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'Je n'ai pas envie de chanter ce soir': A Re-examination of Samuel Beckett's Opera Collaboration *Krapp, ou La Dernière bande*

This article re-examines *Krapp, ou La Dernière bande* (1961), an opera adaptation of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), which was a collaboration between the playwright and the Romanian composer Marcel Mihailovici. Beckett's changes to the libretto give new insights into the writer's developing concerns around form and his aesthetic of failure. In the programme for the Bielefeld production of the opera in 1961, Beckett supplied a sentence from the German translation of his *Texts for Nothing*, although inverting its first two clauses. His inclusion of this line in the programme affords us greater insight into Beckett's ever evolving conception of the play. Shane O'Neill's doctoral research on Samuel Beckett's self-translated drama is funded by the Irish Research Council. He teaches at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, and has published essays in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* and the edited volume *Samuel Beckett and Translation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

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The Innate Musicality of *Krapp's Last Tape*/ *La Dernière bande*

Krapp's Last Tape, according to Beckett's biographer James Knowlson, 'is unusual in Beckett's theatrical opus for its tender lyricism and for a poignancy that skirts sentimentality'.¹ Knowlson quotes Beckett's remark during a production of the play by the San Quentin Drama Workshop: 'A woman's tone goes through the entire play, returning always, a lyrical tone . . .'.² Both Beckett and Knowlson emphasize the lyricism of the play and the 'Irishness' of the language. Marcel Mihailovici also seems to have immediately noted the text's musicality, identifying its French translation, *La Dernière bande*, as an ideal candidate for an operatic adaptation.

Krapp's Last Tape began as the 'Magee Monologue', written for the Irish actor Patrick Magee, who had impressed Beckett with his readings of extracts from *Molloy* and *From an Abandoned Work* on the BBC Third Programme. Magee had a very distinct Irish voice, with a 'cracked quality' that, as

Knowlson put it, 'seemed to capture a sense of deep world-weariness, sadness, ruination, and regret',³ a voice that, for Beckett, possessed a 'Distinctive intonation'.⁴ The features of Magee's voice that Knowlson lists perfectly complement the figure of Krapp, sitting alone in his den, amongst the 'ruins' of his life preserved on spools that he fetishizes throughout the play.⁵

Most people assume that, like the vast majority of Beckett's texts, the translation of *Krapp's Last Tape* was undertaken by the playwright himself. In fact, *La Dernière bande* began as a collaborative translation with Pierre Leyris. However, over time, all traces of the collaboration have been gradually removed. Leyris is not credited for his part in the translation in any version of *La Dernière bande* published after 21 April 1960. In addition, no manuscript material documenting this collaboration remains, which makes it impossible to know how much of the translation was undertaken by Leyris, and how much by Beckett himself.

In his study on the genesis of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Dirk Van Hulle demonstrates the gradual removal of Leyris's name from the credits for the translation. The first version of the text, published in *Les Lettres Nouvelles* on 4 March 1959, simply credits Leyris for the translation. The three subsequent publications of the text credit both Leyris and Beckett. These versions are the December 1959 edition published with Minuit that was limited to forty copies and seven 'hors commerce', as well as the 5 January 1960 version and the 13 March edition, both published by Minuit. However, from the edition published eight days later, on 21 March 1960, there is no further mention of Leyris's name and all subsequent printings of the texts state that they are translated into English by the author.⁶

It seems incredible that, within the space of a few months, Pierre Leyris would go from being accredited with the entire translation of the text to having his name entirely removed from the credits. Leyris himself admitted in a letter to Pascale Sardin that, over the course of several hours, Beckett revised Leyris's translation until it was almost unrecognizable from Leyris's original: Leyris admitted that 'there was very little left of my bad text'.⁷ If we are to take both Beckett's and Leyris's word for it, the French text that survives is Beckett's definitive translation. We will never know, however, to what extent Leyris's attempt influenced Beckett's translation, or to what extent the text would have differed if Beckett had been the sole translator. For the purposes of this study, *La Dernière bande* is considered to be a self-translated text. It does seem that Beckett managed to recapture the music of the original English drama in his self-translation/revision of Leyris's work. As noted above, *La Dernière bande* was the text from which Mihalovici chose to compose his libretto

A musical theme pervades the text, linked closely to the themes of death and failure.⁸ The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp proclaims: 'Extraordinary silence this evening, I strain my ears and do not hear a sound. Old Miss McGlome usually sings at this hour. But not tonight. . . . Shall I sing when I am her age, if I ever am? No. [Pause.] Did I sing as a boy? No. [Pause.]

