

Words and Music

The role of the musical elements in Samuel Beckett's works

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The image on the title page is an extract from Beethoven's "Piano Trio", no. 5, second movement, bars 19-25, for violin.

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List of abbreviations

Works by Samuel Beckett

<i>C</i>	<i>Cascando</i>
<i>GT</i>	<i>Ghost Trio</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Molloy</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Malone Dies</i>
<i>NT</i>	<i>Nacht und Träume</i>
<i>U</i>	<i>The Unnamable</i>
<i>WM</i>	<i>Words and Music</i>

Other sources

<i>Portrait</i>	<i>James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>
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Introduction

To speak of the concepts of music and sound in the context of Samuel Beckett's oeuvre is to participate in a critical debate in which arguably every facet of the subject matter has been given thorough attention. This is perhaps not surprising: from the 1930's onwards, when Beckett referred to "the more musical Galileo Sr." in "Whoroscope" (7) in 1930 and to "serenade, nocturne, and albadá" in *Murphy* (47) in 1938, up to his death in 1989, he has provided his readers and his critics a vast body of works in which the many aspects of music and sound play an integral part. "In Beckett", Franz Michael Maier relates, "something musical can be found not just here and there, but always and everywhere" (cited in Huettenrauch 169). Miron Grindea notes that "Samuel Beckett's lifelong passion for music remains one of the most fascinating aspects of his creative work" (183). His collaborations with composers such as his cousin John Beckett and Marcel Mihalovici, have not gone unnoticed by critics such as Mary Bryden, who, arguing that "a book could – indeed should – be written on the significance of music in the work of Beckett" (Introduction 1), endeavoured to accomplish this very task in 1998. Adam Piette, in turn, explored thoroughly the sound- and rhyme patterns in Beckett's works – alongside those of Proust, Mallarmé and Joyce – and Maier, both in *Becketts Melodien* (2006) and in "The Idea of Melodic Connection in Samuel Beckett" (2008), is but one of many critics to assess the function of the melodic form in Beckett. The prolific history of Beckett criticism has thus generated an array of works discussing the role of music and sound in the author's oeuvre. This broad field of study has generated moments of conflict between certain critics. For example, the reliability of

Bryden's *Samuel Beckett and Music* (2001) as a source for literary studies, is contended by Eric Griffiths, who criticises the contributors to Bryden's book, most of whom have a background in music rather than literature: "that's composers for you – they can't stop hearing their own setting of words rather than the words themselves" (4). In turn, Griffiths gives up valuable space in his article in order to express his critique on Bryden, space that he could have used to work out his own views on the relationship between Beckett and music more thoroughly. The present thesis paper serves as a critical introduction to this particular field of Beckett studies. Rather than simply recapitulating the words of earlier critics, the present study seeks to place the plethora of – sometimes conflicting – views of these critics in a broader context, while taking as the starting point the of texts written by Beckett. The aim is to establish a clear understanding of the role of the auditory aspects of Beckett's prose, plays and poetry.

Most of the works discussed in this paper stem from Beckett's post-war period; this has not been a deliberate choice but may perhaps have been a logical development. It has been said that after World War II, Beckett forced himself "to develop literary techniques" that allowed him to create a language that reflected, "more powerfully than any other artist . . . on the immediate post-war period (Cloonan 1017). Along with this focus on "the moral and social desolation" that the war had brought about (ibid.), thus came the literary techniques by which Beckett shifted, especially "in his later, more experimental period", from "modernist Joycean monologue, to distinctively post-modern methods of procedure" (Butler 80). *Watt*, written while Beckett was "hiding out in Southern France from the Nazis because of his Resistance activities" (Cloonan 1015), though published eight years after the World War II armistice (1953), might be indicative of the gradual transition that occurs in Beckett's work, from the novelistic style of *Murphy* (1938) to the exhaustive, consciousness-based writing of the "Beckett Trilogy", *Molloy* (1955), *Malone Dies* (1956), and *The Unnamable* (1958),

which Beckett wrote while in Paris after the war.² The post-war era appears to be the era in which Beckett began to deviate from using “mere words” – which he “was less and less able to tolerate” as he grew older (Deleuze 21) – to adopt a style of writing that encompassed more than simply those means used in traditional prose writing. The famous statement that Beckett made in 1949 suggests the same: “[t]here is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, together with the obligation to express” (cited in Butler 79-80 and Cloonan 1014). Christopher Butler, on a final note, writes with regard to the French avant-garde author and film producer Alain Robbe-Grillet:

[any] reliance upon past habits of reading and writing . . . is once more to be renounced, in favour of free invention and that phenomenological investigation of the artist’s own processes . . . (14)

The same might have been written with reference to Beckett, to whom, after the war, the use of facets of art such as images, sound, music, silence, composition and choreography appear to become equally important to the use of language and words in his writing.

The key focus of this study will be on three facets of the auditory in Beckett’s work, namely the notion of sound, the role of music, and the role of musical composition in the texts. This division is partially based on an observation made by Beckett’s contemporary, the avant-garde composer John Cage, who argued that “[c]omposing’s one thing, performing’s another, listening’s a third” (cited in Bryden, *Silence* 21). Drawing on this division, Bryden makes this conception the starting point of her essay “Beckett and the Sound of Silence” (1998):

COMPOSER COMPOSES . . . PERFORMER PERFORMS . . . LISTENER LISTENS (21)

² Gontarski argues that Beckett’s oeuvre might include another trilogy, namely the sequence of 1980’s novels *Company* (1980), *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), and *Worstward Ho* (1983) (xi). In the present paper, however, any reference to “the Trilogy” concerns the three collected novels written in the 1950’s.

When Cage asks: “[w]hat can they have to do with one other?” (cited in Bryden, 21.), Bryden answers:

Within this cooperative field, the composer, his or her work completed, listens to listeners listening to a performer who is reconstituting the sound to which the composer first imaginatively listened. (21)

These three separate concepts may be united in Beckett’s work. His narrators have often been compared with musical composers – for example, Molloy in Harry White’s article on serial composition (1998), and Watt in Maier’s essay referred to above. His characters often appear as listeners who are often extremely susceptible to sound-induced compulsions, as will be shown in the present paper. The influence of musical composition and performance, on Beckett’s work, finally, has been discussed thoroughly by his critics, who have linked his work to a scope of musicians ranging from the Romantic composers Schubert and Debussy to the avant-garde composers Cage and Schoenberg.

The amalgamation of listener, performer and composer, and the resulting trinity of sound-music-composition that go with Beckett’s ubiquitous style of writing play an important role in the author’s comprehensive body of works. This role will be assessed in the present paper. In chapter one, the importance of sound in Beckett’s works is determined by assessing the use of rhyme- and sound-patterns in various texts, the role of sound and silence in the Trilogy, and the influence of sound on the structure of two of Beckett’s more abstract prose pieces. Chapter two is a dissertation of the role of performed music and song in Beckett’s texts. The perceptions of various critics on this topic are posited in order to establish a clear view on how certain composers, musical compositions and musicological practices influenced Beckett’s work, and this influence is traced in *Watt* (1953) and the radio plays *Words and Music* (1961) and *Cascando* (1963). The third chapter examines the degree to which the method of construction of a number of Beckett’s works appears to resemble the creation of

musical compositions. The three major aspects of music – sound, performed music and musical composition – affect Beckett’s prose, plays and poetry to such an extent that the author’s eclectic methods of artistic expression challenge and stretch the boundaries of fiction writing.

1.

In order to be able to go deeper into the role of music in Beckett's oeuvre, it must first be determined to what extent and on what level the primary building-blocks of music, i.e., sounds, influence his works. Rhyme patterns appear to concentrate around passages where the speakers remember crucial moments in their lives. In the Trilogy, the intricate use of sound appears to be analogous to the desire of the speakers to define who they are as individuals; moreover, the peculiar relationship between sound and silence seems to create a state of existence in which these characters have to speak. Certain specific sounds reverberate in the prose pieces *Ping* (1966) and *neither* (1976). The different roles that are attributed to sound in Beckett's prose works allow for these sounds to expand their influence to such an extent that they make the narrators as well as the reader reflect on their own presuppositions about the nature of sound, the character as an individual and the nature of writing.

1.1.

There appears to be a direct connection between rhyme and memory in Samuel Beckett's work. Adam Piette has written extensively on the notion of rhyme in Beckett's texts, which, Piette claims, are concerned with hearing "down at the micro-level of 'every mute micro-millisyllable'" (198). It is exactly at this level, the level of phonemes, that Piette traces the use

of rhyme in Beckett's English as well as French work. For example, he assesses *Fizzle 6*, "Old Earth", a short prose piece that "splits naturally into three parts" (Piette 211), as follows:

A tiny key-word covers all three [sections], the word 'gaze' . . . It is rhymed in all three sections: in the first with 'lies' and 'eyes' and 'refuse'; in the second with 'rise', 'guzzle guzzle', and 'days', in the third with 'skies', 'agonies', and 'skies' again . . . the 'z'-string around 'gaze' accentuates the delicate 'z'-endings of English plurals . . . a small whirr of zeds trembles through the whole fizzle. (ibid.)

Piette is right to recognise that Beckett's work maintains rhyme patterns, "the 'coloration and accentuation of single words and phrases'" (ibid., 200) throughout. A short list of passages from several of Beckett's works may illustrate how rhyme is used in the manner that Piette observes. *Murphy* uses alliteration – "That long hank of Apollonian asthenia,' groaned Neary, 'that schizoidal spasmophile'" (33) – and "bilingual" rhyme in the name "Celia", in which both English and French words may be traced: "*Celia, s'il y a, Celia, s'il y a . . .*" (72).

In *Molloy*, the eponymous speaker wonders:

But did I at least eat, from time to time? perforce, perforce, roots, berries, sometimes a little mulberry, a mushroom from time to time, trembling, knowing nothing about mushrooms. (79)

Various examples of assonance may be traced here such as the /u:/-sounds of "roots" – "mushroom" – "mushrooms", which may be part of a sequence of eye-rhymes around the letter "o": "from" – "perforce" – "roots" – "sometimes" – "mushroom" – "knowing" – "nothing". Moreover, whole words are repeated, thus giving strength to the sense of poetic language in this passage. Next, when the Unnamable makes reference to Malone, he says:

So after a long period of immaculate silence a feeble cry was heard, by me. I do not know if Malone heard it too, I was surprised, the word is not too strong. After so long a silence a little cry, stifled outright. (290)

Both /s/- and /ai/- rhymes may be observed here, in the sequence, “so” – “silence” – “surprised” – “strong” – “stifled” and the sequence, “silence” – “cry” – “by” – “I” – “surprised” – “stifled” – “outright”, respectively. Finally, rhyme may be traced in the plays as well, such as *Endgame*, where Hamm says: “[s]easonable weather, for once in a way . . . Well what ill wind blows you my way?” (117). Hamm uses /w/-rhyme, which may be joined with the rounded “o^w” in “once”. Piette observes that these instances of rhyme occur at crucial moments, when speakers attempt to remember certain specific details of their past:

Beckett uses rhymes to locate stress-points in the formality of the voices’ self-conceptions where those memories refuse to buckle beneath the weight of the reason-ridden imagination and its forgetfulness. (Piette 200)

In other words, rhyme patterns are centred on memories. This may be recognised in all of the examples given above: “Old Earth” is “a brief tale of a self . . . who dreams of death within the earth and yet remembers his pasts” (Piette 211). Molloy and the Unnamable both ponder upon old habits. Hamm is telling a story about a past Christmas Eve. The exception to the rule might be the passage from *Murphy*, where the alliteration mainly gives strength to Neary’s swearing. However, seeing as immediately afterwards, Neary evokes a memory of his – “Last time I saw him . . .” (33) – Piette’s argument still holds.

Piette’s work is primarily involved with rhyme patterns on a minute scale – that of the phonemes of which words consist. Sometimes, he extends his view to the repetition and transposition of words across phrases, such as in: “. . . *derrière mes yeux fermés, se fermer d’autres yeux*” (*Malone Meurt*, cited in Piette 206), or: “tattering and fluttered where in tatters already by sudden flurries as suddenly stilled . . .” (*Fizzles* 226-7). This scope may be further extended to include repetition and resonance across paragraphs, and even across different works. Sound-repetition on a cross-paragraph level includes Malone’s complaint, spread across *Malone Dies*: “What tedium” (181, 210), “Mortal tedium” (211). In *What Where*

(1983), whole passages are repeated and echoed multiple times throughout the play: “Not good. / I switch off . . . I start again.” (471) In *Play* (1963), examples of sound-repetition across the text are M’s hiccups and the numerous instances where the words of one speaker resound in the other two’s:

m: We were not long together when she smelled the rat . . .

w2: . . . I smell you off him, she screamed, he stinks of bitch . . .

w1: Then I began to smell off him again. Yes. (309-11)

On a cross-textual level, several repetitions may be distinguished. One example of this is the narrator’s journey through the mud in *How It Is* (1964) – “I say them as I hear them murmur them in the mud” (411) – which echoes Estragon’s complaint in *Waiting for Godot* (1953): “All my lousy life I’ve crawled around in the mud!” (57). Most of these cross-textual repetitions are based around sound. Beckett famously makes use of characters with names that resemble the basic sounds of drums. *Murphy* mentions “Bim”, “Bom”, “Bum” and “Tom”; three characters in *What Where* are called “Bim”, “Bam”, “Bom”; *How It Is* has “Bom”, “Bem”, and “Pim”, and “Bim” and “Bom” appear in *More Pricks than Kicks*. Next, the “clearly audible, rhythmic thread” of May’s feet in *Footfalls* (1975) is referred to in *neither* – “unheard footfalls only sound” (258) – as well as in the poem “Roundelay” (1976), where the only sounds heard are those of footsteps:

steps sole sound

long sole sound

until unbidden stay

then no sound (ll. 1-6)

May’s footfalls further echo in *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1982): “*Footfalls* anticipates the key ritual that five years later will possess the old woman of *Ill Seen Ill Said*: the ‘long pacing to and fro in the gloom’” (Graham 47). Piette, too, notices this:

Beckett's *Ill Seen Ill Said* narrator finds his style tuned into the dying woman's heartbeat. The sound-effects mime the reunification of past selves with the present self, changing memory into presence, uniting body, heart, and past experience, with the prose rhymes actually heard, like May's footfalls on the stage (250)

The macroscopic repetitions across Beckett's texts are comparable to the microscopic rhyme patterns within phrases and words, in that they invoke memories (although at issue might be exactly whose memory is invoked in these cross-textual references – the speaker's or the reader's?). As a result, fragments of past experiences as well as remnants of earlier texts are evoked through repetition on all levels.

