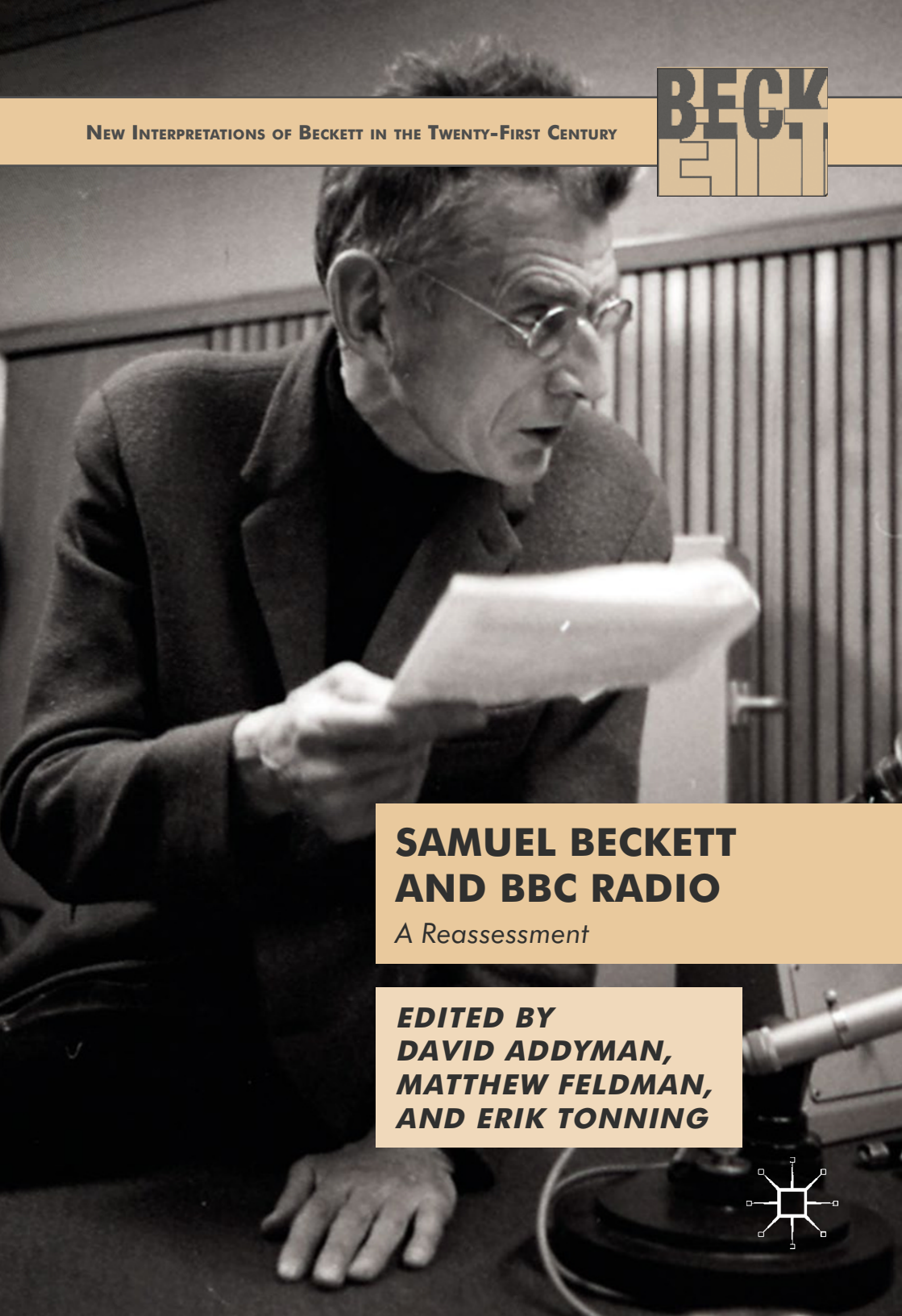
New Interpretations of Beckett in the Twenty-First Century

BECKETT



SAMUEL BECKETT AND BBC RADIO

A Reassessment

EDITED BY DAVID ADDYMAN, MATTHEW FELDMAN, AND ERIK TONNING

New Interpretations of Beckett
in the 21st Century

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Samuel Beckett and BBC Radio

A Reassessment

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"Beckett's experimentation with the medium played an important part in the growing awareness of the potential sound drama offered in relation to new directions in art, and it also had a lasting effect on his own future work."
"Beckett and the BBC Third Programme"

In memoriam
Julie Campbell

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Introduction

David Addyman, Matthew Feldman, and Erik Tonning

Godot was not the only uncertain entity heralded in early-1950s Europe. Across the Channel, from the 5 January 1953 Théâtre de Babylone run that catapulted Samuel Beckett to global recognition, was another long-mooted arrival. In a recent volume that, like the present one, also centers upon the British Broadcasting Corporation's (hereafter BBC) extensive holdings of microfilm and files at its Written Archives Centre in Caversham (hereafter WAC), Finn Fordham identified this specter as television—haunting several passages by Beckett's one-time mentor, James Joyce.[1] In fact, on 17 March 1953—only three days before the passage of the UK's Television Act—the earliest-dated document in Samuel Beckett's detailed WAC archives records that the BBC's Parisian representative, Celia Reeves, had seen *Godot* in Paris together with the Features producer and novelist Rayner Heppenstall. Both recommended it for the Third Programme, the BBC's "highbrow" national radio service, although the broadcast failed to materialize in the 1950s on grounds that are explored in several chapters to follow. *Godot* would have to wait until

