support this point in relation to his final production of *Godot* in 2005, when she declared, ‘Hall’s 2005 anniversary production of *Godot* both drew upon and cemented his reputation as England’s foremost director of Beckett.’<sup>620</sup>

### **5.1.2. ‘I spoke to Sam last night – he said it’s ok’: Pinter and *Krapp’s Last Tape***

With 2006 marking the centenary of Beckett’s birth, celebratory events, productions, exhibitions, festivals and seasons dedicated to Beckett’s life and writing were presented in numerous towns and cities in the UK, Ireland, France and internationally. London theatres celebrated this anniversary year by staging a strong programme of Beckett performances, as it hosted the Beckett Centenary Festival at the Barbican Centre in April and later in October Hall’s final *Godot* was finally staged at the Ambassadors Theatre. Midway through *Godot*’s

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>618</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 417.

<sup>619</sup> Taylor, 2003.

<sup>620</sup> Eltis, ‘‘It’s all symbiosis’’: Peter Hall Directing Beckett’ in *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. by Tucker and McTighe, p. 108.

run at the Ambassadors, another major staging saw Harold Pinter play Krapp in the Theatre Upstairs at the Royal Court, directed by the theatre's outgoing Artistic Director Ian Rickson. Despite its limited run of ten performances, the sight of a British Nobel Prize winning writer at the terminal stages of his life playing Beckett's failed writer coming to the end of his, captured the imagination of the post-Beckett era and was regarded as a major theatrical event in British theatre. Furthermore it was a production that marked many moments or anniversaries: it would celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Court, the return of Beckett's drama to a theatre he was so closely associated with for the first time in 27 years and, sadly, Pinter's final stage performance.

Beckett's impact on Pinter has been highlighted by numerous scholars, including David Tucker's recent examination of this connection in his article, "That first last look in the shadows': Beckett's Legacies for Harold Pinter'.<sup>621</sup> Indeed, as Mark Taylor-Batty has identified, it was how many commentators remembered Pinter, as many obituaries for Pinter in the UK and Europe highlighted the influence Beckett had on his work.<sup>622</sup> While later in his career Pinter was more acutely aware of these associations, he would also be the first person to admit his admiration for Beckett. This was epitomised in his tribute to Beckett on his sixtieth birthday, when he called him 'the finest writer writing', before emphatically and emotively capturing the impression Beckett's work left on him:

The farther he goes the more good it does me. I don't want philosophies, tracts, dogmas, creeds, way outs, truths, answers, *nothing from the bargain basement*. He is the most courageous, remorseless writer going and the more he grinds my nose in the shit the more I am grateful to him. He's not fucking me about, he's not leading me up

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<sup>621</sup> See Tucker, "That first last look in the shadows': Beckett's Legacies for Harold Pinter' in *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. by Tucker and McTighe (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen, 2016)

<sup>622</sup> An AHRC Staging Beckett interview between Ian Rickson, and Mark Taylor-Batty, 'Samuel Beckett: A Conversation', at the Minghella Building, University of Reading, 3 October 2013, 7.30pm. [http://www.cms.rdg.ac.uk/UploadedFiles/SB\\_Rickson\\_TaylorBatty\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.cms.rdg.ac.uk/UploadedFiles/SB_Rickson_TaylorBatty_transcript.pdf) [accessed 22 September 2016].

any garden, he's not slipping me any wink [...] he's not selling me anything I don't want to buy, he doesn't give a bollock whether I buy or not, he hasn't got his hand over his heart. Well, I'll buy his goods, hook, line and sinker, because he leaves no stone unturned and no maggot lonely. He brings forth a body of beauty. His work is beautiful.<sup>623</sup>

In this tribute, Pinter was in fact quoting a letter he wrote to a friend in 1954; at a time when he knew Beckett better from his prose work and at a stage of Beckett's growing reputation in France following the release of *En Attendant Godot* the year before. Pinter's knowledge of Beckett began before his presence on the London stage one year later and it would stretch into the final years of his own lifetime.

Inevitably the writing of history allows hindsight to uncover many unknowns and a chance to reflect on the ironies that would unfold in later years. One such irony connects 1958 and 2006, two dramatists, one play and the Royal Court Theatre. In 1958 *Krapp's Last Tape* received its world premiere in a double-bill with *Endgame* programmed by George Devine, however in the same year he declined Pinter's submitted scripts for *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*. Devine noted of these plays in his report, 'I don't quite know where to place these. They belong to the 'theatre de silence' but the issues are so small that one feels a lack of interest, except in the style itself...I would say they are little sketches or essays from a writer of whom one would like to hear more fully – but the sketches themselves are not enough for presentation.'<sup>624</sup> While Beckett was a key component in Devine's English Stage Company, Pinter – the British dramatist most frequently compared with Beckett – did not receive the same support the Royal Court had shown Beckett and his work would be predominantly produced at the RSC or the NT. Although this context offers a helpful insight into the differing relationships between the two writers and the Royal Court, it should also be

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<sup>623</sup> John Calder (ed.), *Beckett at 60: A Festschrift* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), p. 86.

<sup>624</sup> Little and McLaughlin, p. 64.



pointed out that following the premieres of *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* at the Hampstead Theatre Club in 1960, they would be staged at the Court later that year. By fast-forwarding forty eight years, both Beckett and Pinter were eventually presented in the same Royal Court season.

Given the association between Rickson's directorship and the new plays developed over his time at the Royal Court, *Krapp's Last Tape* was an intriguing choice for Rickson's final season. Since 1998, plays such as *The Weir* (1998) by Conor McPherson, *Fallout* (2003) by Roy Williams, *The Sweetest Swing in Baseball* (2004) by Rebecca Gilman highlighted the quality of new plays developed over these years. However, he would mark his final season by returning to classical plays with resonances from the fifty year history of the Royal Court as *Krapp's Last Tape* appeared in a season that also featured an all-star production of Anton Chekov's *The Seagull* (2006) in a new version by Christopher Hampton. Pinter's performance in *Krapp's Last Tape* in 2006 was significant for the many reasons already highlighted, though it was remarkable given the fact he was unwell having battled cancer and in the build-up to the production suffered a terrible skin complaint, which affected his mouth and speech. Rickson had previously asked Pinter to direct his own work during his tenure at the Royal Court, which he declined to do, but, intriguingly, Rickson recalled how when they had lunch to discuss the proposition of him performing as Krapp, Pinter said 'I want to do it' in the first three minutes of their meeting.<sup>625</sup> The initial plan for Rickson's final Royal Court season was, as he recalled, to 'map out a theatre lineage of Joyce, Beckett and Pinter, because when you read lots of plays you realise how influential that tributary is for writers'.<sup>626</sup> Due to rights and complications, this programme did not materialise, though the scheduling of Pinter in *Krapp's Last Tape* did reflect these intentions.

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<sup>625</sup> Interview between Ian Rickson and Mark Taylor-Batty, 3 October 2013. Pinter was asked to direct *Ashes to Ashes* and *Mountain Language*, plays that Katie Mitchell would later direct for the Royal Court.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

Rehearsals for the production were scheduled each day at the Royal Court from 2.30pm to 6pm for four weeks ahead of its opening night on 12 October. One major concern for Rickson was naturally Pinter's health and he admitted, "Privately, I was worrying that I was putting someone quite infirm through something too demanding. However, I also had the feeling it would be really rejuvenating and a great exercise for our talents."<sup>627</sup> Indeed, Rickson's concerns and hopes were answered in his account of their rehearsals which reflects the enthusiasm with which Pinter embraced the challenge of performing in Beckett. He was engaged as much practically as he was intellectually, as for a self-proclaimed technophobe he had to go through rigorous 'spool school' training and become accustomed to using an electric wheelchair on stage. Meanwhile, their critical practice saw their discussions range from Manichaeism to Kafka. For example, Pinter was familiar with Kafka's writing and was engaged when Rickson introduced a relevant quote from the Czech writer into the rehearsal room, which read, 'You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table, desk, and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait. Be quiet. Simply wait, be quiet, still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you, to be unmasked. It has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.'<sup>628</sup> For Rickson, working with Pinter was as invigorating as it was intimidating. Occasionally his practice returned to his Stanislavskian methods, where he tried to get Pinter to think of the objectives behind on stage decisions and through pictures. One particular moment during the early days of their rehearsals proved significant in their collaborations, as Rickson recalled a tense moment where he had to establish his position as the director:

We both love *Partie de Campagne*, the Maupassant story, as well as the Jean Renoir film of it, and there's a section of Krapp drawn from the idea of a boat on water and

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<sup>627</sup> Jonathan Heron and Ian Rickson, "The feeling in the play": An interview with Ian Rickson', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 23.1 (2014), 95-106, (p. 96).

<sup>628</sup> Interview between Ian Rickson and Mark Taylor-Batty, 3 October 2013.

something happening. On this afternoon I was asking him to really take me through, I can't remember whether it was reeds or irises or something, I remember him saying: 'I've known this play for fifty fucking years, don't ask me about it', and I said 'I have to'. And I really had to stand up to him. I was shaking under the table but having done that I found him then very supple the next day, and we found a really trusting way of working.<sup>629</sup>

In spite of this tense moment (and perhaps, as a result), Rickson and Pinter shared a fruitful collaboration that as I will now discuss was heralded by London's critics.

The combination of Pinter acting in a Beckett play in 2006 could have easily sold out the Theatre Downstairs at the Royal Court, though the decision to stage the play in the significantly smaller Theatre Upstairs meant tickets were treasured like gold dust for a performance that 'stimulated its own extra-theatrical curiosity'.<sup>630</sup> The unique curiosity stimulated by this performance was supported by the artistic decision to stage the play in the Theatre Upstairs, as Rickson highlighted of the venue's haunting quality in relation to Krapp, 'The Theatre Upstairs is an old attic. It has a special reverberative quality because of all the risk writers have taken, their collective failures and adventures, so the performance echoed with all those special ghosts.'<sup>631</sup> Beyond the ghosts of the theatre space, Pinter's performance managed to exorcise many ghosts of the past, as according to Billington, who had seen numerous performances of the play, he 'offers the harshest, least sentimental reading of Beckett's play I can recall.'<sup>632</sup> This interpretation may have been aided by a number of excisions made to the play which were made out of necessity rather than convenience with two of the play's most iconic images cut in performance. For example, Krapp's slapstick

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> Michael Billington, 'Krapp's Last Tape', *The Guardian*, 16 October 2006. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/oct/16/theatre.beckettat100> [accessed 24 February 2016].

<sup>631</sup> Interview between Ian Rickson and Mark Taylor-Batty, 3 October 2013.

<sup>632</sup> Billington, 'Krapp's Last Tape', 2006.

routines with bananas were removed as Pinter's was allergic to banana. Meanwhile, the skin condition Pinter developed meant he suffered mobility issues and used an electric wheelchair during the performance, which also saw him unable to cradle Krapp's tape recorder due to his confinement to the chair. While many would question if such decisions were approved by the Beckett estate, following the precedent they set with *Footfalls* in 1994 – a matter I will address shortly – Rickson said that Pinter remarked in rehearsals, 'I spoke to Sam last night – he said it's ok'.<sup>633</sup> The decision to drop Krapp's banana act was met with approval in Paul Taylor's review, who also identified the production's built-in irony: 'Here is the man we know to be our greatest living dramatist playing a disastrously failed and flawed writer (or would-be writer).'<sup>634</sup> Ultimately this perspective of Pinter and specific moments in his delivery of the text would leave a lasting impression on the memory of those who saw it, as Billington explained, 'At two precise moments, Pinter looks anxiously over his left shoulder into the darkness as if he felt death's presence in the room. This is the moment that will linger longest in the memory. It is impossible to dissociate Pinter's own recent encounters with mortality from that of the character.'<sup>635</sup>

Overall, the production lived up to its description on the Royal Court's website, as they declared, 'One of the major creative baton passes of the 20th century was from Samuel Beckett to Harold Pinter.'<sup>636</sup> This staging emphasised again how Beckett's drama influenced not just the practice of actors, directors and designers, but also the wider theatre culture, as he inspired several generations of playwrights. His influence on Pinter and Stoppard has been well documented and analysed, though in the years following his death, it would be amiss to forget the impact his work had on the more recent writing talents from the UK and Ireland,

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<sup>633</sup> Interview between Ian Rickson and Mark Taylor-Batty, 3 October 2013.

<sup>634</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Krapp's Last Tape, Theatre Upstairs, London', *The Independent*, 15 October 2006. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/krapps-last-tape-theatre-upstairs-london-6230789.html> [accessed 24 February 2006].

<sup>635</sup> Billington, 'Krapp's Last Tape', 2006.

<sup>636</sup> See <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/krapp-s-last-tape> [accessed 7 March 2016].

such as Sarah Kane, Conor McPherson, Marina Carr, Martin McDonagh and Owen McCafferty, to name but a small number of writers who encapsulate the enduring influence today.<sup>637</sup> I would like to address the potential depth of this impact in future articles, but with the limits of this thesis in mind, I will proceed to focus more specifically on the growing number of West End performances of Beckett's drama involving celebrity performers from British culture, as Beckett's drama grew in popularity with these performers and in the wider public consciousness.

## 5.2. Beckett and West End celebrity

Rik Mayall: *You may as well pass the time telling gags, which is basically what Godot is about. [...]*

Jonathan Ross: *Which is basically the play, and I suppose putting comedians in it. Now Steve Martin and Robin Williams played it a while ago in New York.*

Mayall: *Yeah. Well apparently they kept jumping off the stage, or Robin did anyway. Robin.* [Laughs with embarrassment having referred to Williams by his first name.]

Ross: *So they played it much more for laughs than you would.*

Mayall: *They played for their own laughs.*

Adrian Edmondson: *He apparently improvised a lot of his own material into the play.*

Ross: *Which isn't really fair game now, is it?*

Mayall: *Well I didn't see it. I would have liked to have seen it.*

Ross: *Now [...], you've had a movie out in Hollywood, [called] Drop Dead Fred...<sup>638</sup>*

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<sup>637</sup> For example, recent studies have addressed Beckett's influence on contemporary writers such as Sarah Kane. See Graham Saunders, 'The Beckettian world of Sarah Kane' in *Sarah Kane in Context*, eds. L. de Vos and G. Saunders, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2010), pp. 68-79. While comparisons between Beckett and Irish playwrights have been made in sources such as, Martin Middeke and Peter Paul Schnierer, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary Irish Playwrights* (London: Methuen, 2010).

<sup>638</sup> See "Tonight with Jonathan Ross", Channel 4, September 1991. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCysBpjRKME> [accessed 11 February 2016].

If there was a moment that signified the transition of Beckett's theatre into the mainstream of British culture, perhaps Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson's conversation with Jonathan Ross on Channel 4 about their upcoming West End performance in *Waiting for Godot* characterised it. It may have been broadcast at an earlier stage of Ross's notoriety, though the idea of these three popular personalities discussing Beckett on a live chat show – a format that contributed to the rise of celebrity culture – would have been a curiosity for audiences both then and now. Mayall and Edmondson were arguably approaching the height of their fame, as by 1991 they were both hugely popular comedians, who straddled Britain's mainstream and alternative comedy movements through their cult sitcoms *The Young Ones* (1982-84) and *The Dangerous Brothers* (1986). Mayall had also flirted with Hollywood fame through his role in *Drop Dead Fred* (1991) and their presence on this chat show would predominantly promote their upcoming BBC sitcom *Bottom* and their appearance as Vladimir and Estragon in *Godot* in the Queen's Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue.

Although early attempts to cast star actors failed in London and New York, Bert Lahr and Tom Ewell became the first well known double act to play Vladimir and Estragon in *Godot*'s American premiere at the Coconut Grove in 1956. Later star casting saw Peter O'Toole play Vladimir in three productions in Bristol (1957), Dublin (1969) and Nottingham (1971), though arguably the mainstream interest in casting star actors in *Godot* and other Beckett plays developed more consistently following the performance of Robin Williams and Steve Martin at the Lincoln Center in 1988.<sup>639</sup> With their public profile and notoriety as a double act, the presence of Mayall and Edmondson in *Godot* may be read as London's attempt to mirror the efforts of the New York star vehicle. Indeed, it may be argued both the performances of these star double-acts instigated and contributed to a wider public interest in

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<sup>639</sup> This production was directed by Mike Nichols, who was by then an acclaimed Hollywood director for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and *The Graduate* (1967), for which he won an Academy Award for best director. It had links to the London performance history, as Beckett's assistant director for the rehearsals of *Endgame* at Riverside Studios in 1980 was then the Artistic Director of the Lincoln Center. Walter Asmus, who directed *Godot* at Riverside in collaboration with Beckett, observed these rehearsals.

