Skenè Studies I • 2

Oedipus at Colonus and *King Lear*: Classical and Early Modern Intersections

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi

Supplement to *SKENÈ. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*

ISSN 2464-9295
ISBN 979-12-200-6185-8

SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies
https://textsandstudies.skeneproject.it/index.php/TS
info@skeneproject.it

Dir. Resp. (aut. Trib. di Verona): Guido Avezzù
P.O. Box 149 c/o Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE150) – Viale Col. Galliano, 51, 37138

Contents

15

Shades of *King Lear* in Beckett's Theatre and Late Work

Barry A. Spence

Abstract

Samuel Beckett's late prose work *Worstward Ho* (1981), which arguably breaks ground as a form of theatre of the page, performs multiple recursive variations of his favourite line from *King Lear*, Edgar's remark as an aside, on seeing his blind father: "The worst is not So long as we can say 'This is the worst'" (Act IV, scene 1). This line is among a group of lines from Shakespeare's play that Beckett copied into his so-called Sottisier Notebook in the 1970s (UofR MS2901) and that pertain to his longstanding preoccupation concerning the limits of language. Using the fact of the importance of *King Lear* to such late works as this and *Ill Seen Ill Said* as a jumping off point, this paper offers a reading of Beckett's work of the 1950s and '60s as directly and indirectly influenced by this most devastating of Shakespeare's tragedies. Of particular interest is Beckett's innovative use of different media: theatre, radio, cinema, and prose.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett; *All That Fall*; *Film*; *Krapp's Last Tape*; *Worstward Ho*; Shakespeare's *King Lear*; language; speech; vision; old age; infirmity

In an October 1983 letter to Joseph Chaikin, Samuel Beckett wrote, "When I recently reread *Lear* I thought: unstageable. I know I'm wrong" (Beckett 2016: 620). Among whatever else, one element Beckett presumably had in mind is the powerful tempest that drives the centre of Shakespeare's play: "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! / You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout / till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd our cocks! . . . Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!" (Shakespeare 1989: 3.2.1-3, 14). Thus does the cast out king greet the savagery of the storm as fit reflection and partner of his interior torment ("this tempest in my

mind", 3.4.12). The storm serves as visualizable counterpart, even while the theatrical medium, with its limited special effects – perhaps the most significant limitation of which concerns dimensions of spatial scale – depends of course primarily on the performative power of words: the verbal extremity of Lear complements the however partially realized spectacle of a storm ("where the greater malady is fix'd, / the lesser is scarce felt", 3.4.8-9). The thunderclaps of Lear's own anguished rhetoric – "Take physic, Pomp; / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them, / And show the Heavens more just" (3.4.33-6) – contribute to any successful staging of the tempest's violent dimensions and the proportionate smallness of its suffering "forked" creatures.

Twenty-five years before this letter, Beckett had staged his own transformative storm:

> Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. (*Impatient reaction from Krapp.*) The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to (*Violent reaction from Krapp.*) record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that… (*hesitates*). (*Krapp thumps on table.*)… for the fire that set it alight. What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely – (*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, mechanical with gabble, 2 seconds, switches on again.*) – great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most – (*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, mechanical with gabble, 3 seconds, switches on again.*) – unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire – (*Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, mechanical with gabble, 4 seconds, switches on again, lowers head.*)
> (Knowlson 1992: 7-8)

While in *Krapp's Last Tape* (hereafter *KLT*) Beckett subsumes the visualized immediacy of the storm within the several temporal re-

moves – the sixty-nine year old Krapp is listening to a tape-recording of his thirty-nine year old self recounting the event from March of his thirty-eighth year – the visceral power of that storm's howling wind and flying foam on the "jetty" or East Pier in Dún Laoghaire is indirectly evoked through the turbulent reaction the recording triggers: Krapp's curses, impatient switching on and off, his furious fast forwarding, underscored especially by the mechanical "gabble" of the tape recorder during these increasingly lengthy spurts of fast forwarding. And while it may seem of secondary dramatic significance, the storm, as in *King Lear*, forms the setting for a pivotal change in self-knowledge and life direction – what Beckett, in the play's first two typescripts, had called "The turning-point, at last" (Van Hulle 2015: 213). Both plays present the storm as an environmental parallel to an internal transformation, a revelation and embrace of "dark". In both plays the storm functions as a dramatic, and in the case of *KLT* arguably a Romantic, extension of the protagonist's internal struggle.[1] And it is this Romantic image of a storm-centered self-awakening that the sixty-nine year old Krapp rejects as hollow, dishonest, and an embarrassment; much as Beckett's artistry assiduously pared itself free of such superfluity, pomp, and the circumstance of high meaning.

The unremitting darkness of Shakespeare's tragedy offers a stereoscopic tale of personal blindness, realization, and the potency of sight independent of the eyes. This transformational arc is realized in the figures of Lear and Gloucester. The narrative of Krapp has elements of a similar trajectory: his thirty-nine year old self's clarity of "vision", gained during the storm, is understood by his sixty-nine year old self as a form of blindness, which makes way for an end-of-life staring into memory and void: "(*Krapp motionless staring before him. The tape runs on in silence*)" (Knowlson 1992: 10).

The issue of the limits of language pervades *King Lear* in multiple forms. From the challenge Lear sets his daughters and which opens the play – Goneril: "I love you more than word can wield

1 Beckett was known to draw on such Romantic images, so for example Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Two Men Observing the Moon* contributed to the dramatic image of two wayfarers in *Waiting for Godot*.

the matter; / Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty" (1.1.54-5) and Cordelia: "Since I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.76-7) – to Edgar's exclamation on seeing his blind father: "Who is't can say, 'I am at the worst'. . . The worst is not / So long as one can say, 'This is the worst'" (4.1.25, 27-8), the play plumbs the depths of language's inadequacy to (and implication in) the extremes of human experience. The tragedy, to a similar degree, develops the theme of human visual perception. Here the faculty of sight is misleading as well as easily misled. Consider the role of disguise and concealment that runs the course of the play. Kent and Edgar in particular maintain the play's moral compass through the use of disguise. Gloucester is deceived by the false letter of Edmund, sees Edgar as wicked and Edmund as virtuous, and only has the veil of deceit removed when Cornwall gouges the "vile jelly" from his sockets. One thinks as well of Lear's dying words: "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!" (5.3.310-11), his last breath escaping as he mistakenly believes he sees the breath of Cordelia in a misted mirror. Furthermore, the play intertwines the powers of sight and speech and associates their sharp limitations. Lear: "O! You are men of stones: / Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so / That heaven's vault should crack." (5.3.256-8). Cordelia: "But even for want of that for which I am richer, / A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue / That I am glad I have not." (1.1.229-31).

As shown by passages copied into his Sottisier Notebook,[2] Beckett reread *King Lear* at some point between 1979-1981, as he was well into his seventies. Several prominent elements of Shakespeare's play figure as fundamental to his late prose work, particularly to *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1979-1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1981). But the central thematic concerns of *King Lear* – vision and blindness, the limits of language and sayability, the plight of worsening, and old age and infirmity – are not only essential to those late works but form the ground of much of Beckett's work following his own "turning-point" (Van Hulle 2015: 213) or revelation in 1945, in which he realized that his artistic "way was in impov-

2 MS 2901, University of Reading. All manuscripts referred to in this essay are in the collection of the Beckett Archive at the University of Reading.

erishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding" (Knowlson 1996: 319).[3] In other words, Beckett's personal anagnorisis in 1945, his realization of the true nature and path of his artistic work, which amounted to an embrace of the "dark" (Knowlson 1992: 7) that artists typically avoided, this resolution to focus on impotence, infirmity, failure, wandering, and exile, would motivate his formal innovations to embody this impoverishment, to eschew or elide, for instance, the grand Romantic image and ironize it into gesture. Such is the way *KLT* uses tape-recording technology to redirect the drama of a momentous storm into an irritant in an old man's impatience. Theatre is the space of the human interior.[4]

Beckett's passing comment about stageability in relation to *King Lear* serves as a reminder of his lifelong focus on formal innovation within different artistic media. He had composed works for media typically more suited to conveying nature's large-scale machinations, namely film and radio. His awareness of the relative resources of scale involved in different media is clear. For example, in 1961 Beckett authorized a BBC television production of *Waiting for Godot*. After viewing the results he "put his head into his hands" and commented, "it's not right for television", later saying, "My play wasn't written for this box. My play was written for small men locked in a big space" (Knowlson 1996: 435-6).[5] This judgement accords with the general truism of Beckett as exacting in his vision that a given story is to be realized, with some exceptions,[6] in particular forms or media. His attention to such formal

3 In interviews with James Knowlson Beckett was clear that his own turning-point came in his mother's house in Foxrock, not on the jetty in Dún Laoghaire. See Knowlson 1996: 319.