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4 April 1960 to make his absence felt on the BBC—despite the aid of a narrator for radio.[2] The 1960 *Waiting for Godot*, moreover, was preceded by a number of other BBC radio "adaptations" of Beckett's work, including Patrick Magee's readings of "From an Abandoned Work," and excerpts from *Molloy, Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*.[3] As is highlighted across this volume, alongside Beckett's better known, "canonical" radio drama—*All That Fall, Embers, Words and Music,* and *Cascando*—these "non-canonical" broadcasts helped establish Beckett's Anglophone reputation and, as scholars have shown, also fuelled his creativity in later years.[4]

Mirroring the modernist avant-garde's public domestication only years after their initial appearance, the popular arrival in British households of what James Joyce characterized as "tellavicious" was indeed experienced as a potentially pernicious influence by some BBC executives in the 1950s.[5] Put bluntly, the rise of television threatened the "dumbing down" of British culture—and the BBC saw itself as that culture's leading light. Cuts to broadcasting hours, demoralized staff and fears about the rise of home television meant that the Third Programme's role became to some extent symbolic: it would continue to broadcast "high art" in an increasingly *This Is Your Life* celebrity culture. Responding to this challenge, BBC radio managers redoubled their search for high-quality original programming in the later 1950s, including Beckett, Harold Pinter, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov and other exponents of what Martin Esslin, one of those very BBC managers at the time, memorably dubbed "The Theatre of the Absurd." This introduction will examine some of these wider contexts below, before turning to a short survey of individual contributions that reassess the nature and scope of Beckett's relationship with BBC radio. Both here and in the ensuing chapters, special attention is given to the later 1950s and early 1960s, a time of key developments for home media use no less than for Beckett's work and international reception.

During these years, media consumption was changing markedly in Britain. By the later 1950s radio was being swiftly eclipsed by television, nearly 40 years on from the BBC's initial appearance as the British Broadcasting Company on 14 November 1922. Re-launched on New Year's Day 1927 with a Royal Charter, the Corporation's first Director-General, Sir John Reith, made no secret of its Arnoldian aim to educate the nation:

> [O]ur responsibility was to carry into the greatest possible number of homes everything that is best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement, and to avoid the things which are, or may be, hurtful.

> It is occasionally indicated to us that we are apparently setting out to give the public what we think they need—and not what they want, but few know what they want, and very few what they need.[6]

By the 1930s, BBC radio was overwhelmingly admired and emulated, and remained culturally ambitious in its output. Normal radio and television services were halted upon the outbreak of war in 1939, with the familiar Home and Light services from the 1930s only re-launched in June 1945. The BBC resumed television transmissions only 13 months later. Finally, the September 1946 launch of a third radio station was intended to be the vanguard of the BBC's most culturally highbrow output. Divided roughly equally between music and spoken-word programs, the Third Programme deliberately undertook challenging productions with a "consciously minority appeal." The Third Programme's unashamedly "small, satisfied and influential audience," continues Kate Whitehead, was "an important patron of creative writers" at this time, unafraid of undertaking many "avant-garde broadcasts," including championing the work of "late modernist" writers like David Jones, Dylan Thomas and Louis MacNeice.[7]

Revealing of just how far this golden age of radio "was to be shattered by the advent of competitive television" is Asa Briggs's panoramic study in five parts, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*.[8] Dealing with the decade after World War II, his fourth volume is subtitled *Sound and Vision*. Underscoring the fundamental changes brought about by the rise of television in 1950s Britain, Briggs's final pages cite Sir Ian Jacob, the BBC's Director-General from 1952 to 1959, who was among the first to actively support television broadcasting:

> [T]hose engaged in sound broadcasting may have been wondering whether they would become a forgotten army, and whether in the intense struggle now taking place, they were going to be sacrificed in the demands for television.... Transfers of people and of resources were bound to take place, and many of them would be from sound to television. That was not surprising when it was remembered that originally sound broadcasting held the entire bank.[9]

This post-war epoch of the BBC's media monopoly lasted until the launch of *Competition* (the title of Briggs's fifth and final volume). This took the form, above all, of "independent" television, or ITV—commencing the same month as Beckett's first BBC radio "adaptation," a reading from

Watt in September 1955.[10] As with the vast majority of BBC productions of, and about, Beckett's work in the crucial period 1956–1964, these extracts from *Watt* were aired by the Third Programme: *the* principal vehicle for Beckett's public dissemination in Britain.

