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Resembling a harp on its side, Dublin's €60 million *Samuel Beckett Bridge*, designed by Santiago Calatrava, is a metaphor for the question this paper poses: 'how does Beckett connect literature and music whilst upholding their separateness?' Ludwig Wittgenstein's suggestion that 'understanding a sentence is more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think' stands us in good stead for an interdisciplinary approach to Beckett's late teleplays.¹

With this in mind, this paper uncovers the dominant musical disturbances at work behind the text in *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume*, written in 1975 and 1982 respectively.² In *Ghost Trio* a man sits in an empty room with a cassette player in his hands. Unlike Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape*, he does not operate the cassette, but hears random fragments of a Beethoven piano trio. This prompts him to think of a woman who is not there and, as a mysterious Voice says, he 'think[s] he hears her'.³ He walks around the room, looks out of the window, and returns to his seat. When he hears a knock at the door, he goes to answer it, thinking that it will be 'Her'. He is disappointed when a hooded boy answers and shakes his head, so he returns to the cassette and the play ends. In *Nacht und Träume*, a man sits at a table and when he hears a Schubert *lied* being hummed, he lowers his head and sleeps. In the top right corner of the screen a close up of the dreaming man's face appears. His head rises, he is given a sip of water, his brow is wiped and he holds the mysterious hands that have

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976. p. 143.

² *Ghost Trio* was first broadcast on 17 April, 1977 for the *Shades* episode of the *Lively Arts* programme on BBC, which also included *Not I* and *...but the clouds...* *Nacht und Träume*, originally entitled 'Nachtstück' ('Nightpiece') was broadcast in 1983.

³ Samuel Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. p. 410

bestowed this kindness. The camera goes back to the original image of the man now awake again at the table and the sequence is repeated.

I will begin by outlining Beckett's relationship with music before demonstrating how Beckett uses music as an instrument of deconstruction and subversion to unsettle and restrict his characters. I show how Beckett's adherence to his aesthetics of failure undermines the Romantic idealism of the music he fragments and recasts. I suggest that rather than providing harmony and resolution at the top of the artistic hierarchy, in Beckett's late works music is rendered discordant and inhibits his subjects. As Beckett himself said, he used television to bring together '[a]ll the old ghosts. *Godot* and *Eh Joe* over infinity'.⁴ Through television, normally watched in a private domestic setting, the effect of loneliness is doubled. The viewer mirrors Beckett's subjects as he or she sits alone in a room and is led by the same music (which is the only sign of life). After Beckett told Charles Juliet that 'the sense of hearing is increasingly becoming more important than that of sight', Beckett used television to move away from the predominance of the image.⁵ This comment appears counter-intuitive, but television is an aural as well as a visual medium, and Beckett used this as the foundation for his writing. After developing the musicalisation of language in his radio plays (where Music is a fully-fledged character in *Words and Music* and *Cascando*), television allowed Beckett to become even more invested in the musicality of his text. Ultimately, television enabled Beckett to become compositional in his style. *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume* are orchestrated rather than written works, for their subjects respond to the musical structure, which, as is evident in Beckett's notebooks, he planned first.⁶ By casting a permanent grey

⁴ Beckett qtd. in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996. p. 621. Brian Wall picked up on this idea of revisiting and recording old characters, stating: 'television serves as the field upon which the ghosts of the dead will be summoned'. Wall, Brian. '...but the clouds...', *Quad, Nacht und Träume: Fantasy, Death, Repetition*, *JOBS*, Vol. 18, Issue 1-2 (Sept., 2009): p. 91.

⁵ Beckett, Samuel qtd. in *Beckett and Musicality*. Ed Nicholas Till & Sara Jane Bailes. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2014. p. 196. Even when speaking about painter Bram van Velde, Beckett told Charles Juliet that '[t]he eyes are now much less important'. Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*. Trans. Janey Tucker. Leiden: Academic Press Leiden, 1995. p. 155.

⁶ See Beckett's *Ghost Trio* notebook (MS 1519/1) at the Beckett Collection, University of Reading.

shadow over the image, and zooming in and out when the music's volume rises and falls, Beckett confuses the viewer's auditory and visual senses by encouraging a synaesthetic engagement with the play. Thus, Beckett's teleplays are soundscapes where speech follows musical sound. With such opacity, the movement of the image within its frame has to be carved out of sound, not light. Beckett uses television to get inside the skulls of these fragile subjects and create wordless dramas.

Brad Bucknell suggests that, far from being 'helped' or 'clarified', Beckett's works are *complicated* by music, which serves to fragment linearity and direction. This chimes with the outcome of Beckett's use of Beethoven and Schubert.⁷ Beckett re-appropriates Beethoven and Schubert's scores and gives them a strictly Modernist sensibility. This music is not used to rationalise the disordered thoughts of Beckett's protagonists, but to confuse the past with the present and create half-remembered, half-invented scenarios. Beckett's appropriation of Romantic music unglues point and line rather as the atonal composers did, forming instead an assemblage of ill-fitting fragments. Melodic disjunction is the result, not only of Schoenberg's emancipating dissonance, but also of Beckett's drive toward atonal literature.

⁷ See Brad Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, and Stein*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Conclusion.



