



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Theatre of the Skull

***Rough for Radio II* by Samuel Beckett**

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Sigurlaug Sturlaugsdóttir

Janúar 2011

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Abstract

This B.A. thesis examines Samuel Beckett's portrayal of the artistic mind and the process of creativity in his radio play "Rough for Radio II". The play as a piece of performance for radio will be briefly discussed. Then how Beckett highlights four different parts of the artist's mind, turning each one into a separate character with a very specific function; Fox is the subconscious, the inner voice of creativity; the Animator is the self conscious, the critical part; the Stenographer the memory; and Dick the suffering the self conscious has decided is a necessary part of the creative process. All four characters are examined as well as the role each one plays within the play. The grotesque relationship between the characters is discussed and how each participant is involved in the tortuous act of creativity. The method used in the play to inspire creativity and its effect on the characters is explored. Also, how the play parodies the tortured artist, who constantly struggles with his art, and his difficulties in producing a piece of creative work. Essentially "Rough for Radio II" is a monodrama that parodies the creative process.

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1. Introduction

Samuel Beckett wrote “Rough for Radio II” in 1961; the play was written in French, later translated into English, and first broadcast in 1976. Beckett himself struggled with his own creativity and found the creative process an arduous one. In the play Beckett divides the artist’s mind into four characters, giving a descriptive name to each one. The Animator, the self conscious part of the artist’s mind, is determined in extracting Fox’s voice, the subconscious part, using pain as an incentive. Dick, the Animator’s henchman, represents the suffering that the self conscious part has decided is the necessary stimulant to inspire creativity. As the torturer, his job is to whip Fox until he speaks. The Stenographer, the artist’s memory, records the interrogation sessions, and is used as a sexual prop and stripped of her clothing as well as her identity. All four parts participate in the production of bringing a piece of creative work on to the stage of the artist’s mind. While all four parts play a different role in the creative process, the Animator, the conscious self, is the most powerful one. His agenda is simple; to produce a written record of Fox’s monologues. The Animator’s search for Fox’s words is a tortuous journey for everyone involved; the creative process is not an easy one for the artist. Beckett then proceeds to parody this process, exposing the absurdity of his characters and their situation. He also highlights the desperation hiding behind the artist’s agenda and the fear that the creative inner voice will run dry, leaving the artist without any means to produce his art. The sheer tragicomedy of the play is exposed through the characters antics as well as their words. As a production of the artist’s mind the play is multifaceted and its portrayal of the creative process is fascinating. “Rough for Radio II” is a monodrama which parodies the creative act.

2. On Air – Beckett and Radio

The first performance of “Rough for Radio II” was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on Beckett’s seventieth birthday, April 13, 1976 (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 141). After listening to the broadcast Beckett, who regarded “the work as unfinished, no more than a rough sketch ... felt ... that it had ‘not come off.’” (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 149).

He put the blame – with his customary kindness and courtesy – on the script and thus on himself, although he felt that the production, which made the Animator and his team start briskly and become more weary and discouraged as time went on, should already have started at a high degree of weariness and despair.” (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 149)

Despite Beckett’s own misgivings about the play and its production, “Rough for Radio II” is considered one of his most accessible works. The play addresses the workings of the artist’s creativity “with voices ... emanating from more or less mysterious sources, and the dependence of the principal characters on these and their ... attempts at achieving some sort of control over them” (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 142).

Writing for radio gave Beckett a chance to view his own work from a new perspective and allowed him to ignore the physical aspects of his characters and focus completely on each character’s external and internal voice; “writing for radio allowed Beckett to shape his dramatic words and voices for and through human beings, free from the distraction of the other aspects of their, and our, physical reality” (Richardson and Hale 286). Beckett instinctively understood radio’s potential (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 130) and it became “a natural medium for Beckett’s exploration and expression of the self-consciousness descending in search of itself and talking about it” (Richardson and Hale 285). Regarding his radio plays Beckett himself stated that

“radiophonic expression demands a specific writing. One writes differently for it: words come out of the dark” (Richardson and Hale 287). Beckett’s own statement is reflected within the radio set itself, a box that spews forth words from the void within.