In a sense, the use of rhyme and sound-repetition in Beckett's work is analogous to the need to create harmony (or dissonance) between words. Harmony is what makes a text sing, what makes it lyrical. Hodgart and Worthington argue that “[i]n a song, the words are always incomplete in themselves: they need the music to give them their full aesthetic meaning . . .” (3). They write this in reference the “Sirens” chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922); however, they could have said the same with regard to the passages in Beckett's work where memory plays a role. Piette writes:

Beckett's music, the ‘coloration and accentuation of single words and phrases’ . . . is a difficult music of memories struggling for tiny life within a formal system of echoes, traces of a remembering voice. (198)

Later on, he concludes:

The sound repetitions . . . are neither essentialist signs of ideal feeling, nor are they purely musical features signifying authorial structural control . . . They are short-term, ephemeral features in the prose that may be used to mime memory's brief and fleeting inhabiting of the present-tense narrative voice. (246)

Rhyme might become a literary device which the self-conscious narrators utilise in order to remember, similar to the way in which certain folk tunes or melodies may suddenly activate dormant memories of the past. Readers may recognise, in the Unnamable, Molloy, or Hamm, themselves being suddenly reminded of something after hearing a sound or smelling a certain scent. In the end, Beckett's characters appear to be undergoing a "tip-of-the-tongue" experience, i.e., the feeling of knowing everything about a certain word except for the word itself. Beckett puts this phenomenon into words in his last piece of writing: "what is the word" (*Poems* 115), a short poem in which every word is repeated and every sound is rhymed, in order to simply find out "what is the word". All that remains, however, is "a musical structure retaining only the recollection of aphasia" (Cohn 388). Perhaps, in Beckett, what remains when words die is music. Piette, on a final note, writes that

[t]he key-word accentuation of sound-repetitions, in miming the currents of memory in the human voice, does not prove that fiction reflects life; rather it demonstrates that fiction . . . attempts to remember it (252).

The colourations and harmonies, the sound- and rhyme patterns that are spread throughout Beckett's body of work are the relics of memory; in this light, many of Beckett's characters, from the Unnamable to Hamm, might cling so heavily to these relics in order to remember anything.

1.2.

"Pre-eminent among the sounds in Beckett's writing is that of the voice", Bryden writes (*Silence* 28). The Beckettian speaker is a character whose thoughts form the body of the texts in the Trilogy. The developments which these characters go through, as well as the actions

that they take, may be strongly influenced by sound. Unlike the earlier novels *Murphy* and *Watt*, which both resemble the traditional novel when their form is assessed, the three consecutive novels that Beckett wrote in the post-war period all feature these Beckettian speakers. *Molloy* follows Molloy and Jaques Moran, *Malone Dies* consists solely of the account of the dying Malone, and *The Unnamable* is carried completely by a character who might appear to be nothing *but* a speaker. As a result, a large portion of the text in all three novels takes the form of lengthy paragraphs that sometimes stretch several pages. The *Unnamable* is definitely the most aware of his situation: “I speak, speak, because I must” (*U* 300). The other characters, nonetheless, also reflect on their own use of language: “[w]hat I assert, deny, question, in the present, I still can”, says Moran, “[b]ut mostly I shall use the various tenses of the past. For mostly I do not know, it is perhaps no longer so, it is too soon to know, I simply do not know, perhaps shall never know” (*M* 100). “Projected to without, they refer to within”, argues Bryden (*Silence* 28). The obligation to speak is inherent to the monologue form that the three novels adopt, but Beckett takes this notion and turns it into a matter of obsessive compulsion, especially in *The Unnamable*. Rather than speaking in order to tell a story, the speaker speaks, he produces sound, because the novel calls for a monologue. “. . . I must not try to think, simply utter” (293). The *Unnamable* at one point replaces words with screams:

. . . my screams will stop, from time to time, I’ll stop screaming, to listen and hear if anyone is answering, to look and see if anyone is coming, then go, close my eyes and go, screaming, to scream elsewhere. (377)

Being able to produce sound is so important to the *Unnamable*, that it appears to influence him physically:

Yes, my mouth, but there it is, I won't open it, I have no mouth, and what about it, I'll grow one, a little hole at first, then wider and wider, deeper and deeper, the air will gush into me, and out a second later, howling. (377)

Later on, the screams and howls are replaced with other sounds:

I go along, improvised, as I groan along, I'll laugh, that's how it will end, in a chuckle, chuck chuck, ow, ha, pa, I'll practise, nyum, hoo, plop, psss, nothing but emotion, bing bang, that's blows, ugh, pooh, what else, oooh, aaah, that's love, enough, it's tiring . . . (401)

To a certain extent, the production of sound may become equally important to the construction of a coherent story, although the latter is definitely present in all three novels. The importance of sound is stressed when the characters show not only to be speakers, but to be adept listeners as well. Molloy, Moran, Malone and the Unnamable all appear to be extremely receptive of exterior sounds. Molloy:

. . . it was a night of listening, a night given to the faint soughing and sighing stirring at night in little pleasure gardens, the shy sabbath of leaves and petals and the air that eddies there as it does not in other places . . . (*M* 44)

Molloy's keen ear allows him not only to perceive the subtle sounds outside at night; in the same style observed by Piette, he manages to blend into this passage the /f/-sounds that the "leaves and petals and the air" are likely to have made as well. Next, Moran says:

I surrendered myself to the beauty of the scene . . . I listened attentively to the sounds, faint and clear, borne to me on the air. For an instance I fancied I heard the silence . . . (139)

During childhood, Malone was able to discern sounds with great accuracy:

in the dark, on stormy nights, I could tell from one another, in the outcry without, the leaves, the boughs, the groaning trunks, even the grasses and the house that sheltered

me. Each tree had its own cry, just as no two whispered alike, when the air was still . . . There was nothing, not even the sand on the paths, that did not utter its cry. The still nights too, still as the grave as the saying is, were nights of storm for me, clamorous with countless pantings. These I amused myself with identifying, as I lay there. (*MD* 200)

The Unnamable, finally, presumably has the worst hearing of all the listeners in the Trilogy, although he still seems to be duly receptive of certain aural input:

[If Malone] made a noise, as he goes, I would hear him all the time, on my right hand, behind my back, on my left hand, before seeing him again. But he makes none, for I am not deaf, of that I am convinced, that is to say half-convinced. (*U* 289)

The notion that the speakers of the Trilogy all stress that they have an almost overly sensitive hearing, is one way in which the importance of sound in the novels is emphasised.

There may be a striking correlation between the Trilogy and *Not I* (1972), concerning the treatment of sound. This play features Mouth – which appears to be nothing but a disembodied mouth – on a pitch-black stage. Mouth appears to be trapped in a state of existence in which it produces a relentless flux of utterances. In a sense, this play's set-up is reminiscent of Molly Bloom's stream-of-consciousness soliloquy in *Ulysses*, notwithstanding the difference between Molly's extensive run-on sentences, devoid of any punctuation, and Mouth's monologue, which consists of nothing but short phrases, or parts of phrases, or even parts of words, interrupted by an excessive amount of punctuation:

. . . but so dulled . . . feeling . . . feeling so dulled . . . she did not know . . . what position she was in . . . imagine! . . . what position she was in! . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . but the brain– . . . what? . . . kneeling? . . . yes . . . (*Not I* 377)

The pauses in between these phrases do not slow down the tempo of the speaker's discourse.

In stage productions, the actress uses them as minute breathing pauses. As opposed to the

many slow-paced plays such as *Footfalls*, *Eh Joe* and *Come and Go*, the speech pattern comes across as hushed and, in a sense, nervous. The stage directions at the beginning of the play read:

As house lights down MOUTH's voice unintelligible behind curtain. House lights out. Voice continues unintelligible behind curtain, 10 seconds. With rise of curtain ad-libbing from text as required leading when curtain fully up and attention sufficient into . . . (376)

after which the play sets off, maintaining throughout the style of discourse as shown above.

The stage directions at the end of the play read: "*Curtain fully down. House dark. Voice continues behind curtain, unintelligible, 10 seconds, ceases as house lights up*" (383). Both of these stage directions reinforce the notion that Mouth is in a perpetual state of having-to-speak. On several levels this situation might mirror the Unnamable's; when he reflects on his own condition, he relates that

. . . I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know, it's round that I must revolve, of that I must speak, with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me, or if there are others, to whom it might belong, they have never come near me, I won't delay just now to make this clear . . . So it is I who speak, all alone, since I can't do otherwise. (*U* 301)

Most aspects of this passage, from the use of run-on sentences, to the interrupted passages and the alleged obligation to continue talking, may be traced in *Not I*. The Unnamable expresses his uncertainty as to whether the voice with which he speaks is, in fact, his own – "it is not mine, I have none . . . but it can only be mine" (301). Mouth's perception of whose voice it is using and hearing is equally distorted:

. . . no idea what she's saying . . . imagine! . . . no idea what she's saying! . . . and can't stop . . . no stopping it . . . she who but a moment before . . . but a moment! . . . could

not make a sound . . . no sound of any kind . . . now can't stop . . . imagine! . . . can't stop the stream . . . and the whole brain begging . . . something begging in the brain . . . begging the mouth to stop . . . pause a moment [. . .] and no response . . . as if it hadn't heard . . . (*Not I* 380)

The similarities between *Not I* and the Trilogy come into view most predominantly when Mouth complains about its peculiar state of existence: “. . . what? . . . the buzzing? . . . yes . . . all the time the buzzing . . . dull roar . . . in the skull . . .” (381). In these words reverberate those which Malone utters a short while before he dies:

Do I hear anything at the present instant? Let me see, No, the answer is no. Neither the wind, nor the sea, nor the paper, nor the air I exhale with such labour. But this innumerable babble, like a multitude whispering? I don't understand. (*MD* 267)

Malone, too, is puzzled by the indescribable ringing in his head. Earlier, he already refers to the noise in his head, after recollecting how excellent his hearing used to be when he was younger:

. . . the noises of the world, so various in themselves and which I used to be so clever at distinguishing from one another, had been dinning at me for so long, always the same old noises, as gradually to have merged into a single noise, so that all I heard was one vast continuous buzzing. The volume of sound perceived remained no doubt the same, I had simply lost the faculty of decomposing it. (201)

In a similar sense, the Unnamable relates: “I suppose that I went silent, that I can go silent. And now this noise again” (*U* 302). Later:

The noise. How long did I remain a pure ear? Up to the moment when it could go on no longer . . . These millions of different sounds, always the same, recurring without pause, are all one requires to sprout a head, a bud to start with, finally huge, its function first to silence, then to extinguish . . . (347-8)

Moran appears to hear the buzzing as well, although he does not name with in such words (or he does not know how to): “[w]hat I heard, in my soul I suppose, where the acoustics are so bad . . .” (*M* 107). Bryden, discussing Winnie’s singing – a “*musical-box tune*” (*Happy Days* 168) – refers to “the Beckettian organism”, a being “whose inner ear is all too often a straining, buckling receiver for a stream of sound-scars” (Bryden, *Silence* 29). The passages from *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* cited above might suggest that the characters from those novels, as well as Mouth, are burdened with such “receivers”. Sound is omnipresent in the minds of these Beckettian organisms – “one listens . . . without reason, as one has always listened, because one day listening began, because it cannot stop” (*U* 363).

At this point, it may be worthwhile to assess how and when the buzzing manifests itself. The Unnamable, Molloy, and Moran, ironically, all seem to agree that they hear the buzzing when the environment is fully silent: “I’m inside, I’m in something, I’m shut up, the silence outside, side, outside, inside, there is nothing but here, and the silence outside, nothing but this voice and the silence all round” (*U* 403); “All was silent. I have an extremely sensitive ear . . . I could just hear that adorable murmur of tiny feet, of quivering feathers and feeble, smothered clucking that hen-houses make at night . . .” (*M* 122). One anecdote written by John Cage may be particularly significant in this context. “Try as we may to make a silence, we cannot”, he says (cited in Bryden, *Silence* 26). He writes about his experiences in an anechoic chamber . . . a room without echoes. I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood circulation. (ibid.)

Cage’s experience resounds in *Molloy*, when the novel’s eponymous speaker says that “[t]he least unusual noise is . . . more noticeable because of the silence of the night” (*M* 73). An alternative explanation for the buzzing may be that Malone, Mouth, Molloy, Moran and the

Unnamable all suffer from tinnitus symptoms, which explains the strain that the inescapable sounds put on them. Next, the buzzing may also be on of the driving forces behind the speakers' urge to produce sound simply for the sake of producing sound: "the words I uttered myself, and which must nearly always have gone with an effort of the intelligence, were often to me as the buzzing of an insect", says Molloy (45). In a sense, the silence outside, through which the buzzing inside is always audible, has become unbearable for these speakers. "When I stop, as just now, the noises begin again, strangely loud, those whose turn it is", says Malone (*MD* 200). The Unnamable says: ". . . nothing but fear . . . of sound then, if you like, we'll have that, one must have something, it's a pity, but there it is, fear of sound, fear of sounds". Sound, then, is manifested as a dominant power that both traps the speaker and forces him to speak. Gontarski describes the narrators of the three novels as "Beckett's omnidolent creatures", quoting the speaker of *First Love*, who says: "as long as I kept walking I didn't hear [the cries] because of the footsteps" (ix). In the context of Mouth's condition, and that of the narrators in the Trilogy, this might be translated into: "as long as I keep speaking I will not hear the buzzing". The result of this reaction to the inner tinnitus symptoms is not only that sound – the production and the suffering of it – shapes the narrative form of the novel, it may also have as a consequence that these characters are forced to reflect themselves on all levels, and as such establish who they are as individuals. The reader learns about the personalities of Molloy – "[t]he words engraved myself for ever on my memory" (*M* 45) – and Moran – "[i]f there is one thing gets on my nerves it is music" (100). Malone – and the reader with him – tries to make sense of the life that lies behind him: "I call myself an octogenarian, but I cannot prove it. Perhaps I am only a quinquagenarian" (*MD* 179). The Unnamable, finally, attempts to determine who he is, and if he really is anyone, and while doing so he shapes the words that in a sense make him into what he is: "[i]s there a single

word of mine in all I say? No, I have no voice, in this matter I have none . . . I'm like worm, without voice or reason, I'm Worm, no . . .” (340-1).