Fig. 1. Avigdor Arikha, *Samuel Beckett Listening to Music*, 9 December 1976, hard graphite on rag paper, 26.8 x 34.5.8

Beckett's engagement with music as an amateur pianist and avid listener, his erudition when speaking with contemporary composers (such as Morton Feldman and Marcel Mihalovici), his tendencies to conduct rather than direct his actresses, and synonymy of word and note: all lead one naturally into musico-literary discourse.⁹ The above sketch (Fig. 1) by Avigdor Arikha depicts Beckett listening to Schubert's *Piano Sonata in Bb major, D. 960*, performed by Artur Schnabel. Beckett's tastes, however, were not limited to traditional composers. Though he was particularly fond of Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert, he also enjoyed the percussive rhythms found in Bartók.¹⁰ Arikha testifies to Beckett's eclectic tastes when he recalls the period during which they listened to 'quite a bit of dodecaphonic music –

⁸ Image reproduced in: Omer, Mordechai. 'Passage of Time: Portraits of Samuel Beckett by Avigdor Arikha', in *Drawing on Beckett: Portraits, Performances, and Cultural Contexts*, Ed. Linda Ben-Zvi. Tel Aviv: Assaph, 2003, pp. 1-34.

⁹ Billie Whitelaw offers interesting insights into Beckett's conducting manner during stage rehearsals in her autobiography: *Billie Whitelaw...Who He?* London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1995. Other contemporary composers who have written pieces in response to Beckett's works include: Luciano Berio, Philip Glass, György Kurtág, Heinz Holliger, Michael Nyman, Richard Barrett, Mark-Anthony Turnage, and John Tilbury.

¹⁰ The percussive rhythms in *Quad* (1981) are an example of Beckett's less conventional tastes.

Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, (before 1959)'.¹¹ Moreover, Beckett's interest in music was not passive or uninformed. Walter Beckett, one of the many musicians of the Beckett family, praised 'Sam's musical knowledge', adding that he 'conceived and wrote his works in a rhythmical fashion as if they were music' for 'words to him were notes' that 'had to be clear to the ear and at the same time create a word picture'.¹² Although Beckett could be described as a composer with words, in Beckett's late works music does not say (or do) what language cannot. Walter Pater's famous maxim that 'all art aspires to the condition of music' does not apply.¹³ Beckett's crescendo of the note and diminuendo of the word come at the expense of communication and coherency. Music's role is not to clarify, but to lead, and the direction it takes its listener is far from consolatory. Sara Bailes and Nicholas Till remark that for Beckett, listening provided a way of 'approaching the predicament of one's existence and, in particular, encountering the self', and in these teleplays, where Figure sits hunched over the cassette listening to the music it plays, and Dreamer sits listening to a faintly audible, unlocatable tune, Beckett certainly uses music to 'encounter the self'.¹⁴ Furthermore, as we sit watching and listening in our own empty chambers, we also confront the 'predicament of our existence'.

In these teleplays music distracts, obscures, and controls the characters (Figure and Dreamer), propelling their inevitable degradation and irresolution. Figure and Dreamer are two helpless souls incapable of escaping the confinement caused by the musical form that directs them. As a result, they sink deeper into an aporetic world.¹⁵ Music adds further doubt

¹¹ Arikha qtd. in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 496.

¹² Walter Beckett qtd. in Deborah Weigel, *Words and Music: Camus, Beckett, Cage, Gould*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010. p. 58.

¹³ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry*. Ed. and Intro. Adam Philips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. p. 86.

¹⁴ *Beckett and Musicality*. p. 4.

¹⁵ In his chapter on Beckett and aporia in *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge defines an aporia as: 'a Greek word meaning "difficulty, being at a loss", literally, "a pathless path", a track that gives out. In classical rhetoric it denotes real or pretended doubt about an issue, uncertainty as to how to proceed in a discourse'. David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1992. p. 219. The sense of disorder and uncertainty the aporia stands for and creates is mirrored in Beckett's work, particularly in *The Unnamable*.

and frustration to Figure and Dreamer's aporetic chambers. Consequently, nullity becomes the driving force behind Beckett's form, and Figure and Dreamer are obliged to affirm and exist in this indeterminate vacuum. When exploring Beckett's writing process from score to text, one can see where and how music acts as such a dominant agent that it highlights how language is 'doomed to fail', due to the ineffability of the feeling or idea that it is trying to express.¹⁶ Dreamer and Figure's inability to 'utter of eff' is made worse by music's persistent lack of consolation which causes their wearied frustration.¹⁷ In *The Exhausted*, Gilles Deleuze suggests that in Beckett's works 'the visual image is dragged along by music, the aural image that rushes towards its own abolition. Both rush toward the end, all possibility exhausted'.¹⁸ Thus, in line with a Deleuzian reading, destruction inadvertently becomes construction, in a musical series of undos without termination. The play's fading in and out of Beckett's carefully selected selection of Beethoven and Schubert extracts mirrors the insubstantiality of our being-in-the-wor(l)d. Figure and Dreamer remain trapped between the desire to express and the knowledge that this desire holds elements of denial and failure.

