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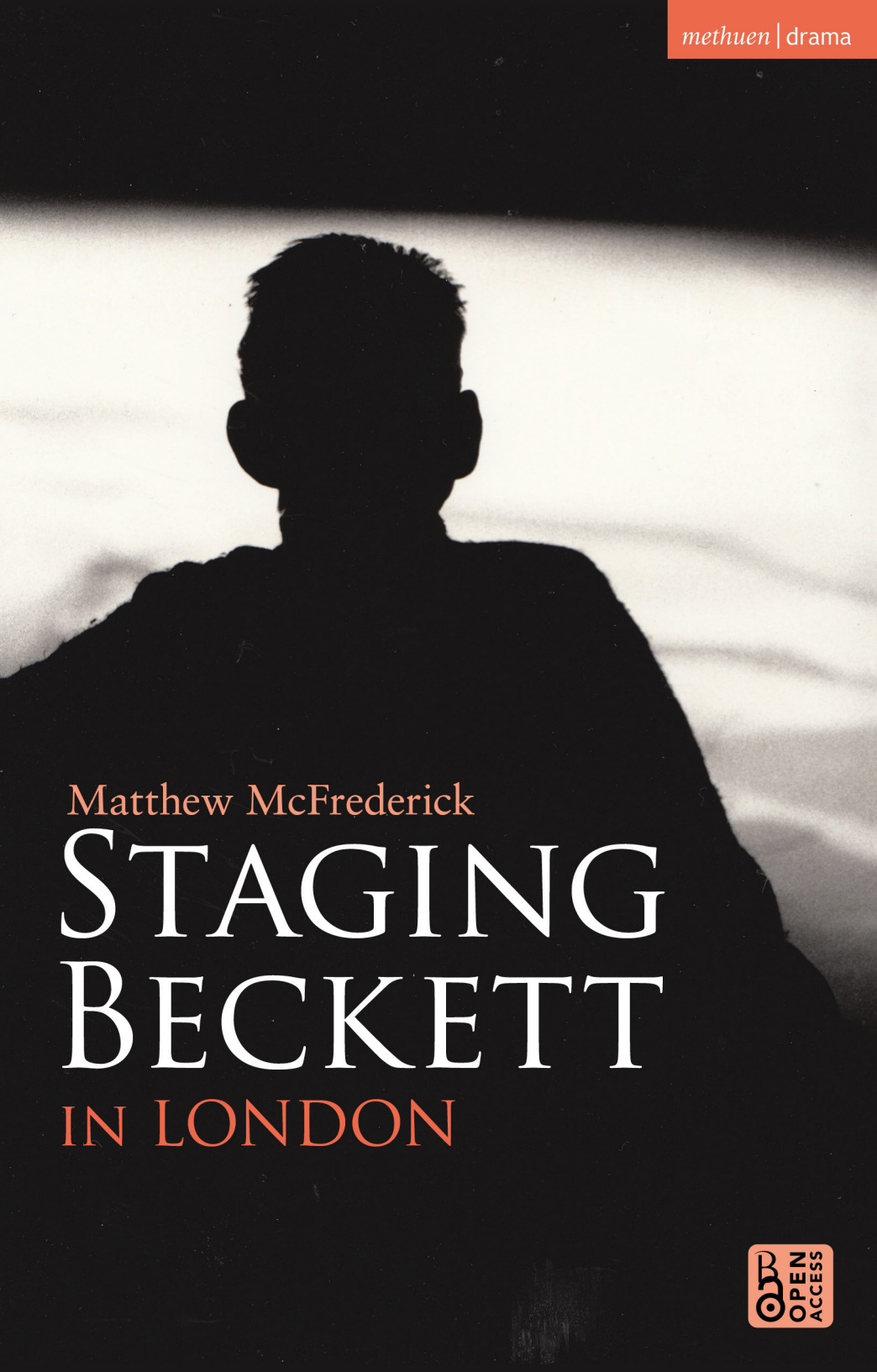

Matthew McFrederick

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For Kelly and Sophia

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M.McF

Introduction

Staging Beckett in London

On 20 April 2016, Samuel Beckett's association with London was formally recognized by English Heritage as they unveiled a blue plaque in his honour outside 48 Paultons Square, where Beckett resided in 1934. According to Ronald Hutton, chairman of English Heritage's blue plaques panel, this plaque and the one unveiled for the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Patrick Blackett at the same house were designed to 'celebrate their connection to London'.[1] The strength of Beckett's connection to London in terms of his stay at Paultons Square may appear an unlikely relationship to celebrate, given he lived in this house for only seven months with mixed feelings about the city when he was receiving his well documented psychotherapy treatment from Wilfred Bion at the Tavistock Clinic.[2] Nonetheless, his experience of London led Beckett to write *Murphy* (1938), and these years would prove integral to his growth as an individual and writer. Although the blue plaque formally recognizes Beckett's relationship with London in the 1930s, this book will proceed on the basis of a longer and more fruitful relationship between Beckett and London – through the residency of his dramatic oeuvre in London's theatres.

Beckett has sustained a long and varied relationship with London and its theatres. Although Dublin and Paris have obvious connections with Beckett's life, London has proved a consistent home for his drama, the origin for many of his major collaborations and a theatrical landscape where his legacy continues to flourish today. London is one of the world's pre-eminent theatre centres and home to a vibrant array of theatres producing and receiving a wealth of performances year in, year out. Within this ecosystem of theatre, playwrights come and often go in terms of their longevity, but Beckett's drama – comprising

nineteen available plays licensed for performance – has managed to establish itself as a regular fixture in the fittings of the city's theatres.[3]

Staging Beckett in London will present the first dedicated performance history of Beckett's drama in London theatres from the English language premiere of *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre in 1955 to 2024, just as *Godot* has been revived at the Theatre Royal Haymarket. Beckett's drama has, of course, not been staged in every theatrical building, but it has covered venues across the geography of London, from the Roundhouse to the Battersea Arts Centre and from the Lyric Hammersmith to the Theatre Royal Stratford East. London's major, marginal, subsidized, fringe and commercial venues have staged notable Beckett performances during many key phases in British theatre history with many noteworthy actors, directors and designers. Some productions have retained a special place in the cultural memory; however, many have been hidden or neglected in accounts of Beckettian performance histories to date. This study sets out to construct a performance history that reinvestigates the multifaceted relationship between Beckett's drama and London, charting how a selection of both key and lesser-known professional productions were staged across the city's metropolitan theatres, with the support of extensive discoveries made in underutilized performance archives.

The decision to write this history on the London productions of Beckett's drama was first determined by the plans and objectives of the AHRC-funded Staging Beckett project, which included a PhD studentship that I held and under whose aegis this initial project was undertaken. The three-year Staging Beckett research project (2012–2015) between the Universities of Reading and Chester, in collaboration with the Victoria and Albert Museum, brought together a team of researchers to explore 'the impact of productions of Samuel Beckett's drama on theatre practice and cultures in the United Kingdom and Ireland (1955–2010)'.[4] The project set out to analyse landmark and lesser-known professional productions of Beckett's drama and to evaluate whether a distinctive British or Irish tradition of staging Beckett's drama materialized over the course of these productions.

Many of the project's early and later questions developed from the discoveries that materialized as a result of the project's emphasis on archival research, as the research team consulted new and under-exploited British and Irish performance archives. These findings would contribute to the project's creative and academic outputs, including the volumes *Staging Beckett in Great Britain* and *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland* (Tucker and McTighe 2016; McTighe and Tucker 2016), special issues of the journals *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui*, focusing on international performances staged at the margins of theatre cultures (McMullan and Pattie 2017), and *Contemporary Theatre Review* on Beckett and contemporary theatre and performance cultures (McMullan and Saunders 2018), three academic conferences[5] and several exhibitions, such as '*Waiting for Godot* at 60', which showcased selected archival materials from UK, Irish and international productions of *Godot* to coincide with the anniversary of its UK premiere.[6] Many of these were supported by a key project output – the Staging Beckett Database – an online data resource containing records for productions of Beckett's drama staged in the UK and Ireland since 1955, which became a pivotal research method as I will shortly discuss.[7]

Research methods: The staging Beckett database, theatre historiography and performance archives

Writing any history is a complex undertaking, as the active pursuit of truths about the past is conditioned by the historian's position in the present, a temporally distant position that always limits the historian's ability to gain a full understanding of the past world. Due to the ephemerality of the theatrical event, constructing a performance history presents many intricacies and obscurities to the researcher embarking on the process. As W. B. Worthen acknowledges of performance histories, 'all writing about performance must face its own impossibility: the event is gone, the records are always partial and

suspect, and the only thing we know is that nothing we say happened actually took place in precisely that way' (2003: 6). The complexity relates to the dualism between the main characteristics of both theatre and history as disciplines of study: the theatrical event is both live and transitory, while histories aim to study a past that can only partially be retrieved from a distanced point in time. Rebecca Schneider articulates of this dualism: 'for historians, studying a medium in its liveness, its "nowness," may seem against the grain of the project of history – a project that, by most accounts, seeks to analyse the "then" in some distinction to the "now"' (2014: 3).[8] In attempting to retrace these past Beckett performances, several research methods have structured and supported the accounts in this book, including data collection, theatre historiography and performance archives.

Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie have contended that historical research is 'normally practiced [and] proceeds in two stages: the collection, organisation and description of data, selected on the basis of hypotheses or assumptions either conscious or unconscious: and interpretation of data at the level of "cultural-historical integration"'; two stages that have guided this investigation into the performance histories of Beckett's drama in London (1989: 14). The collection of data – that would form the Staging Beckett Database – involved significant archival research into records of productions held in a number of UK and international repositories. Extracting core data around the what, where, when and who of each performance helped establish the breadth of the history within London before further critical questions around why and how a performance was created could be explored in their many nuances. Important research resources included earlier methods by which performance data was preserved, including the Theatre and Performance Card Index held at Victoria and Albert Museum,[9] *Theatre Record*[10] and the online theatre archive, UK Theatre Web (UKTW),[11] before consulting and supplementing these findings with production files for individual performances, wider performance archives, books and journals.[12] The data available from these sources was the starting point of this history, as they clarified its scope, supported landmark

performances and uncovered forgotten presentations. The Database aimed to offer a comprehensive dataset for Beckett's performances in the UK and Ireland, but such was the piecemeal nature of some records and archives, the Database was and will remain liable to gaps – something that Jacques Derrida alludes to as the 'incompleteness of the archive' (1998: 52). It is acknowledged that there will inevitably be some form of incompleteness evidenced in the Database as records for productions, personnel and so on come to light, but the living nature of the Database means these records can be updated as information becomes available. Instead, it is best to think of the Database as an ever-evolving model of collected data that includes the information accessible or known up to a particular point in time.

To date, 172 productions of Beckett's drama in London have complemented the records of other performances staged elsewhere in the UK and Ireland, and these records have now been published online via the Staging Beckett Database.[13] By organizing these records chronologically, it was possible to identify emerging trends and patterns from the Beckett performances, potential narratives that were supported through further research into the artistic heritage and performance cultures over these years. For example, research demonstrated the close relationship between the English Stage Company at the Royal Court and Beckett prior to George Devine's departure in 1965, how Beckett's absence from the National Theatre was compensated by his presence at the Young Vic under Frank Dunlop's directorship, and how Beckett's death in 1989 led to a resurgence in staging his drama in London. This chronology supported the structure of the book, which will be explained at the end of this Introduction.

Beckett's life and work have been the subject of many archival initiatives from the 1970s to the present day, with several ongoing or recent publications and projects focusing on his manuscripts, most notably the Letters of Samuel Beckett (2011, 2014 and 2016) and the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project.[14] In a special issue of *Modernism/Modernity* (2012) dedicated to Beckett and archives that 'assays the value of the archive' in relation to his work, Peter Fifield

argues Beckett is 'an archivist's author' through the way he stored and maintained his proofs, drafts, diaries and notebooks (2011: 673). Beckett's notebooks, letters and scripts have informed this book, but performance archives documenting theatre productions in multiple UK and international repositories, as well as private collections, proved integral in its development.[15] Stage files at the University of Reading and Victoria and Albert Museum revealed many specific details of key productions, and each stage file contained a range of sources from programmes to reviews. Further archival enquiry evidenced that a significant range of materials from practitioners and theatres informed the creation of the event, though inevitably these are 'ephemeral traces of performance', as Anna McMullan and Graham Saunders refer to them (2018: 5). Complementing the stage files was a wide range of additional ephemera, including posters, tickets, cast lists, photographs, videos, DVDs, cassette recordings, interviews, letters, emails, set and costume designs, model boxes and websites, which would vary from performance to performance and from archive to archive. These fragments supported this study in what Helen Freshwater calls the 'recontextualization of the past' (2003: 739)[16] and the negotiation involved with these materials, which acts 'as a literal substitute for the lost object, the unrecoverable past' (2003: 735).

In writing this narrative, as mentioned above, I recognize that it is impossible to describe or capture the history *as it was*. As with any history, I am reading these events at a distance and with an insufficient understanding of the past. With respect to the archival documents accessed, it is important to acknowledge that archivists have chosen to preserve these materials, while it is unknown what other sources or productions they have chosen not to preserve. Freshwater has contended of these circumstances: 'The original decisions as to which materials are to be preserved and which are to be discarded, prior to public access, are often unavailable to the researcher. But the archive's very existence indicates a priori value judgement decision concerning the worth of the documents or artefacts it contains' (2003: 740). Throughout the process of this history, many decisions have been made that are fundamental to

how this history has unfolded and can be told. Just as prior decisions have been made about what documents to preserve from a production, as a theatre historian consulting these materials, I have had to decide from my reading of the resources which specific details or opinions about the production should shape this research.

Due to the transitory nature of performance, performance archives can also seduce and inspire at the prospect of reuniting the researcher with distinguished moments from the past. For example, the V&A and the University of Reading's Beckett collections hold Peter Snow's set and costume designs for *Godot*'s London premiere at the Arts Theatre, items that exude what Freshwater has described as '[t]he allure of the archive' (2003: 731). The material qualities of these items, including for many objects, their beauty and the way they seem to bring history into the present, make them compelling to the uninvited reader from the present. Freshwater writes of the archive's seductive hazards, 'we are surely all vulnerable to this beguiling fantasy of self-effacement, which seems to promise the recovery of lost time, the possibility of being reunited with the lost past, and the fulfilment of our deepest desires for wholeness and completion' (2003: 738). With performance histories, there is 'an irrepressible desire to return to the origin' and to understand how it was staged (Derrida 1998: 91). This *mal d'archive*, as Derrida puts it, stems from the ephemeral qualities of theatre, where its transitory nature makes it difficult to capture or preserve; a quality that thus heightens the desire to reconnect with the theatrical past. Through the consideration and careful selection of what Schneider refers to as 'performance remains', this book will reconstruct and negotiate the past, though ultimately it can only depict a recontextualization of the performance processes or how the performance was staged (2011).

Historiographical research methods support the interpretation of the data collected for the Staging Beckett Database and the materials accessed in performance archives, raising a number of questions in the construction and narration of Beckett's London performance histories. Historiography is a recent but increasingly employed methodological approach in Theatre Studies, with many publications supporting this

study (see Postlewait and McConachie 1989; Bial and Magelssen 2010; Davis Normington and Bush-Bailey 2013; Cochrane and Robinson 2020). Given this book's focus on performances, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* by Thomas Postlewait proved an invaluable manual for interpreting the theatrical event. Postlewait identifies four main contributing factors to the theatrical event in his model for historiographical research: world events, receptions, artistic heritage and agents (2009: 15).[17] In constructing a performance history, it is necessary to assess and evaluate the relevance and restrictions of these contributing factors. Although some events may be discussed in relation to all four factors, for many of the productions examined it may not be beneficial, or there may not be sufficient evidence available to suggest how a specific factor influenced a production. For example, although world events frame all theatrical events, in practice, it can be difficult to attribute how global contexts have influenced a performance, whereas when discussing Beckett productions prior to and after Covid-19, how the play was interpreted in performance and experienced in the theatre contributed to how I read the production in Chapter 10.

For the benefit of this history, Postlewait's framework will be adapted to also consider, where appropriate, the cultural memory or legacies of the theatrical event, as – by virtue of their realization and impact – several productions and the agents that contributed to its realization shaped how the play, theatre or history would be informed by the enduring influence of its cultural memory. Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage* has also supported the analysis of how many performances in this study have been received. Carlson explores how theatre recycles and reuses material in performance – both physical and narrative – and how the haunted text, body, production or space influences the reception of the theatrical event. In researching Beckett productions in London, it was evident that many critics would recall recently staged or well-defined memories of past productions to compare performances they were reviewing in the present, such was the strong residue of cultural memory associated with a specific play, performer or production. For example, when Albert Finney played Krapp at the Royal Court in 1973,

many London critics were ghosted by the recent performance of Martin Held at the 1971 World Theatre Season, as his clear, subtle and poignant performance left an indelible mark on how they read *Krapp's Last Tape*. For many practitioners, critics and theatregoers, the performance and reception of Beckett's drama in London have developed and engaged with its own unique 'repository of cultural memory', from the rekindling of popular performance techniques in *Godot* to the vivid and enduring performances of Beckett's plays, and the more recent convention of star actors staging Beckett, where their celebrity or recognizable past roles haunt the memories of audiences watching them in different circumstances (Carlson 2006: 2). As Carlson identifies, 'All reception is deeply involved with memory, because it is memory that supplies the codes and strategies that shape reception' (2006: 5). Through these factors and methods relating to theatre historiography and cultural memory, this study will be able to reconstruct and negotiate new readings of the histories of Beckettian performance in London theatres and theatre cultures.

The performance histories of this book will pursue many lines of enquiry, though the parameters of what can be addressed have already been established through the performance and the materials preserved from the theatrical events in public or private archives. Through these parameters, this history will strive to construct, as Postlewait suggests, 'truths about the past within the conditions and constraints of possible knowledge' (2009: 1). In writing this history, I recognize, as Jim Davis et al. have stressed, that for historians 'there can be no "objective truth" waiting to be uncovered when they delve into the theatrical past, but merely assessments and interpretations of the evidence available' (2013: 90). Over the course of this study, ideological and subjective decisions have been made over the productions and the evidence used relating to these performances, which will ultimately shape its direction and narrative. Each chapter will attempt to maintain a coherent structure by addressing a number of contributing factors that have shaped the respective theatrical event and performance culture in terms of how it was intended, created, received and the extent to which surrounding

contexts influenced how the event materialized. It is important to highlight that while these factors are influential on each event, they do not operate in isolation, as they are in tension and in dialogue with each other in terms of how the event materialized and the narration of the events. Through these contributing factors, it will be possible to offer a more informed and evaluative history of each Beckett production discussed and, in turn, the overall history.

Beckett, Britain and London: Performance histories

Scholarly approaches to Beckett's life and *oeuvre* have offered a breadth of innovative readings since the first critical studies of his work appeared over six decades ago. Amidst this significant body of publications by scholars of different generations, performance histories of Beckett's drama have remained an under-examined domain of Beckett Studies. Existing publications addressing Beckett's performance histories have provided valuable contributions to the field and this book, but the lens through which these past performances have been surveyed has been driven by the primary motives of these respective publications. To give just some examples: a focus on *Godot* (Bradby 2001; Croall 2005; Taylor-Battys 2008), on *Krapp* (Knowlson 1980), on biography (Knowlson 1996; Cronin 1996) and Beckett's direction (McMillan and Knowlson 1994; Gontarski 1992), on American or international productions (Kalb 1989) or on Irish productions (Murray 1984). Meanwhile, more recent publications have shown how contemporary interpretations of Beckett's theatre have reimagined his theatre for today through its sustained experimentation (Johnson and Heron 2020) and disability practices (Simpson 2022).

Interest in productions of Beckett's drama has been a staple of the *Journal of Beckett Studies* (1976 –), publishing reviews of British, Irish and international productions, as well as interviews with selected practitioners over the forty years, but the recent 'The Performance

Issue' (2014), edited by Jonathan Heron and Nicholas Johnson, was the first time the journal had solely focused on performance. This edition highlighted the new avenues within performance that scholars and practitioners are using to examine Beckett's work, with essays on performance art, music and laboratories, as well as interviews with several notable practitioners. This edition also included the co-authored paper, 'Staging Beckett: Constructing Histories of Performance' by McMullan, McTighe, Pattie and Tucker (2014), which asks many pivotal questions and outlines many of the challenges involved in reconstructing performance histories – a precursor for the aforementioned Staging Beckett-led outputs. *Staging Beckett in Great Britain* and *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, in particular, offered the first extended treatment of Beckett's oeuvre in these geographical locations and theatre cultures, with the former exploring performances in broader British theatre contexts, including a selection of London's theatres or districts: the Arts Theatre, Royal Court, Riverside Studios and West End. Building upon these earlier publications, this study will re-examine several landmark performances, but it will also investigate lesser-known plays and performances, how productions reimagined Beckett or opened up his work to new theatres, audiences and possibilities on stage as a sign of London's fixation and innovation with Beckett.

In *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre Histories*, S. E. Wilmer highlights that 'National theatre historians often have to negotiate assumptions (their own and those of others) about national identity and national character. [. . .] they have to decide what types of theatrical events to record, which artists to feature, and what method to use in telling the story' (Wilmer 2004: ix–x). British theatre histories have been hesitant to address productions of Beckett's drama beyond the influence of *Waiting for Godot*'s premiere – a premiere that is keenly discussed and debated, alongside the premiere of *Look Back in Anger* (1956) by John Osborne, as the starting point of contemporary British theatre.[18] This study will not revisit this much debated topic, but it will contribute original insights into the relationship between Beckett's

drama and British theatre history. By reading existing narratives on contemporary British theatre history, it is clear *Godot*'s first performance attained 'a definite and substantial identity' (Postlewait 2009: 249). This established identity has obscured the visibility of other Beckett productions in national theatre narratives, and this history will proceed to reconsider the role London productions of Beckett's drama have played in these narratives, where Beckett has arguably been a more influential writer than existing histories have credited. Beckett's understated role in these narratives is understandable due to the breadth of theatre produced in the UK, but this also suggests that Beckett and his drama did not quite fit into traditional assumptions of British and London theatre cultures, nor did he write state of the nation plays. As an experimental Irish dramatist living in France, who often originally wrote in French and set many of his plays in nondescript locations and with apparently incomprehensible plots, Beckett was at odds with British identity and character and therefore occupies a smaller part in the grander national theatre histories.[19] But this was no insignificant part.

Beckett's plays – as this book will proceed to demonstrate – have been a consistent presence in major London theatres, which were eager to offer a broader range of dramatic forms and cosmopolitan drama, as well as new writing, and Beckett often fulfilled their agendas and diverse programming needs as an international, experimental writer. Several histories have been written of individual London theatres examined here: for example, the Royal Court, (Roberts 1999; Browne 1975; Little and McLaughlin 2007; Findlater 1981) the National Theatre (Elsom and Tomalin 1978; Rosenthal 2013) and the RSC (Addenbrooke 1974). Once again, productions of Beckett's drama are mentioned, but they do not constitute longer case studies within the far-reaching histories of these institutions. Nonetheless, the longevity of his drama in London theatres means it has been at the forefront or implicated in key moments, trends, debates or issues within the city's theatre ecology: the infrastructure of London theatres (e.g. the creation of the Royal Court, NT,

RSC and Young Vic), historical legislation (the role of the Lord Chamberlain), festivalization (e.g. at the World Theatre Seasons and Barbican), authorship issues (the Beckett Estate) and global events (Covid-19).

The ambition of this study is to open up Beckett's role and presence within the contexts of London's metropolitan theatre culture. This book will suggest how Beckett's drama offers a lens through which it is possible to tell a different story of London theatre and, similarly, through London theatres, new readings of Beckett's theatre in performance can be extracted and evaluated.

Structure and Parameters

The structure of this book attempts to capture the multifaceted production history of Beckett's drama in London. Comprising ten chapters, the book is organized chronologically according to key theatres producing the plays during Beckett's lifetime, while the post-Beckett years pick up on emerging themes – or in the case of the final chapter – moments of global crisis. This book will follow the initial boundaries of the Staging Beckett project by focusing only on professional productions of Beckett's nineteen plays licensed for the stage. As a result, this book acknowledges – due to the length and breadth of the history as it stands – that it will be unable to trace the notable performance histories by amateur companies in London, such as Questors or Tower Theatre,[20] nor will it deal with the eclectic range of staged adaptations of Beckett's works for TV, radio or prose, characterizations of Beckett or Beckett-inspired work.[21] It will, however, extend the history to 2024 to ensure the core material is up to date and to account for the most recent developments in Beckett performances in London theatre cultures. Furthermore, as the history extends to 172 known performances, it has obviously not been possible to discuss every Beckett production staged in London, and I will therefore concentrate on a selection of case study performances for each chapter.[22] I will focus on a range of familiar and

lesser-known Beckett plays and productions that capture the emergent relationships and themes of the times. Many case studies were also representative of original archival findings, new research through interviews with key agents, or – in the case of latter chapters – direct experiences. Several deserving performances have not been discussed at length, but this is mitigated by their presence in existing publications, and my aim is for this book to prove generative for further histories of productions not discussed here.

Chapter 1 begins with the English language premiere of *Waiting for Godot* (1955) at the Arts Theatre but will reopen the narrative of this much-discussed landmark production from post-war British theatre history by exploring neglected details of its early reception and casting issues through original memoirs from the first cast, its issues with censorship through the Lord Chamberlain's interventions, and the scenographic design by Peter Snow. Despite the early international success and notoriety *Godot* achieved, Beckett still found it difficult to find a venue for his next plays, *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* (*Endgame* and *Act Without Words I*, 1957). Chapter 2 documents how the English Stage Company at the Royal Court offered Beckett and his plays a supportive London home for his theatre, one that shaped and continues to shape how many people see Beckett's drama on stage through key professional collaborations, including with Donald McWhinnie, Jocelyn Herbert and Patrick Magee. Central to this chapter is Beckett's relationship with George Devine, the first artistic director of the Royal Court. It will reveal how Devine and his new writing theatre championed Beckett's bold dramatic vision through hosting early performances and world premieres (including performances in French), trialling Beckettian performance practices and making a stand in the face of further interventions from the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

Chapters 3 and 4 chart how Beckett's connections in London grew to include Britain's largest subsidized theatres: the National Theatre (NT) and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Chapter 3 moves between the British premiere of *Play* (1964) by the NT at the Old Vic to multiple, popular productions for young people at the Young Vic (1969–74) to

Peggy Ashcroft and Peter Hall's reunion at the NT for *Happy Days* – first at the Old Vic and then as the first play presented in the Lyttelton at its new Southbank home. Chapter 4 then brings to light the relationship between Beckett and the RSC during the 1960s and early 1970s, where *Act Without Words II* (1964) was quietly presented around the same time as a highly regarded staging of *Endgame* (1964) with Jack MacGowran and Patrick Magee took centre stage. Attempts to lure Beckett to the RSC animate this chapter, before a further eclectic phase of this production history saw notable foreign language productions of Beckett's drama staged as part of the RSC's World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre (1965, 1970 and 1971).

Chapter 5 traces the performance histories of his later plays and collaborations during the last decade or so of Beckett's lifetime. Returning to the Royal Court proved a fruitful moment for his emerging opus and the iconography of Beckett productions with *Not I* (1973), *Warten auf Godot* (1976), the world premieres of *Footfalls* and *That Time* (1976), and *Happy Days* (1979) all attesting to the Court's commitment in these Beckett-led performances with notable and less celebrated collaborators. Chapter 6 moves along the Thames between Riverside Studios and the NT. Rather than a London production, it begins by focusing on two rehearsal periods for *Endgame* (1980) and *Waiting for Godot* (1984), where Beckett's direction for the San Quentin Drama Workshop led to a unique phase of open rehearsals at the Hammersmith arts centre. Meanwhile at the NT, Beckett returned to support Billie Whitelaw's performance in his late play *Rockaby* (1982); some of the last performances of his lifetime that signalled his enduring interest in how his work was staged.

Beckett's death in 1989 did not lead to the withdrawal of his work from London theatre programmes. Chapter 7 discusses how the rebirth of Beckett's drama was reflected in three productions during the 1990s: a comedy-led, commercial production of *Godot*, starring Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson (1991), a Deborah Warner production of *Footfalls* (1994) that incurred a notable intervention from the Beckett Estate and a fresh staging of *Endgame* (1996) by Katie Mitchell, which

interpreted Beckett's stage directions by creating a detailed, realistic set. 'Beckettmania', Chapter 8, explores the proliferation of his plays across London stages, particularly through their festivalization and mainstream successes. London's enthusiasm for Beckett was encapsulated by the Gate/Barbican Festivals of 1999 and 2006, as well as arguably its highest-profile London performance when movie stars Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen played Didi and Gogo, as this chapter will discuss.

Chapter 9 returns to what was arguably Beckett's London home – the Royal Court – to show how two rare revivals for the new writing venue maintained its connection with his drama after Beckett's death. In 2006, Harold Pinter, then Britain's most acclaimed playwright, played Krapp, Beckett's failed, lonely writer, in an Ian Rickson-directed performance that captured the imagination of London theatregoers, with demand at fever pitch. The second case study examines how a creative connection from Beckett's own productions sustained his association towards Beckett's drama with a leading contemporary Beckett actor, as Walter Asmus directed Lisa Dwan in a trilogy of late works, *Not I*/*Footfalls*/*Rockaby* (2013), that sold out the Royal Court before embarking on a West End transfer and international tour. This chapter is supported by my own direct involvement in this history as its assistant director, which attempts to consider the scope of performance histories through insights into the creative and technical process. 'Beckett and Covid-19' is the final chapter in *Staging Beckett in London*, which explores how Beckett's drama spoke to and was impacted by the pandemic, as an Old Vic production of *Endgame* (2020) with Daniel Radcliffe was curtailed by these global events, and Dwan's performance as an optimistic and frustrated Winnie (2021) provided London audiences with hope as the theatre landscape and experience changed. This seismic moment for theatres concludes this history, which epitomizes how Beckett's adaptability and longevity ensure he continues to speak to present moments and world events, as his work is reimagined by a new generation of theatre practitioners for contemporary audiences.

1

Beckett and the Arts Theatre

The history of staging Samuel Beckett's drama in London begins with the British premiere of *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre on 3 August 1955. This play, production, theatre and date are firmly etched into numerous histories of British theatre since the Second World War and Beckett's performance histories. You might rightly ask: Why does this production history need another narrative? To omit the landmark production would, first of all, be difficult to justify, as it is the point from which the history begins and, as this chapter will reveal, had the circumstances around the production not emerged as they did, it might not have materialized as a history at all. Although the overall ambition of this book is to expand the performance histories of Beckett's drama across London, it also recognizes that the first staging is key to establishing the origins of this performance history, as well as the context of London theatre culture prior to and after the event. The importance of this production is signified through its existing place within Beckettian and British performance histories and the extensive materials preserved from the event across international archives.[1] By beginning with the Arts Theatre premiere, this chapter will reopen the narrative of this landmark performance by exploring neglected details of its early reception and staging, the initial difficulties it faced in finding a venue, director and cast and its battles with censorship in the form of the Lord Chamberlain's Office. With the support of many underutilized archival sources, the chapter will illustrate how the performance archive can supplement existing theatre narratives by reconsidering the early role this production played in assumptions about Beckett in the national culture and adding new perspectives on how practitioners

approached his work in performance and how audiences responded to the early presentations of his drama.

London theatres pre-*Godot*

When *Waiting for Godot* was first produced in London, the landscape of British theatre was significantly different to how it is today. It was staged before the English Stage Company at the Royal Court led a renaissance in new playwriting and before the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and National Theatre (NT) – Britain's two biggest subsidized theatres – were formed. London's overcrowded stages provided few opportunities for new writing and, despite some notable exceptions, British theatre was failing to develop 'distinctive theatrical voices of its own' (Pattie 2012: 29). Of course, Beckett's theatrical voice had been first showcased in 1953, where it enjoyed an extended run at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris. Following introductory stagings in Germany, Holland and Spain, it was two and a half years before *Godot* arrived in London, and it remained uncertain what impact this play with a reputation on the continent would stimulate in London audiences. In *1956 and All That*, Dan Rebellato points out that Beckett's *Godot* was not the only play to arrive from Europe as Jean Anouilh was 'probably the most successful playwright in Britain' during the early 1950s, and London's stages also presented the work of Jean Giraudoux, Jean Genet and Eugene Ionesco, as well as many other European dramatists (1999: 128). However, its prominent reception in British newspapers and important place within British theatre histories, particularly alongside John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, have often led to *Godot* being perceived as a turning point in narratives of post–Second World War London theatre. Although the infrastructure of London as a theatre culture was still developing by the time of its premiere, *Godot* was one of a number of plays that were successfully staged in Europe and introduced to London, but both Beckett and the play have been foregrounded due to the fascination

Godot generated in the national culture and audiences and the more overt challenges the play presented to the conventions of British drama.

Prior to the formation of the UK's many notable subsidized theatres, the pre- and post-war theatre industry in London was a commercial enterprise dominated by star actors and production companies, such as H. M. Tennent Ltd, managed by Hugh 'Binkie' Beaumont. Alongside the steady decline of music hall and variety in the post-war years, theatre faced similar challenges from the increased popularity and availability of cinema and television, as well as fewer available theatres in the immediate post-war phase, which in turn meant 'greater congestion, as long running productions refused to give way to new work' (Pattie 2012: 29). This was identified by many theatre makers and the Arts Council, with their secretary general, Bill Williams, remarking in a speech in Liverpool in 1953:

> The theatre in London is dominated by show business organised on strict commercial lines. There are some specially obnoxious features about the London theatre. One is the profiteering in bricks and mortar by speculators. . . . The consequence . . . is that any show which does not reveal immediate signs of a long run is whipped off at once. The twin mottoes of the London theatre are: long run or sudden death. (Qtd in Pattie 2012: 29)

Indeed, it was this ideology that frustrated early attempts to have *Godot* staged. *Godot* was considered a new, avant-garde product from the continent, staged in a conservative theatre culture that operated under commercial imperatives; a combination that appeared to offer little promise of a sustained relationship, unless the production had a star cast.

Waiting for the cast: 'to hell with the stars'

Waiting for Godot is a play about waiting. Two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, meet on a country road by a tree, awaiting the arrival

of Godot, who fails to turn up, but they spend their time inventively discussing everyday matters, needs or memories as three characters arrive – Pozzo, Lucky and The Boy – who help pass the time, all the while hoping for Godot's arrival, before repeating these routines in a similar vein the next day at the same location. At face value, the play is not complicated, but for those encountering it for the first time in the 1950s, it was radical to have a script so open in terms of meaning and interpretations, a characteristic that put off many of its initial audiences, but also actors and directors too.

Staging *Godot* in London proved a long and protracted process for Beckett and the different parties involved. Finding a star cast was a priority and the first issue for its British producers: the film and theatre director, Peter Glenville, and the theatre impresario, Donald Albery. After seeing the Paris premiere and receiving a rushed translation by Beckett on 7 September 1953, Glenville and Albery signed a joint contract for the play's English language performance rights. Their intention was to open the play in the West End with a renowned cast to sell the play to London audiences. In attempting to make *Godot* a star vehicle, they tried to lure Ralph Richardson and Alec Guinness to play Vladimir and Estragon. Carol King later argued of Glenville's plans that 'his desire to stage the play using leading actors he was familiar with was misplaced, and motivated by his Beaumont training to assemble a cast that would draw in the crowds' (2010: 177). Despite the illness of his brother Frank in Ireland, Beckett supported efforts to entice Richardson to play the role of Vladimir as, on a return trip from Ireland, he visited the actor's dressing room alongside Glenville at the Theatre Royal Haymarket. The meeting encapsulated the early obsession the play's meaning aroused in theatregoers and theatre professionals, as Richardson asked Beckett for 'the low-down on Pozzo, his home address and curriculum vitae' (Beckett 2011: 507). Beckett was reluctant to answer Richardson's queries in what was a difficult and fruitless meeting, as Richardson was subsequently unable to do the play due to prioritizing his film commitments.

Richardson's unavailability was later matched by Guinness and Cyril Cusack, amongst others, though perhaps the most surprising withdrawal came from Glenville as director, despite his stake in the play. As Albery wrote to Beckett on 21 July 1954:

> I understand from Peter Glenville that he is still very keen to do 'Godot' but he could not undertake a definite agreement that it would be his next play as he feels – I think quite wrongly – that this is not a commercial play and that after 'The Prisoner' he should do a more commercial play and then 'Godot'.(1954)[2]

Glenville's stance presents an illuminating insight into the perception of *Godot* at the time: he – even as the play's performance rights holder – saw the play as a risk for his own career, something that the production's run and the play's recent performance history would mock. Beckett referred to these delays as 'shilly-shally' (2011: 497) and would articulate his frustration further by writing to Pamela Mitchell on 25 July 1954: '[I] have told them to get on with it with whatever people available and to hell with stars. If the play can't get over with ordinarily competent producing and playing then it's not worth doing at all' (2011: 490). With this prelude, Albery advanced his efforts to find an interested and committed director, cast and theatre for London, but these difficulties would delay plans to stage earlier English language *Godot*s in Ireland and America, including, to Beckett's frustration, a proposed performance with Marlon Brando and Buster Keaton (Knowlson 1996: 413).[3] Ultimately, these casting difficulties reveal the unpropitious commercial climate *Godot*'s London premiere was produced in and the irony that a play about everyman figures was perceived to be dependent on star actors.

Godot and the Lord Chamberlain

If the early casting difficulties for *Godot* proved draining on Beckett and his producers, these frustrations would continue through the form

of censorship dictated by the Lord Chamberlain's Office – another key phase of British theatre history that Beckett's drama traversed. Up until September 1968, every new play put forward for performance in a public theatre in the UK was required by law to obtain a licence from the Lord Chamberlain's Office since the introduction of the Theatre Licensing Laws of 1737, in effect shaping and controlling the presentation of drama that audiences encountered.[4] Of Beckett's plays, *Godot* and *Endgame* were the subject to the most objections and represented two prominent examples that tested the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction and purpose, but *Happy Days* (1962), *Act Without Words II* (1964), *Play* (1964), *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (1965) and *Come and Go* (1966) were also reviewed as part of this obstinate and subjective process.[5]

Waiting for Godot was Beckett's first encounter with censorship in the UK, and the experience would highlight how the archaic British laws were restrictive for new writing in British theatres. Ironically, this historical legislation determined that similar mediums, such as the music hall, film, broadcasting and publishing, were not restricted by governing powers; however, these laws applied to public theatres. As a result, this controlled the theatre produced in the UK until 1968, as it shaped the work of playwrights, companies and the types of theatre presented in the UK. As a foreign dramatist working in Britain, Steve Nicholson recognizes that Beckett would have been 'less prone to instinctive self-censorship than most British playwrights' and 'less inclined to accede so willingly to official demands' (2011: 46). Correspondence between Beckett's producers and the Lord Chamberlain confirms Nicholson's arguments as they discussed the alterations of the text for several months before the play was officially licensed.

Although *Godot*'s London debut was staged in the Arts Theatre, a club theatre where plays did not require a performance licence, it was the producers' early West End ambitions that meant the play was scrutinized by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, with Albery acting quickly in order to obtain a licence in advance of securing a theatre and cast. This ambition was the driving factor behind the correspondence that developed between Beckett, Albery and the Lord Chamberlain's

Office, and although their efforts for a performance licence would not influence its premiere at the Arts Theatre, they would prove useful when the play earned a West End transfer to the Criterion Theatre.

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

1. Act 1, page 2, '(pointing) You might button it all the same'. 'True' (he buttons his fly)'.
2. Page 3, 'his hand pressed to his pubis'.
3. Page 9, from, 'It'd give us an erection', down to 'Did you not know that?' on page 10.
4. Page 27, 'on his arse'.
5. Page 40, alter the lines from 'Given the existence as uttered forth' down to 'and who can doubt if it will fire the firmament'.

Omit 'Fartov'.

6. Page 52, omit from 'But you can't go barefoot' down to 'and they crucified quick'.
7. Act 11, page 3, omit 'you see, you piss better when I'm not there'.
8. Page 16, '(he resumes his foetal posture)'.
9. Page 20, 'Gonoccoccus! Spirochaete'.
10. Page 30 'Who farted?'
11. Page 38, 'and the privates'.
12. Page 54, Estragon must be well covered when his trousers fall (Gwatkin 1954).

As many of these objections suggest, the Lord Chamberlain's issues were based on the play's sexual, religious and lavatorial references. Furthermore, these decisions were often arbitrary; a matter accentuated by Albery's suggestions to Beckett regarding the aforementioned objections. Albery proposed submitting 'alternative dialogue if an omission matters to the play' adding, 'it is surprising how near and how strong you can make the alternative. The fact that you have agreed to alter something seems to be more important than the alteration itself' (Beckett 2011: 481). Albery's comments indicate the uncertain

parameters by which the Lord Chamberlain's Office functioned in objecting and accepting words or phrases. In contrast, as an artist who judiciously chose his words, Beckett responded by asserting it was with 'the greatest reluctance' he was 'prepared to try and give satisfaction to the Lord Chamberlain's Office' on ten of the twelve disagreements, as he offered alternatives to these offending words (Beckett 2011: 481). Of these disputed sections, Beckett questioned the issues surrounding items five and six, arguing, 'their interdiction[s] [were] wholly unreasonable', they were 'vital to the play' and could 'neither be suppressed nor changed' (Beckett 2011: 481). Beckett begrudgingly altered his text, but his stance demonstrated how he was also firm on the alteration of specific lines that were imperative to his text. Beckett's correspondence underlines his frustrations with the role of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and they indicate how the Lord Chamberlain's interdictions were also responsible for *Godot* not making its UK premiere in the West End. In the immediacy of the event, Beckett was baffled by the Lord Chamberlain's demands and angry that the intrusion was one factor in stalling an earlier West End presentation, but arguably the way in which the events of this production panned out were also intrinsic to its success. Had this first production premiered in the West End, would it have been afforded such a long initial run and established such curiosity and interest with the public and national press?

The expurgated text used at the Criterion Theatre would have omitted many sections of the text that would generally be considered as the play's humorous segments. For example, one notable cut outlined by Norman Gwatkin was Vladimir and Estragon's duologue about hanging themselves; dialogue that epitomizes the tragicomic elements of *Godot*, as their contemplation of suicide is quickly overshadowed by the prospect of an erection, one of the play's most notorious moments of comedy. What is ironic about this alteration is that the Lord Chamberlain felt the suicidal undertones of this dialogue were more appropriate for audiences to hear than humour concerning sexual arousal. As a result, the dialogue was replaced by whispering and a flat response to a tragic question.[6]

ESTRAGON What about hanging ourselves?
VLADIMIR Hmm. It'd give us an erection.
ESTRAGON (Highly excited) An erection! [Vladimir whispers to Estragon. Estragon highly excited.]
VLADIMIR With all that ensues follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you tear them up. Did you not know that? (Beckett 1954)

The need to conceal Vladimir's joke (see changes below) emphasized the conservative nature of the British theatre culture in the 1950s and deprived audiences – and the actor playing Vladimir – of one of *Godot*'s most recognizably comedic lines.

The twelve objections the Lord Chamberlain's Office expressed about *Godot* were overcome through the use of alternative phrases, though also through the aid of a rehearsed reading, which was organized by Albery and observed by the Office's Senior Examiner, Charles D. Heriot.[7] Albery noted the changes to both Beckett and Gwatkin, with the latter agreeing on the points outlined with the exception of point number 10, as the Lord Chamberlain did not permit any reference to the breaking of wind. Although the majority of the issues were now resolved, Beckett returned his proposed alterations to Albery one further time:

1. Replace fly by coat. The rest unchanged.
2. Replace pubis by stomach.
3. Read:

Estragon What about hanging ourselves?
Vladimir Humm . . .
(He whispers to Estragon)
Estragon No!
Vladimir With all that ensues, etc.

4. Replace arse by backside.
5. Replace Fartov by Popov.
7. Replace piss by do it.
8. Replace foetal by crouching.

10. Replace farted by belched. (This passage, leading up to Estragon's fausse sortie top of p. 31 cannot simply be deleted.)
11. Replace privates by guts. (2011: 483)[8]

Despite his unwillingness to accede to points 6, 9 and 12, these alterations represented the text that was finally deemed permissible for public London theatres, much to Beckett and Albery's relief. Due to the difficulties in finding a theatre and cast for the production, the licence was not initially needed for the production that transpired at the Arts, but it demonstrated another hurdle encountered as *Godot* sought to be staged. As a positive, it would enable later performances at the Criterion Theatre; however, the legacy of the Lord Chamberlain's interventions and Beckett's misgivings with the English text would continue, as he referred collaborators and friends to the US edition from Grove Press.[9]

Premiering *Godot*: 'journeying in a new country'

When *Godot* was eventually staged at the Arts Theatre, one noticeable absentee from the production process was Beckett himself – in what was the only major London premiere that he did not directly contribute to or collaborate on. Following Glenville's withdrawal, the *Godot* script was passed to a number of London directors before it landed on the desk of an enthusiastic 24-year-old called Peter Hall, a moment that would enhance Beckett's career and change Hall's life.[10]

Hall was the recently appointed Artistic Director of the Arts Theatre at a time when it operated as a club theatre, whereby its productions were watched by paying members – a status that meant its performances were not under the auspices of the Lord Chamberlain. Under its previous director, Alec Clunes, the Arts had shown a preference for Victorian and Elizabethan revivals, but its artistic intentions and reputation soon saw it more regularly stage new plays from the UK and Europe.[11] Casting star actors delayed Glenville and Albery's West End ambitions with *Godot*, but securing the production's cast proved difficult for Hall, largely due to how different actors responded to

Godot. The cast that would eventually make *Godot* one of the most discussed theatrical performances in British theatre history were young and in the infancy of their careers: Paul Daneman (aged twenty-nine), Peter Woodthorpe (twenty-four), Peter Bull (forty-three) and Timothy Bateson (twenty-nine). Daneman, who played Vladimir, trained at RADA, and Woodthorpe, as Estragon, was appearing in his first professional production and in the middle of a biochemistry degree at Cambridge, while Bull and Bateson were more familiar to the stage as character actors. Although they were not 'stars' at the time of *Godot* and often self-deprecating about their achievements, they were burgeoning actors and following the production they would all proceed to have prominent, lengthy and wide-ranging careers across stage and screen.[12]

Rehearsals started in early July in an upstairs room at the Arts Theatre with the cast and crew having to contend with the summer's heatwave as well as Beckett's unfamiliar play. According to Bull, Hall revealed his limited understanding of *Godot*, saying early in rehearsals: '[I] [h]aven't really the foggiest idea what some of it means [. . .] but if we stop and discuss every line we'll never open. I think it may be dramatically effective but there's no hope of finding out till the first night' (1959: 168–9).[13] His honesty may have proved reassuring for the cast, as Daneman, Woodthorpe, Bull and Bateson shared an inability to comprehend the script, nor did they foresee the impact *Godot* would have on the artistic heritage of British theatre. Daneman considered himself an informed reader of plays, yet he admitted: 'I had never, never, in all those years read anything like this. [. . .] At first I thought it was written by a lunatic. And by the end I still thought it was written by a lunatic; but a genuine lunatic, not a phoney' (Daneman).[14] While several actors turned *Godot* down as they considered the text incomprehensible, the first cast accepted their roles primarily to remain in work, but beyond their initial confusion, they recognized its merits. Even Bull, who was flamboyantly critical of the play, contended, 'there was a hypnotic quality about the dialogue which could not be lightly dismissed' (1959: 167). Like its early and subsequent reception, an obsession with its meaning characterized the responses of its audiences and cast, which Daneman observed in his memoir:

> 'what the hell does it mean?'
>
> This was the question that everyone was to ask about this play; a question that no one would dream of asking today. Now we talk incessantly of what a play is 'about' [. . .] But in 1955 we still wanted to know what a play meant. (Daneman: 4)

By deliberately evading a clearly defined and rational meaning, *Godot* challenged the dominant traits of London's mainstream theatres in the 1950s that plays should be logical and easily comprehensible for audiences attempting to interpret the drama they experienced. Bull elaborated on the practical difficulties he found in *Godot*, describing rehearsals as 'the most gruelling that I've ever experienced in all my puff. The lines were baffling enough, but the props that I was required to carry about my person made life intolerable' (Bull 1959: 169). Although line learning, comprehending the text and carrying props may appear basic tasks for an actor, Bull's commentary suggests how this was more demanding than the usual roles an actor would have faced in British theatres at the time.