Talks, readings and radio drama—often with musical accompaniment—were the Third Programme's bread and butter throughout its 21-year existence. Yet the onset of television competition in the mid-to-late 1950s created a "paralysing anxiety" among Third Programme staff. Indeed, the whole of "the BBC was thrown into a state of panic," argues Humphrey Carpenter, for "the decline in radio listening had been hugely accelerated by the choice of television channels." The BBC's response was to initiate a top-down "reorganisation of radio." This entailed a "savage reduction in broadcasting hours" during 1957. In practice, it represented a 40 % reduction in the Third's hours between the transmission of *All That Fall* on 13 January 1957 and "From an Abandoned Work" on 10 December that same year.[11] In Whitehead's important survey of the Third Programme's literary output, the penultimate chapter, tellingly, is called "The Cut-backs of 1957," within a section entitled *The End*: "The 'streamlining' of 1957 had both cut the hours and undermined the ethos of the Third Programme, ending the sense of cultural 'mission' propounded by [Sir William] Haley which had motivated the network during its first ten years."[12]

As part of this revised strategy, a concerted effort to recruit "new talent" was undertaken, particularly for bespoke radio dramas. As Controller for the Third Programme at the time, John Morris had the unenviable task of overseeing severe broadcasting cuts while at the same time attempting to attract up-and-coming authors. His view, expressed in the Foreword to an anthology of Third Programme texts to celebrate its tenth anniversary in 1956, was that "any attempt to 'brighten-up' by 'talking down' to our listeners would inevitably have led to a general lowering of intellectual standards." Morris ruefully continued,

> I myself believe the days of 'experimental broadcasting' are long since past, but there is still much to do in solving the difficult problem of how to present abstract thought in such a way that it can be apprehended orally.[13]

Interestingly, this was the same man who went to Paris to meet Beckett and encourage the writing of *All That Fall*—he officially received the play on 29 September 1956—and oversaw a production so experimental that it led to the launch of the BBC Radiophonic workshop in 1958.[14]

From this point, the story of Beckett and the Third Programme is rather more familiar. It is touched upon in several of the chapters in this collection, and has been carefully assessed by the late, pioneering scholar of Beckett and the radio, Julie Campbell.[15] Less appreciated to date, however, is the level of perceived threat posed by television to radio's hegemony, during precisely the years of Beckett's closest and most fruitful relationship with the BBC. True, combined radio and television licenses had grown by more than 1.1 million per year between 1953 and 1966.[16] But it was the latter which was the driving force. In 1953, some 22 % of British households had television receivers; a decade later that figure had risen to 89 %. More troublingly for a once-dominant BBC radio, the quantity of listening dropped precipitously in these years: from 2 hours and 8 minutes in 1952, to 1 hour and 32 minutes in 1955 and only 1 hour and 14 minutes in 1963.[17] This, then, was the quickly changing landscape surrounding Beckett's turn to BBC radio.

***

It has become generally accepted that Beckett's multifaceted, *sui generis* works had to await their public until after the Second World War. Despite the recent scholarly attention given to Beckett's undoubtedly formative interwar writing, his "early" works received limited attention upon release: this applies to the award-winning poem "Whoroscope" (1930), the academic study *Proust* (1931), the short stories *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), his selected poems, *Echo's Bones* (1935) and the novel *Murphy* (1938). Written fitfully in wartime hiding from the Gestapo, *Watt* would await a publisher until after the appearance of the works that made Beckett's name, above all, "The Trilogy" of novels and the 1953 Parisian stage début of *En Attendant Godot*.[18] During his many "years of wandering," in the words of the 1934 poem "Gnome," engagements with radio either never came off—as in the case of the 1946 "Capital of the Ruins," apparently intended for Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ)—or were registered merely as personal annoyance, as with a 1938 complaint from Paris to his confidante, Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett's earliest-known remarks on radio:

> A terrible wireless has started next door. They turn it on when they get up, keep it on till they go out, & turn it on again when they come in. One morning it waked me at 7 am. I must put up with it.[19]

Around the time of Beckett's leap to widespread acclaim in the mid-1950s, he was, according to his biographers, sinking into a deep morass

born of an inability to move beyond his post-war "frenzy of writing." Beckett was only too aware of his writer's block, lamenting with the characteristic (extra) gloominess of this period to Barney Rosset, his American publisher: "I think my writing days are over. *L'Innommable* finished me or expressed my finishedness."[20] Despite completing *Fin de Partie*, the English translation of *L'Innommable*, and his 13 *Texts for Nothing*, Beckett confessed to feeling that he was "dried up, with nothing left but self-translation."[21] It was here, fortuitously, that the BBC's increasing pursuit of Beckett bore fruit; providing, in James Knowlson's apt words, an "escape route" via a new medium: radio broadcasting.[22] Following the success of *All That Fall*, this was certainly the view cast by Donald McWhinnie, a BBC drama producer and later director of several Beckett's plays: "My impression is that if he is to write at all in the near future it will be for radio, which has captured his imagination."[23]

Naturally enough, scholarly explorations of Beckett's reception have tended to focus on his post-*Godot* publishing and stage drama, tracing the waves of a truly global expansion of both public and critical interest in Beckett's work.[24] According to Shane Weller, for instance, by 1961, "9,000 copies of *Molloy* had been printed [and] 24,000 copies of *Godot* had been printed" by Beckett's French publisher, *Les Éditions de Minuit*.[25] Many thousands were also seeing his plays, of course, in Europe and beyond. Yet the Third Programme catered to many *tens* of thousands, and played a crucial role in Beckett's Anglophone reception. To date, however, the extent of the BBC's embrace of Beckett has not received a full-length academic study—a key lacuna addressed by *Samuel Beckett and BBC Radio: A Reassessment*.