Many early critics like James Knowlson and Enoch Brater, perhaps influenced by the paintings shown before *Ghost Trio* begins, focus on the *image*, as both an iconographic and minimalist depiction of the twentieth-century human condition. However, more recently, Michael Maier and Catherine Laws have brought our attention to the way *Ghost Trio* is structured through its use of music. Whereas both Maier and Laws suggest that music links Figure to the woman he yearns for, offering a moment of comfort, I suggest that music is a weapon that breaks the bond between Figure and his lost love. To do this, music takes control of Figure's movements and thoughts as he follows the musical patterns as if they were stage directions.

¹⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, Ed. C. J. Ackerley. London: Faber & Faber, 2009. pp. 52-53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53. Connections to *Watt* and the Music Master's scene with Addie in *Embers* can be made in line with being unable to "Eff!" See: Beckett, Samuel. *CDW*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. p. 259.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', Trans. Anthony Uhlmann. *SubStance*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Issue 78 (1995): p. 18.

The second movement of Beethoven's *Geistertrio, Op. 70 No. 1*, informs Beckett's writing process as well as Figure's existence. Beethoven's music structures the play and surprises the viewer's expectations. Beckett uses this familiar piece and distorts it to create a greater effect of distress for Figure and the audience precisely by debunking our sense of familiarity. When we expect the continuation of a melody, Beckett disrupts Beethoven's sequence and the music surprises us with either a contrasting phrase or silence. Arguably, Beckett's fragmentation of Beethoven causes a more jarring effect than if he had used atonal music which does not offer memorable melodies. As Beckett's use of Beethoven simultaneously creates and weakens the structure of the play, music can be interpreted as the deconstructivist catalyst at work behind the scenes. As a result, the music destabilises its own structure, much like the 'eccentric centre' of Erskine's painting in *Watt*.¹⁹ Music works through a cycle of composition, decomposition and recomposition. As Beckett 'cuts up' Beethoven's score to create caesuras and sudden discontinuities in the piece, this 'Beckettified Beethoven' enables the disruption of linearity and prevents progression. As musicologist Beatrice Hanssen writes, '[s]een against the context of a mundane, banal, often violent modernity, music's anti-iconic and nonvisual rupturing of modernity takes the form of a caesura'.²⁰ These breaks mark uncomfortable pregnant moments that foreground Figure's isolation.

Alone in a room with nothing but 'Dust' on 'that specimen of floor', Figure waits for a change in his monotonous existence.²¹ Hoping that the knock on the door is a sign of the

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida explains that the 'eccentric centre' is the place where deconstruction takes place within the work. For Derrida, deconstructivism is 'already at work', it is not at the centre, but 'in an eccentric centre, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct'. Derrida stresses that deconstructivism does not supervene afterwards or from the outside. He argues that 'it is always already at work in the work' and justifies this comment by saying that 'the destructive force of Deconstruction is always already contained within the very architecture of the work'. Jacques Derrida, *Memories: for Paul de Man*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. p. 153.

²⁰ Hanssen qtd. in *Sound Figures of Modernity: German Music and Philosophy*, ed. Jost Hermand and Gerhard Richter. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. p. 185.

²¹ *CDW*. p. 408.

imagined woman's return, Figure is disappointed when a hooded Boy 'shakes his head faintly' and walks away.²² Figure returns to the taunting sounds of Beethoven's piano trio that direct both the visual (Figure) and the auditory (Voice). Music's omnipresence weakens Figure's agency, for he is always at the whim of the cassette. The eeriness of the music, which has little sense of progression, translates into the nebulousness of the screen-shots as Figure blends into his grey surroundings. Throughout the play, the viewer witnesses the human process towards complete ruination, or 'Shades of grey', as Voice states in Act 1, whilst the listener hears music's mushrooming, all-consuming predominance.²³ Music manipulates the state of play by blotting-out Voice by the end of Act 2 and chaining Figure to the cassette. Ultimately, the more control music asserts, the more forlorn and alone Figure becomes.

The cassette is a commanding and ideologically loaded artefact. It is an agent of recall that replays disordered extracts from Beethoven's score. This machine contains the musical framework that structures and dictates Figure's actions. According to Daniel Albright, radio, television and the tape recorder gave Beckett clues for reconceiving humans as 'playback device[s]' and 'conglomeration[s] of a human being and electronic machine'.²⁴ Beckett's cassette has a life of its own and cannot be controlled by Figure. The cassette consistently breaks the bond between Figure and the woman he desires and thinks is at the door. It makes Figure live in limbo between his past recollections and present reality. With no stage direction instructing Figure's use of the cassette, though he pores over it, he is not in charge of the music emitted. Figure is passive and helpless, at the whim of the cassette and its musical direction. He merely mirrors the circular and unprogressive musical form it emits.

A part of, but apart from the repeating musical pattern of the play, Figure is fettered to Beckett's musical organisation. This makes Figure's yearning for 'Her' a fruitless endeavour.

²² Ibid., p. 413.

²³ Ibid., p. 408.

²⁴ Daniel Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. p. 120.