Under Hall's direction, there was a lot of trial and error in the interpretation of Vladimir and Estragon. Daneman charted the evolution of their roles in his memoir by noting their initial efforts, 'Peter's plan was that we should be clowns – clowns of the patsy persuasion: outsize boots, baggy pants, blue chins, red noses and circumflex eyebrows' (Daneman: 5). Despite these initial intentions, they realized their routines as a double act 'didn't seem to work', before discovering that when they 'reacted intuitively' and were 'more intimate and domestic' in the scenes, their characters began to emerge.[15] As Daneman continued, 'A lot of the comic business dwindled and eventually disappeared, along with our concept of ourselves with red noses, fright wigs and big boots. We became – for want of a better description – just tramps' (6). Given the new theatrical terrain *Godot* was entering when this performance was staged in London, Hall's production was a matter of discovery for the actors, audiences and the director, which he would reflect on when he returned to direct *Godot* in 1997: 'I was journeying in a new country and finding my way' (1997).

Part of Hall's journey saw his prior directing experience prove more suited to Beckett's work than was later credited. This was particularly evident through his willingness to confidently utilize the silences and pauses outlined in Beckett's text. He had first used silences when he directed Jean Giraudoux's *The Enchanted* (1955) at the Oxford Playhouse, though undoubtedly this key feature in terms of dramatic rhythm enjoyed greater prominence through its frequency in *Godot*. The impact of these silences stemmed from the fact that they were unexpected by British audiences in the 1950s. As Daneman contextualized, 'at that time the pace of performance was much faster, particularly in the picking up of cues; actors were trained to prepare their minds and take breaths so that their first words would follow instantly on the previous actor's last ones' (7). As the actor incorporating these silences into the performance, Daneman recalled the many questions he had for Hall regarding the length of the pauses and silences:

> 'How long?' I asked.
> 'Until they think you've dried, and start shuffling.'
> 'And then?'
> 'Go on till they start tittering.'
> 'And then? Till when?'
> 'Oh . . . until they start to sigh and the first seat bangs up. Should be fun.' (7)

Hall's nerve to make his actors execute the silences Beckett envisaged was one example of *Godot*'s impact on performance practices in London, as it can be argued silences and pauses became a more frequently and confidently employed convention in British playwriting and theatres, as later writers like Harold Pinter would demonstrate.

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

Understanding and performing *Godot* raised several questions for its first London actors and director, but similar experiments and justifications were explored by the English artist and theatre designer Peter Snow.

Hall wrote to Snow on 23 May 1955, expressing his eagerness for Snow to design *Godot* and included a copy of the script, which he cautiously introduced before leaving it up to Snow to decide on the play's merits and his willingness to design it (See Hall 1955). It suggested the variety of reactions and rejections Hall received from other practitioners in his attempts to stage *Godot*, but nonetheless Snow accepted, a decision that significantly shaped how early audiences encountered a Beckett play for the first time in the UK (Figures 1 and 2).

Snow's design process can be traced through the preservation of a wealth of drawings, a maquette and photographs of the production. Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact lineage of these materials, the maquette appears to be representative of an early idea that was not realized in performance. Snow's interpretation of Beckett's stage directions, 'A country road. A tree. Evening.', communicated by his maquette shows a design fusing the indoors and outdoors. The tree dominates the interior space, as its trunk and roots emerge through the

Figure 1 A speculative model box by Peter Snow for *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre, 1955. UoR, BC MS5531.© Beckett International Foundation, University of Reading

Figure 2 Peter Woodthorpe as Estragon in the opening scene of *Waiting for Godot* at the Arts Theatre, 1955. Directed by Peter Hall and designed by Peter Snow. Photograph by Houston Rogers of *Waiting for Godot*, Arts Theatre, London, 1955. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. a. THM/245

wooden floorboards. Its criss-crossed empty walls give the impression of being nowhere and everywhere, while the doors accommodate the characters' entrances and exits, and its reeds suggest the playwright's intentions for a natural setting. Inevitably, this speculative design was not pursued in performance, but it does represent a historical lens for English theatre during the 1950s, where many plays were staged in domestic spaces, whereas *Godot*'s outdoor setting suggested a radical departure from the visual uniformity of these stages.

Although the room, its walls, doors, floorboards and lightbulb were not retained in the final design, one feature that Snow did incorporate was its reeds. Unaccustomed to its unconventional plot, few props, action, movements or characters, the actors' presence garnered greater attention in performance than other plays presented in London. Snow's design was guilty of attempting to adhere to the climate of realism

dominating the British stage, as further drawings and photographs attest to the extra stones, reeds, an oil drum and the elongated tree that formed his final design. Beckett was not involved in the creative process, but his letters show how his impression of the design drew comparison with the often brooding and wild depictions of nature in Salvator Rosa's landscapes (2011: 547–8). Meanwhile, Hall would later acknowledge that the set was overburdened and admitted that the 'background music by [Béla] Bartók' was a mistake, which, as David Bradby contended, would 'heighten the sense of strangeness' for the production's setting and scenography (2001: 75). In contrast, Katharine Worth defended some of the production's early scenographic choices and argued these decisions played a complementary role in helping the actors 'meet the formidable challenge presented by a bare stage in 1955' (1999: 28). Furthermore, she believed the additional scenery was used to make the actors feel 'more comfortable with something around them' (Worth 1999: 28). Some decisions were literal, such as the reeds representing a nod to Estragon's line 'Pah! The wind in the reeds' (Beckett 2006: 21), but it may be argued that these embellishments supported how the first British actors and audiences understood *Godot* and helped transition both parties towards further scenographic innovations developed in Beckett's later work. Snow's design was the starting point for the realization of Beckett's scenography in the UK and, in many respects, was a significant stepping stone towards performance design practices that would embrace the focused and more minimalist aesthetic Beckett intended for his plays.

Godot's reception: Re-examining the rules

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

> The nerves built up on the first night. I have never seen people so ill. Peter Bull was vomiting in basins and running to the loo. It was really panic. Then Peter came on and within two pages he jumped, in his nerves, eight pages. (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 122)

Bull continued his own animated account of the production by admitting, 'The first night was, I think, my most alarming experience on stage' (1959: 171). As well as skipping eight pages of text, he was also nearly guilty of strangling Bateson due to the dangerous placing of Lucky's rope inside the sleeve of his coat. Although these practical matters added to the stress, the actors were more concerned with the audience, as Bull described: 'Waves of hostility came whirling over the footlights, and the mass exodus, which was to form such a feature of the run of the piece, started quite soon after the curtain had risen' (1959: 171). The production was subject to a variety of reactions, with accounts suggesting boos and catcalls ranged from 'This is why we lost the colonies' (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 122) to ironic laughter at the line 'I've been better entertained' (Knowlson 1996: 415). The publication of daily newspaper reviews intensified the negative atmosphere around the production; however, much of the criticism was reserved for the play rather than the performers, as typified by Milton Shulman's reflections: 'Peter Woodthorpe and Paul Daneman play a beautifully orchestrated duet as the two symbols of baffled, patient and disappointed mankind. But the excellent work of the cast cannot obscure the many deadly dull and pretentious passages in Waiting for Godot' (1955). Disapproval towards the writing was also combined with suspicions raised by *Godot*'s arrival from Paris, as voiced by Cecil Wilson in the *Daily Mail*: 'This play comes to us with a great reputation among the intelligentsia of Paris. And so far as I am concerned the intelligentsia of Paris may have it back as soon as they wish' (1955). There were conversations about the play's potential closure following its first week at the Arts, but as several narratives have credited, the perception and the atmosphere surrounding the production largely changed following the Sunday reviews by Harold Hobson and Kenneth Tynan (1955).

Tynan's review praised *Godot*'s bold exploration of dramatic traditions, structures and conventions, as it observed:

> By all the known criteria, Mr Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot is a dramatic vacuum. It has no plot, no climax, no denouement; no beginning, no middle and no end. [. . .] It forced me to re-examine the rules which have hitherto governed the drama; and having done so, to pronounce them not elastic enough. It is validly new: and hence I declare myself, as the Spanish would say, *godotista*. (1955)

Ironically, after *Godot*'s turbulent but ultimately successful first weeks, the Criterion transfer materialized, something Hall and Daneman did not anticipate with Daneman signing an advanced contract to perform in a show entitled *Punch Review* starting in September, the brainchild of *Punch*'s editor, Malcolm Muggeridge. Daneman was subsequently replaced as Vladimir by Hugh Burden, but a further irony of this decision was evident as *Godot* continued in London until March, while *Punch Review* closed with terrible reviews within one month. Concluding his memoir, Daneman recognized the satire, as he noted it 'prompted Harold Hobson to announce in his column that, while Godot [is] still running, I was now out of work, and that perhaps Mr Malcolm Muggeridge could explain the joke to me' (15).

After its initial casting and director difficulties, its problems with the Lord Chamberlain and its infamous critical and audience reception, *Waiting for Godot* would play for 263 performances between the Arts and Criterion Theatres, before the production bid farewell to the capital with many of its original cast members embarking on a regional tour of the play.[16] This eight-week tour saw the play travel to Blackpool, Birmingham and Bournemouth, amongst many other towns and cities in England, concluding on 28 July 1956, nearly one year after its emergence at the Arts Theatre. For a production that was unsure whether it would go beyond its opening week, *Godot*'s lengthy production run defied expectations and hinted at the ability of Beckett's drama to assume a popular identity, largely initiated by the unique circumstances of this first production. Woodthorpe reflected

on these circumstances: 'for this little play to run, that half the world didn't understand – and booed at first – with no one in it, for months and months and months was a tremendous shock to the theatre establishment of the day' (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 124). Despite its lengthy run in the West End, the interest it stirred with audiences and theatrical commentators, these positive signs were not reflected at the box office, where it made only £500 at the Criterion (see Williams 1956). Nonetheless, the reverberations of this production and Beckett's drama more broadly would persist in the UK to the present day, as its influence on theatre cultures, practice and writing continues to be felt and reflected upon. These factors became more accepted through time, but they also contributed to the cultural fascination with *Godot*'s first UK performance and signalled the beginning of a new dawn in British theatre, where conventions, values and the experience of theatre were more commonly tested, as the English Stage Company at the Royal Court would shortly discover for a more sustained period.

2

Beckett and the Royal Court

The George Devine years

One mile away from 48 Paultons Square, where English Heritage chose to install a blue plaque marking Samuel Beckett's time at the property, is perhaps a more fitting place to commemorate a more sustained connection between Beckett and London: the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square. Since 1957, Beckett's drama became synonymous with the new writing theatre, hosting five world premieres, as well as seasons and revivals of his work. The rich tradition of staging Beckett's drama at the Royal Court dates back to the origins of the English Stage Company (ESC) under its founding director, George Devine, a central figure in British theatre history and an influential figure in Beckett's reputation as a playwright.

The emergence of the ESC at the Royal Court marked a significant generational shift in London's theatre culture towards new writing. Devine was the driving force behind this transformative intervention for the theatre sector that saw major new plays by John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and Ann Jellicoe entering its domain in a cultural moment that is often credited for restoring 'the theatre to the forefront of British artistic life' (Wardle 1978: xii). Devine believed that the theatrical future lay 'somewhere in a triangle between Brecht, Beckett and Ionesco', and it was his 'desire to pursue three strands of work: European modernism, contemporary revivals of classics, and new plays' (Little and McLaughlin 2007: 17), beliefs reflected in his programming at the ESC when it earned its reputation as a writer's theatre. At Sloane Square, Devine gave writers a home and a platform, whereby their

voice could be heard, and, in Beckett's case, this support was evidenced through productions of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* (3 April 1957), *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* (28 October 1958), *Happy Days* (1 November 1962) and *Waiting for Godot* (30 December 1964), all staged during his tenure.[1] This support extended to the travails caused by the Lord Chamberlain's interjections and in spite of the theatre's limited subsidized budget. London theatre culture remained dominated by the West End's commercial and star driven ethos, and, despite its Chelsea location away from the fashionable and theatrical centres of the 1950s, Devine hoped 'out of the 9 million people in Greater London he would find 3,500 a week to fill the Court' (Wardle 1978: 174).[2]

To date, several narratives have told the story of the Royal Court's history, including studies by Browne (1975), Findlater (1981), Roberts (1986 and 1999) and Little and McLaughlin (2007), but given the breadth of the theatre's output, there are limitations to the scope with which Beckett's productions have featured within these histories. This chapter will return to the first two Beckett productions by the ESC, where Beckett worked with some of his most trusted professional collaborators, including Donald McWhinnie, Jocelyn Herbert and Patrick Magee, and it will discuss how the ESC offered Beckett a supportive London home for his drama, one that shaped and continues to shape how many people see his work.[3] Central to this chapter is Beckett's relationship with Devine, and it will reveal how Devine and his new writing theatre championed Beckett's bold dramatic vision during its two earliest Beckett productions.

Fin de Partie and *Acte Sans Paroles*: 'the extremes of Beckett in French'

Nine days before the ESC opened its inaugural season with *The Mulberry Bush* by Angus Wilson on 2 April 1956, *Waiting for Godot* concluded its extensive run of 263 performances at both the Arts and Criterion Theatres. By contrast, *The Mulberry Bush* did not stir the same curiosity,

but its presentation signified a fresh start for new writing structures in the UK, as it offered a safe introduction to the ESC's first season, which also featured plays by Arthur Miller, Ronald Duncan, Bertolt Brecht and, most notably, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*.[4] One year later, the world premieres of *Fin de Partie* (*Endgame*) and *Acte Sans Paroles* (*Act Without Words I*) launched the ESC's second season with a gala performance on 2 April 1957.[5] The French language productions of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* formed part of the ESC's 'French Fortnight' in what was a celebration of French culture at the Royal Court, where the plays were closely followed by performances of Jean Giraudoux's *The Apollo de Bellac* and *The Chairs* by Eugene Ionesco, and a fusion of God Save The Queen and La Marseillaise opened the productions to mark the cultural exchange, as it was then still a custom to play the national anthem prior to theatre performances. This celebration epitomized how Devine advocated for a European strand within his programming, and the Court's international outlook cast Beckett as a central tenet of their plans, which saw plays by other European writers such as Brecht, Ionesco, Sartre, Genet and Arrabal in its early seasons.[6] Dan Rebellato has suggested the 'overlap' of Beckett, Ionesco and 'the movement inspired by *Look Back in Anger*' stimulated within the London theatre landscape, 'a brief moment of undifferentiation where the ideas of experiment and innovation seemed to cross boundaries of cultural identity' (1999: 145). Here, Rebellato identifies the continental influence at the Court, particularly with French writers, crossing the boundaries of British cultural identity during this period. For the ESC, Beckett was a writer who drew British theatre into European artistic currents through his innovations in theatrical styles that challenged the conventions of British writing and, in turn, influenced the development of British writers in terms of forms, content and aesthetics.

Despite the early international success and notoriety *Godot* achieved, Beckett still found it difficult to find a French theatre prepared to stage his next play. *Fin de Partie* is a game about ending that focuses on the struggles and disorder shared between the seated Hamm and his servant Clov, who can't sit down. The two men's deteriorating

bodies are situated in an entropic world with the scenario presented in a largely bare room only occupied by Hamm's chair and two bins containing the aged man and woman, Nagg and Nell. Initially, the company, which featured Roger Blin as Hamm and Jean Martin as Clov – both of whom had performed in *Godot*'s world premiere – were in advanced rehearsals with Beckett, but as Mark Taylor-Batty has charted, the Theatre de l'Oeuvre postponed *Fin de Partie* in favour of a more financially lucrative production.[7] The delayed staging reflected the state of French theatres during the 1950s, which faced financial constraints and a coyness in risking money on plays without any external funding. Martin suggested the success of *Godot* went against their production, as he argued, 'The directors, who always lacked money (and sometimes enthusiasm), did not believe the miracle of *Godot* could be repeated. Once, fine – twice, never' (Wilmer 1992: 31).[8] Ironically, it was *Acte Sans Paroles* that first captured Devine's interest in staging Beckett when scheduling his second season, and he elucidated his admiration in an effusively charming letter: 'We like ACTE SANS PAROLES immensely. I find it wonderful, poetic, comical and theatrical' (Devine 1956b). *Acte San Paroles* presents a male figure in a sun-drenched desert facing various forms of temptation (e.g. a shaded tree or a carafe of water), while whistles signal what Anna McMullan refers to as a 'new possibility of corporeal relief or prosthetic extension (scissor, rope)' with the man attempting and reflecting on how to grab the materials within the bare setting. (McMullan 2010: 62). Beckett wrote the mime – largely overlooked in Beckettian performance histories – after receiving a request from the Sadler's Wells-trained dancer Deryk Mendel to write a scenario for him.[9] Besides warming to Mendel's enthusiasm, Beckett asked his cousin John to bring out the mime's rhythms and humour by composing music to accompany Mendel's performance. Rehearsals were held in a studio space along the Boulevard de Clichy in Paris and involved a lot of experimentation in synchronizing John Beckett's music with Mendel's movements.[10] Despite his limited input into the creative process, Beckett did suggest the mime's connection to *Fin de Partie*, as he is believed to have told Mendel that the man in *Acte Sans*

Paroles was 'Clov thrown into the desert' (Beckett 2014a: 65). Paris launched Beckett's career as a dramatist, but when Devine stepped in to offer the Court for *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* when the Theatre de l'Oeuvre fell through, it suggested how London would prove to be the city that supported and sustained Beckett's work at key phases of its development.

Irrespective of the double bill's late programming, the ESC required a performance licence from the Lord Chamberlain's Office to stage the production. Here Beckett received the full support of Devine, who – already experienced with its hindrances from his inaugural ESC season – swiftly engaged with the process, telegramming Beckett: 'CHAMBERLAIN IN GENERAL AGREEMENT SOME SEX SLANG POSSIBLY QUERIED BUT PROBABLY NOT CRUCIAL' (Devine 1957b). What is revealing from the demands of the Lord Chamberlain concerning the French and English texts of *Endgame* is that when the play was translated and performed in English, it was subject to more interdictions than the French text. With *Fin de Partie*, the Lord Chamberlain requested the omission or changing of one word, leaving Beckett to mull over replacing the word 'conneries' (see Beckett 1957a).[11] This was Beckett's second experience of dealing with the Lord Chamberlain, but nonetheless, he acknowledged his relief at the smaller number of interdictions than Beckett expected. One irony to prevail for the fastidious Lord Chamberlain's Office was their omission of *Acte Sans Paroles* from the original licence, which Devine had to return to be amended.

As the plays proceeded into production, designing their unfamiliar stage images presented a sizeable challenge for the first designer, Jacques Noël, who produced a design that made a valuable, albeit testing, introduction to the development of Beckett's scenography. Noël was in the early stages of a prolific and respected career in French theatre, and he had already worked in several prominent Parisian theatres, notably on premieres for Eugene Ionesco's plays.[12] Impressions of his designs have been restricted to limited written accounts and a poor range of photographic evidence; however, his designs have been preserved.[13]

For *Fin de Partie*, Noël used high flats, which were painted dark grey and arranged in a rounded formation, with the effect of the colour, the shape of the set and its height arguably adding to – rather than complementing – the intensity and bleakness of Beckett's text and the performance. Taylor-Batty has argued the intentions behind the set were to 'place Hamm more visibly in the centre of the world over which he ruled, also creating the impression of the interior of a human skull, with two windows like eye-sockets gazing out at the desolated land and coast' (Taylor-Batty 2007: 111). Although this theory supports Blin's portrayal of Hamm, the combination of Noël's bleak and intense set arguably overwhelmed the production. This was echoed by Jocelyn Herbert, who worked as a scenic painter on this production, and recalled: 'Noël's set was very dour, rather like a tower made of stone. [. . .] The French set was completely circular [and] very much dark grey' (Courtney 1993: 28). Herbert's notes suggest how its dark colours overburdened the tone of the London performance, which, alongside its obscure content and the French language, did not make it a digestible first outing. Beckett recognized his own responsibility in the creation of Noël's set (see Beckett 2014a: 181) and summarized of the production more generally to the American director Alan Schneider: 'The hearts of oak were very sour and disapproving of such indecent preoccupation with sorrow' (Harmon 52). Beckett's reflections highlight how he could identify his own mistakes, but also how British conservatism informed his interpretation of his work's relationship with British theatre culture, as early audiences were not receptive to the bleak vision they encountered.

The design for *Acte Sans Paroles* attempted to represent a different but equally unusual scenario for its initial audience, as the set design incorporated a tall, skeletal palm tree held up on a stand and placed against a grey circular background, a bleak, desolate image that was emblematic of the player's situation. Noël's drawing placed the man standing on the two boxes staring at the glass of water with the word 'EAU' hanging on a placard from the overhead rig as light shone from the wings onto his forehead. Music was also an integral component

of the mime's scenography, with T. G. Clubb on xylophone, Jeremy Montagu on percussion and John Beckett on piano. John Beckett described the music as 'a kind of rumpus going on [. . .] the music which was all based on this kind of kaleidoscopic or variation of a small number of ideas, with the ring of the xylophone and the harsher side drums' (John Beckett 1991 and 1992). It was unclear how audiences felt about the brittle sounds, the bare setting and Mendel's movements, as critics largely overlooked the performance, except for Harold Hobson who offered one brief positive note: 'Acted by Deryk Mendel with blank desperation, its last thirty seconds are especially fine' (Hobson 1957). The ESC's position was clearer, as Devine would undercut his earlier superlatives about the mime by not including it as a companion piece for *Endgame*'s return in 1958. He wrote to Beckett:

> After very careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that it would be better not to present the Mime. Even if the technical difficulty of the orchestra were overcome by using a tape recording, I feel that it is has already been seen and reviewed here, and might detract from the great interest of the play in English.[14] (1957c)

Devine's decision to not reprise *Acte Sans Paroles* was final, in a moment that demonstrated how Devine was willing to make difficult artistic decisions in their professional relationship, where he deemed it necessary.

The immediate reception of the double bill was dominated by less than favourable notices for *Fin de Partie*. From Beckett's perspective, it is clear through his correspondence to friends and confidants that he had a number of issues with the 1957 performance. Firstly, he was disgruntled by its critical reception and their limited understanding of French. Secondly, his own text and, thirdly, Noël's set, believing these latter two issues negatively influenced the play's atmosphere and acting. For Beckett, the 'press was hostile' except for '[a] fine article from Hobson' (Harmon 1998: 13), who described *Fin de Partie*'s presentation as 'among the greatest of the services that the English Stage Company

has rendered to the British public' (Hobson 1957). Hobson's fulsome praise once again demonstrated the critic's admiration for Beckett's drama, but its impact on the production's audiences was inconsequential as it was printed after the final performance. Beckett expressed his dissatisfaction with the play's wider reception in a letter to Schneider, as he noted the critics 'were stupid and needlessly malevolent. Their ignorance of French explains the former, but hardly, or not entirely, the latter' (Harmon 1998: 14). The French language was a difficulty for a largely Anglophone audience – and one may assume the production's critics – but *Fin de Partie* accumulated expectations arising from *Godot* as Beckett's next play after his debut.[15] This expectation was underlined in *Punch* magazine, where the reviewer surmised 'one admires Mr Beckett, and expects a lot from him', before they referred to *Fin de Partie* as 'a sad disappointment' (Unknown Author 1957). Kenneth Tynan – widely credited for championing and saving *Godot*'s London premiere – was deeply critical of *Fin de Partie*, describing it as 'portentously stylised, piled on the agony until I thought my skull would split' (Tynan 1957). Tynan concluded his criticism of the play by writing, '[f]or a short time, I am prepared to listen in any theatre to any message, however antipathetic. But when it is not only disagreeable but forced down my throat, I demur' (Tynan 1957). The criticisms communicated by London's critics were shared by Martin as Clov, who contextualized the rushed nature of the rehearsal process by noting how they 'lost fifteen days' to meet the Royal Court's early schedule, but the general critical consensus also chimed with Martin, who reflected: 'the quality of the performances on opening night was not the same as when we finished the engagement and had built up a rapport' (Wilmer 1992: 31–2). Inevitably, the play's fragmentary forms, its tragicomic tone and disparate content were a demanding challenge for its underprepared first producers, performers and audience.

One year later, however, memories of the double bill were recalled by the *Times*, who praised the ESC for its inspired programming as 'the marauder of frontiers' on the London stage (Roberts 1999: 64). They summarized, '[b]etween the extremes of Beckett in French and Olivier

in vaudeville [performing in Osborne's *The Entertainer*] there has been a steady output of sophisticated cosmopolitan drama' (Roberts 1999: 64). The vibrant ESC programme suggested the theatre's potential to the British public, but this early moment also highlighted the contribution Beckett's plays would have on British theatre culture. Such early references to his work as 'cosmopolitan' epitomized how his work was neither exclusively Irish, French or British, but a sophisticated brand of international drama that crossed the borders of national identity; something Devine was eager to foster as he programmed *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* one year later.

Endgame and *Krapp's Last Tape*: Frustration and elation

Plans to translate *Fin de Partie* were in motion as early as January 1957, when Beckett agreed to translate the play in return for having Blin's production staged at the Royal Court three months later. Translating the play was not, however, a straightforward task for Beckett. Devine was alerted to this difficulty by their mutual friend Mary Hutchinson, and he wrote to Beckett to see if he was 'seriously doubtful whether FIN DE PARTI[E] can be rendered into English' (Devine 1957a).[16] The translation proved an onerous task for Beckett, and he expressed these sentiments to his friend, the poet and critic Thomas MacGreevy: 'I find it dreadful in English, all the sharpness gone, and the rhythms. If I were not bound by contract to the Royal Court I wouldn't allow it in English at all' (Knowlson 1996: 438).[17] Despite expressing these difficulties, Beckett would always persist for the sake of his friendships and his respect for Devine, producing the translation by the middle of August as promised.

The 1958 production saw *Endgame* share the bill with the world premiere of *Krapp's Last Tape*. Devine's decision not to present *Act Without Words* clearly frustrated Beckett, who thought their agreement covered the plays presented in April. He expressed this frustration to Donald McWhinnie by noting, 'Devine wrote announcing he would

present Endgame in March, not with the mime, but with A Resounding Tinkle. I find it impossible to leap at this and have said so suggesting they forget all about me until I can offer, to complete the evening's misery, something from my own muckheap more acceptable than the mime' (Beckett 2014a: 79).[18] Despite the annoyance Beckett conveyed, Devine's stance was vindicated as it encouraged Beckett to write *Krapp's Last Tape*, a play about the lonely, failed writer Krapp, who listens back on reels of tape to the hopes, dreams and memories of his younger self, while recording his realizations about his life in the present.

Endgame and *Krapp's Last Tape* shared the same bill, but the performances were created separately with Beckett able to attend and advise on both rehearsals. The rehearsals were significant as they enabled Beckett's first collaborations with several practitioners who played an important role in establishing and maintaining his theatrical vision. For *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett had more concrete ideas of how the play would be staged and engaged two figures synonymous with his drama for the first time in a theatre production: Patrick Magee as Krapp and Donald McWhinnie as director, who had previously impressed Beckett when producing *All That Fall* at BBC Radio in 1957. This production was the first time Beckett had written an original drama in English, and the production undoubtedly benefited from the greater care, consideration and preparation Beckett and the practitioners offered to the play's performance. For Beckett, the rehearsals saw *Krapp's Last Tape* undergo many exciting practical developments. As he told Schneider, 'I am extremely pleased with the result and find it hard to imagine a better performance than that given by Magee both in his recording and his stage performance' (Harmon 1998: 50). It was through Beckett's work with Magee and the 'admirable' direction of McWhinnie in rehearsals that they 'established a certain amount of business which is not indicated in the script and which now seems [. . .] indispensable' (Harmon 1998: 50). The 'business' McWhinnie refers to was, in fact, newly discovered stage images, which made *Krapp's Last Tape* such an intimate monologue and can be traced through the memory of the play's performance history. For example, his rehearsals with Magee

saw Krapp develop a personal relationship with the machine by having his arm hug the tape recorder, while their experiments on the play's finale discovered that the red light of the recorder could continue to burn as the stage fell into darkness. Meanwhile, in terms of Krapp's movements, Magee found slipping on a banana a difficult slapstick moment to execute though he did develop a walk, which he thought should be 'quite extreme' whereby as Krapp he used his left hand 'as if he were holding onto some invisible rail or rope all the way round – as if there were something there supporting him' (Knowlson 1980: 44). In contrast to Krapp's walk, Magee and McWhinnie acknowledged that other scenes required him 'to keep absolutely still, absolutely quiet, absolutely rigid to hold the audience's concentration as well as his own' (Knowlson 1980: 45). Magee supported the physical demands of his performance with his distinctively crackled voice, which ensured Krapp remained strongly spirited, as Beckett 'was very insistent that "not with the fire in me now" should be firmly delivered, with the emphasis on "fire"' (Knowlson: 1980: 44). Beckett was very satisfied with the positive collaborations he had with McWhinnie and Magee on *Krapp's Last Tape*, a fact indicated by his desire to work with both on future productions of his drama.

Rehearsals for *Krapp's Last Tape* were attended by Beckett as a consultant and admirer, but he played a more active role in the preparations for *Endgame*. The company included Jack MacGowran (Clov), Frances Cuka (Nell), Richard Goolden (Nagg) and Devine (Hamm), whose commitment to his first Beckett production saw him direct as well.[19] His instinctive approach to the text in performance saw him and Jack MacGowran work on extracting the comedy from their Hamm-Clov relationship, an approach that did not meet Beckett's approval as he asked the cast to strive for a 'toneless voice' shortly after his first visit to the play's rehearsals. Of these demands, Irving Wardle suggested, '[o]ne cannot say that the production would have been "better" without Beckett's assistance, though perhaps it might have been more popular' (Wardle 1978: 205). Even with Devine's extensive practical and pedagogical experience in theatre, he welcomed Beckett's

advice in rehearsals and, in effect, passed control of the production over to the playwright, thus demonstrating Beckett's authority in their working relationship. As Wardle suggests, 'their relationship differed from that of the other author-director teams. Beckett was always the senior partner' (Wardle 1978: 205). Beckett may have assumed the authority in their practical working relationship, but the experience of directing *Endgame* with Beckett's perspective to hand would influence Devine's approach to his later productions of *Happy Days* (1962) and *Play* (1964). Although he worked tirelessly to ensure *Endgame* made it onto the Royal Court stage, Devine was also 'exceptionally nervous of his responsibilities towards it' as both an actor and director (Wardle 1978: 206). Combining both roles was problematic, particularly since the black glasses specified in the script made him effectively blind and unable at times to offer a director's perspective on the performances taking place around him. Several recollections of this performance emphasize how 'utterly petrified' Devine was in the role of Hamm, as when he had the handkerchief placed over his face, he could be seen shaking with terror in his seat (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 166). Despite Devine's admirable efforts in getting *Endgame* staged and his overall commitment to the project, his production required more attention and reflection in rehearsals than his many other commitments would allow him.

One person who had an integral role in overseeing both *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* was the designer Jocelyn Herbert. Prior to this production, the designs for Beckett's drama in the UK by Peter Snow and Jacques Noël were criticized for being too cluttered or too bleak; however, the 1958 production marked a key phase in the development of Beckett's theatre and theatre design. It initiated a long and fruitful collaboration between Beckett and Herbert that saw her begin to shape, as Anna McMullan has argued, 'what we now think of as the visual or scenographic aesthetic of Beckett's theatre' (2012: 1). Beckett and Herbert were familiar before the 1958 production, and their relationship would grow over the course of their collaborations, with Beckett later calling her his 'closest friend in England' (Courtney 1993: 219). Before

working on *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, Herbert was developing her scenographic practice, having previously designed non-naturalistic productions in Yeats's *Purgatory* (1957), *The Chairs* (1957) by Ionesco and *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (1958) by Ann Jellicoe for the ESC. Working on other plays, in addition to her scenic painting on Noël's set the previous year, contributed to her designs, where she established her own vision for the play. As Herbert recalled:

> my design was more abstract [. . .]. I had tall walls that just went on going up, and there were some beams as I thought it were a kind of ruin. The bricks were a bit cubistic rather than naturalistic, although the chair and the dustbins looked real, and I used dun colours and greys [. . .]. (Courtney 1993: 28)

Indeed, Herbert's designs demonstrated how she used lighter colours and more distinctive shapes, which, in turn, complemented her emphasis on the play's furniture. Through these shapes, colours and the set's height, Herbert outlined how she strived to satisfy *Endgame*'s 'enclosed' and 'claustrophobic' attributes through its tall, curved walls (Courtney 1993: 28).

Krapp's Last Tape preceded *Endgame* in the event's running order, and the fact it was a world premiere presented Herbert with the added responsibility of designing a new Beckett play for the first time. While *Endgame* played upstage, *Krapp's Last Tape* was presented downstage and had a black curtain drawn in front of the *Endgame* set. Herbert recognized the need for a dark space and achieved it through 'soft or framed black serge or velour which masks the acting area of the stage' (Courtney 1993: 29). She soon realized a similar aesthetic restraint was also necessary for the play's costume design. Beckett's text suggests Krapp's comparable qualities to a clown through its reference to his 'purple nose' and this impression was reflected in Herbert's initial designs (Beckett 2006: 215). Several of her early interpretations of Krapp depicted the character's clown-like features by clearly visualizing a red or purple nose and large white or blue boots (Figure 3). Herbert refined and developed this vision of Krapp, which saw

Figure 3 An early drawing for Patrick Magee as Krapp by Jocelyn Herbert. Royal Court Theatre, 1958. National Theatre Archive, Jocelyn Herbert Archive, JH/4/9 (JH1751). Courtesy National Theatre Archive

Magee wear a pair of short black trousers, a black waistcoat and a white shirt that were all old, slightly unkempt and well worn. Furthermore, Magee noted how they reduced suggestions that Krapp may be a clown, saying, 'My hair was cut short and was combed forward. I left stubble on my face and used a pale grey make-up, with some slight reddening around the nose. Not as extreme as a big boozer's; and not

"purple"' (Knowlson 1980: 43). McWhinnie's account also contains the need to downplay the clown depictions of Krapp, noting, 'I felt when I first did it that the clown-like side was over-stated. And I think that Sam has felt that since too . . . he seemed more interested in putting a real person there than a clown' (Knowlson 1980: 47). These changes signified the judicious analysis the collaborators brought to the production and how they each worked towards a less-is-more approach in the performance's characterization, set, costume and make-up.

In addition to these scenographic elements, the 1958 production was complemented by a simple but purposeful lighting design that involved 'overhead lighting, with a bit of frontal lighting', which created 'a zone of light' amidst the tight Royal Court stage and its black background, a setting that would give birth to Magee's Krapp and allow his character to maximize his understated entrances, exits and the play's lighting blackouts (Knowlson 1980: 43). As Beckett's correspondence suggested, *Krapp's Last Tape* represented his best early experience with theatre in London, as Magee's performance and McWhinnie's direction produced a staging that earned praise from both the playwright and London's critics. Herbert made a significant contribution to the performance through her understated and purposeful design, which subtly enabled the actor's body and the play's relationship between light and dark to come to the fore. Her interpretation of Beckett's play succeeded through its sensitive attention to the play's atmosphere and dramatic characteristics, whereas previous London designs had earned Beckett's criticism.

Critical accounts of the 1958 double bill were varied and by no means flattering. Reviews of the performance referred to *Fin de Partie* the previous year, and while Devine's work was 'freer in manner', it was also perceived to be 'inadequately acted' (Lambert 1958). Devine's direction put 'spasms of vigour into the acting', which Beckett tried to reduce at the later stages of rehearsal as they attempted to explore the play's humour (Darlington 1958). Ultimately, many critics felt Devine and MacGowran did not build a rapport as Hamm and Clov, and indeed

MacGowran thought Devine was wrongly cast as Hamm, describing him as 'too avuncular'; however, he recognized his own performance as Clov needed a fuller development of his character, something he would aim to achieve in later Paris and London productions (Young 1987: 59). Part of the irritation from the reviewers' perspective was that Beckett's drama did not conform to the conventions of the drama they were used to in the UK at the time. For example, W. A. Darlington noted, 'these exchanges go on and on without bringing them any development of character' (Darlington 1958). Darlington's comments echo MacGowran's sentiments of the realized performance, but they are intended as a commentary on Beckett's text, as Hamm and Clov talk incessantly without a resolution to their conversation – a stylistic decision many critics found difficult to understand or engage with when seeing *Endgame* performed for the first time.

Beckett encountered his own frustrations watching *Endgame*; however, he responded favourably to *Krapp's Last Tape* – a view shared by the UK's press – in what was the first Beckett play to premiere in the English language. The *Times* declared Magee's performance 'a brilliant *tour de force*, as strong in imagination as in execution' (Unknown Author 1958). The production inspired Kenneth Tynan to write his own parody in the form of a review entitled 'Slamm's Last Knock', where he referred to the play as 'another dose of nightmare gibberish from the so-called author of "Waiting for Godot"' (1958). The parody often negatively portrays Beckett's play, though he did refer to Magee's performance as 'probably perfect' and 'fine throughout' (1958). Beckett's own personal enthusiasm for *Krapp's Last Tape* lauded the work of his actor-director duo. Most notably, in a letter to Mary Manning, he was fulsome in his praise of the production: 'Terrific performance by Magee . . . pitilessly directed by McWhinnie. Best experience in the theatre ever' (Knowlson 1996: 458). In many ways, this double bill encapsulated Beckett's productions during the Devine years at the Royal Court. These collaborations brought about many highs and lows for Beckett and Devine, but the encouraging atmosphere of the Court and the positive partnerships it initiated led to a strong commitment

to present his work in Sloane Square, as Devine directed *Happy Days* with Brenda Bruce in 1962 and Anthony Page staged *Waiting for Godot* with Nicol Williamson and MacGowran in 1964, a British premiere and a revival that would add to the impressive legacy of Beckett's drama during Devine's directorship.

On 25 January 1965, after '145 productions and 87 "Sunday Nights"', Devine announced his resignation as artistic director in a speech that compared the aptness of his experience with the Beckett character he had most recently directed: 'The weight of this edifice has driven me into the ground up to my neck, like poor Winnie in *Happy Days*. I should have passed the job on several years ago. I thought I should see it through. I damned nearly did. I am getting out just in time' (Browne 1975: 48). Devine's departure from the Court and his death in 1966 signalled the loss of a trusted friend and collaborator for Beckett and the most influential figure in the early phase of Beckett's London performance history. Through Devine's early foresight, Beckett's theatre was given a London home he could trust during a pivotal period of his career as a playwright. As he recalled years later:

> I had trouble finding a theatre in France for the first production of *Fin de Partie*, so I came to The Royal Court to do it. The atmosphere in the fifties and sixties was very good and everyone was extremely keen. George Devine was omnipresent, the whole heart of the theatre. (Courtney 1993: 219)

The creative partnership Devine offered Beckett was one he remembered fondly and never forgot, as he maintained a loyalty to the Court during his working life, as and when London performances arose. The legacy of the relationship Devine instigated would see Beckett's drama span eight artistic directorships, eleven of his nineteen plays staged, including five world premieres and two British premieres of his works.[20] The support Beckett received from the ESC and his acceptance into London theatre cultures more generally indicate how Beckett's drama questioned the boundaries of national and cultural identity but was equally embraced by a theatre culture seeking

more radical, international drama to foster its artists, audiences and theatres. Beckett's drama was a bold proposition for a producing theatre in the 1950s, but Devine was nonetheless willing to endorse Beckett's brand of theatre, which met the ESC's early programming ambitions and allowed him the right to fail when he needed it most. Through Devine's early support, Beckett's drama would soon engage the interest of other subsidized London theatres, such as the National Theatre and Young Vic in the 1960s and 1970s, as Chapter 3 will now attest.

3

Beckett and the National Theatre

The Old Vic, Young Vic and Southbank

After many years of dreaming, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, starring Peter O'Toole, was the play chosen to initiate the National Theatre Company's inaugural season at the Old Vic Theatre, at the corner of The Cut and Waterloo Road. At the first major National Theatre (NT) press conference on 6 August 1963, Laurence Olivier declared, 'We aim to give a spectrum of world drama and to develop in time a company which will be the finest in the world' (Elsom and Tomalin 1978: 133). With hindsight, the 'spectrum of world drama' Olivier referred to had notable limitations in sex, race and geography, but it was attempting to cater for a range of interests at that time, as it opened with *Hamlet* on 22 October 1963, before offering a mixture of staple classics (*The Master Builder* by Henrik Ibsen and Shakespeare's *Othello*), forgotten classics (George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* and *Hobson's Choice* by Harold Brighouse), modern European drama (*Andorra* by Max Frisch), and Greek drama (*Philoctetes* by Sophocles). The status of Beckett's drama was shown by the inclusion of *Play* in the NT's 'spectrum of world drama' when his work was included in the formative season of Britain's newest major theatrical institution. This early appearance, however, was not a sign of a frequent and long-standing relationship between Beckett and the UK's leading subsidized theatre, as only four Beckett plays have been staged on the NT's main stages to the present day (with five productions in total), a statistic that underlines the need to investigate the broader history of individual theatres when attempting to construct a performance history.[1]

As John Elsom wrote, 'The policy of the National – leaving aside its aspirations to excellence, which nearly all serious companies share – was thus to resist specialisation, in whatever form that concentration might take' (Elsom and Tomalin 1978: 149). Although it can be argued that the Artistic Directors of the NT maintained their working relationship with some writers, Beckett was never seen as 'a National playwright', nor is it the intention of this chapter to argue otherwise. What is important to highlight is how he was embraced by its offspring – the Young Vic – to give a more nuanced picture of the connections between Beckett's drama and the broader infrastructure of the UK's National Theatre.[2] Today, the Young Vic is its own independent theatre, but its origins are closely tied to the National Theatre, where it initially produced theatre for younger audiences. Here, Beckett's drama was produced with young people in mind and became increasingly popularized in what were some of the earliest theatrical experiences for young theatregoers – a popularity that goes some way to explaining Beckett's absence on the National's main stages in the years from *Play* (1964) to *Happy Days* (1974) to *Rockaby* (1982). This chapter will begin by discussing *Play* at the Old Vic, a production that demonstrated how practitioners could stand up for Beckett's vision – against some of the most significant figures in British theatre – and suggested the bold sense of experimentation that his drama showed over the following years. It will then move 100 metres along The Cut to explore the Young Vic's overlooked productions of Beckett's drama during the 1970s, before returning to the NT, where Peggy Ashcroft's performance as Winnie in *Happy Days* bridged the National's two homes, initially playing at the Old Vic and later opening the Lyttelton Theatre on the Southbank.

Play at the NT – 'a new kind of music'

Renovations to the Royal Court meant the ESC and Devine transferred their first option rights for *Play* to the NT in a production he would direct. This opportunity was significant as it was the first Beckett play produced at the NT, but it was an early example of opening up Beckett's

drama to wider parts of the city's theatre cultures and geography beyond Sloane Square.[3] Having received its world premiere as *Spiel* on 14 June 1963 at the Ulmer Theatre in Ulm, Germany, directed by Deryk Mendel, the British premiere followed at the Old Vic under Devine's direction on 7 April 1964.[4] Devine had previously collaborated with Beckett on *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, and Beckett's input in rehearsals was again welcomed, as according to Irving Wardle, Devine 'believed Beckett was the best guide to staging the plays' (1978: 207).[5] Devine was now experienced in directing Beckett's drama, but *Play* represented a completely new shift in terms of Beckett's theatrical innovations. *Play* involves three characters – M, W1 and W2 – a man, his female partner and his mistress, who are positioned in three individual and identical urns with only their heads visible. Each figure rapidly delivers their story when their speech is 'provoked' by a spotlight on their face, as it moves interrogatively between the characters (Beckett 2006: 397). At the end of its first run, the drama is repeated a second time.

Once again for a London Beckett production, *Play*'s realization was indebted to the skills of Jocelyn Herbert, who had previously designed the sets and costumes for *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days* at the Royal Court. After Beckett felt 'excruciated' from the 'unpleasant bulging shape' used for the urns in the Ulm premiere (2014a: 551 and 583), Herbert's design built three long, slim urns to hug around the actors' bodies. Her design concept factored in the actors' comfort, as they stood below the urns that were placed on a platform and had a bar to hold onto as they performed. Furthermore, her inventive hair and makeup design heightened the unfamiliarity of the characters in the urns: 'We chose desiccated wigs made as if they were the actors' own hair [. . .]. We made make-up out of oatmeal mixed with water and a little glue [. . .] and put ordinary make-up first and then covered the actors' faces with this mixture. Lastly, we added grey and white pancake' (Courtney 1993: 98). This costume, wig and make up design blended the actors into the overall environment and gave the impression that the actors were decaying, particularly when flakes of porridge broke off the actors' faces mid-performance, as suggested in her make up drawing for Billie Whitelaw as W2 (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Make up design by Jocelyn Herbert for Billie Whitelaw in *Play*. National Theatre at the Old Vic, 1964. National Theatre Archive, Jocelyn Herbert Archive, JH/4/27 (JH4370). Courtesy National Theatre Archive

Alongside Herbert's design, the onerous technical demands of *Play* were complemented by Devine's accomplished skills in lighting design. In a letter to Beckett, Devine described how the lights were operated in the production, which involved the light bouncing off a mirror on a swivel 'operated by hand with 2 end stops and a groove in the middle' to ensure the light hit the three urns when necessary (1964a). He continued to note the intricacies by stating, 'The mirror operator has a dimmer controlled by him for intensities' with the three lights 'controlled by the main switchboard' (1964a). Ultimately, the technical execution of this production provided Beckett with major insights into the possibilities of lighting equipment and design, an influential

learning experience for the writer, as his later emphasis on lighting for *Not I*, *That Time*, *Footfalls* and *Catastrophe* suggested.

The visual and technical intricacies of *Play* at the Old Vic supported a talented cast made up of actors from the NT's Company: Robert Stephens, Rosemary Harris and Billie Whitelaw.[6] Both Harris and Stephens were members of the National's company, who performed in their earlier productions such as *Hamlet* and *Uncle Vanya*; however, their new roles as M and W1 contrasted significantly with their previous performances, given the unconventional position of their characters and their restricted bodies inside an urn with little or no action or interaction with each other on stage. For Whitelaw, it was her first experience with the National and with a Beckett play, in what would become a long-standing collaboration between the writer and actor. Harris thought the characters were 'dead and under interrogation' (Rosenthal 2013: 81) and, according to Whitelaw, both Harris and Stephens 'wanted to know more about the characters they played [and] the meaning of the piece' (Whitelaw 1995: 76), which reflects the practices they had become accustomed to within UK theatres around characterization and narrative. Whitelaw's autobiography implies she was less concerned with this traditional approach, as she noted: 'The excitement would come from the musicality of the piece, rather than the story-telling. I wasn't the least bothered by the lack of characterisation or psychology' (Whitelaw 1995: 76). Whitelaw's indifference saw her abide by the director and author's wishes, but she indicated that 'Robert Stephens and Rosemary Harris felt it was all going much too fast' and told herself, 'Just keep out of this, Whitelaw' (Whitelaw 1995: 78), as wider artistic tensions were about to emerge over how *Play* should be performed.