Beckett's work as they helped introduce *Godot* to audiences less familiar with the play and Beckett's work in general. It is the impact and performances of these celebrated actors in *Godot* that I would like begin this section by addressing, as I would argue they initiated a cultural and commercial shift for Beckett's drama post-Beckett as it was accepted by a growing number of star actors and staged in larger and more commercially driven West End theatres. Following this production, I will examine a later example of the increasing interest Beckett's drama experienced, the 2009 Theatre Royal Haymarket production of *Godot* starring Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart, in what was arguably the most high profile staging of Beckett's drama to date.

### **5.2.1. The comedians' *Godot*: Mayall and Edmondson's business with Beckett**

The relationship between Beckett's drama and the West End has predominantly materialised in the post-Beckett era, though it did in fact begin with the first London production of *Godot*, when it transferred from the Arts Theatre to the Criterion Theatre in September 1955. The original intentions for the production were that it would be staged in the West End with two of the star actors of that time, Ralph Richardson and Alec Guinness. As with other eras in the history of London theatre, in 1955 star actors were an integral part of the West End's fabric and although this production could not attract these celebrated figures, it transferred to the Criterion as a result of the notoriety and curiosity *Godot* achieved through its reception in the British press and from theatregoers. Thirty five years passed before the star partnership of Mayall and Edmondson played a pivotal role in re-introducing *Godot* to the West End, in what was the first Beckett performance in London to feature two mainstream television stars. These factors, I would argue, helped mark this production as a significant event in the play's performance history and the histories of Beckett's *oeuvre* more broadly. Although many London theatres had shown a sustained and growing interest in staging Beckett's drama, the

city's mainstream theatre district was unfamiliar terrain for his work, as up until 1991 West End producers did not see his theatre as a commercial product that they could sell to audiences, particularly in theatres such as the Queen's, which seats over 1,000 spectators. By casting a well-known double act as Beckett's most famous duo, the play gained a new level of marketability within the mainstream theatre sector. The impact of the Queen's Theatre production has, however, been under-recognised in previous commentaries of the play's performance history. For example, David Bradby overlooked the performance in favour of productions mounted at the same time by Walter Asmus, Susan Sontag and Peter Hall, and while Jonathan Croall briefly highlighted the performance, his under-nuanced account, which includes one negative review from Paul Taylor, suggests that its critical reception has limited historical examinations of the production.<sup>640</sup> In examining this staging I will redress its influence in enabling Beckett's drama to find a mainstream audience and offer a more balanced account of the play's critical reception.

Mayall and Edmondson's appearance in *Godot* epitomised the West End's climate of star casting at the start of a decade where the UK showed an increasing fixation with celebrity culture. With tabloid newspapers and glossy magazines inundating the public with news, gossip and photographs of famous personalities, the 1990s was the decade in which as Aleks Sierz argued, 'the public obsession with celebrities plumb[ed] to new depths'.<sup>641</sup> Of course, London's West End was historically a familiar and competitive market for selling celebrities – for example, this was epitomised by the Binkie Beaumont's management of London theatres from the 1930s to the 1950s – though noticeably over the 1990s, productions consistently sold tickets based on the star actors performing in plays or musicals. As Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody wrote of this market, 'Selling celebrity, in the theatre as in any

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<sup>640</sup> See Bradby, *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* and Croall, *The Coming of Godot*, p. 117.

<sup>641</sup> Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting. The 1990s: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*, p. 14.



other area of culture, is a business.’<sup>642</sup> Beckett’s drama was an unfamiliar product for West End audiences to consume, as the genre, form and content of his work was commonly perceived to be an unorthodox product for the popular tastes of its West End consumers. Although the thought of Mayall and Edmondson in a Beckett play may have been perceived as an unlikely match, both actors were keen to highlight their affinity to Beckett and his influence on their stand-up comedy and sitcoms in much of the production’s pre-publicity. Referring to Beckett with an air of familiarity as “Sam” in the numerous newspaper, magazine and TV interviews they did on the performance, both actors claimed to have been introduced to and inspired by *Godot* in their formative years, before meeting at the University of Manchester where they started writing together from their love of Beckett’s style of humour.<sup>643</sup> Mayall recognised their debt to Beckett as he stated, “Our comedy actually developed from a love of Beckett – of *Godot* in particular – and a lot of our early stuff was Beckett-piss-takes. I have always been drawn to Beckett. I like the simplicity. I like the honesty. I like the vulgarity, the violence. I like the uniqueness of it – the way it doesn’t fit in and it annoys people. Our style is actually very Beckettian.”<sup>644</sup> These comparative reflections could appear misplaced to some critics or be construed as a way in which the performers sold or marketed their affiliation with Beckett, though on the other hand, their characters’ jokes about excretion, erections and sex, their slapstick routines, and their emphasis on pain and violence in both *Bottom* and *The Young Ones* do compare to the routines and gags of Vladimir and Estragon. While previous productions of *Godot* in London had extracted the

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<sup>642</sup> Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>643</sup> Mayall is believed to have played the role of the boy as an eight year old in an amateur production directed by his father John Mayall in Droitwich. Mayall and Edmondson discussed Beckett’s influence on their work on “Tonight with Jonathan Ross”, ITV, September 1991. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCysBpjRKME> [accessed 11 February 2016].

<sup>644</sup> Zoe Heller, ‘One old double act deserves another’, *The Independent on Sunday*, 22 September 1991, p.16. On “Tonight with Jonathan Ross”, a blushing Edmondson supported Mayall’s comparisons by referring to their writing as “a bit Beckettian”.

comedic elements of the play, Mayall and Edmondson's clowning brought out a heightened vulgar and physical- based humour from the play.

In Mayall and Edmondson, the producers (Phil McIntyre by arrangement with Stoll Moss Theatres Ltd) had two actors whose presence would arouse the interest of fans from their television work and expose Beckett's drama to a new generation of audiences, many of whom were unfamiliar with the play or Beckett. As Marvin Carlson has highlighted of similar circumstances, 'audiences are at least as often attracted to a new production by their previous acquaintance with the actors that are appearing in it as they are by the name of the dramatist.'<sup>645</sup> To what extent audiences were familiar with Beckett is difficult to ascertain, but as many commentators highlighted the larger proportion of young theatregoers, it is fair to speculate many audience members were keen to see Mayall and Edmondson in a rare stage appearance that was directed by Les Blair. Many of these fans may not have been familiar with *Godot* and thus could not have been ghosted by previous productions of the play, however most likely they would have had memories of Rick and Vyvyan from *The Young Ones* or perhaps Mayall's role as Alan B'Stard in *The New Statesman* (1987 – 1994). Indeed many audience members would have bought tickets for *Godot* on the basis of their memories and expectations of the duo from their past roles. However, as some critics argued, the ghosting and expectations of the stars in their past roles worked to the detriment of Mayall and Edmondson's performance, as they felt it reflected an awareness of their need to appease the audience. For example, Paul Taylor criticised their willing participation in the operations of celebrity tied to the performance, as he argued the actors sought to meet the expectations of the spectators:

The special wit and poignancy of this set-up are largely obliterated in the current version, because the stars (especially Mayall as Vladimir) insist on establishing a

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<sup>645</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine*, p. 69.

mugging complicity with punters that makes the relationship across the footlights an uncomfortably knowing one. It's not the actors' [...] fault that they have fans; it is that they play up to them and their expectations.<sup>646</sup>

This knowing relationship proved a negative facet of the performance for several critics and even Derek Jarman – the play's set designer – recognised in his diary 'the laughs are mostly for 'business''<sup>647</sup> It was clear this production divided opinion as although some critics would argue the production had its failings, the comic approach of Mayall and Edmondson would prove entertaining for a larger proportion of the audience, as Charles Spencer recorded: 'the first-night audience at the Queen's spent much of the evening responding as if they were watching the most rib-tickling of comedies.'<sup>648</sup> As these varying reports note, Mayall and Edmondson's production divided the opinions of critics and audiences with reviewers deriding their performances or use of comedy, and audiences enjoying these facets of their production.

In writing any performance history, the narration of the performance is frequently limited to the views of a handful of influential people; the critics. This production suggests the difficulty attached to reconstructing these events as, on the one hand, there are records of audience members being entertained, while on the other hand, the critics, whose viewpoints have been archived, were critical of the performance, with the likelihood they were ghosted by memories of productions they favoured, such as Michael Billington recalling Beckett's Schiller Theater production. Blair's interpretation was generally critiqued for not balancing the play's comedy with its pathos, as well as Mayall and Edmondson's frequently exaggerated performances. These issues were stressed in Billington's largely negative

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<sup>646</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Mugging the punters for laughs', *The Independent*, 2 October 1991, p. 18.

<sup>647</sup> Keith Collins, *Derek Jarman: Smiling in Slow Motion* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 53.

<sup>648</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Capsule of pessimism', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1991.

account of the performance, as he felt it ‘sacrifice[d] desolation to loony-tunes comedy’.<sup>649</sup> The critical reception of Mayall and Edmondson’s performance underlined the shift Beckett’s plays had undergone. After early critics dismissed his plays for being too bleak or boring, performances of his work were now criticised for proving too comedic and not balancing these characteristics with the tragic elements of his drama. He concurred with Taylor’s comments that the production sought laughter where, ‘right from the first moment there is something strenuous about the fun. Mr Edmondson’s Gogo rolls over the ground in an orgy of embarrassment in the attempt to pull off his recalcitrant boot. And Mr Mayall’s Didi establishes his hectoring superiority by beating him on the back and putting on a governess-voice to tell him “Boots must be taken off every day.”’<sup>650</sup> The over-emphasis of their highly physical routines was a disappointment for many reviewers, as Louise Kingsley surmised, ‘they extract and elaborate every possible gag the text has to offer’<sup>651</sup> Indeed this style of jostling was evident in the brief performance extracts transmitted on Channel 4’s Box Office programme, where following Edmondson’s Yorkshire infused line “He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet”, saw Mayall extrapolate every possible gag associated from the sentence as he simultaneously mocked the smell emanating from their mouth and feet through his use of over-exaggerated hand movements and an over-emphasis of specific words within the text.<sup>652</sup> Overall, such moments would epitomise the playful additions infused on the play by Mayall and Edmondson’s personalities, which produced a performance that as Robert Sandall has summarised, ‘was as irresistibly funny as it was brutally unsubtle.’<sup>653</sup> The production’s emphasis on comedy divided opinions with some experienced critics responding to his work in accordance to Beckett’s own productions or performances that had adhered to

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<sup>649</sup> Michael Billington, ‘Waiting Games’, *The Guardian*, 2 October 1991.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Louise Kingsley, ‘The Young Ones are hanging about’, *London Life*, 10 October 1991, p. 4.

<sup>652</sup> See *Waiting for Godot*, Box Office, Channel 4, 30 September 1991.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3bioHoZNi0> [accessed 11 February 2016].

<sup>653</sup> Robert Sandall, ‘Play it again, Sam, for laughs’, *The Sunday Times*, 29 September 1991.

more straight readings of *Godot*'s tragicomic qualities. With Mayall and Edmondson, on the other hand, the production negotiated their star quality, the audiences' knowledge of their previous roles and a more deliberate reading of *Godot*'s comedy to produce an entertainment that appealed to a greater number of theatregoers. The production may not have abided with conventional approaches to Beckett, but it did ensure the post-Beckett period would see his drama introduced to new audiences, many of whom were unfamiliar with his work – a matter that would be seized upon, and in some cases explicitly exploited, post-Beckett.

### **5.2.2. Engaging with celebrity culture**

Despite the production's mixed reception, Mayall and Edmondson's appearance in *Godot* made a significant contribution to Beckett's broadening appeal, and as the earliest and most prominent Beckett staging post-Beckett, it could be viewed as the production that encouraged a multitude of practitioners and theatres to embrace his work. Following its precedent, Beckett's drama started to be presented across many of London's fringe venues and revived more frequently in the West End, as it was clear that many practitioners approaching Beckett were keen to reinterpret his plays. For example, Efendi Productions set their 1994 performance of *Godot* at the Lyric Hammersmith on an Arabian desert in a performance that preceded Peter Hall's three post-Beckett revivals.<sup>654</sup> Besides *Godot*, *Happy Days* and *Krapp's Last Tape* were the most frequently produced Beckett plays of the 1990s and 2000s with twenty three performances of these two plays staged across two decades. This frequency highlights their valued position in Beckett's canon, though it also suggests the financial appeal of staging Beckett's plays for theatres. Arguably the combination of Beckett's artistic integrity, his growing popularity and the alertness of many theatres to the economics of presenting one (normally a star) actor in a production made these plays particularly attractive

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<sup>654</sup> This was a co-production with the Theatre Royal Plymouth that ran at the Lyric from 9 February to 5 March 1994, where Kevork Malikyan and Nadim Sawalha played Vladimir and Estragon.

to stage. Notable performances of *Happy Days* saw it presented in French with Natasha Parry (in 1997), with renowned Irish actresses Rosaleen Linehan (1996 and 1999) and Fiona Shaw (in 2007) and with Felicity Kendal (in 2003). Meanwhile, *Krapp's Last Tape* became one of Beckett's most admired plays for performance, with John Hurt (in 1999, 2000 and 2006), Harold Pinter (in 2006) and Michael Gambon (in 2010) each delivering what were considered in their different ways landmark productions. Meanwhile, some unlikely performers were appearing in Beckett, including Steve Harley, best known as the lead singer of the Cockney Rebel, who performed Beckett's lesser known fragments, *Rough for Theatre I* and *Rough for Theatre II*, at the Arts Theatre – where *Godot* had its British premiere – in 2007.<sup>655</sup> Few reviews of the performance have been preserved in archives or online, though Sam Marlowe was very critical of Harley's transition from rock star to stage actor and the entire production, writing in *The Times* that Harley alongside Mike Bennett, 'don't so much perform the plays as trample flat-footedly all over them' and 'Bennett has the monotonous forced jollity of a children's TV presenter, and Harley never communicates the agony of loneliness and helpless abandonment'.<sup>656</sup> She summarised her one star review by stating, 'There's something faintly obscene about watching work so full of pain played with such glib insensitivity'.<sup>657</sup> For better or worse, the immediate decades after Beckett's death saw his drama prolifically interact and engage with celebrity culture.

### 5.2.3. The X-Men *Godot*: Embraced by the West End

After Mayall and Edmondson had initiated Beckett and *Godot*'s transition to mainstream West End audiences, more well-known double acts were cast as Didi and Gogo, including Alan Howard and Ben Kingsley at the Old Vic (in 1997), Julian Glover and Alan Dobie at the

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<sup>655</sup> Steve Harley is best known for the number one selling single "Make Me Smile (Come Up and See Me)". For photographs of the production see: <http://www.steveharley.com/photos/steve-in-beckett.html> [accessed 22 February 2016].

<sup>656</sup> Sam Marlowe, 'Cocky rabble's greatest miss', *The Times*, 12 July 2007.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

Piccadilly Theatre (in 1998), while at the Barbican Johnny Murphy and Barry McGovern performed the roles twice (in 1999 and 2006) and in another Peter Hall-directed production, Dobie appeared again alongside James Laurenson at the Ambassadors (in 2006). These productions contributed to Beckett's sustained presence and profile in London theatres with each production staged for a number of weeks in the West End or in a prominent London theatre. This narrative will not offer an extended discussion of these performances, as some of these performances have been referenced already in this chapter and others have been surveyed in detailed accounts by both Bradby (2001) and Croall (2005). Instead I will conclude this section's emphasis on Beckett and West End celebrity by examining the Theatre Royal Haymarket's production of *Waiting for Godot* that became the must-see West End performance of the 2009 season.



**Figure 25** Ian McKellen, Ronald Pickup and Patrick Stewart in *Waiting for Godot*, Theatre Royal Haymarket, 2009.  
Credit: V&A Theatre and Performance Collection, Douglas Jeffrey Collection.