Silence, in turn, becomes a device that gives strength to sound, as it is the condition in which the buzzing is the loudest. Ultimately, to be fully silent, i.e., to cease speaking, is to die, which may become evident in *Malone Dies*. The final two pages set themselves apart from the rest of the text in that they show Malone's extensive paragraphs deteriorating into ever shortening sentences, until nothing remains:

never there he will never
never anything
there
any more (281)

The Unnamable also seems to suspect that in order to make the buzzing stop the only option is to stop existing. Using a certain elevated language, he narrates:

the spark is present, ready to burst into flame, all it needs is preaching on, to become a living torch screams included. Then they may go silent, without having to fear an embarrassing silence, when steps are heard on graves as the saying is, genuine hell.
(354)

The downside of this, according to the Unnamable, is that it is not possible to stop producing speech. Just like Mouth in *Not I*, there will always be people – if they are still people – like the Unnamable, who have to speak, and whose speech is perhaps part of the buzzing that others may hear in this perpetual state of existence:

. . . when it stops for a good few moments, a good few moments . . . what then, murmurs, then it must be murmurs, and listening, someone listening, no need of an ear, no need of a mouth, the voice listens, as when it speaks, listens to its silence, that makes a murmur, that makes a voice . . . (401-2)

Cage appears to share this impression with the Unnamable. “Until I die there will be sounds”, he writes. “And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music” (cited in Bryden, *Silence* 26). The *Trilogy*, on a final note, shows to what extent sound and silence are intermingled in Beckett’s work; the condition of the Beckettian listener, who becomes a speaker in order to block out the buzzing in their minds, may suggest that the influence of sound and silence on all aspects of his prose, plays and poetry should not be taken lightly.

1.3.

Sound might form the basis of the abstract prose pieces *Ping* and *neither*. The former is a one-paragraph text “about a lone still figure in a white box” (Cohn 298). In the short text, a “ping” is heard at least twenty times (*ibid.*, 299). Apart from these “pings”, the words “white” and “perhaps” are repeated frequently throughout the text: “White ceiling shining white one square yard never seen ping perhaps way out there one second ping silence” (194). *neither* is a short text, eleven lines long, each arguably representing a swinging movement, like Murphy’s “sitting naked in his rocking-chair” (*Murphy* 1): “TO AND FRO” (*neither* l. 1); “neared gently close . . . gently part” (ll. 3-4); “back and forth” (l. 5). Catherine Laws describes the text as “short and abstract, lacking concrete references, narrative, or drama, and evoking nothing more substantial than oscillatory motions” (2008, 230-1). In *Ping*, the same oscillating movement is noted by Ruby Cohn – “[p]hrases are musicalized by rhyme, assonance, and alliteration” (299) – and by Elizabeth Segré, who “has analyzed the parallel threads of polysemy, oscillatory rhythms . . . and phonetic patterning” (*ibid.*, 300). Several explanations for this oscillating movement may exist. David Pascoe argues that Beckett’s style “follows the

memory of a machine moving in its element . . . banally feeding back positively and negatively” (21). He describes Beckett’s writing as “a formally defined system where the range of possibilities for communication is circumscribed by binary-encoded signs . . .” (23). He traces this digital system in *Not I* – “. . . on and off . . .” (*Not I* 378, cited in Pascoe 22). This binary, on-and-off coding may easily be traced in *Ping* as well as *neither*. Cohn recognises the swaying between opposites in the French original, *Bing*: “the repetitions of ‘inachevé’ change to ‘achevé’” (300). In Beckett’s own English translation, these words return as “only just” and “over”, respectively, denoting a similar opposition. Other examples include: “black and white” (*Ping* 195) and “no meaning . . . a meaning . . . perhaps a meaning” (194-5). Similarly, in *neither*, the swaying movement is one between opposites such as: “inner . . . outershadow” (l. 1), “self . . . unself” (l. 2), etcetera. As opposed to what happens in binary code, however, both *Ping* and *neither* do make the reader aware of “a dislocated *betweenness*: ghostly movement back and forth” (Laws 2008, 231). Rather than merely switching between two opposites, the movements in *neither* and *Ping* travel in between the opposite points in a smooth pattern. In *Ping*, perhaps, the movement reaches an outermost point at each “ping”, reverts and travels to the next “ping”. Each time that “white” or “perhaps” is mentioned may denote a particular point in between the outermost. When this motion is repeated, an action mirrored by the repetitive rhythms in *Ping* – “Light heat” (193); “Light heat” (194); “Light heat” (195); “planes meeting . . . planes shining . . . planes no traces” (194-5) – the shape the movements make over time turns out to be a sinusoidal wave: the smooth shape of which sound exists. Indeed, the wavelength may lie at the heart of both *Ping* and *neither*. Already in 1938, Beckett refers to the notion of tone frequency when he has Murphy mention “the proper A of international concert pitch” (*Murphy* 45-6). *Ping*’s onomatopoeic title obviously mirrors this; it is sound throughout. When the vibrations stop, “at last halt for good / then no sound” (ll. 8-9); “ping silence ping over” (*Ping* 196). At issue

remains what both prose pieces actually say, for the sound-shape appears to determine primarily the form of both text. *neither* mentions the oscillation “from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself” (1. 2). A large part of *Ping* appears to be devoted to describing the human body, presumably that of the speaker: “Head haught eyes light blue almost white silence within” (*Ping* 193); “White feet toes joined like sewn heels together . . .” (194). Laws argues that the oscillation between opposites in *neither* is also an oscillation between remembering and forgetting. “Above all”, she writes, “this exploration of memory is an exploration of the self” (2008, 241). The reference to “footfalls” (*neither* 1. 7) might reinforce this perception; the eponymous play may also be regarded as a journey into the self, starting with May’s asking: “[w]hat age am I now?” (*Footfalls* 400), and ending with the Voice saying: “revolving it all . . . in your poor mind” (403). Laws: “Beckett’s breakdown of language and narrative effects the increasing musicality of his texts” (2008, 243). As Beckett’s texts deviate more and more from the traditional novel form, however, his speakers retain the need to reflect on themselves. Ruby Cohn:

[*Ping*] is recognizably a Beckett text in that the grammatical ellipsis mirrors the narrative ellipsis . . . the little body is barely human, the prose is barely comprehensible. Yet the foreign eye implores the text for continuity. (300)

In other words, the foreign onlooker – represented by the “eyes” mentioned in the beginning of the text – endeavours to find the human aspect of it all, however faint. When Catherine Laws assesses John Feldman’s adaption of Beckett’s *neither* into a libretto, her words could easily describe the original text:

his use of apparently contradictory compositional processes, both systematic and intuitive, becomes part of the process of mapping a tentative journey toward the possibility of individuation. (2008, 242)

The self-consciousness of the protagonists in the Trilogy might be traced in *neither* and *Ping*, even though the latter texts lack a narrator as clearly defined as the 1950's novels. Beckett's rhythmical prose pieces *neither* and *Ping* show how once again in Beckett's work, the notions of sound and self-exploration may interact with each other.

1.4.

Sound lies at the basis of all music, and it likewise takes up a strong position in Beckett's work. In many forms, sound oscillates through his writing. David Hayman refers to the author as "Beckett the craftsman, the musician using 'phonetic' means to liberate meaning and emotion" (185). Adam Piette goes to great lengths to stress the importance of sound- and rhyme patterns on this "phonetic" level and observes how they centre on crucial moments in Beckett's work; not only on such an atomic level, however, but on the broadest scope as well do Beckett's speak evoke memories and past emotions. The Trilogy, consisting of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, shows how Beckett's speakers are strongly influenced by the sounds and silence exterior and interior to them, and how this affects the narrative form of the novels. In the more abstract prose pieces *Ping* and *neither*, sound presents itself as the leading principle by which the texts are shaped. This influential role of sound may be traced in the broader field of creative arts, which all underwent certain radical changes in order to fill up the void left by the war, to make up for the feelings of "alienation, emptiness, and inevitable despair" that no doubt existed in the "postatomic" period (Perloff, Witt-Watt 116). With regard to music, Christopher Butler argues that ". . . for many composers in the 1950's, every element of musical structure, rhythm, dynamics, theme, or series, was open to radical reappraisal" (11). The relation between sound and music, which has been scrutinised equally

heavily in the latter part of the twentieth century, is one that easily fits in this list and most likely arises from the same period. Cage, in an interview with Miroslav Sebestik, explains his views on the nature of sound. He refers to the conventional idea

that for something to just be a sound is to be useless, whereas I love sounds just as they are. I have no need for them to be anything more than what they are. I don't want them to be psychological; I don't want a sound to pretend that it's a bucket, or that it's a president, or that it's in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound. (*Écoute*, 2004)

The importance of sound grew as postmodern composers tried to break out of the restraints of "tonal relations" (Butler 27) in music. In the 1970's, Jean-Paul Sartre expressed his concern about this shift "from sound to noise", as he called it:

Music is viewed today as *the art of noise*, *sound* being a noise like any other, which arises now and then but could be replaced by noises, whereas my generation thinks of music as *the art of sounds*, which is not the same. (cited in Bryden, *Silence* 24-5)

In other words, post-war perspectives on music had shifted from a traditional view, based on harmony and logical successions of notes, to a broader standpoint in which predictability and the relation between certain tones were no longer favoured over possibility. The implications that these developments had with regard to the music that was being composed, and the notion that Beckett was aware of this new sound-based perspective of musical composition will be discussed in chapter three of the present paper.

Next, the avant-garde movement in creative art has shown silence to have become as important to music as sound, a notion most famously worked out in Cage's *4'33"* (1952), a musical piece for any instrument, notorious for having the performer(s) stay silent for exactly four minutes and 33 seconds, the music being "simply the accidental noises in the room in which the piece is 'performed'" (Butler 68). "The sound experience which I prefer to all

others is the experience of silence”, explains Cage (*Écoute*). Readers may recognise the same interest in silence in Beckett. Bryden, after acknowledging the degree to which Beckett’s work is involved with sound, argues that “there is a peculiarly rich role allocated to silence in Beckett’s writing” as well (*Silence* 24). This has become apparent in the discussion of the Trilogy in the present paper; silence, or that which remains when the speaker stops talking, is also the sphere that allows for the speaker to be burdened by that “multitude of whispering” (*MD* 267). That moment in which the speaker may “hear them whispering, some perhaps whispering” (*U* 363) forces them to produce sound, for having to speak might being forced to stay silent. The Unnamable prefers “the innocent and necessary sound of dumb things constrained to endure” over “the terror-stricken babble of the condemned to silence” (348). “[T]o hell with silence”, the Unnamable cries out (319). To hell with people’s presuppositions about silence. “Silence . . . is part of a continuum of sound” in Beckett (Bryden, *Silence* 27). To hell with the traditional perception of sound; readers may now recognise “the notion of sound not only as continuum, but also as part of the texture of Beckettian music” (*ibid.*, 29). It has been one of the objectives of this chapter to establish sound as one of the determining factors in Beckett’s work. What may have become clear is that Beckett takes the concept of sound and subjects it to certain changes, so that the reader is left to reassess the role of sound in fiction writing. The following chapters may show how sound, and its counterpart silence, continue to influence, through music, every aspect of Beckett’s post-war work.

2.

*what, it may be enquired,
was the music of this threne,
what at least, it may be demanded,
did the soprano sing? (Watt 194)*

Beckett's name is perhaps not bound to music as famously as James Joyce, in whose writing, Hodgart and Worthington suggest, "Essential Life", i.e., that quality of living which makes existing worthwhile, is expressed "above all in song: opera, ballads, folk songs, 'nonsery reams,' music-hall songs, jazz songs, minstrel songs – music which lasts and music which is ephemeral" (22-3). In turn, Beckett, the man who has been referred to as the modern proponent of "one of the most terrifying . . . images of the human condition: that of Hell on earth" (Butler 82), seems one a first glance to be connected to slow-paced, monotone speech – "Bore them to death . . . Bore the pants off them", he allegedly instructed Billy Whitelaw during rehearsals for *Footfalls* (Bryden, *Silence* 45) – and images of monochrome, desolate landscapes:

HAMM: Is it night already then?

CLOV: [*Looking.*]

HAMM: Then what is it?

CLOV: [*Looking.*] Grey. [*Lowering the telescope, turning towards HAMM, louder.*]

Grey! [*Pause. Still louder.*] GRREY! . . . (*Endgame* 107)

Maier argues that “[o]ne would expect that the constitution of music in itself – harmony – was opposed to Beckett’s impulses of rebellion and sarcasm” (2008, 380). Indeed, the calculated, almost arithmetical approach to certain words, sounds, and songs might seem “computerized” (Porter Abbot, cited in Lees 7) rather than harmonious. Following such a “linear logic” (Lees 7), this calculated language might easily be recognised, for instance, in the typescript of *Quad* (1984):

1st series: 1, 13, 134, 1342, 342, 42

2nd series: 2, 21, 214, 2143, 143, 43

3rd series: 3, 32, 321, 3214, 214, 14

4th series: 4, 43, 432, 4321, 321, 21

Four possible solos all given.

Six possible duos all given (two twice). (451)

However, it might already have become evident that “in fact, Beckett’s works resound with music”, as Maier continues (2008, 380). “They abound with evocations of aural memories, sounds and their withdrawal, acoustic qualities, rhythms and melodies”, Bryden adds (Introduction 1). Even in *Quad*, with its highly patterned structure based around pure motion, music might resound, not only the percussion that supports the movements of the players, “say drum, gong, triangle, wood block” (452) but also in the play’s indistinct musical structure, which will be discussed in chapter three. The present chapter aims to examine the role of music in Beckett’s work; it focuses on those passages where the reader might come across any references to music, songs or melodies. First, various views of critics on Beckett’s relation to certain genres of music or specific musicians are compared to each other. Next, song and melody are shown to affect the narrative as well as the form of the novel *Watt*. In the radio plays *Cascando* and *Words and Music*, music is integrated as an active force that affects

the plays from within. In Beckett's works, music, songs and melody become active forces that are able to manipulate both his works in both form and content.

2.1.