Previous narratives of this production have concentrated on the 'fierce arguments' that developed after rehearsals between Beckett and Devine on the one side and Kenneth Tynan, Laurence Olivier and William Gaskill on the other (Knowlson 1996: 516–17). Tynan was famously an early advocate for *Waiting for Godot*, before his reviews consistently criticized Beckett's subsequent plays, and this continued in his new role as Literary Manager at the NT, which he charted in a letter to Devine (with Olivier and William Gaskill copied in):

> before Sam B. arrived at rehearsals, 'Play' was recognisably a work we all liked and were eager to do. The delivery of the lines was (rightly) puppet-like and mechanical, but not wholly dehumanised and stripped of all emphasis and inflections. On the strength of last weekend, it seems that Beckett's advice on the production has changed all of that – the lines are chanted in a breakneck monotone with no inflections, and I'm not alone in fearing that many of them will be simply inaudible. I suspect Beckett is trying to treat English as if it were French – where that kind of rapid-fire monotony is customary. (Tynan and O'Connor 1994: 292)

Tynan's dissatisfaction with Beckett's influence over *Play* stresses his own expectations and ideological stance towards the theatre in performance, as well as revealing Beckett's early intentions about the delivery of *Play* in performance. As a literary manager in what was then a largely literary British theatre landscape, Tynan's comments were based on an appreciation of the play as a text, and he was keen to see the text communicated clearly rather than be challenged by its intelligibility in what he interpreted as a language statement by a writer predominantly writing and living in France. Beckett's primary concern was its performative and experiential qualities, as Knowlson noted, following the production, 'Beckett took a tape-recording of the English version [. . .] to Paris to demonstrate to the French actors exactly how quickly he wanted the lines to go' (Knowlson 1996: 517). Furthermore, Tynan's protestations attempted to empathize with Devine by blaming Beckett for what Tynan saw as *Play*'s wayward staging:

> I trust the play completely, and I trust your production of it, – up to the advent of the author. What I don't especially trust is Beckett as co-director. If you could see your way to re-humanising the text a little, I'll bet that the actors and the audience will thank you – even if Beckett doesn't! (Tynan and O'Connor 1994: 293)

Tynan's letter reveals how he was unable to relate to the radical performative aspects of *Play*, an obscure but innovative play written to be performed. He was a respected critic, but Tynan's comments suggest

how he found it difficult to transition to his new role and respect the work of the artists trusted with the performance. In contrast, Devine's reply expressed his fulsome support of Beckett's role and intentions:

> The presence of Beckett was of great help to me, and to the actors. . . . I assume you read the stage directions: 'voices toneless except where indicated. Rapid movement throughout.' It was always my intention to try and achieve this, as it is, in my opinion, the only way to perform the play as written. Any other interpretation is a distortion. . . . You do not seem to realise that rehearsing a play is an organic process. . . . To play the play as you indicate would be to demolish its dramatic purpose and turn it into literature. . . . You'll have to have a bit more guts if you really want to do experimental works, which, nine times out of ten, only come off for a 'minority' to begin with. . . . I certainly would never have leased the play . . . if I had thought the intention was to turn it into something it isn't, to please the majority. (Wardle 1978: 208)

Devine's stern tone offers a revealing insight into how their respective theatres could deal with new writing, as Devine was willing to fulfil the writer's intentions, whereas Tynan questioned them. Devine was aware of the risk involved with new writing and, in particular, with Beckett's experimentations, and he stood by his 'right to fail' mantra even when working with another theatre, regardless of public perception. Despite Tynan's negative response and reports that Olivier and Gaskill both admitted their dissatisfaction with the production of *Play*, Olivier later supported Devine by admitting how he was 'very sorry' about the whole affair and how Devine had been 'justifiably angry' (Rosenthal 2013: 82). This was echoed in the honest reflections of Gaskill concerning the dispute: 'I was rather on the side of Olivier and Tynan. I was wrong, and George stuck to his guns as he should have done. And then when it was actually performed one saw the validity of what Beckett had demanded' (Gaskill, Saunders and McFrederick 2018: 157).

Play was realized as Devine and Beckett wanted, with the cast delivering the text as the 'dramatic ammunition' Beckett originally envisaged (Devine 1964b). It was a difficult episode for all concerned, but

it reaffirmed Devine's loyalty to Beckett, even when working in a high-profile partner theatre. This was also verified in Devine's programme note for the production, which publicly and tactfully articulated his stance on interpreting the play and encouraged audiences to remain open-minded about the new forms they would encounter:

> When we first see a new form of painting or listen to a new kind of music, we realise that we have to make an adjustment in ourselves and our attitude if we are to get the best out of the experience. So it is with the plays of Samuel Beckett. We have to surrender to the experience which the poet has prepared for us in order to enjoy ourselves or to criticise it. (1964b)

Devine's note was undoubtedly written with Tynan in mind, but this commentary suggests he was also aware of the need to embolden London theatregoers to engage with the work they would experience rather than dismiss it, as typified by the viewpoints of critics of Beckett's. He was introducing new theatrical forms, and, despite their doubters, Devine advocated their role in opening minds and encouraging change. This was epitomized during the production run when the NT decided to switch around *Play*'s original role as the curtain raiser for *Philoctetes*, in a cheering acknowledgement of how their initial disapproval of Beckett's practices had altered.[7]

By 1964, British audiences and critics had seen Beckett's drama interrogate theatrical conventions in terms of plot, action, aesthetics and performance. *Play* challenged these conventions further through its notable confinement of the body and rapid delivery of dehumanized dialogue. Like so many of Beckett's previous productions, while confusion reigned about the play's content, the critics were still able to express their admiration for the performances they had seen. Despite comparisons to an auctioneer of cattle and its 'depersonalised, staccato delivery, rather like a priest in a hurry to get through a particularly boring blessing', critics such as John Higgins did note, 'Rosemary Harris, Billie Whitelaw and Robert Stephens chant the patter trio brilliantly' (1964). Further evaluations of the drama tried to describe

what they had witnessed, with Philip Hope-Wallace attempting to offer a common point of comparison:

> The heads, like a sample of the forty thieves in Alibaba, recite their own side of the cheap little matrimonial smash-up in the fractured splutter of Dickens' Mr Jingle. It is often wryly funny and almost shamefully close to the kind of internal bickerings that do go on in our heads from time to time – and will perhaps through all eternity? (1964)

Bamber Gascoigne surmised the expectations and status of Beckett's drama by articulating, 'It is usual after each Beckett play to say that this time he can really go no further. But there is still plenty to be done away with. The live actor will be the next victim' (1964), a prophetic assessment of Beckett's minimalism given the emergence of *Breath* five years later.

The staging of *Play* at the NT saw Beckett's drama challenge some of the most influential figures working in British theatre in the 1950s and 1960s, but their acrimonious dispute over its presentation did not discourage the producers from maintaining their interest in Beckett as a dramatist. Less than four years later, Olivier sought to present *All That Fall* in the NT's repertoire, meanwhile Gaskill wrote to Beckett stressing his changed perspective: 'I felt that the excitement of the final results of your and George's work more than compensated for the doubts we may have had during rehearsal' (Gaskill 1965).[8] The final example of reconciliation from this production would most ironically come from Tynan, as he looked to include Beckett's *Breath* in *Oh! Calcutta!* – a theatrical revue he conceived five years later. This performance featured full-frontal nudity and explicit material, unbeknownst to Beckett's initial agreement; an added irony to Tynan's misconceptions of *Play* in performance. Having heard of these details by the time *Oh! Calcutta!* was due to be staged at the Roundhouse, Beckett insisted that *Breath* was removed from the production.[9] Beckett's relationships with these key figures in British theatre were tested after *Play* challenged their established theatrical values, but their

interest in staging his drama signified the continued endorsement of his work in London's theatre culture, an interest that would soon transfer within the institution's evolution.

Beckett and Young Vic: Growing up with Beckett

Since 1970, the Young Vic, in its home along The Cut, situated south of the Thames on the border of the Lambeth and Southwark boroughs, has experienced the ever-changing fashions of London's urban life. The theatre was initially erected on The Cut as a temporary building around the shell of an old butcher's shop on a former bombsite in what was a largely marginalized quarter of London in 1970. The original cultural meanings of the site are a distant memory for the regenerated, vibrant cultural quarter that the theatre inhabits today. When the Young Vic opened, it began life in a junior position within the NT's infrastructure and close to its main premises at the Old Vic under the directorship of Laurence Olivier.[10] Plans for the theatre developed out of an absence of young theatregoers in London during the 1960s, as its major theatres operated with a commercial ethos staging mainstream plays or musicals.[11] Olivier was encouraged to act on this absence after seeing Pop Theatre's inaugural production of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* when it travelled to Brighton – a company that offered cheap tickets to younger audiences. Here, he met the director Frank Dunlop, who caught his attention and who Joan Plowright suggested would be 'the ideal man to [. . .] start a National Theatre for Children' (Rosenthal 2013: 159).[12] Dunlop later joined the NT as an Associate Director and Administrator after Olivier promised him he could 'build a theatre for young people' (McFrederick 2017: 245).[13] Olivier recognized the need for this type of theatre following further internal assessments of the NT's operations, identifying three specific limitations in a letter to the Minister of the Arts Jennie Lee on 29 January 1969:

1. We are not paying nearly enough attention to young audiences. [. . .]
2. We have no room in our programmes, in our theatre, workshops or in our planning, for the proper consideration of experimental work that any National Theatre should have.
3. Lastly, and I think most importantly, I am [. . .] getting apprehensive regarding the continuance of the basic structure on which the whole idea of the National Theatre depends for its health and progression, namely the permanent ensemble. (Olivier 1969)

These candid assessments gained the support of the Arts Council, and in 1970 the Young Vic was born with Dunlop as its first Artistic Director and founder. According to Dunlop, his intentions were for the theatre to cater to an overlooked audience, as he stated, 'The Young Vic was created [. . .] to get back an audience that was missing, which was the late teens and early twenties' (McFrederick 2017: 246).

A key part of Dunlop's plans to attract this missing audience to the Young Vic was his eclectic programming, which challenged and entertained younger audiences, and deliberately included Beckett's drama. As Dunlop contended, 'Whilst we did some new things, the main things were first of all the great classics and revivals of recent top writers whose work was not being done and available for young people to see. And [. . .] the two top of my list were Shakespeare and Beckett' (McFrederick 2017: 246). The Young Vic's interest in Beckett can be attributed to Dunlop, who was one of Beckett's leading – if underrecognized – advocates across the British and international theatres and organizations he led. Dunlop worked extensively as a producer and director in the UK and America, leading theatres and festivals such as the Nottingham Playhouse, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Edinburgh International Festival, with Beckett's drama in fact linking his programming at each of these organizations. When reminded about the frequency with which the Young Vic staged Beckett, Dunlop jokingly responded, 'Good god, we did go out on a limb', though he dismissed the idea that programming Beckett was a

gamble: 'I didn't think it was a risk at all. I was absolutely sure it wasn't a risk. I knew my audience and I knew that they would come. They came' (McFrederick 2017: 246–7). Just as Beckett's drama was programmed during the formative years of other post-war British theatres such as the Royal Court, the RSC and the NT, the Young Vic would present Beckett's drama to a new generation of theatregoers. Between 1970 and 1973, it staged eight Beckett plays in four separate theatrical productions, with *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days* built into the theatre's repertory, as this chapter will now explore.

The connection between Beckett's drama and the Young Vic, in fact, predates its long-standing home on The Cut, as *Godot*, an adaptation of Moliere's *Scapino* and *Timesneeze* by David Campton played in the opening Young Vic season on 25 February 1970 at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre in Holborn. *Godot* opened on 18 March, and ticket sales prioritized young people in 'schools [and] youth organisations' with few performances open to the general public (Leaflet 1970). Furthermore, both at the Cochrane and the Young Vic, it was clear from their publicity leaflets that they aimed to break down traditional theatregoing conventions: 'The audience will sit or lie in the auditorium and on the stage and the action will take place all around. Places will not be individually reserved and first to arrive will have first choice of where they will be', in a further sign of the Young Vic's desire to remove stifling barriers to the theatre experience for their younger audiences (Leaflet 1970).

Godot met the Young Vic's objectives as it was an experimental performance for young people using actors from the NT's ensemble, and their publicity leaflets were carefully written to engage with a younger demographic. As Dunlop recognized, 'Beckett, I thought, would appeal with young people once they thought he wasn't *avant garde* or for the upper classes or experimental. We never used the word experimental you see because that would put people off' (McFrederick 2017: 248). The theatre achieved this by stressing *Godot*'s curious and comedic attributes, with one publicity leaflet noting that it was 'a difficult play to understand' before describing it as 'entertaining' and suggesting

the influence of 'Buster Keaton's comedy films' (Leaflet 1970). Irving Wardle labelled the production as 'pop-Beckett', due to its comedic emphasis, its circus and vaudeville routines, 'bursts of circus music' and its 'laugh-a-line tramps' (1970). This exploration of humour was also reported in *the Sunday Times*, 'The production opens too, with a burst of fairground music, and the tramps prance on like cringing comedians, while the play is punctuated from time to time for no clear reason with little bursts of street song. It doesn't spoil things' (Unknown Author 1970a). Undoubtedly, producing Beckett for young people was a risk for the theatre, though this unconventional relationship was embraced by its audience, with Ronald Bryden noting that Dunlop 'proved his point that an audience of children can take "*Godot*" in their stride much as they enjoy "*Alice*," without the worryings after symbolism and significance which busied their elders in the fifties. They listened, they giggled and let it happen' (Bryden 1970). In contrast, some commentators questioned the appropriateness of *Godot* for younger audiences, but it was also reported that *Godot* had higher bookings than the other two productions (See Barker 1970).

As well as attracting a youthful audience, the Young Vic was able to offer practical theatre experience to up-and-coming actors and directors. With the exception of his direction of *Happy Days*, Dunlop deliberately chose young directors to work on Beckett's plays as he believed 'they'd have a different attitude because they'd not necessarily seen them' (McFrederick 2017: 248). By 1970, the iconography of Beckett's stage images was beginning to retain a sense of familiarity within the cultural memory of some theatregoers and critics, though Dunlop's suggestion that previous productions would not have influenced productions staged at the Young Vic emphasizes how a new generation of spectators and practitioners perceived Beckett's work afresh. As Dunlop articulated of Adrian Brine's direction of *Godot*: 'It was very good and very, very simple but virtually in the round. Most of the stage was surrounded by audience and there was only one strip at the end where you could put your back to a wall. This production was done mainly down the stage in the middle of the audience' (McFrederick 2017: 249).

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

> Well known by now. Another young man's production, or at least a production for young people. These productions do seem to strike the right note. Most enjoyable, perhaps a shade light on thought provokingness. House full, mostly young people, and a beautiful queue outside hoping for returns. The spirit of the place develops well. (Unknown Author 1970b)

Godot's positive audience figures and reception saw it added to the theatre's repertory and prompted the addition of *Endgame* and *Happy Days* to the 1971 programme. As a result, Beckett gained a reputation as 'the most popular writer in the short history of the Young Vic' (Unknown Author 1971), beating 'Shakespeare, Moliere and Sophocles to the top of the Young Vic's audience chart' (Wardle 1971). This enthusiasm continued with *Endgame*, directed by Peter James in 1971, in what was the first performance staged in its 100-seater studio space.

Between 1970 and 1973, Beckett was programmed frequently at the Young Vic, but it was not always the case that these productions were unanimously well-received, as epitomized by *Endgame*. Intriguingly, as with *Godot* one year earlier, *Endgame*'s publicity stressed its comedic qualities in an effort to attract young patrons, stating, 'As usual with Beckett the patter of the music hall can be discerned – the joke, the funny story. [. . .] The result is [. . .] a riveting, hilarious, poetic drama which the author has taught us to expect of him' (Publicity Leaflet 1971). Despite this emphasis, the production's critical reception suggests that the play's subtle black comedy was not realized in performance. For example, John Barber 'congratulated [the Young Vic] on their able and reverent attempt' before describing their *Endgame* as 'far too solemn and portentous' (Barber 1971). B. A. Young supported these comments and would have 'preferred if this production had been played for laughs a little more' (Young 1971), while J. C. Trewin doubted its suitability

for younger playgoers questioning 'whether it would urge [. . .] any sustained love affair with the theatre' (Trewin 1971). In contrast, other well-respected reviewers, including Harold Hobson, lauded the production and the theatre: 'Dunlop is making a huge success of the Young Vic, and its latest production [. . .] is bound to increase its reputation' (Hobson 1971). Contrary to Trewin's suggestions, it did have an impact on some of the young audience members in attendance, with the writer Kevin Jackson describing in 1994:

> the one cultural encounter which really burns in my memory without simultaneously making my cheeks burn is the evening I saw [. . .] *Endgame* at the Young Vic in 1971 [. . .] the first play I had gone to see voluntarily and alone. [. . .] I came out of the auditorium with claw marks across my post-pubescent psyche that have yet to fade. (Jackson 1994)

Many of the production's critics may have seen *Endgame* before or been, as Marvin Carlson puts it, 'ghosted by previous experiences', but Jackson's reflections were those of a youthful, inexperienced theatregoer and suggest the pivotal impact the Young Vic had on a new generation of playgoers (2006). While critics offered varied perspectives on the performance, many audience members applauded it, including Dunlop, who praised the company, director and production: 'It was an amazing group of actors and it was the best thing that Peter ever did. I can still see it in my mind. I can just see it. It was so good' (McFrederick 2017: 251). Despite the Young Vic's notable absence from existing performance histories of Beckett's drama, it is clear that the productions had a significant impact on the cultural memory of critics, practitioners and theatregoers, and in the case of *Endgame*, these enduring images remained vividly in the minds of its audiences.

With *Godot* and *Endgame* attracting young audiences to the theatre, Dunlop quickly added *Happy Days* to the theatre's programme in June 1971. *Happy Days* positions the isolated character of Winnie in a mound up to her waist with blazing light in Act 1, where she busies herself with her self-preservation, memories and routines. The play essentially operates as a monologue, as her only respondent is her monosyllabic

husband Willie, and in Act 2, Winnie appears with the mound up to her neck, but she continues to chatter, recalling stories from a little girl called Mildred to Mr and Mrs Shower, and maintaining a resilience despite her difficult circumstances. Denise Coffey's performance in *Happy Days* has been largely forgotten in the cultural narratives generated on the play, which have concentrated on Brenda Bruce, Madeleine Renaud, Peggy Ashcroft and Billie Whitelaw, despite many supportive responses to her interpretation.[14] Andrew Robertson joined Coffey as Willie, in a familiar cast of Beckett performers at the theatre, for a production that would also tour regional theatres, including the Nuffield Theatre in Southampton and the Harrogate Festival.[15] The production shared the Young Vic's emphasis on comedy; a decision that divided commentators. While De Jongh thought it 'robs us of the play's concern with death' (1971b), Garry O'Connor argued it 'tries to steer a new path; Denise Coffey emphasises the comic side of the tragi-comedy' (1971). This emphasis accompanied the circus-like atmosphere of Anusia Nieradzik's set, where balloons symbolized clouds against a blue backdrop, with a raked mound of scorched grass. As Rosemary Say said,

> With a predominantly young audience, Peter James has plumped for the humour rather than the underlying tragedy of the situation in his production. Denise Coffey faces up to her marathon role with a perky courage [. . .]. Such an interpretation, without fear or despair, may lose in depth of feeling but offers its own challenge. I found it perfectly valid. (1971)

Coffey's interpretation characterized the Young Vic's early approach to Beckett, as they sought to balance their efforts to programme experimental drama with entertainment for younger audiences. By engaging with the popular performance techniques ranging from clowning to vaudeville, the Young Vic made Beckett's drama more accessible and, in turn, engaged a new generation of theatregoers with his work.

The Young Vic's early commitment to Beckett concluded with a multiple bill of *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Act Without Words I*, *Act Without*

Words II, *Come and Go* and *Play*, a production that meant they had performed more Beckett plays than any other London theatre up to that point. Dunlop's early seasons had introduced a new generation of theatregoers to the wide range of Beckett's dramatic canon and although later directorships of the Young Vic did not programme Beckett with the same frequency, a tradition of staging Beckett can be seen across the history of the Waterloo theatre. As a theatre, it set out with the intention – as a secondary venue to the NT – to offer inexpensive tickets for classic and experimental dramas to young playgoers. Beckett helped the theatre fulfil this remit as the most popular playwright in the early years of the theatre. At a time when the theatre was uncertain of its longevity, Beckett's drama was prominent and accepted by both the institutional bodies governing and programming the Young Vic and its youthful audience demographic.

Back to the National: *Happy Days* with Hall and Ashcroft

By 1974, both the RSC and the NT were undergoing significant inter-institutional changes that would have a ripple effect across the landscape of London theatres. The NT was awaiting the completion of its three new auditoria on the Southbank and was, in theory, entering its final year at the Old Vic. Meanwhile, complications arose as to what would happen to the Young Vic with the National's move and whether the Young Vic's lease on The Cut would be renewed. These decisions would be influenced by an important change at management level, with Peter Hall appointed as the NT's new artistic director in 1973. Hall's move from the RSC to the NT left a complicated inter-institutional undercurrent, which would prove a contributing factor to Beckett's drama on the London stage. Hall authorized the independence of the Young Vic and directed a new NT production of *Happy Days*, first at the Old Vic and then at its new Southbank home. This original idea

for staging *Happy Days* was planned for the Aldwych Theatre, though Hall's new position meant he brought the idea to the Old Vic, where he would cast Dame Peggy Ashcroft – one of the country's most esteemed actresses and a member of the RSC Directorate – as Winnie.[16]

The NT's production of *Happy Days* represented another milestone in the history of staging Beckett in London, as it showed how his drama was reembraced by the UK's largest subsidized theatre with a renowned actress and director duo at the height of their careers – just over twenty years from when *Waiting for Godot* encountered difficulties in attracting actors, a director or a theatre to stage it. Ashcroft was upset in the aftermath of Hall's decision to move theatres, described as 'the one real crisis' in their friendship, with Ashcroft telling Hall: 'You can't go and compete with the child you've created' (Billington 1988: 233). After this initial disgruntlement and some convincing, Ashcroft would later accept Hall's decision and play Winnie at the NT (Figure 5). The situation was directly addressed in the production's programme, as it attempted to appease any conflict of interest by noting: 'At present on loan to the National Theatre from the Royal Shakespeare Company, where she is an associate artist and director, her integrity is unchallenged. She is of the theatre and for the theatre.'

Beyond the inter-institutional politics, *Happy Days* was an important play for Ashcroft to be cast in, as beyond her classical work she had started to take a keen interest in contemporary drama, performing in Harold Pinter's *Landscape* (1969) and *A Slight Ache* (1973), and *A Delicate Balance* (1969) by Edward Albee. In an interview with Katharine Worth, she remarked: 'Playing Winnie [. . .] was a major event for me. I had always wanted to play the part; in fact, I was slightly miffed that George Devine didn't ask me to do it when he directed the play at the Royal Court Theatre, the first British production' (Ben-Zvi 1990: 11). According to Billington's biography, Brenda Bruce was asked instead because he 'didn't think [Ashcroft] would want to' (Billington 1988: 237). By 1974, Ashcroft was a *grand dame* of British theatre, the first actor honoured by the royal family to perform in Beckett's plays and contrary to Devine's beliefs was 'happy when the opportunity came [her] way' (Ben-Zvi 1990: 11).

Figure 5 Peggy Ashcroft as Winnie in *Happy Days*, National Theatre, 1974. Directed by Peter Hall, designed by John Bury. Photograph by Douglas H Jeffery of *Happy Days*, Old Vic Theatre, London, 1974. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. a. THM/374/1/9550

Beckett's enthusiasm at this major National Theatre revival was embodied by his willingness to join Hall and Ashcroft for three weeks of rehearsals in London from 13 October to 4 November 1974.[17] His desire to contribute to the play's success was indeed characterized by the production notebook he made in preparation for the rehearsals, where his presence proved both useful and, at the same time, a source of irritation for Ashcroft.[18] In revisiting the play, Beckett's reflections prompted cuts and alterations, as he grew to dislike certain sections of the text, saw moments to improve its rhythm or found his stage directions had practical limitations for specific actors or technical challenges. One major cut Beckett had in mind concerned the parasol catching fire, which annoyed both Ashcroft and Hall. Ashcroft saw this as an integral moment in the play and said of the author's edits:

> Peter Hall persuaded him not to [cut it], and I'm sure he was right. It would have been a terrible loss, not just to Winnie's part (though I would certainly have been sad to lose it) but to the whole play. It's such a wonderful moment of theatre when the parasol catches fire and burns up, so unexpected and comical. (Ben-Zvi 1990: 12)

Ashcroft's comments reflect her interest in leaving the play as it was written, and her dissatisfaction was echoed by Hall in his diary:

> This he said had never worked. [. . .] Sam has had trouble about that all over the world [. . .]. He now asks that the parasol merely smokes and the material melts away like some kind of plastic under heat. He also surprisingly, wants to cut an entire page of dialogue relating to the parasol. This disturbed Peggy because it is good and she learnt it. And it also disturbed me because I think he's only cutting it out of a memory of all the difficulties of the past. (Goodwin 1983: 123–4)

In a rare moment for Beckett's involvement in rehearsals, it was Ashcroft and Hall who insisted Beckett's text remained unaltered, and the author's suggested cuts were not adhered to in this instance. Instead, his contributions to rehearsals focused on the intersecting choreography of Winnie's physicality and her routines with her handbag's possessions, including details such as 'which hand she uses and what she does with her hat and glasses' (Billington 1988: 238). Hall described how Beckett's meticulous attention to detail aided their performance by noting: 'for a creative actor, and particularly for Peggy Ashcroft, it was a dreadful corseting. It was a terrifying experience but it gave us what was in Beckett's head. It also gave Peggy a month after he was gone to make it her own and adjust it' (Billington 1988: 238). As a result of this established choreography and subconscious understanding of these detailed movements, Ashcroft was prepared to intertwine Winnie's many stage directions with her lengthy, broken monologue.

The disjointed but honest collaboration led to a performance that was positively received by London's critics and became part of the NT's repertory, touring the UK and Canada; however, Ashcroft later admitted, 'I'm not sure if Beckett would have altogether approved of

my interpretation' (Ben-Zvi 1990: 12). Despite his attendance at three weeks of rehearsals, Ashcroft believed Beckett would have disliked the 'humanized' attributes she gave to Winnie, as she compared her version to the rhythmic and taut vocal demands he placed on Whitelaw when directing the play in 1979 (Ben-Zvi 1990: 12). For an actress like Ashcroft, who was about to celebrate her half-century on the stage, she 'felt a need to work in terms of character: why did Winnie use certain rhythms, what did it tell about her?' were some of the questions she sought to answer when engaged with the role (Ben-Zvi 1990: 12). Indeed, the accent she adopted was inspired by Beckett's presence in rehearsals, as she imagined the voice with a distinctive Irish lilt and told Beckett:

> I know what Winnie's voice sounds like.
> Oh, how?
> Like you.
> Oh I don't know about that. (Ben-Zvi 1990: 12)

She found this decision was justified as she continued to develop her sensitivities towards Winnie's monologue and its delivery, as she 'found there were all sorts of little turns of speech which seemed to come more easily in an Irish rhythm' (Ben-Zvi 1990: 12).

Ashcroft's Irish rhythm as Winnie played at the Old Vic until the NT moved to its new home along the Southbank, designed by the architect Denys Lasdun. This move to the Southbank saw 'the culmination of a tragic-comic, 138-year-long campaign to establish such a building in London' and yet another landmark moment where Beckett's drama was present in the history of British theatre, as *Happy Days* was the first play performed in the Lyttelton Theatre (Billington 1988: 244). This decision was a testament to the production's quality (and the fact it was already in repertory), but the honour accentuated Beckett's stature within London and British theatre by the mid-1970s and signified the respect the NT and Hall had for Beckett's drama, albeit this was not always reflected in their broader programming. As Billington poignantly contended, he was struck by Ashcroft's 'buoyancy, optimism and musicality' in the role

and saw it fitting that 'the National Theatre should begin its life not with some trumpeted gala event but with Britain's leading actress appearing in a play about survival against the odds by a great contemporary writer' (Billington 1988: 244). By this momentous point, Beckett's drama was more naturally accepted by London theatres, and *Happy Days* signified how the nation's largest subsidized theatre was willing to favour his drama in what was a new chapter for British theatre and the theatre's own development.

The relationship between Beckett's drama, the NT, the Young Vic and indeed the Old Vic continued beyond the 1970s through a range of performances that saw the theatres keep in touch with Beckett alongside their varied programming needs. As Chapter 6 will discuss in further detail, *Rockaby* (1982) and *Waiting for Godot* (1987) saw Beckett's drama return to the NT in his lifetime, before Deborah Warner directed *Happy Days* in 2007 following her hiatus from Beckett's drama. Several notable figures from Beckettian and British theatre histories proceeded to work at the Young Vic, including the San Quentin Drama Workshop (*Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, 1980), Ken Campbell (*Godot*, 1982), David Thacker (*Godot*, 1989), Peter Brook (*Fragments*, 2007 and 2008) and Juliet Stephenson and Natalie Abrahami (*Happy Days*, 2014 and 2015). Meanwhile, as the Old Vic transitioned to its post-NT years, the boomerang nature of Beckett's drama in London meant *Waiting for Godot* (1981) was revived in the Apartheid-influenced touring production from the Baxter Theatre, South Africa, to the most recent presentation of *Endgame* and *Rough for Theatre II* in January 2020, which will feature in the final chapter of this book.[19]

This quickfire summary of performances indicates the strong interest in Beckett that persisted in each theatre, but it is also representative of the limitations this history faced in attempting to examine every Beckett production staged in London. Beckett was not 'a National playwright', but his plays were at the very foundation of the NT and the Young Vic's respective journeys towards their current status as major London, national and international theatres. The case studies from this chapter reveal how staging his drama showed the theatres what was needed

and what was possible: *Play* spoke to a need for bravery with theatrical experimentation within the British theatre establishment, the appetite of younger audiences to see Beckett at the Young Vic suggested how his work could appeal to different audience demographics, and Winnie's resilience in the face of adversity signified the survival instincts of the new NT on the Southbank after such a difficult birth. Although Beckett's drama was not necessarily a regular feature at the NT, his drama was present, and its presence contributed to integral phases across the wider NT institutional history and its different London spaces. A similar theme would occur when the Royal Shakespeare Company incorporated Beckett into its formative programming, as Chapter 4 will discuss.

4

Beckett and the Royal Shakespeare Company

By 1964, Beckett had become one of the most coveted writers for Britain's leading subsidized theatres. The English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court produced many of his British and world premieres and was set to revive *Godot* later in the year, while the National Theatre saw the merits of Beckett's writing by staging *Play* in its inaugural season. The Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) interest in Beckett's drama remains an overlooked connection in both the production histories of the writer and this theatre institution, but it was one that saw the presentations of *Act Without Words II* and *Endgame* in the same year at London's Aldwych Theatre, in a further sign of Beckett's prominent role in the development of key British theatres during their formative years.

Officially chartered in 1961, the RSC sought to expand beyond the centrality of Shakespeare to its programming and its long-standing association with Stratford, when Peter Hall was appointed Artistic Director in 1958.[1] A statement on the RSC policy from 1964 declared, 'The Royal Shakespeare Company must draw on the whole spectrum of world drama, but this is not their complete aim. Their work is rooted in Shakespeare, stems from Shakespeare, and their purpose is to build a strong bridge between the classical theatre and the truly popular theatre of our time' (Addenbrooke 1974: 114). This statement suggests how Beckett's drama fulfilled different criteria for the RSC: it was international, it connected the RSC's traditions with its present-day ambitions, and it was gaining in popularity with an increasingly curious theatregoing public, particularly the younger audiences the RSC sought to attract. Growing out of the Shakespeare

Memorial Theatre at Stratford, Hall also identified the need to provide the Company with a London home so its productions could engage with regional and metropolitan audiences by adopting the Aldwych Theatre – a 1,200 seater theatre located at the corner of Aldwych and Drury Lane in the West End – as the Company's London base from 1960 to 1980. With its two locations and its first Arts Council subsidy in 1963, the RSC could present work in a single venue, as was the case with Beckett's drama, but it also allowed the best work from Stratford to play at the Aldwych, including landmark productions such as Friedrich Durrenmatt's *The Physicists* (1963) and Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (1964). With its institutional infrastructure in place, as well as Hall's inventive and ambitious artistic planning – spanning over 100 separate productions during his tenure, the RSC was willing to complement its unending commitment to Shakespeare by programming contemporary drama, like Beckett's, to remain in dialogue with modern works and maintain the broader interests of its audiences.

This chapter will re-examine the neglected relationship between Beckett's drama and the RSC to reveal how one of the UK's major subsidized theatres presented landmark and lesser-known stagings of his drama at its London home during its first decade as a theatre. It will begin with a production of *Act Without Words II*, before investigating a highly regarded staging of *Endgame* with Jack MacGowran and Patrick Magee. This production convinced Hall that the RSC should form a more secure bond with Beckett's work, and the chapter will proceed to document the RSC's pursuit of exclusive rights to Beckett's drama in London. A final eclectic phase of this production history from 1965 to 1971 will return to another notable performance moment in British theatre history, where milestone foreign language productions of Beckett's *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (*Happy Days*) from the Comédie-Française in Paris and the Schiller Theater Berlin's *Das Letzte Band* (*Krapp's Last Tape*) and *Endspiel* (*Endgame*) were staged as part of the RSC's World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre; performances that connected with Beckett's revered status in Paris and Berlin and confirmed the appetite to see these performances in London.

Early RSC connections

Contrary to existing narratives, the first Beckett play produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company was not *Endgame*, but, in fact, the little-known presentation of *Act Without Words II* (*AWWII*)[2] one week earlier at the Aldwych Theatre on 2 July 1964, where it was produced as part of an experimental programme of short British and European works called 'Expeditions One' and ran for eight performances alongside *The Pedagogue* by James Saunders, *The Keyhole* by Jean Tardieu, *No Why* by John Whiting and *Picnic on the Battlefield* by Fernando Arrabal. Expeditions One aimed 'to establish a programme that will give scope to short plays which because of their difficult length might not otherwise be performed', and, 'to provide a stage for experiment so that dramatists can put before an audience a technique, a theme, or an idea which they cannot otherwise be sure will work' (Marriott 1964). *AWWII* met the brief, as a mime that focuses on two characters: A, a slow and spiritual being, and B, a more efficient, business-like character, who take turns in appearing and returning to their sacks to complete their daily routines after being prompted by a goad that pokes their sacks in turn. It was directed by Elsa Bolam – the first female director of a Beckett play in London – who reflected on the scenario's meaning: 'you ended up doing the same thing in the end, just taking one more daily step through your life, the length of which is preordained, but not by you'.[3]

Bolam was then an assistant director at the RSC, working under Clifford Williams on productions of David Rudkin's *Afore Night Come* (1964) and *The Jew of Malta* by Christopher Marlowe (1964), before she was handed the script of *AWWII*. Bolam revealed about her production: 'I tried to stage it exactly as Beckett specified, but instead of a low platform, we had a white strip of canvas placed across the stage to form a sort of roadway.' Although it was unusual for performers to crawl in and out of sacks at the time, Bolam collaborated effectively with her 'two brilliant (and very nice) actors' Freddie Jones (A) and Geoffrey Hinsliff (B). Challenges did arise, however, from performing the script on the Aldwych stage and its backstage spaces, as Bolam elaborated:

> The Goad was a metal arrow protruding from a tube, which was set to prod at the shoulder height of an actor sitting in a sack on the floor of the stage. It was mounted on wheels, and had to appear three times, being longer each time. Because there was so little room in the Prompt corner, we resorted to the use of vacuum cleaner tubing, which the stage-hands had to play out. This was very hard to achieve smoothly.

Such were the difficulties, in fact, that halfway through rehearsals, John Barton decided to omit the mime from Expeditions One. Understandably, Bolam was 'very upset'; however, the production was later reinstated after Williams saw a rehearsal, but 'only just in time for the opening'.

Bolam's production has previously been overlooked in Beckett's performance histories, largely because Beckett was not involved, nor known to have attended, and its limited critical reception.[4] Bolam

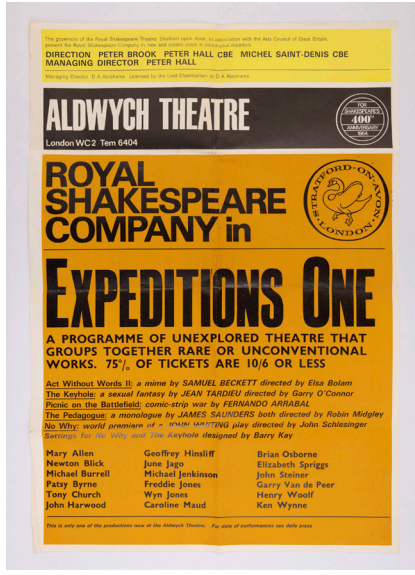

Figure 6 Image of the poster for Expeditions One by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre, 1964. UoR, Uncatalogued. Kindly donated by Elsa Bolam. Beckett International Foundation, University of Reading. © RSC

recalled seeing him in a pub at the time while he visited London for rehearsals of *Endgame*, but admitted:

> I was timid then and very much in awe of him, and so we never spoke, but in retrospect I should have just marched up to him and asked him whether if he'd mind if we staged the show in reverse, there being much more offstage room on the other side of the Aldwych stage. And the stagehands would have been cheering in the background!

The production's neglected place in performance histories may also be attributed to the play's omission from the original programme, where it was instead documented as a loose insert, which suggests how the performance could easily have been forgotten or lost in terms of records and documentation of the event. It was, however, included in the poster of Expeditions One, which demonstrates the haphazard programming and start for Beckett's relationship with the RSC (Figure 6).

Beckett's primary reason for visiting London in January 1964 was to attend rehearsals for the English Theatre's revival of *Endgame*, destined for the Studio des Champs-Elysée in Paris. English Theatre, not to be confused with the ESC, was a company concerned with producing English language plays in Paris 'to combine [the] highest acting standards with plays of contemporary theatrical value' (Programme 1964a). It was undoubtedly the company's casting that enticed Beckett to London, with MacGowran and Magee playing Clov and Hamm, two great friends and actors he deeply admired from the 1958 productions of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, respectively, and as he expressed to the director Michael Blake, he dreamed of them in *Endgame* (see Beckett 1963a). Beckett's dream would materialize twice in the same year, as the English Theatre production would pave the way for an RSC production at the Aldwych in July, this time with MacGowran and Magee directed by Donald McWhinnie. The London rehearsals for the English Theatre production saw Beckett contribute to the practical realization of his play, a contribution that was uniquely documented in a diary by *the Times* journalist Clancy Sigal, who was granted access to the assortment of venues the company rehearsed in from The Establishment nightclub to

an upper floor at the Royal Court. Sigal's diary entries outline how 'The work atmosphere was always quiet, curiously formal, even delicate, often intense' (Sigal 1964: 17). Beckett's arrival saw the actors become 'more hesitant', as the playwright poured over the text, their vocal inflections, pace and physical movement (Sigal 1964: 17). For each working day, Beckett's focus was spread across multiple facets of the performance, as his account of Day 2 indicated he was 'crucially interested in the stage space in which the players manipulate themselves' and Day 5 revealed his frustrations with his working version of the text: 'Beckett [. . .] is asked if he ever sees anything in his work, this play. "Yes. Mistakes . . . The more I go on the more I think things are untranslatable"' (Sigal 1964: 17–22). The rehearsals provided Magee and MacGowran with several insights into their characters, and their collaboration was enlivened by some relaxed humour, for example, on Day 4 when Sigal recorded: 'Magee asks, with extreme diffidence: "Sam – Hamm, what does he look like?" "Like you." "Well," grins the actor, "that's a blessing." [. . .] Beckett adds something. "A bit of a monster. The remains of a monster. Yes, the remains of a monster."' (Sigal 1964: 17–22). As these examples suggest, the rehearsals combined the good humour of the friends and collaborators with concentrated work on realizing the play.

Following the production's varied and tight rehearsal spaces, the performance travelled to Paris for the equally intimate stage of the Studio des Champs-Elysées, where Hamm's centrally positioned chair was no more than one metre away from Nagg and Nell's bins and Clov's door was deliberately shorter than MacGowran, whose costume blended into the greyscale aesthetic of the room. The French designer Matias – who would later work on many landmark French and German productions of Beckett's plays – sought to maximize and question space and at the same time explore the play through spatial limitations and restricted colours, as he 'supplie[d] an atmospheric set in shades of black' (Kamm 1964). The performance at the Studio des Champs-Elysées was well received by the limited press clippings that survive. Henry Kamm in the *New York Times* applauded the play and performances in a review that accentuated the Hiberno tones of its core protagonists: 'If the play

is magnificent, the performance does not let it down. Patrick Magee as Hamm and Jack MacGowran as Clov, gifted Irish players, underline the Irishness of Beckett without masking the play's larger meaning' (Kamm 1964). The two actors were praised for their respective performances with MacGowran 'funny and affecting', while Magee was commended for his 'uncommonly expressive voice and well calculated gestures' (Kamm 1964). Some narratives have questioned Blake's role as director given Beckett's influence in rehearsals, but Blake is credited in the programme and Kamm's review credits him for 'staging a performance of well judged pace and scrupulous attention to Beckett's explicit stage directions', in an indication of Beckett's influence on its London rehearsals at the very least.

Endgame at the RSC

The year 1964 was a fruitful year for Beckett productions in which the writer spent a considerable amount of time in London, as his professional commitments meant he visited the capital for rehearsals and performances of *Endgame* (English Theatre), *Play* (National Theatre), *Endgame* (RSC) and *Waiting for Godot* (Royal Court). Across the year, he was familiar with developments at the RSC, even attending the influential Theatre of Cruelty season, directed by Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz, with its Experimental Group at the LAMDA Theatre Club.[5] The programme suggested a theme with the RSC's output that year, as David Addenbrooke observed, '[w]hether by accident of design, nearly every play staged by the RSC during 1964 was, in some way, influenced by "cruelty"' (Addenbrooke 1974: 137–8).[6]

Endgame initially ran in repertory from 9 July to 13 November (before extending until 3 December 1964), and the decision to schedule the morbid yet comical play for such a considerable time, particularly – given its themes – during the summer, highlighted the extent of the RSC's bold programming and commitment. When Beckett returned in

July for *Endgame* rehearsals at the Aldwych, he was motivated to return to London and the play because of MacGowran and Magee, as well as newly cast performers for Nagg (Bryan Pringle) and Nell (Patsy Byrne), but an added incentive was to collaborate with Donald McWhinnie once again, given the results of previously collaborating with him on *Krapp's Last Tape* and for radio. In addition to these variants, the production was designed by Ralph Koltai, then Associate Designer at the RSC. Koltai's design was inevitably different from the work of Matias due to the Aldwych's larger playing area, which led to significant distances between the play's focal positions (bin, chair, windows and door), as indicated by the scale of the production's model box in terms of its height, width and depth.[7] As a design, it represented a notable departure from Koltai's existing portfolio, whose distinctive design style often emphasized a marriage between beauty, concept and colour in their careful realization. The set was presented in a curved proscenium with Hamm's chair centrally placed in the room that is empty with

Figure 7 Patrick Magee (Hamm) and Jack MacGowran (Clov) in the RSC production of *Endgame*, Aldwych Theatre, 1964. Directed by Donald McWhinnie, designed by Ralph Koltai. Photo by Reg Wilson © RSC

the exception of the dull dustbins that are black with worn white and dirty patches. The grey floor emphasized space through its emptiness, and the back wall is a patchwork of mould, decay and smatterings of paint, which range from white and grey closest to the ground to grey and black effects as the design grows taller. Koltai used a criss-crossed metal sheet to construct the walls of the room to create what Eric Shorter described as a 'great grey dungeon of a set' (Shorter 1964). As his career attests, Koltai was one of the major UK theatre designers; however, Beckett's letters reveal there was little mutual professional or personal affection, as he wrote to Barbara Bray, 'No one likes set, fussy self-opinionated bastard', in an example of how Beckett could also be at odds with collaborators in London (2014a: 607) (Figure 7).

The revival of *Endgame* saw the play continue to receive damning responses from some London critics. One detractor, Bamber Gascoigne, in a detailed analysis of the play and the performance, argued:

> The relentless mathematical repetitions of the script are played for maximum irritation. Patrick Magee's Hamm operates in an unbroken parabola of petty tyranny, growling at one end of the scale, roaring at the other. Jack MacGowran's Clov, whimpering and snarling, jerks about the stage with an infuriating gait, like Marcel Marceau in high wind. [. . .] Stripped of all poetry and humour, we are left only with Beckett's facile pessimism, in remarks like 'You're on earth, there no cure for that.' Apart from the pleasure of Ralph Koltai's set, I spent, as you may have noticed, an entirely gruesome evening – one of boredom, relieved only by anger. (1964)

In contrast, Bernard Levin saw the value of *Endgame*'s inclusion as the third production in the RSC's series of important modern plays when he described it as:

> a remarkably impressive and haunting piece of work. Mr Beckett's plays may be static, but they are not sterile, and this one is alive and vigorous throughout, couched in rhythmic, allusive, fresh and ear-catching prose.[. . .] Mr Donald McWhinnie's direction has held the balance finely, suggesting the desolation outside as well as the spark

> within, and Mr Patrick Magee and Mr Jack MacGowran play their eternal see-saw with excellent mutual understanding together with temperamental contrasts that are never over-stressed. (1964)

Here, Gascoigne and Levin offer conflicting views of how they engaged with the text and its delivery, which indicates the difficulty in reconstructing past performances and the limitations of conclusively presenting one version of events. Further reviewers, such as Benedict Nightingale, indicated that there was a judicious discipline to McWhinnie's directions and the actors movements, as he elaborated: 'it's befittingly performed by fearsome robots. Each movement, each gesture, each anguished clutch at the head and terrified bend of the body, seems to have been planned by a choreographer and executed by a ballet dancer. Throughout, the muscles of the actors are tautly prepared for the next hopeless, helpless posture' (1964). These descriptions provide a useful precursor to Beckett's own diligently maintained and organized director's notebooks, which underlined his careful planning and judicious directorial style. Intriguingly, the reviews for the 1964 production did signify how critical readings of Beckett were becoming more nuanced in some instances rather than derisory, as the *Times* drama critic showed:

> Stretches of it, certainly, are boring: but to recognize that is only to acknowledge that the play is working as it should. Beckett is dealing with last things – with a world stripped of the illusions of appetite, affection, and ambition, and where there is nothing but meaningless, habit-ridden routine, the end game itself, to pass away the sluggish hours before the final silence. And one method of conveying his bleak vision is deliberately to tease the audience with boredom, from the first line of the play ('It's finished') and in the repeated references to the pointlessness and interminable duration of the action. (Our Drama Critic 1964)

Through more thoughtful reviews, the largely sell-out performances and the extension of the production's repertory season by a further month, the production suggested how some of London's theatregoers were beginning to warm to Beckett by the mid-1960s.

Peter Hall's decision to schedule *Endgame* once again demonstrated the key role the director had in supporting Beckett's career following *Godot*'s premiere, but Beckett's drama also supported Hall's artistic endeavours – albeit with a higher profile at the newly formed institution. Hall would later write to Beckett to express the pride within the RSC at the production's achievement, 'We all feel here that it is one of the best things this theatre has ever done' (Beckett 2014a: 633). The respect shown by Hall was echoed by Peter Brook, who responded favourably to *Endgame* at its press night and exemplified his admiration for Beckett by later asking if he would consider adapting *Life is a Dream* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca (Beckett 2014a: 640). Beckett was honoured at the proposal, and although it did not materialize, it was an early example of how the RSC courted Beckett and his writing. The RSC would continue their advances towards Beckett through Hall's correspondence, who proposed a Beckett season at the Aldwych, including *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Waiting for Godot* and a new play, as Hall sought to build Beckett's work into the RSC repertory (see Beckett 2014a: 632–3 and Hall 1965). Beckett gave a great deal of thought to Hall's proposal, but it conflicted with his commitment to the Court and his personal loyalty to Devine, who was due to retire, for his early support. As he explained to Devine: 'I have always regarded the Court as you and our understanding is essentially a personal one between you and me rather than with the Society. The theatre will never be the same for me with you gone and quite frankly I am not interested in maintaining its priority in your absence' (2014a: 663). Devine relayed his concerns over giving the RSC exclusive rights to his plays – a right that Beckett had informally given to the Court since their relationship began in 1957, prioritizing them over other London or regional theatres in the UK. By the end of March, Beckett decided to open the first option on his works to all London theatres following Devine's departure in September 1965. It was a decision Beckett had given serious consideration to and it marked a new dawn for this performance history as it would open up his drama to more theatrical homes, practitioners and audiences across London, but as the future performances and his letters attest, he would

maintain a fondness and loyalty to the Sloane Square venue.[8] Although this decision may have disappointed Hall, Beckett remained open to offers from the RSC and it did not deter the RSC from staging his work. In 1968 they produced *Waiting for Godot* as part of their outreach programme, Theatregoround, which initially played at the Aldwych Theatre before touring alongside other plays to colleges in Staffordshire and Leicestershire, helping to broaden Beckett's reach in metropolitan and regional areas, while further notable Beckett productions would also emerge at the RSC's London home.