The newfound enthusiasm for Beckett's work in the West End was stimulated by the Haymarket's all-star casting, as its director Sean Mathias recruited Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen to play the roles of Vladimir and Estragon (pictured with Ronald Pickup in Figure 25). Both actors were renowned for their performances on stage and screen in careers that spanned forty years and by 2009 both actors were globally famous for their respective roles in major Hollywood blockbusters including *X-Men* (2000 – 2014) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001 – 2003). Besides the attention its star duo received, the staging also boasted the experienced and gifted stage and screen actors Simon Callow and Ronald Pickup, as Pozzo and Lucky.<sup>658</sup> Although the 2009 production will inevitably be remembered for its casting, it also symbolised Beckett's integral, if somewhat overlooked role within the British theatre culture. This staging could be read as a symbol of national pride amidst difficult economic conditions, as it used renowned British actors and creatives in a production that toured Britain before its extended West End run. Although Beckett was Irish, this production epitomised how much Beckett had become an integrated part of the national culture and the evolution of his acceptance within British theatre cultures since his emergence in the UK in 1955. In contrast to the 1955 premiere, the Haymarket production employed an old system of traditional touring by starting in the provinces, touring to Brighton, Bath, Norwich and Newcastle, before opening in the West End on 6 May following previews.<sup>659</sup> With its success on the road, the decision to begin with a regional tour may be viewed as a clever promotional tour ahead of its London run, as its sell-out tour was followed by a sell-out run at the Haymarket, though by the time the production reached London it would not only improve

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<sup>658</sup> While Callow was perhaps best known for his portrayal of Mozart in *Amadeus* at the NT in 1979, his work on Dickens and popular movies such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), Pickup had worked at the NT under Laurence Olivier and in the late 1970s collaborated with Beckett and Donald McWhinnie on *Play* at the Royal Court in 1976, and *Ghost Trio* and *...but the clouds...* for BBC2 in 1977.

<sup>659</sup> This production played at the following theatres: Malvern Theatres (5 – 14 March), Milton Keynes Theatre (16 – 21 March), Brighton Theatre Royal (23 – 28 March), Bath Theatre Royal (30 March – 4 April), Norwich Theatre Royal (6 – 11 April), Edinburgh King's Theatre (13 – 18 April) and Newcastle Theatre Royal (20 – 25 April).



national pride in the regions, but boost morale in the West End through its prestige and box office takings at a difficult economic moment for London theatre. Inevitably much of the show's box office appeal centred on McKellen and Stewart's partnership, as they were obviously seen and used as 'valuable commodities' for the production.<sup>660</sup> This was reflected in much of the show's publicity as they contributed to newspaper, magazine and television interviews relating to the performance and a Sky Arts observational documentary entitled *Theatreland* (2009). Their value was signified through the Haymarket's posters, which were presented in two ways: either with their names and Beckett's (see Figure 26) or with the additional credits for Callow and Pickup and Sean Mathias's direction. Both formats of this poster used McKellen and Stewart's well-known faces to stress their presence in the production and the posters also recognised *Godot*'s own iconographic images by including bowler hats on the actors and images of a tree and a leaf within the play's title. While the posters symbolised the theatre's engagement with the actors' celebrity and how *Godot*'s renowned images had its own brand power in 2009, the combination of the play and its stars meant the Haymarket production was one of the West End's most attractive products in 2009.

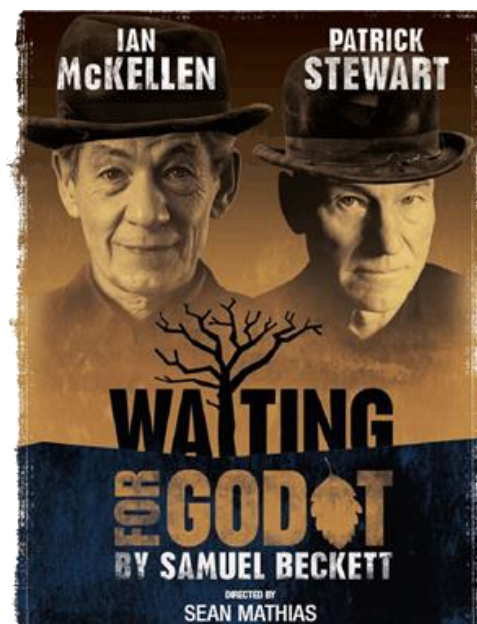


Figure 26 Theatre Royal Haymarket poster for *Waiting for Godot*, 2009. Credit: <http://www.mckellen.com/stage/godot/photos.htm> [accessed 13 September 2016]

<sup>660</sup> Luckhurst and Moody, p. 7.

Despite *Godot*'s growing prominence as a play, it remained an intriguing choice for Mathias's opening season as the theatre's artistic director. With its history dating back to 1720 (and residing in its current location since 1821), the Haymarket was an important venue in the landscape and geography of London's theatre district, which as Marvin Carlson has recognised was built by architect John Nash for 'the effect of a monumental theatre in this façade house' and 'as a landmark in the district as a whole'.<sup>661</sup> Artistically, it was known for its presentation of classical British plays, comedies or farces with leading actors consistently present in the theatres programming. Given the artistic heritage of the theatre and *Godot*'s own unique performance history, the Haymarket's decision to stage *Godot* proved a surprising decision for many critics and commentators. Michael Billington acknowledged this when he commented, 'It's a sign of how much our theatre has changed that Beckett's masterpiece, once seen as a subversion of West End theatre, now occupies one of its iconic temples.'<sup>662</sup> The decision signified *Godot*'s transformative journey in the UK's theatre culture, as Beckett's once uncertain position on the London stage saw it now occupying a significant site in the West End with actors that would be the envy of any theatre in the world. Fifty four years after its first unlikely appearance in the West End, the 2009 Haymarket production continued to show *Godot*'s ability to achieve the improbable, as it had achieved an unprecedented mainstream appeal through its star actors, in spite of the economic downturn.

Before the Haymarket production, McKellen and Stewart had last appeared on stage together in Tom Stoppard's play *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* for the RSC in 1977. Their on stage reunion in 2009 saw both actors considered the ideal age to play Vladimir and Estragon at 70 (McKellen) and 68 (Stewart) in what was their first performance in a Beckett

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<sup>661</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 117.

<sup>662</sup> Michael Billington, 'Waiting for Godot', *The Guardian*, 7 May 2009. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/may/07/waiting-for-godot-theatre-review> [accessed 21 February 2016].

play.<sup>663</sup> With a lifetime of stage experience, their decision to perform in *Godot* saw the actors undertake a new theatrical challenge at a later stage in their careers. Interestingly, the critical reception of their performance mirrored the response given to the Mayall and Edmondson production; it was acclaimed by their fans and those new to Beckett's work, but was criticised by many reviewers for the emphasis on the play's comedy against its tragicomic qualities.<sup>664</sup> Clapp argued the production was 'insufficiently deathly' before contending the level of energy exuded by the performance worked to its detriment rather than benefit, as she wrote, '[i]ts faults are intertwined with its assets: its extraordinary actors. This is a Rolls-Royce performers' version: everyone gets a terrific go but there's never a moment when someone isn't going at it.'<sup>665</sup> This view was supported by Billington who felt the play had 'a patina of cosy charm'<sup>666</sup>, while Charles Spencer – a fierce critic of Beckett's drama – felt, 'It would be an exaggeration to suggest that this starry new production turns Samuel Beckett's dark modern classic into a feel-good comedy, but there are moments when it comes perilously close.'<sup>667</sup> Mathias's production gained a lot of its comical attributes from its explicit references to the music hall and variety tradition, the pre-*Godot* performance culture that has ghosted much of its reception in Britain. This was most clearly and unsubtly demonstrated during the production's curtain call, when the actors returned to dance to 'Underneath the Arches'; a nod to the English music hall tradition and the songs of the double act, Flanagan and Allen, who performed in London from the 1930s to the 1950s. Beyond the use of this song during their curtain call, variety routines were constantly played with during the performance. For example, McKellen and Stewart rekindled hat-swapping techniques with

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<sup>663</sup> Stewart was often quoted in the production's pre-publicity recalling having seen Peter O'Toole playing Vladimir at the Bristol Old Vic in 1957 as a 17 year old and promised himself he would one day play the role himself.

<sup>664</sup> Susannah Clapp, 'Waiting for Godot', *The Guardian*, 10 May 2009. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/may/10/waiting-for-godot-haymarket> [accessed 29 July 2016].

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Billington, 'Waiting for Godot' 2009.

<sup>667</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Waiting for Godot, Haymarket Theatre Royal', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/charles-spencer/5295063/Waiting-for-Godot-Haymarket-Theatre-Royal.html> [accessed 21 February 2016].

the ‘practiced skill of comic veterans’ and in their use of the play’s quotidian objects they found humour akin to variety, which suggested how memories of this performance culture have persisted in the British theatrical tradition and consciousness through productions of *Godot*.<sup>668</sup>



Figure 27 Ian McKellan and Patrick Stewart wore bowler hats around New York to promote their production of *Waiting for Godot*, using the hashtag: #gogodididonyc. Credit: <https://twitter.com/SirPatStew/media> [accessed 13 September 2016]

The success of this production saw it return to the Haymarket one year later and further presentations at a number of international venues with Roger Rees replacing Stewart and Matthew Kelly playing Pozzo in these performances. Despite Stewart’s absence one year later, he would reunite with McKellen as Didi and Gogo in 2013 when they brought *Godot* to Broadway’s Cort Theater in a repertory season with Harold Pinter’s *No Man’s Land* (1974). Although *Godot* had played on Broadway before, it was another indication of Beckett’s acceptance by the mainstream theatre market, again with McKellen and Stewart’s help. Their celebrity demonstrated how Beckett’s drama had commercial appeal, though as their New York run showed, their relationship with *Godot* had the ability to captivate the internet and

<sup>668</sup> Billington, ‘Waiting for Godot’, 2009.

the more recent phenomenon of social media, as they shared images of their friendship embracing *Godot*'s well-known characteristics via Twitter (See Figure 27). These witty photographs of the actors posing in bowler hats beside Elmo, Santa Claus, on top of the Empire State Building and beside bags of rubbish infiltrated the internet and showed how Beckett was now gaining a viral appeal in the age of modern communication. As the post-Beckett era showcased, impressions of Beckett were no longer fixated with bleak existentialism or pessimism, it was now the source of fun and inspiration and a marketable and commercial product in its own right.

### **5.3. Beckett and new wave British theatre directors**

As the previous section has identified, performances of Beckett's drama in the 1990s and 2000s were closely connected with the West End's obsession with celebrity culture, however these decades – particularly the 1990s – also showcased how a new generation of practitioners were embracing Beckett's theatre for the first time. The 1990s was a decade in which the UK's theatre sector produced its own exceptional creative talents, mirroring the exciting endeavours of artists from a variety of different art forms. Christened 'Cool Britannia' by the British media, this era saw a new wave of promising talents, who helped to develop a new sense of national pride in all cultural activities linked to Britain. For example, in art, the Young British Artists such as Damian Hirst and Tracey Emin gained a popular and notorious appeal for their radical conceptual work, and in music, the Britpop phenomenon saw the rivalry of Oasis and Blur grip the nation, while other pop bands such as the Spice Girls brought energy and glamour to the British charts. Likewise, the British theatre was awash with new writing talents such as Sarah Kane, Jez Butterworth, Mark Ravenhill, whose work was later categorised as "in-yer-face" theatre or examples of British political drama in

the 1990s.<sup>669</sup> While the histories produced on British theatre in the 1990s largely focused on its emerging playwrights, a lesser credited aspect of British theatre from this time was its new wave of theatre practitioners, such as the directors Deborah Warner and Katie Mitchell, whose association with Beckett I would like to discuss in this section. Although both Warner and Mitchell made theatre from the late 1980s onwards, in the 1990s they exemplified the new wave of exciting and innovative theatre practitioners working in Britain over these years, with both Warner and Mitchell considered amongst the most prominent directors working in international theatre and opera today. Their productions are best known for provocatively reinterpreting classical plays for contemporary audiences and in the process their work has earned a loyal legion of theatregoers. During the mid-1990s these two prominent female directors – a lesser occupied role by female practitioners in this history up to this point – approached Beckett’s drama for the first time with contrasting fortunes, as Warner directed *Footfalls* in 1994 and Mitchell directed *Endgame* in 1996. This section will now contextualise the work of each director, before discussing their production, its reception and what impact their different approaches to staging Beckett had on this performance history.

### **5.3.1. Warner and Beckett: Foot forward or ‘footfault’?**

Significantly, Warner was the first of these two directors to stage Beckett’s drama in London when she directed Fiona Shaw and Susan Engels in *Footfalls* at the Garrick Theatre. It was an exciting and ambitious project for many reasons. Firstly, *Footfalls* would renew the creative partnership between Warner and Shaw, who had previously collaborated with much success on classics such as *Electra* (1988), *The Good Person of Sichuan* (1989), *Hedda Gabler* (1991) and later *Richard II* (1995), and for many, *Footfalls* was viewed as an opportunity to see these innovative female practitioners work on a modern play. Secondly, as a theatrical event,

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<sup>669</sup> See Sierz, *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London, Faber and Faber, 2001) and Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders, *Cool Britannia?: British Political Drama in the 1990s* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

Warner's production was a risky but innovative proposition. It chose to present *Footfalls*, a play that lasts approximately thirty minutes, by itself and thus allowing the play to stand alone, as Warner had identified that most productions of Beckett's short plays were presented in multiple bills. Indeed as the Staging Beckett Database records show, this latter point was true. By 1994, only two significant productions of *Footfalls* had been staged in London with the play presented as part of a multiple bill and performed by Billie Whitelaw on both occasions.<sup>670</sup> With this in mind, *Footfalls* remained a largely unfamiliar Beckett play to the wider theatregoing public, especially one that was to be staged in the mainstream theatre market of the West End. It earned the reputation as the "pre-restaurant play"; however the decision to present it twice nightly in the West End was a significant risk for its theatrical producers to commit to.<sup>671</sup> Nonetheless the enthusiasm for the venture brought together many producing partners, including Warner, Catherine Bailey Ltd, Stoll Moss Theatres and its executive producer in France, the Maison de la Culture Bobigny, who were funding the project on the basis that the performance would tour to Paris following its London run – an unusual touring path for a Beckett work. The decision to bring their work to the Garrick was both for commercial and practical reasons, and as Shaw and Warner then held a mainstream appeal, the 'highly uncommercial venture of putting a Beckett play on in the West End sold out on the strength of their names on the marquee.'<sup>672</sup> With its artists, ambition, risk and support, the 1994 production of *Footfalls* had the potential to make an unorthodox West End project a success, though as I will discuss the production would be remembered more for its notoriety in Beckettian and more broadly British performance histories than for the potential it promised. Before discussing the more public and disputed facets of this performance

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<sup>670</sup> Whitelaw performed in the play as part of the triple bill "Play and Other Plays" at the Royal Court in 1976 and in *Enough*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* at Riverside Studios in 1986. Besides these productions, I have only found two other performances of *Footfalls* in London, which materialized at the Baron's Court Theatre and the Café Bar Ricardo – both London fringe venues – in 1993, again presented as double bills.

<sup>671</sup> David Lister, 'Presenting the pre-restaurant play', *The Independent*, 15 March 1994, p. 4.

<sup>672</sup> Gerard Raymond, 'Censorship From the Grave', *Theater Week*, 2-8 May 1994, pp. 25-26.

history, I would like to consider Warner's work as a director and what the production did in order to stimulate the controversy associated with it.

A useful way to begin this examination of Warner's production, is to think about her reputation and her approach to theatrical practice. Aoife Monks has suggested Warner's productions are broadly known for three modes of theatrical representation: 'her loyalty to the text', 'the need for 'transparent' theatre productions which remove ideological and historical filters from the audience's experiences' and an 'emphasis on experimentalism and risk in performance, garnered from their interest in the European modernist avant-garde.'<sup>673</sup> Although Monks does not discuss these three strands of Warner's work in relation to her direction of *Footfalls*, they offer a useful reading of her direction of the piece, as Warner did not fully abide by Beckett's text and encountered difficulties in removing the historical filters or experimenting with Beckett's stage directions. Contrary to Monks's first point on Warner's directorial attributes, difficulties arose in this production's opening night as '[f]ive lines of dialogue had been transposed from mother to daughter'.<sup>674</sup> Following Edward Beckett's intervention after the first night, these lines were restored to Engels as mother for the remainder of the production's London run. Despite the reassignment of lines Warner stressed in an interview with Mel Gussow, she was 'no cowboy when it comes to text'.<sup>675</sup> Prior to *Footfalls*, Warner was known for being respectful of the playwright's text, even in her grandest of theatrical projects, as Paul Taylor contextualised, 'she made her reputation by sticking up for the whole text of *Titus Andronicus*, an undervalued Shakespeare play which no one before her had thought remotely feasible without butchery'.<sup>676</sup> By reassigning some of the lines in *Footfalls* she was attempting to suggest the ambiguities between May and Mother, though it was a decision Warner would regret with hindsight. Furthermore the production

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<sup>673</sup> Aoife Monks, 'Deborah Warner', in *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, ed. by Shomit Mitter and Maria Shevtsova (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 258.