Allusion is a vital aspect of Beckett's writing, often influencing the plot, narrative or colouration of his works, so that the reader forms certain associations. *Molloy* is full of allusions to Beckett's earlier novels – "Oh the stories I could tell you, if I were easy. What a rabble in my head, what a gallery of moribunds. Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and all the others" (132) – as is *The Unnamable*:

. . . then he says I, as if I were he, or in another . . . then he says Murphy, or Molloy, I forget, as if I were Malone, but their day is done . . . it's always he who speaks, Mercier never spoke, Moran never spoke, I never spoke . . . (396)

Beckett spends a considerable amount of text to refer to other works, his own as well as those of others. One field of the creative arts that he appears to be keen to allude to is that of music and song. Mary Bryden writes that ". . . there is to be found in Beckett's work a wealth of explicit allusion to the codes and conventions of the musical world" (Silence 28). As references to songs, tunes and compositions abound in Beckett's work, various specific songs or even whole genres of music are accomplishedly worked into his writing, in some cases affecting even the underlying structure of his works. This section is a comparative dissertation of some of the allusions to musical pieces found in these works, and cross-examines the perceptions of his critics in this frame of reference. The range of echoes of earlier musical compositions that fluctuate throughout Beckett's works might not allow for them to simply be

divided up, for instance, into specific musical periods; however, for the sake of this paper's treatment of the subject-matter, some classification might be possible.³

First, a broad scope of traditional music may be traced in Beckett's writing. Eric Griffiths, for instance, points out a certain traditional song that Beckett alludes to:

Strains of remembered song emerge repeatedly in his writing, as in 'Still' where 'western window' caught at the old, anonymous 'Western wind, when will thou blow / The small rain down can rain? / Christ if my love were in my arms / And I lay in my bed again'. (3)

Next, "Roundelay" calls to mind the medieval circle dance with the same name. The poem mirrors this dance in its circular structure:

on all that strand
at end of day
steps sole sound
long sole sound
until unbidden stay
then no sound
on all that strand
long no sound
until unbidden go
steps sole sound
long sole sound
on all that strand
at end of day (ll. 1-13)

³ The musical styles and experimentations of the postmodern period that Beckett alludes to are not discussed in this section; these are dealt with in detail in chapter three.

The footfalls, “steps sole sound / long sole sound”, may illustrate how this circular form is imitated in that they appear as exact opposites, two lines from the beginning and two lines before the end. From the middle, all phrases spread out above and below to form a vertically symmetrical structure that mimics the circular structure of the dance; the reader might almost “hear” the dance being performed. In *Molloy*, following, Jaques Moran says: “I would call her at the last moment and say, Martha, we’re leaving, for one day, two days, three days, a week, two weeks, God knows, goodbye” (*M* 99). His manner of speech in this passage calls to mind the sixteenth-century poems of Sir Philip Sidney and the songs of John Dowland’s. Sidney writes in Sonnet 47 of *Astrophel and Stella*:

Virtue, awake! Beauty but beauty is;

I may, I must, I can, I will, I do

Leave following that, which it is gain to miss. (ll. 9-11)

Dowland writes in “Come Again: Sweet Love Doth now Invite”:

Sweet love doth now invite,

Thy graces that refrain,

To do me due delight,

To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die,

With thee again in sweetest sympathy. (ll. 2-6)

All three passages above include a sequence of words, succeeding each other in a rising order of importance: “one day”, “two days”, etc; “I may”, “I must”, etc; “to touch”, “to kiss”, etc. In Dowland’s song, each step of the sequence, “[t]o see”, “to hear”, “to touch”, “to kiss”, and “to die” is connected with a sequence of rising notes, respectively: D – G, E – A, F# – B, G – C, A – D. The rhetorical figure that Beckett, Sidney and Dowland adopt here is the climax: “[g]enerally, the arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of increasing importance, often in parallel structure” (Burton 1). Like Dowland’s text, Sidney’s and

Beckett's texts may likewise be accompanied by a rising order or notes. Music, then, is able to turn these literary works into songs. Finally, the traditional Irish music that Beckett undoubtedly grew up with reverberates in his texts, for instance in *What Where*, which alludes to the work of the early nineteenth-century poet and musician Thomas Moore. "With comparisons of his style to that of Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Robert Southey, and Robert Burns," Moore was at one point regarded as "the supreme poet of his day" ("Moore, Thomas – Introduction" 164). As a student and later as a teacher at Trinity College, Beckett presumably passed Moore's statue on College Street daily. Knowlson says that "[Beckett] admitted that he expressly associated this play with Thomas Moore's poignant poem, 'Oft, in the Stilly Night' . . ." (685). The second chorus of the song begins with the lines:

When I remember all
The friends, so link'd together,
I've seen around me fall
Like leaves in wintry weather;
I feel like one,
Who treads alone (Moore ll. 13-17)

Knowlson argues that these lines form the basis of the overall structure of *What Where*:

The play begins with 'We are the last five. / In the present as were we still'. But it ends with the Voice of Bam alone again in the winter of life saying: 'I am alone. / In the present as were I still.' (686)

Music appears to lie at the basis even of the structure of a play as minimalistic as *What Where*.

Next, Beckett's interest in German Romantic music echoes throughout his body of works. Griffiths explains:

. . . the affinities are clear . . . between [Beckett's] world and the world of German Romantic song with its twilit distances, recollected love, sudden focus on a tree or flower, prayers of uncertain aim, and many sighs . . . (3)

Griffiths traces these sighs in *Ill Seen Ill Said*: “sigh upon sigh till all sighed quite away” (cited in Griffiths, *ibid.*). The sighing may be heard in *Stirrings Still* (1988): “Oh all to end” (265). In *Molloy*, Moran stops a number of times to focus on specific elements of the natural world:

I listened to the owls. They were not eagle-owls, it was a cry like the whistle of a locomotive. I listened to a nightingale. And to distant corncrakes. If I had heard of other birds that cry and sing at night, I should have listened to them too. (146)

The same may be recognised in *Watt*, where Watt, like a true Romantic, feels at harmony with nature surrounding him:

He feels it. The sensations, the premonitions of harmony are irrefragable, of imminent harmony, when all outside him will be he, the flowers the flowers that he is among him, the sky the sky that he is above him, the earth trodden the earth treading and all sound his echo. (200)

At times, these reflections on the natural world might come to resemble the paintings of an artist like Caspar David Friedrich. In Moran, *Molloy* depicts a man gazing at and contemplating the overwhelming landscape:

I had just caught sight of a shepherd I liked the look of. He was sitting on the ground stroking his dog. A flock of black shorn sheep strayed about them, unafraid. What a pastoral land, my God. (*M* 152)

Friedrich's paintings *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819-20) and *Man and Woman Observing the Moon* (c. 1833) have both been suggested to be the model for the image that Beckett creates in *Waiting for Godot*, a landscape showing Pozzo and Lucky waiting under

the tree. Peggy Phelan writes that Beckett saw both paintings in 1937; she cites him admitting that he had a “pleasant predilection for 2 tiny languid men in [Friedrich’s] landscapes, as in the little moonscape, that is the only kind of romantic still tolerable, the *bémolisé*” (1280). It is exactly this portrayal of the sublime natural world and contemplation on man’s position in it that the German Romantic composers (as well as Late Romantic composers like Claude Debussy) aimed to reflect in music, and it is these musicians that Beckett reflects on in his writing. His use of “*bémolisé*”, a French musical term denoting the lowering of pitch with half a step – a flat or “*Bemolle*” – is illustrative of his eclectic view of the relationship between different arts, painting, writing and composition. Griffiths gives an example of how Beckett uses specific works by these Romantic composers:

. . . in the harried and self-lacerating short text ‘Afar a Bird’, there appears as if from nowhere that title-phrase; it has been flown in from the end of Brahms’s ‘In Waldeinsamkeit’, another favourite of Beckett’s: ‘*Ferne ferne ferne / Sand ein Nachtigall*’ (3)

Grindea relates that “[t]he composer who spoke most to [Beckett] was Schubert, whom he considered a friend in suffering” (183). Bryden appears to argue the same: “. . . the song which has come to be a kind of emblem for all of Schubert’s *Lieder* – ‘An die Musik’ – should have been so evocative for Beckett” (Silence 28). The lyrics in the second chorus of “An die Musik” read:

*Oft hat ein Seufzer, deiner Harf’ entflossen,
Ein süßer, heiliger Akkord von dir
Den Himmel besserer Zeiten mir erschlossen,
Du holde Kunst, ich danke dir dafür!* (ll. 6-9)

The “*heiliger Akkord*” strung on the harp carries the speaker away to “*eine bessere Welt*” (l. 5); in Schubert’s point of view, music offers consolation in difficult times. In Beckett’s *What Where*, Schubert’s music takes up a less consoling role, however. Knowlson writes:

In the Schubert *Lieder*, the traveller in the opening poem, ‘Gute Nacht’ . . . has lost his love and journeys disconsolately on from May into snowy winter. In the spine-chilling ‘Des Wegweiser’ . . . the signpost points to ‘one road that I must follow / From which no one e’er returned’. The cycle of seasons provided Beckett with the formal structure of [*What Where*], moving from spring to the final ‘It is winter. / Without journey’, suggesting death but also alluding quite explicitly to Schubert’s title, *Winterreise*. (685)

The desolate world of *What Where* only offers death to the Voice of Bam, after his is left alone by Bim, Bem, Bom and the fifth character. The cycle of seasons in *Winterreise* and *What Where*, in turn, is imitated in the following, lengthy passage in *Watt*:

The crocuses and the larch turning green every year a week before the others and the pastures red with uneaten sheep’s placentas and the long summer days and the newmown hay and the wood-pigeon in the morning and the cuckoo in the afternoon and the corncrake in the evening and the wasps in the jam and the smell of the gorse and the look of the gorse and the apples falling and the children walking in the dead leaves and the larch turning brown a week before the others and the chestnuts falling and the howling winds and the sea breaking over the pier and the first fires and the hooves on the road and the consumptive postman whistling *The Roses Are Blooming in Picardy* and the standard oil-lamp and of course the snow . . . (205-6)

Spring starts with “[t]he crocuses . . . turning green”, moving into summer with “the wasps in the jam”, into autumn with “the apples falling and the children walking in the dead leaves”, ending in winter with “the first fires . . . and of course the snow”. Here too, the cycle of

seasons ends, in a sense, in death; the tune that the postman sings alludes to Frederic Weatherly's *Roses of Picardy* (1916), a ballad that was popular amongst the British soldiers stationed in France and which has thus become associated with the First World War (Tucker 825). Because of his experiences in the World War II, Beckett had come to relate war with "real devastation and misery . . . people in desperate need of food and clothing, yet clinging desperately to life" (Knowlson, cited in Perloff, *Hiding* 81). In *Waiting for Godot*, Perloff recognises some of the trauma's caused by warfare in the character Gogo. Perloff:

At the beginning of Act I, we read:

VLADIMIR: (hurt, coldly). May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?

ESTRAGON: In a ditch.

. . . in Act II, the . . . theme is treated to the following variation:

VLADIMIR: Gogo! . . . Where did you spend the night?

ESTRAGON: Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me! (ibid. 86-7)

Seeing as World War I was primarily a trench war, readers might recognise in Gogo's reaction that of a soldier, who, having perhaps hummed *Roses of Picardy* on his way to the Front, is now stationed in a ditch, fearing his life. Romantic music offers Beckett new ways to incorporate feelings of loss and desolation, as well as the sublime experience of nature into his writing. What appear to be opposites exist simultaneously in Beckett's works.

Finally, opera appears to have a role in Beckett's writing, which might seem peculiar when it is taken in consideration how much Beckett allegedly despised this art form. Beckett complains in *Proust* (1930) about what Bryden calls "the enforced materialization of music which opera effects" (33): ". . . by definition, opera is a hideous corruption of this most immaterial of all the arts" (Beckett, cited in Bryden, *Silence* 33-4). James Joyce, on the other

hand, was a great admirer of opera. Hodgart and Bauerle explain that Joyce had grown up with it. With regard to Joyce's father, they write:

Joyce's university friend C. P. Curran called the elder Joyce "a notable singer, with a wide knowledge of Italian opera," who could "hold the attention of any room all night if there was a piano at which he could sit, play, and sing. (4)

Bauerle writes that Hodgart and Worthington's earlier work, *Song in the Works of James Joyce* (1959), listed "some two hundred fifty allusions to opera in *Finnegans Wake*", to which she has been able add even more (vii). In Beckett's works, there may not be as many allusions to opera as there are to other musical genres. It may therefore seem striking that Beckett at one point agreed to have one of his prose pieces adapted into an opera. Laws relates how Morton Feldman was able to compose a "one-act opera for a single soprano and orchestra" upon Beckett's *neither* (1998, 58). Beckett cooperated with this endeavour, albeit reluctantly at first: "[a]t an initially rather awkward meeting", Laws writes, "the author embarrassedly explained that he liked neither opera nor his words being set to music, only to find that Feldman was in complete agreement with him" (ibid.). It might be argued that Beckett's anxiety for "the subordination of the Word to the alternative rhythms of music" or "the enforced materialization of music which opera effects" (Bryden, *Silence* 33) was calmed because of Feldman's outlook on this project. In an interview, Feldman explains:

. . . I hardly ever go to the opera. I just don't experience what exactly is meant theatrically by opera. If I had to talk about it, I wouldn't want to use a term like prosaic or clichéd, but it's something to some degree related. (Frost 50)

Laws writes that "Feldman neither sets the text so as to allow the words to be clear to the audience, nor gives the sense of commenting on the words" (1998, 58). Instead, he manages to transfer Beckett's text to a different medium, using the working tools that this medium offers in order to create something that does not undermine the original. "Rather than 'setting'

the text in any traditional sense”, Laws writes, “Feldman renders this single insubstantial idea in musical terms (2008, 231). James Joyce “followed opera assiduously”, and clearly “hoped that his readers would recognize particular bits of opera music and lore” in his texts (Hodgart and Bauerle 104-5). Beckett appears to have stayed away from it as far as possible.

Nonetheless, what Feldman’s *Neither* might show is that opera does play a role in Beckett’s work, although it must first be rid of its conventions.