In terms of audience size, a striking example is the Royal Court Production of *Fin de Partie*, which opened on 3 April 1957 and seated 380 people per performance. One month later, the Third Programme broadcast a radio production (also in French). Like the London stage première, directed by Roger Blin, Michael Bakewell's radio production on 2 May 1957 included the same, celebrated cast (Blin, Jean Martin, Georges Adet and Christine Tsingos), but added a narrator (Jacques Brunius) to compensate for the "blind medium" of radio. Of these two performances of *Fin de Partie*, the latter would have been more widely received, a point stressed by P.H. Newby, Controller of the Third Programme between 1959 and 1967 (when the Third Programme was progressively absorbed into the new Radio 3 service):

> The range of drama we offer is enormously wider than anything offered by the London theatres. In any case, the mass of the population cannot get to

> them. Any drama critic who took note of one of our new productions could do so in the knowledge that its audience would be nation-wide and big enough to fill the Royal Court Theatre for about nine months and that when it is repeated ten days or so later there will be another audience just as large.

Newby went on to stress that the Third Programme was "broadcasting Beckett's play *All that Fall* (it was commissioned by the Third Programme) for the seventh time early next year." By his calculations, this was the equivalent of more than four years of selling out the Royal Court Theatre.[26] Unlike the ensuing five "adaptations" of Beckett's work airing on the Third Programme, however, the theatrical *Fin de Partie* was not repeated for another 50,000 or more auditors. It seems quite likely, then, that a greater number of people in Britain were introduced to Beckett's work via BBC radio than those reading it or attending a live performance.

Added to the BBC's many performances *of* Beckett's work in Britain between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, moreover, were a number of programs *about* Beckett as well. According to Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, *Waiting for Godot* was first reviewed for the Home Service on 21 August 1955—incidentally, some three weeks before Jack Holmstrom's reading of *Watt* excerpts on the Third Programme—and received comment for a second time the following week. This was followed by a review of *All That Fall* a week after its première. In the 1960s, the Home Service also reviewed *Happy Days, Words and Music, Play, Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*.[27]

Yet once again it was the Third Programme that led the way in presenting, and even framing, Beckett's work. The following is a list of broadcasts on Beckett's contemporaneous works by the Third Programme in the decade following the 1957 transmission of *All That Fall*: Ronald Gray's Christian interpretation of *Waiting for Godot* (9 January 1957); G.S. Fraser's review of the recently broadcast *All That Fall* for the "Comment" segment (24 January 1957); J.J. Whiteman's theater review of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte sans paroles*, two days after its London premiere (4 April 1957); A.J. "Con" Leventhal's "Samuel Beckett: Poet and Pessimist" (30 April 1957); Patrick Bowles on translating *Molloy*, "A Master Work of Disillusion" (15 June 1958); Anthony Cronin's "The Unsayable," a discussion of "The Trilogy" (19 January 1959); Karl Miller for "Comment" on *Embers* and *All That Fall* broadcasts (25 June 1959); Barbara Bray for "Comment" on *Comment c'est* (2 February 1961); Peter Bull's radio documentary on *Waiting for Godot*, "Waiting for What?"

(14 April 1961); a "New Comment" roundtable discussion of Beckett's work (11 October 1961); Denis Donohue's "The Play of Words," partly on Beckett's drama (30 June 1962); Laurence Kitchin's general twentieth-century drama program, which included discussion of Beckett, called "Compressionism: The Cage and the Scream" (8 January 1963; with Kitchin later contributing to "New Comment" on *Play*, 14 April 1964); a "New Comment" installment on "Beckett's work from the actor's viewpoint" (2 June 1964, including interviews with Jack MacGowran and Patrick Magee); Christopher Ricks's "The Roots of Samuel Beckett" (18 November 1964); Eric Rhode for "New Comment" on *Waiting for Godot* at the Royal Court Theatre (6 January 1965); John Fletcher's "Beckett as Critic" on Beckett's non-fiction literary criticism (2 October 1965); and Barbara Bray on "Imagination Dead Imagine" for "New Comment" (9 March 1966).[28] Roughly half of these programs were repeated.[29]

Alongside this enormous dissemination, importantly, critics for the Third Programme advanced a number of abiding interpretative frameworks for Beckett's works. Even the advance billing for *All That Fall*, published in the BBC's house journal, *The Listener* (1929–1991), provides an early profile of the "mysterious author": "Figure, athletic; manner, decisive; a blend of extreme seriousness and twinkling good humour; modest; kind; and thoroughly good company." Published for a readership in excess of 130,000, this portrait was offered, fittingly, by Donald McWhinnie, later to direct television productions of *Waiting for Godot, Eh Joe* and *Ghost Trio*. McWhinnie summarized *All That Fall* in these terms:

> On the face of it, a simple, if unexpected, affair: an anecdote set in a rural community of Ireland. In fact, a careful synthesis of speech, sound and—as you might expect—silence; hectically funny and bitterly tragic; a story of the inadequacy of life and death, breathing an atmosphere of vitality and ruin, farce and suffocation.
>
> It is remarkable that Beckett shows such a clear grasp of the medium in his first work for radio; however, the problems he sets his producer cannot be solved by conventional means. Our meeting in his beloved Paris was all the more valuable; we worked over the text in detail, elucidating, modifying, adjusting even the tiniest of points of emphasis.[30]

A week later, on 9 January 1957, *The Listener* published Ronald Gray's "A Christian Interpretation of *Waiting for Godot*"—only four days before *All That Fall*—which elicited a lively correspondence over subsequent weeks.[31]