<sup>674</sup> Mel Gussow, *Conversations with (and about) Beckett* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000), p. 100.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>676</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Way Out of Line', *The Independent*, 18 March 1994, p. 23.



was also deemed to have contravened many of the specific staging requirements outlined by the estate in its rights agreement, as Gussow described:

In this version, the actress went ‘walkabout,’ moving from the stage to a promontory on the edge of the dress circle and then back to the stage again. In both locations, she postured and grimaced the character’s pain. The performance disregarded the author’s designations of costume, lighting and stage directions, and the supposedly disembodied voice of the character’s mother (Susan Engel) seemed to come live from the orchestra.<sup>677</sup>

Gussow’s account of the performance’s transgressions, according to the Beckett estate, resonate with Monks’s notes on Warner’s directorial style with respect to the transparency, experimentalism and risk associated with her work; her interpretation reflected a consistency with her directorial style, it just did not correspond with the wishes of the estate. Indeed, in her own analysis of the production in an interview with Gussow, Warner accentuated the approach that guided her work on *Footfalls*, as she said, ‘Now the play should be done a little more bravely...to release Beckett for a new generation. If there’s a Beckett cliché, it’s someone standing in a white light in a black box set. In its time, that was highly innovative. But I have to carry with me the history of my time.’<sup>678</sup> These comments epitomised a large part of her creative and growing mainstream appeal, as she felt her productions had to speak in the present, just as her previously imaginative re-readings of classical plays had been applauded for doing so. Once again this was contextualised by Taylor, who noted, ‘the last time she offended against an author’s stage directions, as she flagrantly did in her 1991 production of *Hedda Gabler*, she received almost universal acclaim’.<sup>679</sup> However, as she found out in the case of a more recently deceased writer, and with a playwright who so

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<sup>677</sup> Gussow, *Conversations with (and about) Beckett*, p. 100.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>679</sup> Taylor, ‘Way Out of Line’, 1994.

stringently specified the adherence of his stage directions, the reverberations of re-reading the playwright's text would lead to an unexpected theatrical storm.

Before addressing the controversy that this performance produced, I would like to first reflect on the production's critical reception, as over the week it was staged the performance divided critical responses. Both Michael Coveney and Irving Wardle hugely admired Warner's production, with Coveney calling it a 'superb, poetic, and clarifying production'<sup>680</sup> and Wardle labelling it 'spell-binding'.<sup>681</sup> Intriguingly, their Sunday reviews would both recall past performances of the play that ghosted their impressions of Warner's production. Coveney was supportive of Warner's work and even ranked the performance over Beckett's 1976 performance, arguing,

I have seen this piece performed twice before (by Billie Whitelaw in London and Susan Fitzgerald in Dublin) to Beckett's exact specifications, and the suffocating aroma of High Art hung thickly and off-puttingly about. Shaw and Warner's work is a Beckett breakthrough, redefining the play's theatre-ness while, honouring, most remarkably, Beckett's Irish rhythms and cutting humour.<sup>682</sup>

Meanwhile, Wardle also felt, 'It did little for me when I saw it in the 1970s.'<sup>683</sup> However, this opinion should be nuanced with his response to Beckett's production in 1976, when he reflected, 'in terms of stage imagery, and the sense of an indefinable, unassuageable grief, the impression is as potent as that Miss Whitelaw made in *Not I*'; an opinion that suggests Wardle may have subsequently changed his mind about the play's first production or that he offered contradictory judgements on the performances.<sup>684</sup> Besides their praise, however, the performance was criticised in the notices of several newspapers. Alastair Macaulay

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<sup>680</sup> Michael Coveney, 'Such good behaviour at Pinter's Party', *The Observer*, 20 March 1994, p. 11.

<sup>681</sup> Irving Wardle, 'Still queasy after all these years', *The Independent on Sunday*, 20 March 1994, p. 26.

<sup>682</sup> Coveney, 'Such good behaviour at Pinter's Party' 1994, p. 11.

<sup>683</sup> Wardle, 'Still queasy after all these years', 1994, p. 26.

<sup>684</sup> Irving Wardle, 'People in a timeless limbo', *The Times*, 21 May 1976.

acknowledged Warner and Shaw's attention to the play's meaning and their changes to Beckett's instructions within the play, though his main issue was with the actor and director's collaborations, as he asked, 'must Shaw and Warner reveal their talent in so self-advertising a manner?', before reporting, 'Shaw's withered-old-maid posture is too obviously contrived; her sexually frustrated fiddlings at the folds of dress before her crotch are over-emphatic; and her little girl petrified virgin voice makes the whole affair artificial.'<sup>685</sup> Indeed, Shaw's Irish accent in comparison to Engel's English voice was queried by a number of commentators. Furthermore, several critics pondered the symbolism behind the performance's spatial rearrangement; as Billington contended, it was an issue in relation to the play, '[it] proved to me was that if you liberate May from the spatial confinement that is her existence, you rob the play of its visual and emotional power'.<sup>686</sup> Billington's article offered an important commentary concerning the questions and challenges of re-interpreting a Beckett text and the wider practical questions, which corresponded with the British tradition of respecting and adhering to the playwright's text. However, as Billington concluded such radical experiments were not suited to Beckett's later work and particularly *Footfalls*, writing, '[it] is too unyielding, too fixed in its theatrical demands, to achieve the malleability of a classic'.<sup>687</sup>

Although Warner did not want her production of *Footfalls* to be remembered in terms of the controversy her interpretation stimulated, it would be difficult for any history to overlook this much publicised dispute. It is well known by now that this frequently referenced staging did not meet the approval of the Beckett estate (under the executorship of Edward Beckett), as it contravened a number of the articles stipulated in the performance rights agreement signed by both parties, which led to a subsequent ban of the production's proposed tour. These actions saw Beckett's drama receive an unprecedented level of media attention, which I would argue has subsequently played an important role in the public's

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<sup>685</sup> Alastair Macaulay, 'Beckett's 'Footfalls'', *Financial Times*, 17 March 1994.

<sup>686</sup> Michael Billington, 'Foot fault', *The Guardian*, 22 March 1994, pp. 4-5.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

perception of Beckett and his canon in the UK and internationally. This was illustrated through coverage of the debacle on the front page of *The Guardian* on 19 March 1994 – to my knowledge the first time, with the exception of his death, that Beckett appeared on the main page of a national British newspaper. The article presented the Beckett estate as a stern executor of Beckett’s literary legacy, which derived from an unsympathetic quote from Leah Schmidt of Curtis Brown, as Madeleine Bunting and Angella Johnson wrote, ‘Trustees of the estate of Samuel Beckett are so angered with the interpretation of one of his plays in a production running in London that they have declared its director will never stage his plays again.’<sup>688</sup> Inevitably the article would expose Beckett’s drama to a larger proportion of *The Guardian*’s readership and as a result a heated debate was initiated which engaged many critics, practitioners, academics and regular theatregoers surrounding questions similar to the one Billington posed at the time: ‘is a theatrical text simply a blueprint for its interpreters or does it have an integrity of its own that demands respect?’<sup>689</sup>

It was a divisive issue, as many commentators argued Beckett’s text should be respected, while others felt contemporary theatre practitioners should have the freedom to interpret the drama as they wish. *The Guardian*’s ‘Letters to the Editor’ section, in particular, was inundated with responses to the production, including contributions from Edward Beckett and Fiona Shaw. In his reasonable and well-nuanced letter, Edward Beckett denied Warner had been banned from directing his uncle’s work for life, but this was counter-balanced as he stated, ‘If Deborah Warner is to direct Beckett in the future, and I personally hope she does, it must be with frankness and with the collaboration of the estate.’<sup>690</sup> Shaw appreciated Edward Beckett’s letter for clarifying the confusion sparked by the allegations Warner had been banned but defended the merits of her work by writing, ‘By changing the

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<sup>688</sup> Madeleine Bunting and Angella Johnson, ‘Exit for life the director who dared to play with Beckett’, *The Guardian*, 19 March 1994, p. 1.

<sup>689</sup> Billington, 1994.

<sup>690</sup> Edward Beckett, ‘The wrong route to the heart of Beckett’, *The Guardian*, 24 March 1994, p. 25.

play's spacial [sic] relationship she released a different aesthetic which allows the play to be enjoyed at the heart of experiment where Beckett flourished'.<sup>691</sup> However, despite Shaw's explanation, in the final paragraph of his letter Edward Beckett used his musical background to compare the question of interpretation in different arts forms, as he wrote:

The estate does not seek to restrict freedom of interpretation, the very life blood of music and theatre. There are more than 15 recordings of Beethoven's late string quartets in the catalogue, every interpretation different, one from the next, but they are all based on the same notes, tonalities, dynamic and tempo markings. We feel justified in asking the same measure of respect for Samuel Beckett's plays.<sup>692</sup>

Given these justifications, he felt bound to stop Warner's production at the end of its week long London run and thus signified that practitioners approaching Beckett's texts would need to comply with his stage directions and the contract under which his performance rights were issued. The consequences of this very public case have shaped the cultural reputation of Warner and, perhaps more so, the Beckett estate, as both parties gained notoriety within the public's cultural memory for their respective roles in this theatrical event. While the decision had an impact on the figures directly involved and later productions of Beckett's drama, the debate over the freedom of interpretation would influence the national culture through the high profile attention it received, though one benefit of the controversy would include its role in Martin Crimp's decision to write his play *Attempts on her Life* (1997).<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Fiona Shaw, 'Being true to Beckett', *The Guardian*, 25 March 1994, p. 25.

<sup>692</sup> Edward Beckett, 'The wrong route to the heart of Beckett', 1994.

<sup>693</sup> In an interview with Harriet Devine, Crimp said, 'One of the reasons for writing *Attempts on her Life* was my knowledge about the Beckett estate's control of his work, which for me is a negative aspect of his inheritance'. See Harriet Devine, *Looking Back: Playwrights at the Royal Court, 1956-2006* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 88.

### 5.3.2. Mitchell's *Endgame*: A reimagining within the stage directions

Records from the Staging Beckett Database suggest the controversy surrounding *Footfalls* may have initially deterred practitioners from approaching his work, as 1995 saw no productions of Beckett's drama staged in London. After this fallow year, however, and perhaps to the surprise of many, the number of Beckett performances in London proliferated across the city, with performances at the Battersea Arts Centre and the Watermans Arts Centre, as well as more familiar London venues for Beckett's work.<sup>694</sup> Besides its reinvigorated presence in the West End, Beckett's drama also appeared in London's "boutique theatres", such as the Almeida and the Donmar Warehouse, with the latter theatre staging *Endgame* in a production led by another promising British theatre director, Katie Mitchell. The production saw the Donmar reengage its interest in Beckett's drama, after re-opening as an independent producing house in 1992 under the artistic directorship of Sam Mendes, who was then primarily known as a theatre director before his work on film with *American Beauty* and *Skyfall*. Mendes – who himself had directed *Endgame* as a student – scheduled Mitchell to direct the play with a cast featuring Alun Armstrong and Stephen Dillane as Hamm and Clov. Mitchell has been criticised by some commentators, such as Michael Billington, for the 'increasing personal stamp' she places on her interpretations of classical texts.<sup>695</sup> Indeed, the experimentalism and uncompromising style and vision that has guided her productions at many of Britain and Europe's major theatres has seen her labelled as 'British theatre's true auteur'; a revered concept in mainland Europe, but one that British

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<sup>694</sup> The performance of *Godot* at the Watermans Arts Centre was produced by Tottering Bipedes who had the idea of having the roles played by actors with physical impairments. Their director Katie London recalled the issues presented between the Beckett estate and Warner, as she critiqued the estate and their agents, Curtis Brown, for allowing their production the rights to tour England though not London. As Peter Hall was planning his 1997 production of *Godot*, Curtis Brown restricted their performance in London, before granting the performance rights after hearing their venue was in Brentford. See Katie London, 'The Beckett estate proudly presents...Waiting For Permission', *The Guardian*, 3 May 1997.

<sup>695</sup> Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 404.

critics such as Billington are diametrically opposed to in the theatre.<sup>696</sup> Mitchell's theatre training was heavily informed by directors from Northern and Eastern European traditions, whom she worked with as part of a grant she received from the William Churchill Memorial Trust. This enabled her to engage with continental theatre practices, as she worked under directors such as Lev Dodin and Anatoli Vassiliev, all the time viewing a diverse range of theatre in her spare time. These experiences significantly shaped her approach to directing, which became more distanced from the British tradition. Of her direction, Dan Rebellato has suggested, 'Mitchell's work has a sensibility and a set of priorities that fit awkwardly into the institutional structures or critical consensus that surround British theatre practice. Put simply, Katie Mitchell is too European for some British tastes.'<sup>697</sup> Rebellato's comments on Mitchell resonate with considerations of Beckett, who was arguably at the beginning of his career too European for British tastes, but gradually became more accepted in the nation's theatre culture. Following the infamy of *Footfalls* and given Mitchell's directorial grounding, her production of *Endgame* could have roused similar notoriety, though instead Mitchell offered a fresh interpretation of the play within the limits of Beckett's prescribed stage directions.

Mitchell was in fact originally due to direct another play at the Donmar, though after that production failed to materialise she rediscovered Beckett through *Endgame* and "was amazed by how powerful and humane it was, and how badly [she] had misjudged him."<sup>698</sup> Mitchell's rediscovery of Beckett echoed the revived interest in his work by many of her contemporaries and the work of more established practitioners. As a practitioner following the *Footfalls* dispute, Mitchell felt the need to approach her *Endgame* rehearsals with some trepidation as she commented, "if I was in any doubt, I'd fax the estate's representative, and

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<sup>696</sup> Philip Oltermann, 'Katie Mitchell, British theatre's true auteur, on being embraced by Europe', *The Guardian*, 9 July 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jul/09/katie-mitchell-british-theatre-true-auteur> [accessed 17 February 2016].

<sup>697</sup> Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato, *Contemporary European Theatre Directors* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 319.

<sup>698</sup> Rupert Christiansen, 'A new angle on Beckett', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 November 1997. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4710913/A-new-angle-on-Beckett.html> [accessed 2 February 2016].

he'd come down and help sort the problems out [...]. It was all very delicate, but co-operative. And ultimately you realise that there's no writer whose rigid instructions are more helpful.”<sup>699</sup> Indeed, this outlook on Beckett's stage directions has been shared by other eminent practitioners, who rather than finding his directions restrictive, have in fact found his parameters more rewarding for the performance. Mitchell's reflections on her approach to *Endgame* came as she was directing an evening of six Beckett shorts, consisting of *Footfalls*, *Rockaby*, *Not I*, *Embers*, *A Piece of Monologue* and *That Time*, for the RSC at The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon in October 1997, which suggests the positive experience she had working on *Endgame* one year previously. While she was keen to adhere to Beckett's text and stage directions, she again highlighted the debates which had marred *Footfalls* one year earlier:

It's not that I want to depart from anything that Beckett has written. But we have to move on from what has become the conventional way of staging these plays, in a rather cold, abstract and over-reverent style, with the actors wearing white-face and long wigs. I want an audience to recognise themselves in the characters, not regard them from a distance as weird psychotics. There's a danger that Beckett's plays could turn into mummified museum pieces, labelled as a little theatrical backwater and not treated as living art.<sup>700</sup>

Here, Mitchell suggests a tradition of staging Beckett had developed by the 1990s and through her awareness of these staging methods, her own production was able to offer a fresh approach to Beckett's canon that did not fall foul of the Beckett estate.<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Mitchell's later Beckett productions are arguably more radical interpretations of Beckett's texts and more representative of the German theatre culture where they were staged. These productions include *Footfalls* and *Neither* at the Berliner Staatsoper in 2014 and *Glückliche Tage* at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg in 2015.



Although the performance histories of Beckett's drama post-Beckett have been subject to limited analysis to date, several histories discussing productions of his work in the 1990s have concentrated on *Footfalls*, because of the wider public attention this staging received, a historiographical issue which has diminished the performance profile of Mitchell's *Endgame* in the history of Beckett productions within the UK. Perhaps not surprisingly, when this staging was examined by London's critics, the cultural residue of the *Footfalls* controversy meant Warner and the Beckett estate remained at the forefront of many reviews. For example, Taylor had found himself pondering the limits that the Beckett estate would impose on potential productions, as he wrote, 'Ever since the Beckett estate fell with punitive pedantry on Deborah Warner's *Footfalls*, I've found myself fantasising about ways you could produce his plays that would liberate them from the strait-jacket of his stage directions while not being untrue to the spirit or the significance of the works.'<sup>702</sup> Despite recollections over directorial freedom with Beckett's drama proving a prominent presence in this production's reception, Mitchell's direction was unanimously acclaimed for its original interpretation of a well-known play and its resistance to stray from Beckett's stage directions. This was aided by Mitchell's work on the text with her cast and in her collaboration with designer Rae Smith, as they reconfigured *Endgame*'s traditional scenic arrangement, positioning the dustbins of Harry Jones and Eileen Nicholas as Nagg and Nell behind Armstrong's Hamm. Furthermore the windows which are conventionally small and high in the set's background were in fact larger and closer to the floor in Smith's dark and gloomy vault-like set.