If Beckett’s work is further compared to that of Joyce, readers may discover that the many allusions to music are part of a range of elements that the authors’ writings have in common. In Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the narrator refers to that very same song by Thomas Moore which Beckett alludes to in *What Where*:

The voice of his youngest brother from the farther side of the fireplace began to sing the air ‘Oft in the Stilly Night’. One by one the other took up the air until a full choir of voices was singing. They would sing so for hours, melody after melody . . . till the first dark night clouds came forth and night fell. (*Portrait* 142)

The most striking difference between the authors’ treatments of the song may be the effect that its incorporation into the story has on the condition of Joyce’s and Beckett’s characters. In Beckett’s play, the focus has been shown to lie on the gloomy lines, “I feel like one, / Who treads alone” (Moore ll. 19-20), driving the Voice of Bam into a state of isolation. The exact opposite happens in Joyce, where the family are joined in harmony by Moore’s song. In this sense, the family in *Portrait* is able to take from the song what the Voice of Bam cannot. The refrain of Moore’s song goes as follows:

Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere Slumber's chain hath bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me. (ll. 9-12)

The Voice of Bam only feels loss, ignoring the consolation offered, like in Schubert's "An die Musik", by Moore's implication that memories of lost moments might, in fact, give people the opportunity to appreciate the beauty in those memories – "in the stilly night . . . Sad Memory brings the light / of other days around me" (ibid.).

At question remains, however, why allusion is so important to Beckett, and why references to musical pieces in particular. One possible answer may be that the incorporation of music into written text best reflects Beckett's own musical background. Like Stephen's family in *Portrait*, Beckett loved singing songs and making music:

Occasionally, an unusual comic element would enhance the atmosphere. John Beckett, a cousin of Sam's . . . sat down at the piano after the final performance of *Endgame* at the Royal Court Theatre and improvised some hilarious variations of the *Marseillaise*, to the delight of Beckett, who responded by singing several bawdy Irish songs . . . (Grindea 184)

As did Joyce, who had grown up in a musical family – "For at least three generations . . . there were good and experienced singing voices in the Joyce home" (Hodgart and Bauerle, 5-6) – and whose interest in music grew, arguably, as his eyesight deteriorated. Stuart Gilbert connects Joyce's musicality partially to his growing up in Dublin:

One of the most remarkable features of Dublin life in the heyday of Mr. Bloom was the boundless enthusiasm of all classes of citizens for music . . . (cited in Hodgart and Worthington 4)

Perhaps, the Irish English language of the Dubliners Joyce and Beckett is inextricably bound to music and song; the allusions to song in both authors' writings may be a symptom of the desire to capture its lyrical qualities in print. Joyce points out the beauty of music and song, and Beckett, like a student who defies his master, takes Joyce's lyrical, allusion-strewn writing and perverts it, so that allusion to music and song becomes a literary device that

shapes poems such as “Roundelay” and plays such as *What Where*. The main function of the allusions to music remains, nonetheless, to evoke associations. Bryden writes:

By permeating his writing with his own sensitivity to sound and music, he is not seeking to add an extra dimension of ‘meaning’, but rather to enhance its ambiguity. (Silence 35).

Like Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, Beckett’s works too are given colour by their many references. Perhaps not those to Dante, Proust or Descartes, but particularly those to Moore and Schubert determine the musical quality of Beckett’s work.

2.2.

The manner in which certain melodies and songs are represented in *Watt* might coincide with the titular character’s odd relationship to music. The novel is perhaps best known for its many lengthy passages, in which the narrator exhausts all possibilities in a specific situation or context. The following passage is illustrative of Beckett’s “depotentialization”, as Deleuze puts it (16):

And the poor old lousy old earth, my earth and my father’s and my mother’s and my father’s father’s and my mother’s mother’s and my father’s mother’s and my mother’s father’s and my father’s mother’s father’s and my mother’s father’s mother’s and my father’s father’s father’s and my mother’s mother’s mother’s and other people’s fathers’ and mothers’ and fathers’ fathers’ and mothers’ mothers’ and fathers’ mothers’ and mothers’ fathers’ and fathers’ mothers’ fathers’ and mothers’ fathers’ mothers’ and fathers’ mothers’ mothers’ and mothers’ fathers’ fathers’ and fathers’

fathers' mothers' and mothers' mothers' fathers' and fathers' fathers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' mothers'. An excrement. (*Watt* 205)

In this “lousy old earth”, where all paths need to be walked before Watt may continue in any direction, everything appears to have a peculiar affinity with music. The poem cited at the beginning of this chapter, “*what . . . did the soprano sing?*” is not a poem at all, or at least it is not presented as such in *Watt*; in actuality, it is a footnote written in prose form, without any line breaks or italics. The addition made in this paper might reveal the underlying musicality of this sentence. From the repetition in form (the passage consists of two interrogative phrases, each starting with “what”, the second rhyming the first’s “it may be enquired”) to the oblique rhyme in “threne” – “sing”, the whole passage becomes poetical, and appears to sing. Music in *Watt* is represented in at various ways. First, numerous allusions to existing songs and compositions alternate with tunes that the characters make up themselves. Examples of these allusions include a Christian hymn sung by the narrator:

*Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh-igh,
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky-* (214)

Next, the narrator makes a reference to “*Songs by the Way*, by George Russell (A.E.)” (356), and Mr. de Baker makes up a song of his own:

*Said the column of cubes to the column of roots,
Oh what will you have to drink?
...
Why, thank you, sir, said the column of roots,
I'll have a bottle of ink.*

Hahahaha, haha, ha, hum, said Mr. de Baker. (326)

The Addenda at the end of *Watt* makes reference to a number of existing works, including Goethe's *Faust*: "*die Merde hat mich wieder*" (376). It mentions a "[d]escant heard by Watt on way to station (IV)" (379), which is presented in a manner resembling a piece of sheet music – a form which recurs more often in *Watt*:

Sop. darkly awhile the exile air
Alt. the — ex — ile — air —
Ten. ile — — — air — — —
Bas. ile — — — air — — — (ibid.)

The next step that the narrator takes is to include a genuine musical score to the Addenda, one that partially answers the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, "what did the soprano sing" (see fig. 1.). Next, the language that the narrator uses is often embellished with elements of song and melody. Marjorie Perloff points at the musicality of the following lines: "For when on Sam the sun shone bright, then in a vacuum panted Watt, and when Watt like a leaf was tossed, then stumbled Sam in deepest night" (*Watt* 151). She uses the same technique as the one used at the beginning of this chapter, to illustrate the poetic language of the passage:

For when on Sam the sun shone bright
then in a vacuum panted Watt,
and when Watt like a leaf was tossed,
then stumbled Sam in deepest night. (Perloff, *Witt-Watt* 138)

In Perloff's reading, the lyrical elements of the phrase are not presented as elements of musical composition, but as a code language similar to those used for communication during World War II. A passage written in "pseudoarchaic English" (ibid.) becomes an example of war-speak. This does not, however, negate the notion that the musical aspects are evident here, which Perloff too seems to acknowledge when she writes: "[n]ote that the last sentence

is phrased as a poem” (ibid., 137). The following passage likewise encompasses various musical aspects, such as rhyme, rhythm and restatement:

The Tuesday scowls, the Wednesday growls, the Thursday curses, the Friday howls, the Saturday snores, the Sunday yawns, the Monday morns, the Monday morns. The whacks, the moans, the cracks, the groans, the welts, the squeaks, the belts, the shrieks, the pricks, the prayers, the kicks, the tears, the skelps, and the yelps. (*Watt* 205)

The term “restatement” signifies the repetition of a certain theme, sometimes with variations. This musical term may be altered here to describe the constant repetition of two themes: that of the days of the week and that of the actions that are performed. The fast-paced manner in which these repetitions occur might resemble an up-tempo beat, which may be regarded as a symptom of the narrator compulsively writing down his train of thought (the passage is followed by the discussion of the “lousy old earth”, cited above).

In *Watt*, the singing of songs and melodies never appears to go smoothly. In the Christian hymn, for instance, the narrator cuts his song off and starts criticising his own singing: “haw! I began a little low perhaps”, seemingly blaming the draft for his inability to finish the song: “. . . and the door open on the wind or the rain or the sleet or the hail [etc]” (214). Another example of the difficulty that the narrator experiences with representing songs in a satisfying manner is: “[t]he song that Erskine sang, or rather intoned, was always the same. It was: / ?” (236). The question mark is set off from the body of the text, which might lead to the assumption either that the narrator has been unable to write the song down, or that the publisher of the novel has issued a misprint. Next, during one of his stream-of-consciousness-induced writing fits, the narrator suddenly bursts into song:

We shall be here all night,

Be here all night shall we,

*All night we shall be here,
Here all night we shall be.
One dark, one still, one beath,
Night here, here we, we night,
One fleeing, fleeing to rest,
One resting on the flight. (206)*

The song appears to have been instigated by the preceding phrase “. . . at this rate we shall be here all night”, and ends with the narrator guffawing loudly: “Haw! You heard that one? A beauty. Haw! Hell! Haw! So. Haw! Haw! Haw! My laugh, Mr.—? I beg your pardon” (ibid.). The first four lines of the song are nothing more than variations of one sentence, and this continues in “Night here, here we, we night”, where the singer only posits words and parts of phrases, dropping all semantic sense – although he does seem to create harmony between the separate words when their sounds are taken in regard. After coming to his senses, the narrator continues his train of thought, ignoring the song, leaving the impression that the latter is merely the result of a compulsive fit. It might become apparent that music becomes a force that emotionally strains the narrator of *Watt* as well as its titular character. Watt’s reaction to the piano-tuners in Mr. Knott’s music room is illustrative of this. Watt is unable to accept the Galls as “two men, come to tune a piano, and tuning it” (227). Instead, all he takes in is what he sees at face value.

. . . the scene in the music-room, with the two Galls, ceased very soon to signify for Watt a piano tuned, an obscure family and professional relation . . . and became a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and comment comment. (226)

Music, in this case the importance of having Knott's piano tuned, thus seems to play no role whatsoever in Watt's mind. In a sense, it appears that even the Unnamable has a better recollection of the incident than Watt:

. . . full of general knowledge we are this evening, we have even piano-tuners up our sleeve, they strike A and hear G, two minutes later, there's nothing to be seen in any case, this eye is an oversight. (*U* 366)

Heath Lees writes that that "Watt is exposed to musical stimuli which exert a diminishing influence upon him. Musically speaking . . . the novel might be described as a *diminuendo al niente* – a fading into nothing" (1). Lees suggest that the novel is "symptomatic" of Watt's inability to cope with music in any way (*ibid.*). This may be observed in Watt's reaction to the choir voices that he hears on pages 190-1, referred to above: ". . . sometimes Watt understood all, and sometimes he understood much, and sometimes he understood little, and sometimes he understood nothing, as now" (190-1). "The novel's treatment of the voices, of the experience of music and of the encounter with Nature", Lees argues,

all suggest that if Watt had accepted the invitations offered by music all might have been well – or at least for the best possible. But increasingly he ignores it . . .

Murphy's strained crescendo of failure in 'music, MUSIC, *MUSIC*' has now become a diminuendo of failure from *MUSIC* to an empty, fading clatter. (4)

In other words, Watt's inability to hear music renders music's harmonious or melodic qualities void. What remains for Watt is to examine the systematic, arithmetical language behind music; this, however, turns out to be impossible, as any such system is flawed. At one point, lying curled up in a ditch, Watt hears a choir of mixed voices "from afar". The narrator again transcribes the song as a piece of sheet music (see fig. 2.). The second verse of this song begins, like the first, with a sequence of numbers:

Fifty-one point one

four two eight five seven one

four two eight five second one

oh a bun a big fat bun (196)

The song's arithmetic is blended with the numerals used as lyrics. Both languages are calculated and based on a specific system: the rhythm, on the principle of modern music notation, and the lyrics, as Feldman points out, on the European calendar: ". . . the '52.285714 . . .' cited above refers to the weeks in a *leap-year* (366 days)" (19). This amalgam of mathematical elements, however, still does not provide Watt with a satisfactory system by which he might be able to enjoy music. Feldman relates that the first verse of the song is

preferred by Watt in his song to the second verse of '52.142857 . . .' . . . a *non-leap-year* (365 days). Yet both are infinitely recurring numbers, and both are a perfect

Beckettian example of this breakdown in systematic thought; for a year has exactly 52 weeks in it, does it (K)not(t)? (ibid.)

Note that the rhythm of the song, likewise, is slightly off. The score shows the rhythm for every syllable sung. For example, for "Fifty" as well as "greatgran", the score defines that both syllables of the word be sung as two quavers, and "two" is either a crotchet or a quaver followed by an eighth rest. Every time the word "seven" is sung, however, the score only gives the notation for the first syllable, a quaver. It is impossible to sing both syllables as one note, without having to use a contraction such as "se'en", recalling the archaic "e'er". Readers might mistakenly attribute this flaw to Beckett's alleged "amateur knowledge of music and musical matters in his writing" (Lees 1) – a conception which Lees laments – but Bryden acknowledges that Beckett, "as a gifted musician, also took a keen interest in more technical aspects of sound production and acoustics . . ." (Silence 37). Arguably, Beckett may have included the flaw to illustrate the trouble that both Watt and the narrator have with coping

with music. Watt's "next musical encounter" (Lees 3), the so-called "Frog Song", seems to work the other way. In the croaking of the three frogs, Watt again endeavours to find a coherent, logical system; however, because their croaking does not, in any way, fit into such a system, he projects one onto it by dividing the croaks up like notes in a musical score (see fig. 3). Lees relates that "[c]ommentators have experienced difficulty in assigning any really musical meaning to the song, Susan Senneff, for example, concluding that it is little more than 'a humorous interlude of noise'" (6). However, this claim does not hold when in Watt's representation of the Frog Song, the croaks appear to form chords, two dyads at the beginning and the end, and several dyads throughout. In the following passage, where Watt is hearing voices inside his head, something similar happens:

Now these voices . . . sometimes they sang and cried and stated, and sometimes they sang and cried and murmured, and sometimes they cried and stated and murmured, and sometimes they sang and cried and stated and murmured, all together, at the same time, as now, to mention only these four kinds of voices, for there were others. (190-1)

The phrase, "all together", may in this context be regarded as a chord performed by the voices. Lees further explores the extent to which a coherent system may be traced in the Frog Song. He argues that "[t]he lower two frogs sing at a distance of five and three, numbers whose addition gives the interval with the top frog – eight" (6). Figure 3 shows these distances as horizontal bars. The distance between each croak of the bottom frog is thus three steps, five steps for the middle frog and eight for the top frog. These numbers correspond with the intervals of third, fifth and eighth in musical theory – "the very basis of Western tonal concord" (ibid., 8) – in Western music, a third, for instance, spans three staff positions: three semitones in the minor third and four in the major third. This coincidence between the Frog Song and music does not negate, however, the notion that this musical system is imposed on what is only a recollection of the croaking frogs, which presumably never did sport such

coherence as is attributed to them by Watt. One critic who disagrees with the idea of concord between the frogs' croaks is Maier, who argues that "[i]n the trio . . . the idea of a prestabilized musical harmony is deconstructed by the dichotomy between the whole and the parts and by the isolation of the parts" (2008, 390). The Frog Song is illustrative of the way in which the notion of coherence and concord is questioned in Beckett's work, just like the choir of voices inside Watt's head might show how the Western musical system is flawed, if only on a minute level. "Not even music is the ideal, purely musical language, intelligible yet undistorted", writes Lees. "On the contrary, says Beckett, music itself is distorted and incomplete and, like language, forced to surrender its natural life on Western man's altar of systematic reason" (4). Lees further explains why the system is flawed: the tonal relations that lie at the basis of the Western twelve-tone system are not perfect, and need to be tinkered with in order to make the system work.