Figure is denied both authority and liberation; he must wait for musical instruction whilst his anxiety and sense of imprisonment build. As he moves around his chamber (from door, to pallet, to window, to door, etc.), Figure's physical movements mirror his internal thoughts, which ricochet between dejection and possibility. This leaves him in a state of flux. 'Imperceptibly ajar' the door and window amplify Figure's solitary confinement forged by musical bars.²⁵ Beckett's transferral of autonomy from Figure to music is, according to Jonathan Bignell, part of a 'deliberate strategy of deconstructing agency'.²⁶

Fittingly, Beethoven's score is itself replete with harmonic contrast and tonal tension. Beckett's chosen extracts hover between the two main key areas of Beethoven's second movement: D minor and C major (interestingly, not the relative F major key). Thus, the music itself is in a state of transition, anticipating but cut short from its harmonic counterpart. As Catherine Laws observes, the material is 'in a state of harmonic and textual flux, [this] emphasises its instability'.²⁷ With its slow crescendos and diminuendos, chromatics, silences, and impressionistic use of tremolando, the tensions we see in Figure are visual representations of the modernised and unsympathetic music.

For example, at the beginning of Act 2 as the music starts, Figure raises his head, Voice responds with 'No one', music stops, Figure relapses and Voice commands 'Again'.²⁸ This endless cycle of disappointment mirrors Beethoven's score where three sustained notes in the strings (violin and cello) followed by a mournful response on the piano, taunt the listener, creating an ominous mood filled with suspense. Where Beethoven's wraithlike,

²⁵ CDW. p. 408. Mary Bryden links the word 'overture' (from the Late latin *operatura* meaning 'opening') to the 'making available of oneself for the reception of some external event or atmosphere'. Bryden suggests that music 'is a site of radical possibility and unpredictability' and links this with the windows and doors to Figure's chamber. However, the door to Figure's cell has no visible handle to be fully opened and the rain outside the window restricts visibility and has an enclosing effect that reduces his possibility for escape. See Mary Bryden, qtd. in *Beckett and Musicality*, p. 192.

²⁶ Jonathan Bignell, *Beckett on screen: the television plays*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 98.

²⁷ Catherine Laws, *Headaches Among the Overtones: Music in Beckett/Beckett in Music*. New York: Rodopi, 2013. p. 148.

²⁸ CDW. p. 410.

doleful passages are audible when the camera zooms-in for a 'close-up' on Figure when he is alone and bowed over the cassette or standing in the centre of the room, the same passages are 'unheard' when he is at the door or fringes of the room.²⁹ Music embodies the point of tension between the cruel push and pull of hope and suffering that Figure feels. Under Beckett's direction, the musical offering is simultaneously a retraction.

As the music replays the same phrases, Figure is made to repeat the same actions and the teleplay becomes a recording of Figure's mechanical motions. His happiness seems to lie in either the future or the past. The present is a 'dark cloud over a sunny plain' continually moving and recasting a shadow of ennui over fond recollections and hopes.³⁰ To reinforce Figure's monotonous routine, Voice ends Act 2 by saying 'Repeat', forcing Figure to perform his actions again.³¹ Repetition is a key component in the simultaneous doing and undoing of communication. Voice's repeated interrogatives reinforce her presence, but reduce her impact as she exposes the arbitrariness and emptiness of her language. Steven Connor suggests that repetition is at once an affirmation and negation of survival in language, for 'if repetition is the sign of the endlessness of language, then repetition is a strategy for turning language against itself, using words to erase other words'.³² The deconstruction and displacement of Voice's repetitions are embodied by Figure, whose repetitive movements have a similar effect as language does for Voice.

Furthermore, in a play operating on the basis of repetition with a difference, Figure and Voice circulate in a confined sense of space and time according to musical direction. *Ghost Trio* consists of a 'perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms' and like

²⁹ Ibid., p. 409.

³⁰ Schopenhauer qtd. in Singh, R. Raj. *Schopenhauer: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum, 2010, p. 46.

³¹ CDW. p. 411.

³² Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 16-17.

Play (1963), it loops back on itself.³³ I suggest that this encircling effect is because the structure contains a *da capo* that functions as a musical impression of involuntary memory. This *da capo* is regressive rather than progressive and, following Giambattista Vico's cyclic theory of history, *Ghost Trio* lapses back into chaos. In *Proust*, Beckett defines *da capo* as 'a testimony to the intimate and ineffable nature of an art that is perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable'.³⁴ With Figure's movements triggered by the recurring Beethoven excerpts, the musical form of *Ghost Trio* features as a means of musical transportation whose journey is a circular path that resists resolution. *Ghost Trio* does not offer answer; it ends where it began.

As the actions and music repeat themselves in all three acts to create a loop, Beckett's score charts the process of Figure's involuntary memory. Whilst the notion of a 'fragmented loop' seems confusing, if not impossible, this is precisely the effect Beckett is trying to achieve. The repetitions of disconnected extracts prevent Figure from indulging in memories of his lost love and promulgate his endless circling movements around his chamber. This split between his body (constantly looping) and mind (seemingly fractured in his thought processes) reinforces Beckett's anti-Cartesian stance seen in works like *Whoroscope*, *Molloy*, and *Watt*. When we see Figure bowed down over the cassette for the third time, the longest continuous excerpt of music is played. Now Figure is completely alone: Voice and Boy have left and music is his only company. This recurring theme, or implicit *da capo*, not only symbolises Figure's thoughts of 'Her' but also marks the point at which he is at his lowest ebb. Beckett's text fits within Beethoven's structure to create an endless loop of slightly varying repetitious acts. This slight variation means that *Ghost Trio* is an *imperfect circle* where Figure's solicitation of resolution entails an ellipsis or 'simple redoubling of the route'

³³ Beckett, *Murphy*. New York: Grove Press: 1957, p. 24. *Play* ends with a *da coda* and repeats itself before finally ending.