The sensitivity with which Mitchell directed *Endgame* contrasted with the auteur style she was famed for and had applied to her previous productions of classics, such as her RSC productions of *Ghosts* (in 1994) and *Henry VI* (in 1994). Even Billington, who would

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<sup>702</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Endgame', *The Independent*, 19 April 1996, p. 7.

later prove a trenchant critic of her directorial approach, praised Mitchell's 'excellent new production' for its extraction of the humour and empathy in a play he saw as Beckett's vision of the end of existence.<sup>703</sup> He continued his praise by writing at length about Armstrong and Dillane's depiction of Hamm and Clov:

the whole point of Mitchell's production is that recognisable human impulses survive even in a terminal situation: she gives us characters rather than abstractions. Alun Armstrong's vocally incisive Hamm may be a crippled tyrant, but there is something deeply moving about his simultaneous craving for death and for residual human contact: he variously begs Clov to kill him and kiss him, as if his ultimate terror is that of total solitude. [...]

There is also wild humour about Stephen Dillane's astonishing hump-backed, strenuously limping Clov. He is both a morose Caliban to this toppled Prospero, dragging a ladder across the stage to grate on his master's nerves, and yet also someone who cannot quite forfeit his dependency.<sup>704</sup>

Armstrong came to the role as an experienced stage actor best known for his collaborations at the RSC on *Nicholas Nickleby* (1981) and *Les Misérables* (1985), and at the NT with the title role in *Sweeney Todd* (in 1993). On the other hand, Dillane had a strong acting reputation from the early success of *Angels of America* (in 1993), before his standing as an actor was underlined through his Tony Award winning performance in Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* (2000), and arguably his best known role to date, as Stannis Baratheon in *Game of Thrones*. Mitchell's concentrated work on the characterisation of this play during rehearsals was exemplified through Dillane's performance, as Robert Butler argued, 'Dillane is superb. Hunchbacked, nervous, his straggly hair falling across his thin bearded face, he raises his

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<sup>703</sup> Michael Billington, 'The exhilaration of the grim reaper', *The Guardian*, 18 April 1996.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*

eyes to the roof, scratches his dirty trousers and mutters soft rapid rebuttals. His timing is a delight. We glimpse years and years of frustrated servitude.’<sup>705</sup> Furthermore, many critics were impressed with the humour conveyed by Dillane’s Clov, particularly through his running gag with his step-ladder. Besides Armstrong and Dillane, the performances of Jones and Nicholas also drew admiration from critics despite their obstructed visibility at the back of the stage. As Taylor wrote in *The Independent*, ‘Harry Jones and Eileen Nicholas are the most affecting Nagg and Nell I have yet seen, playing the dust binned duo as a pair of shrivelled senile Scots, who need one another to act as audience for rusty jokes and unreliable memories.’<sup>706</sup>

At a time when practitioners of Beckett’s drama may have felt a greater level of scrutiny concerning the need for their performances to meet the approval of the Beckett estate, Mitchell’s production demonstrated how it was possible to balance a new interpretation of Beckett’s in the theatre within the parameters of his dramatic text. Through its use of performance, characterisation, scenography, tone and rhythm, Mitchell highlighted that beyond its confines, Beckett’s text has a flexibility that is waiting to be activated. Despite the pressure of greater scrutiny and *Endgame*’s strong potential for ghosting, her production achieved the compliment of satisfying both challenges and being ‘refreshingly non-reverent [and at the same time] uplifting’.<sup>707</sup>

Both Warner and Mitchell staged Beckett’s drama at arguably a formative phase of their development as directors. The experience would inform their later theatre practice, where they would enhance their reputations within British and international performance cultures. For the two practitioners, working on these productions brought them mixed feelings towards Beckett’s drama. While in Warner’s case she gained an unwanted name for notoriety, it did raise her own public profile and intrigued many theatregoers into seeing her

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<sup>705</sup> Robert Butler, ‘Beckett rescued from his admirers’, *The Independent on Sunday*, 21 April 1996, p. 13.

<sup>706</sup> Taylor, ‘Endgame’, *The Independent*, 19 April 1996.

<sup>707</sup> Michael Coveney, ‘Hamm with relish’, *The Observer*, 21 April 1996, p. 12.

next productions. Whereas Warner did not return to Beckett for another thirteen years when she directed Shaw in *Happy Days* at the NT, Mitchell's engagement continued one year later when she directed 'Beckett Shorts' for the RSC<sup>708</sup> and at various stages across her career with the director recently stressing her admiration for Beckett as she called *Footfalls* "the most exquisite play ever written."<sup>709</sup> Since their work on these productions, their interpretations of classical texts have continued to appeal to contemporary audiences and, while they can at times divide opinion, for many producers and theatregoers, the characteristics of their productions for experimentalism, truthfulness, flair and precision, has seen them produce provocative work with a mainstream allure. While other notable directors from this generation of practitioners turned to Beckett later in the 2000s, including Simon McBurney who directed and performed in *Endgame* with Mark Rylance at the Duchess Theatre in 2009, Beckett's growing appeal to practitioners, theatres and audiences in the late 1990s and 2000s saw several producers package his work in an accessible and consumable festival format that would celebrate his life and work. The final section of this chapter will now discuss the Gate Theatre Dublin and Barbican Centre's 1999 and 2006 Beckett festivals, which produced large scale theatrical events dedicated to Beckett's entire theatrical canon.<sup>710</sup>

#### **5.4. Beckett and festivals**

If the post-Beckett era signalled the proliferation of his work in both single and multiple bill formats, it also signalled the growing propensity to festivalise Beckett's canon. This shift in the post-Beckett era to package his work for theatregoers as a large scale event originated in Dublin when they produced the first Beckett Festival at the Gate Theatre in 1991; staging

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<sup>708</sup> For an account of Mitchell's RSC production of "Beckett Shorts", see Derval Tubridy, "An Unforgettable Image': Staging Beckett's Short Plays", in *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. by Tucker and McTighe (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen, 2016), pp. 129 – 135.

<sup>709</sup> See Interview with Katie Mitchell. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOXN2tLN1II> [accessed 4 March 2016].

<sup>710</sup> Simon McBurney directed *Endgame* and played Clov alongside Mark Rylance as Hamm at the Duchess Theatre.

each of his nineteen plays and other Beckett related talks and events, before touring different iterations of the festival to New York in 1996 and London in 1999. While the festival's originality lay with the ambitious idea of presenting each of his works for the stage, it was of course not the first time Beckett's work had been produced in the festival format. In London his drama had previously played a familiar role in arts festivals and theatre seasons, in events such as the Bloomsbury Festival in 1988 and the World Theatre Seasons in the 1960s and 1970s. Beyond these variations, his work was also subject to its own single-author seasons during his lifetime. In 1976, the Royal Court produced its 70<sup>th</sup> birthday Beckett Season with two world premieres, while elsewhere in Britain the Edinburgh Festival – under the directorship of Frank Dunlop – organised a “Samuel Beckett Season” in 1984 at the Church Hill Theatre, and internationally, the Festival d'Automne's “Hommage à Samuel Beckett” marked his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in Paris in 1981. These events signify how the festivalisation of Beckett's drama was actively under way during his lifetime, but as I will discuss in this section, the major festivals and seasons produced in London since his death have utilised Beckett's broad appeal across art forms to stage large, multi-arts festivals on Beckett's ever-rising and consumable status as a brand within the arts, literary and performance sectors. This section will primarily focus on the 1999 and 2006 Beckett festivals produced at the Barbican Centre, their reception and their influence on the rising interest towards Beckett's work in London.

#### **5.4.1. The 1999 Beckett Festival: An oxymoron or an unmissable celebration?**

The 1999 Beckett festival saw the Gate Theatre, Dublin and London's Barbican Centre join forces to produce a festival that had enjoyed much previous success at the Gate in 1991 and the Lincoln Center in 1996. Besides a reading of *Catastrophe* in 1984 – where Derek Jacobi read its stage directions – the 1999 festival was the first time the Barbican Centre had hosted

Beckett's work.<sup>711</sup> Meanwhile the Gate had in many respects 'reclaimed' the exilic Beckett for Ireland towards the late 1980s and was by this point a leading exponent of Beckett's *oeuvre* through their previous performances in Dublin and London, as well as on international platforms.<sup>712</sup> London theatres had previously welcomed the Gate's Beckett productions, as Riverside Studios hosted *I'll Go On* with Barry McGovern in 1986, and while the Gate cemented its reputation with Beckett's drama in Dublin, ten years later it brought *Happy Days* with Rosaleen Linehan and McGovern to the Almeida Theatre in Islington.<sup>713</sup> With the Gate's growing expertise in staging Beckett and the Barbican Centre's capacity for accommodating multiple performances, exhibitions, talks and screenings, the two producers were able to transform the venue's brutalist buildings into the home of an extravaganza dedicated to Beckett.

In his review for the opening of the 1999 festival, Charles Spencer amusingly captured an alternative viewpoint of the event, writing, 'The very words "Beckett Festival" are the kind of wildly improbable oxymoron that the writer himself would have appreciated. Festivals are about life, vitality and celebration, and here is one devoted to a man whose entire oeuvre could be summed up in the phrase "life's a bitch and then you die".'<sup>714</sup> Although Spencer's commentary finished in his usual disrespectful treatment of Beckett's work, his perception of the event encapsulated how some commentators continued to see the transfer of Beckett's canon to the festival format as an unlikely proposition. Indeed Beckett voiced his own shock about the concept, when Colgan impulsively told him how he was

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<sup>711</sup> It was read as part of "Thoughtcrimes" at the Barbican, 16-27 January 1984; a joint presentation by the RSC with the Index on Censorship. Several plays were also read or performed, including *Mistake* by Vaclav Havel, *A Czech 1984* by Milan Simecka, *A Minor Apocalypse* by Tadeusz Konwicki and *A Day in the Life of El Salvador* by Manlio Argueta.

<sup>712</sup> Brian Singleton, 'The Revival revised' in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, ed. by Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 259.

<sup>713</sup> *Waiting for Godot* was first performed at the Gate and continued to be staged by the theatre until 2008, which saw the conclusion of its 32 county tour of Ireland at the Ardhoven Theatre in Enniskillen. It was directed by Walter Asmus and designed by Louis le Brocqy. *Happy Days* was directed by Karel Reisz and designed by Tim Hatley. It was also presented at the 1999 festival.

<sup>714</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Godot gets Beckett Festival off to a flying start', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 September 1999, p. 23.

going to produce each of his nineteen plays for the stage, Beckett replied, ‘You can’t be serious’.<sup>715</sup> By the time this bold plan had reached London it was the third time Colgan would deliver this ambitious project. It would dismiss any oxymoronic associations with the term “Beckett festival” as the festival was awash with vitality and excitement through the large audiences that flocked to the Barbican to take in the plethora of events on offer, as Beckett’s nineteen plays were staged over eighteen days alongside an extensive programme of talks, films, art and exhibitions.<sup>716</sup> The principles by which the festival operated were outlined by the artistic director of the Barbican, Graham Sheffield, as he wrote in the festival programme, ‘I can only begin to broaden my understanding of his extraordinary personality through those who knew him, those who create new work inspired by him, and of course: his work. These three paths are at the core of this Beckett Festival’.<sup>717</sup> This sense of understanding was imparted through talks by academics and friends of Beckett, such as James Knowlson, and practitioners who had closely collaborated with him on key productions, with Walter Asmus’s *Godot*, for example, playing such a central role in the festival’s tribute to Beckett’s vision, as well as the Gate’s long term association with Beckett.

One of the festival’s many attractions lay in the sophisticated programming of its events, as David Clare has argued, ‘Art works (including radical ones) are often made more easily ‘consumable’ today through their packaging within a festival format’.<sup>718</sup> Indeed, the 1999 festival showed how, particularly with Beckett’s shorter plays, it would package these productions with audiences in mind as it sought to strike a balance between the duration of the overall event, its value for money and the economics of staging these plays. Colgan

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<sup>715</sup> Programme for the 1999 Beckett Festival at the Barbican Centre. UoR, Beckett, BC Stage Files/FES 1999.

<sup>716</sup> This excluded *Eleutheria*, which at Beckett’s request has remained unavailable for performance by his estate. Intriguingly, when he was considering it for performance in 1948, he wrote to Thomas MacGreevy on 18 March, ‘*Eleutheria* is hithering, thithering and beginning to be spoken of a little. I think it will see the boards in time, even if only for a few nights. But never those of the *Gate*.’ See Craig et al., eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. Volume II: 1941-1956*, p. 75.

<sup>717</sup> Programme for the Gate Festival, 1999. UoR, Beckett, BC Stage File/FES 1999.

<sup>718</sup> David Clare, ‘The Gate Theatre’s Beckett Festivals: Tensions between the Local and the Global’ in *Staging Beckett in Ireland*, ed. by McTighe and Tucker (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen, 2016), p. 54.

described this packaging of the festival in his own commercial language as “Eventing”, before he outlined the ethos of this term, “When you *Event* something, you have a much better chance of getting them to sit through even five hours.”<sup>719</sup> Nine productions were mounted in total with Beckett’s four early plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Happy Days* presented individually, and his late plays were organised into the following five triple bills:

*Play/ Act Without Words III/ Come and Go*

*Not I/What Where/Act Without Words I*

*Footfalls/ Rough for Theatre I/ Rockaby*

*Ohio Impromptu/ Rough for Theatre II/ Catastrophe*

*Breath/ That Time/ A Piece of Monologue*

The commitment its producers showed in staging all of Beckett’s later plays was arguably the most impressive contribution of the festival to performance histories of Beckett’s drama. Prior to the festival, many of these short plays were on the periphery of Beckettian performance histories because of their few presentations, particularly with respect to London. However, by festivalising Beckett’s opus, as Brian Singleton has argued, ‘their lesser-known and less popular works can be consumed on the international markets, thus reinforcing their canonical status.’<sup>720</sup> By grouping these short plays together, the festival brought more prominence to these lesser known works and demonstrated how many of these unfamiliar plays could be produced and staged in a manner that engaged audiences. For example, some plays, such as *A Piece of Monologue*, have had a limited presence in performance histories of Beckett’s *oeuvre* and while it has been one of his less appealing works to stage, its

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<sup>719</sup> See Anna McMullan and Trish McTighe, ‘Samuel Beckett, the Gate Theatre Dublin, and the Contemporary Irish Independent Theater Sector: Fragments of Performance History’, *Breac*, 10 July 2014. See: [https://breac.nd.edu/articles/48971-samuel-beckett-the-gate-theatre-dublin-and-the-contemporary-irish-independent-theater-sector-fragments-of-performance-history/#\\_edn10](https://breac.nd.edu/articles/48971-samuel-beckett-the-gate-theatre-dublin-and-the-contemporary-irish-independent-theater-sector-fragments-of-performance-history/#_edn10) [accessed 1 September 2016].

<sup>720</sup> Singleton, p. 259.



presentation through the festival has most likely provided the play with a platform whereby other theatre makers have been encouraged to stage it. I would argue the Barbican and Gate Theatre's Beckett Festivals were the catalyst for the growing inclination from practitioners to stage Beckett's short plays as they were performed more regularly in fringe venues and established theatres. Undoubtedly the presentation of these shorter plays developed much curiosity for practitioners, critics and audiences due to their limited performance history in comparison to Beckett's four early plays. Although the festivals celebrated Beckett's work, some commentators nuanced the celebration of Beckett through their criticism and questions of Beckett's shorter works. For example, Oliver Reynolds felt the triple bill that included *Footfalls* was 'one of the few engrossing productions in the series of short plays'.<sup>721</sup> Michael Billington has also suggested how in spite of his admiration of the event itself, he did not deem the boundless praise bestowed on his work by some commentators as proportionate: 'we do him a disservice to approach him in a spirit of uncritical reverence and assume all his theatrical works are of equal weight. One thing the Beckett festival has done is to show that some of his plays have a universal application while others are over-determinist curiosities that leave little room for growth.'<sup>722</sup>

Amongst the cast and creative teams involved in the festival there were actors and directors experienced with Beckett's drama such as Barry McGovern, Alan Stanford and Ben Barnes, celebrity performers including John Hurt, and well known practitioners working on Beckett for the first time, such as Niamh Cusack and Robin Lefevre. The festival was true to Sheffield's guiding principles and beyond its occasional use of European directors and celebrity casting, it showed how the Gate had reconnected Beckett with his Irish roots. Many of their productions during the festival used a large pool of Irish actors and designers, which saw, as Anna McMullan and Trish McTighe have argued, 'the reclaiming of Beckett as an

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<sup>721</sup> Oliver Reynolds, 'Beside ourselves, necessarily', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 September 1999, pp. 18-19.