The intervals of 3rd, 5th and 8th, the very basis of Western tonal concord, will never cohere unless fixed in a pre-distorted musical system. Musical 'order' demands a continuous tinkering with natural sound to make the tonal system repeatable and therefore amenable to the form of series - the triumph of *ratio* over musical matter. (8)

Watt's inability to deal with this inconsistency may be the reason why he is constantly attempting to challenge and exhaust the rules, sometimes by contorting linguistic conventions: "*Ot bro, lap rulb, krad klub. Ot murd, wol fup, wol fup. Ot niks, sorg sam, sorg sam. Ot lems, lats lems, lats lems. Ot gnut, trat stews, trat stews*" (Watt 303). It may also be the reason why both the narrator and Knott, who are inextricably bound to Watt, attempt to break the system as well. The former does so by exhausting all possibilities with regard to trivial matters, like he does in his description of the Lynch family, which spans three pages (249-51). The latter does so, for instance, by carrying out certain *non-sequitur* acts, such as talking to birds in a flower garden and uttering sounds like: "PLOPF PLOPF *Plopf Plopf plopf plopf plopf plo pl*"

(288). Feldman argues that “Beckett shares the same ‘human dilemma’ plaguing his characters: how to *not* fail in expressing something outside of conditioned perception, or through a consistent metaphysical system” (19). “The piano is doomed, in my opinion”, says the younger Gall in Knott’s music room; “The piano-tuner also, said the elder. / The pianist also, said the younger” (*Watt* 225). Watt fails to cope with music, and so do the conventions of modern musical composition fail; nonetheless, in *Watt*’s portrayal of this failure, the novel becomes one of Beckett’s most musical works.

2.3.

Writing about the musicality of Beckett’s writing, Bryden suggests that this notion finds its clearest manifestation within the dynamics of theatre or live reading, such that many actors, when directed by Beckett, have reported feeling like musical instruments or channels of resonance (Introduction 1).

Billy Whitelaw, who has often been described as “Beckett’s muse” (Atkins par. 2), allegedly “put herself entirely at his disposal, allowing him, for example, to mold her body as if he were a sculptor” (ibid.), and she herself has expressed similar thoughts when talking about footfalls: “[a]s the play progressed, I began to feel more and more like a “thing” or the spirit, something that was vaporising as we went on” (cited in Bryden, Introduction 2). She compares her role as an actress to a puff of smoke, which

has a tone and a rhythm. Sometimes it whirls around, sometimes it almost disappears, only to start whirling again in a gush, before disappearing in a diminuendo of nothingness. (ibid.)

In two of Beckett's radio plays, this phenomenon works the other way around. Instead of having his characters turn more and more into enigmatic instruments, Beckett takes the ungraspable notion of music and incorporates it into his plays as a character. In *Words and Music* as well as *Cascando*, the character Music becomes an active force that is able to exert its influence various aspects of the play and dominate the other characters. Ruby Cohn writes about the plays:

When critics consider the radio plays at all, *Words and Music* and *Cascando* are usually paired. So they should be – each written for a musician friend, each featuring a threesome with Music as one member, each intended for radio, and each almost devoid of referential content (270).

In addition to this list, readers might further recognise several similarities between the players in both plays. Croak and Opener in *Words and Music* and *Cascando* respectively start off as dominators, the former as “an aged tyrant” (Bakewell, cited in Cohn 268), forcing the other characters to portray certain “themes” (ibid.), and the latter like a director, using the phrases “I open” and “I close” to drive the others' actions (C 297). “They have apparently no creative ability as musicians”, Worth argues, “yet are compelled to create through music as well as words” (10). As a result, the characters Words and Voice appear to be in full service of these dominators; they are limited in their capabilities as all they can do is utter phrases, and never become possible to use language naturally. When Croak shouts out: “Love!”, Words responds:

[*Orotund.*] Love is all the passions the most powerful passion and indeed no passion is more powerful than the passion of love. [*Clears throat.*] This is the mode in which the mind is most strongly affected and indeed in no mode is the mind more strongly affected than in this. [*Pause.*] (WM 288)

Even though the word “love” is mentioned four times in this passage, Words’s voice is completely devoid of any passion. Instead, his manner is colourless and calculated – in a sense, computerised. Voice similarly fails to speak fluently or vividly, so that his manner of speech resembles that of Mouth in *Not I*: “– come on . . . Woburn . . . arms spread . . . same old coat . . . face in the bilge . . . he clings on . . . island gone . . .” (C 302). Both characters named Music, on the other hand, are unable to speak, and only express themselves through music. In the typescript for *Words and Music*, this role is represented by stage directions such as: “*Loud rap of baton and as before fortissimo, all expression gone . . .*” (288). In *Cascando*, Music is represented as a dotted line, instructed only scarcely by stage directions such as: “[*Weakening*]” (300). In productions of the plays, actual music is used, as is the case in the earlier radio play *All that Fall*, which uses Schubert’s *String Quartet No. 14 in D minor*, “Death and the Maiden”. As opposed to *All that Fall*, however, in *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, the music has been composed specifically for the occasion, respectively by John Beckett and later, Morton Feldman, and by Marcel Mihalovici, and music now plays a more active role. The relationship between Words/Voice and Music is evident. With regard to *Words and Music*, Cohn writes: “[t]ension rises between them, as they separately respond to Croak’s command . . . Words is pedantic, whereas Music is overemotional” (268). *Words and Music*, as well as *Cascando*, seems to be “an exploration of their different capacities for generating significance either separately or when working together” (Laws, 2001, 279). By the end, it seems inevitable that the two join in unison, in order to complement each other. This is exactly what Opener in *Cascando* attempts to achieve:

OPENER: [*With VOICE and MUSIC.*] As though they had linked their arms.

VOICE: [*Together [with MUSIC].*] – sleep . . . no more stories . . . come on

MUSIC:

. . .

OPENER: [*With* VOICE *and* MUSIC.] Good. (303)

Cohn writes that “Opener marvels at their union . . . ‘From one word to another, it’s as though they drew together’” (273). Croak, on the other hand, suffers under the collaboration between Words and Music. Frustrated by Words’s inability to speak with passion, Croak order his two servants to work together: “Together. [*Pause. Thump.*] Together! [*Pause. Violent thump.*] Together, dogs!” (WM 289). By doing so, he sets in motion his own demise. “The only way Words and Music collaborate with each other”, Minako Okamuro writes, “is to *sing a song*” (218). Their forced alliance results in exactly this: Words, trying to sing, is given suggestions on how to proceed by Music:

WORDS: Then down a little way / Through the trash / To where . . . towards where . . .

MUSIC: *Discreet suggestion for above.*

WORDS: [*Trying to sing this.*] (WM 293)

From the moment that Words and Music start working together on their song, Croak begins to lose his influence as an aggressor. His objections, in the form of groans and shouts – “[*Anguished.*] No!” (ibid.) – are completely ignored. Okamuro writes that during “Words’s attempt to sing a song with the music suggested by Music, Croak lets his club fall and impatiently leaves them to their song (222). In other words, Croak gives up his position of authority. Clas Zilliacus’ reading of the play as having a “medieval atmosphere, with Croak as a chatelain, fitfully in command of his feudal servants” (Cohn 268), might be significant at this point. A memory, with at its basis an archaic myth, is what finally broken Croak and set in motion his fall from power. Okamuro relates Croak’s words at the beginning of the play – “I am late, forgive. [*Pause.*] The face. [*Pause.*] On the stairs. [*Pause.*]” (WM 287) – to William Butler Yeats’s *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), and his version of the Cailleac Bheara myth (Okamuro 221-3). Moorjani explains: “[i]n the Celtic myth, if the young hero responds to the advances of the old hag, she is transformed into a young woman

who helps him to accede to power” (cited in Okamura 223). The face that Croak sees on the stairs appears to be linked to this enthralling woman; this becomes clear when Words and Music sing their song:

Age is when to a man
Huddled o’er the ingle
Shivering for the hag
To put the pan in the bed
And bring the toddy
She comes in the ashes
Who loved could not be won
Or won not loved
Or some other trouble
Comes in the ashes
Like in that old light
The face in the ashes
That old starlight
On the earth again (*WM* 291)

This poem might incorporate the Cailleac Bheara myth into Croak’s past. In this reading, Croak appears to be the one who is “Shivering for the hag”, fearing “the face in the ashes”, which may be the same face that he saw on the stair prior to his entrance in the play. Words and Music’s song remembers Croak of how he had once come to power, and how easily this could be taken away from him. Worth’s question whether music “might . . . be combined with words to tap springs of imagination inaccessible to words alone” (9) might be answered by *Words and Music*’s “text-music tandem” (Cohn 273); without Music, Words could have never found it in him to create this song. In a Yeatsian fashion, the song becomes a magical spell

that undoes the one cast on Croak by the woman “[w]ho loved could not be won”. Words and Music force Croak to give up the status he had once magically attained. With Croak having stepped down from his politically superior position, however, Words and Music are not yet at rest. Croak’s former servants both try to take up the position of the dominating power, Words by imitating Croak’s imperative manner of speaking, and Music by opposing them:

MUSIC: *Brief rude retort.*

WORDS: Music. [*Imploring.*] Music! [*Pause.*]

MUSIC: *Rap of baton and statement with elements already used or wellhead alone.*

WORDS: Again. [*Pause. Imploring.*] Again!

MUSIC: *As before or only very slightly varied.*

WORDS: *Deep sigh. (WM 294)*

Words’s sigh might indicate that he, too, has given up on trying to control Music. Cohn appears to argue the same when she says:

Words implicitly rebels against his departed master; rather than the commanded ‘together’-ness, a sigh by Words may acknowledge emotion beyond the power of words. Perhaps Music is the new master. (270)

At question is what remains when Music takes over Croak’s authority. Laws points out that “[the readers] are left unsure as to quite what has been achieved as Croak shuffles off: what is the nature of the shocked pause with which this performance ends?” (2001, 289). *Cascando* may provide an answer to these questions. The gradual unison of Music and Voice reaches such a high point for Opener that it starts to overwhelm him. Finally, Opener is taken in by Music as well:

MUSIC:

OPENER: [*With* MUSIC.] God.

MUSIC:

[*Silence.*] (C 303)

Cohn refers to Enoch Brater, who reads this passage “as the play’s climax, in which Music establishes his superiority” (Cohn 273). The final part of the play portrays Opener listening to the unison of Voice and Music, and different from the situation in *Words and Music*, the atmosphere is undisturbed by any feelings of agony. Cohn argues that “[r]est . . . is attained because Opener approves the joint repetition of phrases without closure” (273). She thus attributes the final achievement of the play to Opener. However, it might be argued that Opener has already given up his directive role and is now being carried away by the duet between Voice and Music: “OPENER: [*With* VOICE *and* MUSIC, *fervently.*] Good!” (C 304). From this point of view, Opener’s role in the final lines of the play is of a different nature, and *Cascando*’s ending appears to consist, rather, of a duet purely between Voice and Music. The length of the final dotted line seems to indicate that Music continues a short while after Voice ceases talking, ending the play in “[*Silence.*]” (304). In a sense, *Cascando* is the conclusion to the interrupted story of *Words and Music*. The many aesthetic and structural similarities of the two plays might allow for a direct line to be drawn between them. “Music, Voice, and Opener”, Worth writes, “separately but mysteriously in collaboration, had composed a work of art that Music knew to be ‘finished’” (20). Instead of having its story cut short by Croak’s and Words’s withdrawal in *Words and Music*, Music has now evolved into an autonomous power that nonetheless works in unison with Voice and Opener. The now-dominant Music decides when the story is finished. To use Beckett’s words: “Music always wins” (cited in Worth 16).

2.4.

Daniel Albright writes that “Beckett being Beckett, was less interested in what a medium could do than in what it couldn’t do” (cited in Maude 846). The works that have been discussed in this chapter all illustrate how Beckett deals with the notion of music in his works. The many references to songs and melodies colour Beckett’s works, and intermingle his language with rhythm, sound and allusion. The story of Watt is indicative of what might happen when someone is unable to deal with the overwhelming qualities of certain types of music, turning musical fragments into a series of failures. In *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, the unsatisfactory attempt to unite music with words in the first play is repeated in the latter, only this time with success. In all these works, music is an active force that steadily increases its (sometimes destructive) influence on Beckett’s characters. Sartre explains why music in general is able to affect people to such an extent:

If so many people have seen fit to look for consolation in music, I think it’s because music speaks to them of their woes in the same voice they will use to speak of them when they are consoled, and because it makes them see things the way they will see them the day after tomorrow. (cited in Bryden, *Silence* 32)

The Opener in *Cascando* might be looking for this consolation, and attains it through experiencing the overwhelming force of Words and Music working together; for a moment, it appears, and this feeling brings him in an ambrosial state of mind; it brings him closer to “God” (C 303). Sartre himself referred to the soothing power of music in *La Nausée*, where a simple jazz melody makes Roquentin forget, if only for a moment, about the “nausea” he has been experiencing – in Beckettian terms, his experience of the buzzing:

What has just happened is that the Nausea has disappeared. When the voice was heard in the silence, I felt my body harden and the Nausea vanish . . . At the same time the

music was drawn out, dilated, swelled like a waterspout. It filled the room with its metallic transparency, crushing our miserable time against the wall. I am *in* the music.