4 Of course the theatre of classical Greece was ideal for depicting vast scale, due to the fact the theatres were uncovered and built into the landscape, open to the sky and elements.

5 While this anecdote appears to run contrary to my hypothesis about Beckett's comment concerning the unstageability of *King Lear*, the latter concerns the scale of the tempest, not the evocation of "big space".

6 There are numerous exceptions here. *Not I*, for instance, was produced for theatre and television, and both *Eh Joe* and *Quad* were realized in two media, in addition to their printed form.

concerns seems to have intensified in the wake of his own turning-point. He began writing works for theatre, mime, radio, film, and television, and his prose fiction became, on the one hand, increasingly resistant to categorization, and on the other hand, more distinctly performative. He puts the resources of each of these media to work in his artistic process of "subtracting" (Knowlson 1996: 319) and lessening. And it is noteworthy the way this art of lessening, as it finds instantiation in different media, enacts those core themes and concerns of Shakespeare's darkest tragedy.

One can observe the practice of what can be called a Lear poetics at the heart of much of Beckett's work following the 1945 turning-point. This consists in a simultaneous thematic and formal exploration of: 1) the limits of language; 2) the role of sight and vision; 3) a lessening or worsening, which especially takes the form of paring down of expressive elements and essentials of a given work; 4) the pervasive effects of age and infirmity. This *Lear* poetics is a way of reading Beckett's artistic practice across media. It offers a reading of this practice in light of his rereading of *King Lear*, as a way to suggest the affinity Shakespeare's tragedy has to Beckett's artistic sensibility, and, in turn, is a form of speculation on what drew him back to the play. Although admittedly, any attempt to make such a sharp distinction between his pre- and post-World War Two work is doomed to faulty formulation.

The four attributes that characterize this *Lear* poetics surface in his earlier writing. For instance, his preoccupation with the limits of language and of the idea that anything said must necessarily be missaid is perhaps most famously formulated in the commonly quoted letter to Axel Kaun from 9 July 1937: ". . . more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it. Grammar and style! . . . A mask . . . To drill one hole after another into it until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through . . ." (Beckett 2009c: 512-21). The reading offered here though is of necessity circumscribed, an attempt to highlight the prevalence of certain correspondences, specifically how the driving themes of *King Lear* are a deep concern of Beckett and how they are reflected in formal methods and strategies in his mature work. Four works in distinct and different media will

serve to illustrate the range of this *Lear* poetics: *All That Fall* (a radio play from 1956), *Krapp's Last Tape* (theatre, 1958), *Film* (cinema, 1963-4), and *Worstward Ho* (prose, 1981).

1. Genetic Evidence

The so-called Sottisier Notebook contains several Shakespeare passages in Beckett's hand, in the following layout:

Where is the life that late I led?
(Petruccio: IV.i)

_____

"unburdened crawl towards death"
(Lear I.1)

_____

"The lamentable change is from
the best,
The worst returns to laughter—"
(Ib.iv: Edgar)

_____

"Who is't can say, I am the worst—"
(Ib.)—

_____

" -- The worst is not
So long as one can say, This is the worst"
(MS 2901)

Beckett has underlined the quotation from *The Taming of the Shrew* and used a short line to separate the quotations. These are immediately followed by a number of English translations of some of the "Mirlitonnades", very short poems written in French between 1976 and 1980 (the final versions of which were also entered in this notebook). These English versions are all dated within the year 1981, which suggests the likelihood that the Shakespeare passages, which are not dated, were copied not long before. The first of the English "Mirlitonnades" that follows these passages is an answer to Petruccio's question "where is the life that late I led?":

There
the life late led

down there
all done unsaid
(MS 2901)

As a response, it seems to further underscore the importance given to the Petruccio question by the underlining. And the Lear quotation from *King Lear* Act 1 Scene 1 also seems to extend the train of thought of Petruccio's line: the first and last words of "unburdened crawl towards death" echo the rhyme in the "Mirlitonnade" response, "led" and "unsaid", where an unburdening is equivalent to an unsaying and the past tense of leading life is death. The entire group of quotations could be read as related to the Petruccio line, since the lines from Edgar are really uttered as woeful asides upon seeing Gloucester blind and hearing his comment: "I have no way, and therefore want no eyes; / I stumbled when I saw . . . / Might I but live to see thee [i.e., Edgar] in my touch, / I'd say I had eyes again" (4.1.18-19, 23-4). The overall sentiment uniting these various elements, on the one hand, relates to the metaphor of life as a path or way (form of spatial extension), and, on the other, suggests notions of worsening, particularly in the form of the infirmity of old age ("crawl towards death", "down there"): that life is a way worsening towards death and unsaying. And it was at this time that Beckett was working on the prose piece *Worstward Ho*, which, as will be discussed, presents a set of performative variations on Edgar's "worst" comments, all in short phrasal units and in language that arguably resonates with the idea of unsaying: "Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid" (Beckett 2009b: 81).

Whether or not the Petruccio line can be read as a sort of heading does not change the basic importance of these quotations to Beckett's work and to the idea of a *Lear* poetics. They express the ideas of worsening, of old age, and of what can be said, unsaid, and missaid. The three quotations from Edgar give, not just the idea of the relative nature of the condition of being "worst", but also put forward the conundrum of the limits of sayability itself. Moreover, the words of Gloucester that hover in the background of these lines of Edgar bring in the fourth attribute of the *Lear* poetics: vision, blindness, and the phenomenon of seeing without

eyes ("Might I but live to see thee in my touch, / I'd say I had eyes again"). This sentiment is given even sharper focus by Gloucester when he later says to Lear: "I see it feelingly" (4.6.146). In other words, these quotations ground this formulation of a poetics, not just in what can be observed in the artistic works as Beckett produced them, but as a detectable element in the composition process itself.

Another line from *King Lear* deserves mention in this connection, although it does not appear as a separate item copied into a notebook. It does, however, exist as an element in a revision process. Cornwall's exclamation as he gouges out Gloucester's eyes: "Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly! / Where is their lustre now?" (3.7.81-2) was worked into the final version of *Ill Seen Ill Said*. In the second typescript, the phrase "weary eye", which Beckett translated from the original French "oeil las", was replaced by "vile jelly" (MS 2207/1).

> Suddenly enough and way for remembrance. Closed again to that end the vile jelly or opened again or left as it was however that was. Till all recalled.
> (Beckett 2009a: 73)

Cornwall's phrase "vile jelly" offers an especially vivid visual image, but one whose vividness depends on palpability to the sense of touch: a jelly quivers before the eyes but also to the touch and has material properties that render it somewhere on the continuum between liquid and solid, a state the sense of touch may shrink from encountering. The sense of taste – perhaps strictly in terms of mouth feel – is also involved, since jellies are a food type and associated with puddings, like blancmange. Cornwall's metaphor, while inflecting this multi-sensory image with the quality of being revolting, particularly through the use of the modifier "vile", is powerful in this context because it anticipates how Gloucester will have to lead his life, or crawl towards death, by seeing feelingly.