Did I ever sing? No'.⁹ Krapp later contradicts this sentiment when he actually does break into song:

Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh-igh,
Shadows—.¹⁰

The lyrics of this hymn suggest what little life remains in the figure on stage. A fit of coughing cuts short his attempt at song. Krapp is a mass of regrets, sorrow, and contradictions which are epitomized by his inability to finish this short musical lament. Through his manipulation of the text's form, Beckett stages the failure of the body. This breakdown of language and enforced silence evokes Beckett's famous 'German letter' of 1937 to Axel Kaun in which he outlines his desired literary form:

Is there any reason why that terrifyingly arbitrary materiality of the word surface should not be dissolved, as for example the sound surface of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is devoured by huge black pauses, so that for pages on end we cannot perceive it other than a dizzying path of sounds connecting unfathomable chasms of silence?¹¹

That Beckett evokes Beethoven in this description emphasizes the influence of music on his own writing and compositional thought, and he expressly links his developing aesthetic to failure – 'huge black pauses' and 'chasms of silence'.

This is literalized further in *La Dernière bande*. The lyrics of the hymn that Krapp sings are even more bleak. This is pertinent, considering that the translation would have been Beckett's first opportunity to rework and develop the text further:

L'ombre descend de nos montagnes,
L'azur du ciel va se ternir,
Le bruit se tait—.¹²

Marie-Claude Hubert argues that the hymn presents 'an unsettled cosmos where the sun neither rises nor sinks, where, like in Dante's *Inferno*, which we know was Beckett's bedtime reading book, nothing grows anymore, where the fire consumes everything'.¹³ The

song in the French version is not a direct translation of the hymn from the English text. The final line, 'Le bruit se tait', to replace the English word 'shadows', is the most striking change. The 'noise' of Krapp's song is stopped by his fit of coughing; in this manner, Krapp's own failure to express himself is doubly staged, that is, both through the words (un)spoken and the performance onstage. In her analysis of the play, Hubert seems to suggest that the hell she alludes to will arrive when the 'noise' ends. Considering the play's ending – Krapp staring into the void as the tape rolls on silently – this interpretation seems particularly ominous. The 'shadows' have already descended from the mountains in the French version of the text and darkness looms heavy on the play's protagonist.

**'Je n'ai pas envie de chanter ce soir':
Failure to Begin Again**

Before adapting *La Dernière bande* for operatic performance, Beckett attempted to compose a libretto for Mihalovici from scratch. On 10 April 1958 he wrote to Barney Rosset, his American publisher at Grove Press, stating that he had 'received a proposal from Marcel Mihalovici to furnish him with the libretto of a half-hour opera! First line: "Je n'ai pas envie de chanter ce soir".¹⁴ Literally translated, this line reads 'I have no desire to sing tonight'. Having penned this opening phrase, Beckett progressed no further with his libretto, writing to Ethna MacCarthy-Leventhal on 2 June: 'Have now to try and excogitate a libretto for Marcel Mihalovici (bouffe!). So far can't get beyond the first line: "pas envie de chanter ce soir".¹⁵ Knowlson confirms that Beckett only managed to write that one line before giving up, and cites a letter written by Beckett to Jacoba Van Velde on 12 April, two days after his letter to Rosset: 'There are two moments worthwhile in writing . . . the one when you start and the other when you throw it in the waste-paper basket.'¹⁶

The opening line of this libretto is again reflective of Beckett's developing aesthetic of failure, and evokes other such negatively constructed openings in Beckett's writing. Take,

for example, Clov's opening words in his previous play *Endgame* ('Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished')¹⁷ and the title and opening words of his later prose text *For to End Yet Again* (1976). Such opening phrases tend to corrode the text from within and, in this case, the failure staged within the libretto's opening line prevents the text from developing any further. Beckett's aesthetic of failure is closely related to his concerns around form; two years after beginning this adaptation process, he would admit to Tom Driver that 'to find a form to accommodate the mess, that is the task of the artist now'.¹⁸ Yet Beckett's own obsession with failure made it impossible to develop the form of an original opera where its protagonist has no desire to sing. It was after this 'failure' to produce an opera that Mihalovici asked Beckett to adapt his French version of *Krapp's Last Tape* into a libretto. On 20 March 1959, almost a year after his first attempt to write for Mihalovici, Beckett writes again to Barney Rosset: 'Marcel Mihalovici, French Roumanian musician, wants to make a chamber opera out of *Krapp*, for the RTF and for a theatre in Germany. I gave him permission and suppose you have no objection.'¹⁹