International Beckett: The World Theatre Seasons

A significant, but often understated, strand of the RSC's programming was the international and foreign language productions it presented as part of the World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre in London, productions that demonstrated how Beckett's drama was both on the inside and outside of British theatre cultures. The emergence of these seasons occurred when London's theatre culture was more recognizably evolving, in terms of theatrical content and the developing infrastructure of subsidized theatres. Organized by the impresario Peter Daubeny from the mid-1960s, the Seasons were credited by Jen Harvie for doing 'much to break down the parochialism of the West End', and playing 'a crucial role opening up the West End stage to world theatre' (Harvie 2008: 121). The seasons brought regular cultural vitality to London's theatrical landscape during the summer months from 1964 to 1973 in what was one of the first sustained programming commitments to international theatre in London. The 'World Theatre' that Daubeny sought to showcase was, as Harvie argues, 'unquestionably Eurocentric', epitomized by the Western European origins of the Beckett productions staged, though it did also feature performances from America, Turkey and Japan, for example (Harvie 2008: 121). Nonetheless, Daubeny's achievements in organizing these seasons in the 1960s were remarkable considering the numerous complications involved in producing

international theatre at that time with problems of limited budget, communications with touring companies, the transportation of sets, the Lord Chamberlain and audience translations. Overall, the seasons demonstrated how the RSC's programming could be both international and culturally enriching, with Hall remarking of the first season's cultural and political tolerance: 'This exchange is planned to honour William Shakespeare. Politically it should draw our countries together: artistically it should provide capital that can be used in the future' (Addenbrooke 1974: 77).

As the ESC's pioneering French language premieres of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* in 1957 had shown, this was not the first time London had welcomed foreign language productions of Beckett's drama, but nonetheless, the presentation of German and French Beckett productions as part of the World Theatre Seasons of the mid-1960s and early 1970s did represent significant financial expenditure, and the ambition of the programme was to enrich British theatre culture with international drama that reimagined the potential of theatre. As Daubeny articulated, 'The World Theatre Season makes the world of drama expand its boundaries. It is the aggregate of world culture . . . it is a world which can re-fashion thought and standards and vision in the theatre. In turn it becomes an unfailing source of new creation in Britain' (Addenbrooke 1974: 77). Over these years, the most nuanced continental productions of Beckett's drama were represented with *Oh Les Beaux Jours* from the Théâtre de France (in 1965) and the Schiller Theater's Beckett-directed *Endspiel* (in 1971) and *Das Letzte Band* (in 1970 and 1971) all visiting. While these productions are considered significant in the international performance histories of Beckett's drama, their presence in London has been often overlooked.

Beckett's decision to end his first option agreement at the Royal Court coincided with his more active involvement in performances of his drama staged in France and Germany. Just as his work in London would be associated with the Royal Court, in Paris Beckett supervised or assisted productions of *En Attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) in 1961, *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (*Happy Days*) in 1963, and *Comédie* (*Play*)

and *Va et Vient* (*Come and Go*) in 1966, at the Odéon Théâtre de France. Meanwhile, Beckett's connection with the Schiller Theater in Berlin was established in 1965, following a plea from director Deryk Mendel to help his troubled production of *Warten auf Godot*. Beckett's sizeable contribution to this production initiated rich collaborations between Beckett and the Schiller Theater.[9] Having spent many years supervising and observing experienced directors such as Roger Blin, George Devine, Donald McWhinnie and Anthony Page, the Schiller production of *Endspiel* in 1967 would mark the first time Beckett had taken full responsibility for directing his own drama.[10] This was followed by *Das Letzte Band* in 1969, which one year later, as part of the World Theatre Season, would mark the first time a Beckett-directed play was staged in London. With the loss of Devine's energy as a producer, it transpired that fewer London productions of Beckett's *oeuvre* were staged during the mid to late 1960s, but through Daubeny's knowledge of international theatre, the foremost European productions of his plays toured to London, in an exceptional moment for his drama's history in the UK.[11] Their inclusion in the World Theatre Seasons signified Beckett's growing international reputation and its prominence in two major European theatre companies, as well as his active involvement in the international productions of his drama. Of course, the presence of these three productions in London has been neglected due to their very limited performance runs at the World Theatre Seasons. For example, the initial visit of *Oh Les Beaux Jours* was restricted to one Saturday matinee – a decision that led the theatre critic of the *Times* to write, 'one wishes that the experience had been offered to more than a single audience' (Our Drama Critic 1965). However, despite these obvious limitations, the 1,200 seats in the Aldwych's auditorium meant that these performances could have had a sizeable attendance and the impact of these performances would also be evident in the reception of later performances, as they became the standard against which later productions would be compared by critics and audiences.

Oh Les Beaux Jours, featuring Madeleine Renaud as Winnie and Jean-Louis Barrault as Willie, was Beckett's first play presented in the World

Theatre Season in April 1965.[12] It exemplified how Beckett, his drama and certain practitioners would have a long-standing history of collaboration, as Renaud would perform *Oh Les Beaux Jours* and other Beckett dramas across three decades. Further cross-cultural creative partnerships were evident from this production as it was directed by Roger Blin and designed by Matias, who would, in fact, design all Beckett performances presented at the World Theatre Seasons. Akin to *Fin de Partie*'s premiere at the Royal Court in 1957, the French language would present issues for a largely monolingual audience, though these issues were reduced by the simultaneous translation provided to patrons during the performance. After inviting international theatres to present their work in London, one stumbling block for each company until 1968 was the requirement of a performance licence by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, even for a single scheduled performance in the case of *Oh Les Beaux Jours*. While three fragments of the text were questioned – in another example of the restrictions theatrical performances faced over these years – *Oh Les Beaux Jours* was granted a licence on 12 March 1965.[13]

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

> Throughout rehearsals, I laid stress on the punctuation of the text. Beckett's texts are stuffed with full-stops and these full-stops have to be played. 'This will have been another day! (Pause.) After all. (Pause.) So far.' In their very precise order, those phrases go from joy, to a diminished joy, to nothing. (Taylor-Batty 2007: 123)

For many critics, it offered a chance to compare Renaud with Brenda Bruce's performance in the 1962 British premiere. W. A. Darlington

argued they were on a par after Act 1, though Act 2 'gave Mme. Renaud the chance for a real tour de force of expressive acting' (1965). Hope-Wallace had strongly praised Bruce in 1962, writing, 'Admiration for Miss Bruce's *tour de force* grows in my mind with every minute that separates me from the play itself' (1962). Ironically, his praise for Bruce's performance had left his memory by 1965, as he contended, 'Renaud totally eclipsed for me the English and Irish creators of the role', adding, 'She is an actress of perfectly controlled inflection and gesture' (1965). The impact of Renaud's acclaimed performance was restricted by its limited run, though interest in this production was signified by its return to London four years later for a further four performances as part of a dedicated Madeleine Renaud Season at the Royal Court, in a rare example of a London theatre season celebrating a foreign actor.[14]

Following Renaud's success with *Oh Les Beaux Jours*, the next Beckett production in the World Theatre Seasons would take place one year after Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature with the Schiller Theater Berlin's staging of *Das Letzte Band*, featuring Martin Held as Krapp, visiting in April 1970.[15] Daubeny had previously recognized the pedigree of the Schiller Theater by programming their productions in 1964, and their return in 1970 saw *The Captain of Kopernick* and *Intrigue and Love* accompany *Das Letzte Band* in the season, the latter described on its reprisal as 'one of the highlights of the 1970 World Theatre Season' (Programme 1971). This time the production would have a limited run of two performances, though it returned one year later alongside Beckett's production of *Endspiel* with Ernst Schröder as Hamm and Horst Bollman as Clov.[16] Despite the obvious language barriers again posed by these performances, British critics were fulsome in their praise, with Anthony Curtis describing the performance as 'a most rewarding experience to see it now bodied forth in the flesh by a master' (1970). Under Beckett's direction, Held was able to extract a specific understanding of Krapp's character, commenting, 'Krapp is eaten up by dreams. But this is without sentimentality, there is no resignation in him. [. . .] He sees very clearly that he is finished with three things, with his opus, with love and also with religion'

(Knowlson 1980: 68–69). These carefully crafted traits were stimulated in his London performance with Irving Wardle suggesting Held 'was less sympathetic towards the reclusive Krapp than some of his past interpreters have been' (Wardle 1970). This sense of character was finely balanced with Held's ability to conjure and maintain a sense of unpredictability as Krapp and Beckett's meticulous detail as director, with Wardle adding, 'It is a performance of superb timing and surprise, rivalling Olivier's power to arouse expectations and then do something different' (1970). High praise was bestowed on *Das Letzte Band*, which was described at the time by both Wardle and John Barber as 'definitive', with this performance significantly shaping future experiences of the play through the strong imprint the performance left on the memories of audiences and critics. The *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald* sought to compare both performances with productions they had encountered before, but they qualified their commentary with its achievements: 'Krapp is calm not harrowed or sour, or defeated as in the many English and American productions I have seen. Having seen emptiness and decay, this Krapp gains some passive strength from having imagined the worst. The effect is subtle, and the means could only be accomplished after long practice' (Unknown Author 1971).

Less documentation remains for the *Endspiel* performances in London, but once again the play competed with the size of the Aldwych Theatre, having premiered in the comparatively much more intimate Schiller studio space.[17] Designed by Matias, the playing area employed a dark wooden floor, and the room had three walls that achieved a chiaroscuro effect with its varied grey tones and the darkness rising with the height of its flats. Matias was particularly attentive to the shape of the room and aimed for balance between its windows, walls, chairs and bins, the latter of which were industrial in appearance with grey, round lids. Hamm's wooden chair was a respectful, everyday size on castors, but it achieved comedy as Bollman's height meant he could just about peer over the back of the chair as Clov. Schröder wore a black toque with decorative features, blacked-out modern sunglasses and a black robe with his feet covered by a dark blanket, whereas Clov was

dressed in grey, loose-fitting pyjama-like top and trousers with the trousers higher than his waist. Regardless of the limited notices for *Endspiel*, the available reviews were complimentary of the production's qualities: '"Endgame" is lighter and quicker than most productions I have seen, yet the understanding of the text is deep. The play works subtextually, by an old theatre magic that looks totally unmagical and never draws attention to itself' (Unknown Author 1971). Despite the limited production materials preserved for these London performances, their place in this narrative calls attention to significant productions of Beckett's drama first presented elsewhere in Europe during the 1960s. Their presence as part of the World Theatre Seasons shows the part Beckett's drama played in yet another significant moment in British theatre history. The Season accentuated the versatility of Beckett's drama and how it could fit into several moulds within London theatre cultures, as it was widely considered international and was given internationally acclaimed performances that were welcome in London. What the RSC proved over this period was that it was far from 'antique, square, institutional, conservative, traditional' (Addenbrooke 1974: 63). It was inevitably grounded in Shakespeare's oeuvre, but it produced high-quality productions of national and international importance, and it sought to showcase and celebrate contemporary theatre and performance practices.

By its name and primary artistic priorities, the RSC appears an unlikely home for Beckett's drama, but during the 1960s, the institution and the Aldwych Theatre did represent another strand of London theatre cultures that his plays contributed to. Introducing Beckett and the work of other contemporary dramatists allowed the RSC to expand upon its obvious remit as purveyors of Shakespeare, but it also demonstrated their interest in his plays, something they communicated overtly in their accompanying publicity materials: 'Samuel Beckett, in the opinion of many people, is the most important writer alive. His endgame [. . .] is a modern masterpiece that defies all categories' (Programme 1964b). As this chapter has shown, the ambition of Hall and the RSC was to develop the Company's relationship with Beckett

through exclusive rights to make new productions of his drama, and discussions arose concerning new plays and potential adaptations. In many respects, it represents a history that could have been, as it failed to materialize, but it emphasizes the esteem Britain's leading theatres held his drama in and their desire to stage it. The RSC *Endgame* showed how a high-quality, experimental theatre production from an international writer had artistic merit but also box office appeal; attributes that Hall would have recognized from his early experiences with *Godot* and his subsequent encounters with Beckett. Even after Hall departed as Artistic Director, the interest in Beckett was sustained through Peter Daubeny's World Theatre Seasons with milestone European productions. These performances may have had limited performance runs, but the Seasons underlined how Beckett's work fitted into seminal moments in British theatre history and demonstrated how London and, more broadly, British theatre culture would benefit once again from the cross-cultural relationship Beckett's drama encouraged between its theatres and the European continent. This would be explored further when the Schiller Theater production of *Warten auf Godot* was presented at the Royal Court in 1976, in a decade where alongside new productions of his late plays, Beckett's vision of theatre was becoming more distilled and impactful during the continuation of his collaborations back at the Sloane Square theatre, as Chapter 5 addresses.

5

Back to Beckett at the Royal Court

A consistent London home

After the departure of George Devine as Artistic Director of the English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court in 1965, the leadership of the theatre changed hands to a number of individuals or teams of Artistic Directors until the end of the 1970s: William Gaskill (1965–72), Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page (1969–72), Oscar Lewenstein (1972–5), Robert Kidd and Nicholas Wright (1975–7) and Stuart Burge (1977–9). Inevitably, these frequent changes to artistic policy led to upheaval within the Court and a more eclectic range of theatre and performance, but one constant in its artistic vision was the presence of Beckett's drama.

Beckett may have ended his UK first option rights agreement with the Court following Devine's resignation, but he maintained a fondness for the theatre and continued to think of the ESC when seeking to produce a new play for the first time in London. In the first years of Gaskill's directorship, Beckett had a quieter spell in terms of his theatrical output, which limited productions of his drama. The year 1969 saw Beckett awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and it also marked his return to the Court with *Oh Les Beaux Jours* playing in the Madeleine Renaud season with the French actress as Winnie.[1] One year later, a production entitled 'Beckett/3' was presented in the Court's Theatre Upstairs, comprising *Play* and *Come and Go*, directed by Gaskill, and *Cascando*, directed by Roger Croucher. This trio of plays returned in October 1970 for the Come Together Festival, which opened up the Court to Britain's growing alternative theatre movement, where 'Multi-

media, neo-Dada, environmental and agitprop work was mixed up with high jinks, dirty jokes and straight plays' (Findlater 1981: 127). Gaskill's intention for the event was 'to create a really popular Festival' (Unknown Author 1970c).[2] Whether he was suggesting Beckett's work met these aims is open to conjecture, but these performances set the tone for subsequent programming at the Sloane Square theatre.[3]

Moving further into the 1970s, this chapter investigates the Royal Court's continued commitment to his drama as it showcased and facilitated a mix of new plays, revivals and international productions of *Not I* (1973 and 1975), *Warten auf Godot*, *Footfalls* and *That Time* (1976) and *Happy Days* (1979) – performances that Beckett either directed or contributed to.[4] It examines this period of landmark performances of the respective plays that attained 'a place and import in the cultural narratives and practices of the age' within the iconography of Beckett's London performance histories (Postlewait 2009: 249). The chapter charts some of the practical discoveries from direction to scenography but also uncovers less well-known conditions and perspectives about the events through their realization by key agents from Beckett's London and international performance history.

Not I: 'Stage in darkness but for [the designer and stage manager]'

The 1973 production of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I* was Beckett's next direct involvement at the Royal Court and his first practical engagement with *Not I*. In discussing central considerations around theatre historiography and performance events, Thomas Postlewait has argued, 'Often, because of the attention it receives at the time of its occurrence, the event achieves a definite and substantial identity, one that it then maintains in the future. It also, quite often, then serves to exclude other events from visibility and consideration' (2012: 249). Produced within a Royal Court season that included *The Freedom of the City* by Brian Friel, David Storey's *The Farm* and *A Sense of*

Detachment by John Osborne, *Not I*'s solitary, spotlit mouth immersed in darkness rapidly delivering a torrent of words represented a very different visual and experiential encounter for audiences of the 1973 season in what was one of the most striking and original stage images presented in the British theatre to that date.[5] The performance saw critics unanimously praise Billie Whitelaw's performance as Mouth (See Barber 1973; Billington 1973; Say 1973), meanwhile further attention around Whitelaw's performance was documented and maintained in subsequent newspapers, interviews, scholarly publications and biographies of both Whitelaw and Beckett, accounts that established Whitelaw's long-standing association with the play. Because of the substantial identity this overall production formed around *Not I*, Beckett and Whitelaw, both events and people were neglected from the narratives that emerged around it. In returning to this production, I re-examine the efforts of its designer, Jocelyn Herbert, and its stage manager, Robert Hendry, who were central to the production's scenographic, technical and practical realization and who have been less visible in histories of the event. They offer new ways of reading this production and, in turn, Whitelaw's performance.

Rehearsals for *Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape* began on 18 December 1972 under the direction of Page with Beckett's assistance.[6] *Krapp's Last Tape* with Albert Finney – then a recognizable star of stage and screen for films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *Tom Jones* (1963) – accompanied *Not I*, however, critics overlooked the performance in favour of *Not I* and offered less favourable comparisons of Finney with Martin Held's recent presentation of Krapp at the Aldwych Theatre (see Billington 1973; Barber 1973), such was the strength of 'processes of recycling and recollection' of cultural memories from this seminal performance (Carlson 2006: 2). Subsequent narratives highlighted Beckett's personal dissatisfaction with Finney in rehearsals, which did little to modify the residue of the performance. James Knowlson noted that Beckett disapproved of Finney's over-expressive portrayal of Krapp and referred to Beckett even falling asleep during rehearsals (see 1996: 596).[7] Beckett's dislike of Finney's performance

and the contextual matters around its reception inevitably limited and obscured narratives around *Krapp's Last Tape* as part of this double bill.

With the exception of Anna McMullan's writing on Herbert's scenographic collaborations with Beckett, Herbert's contribution to the early presentations of *Not I* has often been under-examined to date (see 2012: 8–12). With her style referred to as 'spare asceticism' (Hartnoll 1996: 219) and her desire throughout her career in the theatre 'to try and get rid of a lot of scenery' (Eyre 2011: 193), Herbert shared many artistic preferences with Beckett, evident in her scrupulously realized scenography of *Not I*. To achieve Beckett's opening and central image, 'Stage in darkness but for Mouth', required a very deliberate conception of space, colour, lighting, costume and theatrical illusion (Beckett 2006: 376). Herbert alluded to the visual demands of representing Mouth's disembodiment by noting, '*Not I* was really a technical problem to find a way to black Billie Whitelaw's face up and light her mouth since the whole point is to have the rest of the face and body invisible' (Courtney 1993: 87). Meanwhile, the Auditor's presence proved an added difficulty in Herbert's scenic composition, as she sought to integrate this silent observer covered in black djellaba downstage left, who raises their arms in four gestures of 'helpless compassion' responding to Mouth's performance (Beckett 2006: 375). This challenge was conveyed in some of her earliest thumbnail sketches, which suggest how Herbert sought to distinguish between Mouth and Auditor, before later drawings concentrated on the cloaked figure's relationship to a solitary mouth within the stage frame and in a space consumed by darkness (Figure 8).[8]

Herbert's acute sense of the mutual rigour of the play's design and performance was best evidenced when she suggested Whitelaw sit when performing the piece after watching a rehearsal. In a bid to focus on the physicality she found in the piece, Whitelaw did not heed Herbert's advice and initially opted to stand when delivering the lines, which led to notable physical effects in performance: 'I was standing on a raised platform and when I tried to speak standing up in the pitch dark I got raging vertigo and sensory deprivation and began to hyperventilate' (Courtney 1993: 87). After Whitelaw's physiological

Figure 8 Set design by Jocelyn Herbert for *Not I*, Royal Court Theatre, 1973. National Theatre Archive, Jocelyn Herbert Archive, JH/4/8 (JH4390). Courtesy National Theatre Archive

and sensorial experience, Herbert decided to seat her on what was known as 'an artist's rest' (Hendry 1992). Herbert built this large, black chair with a belt and a bar to stabilize Whitelaw. It was positioned on a black rostrum, which allowed Mouth to appear 'about eight feet above stage level', while Auditor stood stage right on an 'invisible podium about 4 feet high' (Beckett 2006: 376). In the light of day, Hendry suggested that 'the chair looked disquietingly like an electric chair', an example of the theatrical illusion the creative team would achieve when the performance was fully realized (1992). Nevertheless, it helped position and hold Mouth steady within the space, which would demand further input from the scenic and technical team as lighting was introduced. Jack Raby's lighting was positioned downstage centre in front of Herbert's set with just 'two spots from below hidden by a screen from the audience' (Hendry 1992). Once again, the angle and concealment of these floor lights highlighted how production elements

were thoughtfully integrated into the design's emphasis on darkness. However, as Whitelaw performed with the combination of the set, the lighting and the blacked-out theatre space, the physical delivery of the monologue affected her performance within the scenographic environment created:

> What was happening in performances was that my head started to shake; all the energy was going into the back of my head and neck. When I was building up speed [. . .] my head started to shake violently, my mouth was juddering in and out of Jack Raby's very precise lighting. (Whitelaw 1995: 125)

As a result of this unanticipated performative and technical relationship, the practical solution from Herbert was that 'her head was clamped firmly but gently between two pieces of sponge rubber' in order for her mouth to be precisely lit when delivering the monologue. (Hendry 1992). This approach may raise some concerns around the confinement Whitelaw endured, but Hendry's interview suggests the utmost care was shown towards Whitelaw over the comfort of her head's placement and the choice of materials that secured her position as she delivered the demanding monologue.

Although much artistry and problem-solving were achieved by the creative and technical team in visualizing Mouth, the cloaked figure of the Auditor proved a less convincing creation to represent, as played by Brian Miller and Melvyn Hastings in 1973 and 1975, respectively. Despite their best efforts, Beckett 'couldn't get what he had in his mind's eye to work on the stage', as it was suggested the role could prove distracting from Mouth, and lighting the figure on stage in a theatre engulfed in darkness was a testing practical requirement (Whitelaw 1995: 123). Beckett somewhat agreed with the dissatisfaction over the intricacies involved in conjuring the figure in the performance, as he noted, 'There was a lot of trouble with the silent observer in the play who has to raise his arms. It's very difficult to get the timing right' (Courtney 1993: 87). Little written or visual evidence exists on the role of Auditor in this production, but set designs by Herbert characterized

the relationship and the aesthetic difficulty involved in illuminating the 'undeterminable' figure dressed in black djellaba (Beckett 2006: 376); an impression echoed in Hendry's reflections, as he reported 'the low level light on the figure [. . .] was such a distraction for the audience' (1992).[9]

Despite Beckett's detailed stage directions across all of his plays, *Not I* is an example of where unexpected creative interventions were required from the designer. The Auditor wears 'loose, black djellaba, with hood'; however, no costume reference is specified for Mouth. As part of her creative process, Herbert visualized the piece through the relationship between Mouth and Auditor, with her later designs presenting her explorations of how a lit disembodied Mouth and the Auditor arising from the shadows would be consumed by the blackness of the Royal Court's auditorium; something she had previously experimented with in *Play* (1964) and *Come and Go* (1970). Images of Whitelaw pre-performance evidence how her mouth was the only part of her body not concealed in black garments. Herbert draped Whitelaw's entire body from the neck down in a large, black hooded cape, and her head was dressed with a mask made from black gauze covering the majority of her face. Initially, this covered her eyes, but due to the dizzying effects of performing the monologue, Herbert incorporated 'a transparent strip for her eyes', while additional care in positioning the mask ensured her nostrils were uncovered so Whitelaw's breathing was not impeded as she performed the monologue with speed and vigour (Hendry 1992). A further creative component required for the staging was make up. Herbert's desire to enhance the size of Mouth's disembodied presence was experimented on through black and white drawings that signified the orifice she envisaged with elaborate white make up surrounding Mouth. The eventual design of Whitelaw's red lips surrounded by white make up gave the effect of 'a rather enlarged mouth' (Courtney 1993: 87). Reviews of the performance confirm that the design had a strong visual impact on the audience as intended, with Rosemary Say referring to the 'pulsating white-ringed mouth' and she contrasted this against 'the intense theatricality of a blacked out stage' (Say 1973).

One more person central to the overall production was Robert Hendry, the Court's regular Deputy Stage Manager. This essential, but often overlooked role, as Lawrence Stern has established, is '[t]he person who has responsibility for making the entire production run smoothly, on stage and backstage, in pre-rehearsal, rehearsal, performance, and post-performance phases' (Stern 1987: 1). Hendry is a regularly forgotten figure in Beckett's performance histories, but he was also a consistent presence as stage manager in many of the key performances at the Court in the 1970s. As stage manager for *Not I*, he rigorously dissected the play's practical intricacies in what was a testament to his pre-performance planning and support for Whitelaw. It was clear that their pre-performance routine was treated with a heightened sense of reverence and focus, as Hendry described:

> I had arranged it backstage at the Court almost as if no one was able to breathe. [. . .] I personally went up to her dressing room and escorted her to the stage. No one was even allowed to say good evening to her on her way to the stage. . . . It was almost like taking someone to an execution. Once she was set up, all people left the stage not being able to talk to each other, nobody was allowed to move. (Hendry 1992)

These descriptions affirm Whitelaw's focus in this demanding solo performance, and although these rituals may have aided her process, they do raise questions about the pressurized environment established within the theatre – both for the performer and for the professionals backstage, who were literally silenced as part of the production process. The measures were, nonetheless, in place with supportive intentions, which represented Hendry's attentive professionalism towards the lead performer, particularly around the text in performance. Backstage, Hendry had an earpiece to follow Whitelaw's text and 'held a microphone in his hand beside the promptbook so [Whitelaw] could hear the pages turning' in her piece, such was her visual memory in remembering the pages (Hendry 1992). They had also agreed on a warning system in the event of Whitelaw misremembering the text, where Whitelaw would 'repeat the last few words as a sign that she

needed a prompt' (Hendry 1992). Elizabeth Osborne and Christine Woodworth refer to the importance of historiographies 'recovering the workers visibility', particularly when histories can privilege certain performance professions over others (2015: 44). Both Herbert and Hendry were invisible in the public performance, but they were intrinsic to its smooth presentation across multiple performance runs and its distinguished status in Beckettian performance histories. The success of its first presentation contributed to the Royal Court's decision to re-stage *Not I* in 1975 – this time in a double bill with Athol Fugard's *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immortality Act* – ahead of the Royal Court's decision to mark Beckett's seventieth birthday one year later.

Beckett's seventieth Birthday Season

The Royal Court's dedication and interest in staging Beckett's drama were epitomized by its season of plays to honour his seventieth birthday in 1976. The event coincided with the Theatre's twentieth anniversary and it represented their first single-author season, as they programmed *Warten auf Godot*, *Endgame*, *Play* and the world premieres of *That Time* and *Footfalls*. This section begins by concentrating on the staging of *Godot* at the Royal Court and its British reception, before investigating the practical and scenographic realization of the world premieres; three performances that established further authorized productions that have each retained a strong impact on subsequent productions of the plays in performance, but also Beckettian practice more broadly, as they represented some of his most recognizable stage images.

The Beckett-directed Schiller Theater production of *Warten auf Godot* began the Royal Court's tribute on 22 April, nine days after Beckett's seventieth birthday (Figure 9). Inviting the Schiller company was an unusual step given the Court's aim to present new writing, but the reasons for the company's revered position in Beckettian

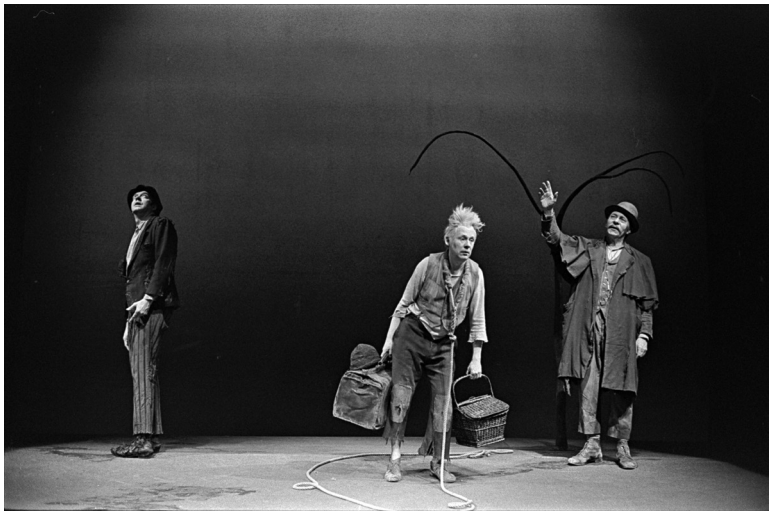

Figure 9 Stefan Wigger (Vladimir), Klaus Herm (Lucky) and Karl Raddatz (Pozzo) in the Schiller Theater Berlin's tour of *Warten auf Godot* at the Royal Court Theatre, 1976. Directed by Samuel Beckett and designed by Matias. Photography by Douglas H Jeffery of *Warten auf Godot*, Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. a. THM/374/1/4525

performance became obvious to those in attendance, despite accruing disappointing attendance figures of 53 per cent (Findlater 1981: 252).[10] Plans to bring the Schiller production to London were in place by 1975, and although Beckett agreed to its inclusion, he did raise reservations about the production transferring to the Royal Court with Kidd, Wright and Herbert, even suggesting they produce a new production of *Godot* in English (see Beckett 1975). His doubts concerned the Court's intimate stage space, as he was aware the Schiller *Godot* was first staged and meant for an open and expansive space. Intriguingly, when the production transferred to the Royal Court stage, the results, according to the production's assistant director Walter Asmus, were more helpful than damaging:

> Beckett once said, *Godot* wants a large stage, a lot of space around it and that was the case in the Schiller Theater. But I felt at the Royal

> Court, it gained in concentration and naturally it would speed up a little bit as the crossings were not so long. In the Schiller Theater to cross from the stone to the tree took much longer than at the Royal Court. From the stone to the tree at the Royal Court was five metres, and the Schiller Theater it was twelve metres. I liked it very much, it was more intimate and more condensed.[11]

Asmus's commentary reveals how the production was changed by touring to the Court, as inevitably each theatre can have different dimensions, a different relationship to the audience and different acoustics, which can change the attributes of a given performance. The change of stage and its space had a psychological effect on the cast, which included Stefan Wigger, Horst Bollman, Klaus Herm and Carl Raddatz. As Asmus recalled, 'Walking into the Royal Court – for the actors – at the first sight was a shock for them. [. . .] They said "Oh we can't do it"'. These protestations were later eased through their dress rehearsals and having watched a number of performances of the Royal Court run, Asmus was left with the 'impression that it was gaining rather than losing'.

With these gains and despite its performance in the German language to a largely Anglophone public, this touring production was positively received by British critics and practitioners. Robert Hendry's opening night show report recorded a 'very good reception' from its audience for a relatively quick performance lasting 1 hour and 52 minutes (1976a). Peter Hall offered one of the most revealing perspectives on the Schiller performance, writing in his diary: 'Absolute clarity, hardness. No sentimentality, no indulgence, no pretension' – an evaluation that reflects how far practical interpretations of *Godot* had developed in London since Hall first staged it in 1955 (Goodwin 1983: 230). Working through his French designer Matias, Beckett's production played on a bare stage with only a slim, grey tree that branched into three and a stone. The production's clearly defined stage minimalism informed its actors in performance, though, as Katharine Worth argued, these characteristics did not overwhelm the performance: 'along with these

austere qualities went a sense of fun and tenderness, liable to break out at any minute like a sudden, unexpected smile' (1990: 58). Michael Billington offered a more nuanced position on the performance's achievement by contending, 'It is part of this play's greatness that no production can ever be definitive. But at least this spare, exact, marvellously clean production shows that Godot is infinitely more than either slapstick tragedy or awesome cultural monument' (1976). Inevitably, the ghosts of this illustrious *Godot* would haunt future revivals of the play in London as recollections of Beckett's production with his own directorial imprint were recycled in the play's cultural memory through future reviews, photographs and notebooks of this landmark production.

The birthday season continued with a revival of *Endgame*, directed by Donald McWhinnie, with Patrick Magee reprising the role of Hamm alongside fellow Northern Irish actor Stephen Rea as Clov, before a triple bill of *Play*, *That Time* and *Footfalls* – or 'Play and Other Plays' as it was oddly marketed.[12] *That Time* works akin to a largely static installation with a live actor, whereby the head of Listener is illuminated, including his long white hair, while he listens to a voice that emanates from three separate sources within the auditorium, delivering a three-part text about three different phases of a man's life.[13] Listener does not speak, he only opens and closes his eyes four times, and the play concludes with a smile emerging from Listener that Beckett notes as 'toothless for preference' (2006: 395). Since its first performance, *That Time* may represent the most curious presentation of the three plays after it 'was intended to be the star attraction', but it is now one of Beckett's least performed plays in London (Knowlson 1996: 619). Beckett had finished a first draft of *That Time* in July 1974, but he returned to it intermittently until August 1975, due to 'misgivings over disproportion between image (listening face) and speech and much time lost in trying to devise ways of amplifying [the] former' (Harmon 1998: 328). He went to great efforts changing and intercutting the configuration of the text's voices (A, B and C), as he sought to ensure no voice was separated from its next recurrence by more than three voices (see Beckett 1975).

Beyond this puzzle, he was also adamant *That Time* should not be performed on the same billing as *Not I*, most likely due to their similar staging and technical specifications, as in the former only the Listener's face is visible amidst the darkness, with the face located ten feet above the stage (Figure 10).

Both the image and recorded voice would occupy Beckett's practical interest during rehearsals for *That Time*. Once again, his collaborations with director Donald McWhinnie and designer Jocelyn Herbert supported the development of the production and its imagery, as Herbert's drawings revealed the play's fascination with Listener's facial expressions, eyes and 'long flaring white hair' (Beckett 2006: 388). Herbert achieved this image in performance by seating Magee on a chair where she could then arrange his outspread hair. The careful attention given to this image strived to form, as Knowlson

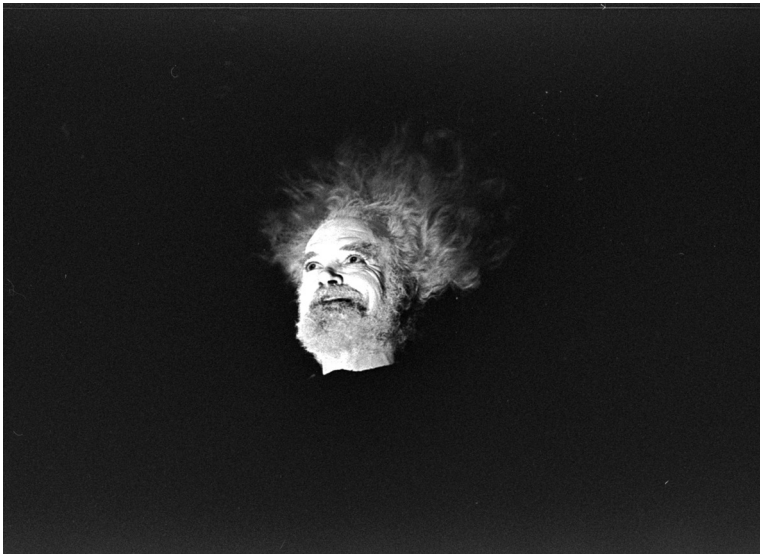

Figure 10 Patrick Magee as Listener in *That Time*, Royal Court Theatre, 1976. Directed by Donald McWhinnie, designed by Jocelyn Herbert. Photography by Douglas H Jeffery of *That Time*, Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. a. THM/374/1/1382

suggests, 'a close resemblance to William Blake's painting of God the Father or Job' (Knowlson and Haynes 2003: 74). Alongside Herbert's designs, a significant impression of the play can be formed through a preserved recording of Magee's voices for A, B and C.[14] Given the desired effect of distinguishing between the voices in the performance, it is surprising that Magee's recording does not differentiate between the three voices in delivery or tone, which highlights the highly disciplined, taut delivery of the speech that Beckett's direction sought. Although cassette tape recording is now an outdated technology, part of the recording's interest must lie in the evidence of the technology's significance to the performance, which signifies its importance in Beckett's creative intentions. As he noted of the sounds' sources and their specific modulation in the theatre, 'dissimilar contexts and dislocation in space – one coming to him from left, a second from above, third from right' (Harmon 1998: 329). The stress Beckett placed on the source of the play's three voices demonstrates that he was testing how the technology behind the voices could be implemented within a theatre space and therefore how it affected the audience experience of the event.

During the performance run, *That Time* placed several technical demands on its creative team, but one of the main challenges concerned the behaviour of Magee, who could turn up for performances inebriated. This was highlighted in Hendry's show reports, with one noting, 'Mr Magee not getting on to[o] well with the pub next door. Went up on second show with a very fraught Mr Magee' (Hendry 1976b). And a later report describing, 'Mr Magee still in an unhappy state i.e. DRUNK' (Hendry 1976c). Although Hendry's reports note Magee's condition, it is unknown whether his intoxication was detrimental to his performance, but his lack of professionalism caused concern amongst the technical and stage management team during the performances.

Despite *That Time*'s limited performance history, its premiere earned a respectable critical reception. Its fusion of a largely still, live actor and a recorded voice suggests a more passive experience for the audience, but Worth described a much more participatory role in the encounter:

> The potentiality for hallucinogenic reactions was strong in the first production of *That Time* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1976. Everything was blotted out for the first twenty minutes or so of the performance except for the old man's face with its streaming white hair high up in the stage darkness and the flow of his voice, coming from three different sources. The idiosyncratic, melodious tones of Patrick Magee heightened the hypnotic mood, but we had to be active, not passive, listening for the voices as they tracked around, catching minute changes: in listener's breathing or the closing of the eyes at certain points; his smile at the end. (Worth 1999: 45)

Worth's evaluation of the play signifies the almost immersive qualities Beckett's technical specifications stimulated. While the audience's visual perception of the play was diminished, her responses show how Beckett's vision of the late plays in performance placed a heightened importance on the aural and sensorial experience of the event.

Footfalls concluded the experimental programme with Beckett directing Whitelaw as May and Rose Hill as Mother, which was an additional fillip for the Court's programme. In *Footfalls*, the spectral figure of May paces across a strip of floor into light and darkness and is in dialogue with an unseen woman's voice who is her Mother. The beginning suggests she has nursed her poorly mother, but as the play progresses, it appears that May has not been out of the house for years and her inner torment sees her 'revolving it all [. . .] in [her] poor mind' and through her regular footsteps, the once carpeted floor has been worn bare (Beckett 2006: 403). *Footfalls* was not written specifically for the season, but after finishing the play at the end of 1975, it was hastily included in the final season with Beckett keen to see Whitelaw play May. *Footfalls* represents one of Beckett's most theatrically intricate later works, in which the interplay between May and Mother demands a highly disciplined approach to its theatrical specifications in relation to the body, choreography, lighting, voice and rhythm. Beckett himself pondered the appropriateness of his latest vision for the theatre, telling Whitelaw's husband, Robert Muller: 'I'm not quite sure whether the theatre is the right place for me anymore' (Whitelaw 1995: 145). These

sentiments were echoed by Whitelaw, who felt the play challenged the art form, as she contended, 'I sometimes felt like a walking, talking Edvard Munch painting' (Whitelaw 1995: 145). Some critics identified Beckett's debt to art in their response to the play, with Worth, for example, identifying its sculptural qualities:

> Surrounded by darkness, in silence broken only by the sound of her own footfalls, she created one of Beckett's most overwhelming visual images; a sculptured figure of tragic grandeur, in her trailing robe, dimly grey in the dim light, painfully bowed, arms crossed over her breast, pacing her nine rhythmic steps (seven in the printed text) to and fro on the narrow strip of stage she is confined to. (Worth 1976: 78)

Whitelaw's stark, ghostly depiction of May materialized as a result of much moulding and fine-tuning from both the author and actress. Both walked around the theatre experimenting with May's posture and the position of her arms as she paces along her strip. The attention given to May's physical demeanour is conveyed in Herbert's costume and set designs, which suggest how both Beckett and Whitelaw experimented with May's postures, with one identifiable drawing capturing Beckett musing over the character with his arms crossed and his left hand by his neck to give the impression 'she'd be shrinking back into herself' (Courtney 1993: 92) (Figure 11).

Both Beckett and Herbert were keen for many of the specific details within *Footfalls* to work on the audience's aural senses and achieved this through Herbert's costume design for May. Herbert's dress resembled the 'tangle of tatters' Beckett implied in the text, and she combined this feature with the audible qualities of the dress, made apparent from May's constant pacing (Beckett 2006: 402). As Herbert described:

> the swishing noise of the figure's dress was very important so I made a taffeta petticoat. [. . .] I [. . .] bought a very old lace evening dress with long sleeves and a lot of lacy net curtains which I dyed different greys and shredded. [. . .] Originally the shoes were going to be noisy but in the end we left it as just the swishing of petticoats. (Courtney 1993: 92)

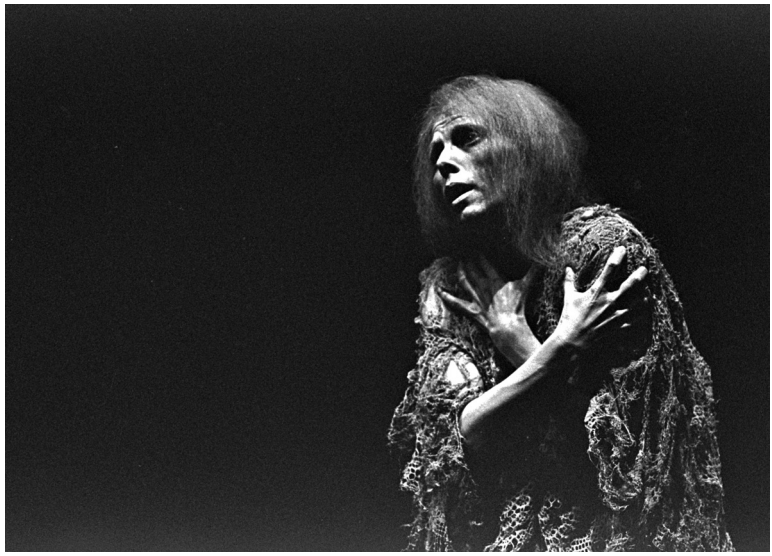

Figure 11 Billie Whitelaw as May in *Footfalls*, Royal Court, 1976. Directed by Samuel Beckett, designed by Jocelyn Herbert. Photography by Douglas H Jeffery of *Footfalls*, Royal Court Theatre, London, 1976. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. a. THM/374/1/1382

With her sensitivity about many of its minute design details, Herbert's collaborations with Beckett and Whitelaw critically informed the development of Beckett's vision for the spectral late play for the 1976 premiere.

With its many ambiguities of character, place, time and narrative, *Footfalls* proved to be another difficult Beckett play for London's critics to comprehend, and the premiere was subject to a largely mixed reception. Frank Marcus attempted to describe May's situation before honestly admitting 'I have read this play twice and seen it once, but its meaning remains impenetrable' (1976).[15] Meanwhile, B. A. Young – arguably one of Beckett's most receptive critics in London – found *Footfalls* 'the least immediately attractive play of the three [. . .] though no doubt I shall grow to like it' (1976). Beckett's sense of theatrical invention brought together theatrical elements in a manner that suggests the experiential,

phenomenological style of theatre his late drama in particular was pursuing. This translated in performance as typified in the measured analysis of Worth, who suggested how the production foregrounded these characteristics:

> if our reliance on our senses was subtly undermined, it was also exercised: by being deprived of so much we were made to concentrate hard on what we had; words, cadences, the relation of things heard to things seen: we were brought to a state of hyper-sensitivity which made possible perception of an order rare in the theatre. There were some hazards in this condition; a creaking chair became a distraction, a cough a real horror; one began to wish for a concert hall discipline, all coughs and sneezes held back to the interval! We did in a way need to listen to music, to catch the fine nuances of sound that carried so much dramatic meaning; change of timbre, the length of a silence, the weight of a footfall. (1976: 75–6)

Worth's comments signify how spectators experienced a theatrical event where there was a heightened significance for every sound and a greater awareness of the communal audience. The audience's heightened sense of spectatorship was established through Herbert's 'black as the tomb' scenic framework, from which each of the three plays emerged in this final production to celebrate Beckett's seventieth birthday (Barber 1976), which captured the playwright and director's ambitions and intentions for these new plays in performance.

'Another happy day': Whitelaw's Winnie

If 1976 showcased Beckett's *opus* in one of the first extended seasons of his theatre staged in London, his return for *Happy Days* in 1979 would mark his final act of directing his work at his mainstay London theatre. Beckett discussed the idea of directing Whitelaw in *Happy Days* after they had worked together closely on *Footfalls*, and it was out of respect to Peggy Ashcroft's recent portrayal of Winnie at the NT – a performance Beckett contributed to – that they delayed the production plans until

1979 (see Beckett 1977). In the meantime, the Court's unstable journey through the 1970s continued with both Wright and Kidd departing Sloane Square and Stuart Burge being appointed Artistic Director. Burge was considered something of an 'outsider' to the normally close-knit Court staff, though he did come to the theatre with a strong reputation following success at the Nottingham Playhouse. Changes to the theatre's management structures marked the beginning of his tenure, and his programming responded to financial difficulties through significant revivals, including *Happy Days* and John Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence*.[16] Reviving *Happy Days* was the Court's third presentation of the play since its 1962 British premiere and yet another reprise of the play in London. This was duly noted by Billington, who reported, 'Over the years it has been played in London by Peggy Ashcroft, Madeleine Renaud, Brenda Bruce, Denise Coffey and Marie Kean. And [. . .] I can think of more urgent tasks confronting the Royal Court than another revival' (1979: 13). This was a fair reflection of the artistic needs of the Theatre, but *Happy Days* would prove to be a well-judged financial move, as it proved to be one of the Court's most successful productions in 1979 – alongside *Bent* by Martin Sherman and Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* – filling 94 per cent of seats (Findlater 1981: 253). From a nostalgic viewpoint, it continued the Court's tradition of staging Beckett and the tradition of Beckett now directing his own work at the theatre, as it facilitated a significant collaboration between author and actress.

Billed at the time as Beckett's final production in the theatre, Leonard Fenton completed the onstage duo, and the performance once again benefited from the talents of Herbert, Hendry and Raby.[17] Ahead of their rehearsals, Beckett immersed himself in the text, where his visual and aural scrutiny was evidenced in his detailed and meticulous director's notebook.[18] The level of engagement was also apparent in the disciplined work he and Whitelaw produced during their seven-week rehearsal process, which strived to meet the vision of the play in Beckett's mind. *Happy Days* had perhaps proved to be the one play he found most difficult in meeting his expectations in performance, and in one rehearsal, he recalled releasing this frustration by lamenting, 'I'm

beginning to hate this play'; a comment Herbert 'reproached' him for saying in front of Whitelaw (Courtney 1993: 55).

Many rehearsals would concentrate on the pace, rhythm and stress Whitelaw afforded the text, and Beckett would often give line readings – tolerated by Whitelaw as a regular feature of their working methods. His emphasis on the voice in relation to *Happy Days* is signified in his production notebook, which distinguishes the different voices Winnie uses throughout the play:

> Winnie's voices
> usual
> To herself
> [To] Willie
> Willie's "I worship .." whine
> Showers'
> Reason } says, tell me
> Something [} says, tell me]
> Description Dolly
> Narrative (Mildred, Showers)
> Quotes (Knowlson 1985: 31)

Beckett's precisely identified vocal distinctions were not available to its audience, but it was discernible in performance, with Peter Jenkins writing, 'Whitelaw achieved an immense range of voice' (1979: 23). The effect of this vocal range in performance was perhaps best described by Worth, who argued, 'It was a mysterious tune that was being played through the actress, an expressive melody which allowed her many changes of tone but always maintained a context of dreamlike strangeness. Billie Whitelaw's vocal modulations were timed with the exactness of an orchestral instrument' (Worth 1990: 97). Beyond the musical quality of her vocal performance, another crucial aspect of the performance was its use of emotional colour, which was a characteristic that changed noticeably between acts and a development in Beckett's emphasis on 'no colour' in *Not I* (Whitelaw 1995: 120). Whitelaw

acknowledged of her interpretation, 'The second half of *Happy Days* has a sort of desperation to it. The colours are from a different part of the palette than those used in the first act. More grey and black' (Ben-Zvi 1990: 6). Whitelaw was able to draw from a carefully considered range of colours in her interpretation of Winnie, which enabled a number of striking and original moments to develop. As Worth asserted:

> There was also something wild, even manic, about this Winnie [. . .]. Her shriek as she concluded the Mildred story was a moment of real terror, something like the awful shriek through which the same actress expressed the trauma of Mouth [. . .]. It gave a force to the Mildred episode which took us deep into some unacknowledged hysteria of Winnie's. (Worth 1990: 99)

These emotional discoveries were also recorded by Knowlson, who noted the trauma that followed the interval,

> The second act was a major triumph, more deeply sunk in terror than in previous productions and reaching at times towards the tones of *Not I*. It also shows how some critics, as well as a number of directors, have been very wrong in failing to recognise how crucial the internal contrasts between the two acts are to the power of the play. (1979: 143)

In contrast to the aforementioned reviews of Knowlson and Worth for academic publications, when the production was first staged on 7 June, it experienced a somewhat indifferent initial reception with the British press. This response owed a lot to the unfortunate timing of the production, which, while not evident in the reviews, was contextualized by Knowlson in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* later:

> There was little by way of preliminary fanfare to herald Beckett's own first production in English of *Happy Days*. [. . .] the first night provoked a somewhat desultory critical response: several of the main London drama critics were already away on holiday; others preferred the 'sleek, smooth, slick' attractions of the musical, *Grease*. (Knowlson 1979: 141)

Only a small number of reviews appeared following its first night, and while Billington was won over, Robert Cushman contended Beckett's

production did 'not succeed in being different from anyone else's' (1979: 15). Such was the mixed response.