The characters in a radio play speak directly to the listener. The acoustic experience, voices emitted into a microphone in a studio then travelling on the airwaves until they reach the audience, turns the microphone into the listener’s ears. This makes it possible to expose the listener to both external and internal voices and sounds (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 130). The auditory action is transformed instantly into visual images by each listener; “in radio drama the slightest verbal, musical or sound hint *does* powerfully activate the visual imagination” (Esslin, “The Mind” 172).

The characters and the events of the play take place inside the listener’s mind and are brought to life by the listener’s imagination. Since the listener himself is responsible for creating his own visual images, or staging the play within his own mind, his personal production will always fulfil his expectations. “There is no danger that the image seen will fall short of what he may have expected - as it often does in the theatre or on the screen” (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 132). The listener’s personal involvement in staging the play makes him “an active collaborator with the producer” (Esslin, “The Mind” 177). The final output, the visual staging of the play within the listener’s mind, is a merger of minds.

Both Esslin and Levy have called Beckett’s radio ‘theatre in a skull,’ and one cannot imagine a more perfect medium for portraying the exploration of a human mind than one that uses the human mind for a stage, making words resonate in his listeners’ skulls to communicate the

unstoppable voices of his characters' consciousness (Richardson and Hale 286).

A radio play is a linear even; the action can only move forward and information is hidden and revealed as the play progresses. This build up gives the author the chance of creating a different kind of dramatic tension (Esslin, "Samuel Beckett" 130). With no visual clues available for interpretation the spoken word, brought forth by voices belonging to imaginary characters, becomes the solid reality. Accordingly, every word uttered, be it a part of an internal monologue or an external dialogue, is rife with importance. The listener has an exclusive access to each character and can listen in on the characters external as well as internal thoughts and ideas. The author completely controls the flow of information. For example, if a character is allowed to voice his internal thoughts the audience is exposed to more information than the rest of the characters in the play.

Nowhere has Beckett demonstrated more eloquently the failure of words, more musically the limits of music, or more successfully the art of failure than in his works for radio. (Richardson and Hale 291).

3. Monodrama – The Mind as a Stage for Four Players

In his essay "Samuel Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting" Martin Esslin states that categorising "Rough for Radio II" as a monodrama subsequently situates each character as a distinctive voice in the artist's mind (148). Thus the captive Fox, or Vox, is the subconscious voice of creativity; the Animator is "the critical faculty" who tries to extract and control Fox's stream of words; the Stenographer "is the recording faculty" and "the artist's conscience" (148-149). Also, as the Animator's subordinate and the

only female character in the play, she is the target of the Animator's vulgar comments throughout the play. The mute Dick, who wields a pizzle, represents the artist's method of suffering to stimulate his creativity while the erotic titillations present in the play hint at the similarities between the artist's sexual urges and his compulsion to express himself (149).

Fox, bearing a name that is "a fricative removed from 'Vox,' or voice" (Ackerley and Contarski 489) suggest that hidden in Fox's name is the key to his being. He is the mysterious source of creativity and the compelling voice within the artist's mind, his subconscious. However, Beckett did use the name Fox intentionally, not Vox, which also associates Fox with the animal that is his namesake. Foxes have "a legendary reputation for intelligence and cunning" (NationalGeographic.com) and the word fox has been used as a metaphor to indicate an intelligent person since the 13th century (Harper). Nevertheless, Fox is a prisoner and the exhausted victim of endless interrogation and torture. Fox is kept in complete darkness, "bound, gagged, blindfolded, ears plugged, and hooded" (Ackerley and Contarski 489) and is confined behind closed doors. He is trapped and at the mercy of an enemy that is unknown to him. As the artist's inner voice of creativity Fox is trapped within the artist's mind. Fox is the subconscious, a prisoner of the artist's conscious self who is compelled to extract monologues from Fox.

Fox's outcast status, his captivity and physical restraints as well as the relentless search for the secrets hidden within him can be compared to the animal's situation. The fox is considered a dangerous vermin which frequently carries rabies and the animal is hunted for sport (NationalGeographic.com). In fox hunting, riders and their followers use hounds to find a fox's scent and flush it out. Once the fox is caught "the top dog of

the pack will administer a sharp nip to the back of its neck, killing it outright” (News.BBC.co.uk). If the fox goes into the ground to hide, a terrier is sent into the hole to dig the fox out and then it is shot (News.BBC.co.uk). The outlook is indeed bleak for both the hunted animal and the confined man. Beckett’s Fox is trapped in a room with no means to escape and has a human terrier, the Animator, chasing him, desperate to dig out his hidden secrets.