2. Radio

The four works discussed here are demonstrably self-reflexive, as much about the medium that actualizes them as anything

else. This is certainly the case with Beckett's first "play for radio", which he wrote on invitation from the BBC, in 1956. The particular challenges posed by radio triggered more or less a seven-year focus on stories for that medium, during which he realized seven compositions, including: *Embers* (1959), *Esquisse radiophonique / Rough for Radio I* (1961), *Pochade radiophonique / Rough for Radio II* (early 1960s), *Words and Music* (1961-1962), *Cascando* (1962-1963), and *The Old Tune* (English version of a play by Robert Pinget, 1963).

The medium of radio is particularly adept at conveying a sense of spatial openness and depth. Louder sounds occur more in the foreground, whereas softer ones seem further away, but a sense of precise spatial dimensionality eludes the listener. A medium without a visual dimension, it nevertheless relies on visualization through aural experience, on the capacity to unfold within the listener's skull. It is the peculiar power of radio that when broadcast it is there, it is everywhere, and yet it is nowhere. It is a decidedly interior and intimate medium, and yet, also impersonal and public (Connor 2014: 66).

All That Fall is a radio play that continually reminds the listener of the ongoing act of visualization involved in making sense of the story. Vision is one of the story's primary themes. The play tells of Mrs Rooney's walk up the road to the train station to welcome home her blind husband Dan. She is old, infirm, and has difficulty moving, much less walking. Along the way she encounters a man driving a horse and cart carrying a load of dung, a man on bicycle, an old admirer driving an automobile, and finally the train. The play offers the aural spectacle of significant technological developments: in addition to the various machines of transport, she twice hears the distant sound of a phonograph playing a recording of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, and Mr Slocum, the motorist, on being asked about his "poor mother" responds by praising the medical capacity to "keep her out of pain" ("That is the great thing, is it not, Mrs Rooney?", Beckett 2006a: 163). The technologies of the road tend to overwhelm Mrs Rooney, in terms of their speed, noise, and ability suddenly to stir up the dust.

Mrs Rooney's anxieties are frequently manifest as is the persistent grief over her young daughter's death several decades in

the past. She is depicted as an elderly, overweight, and debilitated woman out of step with the time and (somewhat) out of place in her community. While many of her anxieties and memories are understandable, she is also beset at moments with more existential anxieties that usually involve the faculties of sight or speech. A particularly noteworthy instance of the anxiety of vision occurs when the dung carter's horse stares at her:

> How she gazes at me to be sure, with her great moist cleg-tormented eyes! Perhaps if I were to move on, down the road, out of her field of vision… (*Sound of welt.*) No, no, enough! Take her by the snaffle and pull her eyes away from me. Oh this is awful!
> (Beckett 2006a: 159)

This odd moment is immediately followed by a complaint about the lot befallen her ("What have I done to deserve all this . . . ", ibid.) which presumably means the difficulty of walking on the road and the discomfort of being stared at by the horse. Given the proximity of the image "great moist cleg-tormented eyes", what she then says serves to put one in mind of Cornwall's image in *Lear*:

> (*She halts.*) How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel.
> (Ibid.)

Again, the listener is called upon to see feelingly and is rewarded with a particularly vivid image. While here the jelly is ostensibly a food item (Dan later says, "You are quivering like a blancmange", 176), there are resonances with Cornwall's "vile jelly". These work primarily through the network of immediate verbal associations, which link the jelly with the eye. The horse staring can be seen as triggering this exclamation. A "cleg" is a horsefly, so Mrs Rooney's image of being a jelly "thick with grit and dust and flies" makes a figurative connection between the jelly and the horse's eyes, since both are pursued by flies. Second of all, soon after (two pages of text later), Mrs Rooney comments to the cyclist Mr Tyler, "Let us halt a moment and let the vile dust fall back on the viler worms"

(161). The missing modifier in Cornwall's image (vile) is restored and doubled, and the appearance of the dust makes a connection to the "thick with grit and dust and flies".[7]

Furthermore, this constellation of elements – the dust, the condition of being vile, the acts of mental visualization and actual seeing – might put one in mind of a similar constellation in *King Lear*, during the verbal confrontation between Albany and Goneril:

> ALBANY O Goneril!
> You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
> Blows in your face.
> . . .
> ALBANY Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile.
> . . .
> ALBANY If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> It will come,
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep.
> (4.2.29-31, 38, 46-9)

Admittedly, this last point is a debatable reading, but the echoes are suggestive. And they are supported by the importance of wind in *All That Fall*. The sound of wind is repeatedly used for aural effect. But this is not to argue that the figure of Goneril is associated with Mrs Rooney, or that Beckett is creating the kind of grand confrontation that Albany speaks of. (Although in *Worstward Ho* the notion of "preying" is important, and that work clearly draws on *King Lear*.)[8] But it seems reasonable to connect the textual occurrence of jelly and vile and to see the combination as evocative of Cornwall's image.

Mrs Rooney is at other moments clearly associated with eyes.

7 See Van Hulle 2010 for a related reading of the connection to Cornwall's "vile jelly".

8 For example: "That said on back to try worse say the plodding twain. Preying since last worse said on foresaid remains. But what not on them preying? What seen? What said? What of all seen and said not on them preying?" (Beckett 2009b: 94). The association between seeing, saying, and preying is also an element in *King Lear*.

At the train station she says to the small crowd on the platform awaiting the train:

> Do not flatter yourselves for one moment, because I hold aloof, that my sufferings have ceased. No. The entire scene, the hills, the plain, the racecourse with its miles and miles of white rails and three red stands, the pretty little wayside station, even you yourselves, yes, I mean it, and over all the clouding blue, I see it all, I stand here and see it all with eyes…(*The voice breaks.*)…through eyes…oh if you had my eyes… you would understand…the things they have seen… and not looked away…this is nothing…nothing… (Beckett 2006a: 172)

Here the act of seeing is equated with the fact of suffering. This is a permeating theme in Beckett's work. And it is unmistakable in this radio play, especially given the way Mrs Rooney seems to suffer under the gaze of the horse. The phenomenon is remarkably similar to what Beckett would construct as the central theme in his film *Film*. In that work, which he wrote immediately following his spate of works for radio, the term he uses to describe that dynamic is the "agony of perceivedness" (Beckett 2006b: 372-3). This phrase is apt for describing Mrs Rooney's experience of the horse. And similar to the protagonist's (O's) reaction in *Film*, she speaks of wanting to get out of the angle of his field of vision – what is termed in the script of *Film*, being within the "angle of immunity" (ibid.). There O must keep the gaze of others within the angle of immunity in order to avoid the agony of perceivedness.

Mrs Rooney also invokes the idea of seeing feelingly. When getting into Mr Slocum's motorcar, Mrs Rooney's frock gets torn by the closing door. She complains and says:

> What will Dan say when he sees me?
> Mr Slocum Has he then recovered his sight?
> Mrs Rooney No, I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole?
> (Beckett 2006a: 164)

None of these possible intertextual echoes are meant to demonstrate conclusively that Beckett is thinking of *King Lear*. Rather, they demonstrate the idea of a Lear poetics in practice. Mrs Rooney's words not only gain meaning when said within the

diegesis – the fictional world as narrated – a meaning that is particular to the narrative, they also highlight, on a meta, extra-diegetic level, the fact of the visualizing process that the medium entails for the listener, who must see it all "with the eyes" and "through the eyes" (172), but in the vast receptive theatre of the skull; in other words, must see it feelingly. For instance, the fact of Mrs Rooney's considerable physical weakness is brought to life in the radio play by the sounds of her "*dragging her feet*" or the "*sound of her toiling up steps*", as the stage directions indicate (170). But it is the complex imaginative process of mental visualization in the listener that actualizes and brings the fictional world to life, aided of course by the sound effects of the radio broadcast.