Of course, most radio broadcasts on Beckett did not later appear in *The Listener*. In this category his intimate friend and BBC correspondent Barbara Bray attempted, on 11 October 1961, "to consider how far the reading of Beckett's novels casts a useful light on his plays." Broadcast on the recently launched "New Comment" program, 23 minutes and 30 seconds were devoted to Beckett's work, with contributions by Martin Esslin, Patrick Magee and others.[32] Earlier that year, in another Third Programme broadcast not published in *The Listener,* Bray disputed the description of *Comment c'est* (1961) as a novel, comparing it instead to Dante's *Divine Comedy*—a text Beckett re-engaged when attempting to move beyond his creative impasse in the mid-1950s—in offering this homage:

> This a piece of 'total writing,' in which all the apparently contradictory powers, rational and irrational, of a uniquely rich and delicate sensibility and a uniquely piercing intelligence are brought together to give as pure a rendering of modern consciousness as words have yet been made to convey.

Upon receipt of the script the day after its broadcast, Beckett wrote that he liked it "very much—quite sincerely. You have 'understood' the book as no one so far."[33]

Barbara Bray was not the only commentator for the Third Programme drawn from among Beckett's network of friends (or family, in the case of BBC musical collaboration with his cousin John Beckett). Indeed, for Martin Esslin, who took over from Donald MacWhinnie in 1961 as Assistant Head of Radio Drama (Sound), "Beckett worked very much that way, with friendships. He wanted people whom he could trust and with whom he could work."[34] Personal connections were integral to Beckett during this pivotal period of "getting known," in the words of the radio-inspired *Krapp's Last Tape* from 1958. It is a pattern amply attested to in James Knowlson's masterful biography.[35] In a telling example related to radio, an old friend from Beckett's Dublin days, Con Leventhal, read "Samuel Beckett: Poet and Pessimist" for the Third Programme on 30 April 1957, only two days before the Francophone broadcast of *Fin de Partie*. Leventhal's talk then appeared in *The Listener* on 9 May, revealing a number of persisting tropes from Beckett's early prose and poetry to his 1950s plays. The piece compares Beckettian irony with that of the "dadaists and early surrealists," as a "jousting with words" and displaying an "erudition deeper, one suspects, than that of the Master"—James Joyce. Conducting an investigation of humanity's "via dolorosa," Beckett's was a world

"barren of hope" for Levanthal.[36] Interestingly, two years before contributors to Ruby Cohn's influential special issue on Beckett for *Perspective* identified motion and rest as key themes in Beckett's early work—a collection often associated with launching Anglophone Beckett Studies in 1959—Leventhal identified the conception of movement-in-stasis and, in particular, the rocking chair, as a kind of "Beckett mascot."[37]

Like Leventhal's contribution, many Third Programme commentaries on Beckett's work were clustered around broadcasts of radio productions of his prose and drama. Alongside periodic publication in *The Listener*—which would double or even triple the potential audience—this was clearly intended to increase British interest in, and knowledge of, Beckett's work. Emblematic of these commentaries is that by Beckett's co-translator for *Molloy*, Patrick Bowles, whose "*Molloy*: A Masterwork of Disillusion" aired three days before the broadcast of *Malone Dies*, and was printed as "How Samuel Beckett Sees the Universe" in *The Listener* the following day, 19 June 1958. Some 50 years before Beckett's proximity to European phenomenology was explored at length, Bowles found that *Molloy*, and "The Trilogy" of novels more generally, explores when "the distinction between the inner and outer world breaks down"; that is, the subject-object cleavage between "within and without": "What we perceive does not come to us cold, but is momentarily joined to us, object and subject in an unbreakable relationship."[38] This was in close keeping with Bowles's notes from meetings with Beckett in the middle 1950s—amidst the taxing translation of *Molloy*—in which he employs Husserlian terms to approach the "consciousness of consciousness. Not merely being the consciousness *of* some object, but the awareness of being *awake*, if you like."[39]

Over and above the much wider circulation of Third Programme commentaries later appearing in *The Listener*—greatly inflating the potential audience with its six-figure print run—several early Beckett scholars advanced readings of Beckett's work. Six weeks after *Cascando* aired on 6 October 1964, Christopher Ricks, later of *Beckett's Dying Words* renown, contributed "The Roots of Samuel Beckett." This was only a month before an "unexpurgated" rendition of *Waiting for Godot* opened at the Royal Court Theatre, and four days before Beckett's Robert Pinget "translation," *The Old Tune* (first aired on the BBC on 23 August 1960) opened at London's Mercury Theatre).[40] In the ensuing publication of Ricks's Third Programme radio broadcast, he granted that "comparison and analysis," "the critic's usual tools," were difficult to apply to Beckett's "greatness and originality." Ricks placed Beckett in the tradition of Dante,

Bunyan, Swift, Dr Johnson and even Shakespeare's *King Lear*.[41] Similarly John Fletcher, having just published *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* and soon to release *Samuel Beckett's Art*—two paradigm-setting works in the nascent field of Beckett Studies—contributed an analysis of Beckett's criticism to the Third Programme, appearing as "Beckett as Critic" in *The Listener* on 25 November 1965; in other words, some five years before Lawrence Harvey's pioneering study, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*. Nearly as remarkable as the frequency of Beckett's work on the Third Programme, surely, is the space given there to early explications of that work (and, occasionally thereafter, in *The Listener*, which typically also ran notices on his recent radio productions).