³⁴ Beckett, *Proust*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1931. p. 15.

rather than an enlightening conclusion.³⁵ Figure is denied company and left either ‘standing irresolute’ or with his ‘*head bowed right down*’.³⁶ In Beckett’s selected fragments, there is an implicit *dal segno* as the music continually curls inward. This is physically mirrored by Figure’s foetal-shaped position as he sits coiled around the cassette. We see Figure looking like a snake-stone fossil: ‘*With growing music move in slowly to close-up of head bowed right down over cassette now held in arms and invisible*’, a position he is to ‘*[h]old till end of Largo*’.³⁷ Here, Figure embodies the form of the teleplay, one of retrograde. Figure remains silent, unable to communicate, drawn to the cassette; in return the music from the cassette fades in and out to prompt the rise and fall of Figure’s emotions and mirror his transient appearance. The play is a build up to an event that never happens; it is not concerned with the event, but provides the conditions for the evasion and erasure of the hoped-for arrival of ‘Her’.

Despite showing signs of forlornness and debility, Figure still hopes for company. His ‘*sharply raised head*’ as he ‘*thinks he hears her*’ emphasises the extent of his hope whilst reinforcing his disappointment.³⁸ By turning ‘unchanging future into unchangeable past’, music does not fulfil promise, it silently drains it.³⁹ According to Enoch Brater, music ‘establishes the overall mood of frustrated expectation’; the viewer experiences this frustration as the music and Figure alike keep repeating the same phrases.⁴⁰ Ceaseless repetition obscures clear referentiality and semantic meaning as words adopt musical patterns. In this teleplay music’s promise and retraction forestalls hope only to cause

³⁵ Derrida explains in *Ellipsis* that ‘the abyss of representation remains dominated by its rhythm indefinitely’. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 2001. p. 378.

³⁶ *CDW*. pp. 412, 414.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

³⁹ Beckett, ‘The Unnamable’ in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett*. New York: Grove Press, 1958. p. 412.

⁴⁰ Enoch Brater, *10 Ways of Thinking about Samuel Beckett: The Falsetto of Reason*. London: Meuthen Drama, 2011. p. 145.

disappointment. Eric Levy suggests that hope is ‘the source of moral suffering’.⁴¹ In my reading, music is what Levy terms as ‘hope’. Only Schopenhauer’s insistence on the immediacy of suffering and misfortune in music can justify Figure’s existence. For Schopenhauer, from the moment the melody and harmony is uttered, desires are aroused in the listener for resolution, as the musical journey is an analogue for our journey from life to death. Constantly withholding the final chord of the piece and cutting up sections so that resolution is upset by a series of discords, Beckett extends Figure’s sense of longing until it reaches a pitch of incomparable misery.⁴² Figure appears as ‘an incarnation of dissonance’ in an environment that isolates and alienates him from his surroundings.⁴³ In a cruel twist of fate, Figure’s hopefulness, shown in his reaction to the music he hears, becomes the cause of his helplessness.

Seven years on, *Nacht und Träume* is even more minimal, dark and gloomy, as Beckett pushes existence to its brink and marks the instant when the visual and vocal are swept aside, supplanted by music. As Beckett strove towards impotence, greater abstraction and minimalism, he turned increasingly to music to express this aporia of existential angst. As Beckett moves away from the predominance of the word and image, music quite literally calls the tune. From *Molloy* onwards the goal was to create a work like *Nacht und Träume*: ‘to obliterate texts’, ‘blacken margins’ and ‘fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery’.⁴⁴ Here, Beckett empties his play of words and possibility. His protagonist’s world is ‘blank and

⁴¹ Eric Levy, ‘The Beckettian Mimesis of Time’. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (Winter, 2011): p. 98.

⁴² In Act 2 of *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner explores the quasi-satisfied, quasi-frustrated dissonance awaiting final consonance, for Tristan, in utter anguish longs and calls out for the peace of death from his agonising longing, expressed in the delaying ‘Tristan chord’. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: Volume II*. Trans. E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover, 1966. p. 456.

⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Clifton P. Fadiman. New York: Dover, 1995. p. 91.

⁴⁴ Beckett, ‘Molloy’ in *Three Novels*. p. 13.

flat', his misery is inconsolable and his faculties are closing down. *Nacht und Träume* is as close as Beckett gets to 'the end', the nihilism at degree zero.