It is worth briefly pointing out other, arguably meaningful, correspondences between Beckett's radio play and Shakespeare's tragedy. Her husband Dan is blind, and she, like Gloucester's Edgar in *Lear*, must serve as his eyes: another way Mrs Rooney is figuratively linked with the faculty of sight. In *Lear* an Old Man initially serves as guide and leads the recently blinded Gloucester into the care of Edgar. In *All That Fall*, the little boy Jerry leads Dan down the train platform into Mrs Rooney's care. Whereas Gloucester instructs Edgar to lead him to the cliffs of Dover, Dan comments to Mrs Rooney, as they are about to descend the platform stairs: "Let us get this precipice over" (176). Rain becomes audible to the listener as Mr and Mrs Rooney are trudging slowly, haltingly home, and the final stage direction of the play indicates: "*Tempest of wind and rain*" (188). The themes of children and the parent-child relationship figure in multiple ways in the play: Mrs Rooney suffers remembering her own lost child; it is mentioned that the little boy Jerry loses his father ("They took him away, Ma'am") and is "all alone" (175); and the final dialogue of the play establishes that the reason the train was late was because "a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. (*Pause.*) On the line, Ma'am. (*Pause.*) Under the wheels, Ma'am" (188).

In general, the radio play associates seeing and being seen with the experience of suffering, and this suffering is strongly connected to the infirmity of old age. The notion of senescence pervades the work. Finally, language and speech surface as another theme. This is most prominent when Mrs Rooney asks the carter:

> Do you find anything… bizarre about my way of speaking? (*Pause.*) I do not mean the voice. (*Pause.*) No, I mean the words. (*Pause. More to herself.*) I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very… bizarre. (158)

This is picked up later when Dan comments, "Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language" (182). It is tempting to interpret this somewhat abrupt theme as another self-reflexive comment on the fact that the listeners' experience of *All That Fall* relies more on the performative power of words than on the descriptive. The resources of radio entail much more than the signifying power of speech. Words must do something, and not just say. Performative sounds – *"Rural sounds. Sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together."* (157) – along with their silence contribute to radio's distinctive dimensionality.

3. Theatre

During the period Beckett created his works for radio he also broke new ground in theatre by writing *Krapp's Last Tape*, a play that makes innovative use of tape-recording technology to bring temporal depth and complexity to an intimate, interior setting wherein a "wearish old man" (Knowlson 1992: 3) (that is, sickly and withered) performs a self-examination by way of two archived past self-examinations (from his thirty-ninth and twenty-ninth years). While ostensibly focusing on the full life of an individual, this is theatre envisioned on the micro scale; an antidote of sorts to the scale of *King Lear*, while also following its essential themes. Set on the evening of his sixty-ninth birthday, the tape-recording ritual of annual remembrance is the occasion for setting down a recap ("These old PMs are gruesome . . . ", Knowlson 1992: 5), a distilled personal narrative of the important moments and events from the previous year.

Krapp is undone in this effort by the complex feelings of regret, anger, and arguably despair which an old recording triggers. In a concrete sense, he is unsaid as he prepares his own saying of him-

self and realizes that in the past he has "missaid" (Beckett 2009b: 81). The play dramatizes the general truth that an individual is not a single self but a series or succession of selves. And in the case of Krapp, this sense of a succession is presented through the experience of simultaneity, as three distinct versions of himself are given voice (two of which are embodied through the tape-recorder itself) on stage at the same time, are interlocutors even. Such a story of personal reflection could go in many directions, and the spectacle of an individual at three different periods in his or her life might easily convey a sense of personal development and growth in self-knowledge, just as the traditional conception of tragedy entails a kind of linear developmental process: a hamartia or fatal mistake, followed by a realization or anagnorisis, which produces an increase in self-knowledge, even if the final end point is one of doom. Lear's personal trajectory in *King Lear* is a case in point. But while there are many of the same elements in *KLT*, Beckett manages to instill an ambiguity in the trajectory of Krapp. It is not clear whether Krapp attains a greater degree of self-knowledge or succumbs to a species of nostalgia due to the worsening effects of old age. In other words, in a certain light Krapp is a tragic figure, from other angles he is an ordinary old man overcome by personal failures and bad decisions.

Because nostalgia, in the pure etymological sense a grief or longing for homecoming, is a dramatic feature here, the play might easily become marred by sentimentality. But Beckett is careful to avoid this pitfall. He does this largely by undercutting the objective authority and judgment of the old Krapp reacting to his former selves: the audience is made aware of the old Krapp's foibles and missaying, even as Krapp is registering those of his earlier selves. The overall effect is a lifetime of worsening despite regular efforts at saying himself to clarity, but which end as failures and missaying. On a formal level, Beckett achieves this by breaking up the language into halting phrasal units (aposiopesis), by adding and expanding the pauses between the bursts of speech, and thus creating a tension between periods of silence and efforts at articulation. And perhaps most significantly for the arguments here, he scatters the play with moments wherein Krapp assumes the "*listening position*" (Knowlson 1992: 4, 221): protracted peri-

ods of staring into "dream and nothingness" ("Traum – Nichts", Knowlson 1992: 241) as he listens to the tape-recorder. These moments of staring represent an exchange of seeing with the eyes for seeing in the skull. The ambiguity rests in the question of blindness or vision: when, if ever, does he see himself correctly.

Ultimately, one can recognize resonances between Edgar's aside on the sayability of being worst and *KLT*. Both in terms of Krapp's repeated (annual) efforts to say himself into a narrative fit for archiving – the play stages the way the man eludes sayability – and in the way Krapp's disposition predisposes him towards pronouncements that reveal his own worsening, the play, while downplaying any high drama and keeping the scale intimate and quotidian, offers an enactment of those twin aspects of Edgar's aside. Beckett's close attention to staging and choreographing Krapp's gestures and positioning in relation to the tape-recorder on the table in front of him, which achieve a palpable intimacy, along with the strategic use of aposiopesis and stretches of staring silence achieve a powerful demonstration of the full resources of theatre, as a medium in which language is the helpmate of aural and visual spectacle. One can see the connection between the medium of radio and his use of a tape-recorder as a diegetic form of archival broadcasting: both create an enveloping soundscape that requires active visualization on the part of the listener. And just as in his works for radio, the role of silence is as important as that of words.

One further connection to Edgar's aside needs to be discussed, beyond the general way *KLT* seems to enact its sentiment. Edgar's statement, as said already, brings together the issue of the limits of language and sayability and the idea that an extreme situation – as long as it remains utterable – can become worse or more extreme. Beckett was clearly drawn to this expression, and not simply in the form uttered by Edgar. Notebook evidence and correspondence reveal that he was drawn to what can be described as allomorphic versions of the same essential idea. For instance, in the so-called *Sam Francis Notebook* (MS 2926), which Beckett most likely used between 1950 and 1959 (during the period he wrote *KLT*), one finds a quotation from the final line of poem 170 of Petrarch's Canzoniere: "chi pò dir com' egli arde è 'n

picciol foco" ("he who can say how he burns is in but a little fire").[9] It is a line he quoted on multiple occasions. In April 1958, a couple months after he started writing *KLT*, he includes the line in a letter to A. J. Leventhal and Ethna MacCarthy-Leventhal, after which he explains:

> *arde* being understood more generally, and less gallantly, that [*for* than] in the Canzoniere. As thus solicited it can link up with the 3rd proposition (coup de grâce) of Gorgias in his *Nonent*:
> 1. Nothing is
> 2. If anything is, it cannot be known.
> 3. If anything is, and can be known, it cannot be expressed in speech.
> (Beckett 2014: 136)

This passage from Gorgias offers a related formulation of the limits of speech in terms of knowledge, although expressed as a syllogism rather than a pithy utterance. A third allomorphic instance is a line Beckett copied from Seneca's *Hippolytus* into a notebook (MS 2934) kept during the same period as the Sottisier Notebook: "curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent" ("light sorrows speak, deeper ones are silent").[10] Each formulation of this idea echoes the central dilemma of *KLT*. The Seneca line especially is an elegant way of stating Krapp's self-analysis on his sixty-ninth birthday.