Beyond the production's critical reception, the committed efforts of both Whitelaw and Beckett were signified by the perfectionism shown by their self-critical reflections. Beckett admitted these sentiments towards the performance, writing to Schneider, 'Billie had difficulty with 1st act, but seems to have mistressed it in the course of run. 2nd act very good' (Harmon 1998: 378). He was, however, grateful for her dedication and courage in the role, in spite of the demands of his overly meticulous directing methods. Whitelaw's self-critical response to her own performance suggests her disappointment at not attaining the levels she had expected of herself, contending:

> I wish to god I could have continued with Winnie. I was just about making that play my own, making Winnie my own, and then we came off. [. . .] Of all the plays I've done, that needed working. I needed time to work my way into it because Beckett had so many notes that he gave me, and just technically it was like me talking and trying to boil a pan of milk at the same time – movement and speech, speech and movement, and putting things down, not only on a word, putting things down, say putting the toothbrush or lipstick or the whatever down, on a syllable of a word. (Ben-Zvi 1990: 4–5)

The demands Beckett placed on Whitelaw in his direction of *Happy Days* would mark the culmination of his work at the Court, bringing to an end a direct association spanning twenty-three years. The loyalty Beckett showed to the Court existed as a result of the support by successive Artistic Directors, who maintained the tradition of programming his drama, enhanced his practical knowledge through access to rehearsals and – as this decade has suggested – supported the culmination of his practical ideas through his direction of these key productions.

The relationship between Beckett and the Court, its staff, its practitioners and audiences would undoubtedly shape the most lasting impressions of Beckett's theatre and Beckett the playwright for the British

public. By virtue of Beckett's direction or involvement, these authorized performances became established within the iconography of traditions of staging Beckett, a significance that has been heightened through the notebooks, photographs and reviews related to the productions. Further efforts were made to stage some of his later plays during Max Stafford-Clark's Artistic Directorship, including a triple bill of *Catastrophe*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *What Where*, but these productions did not materialize much to the disappointment of both parties.[19] Over the passing years, Beckett had experienced many similar disappointments, though these were considerably outweighed by the rich performance history of his drama that developed at the Royal Court and as a result of the Royal Court. Their association over the 1970s represented a decade of continuous creative, practical and technical discoveries for the writer, directors, performers, designers and stage managers contributing to the realization of his drama. These productions reaffirmed the relationship, enhanced collaborations and consolidated his drama's reputation in the UK through its reception amongst many critics, scholars, practitioners and general spectators encountering the familiar or newer works. The next chapter will reflect on an unforeseen, but important move for Beckett to west London, when he worked on some of the final rehearsals of his lifetime at Riverside Studios.

6

Beckett-on-Thames into the 1980s

With the end of the 1970s seeing the conclusion of Beckett's direct association with the Royal Court, the start of the 1980s would mark the beginning of notable new connections between Beckett and other London venues in a decade where his drama began to inhabit a range of alternative London homes.[1] It was also the decade in which the most significant events concerning Beckett's theatre in the UK were not performances but rather two rehearsal periods he surveyed at Riverside Studios, the Hammersmith arts centre that would become more frequently associated with his work. In what was a unique phase of this performance history, Beckett's well documented work at Riverside Studios did not see lengthy runs of his plays staged in West London, but rather, as this chapter will explore, rehearsal periods in which new impressions of Beckett were formed and in which he shaped his final directorial visions of *Endgame* (1980) and *Waiting for Godot* (1984) when he worked with the San Quentin Drama Workshop.[2]

Further along the Thames at the Southbank, the National Theatre (NT) returned to Beckett's drama, as it presented the London premiere of *Rockaby* (1982) at its Cottesloe Theatre. This chapter will also discuss how this seminal performance with Billie Whitelaw materialized, the practical presentation of this shorter work and, once again, Beckett's direct involvement in the production process through the support he offered Whitelaw and its director Alan Schneider. These key stagings encapsulated how, in the final years of his lifetime, Beckett remained committed and energized by how his drama was staged, thanks to working with new as well as familiar venues, but also with new and familiar collaborators.

Beckett at Riverside Studios

Prior to the 1980s, Beckett had directly worked in many of the UK and Europe's most distinguished theatres, including the Royal Court, the NT, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Odéon Théâtre de France and the Schiller Theater in Berlin, involving actors he was eager to collaborate with such as Patrick Magee, Klaus Herm and Billie Whitelaw.[3] But how did Beckett come to know of Riverside? Why, after working in theatres often considered amongst the pinnacle of the Western theatre tradition, would Beckett rehearse some of his final theatre productions in an arts centre in Hammersmith? And why was Beckett working with performers he had not handpicked?

Beckett first encountered Riverside in a working capacity with the rehearsals of *Endgame* on 7 May 1980, though he would have been familiar with the geographical area at least since his early years at the Royal Court, having attended dinner parties at George Devine's house on the Lower Mall in Chiswick.[4] Indeed his later knowledge of Riverside most likely came from Devine's partner, his close friend and Royal Court scenographer, Jocelyn Herbert. Herbert was friendly with the then Riverside Programme Director and later Artistic Director David Gothard, who suggests Herbert recommended Riverside as an alternative venue for the San Quentin rehearsals in London and that Beckett 'would have trusted her recommendation entirely'.[5]

At first glance, Riverside Studios may appear an unlikely place for Beckett to finish his practical work in the British theatre. However, to think this would be a disservice to the venue's history, which deserves further examination.[6] A former BBC TV studio where science fiction drama *Doctor Who* and the sitcom *Hancock's Half Hour* were shot, situated on the banks of the Thames in Hammersmith, Riverside is located at the margins of London's theatrical and artistic centre.[7] Following the departure of the BBC in 1975, a charitable trust formed by Hammersmith and Fulham Council converted the buildings into two large multipurpose arts spaces before making Peter Gill the venue's first Artistic Director in 1976. Gill's opening seasons staged acclaimed

productions of *The Cherry Orchard* (in 1978) and *The Changeling* (in 1979) before his departure to the National Theatre Studio. The reputation of the Studios continued to grow and in the early 1980s it became a hub of cultural activity that programmed major international artists including Tadeusz Kantor, Dario Fo, Joan Miró and David Hockney, as well as a visionary place for discovering emerging artists such as the dancer and choreographer Michael Clark. Furthermore, it proved to be a place of learning for many writers, actors, dancers and artists, as Hanif Kureishi, a former employee, stated: 'Riverside was what a university should be: a place to learn and talk and work and meet your contemporaries. There was no other place like it in London' (2000: 4). Under the artistic directorship of Gothard in the early 1980s, it earned a reputation as 'the Royal Court Theatre in exile' (Wiesner 2006: 2) with Emily Green arguing that it 'made the Fringe look dowdy, the West End look taxidermied and the National Theatre a concrete maiden' (1994). Beckett's presence at rehearsals was a fillip for the theatre and remains a celebrated part of the Studios' history.

Beckett was in Hammersmith to collaborate with the San Quentin Drama Workshop, a connection that grew out of his friendship with the former San Quentin prisoner turned actor, Rick Cluchey, who first discovered Beckett's drama in the Californian penitentiary.[8] The San Quentin Drama Workshop had previously travelled to London on 18 October 1978 to perform *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* at the Open Space Theatre and their Riverside rehearsals were the culmination of Cluchey's persistent letters and requests to Beckett to support their performances. Although Beckett had attended San Quentin rehearsals in the past, his presence at Riverside proved to be a much more open and accessible event, where friends, actors, academics, writers, photographers and artists were free to attend and watch the rehearsals. Researching Beckett's rehearsal period at Riverside Studios prompted several engaging interviews or pleasant email exchanges with many people either directly participating, facilitating or observing the rehearsals. One reply to stand out was a reply from Cluchey, the founder of the San Quentin Drama Workshop, which read: 'welcome

to Beckettland-home for lost Beckettians-and other late arrivals of stout heart'.[9] Cluchey's introduction reveals the warm, enthusiastic commitment towards Beckett that characterized Cluchey's endeavours with San Quentin, which instigated two significant rehearsal periods at Riverside Studios.

Documenting Beckett

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, Thomas Postlewait stresses how performance histories depend on 'the available documentation [. . .] to reconstruct the event' (2009: 230). Documentation of rehearsals is normally limited to the notes and perspectives of the practitioners involved, as they usually signify the private and mysterious phase of a production's life, where only the cast and crew experience its creative spirit, its struggles and ecstasies. Prior to Riverside, Beckett's rehearsals were largely only attended by the cast, creative team, close friends or the occasional theatre employee.[10] His Riverside rehearsals in 1980 and 1984 were more open than normal, certainly very open for someone regularly depicted as an exceptionally private man. In an unprecedented step, they were also observed by artists, directors, journalists, photographers and academics, whereby the friendly, creative surroundings of Riverside made the rehearsals become an unintentional performance laboratory. This openness enabled a breadth of documentation for the rehearsals, as the observers responded to Beckett's direction and the rehearsal environment in their respective mediums, materials that have since been preserved in the University of Reading's Beckett Collection and other private collections.[11] Such documents, Postlewait suggests, act as 'windows through which we can observe the[se] past events' (2012: 239). Indeed, reading these documents today reaffirms the assertions of Beckett's assistant director for *Endgame*, Gregory Mosher, who surmised 'two parallel events progressed – the production of *Endgame* and the tracking of a reclusive maestro' (Oppenheim 2000: 132).[12]

Beckett's presence at Riverside generated an 'extraordinary fascination' for those in attendance (Knowlson 1987: 451) and the responses of the observers show how, as Postlewait notes, 'certain events, at the time they occur, get characterized by participants and observers as significant' (2012: 248). Part of this fascination was alluded to in the newspaper reports published, where journalists such as Maeve Binchy and Brian Appleyard recorded their own portraits of Beckett – almost as proof that they saw him – and shared their surprise at Beckett's openness, which was typified in the conversations they shared with him, as he was known to rarely speak to journalists. Before her transition to being a popular novelist, Binchy wrote a feature on Beckett in the *Irish Times*, which was reported to have angered Beckett as Binchy chose to focus on his appearance and memories of Dublin while neglecting the work on stage.[13] He later saw the need to mix his anger with his humour, as actors Alan Mandell and Bud Thorpe both recalled with much amusement how Beckett referred to her as 'Bitchy Binchy' in response to the article.[14] Despite Beckett's annoyance with Binchy in this instance, four years later he again allowed journalists into rehearsals for *Godot*, with Steve Grant offering another depiction of the playwright:

> A 77-year-old man sits in the foyer of Riverside Studios all but ignored in the lunchtime buzz of rattling plates and conversation. He seems tired, occasionally rubbing his eyes, sipping at the half of Guinness in front of him on the scrubbed wooden bench. He is painfully thin, the quarter miler's wiry frame having succumbed to stiffness in the last few years; the hair, neat and silvery, is stroked up from the lined forehead in a self supporting ridge. His voice is soft, almost a whisper, a Dublin voice, lilting, musical, despite the bearer's long residence in Paris. (1984: 13)

The written accounts of Beckett at Riverside suggest he appeared more open than usual to the presence of visitors during both sets of rehearsals. Hugh Herbert referred to the mutual understanding that appeared to operate between visitors and Beckett during rehearsals by reporting:

'[Beckett] had accepted we should be there, the pretence was that we were not' (Herbert 1980). Various people attended the rehearsals, each perceiving the events differently depending on their own relationship to the man, the work and their own discipline. It became a meeting space for Beckett and friends such as Nicol Williamson, Irene Worth and Shivaun O'Casey, while other new faces and strangers visited the venue to see the playwright.[15] Beckett was largely able to overlook watchful eyes in the theatre space, later jokingly referring to the events as a 'jamboree' (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 42). Mandell – who played Nagg in the 1980 *Endgame* – 'was not used to allowing people in to observe the rehearsal period', but noted 'Beckett didn't seem to mind all the drop ins'.[16] Despite Mandell's understandable reservations as an actor, many of the stories from those attending ultimately helped publicize the San Quentin tours, while marking Riverside as a venue more closely associated with Beckett's drama.

Beckett's openness was 'a great surprise' for those who witnessed the rehearsals, which saw new portraits of Beckett emerge, as Lawrence Shainberg articulated in the *Paris Review*: 'Beckett's presence destroyed the Beckett myth for me, replacing it with something at once larger and more ordinary' (Shainberg 1987). Shainberg's assertions were supported by the striking photographs and drawings that materialized as a result of Beckett's time in rehearsals. Some of the most iconic photographs were taken by John Minihan during these rehearsals, with his two publications *Samuel Beckett: Photographs* (1995) and *Samuel Beckett: Centenary Shadows* (2006), adding to the iconic visual portraits of Beckett. Minihan's images are closely connected with the event and have been deposited and recycled in the venue's 'repository of cultural memory' (Carlson 2006: 2) as a means of public interface through their later use in playbills, exhibitions and on social media. Further images of Beckett were taken in both the 1980 and 1984 rehearsals by Chris Harris and have recently come to light through the David Gothard Collection.[17] Harris's portraits also offer a new lens for viewing Beckett, which is, as Gothard suggests, 'unexpected [and] not familiar' (Wiesner 2006: 15). Through Harris's candid images, Beckett displays a more

liberated character in action, which suggests his directorial precision, concentration and rapport with the San Quentin cast.

As well as photographers, Beckett also became the study of two painters: Tom Phillips and John Devane. Phillips's lithograph, 'Samuel Beckett' (1984), has been exhibited at London's National Portrait Gallery and evolved from his rehearsal sketches. Phillips discussed his own approach to drawing Beckett by stating, 'At the beginning I did not know quite how to set about drawing him [. . .]. I gradually realized sitting behind, trying to form a strategy, the back of his head was as eloquent as the front, and as recognizable' (Phillips 2014). Phillips's piece complements a similar photographic study of Beckett from Harris.[18] Intriguingly, both artists identify and respond to Beckett's distinctive physical features from their perspective as voyeurs of these rehearsals, watching both Beckett and the onstage drama that unfolded in front of him. Their portraits both construct and contribute to the aura and depictions of Beckett's presence in rehearsals, suggesting, as do the aforementioned reports and interviews, the number of ways in which Beckett can be read or represented from his time at the Studios. Harris and Phillips visualize a recurring representation of Beckett's time at Riverside as they show (even without a trace of face) how portrayals of this rehearsal event staged Beckett in the foreground as much as the struggle of Lucky in the background. With this image of Beckett actually in the rehearsal space in mind, this chapter will now proceed to address his practical work with the San Quentin Drama Workshop in rehearsals.

Rehearsing *Endgame* and *Godot*

Before discussing Beckett's participation at Riverside, it is important to contextualize how both rehearsal periods were assisted by rehearsals or performances prior to his involvement. San Quentin had staged *Endgame* before and had been briefly observed by Beckett in Berlin, while *Godot* was initially directed by Walter Asmus for five weeks in

Chicago. Beckett's involvement at Riverside shows how he was still working creatively with these texts as he fine-tuned these existing performances with revisions and cuts while encouraging a greater emphasis on the work's shape, pace and rhythm ahead of their tours. Many of these decisions were shaped by Beckett's continuous directorial experience, which evolved as he worked on his plays in performance (Figure 12).[19]

The *Endgame* rehearsals ran from 7 May to 22 May 1980, initially in Studio 2 as *The Biko Inquest*, featuring Albert Finney, was running in the main theatre. By returning to *Endgame* with San Quentin, Beckett was able to reread the play and develop a greater clarity and finessed vision of the staged text in English. This was epitomized by how he envisaged the play's structure, as he began to see it with an eight-scene structure in comparison to the sixteen he outlined in his Schiller Theater production. Both the Schiller and Riverside rehearsals employed further emphasis on the play's patterning in performance; for example, Clov's

Figure 12 Samuel Beckett directing Bud Thorpe and Rick Cluchey in rehearsals for *Endgame* at Riverside Studios, 1980. Photo by Chris Harris. David Gothard Theatre and Performance Collection.

inspection of the opening scene in a clockwise order (Hamm, bins, sea window, earth window) was followed by an anticlockwise arrangement as he unveiled the scene (earth window, sea window, bins, Hamm).[20] His direction demanded his actors intertwine these stage patterns with choreographic precision, something that was achieved by Thorpe's adherence to mathematical symmetry for Clov's movements in and out of the kitchen to his stage left. With this in mind, Beckett would write in his notebook, for example, 'C's entrance identical-same number of steps to A, same half turn away' (Gontarski 1992: 50). Beckett walked Thorpe through this choreography on stage, just as he was likely to offer actors line readings when necessary, and often surprised the actors by his active participation during rehearsals. On one occasion, to the amazement of the actors, he performed the role of Nell alongside Mandell (in the absence of Teresita Garcia Suro), a character he described as 'a whisper of life' (Thorpe). In an interview with James Knowlson, Thorpe expressed his captivation with this moment, saying 'the two of them, they could have done it [. . .] it was frighteningly beautiful' (1993).

Rehearsals often saw Beckett critique his work, with Mandell recalling Beckett saying 'There's too much text' in relation to lines such as Hamm's 'All is . . . all is . . . all is what? (*Violently*) All is what?' (Gontarski 1993: 56). Cuts, revisions and alterations illustrated his direction, with notable textual cuts made to the song scene and all references to the song. Excisions were also made when he decided there was too much clutter on the stage, such as the picture identified in the original editions of the text or with his descriptions of the characters when he chose for them not to have red faces. As he watched the play in performance, he saw the need for simplifications to moments such as Clov's observations with the telescope and his use of the ladder. By working practically, Beckett also made justifications in light of the text, as he wrote in his production notebook, 'Windows not high' in order to legitimate Hamm's question 'Have you shrunk?' (Gontarski 1993: 43). These practical developments, the rapport he shared with what he called the 'San Quentinites' (Harmon 1998: 372) and the ambiance of Riverside led to a largely positive rehearsal experience for Beckett, as Mandell noted:

> Beckett more than enjoyed the rehearsals. He revelled in them. Well perhaps revelled is not quite the right description. At one point I was alone with him at our London digs. [. . .] He told me he would not be coming to Dublin for the opening. When I asked why he said 'They'd eat me up alive.' I told him what a joy the experience had been for me. He said, 'You've given me life.' He meant, I think, the whole rehearsal period and more.[21]

With these experiences in hand from Hammersmith, the cast and production team departed for Dublin without Beckett on the first stop of their Irish and British tour; however, the production swiftly returned to London at the Young Vic in a double bill with *Krapp's Last Tape* in July 1980, playing to 'mainly earnest students and committed theatre buffs' (Arts Council memo, 1 August 1980). Little did Beckett or the core San Quentin group know at the time, but they would be back at Riverside to rehearse *Godot* four years later.

Original plans for San Quentin's *Godot* rehearsals suggested that they would take place in Paris, though Beckett's fondness for the Hammersmith venue was demonstrated as he urged Cluchey to 'Try for Riverside again' (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 46). Prior to the second rehearsals, he had again strongly indicated that his directing days were over, though he relented, and his participation in 1984 was ultimately for the Workshop's benefit, as Cluchey told him their tour to the Adelaide Festival (and subsequent Australian dates) hinged on his direct involvement. Beckett relayed a message to the production's director, Walter Asmus, stating that he agreed 'mostly to satisfy the Festival's insistence that I should "survey" (as Rick put it) the production' (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 47). As further correspondence with Cluchey suggests, Beckett was keen to underline some rules and accentuate his physical condition in advance of rehearsals:

I need assurance on 2 counts:

1. That I shall not appear in any film of proceedings in London.
2. That the general title B. directs B. will be modified as requested.

> Please understand the extent of my fatigue & do not ask too much of me. (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 47)

Although the tour was branded as 'Beckett directs Beckett', Beckett showed scepticism towards this title for the San Quentin triple bill, particularly in the case of *Godot*, where he was reluctant to be identified as the production's director due to his respect for Asmus, who was given the official credit.[22] Beckett wrote to Cluchey, stating, 'Your Godot should carry the mention "in consultation with the author"' (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 47). In turn, Asmus's reflections suggest his own loyalty, as he admitted upon Beckett's arrival in London, 'I didn't justify anything. [. . .] I just handed it over to him all together, I didn't interfere at all, I took notes'.[23]

Rehearsals for *Godot* began on 20 February 1984, in what would be the final theatre production Beckett would work on in the UK. Asmus recalled Beckett's condition when he arrived in London; he was too 'tired to do the production [and] not really in command or the shape he had been in 10 years ago'. Even though he made notes and changes to a 1981 Faber text of *Godot* prior to rehearsals, both Asmus and the cast have suggested that he felt unprepared, in comparison to past rehearsals, as he could no longer memorize the text. Nonetheless, he still demonstrated a keen eye for the play's symmetry on stage, an attentiveness that even caught out Asmus's precise direction. For example, Asmus recalled his direction of specific entrances with Pozzo and Lucky entering audience right in Act 1. In Act 2, Beckett has them enter audience left, though Asmus admitted, to his own embarrassment, how he had them enter audience right again with Beckett quick to assert: 'No! No, No! It's all wrong, they enter from the other side.'

The rehearsals proved to be another opportunity for Beckett to examine *Waiting for Godot* and make alterations to the play in performance and to the English text. Some of these changes took into consideration his work on *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller Theater, alongside further discussions with Asmus in relation to his 1978 Brooklyn Academy of Music production and his own

reflections on reading the play in 1984. Ideas that were reaffirmed in the San Quentin production included the swapping of Vladimir and Estragon's jackets and trousers after Act 1, and the tree was also modelled on Matias's pale, thin Schiller design. Furthermore, the concept of twelve *Wartestellen* – or waiting moments – developed in Berlin was again used by Beckett and Asmus, as they saw this as a 'major motif' for the play's 'visual structure' (McMillan and Knowlson 1994: 91).[24] Rehearsals at Riverside emphasized the symbiotic parallels between each pairing, as: 'Beckett concurred with J. Pat Miller's incorporation of gestures in Lucky's monologue similar to those of Pozzo in his to create a visual parallel between the two speeches' (McMillan and Fehsenfeld 1988: 75). By revisiting the play with more practical experience of the theatre, at a later stage in his own life, with different actors and a different environment, the production would inevitably develop its own tone, form and modulations in performance.

Each of the San Quentin actors expressed their fondness of the rehearsal experience. Lawrence Held played Estragon in this production and described how his process developed with and without Beckett:

> the basic character was there and remained; but the levels on which that basic character worked were expanded considerably. There were moments that I felt very happy with, moments that were very amusing, that had been developed in Chicago, but suddenly they had the life taken right out of them. And that, initially, was a problem for me; but that is always an actor's problem – having to accommodate the director's wishes. And in this case, the director also happens to be the writer. It became very obvious to me that Beckett's work is always in a state of flux and evolution, and that this was how he felt at this particular time, hence this is how he was going to direct it. (Quoted in Duckworth 1987: 177–8)

Part of the evolutionary process led to rehearsals heightening the 'contrast between the characters of Vladimir and Estragon' (1987: 178). Further character-specific developments led to changes for the role of

Pozzo, where substantial cuts were made to Pozzo's speeches and much of his stage business, particularly around the use of his pipe. Performed by Cluchey, Beckett saw Pozzo's relationship with Lucky as less violent in this production, and he cut his numerous jerks of the rope in favour of Pozzo simply 'return[ing] to the end of the rope' (McMillan and Knowlson 1994: 23) as he organizes Lucky around the stage.

Although significant cuts were made, additions were also integrated. Notably, one segment of dialogue from the original French text was restored to the English text, having been overlooked for thirty years. Beckett contemplated three different variations, though it was eventually performed (and published) as follows:

> ESTRAGON: Let's go!
> VLADIMIR: Where? (*Moves towards* ESTRAGON. *Seducingly*) Perhaps we'll sleep tonight in his loft. All snug and dry, our bellies full, in the hay. That's worth waiting for. No?
> ESTRAGON: Not all night.
> VLADIMIR: It's still day.
> (*Silence. Both look at the sky.*) (McMillan and Knowlson 1994: 19)

Although this passage represents an addition to the text, Beckett more often simplified the text and made the staging clearer when he could.

Time limitations once again determined the working parameters of this process, though as Cluchey asserted, 'if [Beckett] had had ten more days, I'm sure he would have cut, added, cut, orchestrated, rearranged, in an endless process' (qtd in Duckworth 1987: 179). Beckett's rigour in rehearsals demonstrates how the writer would continue to shape and discover his play through performance, even in rehearsals that would prove to be his final production of *Waiting for Godot*, defying the idea that a performance could be definitive or complete. Beckett's exertions for *Godot* surpassed his exhaustion after *Endgame*, but it was a fondly recalled experience for a production he described as 'very presentable' (Knowlson 1996: 691). One of his highlights was the performance of J. Pat Miller as Lucky. Beckett told Miller 'he was the best Lucky he had ever seen' because of the 'overwhelming' and 'searing' way he delivered

Lucky's speech (Knowlson 1996: 691). Of one performance by Miller, Asmus recalled, 'I could feel the vibrations beside me. Beckett was trembling beside me. Lucky's speech had moved him so much. I felt tears coming to my own eyes. This holy moment.'[25] Beckett would be glad he praised Miller, as Miller died of AIDS shortly after the conclusion of their Australian tour. The tour would prove the culmination of Beckett's two Riverside rehearsals, where San Quentin would add their productions of *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Godot* as part of their 'Beckett directs Beckett' programme. As Beckett departed Riverside, his work and indeed this production remained for a few more days, with Gothard arranging for San Quentin to perform to local school children on 1 and 2 March 1984, which allowed Beckett's drama to reach a new generation.

Beckett's time at Riverside epitomized his fulsome commitment to his theatre, but perhaps more importantly to the people and the new venue he encountered. By 1984, he was seventy-seven and inevitably left Riverside tired from his exertions over rehearsals, though he enjoyed the work and the friendly atmosphere of the arts centre. When the theatre later experienced funding difficulties with the Greater London Council (GLC), he signed a letter alongside several prominent artists to the editor of the *Times* describing Riverside as 'a joyful building' (Matta et al. 1982). Riverside's subsequent funding difficulties saw its closure for several months and in an attempt to lighten the mood, Beckett referred to the GLC as the 'G.L. Curmudgeons' in a letter to Gothard, who had subsequently left Riverside (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 54). More significantly, however, Beckett stated succinctly, 'Another haven closed' (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 54). Although he was only present in Hammersmith for a number of weeks, he developed an affection for the venue and the people who helped him. His drama would continue to be staged even when he was not directly involved, underlining his position in Riverside's eclectic international programming during the 1980s, featuring actors such as Joe Chaikin, Billie Whitelaw and Max Wall.[26] Over these years, Riverside established itself as the alternative home for Beckett's drama in London, stimulated by rehearsals that proved

a significant pedagogical and public moment, where well-worn public images of Beckett were redefined and a new generation of practitioners, producers and devotees were educated and inspired.

Beckett by the Southbank

In between the rehearsals of *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's drama moved further down the Thames through productions staged at the NT's Southbank home, where Peter Hall's rapidly expanding programming 'had already produced more new shows in just four years on the South Bank than Laurence Olivier's NT Company staged in a decade' (Rosenthal 2013: 336). The year 1982 epitomized the NT's productivity, which ranged from box successes such as *Guys and Dolls* (1982), *The Beggar's Opera* (1982) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1982) to productions that did not meet box office targets, including *Don Quixote* (1982) and *Jean Seberg* (1983). Both Beckett performances would contrast significantly to these larger 1982 NT productions. The first, lesser-known staging was a touring production that included *Act Without Words I* and *II* by the Japanese Noho company on the NT's terrace, with Jonah Salz directing both plays, Akira Shigeyama playing Man and A, and Yasushi Maruishi as B.[27] Despite Beckett's initial wish to see its London premiere at the Royal Court,[28] the second – and the focus of this section – saw *Rockaby* premiere on 9 December 1982 at the NT's Cottesloe Theatre, where it was performed by Billie Whitelaw in seven early evening performances alongside a reading of Beckett's short story *Enough*.[29]

Rockaby concentrates on a woman (W) sitting in a rocking chair, wearing a black evening dress. W sits still but rocks rhythmically to a recorded voice (V) that delivers a lullaby over what are essentially four acts, with W only speaking to request more of the poem or to join three key lines: 'time she stopped', 'living soul' and 'rock her off' (Beckett 2014b: 45–6). By its defiant later line 'Fuck life' and its conclusion, W's

slight head movements suggest the woman has died or at least accepted death. *Rockaby*'s NT performance, directed by Alan Schneider and designed by Gvozden Kopani, was a revival of the original production in the Center Theatre at the State University of New York at Buffalo, first mounted on 8 April 1981. This emerged after Daniel Labeille, a professor of theatre studies at the University, had plans to produce two Beckett plays, before he asked Beckett to write a new play for the occasion. It eventually became 'A Samuel Beckett Celebration', including a number of academic and practitioner panels on Beckett's work and the premiere of *Rockaby*. Part of the planning and one source of the finances that contributed to the programme came from the agreement that the rehearsal process and performance would be filmed by D. A. Pennebaker, a renowned documentary film-maker who had previously filmed Bob Dylan and David Bowie. Beckett wrote the play for Buffalo with Schneider and the actress Irene Worth in mind, but a lucrative filming clash saw Whitelaw offered the role, an outcome that pleased Beckett and maintained Whitelaw's strong association with his female roles.[30]

Preparations for the Buffalo premiere saw Schneider, Labeille and the documentary team travel to London, as Whitelaw concluded a pre-existing commitment performing *Passion Play* at the Aldwych running until 3 April, while Beckett travelled to London to assist. One year later, minus the documentary team, they rehearsed at the NT, where according to Anthony Cronin, Beckett 'hobbled in on' rehearsals and was supportive of Whitelaw's performance, describing her as 'great as always' (Cronin 1996: 575). Rehearsals began in London one week prior to the performance, with a significant portion of their time focused on its technical intricacies and with Beckett making minor suggestions concerning its very specific lighting cues and levels, as well as its rocking movements. Knowlson highlights that much time was saved by using the original voice recording from Buffalo for the Cottesloe performance, and although there were 'a few minor things on the tape that he heard a little differently in his head', overall Beckett was very satisfied with the performance (Knowlson 1996: 663–4).

Since this production's premiere in America and its later revivals, Whitelaw's performance has been subject to extended commentaries in books such as Jonathan Kalb's *Beckett in Performance*, her own perspective in *Billie Whitelaw . . . Who He?* and documented in Pennebaker's short film. These sources inevitably concentrated on *Rockaby*'s first performance in Buffalo and only briefly highlighted its presence in London, where its impact was restricted by a limited number of early evening platform performances scheduled before the main NT programme and a brief but favourable reception in the press.[31] Staging *Rockaby* supported the NT's ambitions for experimental programming, but Rosaline Asquith criticized the culture of the Cottesloe's productions, arguing that the theatre's claim 'to have nurtured experimental work, tends unfortunately to confine its spirit of adventure to [. . .] "platform performances"' (1982). Despite this criticism, Asquith was complimentary of *Rockaby*, describing it as an example of 'the master of the minimal at his most refined' (1982). Similarly, Martin Esslin concurred with the sentiments around platform presentations and argued the Buffalo staging was more finessed:

> Having seen it at its first night I felt that the London performance lacked some of the impact of the original staging. The rocking chair here creaks a little too much – or did so during the first performance on December 9. The lighting was not quite as precise. But these flaws derived no doubt from the slightly improvised nature of platform performances at the National. (Esslin 1983)

Esslin's observations identify some of the shortcomings arising from *Rockaby*'s first London performance that were not raised by other reviewers, many of whom saw the play for the first time. Esslin's comments could be read as a harsh critique of the performance from a second viewing, but Whitelaw's performance earned praise from first-time critics, such as John Barber, for its finely balanced vocal and physical delivery: 'Miss Whitelaw's performance is appropriately cold and withdrawn, her recorded voice is fittingly rhythmic and distantly urgent' (Barber 1982), and Harold Hobson described Whitelaw's

'poignant and haunting performance [as] beautiful' (1982). Esslin concluded his review by offering a positive evaluation of *Rockaby*'s lasting impression: 'It is the image that carries the emotional impact; the image that remains in the mind' (1983). The final image of W's head slowly sinking to her side and the fade-out of the spotlight on W's face represents the distillation and impact of Beckett's late work in performance.

After presenting this vivid image in *Rockaby*, the NT's final project in Beckett's lifetime saw the theatre present their first and only production of *Waiting for Godot* in 1987[32] – a fact that was given added irony when its NT2000 survey asked more than 800 playwrights, actors, directors, theatre professionals and arts journalists to name ten English language plays that they considered significant, and *Godot* topped the list. Mounted in what was Peter Hall's final NT season, the 1987 production was directed by Michael Rudman and designed by William Dudley, featuring John Alderton (Estragon), Alec McCowen (Vladimir), Terence Rigby (Pozzo) and Peter Wight (Lucky). Beckett's continued involvement with London performances was signified as he met Rudman in Paris to discuss the staging. It was a meeting of conflicting theatrical styles, as Rudman believed 'only a production rooted in naturalism will work in Britain' and as he recalled, 'he seems very resistant to any conversation about accepted theatre practices such as actors delving into the biography of characters, or costumes representing the history of characters' (Rudman 1987). These were queries he had become accustomed to, and, as his Riverside rehearsals had shown, he was more concerned with the clarity of speech, movement and shape of his plays in performance than answering questions, regardless of the venue or personnel involved.

Elsewhere in London during the 1980s, other notable productions were staged: Donald Howarth's Baxter Theatre multiracial production of *Godot* set John Kani and Winston Ntshona as Didi and Gogo on the South African veldt,[33] Max Wall and Trevor Peacock played the same roles in the round at the Roundhouse in the same year, while the London premieres of *Catastrophe*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *What Where*

– directed by Schneider and featuring David Warrilow – were staged at the Donmar Warehouse, and Norman Beaton's 1988 Bloomsbury Theatre performance saw him become the first Black actor to play Krapp. As these productions proved, Beckett's drama was no longer being staged in a limited number of London theatres, but rather his work was opening up in a greater range of geographically diverse theatres with notable actors and creatives that hinted at the rich performances set to develop after Beckett's death in 1989. Beckett's presence at Riverside and the NT in the latter years of his life brought together a range of personalities for these notable rehearsals and productions, which accentuated how much Beckett valued seeing his work staged and collaborating with friends, despite his occasional complaint to the contrary. These moments brought together some of his major collaborators as participants, facilitators or observers of his drama in performance, who had supported his artistic ambitions and, in many cases, would sustain the legacy of his *oeuvre* by producing or promoting his work in London, nationally or internationally in the years that followed.

7

Staging Beckett post-Beckett

The 1990s

When Samuel Beckett died on 22 December 1989, it was uncertain what future awaited his plays in performance and what appeal his drama would have after his death. Far from a withdrawal, the years that followed Beckett's death saw an even greater interest in his drama across London's theatre cultures, as his *oeuvre* spread to new boroughs and venues with fresh, familiar or famous faces eager to return to his work or embrace the challenge of staging Beckett. The upsurge in productions after his death from 1990 to 2024 is reflected in the records compiled for the Staging Beckett Database, where a quantitative reading of the data highlights that of the 172 recorded Beckett performances staged in London across the timeframe of this history, 107 productions have so far been staged since his death in 1989.[1] Beyond this surface-level data, there was an upsurge in presentations of Beckett's work in fringe and mainstream houses, which signified how Beckett appealed to emerging theatre practitioners and more commercially minded ventures in the West End or as part of festivalized programmes, as performances of Beckett's drama proliferated post-Beckett. To misquote Beckett's *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), death was the rebirth of him – or his drama at least.

The post-Beckett era saw many actors, directors and designers drawn to his work for the first time, though this new phase also maintained its connections to Beckett's lifetime through practitioners who had worked directly with Beckett and were eager to continue their explorations of his *oeuvre*. One production that linked these two phases of this production

history was the double bill of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Catastrophe* at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester (Figure 13). The production brought together a number of Beckett's friends and collaborators, who were aware of his growing frailty and mounted the production as a plan to 'cheer him up', including actor David Warrilow, director Antoni Libera, designer Jocelyn Herbert and David Gothard, Artistic Associate of the Haymarket.[2] It originally opened in Leicester in October 1989 and, by coincidence, its scheduled tour to Riverside Studios on 8 January 1990 saw the first performance of Beckett's drama in London after his death, produced at the last London venue he worked in. By the time the production reached London, Beckett's death had inevitably altered the context of its presentation, but as Benedict Nightingale suggested, 'this is as much an occasion for celebration as for mourning' (Nightingale 1990). Further celebrations to mark Beckett's contribution to London

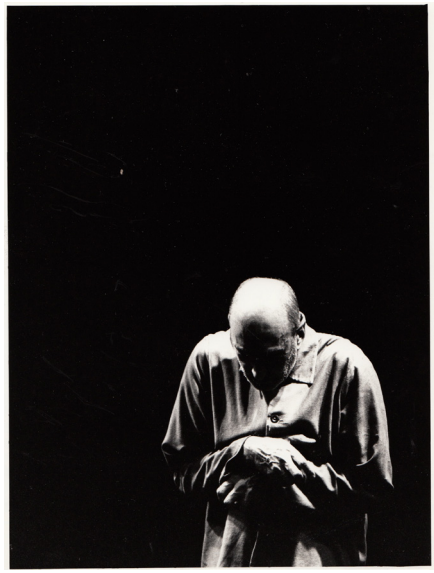

Figure 13 David Warrilow playing the Protagonist in *Catastrophe* at Riverside Studios, 1990. Directed by Antoni Libera, designed by Jocelyn Herbert. Photo by Chris Harris. David Gothard Theatre and Performance Collection.

and British theatre were formally made, including the National Theatre's memorial event in the Olivier Theatre – 'A Celebration of the Life and Work of Samuel Beckett' – indicating the esteem he was held in.[3]

The proliferation of performances across London since Beckett's death means it would be impossible to appropriately deal with each production and, as a result, the chapter will concentrate on three key productions from the 1990s: *Waiting for Godot* (1991) at the Queen's Theatre with the alternative comedy duo Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson, Deborah Warner's 1994 production of *Footfalls* at the Garrick Theatre and Katie Mitchell's 1996 direction of *Endgame* at the Donmar Warehouse. For different reasons, these performances encompassed the new dawn that awaited Beckett's drama post-Beckett, as his work was more frequently revived with high-profile performers or emerging theatre makers, it was subject to fresh interpretations and it raised questions around how artistic responses were received or restricted, as this chapter will discuss.

The comedians' *Godot*: Mayall and Edmondson's business with Beckett

Staging *Godot* at the Queen's Theatre (now the Sondheim Theatre) represented a seismic shift in perceptions towards producing Beckett's drama in London. The versatility of Beckett's plays ensured that they fulfilled the remits of several subsidized institutions at this point: emphases on new writing, theatre for young people, international drama and experimental performance. With the exception of *Godot*'s premiere transferring to the Criterion Theatre and the international productions staged at the Aldwych Theatre for the World Theatre Seasons, Beckett's drama was not commonly seen in the West End, London's commercial theatre district.[4] Beckett's commercial potential was initially identified as far back as 1954 by *Godot*'s first London producer, Donald Albery, who originally proposed a West End opening with two star actors, Ralph

Richardson and Alec Guinness, that failed to materialize. These casting and commercial motives lay largely dormant as an idea until Robin Williams and Steve Martin played Didi and Gogo at New York's Lincoln Center in 1988, when the venue welcomed large audiences to see the Hollywood actors' trademark energetic, slapstick comedy.[5] Three years later, Mayall and Edmondson traded on their partnership as performers for television sitcoms for Beckett's double act in a production directed by Les Blair, in what may be read as London's attempt to mirror the New York star vehicle.[6] London's West End was historically a familiar and competitive market for the 'business' of selling celebrities, but Beckett's drama was an unfamiliar product for West End audiences to consume, as the genre, form and content of his work were commonly perceived to be an unorthodox product unlikely to satisfy the popular tastes of its consumers (Luckhurst and Moody 2005: 7). The duo played a pivotal role in reintroducing *Godot* to the West End, but was Beckett mainstream and would *Godot* be sufficiently popular in a theatre that holds approximately 1,000 spectators?

By 1991, the hugely popular comedians were approaching the height of their fame, as they straddled Britain's mainstream and alternative comedy movements through their cult sitcoms *The Young Ones* (1982–4) and *The Dangerous Brothers* (1986) with *Bottom* (1991–5) shortly following *Godot*. Their appearance coincided with the UK media's increased fixation on celebrity culture, particularly the fundamental role celebrities occupied in British tabloids, glossy magazines and chat show culture. If there was a moment that signified the transition of Beckett's theatre into the mainstream of British culture, perhaps the duo's conversation with Jonathan Ross on Channel 4 television characterized it.[7] Broadcast at an early stage of Ross's career, the idea of these three personalities discussing Beckett on a popular chat show format was unprecedented in the early 1990s. In promoting the performance, both Mayall and Edmondson were keen to highlight their affinity to Beckett and his influence on their stand-up comedy and sitcoms.[8] Mayall recognized:

> Our comedy actually developed from a love of Beckett – of Godot in particular – and a lot of our early stuff was Beckett-piss-takes. I have always been drawn to Beckett. I like the simplicity. I like the honesty. I like the vulgarity, the violence. I like the uniqueness of it – the way it doesn't fit in and it annoys people. Our style is actually very Beckettian. (Heller 1991: 16)[9]

This acknowledgement of their debt to Beckett was evidenced in their television characters' jokes about excretion, erections and sex, as well as their slapstick routines around pain and violence; material that echoes some of the comedic routines and gags of Vladimir and Estragon.

The presence of Mayall and Edmondson greatly appealed to fans of their television work and, as a result, the production introduced Beckett's drama to a new generation of theatregoers, many of whom would have been unfamiliar with the play or Beckett. Marvin Carlson has argued of similar exchanges, 'audiences are at least as often attracted to a new production by their previous acquaintance with the actors that are appearing in it as they are by the name of the dramatist' (Carlson 2006: 69). To what extent audiences were familiar with Beckett is difficult to ascertain, but as many commentators observed a larger proportion of young theatregoers than they were used to, it is fair to speculate many audience members would have bought tickets for *Godot* on the basis of their memories and expectations of the duo from their past roles as Rick and Vyvyan from *The Young Ones* or perhaps Mayall's role as Alan B'Stard in the political sitcom *The New Statesman* (1987–94). Some critics argued the ghosting and expectations of the stars in their past roles worked to the detriment of Mayall and Edmondson's performance, which suggested a need to appease the audience. Paul Taylor, for example, criticized their willing participation in the operations of celebrity tied to the performance, as he argued 'the stars (especially Mayall as Vladimir) insist on establishing a mugging complicity with punters that makes the relationship across the footlights an uncomfortably knowing one. It's not the actors' [. . .] fault that they have fans; it is that they play up to them and their expectation' (1991: 18).

The production was co-designed by the artist and film-maker Derek Jarman and Madeleine Morris, who had just finished her MA in Set Design at the Slade art school, each of whom had conflicting perspectives on the production's motives (Figure 14). In his diaries, Jarman wrote, 'the laughs are mostly for "business"' (Collins 2001: 53), whereas Morris had an entirely different reading: 'It definitely wasn't a business. It was something that they loved. I think they genuinely loved it and they really, really wanted to bring it to life.'[10] Jarman's comments may have reflected his investment in the project, as due to his hectic schedule, Morris admitted leading on the design in consultation with the artist. In imagining *Godot*'s setting, the designers were influenced by the landscapes of their respective homes in Dungeness, as Morris highlighted, 'we both loved big skies and flat landscapes and it's the whole sort of slightly dystopian, end of the world feel'. This feeling was achieved by the wrap-around yellow sky but also through the

Figure 14 Set design by Madeleine Morris for *Waiting for Godot* at the Queen's Theatre, 1991. Co-designed with Derek Jarman. © Madeleine Morris.

deliberately dull earth tones evoked in the 'marshscape' and 'muddy environment' they created for their country road. The concept for the tree was Jarman's idea, as Morris explained its shape and form took inspiration from 'pollarded trees' due to their shortened, spindly branches; something that S. E. Gontarski contended in a review 'could never be mistaken for a bush or a shrub' (1991: 6). Morris and Jarman's aesthetic juxtaposed the glamour traditionally associated with the West End and the more minimal design choices of previous *Godot*s in London. For Morris, it mirrored the alternative comedy of the co-stars: 'it was very Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson, it was very much their kind of take on it', who were dressed in deliberately muddied suits to give the impression they crawled around the setting.

Fans of Mayall and Edmondson would have been unconcerned with the juxtaposing environment as they flocked to the Queen's, but the performance itself received some criticism in the press for not balancing the play's comedy with its pathos. Billington's account accentuated that this was a production weighted towards comedy, as he argued it 'sacrifice[d] desolation to loony-tunes comedy' (Billington 1991). He concurred with Taylor's comments that the production sought laughter where,

> right from the first moment there is something strenuous about the fun. Mr Edmondson's Gogo rolls over the ground in an orgy of embarrassment in the attempt to pull off his recalcitrant boot. And Mr Mayall's Didi establishes his hectoring superiority by beating him on the back and putting on a governess-voice to tell him 'Boots must be taken off every day'. (1991)

The overemphasis of their highly physical routines was a disappointment for some reviewers, as Louise Kingsley surmised, 'they extract and elaborate every possible gag the text has to offer' (1991).[11] Despite these comments – suggestive of how critics believed the play should be staged – it appeared to prove entertaining for a larger proportion of the audience, as Charles Spencer recorded: 'the first-night audience at the Queen's spent much of the evening responding as if they were watching

the most rib-tickling of comedies' (1991). These deviating responses demonstrate the subjective nature of reactions to the performance and the difficulty in reconstructing a performance event based on a limited number of insights, often with conflicting viewpoints, which accentuates how the reception of an event will always be open to a multitude of perspectives.

The Queen's *Godot* may not have abided by conventional approaches or perceptions of staging or designing the play, but it did demonstrate how high-profile performers and emerging artists were bringing new ideas to Beckett as his work returned to mainstream environments. Notably, this early performance of London's post-Beckett era saw his drama introduced to new audiences, many of whom were unfamiliar with his work – a situation that would become increasingly marked as Beckett became a more staple part of the West End diet.

Foot forward or 'footfault'?

A further development for Beckett's drama in the 1990s was the interest it sparked in a bold, new generation of theatre practitioners. The 1990s was a decade in which the UK's theatre sector produced its own exceptional creative talents, mirroring the exciting endeavours of artists from a variety of different art forms. The 'Cool Britannia' era saw a new wave of promising talents, including the Young British Artists like Damian Hirst and Tracey Emin or the Britpop era with the likes of Oasis, Blur and the Spice Girls occupying the charts, artists and personalities who established a new sense of national pride in all cultural activities linked to Britain. Likewise, the British theatre was awash with new writing talents – many of whom were inspired by Beckett – such as Sarah Kane, Jez Butterworth and Martin Crimp, whose work was later categorized as 'in-yer-face' theatre or examples of British political drama in the 1990s (Sierz 2001). Alongside these playwrights, Deborah Warner and Katie Mitchell – two prominent female directors – built their reputation for provocatively reinterpreting classical plays

for contemporary audiences and earned a loyal legion of theatregoers in the process. During the mid-1990s, they turned their attention to Beckett's drama for the first time in what were contrasting productions and experiences for the directors.