<sup>722</sup> Michael Billington, 'Happy days', *The Guardian*, 22 September 1999, p. 13

Irish writer'.<sup>723</sup> Indeed the marketing of Beckett's work as an Irish product was not lost on London's critics with Taylor recognising, 'the festival boasts a wealth of Irish acting talent. And this, surely, is a major selling point – the chance to demonstrate that the playwright's bleak comedy works best when you give it an authentic Irish accent?'<sup>724</sup> The combination of Beckett's international status with his Irish roots and the delivery of his work by Irish actors who naturally embraced the Irish cadences within his drama added to the festival's allure. Spurred on by Ireland's Celtic Tiger boom of the 1990s, the Gate's decision to reflect on Beckett's heritage through its use of Irish actors for the potential exportation of the event, epitomised how the Irish theatre sector had a growing awareness of how to sell its product in the globalised arts world. As McMullan and McTighe have convincingly argued, 'In this globalized climate, the Gate could present the cosmopolitan Beckett as a harbinger and icon of a new, secularized Ireland, at once Irish and international.'<sup>725</sup> Beckett was reclaimed as an icon of Irish culture, but his international relevance meant he blurred the boundaries of nationhood as he was not only festivalised in Ireland, but the UK as well. While British audiences had previously become accustomed to the 'Stage Irishman' on their stages, through the Gate Theatre's Beckett Festivals at the Barbican Centre, a more serious, intellectual representation and product of Ireland was presented and embraced by London's cosmopolitan theatregoing audience.

Overall the festival was warmly welcomed by audiences and critics, with Billington's summary of the festival offering the most insightful commentary on its achievement, as he argued,

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<sup>723</sup> McMullan and McTighe.

<sup>724</sup> Paul Taylor, 'There was this Irishman...', *The Independent*, 31 August 1999. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-there-was-this-irishman-1114763.html> [accessed 19 March 2016].

<sup>725</sup> McMullan and McTighe.

Perhaps the biggest single lesson is that there is a huge public appetite for single-subject festivals: something long ago learned in the cinema and concert hall but consistently denied in the theatre. [...] But the most extraordinary thing about the Beckett festival was the way it instantly caught fire. The Pit sold out straight away and scheduled extra performances for Krapp's Last Tape. Plays such as *Endgame* and *Happy Days* packed the main Barbican Theatre. Even a reading of Beckett's Poetry and Prose produced the kind of ticket fever you associate with the Cup Final.<sup>726</sup>

The festival highlighted the unprecedented demand and contributed to the renewed interest in his work from practitioners, artists, academics and the public, from its rich and well-packaged programming. The enthusiasm exuded by the 1999 festival saw a steady rise in the number of performances of his plays across London and ahead of the next Beckett festival in 2006. His work also appeared in other arts festivals across London, which suggested its popularity amidst different art forms and artists. For example, a much overlooked performance of *En Attendant Godot* in 2000 by the respected Swiss director Luc Bondy was included in the Southbank's hugely popular, annual Meltdown festival, which was welcomed for a limited number of performances alongside others acts such as Asian Dub Foundation, Blur, Jarvis Cocker and Radiohead in a festival curated by the singer-songwriter Scott Walker. Of course, Beckett's post-Beckett popularity and propensity to be festivalised was best characterised six years later when a revised festival between the Gate and Barbican became one of the flagship events for Beckett's centenary celebrations in London.

#### **5.4.2. The Beckett Centenary Festival**

Ahead of the planned celebrations to mark his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, Beckett remarked to Jocelyn Herbert, 'I dread the year now upon us and all the fuss in store for me here, as if it were my

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<sup>726</sup> Billington, 'Happy days', 1999.

centenary. I'll make myself scarce. While it lasts, where I don't know. Perhaps the great Wall of China, crouch behind it till the coast is clear.<sup>727</sup> In this letter Beckett somewhat predicted the commotion that would materialise to mark his centenary, which was not restricted to an Irish or French celebration, but an international salutation to Beckett and his work. With many of the world's major cultural centres paying homage to Beckett in 2006, London also contributed to what was 'claimed as the biggest ever international event for a modern writer' with its own plethora of Beckett-related productions, talks, lectures, screenings, events and exhibitions.<sup>728</sup> This 'Beckettmania', as Sean Coughlan described it, was epitomised by the return of the Gate's festival to the Barbican Centre, albeit as a revised programming under the title of "The Beckett Centenary Festival".<sup>729</sup> Both theatres had collaborated on reprisals of Beckett's work at the Barbican since the 1999 Festival, as it hosted *I'll Go On* in 2000 and the London premiere of the Gate's divided Beckett on Film project in 2001, which presented Beckett's nineteen stage plays adapted for film. Their plans to celebrate Beckett's centenary in London supposedly stemmed from a persuasive proposal from Sheffield to Colgan, with the latter commending the Barbican's role in the centenary, by writing, 'once more it is the Barbican who have shown the courage and created the energy to bring so much of Beckett's work to the London stage.'<sup>730</sup> On this occasion six productions were organised for the Barbican Centre and while *Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* were again presented alone, the shorter plays were this time offered as pairings of *Rockaby/Ohio Impromptu*, *Footfalls/Come and Go* and *Play/Catastrophe*. This arrangement thus allowed greater attention on the plays involved, though a shorter evening at the theatre. While fewer performances of the Beckett canon were available to view as live performances,

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<sup>727</sup> Letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 11 January 1981. UoR, Beckett, HER/102.

<sup>728</sup> Sean Coughlan, 'Beckettmania', BBC News, 13 April 2006.

See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4903036.stm> [accessed 19 February 2016].

<sup>729</sup> Ibid.

<sup>730</sup> Michael Colgan, Programme note for the 2006 Beckett Centenary Festival at the Barbican Centre, London, p. 2. UoR, Beckett, BC MS 5244.

as this edition of the festival followed the Gate's 2001 *Beckett on Film* project, the producers were able to present these plays either in the theatre or on screen. It is likely this decision would have been influenced by restrictions rather than the theatre's intentions, as the celebrations in London and forthcoming productions, such as *Happy Days* at the National Theatre featuring Fiona Shaw in 2007, may have held the performance rights for individual plays. The festival nonetheless stirred a similar excitement to its 1999 presentation and although the number of productions had decreased, both the Gate and Barbican showed once again how Beckett's packaging as a single author in the festival format appealed to London theatregoers.

After the Beckett Centenary Festival, London theatres resisted the need to 'event' Beckett's canon again until the Barbican once more revived their interest in his work through their International Beckett Season in 2015. Over the intervening years the Gate Theatre continued to revitalise the festival format through their Dublin-based multi author festival Beckett Pinter Mamet (or BPM as it was advertised) in 2010, meanwhile in the same year they returned to London with Michael Gambon performing *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Duchess Theatre, this time adopting a Beckett-related format to their eventing, as it played '[i]n the great British tradition of Variety and Music Hall [...] twice nightly'.<sup>731</sup> Although the Gate continued their links with the Barbican through their adaptation of *Watt* for the stage in 2013, their interest in exporting Beckett to London as a festival package would subside as they pursued other locations, such as their season of *Eh Joe*, *First Love* and *I'll Go On* (alongside Pan Pan's Theatre Company's productions of *All That Fall* and *Embers*) at the Edinburgh Festival in August 2013; an event which coincided with the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival. In perhaps the most audacious plan relating to Beckett and festivals, Sean Doran, the founding director of the Enniskillen festival, offered festival

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<sup>731</sup> See:

<http://www.gatetheatre.ie/section/TheGateTheatreproductionofKrappsLastTapetourstotheWestEndwithMichaelGambon> [accessed 8 March 2016].

patrons the chance to get on a chartered plane from Enniskillen to Edinburgh, as part of the Paradiso section of the Dante theme that ran through his 2013 festival. For Doran – a self-proclaimed imagineer – it epitomised the creativity and eccentricity within which his festival worked, particularly given the fact that Enniskillen’s miniscule St Angelo Airport has no regular or commercial flights. This idea symbolised the extent to which Beckett and his work had been packaged and festivalised for Beckett enthusiasts, but for all the imagination the idea exuded, it failed to materialise due to lack of numbers. However, as I will return discuss, this festival and the Beckett’s International Beckett Season have continued the concept of organising a festival or season of his works within the British culture, with a high level of interest, in spite of the numerous Beckett productions that have surfaced in recent decades.

### **5.5. Conclusion: ‘Beckettmania’: Beckett post-Beckett (1990-201)**

Over this phase of the production history, the rising interest in Beckett’s drama has been reflected by the wealth of performances produced on a variety of London stages featuring the work of a large number of British, Irish and international theatre makers. These productions, in addition to the growing number of academic publications, teaching, talks, films and art work relating to Beckett, have contributed to a greater public knowledge and demand of his work. I would argue since the first performance of *Waiting for Godot* in 1955, the trajectory of interest and value ascribed to his drama has been continuously ascending and these rising aspects relating to his work have been particularly evident since his death in 1989. When *Godot* was first performed at the Arts Theatre, it experienced difficulties in attracting actors, directors, designers and even theatres to stage the play for the first time. In Chapter 2 I highlighted how this was epitomised by the commitment of its proposed director and co-producer, Peter Glenville, and once again I would like to return to why Glenville was unable

to commit to the staging. As Donald Albery, its other co-producer, reported in a letter to Beckett:

I understand from Peter Glenville that he is still very keen to do “Godot” but he could not undertake a definite agreement that it would be his next play as he feels – I think quite wrongly – that this is not a commercial play and that after “The Prisoner” he should do a more commercial play and then “Godot”.<sup>732</sup>

Reflecting on Glenville’s decision not to direct *Godot* in relation to the performance histories of Beckett’s drama over the past twenty five years shows how the playwright’s stature has grown and developed within London’s theatre culture. While this production failed to secure Glenville – one of the UK’s most acclaimed theatre and film directors of the 1940s and 1950s – as its director because of commercial reasons, in contrast the 1990s and 2000s saw some of the UK’s most prominent emerging and established directors attracted to working on Beckett’s drama. Furthermore, while it is true that few if any directors, actors or impresarios would have genuinely anticipated *Godot*’s run at even the Criterion Theatre in 1955, by the post-Beckett era Beckett’s drama would have undertaken a notable commercial shift as his theatre started to be presented more regularly in London’s mainstream theatre sector. It is this ironic transformation of how his work has been perceived that makes Beckett’s rise in the post-Beckett era of this history all the more remarkable. Beckett’s drama began its life in as the antithesis of commercial theatre and had to grapple against the commercial forces of London theatres in the 1950s with respect to its casting and venue issues. Just over fifty years later, the problems faced by *Godot*’s first production were reversed, as Beckett was celebrated in a Festival dedicated to his life and work, performed by star casts and directors, and produced in London’s largest dedicated arts centre.

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<sup>732</sup> Letter from Donald Albery to Samuel Beckett, 21 July 1954. HRC, Texas, Glenville, 5.20.

This chapter has highlighted how the post-Beckett era with its proliferation of performances may be read through the emergent strands with which his work has been produced and connected to: its appeal to celebrity actors in West End performances, its attraction to promising and renowned practitioners and finally, the festivalisation of his work.



Figure 28 Poster for *Not I/Footfalls/ Rockaby* at the Duchess Theatre in 2014. Credit: Matthew McFrederick

Besides the productions I have largely focused on in this chapter, many other performances from this timeframe and later productions exuded these characteristics, while the greater interest in presenting his work was also reflected in the growing diversity of productions staged in London, such as Talawa’s successful tour of *Godot* featuring the first all-black cast for the play in the UK<sup>733</sup>, and by fringe theatres including the Battersea Arts Centre and the Arcola Theatre.<sup>734</sup> These productions would also play an important role with

<sup>733</sup> Given that this production at the Albany Theatre was staged in 2012 and outside the remit of this thesis, I have been unable to offer a closer examination of Talawa’s staging and the way in which it challenged the politics of Britishness. For a fascinating, extended discussion of this production, see Kene Igweonu, ‘The tree has four or five leaves’: Talawa, Britishness and the First all-Black Production of *Waiting for Godot* in Britain’, in *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*, ed. By Tucker and McTighe (London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama, 2016), pp. 141 – 155. By staging *Godot*, Igweonu articulates, Talawa were able ‘to project a unique view of Britishness’ through the play’s themes and their ‘nuanced articulation of the politics of “blackness” to suggest how Beckett’s drama was amenable to different casting and contexts, and could speak to diverse audiences in London and the UK. Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>734</sup> Talawa staged *Godot* at the Albany Theatre in London in 2012. The Arcola Theatre also produced *Godot* in 2014, directed by Simon Dormandy. Meanwhile, the Battersea Arts Centre hosted seven separate Beckett productions.



respect to Beckett's place in the theatre ecology of London, as they showed the breadth of his appeal and they allowed practitioners to test and develop their practical intuitions towards Beckett's work. For example, the Battersea Arts Centre allowed two preeminent Beckett practitioners work on his drama for the first time, as it staged *Play* and *Not I* in a production directed by Natalie Abrahami with Lisa Dwan playing the role of Mouth for the first time. Through the Staging Beckett Database and the public profiles of these two practitioners it is possible to trace their performance genealogy through Beckett's drama as they would proceed to work on later productions. Abrahami would direct Juliet Stephenson in *Happy Days* at the Young Vic in 2014 and following its initial success, again in 2015, while Dwan would perform *Not I* at the Purcell Room at the Royal Festival Hall in 2009 and at the Royal Court in 2013, where it captivated audiences. With the support of the Royal Court, Dwan would later perform the "trilogy" of *Not I/ Footfalls/ Rockaby* at the Court and its success would lead to a West End transfer to the Duchess Theatre (See Figure 28) and a national and international tour. These productions have played an important role in maintaining Beckett's presence on London stages, though perhaps their most pertinent impact on this performance history has been their role in staging Beckett's drama for future generations of theatregoers; in performances that have suggested Beckett's enduring influence on London stages. As the conclusion of this performance history will discuss, Beckett's theatre revitalised British theatre and became an integral element of its artistic heritage through its theatrical vision, by defying expectations and its ability to intrigue and appeal to successive generations of theatregoers and practitioners in London.

## 6. Conclusion: Staging Beckett: A Production History of Samuel Beckett's Drama in London

I have given a good deal of space to Mr. Beckett's play because I believe it to be an exceedingly fine one, and because I believe him to be the best of a new generation of playwrights whose work will reinvigorate, by diffusion, our exhausted stages.<sup>735</sup>

J. W. Lambert, *International Theatre Annual* (1957)

When Samuel Beckett's drama was staged in London theatres during the 1950s, the early editions of the *International Theatre Annual* set the tone for the production history that would follow.<sup>736</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, J. W. Lambert's evaluation of London theatre in 1957 chose to focus on *Fin de Partie*'s premiere at the Royal Court; a production that had a limited run of six performances and played to a largely Anglophone audience. Nonetheless, Lambert's admiration for Beckett was clear and his bold prediction (for the time, at least) offers an apt point of reference from which to consider the extensive performance history that unfolded for Beckett's drama in London theatres.

This thesis has demonstrated the crucial, but neglected role Beckett's drama played in reinvigorating London's theatres since 1955 through its relationship with the theatre cultures in which his work was immersed. Beckett's plays were staged in diverse theatrical contexts across London, from new writing theatres to amateur and fringe companies, from major subsidised institutions to commercial houses, thus signifying the versatility his theatre possessed, as different theatres programmed his drama at specific moments in their history. Through these many platforms, he challenged many of the dominant theatrical forms

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<sup>735</sup> J. W. Lambert, 'The London Theatre', in *International Theatre Annual*, ed. Harold Hobson (London: Calder, 1957), p. 12.