Dirk van Hulle offers a thorough analysis of this intertextuality in relation to Beckett's play, exposing the genetic process that links the Petrarch line in particular to Beckett's revisions. He shows how the words "burning" (*arde*) and "fire" get added at key points in Krapp's speech, most crucially in the tape-recorded recounting of the "vision" during the storm on the jetty, which was discussed above. "[F]ire" occurs twice in that brief aposiopetic passage: "for the fire that set it alight" and "unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire". Van Hulle argues that the Petrarch line was in Beckett's mind when he wrote *KLT*, and that one can see this in the changes made during the various stages of composition,

9 Translation by Durling 1976: 317 (quoted in Beckett 2014: 138).
10 Translation by Dirk van Hulle (2015: 177).

as Beckett built in the subtle distinction between the notion of burning and fire associated with romantic passion, which is how the older Krapp thinks of the words, and the notion of fire associated ("more generally, and less gallantly", as Beckett says in the letter) with intellectual passion, which is how the thirty-nine year old Krapp means it in the recording (Van Hulle 2015: 171-80). The point here though is that Petrarch's line is equivalent to Edgar's as far as the notion of a *Lear* poetics is concerned, both link the limits of language and the phenomenon of worsening.

4. Cinema

Beckett wrote his only screenplay in 1963, and the shooting of the film was done in New York City in the summer of 1964 (the opening street scene in lower Manhattan, near the Brooklyn Bridge, the interior scenes on the upper West Side). The twenty-two minute black and white film that resulted was screened at the Venice and New York film festivals in 1965. It starred Buster Keaton, was directed by Alan Schneider, had Boris Kaufman as director of photography, Sidney Meyers as editor, and Barney Rosset as producer. The film makes an important contribution to modernist experimental cinema of the 1960s. In recent years it has gained acclaim as an important work in Beckett's *oeuvre*, no doubt helped by Ross Lipman's 2015 documentary or "kino-essay" on Beckett's film, *NotFilm*. Prior to this, its one-off nature may have encouraged its marginalization as a fleeting experiment. But this is a mistake, on the one hand, because the film is of a piece with his formal innovations in other media, and, on the other hand, because Beckett was deeply interested in cinema and had considered becoming a filmmaker himself, reading widely in film theory and writing Sergei Eisenstein in the hope of studying with him at the Moscow State School of Cinematography ("naturally in the scenario and editing end of the subject", Beckett 2009c: 317-18).

Significantly, Beckett titled his film *Film*, calling immediate attention to the self-reflexive nature of the work. The title signals that Beckett would focus not just on the formal aspects of cinema but on perhaps the core defining feature of the medium, on

what makes a film cinema. It tells a pared down story that especially falls in line with one aspect of his *Lear* poetics: the inseparable relationship between being, seeing, and being seen – what he articulated, borrowing a line from the idealist philosopher George Berkeley, as "*esse est percipi*" ("to be is to be perceived").[11] In one formulation he summarized the film as: "for one striving to see one striving not to be seen" (MS 1227/7/6/1).

The film focuses on one character and it splits that protagonist in two: an individual who is seen by the camera, called "O" (object) in the screenplay, and who is seeking to escape the gaze of both the camera and the other characters (and creatures) in the film; and the following eye of the camera itself, referred to as "E" (eye) – ("the protagonist is sundered into object (O) and eye (E), the former in flight, the latter in pursuit", MS 1525/1). A primary innovation in the film is to have the properly focused image of the camera's gaze function as the perspective of E, and to have a blurred version of the camera's gaze function as the subjective perspective of O. The latter is experienced by the audience as a point-of-view shot (POV), but both camera perspectives are, by this logic, POVs. Despite having no formal training in filmmaking, Beckett recognized the importance of realizing this sundering of protagonist into subject and object on the formal level, by utilizing the technical capacity of the medium. That is, the camera would have to serve in the roles of both E and O, but each role must be realized through a distinguishing technique. Beckett pared down the story to where there is no exposition of the central concept. This lessening of elements to the essential, which is then conveyed through formal strategies, increases the interpretative challenges for the viewer.

As already discussed, Beckett characterized O's motivation for fleeing as due to the "agony of perceivedness" (Beckett 2006b: 372-3). E prevents triggering this agony by keeping the camera's gaze within the "angle of immunity" (ibid.), which Beckett defines as keeping the camera within forty-five degrees of the axis directly behind O. Basically this means keeping the camera's position outside O's peripheral vision. There is no explanation offered with-

11 Author's translation.

in the film (or in Beckett's *Film* notebook or screenplay) as to why O feels the agony of perceivedness (just as there is no explanation of why Mrs Rooney experiences it in *All That Fall*). Moreover, the three secondary characters in the film also experience this agony when they return the camera's direct gaze. The so-called agony of perceivedness appears therefore to be a general malady, not one specific to O. The film demonstrates the horror of perceivedness three times: first, with a "shabby genteel" (Beckett 2006b: 373) couple on the street into whom O collides as he is fleeing; second, with a woman carrying a tray of flowers down a flight of stairs; third, in the final confrontation between O and E in the room where O is sitting in a rocking chair. "As they [the couple] both stare at E the expression gradually comes over their faces which will be that of the flower-woman in the stairs scene and that of O at the end of film, an expression only to be described as corresponding to an agony of perceivedness" (MS 1525/1). It is through the last confrontation that the audience realizes that E and O are the same person: "that pursuing perceiver is not extraneous, but self" (MS 1525/1). This third and climactic time happens in what Beckett called, both in the notebook and the screenplay, the "investment". The use of the word here has an archaic meaning: "the surrounding or hemming in of a town or fort by a hostile force so as to cut off all communication with the outside; beleaguerment; blockade" (*OED*: 458). The connotations of hostility and martial aggression clearly point to Beckett's attitude about this pressing danger of perceivedness. It gives credence to Ross Lipman's argument in *NotFilm*, that Beckett himself "felt the camera as a literal wound and sought to avoid it" (2015). Lipman corroborates this claim with anecdotal evidence from James Knowlson, such that he is able to extend his diagnosis to a personal anxiety of Beckett's that included a general aversion to being recorded, whether visually, audially, or audio-visually.

Rather than focus on this as a possible phobia of Beckett's, one can instead recognize how Beckett understands the interrelationship of perceiving and being perceived, both as relates to the nature of cinema and in terms of the general ontological condition. The interpretative challenges of *Film* can be navigated by viewing them in layers. One insight of *Film* is that a film does not exist

outside the viewer's act of perception. A film is, in a sense, an act of seeing: the camera sees and records as it sees. And as a recorded act of seeing, the medium of film functions to be seen: a film does not exist until what it saw is then seen, but when the viewer sees it the film becomes a present tense act of seeing, or a re-seeing. For cinema, its act of seeing is a step towards its being, but it needs to be seen by an audience in order to exist fully. To be, in the case of film, is to be perceived. Beckett's *Film* anatomizes this reality. It demonstrates this basic fact of cinema: a film is actualized in the perceiving mind of the viewer.