(22)

Whereas for Watt, Opener, and Sartre's Roquentin, it helps them reach a state of tranquillity, to the ill-fated Watt and Croak music turns out to be unbearable. They are unable to cope with the strain it puts on them. Watt's solution to this problem is to desperately cling on to his system of logic; Croak's is to just give up and walk away. Reference to music in the works of Samuel Beckett becomes a vital element of the narrative and illustrates how various art forms are combined in his work, to create a ubiquitous form of artistic expression that sometimes strains, sometimes soothes, but always enriches, like an old tune that might evoke memories long forgotten.

3.

Whereas the preceding chapter focused on Beckett's use of performed music within the context of a narrative, such as allusions to certain musical pieces in his texts, or the relationship between Beckett's characters and certain aspects of music, this chapter assesses the role of musical composition, and traces its influence on the level of form and structure. Bryden argues that "[w]hether read aloud or silently, Beckett's careful words resemble elements of a musical score, coordinated by and for the ear, to sound and resound" (2). The present chapter examines to what extent Beckett's works may be regarded as musical compositions, where words, sounds, phrases, themes, as well as the actors in his plays, come to resemble notes, bars, motifs, and instruments, and where certain narrative procedures approximate various musical and compositional techniques. *Lessness* (1970) incorporates elements of aleatoric music, as *Molloy* does with serialism. In the later plays, Beckett appears to a certain extent to behave like a musician. The television plays *Nacht und Träume* and *Ghost Trio* are conceived within the context of two particular musical compositions. The degree to which musical composition forms an integral part of Beckett's creative process sheds new light on the conventions of narrative structuring in fiction writing.

3.1.

Elements of post-war experimental musical composition are incorporated in Beckett's writing. In order to illustrate the desire for new ways of musical composition that arose in the 1950's, Christopher Butler cites Descartes: "I do not wish to know whether there were any men before me", arguing that this slogan "finds a frequent echo in the postmodern period" (8). The rejection of the past and a renewed interest in the present, a notion which has been prefigured in by Beckett in *The Calmative* – "All I say cancels out; I'll have said nothing" (62) – finds its way in Schoenberg's twelve-note serialist technique and Cage's aleatoric music. The latter illustrates his intentions in an interview with Miroslav Sebestik:

I can't tell anybody how to listen or how to look; I certainly can't tell them what to remember, particularly when I don't want to remember anything myself. If I look at a *Coca-Cola* bottle, and then look at another *Coca-Cola* bottle, I want to forget the first *Coca-Cola* bottle, in order to see the second *Coca-Cola* bottle as being original – and it is original, because it is in a different position in space and time, and light is shining on it differently – so that no two *Coca-Cola* bottles are the same. (Écoute)

In postmodern musical composition, the impression arises that every note is equally important to all other. In other words, in a musical context, Schoenberg and Cage may be seen to reflect on Storr's impression that "[w]e delight in perceiving coherence where there was none before" (cited in Bryden, *Silence* 41), by which the latter means that instead of working in the context of existing presuppositions about the aesthetic quality of traditional successions of tones, the creative process now appear to be governed by mathematical principles that can be explained logically. As a result, Schoenberg's compositions adopt a strict system of rules, which ascertains that all twelve notes in the chromatic scale are used, without laying emphasis on any of these, thus "avoiding preference and . . . eliminating the chance for the

establishment of tonality” (Román 2). Like Cage’s *Coca-Cola* bottles, each note that sounds is regarded as a full-fledged entity anchored within the present, and further loses any temporal meaning. Bryden recognises “Beckett’s interest in dodecaphonic music [i.e., twelve-tone serialism]” in the author’s correspondence with Thomas MacGreevy, which “reveals a positive response to Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern [Schoenberg’s successors] as early as 1949” (Introduction 1). When the Unnamable says that “[t]he sounds I do not yet know have not yet made themselves heard” (*U* 290), the rejection of temporal relations between words might echo those between the notes in Schoenberg’s music; however, it is *Molloy* where the serialist technique is represented most strongly. Bryden is one of many critics who recognise “a potentially interesting parallel between the famous ‘sucking stones’ episode in *Molloy* and techniques of serialism and twelve-tone composition in music” (Silence 41). White recognises the same:

The painstaking description of different methods by which sixteen stones are or might be sucked in strict succession is so patently suggestive of serial technique that Beckett’s unawareness of the latter is hardly tenable. (162)

Having collected sixteen stones at the beach, Molloy goes to great lengths to ensure that his “sixteen stones will have been sucked once at least in impeccable succession, not one sucked twice, not one left unsucked” (*M* 67). Molloy describes his desire for a system, “. . . to suck the stones in the way I have described, not haphazard, but with method”, as “a bodily need” (68). Molloy makes several attempts to develop such a system, further approximating Schoenberg’s technique each time:

These other stones then I begin to suck, one after the other, and to transfer as I go along to the left pocket of my greycoat, being absolutely certain, as far as one can be in an affair of this kind, that I am not sucking the same stones as a moment before, but others. (67)

The satirical undertone of this passage transforms Schoenberg's creative process into a struggle that turns out to be futile, as Molloy at a certain point "tires of the permutational cycle and restricts his mineral hoard to one stone alone" (Bryden, *Silence* 41). Molloy explains that

. . . deep down it was all the same to me whether I sucked a different stone each time or always the same stone, until the end of time. For they all tasted exactly the same.

And if I had collected sixteen, it was . . . simply to have a little store, so as never to be without. (*M* 69)

As White argues, ". . . the deadpan distribution of sucking-stones in *Molloy* . . . its poker-faced parody of serial technique stands out with pedantic gusto from the surrounding text" (162). In the end, Schoenberg's compositional technique proves unsatisfactory for Beckett: "here it is, in all its hideousness" (*M* 66).

Instead of *Molloy*, then, the work in which postmodern musical composition is best represented might be the short prose text *Lessness*. This text takes Schoenberg's "paradigm of serialist technique" (Maier 2008, 166) and takes from it the notion that all parts are equal, while it drops the serial technique. Instead, it adopts Cage's variant of aleatoricism, a category of artworks that incorporate chance-elements into the process of creation. Simms explains that in Cage's variant, called indeterminacy in composition, any part of a musical composition is chosen by chance, and in performance, the order of the parts of a piece is not specified (347). In *Lessness*, Beckett adopts a similar technique. Brater and Brienza explain that the author uses 60 syntactical units: "each syntactical unit is firm, compact, elegiac, and haunting: and each is used exactly twice, 60 in the first part, the same 60 in the second part, 2 in no consistent pattern or recurring sequence. The 120 units are arranged in 24 paragraphs" (244). Each of the 60 sentences appears to have been selected randomly in both parts, presumably without preference. The phrase, "Little body little block heart beating ash grey only upright",

for instance, appears half-way part one and at the very end of part two, but their position is not determined on the basis of any relation to other segments of the text whatsoever. As a result, any semantic or harmonious relation between the separate parts exists solely in the mind of the reader. Maier argues that “musical form in Beckett *is* an end in itself” (2008, 376). *Lessness* may be considered demonstrative of the author’s attempt to achieve this. What remains, is pure form, reduced to its phenomenological core, where words-in-themselves behave like sounds, existing in the present while being void of any semantic meaning; aleatoric music and indeterminate writing become one. White hits an interesting mark when he points at “that fundamental consensus which exists between tonality in music and realism in literature in so far as one is related to the other” (163); in other words, he draws a comparison between the manner in which music might sound harmonious or natural to listeners on the one hand, and realism in fiction on the other. Beckett’s work, in this sense, appears to be profoundly involved with disrupting these harmonies; as such, it introduces a new way to regard the relation between words and music – an atonal representation of a more abstract reality.

3.2.

In Beckett’s later plays, the author treats his works to a certain degree like musical pieces. Bryden explains that “. . . Beckett’s sensitivity to voice, pitch, resonance, and duration often makes his manuscript drafts resemble musical scores” (Silence, 33). *Footfalls*, *Play*, *That Time* (1976), and *Quad* illustrate how Beckett waves musical composition into his work as a playwright.

First, an intense scrutiny of rhythm controls the pattern of *Footfalls*. The directions for the play read:

Pacing: starting with right foot (r), from right (R) to left (L),

with left foot (l) from L to R.

Turn: rightabout at L, leftabout at R.

Steps: clearly audible rhythmic thread.

Beckett's sensitivity for the sound of footsteps has been recognised in "Roundelay" as well as in *neither*. In *Footfalls*, this sensitivity reaches a high point. The pacing becomes so important that it interferes with May's manner of speaking:

. . . The floor here, now bare, once was— [M begins pacing. *Steps a little slower.*] But let us watch her move, in silence. [M paces. *Towards end of second length.*] Watch now feat she wheels. [M turns, paces. *Synchronous with steps third length.*] Seven, eight, nine, wheel. [M turns at L, paces one more length, halts facing front of R.] (401)

May's zealous dedication to the steady rhythm of her footfalls is further stressed when she says that ". . . the motion alone is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall" (ibid.). Like Stockhausen's musical piece *Mantra* (1970), every aspect of Beckett's theatrical composition is devoted to rhythm. In its devotion, the play resembles a shamanic percussion session, in which the entrancing quality of the slow, steady mantra of footfalls is central.

In *Play*, the careful arrangement of speech resembles the writing of a musical score. In general, the focus of the play constantly swaps between the three speakers, M, W1, and W2; one starts speaking the moment that the other stops. At certain points, however, Beckett has the characters start speaking at exactly the same time. Three out of six times he causes them to short-circuit, in a sense; this effect is accentuated by a blackout of the house lights:

w1: Mercy, mercy–
w2: [*Together.*] To say I am–
m: When first this change–

[*Spots off. Blackout. Five seconds. Spot on m.*] (312)

This might emphasise the discord between the speakers at this point, which may be explained as being a remnant of the intricate love triangle between M, W1, and W2 – “w2: . . . Some day you will tire of me and go out . . . for good . . . Give me up, as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking at someone else . . .” (ibid.). The other three times when the characters speak together, they appear to be in concord. This happens in the opening sequence, halfway through the play and at the end, where each time the speakers repeat the same passage:

w1: Yes, strange, etc.
w2: [*Together.*] Yes, perhaps, etc.
m: Yes, peace, etc. (317)

As opposed to the short, interrupted discords, these instances are lengthy and indicative of the stream-of-consciousness-based speech patterns that the speakers maintain throughout. In the notes accompanying the play’s typescript, the passage is described as a “CHORUS” and is written down in the same form as that of *Watt*’s Frog Song and the “descant” added in *Watt*’s Addenda. This signifies the similarities between Beckett’s *Play* and a piece of sheet music; in this context, the signal, “[*Repeat play.*]” (ibid.), shifts from a textual repeat sign to a musical, and of the following, “[*Closing repeat.*]” (ibid.), might be seen as a coda, a musical symbol designating the passage that brings a piece to a conclusion.

Like *Play*’s disembodied speakers, the three incorporeal voices in *That Time* switch from one to another in a continuous flux. The speakers in *Play* use words to create a sense of musical concord; the three voices in *That Time*, rather, use musical notes to emphasise their dissimilarities – each speak in a different musical tone in order to stress the the difference

between them. In a note accompanying the play's typescript, Beckett writes that "[m]oments of one and the same voice A B C relay one another without solution of continuity . . . Yet the switch from one to another must be clearly perceptible (387). In order to make the distinction between the voices as clear as possible, the author suggests that "it should be assisted mechanically (e.g. threefold pitch)" (ibid.). To an extent, the play emphasises the discord between the three voices; as a result, though, the constant changes in timbre come to resemble a simple melody, outstretched over the speakers' lengthy passages. The manipulation of voice pitch is introduced as a technical solution rather than an artistic device; however, the resulting music affects the reader's perception of the individual voices by stressing their affiliation.

Following her claim that many of Beckett's drafts resemble musical scores, Bryden argues that "[o]thers, like the manuscript and typescript of *Quad* . . . bear some similarity to orchestrated ballets" (Silence 33). Bryden seems to draw on Deleuze, who explains that in *Quad*,

the general similarities between the work of Beckett and modern ballet are numerous: the abandonment of all privileging of vertical stature; the agglutination of bodies as a means of keeping upright . . . the substitution of a "gestus" as a logic of postures and positions for all story or narrative . . . the appropriation by dance of walking and its accidents; the acquisition of gestural dissonances... It is not surprising that Beckett requests that the walkers of *Quad* have 'some ballet training'. It is needed not only for the walking but the hiatus, the punctuation, the dissonance. (13-4)

The notion that *Quad* resembles a ballet in its choreography seems to be clear; however, the play bears similarity to a musical composition as well. Deleuze acknowledges that *Quad* may be considered as a "musical work" (14), but does not go into this more deeply, save for saying that the play lacks any actual, accompanying music ". . . because there is no need for *Quad* to illustrate a music which, in developing differently its ghostly dimension, has a role elsewhere"

(ibid.). In other words, *Quad* needs no accompanying music because it is musical in itself. In this sense, the coming and going of dancers bears similarities to the addition and deletion of musical layers in digital composition, which many musicians began to use commercially from the late 70's onwards, owing to the growing popularity and better affordability of digital synthesizers. Each dancer becomes a colour-coded "layer" – "1 white, 2 yellow, 3 blue, 4 red" (*Quad* 452). The dancers' movements, which follow a strict pattern, might mirror the frequency waves of which the sounds in a layer are formed. In electronic music, each "layer" consists of a unique sequence of tones, which Beckett seems to allude to when he directs: "[e]ach player has its own distinct sound" (ibid.). Finally, each player is accompanied by his or her own type of percussion, "to sound when he enters, to keep when he paces, to cease when he exists" (ibid.); the dancer-percussionist tandem allows for further development of each (p)layer's own distinct sound, within the confinements of the play's steady, "slow tempo" (453). Within the framework of theatre and dance, Beckett creates a platform for the construction of digital music.

Harry White writes that "[Beckett's] later work, in short, invests language with the function of music", immediately thereafter claiming that Beckett endeavours to carry out this musical infusion on more levels than only that of language:

. . . posture, lighting, appearance, movement, time, space, and sound are so completely structured that music itself unobtrusively consorts with them in the realization of the text. No less than in Eliot or Broch, music in Beckett functions not primarily as a literal presence, but as a structural precedent. (165)

The plays *Footfalls*, *Play*, *That Time*, and *Quad* illustrate in what ways exactly might music act as such a "structural precedent". The present section focuses on only a small segment of Beckett's later plays, because this may be sufficient to illustrate the similarities between the author's work and that of a musical composer, but this argument might hold for other works

as well, such as *What Where*, with its repetition and variation of certain themes, or *Nacht und Träume* and *Ghost Trio*, which are discussed in detail below.