Warner's first experience with Beckett's drama was at the West End's Garrick Theatre in 1994 when she directed Fiona Shaw and Susan Engels in *Footfalls*, in what was an intriguing and ambitious project for many reasons. Firstly, *Footfalls* would renew the creative partnership between Warner and Shaw, who had previously collaborated with much success on classics such as *Electra* (1988), *The Good Person of Sichuan* (1989), *Hedda Gabler* (1991) and later *Richard II* (1995) and, for many, *Footfalls* represented an exciting chance to see the innovative female practitioners collaborate on a modern play. Secondly, as a theatrical event, Warner's production was something of a pioneering proposition. It chose to present *Footfalls*, a play that lasts approximately thirty minutes, by itself as an early evening 'pre-restaurant play' and thus allowed the play to stand alone, as Warner had identified that most productions of Beckett's short plays were presented in multiple bills (Lister 1994: 4). By 1994, impressions of the play were largely either conditioned by Beckett's original direction or haunted by Billie Whitelaw's embodiment of the spectral figure of May at the Royal Court and Riverside Studios.[12] *Footfalls* thus remained an unfamiliar play to the wider theatregoing public, especially when staged in London's mainstream theatre market. Staged twice nightly, its West End presentation was a risk for its theatrical producers, but nonetheless, enthusiasm for the venture brought together many producing partners, including Warner, Catherine Bailey Ltd, Stoll Moss Theatres and its executive producer in France, the Maison de la Culture Bobigny, who were funding the project on the basis that the performance would tour to Paris. The producers' decision to bring Shaw and Warner's work to the Garrick was for commercial and practical reasons, as the 'highly uncommercial venture of putting a Beckett play on in the West End sold out on the strength of their names on the marquee' (Raymond 1994: 25–6). With its artists, ambition, risk and support, the 1994

production of *Footfalls* had the potential to make an unorthodox West End project a success, but it would instead be remembered for a then unprecedented intervention in Beckett's London performance history.

Following Beckett's death in 1989, the role of overseeing his legacy was the responsibility of his nephew, Edward Beckett, who was the nominated executor of the Samuel Beckett Estate alongside his literary executor, Jerome Lindon.[13] Up to this point, Edward Beckett's newly acquired role was relatively unknown, but the opening night performance of *Footfalls* prompted the Estate to intervene in the production's presentation. Edward Beckett's concerns lay with alterations to the text and the staging of the play, in which '[f]ive lines of dialogue had been transposed from mother to daughter' and the location of Shaw as May was altered, as Mel Gussow described:

> In this version, the actress went 'walkabout,' moving from the stage to a promontory on the edge of the dress circle and then back to the stage again. In both locations, she postured and grimaced the character's pain. The performance disregarded the author's designations of costume, lighting and stage directions, and the supposedly disembodied voice of the character's mother (Susan Engel) seemed to come live from the orchestra. (2000: 100)

Warner's productions, as Aoife Monks has suggested, are broadly known for three modes of theatrical representation: 'her loyalty to the text', 'the need for "transparent" theatre productions which remove ideological and historical filters from the audience's experiences' and an 'emphasis on experimentalism and risk in performance, garnered from their interest in the European modernist avant-garde' (2008: 258). Gussow's account of the performance's transgressions resonates with Monks's notes on Warner's directorial style with respect to the transparency, experimentalism and risk associated with her work. By reassigning some of the lines in *Footfalls*, Warner was attempting to suggest the ambiguous connections between May and Mother, and her decision to relocate May signified her intent to produce the play through contemporary performance practices in this environmental

Figure 15 Fiona Shaw in *Footfalls* at the Garrick Theatre, 1994. Directed by Deborah Warner, designed by Hildegard Bechtler. Photo: Donald Cooper / Photostage

staging that reconfigured the audience's relationship with the Garrick's auditorium. This was consistent with her directorial style, but not with the wishes of the Beckett Estate (Figure 15).

After Edward Beckett's intervention on opening night, the lines in question were restored to Engels as Mother for the remainder of the production's London run, but it led to a theatrical storm that would shape the reputations of Warner and the Beckett Estate. These actions saw Beckett's drama receive an unprecedented level of media attention, which has subsequently played an important role in the public's perception of Beckett, his Estate and his canon in the UK and internationally. This was demonstrated as news of the debacle reached the front page of the *Guardian* on 19 March 1994, where the Beckett Estate was presented as a stern executor of Beckett's literary legacy. Madeleine Bunting and Angella Johnson reported, 'Trustees of the estate of Samuel Beckett are so angered with the interpretation of one of his plays in a production running

in London that they have declared its director will never stage his plays again' (1994: 1). Inevitably, the article would expose Beckett's drama to a larger proportion of *The Guardian*'s readership and it prompted heated debates as many commentators argued Beckett's text should be respected, while others felt contemporary theatre practitioners should have the freedom to interpret the drama as they wish. *The Guardian*'s 'Letters to the Editor' section, in particular, was inundated with responses, including contributions from Edward Beckett and Shaw. Edward Beckett denied Warner had been banned from directing his uncle's work for life, but this was counterbalanced as he stated, 'If Deborah Warner is to direct Beckett in the future, and I personally hope she does, it must be with frankness and with the collaboration of the estate' (Beckett 1994: 25). Shaw appreciated Edward Beckett's letter for clarifying the confusion sparked by the allegations that Warner had been banned but defended the merits of her work by writing, 'By changing the play's spacial [*sic*] relationship she released a different aesthetic which allows the play to be enjoyed at the heart of experiment where Beckett flourished' (Shaw 1994: 25). However, despite Shaw's explanation, in the final paragraph of his letter Edward Beckett used his musical background to compare the question of interpretation in different art forms, as he wrote:

> The estate does not seek to restrict freedom of interpretation, the very life blood of music and theatre. There are more than 15 recordings of Beethoven's late string quartets in the catalogue, every interpretation different, one from the next, but they are all based on the same notes, tonalities, dynamic and tempo markings. We feel justified in asking the same measure of respect for Samuel Beckett's plays. (1994: 25)

Given these justifications, he felt bound to stop Warner's production at the end of its week-long London run, electing to 'not take any royalties' but also denying its next presentation in Paris.[14] More notably, the intervention signified that practitioners approaching Beckett's texts would need to comply with his stage directions and the contract under which his performance rights were issued.

Despite the prominent disputes that arose, the critical reception of the piece had many admirers. Michael Coveney called it a 'superb, poetic, and clarifying production' (Coveney 1994: 11) and Irving Wardle labelled it 'spell-binding' (Wardle 1994: 26). Intriguingly, their Sunday reviews would both recall past performances of the play that ghosted their impressions of Warner's production. Coveney was supportive of Warner's work and even ranked the performance over Beckett's own production in 1976:

> I have seen this piece performed twice before (by Billie Whitelaw in London and Susan Fitzgerald in Dublin) to Beckett's exact specifications, and the suffocating aroma of High Art hung thickly and off-puttingly about. Shaw and Warner's work is a Beckett breakthrough, redefining the play's theatre-ness while, honouring, most remarkably, Beckett's Irish rhythms and cutting humour. (Coveney 1994: 11)

Besides their praise, however, the performance was criticized in the notices of several newspapers with Shaw's Irish accent in comparison to Engel's English voice queried by a number of commentators. Furthermore, several critics pondered the symbolism behind the performance's spatial rearrangement; as Billington contended, it was an issue in relation to the play, '[what it] proved to me was that if you liberate May from the spatial confinement that is her existence, you rob the play of its visual and emotional power' (Billington 1994: 4–5). Billington's article offered an important commentary concerning the questions and challenges of reinterpreting a Beckett text and the wider practical questions, which corresponded with the British tradition of respecting and adhering to the playwright's text. Billington concluded such radical experiments were not suited to Beckett's later work and particularly *Footfalls*, writing, '[it] is too unyielding, too fixed in its theatrical demands, to achieve the malleability of a classic' (Billington 1994: 4–5).

Warner would later argue of the approach that guided her production: 'Now the play should be done a little more bravely . . . to release Beckett for a new generation. If there's a Beckett cliché, it's someone standing in

a white light in a black box set. In its time, that was highly innovative. But I have to carry with me the history of my time' (Gussow 2000: 103). These comments epitomized a large part of her creative and growing mainstream appeal, as she felt her productions had to speak to the present, just as her previously imaginative re-readings of classical plays had been applauded for doing so.[15] For Edward Beckett, he felt the need to publicly explain his actions, in order to dampen the furore that had arisen, but to also signal the Estate's presence in the management of Beckett's legacy, as he observed:

> I eventually had to write in to *The Guardian* to close the whole thing – then people suddenly realized that there was an estate. The author was dead, but there was actually somebody there looking after things; making sure that people didn't deviate too much from the author's directions. [. . .] It was very much to protect the legacy and to protect the play, that was the reason for doing it. We just felt that they'd gone outside the lines.

Inevitably, his intervention created a reputation for the Estate that remains a notable feature of the cultural memory attached to Beckett's work, and its legacy has undoubtedly impacted how many theatre practitioners have staged his drama in London since.

Mitchell's *Endgame*: A reimagining within the stage directions

Records from the Staging Beckett Database suggest the controversy surrounding *Footfalls* may have initially deterred practitioners from approaching his work, as 1995 saw no productions of Beckett's drama staged in London. Following this fallow year, however, and perhaps to the surprise of many, the number of Beckett performances increased across the city, with performances presented in multiple venues, including *Act Without Words I* and *II* (1996) by Academy Productions at the Battersea Arts Centre and *Rockaby* (1999) at Royal Holloway

with Rosemary Pountney, as well as more familiar London venues for Beckett's work. Besides its reinvigorated presence across the city, Beckett's drama also appeared in London's 'boutique theatres', such as the Almeida and the Donmar Warehouse. After reopening as an independent producing house in 1992, under the artistic directorship of Sam Mendes, the Donmar reengaged its interest in Beckett's drama by staging *Endgame* in a production directed by Katie Mitchell, designed by Rae Smith and featuring Alun Armstrong and Stephen Dillane as Hamm and Clov.[16] By 1996, Mitchell was still an early-career theatre director, but she was building a reputation for experimentalism and her innovative interpretations of classical texts; an uncompromising style and vision that has guided her productions at many of Britain and Europe's major theatres have seen her labelled as 'British theatre's true auteur' (Oltermann 2014). Mitchell's theatre training was heavily informed by directors from Northern and Eastern European traditions, particularly through her work under directors such as Lev Dodin and Anatoli Vassiliev. With these experiences informing her direction, scholars like Dan Rebellato have argued that, 'Mitchell's work has a sensibility and a set of priorities that fit awkwardly into the institutional structures or critical consensus that surround British theatre practice. Put simply, Katie Mitchell is too European for some British tastes' (Delgado and Rebellato 2010: 319). Rebellato's comments on Mitchell resonate with considerations of Beckett, who was arguably at the beginning of his career too European for British tastes but gradually became more accepted in the nation's theatre culture. Following the infamy of *Footfalls* and given Mitchell's directorial grounding, her production of *Endgame* could have roused similar notoriety, though instead Mitchell produced a fresh interpretation of *Endgame* within Beckett's prescribed stage directions.

Mitchell was, in fact, originally due to direct *The Maids* by Jean Genet at the Donmar, but when the production failed to transpire, she rediscovered Beckett through *Endgame* and 'was amazed by how powerful and humane it was, and how badly [she] had misjudged him' (Christiansen 1997). The *Footfalls* dispute meant Mitchell approached

her *Endgame* rehearsals on a cautious footing as she commented, 'if I was in any doubt, I'd fax the estate's representative, and he'd come down and help sort the problems out [. . .]. It was all very delicate, but co-operative. And ultimately you realise that there's no writer whose rigid instructions are more helpful' (Christiansen 1997).[17] Although Mitchell acknowledged the helpfulness of the stage directions, she pointed out the need to move theatrical practices around Beckett's texts forward:

> It's not that I want to depart from anything that Beckett has written. But we have to move on from what has become the conventional way of staging these plays, in a rather cold, abstract and over-reverent style, with the actors wearing white-face and long wigs. I want an audience to recognise themselves in the characters, not regard them from a distance as weird psychotics. There's a danger that Beckett's plays could turn into mummified museum pieces, labelled as a little theatrical backwater and not treated as living art. (Christiansen 1997)

Here, Mitchell suggests how a tradition of staging Beckett had developed in the UK by the 1990s, whereby there could be reliance on past interpretations, particularly those directed or directly involving the author, and there was a need to engage with his plays through contemporary practices and in the current moment.[18]

Mitchell's practices employed a realistic approach that would often ground her direction before and after *Endgame*. In a later interview with Anna McMullan, she recalled her methods:

> We decided to treat the situation as if it were real – a realistic house somewhere in the countryside in the future after some awful apocalyptic event. We thought that the event could be nuclear or environmental. The event had destroyed some of the building, so that it had sunk slightly into the earth and slid towards some water. That is why you saw earth out of one window and water out of the other window. We imagined that the house was still moving ever so slightly as if it could fall down at any moment and at moments you could hear the odd distant creak and see a tiny trickle of dust fall from the ceiling into the room where Hamm sat. (Mitchell and McMullan 2018: 128)

Conceiving the play through a realistic viewpoint, this extended answer signifies Mitchell's thoughtful and sensitive approach to *Endgame*. The interpretation represented a departure from past productions in the UK, stayed within the Beckett Estate's parameters, and reimagined the play in a style that was true to her emerging directorial method.

In later years, Michael Billington would often question Mitchell's approach, but here he praised Mitchell's 'excellent new production' for its extraction of the humour and empathy in a play he saw as Beckett's vision of the end of existence (Billington 1996). He continued his praise by writing at length about Armstrong and Dillane's more relatable depiction of Hamm and Clov:

> the whole point of Mitchell's production is that recognisable human impulses survive even in a terminal situation: she gives us characters rather than abstractions. Alun Armstrong's vocally incisive Hamm may be a crippled tyrant, but there is something deeply moving about his simultaneous craving for death and for residual human contact: he variously begs Clov to kill him and kiss him, as if his ultimate terror is that of total solitude. [. . .]
>
> There is also wild humour about Stephen Dillane's astonishing hump-backed, strenuously limping Clov. He is both a morose Caliban to this toppled Prospero, dragging a ladder across the stage to grate on his master's nerves, and yet also someone who cannot quite forfeit his dependency. (Billington 1996)

Mitchell's concentrated work on the play's characterization was exemplified through Dillane's performance, as Robert Butler argued, 'Dillane is superb. Hunchbacked, nervous, his straggly hair falling across his thin bearded face, he raises his eyes to the roof, scratches his dirty trousers and mutters soft rapid rebuttals. His timing is a delight. We glimpse years and years of frustrated servitude' (Butler 1996: 13). Furthermore, many critics were impressed with the humour conveyed by Dillane's Clov, particularly through his running gag with his step-ladder. Besides Armstrong and Dillane, the performances of Harry Jones and Eileen Nicholas also drew admiration from critics despite their obstructed visibility at the back of the stage. As Taylor referred

to them as 'the most affecting Nagg and Nell I have yet seen, playing the dust binned duo as a pair of shrivelled senile Scots, who need one another to act as audience for rusty jokes and unreliable memories' (Taylor 1996: 7).

Following the controversy of *Footfalls* two years earlier, questions over directorial freedom more keenly ghosted this production's reception. Taylor, for example, mused, 'Ever since the Beckett estate fell with punitive pedantry on Deborah Warner's Footfalls, I've found myself fantasising about ways you could produce his plays that would liberate them from the strait-jacket of his stage directions while not being untrue to the spirit or the significance of the works' (1996: 7). These debates would ghost practitioners approaching Beckett's drama, but Mitchell's direction was unanimously acclaimed for its original interpretation of a well-known play and its resistance to stray from his stage directions. S. E. Gontarski, the editor of *Endgame* volume of *The Theatrical Notebooks*, argued of this production:

> This is absolutely faithful Beckett and yet Katie Mitchell made the play her own. [. . .] On opening night, it was clear that Mitchell was neither intimidated nor felt constricted by Beckett's text or his own productions, did not, more importantly, feel compelled either to slavishly follow Beckett's staging or to disregard his insights. (Gontarski 1996: 199)

Mitchell's *Endgame* demonstrated how it was possible to balance a new interpretation of Beckett within the parameters of his dramatic text. Through its emphasis on the real in its use of performance, characterization, scenography, tone and rhythm, Mitchell suggested how, beyond its parameters, Beckett's text has a flexibility that can be activated, as she proved how *Endgame* could be 'refreshingly non-reverent [and at the same time] uplifting' (Coveney 1996: 12).

As this performance history moved into the post-Beckett era, how Beckett was staged was subject to more layers of scrutiny, particularly as interest in his works grew and questions over authorial control garnered unprecedented attention for his work. Beckett's new dawn

was represented in these three notable performances, which toyed with celebrity, controversy and experimentation. As Mayall, Edmondson, Warner and Mitchell showed, staging Beckett was an attractive prospect for a new generation of audiences and theatre practitioners, but the work also remained appealing to experienced directors too, with Peter Hall twice returning to *Godot* at the Old Vic in 1997 and Piccadilly Theatre in 1998, while Peter Brook brought *Oh Les Beaux Jours* (*Happy Days*) to Riverside Studios in 1997. The 1990s was also a remarkable period for Beckett's drama across London's fringe theatres as it occupied an eclectic range of locations, venues and spaces, such as the Institut Francais, Etcetera Theatre Club, Attic Theatre, Barons Court Theatre, White Bear Theatre Club and the Battersea Arts Centre – to name but a few. Of course, several productions included the now-familiar early works, but there were also outings for the lesser-known *Rough for Theatre I* and *II*, *A Piece of Monologue* and *Breath*, as well as French language productions, suggesting the early enthusiasm and broader interest Beckett's wider dramatic oeuvre stirred with the array of theatre companies who sought to produce his work. Furthermore, Efendi Productions set *Godot* in the Levant with Jordanian and Turkish-Armenian performers at the Lyric Hammersmith,[19] meanwhile Tottering Bipeds presented a touring production of *Godot* featuring disabled actors at the Watermans Arts Centre in 1997, indicating how fresh, diverse and inclusive interpretations of Beckett's best-known play were possible.[20] Stagings of Beckett in London were at this point evolving with respect to what, where and who they were staged by, but this was just the start of the 'Beckettmania' that would start to materialize by the end of the decade, as the next chapter will explore.

8

Beckettmania

The new millennium

One of the main difficulties in constructing a performance history on Beckett in London during the post-Beckett era lies in the sheer volume of performances to consult and consider. The next phase of this history will investigate productions between 1999 and 2010, when a boom in Beckett performances of assorted combinations in numerous locations with many theatre professionals occurred. To give a condensed impression: John Calder – Beckett's publisher – started the Godot Theatre Company and proceeded to regularly stage his plays in venues such as the Cockpit and Southwark Playhouse, Swiss director Luc Bondy toured his production of *En Attendant Godot* in 2000 to the Southbank Centre as part of their Meltdown Festival, Peter Hall returned to the Arts Theatre to direct Felicity Kendal in *Happy Days* in 2003, Lee Evans and Michael Gambon explored Clov and Hamm's tragicomic musings and rituals in *Endgame*'s 2004 revival at the Noël Coward Theatre, Steve Harley – frontman of the rock band Cockney Rebel – appeared in *Rough for Theatre I* and *II* at the Arts Theatre in 2007, Deborah Warner directed Fiona Shaw as Winnie when the duo returned to Beckett at the NT in 2007 and in 2009 Complicité director Simon McBurney teamed up with Mark Rylance – following his first run of Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* – to present *Endgame* at the Duchess Theatre. Without extending this selection of productions further, these years accentuate the varied mix of plays, practitioners and venues involved in some of the Beckett performances that populated London's stages over this time. Many of these performances deserve closer

examination, but this chapter will instead concentrate on the 1999 and 2006 Gate Theatre Dublin and Barbican Centre Beckett Festivals and the Theatre Royal Haymarket's 2009 production of *Waiting for Godot* in what were major events that opened up Beckett's work to large London audiences – events that contributed to the 'Beckettmania' that transpired in London over these years and since (Coughlan 2006).

The Beckett Festivals: An oxymoron or an unmissable celebration?

If the post-Beckett era signalled the proliferation of his work in both single and multiple bill formats, it also signalled the growing propensity to festivalize Beckett's canon. This shift in the post-Beckett era to package his work for theatregoers as a large-scale event began with Dublin's Gate Theatre producing their first Beckett Festival in 1991, where they staged each of his nineteen plays and organized other Beckett-related talks and events, before touring different iterations of the festival to New York in 1996 and London in 1999. While the festival's originality lay in the ambitious idea of presenting each of his works for the stage, it was, of course, not the first time Beckett's work had been produced as part of a festival in London. The premieres of *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court were packaged as a double bill and opened George Devine's French Fortnight in a celebration of French culture. His drama proceeded to play a familiar role in arts festivals and theatre seasons, in events such as the World Theatre Seasons in the 1960s and 1970s and the Bloomsbury Festival in 1988. Beckett's work was also given its own single-author seasons during his lifetime, such as the Royal Court's seventieth birthday season in 1976 with the world premieres of *Footfalls* and *That Time*.[1] The first festival to pay homage to the author after his death was 'A Flexible Beckett Festival' – split between Barons Court Theatre and Wardour Street, Soho – which produced *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Footfalls*, *Come and Go* and *Play* in the fringe venues with emerging and

early-career artists. These examples demonstrate how Beckett's drama was incorporated as part of cultural or arts festivals, theatre seasons or celebrations dedicated to the playwright, but the ambition of the Gate/Barbican Beckett Festivals would expand the scale with which his work was produced in London and consumed by the city's audiences.

The 1999 Beckett festival saw the Gate Theatre, Dublin and London's Barbican Centre join forces to produce a festival that had enjoyed much previous success at the Gate in 1991 and the Lincoln Center in New York in 1996. Besides a reading of *Catastrophe* in 1984 – where Derek Jacobi read its stage directions – and a 1998 tour of *Krapp's Last Tape* from the RSC featuring Edward Petherbridge, the 1999 festival was the first time the Barbican Centre had hosted Beckett's work.[2] Meanwhile, the Gate had, in many respects, reclaimed the exilic Beckett for Ireland towards the late 1980s and was, by this point, a leading exponent of Beckett's *oeuvre* through their previous performances in Dublin and London, as well as on international platforms.[3] London theatres had previously welcomed the Gate's Beckett productions, as Riverside Studios hosted the adaptation *I'll Go On* with Barry McGovern in 1986 and while the Gate cemented its reputation with Beckett's drama in Dublin, ten years later it brought *Happy Days* with Rosaleen Linehan and McGovern to the Almeida Theatre in Islington.[4] With the Gate's growing expertise in staging Beckett and the Barbican Centre's capacity for accommodating multiple performances, exhibitions, talks and screenings, the two producers were able to transform the venue's brutalist buildings for a celebration dedicated to Beckett.

Following its opening, Charles Spencer captured an alternative viewpoint of the event, writing, 'The very words "Beckett Festival" are the kind of wildly improbable oxymoron that the writer himself would have appreciated. Festivals are about life, vitality and celebration, and here is one devoted to a man whose entire oeuvre could be summed up in the phrase "life's a bitch and then you die"' (1999: 23). Spencer's commentary finished with his usual sarcastic treatment of Beckett's work, his perception of the event encapsulated how some commentators continued to see the transfer of Beckett's canon to the festival format

as an unlikely proposition. This was later echoed by Trish McTighe when considering the peculiar surface-level reading of the idea: 'the processes by which festivalization makes visible, draws attention to, and displays seem greatly at odds with an author such as Beckett, whose negative attitude to public appearance and authorial spectacle is well documented' (2023: 8). Indeed, Beckett apparently voiced his own shock about the concept when Colgan impulsively told him how he was going to produce 'each of his nineteen plays for the stage', Beckett replied, 'You can't be serious' (Programme 1999). By the time this bold plan had reached London, it was the third time Colgan would deliver this bold project. The Festival itself was awash with vivacity and excitement because of the large audiences that flocked to the Barbican to take in the plethora of events on offer, as Beckett's nineteen plays were staged over eighteen days alongside an extensive programme of talks, films, art and exhibitions. The principles by which the Festival operated were outlined by the artistic director of the Barbican, Graham Sheffield, as he articulated, 'I can only begin to broaden my understanding of his extraordinary personality through those who knew him, those who create new work inspired by him, and of course: his work. These three paths are at the core of this Beckett Festival' (Programme 1999). Engaging with connections and memories of Beckett was 'consciously utilized' by its performances and wider Festival programme, as this included talks by academics and friends of Beckett, such as James Knowlson, and practitioners who had closely collaborated with him on key productions, such as the Gate's *Godot* directed by Walter Asmus, for example, playing a central role in the festival's celebration of Beckett.

One of the festival's many attractions lay in the sophisticated programming of its events, as David Clare has argued, 'Art works (including radical ones) are often made more easily "consumable" today through their packaging within a festival format' (2016: 54). The 1999 festival showed how, particularly with Beckett's shorter plays, it would package these productions with audiences in mind as it sought to strike a balance between the duration of the overall event, its value for money and the economics of staging these plays. Colgan described this

packaging of the festival in his own commercial language as 'eventing', before he outlined the ethos of this term: 'I don't think audiences will sit down for two hours anymore unless you give them a reward. And the reward you give them is by telling them that they have been to an *Event*. When you *Event* something, you have a much better chance of getting them to sit through even five hours' (Qtd in McMullan and McTighe 2014). Nine productions were mounted in total, with Beckett's four early plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days* presented individually, and his late plays organized into five triple bills:

Play/ Act Without Words II/ Come and Go
Not I/ What Where/ Act Without Words I
Footfalls/ Rough for Theatre I/ Rockaby
Ohio Impromptu/ Rough for Theatre II/ Catastrophe
Breath/ That Time/ A Piece of Monologue

The commitment its producers showed in staging all of Beckett's later plays was one of the most impressive contributions of the festival to Beckett's performance histories. Prior to the festival, many of these short plays were on the periphery of Beckettian performance histories due to their limited number of presentations, particularly with respect to London. The artistic and economic relationship between Irish drama, dramatists and festivalization has been recognized by Brian Singleton, who has argued, 'great writers are the mainstay of Irish cultural capital […] by festivalizing their opus their lesser-known and less popular works can be consumed on the international markets, thus reinforcing their canonical status' (Singleton 2004: 259). Thus, by grouping these short plays together, the festival brought more prominence to these lesser-known works and demonstrated how many of these unfamiliar plays could be produced and staged in a manner that engaged audiences. For example, some plays like *A Piece of Monologue* – as its presence in this book has attested – have had a limited production history in London, but through the festival format, the play has gained a platform whereby other theatre makers have been encouraged to stage it.

As the 1999 Festival sought to celebrate Beckett's available drama for the stage, some commentators nuanced the veneration of all things Beckett through their criticism of some of Beckett's shorter works. Oliver Reynolds felt the triple bill that included *Footfalls* with Susan Fitzgerald was 'one of the few engrossing productions in the series of short plays' (1999: 18–19). Michael Billington has also suggested how in spite of his admiration of the event itself, he did not deem the boundless praise bestowed on his work by some commentators proportionate: 'we do him a disservice to approach him in a spirit of uncritical reverence and assume all his theatrical works are of equal weight. One thing the Beckett festival has done is to show that some of his plays have a universal application while others are over-determinist curiosities that leave little room for growth' (1999: 13). Such comments brought a helpful perspective to the Festival's scope and achievements, but one of its legacies was the growing interest it initiated in practitioners staging Beckett's short plays as they were performed more regularly in fringe venues and established theatres, such was the attraction and curiosity they inspired.

Amongst the cast and creative teams involved in the festival, there were experienced Beckett actors and directors such as Barry McGovern, movie stars including John Hurt and well-known practitioners working on Beckett for the first time, such as Niamh Cusack and Robin Lefevre. The festival was true to Sheffield's guiding principles and beyond its occasional use of European directors and celebrity casting, the Gate complemented their productions by employing a pool of Irish actors and designers to emphasize the relationship between Beckett, his drama and his Irish identity. As Anna McMullan and Trish McTighe have argued, part of the Festival's modus operandi involved 'reclaiming [. . .] Beckett as an Irish writer' (2014). Emphasizing Beckett's work as an Irish product was not lost on London's critics, with Taylor recognizing, 'the festival boasts a wealth of Irish acting talent. And this, surely, is a major selling point – the chance to demonstrate that the playwright's bleak comedy works best when you give it an authentic Irish accent' (Taylor). The combination of Beckett's international status with his Irish heritage

and the delivery of his work by Irish actors who naturally embraced the Irish cadences within his drama added to the festival's allure. Spurred on by Ireland's Celtic Tiger boom of the 1990s, the Gate's decision to export the event epitomized how the Irish theatre sector had a growing awareness of how to sell its products in the globalized arts world. As McMullan and McTighe have convincingly argued, 'In this globalized climate, the Gate could present the cosmopolitan Beckett as a harbinger and icon of a new, secularized Ireland, at once Irish and international' (2014). Beckett was reclaimed as an icon of Irish culture, but his international relevance meant he blurred the boundaries of nationhood as he was not only festivalized in Ireland but also in London and New York. In contrast to the 'Stage Irishman' depictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, London audiences were encountering a more serious, intellectual representation and product of Ireland, one that was embraced by London's cosmopolitan audiences through the Gate/Barbican Beckett Festivals.

Overall, the 1999 festival was warmly welcomed by audiences and critics, with Billington's summary of the festival offering an insightful commentary on its achievements, as he argued,

> Perhaps the biggest single lesson is that there is a huge public appetite for single-subject festivals: something long ago learned in the cinema and concert hall but consistently denied in the theatre. [. . .] But the most extraordinary thing about the Beckett festival was the way it instantly caught fire. The Pit sold out straight away and scheduled extra performances for Krapp's Last Tape. Plays such as Endgame and Happy Days packed the main Barbican Theatre. Even a reading of Beckett's Poetry and Prose produced the kind of ticket fever you associate with the Cup Final. (Billington 1999)

The festival highlighted the unprecedented demand and contributed to the renewed interest in his work from practitioners, artists, academics and the public because of its rich and well-packaged programming. Ultimately, the enthusiasm exuded by the 1999 festival saw a steady rise in the number of performances of his plays across London in the

years that followed. Undoubtedly, the artistic and commercial success of 1999 encouraged the Gate and Barbican to join forces once again for a revised festival in 2006, which became one of the flagship events for Beckett's centenary celebrations in London.

Ahead of the planned celebrations to mark his seventy-fifth birthday, Beckett remarked to Jocelyn Herbert, 'I dread the year now upon us and all the fuss in store for me here, as if it were my centenary. I'll make myself scarce. While it lasts, where I don't know. Perhaps the great Wall of China, crouch behind it till the coast is clear' (Beckett 2016: 541). Twenty-five years later, Beckett's prophetic letter somewhat predicted the commotion that would materialize to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth, which was not restricted to an Irish or French celebration, but an international salutation to Beckett and his work. With many of the world's major cultural centres paying homage to Beckett in 2006, London contributed to what was 'claimed as the biggest ever international event for a modern writer' with its own plethora of Beckett-related productions, talks, lectures, screenings, events and exhibitions (Coughlan 2006).

Both the Gate and Barbican maintained their close connections following the 1999 festival, as the Barbican hosted the London premiere of the Gate and Blue Angel Films' ambitious and starry Beckett on Film project in 2001, which presented Beckett's nineteen stage plays adapted for film with many prominent actors and directors. As their planning progressed for the centenary, staging Beckett's drama in London would also create competitive tensions between directors in the build-up. When Peter Hall attempted to bring his 2005 production from the Theatre Royal Bath to the Arts Theatre in London to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the play's London premiere, it failed to happen as the Gate already held its London performance rights.[5] The Gate's unwillingness to release the rights versus Hall's desire to stage the play led to a public spat between Hall and the Gate's Artistic Director Michael Colgan. When interviewed about the issue, Hall said, 'I'm very upset about it. They have refused to allow us to do it in September because they say it will upset their box office. It is outrageous. The Arts

Theatre only holds 320 people so it is hardly major competition. They wouldn't even have a meeting to discuss it' (Barnes 2005: 14). While Colgan responded to the matter, saying,

> He's coming on like a child with big tears coming out of his eyes, saying 'this is terrible, nothing is happening' – but what is happening is that he is trying to bully us. [. . . Beckett's] estate do not want two productions on at the same time. You can't just say I did the first production so I should be able to do it. (Barnes 2005: 14)

Despite the nostalgia attached to an anniversary production, Colgan refused to concede, and Hall's final *Godot* would have to wait until later in 2006 – after the Festival – presenting *Godot* this time at the Ambassadors Theatre.

The Gate/Barbican's collaborative plans to celebrate Beckett's centenary in London stemmed from a persuasive proposal from Sheffield, which Colgan commended by writing, 'once more it is the Barbican who have shown the courage and created the energy to bring so much of Beckett's work to the London stage' (Colgan 2006: 2). On this occasion, six productions were scheduled for the Barbican Centre with *Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* again presented alone, while the shorter plays were this time offered as pairings of *Rockaby*/*Ohio Impromptu*, *Footfalls*/*Come and Go* and *Play*/*Catastrophe*. This arrangement allowed greater attention on the plays involved, albeit a shorter evening at the theatre. While fewer performances of the Beckett canon were available to view as live performances, as this edition of the festival followed the Gate's 2001 *Beckett on Film* project, the producers had the flexibility to present these plays either in the theatre or on screen. The festival nonetheless stirred a similar excitement to 1999 and although the number of productions had decreased, both the Gate and Barbican showed once again how packaging Beckett as a single author in the festival format appealed to London theatregoers.

After the Beckett centenary festival, London theatres resisted the need to 'event' Beckett's canon again until the Barbican once more revived their interest in his work through their International

Beckett Season in 2015, which on this occasion was independent of the Gate, but Irish artists and companies such as Lisa Dwan, Olwen Fouéré, Company SJ and Pan Pan proved a prominent feature of this international season that also saw the Sydney Theatre Company present *Godot* and the avant-garde American director Robert Wilson play Krapp. Meanwhile, the Gate continued to export their Beckett productions to London with Michael Gambon performing in *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Duchess Theatre in 2010, this time 'eventing' Beckett in the spirit of the popular performance traditions connected with his work, as it played '[i]n the great British tradition of Variety and Music Hall [. . .] twice nightly'.[6] Beckett was Irish and his drama had become an appealing Irish product in the international theatre marketplace, which London theatres and audiences readily bought into and consumed. This appetite was satisfied through the Gate/Barbican festivals, but the city's dependence on Beckett continued with other artists, producers and theatres – perhaps most notably in 2009.

The X-Men *Godot*: Embraced by the West End

After Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson initiated Beckett and *Godot*'s transition to mainstream West End audiences, more well-known actors were paired as Didi and Gogo, including Alan Howard and Ben Kingsley at the Old Vic in 1997, Julian Glover and Alan Dobie at the Piccadilly Theatre in 1998, while at the Barbican, Johnny Murphy and Barry McGovern performed the roles twice in 1999 and 2006 and in another Peter Hall-directed production, Dobie appeared again alongside James Laurenson at the Ambassadors in 2006.[7] These productions contributed to *Godot*'s sustained presence and profile in London theatres, with each production staged for a number of weeks in the West End or in a prominent London theatre. In its earliest days, *Godot* had difficulty in getting staged as it was rejected by actors, directors and theatres in the 1950s, but its trajectory of growth peaked when the Theatre Royal

Haymarket decided to stage it in 2009 in Sean Mathias's first season at the independent theatre.

Godot's appearance in the West End in 2009 followed the effects of the global financial crisis from 2007 to 2008, when challenges in the US sub-prime mortgage market filtered through to Europe, which led to – amongst many problems – the nationalization of the Northern Rock bank in the UK, the failure of Lehman Brothers financial corporation and turmoil on global stock exchanges.[8] This gloomy period served as the backdrop for a staging that developed a heightened public interest motivated by the Haymarket's all-star casting, as acting royalty Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen were brought together to play Vladimir and Estragon in a production Mathias also directed.[9] Both McKellen and Stewart enjoyed celebrated stage and screen careers spanning forty years, and, by 2009, both actors were globally famous for their respective roles in major Hollywood blockbusters, including in *X-Men* (2000–2014) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001–3). Their onstage reunion in 2009 saw both actors considered the ideal age to play Vladimir and Estragon at seventy (McKellen) and sixty-eight (Stewart) in what was their first Beckett play.[10] Besides the attention the star duo received, the staging also boasted further talents with experienced actors Simon Callow and Ronald Pickup playing what the latter saw as the 'collapsed relationship' between Pozzo and Lucky (Pickup 2015).[11] Of all the cast, Pickup was the most experienced Beckett actor, having performed in *Play* at the Royal Court in 1976, and he was subsequently cast in *Ghost Trio* and . . . *but the clouds* . . . for BBC2 in 1977 (Figure 16).[12]

Inevitably, much of the show's box office appeal centred on McKellen and Stewart's partnership, as their celebrity and talents were seen and used as 'valuable commodities' for the production (Luckhurst and Moody 2005: 7). This was reflected in much of the show's publicity as they contributed to newspaper, magazine and television interviews relating to the performance and a Sky Arts observational documentary entitled *Theatreland* (2009). Their marketability was signified through the Haymarket's posters, which were presented in two ways: either with their names and Beckett's or with the additional credits for Callow and

Figure 16 Patrick Stewart (Vladimir), Ronald Pickup (Lucky), Simon Callow (Pozzo) and Ian McKellen (Estragon) in *Waiting for Godot*. Theatre Royal Haymarket, 2009. Directed by Sean Mathias and designed by Stephen Brimson Lewis. Photography by Graham Brandon of *Waiting for Godot*, Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, 2009. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. a. THM/110/2

Pickup and Sean Mathias's direction. Both formats of this poster used McKellen and Stewart's well-known faces to stress their presence in the production and the posters also recognized *Godot*'s own iconographic imagery by including bowler hats on the actors as well as a tree and a leaf within the play's title. While the posters symbolized the theatre's engagement with the actors' celebrity and how *Godot*'s renowned images had its own brand power in 2009, the combination of the play and its stars meant the Haymarket production was one of the West End's most attractive products in 2009.

Godot's presence at the Haymarket – a Grade I listed theatre dating back to 1720 – represented a significant milestone for the play, as the grand dame of a theatre with its royal patent is considered one of London's iconic venues with a long history of hosting some of the world's most notable actors and premieres of major plays, including

the work of Oscar Wilde amongst many others. Marvin Carlson has recognized its importance in the landscape and geography of London's theatre district, as it was built by architect John Nash for 'the effect of a monumental theatre in this façade house' and 'as a landmark in the district as a whole' (Carlson 1989: 117). Given the artistic heritage of the theatre and *Godot*'s own unique performance history, it remained an intriguing choice for Mathias's opening season as the Haymarket's Artistic Director. Michael Billington acknowledged this when he commented, 'It's a sign of how much our theatre has changed that Beckett's masterpiece, once seen as a subversion of West End theatre, now occupies one of its iconic temples' (2009). The decision signified *Godot*'s transformative journey in London's theatre culture, as after an uncertain beginning it was now able to occupy a significant West End theatre with actors that would be the envy of any theatre in the world. Fifty-four years after its first appearance in the West End, the 2009 Haymarket production continued to show how, as David Bradby has argued, 'as well as being one of the most challenging twentieth-century plays [. . .] it is also one of the biggest crowd-pullers' (2001: 77).

The critical reception of their performance mirrored the response given to the Mayall and Edmondson production: it was acclaimed by their fans and those new to Beckett's work, but was criticized by many reviewers for the emphasis on its comedy in a tragicomic play. Susannah Clapp argued the production was 'insufficiently deathly' before contending the level of energy exuded by the performance worked to its detriment rather than benefit, as she wrote, '[i]ts faults are intertwined with its assets: its extraordinary actors. This is a Rolls-Royce performers' version: everyone gets a terrific go but there's never a moment when someone isn't going at it' (2009). While Spencer felt, '[i]t would be an exaggeration to suggest that this starry new production turns Samuel Beckett's dark modern classic into a feel-good comedy, but there are moments when it comes perilously close' (Spencer 2009). In his defence of their comic approach, Mathias argued: 'I think the problem here is that the critics are just imposing what they want to see on it, but unfortunately that's not the way it goes' (Terrill 2009).

McKellen supported this viewpoint as he later contended: 'We'd been educated by the audience. Very early they started to laugh. Sometimes raucously. [. . .] One of the problems of doing Beckett is he directed *Waiting for Godot* himself and therefore we think there is a way to do the play that he laid down' (Wilson 2015). Both responses imply their awareness of their comic emphasis, but they suggest how perceptions of how to stage *Godot* were for some limited as 'the present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations', such as the expectations derived from Beckett's own production or more traditional stagings that in many ways haunted the reception of the Haymarket performance (Carlson 2006: 2).

Part of the comedy in Mathias's production did, however, delve into the past as it employed explicit references to the music hall and variety tradition, the pre-*Godot* performance culture 'ghosting' much of the play's reception in Britain (Carlson 2006: 7). This was most clearly demonstrated during the production's curtain call, when the actors returned to dance to 'Underneath the Arches', a nod to the music hall song of the double act Flanagan and Allen, who performed in London from the 1930s to the 1950s. Beyond the use of this song during their curtain call, variety routines were constantly played with during the performance. For example, McKellen and Stewart rekindled hat-swapping techniques with the 'practiced skill of comic veterans' and in their use of the play's quotidian objects they found humour akin to variety, which showed how the comedy and memories of this performance culture have persisted in the British theatrical consciousness through productions of *Godot* (Billington 2009).

With its echoes of British performance traditions, its renowned British actors touring nationally before opening in an iconic London theatre, the 2009 production could almost be read as a symbol of national pride. By the time the production reached London, it had not only galvanized national interest through an initial tour of the provinces, taking in Brighton, Bath, Norwich and Newcastle,[13] but also boosted morale in the West End through its prestige and box office takings, as the Haymarket sold out eight times a week and saw early

queues for returns, including on press night where a brand new union jack flag was hoisted above the theatre (See Terrill 2009). The latter signified the venue's royal status, their staff's pride in the venue, and their pride in the opening of a new production and, although it had nothing to do with Beckett directly, it symbolized how much Beckett's drama had become an integrated part of the national culture and the evolution of his acceptance within London theatre cultures since his emergence in the UK in 1955.

The success of this production saw it return to the Haymarket in 2010, and further presentations materialized at international venues with Roger Rees replacing Stewart and Matthew Kelly playing Pozzo in these performances, before Stewart and McKellen reunited three years later as *Godot* ventured to Broadway, once again testifying to Beckett's potential in commercial theatre centres.[14] Both the Theatre Royal Haymarket *Godot* and the Gate/Barbican Beckett Festivals encapsulated the 'Beckettmania' sweeping London. As the post-Beckett era showcased, impressions of Beckett were no longer fixated on bleak existentialism or pessimism, they could be serious and highbrow art, but the work was now also a source of fun and inspiration and a marketable and commercial product in its own right. Beckett was an Irish product as the festivals had shown, but his drama also plays an integral, if somewhat overlooked, role within British theatre culture. Fifty-four years after its first unlikely appearance in the West End, the 2009 Haymarket production continued to show *Godot*'s ability to achieve the improbable, as it had achieved an unprecedented mainstream and cultural acceptance. The public appetite for his works during this decade also confirmed the elasticity of his plays. They were for celebrities, the West End, the fringe, amateur groups, academics, movie stars, emerging actors and creatives and – as the next chapter will demonstrate – old friends and new voices, including a Nobel Prize-winning playwright.

9

Beckett after Beckett at the Royal Court

Old friends and new voices

The post-Beckett years of this history have so far discussed how new venues and personnel explored Beckett's drama for the first time at different phases in their careers. Equally, in these years, his drama would prove to be a source of inspiration for friends and professionals from Beckett's lifetime and his own theatrical network, many of whom were central figures in either British theatre history or Beckett's international production history. For example, Sir Peter Hall continued his association by directing *Godot* three further times in 1997, 1998 and 2006, as well as *Happy Days* at the Arts Theatre with Felicity Kendal in 2003. And Sir Peter Brook started staging Beckett's drama when his wife Natasha Parry played *Oh Les Beaux Jours* at Riverside Studios in 1997 with a mound intended to represent the world, and he reimagined Beckett's shorter works for *Fragments*, which notably experimented with gender roles in *Come and Go* when it toured to the Young Vic in 2007 and 2008. This chapter will instead return to the Royal Court, a venue synonymous with Beckett, to discuss two productions with familiar figures from his lifetime, as they collaborated with notable new voices. In 2006, his friend Harold Pinter, then Britain's most acclaimed living playwright, was directed by Ian Rickson as he played Krapp, Beckett's failed, lonely writer in what was his final stage role. Later, in 2013, Walter Asmus - Beckett's Schiller Theater assistant director and long-standing collaborator - directed *Not I*/*Footfalls*/*Rockaby* with Lisa Dwan performing each role in a triple bill that sold out the Royal Court, before embarking on a West End transfer and international tour.

The reflections on this production are supplemented by my own direct contribution to this history of staging Beckett in London as assistant director to Asmus; a perspective that will also consider the scope of performance histories more broadly, as it reveals how this privileged perception of the event and gaps in knowledge collide.

Pinter and *Krapp's Last Tape*: 'I spoke to Sam . . . '

The consistency with which Beckett was staged at the Royal Court lapsed following his direction of Billie Whitelaw in *Happy Days* in 1979, despite efforts to stage some plays in the 1980s and 1990s.[1] Beckett's work returned in 2006 with Harold Pinter playing Krapp, marking both the centenary of Beckett's birth and the fiftieth anniversary of the Royal Court. With a limited run of ten performances, the sight of a British Nobel Prize-winning writer at the terminal stages of his life playing Beckett's failed writer coming to the end of his, captured the imagination of audiences in the post-Beckett era and was regarded as a major theatrical event in British theatre. Beckett's influence on Pinter's writing has been well documented, and their connection began with Pinter's initial admiration of Beckett's prose, but it grew to one of regular correspondence, meetings (predominantly in Paris and London), mutual admiration and professional advice.[2] Pinter's admiration was most publicly recorded, as shown by his opening speech for The Samuel Beckett Exhibition at the University of Reading in 1971, where he then referred to Beckett as 'the greatest writer of our time' (1971: 3).

Inevitably, the writing of history allows hindsight to uncover many unknowns and a chance to reflect on the ironies that would unfold in later years. One such irony connects 1958 and 2006, two dramatists, one play and the Royal Court Theatre. In 1958, *Krapp's Last Tape* received its world premiere in a double bill with *Endgame*, programmed by George Devine; however, in the same year, Devine declined Pinter's submitted scripts for *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* noting in his report:

> I don't quite know where to place these. They belong to the 'theatre de silence' but the issues are so small that one feels a lack of interest, except in the style itself . . . I would say they are little sketches or essays from a writer of whom one would like to hear more fully – but the sketches themselves are not enough for presentation. (Little and McLaughlin 2007: 64)

While Beckett's work was a key component in Devine's English Stage Company, Pinter – the British dramatist most frequently compared with Beckett – did not receive the same early support the Royal Court had shown Beckett, and his work would be predominantly produced at the RSC or the NT.[3] But fast-forwarding forty-eight years, both Beckett and Pinter were eventually presented in the same Royal Court season.

Given the association between Rickson's directorship and the new plays developed over his time at the Royal Court, *Krapp's Last Tape* was an intriguing choice for his final season. Since 1998, plays such as *The Weir* (1998) by Conor McPherson, *Fallout* (2003) by Roy Williams, *The Sweetest Swing in Baseball* (2004) by Rebecca Gilman highlighted the quality of new plays developed over these years. However, he would mark his final season by returning to classical plays with resonances from the fifty-year history of the Court as *Krapp's Last Tape* appeared in a season that also featured an all-star production of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (2006) in a new version by Christopher Hampton. Pinter's performance in *Krapp's Last Tape* in 2006 was significant for his association with Beckett and the theatre's artistic objectives, but it was all the more remarkable as he had been unwell, having battled cancer, and in the build-up to the production suffered a terrible skin complaint, which affected his mouth and speech. Rickson had previously asked Pinter to direct his own work during his tenure at the Royal Court, which he declined, but when over lunch Rickson proposed the idea of performing Krapp, Pinter said 'I want to do it' in the first three minutes of their meeting (Rickson and Taylor-Batty 2013).[4] Pinter was an experienced actor from the 1950s, having trained in London and started out in touring repertory companies with Anew McMaster and Donald Wolfit as he began writing his first plays. He saw the premiere

of *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1958 with Patrick Magee and his long-standing interest in performance and in the play meant it was a role he could not turn down.[5] The initial plan for Rickson's final Royal Court season was, as he recalled, to 'map out a theatre lineage of Joyce, Beckett and Pinter, because when you read lots of plays you realise how influential that tributary is for writers' (Rickson and Taylor-Batty 2013). Due to rights and complications, this programme did not materialize, though the scheduling of Pinter in *Krapp's Last Tape* did reflect these intentions.