Nacht und Träume depicts a Dreamer sitting at a table with his head drooping down into his hands, in need of comfort and compassion. Dreamer falls asleep to Schubert's *lied* of the same name D. 827 (first hummed then sung) which fades as his dreamt-self appears in the top right corner of the screen. In the silent dream sequence, the dreamt-self's head is lifted, he's given a sip of water and his brow is wiped with a cloth. With outstretched hands, the dreamt-self holds the hand of the invisible woman and pulls it towards him. Covered over in faintly lit darkness, the other hand of the invisible woman rests gently on the head of the dreamt-self, as if in acknowledgement of Dreamer's sorrow. This image is short-lived and almost immediately fades, suggesting that the sentimental solace of German Romanticism has no place in an *unheimlich* world of angst and isolation.⁴⁵

Interpretations of *Nacht und Träume* range from seeing the play as an image of prayer (Brater and Knowlson) to a musical haven suspended in a void (Catherine Laws). Ruby Cohn sees the teleplay as consisting of a flow of sound that 'enhances that feeling of entropic infinitude'.⁴⁶ I shall expand on Cohn's perspective to explain how music amplifies Dreamer's sense of irredeemable sadness, what this 'entropic infinitude' is and if one can escape from it. The polarity of dreams and reality, music and silence, darkness and light, disconnection and company, all beg the question: is Dreamer's unwavering hope doomed to failure, or does he require it to go on living? In line with a musico-literary discourse, the remainder of this paper asks: how does Schubert's music shape this paradigm of hope followed by despair, and does it accentuate Dreamer's sense of pain or release?

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Miron Grindea claimed that Schubert was 'the composer who spoke most to [Beckett] whom he considered a friend in suffering'. Grindea qtd. in *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed Mary Bryden. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 183.

⁴⁶ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 158. I find Cohn's use of 'enhance' here misleading due to its positive connotations. A more unbiased word like 'increase' would suit the context better.

The image of Schubert as a composer with ‘incandescent purity and intensity of vision’, as John Reed puts it, ties in with Beckett’s image as a writer. However, when Reed adds that Schubert’s music ‘speaks, with a kind of consoling sadness, of a lost world of innocence and joy’ differences between the two emerge.⁴⁷ Where Schubert consoles, Beckett does not. Due Beckett’s fragmentation of Schubert’s *lied*, *Nacht und Träume* does not allow therapeutic resolution, and melancholy persists. Dreamer is beyond consolation, and the music is an expression of his despair, not an act of healing. Under this less Romantic hue, Beckett can be seen as a messenger of human sorrow and suffering.

Beckett’s teleplay uses the last seven bars (and quaver of the eighth bar before the end of the piece) of Schubert’s *lied*. The inclusion of this semitone ‘sighing figure’ in E for ‘holde’ (‘gentle’) crosses the bar-line on the first syllable of the word, and as Susan Youens observes:

The combination of –h, the softest consonant of all, and the dark vowel –o makes of this rhythmic divergence an enactment of sighing, an exhalation of mingled yearning and loss. When the double-dotting [of the crotchet in D#] prolongs the syllable further, no one could mistake the fervour of the persona’s desire for reunion with dreams and night.⁴⁸

This tired caressing note and the dilatory weight of Matthaüs von Collin’s poetry create a long drawn-out melodic line that sets the introverted and contemplative tone for Beckett’s play. However, the play’s seriousness is not sugared by empathic understanding: instead, music perpetuates Dreamer’s cycle of disappointment. In Dreamer’s alternating states of consciousness, Beckett’s purpose is akin to Lawrence Kramer’s description of music’s own purpose: ‘to represent the activity of a unique subject, conscious, self-conscious, and unconscious, whose experience takes shape as a series of conflicts and reconciliations

⁴⁷ John Reed, *Schubert, the Final Years*. London: Faber & Faber, 1972. p. 269.

⁴⁸ Susan Youens, *Schubert’s Late Lieder: Beyond the Song-Cycles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 92.

between inner and outer reality'.⁴⁹ Though he ricochets between these states of being, Dreamer remains passive; he does not pace across the stage like M in *Footfalls*, or rock in a chair next to a window like the senile woman in *Rockaby*. Dreamer has lost his agency and is a victim of his own existence. By the time we see him, he appears lifeless and beyond hope.

As a silently dreaming presence, the subject is no longer made of words, nor does he exist in words, but is composed of an inner-music. Defined by music, and acting through its presence, as Laws points out: 'heard through the voice of someone within the play, the music operates more intimately, as part of a personal expressive vocabulary'.⁵⁰ With no scene or setting to develop, the music is adopted, 'becoming part of what that individual 'is' or has to "say"'.⁵¹ Whilst I agree with Laws's assertion that music becomes synonymous with the makeup of Dreamer, I would like to suggest that this is a more sinister dynamic than is at first apparent. The solitariness of Dreamer is exaggerated by Schubert's vocal line which, lacking the context of a piano accompaniment, leaves the unanchored melody partial and drifting. Beckett's removal of the measured pulse of the bass tremolando isolates the voice and, in turn, Dreamer. Hence, *Nacht und Träume* depicts a lone man sitting forlorn and speechless in a musical terra-incognita. The repeated extracts defamiliarise Schubert's comforting, lulling tones, making the listener question its innocence and integrity as a lullaby. We feel estranged as music takes on a more sinister character and the scene becomes one of horrific entrapment. As it induces sleep but prevents Dreamer from experiencing physical connectivity and comfort, music is a metaphorical prison that traps Dreamer in a terrifying cage of nihilism and helplessness. The dreamt-self becomes a morbid manifestation of the denial of sentimentality. Originally believed to be 'somewhat too sentimental' for Martin Esslin, it now seems as though *Nacht und Träume* is deviously sinister, using the promise of sentimentality

⁴⁹ Lawrence Kramer, *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. pp. 201-2.