Especially during the later 1950s and 1960s, there can be little doubt that the BBC doused its audience in programs by, and on, Samuel Beckett. Yet as several contributions here show, this was by no means restricted to these years. Beckett's 60th birthday was marked with a radio production of *Play* and two broadcasts on his poetry (both of the latter narrated by John Fletcher). Redoubling its coverage a decade later, what was now Radio 3 premièred *Rough for Radio II* on Beckett's 70th birthday; and the next day, 14 April 1976, Radio 3 repeated highlights from Jack MacGowran's 1966 poetry readings. The latter included then-virtually-unknown poems like "Whoroscope," "Serena I" and "Serena II," "Alba," "Echo's Bones," "Sanies I," and "Saint Lô."[42] Capping this extravaganza was what Radio 3 called "the first publication" of "For to End Yet Again" on 10 October 1976, just as "Beckett at 80" offered the first broadcast of *A Piece of Monologue*. There were many more productions besides these surprising "adaptations," as is presented in the "case-log" comprising Matthew Feldman's chapter "Beckett's 'Non-canonical' Radio Productions, 1957–1989." Before turning to a detailed overview of the present volume, however, a final word is in order on the corpus of materials to be reassessed.

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From the BBC WAC's paper and microfilm collection, Beckett's radio productions are effectively split into two separately held categories. The first are microfiche production details and scripts for virtually all of the BBC radio "adaptations" listed in the so-called Play Library collection at Caversham. Also contained on microfiche are various programs about Beckett from the more general—and more disorganized—"Talks Library, 1922–1970" (as noted above, some of which also appeared in *The Listener*).[43]

Of greater interest still may be the second category of BBC WAC materials. Archived manuscript holdings for Beckett's BBC work (including television) are concentrated in the following files: "Samuel Beckett: Source File"; "Samuel Beckett: Copyright Files"; "Samuel Beckett: Drama Writer Files" (1960–1974 and 1975–1979); and finally and most relevantly here, the four-part "Samuel Beckett: Scriptwriter Files" (1953–1962; 1963–1967; 1968–1972; and 1973–1982). These materials shed light upon most BBC productions of Beckett's work over the last 33 years of his life. They are analyzed by contributors around several key themes, such as those dealing with degrees of collaboration intrinsic to radio production; as well as matters of contracts and payment; musical accompaniment and performers; the technicalities of broadcast transmission; and correspondence with, and more often about, Beckett among BBC staff. It is an expansive corpus of materials, comprising some 2,000 pages in total—making the BBC WAC holdings one of the most extensive Beckett-related caches to date, and receiving only limited scholarly treatment before now.

Erik Tonning's chapter "Mediating Modernism: The Third Programme, Samuel Beckett, and Mass Communication" sets out key elements of the Third's intellectual milieu. As Tonning has established elsewhere,[44] a kind of "Christian modernism" prevailed among a number of influential voices at the BBC, advocating "a more existentially reflected and artistically oriented culture" in post-war Britain. Ironically enough—and despite initially prevaricating over broadcasting *Waiting for Godot*—the Third Programme's "framing" of Beckett as a kind of tragi-comic moralizer helped to draw attention away from potential charges of blasphemy. It also showed the way in which the Third Programme "mediated" difficult modernist writers for a wider British public.

Yet in the next chapter, "The BBC and Beckett's Non-Radiogenic Plays in the 1950s," Dirk van Hulle makes clear the path was not a smooth one in the 1950s, even if the BBC would come to play a "substantial" role in Beckett's career. "The BBC and Beckett's Non-Radiogenic Plays in the 1950s" looks more closely at three 1950s Beckett plays with a very different relationship to broadcasting: *En Attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot* (1953), *Fin de Partie/Endgame* (1956) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958). Furthermore, the multiple formats Beckett was working in—writing theatrical and radio drama, self-translation and a return to prose with *Comment c'est*—reveal that radio was indeed "a catalyst for Beckett's work in the late 1950s." It may have taken time for the BBC to fully appreciate Beckett's "radiophonic potential," van Hulle asserts, but the Corporation would soon make up for lost time.

To be sure, the BBC collaborated with Beckett in various ways, from discussing initial ideas for radio outputs to helping to realize radio sound. But was Beckett actually "commissioned" by the BBC, in the words of P. H. Newby, above? Even if this was certainly not Martin Esslin's view, for Pim Verhulst, it was nevertheless accurate. In "The BBC as 'Commissioner' of Beckett's Radio Plays," Verhulst's attention is trained upon *Embers*—written in 1958, the same year he recently established as the most likely for the composition of *Pochade radiophonique*[45]—as well as *Words and Music, Cascando* and Beckett's translation of *Pochade*, broadcast on 13 April 1976 as *Rough for Radio II*. Even if this quasi-commissioning proved a "strain" for Beckett, Verhulst shows that Beckett let himself be "coaxed" by trusted colleagues like Donald MacWhinnie and later Martin Esslin.