Krapp, ou La Dernière bande was composed by Marcel Mihalovici in collaboration with Beckett and Elmar Tophoven, Beckett's German translator. Knowlson notes that 'Beckett felt with Mihalovici that he was close to the creative process of a composer'.²⁰ During the adaptation process, Beckett and Tophoven sat 'either side of the composer, adapting the text to the music or modifying the score'.²¹ Mihalovici claims that the writer's help was 'essential' to the operatic adaptation: 'Beckett is a remarkable musician . . . he possesses an astonishing musical intuition'.²² He writes that 'Beckett on occasion caused me to make changes in what I showed him in the score, he either approved or disapproved, made me modify certain stresses in the vocal line'.²³

Krapp, ou La Dernière bande was published as a trilingual edition in Paris by Heugel in 1961. The decision to publish the score and libretto in a trilingual edition seems to have been made by the publisher at the beginning of the adaptation process, as is revealed in a

letter from Beckett dated 10 March 1960 to Barbara Bray:

All afternoon in the beautiful 18th century premises of the music editors Heugel discussing contract for Mihalovici's *Krapp* opera. They are to publish the reduction for piano with triple text (French, English, German). M. is now beginning his orchestration. I shall have to modify slightly here and there the English to adapt it to music written to French text.²⁴

Beckett's correspondence during this period with Bray makes it clear that, from the outset, Beckett was aware that this adaptation would involve some alterations to the text in order that the music and the text would flow together symphonically.

The adaptation process took place over the following months of that year. On 4 July, Beckett writes to Bray: 'Last week continued work with Mihalovici on KRAPP. Like his music – what the piano can tell me – more and more. Should finish in a couple of séances.'²⁵ It seems that the combination of music and words revealed something more to Beckett about his own text, highlighting the innate musicality of his own writing. It also gave him a further opportunity to rework the text into a different theatrical form, allowing him to further emphasize the themes of death and failure. On 11 July, he announces to Bray that he has 'Finished work with Mihalovici. Opening announced for Bielefeld in Feb.'²⁶ The editors of the *Letters* confirm that the 'operative premiere of Mihalovici's *Krapp, ou La Dernière bande* would take place at the Städtische Bühnen in Bielefeld, Germany, on 25 February 1961'.²⁷

Beckett seems to have been quite optimistic about the overall result. Writing to Alan Schneider on 4 August 1960, he states: 'The Mihalovici opera is finished and as far as I can judge a very fine job.'²⁸ However, in a letter to Bray of 16 October 1960, he reveals that the German translation of the play 'had gone all haywire under pressure of musical exigencies'.²⁹ He tells Bray that both Mihalovici and Tophoven came to help with the libretto and they had eventually '[g]ot it more or less right'.³⁰ It seems that, despite Tophoven's presence, Beckett felt the need to intervene in

the German adaptation to make the text suit the 'exigencies' of Mihalovici's music.

This did not mean that the English libretto posed no such 'exigencies' either, and work on this trilingual production continued into December. Writing to Schneider on 9 December, Beckett reveals that '[w]e had to go over the script together (English) and modify a few things, as [Mihalovici] composed his music on the French text'.³¹ Beckett seems to have been quite heavily invested in this project, perhaps because of his friendship with the composer. In the same letter, he reveals that he was 'impressed' by the music that Mihalovici had shown him. This adaptation brought form – specifically a musical form – to the forefront of his thought: 1961, the year the opera was staged, was also the year that he made his oft-cited remarks to Tom Driver about form accommodating 'the mess' of his writing.

Between the end of 1961 and the beginning of 1962 – not long after the premiere at Bielefeld on 25 February 1961 – Beckett composed his explicitly 'musical' radio plays *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, Beckett himself noting that '[m]usic always wins' in the former (emphasizing again the failure of words),³² the latter play featuring music composed by Mihalovici. Catherine Laws states that the concerns of *Words and Music* 'are clearly related to Beckett's general preoccupation with the limitations of the expressive powers of language'.³³ Evoking Schopenhauer, Laws notes that Beckett's 'early monograph *Proust* clearly recognizes Proust's indebtedness to Schopenhauer's view of music as the highest art form'.³⁴ When considered in this light, the words of Beckett's text were always destined to fail, at least in his perception. This might explain the reasons for some of his textual 'undoing', which will be analyzed in subsequent sections of this essay.