⁵⁰ *Headaches Among the Overtones*. p. 202.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

to lure Dreamer and the audience into a world of denial and retraction.⁵² ‘Push[ing] this impoverishment to the brink of silence’, Beckett uses silence to create an experience of ‘the menace, the miracle, the memory, of an unspeakable trajectory’ that is ‘communicated by the intervals’ and ‘between the phrases’ of Schubert’s *lied*.⁵³ The tragedy here, as in *Ghost Trio*, is that of losing one’s grasp of the hands of his loved one.

The most significant point in the play is when, in the ‘kinder light’, a hand ‘appears and rests gently’ on the dreamt-self’s head, having emerged from the ‘dark beyond and above’.⁵⁴ The ‘kindness’ of the dimly lit room and the ‘gentle’ hands (‘large but female’ as Beckett specified) add to the sense of comfort and compassion exchanged in this scene.⁵⁵ When the dreamt-self’s hands are softly clasped, the image is reminiscent of Dürer’s ‘wonderful etching of praying hands’, that Beckett had hanging in his ancestral home at Cooldrinagh.⁵⁶ A figureless tangibility is presented in both Dürer’s painting and Beckett’s teleplay, running along Schopenhauerean lines of sentimentality and suffering. Here, the palpability of human touch is not felt but imagined because whereas the dreamt-self ‘feels’ this touch, Dreamer experiences no physical contact and his desire for tangibility remains. Dreamer cannot clasp the woman’s hands; they only appear as the ephemeral figments of his dreams. His raised head could also be interpreted as a searching pose, suggestive of his lack, as well as a waking pose. Music, the woman’s replacement, is a dissatisfying nonentity in relation to the physical presence of another person. Its detached sounds compliment

⁵² Martin Esslin, ‘Towards the Zero of Language’ in *Beckett’s Later Fiction and Drama*, Ed. James Acheson, and Kateryna Arthur. London: Macmillan, 1987. p. 46. Whilst Beckett’s use of German Romanticism may be seen as sentimental indulgence, upon closer inspection, his selection of the last few bars of this piece, played without piano accompaniment, creates a darker more elusive sound. Beckett removes narrative to provide his teleplay with an even more muted and solemn sound than the piece ordinarily creates. James Knowlson also challenges Esslin to defend this teleplay’s sobriety. Knowlson comments that it ‘could have been sentimental, even maudlin’, but ‘the mysterious quality of the action, the beauty of the singing [...] and the specificity of the repeated, almost ritualistic patterns avoid this’. *Damned to Fame*. p. 683.

⁵³ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2013, p. 54; Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to middling Women*. New York: Arcade, 2012. p. xvii.

⁵⁴ *CDW*. p. 465.

⁵⁵ *Damned to Fame*. p. 600.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 682.

Dreamer's detached existence. The music's fragmented state (only the last seven bars are used) correlates with Dreamer's split between his waking and dreaming states. This void between consolation (dreamt-self) and isolation (Dreamer when awake) exaggerates his sadness and longing as he yearns for what he lacks and exists only in his dreams. Trish McTighe suggests that 'the sense that takes over in the darkness is that of touch [and] the impossibility of that touch ever occurring'.⁵⁷ Dreamer is caught within the nexus of flesh and spirit, reality and dreams, darkness and light. His situation is confused between having company in his dream and being alone when he wakes. If the viewer saw his floating dream sequence as his reality and his position at the table as his dream, *Nacht und Träume* could be interpreted as a sentimental teleplay of a man who is comforted as he nears death. However, Beckett's inversion of this removes any tenderness: Dreamer must wait alone, unable to speak or move. Haptic certitude is rejected through the play's musical construction. As music both triggers the dream and wakes the dreamt-self, Schubert's *lied* emphasises the nothingness between these two states of consciousness.

Finally, Beckett's attack on language is complete as his art is more a visualisation of Schubert's *lied* than a body of text or tissue of quotations.⁵⁸ In these late works Beckett relied purely on music to convey meaning and orchestrate structure and, as Albright identifies, he 'adapted his plots from musical structures' as 'the strangely evacuated, incidentless textures of the plots often reflect the circularity, the unprogressiveness of certain musical structures'.⁵⁹ As Dreamer and his dreamt-self are positioned on diagonally opposing sides of a grey void (separated by 'darkness throughout Space', to quote Collin's verse), the split selves appear bound together by the tinge of pain that is extenuated by Schubert's melancholy *lied*.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Trish McTighe, "'Noli me tangere': Haptic Certitude in Beckett's *Eh Joe* and *Nacht und Träume*". *Modern Drama*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (2012): p. 217.

⁵⁸ Albright describes Beckett's transformation of actual pieces of music into stage spectacles a 'visionary hallucination'. *Beckett and Aesthetics*. p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155. In musical terms this is comparable to the *ritornello* or *dal segno*.

⁶⁰ Matthaes Casimir Von Collin, qtd. and trans. in Martin Esslin, 'Towards the Zero of Language'. p. 45.