BBC collaboration is also at the heart of Catherine Laws's chapter, "Imagining Radio Sound: Interference and Collaboration in the BBC Radio Production of Beckett's *All That Fall*." Sometimes working with his cousin, John Beckett, Beckett's growing familiarity with the medium of radio by the late 1950s allowed him to experiment with sound as a "character" in his radiogenic works. Drawing upon her recent monograph on Beckett's lifelong relationship with music, Laws examines Beckett's sophisticated "radio soundscapes" for the BBC, which has the effect "of collapsing the unity of time and space in an acoustic context" in *All That Fall*.[46] Like the preceding three chapters, Laws stresses the practical necessity, and yet surprising scope, of Samuel Beckett's collaborative work for radio. These opening chapters collectively attest that Beckett—often regarded as the apogee of an isolated, unaffiliated artist—could not do without the BBC's technical and professional advice for the successful realization of his radio productions, nor was he indifferent to the Third Programme's "wooing" of him, and the prospect of an unrivaled platform in Britain for his work.

As Stefano Rosignoli shows in his chapter, "Author, Work and Trade: The Sociology of Samuel Beckett's Texts in the Years of the Broadcasts for BBC Radio (1957-89)" the dozens of radio productions (and repeats) of Beckett's work aired on BBC radio were also comparably well paid. After years of penury, "Author, Work and Trade: The Sociology of Samuel Beckett's Texts in the Years of the Broadcasts for BBC Radio (1957–89)" reveals another side of Beckettian collaboration: the thorny matter of contracts and copyright. The extent to which Beckett was interested in wealth and fame has led to two very different perspectives. One picture, offered

by Stephen Dilks, is of Beckett "salivating over his royalty statements" and cultivating a "hagiographic myth" of secular-saintliness. Mark Nixon paints a strikingly different picture of a Beckett willing to help friends and to donate manuscripts, emphasizing acts of charity among Beckett's growing circle.[47] Tending toward the latter of these positions, Rosignoli offers a portrait of Beckett's burgeoning income from publishing, theater and radio, on the one hand, and of his trying to keep such business questions at arm's length on the other. Nor does a clear pattern emerge for decisions like those in 1966, when Beckett firmly rejected a radio production of *Three Dialogues* (1949) but showed "a degree of flexibility" over allowing a radio "adaptation" of *Play* (1964). The latter, coming in at 18 minutes and four seconds, was aired by the Third Programme on 11 October and 30 October 1966, and then a third time by its successor, Radio 3, on 2 September 1967.

The ensuing three chapters then train this volume's attention upon specific texts, commencing with John Pilling's "Changing My Tune: Beckett and the BBC Third Programme (1957–1960)." While neither comfortably "canonical" nor "non-canonical," what "Changing My Tune: Beckett and the BBC Third Programme (1957-1960)" dubs Beckett's "expertly done" translation of Pinget's La Manivelle stresses the radiophonic importance in "the choice of an interpreter." For the Third Programme's 1960 broadcast, Jack MacGowran played Mr Cream, while Gorman was played by Patrick Magee, who had already performed "the trilogy" and "From an Abandoned Work" for the Third Programme by that time. "'My God to have to murmur that': Comment C'est/How It Is and the Issue of Performance," then examines Beckett's contemporaneous "novel" from 1961, which Beckett once referred to as a "microphone text." In the event, *How It Is* would never be broadcast on BBC radio—despite what Elsa Baroghel sees as a contribution to "Beckett's exploration of sound technique across genres in the late 1950s"—even if the composition of *Comment c'est* ultimately "helped inform Beckett's later radio plays." Indeed, as Paul Stewart demonstrates, not just radio plays but BBC radio "adaptations" also helped in this regard, as is stressed in "Fitting the Prose to Radio: The Case of 'Lessness'." Even if the outcome left Beckett "deeply dissatisfied," in the words of Martin Esslin, the latter nonetheless believed "Lessness" was "really for the radio." Thanks to Stewart's insight in "Fitting the Prose to Radio: The Case of 'Lessness'," it becomes clear just how a radio producer and literary artist might offer such different interpretations of Radio 3's broadcasts of "Lessness" on 25 February and 7 May 1971; ambitiously,

the performance used six different actors (all Beckett "enthusiasts") to read a mathematical proportion of 60 sentences as voices A–F, collectively "meant to convey a single consciousness."[48]

In "'My Comforts! Be Friends!': Words, Music and Beckett's Poetry on the Third," Melissa Chia turns to Beckett's poetry on BBC radio, from the role of "Words" in *Words and Music*, broadcast on the Third Programme on 13 November 1962, to several programs dedicated to readings in 1966 and 1979. "'My comforts! Be friends!': Words, Music and Beckett's Poetry on the Third" then interrogates the role of literary critics on BBC radio, exemplified by Esslin and Fletcher in the 1960s, who championed Beckett's otherwise neglected poems—despite strong opposition from within the BBC. It may well have been Esslin's "energy, diligence, and persistence," as Steven Matthews notes in his contribution, that got such challenging works aired—like the 143-minute readings of all 13 *Texts for Nothing* read by Patrick Magee in 1975–1976. "Meditations and Monologues: Beckett's Mid-late Prose on the Radio" turns to these "meditations on being," as the Opening Announcement for these broadcasts for Radio 3 put it. Matthews's essay raises questions of intellectual "framing" and other forms of editorial input vis-à-vis Beckett's later work with BBC radio. It should be remembered that even in the middle 1970s, as Matthews notes, turning full circle to the longer-term context of a by-then cherished national institution, that the BBC was "an important mediator of Beckett's avant-garde practice to the broader UK public."