While Fox has yet to give up the very thing the Animator is after, he has “failed so far to let it escape” (122), his imprisonment has taken its toll. Fox is exhausted. He has to endure savage whipping yet he can barely muster a reaction to the pain; his usual reaction is a “faint cry” (117). Even when the Stenographer disrobes, causing enthusiastic reaction from the Animator, Fox’s only response is silence.

S: Thank you sir, not on my account, it can never be too warm, never too bright, for me. But, with your permission, I shall shed my overall.

A: [*With alacrity.*] Please do, miss, please do. [*Pause.*]

Staggering! Staggering! Ah were I but...forty years younger! (117).

Fox’s total lack of response to the unclothed Stenographer ends when the Animator orders her to kiss Fox, hoping to rouse some reaction from him. The Stenographer’s kiss turns out to be just another painful act of torture; Fox howls in pain and then promptly faints. The Animator’s, or the self conscious, use of erotica as a stimulant for Fox, the subconscious, fails miserably.

A: Dick! - no, wait. Kiss him, miss, perhaps that will stir some fibre.

S: Where, sir?

A: In his heart, in his entrails - or some other part.

S: No, I mean kiss him where, sir?

A: [*Angry.*] Why on his stinker of a mouth, what do you suppose?

[STENOGRAPHER *kisses* FOX. *Howl* from FOX.] Till it bleeds! Kiss it white! [*Howl* from FOX.] Suck his gullet! [*Silence.*]

S: He has fainted away, sir. (122)

Fox's lack of vitality as well as the Animator's referral to his team as "the same old team" (115) implies that Fox has had to endure captivity and torture for a long time. Of course Fox has always been imprisoned within the artist's mind as well as the Animator and his team; the self conscious is forever struggling to inspire the subconscious.

The Animator is the "the conscious, critical part of the artist's mind" (Esslin, "Samuel Beckett" 146) whose objective is to ensure that Fox will continue delivering his monologues. In French the term *Animateur* "is used for a radio or television producer" (Esslin, "Samuel Beckett" 146) which not only makes the Animator's name exceptionally fitting for a radio play but also emphasises his status within the artist's mind. As the conscious self the Animator is the producer of the show that is being performed within the artist's mind. The producer's responsibility is to make sure that the production will be a success, that everyone involved are prepared and doing their job and that the correct material will be delivered.

A: Ready, miss?

S: And waiting, sir.

A: Fresh pad, spare pencils?

S: The lot, sir.

A: Good shape?

S: Tiptop, sir.

A: And you, Dick, on your toes? [*Swish of bull's pizzle. Admiringly.*]

Wow! Let's hear it land. [*Swish and formidable thud.*] Good. (115)

The meaning of the word *animator* is the “one who enlives or inspires” while the meaning of *inspire* is to “influence or animate with an idea or purpose” (Harper). The Animator, the conscious self of the artist's mind, is certainly eager to live up to his name and inspire Fox, the subconscious, to produce text.

A: ... Fox, I hope you have had a refreshing night and will be better inspired today than heretofore. (115)

The Animator's chosen method of inspiration is torture and pain, which adds a grotesque dimension to his name.

A: Just a shade lighter, Dick. [*Mild thud of pizzle.*] Ah no, you exaggerate, better than that. [*Swish and violent thud. Faint cry from FOX. Ruler.*] Ah but no, no no. On! (121)

The creative process is extremely painful to the artist's conscious self and when dealing with “a sluggish, sleepy, and feeble creative core” (Esslin, “Samuel Beckett” 148) there is barely any progress. The artist's mind struggles constantly to stimulate its creativity and produce text from the subconscious. It is an excruciating and exhausting battle with no end in sight.

The formality of the Animator's language is in stark contrast to the brutality of the situation. He is the leader of the interrogation of the captive Fox who is physically restrained and subjected to sensory deprivation. The Animator's polite discourse only serves to exaggerate the abnormality of the situation.