Secondly, the viewer's act of watching a movie makes the movie into an object, and by extension what the camera saw and recorded becomes in turn the equivalent of that object. The recording act of the film camera – a movie's inherent 'eye' – has a similar structure to that of this viewer/film arrangement. In both cases, seeing entails a subject positioning and thus a subject and object relationship: viewer and movie; film camera (subject) and the event seen and recorded (object). Beckett's "sundering" (MS 1525/1) of the protagonist into eye (E) and object (O), or pursuer and pursued, dramatizes this dynamic, even while it mirrors it. *Film* fulfills the basic archetypal pattern of a chase movie, and here the pursuer is subject (E) and the prey is the object (O). The nature of this chase is that of seeing and being seen. The role of subject is technically equated with the camera (or camera's seemingly objective gaze). This arrangement mirrors the relationship between spectator and projected film, but whereas in the former arrangement the camera's gaze is the subject, in the latter the camera's gaze as presented is the object. By aligning the camera's act of seeing (subject) with the spectator's act of seeing (subject), Beckett seems to be making the theoretical point that to be is to be perceived, not just for film as a medium, but for the spectator as well. And here is one place the agony of perceivedness starts to make interpretative sense: the film spectator is typically understood to enjoy a kind of voyeuristic privilege and power, able to see without being seen, able to be without being perceived. But the idea that the film needs to be seen by the spectator in order to exist as a film means that the spectator's act of seeing – the spectator's presence, in other words – is an anticipated formal component in

the arrangement. The spectator too is therefore perceived. The liberation from being which the voyeur by implication enjoys is, as a result, cancelled.

Thirdly, in *Film* Beckett stages the ontological condition that the individual has no being without the act of self-perception: self-perception is inherent in being. As he describes the dynamic yoking O and E: "Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception" (Beckett 2006b: 371). O is the "non-being", and E is his completing act of self-perception. This is one way of stating the film's concern with the twin nature of the eye: of sight and of self-consciousness. And the implication would seem to be that the agony relates to the inescapable reality of this burden of self-consciousness. In *King Lear*, Lear's self-possession during the first two acts corresponds to a sense of self-consciousness, but during the tempest his demands to be perceived as the monarch he was, which would maintain his being who he was, gives way to a scattering of his former sense of self until he becomes, like O, a preyed upon non-being. In the tragedy, the initial self-consciousness of Lear is exposed as an error (hamartia), a form, not of perception, but of blindness, or what one might call a diseased perception.

Beckett, in a discussion with film colleagues, used similar language to characterize the acts of perception in *Film*:

> The space in the picture is… the function of two perceptions both of which are diseased… Exemplifying these two try and find a technical… technical equivalent, a cinema equivalent for visual appetite and visual distaste… There is no normal eye in the picture. The norm is in the spectator's personal experience, with which he will necessarily compare these new experiences.
> (from a tape-recorded conversation quoted in *Notfilm*)

The perceptions of E and O are both "diseased", and E represents "visual appetite" and O "visual distaste". The latter two descriptions help clarify the meaning of "disease" here. It seems the idea of the chase in *Film* functions as more than just a quintessential act of cinematic storytelling. A chase involves turning an individual or entity into an object of pursuit; it entails a process of objectification, and a predator and prey relationship. This is similar

to the structure of *King Lear*, where Lear is displaced into the status of prey, as are both Kent and Edgar, although the latter make use of disguise to stay figuratively within the angle of immunity and avoid being perceived. Disguise is key to how Shakespeare's tragedy explores the related issues of being, perceivedness, and self-perception.

In Beckett's lessening process conventional dramatic devices like disguise are avoided, though it is worth noting how O counters E's trespassing of the angle of immunity by having his "right hand shielding the side of face" or by "halting and cringing aside" (Beckett 2006b: 372). He does not wear a disguise but employs gestures indicative of a wish to be incognito, to remain "unknown" (*incognitus*), immune to visual perception. This is in keeping with the way the film stages the ontological dynamic in purely visual terms. In his notes, Beckett situates the action of the film in 1929, right at the time that sound technology entered cinema. *Film* comments self-reflexively on its nature as a 'talkie' by limiting the sound dimension to one "sssh!", which is uttered by the shabby genteel woman as she looks in the camera. Within the diegesis she is silencing her male partner as he prepares to verbally assail O, who, after colliding into them, has taken off without apology. On the meta level, her "sssh!" alerts the audience that while the medium is an audio-visual one, the dimension of sound will be bracketed. It foregrounds the visual nature of the medium. By doing so the film offers a narrative world that is an embodiment of the E/O split, one that enacts the principle *esse est percipi* and that therefore has nothing to do with the cinematic medium's capacity for naturalistic presentation.[12] *Film* is not an exercise in realism or naturalism. In a sense, the entire film occupies the space of the protagonist's being. "In the skull the skull alone to be seen", as Beckett writes in *Worstward Ho* (Beckett 2009b: 91).

In *All That Fall* Beckett used the resources of the radio medium

12 Beckett's loathing of naturalism is well-documented, and it extends to his attitudes about cinema. He was interested, for instance, in the theories of Rudolf Arnheim, who celebrated cinema's capacity for artifice. An early indication of this attitude can be seen in a February 1936 letter to Thomas McGreevy (Beckett 2009c: 312).

to construct primarily a spatial experience. In *KLT* he employed sound recording technology to give an experience on stage of extended and layered temporality. In *Film*, while he clearly recognizes that one of the defining tropes of cinema is the chase, and he builds the film on this, he also constructs a film that can be viewed as enacting an interior reality in the form of an abstract ontology, much like *KLT*. Furthermore, in *Film* he foregrounds the phenomenon of visual perception and also the image itself. In this connection it is worth noting his actor Billie Whitelaw's anecdote during an interview. She said that Beckett commented that he didn't know if the theatre was the right place for him. She responded, "I know, sometimes I feel you could put a frame around me and hang me on a museum wall" (MS 4564). This neatly encapsulates the way Beckett's theatre tends towards the crystallization of images, rather than emphasizing movement, and it suggests as well Beckett's openness to and resourcefulness in the use of different media. His lifelong interest in visual art and painting clearly relates to this gravitation towards the image, whether dramatic, painterly, or photographic. But with *Film*, as an instance of cinema, the structural motif of the chase means that the visual presentation of movement is primary, rather than the stasis of the image, even though he also noted the "strangeness and beauty of pure image" in connection with his film (*Notfilm* 2015).

The "strangeness and beauty of pure image" is manifest from the film's beginning, and can be most clearly described through a brief analysis of the opening sequence of the film. This reveals both what Beckett means by "pure image" and how the film works as an ontological instantiation of visual perception.

Film's opening sequence shows: 1) an extreme close-up of the heavily wrinkled eyelid of the closed eye of the protagonist (Keaton); 2) an extreme close-up of the gazing pupil; 3) dissolve to a medium long shot of a heavily textured exterior wall, the only remains of a building (the dissolve suggests the wall is the object of the pupil's gaze); 4) a steady pan to the right scanning horizontally the length of the wall, as though examining it; 5) the pan continuing as it ascends into the sky, still towards the right; 6) the motion of the camera continues but as a direct vertical tilt downwards from the sky; 7) which becomes momentarily stationary

gazing on the rear façade of a multiple story building (fire escape, windows, doorways); 8) following the same rhythm and pace, the camera's gaze tilts straight upward and retraces the panning path in reverse; 9) once back at the initial perspective on the wall, a sudden whip pan to the right down the wall coming to rest on the figure of O, who is in flight.

This opening sequence is in sharp focus and therefore represents the perspective of E. The opening extreme close-up on the eyelid, which is repeated at the end of the film, foregrounds the act of visual perception. It becomes clear that the eyelid is that of E, and therefore that of the focused camera's gaze. In other words, the opening sequence establishes an equivalency between the eyelid and pupil and the camera's eye. The use of lighting in the shot of the eyelid is such that it heightens the effect of the eyelid's wrinkled texture: a very visceral visual effect, which among other associations conveys agedness.