Krapp, ou La Dernière bande was first performed as an oratorio at the Palais de Chaillot alongside Manuel de Falla's opera *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* on 13 February 1961.³⁵ The German premiere, *Krapp, oder Das letzte Band*, was performed by an American, William Dooley, singing in German, and it was performed again in 1965 at the Berlin Festival on

25 September and 11 and 12 October. Beckett was glowing in his review of the Bielefeld performance, writing to Bray on 1 March that it 'was a success, wonderfully sung by a young American who'll be a big name in not so long'.³⁶ However, despite Dooley's performances garnering universal praise, the 1965 stagings of *Krapp, oder Das letzte Band* were quite heavily criticized, in particular the music. Wolfgang Schimming wrote that '[t]he music in part underscores the text in an illustrative fashion, in part it is thoroughly noisy, but it is certainly weaker than the play by itself'.³⁷ Anita Laeseck wrote that 'Mihalovici's music is rather clever, not without vision, but it quickly exhausts itself and languishes over long periods. It is in no way comparable to Beckett's highly original idea'.³⁸

Beckett would later write to MacGreevy in relation to these performances, claiming that 'Suzanne went and thought Dooley remarkable, but a characteristically frightful German *mise en scène*',³⁹ perhaps mentioning the 'frightful' staging to deflect the negative attention from the criticism of his friend Mihalovici's composition. He had already written to MacGreevy on Christmas Day 1965, stating that 'I haven't seen much of Chip [Mihalovici] & Monique but dine with them tomorrow. His *Krapp* sung by the same American was very badly received in Berlin and I think he was simply wounded by the critics'.⁴⁰

Textual Variants

In *The Making of Samuel Beckett's 'Krapp's Last Tape'/'La Dernière bande'*, Dirk Van Hulle writes that the 'traces of this close collaboration are preserved in Mihalovici's original manuscript notebook . . . with the composer's French version and music in blue ink, Elmar Tophoven's German text in pencil, and Beckett's English version in red ink'.⁴¹ There are several notable changes made to the operatic text, as noted by both Knowlson and Van Hulle in their studies. Beckett was aware that changes would have to be made for his text to work as a libretto. Before undertaking them, Beckett mused to Bray over his forthcoming task in translation: 'Shall be working this week

with Mihalovici a[d]justing *KRAPP* where required – "Jesus Christ" instead of "Jesus" I suppose that kind of thing – or perhaps merely "Jaysus".⁴² Beckett immediately considers making the language in the English libretto more 'Irish', as suggested by the word 'Jaysus'. However, in the footnotes of Volume 3 of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, it is noted that:

In the final trilingual score of Mihalovici's *Krapp*, the word 'Jésus' is preserved in the French, and 'Jesus' in the English. In the German, 'Cette voix! Jésus' becomes 'Diese Stimme nein' (measures 226–227), and, where it occurs later, 'Jésus' becomes 'Mein Gott!' (measure 685).⁴³

Despite Beckett's initial response to further Hiberno-Anglicize the operatic text, it appears that he was content with the existing rhythms in this phrase of the opera and saw no need to change them.

Knowlson emphasizes the musicality of Beckett's contribution: 'Beckett sometimes changed his original English text to provide extra "notes" or different rhythms: so, "incomparable bosom" became "a bosom beyond compare" and, because of the need for an extra syllable to accommodate the music, "dunes" became "sand dunes"'.⁴⁴ Knowlson's astute observations make clear Beckett's involvement in the creative process of the musical adaptation of his text. He adapts it accordingly so that the libretto perfectly matches the needs of the music. This attention to detail ensures that both elements – the words and the music – flow together symphonically.