Rehearsals for the production were scheduled each day at the Royal Court from 2.30 pm to 6.00 pm for four weeks ahead of its opening night on 12 October. One major concern for Rickson was naturally Pinter's health, and he admitted, 'Privately, I was worrying that I was putting someone quite infirm through something too demanding. However, I also had the feeling it would be really rejuvenating and a great exercise for our talents' (Rickson and Heron 2014: 96). Rickson's concerns and hopes were answered by the enthusiasm with which Pinter embraced the challenge of performing Krapp. He was engaged as much practically as he was intellectually, and the self-proclaimed technophobe had to receive what Rickson referred to as 'spool-school' training in how to operate the tape recorder that is central to the action, before also becoming accustomed to manoeuvring an electric wheelchair, due to his limited movements at the time, in Hildegard Bechtler's dark and intimate stage design (Rickson and Taylor-Batty 2013). As part of their creative process, their critical practice saw discussions range from Manichaeism to Kafka. For example, Rickson knew Pinter was familiar with Kafka's writing and introduced a quote from the Czech writer into rehearsals: 'You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait. Be quiet. Simply wait, be quiet, still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you, to be unmasked. It has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet' (Rickson and Taylor-Batty 2013). This technique showed Rickson's ability to tap into Pinter's intellectual engagement with the play, which he found as invigorating as it was intimidating. Occasionally, his practice returned to his Stanislavskian methods, where he tried to get Pinter to think

of the objectives behind onstage decisions and through pictures. One particular moment during the early days of their rehearsals proved significant in their collaboration, as Rickson recalled an anxious episode where he had to establish his position as the director:

> We both love *Partie de Compaigne*, the Maupassant story, as well as the Jean Renoir film of it, and there's a section of Krapp drawn from the idea of a boat on water and something happening. On this afternoon I was asking him to really take me through, I can't remember whether it was reeds or irises or something, I remember him saying: 'I've known this play for fifty fucking years, don't ask me about it', and I said 'I have to'. And I really had to stand up to him. I was shaking under the table but having done that I found him then very supple the next day, and we found a really trusting way of working. (Rickson and Taylor-Batty 2013)

In spite of this tense moment (and perhaps, as a result), Rickson and Pinter shared a fruitful collaboration.

The combination of Pinter acting in a Beckett play in 2006 could have easily sold out the Theatre Downstairs at the Royal Court, though the decision to stage the play in the significantly smaller Theatre Upstairs meant the performance 'stimulated its own extra-theatrical curiosity' due to limited seating (Billington 2006). This was so much the case that it even applied to the Theatre's own staff. Bechtler described the scenes of its technical rehearsal and how it became a performance: 'they said could the Royal Court people at least see it, but of course what happened was friends of the Court and so on and so on managed to sneak in there, so there was almost every writer in there. There were people sitting on stairs and beams' (Bechtler). The unique curiosity stimulated by this performance was supported by the artistic decision to stage the play in the Theatre Upstairs, as Rickson highlighted the venue's haunting quality in relation to the character of Krapp, the failed writer: 'The Theatre Upstairs is an old attic. It has a special reverberative quality because of all the risk writers have taken, their collective failures and adventures, so the performance echoed with all those special ghosts' (Rickson and Taylor-Batty 2013).

Significantly, the 2006 production challenged and exorcized a number of ghosts associated with past performances of *Krapp's Last Tape* through the specific changes and omissions it incorporated. This acknowledgement of the play's cultural residue saw the production challenge many of the play's most recognizable images and moments – choices that arguably contributed to what many commentators, including Billington, saw as 'the harshest, least sentimental reading of Beckett's play I can recall' (Billington 2006). Several of the production's changes were made out of necessity rather than convenience, but the excisions served to cut some of Krapp's memories and obsessions that haunt both his character and have haunted the play's performance history. Most noticeably, Pinter's confinement to his motorized wheelchair highlighted the mobility issues he faced and meant he had to manoeuvre between the desk and backstage. This decision meant reconsidering Krapp's onstage movements, and the production also enabled the play to break free of many of its most enduring images from performance. For example, since Patrick Magee cradled the tape recorder in his 1958 Royal Court premiere, many actors playing Krapp have subsequently reused this hunched posture where they hug the recorder, but instead of this approach Pinter maintained his accustomed brooding posture and diligently listened to every word emitted from the tape recorder. Further excisions saw cuts to the song to save his voice and Krapp's slapstick routines with bananas, as Pinter was, according to Rickson, 'allergic to bananas (or at least he said he was!)' (Rickson and Heron 2014: 99). When wondering how to approach the Beckett Estate with these changes, following the precedent set with *Footfalls* in 1994, Rickson said that Pinter remarked in rehearsals, 'I spoke to Sam last night – he said it's ok' (Rickson and Taylor-Batty 2013). In response to this comment, Edward Beckett would later joke: 'Yes, well he didn't speak to me. But I wasn't going to stop old Harold. I just accepted it completely as totally exceptional circumstances.'[6] The alterations did remove some of the play's most instantly recognizable images or moments of comedy, but they allowed the production to benefit from a heightened sense of clarity and reduced sentimentality.

Overall, the production was generously received, and so was Pinter in what would prove to be his final stage performance. For many, the lasting impressions of the performance were dominated by his regard for Beckett and his proximity to death. As Billington explained, 'At two precise moments, Pinter looks anxiously over his left shoulder into the darkness as if he felt death's presence in the room. This is the moment that will linger longest in the memory. It is impossible to dissociate Pinter's own recent encounters with mortality from that of the character' (2006). These many haunted encounters, both onstage and offstage experiences, epitomize what Carlson has described as the 'ghostly tapestry' of any production (Carlson 2006: 165). Pinter's 2006 performance weaved a complex tapestry of memories concerning text, space, production and body. Through Rickson's creative programming and clear direction, he was able to produce a performance that celebrated Beckett, Pinter and the Royal Court Theatre in an event that signified the theatre's enduring connection with Beckett and the level of support friends like Pinter showed his drama in the post-Beckett moment, a dedication that continued even into the latter moments of their own existence.

Not I/*Footfalls*/*Rockaby* – 'Nothing like the Royal Court'

It is the first day of rehearsals for the upcoming Royal Court production of *Not I*/*Footfalls*/*Rockaby* and I am one hour early.[7] I have walked around most of Sloane Square and the King's Road and have managed to stumble across an inexpensive cup of tea to relax over. Walter Asmus, Samuel Beckett's long-term collaborator, is directing the production, which will see Lisa Dwan play every performance role in each play – and I have been appointed assistant director, an incredible honour and responsibility.[8] Our first rehearsal throws me right into the deep end: we are rehearsing as a trio on the main stage of the Royal Court. I have only just been reading histories about the Court, its landmark

productions by Beckett, Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane, and the famous performers who have trod its boards. But before I have a chance to soak it in, Asmus wants to go straight into a run-through of *Footfalls* with a recording of Mother's Voice that Dwan and he made during initial rehearsals at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Annaghmakerrig, Ireland.[9] In the absence of our technical team, I must operate the sound. I am experienced with many facets of theatre, but I have never been a sound operator, and my first attempt is for *Footfalls* – an unbelievably intricate play that demands precise timing to cue May's dialogue in time with her steps and wheels – on the Royal Court stage. Thankfully, the ordeal passes with a solid, if unspectacular, display from London's newest sound operator in an early reminder of the demands of staging Beckett.

Preparations for this production were grounded in Asmus and Dwan's respective association with the plays. Asmus had, in fact, been Beckett's assistant director on the German premiere of *Tritte* (*Footfalls*) in 1976 at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt, so he had a close understanding of the playwright's creative intentions.[10] Asmus proceeded to direct *Footfalls* twice for the screen with the esteemed actresses Billie Whitelaw and Susan Fitzgerald, as well as *Rockaby* with Whitelaw.[11] Dwan, on the other hand, represented a new generation in Beckettian practice. After early training as a dancer, Dwan later embarked on a career in publishing – a job she would combine when she first performed the role of Mouth in a double bill with *Play* at the Battersea Arts Centre in 2005, then directed by Natalie Abrahami.[12] Dominic Cavendish contended of this early performance, 'Dwan's – contorting and twitching away high up in the air and far back in the dark – makes an unforgettable sight, and in itself is worth the price of admission' (Cavendish 2005). She subsequently received guidance from Whitelaw and performed the play at the Southbank Centre's Purcell Room (2009), and Portora Royal School for the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival (2012), before presenting the solo production at the Royal Court in 2013.[13] The Royal Court and Mighty Mouth co-production was steeped in cultural memory as it coincided with the play's fortieth anniversary

and the performance was accompanied by an interview with Whitelaw and a post-performance discussion, but the experiential nature of the production and the searing pace with which Dwan delivered Mouth's monologue – a much noted feature of her interpretation – stirred much publicity and created a sell-out event. Significantly, Asmus saw the performance and proposed directing her in *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* with the idea that Mother's Voice in *Footfalls* could be played by the one actor. This concept received the approval of Edward Beckett and thus initiated 'the trilogy' production one year later.[14]

Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby was scheduled for 9 January 2014 by the Royal Court artistic director Vicky Featherstone, in an eclectic programme of work that followed *Let The Right One In* adapted by Jack Thorne and preceded *The Mistress Contract* by Abi Morgan in the Theatre Downstairs. Rehearsals at the Court began on 4 November 2013 with a week on the main stage, before a more regular rehearsal pattern began on 2 December in a white rehearsal room in the theatre's main administrative building, an early irony given the production's preoccupation with darkness. Time was divided between the three plays with *Not I* and *Footfalls* prioritized early on. Dwan's history with *Not I* meant the piece was essentially her interpretation, as she brought an impressive verve and verbal athleticism to the demanding part, delivering a normal run of the play in just over eight minutes most times. In an interview for this book, she referred to enjoying the words as 'springboards' and 'the muscularity of the language', which was evidenced in the relish she brought to the renditions of *Not I* in the rehearsal room, dress rehearsals or public performances.[15] Most rehearsals for *Not I* involved me on book (in the exceptionally rare moment where a prompt was needed) and conversations about pacing, enunciation or intonation. Despite her knowledge of *Not I* and the reception of her earlier performances, Dwan never took the play for granted and proactively requested run-throughs in the majority of rehearsals, as she admitted, 'It is terror inducing and I think the very fact that I never ever felt like I had it. It may have seemed to you like I may have been able to rattle it off. I really wasn't ever fully comfortable. I

was stretched to my eyes.' Here, Dwan highlighted the play's precarious hold over a performer in an admission that underlines the continual demands the monologue places on every performer's memory, even for a performer seemingly so in control of its incessant chatter.[16]

A significant amount of the production's rehearsal time focused on *Footfalls* (Figure 17), while *Rockaby* was rehearsed intermittently. Trying to comprehend May psychologically – and her 'psychological tyranny' as Dwan put it – was a complicated and evasive process. Many questions arose about this 'creature' – as we called her – who had not been 'out since girlhood', her state of mind, her story, her need to pace and how long this would continue (Beckett 2014b: 29). The play acts like a 'living sculpture' on stage and several rehearsals would concentrate on Dwan's physicality and movements for the role of May.[17] We experimented with May's arms (wrapped around the body, dangled, folded and around the shoulder) and her footsteps. Although the stage directions for May's movements – 'seven eight nine wheel' – appear

Figure 17 Matthew McFrederick, Lisa Dwan and Walter Asmus during rehearsals of *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby*, Royal Court Theatre, 2014. © John Haynes. All rights reserved 2024/Bridgeman Images.

straightforward, it required regular repetition to maintain precision and smoothness in terms of Lisa's steps from heel to toes, consistent distancing between steps and a consistent pace in order for it to attain a 'rhythmic tread' in performance (Beckett 2014b: 27–8).[18]

As Dwan was playing May and Mother, it was particularly important to distinguish between the two characters vocally. She developed a soft, gravelly tone for Mother to distinguish between the fraught, vulnerable tones of May. Many rehearsals were held in the theatre's sound studio, working on the pace, intonation, texture of Mother's Voice with sound designer David McSeveney.[19] The ambition was for Dwan to do the performance in one take and that would later be split up for our sound operator to play in dialogue with May's lines and movements. One of the early challenges with this approach was how May's lines arose in isolation rather than in the dialogue between May and Mother that would normally emerge with two actresses. Later rehearsals in the recording studio saw us experiment with Dwan reading both parts – with the added difficulty of swapping between the distinct voices – and on some occasions, I even stepped in, reading May's part to support Dwan's dialogical response as Mother, enabling Dwan to listen and respond more authentically to the conversation. For the role of May, Asmus discouraged Dwan from putting any emotion into the lines, and a recurring note was for the piece to 'create silences, charged silences'.[20] One further important intention for both characters was to give a sense of shock and surprise in the delivery of their lines, for example, through May and Mother's early questions and why was the door locked in May's monologue. Dwan achieved this in performance, as she suggested she was unaware of what was coming next in order to 'make the text live'.[21]

The progression of rehearsals saw an expansion of the personnel working towards the creative and technical realization of the production, a phase that reminded me how integral and – at times – overlooked these roles can be in performance histories.[22] Cath Binks – our stage manager – became a supportive presence in the rehearsal room, organizing the book, calling the show, while Niall Black – the theatre's production manager – co-ordinated between the theatre's

multiple productions, organized the technical team and provided many solutions to arising issues. Designer Alex Eales and lighting designer James Farncombe visited some early rehearsals, but they became a more regular presence when moving into technical and dress rehearsals. The design ambition for *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby* was to enable the audience to experience the three plays in total darkness with only Farncombe's lighting directing the audience's vision. To achieve a total blackout in the auditorium, black tabs were employed before and after each play, black fabric had to cover the rostra for *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, the headboard for *Not I* and any other parts of the stage that reflected light.[23] Even with these initial efforts, it became apparent from technical rehearsals that small fragments of light still managed to seep into the auditorium from beneath curtains, doors with even tiny pinpricks of light emitted from the theatre's tungsten and LED lights, which I was responsible for finding and covering up with the help of the stage crew. One contentious issue in achieving the black out concerned the emergency exits. After serious queries from the health and safety officers from the local council, approval was granted to cover them up during the performances – an exceptional artistic decision supported by Featherstone and Executive Director Lucy Davies. A brief interlude from the total blackout was provided in between each performance with very faint side houselights coming up alongside composer Tom Smail's eerie and ghostly three-minute score to distinguish each play and facilitate scene, costume and make up changes backstage, which the team worked frantically to execute.[24]

Farncombe's lighting was a fundamental component in each of the three plays. The light source for *Not I* was checked prior to each performance in order to precisely hit Dwan's mouth.[25] Lighting *Footfalls* strived to achieve the stage directions, 'dim, strongest at floor level, less on body, least on head' (Beckett 2014b: 27). For Asmus, creating it required time and precision:

> When we do the lighting for *Footfalls* it takes me hours and hours, but if you have a schedule: two hours rig the lights, focus the lights, find the

> level of the lights, all in two hours or three hours, it is impossible. It's the same with the lighting in *Footfalls*, you come back the next day – and I have had this experience, thank God, with Beckett so I have some strong person above me who tells me that I'm right to insist that I have to look at it again, maybe it looks different tomorrow. (Asmus 2014)

As Asmus suggested, changes were made across multiple tech days for *Footfalls* as Farncombe experimented with levels, angles, fades (usually lasting seven seconds) and frosting, which gave the impression of painting with light in order to create the dim, ghostly moving figure of Dwan's May. The technical rehearsals were demanding, particularly for *Footfalls*, but the achievement of the final image heightened the spectral qualities of May's presence and helped the play become, as Dwan articulated, 'like a poem on stage'.

Dwan was integral to the entire production as she performed every role in the three plays, but one aspect of the performance she was not in control of was when her pre-recorded lines as Mother were delivered. Dwan's live performance of May was in dialogue with her recording of Mother, but as each of Mother's lines required a sound cue, our sound operator, Laura Hammond, effectively became an unseen second actor from the technical box in the dress circle. The timing of these cues was of utmost importance as it determined the play's pace as she had to listen to May, take account of the play's multiple pauses, count May's steps and execute the cue so the line 'seven eight nine wheel' coincided with May's seventh step.[26] Overly long pauses could sap the energy from the performance, and mistimed cues for the steps could disrupt their pacing and feel odd for both Dwan and the audience. Dwan deserved the praise and accolades that came with her powerful embodiment and vocalization of the performance roles, but as much as the production was insightful to me in directing Beckett, the experience highlighted the scenographic demands of his late plays and the importance of the unseen creative and technical team in the realization of these short but precise plays in production.

As the production moved from technical and dress rehearsals into previews and performances in a sold out auditorium, it was evident how integral the communal relationship with the audience was in discovering new and exciting depths for the plays in production. The liveness of theatre also served as a timely reminder of its challenges, particularly in our first Preview. Dwan composed herself amidst the colossal pressure as the only performer and rose to the occasion in performance. However, when the preview moved to *Rockaby*, as usual, the lights faded up on the rocking chair, Dwan spoke her opening line 'More' and her recorded voice played, but the chair did not rock. For the first time in our entire process, the motor responsible for rocking the chair failed to move in what is an essential component for the play, where it appears to move 'without assistance from W' (Beckett 2014b: 38).[27] It was a terrifying moment, and Dwan was helpless in the chair, but Asmus swiftly stepped in from the stalls shouting, 'Can we stop the show, please?' Audience members were aghast, and some people started shushing him. He was unfazed, taking responsibility and asking for the play to be restarted.[28] After this notable issue, later performances at the Court continued smoothly as the run sold out and received strong notices from London's critics. *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby* subsequently transferred to the West End's Duchess Theatre, before embarking on a national and international tour, as well as a further reprise for the Barbican's International Beckett Season in 2015. The tour was a testament to Dwan and the team's dedication to producing the plays and the appeal of Beckett in London, the UK and in international venues. Inevitably, as with any touring production, the performance was subject to slight variations in visual, aural and experiential qualities as it moved between different spaces and audiences, such was the delicate and precise nature of the plays. Having watched the production elsewhere in London, it became evident that the Royal Court performances best encapsulated the meticulousness and tautness this production strived for – or as Dwan summarized, 'nothing like the Royal Court'.

Working on *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby* reminded me how historians face the impossible task of capturing the event *as it was*. How an

event unfolds will depend on someone's direct experience, what they encountered and how they choose to interpret it. This account focuses on some of the practical discoveries and realizations from the performance, but it recognizes as Robert K. Sarós has argued, this is within the 'limitations of what we may surmise' (Postlewait and McConachie 1989: 201). Ernest Nagel also contends, 'historians are rarely if ever in a position to state the sufficient conditions for the occurrence of the events they investigate' (Postlewait and McConachie 1989: 15). Although I may have had a privileged position as assistant director in the production's development, the experience taught me that even this position was subject to what would be historical gaps, as inevitably I missed out on conversations, decisions, emails, rehearsals and performances that informed the event, such is the complex, evasive and organic way that performances and their histories unfold. The production taught me a considerable amount about staging Beckett's drama, but it was perhaps best summarized when I once asked Asmus what he felt the most important element in directing Beckett was. His reply was simple, but all encompassing: 'It's all about the tautness.' When you work practically with Beckett's drama, you realize how all the theatrical components are so finely strung: be it the intonation of a line, the pace of a footstep, the lighting of the body or body part or the timing of a sound cue. This is not the only way to stage Beckett, but it helps capture the essence and artistry this production strived towards.

The artistic heritage of staging Beckett at the Court dates from *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* in 1957 to *Not I*/*Footfalls*/*Rockaby* in 2014. How Beckett has been staged and by whom has evolved in the intervening years, but the theatre itself has been instrumental in Beckett's continued presence in London theatres. Beckett's lifetime saw his work produced by a network of close collaborators who created original productions, and the legacies of this network have been sustained during the post-Beckett phase, with friends and collaborators such as Pinter and Asmus reprising his work, while a new generation of theatre makers, such as Rickson, Dwan and the wider production teams, learnt from this network but also brought their own skills and approaches to staging

Beckett in prominent new performances for contemporary audiences. These intergenerational performances demonstrated how both his early and late plays continued to intrigue and impact practitioners and audiences, as Beckett's legacy in London continued at Sloane Square. In the 2010s, significant productions would be reprised in other venues familiar or new to his work, as several companies and practitioners interpreted Beckett's drama in fresh and urgent ways. For example, in a co-production with the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Talawa presented a long overdue first British all-Black production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Albany Theatre in 2012, Juliet Stevenson delivered a lyrical and finely poised performance as Winnie in the Young Vic's thrust staging in 2014 and in its 2015 revival, and Touretteshero and Jess Thom's inventive and inclusive presentation of *Not I* played across the Battersea Arts Centre, the Albany and the Southbank Centre in 2018.[29] Staging Beckett in London attained another notable celebrity endorsement when the Old Vic announced Daniel Radcliffe and Alan Cumming would perform in *Endgame* and *Rough for Theatre II* in 2020, but as the final chapter will show, London and world theatres would encounter seismic changes to their productions and operations due to the impact of Covid-19.

10

Beckett and Covid-19

On Thursday, 5 March 2020, I left the Old Vic Theatre after seeing *Endgame* and *Rough for Theatre II*. Along The Cut, droves of people were engrossed in conversation, scuttling out of the theatre or passing by to their next destination, while cars, buses and bicycles frenetically lit up the crossroads, all maintaining the hum of London life. As I walked to the square opposite, I made a point of taking a photograph of the theatre building with its neon lights proudly exhibiting their current production, adding a red, pink or purple glow to their departing patrons (Figure 18). The Old Vic had witnessed this scene evening after evening, but transformative changes to the Theatre, the UK and the world were already happening or imminent due to the emergence of Covid-19, which on the very same day saw the first recorded death in the UK from the virus (Daly 2020: 987). Many people will remember what performance they saw before Covid-19 led to national lockdowns or the first performance they saw as lockdowns were eased, reinstated and eased again or lifted entirely. By the coincidence of theatre programming in London, in both cases, the performances I saw were Beckett plays, plays that acquired a heightened sense of relevance for the global context of these particular moments. *Endgame*'s presence as the last production at the Old Vic before Covid-19 holds an uncanny irony for the disquieting circumstances that would unfold in the UK (and across the globe) in the following months. Conversely, as the UK lockdown restrictions eventually enabled theatres to reopen, the sight of *Happy Days* at Riverside Studios symbolized the resilience of the human spirit in moments of adversity in a timely revival of his 1960s play. This chapter will concentrate on these two performances and

Figure 18 Outside the Old Vic Theatre on 5 March 2020 following a performance of *Endgame* and *Rough for Theatre II*. Photograph by Matthew McFrederick

examine how, in the midst of seismic national and global difficulties and uncertainties, Beckett's transferability saw productions of his drama in London speak to the present moments and world events in unprecedented ways.

Endgame and *Rough for Theatre II* at the Old Vic – 'Something is taking its course'

Presented as part of artistic director Matthew Warchus's fifth season, *Endgame* and *Rough for Theatre II* followed new writing in the form of Lucy Prebble's *A Very Expensive Poison*, a revival in Duncan MacMillan's *Lungs* and their annual festive hit, *A Christmas Carol* (adaptation by Jack Thorne). What is uncanny about the Old Vic's decision to programme *Endgame* and *Rough for Theatre II* (*Rough II*) is that this was announced

in April 2019, months prior to the world hearing or knowing about Covid-19. Constructing this performance history has been shaped by my own connection to its process. I met its director Richard Jones to discuss the play, its themes and production history on 19 June 2019 and watched a run-through of both plays in the Old Vic rehearsal room on 23 January 2020.[1] Reflecting back on these preliminary engagements, it was evident that the former was months prior to the pandemic, and, by the latter date, public consciousness of the virus in the UK remained minimal. One day later, the then health secretary, Matt Hancock, described the virus's risk to the UK as 'low' and, by 31 January, the first confirmed case of Covid-19 in the UK was reported (Reuters 2020).

Part of the difficulty in reading or reconstructing this performance in relation to Covid-19 depends on when the production was encountered. Critics across multiple national newspapers did not mention the pandemic when they reviewed it in early February, but when I saw the production on 5 March, there was much greater awareness of the virus and its relevance compared to January's rehearsal, before memories of the production as national lockdowns and the virus's rising death toll brought new meanings to the play. In attempting to navigate the complexities of reading this production, this chapter will begin by discussing the programming of this production, its realization and intentions, before returning to the impact of Covid-19 on a performance that was due to run from 27 January to 28 March 2020, but closed from 16 March.

Across its multifaceted history, the Old Vic has operated under several organizational structures, not least as the early home to the National Theatre Company in the 1960s and 1970s. Since Warchus's appointment as artistic director in 2015, the independent theatre has functioned without Arts Council funding, but managed to forge a reputation for combining bold, popular programming with star-led productions. Its 2020 production – featuring Daniel Radcliffe as Clov and Alan Cumming as Hamm – represented another example of how a London theatre identified and interweaved Beckett's mainstream appeal with the casting of high-profile leading actors. On the face of it, the black

comic tones and existentialist themes of *Endgame* and *Rough II* do not conform to popular tastes, but the casting of Radcliffe in particular – the child (and later young adult) star of the Harry Potter movie franchise – opened both Beckett and the plays to a very different audience demographic than previous London productions, as many of the spectators bought tickets based on Radcliffe's casting. The production's high profile saw it promoted through various forums, including one of the UK's most popular television chat shows: *The Graham Norton Show* on BBC 1. In attempting to 'sell it' to the audience, Cumming summarized: 'It's about death and the end of the world and disease and aloneness against community' before fellow guest and former Nell (from the 2009 Duchess Theatre production) Miriam Margolyes added 'lost hope' (Norton 2020) – comments innocently made prior to Covid's intrusion on everyday life. In a light-hearted and amusing conversation that ranged from *Endgame* to foreskins, both actors did stress the play's comic qualities, before Cumming more snappily referred to the play as 'like a vaudeville act in hell' (Norton 2020). In a sign of contemporary marketing, the Old Vic's endeavours to engage with its audiences also advanced with quirky, in-house marketing strategies and, in particular, its video entitled 'Samuel Beckett or Eeyore?' where the cast (and viewers) guessed whether quotations came from the Nobel Prize for Literature winner or the gloomy donkey from *Winnie-the-Pooh* in an amusing viral video for the social media age (Old Vic 2020).

Both plays were directed by Richard Jones, a multi-Olivier Award-winning director across theatre and opera, renowned for his bold reimaginations of classical plays and operas. After a proposal from the Old Vic, *Endgame* and *Rough II* represented Jones's first foray into Beckett. Although he did not see a relationship between the two plays, he expressed his admiration for both: 'I think *Endgame* is perfect. It's a very, very high literary achievement and I think *Rough for Theatre II* is great, but in the context of the Old Vic evening, it's a curtain raiser'.[2] *Rough II* represented a curious choice for the evening with the combination of its dark, often evasive dialogue, its limited production history and the production's star cast, but its inclusion demonstrated

the propensity to programme Beckett's drama as multiple bills, partly to form a fuller evening and to satisfy the needs of producers to have an interval. First written in the 1950s but not performed until 1976, *Rough II* sees the character of C with his back to the audience, staring out the window, believed to be contemplating suicide, as A and B engage in a mixture of highbrow cross-talk dialogue and prolonged analysis of the character, before C's condition is directly inspected with the play's open ending offering no clarity concerning C's situation.[3] Jones's interpretation brought a business-like clarity to the play as he intended to distinguish between the characters' backgrounds across the two plays with his leading actors: 'I wanted them to sort of reverse classes, so that the classes in *Endgame* were different from the classes in *Rough for Theatre II*. So I wanted the Daniel Radcliffe character to be patrician and elevated as opposed to how he played Clov.' Staging *Rough II* opened the little-known fragment to new audiences, who would return after the interval to an entirely different proposition.

Preparations for *Endgame* saw Jones spend a considerable amount researching around the play, but he admitted of his direction, 'I read all the books, I geeked out on all those, and they went right out the window in rehearsal when you've encountered the two actors. And he would have said that, tailor it to the actors. The actor has to, in some way, write the play.' This approach echoes Beckett's own connection with the play when he worked with the San Quentin Drama Workshop at Riverside Studios as he tailored the text and staging for the needs of the company. With Radcliffe, his way into the play was through the physicality of Clov, as he started working with movement director Sarah Fahie on Clov's physical comedy sequences early on, particularly the opening's dependence on the steel ladder. Radcliffe would later admit the difficulty he encountered with the play, which was part of its appeal, as he contended: 'There is something inherently enticing about something that is so difficult and so challenging. I understood it enough to know that I didn't fully understand it. There was something about that that made me want to figure it out' (WhatsOnStage 2020). Whereas Cumming was absorbed by the text and used his experience of previous roles to ground his

performance, as he suggested: 'It's a little bit like Shakespeare . . . you really have to stick with the rhythm and within the rhythm you can find understanding, but you just have to trust that' (WhatsOnStage 2020). As part of his interpretation, Jones acknowledged

> I wanted it played to the audience . . . if the text goes out to the audience, then the audience goes back to the text. Sometimes Hamm can talk to the audience, and sometimes he can be completely sealed in his isolation or despair, particularly at the end. And those things tonally can be achieved by a very good actor.

In performance, Cumming's Hamm, fierce, wickedly witty and, at times, queer characterization of Hamm thrived upon his relationship with the audience, but his control of the role managed to capture Hamm's introverted qualities too. As much as this approach worked at the start of the Old Vic production, later performances saw noticeable changes in terms of how some audience members experienced the production in the communal setting and, in turn, responded to the play in performance. As Jones recognized: 'When it opened people weren't wearing masks. By the time it closed, more and more people were wearing masks. And it closed a week early because of the theatres being closed down, all they saw in acting this play about disease or entropy was a whole theatre of people with covered faces.' For a performance that played to the audience, this would inevitably create a different relationship between the cast and the audience regardless of their celebrity, fandom or interest in the plays (Figure 19).

The relevance of *Endgame* to Covid-19 was apparent during the production's run as news of deaths and infection rates filtered through from China and Italy during its infancy in Europe, before many more countries and regions felt the burden of Covid-19 on their communities and citizens. As it was the last play I saw in a theatre before national lockdowns contributed to a lengthy closure of UK theatres, the resonances of the play and production grew on reflection. At the time, designer Stewart Laing's tall walled set evoked the idea of setting the play in a hospital or care home through its blue-grey wallpaper, its

Figure 19 Alan Cumming as Hamm and Daniel Radcliffe as Clov in *Endgame* at the Old Vic Theatre on 27 January 2020. Directed by Richard Jones and designed by Stewart Laing. © Manuel Harlan / ArenaPAL

white double-glazed windows, its yellow bespeckled curtains, its cream skirting board and light brown vinyl. Meanwhile, the room's playing space extended downstage left to deliberately expose two wheelie bins holding Karl Johnson as Nagg and Jane Horrocks as Nell, two actors who humorously and emotively captured their characters' final moments. As part of Laing's collaboration with Jones, the care home idea was at the forefront of Jones's mind, as he explained:

> Covid didn't influence our intentions at all. Our design was supposed to look like a care home. You could perform it in a care home. I think if I did it again, I'd push the care home idea more, and I'd push the idea of him being the last person in the care home, and Clov being the last carer, who didn't care, who hated him.

As news developed about the devastating effects of Covid-19 on British care homes, the foresight of Laing's setting for *Endgame* struck a chord

with the contemporary moment. Furthermore, several lines within the play acquired additional tragic weight both in performance and on reflection, such as Cumming's hard-hitting delivery of Hamm's line 'The whole place stinks of corpses' (Beckett 2006: 114). Around a similar phase for the pandemic in the UK, disruptions to supply lines and stockpiling led to some shortages in supermarkets, which, in turn, prompted panic buying of toilet roll, fruit, bicycles – scarcities that echo *Endgame*, where there are no more bicycle-wheels, painkillers, pap or sugar-plums.

By 16 March 2020, the Westminster Council and the Old Vic decided to cancel all remaining performances of *Endgame* and *Rough II*, which was originally due to run until 28 March 2020. It was one of the first productions across London to make the decision, before all remaining theatres followed. In its email to ticket holders, the Old Vic said:

> Given the new travel and other restrictions in place, it is nevertheless becoming increasingly impractical to sustain business as usual at our theatre. [. . .] We are very sympathetic to people's personal circumstances, as we are to the audiences who are still excited to visit the theatre and see our productions. We are also extremely aware of our employees' financial dependence on work being presented and tickets being purchased. (Lord 2020)

The Old Vic's communication of this necessary decision was not made lightly as they considered the health, travel, entertainment and finances of numerous people, but they recognized their own financial needs as an institution where *Endgame* was crafted, as they encouraged anyone who had bought tickets for its later dates to donate these costs to the theatre – a plea that became familiar from many British theatres in order to survive the financial uncertainty of Covid-19. Prior to its closure, plans were afoot for *Endgame* and *Rough II* to play in New York; however, as with many productions around the world, these plans did not transpire as the world tried to respond to its precarious future and the most challenging set of circumstances to face the contemporary international theatre scene.

Happy Days at Riverside Studios – 'great mercies'

The Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center estimates the number of global Covid-19 deaths up to 10 March 2023 was 6,881,955.[4] The pandemic had a major impact on the world through its significant loss of life, its Covid-related deaths and the long-term illnesses that continue to shape the lives of those affected. When the virus started to spread in early 2020, it began to disrupt the lives of billions throughout the world as many countries imposed lockdowns and restrictions on the everyday lives of its citizens to prevent infection. In the UK, many workplaces – where possible – moved online, reinvented themselves or ceased trading entirely, while everyday activities from socializing in person to exercising outdoors had limitations. The rules of the numerous national and local lockdowns had a sizeable impact on the UK's theatre industry, as live performances in theatre buildings were stopped and cancelled in March 2020 with many workers made redundant or contracts cancelled. Many theatres, companies and creatives adapted existing or new work to digital formats, as Zoom performances, audio-related work or live screenings, for example, became more regular forms of encountering productions. For many individuals in UK theatres their lives were in limbo – freelance positions were then making up '71 per cent' of the industry, and it is believed at least '38,000 freelancers left the creative industries in 2020', as they missed out on the Job Retention Scheme, ceased to gain employment (such is the nature of their contracts) and struggled to have their voices heard by HM Treasury (Freelancers Make Theatre Work). The much publicized £1.57 billion DCMS 'rescue package' was designed to support organizations regain their viability by June 2021, while freelancers were taunted by government advertisements around 'Fatima's next job', suggesting they reboot their careers by training in cybersecurity. Ultimately, it was a devastating period for the theatre industry and everyone connected to it.

With the UK public, businesses and industries at the mercy of ever-evolving government stipulations around what was permissible

or not permissible during lockdowns and roadmaps, London theatres eventually reopened their doors in June 2021, and *Happy Days* was one of the first productions to do so. The staging of *Happy Days* marked Beckett's return to his alternative London home at Riverside Studios, but it was a very different venue from the one the playwright experienced in the 1980s, as after closing in 2014, the venue had been demolished and replaced by a brand new, multimillion-pound development in 2019 that maintained the location of the arts venue alongside residential flats. The wholesale changes to the facility meant its entrance moved from Crisp Road to new doors along the Thames footpath, but the production involved familiar practitioners of Beckett's drama with Trevor Nunn directing Lisa Dwan as Winnie. Nunn's illustrious career in British theatre saw him lead the RSC from 1968 to 1986, but more recently, he turned his attention to Beckett at Jermyn Street Theatre, where he staged his radio play *All That Fall* in October 2012, before directing *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Eh Joe* and *The Old Tune* in January 2020 – where he first collaborated with Dwan when she delivered Woman's Voice in *Eh Joe*.[5] The pair had discussed the idea of presenting *Happy Days* together to coincide with the play's sixtieth anniversary before Covid-19, and after working at Riverside Studios on a film of *Pale Sister*, Colm Tóibín's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, they moved forward with the project to revive Beckett's connection at the newly built Hammersmith arts centre.[6]

Rehearsals began and were permitted while the UK public was still living under daily lockdown restrictions. Given the impact of the pandemic on lives and livelihoods across the country, Beckett's situational drama about a woman's resilience and defiance in the face of adversity was an appropriate choice and one that encompassed the circumstances many spectators would have experienced during lockdown in a sign of Beckett's uncanny contemporary relevance. Dwan observed the resonances between Winnie's situation and lockdown through her 'isolation', but also the need 'to busy yourself when you're so stuck, to get a whole day by on how to milk the enjoyment either out of a lipstick or a piece of writing that you can't read and how to just get

through the day when you're so stuck'.[7] For Dwan personally, she started releasing poems online during the early days of the pandemic and it later reminded her of Winnie 'remembering or trying to remember, or misremembering her poems.' *Happy Days* spoke to the everyday circumstances of the pandemic, but it also worked within the practical constraints of theatre professionals mounting a production when the virus remained a significant health risk. Theatres needed to ensure their employees abided by the government's restrictions within the working environment, and as Winnie's role essentially works as a one-woman monologue at a distance from her monosyllabic partner Willie (in this case, Simon Wolfe), its setting and stage directions ensured it conformed with social-distancing parameters. Rehearsals were, nonetheless, always in person and Dwan took precautions by getting a taxi to and fro rehearsals and making social and professional sacrifices before and during the production, as she admitted: 'I was very strict. I didn't socialize. [. . .] I pulled out of *Top Boy* basically to do the play.'[8]

To add to the multifarious difficulties in mounting *Happy Days* amidst the remnants of anxiety and fear brought about by Covid-19, Dwan's feat in playing the summit part of Winnie was all the more impressive as she was seven months pregnant.[9] As part of the process, the company had to test every day, but according to Dwan there were inevitably concerns in the rehearsal room, 'No one got Covid. We were all worried about Trevor's age and I was pregnant, and the big thing was, do you get the vaccine when you're pregnant or not?' This question typified the public uncertainty and truths around the impact of the vaccines on pregnant women, but Dwan proceeded to protect herself and her newborn. On the plus side, Dwan was seated when performing and expressed her joy at her newfound working environment and companion: 'I'm buried up to my waist and the baby is in the mound with me [. . .] if the mound is a metaphor for the grave, it's funny that under this mound is life – and she's kicking away. It's the most amazing sensation' (Akbar 2021a). One aspect of the part that did concern Dwan over her pregnancy was the relentless heat of Winnie's experience captured in Tim Mitchell's lighting, as she noted, 'The heat just technically for any actress playing

Figure 20 Lisa Dwan as Winnie in *Happy Days* at Riverside Studios, 11 June 2021. Directed by Trevor Nunn, designed by Robert Jones. © Helen Maybanks /ArenaPAL

that role is a problem, but particularly when you're pregnant, you have to be very careful not to overheat' (Dwan and Schatz 2021) (Figure 20).

When *Happy Days* opened for previews on 11 June 2021, the UK was on Step 3 of its roadmap out of its third national lockdown, as indoor venues were allowed to reopen again. Riverside – like many theatres – made significant changes to their ticketing process and audience experience. Booking confirmation emails had individualized QR codes as tickets, as well as extensive guidance on Covid-19 safety and what to do if experiencing symptoms. This briefing outlined that audience members should wear masks, maintain social distancing, regularly wash or sanitize their hands and be ready to check in via the NHS Track & Trace QR code; all signs of the new measures and efforts theatres had to undertake to maintain audience safety and anxiety levels in response to the virus.[10] Once inside Studio 2, audiences were carefully ushered to pods, where they were seated individually or in pairs in regular chairs that were socially distanced across the flat auditorium floor. Dwan was

acutely aware of the audience restrictions as she looked ahead for each performance and noted it was a stark difference from her previous experiences, 'with every other Beckett piece I've done prior to that and every other audience, it almost felt like a kind of a seance'. In contrast, due to the circumstances, the audience's much more muted reactions and lack of facial expressions meant 'it was just very difficult because normally there's an energy [from the audience] that they become a kind of carpet and you ride the wave'. However, as Dwan continued, 'it was very difficult to gauge that in a very stilted, often very frightened audience', a reality that many performers and audiences faced as performances across the country reopened post-Covid.

In performance, Dwan's Winnie sat slightly tilted centre stage above the audience in a black dress against designer Robert Jones's brown canvas of scorched mound and sky that stretched and expanded to give the effect as Dominic Cavendish articulated of 'Beckett in widescreen' (2021). According to Natasha Tripney, this 'emphasise[d] her isolation' (2021), but it allowed further emphasis on Dwan's delivery and vocal range, with Arifa Akbar contending: 'Dwan gives the language musicality as well as poetry. Her tone soars, in high mood, and then suddenly swoops to a dark memory, her voice choked. "Was I ever lovable, Willie?" she asks' (Akbar 2021b). The connection between Winnie's situation and Covid-19 was recognized by several reviewers in their critical reception of the play, a matter emphasized by Tripney, as she noted:

> Texts take on a new resonance when watched through the lens of the events of the past 15 months. This is particularly true of Samuel Beckett's play of stasis, *Happy Days*, with its image of Winnie, marooned in her mound of earth, enduring day after day, finding dignity in ritual as she waits for the bell to toll. 'Did I remember to comb my hair?' she wonders, something I suspect we've all thought recently. (Tripney 2021)

Echoing these sentiments, Alex Wood observed, 'While performances are back, the existential dread sparked by Covid has yet to exit stage left

(not helped by Monday's delay to the government roadmap). It seems fitting that Samuel Beckett's revival of *Happy Days* [. . .] makes its return against such a backdrop' (2021). By suggesting how just as the parallels with pandemic could be interpreted in the play, this review accentuated how the precarious shadow of the virus hung over the production's run, which represented a purposeful and timely Beckett revival that showed Beckett's transferability to global events amidst the nerves for London's reopening theatres.

In November 2021, a production of *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* at the Jermyn Street Theatre continued Beckett's presence in London theatres as they adjusted to life after Covid. Despite the theatre's recent interest in Beckett, its artistic director, Tom Littler, wondered whether Beckett was an appropriate choice in light of Covid's impact, as he recorded in his programme note: 'Returning to Beckett seemed both appealing and appalling throughout the last two years – would the great poet-playwright's truths about loneliness and isolation be too much to bear?' (Programme 2021: 3). This co-production with the Theatre Royal Bath – directed by Richard Beecham – was again timely and stage-appropriate as it focused on Beckett's isolated characters May and W.[11] The performance of Siân Phillips in *Rockaby*, in particular, haunted both in terms of her connections with Beckett, as the original Woman's Voice in *Eh Joe*, but also through her pale, ghostly embodiment of W within a gauzed cube, as lines such 'rock her off' echoed around the highly intimate venue (Beckett 2006: 442).

Focusing on Covid-19 is a sombre way to conclude this history given its death toll, its wider health implications, its disruption of lives and businesses and – in this particular context – its damaging effects on the creative arts and live performance. Some theatres closed, the closure of some theatres, like Jermyn Street, was 'almost permanent', while the professional cost saw many people made redundant or forced to quit an industry they had devoted substantial labour, time and training to (Programme 2021: 16). Beckett's drama was fortunate. By coincidence or design, it closed and reopened this highly precarious phase for the

theatre industry in London, speaking eerily and positively to both moments. The sight of theatres reopening represented the resilience of the human spirit when faced with adversity and Beckett's reappearance during the restoration of London theatres demonstrated the enduring interdependence between his work and the city's theatres at even their most vulnerable moment.

Conclusion

When Beckett's drama was first presented in London theatres during the 1950s, the early editions of the *International Theatre Annual* set the tone for the relationship that would follow.[1] In his evaluation of London theatre in 1957, J. W. Lambert chose to focus on *Fin de Partie*'s premiere – a production that received a far from complimentary critical reception and was only presented six times by the English Stage Company (ESC) at the Royal Court Theatre. Lambert argued, 'I have given a good deal of space to Mr. Beckett's play because I believe it to be an exceedingly fine one, and because I believe him to be the best of a new generation of playwrights whose work will reinvigorate, by diffusion, our exhausted stages' (1957: 12). Lambert's reflections signify his early recognition of Beckett's quality as a playwright within the context of post–Second World War British theatre, but they represent a prophetic point of reference for the extensive performance history that transpired for Beckett's drama in London theatres.

Waiting for Godot's London premiere may have been one of the catalysts in transforming post–Second World War British theatre, but Beckett's role in London theatres beyond this landmark production has been largely overlooked. By exploring underutilized performance archives to trace and examine the London productions of Beckett's drama since 1955, the events from this history reveal how Beckett's drama has had a more prominent impact on London theatre cultures than previously articulated. Originally reflecting on data about productions gathered for the Staging Beckett Database, this history has been able to bring to light how Beckett's plays have diffused across the landscape of London theatres, from new writing theatres to fringe companies and from major subsidized institutions to commercial houses, thus signifying the versatility his theatre possessed, as different

theatres programmed his drama at specific moments in their history. For example, Beckett's involvement in the early years of the ESC at the Royal Court under George Devine initiated a consistent relationship with the theatre that constructed many of the earliest and frequently recalled impressions of his plays in performance in what was his most productive partnership with a London theatre. Beckett also played a notable role in the emergence and prosperity of many other major subsidized theatres in London, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, the Young Vic, Riverside Studios and the Donmar Warehouse. Today, these familiar institutions are considered intrinsic to the infrastructure and diversity of London theatres, venues that incorporated Beckett's drama into their formative programmes and their development within the ecology of London theatres.

Beckett reinvigorated London stages through an *oeuvre* that interrogated British theatre practices in terms of performance, directing and scenography, but his theatrical experiments spoke to – and challenged – different generations of theatre practitioners. How Beckett has been staged has evolved significantly since the earliest performances of his dramas, as professionals have approached and activated his texts in many varied and creative interpretations – from traditional proscenium arch and/or black box theatres to site-specific performances. During Beckett's lifetime, productions benefited from a substantial number of leading creatives, many of whom were at the forefront of British and Beckettian performance histories, including Peter Hall, George Devine, Jocelyn Herbert, John Bury, Billie Whitelaw and Patrick Magee – to name but a few. Beckett's own theatre practice developed from working directly with professional theatre makers in London, but also Berlin and Paris, as he transformed from an inexperienced theatre practitioner to a director who wanted to direct or oversee his plays, often shaping the 'deep and complex' cultural memories of his plays in performance through the defining images his productions achieved with London collaborators (Carlson 2006: 2). Meanwhile, after his death, his work continued to be an enticing

prospect for noted friends from his lifetime, such as Harold Pinter, established performers like Patrick Stewart and a new generation of practitioners who staged Beckett at formative phases of their careers, from Katie Mitchell to Lisa Dwan – amongst the many agents who shaped his work for London's contemporary audiences.

The reception of Beckett in London varied from production to production over the timespan of this history, but London's critics played a significant part in shaping and building his reputation and legacy. Some early critics were loyal champions of his drama, such as Harold Hobson, while others were hostile in their responses, including – despite his early praise for *Godot* – Kenneth Tynan. Contemporary criticism saw his work often more favourably received, with Michael Billington offering several intelligent pieces on recent performances, from the issues concerning *Footfalls* at the Garrick Theatre to questions on the uniformity of praise for Beckett's canon during the Gate/Barbican Beckett festivals. An example of how Beckett's reception had changed over time for some critics was epitomized by Charles Spencer in the *Daily Telegraph*, who self-reflectively commented on his criticism of Beckett in a review of the Royal Court's 2014 production of *Not I*/*Footfalls*/*Rockaby*:

> When I was younger, I intensely disliked Samuel Beckett. I found his gloom oppressive and the ambiguity of his writing frustrating. These days however I hang on to his every word, for there is no better guide to the human spirit's darker depths and never more so than in this extraordinary triple bill of late works.