Consideration of the wider listening public in Britain animates the final chapter in this collection. In "'None but the Simplest Words': Beckett's Listeners," Natalie Leeder uses the BBC's scribal mouthpiece, *The Listener*, to return full-circle to the reception of Beckett's "canonical" radio plays—particularly in terms of their musicality. This is discussed in conjunction with the musical writings of Beckett's "one-time sparring-partner," Theodor W. Adorno, who, in these years of growing public recognition, was one of Beckett's best-known auditors. Leeder also raises the vital question of Beckett's audience—readership, viewership and listenership alike—as it began to increasingly intersect with popular culture. That BBC radio offered such rarefied access both (relatively) early and often was significant not only to his popularity in Britain and probably in the development of his poetics, but also, more widely, for thousands of Britons at turns amazed, perplexed and appalled—but rarely indifferent—to encountering broadcasts of Beckett's work. *Beckett in Popular Culture*, a collection of essays by P.J. Murphy and

Nick Pawliuk, testifies that this Anglophone public embrace has hardly abated, some six decades on. In terms of their innovative project no less than for the reassessment of Beckett's remarkably fruitful and longstanding relationship with BBC radio, their conclusion is a timely plea for continued research on Beckett's still-developing relationship with the mass media:

> We have only scratched the surface of this rich vein of material of all sorts in various genres, media, languages, and cultures.
>
> Feel free to post your own examples and accompanying comments on the website voxpopbeckett.ca.[49]

Notes

1. See Finn Fordham, "Early Television and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: New Technology and Flawed Power," in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, eds. Matthew Feldman, Erik Tonning and Henry Mead (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
2. Denys Hawthorne, who would later take part in two BBC poetry readings for the Third Programme, and was one of six voices performing "Lessness" on Radio 3 in 1971, performed the role of narrator.
3. For further discussion, see Matthew Feldman, "Beckett's 'Trilogy' on the Third," in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 26 (2015).
4. Key Anglophone works on Beckett and radio include Katharine Worth, "Beckett and the Radio Medium," in *British Radio Drama*, ed. John Drakakis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Everett Frost, "Fundamental Sounds: Recording Samuel Beckett's Radio Plays," in *Theatre Journal* 43.3 (1991); Marjorie Perloff, "The Silence That Is Not Silence: Acoustic Art in Samuel Beckett's *Embers*"; and Stanley Richardson and Jane Alison Hale, "Working Wireless: Beckett's Radio Writing," both in *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999); Barry McGovern, "Beckett and the Radio Voice," in *Samuel Beckett: 100 Years: Centenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Murray (Dublin: New Island, 2006); Kevin Branigan, *Radio Beckett: Musicality in the Radio Plays of Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008); Steven Connor, "I Switch Off: Beckett and the Ordeals of Radio," in *Broadcasting Modernism*, eds. Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle and Jane Lewty (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009), Jeffrey Lyn Porter, "Beckett and the Radiophonic Body: Beckett and the BBC," *Modern Drama* 53.4 (2010); Gaby Hartel, "Emerging out of a Silent Void: Some

Reverberations of Rudolf Arnheim's Radio Theory in Beckett's Radio Pieces," in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 19.2 (2010); Ulrika Maude, "Working on Radio," in *Samuel Beckett in Context*, ed. Anthony Uhlmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and most recently, Pim Verhulst, "'There are differences': Variants and Errors in the Texts of Beckett's Radio Plays," in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 24.1 (2015).

5. James Joyce, cited in Fordham, "Early Television and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*," 46–7.
6. From Sir John Reith's 1924 *Broadcast Over Britain*, cited in Kevin Jackson, *Constellation of Genius, 1922: Modernism and all that Jazz* (London: Windmill Books, 2013), 386, 426.
7. Kate Whitehead, *The Third Programme: A Literary History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1–2, 12.
8. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume 4: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 520.
9. Sir Ian Jacob, internal BBC memorandum of 18 Oct. 1955, cited in ibid., 1023–4.
10. ITV launched on 22 Sep. 1955. Coincidentally; on the 9th of that month, Jack Holmstrom read selections from Beckett's *Watt*; see John Pilling, *A Samuel Beckett Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 128.
11. These citations are drawn from Humphrey Carpenter, *The Envy of the World: Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 157–8, 166–8, 177.
12. Whitehead, *The Third Programme*, 227.
13. John Morris, "Foreword" to *From the Third Programme: A Ten-Years' Anthology. Imagination, Argument, Experience, Exposition* (London: BBC Publications, 1956), p. vi.
14. For further discussion on the establishment of the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop, see Louis Niebur, *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 1.
15. Julie Campbell, "Beckett and the BBC Third Programme," in *Samuel Beckett Today Aujourd'hui* 24 (2012).
16. Tom Burns, *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 187.
17. Robert Silvey, *Who's Listening? The Story of BBC Audience Research* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 164, 187, and 209.
18. For more on Beckett's post-war rise to global recognition, see Mark Nixon and Matthew Feldman, eds., *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).
19. Beckett to Thomas McGreevy, 26 May 1938, in *Letters I*, 626. For more on Beckett's "Capital of the Ruins," see Darren Gribben, "Beckett's Other