<sup>736</sup> Amongst its articles and emphasis on British theatre – including essays by John Osborne and George Devine – were some of the first publications to discuss Beckett's theatre in a British context.

presented in London theatres during the 1950s, such as naturalism, poetic drama, farces and musicals, for example. With *Godot*, he famously forced Kenneth Tynan ‘to re-examine the rules which have hitherto governed the drama; and having done so, to pronounce them not elastic enough.’<sup>737</sup> With the development of his canon, each new work interrogated theatre practices in terms of performance, directing, scenography and lighting design that would make theatregoers and theatre-makers rethink the conventions of theatre and performance. Following the controversy over *Footfalls* in 1994, many commentators argued that the Beckett estate’s rigidity over his stage directions were too restrictive for practitioners. However, as later performances have demonstrated, such as Katie Mitchell’s production of *Endgame* at the Donmar Warehouse in 1995 or Company SJ’s location specific performance of *Act Without Words II* for the 2015 Barbican International Beckett Season, Beckett’s work can be staged innovatively within these limits.<sup>738</sup> Through such performance histories I have shown the vitality Beckett brought to theatre cultures and theatre practice in London. In concluding this thesis, I will focus my reflections on the research questions that have guided its content by concisely stating how the findings of this history have responded to these queries. These reflections will consider its contribution to knowledge and I will conclude with some final thoughts on this production history of Beckett’s drama in London.

The primary research question of this thesis set out to discover is: what role and impact have productions of Beckett’s drama had on London theatre cultures since *Waiting for Godot*’s premiere in 1955? By tracing the many productions staged since 1955, this history has revealed that Beckett’s drama has had a more prominent role in the broader theatre cultures of London than previously articulated. From the existing histories on contemporary British theatre, it is clear that scholars and commentators – epitomised by Tynan in his

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<sup>737</sup> Kenneth Tynan, ‘New Writing’, *The Observer*, 7 August 1955.

<sup>738</sup> In this production, director Sarah-Jane Scaife framed A (Raymond Keane) and B (Bryan Burroughs) as homeless drug addicts, which is conveyed through the characters uses of the props Beckett stipulates. For example, the characters climb in and out of sleeping bags, which echo the sacks in Beckett’s text.

aforementioned review – saw *Waiting for Godot*'s London premiere as one of the catalysts in transforming post-war British theatre. However, Beckett's role in London theatres beyond this landmark production has largely been overlooked in British theatre histories by John Russell Taylor, John Russell Brown, Ronald Hayman and Michael Billington.<sup>739</sup> As this thesis has demonstrated, the impact of Beckett's drama on London theatre cultures was not just evident in its first production, but from the tradition and practices of staging Beckett that were presented in a range of London theatres to diverse audiences from 1955 to 2010. As I will now surmise, Beckett's role and impact on the landscape of London theatre was unique and was evident through the presentation of his drama in London's theatres and his influence on London theatre cultures, from his practical innovations to the experience it offered to theatregoers encountering his work.

The influence of Beckett's drama across different cultural moments in Britain was apparent through its significance in terms of the development of new writing, the ending of archaic legislative powers, the emergence and prosperity of new venues, and the international performance scene in London. As this study has outlined, Beckett's drama contributed to the life and programming of many London theatres, from the commercial to subsidised sectors and from fringe venues to amateur theatre. Amongst playwrights such as John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and Ann Jellicoe, presentations of Beckett's drama for the ESC at the Royal Court signified how British theatre cultures could champion and produce new writing that would be produced around the world. His early work for the ESC would encourage aspiring playwrights and practitioners to develop their craft and attract alternative audiences to the theatre, who sought original, cosmopolitan drama. The continuity of Beckett's relationship with the Royal Court developed a tradition of staging his work at the theatre and developed the practice of many prominent directors, designers and actors, who would use their

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<sup>739</sup> See Russell Taylor; Russell Brown; Hayman, *British Theatre Since 1955: A Reassessment*; Billington; *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*.

experiences with Beckett's drama as they worked on performances across national and international performance cultures, such as Patrick Magee's performance as McCann in *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter. As well as being an early example of how new writing was developed and staged in the UK, Beckett's work at the ESC was at the centre of a high profile and controversial example of the outdated censorial powers of the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Objections to *Endgame* highlighted the conservative nature of British theatre in the 1950s and, despite the continuation of its role in British society for another decade, Beckett's drama arguably played a prominent role in stimulating and supporting efforts to see an end to its legislative powers.

While Beckett was involved in the early years of the Royal Court, as this study suggests, he also played a notable role in the opening programmes of many other major theatres in London. These venues included the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, the Young Vic, Riverside Studios and the Donmar Warehouse. While these theatres are considered intrinsic to the infrastructure and diversity of London theatres familiar to modern audiences, Beckett's drama played an influential role in the early development and prosperity of these theatres. As a recognised name after *Godot's* premiere, Beckett fulfilled the agendas of these theatres and many others through his reputation as both an experimental and mainstream international writer who, on the one hand, challenged theatrical styles and experiences through his innovations in the theatre and, on the other hand, grew into a commercial product whose work was often a success at the box office.

Beckett's status as an international writer also supported his contribution to London theatre cultures. As a playwright who crossed boundaries of national identity, Beckett's work played a crucial role in opening up London theatres to world theatre. This was evident as international companies staged foreign language productions of his plays at the ESC and World Theatre Seasons, through the legacies of his support towards the international

programming of Riverside Studios, and his support for festivals and seasons that celebrated his canon. Beckett's plays contributed to these different cultural moments and showed how London was a vibrant metropolitan centre for international theatre, the legacy of which is the far-ranging, cosmopolitan drama presented in London today.

Beckett's theatrical style and practical innovations were responsible for the interest in his drama across many London theatres. Through his theatrical experiments, his canon challenged Britain's cultural theatrical tastes and values, which were often preoccupied by the conservative dramatic conventions that dominated London and British theatres. He achieved this by testing what was possible in the theatre in terms of plot, action, structure, characterisation, performance and aesthetic. For example, these practical innovations saw more silences incorporated into performances and a greater inclination to present minimalist stages. Indeed these seemingly simple concepts inspired a new generation of writers, as highlighted by later British playwrights such as Edward Bond, and influenced the practice of actors and designers, who felt more comfortable developing their craft with Beckett's less is more rationale.

Significantly, since 1955, Beckett's theatre has been viewed by different generations of theatregoers in the UK and often changed the way that audience members, particularly early audiences, experience or comprehend theatre. Although some of Beckett's developments or plays could encounter the resistance of audiences, the content and practical innovations of his plays, such as *Not I* or *Footfalls*, entrained audiences in a new way of watching theatre, through the way these plays specifically use theatrical elements and the way that audiences encounter the experience of these elements in unison. Many of Beckett's plays presented audiences with unnerving experiences that encouraged theatregoers to rethink their assertions about drama in performance – whether they attended his work as a young theatregoer at the Young Vic in the 1970s or were attracted by a star performer in West End

in the 2000s. Ultimately, Beckett's impact on London audiences was that his theatre changed what audiences watched and how they experienced the live performance event.

Many of the theatrical performances in this study attest to Beckett's role and impact across London's theatres and seasons, each with different objectives and qualities at integral phases of their individual histories. His dramatic canon and its London performances may not have fitted into the narratives of British theatre histories; however his work was accepted into the varied and rich cultural environments of many London theatres, where his work undoubtedly stimulated a cultural and practical fascination with many playwrights, practitioners and audiences.

The next question I asked was: What theatrical contexts and cultures was Beckett's drama positioned in? In the introduction to this thesis I argued that with the exception of a few key moments, Beckett has been cast adrift of national theatre histories, particularly as a result of his status as an Irish born writer living and writing in France. However, by reflecting on his role in London theatre cultures, it is possible to argue his flexible national identity has been intrinsic to his sustained appeal. On the one hand, he is considered a European or international writer, which has been denoted through the early foreign language productions for the ESC and at the World Theatre Seasons, while on the other hand, he fits into British and Irish programming structures, as epitomised at the NT and the Royal Court, where he subsequently found that London theatres offered his dramas a haven, if not a home for his work. In addition to his hybrid national identity, Beckett's theatre arguably straddled both the commercial and non-commercial theatre markets. Through the early international success of *Godot*, Beckett earned a reputation as an increasingly mainstreamed experimental playwright. Although some of his early ESC and NT productions – *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1958 and *Play* (paired with *Philoctetes*) in 1964 – were by no means financially successful, others performances, including the respective productions of *Godot* and *Endgame* in 1964 for

the ESC and RSC, were. Signs of Beckett's box office potential, his growing prominence in the national curriculum and in academic research and his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 arguably contributed to the rising popularity of Beckett in London during the 1970s and 1980s advocated by the "pop-Beckett" productions at the Young Vic, the growing number of renowned actors, from Albert Finney to Peggy Ashcroft, performing in his plays and the wider diffusion of his drama across London theatres. These encouraging signs and the example of Beckett in New York with Robin Williams and Steve Martin prompted London's commercial theatres to bring Beckett to the West End, as the showcase roles for actors in his plays were exploited by market forces, as star actors, such as Rik Mayall, Felicity Kendal and Ian McKellen, brought Beckett into the mainstream. Through these theatrical contexts and indeed others, Beckett was London's multinational playwright, who fulfilled the agendas of different venues in London theatre cultures.

The third question I considered was: How was Beckett's theatre created and received by theatres, practitioners and audiences approaching his work in London? Inevitably the approaches to staging Beckett's drama have significantly developed over the course of this history, as different practitioners approached his work. Indeed this was epitomised by Beckett himself, as he transformed from an inexperienced theatre practitioner to a director who wanted to direct or oversee his plays so they could have an impact; a development that produced some of the most celebrated performances of his drama. By learning and collaborating with key practitioners from Britain, France and Germany, Beckett was able to develop his practical knowledge of theatre and shape his texts through practice, as his creative process with his plays continually evolved over these years. The earliest attempts to stage Beckett from other professional practitioners regularly encountered difficulties. As the first performances at the Arts Theatre and Royal Court highlighted, actors and directors had problems comprehending the plot and the play's characters, as well as the acting style



required in performance. Furthermore, the first designers faced numerous challenges in presenting his drama on stage as, for example, Peter Snow had issues stepping away from the naturalistic dominance of the British stage and Jacques Noël had problems in capturing the right atmosphere to complement the text and performance. These early productions of Beckett's drama challenged British theatrical norms and as his work grew more familiar, particularly through more accomplished realisations of his works, practitioners began to feel invigorated by his work, creating confident and innovative productions during Beckett's lifetime and over the post-Beckett era. From the Baxter Theatre's South African production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Old Vic to Harold Pinter's performance in *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Royal Court, the approaches to creating and interpreting Beckett's theatre advanced over the timespan with many enduring images of his drama keenly felt by the theatre culture.

Likewise audiences and critics proved more amenable and engaged with Beckett's work over its lifespan in London. From the infamous walkouts and negative reviews that nearly closed the opening production of *Godot* at the Arts Theatre, impressions and interest in Beckett's plays developed with time. Some early critics were loyal champions of his drama such as Harold Hobson, while others were hostile in their responses, including Cecil Wilson. Contemporary criticism saw his work more favourably received, with Michael Billington offering several intelligent pieces on recent performances from the issues concerning *Footfalls* at the Garrick Theatre to questions on the uniformity of praise for Beckett's canon during the Gate and Barbican Beckett Festivals. In many respects the reception of Beckett's theatre in London was epitomised by the reviews of Charles Spencer in the *Daily Telegraph*, who self-reflectively commented on his criticism of Beckett in a review of *Not I/ Footfalls/ Rockaby*:

When I was younger, I intensely disliked Samuel Beckett. I found his gloom oppressive and the ambiguity of his writing frustrating.

These days however I hang on to his every word, for there is no better guide to the human spirit's darker depths and never more so than in this extraordinary triple bill of late works.<sup>740</sup>

While it has been possible to reflect on Beckett's reception in London through selected critics, inevitably the thoughts of the vast majority of audience members have not been recorded from performances. Nonetheless, Beckett's regular presence in London theatres throughout this history indicates how the city's audiences have subscribed to and supported presentations of his work. The public appetite for Beckett's *oeuvre* was best suggested through the post-Beckett phase of this history, where productions and festivals demonstrated the level of interest in seeing his work and the star turns who crucially helped sell these events, as these productions were compared to causing the type of ticket frenzy associated with an FA Cup final.

The final research question this thesis asked was: What legacy or significance has Beckett's theatre had on the theatres his work has been produced in and London theatre cultures more broadly? Since the London premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's plays have maintained a consistent presence in London's theatrical landscape. Although *Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days* represent the most frequently staged works in his nineteen play canon, the post-Beckett era and the festivalisation of his theatre has seen a notable increase in interest towards staging his short or late plays. The propensity with which Beckett's drama was staged in 2015 – the sixtieth anniversary of this history – highlighted the enduring appeal of his theatre that few playwrights, with the exception of Shakespeare, can match. This suggests his work has spoken to different generations of audiences and how the themes and situations of his plays continue to have an impact for those working with or

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<sup>740</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Not I, Footfalls, Rockaby by Samuel Beckett', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 January 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/10571203/Not-I-Footfalls-Rockaby-by-Samuel-Beckett-Royal-Court-review.html> [accessed 27 September 2016].

receiving his theatre. While these points raise his broader legacy and significance in London, more than often his theatre's importance has proved more specific to the artistic traditions of the many London theatres, where his work was staged. Most notably, his longstanding relationship with the Royal Court saw his work benefit from a loyal network of practitioners who were keen to collaborate with Beckett on staging his work.

By summarising the extended answers to these questions developed over the four main chapters of this thesis, I have provided a snapshot of the contribution to knowledge this recontextualisation of the performance histories of Beckett's drama has offered. Inevitably by doing so, I characterise Postlewait's argument that, 'History happens and re-happens, as we continue to reconstitute the past each time we comprehend it. We are always rewriting and rereading history.'<sup>741</sup> Both this thesis and this conclusion have rewritten and reread history, thus proving that its content is not the history of Beckett performances in London, but merely *a* history of these performances. From the outset, performance histories represent their own oxymoronic challenge, as Dennis Kennedy has argued, 'the matter under investigation in performance history was never material (or embodied) for more than a few hours, even if repeated with variations on subsequent days and nights'.<sup>742</sup> The performances discussed in this history may not have been embodied for more than a few hours each night or on subsequent nights, though the association between Beckett's drama and London theatres has proved a long-standing relationship. After overcoming some initial teething problems, Beckett's plays have proved a consistent and sustained part of the theatrical landscape in London, due to the eagerness of theatres to stage his work, the dedication of practitioners and the interest from audiences. Although its role in the grander narratives of British theatre is open to debate, Beckett's drama played an integral part in the history of many London

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<sup>741</sup> Postlewait, p. 268.

<sup>742</sup> Dennis Kennedy, 'Confessions of an Encyclopaedist', in *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History*, ed. by W. B. Worthen (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan: 2003), p. 33.

theatres during crucial moments in their own specific history. As the extensive and wide-ranging performances in this history suggest, his enduring influence and impact mean it is difficult to imagine the theatre cultures of London without Beckett.