Van Hulle notes further changes to the libretto: these are significant because of Beckett's direct involvement in this collaborative adaptation. Many of these changes are resonant of what S. E. Gontarski calls Beckett's 'intent of undoing'.⁴⁵ The words from the theatrical version of the text 'try and imagine'⁴⁶ seem more innocuous than their replacement in the operatic version, 'do my best to imagine'.⁴⁷ The latter construction suggests that there is more effort involved in the act of imagining. The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp on the tape is, of course, talking about conjuring in his head 'those things worth having' when all his dust has 'settled'.⁴⁸

This struggling imagination, juxtaposed with death, dust, and ending, evoke Beckett's later ruinscapes that appear in texts such as *Lessness* (1970) and, in particular, *For to End Yet Again* (1976): 'Skull last place of all black void within without till all at once or by degrees this leaden dawn at last checked no sooner dawned. . . . Sand pale as dust ah but dust indeed deep to engulf the haughtiest monuments which too it once was here and there.'⁴⁹ This also might help to explain Beckett's decision to change 'dunes' to 'sand dunes'. It almost seems as if Beckett is mapping out his own future writing trajectory within this play. The old Krapp of the English version is the Krapp whose dust has finally settled and who has allowed his memories archived in dusty spools to 'engulf' him. He is reminiscent of the character of 'the expelled' in *For to End Yet Again* who 'falls headlong down and lies back to sky full little stretch amidst the ruins'.⁵⁰ Krapp too is amidst the ruins of his life, physically represented by his archive of short annual recordings preserved on spools.

It is significant that in his revision of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett makes explicit the 'old Post Mortems',⁵¹ rather than simply noting the 'old P.M.s', as in other published versions of the play.⁵² There are obvious musical advantages of this change. The staccato 'old P.M.s' is noticeably less rhythmical than the assonant, elongated 'o' sound that emerges in the operatic revision. Despite the addition of two syllables, the word 'mortems' retains the 'ems' sound inherent in the original text. This rhythmical 'o' sound can then be paired effectively with Mihalovici's music to create symphony between the music and words. This small textual change also ensures that the theme of death emerges more sharply than in the play, particularly to non-Irish audiences: 'P.M.s' may well have been understood by an Irish audience; however, not so much an international one. This may be considered as an act of 'pentimenti' or 'redoing', as James McNaughton and James Little have proposed respectively as alternatives to 'undoing'.⁵³ In this manner, Beckett also manages to make his

libretto more universally accessible. Rather than help Krapp find a 'new . . . [hesitates] . . . retrospect' as in the playscript, the post mortems allow Krapp to undertake 'a new inspection of the past', however 'gruesome' he might find this process.⁵⁴ Once again, the opera's libretto is more explicit than the original text and highlights the implicit themes of death and failure in the latter.

The operatic libretto changes 'Flagging pursuit of happiness'⁵⁵ to 'Languishing pursuit of happiness'⁵⁶ – notable because of the different ways an audience might interpret these words. The adjective 'flagging' suggests that Krapp's desire for pursuing happiness is dwindling. However, there still remains a sense that happiness might be worth pursuing. In contrast, the adjective 'languishing' is suggestive of something more lethargic, and thus the tone becomes one of exhaustion and apathy. In this way, the operatic libretto takes on a more negative tone than the play version. This textual change also creates an assonant and alliterative echo between this sentence and the one following: 'Unattainable laxation', which would better suit such a musical adaptation.⁵⁷ This also allows Beckett to highlight the implicit pun: a constipated Krapp, a figure so pathetic that his bowels have now failed him.

It is notable that Beckett reduces, 'especially in terms of the number of syllables',⁵⁸ the number of copies sold of Krapp's book: 'seventeen copies sold of which eleven at trade price' were reduced to '12 copies sold of which 5 to free lending libraries beyond the seas'.⁵⁹ The result of this reduction is not only rhythmical; the text is much bleaker as a result, and Krapp appears as a more pathetic figure – more of a failure – than he does in the play version. Krapp's younger self on tape is speaking/singing to a man who has chosen to pursue a career defined by 'ignorance' and 'impotence' rather than the 'omniscience and omnipotence' of James Joyce, as per his famous admission.⁶⁰ Indeed, like the protagonist of *Worstword Ho*, Krapp too is 'failing better' in Mihalovici's opera, achieving even less success than his theatrical predecessor.

'I'm the scribe, I'm the clerk . . .'