While it has been possible to reflect on Beckett's reception in London through the published work of selected critics, inevitably the thoughts of the vast majority of audience members have not been recorded from performances. Nonetheless, the combination of the many contributing factors to these performances as events (its agents, reception, artistic heritage, cultural memory or world events) made him an attractive writer to programme or see, as attested by the city's audiences who subscribed to and supported presentations of his work.

To date, Beckett has been largely cast adrift from national theatre histories, particularly due to his flexible national identity as an Irish-born writer living and writing in France. As a recognized name after *Godot*'s premiere, Beckett's multifaceted characteristics meant he fulfilled the artistic and financial agendas of many theatres through his reputation as an experimental, international and – as time developed – an increasingly popular writer. Beckett's theatrical style and practical innovations were responsible for the interest in his drama across many London theatres. His drama tested the boundaries of theatre in terms of plot, action, structure, characterization, performance and setting, which, in turn, challenged British theatre's conservative dramatic conventions and values over several decades. His cosmopolitan brand of European drama played a crucial role in introducing London to more international theatre, as demonstrated by the breadth of this performance history, but also the international companies that staged foreign language productions of his plays at the ESC and World Theatre Seasons. Beckett's popularity was indicated by *Godot*'s lengthy premiere, but also through subsequent enterprises such as the Young Vic's 'pop-Beckett' productions and the programming of his work as multiple bills or seasons at the Royal Court. Following his death, his work was more frequently programmed in commercial theatres with star actors, such as Rik Mayall, Ian McKellen and Daniel Radcliffe, and a turn towards the festivalization of his *oeuvre* proved how his familiar and less familiar work acquired cultural capital in London's theatre cultures.

At present and as I conclude this book in December 2024, the Theatre Collection London and Arcola Theatre are about to present *Happy Days* in Dalston with Catharine Humphrys as Winnie,[2] while a finely balanced production of *Waiting for Godot* directed by James MacDonald, and starring Ben Whishaw, Lucian Msamati, Tom Edden and Jonathan Slinger has extended in the West End's Theatre Royal Haymarket,[3] such is the sustained interest in Beckett from producers, commercial theatres, star actors and, of course, London audiences. What performance future awaits Beckett's drama, of course, remains to be seen. One potential development could be the realization of Beckett's

unlicensed drama. On the possibility of *Eleutheria* playing a part in the future of Beckettian performances in London, Edward Beckett remarked:

> *Eleutheria* is not an easy play to put on to begin with. I'm sure it will get performed at some point. I think it would have to be done in a rather special way. I know it's something he never wanted, because he considered it a total failure, and the difference between that play and the next one is quite extraordinary. [. . .] Yes, it would have to be a special occasion. There have been lots of inquiries and people who want to do it, but for the moment, we've just said, you'll have to wait a bit longer.[4]

Edward Beckett's reservations rightly highlight the play's practical and personal challenges, but seeing this unperformed Beckett play on a London stage represents a curious prospect that would extend Beckett's connection with the city's theatre cultures posthumously. Whether this materializes or not, the questions of what, where, when and who will remain key to the future of his nineteen plays currently licensed for performance, as well as why and how they are staged as part of their sustained longevity in London theatres. From reflecting on this history, many further questions will continue to be keenly observed. For example, will Beckett's drama continue to be staged so prolifically? Will future programming and productions address the need for greater diverse and inclusive Beckett performances? How will the parameters of the Beckett Estate be observed or challenged? And how will performances experiment with Beckett's texts as new technologies emerge? These are just some of the questions that await to be answered as this narrative continues to be written and played out on London stages.

To conclude, this book has offered a recontextualization of Beckett's performance histories in London. As Postlewait argues, 'History happens and re-happens, as we continue to reconstitute the past each time we comprehend it. We are always rewriting and rereading history' (2009: 268). The rewriting and rereading of the residency of Beckett's drama in London theatre cultures acknowledges that this book

represents merely *a* history of these performances. From the outset, performance histories represent their own oxymoronic challenge, as Dennis Kennedy has argued, 'the matter under investigation in performance history was never material (or embodied) for more than a few hours, even if repeated with variations on subsequent days and nights' (2003: 33). The performances discussed in this history may not have been embodied for more than a few hours each night or on subsequent nights, though Beckett has maintained – despite some initial teething problems – a consistent presence in London's theatrical landscape due to its place in the artistic heritage of theatres eager to stage his work, the role of key agents and practitioners, and its reception and interest from audiences. Although its role in the grander narratives of British theatre is open to debate, Beckett's drama played an integral part in the history of many London theatres, reinvigorating the city's theatre landscape during crucial moments such as post–Second World War to theatres reopening after Covid-19 lockdowns. As the extensive and wide-ranging performances staged in this history suggest, his enduring influence and impact mean it is difficult to imagine the theatre cultures of London without Beckett. Beckett's acceptance and longevity in London theatre cultures signifies his important place in the city's theatre ecology, but equally it serves as a reminder of London's integral and continuing contribution to his legacy, both nationally and internationally.

Notes

Introduction

1 See http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/search-news/samuel-beckett-plaque-release [accessed 25 April 2016].
2 Beckett stayed at 48 Paultons Square for seven months and later at 34 Gertrude Street for fifteen months from 1934 to 1935.
3 This excludes *Eleutheria*, Beckett's first full length, which is not available for licensed performance.
4 The project team included: Anna McMullan (principal investigator), Graham Saunders and David Pattie (co-investigators), and Trish McTighe and David Tucker (post-doctoral researchers).
5 These included Staging Beckett: Constructing Performance Histories at UoR (2014), Staging Beckett at the Margins at UoC (2014) and Staging Beckett and Contemporary Theatre and Performance Cultures at UoR (2015). For more information, see: https://research.reading.ac.uk/staging-beckett/events-conferences/
6 I curated '*Waiting for Godot* at 60' alongside Anna McMullan and Mark Nixon. It was presented on two occasions: (1) Minghella Studios, University of Reading, as part of the Staging Beckett and Contemporary Theatre and Performance Cultures Conference, 9 to 11 April 2015. (2) Clinton Centre, Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, for the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival, 23 July to 3 August 2015.
7 This was earmarked as a pilot database for the larger Performing Arts Database (formerly the National Performance Data Project), but the plans have thus far not materialized.
8 Schneider has also critiqued this temporal logic of past and present. For example, she argues that materials such as the still image can constitute 'a call towards a future live moment when the image will be re-encountered, perhaps as an invitation to response' (2011: 141).
9 The Theatre and Performance Card Index proved an integral resource for tracking many of the lesser-known or forgotten early productions. The

Index maintained notes for productions staged in the UK from 1955 to 1997, including key performance details such as date, theatre and director.

10 *Theatre Record* is a fortnightly journal that reprints reviews and information for UK and London productions from 1981.

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

12 The Database enabled researchers to record where the sources were found and thus directs future scholars and practitioners back to the archive through its built-in referencing function.

13 The number of productions recorded accounts for productions found between August 1955 and December 2024.

14 For the BDMP, see: https://www.beckettarchive.org/

15 These archives include the University of Reading's Beckett Collections, the Theatre and Performance Collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Library, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the National Theatre Archive and the Jocelyn Herbert Archive (now NT Archive, previously the University of the Arts London, Wimbledon).

16 Helen Freshwater argues when analysing archival documents in a historical context, it is important to acknowledge that this is 'a recontextualization of the past rather than a reconstruction' (2003: 739).

17 By using the term 'agents', Postlewait is referring to the people who were involved in or contributed to the production. Similar models have been suggested by Ric Knowles in his materialist approach to reading the performance event (Knowles 2004).

18 For example, in *Modern British Dramatists* (1968), John Russell Brown distinguishes this production as the first major theatrical event in his chronology of important events, while John Bull's article 'Looking Back at Godot' (2000) examines the arguments as to whether *Look Back in Anger* or *Godot* signalled the post-war revolution in British theatre, before arguing *Godot* was 'the real starting-point for the new wave of the 1950s' (Bull 2000: 93).

19 For many early British critics, his plays did not conform to their expectations of drama, best suggested by the title of Cecil Wilson's review, 'The Left Bank Can Keep It' (Wilson 1955).
20 Both these theatre companies have recorded their performances online through their own innovative indexes of productions. See: http://archive.questors.org.uk/ and http://www.towertheatre.co/plays/list1973.htm#7315 [accessed 1 July 2016].
21 Scholarship on the vibrant topic of Beckett and adaptations, including some performances staged in London, has recently been added to these accounts in the field (See Bignell, McMullan and Verhulst 2021; Zeifman 2008).
22 I will, however, attempt to give an impression of some of the wider productions staged where possible.

Chapter 1

1 Performance remains ranging from set designs to scripts have been stored in several major international institutions, including the British Library, the Harry Ransom Center and the Victoria Albert Museum, as well as the Beckett Collections at the University of Reading.
2 King's biography elaborates further on Glenville's decision (See King 2010: 175–178).
3 Keaton was proposed to play Vladimir alongside Brando as Estragon.
4 The Theatres Act of 1843 also defined some of the legislation until 1968.
5 Two further attempts to license unexpurgated versions of *Waiting for Godot* were submitted in 1964 and 1965. *Eh Joe* was also submitted.
6 Elsewhere in Europe, *Godot* was nearly banned in the municipality of Arnhem, Holland, following criticism from the Roman Catholic press, who saw the play as a homosexual work because Estragon says to Vladimir 'Tu vois tu pisses mieux quand je ne suis pas là' ('You see, you piss better when I am not there') (see Beckett 2011: 521–2). Further censorship issues were experienced in Madrid, as Antonia Rodriguez-Gago reports that a production by Trino Martinez Trives was 'refused a license by the censors' but performed in May 1955 (see Beckett 2011: 534–5 and Cohn 1987: 45).

7 Knowlson notes the reading was given by the cast of *I Am a Camera* (1955) in a dressing room of the New Theatre, with Dorothy Tutin reading the part of the boy (Knowlson 1996: 412).

8 Beckett did not include issues 6 and 9 as the Lord Chamberlain withdrew his objection, while for issue 12, it was agreed Estragon would be well covered when his trousers fall at the end of Act II.

9 Beckett was quick to sardonically voice his dissatisfaction on the matter to its editor, Charles Monteith, writing: 'It is good news your Godot is doing well. My only regret is that it is not complete. Some passages are quite meaningless because of the holes. They could have been bridged with a little rewriting. Well, there it is' (Beckett 2011: 603).

10 Sos Eltis has noted of Hall, 'Harold Pinter and Tennessee Williams approached him to direct their plays; he was appointed the first director of the Royal Shakespeare Company; Leslie Carron asked him to direct her in Gigi – and he married her' (Tucker and McTighe 2016: 87).

11 For example, Campbell Williams (the Administrator for the Arts Theatre) later wrote to J. L. Hodgkinson on 3 December 1956: 'My policy for 1957 will remain unaltered, that is to produce nine or ten of (A) the very best European plays obtainable, (B) plays by new English authors, and (C) include one or two classic revivals' (Williams 1956).

12 Discovered playing *King Lear* at university, Woodthorpe was a talented actor in spite of his youthfulness and earned the acclaim of Beckett and an initially doubtful Peter Bull, who noted, 'It was infuriating in my case to find an amateur actor with more talent than oneself, acting one off the stage, and his seeming confidence and technique struck an impertinent note' (1959: 168).

13 Peter Woodthorpe supports Bull's recollection in his memories of the production (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 122).

14 I am indebted to Sophie Daneman, who kindly sent me her father's unpublished memoir concerning this first production.

15 Similarly, Woodthorpe admitted, 'I didn't understand the play but I know that I felt how to do it. Its poetry spoke to me and its humour. And once I got it, I never lost it. I played it by instinct and feeling' (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 122).

16 The touring production was produced by Michael Wide, directed by Richard Scott and saw Robert Eddison play Vladimir in addition to

the regular cast (Bull 1959: 184–5). Following the tour, Bateson would proceed to direct *Godot* at the Thorndike Theatre in Leatherhead in October 1956.

Chapter 2

1 This production was directed by Anthony Page, who was Artistic Director from 1964–5 while Devine was absent through illness. Although technically this is not part of the Devine years at the Court, he was involved in the planning, and as a revival of Beckett's work at the Court, it offers a fascinating comparison with the other plays which the theatre premiered.

2 As Wardle contextualized, '"Chelsea" on headed writing paper was a good address, but it was a far from swinging area, immune even from the espresso bar boom in neighbouring South Kensington. The King's Road abounded in antique shops, but not in good restaurants or shops of any other kind' (Wardle 1978: 174).

3 Practitioners of Beckett's drama during these years at the Court can be traced through the genealogy of Beckett's production histories in the UK, Ireland and across Europe. These include key figures such as Roger Blin, Jean Martin, Deryk Mendel, Jack MacGowran, Jocelyn Herbert, Patrick Magee and Donald McWhinnie. Many of these collaborations and friendships were fostered during the Devine years at the Royal Court.

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

5 The official 'world premiere' according to ESC's records is 3 April 1957.

6 Devine's own Francophile interests stemmed from his childhood excursions to France, his fluency in French and his previous theatrical work with Michel Saint-Denis at the Old Vic Theatre School. This interest was clearly at the forefront of his programming plans for the second season as he initially sought 'one more item of 20 to 25 minutes' 'preferably from modern French drama' to make a complete show with *Les Chaises* and *Acte Sans Paroles* (Devine 1956a).

7 Blin also directed *Fin de Partie* with Nagg played by George Adet and Nell by Christine Tsingos. Beckett and Jean Martin were annoyed at the news that the Theatre de l'Oeuvre was pulling out. Lucien Beer maintains they had deferred the production rather than cancelled it. No formal, binding contract with an agreed production date had been signed. This production of *Fin de Partie* would eventually open in Paris later in April 1957 in the small Studio des Champs-Elysées, and Beer received a percentage of the box office, following the dispute. (See Taylor-Batty 2007).

8 Beckett wrote to Barney Rosset on 11 January 1956, 'The Oeuvre has suddenly backed out of its engagements. Reason given: on the verge of bankruptcy they had to choose between selling the theatre and signing for a play with two cinema stars and strong financial backing. [. . .] leaving us high, dry and theatreless. The rehearsals were well advanced. Blin and Martin are desolate. So it goes on this bitch of an earth' (Beckett 2014a: 7).

9 He also wrote to Ionesco, Jacques Audiberti, Arthur Adamov and Georges Schehadé, though only Beckett's response offered potential. Prior to the mime, Mendel performed in a clown number in a cabaret at the Fontaine des Quatre Saisons, which Beckett asked his wife Suzanne and publisher Jerome Lindon to attend (Mendel).

10 As John Beckett explained, '[Mendel] used to make the sort of movements [. . .] that the script seemed to demand and I would jot down timings but approximate timings for them [. . .] I mean as far as Sam was concerned we were on our own' (See John Beckett 1991 and 1992). John Beckett created the music in response to these rehearsal ideas, which were then lengthened and shortened at specific points in later rehearsals.

11 'Conneries' (bullshit) would have obviously failed to pass the Lord Chamberlain's scrutiny.

12 For records of Noël's production, see http://www.lesarchivesduspectacle.net/?IDX_Personne=17280. [accessed 18 August 2016].

13 Noël's designs for *Fin de Partie* and *Acte Sans Paroles* were available here: http://art.asso.free.fr/jacques-noel/theatre/resultat-jacques-noel.php?recordID=59&titre=Fin%20de%20Partie [accessed 22 February 2014], but they are no longer accessible online.

14 While the mime was also performed with *Fin de Partie* at the Champs Elysées Theatre, Paris, and in the Werkstatt, Berlin, it was dropped for the

English translation of *Endgame* at the Royal Court. Ahead of confirming this programme, it became clear that Devine was less interested in re-staging *Acte Sans Paroles*. Indeed, this matter tested their early working relationship. Devine wrote of plans to present the play at the 'beginning of March [1958], in repertory, with two other plays', which included proposals to complete the evening with 'a "reading" of "All That Fall"' and suggestions that N.F Simpson's *A Resounding Tinkle* 'would make an admirable partner for "End Game"' (Devine 1957c). This letter also reveals intentions for the 'repertory [to go] on tour for four weeks later in the Spring to some "appropriate" towns'.

15 It has subsequently been the only time *Endgame* has been performed in French in London. Despite the negative verdicts of several other London critics printed after its opening night, the production retained respectable box office takings of 69 per cent (Findlater 1981: 246).

16 Mary Hutchinson was, in fact, responsible for initiating Beckett and Devine's creative partnership, who was a mutual friend to both. Hutchinson was a prominent art patron in London and an early supporter of Beckett's work.

17 Beckett would complete the initial text on 12 August 1957.

18 Devine did later articulate to Beckett that he thought *Act Without Words* would weaken the programme.

19 Intriguingly, Frances Cuka was only twenty-two years old when playing Nell.

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

Chapter 3

1 In 1982, *Act Without Words I* and *II* were also staged by the Japanese Noho company on the NT's terrace, directed by Jonah Salz.

2 Extracts from the section on the Young Vic come from my 2017 article: 'Beckett at the Young Vic'. *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'Hui*, 29:2, 243–255.
3 The Theatre Royal Stratford East presented Envoy Productions staging of *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Alan Simpson, in 1961 and *Happy Days* with Marie Kean as Winnie in 1963.
4 The world premiere cast included Nancy Illig (W1), Sigfrid Pfeiffer (W2) and Gerhard Winter (M).
5 Devine knew Beckett's working methods could also be intense, and he decided to work independently with his cast for a number of early rehearsals before welcoming Beckett into rehearsals from 16 March 1964 onwards.
6 The lights for *Play* were operated by Anthony Ferris, who was given a credit by several critics for the skill and timing with which his role was executed.
7 Gaskill said: 'What was interesting was that the Beckett play was meant to be the curtain raiser for the Sophocles, but it turned out to be so exciting that we did it the other way "round"' (Gaskill, Saunders and McFrederick 2018: 160).
8 Beckett declined the NT's request to stage *All That Fall* (See Hallifax 1968).
9 For a detailed account of *Breath* and *Oh! Calcutta!*, see Saunders 2016.
10 The original 'Young Vic Company' was set up by George Devine following the Second World War under the provisions of the Old Vic Theatre School established by Devine, Michel St Denis and Glen Byam Shaw. It aimed to produce classics for young people aged from nine to fifteen (See Little 2004: 8).
11 These shortcomings within the sector were recognized in the 1965 Arts Council's Young People's Theatre Enquiry (reported in 1966), led by Constance Cummings, which highlighted how young theatregoers were inadequately served by theatres offering expensive tickets for a largely older bourgeois audience.
12 Dunlop had previously founded (with Richard Negri) the Piccolo Theatre in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester, in 1954, and became Artistic Director of the Nottingham Playhouse before founding Pop Theatre, which initially ran during the Edinburgh Festival.

13 This taken from a telephone interview between Frank Dunlop and Matthew McFrederick on 5 November 2015.
14 Despite Beckett's lack of involvement in Young Vic productions, Knowlson highlights that Coffey met Beckett in a Berlin café when on tour with the Young Vic's production of *The Taming of The Shrew*, and he coincidentally was in rehearsals for *Glückliche Tage* with Eva-Katharina Schultz at the Schiller Theater (See Knowlson 1996: 585).
15 Both Coffey and Robertson performed in other Beckett productions at the Young Vic. Coffey played Nell in *Endgame* and later W1 in *Play*, while Robertson played Lucky in *Godot* before playing in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Dunlop is credited with directing *Happy Days* in Harrogate, with Hugh Hastings playing Willie.
16 This production was designed by John Bury. Alan Webb played Willie at the Old Vic and Harry Lomax taking the role at the Lyttelton Theatre and on tour.
17 Ahead of his rehearsals for *Warten auf Godot* at the Schiller Theater, Berlin, in December 1974.
18 Beckett's production notebook for 'Happy Days London 74' is available at: UoR, BC MS 1396/4/11.
19 For further reading on the Baxter Theatre's production, see McFrederick 2021.

Chapter 4

1 Hall was appointed Artistic Director prior to the name of the corporation was officially chartered in 1961. The RSC received its first Arts Council subsidy in 1963.
2 *AWWII* was presented on 1 July 1962 by In-Stage at 9 Fitzroy Square and directed by Charles Marowitz in what *The Stage* referred to at the time as the 'British premiere'. Here, they applauded how the programme – with Raymond Abell's *A Little Something for the Maid* – was 'tautly directed' and 'used the tiny stage to [its] advantage' (L.G.S 1962). There remains some confusion over the venue for the 'British premiere' of *Act Without Words II*. Bernice Schrank and William W. Demastes suggest it opened at 'Clarendon Press Institute, Oxford, with John McGrath' and the 'London

premiere: 25 January 1960 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, with director Michael Horovitz' (1997: 8). No record of the ICA or Oxford performances is available at the V&A Theatre and Performance Archive or the British Newspaper Archive. Although they are not definitive and no archive is complete, I have yet to find a record for the earliest dates above.

3 All references from Bolam are taken from her email to Matthew McFrederick on 20 June 2024.

4 The only review I have found of Expeditions One saw R. B. Marriott declare only Whiting's No Why 'was worth producing at the Aldwych', before noting, 'Samuel Beckett's mime, "Act Without Words", adds nothing to what we know of him; poor stuff indeed' (Marriott 1964). While Marriott's judgement represents the only available document to review the performance, the merits of the production are evidenced as the play was adapted and directed by Paul Joyce as *The Goad* for Twin-Digit Productions one year later.

5 This production ran from 12 January to 10 February 1964 and included works by Antonin Artaud, John Arden and Alain Robbe-Grillet. See: https://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/search/rsc-performances/thc196401 [accessed on 28 February 2023].

6 This included traditional and contemporary works, such as *Endgame*, as Addenbrooke continued: 'there was cruelty, mental and/or physical; violence and/or implied; and "vulgarity", both Elizabethan and modern. During the year, the company's productions included the *Richard II* to *Richard III* history cycle at Stratford; Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, Rudkin's *Afore Night Come*, Beckett's *Endgame*, Vitrac's *Victor*, Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Weiss's *Marat-Sade* at the Aldwych; and Theatre of Cruelty at LAMDA and *The Screens* at Donmar' (Addenbrooke 1974 137–138).

7 See Photographs of *Endgame*, RSC, 1964. UoR, BC MS 5538 E/6.

8 The Staging Beckett Database suggests how in the immediate aftermath of this freedom, Beckett's productions in London entered a period of transition and relocated slowly to other London theatres, although there was some interest. Beckett was also busy with projects for other media, such as *Film* (1964) and *Eh Joe* (1966).

9 Beckett would go on to direct *Endspiel* (*Endgame*), *Das Letzte Band* (*Krapp's Last Tape*), *Glückliche Tage* (*Happy Days*) in 1971, *Warten auf Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*) in 1975, *Damals* (*That Time*) and *Tritte*

(*Footfalls*) in 1976, and *Spiel* (*Play*) in 1978, in performances staged at the Schiller Theater and Schiller Theater Werkstatt.

10 Cohn (1987) and Knowlson (1985) identify *Va et Vient* at the Odéon Theatre in 1966 as Beckett's first full production, though Gontarski highlights that Beckett credited Jean-Marie Serreau with the direction and therefore argues that *Endspiel* in 1967 was 'his first stage production acknowledged in a playbill' (Gontarski 1992: xv).

11 Besides the World Theatre Seasons, I have found the following performances from 1965–9: a performance of *Endgame* and *Act Without Words I* at St Martin's Theatre in 1966, which was presented by the winners of the National Student Drama Festival, *Play* at the Arts Theatre by Quipu Theatre Company and productions of *Happy Days* and *Play* by the amateur theatre company Questors in 1969.

12 It was first staged at the Odéon Théâtre de France in Paris in October 1963.

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

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

15 Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, 'for his writing, which – in new forms for the novel and drama – in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation'. Note on Samuel Beckett's Nobel Prize in Literature, 1969. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/ [accessed 31 August 2015].

16 Nagg was played by Werner Stock and Gudrun Genest as Nell. The German translation was by Elmar Tophoven.

17 *Endspiel* premiered at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt on 26 September 1967.

Chapter 5

1 *Oh Les Beaux Jours* was directed by Roger Blin, designed by Matias and produced alongside *L'Amante Anglaise* by Marguerite Duras for four performances.
2 The Come Together Festival ran from 21 October to 9 November 1970.
3 Impressed by the American influences of the late 1960s, such as the Living Theater and Joe Chaikin's Open Theater, Gaskill opened up the Royal Court spaces by removing the stalls in the main theatre, occasionally playing in the round, and also using the Theatre Upstairs to create a dynamic series of events within the theatre. He saw the Come Together Festival as an attempt 'to house a cross-section of the most interesting new artists under one roof' (Unknown Author 1970c). The Festival also included its first pop concert, new plays by Heathcote Williams and Howard Brenton, Ken Campbell's Road Show and the Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre.
4 This chapter will not concentrate on the performances of *Play* and *Endgame*, in order to examine a wider range of specific plays, performances and practitioners, and – as with any history – limitations mean I cannot discuss them in appropriate depth.
5 The double bill played to 97 per cent of the theatre's capacity, which accounted for approximately 20 per cent of the Royal Court's box office for 1973 (Findlater 1981: 251).
6 Anthony Page directed *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*, but several accounts suggest this status was nominal, due to Beckett's interest in *Not I* and increasing involvement in directing Whitelaw in this production of it.
7 Knowlson's disparaging account continued to report Beckett even held up 'his little finger [and] announc[ed] that there was more poetry in his fingertip than there was in Finney's entire body' (1996: 596).
8 See NT Archive, Herbert, JH4384 – JH4392.
9 In 1975, when recasting the role, Mel Smith – then Royal Court assistant director and later comedian and actor – recalled an unlikely and amusing anecdote about its auditions: 'stage right there's this sort of cloaked figure who was so dimly lit that people often didn't even notice he was there [. . .] I was assistant director on the show and we spent the whole day, the *whole* day auditioning people for the guy in the cloak, it was unbelievable.

In the audition we had a queue of quite good actors coming in and I used to sit stage left doing the whole monologue, you know [mumbles incomprehensibly] like that, while the actors used to stand there going [*Makes arm movements again*]. It was the most embarrassing thing I've ever done in my whole life' (Smith).

10 This production originally opened at the Schiller Theater on 8 March 1975, and its status in Beckett's performance histories is testified by the many publications documenting the production, including a rehearsal diary by its assistant director Walter Asmus (1977), McMillan and Knowlson's *Theatrical Notebook* (1994) and David Bradby's *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* (2001).

11 Interview between Walter Asmus and Matthew McFrederick, 4 February 2014. All subsequent references from Asmus are from this interview unless stated.

12 Unusually, particularly for a new writing theatre, the Court chose to promote the event as 'Play and Other Plays', thus emphasizing the revival of *Play* rather than the individual identity and world premieres of *Footfalls* and *That Time*. Following the performance of *Play*, there was a fifteen-minute interval.

13 The play is not about Beckett's life, but as Knowlson suggests, it 'evolves out of his life' (602). For a fuller description of its biographical links, see Knowlson 1996: 601–2.

14 For the cassette tape of *That Time*, see UoR, Knowlson, JEK C/2/2/18.

15 This viewpoint was shared by Irving Wardle, who wrote in his review, 'I do not understand the play' (Wardle 1976).

16 Burge replaced the long-standing English Stage Company Council with a Board of Management.

17 His assistant director was Roger Michell, who would go on to have a successful career as a film director with films such as *Notting Hill* (1999).

18 See UoR, Beckett, BCMS 1731.

19 See Letter from Samuel Beckett to Max Stafford-Clark, 1 October 1983. V&A, Royal Court Theatre Collection, GB71 THM/273/4/15/9. A production of these plays was directed by Alan Schneider and brought over to the Edinburgh Festival by its then Artistic Director Frank Dunlop. Following their performances in Edinburgh, the plays premiered in London at the Donmar Warehouse in 1984.

Chapter 6

1 This precedent would continue in the 1990s after his death, with a notable upsurge in the West Endification and Festivalization of his work in London. During the 1980s, productions of his plays returned to the National, the Young Vic and the Old Vic and even spread to alternative London locations with the Manchester Royal Exchange's tour of *Waiting for Godot*, featuring Max Wall at the Roundhouse.

2 Extracts from this chapter have been previously published in my 2016 chapter: 'Feckham, Peckham, Fulham, Clapham . . . Hammersmith: Beckett at Riverside Studios' in *Staging Beckett in Great Britain*, eds. David Tucker and Trish McTighe, London: Bloomsbury, Methuen Drama: 37–56. They are reproduced here by kind permission of the publisher.

3 Beckett's Schiller Theater productions of *Endspiel* and *Das Letzte Band* played in Peter Daubeny's World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre in 1970 and 1971 and his production of *Warten auf Godot* was also staged at the Royal Court in 1976.

4 Riverside Studios is approximately 300 metres from Lower Mall, with Lower Mall on the west side of Hammersmith Bridge.

5 Email to Matthew McFrederick, 24 April 2015. It is clear from a letter to Rick Cluchey of 30 July 1979 that Beckett knew Peter Gill was Artistic Director of Riverside Studios and David Gothard was its Programme Director. Beckett also wrote to Alan Schneider early to mid-May 1978: 'Still hopes of *Happy Days* with Billie next summer, at Court or perhaps Riversdale Studios, but nothing firm so far' (Harmon 1998: 370).

6 To date, Riverside Studios has not been the subject of a published history, although the work of Dario Fo and Tadeusz Kantor at the Studios has been. See Murawska-Muthesius and Zarzecka 2011 and Fo and Rame 1983.

7 Riverside Studios is located five miles from where *Waiting for Godot* was first performed at the Arts Theatre and three and a half miles from Beckett's consistent London home at the Royal Court.

8 Beckett and Cluchey corresponded over several decades and would occasionally meet in Paris. After repeatedly asking Beckett to attend rehearsals, Beckett would first work with San Quentin twice before Riverside. Beckett directed Cluchey in *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Akademie

der Künste in Berlin, opening on 27 September 1977, and again one year later when Beckett observed their rehearsals of *Endgame* at the Altkirche in Berlin, in the spare time he had from directing *Spiel* at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt.

9 Email to Matthew McFrederick, 22 April 2015.

10 One exception already discussed in Chapter 4 was the 1964 production of *Endgame* at the English Theatre in Paris, when the journalist Clancy Sigal attended its London rehearsals with Beckett.

11 David Gothard kindly gave me materials concerning Beckett's time at Riverside from his personal archive. These materials, as well as his enthusiasm and energy, have contributed to the detail of this chapter, and his support is greatly appreciated.

12 Mosher was also Artistic Director of the Goodman Theater in Chicago, which was supporting the rehearsals, as Beckett was unable to travel to America to rehearse.

13 Binchy began her article by asserting: 'Beckett looks 54 not 74; he looks like a Frenchman, not an Irishman, and he certainly looks more like a man about to go off and do a day's hard manual work rather than direct one of his own plays for a cast which looks like him as a messiah come to rehearsal' (Binchy 1980: 7).

14 Email to Matthew McFrederick, 9 September 2014.

15 Cluchey recalled one evening after rehearsals that Beckett also met Harold Pinter at Riverside, and that Pinter had arranged for them to leave for dinner in a limousine. Email to Matthew McFrederick, 24 April 2015.

16 Email to Matthew McFrederick, 30 September 2014.

17 These photographs were exhibited as part of '#7 Rehearsing/Samuel Beckett', Chelsea Space, 16 John Islip Street, London, 25 March–29 April 2006.

18 Harris's photograph is the cover image of this book.

19 With *Endgame*, for instance, these rehearsals could draw on the practical experience he had of observing past productions at the Royal Court (1957, 1958 and 1976), Studio des Champs-Elysées (1964), the RSC (1964) and when he directed *Endspiel* at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt in 1967.

20 For further details see Gontarski 1992: 144.

21 Email to Matthew McFrederick, 30 September 2014.

22 Beckett outlined his concern to Cluchey in a letter on 9 May 1984, stating: 'I regret – to put it mildly – that our understanding has not been observed. I.e. that the general description B. directs B. (as proclaimed on front of big program) should not include Godot but be modified in this case to some more accurate formula such as "Directed by W.A. in consultation with the author". Walter does not get the great credit he deserves for this production' (qtd in McFrederick 2016: 213).

23 Interview between Walter Asmus and Matthew McFrederick, 4 February 2014. All subsequent references to Asmus are from this interview unless stated.

24 These were effectively waiting moments in the play, where the action was frozen before the cast resumed.

25 Conversation with Matthew McFrederick, February 2014.

26 In 1981, the acclaimed American actor, director and former leader of the Open Theater, Joe Chaikin, performed *Texts*. In 1986, Billie Whitelaw revived a trilogy of previous performances in the form of *Rockaby*, *Enough* and *Footfalls*, the music hall performer Max Wall played Krapp, Croquet Windows Company staged *Act Without Words I*, *Catastrophe* and *Ohio Impromptu* in 1986 and Barry McGovern toured the Gate Theatre Dublin's production of *I'll Go On* in July 1986.

27 This production also comprised *Tied to a stick* (Bo Shibari), *The snail* (Kagyu), *Auntie's sake* (Obagasake) and *A pot of broth* (by W. B. Yeats). This production was also presented at the Tricycle Theatre (now the Kiln Theatre) on 12–14 August 1982 and included *Rough for Theatre I*. The company then toured to the Edinburgh Festival. One later London production involving a Japanese actor saw Akira Matsui play W in *Rockaby* at LSO St Luke's in February 2017. Billed as 'Noh time like the present…' and programmed alongside three other pieces, Matsui wore a traditional Noh mask during the performance with Hugh Quarshie reading V's lines from a script while standing beside Matsui's rocking chair.

28 See the letter from Samuel Beckett to Jocelyn Herbert, 20 October 1981, UoR, Beckett, HER/104. The Royal Court was unable to stage the play until 1983.

29 *Enough* was included for performances at both the State University of New York at Buffalo and in London. Its inclusion was made at the suggestion of Labeille, who felt *Rockaby* needed a companion piece, given that it lasted approximately fourteen minutes.

30 See correspondence between Samuel Beckett and Daniel Labeille, UoR, Beckett, BC MS 5245.
31 Platform events could comprise performances and talks and were a more regular part of the NT schedule from 1984, before they were replaced by 'Talks and Events' in 2018.
32 *Godot* ran for 110 performances in the theatre's repertory system from 25 November 1987 to 19 July 1988.
33 For a fuller history of this touring production and staging Beckett's drama in South Africa, see McFrederick 2021.

Chapter 7

1 These statistics are of recorded productions up to December 2024.
2 Conversation between David Gothard and Matthew McFrederick, 13 April 2016.
3 'A Celebration of the Life and Work of Samuel Beckett' was presented at the Olivier Theatre at the NT on 1 April 1990, an event that included readings by actors closely associated with Beckett's performance history in London and internationally, such as Jean Martin, Stephen Rea and Billie Whitelaw. Meanwhile, the Royal Court attempted to continue its association with Beckett by staging a new production of *Endgame* in 1994 with familiar practitioners of Beckett's drama; however, the project failed to materialize. There were discussions about Libera directing a new production of *Endgame*, designed by Herbert and featuring Stephen Rea and Barry McGovern as Hamm and Clov.
4 The Arts Theatre is commonly seen as a West End theatre today, but in the 1950s it operated as a club theatre, whereas the Criterion was a public, commercial venue.
5 This production was directed by Mike Nichols, who was by then an acclaimed Hollywood director for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and *The Graduate* (1967).
6 The 1991 performance was produced by Phil McIntyre by arrangement with Stoll Moss Theatres Ltd. Other cast members included Pozzo – Phillip Jackson, Lucky – Christopher Ryan and The Boy – Duncan Thornley and Dean Gaffney.

7 See 'Tonight with Jonathan Ross', Channel 4, September 1991. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCysBpjRKME [accessed 11 February 2016].
8 Referring to Beckett as 'Sam' in numerous interviews, both actors claimed to have been introduced to and inspired by *Godot* in their formative years, before meeting at the University of Manchester, where they started writing together from their love of Beckett's style of humour. Mayall is believed to have played the role of the boy as an eight-year-old in an amateur production directed by his father, John Mayall, in Droitwich. Mayall and Edmondson discussed Beckett's influence on their work on 'Tonight with Jonathan Ross', ITV, September 1991. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCysBpjRKME [accessed 11 February 2016].
9 In 'Tonight with Jonathan Ross', a blushing Edmondson supported Mayall's comparisons by referring to their writing as 'a bit Beckettian'.
10 Interview between Madeleine Morris and Matthew McFrederick. All subsequent references to Morris are from this interview.
11 This style of jostling was evident in the brief performance extracts transmitted on Channel 4's Box Office programme, where following Edmondson's line, 'He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet', Mayall extrapolated every possible gag associated from the sentence as he simultaneously mocked the smell emanating from their mouth and feet through his use of over-exaggerated hand movements and an overemphasis of specific words within the text. See *Waiting for Godot*, Box Office, Channel 4, 30 September 1991. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3bioHoZNi0 [accessed 11 February 2016].
12 Whitelaw performed in the play as part of the triple bill 'Play and Other Plays' at the Royal Court in 1976 and in *Enough*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* at Riverside Studios in 1986. Besides these productions, I have only found two earlier performances of *Footfalls* in London, which materialized at the Baron's Court Theatre and the Café Bar Ricardo in 1993, again presented as double bills.
13 Edward Beckett gained full responsibility as executor of the Samuel Beckett Estate following the death of Lindon in 2001.
14 Interview between Edward Beckett and Matthew McFrederick, 25 May 2023. All subsequent references to Edward Beckett are from this interview unless stated otherwise.

15 Taylor noted, 'the last time she offended against an author's stage directions, as she flagrantly did in her 1991 production of *Hedda Gabler*, she received almost universal acclaim' (Taylor 1994).

17 'The Beckett Plays' consisting of *Catastrophe*, *Ohio Impromptu* and *What Where*, had their London premieres at the Donmar on 27 August 1984. This production was directed by Alan Schneider, who died before it opened, and featured noted Beckett actors David Warrilow and Donald Davis. *Happy Days* was presented by Shared Experience in November 1984, directed by Clare Davidson, before touring.

18 Mitchell's reflections on *Endgame* came as she was directing an evening of six Beckett shorts (*Footfalls*, *Rockaby*, *Not I*, *Embers*, *A Piece of Monologue* and *That Time*) one year later for the RSC at The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon in October 1997, which suggests the positive experience she had working on *Endgame* one year previously.

19 Mitchell's later Beckett productions represent much more radical interpretations of Beckett's texts and are more representative of the German theatre culture where they were staged. These productions include *Footfalls* and *Neither* at the Berliner Staatsoper in 2014 and *Glücklige Tage* (*Happy Days*) at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, in 2015.

20 The company for the Efendi Productions staging of *Godot* at the Lyric Hammersith included: Kevork Malikyan (Estragon), Nadim Sawalha (Vladimir), Brian Purchase (Pozzo), Ben Daniels (Lucky) and Richard Claxton (Boy). Directed by Lisa Forrell and designed by Anthony Lamble.

21 The company for the Tottering Bipeds performance of *Godot* at the Watermans Arts Centre included: Jamie Beddard (Estragon), Simon Startin (Vladimir), Uri Roodner (Pozzo), Alex Harland (Lucky) and Tim Cook (Boy). Directed by Katie London and designed by Jessica Spanyol. Katie London, recalled the issues presented between the Beckett Estate and Deborah Warner, as she critiqued the Estate and their agents, Curtis Brown, for allowing their production the rights to tour England, though not London. As Peter Hall was planning his 1997 Old Vic production of *Godot*, Curtis Brown restricted the Tottering Bipeds performance in London before granting the performance rights after hearing their venue was in Brentford (See London 1997).

Chapter 8

1 Elsewhere in Britain, the Edinburgh Festival – under the directorship of Frank Dunlop – organized a 'Samuel Beckett Season' in 1984 at the Church Hill Theatre and, internationally, the Festival d'Automne's 'Hommage à Samuel Beckett' marked his seventy-fifth birthday in Paris in 1981.

2 It was read as part of 'Thoughtcrimes' at the Barbican, 16–27 January 1984; a joint presentation by the RSC with the Index on Censorship. Several plays were also read or performed, including, for example, *Mistake* by Vaclav Havel and *A Minor Apocalypse* by Tadeusz Konwicki.

3 Directed by Walter Asmus and designed by Louis le Brocquy, *Waiting for Godot* was the first major production of Beckett's theatre mounted by the Gate. First performed in its Dublin theatre in 1988, it was frequently revived, touring nationally and internationally until the conclusion of its 32 county tour of Ireland in 2008 at the Ardhowen Theatre in Enniskillen.

4 *Happy Days* was directed by Karel Reisz and designed by Tim Hatley. It was also presented at the 1999 Festival.

5 Hall's final production of *Godot* has been well documented in Jonathan Croall's *The Coming of Godot*.

6 See: http://www.gatetheatre.ie/section/TheGateTheatreproductionofKrappsLastTapetourstotheWestEndwithMichaelGambon [accessed 8 March 2016]. The Gate and Barbican did maintain their connection over Beckett with their stage adaptation of the novel *Watt* in 2013.

7 Several of these performances have been surveyed in detailed accounts by both Bradby (2001) and Croall (2005).

8 Bank of England, 'The financial crisis – 10 years on'. https://express.adobe.com/page/DAlRb7HdWiHqA/ [accessed on 4 August 2024]

9 McKellen and Stewart had last appeared on stage together in Tom Stoppard's play *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* for the RSC in 1977.

10 Stewart was often quoted in the production's pre-publicity, recalling having seen Peter O'Toole playing Vladimir at the Bristol Old Vic in 1957 as a seventeen year old and promising himself he would one day play the role himself.

11 While Callow was perhaps best known for his portrayal of Mozart in *Amadeus* at the NT in 1979, his work on Dickens and popular movies

such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), Pickup had also worked at the NT under Laurence Olivier.

12 Beckett was keen for Pickup to play Willie when he directed *Happy Days* at the Royal Court in 1979, but he was unavailable.

13 This production played at the following theatres: Malvern Theatres (5–14 March), Milton Keynes Theatre (16–21 March), Brighton Theatre Royal (23–28 March), Bath Theatre Royal (30 March–4 April), Norwich Theatre Royal (6–11 April), Edinburgh King's Theatre (13–18 April) and Newcastle Theatre Royal (20–25 April).

14 In 2013, they brought *Godot* to Broadway's Cort Theater in a repertory season with Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land* (1974). As their New York run demonstrated, their relationship with *Godot* had the ability to go viral on social media, as they shared images of their friendship embracing *Godot*'s well-known characteristics posing in bowler hats beside Elmo, Santa Claus, on top of the Empire State Building and beside bags of rubbish to much amusement.

Chapter 9

1 A new production of *Endgame* in 1994 was discussed but failed to materialize. It would have been directed by Antoni Libera, designed by Jocelyn Herbert and featured Stephen Rea and Barry McGovern as Hamm and Clov.

2 Beckett's first correspondence with Pinter was on 18 August 1960 before the pair would eventually meet on 11 January 1961.

3 Although this context offers a helpful insight into the differing relationships between the two writers and the Royal Court, it should also be pointed out that following the premieres of *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* at the Hampstead Theatre Club in 1960, they would be staged at the Court later that year.

4 Pinter was asked to direct *Ashes to Ashes* and *Mountain Language*, plays that Katie Mitchell would later direct for the Royal Court.

5 He saw Hume Cronyn play Krapp at the Forum in New York, and he relayed his criticisms around Cronyn's listening and stillness on stage to Beckett (see Beckett 2016: 314).

6 Interview between Edward Beckett and Matthew McFrederick, 25 May 2023.
7 As this production represents a phase of this performance history that I have directly contributed to, I have decided to employ the first person voice, where appropriate.
8 Although it feels odd, I have opted to refer to all cast and creatives in this production by their surnames to be consistent with the other chapters in this book, particularly as Asmus and Dwan are referred to elsewhere.
9 Asmus and Dwan rehearsed separately for a week at Annaghmakerrig.
10 This was documented in his rehearsal notes for *Footfalls*. (See Asmus and Watanabe 1977)
11 I do not recall Asmus referring back to these performances in rehearsals.
12 This production saw the three characters in the urns of *Play* combine to suggest the role of the Auditor. As Dwan suggested, 'they simply took a slight bow as a gesture'.
13 Dwan 'really wanted to revisit the piece again' and pitched it to the Royal Court as 'the 40th anniversary and it will cost nothing'.
14 Asmus's argument was that Beckett had mentioned the parallels between May and Mother to him in Germany.
15 Interview between Lisa Dwan and Matthew McFrederick, 24 August 2024. All subsequent references from Dwan are from this interview unless stated.
16 I recall Dwan only requiring a prompt in rehearsal once or twice, which was quite extraordinary for this notoriously difficult text.
17 Notes from my production notebook.
18 The production aimed for lengths of nine, twelve and fifteen seconds, which would get slower across later sections of the play.
19 We made – I would estimate – at least 100 recordings for Mother's Voice.
20 Notes from my production notebook.
21 Ibid.
22 Although I have tried to be attentive to different production roles, often it is difficult for the theatre historian to gain the voices of creatives or technicians who have contributed to performances than say actors or directors, who are more frequently interviewed in pre-show publicity.
23 The headboard for *Not I* was originally designed by Michael Vale for earlier performances.

24 To listen, visit: https://www.tomsmail.net/credit/beckett-trilogy/ [accessed 18 August 2024]
25 When Dwan first performed *Not I*, the lighting design was by Katharine Williams.
26 When Hammond arrived for rehearsals, one of my jobs involved explaining and demonstrating the timing of the cues and how this was broken down for each length and footfall, a sign that I had vastly improved as an interim sound operator since the first rehearsal.
27 The chair for *Rockaby* was positioned on the rostra stage right, and it was operated by Ben Carmichael during the Royal Court performances. He was blameless in this instance.
28 Asmus explained afterwards how in German theatres it could be common for directors to intervene during previews, but it was an unusual occurrence for a London performance.
29 Due to limitations identified in the Introduction to this book, this history has been unable to cover these productions – and many others – in sufficient depth. However, earlier publications have highlighted their importance within Beckettian performance histories. For Talawa's *Godot*, see Igweonu 2016. For the Young Vic *Happy Days*, see Heron and Abrahami 2015. For Touretteshero's *Not I*, see Johnson and Heron 2020 and Simpson 2022.

Chapter 10

1 Although no history can claim objectivity, I feel it is important to highlight where I have been personally engaged with performances so that this is transparent to readers and to maintain a critical distance from the event. I was consulted by Jones following the suggestion of a mutual friend. This was an unpaid meeting, and I was invited into this rehearsal to watch a run-through of both plays.
2 Interview between Richard Jones and Matthew McFrederick, 19 May 2023. All subsequent references to Jones are from this interview.
3 Daniel Radcliffe played A, Alan Cumming was B and C was performed by Jackson Milner.

4 https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html The figures from this repository relate to information collected from 22 January 2020 to 10 March 2023.
5 Further credits include: Designer – Louise Whitemore, Krapp – James Hayes, Joe – Niall Buggy, Gorman – Niall Buggy, Cream – David Threlfall.
6 *Pale Sister* was filmed as part of the BBC's Lights Up series.
7 Interview between Lisa Dwan and Matthew McFrederick, 24 August 2024. All subsequent references to Dwan are from this interview unless stated.
8 Dwan has appeared as Lizzie in the Netflix drama series *Top Boy* from 2013–2022.
9 Joan Plowright had to decline the role of Winnie for the UK premiere of *Happy Days* at the Court as she was pregnant.
10 From the Riverside Booking Confirmation Email on 8 June 2021.
11 Further credits include: Set and Costume Design – Simon Kenny, Sound Design – Adrienne Quartly, Lighting Design – Ben Ormerod, May – Charlotte Emmerson, Voice – Siân Phillips.

Conclusion

1 Amongst its articles and emphasis on British theatre – including essays by John Osborne and George Devine – were some of the first publications to discuss Beckett's theatre in a British context.
2 *Happy Days* was presented from 11 to 14 December 2024. Willie was played by Chris Diacolpoulos in this production, directed by Victor Sobchak and designed by Humphrys.
3 This Theatre Royal Haymarket *Godot* was staged from 13 September until 21 December 2024. The role of A Boy was played in each performance by either Luca Fone, Alexander Joseph or Ellis Pang. The production was designed by Rae Smith.
4 Interview between Edward Beckett and Matthew McFrederick, 25 May 2023.

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