3.3.

In the television plays, *Nacht und Träume* and *Ghost Trio*, the echoes of the two musical pieces that the plays' names derive from emphasise the role which musical performance and composition play in the structuring Beckett's works. The former play is based on Schubert's eponymous *Lied* (1827). Apart from being its name-giver, Schubert's "Nacht und Träume" echoes in Beckett's play when the main character, A, softly hums the last seven bars of the *Lied*. One of the first observations to be made might be that everything in Beckett's play appears to be slow-paced. In the actions of A, as well as those of his dreamt self, B, hurriedness is unfavourable:

25. A dreams. Fade up on B as before . . .
26. Move in slowly to close up of B, losing A.
27. Dream as before . . . in close-up and slower motion.
28. Withdraw slowly to opening viewpoint, recovering A. (466)

As opposed to the long-drawn-out *Footfalls* or *Eh Joe* (1966), however, the resulting atmosphere is not eerie but tranquil. The lights that are used to light the "stage" are not always described as purely technical props, but appear to be considered, in a sense, as entities that touch the skin of and thus affect the characters A and B, the latter who, for instance, is "faintly lit by kinder light than A's" (NT 465). The serene image that is created by the slow movements in combination with the dim lighting mirrors what the vocalist sings in Schubert's *Lied*:

Heil'ge Nacht, du sinkest nieder;

Nieder wallen auch die Träume

Wie dein Mondlicht durch die Räume,

Durch der Menschen stille Brust. (ll. 1-4)

In Beckett's "Evening night" (NT 465) resounds "*dein Mondlicht durch die Räume*", and the calm movements of the play correspond with the verbs, "*sinkest*", "*wallen*", "to sink" and "to drift" respectively, as well as the silence of "*der Menschen stille Brust*". Maier explains the reason for this serenity by contrasting the situation of A to that of Watt:

Watt, hit on his head by a stone, hears a discouraging mourning song which, at best, might be construed as a response to physical trauma . . . he is punished without knowing why. In contrast, the protagonist of *Nacht und Träume* is caressed by a hand. Whether he sings or imagines the song, the response is a consoling one. It is evident that the humming and the singing of the melody have prompted this comforting response. The dreamer is given more than the "Sweet dreams" he sought. He receives a blessing. (2008, 397)

The play's themes of consolidation and harmony may be further traced in A's humming of Schubert's *Lied*. Maier writes:

In the hummed and sung melodic line, all the characteristics Schopenhauer attributes to melody in general can be found in the particulars of its beautiful individual form: this melody is a paradigm of *Zusammenhang* (connection), it is an image of *Besonnenheit* (deliberation), and it conveys a distinct *Gefühl* (feeling). (ibid., 399)

The qualities that Maier attributes to the *Lied* are mirrored by the actions in the play: "16. Together hands sink to table and on them B's head" (NT 466). The notions of "connection", "deliberation", and "feeling" are joined in unison when B touches the disembodied hands, L and R, with his own, and is consoled. Cohn similarly recognising the soothing effect of the

harmonious elements of the play, but relates that in her own “dry summary”, the movements in *Nacht und Träume* turn out to be “not only comforting but rhythmic” (375). The movements of the hands in the play are always instructed to move “gently”: “10. R reappears with a cloth, wipes gently B’s brow, disappears with cloth” (NT 465); “L reappears and rests gently on B’s head” (466). In these stage directions, the word “gently” may be regarded as a denominator of tempo, thus indicating that each “gentle” movement be carried out at a certain pace. The indication, “gently”, moreover, appears to mirror to an extent the tempo marker of Schubert’s *Lied*, “*Sehr langsam*” (1), in conjunction with its dynamic marker, *pianissimo* (ibid.).

Ghost Trio takes over similar traits from the musical composition that it is based on. The play’s name is a derivative of Beethoven’s fifth “Piano Trio” (1809), also known by its unofficial title, “The Ghost”. This title, Cohn argues, “calls attention to [Beckett’s] own instruments – Beethoven’s *Largo*, a woman’s voice, and a camera eye. ‘Trio’ may also embrace the play’s three characters, its three movements, or its three camera positions” (338). The play’s three movements in turn bring up the three movements of the “Piano Trio”, although, as Cohn writes, Beckett only uses sound fragments of Beethoven’s second movement, *Largo*. This is perhaps not surprising as the characteristics of the movement to an extent mirror those of most of Beckett’s later plays. The marker, “*Largo assai ed espressivo*” (9) translates as “very broadly (i.e. slowly) and expressively”, and the dynamic marker, “*Piano, sotto voce*” (ibid.) indicates that the musicians intentionally lower their instrumental volume, giving the piece a hushed character. The atmosphere of Beethoven’s *Largo* has often been described as “eerie” (Goldberg Longstreth), and may be the reason why the piece is called “The Ghost”. To Beckett, Knowlson argues, “‘The Ghost’ retained . . . something of Macbeth’s doomladen atmosphere and involvement in the spirit world” (cited in Maier 2001, 272). As such a “doomladen atmosphere” might be recognised in most of Beckett’s plays

from *Endgame* onwards, the dynamic markers of Beethoven's *Largo* could arguably have been included in his plays as well, for instance as part of the stage directions for the actresses in *Eh Joe*, *Come and Go*, or *Footfalls*. They echo in V's introduction in *Ghost Trio*: "Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly . . ." (408). Sound, on a side note, remains closely linked to musical composition, as the play uses the terms "crescendo" and "decrescendo" to denote any changes in volume: "Crescendo creak of door opening" (412); "Decrescendo creak of door slowly closing" (ibid.). At certain moments in the play, Beckett repeats certain actions. For instance, in the second movement, actions 26-30 are a repetition of actions 31-35 of the first movement. In the third movement, certain actions from the second are repeated, but slightly modified: "26. Action II.21 seen from C. Near shot from C of F and mirror. 5 seconds" (GT 413). In *Nacht und Träume*, the same technique is used: "27. Dream as before (7-16) in close up and slower motion" (266). In the context of musical composition, this may be considered as a textual (or, in performance, televised) variant of either the repetition of a motif, or the modulation of a musical theme, the latter often indicating a repetition of a musical pattern in a different key. In *Ghost Trio*, the actions of F, viewed from a different camera angle and in a slightly different context, might bring about a change in timbre similar to that brought about by modulation. In *Ghost Trio*, Beckett involves Beethoven in his repetitions in III.29, which mimics the action of II.25. Immediately after both of these instances, the "beginning [of] bar 64" of Beethoven's "Piano Trio" sounds. In Beethoven's work, this bar and the following are already repetitions of earlier musical passages: "[o]ne hears bars 64 to 80, the recapitulation of bars 19-35 heard during the previous zoom" (Maier 2001, 270). In this instance, the play does not only mimic musical composition, but it involves actual music in the process. Maier further explores the manner in which music interferes with the text on a structural basis: "Beethoven's ['The Ghost'] divides into two parts and a coda that is intended as the final climax. Beckett endeavoured to make

this intensifying structure effective in his play” (2001, 276). The transition from movement two to three is marked by V’s words:

36. v: Stop.

37. *Music stops. General view from A. 5 seconds.*

38. v: Repeat. (411)

The third movement follows Maier’s structure exactly; after the final repetition, the play jumps forward to the coda, comparable to what happens in *Play*. The climax of the play corresponds with the climax of Beethoven’s *Largo*, which is audible at this point:

36. *Music audible at A. It grows. 10 seconds.*

37. *With growing music move in slowly to close-up of head bowed right down over cassette now held in arms and invisible. Hold till end of Largo. (414)*

Following the climax in the third movement, action II.37 is repeated: “*General view from A. 5 seconds*”, in III.40 (ibid.). However, in the alternative ending introduced by the coda, this time over, F’s face is visible, whereas at the end of the first two movements it remains hidden. Again, music comes into play at crucial moments in the process of character development. In *Nacht und Träume*, Schubert’s *Lied* sets in motion the dreaming sequences, in which B, the imaginary manifestation of A, perform the actions that define the otherwise enigmatic protagonist. In *Ghost Trio*, the climax of Beethoven’s composition finally enables the camera to look into the eyes of F (and into his Self, his “I”), the significance of which Beckett alludes to in 1965, with the making of *Film*. It is in its structure, however, that *Ghost Trio* resembles most the musical piece that it is based on.

3.4.

The postmodern musical techniques adopted in *Lessness* and *Molloy*, the rhythm in *Footfalls*, the incorporation of chords and discord in *Play* and *That Time*, and the reproduction of digital musical layers in *Quad* all illustrate how the construction of text-based art may be accomplished with techniques of music composition. The integration of Schubert's and Beethoven's musical compositions into Beckett's teleplays sheds light on the latter's interest in the shaping power of music. Maier argues that in the latter two plays, "music makes its appearance as an independent entity that exerts its connecting, vision-enabling power" (2008, 380-1). Beckett's late plays, ranging from *Lessness* and *Play* to *Nacht und Träume*, emphasise the importance of music in Beckett's work, and establish it as a determining factor in Beckett's works – not only on a semantic level, but on a structural level as well. Beckett's work puts the consensus of story structure in fiction writing to the test; in doing so, it marks a transition within the artistic environment from traditional forms of artistic expression to one that is no longer bound to the confinements of any artistic discipline.

Conclusion

It has been the intention to examine in this paper in what ways and to what purpose Samuel Beckett incorporates musical elements into his prose, plays and poetry, and to cross-examine the views of several critics on the subject matter. It may have become clear that several musical notions find their way into Beckett's work. His post-war writings exhibit a certain sensitivity to sound, rhyme, and silence, which may correlate to the new modes of artistic expression that arose in the years following the World War II armistice. Music appears to be a strong, controlling force within the narrative of his works – Watt and Croak in particular are evidently strained by this ephemeral presence. On the level of structure, musical composition affects the manner in which Beckett's works are built up. Samuel Beckett's oeuvre is inextricably bound to music and presents the latter as an influential force that sometimes disrupts his texts, but even in doing so exerts a particular sense of harmony. It makes the works sing, beat, vibrate, yet they maintain a sense of tranquillity. The musical modes of his texts allow Beckett's characters to be critical, self-aware, scornful and austere at the same time. Salman Rushdie described his experience of reading Beckett as a headache. First perceiving only silence, he writes,

the pounding begins, but also an awareness of beauty, of a thing said that is said with difficulty because it is not an easy thing to say, and the saying of a difficult thing is not without importance, we are too much in love, more than half in love, in our pampered days, with ease. (xi)

Rushdie's experience might be the ideal example of the manner in which Beckett's mixture of textual and aural impulses may affect his readers.

Beckett shows his characters getting on in an absurd, reason-ridden world. Unlike Beckett's contemporary Sartre, however, this absurd world does not lead Beckett to suggest that all actions are meaningless. His narrators and characters, rather, might resemble Camus's "héros absurde[s]" (164), in that they try to make most of their absurd lives as possible. Beckett's texts and plays show characters, objects and situations simply *as they are*, saying, "I'll go on" (*U* 407); he simply portrays them like the onlooker E does the figures in *Film*. The bleak, bland, diseased environments are the places where Beckett's characters, caught in a sensory condition bordering on synaesthesia, have a look into specific regions of the self. This is where every sound, breath, footfall or melody counts.

"Attunement" (*Murphy* 4) is one way to tune in to this mode of observation, a mode in which that what is shown is true, where there are "no symbols where non intended" (*Watt* 379), and where everything present in the text and shown on stage exists to raise awareness, of the nature of the nature of art works, their method of composition and the medium through which they appear. Murphy's use of the term "attunement" has been noted by Bryden (Introduction 1) as well as Lees (5), who both recognise its significance as an influential factor in the relationship between Beckett's work and music. This might become all the more evident when it is taken into consideration that nearly every auditory and musical element in Beckett's work – ranging from the swaying movements of Murphy's rocking chair, *neither's* positing of opposites and *Ping's* waveforms, to Mr. de Baker's drunken folk songs and the soprano's song in *Watt*, the rhythm of May's footfalls, the buzzing in the Trilogy and in *Not I*, the music in *All That Fall*, *Nacht und Träume* and *Ghost Trio*, and the tendency of certain characters to tediously "form exhaustive series of things" (Deleuze 12) – is there with one intention: to have his readers tune into a state of mind, in which they are able to handle his

ubiquitous style of artistic expression, to become conscious of the manipulative nature of art, and to fully take in the sounds, shapes and meanings of the words that he writes, and those that his “instruments” utter in performance.

List of Figures



Fig. 1. “Threne heard by Watt in ditch on way from station”. From *Watt*, p. 379.

SOP.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
ALT.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
TEN.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
BAS.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩
	Fifty	two	point	two eight	five seven	one four	
	Fifty	two	two	two fifty	two	point	
	Fiffee	fiffee	fiffee	two tootee	tootee tootee	tootee	
	Hem!	fi	-----	-----	-----	-----	f
SOP.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
ALT.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
TEN.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
BAS.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩
	two	eight	five seven	one four	two greatgran		
	two	eight	five seven	one four	two eight		
	two	tootee	tootee tootee	pointee	two eight		
	Christ!	fi	-----	-----	-----	-----	f phew! ty
SOP.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
ALT.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
TEN.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
BAS.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
	ma	Ma	grew how	do	you		
	five seven	one four	two gran	ma	Ma		
	five seven	one four	two eight	five seven	one four		
	two	point	two eight	five seven	one four		
SOP.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
ALT.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
TEN.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
BAS.	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪	♩ ♪ ♪
	do	blooming	thanks	and	you	drooping	
	grew	how	do you	do you	do	blooming	
	two	ma	ma	Ma	grew	how	
	two	eight	five seven	one four	two	Miss oh	

Fig. 2. Part of the first verse of a song heard by Watt, from *Watt*, pp. 194-5.

Krak!	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	Krek!	—	—	—	—	Krek!	—
—	—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—	—
Krak!	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	Krek!	—	—	—	—
Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—
Krak!	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Krek!	—	—	—	—	Krek!	—	—
—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!
Krak!	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	Krek!	—	—	—	—	Krek!
—	—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—	—
Krak!	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	Krek!	—	—	—
Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—
Krak!	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	Krek!	—	—	—	—	Krek!	—
—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!
Krak!	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	Krek!	—	—	—	—
—	—	Krik!	—	—	Krik!	—	—
Krak!							
Krek!							
Krik!							

Fig. 3. The second part of the Frog Song, from *Watt*, p. 280.

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