## Appendix

### Item 1 Performance Record for the London Productions of Samuel Beckett's Drama.

Filename	Production	Venue	Production Note	Year
SB_MMcf_02_231012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Arts Theatre/ Criterion Theatre	English Language/British Premiere	1955
SB_MMcf_32_301112	<i>Fin de Partie/ Acte Sans Paroles</i>	Royal Court	Two World Premieres	1957
SB_MMcf_33_301112	<i>Endgame/ Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Royal Court	English Language Premiere and World Premiere	1958
SB_MMcf_09_261012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Theatre Royal Stratford East	Envoy Productions, Dublin	1961
SB_MMcf_46_040213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Mermaid Theatre	w. Patrick Magee	1961
SB_MMcf_49_270213	<i>Endgame</i>	Tower Theatre London	Amateur Production	1961
SB_MMcf_123_230414	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Questors Theatre	Amateur Production	1961
SB_MMcf_48_050213	<i>Happy Days</i>	Royal Court	w. Brenda Bruce	1962
SB_MMcf_56_280213	<i>Happy Days</i>	Theatre Royal Stratford East	w. Marie Kean	1963
SB_MMcf_03_231012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Royal Court	w. Nicol Williamson	1964
SB_MMcf_34_301112	<i>Endgame</i>	Aldwych Theatre	Royal Shakespeare Company	1964
SB_MMcf_97_200513	<i>Play</i>	Old Vic	National Theatre	1964
SB_MMcf_135_200815	<i>Act Without Words II</i>	Aldwych Theatre	Royal Shakespeare Company	1964
SB_MMcf_55_280213	<i>Oh Les Beaux Jours</i>	Aldwych Theatre	Compagnie Madeleine Renaud National Student Drama Festival	1965
SB_MMcf_50_270213	<i>Endgame/Act Without Words I</i>	St Martin's	Winners	1966
SB_MMcf_95_200513	<i>Play</i>	Arts Theatre	Quipu	1966
SB_MMcf_136_080216	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Aldwych Theatre and Tour	RSC Theatregoround	1968
SB_MMcf_65_280213	<i>Oh Les Beaux Jours</i>	Royal Court	w. Madeleine Renaud	1969
SB_MMcf_72_010313	<i>Happy Days/ Play</i>	Questors Theatre	Amateur Production	1969
SB_MMcf_07_251012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre	Young Vic	1970
SB_MMcf_24_131112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	RADA	RADA - Student Production	1970
SB_MMcf_30_301112	<i>En Attendant Godot</i>		Michèle Lebray Theatre Workshop	1970
SB_MMcf_57_280213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Quipu Basement Theatre	dir. David Calderisi	1970

SB_MMcf_63_280213	<i>Das Letzte Band</i>	Aldwych Theatre	Schiller Theatre Berlin	1970
SB_MMcf_66_280213	<i>Beckett/3</i>	Royal Court	dir. William Gaskill	1970
SB_MMcf_109_020813	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/Act Without Words II</i>	Soho Theatre	dir. Kevin J. Robinson	1970
SB_MMcf_35_301112	<i>Endspiel/ Das Letzte Band</i>	Aldwych Theatre	Schiller Theatre Berlin	1971
SB_MMcf_68_010313	<i>Happy Days</i>	Young Vic	w. Denise Coffey	1971
SB_MMcf_51_270213	<i>Endgame</i>	Young Vic	w. Harold Innocent	1971
SB_MMcf_64_280213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/ Not I</i>	Royal Court	w. Albert Finney, Billie Whitelaw	1973
SB_MMcf_118_170414	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/Act Without Words</i>	Young Vic	w. Andrew Robertson	1973
SB_MMcf_124_230414	<i>I/AWW2/Come and Go/Play</i>	Questors Theatre	Amateur Production	1973
SB_MMcf_137_080216	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Shaw Theatre	dir. Braham Murray	1973
SB_MMcf_137_080216	<i>Endgame</i>	Shaw Theatre	dir. Braham Murray	1973
SB_MMcf_146_080216	<i>Come and Go/Play/All That Fall</i>	Tower Theatre London	Amateur Production	1973
SB_MMcf_23_131112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	South London Theatre Centre	Amateur Production	1974
SB_MMcf_25_131112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	RADA	RADA - Student Production	1974
SB_MMcf_96_200513	<i>Come and Go</i>	Orange Tree, Richmond	Richmond Fringe Festival	1974
SB_MMcf_69_010313	<i>Happy Days</i>	National Theatre, London	w. Peggy Ashcroft	1974
SB_MMcf_59_280213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Greenwich Theatre	w. Max Wall	1975
SB_MMcf_77_090513	<i>Not I</i>	Royal Court	w. Billie Whitelaw	1975
SB_MMcf_05_241012	<i>Warten auf Godot</i>	Royal Court	Schiller Theatre Berlin	1976
SB_MMcf_37_301112	<i>Endgame</i>	Royal Court	w. Pat Magee, Stephen Rea	1976
SB_MMcf_128_160216	<i>Footfalls/Play/That Time</i>	Royal Court	w. Billie Whitelaw, Pat Magee	1976
SB_MMcf_47_040213	<i>La Derniere Band</i>	Greenwood Theatre	w. Pierre Chabert	1976
SB_MMcf_52_270213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/ Endgame</i>	Open Space	San Quentin Drama Workshop	1978
SB_MMcf_74_010313	<i>Happy Days</i>	Royal Court	dir. Samuel Beckett, w. Billie Whitelaw	1979
SB_MMcf_54_270213	<i>Endgame/Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Various Venues	San Quentin Drama Workshop	1980
SB_MMcf_27_131112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Old Vic	The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town	1981
SB_MMcf_29_231112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Roundhouse	Royal Exchange Manchester Tour	1981
SB_MMcf_06_241012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Young Vic	dir. Ken Campbell	1982
SB_MMcf_81_170513	<i>Act Without Words I/Act Without Words II/</i>	National Theatre, London/ Tricycle	Noho Theatre Company, Japan	1982
SB_MMcf_127_230415	<i>Rough I/ Rockaby/ Ohio Impromptu</i>	Theatre/ Assembly Rooms Edinburgh	Amateur Production	1982
SB_MMcf_127_230415	<i>Endgame</i>	Questors Theatre	dir. Alan Schneider, w. Billie Whitelaw	1982
SB_MMcf_82_170513	<i>Rockaby/ Enough</i>	Cottesloe, National Theatre	Whitelaw	1982

SB_MMcf_31_301112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Riverside Studios	San Quentin Drama Workshop dir. Alan Schneider, w. David Warrilow	1984
SB_MMcf_80_170513	<i>Ohio Impromptu/ Catastrophe/ What Where</i>	Donmar Warehouse		1984
SB_MMcf_104_210513	<i>Happy Days</i>	Donmar Warehouse	Shared Experience	1984
SB_MMcf_106_210513	<i>Catastrophe</i>	The Pit, Barbican	Royal Shakespeare Company	1984
SB_MMcf_38_301112	<i>Endgame/Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Riverside Studios	w. Max Wall	1986
SB_MMcf_79_170513	<i>Footfalls/ Rockaby/ Enough</i>	Riverside Studios	w. Billie Whitelaw	1986
SB_MMcf_111_160414	<i>AWW I/ Catastrophe/ Ohio Impromptu</i>	Riverside Studios	Croquet Widows Company	1986
SB_MMcf_04_231012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	National Theatre, London	Lyttelton Theatre	1987
SB_MMcf_58_280213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Bloomsbury Theatre	w. Norman Beaton	1988
SB_MMcf_105_210513	<i>Play</i>	Bloomsbury Theatre	Oracle Productions	1988
SB_MMcf_28_231112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Young Vic	dir. David Thacker dir. Antoni Libera, w. David Warrilow	1989
SB_MMcf_83_170513	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/ Catastrophe</i>	Riverside Studios		1990
SB_MMcf_125_230414	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Questors Theatre	Amateur Production	1990
SB_MMcf_10_261012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Queen's Theatre	w. Rik Mayall, Adrian Edmondson	1991
SB_MMcf_73_010313	<i>Oh Les Beaux Jours</i>	Institut Francais	w. Angela Pleasance	1991
SB_MMcf_102_210513	<i>Endgame</i>	Etcetera Theatre Club	The Three Legged Company	1991
SB_MMcf_70_010313	<i>Happy Days</i>	Attic Theatre		1992
SB_MMcf_08_261012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Theatre Museum, Convent Garden	Stig Theatre Company	1993
SB_MMcf_61_280213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/ Footfalls</i>	Barons Court Theatre	A Flexible Beckett Festival	1993
SB_MMcf_62_280213	<i>Come and Go/ Play</i>	Wardour Street, Soho	A Flexible Beckett Festival	1993
SB_MMcf_101_210513	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Etcetera Theatre Club	Etcetera Theatre Company	1993
SB_MMcf_112_160414	<i>Footfalls/Rough for Theatre I</i>	Café Bar Ricardo	dir. Nigel Willits	1993
SB_MMcf_26_131112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Lyric Hammersmith	Efendi Productions	1994
SB_MMcf_39_301112	<i>Endgame</i>	Arts Theatre/ BAC	Fair Play Theatre Company Tour	1994
SB_MMcf_75_010313	<i>Happy Days</i>	Institut Francais	w. Angela Pleasance	1994
SB_MMcf_78_170513	<i>Rough for Theatre I/ Rough for Theatre II</i>	White Bear Theatre Club	Juxtapose Theatre Company	1994
SB_MMcf_84_170513	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Pentameters Theatre	Roe Drama	1994
SB_MMcf_98_200513	<i>Footfalls</i>	Garrick	dir. Deborah Warner, w. Fiona Shaw	1994
SB_MMcf_103_210513	<i>Not I</i>	Duke of Cambridge Theatre Club	BiteZiZe Theatre Company	1994
SB_MMcf_40_040213	<i>Endgame</i>	Donmar Warehouse	dir. Katie Mitchell	1996
SB_MMcf_87_170513	<i>Breath/Rockaby/Footfalls/Not I/Come and Go</i>	Etcetera Theatre Club	In Motion Theatre Company/ Theatre	1996

			in Progress	
SB_MMcf_88_170513	<i>Act Without Words I/Act Without Words II</i>	BAC	Academy Productions	1996
SB_MMcf_89_170513	<i>A Piece of Monologue</i>	BAC	w. Peter Marinker	1996
SB_MMcf_94_200513	<i>Happy Days</i>	Almeida Theatre	w. Rosaleen Linehan	1996
SB_MMcf_19_011112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Old Vic	Peter Hall Company	1997
SB_MMcf_22_051112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Watermans Arts Centre/ Arts Depot	Tottering Bipedes	1997
SB_MMcf_76_010313	<i>Oh Les Beaux Jours</i>	Riverside Studios	dir. Peter Brook, w. Natasha Parry	1997
SB_MMcf_85_170513	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/ Breath</i>	The Pit/ Arts Theatre	Royal Shakespeare Company	1997
SB_MMcf_21_051112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Piccadilly Theatre	Peter Hall Company	1998
SB_MMcf_86_170513	<i>Play</i>	Riverside Studios	A Million Freds Productions	1998
SB_MMcf_93_200513	<i>Happy Days</i>	BAC	Leap of Faith Productions	1998
SB_MMcf_20_011112	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Barbican	Gate Theatre 1999 Beckett Festival	1999
SB_MMcf_107_020813	<i>Rockaby</i>	Royal Holloway	w. Rosemary Poutney	1999
SB_MMcf_108_020813	<i>Happy Days</i>	Royal Albert Hall		1999
SB_MMcf_138_080216	<i>Happy Days</i>	Barbican	w. Rosaleen Linehan	1999
SB_MMcf_139_080216	<i>Endgame</i>	Barbican	w. Barry McGovern and Alan Stanford	1999
SB_MMcf_140_080216	<i>Play/ Act Without Words II/ Come and Go</i>	Barbican	w. Ingrid Craigie, Gerard McSorley, Conor Lovett	1999
SB_MMcf_141_080216	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Barbican	w. John Hurt	1999
SB_MMcf_142_080216	<i>Not I/What Where/Act Without Words I</i>	Barbican	w. Niamh Cusack	1999
SB_MMcf_143_080216	<i>Footfalls/ Rough for Theatre I/ Rockaby Ohio Impromptu/ Rough for Theatre II/ Catastrophe</i>	Barbican	dir. Ben Barnes	1999
SB_MMcf_144_080216	<i>Breath/That Time/A Piece of Monologue</i>	Barbican	dir. Pierre Chabert	1999
SB_MMcf_145_080216	<i>Breath/That Time/A Piece of Monologue</i>	Barbican	dir. Robin Lefèvre	1999
SB_MMcf_18_301012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	MacOwan Theatre	LAMDA - Student Production	2000
SB_MMcf_115_160414	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	New Ambassadors	w. John Hurt	2000
SB_MMcf_116_170414	<i>En Attendant Godot</i>	Southbank Centre	dir. Luc Bondy	2000
SB_MMcf_122_230414	<i>Footfalls/ Not I/ A Piece of Monologue/ Ohio Impromptu</i>	Questors Theatre	Amateur Production	2000
SB_MMcf_148_080216	<i>Not I/ Footfalls/ A Piece of Monologue</i>	BAC	Sorted Productions	2000
SB_MMcf_60_280213	<i>Krapp's Last Tape/ Not I/ Rough I</i>	New End Theatre	Dear Conjunction Theatre Company	2001
SB_MMcf_41_040213	<i>Endgame</i>	BAC	Liquid Theatre Co.	2002
SB_MMcf_121_230414	<i>Happy Days</i>	Questors Theatre	Amateur Production	2002



SB_MMcf_17_301012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Finborough/Southwark	Godot Theatre Company	2003
SB_MMcf_113_160414	<i>Rough for Theatre I/ Rough for Theatre II</i>	Rose and Crown	dir. Amy Jeavons	2003
SB_MMcf_92_200513	<i>Happy Days</i>	Arts Theatre	dir. Peter Hall, w. Felicity Kendal	2003
SB_MMcf_16_301012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Cockpit/Pleasance/Bloomsbury	Godot Theatre Company	2004
SB_MMcf_42_040213	<i>Endgame</i>	Albery Theatre	w. Michael Gambon, Lee Evans	2004
SB_MMcf_90_170513	<i>Ohio Impromptu/ Rough I/ Rough II</i> <i>Ohio Impromptu/Rough for Theatre I/Rough for Theatre II</i>	Cockpit	Godot Theatre Company	2004
SB_MMcf_119_170414		Southwark Playhouse	Godot Theatre Company	2004
SB_MMcf_91_200513	<i>La Dernière Bande</i>	Cockpit	Godot Theatre Company	2005
SB_MMcf_117_170414	<i>Play/Not I</i>	BAC	dir. Natalie Abrahami, w. Lisa Dwan	2005
SB_MMcf_14_291012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	The Ambassadors	Peter Hall Company	2006
SB_MMcf_15_301012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Barbican	Gate Theatre Dublin Tour	2006
SB_MMcf_132_060815	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Royal Court	w. Harold Pinter	2006
SB_MMcf_150_100216	<i>Rockaby/Ohio Impromptu</i>	The Pit, Barbican	w. Sian Phillips	2006
SB_MMcf_151_100216	<i>Footfalls/Come and Go</i>	The Pit, Barbican	w. Susan Fitzgerald	2006
SB_MMcf_152_100216	<i>Play/Catastrophe</i>	The Pit, Barbican	dir. Michael Barker Caven, Selina Cartmell	2006
SB_MMcf_153_100216	<i>Endgame</i>	Barbican	w. Peter Dinklage, Kenneth Cranham	2006
SB_MMcf_154_100216	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	The Pit, Barbican	w. John Hurt	2006
SB_MMcf_100_210513	<i>Rough for Theatre I/ Rough for Theatre II</i>	Arts Theatre	w. Steve Harley	2007
SB_MMcf_120_220414	<i>Happy Days</i>	Lyttelton, National Theatre	w. Fiona Shaw	2007
SB_MMcf_126_230414	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> <i>Fragments: Rough I/Rockaby/ AWW II/</i>	Questors Theatre	Amateur Production	2007
SB_MMcf_131_060815	<i>Neither/ Come and Go</i>	Young Vic	dir. Peter Brook	2007
SB_MMcf_13_291012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Bridewell Theatre	Tower Theatre Company	2008
SB_MMcf_01_231012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Theatre Royal Haymarket	w. Ian McKellan, Patrick Stewart	2009
SB_MMcf_43_040213	<i>Endgame</i>	Cockpit Theatre	Godot Theatre Company	2009
SB_MMcf_44_040213	<i>Endgame</i>	Duchess Theatre	w. Mark Rylance, Simon McBurney	2009
SB_MMcf_149_080216	<i>Not I</i>	Southbank Centre	w. Lisa Dwan	2009
SB_MMcf_12_291012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Theatre Royal Haymarket	w. Ian McKellan, Roger Rees	2010
SB_MMcf_99_210513	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Duchess Theatre	w. Michael Gambon	2010
SB_MMcf_110_290114	<i>Act Without Words II</i>	Greenwich and Docklands International Festival	dir. Sarah-Jane Scaife	2011
SB_MMcf_11_291012	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	The Albany	1st All Black UK Godot	2012

SB_MMcf_130_060415	<i>Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby</i>	Royal Court/West End/ Tour	dir. Walter Asmus, w. Lisa Dwan dir. Natalie Abrahami, w. Juliet Stephenson	2014
SB_MMcf_45_040213	<i>Happy Days</i>	Young Vic		2014
SB_MMcf_133_100815	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Arcola Theatre	dir. Simon Dormandy	2014
SB_MMcf_134_100815	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Cockpit Theatre	Godot Theatre Company	2014
SB_MMcf_53_270213	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Barbican	Sydney Theatre Company	2015
SB_MMcf_71_010313	<i>Act Without Words II/ Rough for Theatre I</i>	Barbican	Company SJ	2015
SB_MMcf_67_010313	<i>Krapp's Last Tape</i>	Barbican	Robert Wilson	2015
SB_MMcf_147_080216	<i>Catastrophe/ Act Without Words I/Rough for Theatre II</i>	Old Red Lion Theatre	dir. Sara Joyce	2015

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