A: [*Gently.*] Be reasonable, Fox. Stop - you may sit, Dick - stop jibbing.

It's hard on you, we know. It does not lie entirely with us, we know. You

might prattle away to your latest breath and still the one...thing remain unsaid that can give you back your darling solitudes, we know. But this much is sure: the more you say the greater your chances. Is that not so, miss?

S: It stands to reason, sir. (121)

The Animator uses a cylindrical ruler to control the dialogue in the room. He “thumps on his desk” (115) with it when he wants to prompt Fox to speak up or be silent:

A: [*Ruler.*] ...walls...walls what?

S: ‘no further’, sir.

A: Right. [*Ruler.*] ...walls no further... [*Ruler.*] On! [*Silence.*] Dick! (118)

The ruler establishes the Animator as an authoritative character, a man of education and a father figure. As a strong male prototype, representing the artist’s conscious self, these paternal images demonstrate the “father as an internalized principle instituting a moral obligation to grow up and comply” (Ackerley and Contarski 192). Thus the ruler, a phallic symbol of the Animator’s power, is used to signal to Fox when he is supposed to turn on, or off, his stream of words. The ruler represents control, order and obedience and as such clearly depicts the conscious self’s desire to control the subconscious.

The cylindrical ruler is one of the two props the Animator uses to control Fox’s monologues in the interrogation room; the other one is Dick the mute whip-wielding torturer.

A: And you, Dick, on your toes? [*Swish of bull’s pizzle. Admiringly.*]

Wow! Let’s hear it land. [*Swish and formidable thud.*] Good. (115)

Dick, the tool of torture, is mute which seems odd in a radio play where “The primary condition of existence for a radio character is that he talk” (Zilliacus 56).

Despite not being a man of words Dick makes his presence known. When the Animator orders Dick to use his whip the noise heard is the physical sound of Dick exerting his body when wielding his pizzle, followed by the thud when it hits Fox’s body (Beckett “Rough for Radio”).

A: ... [*Thump with ruler.*] Do you mark me? On! [*Silence.*] Dick! [*Swish and thud of pizzle on flesh. Faint cry from FOX.*] Off record, miss, remember? (117)

Dick, the Animator’s torture device, is literally brandishing a bull’s penis; a Dick with a dick, so to speak. As a mute character in a radio play whose only job is to obey orders from the Animator, Dick primarily functions as an extension of the Animator. As such the character is a literal penis substitute as well as a phallic symbol, like the cylindrical ruler. In addition, Dick is a nickname for the male name Richard, which originates from Proto-Germanic, *rik*, which means *ruler*, and *harthu*, which means *hard* (Harper).

As the inflictor of pain Dick embodies the role of suffering and the part it plays in stimulating the artist’s creativity. The Animator, the self conscious part of the artist’s mind, uses pain as a method to stimulate Fox, the subconscious, into speaking. The Animator is determined that using Dick to produce Fox’s monologues is the only option; that pain is the only way to stimulate creativity.

S: I was going to suggest a touch of kindness, sir, perhaps just a hint of kindness.

A: So soon? And then? [*Firmly.*] No, miss, I appreciate your sentiment. But I have my method. Shall I remind you of it? [*Pause. Pleading.*]

Don't say no! [*Pause.*] Oh you are an angel! You may sit, Dick. [*Pause.*]

In a word, REDUCE the pressure instead of increasing it. [*Lyrical.*]

Caress fount of resipescence! [*Calmer.*] Dick, if you would. [*Swish and thud of pizzle on flesh. Faint cry from FOX.*] Careful, miss. (118)

Although the Animator is set in his ways and Dick's role is to torture Fox to speak the results so far have are disappointing; "...same deficiencies...totally unacceptable...outlook quite hopeless..." (116). Despite Dick's efforts, it is clear that his whip-wielding has not delivered the expected results. The artist's method of submitting himself to pain and suffering in order to stimulate his creativity is not bringing about the desired results.

As "the recording faculty" (Esslin, "Samuel Beckett" 149), or the artist's memory, the Stenographer's job is to write down Fox's monologues.

S: He smiled at me!

.....

A: You note it?