In the footnotes of the third volume of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, the editors have noted:

In the program of the Bielefeld premiere of Mihaelovič's opera, SB supplied and signed a line from the 'Texte pour Rien V', although in the program the first two clauses are inverted to read: 'Ich führe die Feder, ich führe das Protokoll, bei den Verhandlungen ich weiß nicht welcher Sache, warum wollen, daß es meine sei, mir liegt nichts daran.'⁶¹

The corresponding line in the English version of the fifth of the *Texts for Nothing* reads: 'I'm the clerk, I'm the scribe, at the hearings of what cause I know not. Why want it to be mine, I don't want it.'⁶² The inversion of the first two clauses suggests that earlier in his life Krapp was the scribe, but now, as he sits in front of the tape recorder, he is the clerk of his creative past self, organizing his thoughts into 'hearings' he no longer wants to associate himself with. Yet nor can he disassociate himself from them. This explains why, at the end of the play, Krapp 'wrenches off tape, throws it away, puts on the other, winds it forward to the passage he wants, switches on, listens staring front'.⁶³ His immobility at the end, as the tape 'runs on in silence',⁶⁴ demonstrates that Krapp is still rooted in the past and laments the lonely life that he has chosen to live. This is the only way in which he can 'Be again, be again. [Pause.] All that old misery. [Pause.] Once wasn't enough for you. [Pause.] Lie down across her.'⁶⁵ Krapp is commanding himself to go back in time and re-experience that moment of happiness, as is clear from his use of the imperative mood.

The line quoted in the Bielefeld programme from *Texts for Nothing* is also remarkable from the perspective of self-translation. First of all, it echoes a passage from Corinthians. Marilyn Gaddis Rose has noted that at I Corinthians, 1, 19–20, St Paul asks: 'For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?'⁶⁶ Beckett would have been familiar with this

biblical passage in English. But *Textes pour rien* was originally written in French. Was Beckett consciously weaving this reference into his work when writing the *Textes pour rien*?

Van Hulle and Nixon note the following:

The two French Bibles in Beckett's library are the translations by *David Martin* and *Louis Segond*.⁶⁷ The *Louis Segond* translation of I Corinthians 1.19–20 reads as follows: 'Aussi est-il écrit: Je détruirai la sagesse des sages, et j'anéantirai l'intelligence des intelligents. Où est le sage? où est le scribe? où est le disputeur de ce siècle? Dieu n'a-t-il pas convaincu de folie la sagesse du monde?'⁶⁸

This, however, does not resemble the opening of Beckett's French 'Texte pour rien V': 'Je tiens le greffe, je tiens la plume, aux audiences de je ne sais quelle cause. Pourquoi vouloir que ce soit la mienne, je n'y tiens pas.'⁶⁹ Indeed, any resemblance to a biblical verse begins from the English translation in which the reference seems to have been made explicit. In this biblical verse, wisdom is scorned, as are those who seek it. The Lord is the source of all knowledge and power. The lines from *Texts for Nothing* echo this sentiment. Yet in this case, the writer-creator withdraws any responsibility from the creative process: 'Why want it to be mine, I don't want it'. This reminds us again of Beckett's admission that unlike the omniscient and omnipotent Joyce, he is working with 'impotence, ignorance'. He is little more than a 'scribe', noting the words down as they appear 'in my helpless head, where all sleeps, all is dead, not yet born'.⁷⁰ The creator shuns responsibility for the text and its meaning while simultaneously recognizing his involvement: 'To be judge and party, witness and advocate, and he, attentive, indifferent, who sits and notes'.⁷¹ This desire to be absolved of the words he writes, even as they are being written, is indicative of Beckett's constant movement towards failure.

Krapp is the 'scribe' and 'clerk' of his own archive in Beckett's reformulated phrase. The words he hears on the recordings are his own, but they are no longer recognizable, made alien by the temporal distance. This is made explicit by his need to (re)define the word 'viduity' using his dictionary. Krapp, like Beckett, is also working with 'impotence, ignorance'. He

listens to words that he once spoke but which no longer have any signification for him, sounding very much like the Joycean echoes of Beckett's own early writings. He tries to reconstruct their meaning but to no avail. There was a time when he was the creator of the words that he hears, 'the hearings of what cause I know not'.⁷² But these words, like Krapp's life, have been archived. Like the narrator of 'Text for Nothing 5', he no longer 'want[s] it to be mine'.⁷³ This is underlined by his distaste in hearing his younger, more verbose voice recount, in almost unrecognizable language, the 'memorable night in March': 'unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire—'.⁷⁴ Hearing these accounts now, he 'curses' loudly, switches the tape off, and winds the tape forward, away from what once seemed important to him, to hear the moment he was looking for, the moment he had dismissively labelled as his 'farewell to love' in his ledger.