There are two significant aspects of this opening sequence. The first is the strong juxtaposition of similar visual textures linking the wrinkled eyelid with the rough and pocked surface of the wall. This juxtaposition establishes an undeniable visual equivalency between the two surfaces, even though one is of skin, the other stone, and by extension an identity relation between the objects themselves. The eye is therefore made to equal the wall, which makes clear sense once one is aware of the *esse est percipi* principle: to be, in other words, to see (eye) is to be perceived (wall); the audience sees the eye as an object like the wall. So in a subtle associative move the film foregrounds its central concept through a strange and beautiful graphic match. The eyelid and its pupil are made to equal the camera's eye, but they are also made to equal the object of a gazing eye. This building of meaning happens purely through visual technique. In this way, the opening graphic match establishes the primary theme of the film, and it also unwittingly evokes key elements of the *Lear* poetics: vision, old age (the wall is a ruin, the eyelid suggests age), and worsening (the eyelid and wall convey a sense of decrepitude). But the equivalency connecting the eyelid and wall also signals the way the film will enact a non-naturalistic scenario demonstrating an abstract ontological proposition.

The second important aspect of this sequence concerns the façade or rear exterior wall of the building which the camera's gaze pauses on momentarily between the forward and reverse phases of its pan. As the camera tilts downwards and comes to rest on the building, there is a figure in a white shirt seated in the doorway of one of the fire escape landings. At the exact moment the camera comes to rest from its downwards tilt, the figure stands and retreats into the interior of the doorway, disappearing from view. As soon as the figure disappears, the upward tilt of the camera engages and the steady movement of its arcing return pan takes over. The white-shirted figure is indistinct as an image (presumably a male), but clearly present. This figure appears on first glance to be purely an accident of the shooting process: an actual inhabitant of the building who happened to be there when Boris Kaufman was filming the shot. The effect is reminiscent of the way shooting on-location (as in Italian neorealist or Nouvelle Vague cinema) can capture incidental actual world elements. And Ross Lipman clearly views the figure in this light, since he makes such a comment in *NotFilm*. But a closer examination suggests a different reality. The precise timing of the movement of the two camera tilts, the second of which is seemingly activated by the figure's disappearance or flight, suggests an element of intentionality, rather than indeterminacy. A careful reading makes it arguable that this part of the opening sequence establishes the idea of the central chase dynamic in the film and that the figure experiences an agony of perceivedness. The white-shirted figure flees the camera's eye or E (presumably in horror) just as the shabby genteel couple, the flower woman, and O will. Against this reading, the apparent accidental nature of the figure can be indicated. But there is nothing to say the figure himself was not incidental at the time of shooting, and then became an intentional establishing element during the post-production phase of editing, under the perceptive vision of Sidney Meyers.

There is potentially a third aspect of the sequence that bears scrutiny. In the centre of that section of the wall which the camera initially focuses on, after the dissolve cut from the close-up of the pupil, there is a detectable outline of a former double door. It is only an outline, as if the doorway had been removed and filled

in with the stone material of the rest of the wall. Again, this subtle visual element suggests associative links, specifically between the idea of the eye as doorway or threshold and the idea of the film screen as a type of window or doorway. If this reading is convincing, it creates equivalencies between the protagonist's and camera's eye and the object of vision and cinema's projected image. But whether this third element is intentional or not, the two primary pieces of this sequence use the power of the image to announce the concerns of *Film*. Bypassing the resources of speech altogether, *Film* deploys a visual grammar that enacts the ontological principle of self-perception, which is also at the heart of Beckett's *Lear* poetics.

As already argued, *King Lear* stages the limits of speech and in equal measure broods upon the limits of seeing and the penetrative power of the eyes. Gloucester is incapable of seeing past the dissembling of Edmund or recognizing Edgar. The pervasive role of disguise further puts in question the epistemic power of sight: that seeing bears little or no relation to knowing. After Gloucester is relieved of his eyes he proceeds "feelingly", and it is this eyeless form of seeing that opens the way to knowing. In this way *King Lear* explores the epistemic limits of both speech and vision, but also depicts the human inclination to rely on both as the ground of knowledge. Think here of Lear's dying hope based on misperception.

Beckett explores similar terrain. Mrs Rooney speaks of Dan's reaction to her torn frock in terms of knowing, feeling, and saying: "I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole?" (Beckett 2006a: 164). Both Beckett and *King Lear* link the acts of seeing and saying as deceptive or unreliable paths to knowledge, but also link them as definitive of being, as necessary to existence, even though they fail as sureties of knowledge. *KLT* stages the breakdown of speech, particularly in terms of the act of instantiating self-knowledge: Krapp's selfhood eludes his annual attempts at archival summary. The tape-recordings amount to something shy of a mockery of this effort. And yet they form an iterative record, a manifestation of the succession of selves that constitute the self.

Knowledge too is bound up in these annual acts of self-analysis: each item culled from the year's memory and cast into the per-

manent stasis of the tape-recording stands for a kernel of knowledge chosen for preservation. For example, Krapp recounts having waited, on a bench outside the place where his mother's death is imminent, for the sign of the lowered blind:

> (*Krapp switches off, broods, switches on again, back to normal listening position.*) – the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (Pause.) Moments. Her moments, my moments. (*Pause.*) The dog's moments. (*Pause.*) In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (*Pause.*) I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. (*Pause.*) (Knowlson 1992: 7)

The process here of witnessing his mother's passing ("the blind went down") is subsumed within the experience of seeing feelingly the small hard ball ("I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day"). The feel of the ball in his hand concretizes the memory of those "few moments" at his mother's passing: the feel of the ball holds within it the entire visual scene, which is sketched so vividly in the tape-recording. Here one can say that it is the act of seeing feelingly that both allows the crystallization of memory and that gives rise to a form of knowledge.

This relationship between knowledge and seeing feelingly is underscored by the central formal strategy that comprises the play: the use of tape-recordings to call up scenes before the mind's eye (both Krapp's and the audience's) while providing little in the way of a domestic scene, one barely illuminated by a suspended lamp, for the eyes of the audience to rest on and draw from. This again is a play that discounts the epistemic power of the eyes and invokes the limits of speech but foregrounds the indefatigable persistence of both in the hunger for knowing, understanding, and being.

Lear's storm-tossed anagnorisis involves the visitation of memories of various forms and potencies (think, for instance, of the mock trial of Goneril and Regan). Likewise memory is at the heart

of both *KLT* and *Film*. Each work uses its respective technology (the tape-recording and the photographic image) to stage the confrontation between, not just a protagonist and his memories, but an individual and his sense of self as mediated by that technology's representation of him as a succession of selves. In *KLT* this happens through the tape-recordings of the voices of his younger selves. In *Film* it happens during the "investment" when O, while sitting in the rocking chair, examines a series of seven photographs of himself at various ages and developmental stages (as infant of six months, as child of four years, at fifteen years old with his dog, on graduation day at the age of twenty, at twenty-one with his fiancée, at twenty-five years "newly enlisted", and at the age of thirty "looking over forty. Patch over left eye…. Grim expression", Beckett 2006b: 381-2). The photographs are viewed by the audience (and therefore E) as O examines them. They are handled in chronological order. After viewing them all, O proceeds to tear them up in the same order and drops them on the floor. Like with Krapp in *KLT*, he is earnestly focused on this self-analysis but ends by rejecting what he sees. The difference is that the concretization of memory in *KLT* happens in the form of recorded speech acts, whereas in *Film* it happens through a series of visual records. But the technology in each case allows for a kind of doubling: the tape-recordings double the speech acts of the living Krapp, and the photographs constitute fixed acts of seeing which are then the object of O's act of seeing. In each case, the formal strategy creates a double articulation that then arguably fails to provide self-knowledge. The archival fixity of these products of technologies of memory fails in terms of epistemic certitude and in bolstering the vitality of a sense of being.

5. Prose

Along with the characteristic elements of the *Lear* poetics, the mental phenomenon of memory figures prominently in Beckett's late work for the page *Worstward Ho*. The hard to classify work also offers the most developed exploration of the conjunction between saying, seeing, knowing, and being. In its concern over the

limits of language, the faculty of sight and interior vision, the process of worsening, and the deteriorating effects of old age it is a fit culmination to arguments for the influence or ghostly presence of *King Lear* in Beckett's work.