Beckett entreats us to gaze into this musically carved void so that as we relate our own solitariness with Dreamer's, we peer into a reflection of ourselves and expose our own inner emptiness. When Beckett cut and edited Schubert's *lied*, he dispensed with the connective tissues of harmonic progression. As a result the teleplay is stylistically like Adorno's definition of music compressed into a moment: 'valid as an eruptive revelation of negative experience'.⁶¹ Musically demarcated into the two most basic states of being (waking and sleeping), *Nacht und Träume* emerges as discretely as it retracts: a true representation of existence.

To revisit our original image of Calatrava's *Samuel Beckett Bridge*, music and literature do not reside on opposite sides of the Liffey, but they do not meet in the middle either. Rather, music is the bridge across which language tentatively treads and on which Figure and Dreamer exist. By cutting-up and reordering Beethoven's *Geistertrio* and Schubert's *Nacht und Träume*, Beckett uses music to create a schism between his subjects and their lost loves. By removing the *Gesamtwerk* feel of these works, Beckett 'makes it new' by deconstructing and reappropriating Beethoven and Schubert, dragging two Romantic composers into a twentieth-century 'literature of the unword'.⁶² Beckett arranges teleplays of dissonance led by his music's tonal changes and silences. With this he is able to capture the silence of his subjects and their spaces. This is not, however, a metaphysical silence that facilitates Quietist reflection, as it is in texts like *Company* (1979). Instead, *Ghost Trio*'s silence is troubled by Voice's unsettling commands and *Nacht und Träume*'s silence is not real, but dreamt. As Maurice Blanchot writes, 'there is no silence, for within that voice the silence eternally speaks'.⁶³

⁶¹ Adorno qtd. in Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. p. 272.

⁶² Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn. John Calder: London, 2001. p. 54.

⁶³ Maurice Blanchot, 'Where now? Who now?' in *Samuel Beckett. Longman Critical Readers*, ed. Jennifer Birkett and Kate Ince. London: Longman, 2000. p. 94.

Like a Mondrian grid, the viewer's focus is directed towards the deliberate omissions crucial for comprehensible discourse, or, to continue the analogy with Mondrian's deceptively random abstract expressionist paintings, our gaze flits to the decentred blocks of colour within the exacting structure. In Beckett's teleplays, it is the disconnection between physical and imagined beings (Figure, Dreamer and their absent companions) created by musical perforation of the text, that severs tangibility.⁶⁴ In a Derridean fashion, the musical event or 'rupture' illustrates that the assumption that there is a rational centre is an artificial construct. We are all floundering, feeling as if the rug has been pulled from underneath our feet. With no sense of an ending, we drift aimlessly with the throbbing beat of music as our guide. These negative endings are brought about through decay, degeneration, and defeat; they are not metaphysical triumphs, rather, expressions of loss. Adorno's musical dialectic that moves towards its own liquidation suggests that in this 'on-going movement of negation', 'all music-making is a recherche du temps perdu'.⁶⁵ As Figure and Dreamer, like Vladimir and Estragon before them, sit and wait (for Godot or 'Her'), the viewer is ever more convinced by the immediate reality that there is 'nothing to be done'.⁶⁶ Blaise Pascal, one of Beckett's 'old chestnuts' described the anguish of passivity follows:⁶⁷

Nothing is so insufferable to man as to be completely at rest, without passions, without business, without diversion, without study. He then feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. There will immediately arise from the depth of his heart weariness, gloom, sadness, fretfulness, vexation, despair.⁶⁸

Beckett's subjects cling onto the fringes of existence as they pass into an indefinite state, and exist between the realms of order and stability on the one hand, and chaos, transformation and disintegration on the other. Like Pim in *How It Is*, Figure and Dreamer are thrown into

⁶⁴ Accordingly, Albright suggests that it is 'the dialectic of the disfigured grid' that 'dominates so much of Beckett's aesthetic formation'. *Beckett and Aesthetics*. p. 113.

⁶⁵ Adorno qtd. in *Sound Figures of Modernity: German Music and Philosophy*, p. 38.

⁶⁶ *CDW*. p. 11.

⁶⁷ *Damned to Fame*. p. 653.

⁶⁸ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*. Trans. W. F. Trotter. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003. p. 131

the pit of an apocalyptic world with their sensory receptors cut off. These nomads roam in ‘the mud the dark [they] recapitulate the sack the tins the mud the dark the silence the solitude nothing else for the moment’.⁶⁹ For Figure, who roams ceaselessly in his chamber, and Dreamer who is taken out of consciousness, music engulfs them in sunken light and indefinite shapelessness. Beckett’s deconstructing form is therefore in line with his aesthetics of lessness and failure. According to Lawrence Harvey, this is due to his determination to ‘discover a “syntax of weakness”’.⁷⁰ Along with Molloy, having experienced the ‘tranquillity of decomposition’, Beckett’s later works expose this dismembered form and in a Deleuzian sense, move towards unbecoming through a very musical *decomposition*.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Beckett, *How It Is*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009. p. 4.

⁷⁰ Lawrence Harvey, qtd. in *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, ed. James & Elizabeth Knowlson. London: Bloomsbury, 2007. p. 135.

⁷¹ Beckett, ‘Molloy’ from: *Three Novels*. New York: Grove Press, 1958. p. 25.

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