Beckett's inclusion in the programme of this particular line from *Texte um Nichts* seems to have been a very apt choice for the writer-translator. Perhaps he hoped that, even without making the biblical connection, audiences would have understood the implications of the line from his short prose text. In both the play and its operatic adaptation, the words on the tape are spoken (or sung) and heard simultaneously by a creator who, because of a temporal and linguistic distance, can no longer relate to the words emanating from the tape – words which once emanated from his own mouth. The literal self-reflection that is forced by translation has made this clear to Krapp – now, as Daniel Katz puts it, 'un homme de la traduction'.⁷⁵ Krapp's thirty-nine-year-old self, who has long been archived in a spool, chose an isolated life creating art rather than pursuing a 'chance of happiness'.⁷⁶ It seems that Time, made literal by Krapp's archive, not God, 'hath . . . made foolish the wisdom of the world'.

Conclusion

Beckett continued to reconsider ways of staging *Krapp's Last Tape* throughout the late

1950s and 1960s, contemplating new ways in which the form of the text could be developed. On 21 September 1959, five months after he had given Mihalovici permission to adapt the text into an opera, Beckett wrote to Alan Schneider that he was considering another adaptation of the play, a 'triptych':

Have an idea for 2 variants on the *Krapp* theme but can't do anything about it till I finish what I'm doing. One would be situation if instead of sacrificing the girl in the boat for the *opus . . . magnum* he had done the reverse. You see the idea, triptych, three doors closed instead of one, the one we have already no. 3.⁷⁷

Again we see Beckett proposing a darkening variant on the play: the first part of the play would present Krapp, 'Mrs Krapp', and a child; the second part would be Krapp and Mrs Krapp, childless; and the third part would be the version of the play we are most familiar with. Beckett's Krapp triptych was never realized, but these remarks suggest that Beckett could see no better life for Krapp; even if he were to marry and have children, he would have been just as unhappy with his 'silly girl' as he is with his 'silly "opus"'.⁷⁸ In Beckett's developing world of failure and ruins, it seems unlikely that Krapp could ever have been given a 'chance of happiness'. The operatic adaptation, finished two years after the publication of *Krapp's Last Tape*, is thus indicative of Beckett's developing aesthetic of failure – linked very closely to the failure of words against music – as well as his darkening vision for the protagonist of his play. Through constant experimentation, Beckett tries to find 'a form to accommodate the mess' of Krapp's life and failures.

Notes and References

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1. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 442.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

4. Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber, 2006), p. 215.

5. Daniel Katz, 'Les Archives de *Krapp*: enregistrement, traduction, langue', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, XVII (2006), p. 145–58: 'C'est la voix qui dit Krapp, la voix que Krapp dit, devenue objet, qui est

source de plaisir. Dans ses carnets de production, Beckett lui-même décrit le magnétophone comme "agent masturbateur" . . . Ceci nous amène à la voix et à la langue, non comme vecteurs de sens et moyens d'expression, mais comme fétiche, tout autant que l'appareil' (p. 148).

6. Dirk Van Hulle, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's 'Krapf's Last Tape'/'La Dernière bande'* (Antwerp: Antwerp University Press, 2015; Beckett Digital Manuscript Project [BDMP] 3), p. 124.

7. Pascale Sardin-Damestoy, *Samuel Beckett: Auto-traducteur, ou l'art de l'empêchement'* (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2002), p. 231: 'il ne restait plus grand-chose de mon mauvais texte' (my translation).

8. Catherine Laws has made the link between musicality and Beckett's aesthetic of failure in regard to Beckett's prose text *Worstward Ho*: 'language is broken down such that the construction is as self-referential as is possible in language, the form as dependent as possible upon the impulsion of the syllables, and the musical effect is therefore intimately bound up with Beckett's "aesthetics of failure"'; Catherine Laws, 'Music in Words and Music: Feldman's Response to Beckett's Play', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, XI (2001), p. 279–90 (p. 280).

9. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 218.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

11. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 1, 1929–1940*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 518–19.

12. Samuel Beckett, *La Dernière bande suivi de Cendres* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2014), p. 20.

13. Marie-Claude Hubert, 'La mise en scène des éléments', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, XX, No. 1 (2008), p. 155–64 (p. 163): 'un cosmos déréglé où le soleil ne se lève ni ne se couche, où, comme dans *L'Enfer* de Dante, dont on sait qu'il fut le livre de chevet de Beckett, plus rien ne pousse, où le feu consume tout' (my translation).

14. Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3, 1957–1965*, ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 127.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

16. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 446.

17. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 93.

18. Samuel Beckett, interview with Tom Driver (1961); reprinted in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 217–23 (p. 219).

19. *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 215.

20. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 496.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 467.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 312.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 342

26. *Ibid.*, p. 343.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 344.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 366–7.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 383–4.

32. Katharine Worth, 'Words for Music Perhaps', in *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. Mary Bryden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 16.

33. Laws, 'Music in Words and Music', p. 279.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Maurice Harmon notes that the 'French version was broadcast on 16 May 1961 by RTF/ORTF'. See Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider, *No Author Better Served:*

The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider, ed. Maurice Harmon (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 81.

36. *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 401.

37. 'Die Musik ist teils illustrative untermalend, teils ausführlich lärmend, aber jedenfalls schwächer als das Wortdrana für sich' (Wolfgang Schimming, 'Halb und Halbe', *Der Abend*, 17 September 1965); *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 687.

38. 'Mihalovicis Musik ist ganz geschickt, nicht ohne Phantasie, aber sie erschöpft sich sehr schnell und stagniert über weitere Strecken. Sie ist dem höchst originellen Einfall Becketts in keiner Weise adäquat' (Anita Laeseck, 'Der Traum des Lieu-Tung', *Das Berliner Wort*, 16 October 1965); *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 687.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 686.

41. Van Hulle, *BDMP 3*, p. 126.

42. *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 340.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

44. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 467.

45. S. E. Gontarski, 'The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Art', *Modern Fiction Studies*, XXIX, No. 1 (1983), p. 5–23: 'Childhood memories, adolescent unhappiness, fears of mortality, wasted opportunities, familial and cultural alienation, memories of suicidal sweethearts: these are the elements Beckett's art needs and needs to undo as he struggles to make universal art out of personal neurosis' (p. 23).

46. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 218.

47. UoR MS 1227-7-10-2, p. 16-7 [Mihalovici's numbering]; Van Hulle, *BDMP 3*, p. 126.

48. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 217.

49. Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose: 1929–1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 243.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

51. UoR MS 1227-7-10-2, 27 [Mihalovici's numbering]; Van Hulle, *BDMP 3*, p. 126.

52. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 218.

53. McNaughton describes 'pentimenti' as follows: 'Beckett's published writing refers to unpublished characters and biographical material; it references his own archive, knowingly, to stage problems of interpretation for readers who, initially at least, had no access to it. To use a visual analogy that Beckett himself employs in *Murphy*, Beckett could be said to make appear pentimenti for his own work. Pentimenti are those earlier drafts of oil paintings that appear in a finished work when the paint fades over time, the ghostly figures appearing behind formally completed ones, eerily reminding us that the artwork is haunted by historical production, other versions and drafts that the finished work partially conceals' (James McNaughton, *Samuel Beckett and the Politics of Aftermath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 19). Little writes that 'composition for Beckett was a delicate balancing act rather than a one-way process of reduction' (James Little, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's 'Not I'/'Pas moi', 'That Time'/'Cette fois', and 'Footfalls'/'Pas'* (Antwerp: Antwerp University Press, forthcoming); *BDMP 10*).

54. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 218.

55. *Ibid.*

56. UoR MS 1227-7-10-2, 32 [Mihalovici's numbering]; Van Hulle, *BDMP 3*, p. 126.

57. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 218.

58. Van Hulle, *BDMP 3*, p. 127.

59. *Ibid.*

60. In a 1956 interview with the *New York Times*, Beckett said of James Joyce: 'He's tending towards

omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance' (reprinted in Chris Power, 'Samuel Beckett, the maestro of failure,' *Guardian*, 7 July 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2016/jul/07/samuel-beckett-the-maestro-of-failure>>, accessed 13 February 2021).

61. *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 398.
62. Beckett, *Complete Short Prose*, p. 117.
63. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 223.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. Marilyn Gaddis Rose, 'The Lyrical Structure of Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, IV, No. 3 (Spring 1971), p. 223–30 (p. 228).
67. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 178.
68. See <<https://www.bible.com/fr/bible/93/1CO.1.19-25.LSG>>, accessed 12 February 2021.
69. Samuel Beckett, *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), p. 145.
70. Beckett, *Complete Short Prose*, p. 117.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 220.
75. Katz, 'Les Archives de Krapp', p. 154.
76. Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 223.
77. *Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 3*, p. 241.
78. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 4, 1966–1989*, ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 122.