Worstward Ho is the sole work of Beckett that is explicitly and intentionally connected to Shakespeare's tragedy in terms of its general project. The prose work is an extended set of performative variations on Edgar's aside on being "worst". As a sounding of the Shakespearean theme of the unsayable worst its language is assiduously pared down to a minimum of lexical elements in limited arrangements of spare syntactic combinations. One can see this in its opening two paragraphs:

> On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on. Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid.
> (Beckett 2009b: 81)

It takes up the challenge in Edgar's formulation and attempts to say the "worst". It does this, on one hand, by way of simplification in the variety of words and in their syntax. Often, for instance, a line must be sounded aloud in order to find the natural pauses that then dictate the part of speech a given word has. And usually the line can be read multiple ways. Many times a word, which might normally be a verb, noun, or adjective, functions in a grammatical role contrary to the norm. This tendency to mutable syntactical functionality is related to the way the text is rich with neologism. One sees this neologistic tendency in the word "nohow" in the above example. And the inventive neologisms proliferate especially in relation to the concepts of "worse", "worst", and "less":

> Void most when almost. Worst when almost. Less then? All shades as good as gone. If then not that much more then that much less then? Less worse then? Enough. A pox on void. Unmoreable unlessable unworseable evermost almost void.
> (101)

The paring down process of both the lexical and syntactical dimensions results in an effect of widening polysemy and ambiguity in the language over all, which oddly creates an enrichment of language, one contrary to the notion of worsening.

The lessening and worsening process also extends beyond the formal level of the language. The words unsay the scene and elements of the narrative itself. There is a general absence of subjects in relation to verbs, and this accords with the thinning away of the narrative scene. And verbs themselves often hover in a sort of undirected imperative mood. It is difficult to know what is happening, where it is happening, who is doing it and to whom it is being done. In fact, there is almost a total absence of narrative 'doing'. In other words, the diegesis is very minimally furnished, and those furnishings it does have, say the "black great coat" that one shadowy figure is initially described wearing, are gradually diminished ("cut off midthigh", 85) until eventually eliminated down to the vaguest "blur" ("Shades can blur", 99). Instead, this narrative is one only in the barest sense possible. There are no events, per se, beyond the seemingly extra-diegetic event of thinning, lessening, and worsening the narrative. Even the use of the word 'narrative' here as a way of describing *Worstward Ho* is suspect, a merely provisional categorization.

But just as Edgar's words simultaneously entail a suggestion, if not of hope, then of at least the positive position: "it could be worse" – so ultimately Beckett's prose exercise in worsening might be said to reveal the resuscitative power of language and speech. The work's language and syntax of the unworsenable worst take on unexpected life through this process of simplification. One witnesses this enrichment in the growth of neologistic language and in the polysemic multi-directionality that steadily replaces the usual process of signification. This fecundity of worsened words and compounds may lack clear signifying meanings, but the language gains a compensating spare beauty:

> So leastward on. So long as dim still. Dim undimmed. Or dimmed to dimmer still. To dimmost dim. Leastmost in dimmost dim. Utmost dim. Leastmost in utmost dim. Unworsenable worst. (95)

The reader is led deeper and deeper into the increasing "dim" and "void", but language itself stubbornly retains its captivating beauty. As an embodiment of *Lear* poetics, here the need to continue to both speak and see, despite the gathering worseness and the infir-

mity of old age, remains.

The work engages Edgar's aside in complex ways, and one method is in how it diminishes the focalizing aspect of the narration and therefore sharply diminishes the reader's ability to visualize elements in the narrative. This is arguably attributable to *King Lear*'s thematization of blindness and disguise, which in the tragedy are related issues. To follow or enact the trajectory of worsening, as Edgar learns, one becomes acquainted with blindness. *Worstward Ho* establishes a dim gloom with only a few discernible shades flitting among its shadows. In one light, these shades seem to have to do with the pared down essence of memories:

> Hand in hand with equal plod they go. In the free hands – no. Free empty hands. Backs turned both bowed with equal plod they go. The child hand raised to reach the holding hand. Hold the old holding hand. Hold and be held. Plod on and never recede. Slowly with never a pause plod on and never recede. Backs turned. Both bowed. Joined by held holding hands. Plod on as one. One shade. Another shade.
> (84)

In keeping with the idea that "in the skull the skull alone to be seen", the work unfolds an interior cognitive space, and within this skullscape one finds the flitting figures of memory. And these shades are increasingly blurred through the worsening process. It is also worth noting how this important theme of blurring (99) appears as a theme in at least two of the other works that fulfill the notion of a *Lear* poetics. In *Film*, O's visual perspective is blurred. And in *All That Fall*, Miss Fitt explains to Mrs Rooney that she did not recognize her because, "All I saw was a big pale blur, just another big pale blur" (169).

The diminished focalization in the narration in *Worstward Ho* makes it less like narrative and more like theatre. Beckett's project, while on one level about pushing language to "say the worst," on further reflection also seems to aim for an innovative linguistic performativity. He gets language to perform on the page, or at least demand to be performed in the mouth so that its multiplicities of meaning, which in many instances remain inert if read silently, can be brought to life. Thus, while this argument stretches

the notion of theatre proper, it is certainly the case that this work is akin to theatre in its attempt to move beyond simply saying – which would end as a missaying – and, following on the implications of Edgar's aside, actually enact or perform a saying of the worst.

Finally, one can see the *Lear* poetics in the way *Worstward Ho* conjoins the acts of saying and seeing. It starts by giving a sort of conceptual and terminological lesson: "Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid" (81). And soon after it gives a further lesson: "See for be seen. Misseen. From now see for be misseen" (84). The trajectory of the whole work serves as a performative demonstration of this interrelationship, even as it presses nohow on.

Works Cited

Beckett, Samuel (2016), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett vol. IV: 1966-1989*, ed. by George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (2014), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett vol. III: 1957-1965*, ed. by George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (2009a), *Ill Seen Ill Said*, in Dirk Van Hulle (ed), *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, London: Faber and Faber.

— (2009b), *Worstward Ho*, in Dirk Van Hulle (ed), *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, London: Faber and Faber.

— (2009c), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett vol. I: 1929-1940*, ed. by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

— (2006a), *All That Fall*, in Paul Auster (ed), *The Grove Centenary Edition*, vol. 3, *Dramatic Works*, New York: Grove Press.

— (2006b), *Film*, in Paul Auster (ed), *The Grove Centenary Edition*, vol. 3, *Dramatic Works*, New York: Grove Press.

— (2006c), *Krapp's Last Tape*, in Paul Auster (ed), *The Grove Centenary Edition*, vol. 3, *Dramatic Works*, New York: Grove Press.

—, MS 1227/7/6/1, Collection of the University of Reading.

—, MS 1525/1, Collection of the University of Reading.

—, MS 2207/1, Collection of the University of Reading.

—, MS 2901, *Sottisier Notebook*, Collection of the University of Reading.
—, MS 2926, *Sam Francis Notebook*, Collection of the University of Reading.
—, MS 2934, Collection of the University of Reading.
—, MS 4564, Collection of the University of Reading.
Connor, Steven (2014), *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
Durling, Robert (1976), *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Poems*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Knowlson, James (1996), *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, New York: Grove Press.
— (ed.) (1992), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 3, *Krapp's Last Tape*, London: Faber and Faber.
Lipman, Ross (2015), *NotFilm*, New York: Milestone Film & Video.
Oxford English Dictionary [*OED*] (1933), vol. 5, H-K, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Shakespeare, William (1989), *King Lear*, ed. by Kenneth Muir, London and New York: Routledge.
Van Hulle, Dirk (2015), *The Making of Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape / La Dernière Bande*, London: Bloomsbury.
— (2010), "Beckett and Shakespeare on Nothing", *Limit{e} Beckett* 1: 123-36.