S: Oh no, sir, the words alone. (115)

According to the "standing exhortations" (116), the rules the team must follow during the interrogation sessions, the Stenographer is only supposed to write down Fox's spoken words.

S: '...instantly to renew our standing exhortations, namely:

1. Kindly to refrain from recording mere animal cries, they serve only to indispose us.
2. Kindly to provide a strictly literal transcript, the meanest syllable has, or may have, its importance.

3. Kindly to ensure full neutralization of the subject when not in session,
 ... The least word let fall in solitude and thereby in danger, as Mauthner
 has shown, of being no longer needed, *may be it* – three words
 underlined.

‘4. Kindly –‘

A: Enough! [*Sickened.*] Well! [*Pause.*] Well! (116)

The exhortations clearly state the importance of the written word; the Stenographer’s is supposed to note down even the meanest syllable. However, Fox’s cries of pain are of no importance and are simply a mere nuisance. The only thing that matters is the “strictly literal transcript” (116); the end justifies the means. As for the exhortations origins they depict the demands from the artist’s external environment; for example, his publishers, editors and readership. These external influences and demands can wreck havoc on the artist’s mind as he labours onwards; on his never ending internal journey of creativity.

The Stenographer also maintains all the written reports of each torture session.

S: [*Coldly.*] Shall I open with yesterday’s close?

A: If you would be so good.

S: [*Reading.*] ‘When I had done ...’ [*Pause.*]

A: Unbelievable! And there he jibbed, if I remember aright.

S: Yes, sir, he would say no more.

A: Dick functioned?

S: Let me see...Yes, twice. [*Pause.*] (117)

The record keeping gives the impression of rule and order; that the system is effective, work in progress and everyone involved are productive. Although the Stenographer is

keeping meticulous records the end results are not satisfactory. In fact, “the report on yesterday’s results” (116) states that the transcript is painfully inadequate.

A: Let us hear again the report on yesterday’s results, it has somewhat slipped my memory.

S: [*Reading.*] ‘We the undersigned, assembled under - ’

A: Skip.

S: [*Reading.*] ‘...note yet again with pain that these dicta - ’

A: Dicta! [*Pause.*] Read on.

S: ‘...with pain that these dicta, like all those communicated to date and by reason of the same deficiencies, are totally unacceptable. The second half in particular is of such - ’

A: Skip. [*Pause.*] Well?

S: That is all, sir. (116)

The Stenographer is the only character that speaks directly to the Animator. She is the artist’s memory and as such is in close contact with the Animator, the conscious self, who depends upon the Stenographer and her recording of the daily sessions. However, the Stenographer is the Animator’s subordinate and as such is under his rule; the artist’s conscious self controls how his experiences are stored as memories.

A: Crabbed youth! No pity! [*Thump with ruler.*] Do you mark me? On!

[*Silence.*] Dick! [*Swish and thud of pizzle on flesh. Faint cry from FOX.*]

Off record, miss, remember?

S: Drat it! Where’s that eraser?

A: Erase, miss, erase, we’re in trouble enough already. [*Ruler.*] On!

[*Silence.*] Dick! (117)

The Stenographer is the only woman in the play. She is the Animator's female subordinate and her status is evident in her writing utensils. While the Animator has a cylindrical ruler, she has to do with a much smaller item, a mere pencil. A female, as the artist's memory, associates it with emotions and emphasises the part feelings play in creating memories. However, emotions do not play a large part in the Stenographer's role. She represents the token sex symbol and as such becomes the target of the Animator's lewd comments.

A: ... You see, the same old team. I hope -

S: [*Aflutter.*] Oh!

A: What is it, miss? Vermin in the lingerie? (115)

The Animator's crude remark foreshadows that the Stenographer will later only be wearing her underwear.

A: Does the glare incommode you, miss, what if we should let down the blind?

S: Thank you sir, not on my account, it can never be too warm, never too bright, for me. But, with your permission, I shall shed my overall.

A: [*With alacrity.*] Please do, miss, please do. [*Pause.*]

Staggering! Staggering! Ah were I but...forty years younger! (117)

S: [*Rereading.*] 'Ah my God my God.' [*Blow with pencil.*] 'My God.'

The Stenographer's decides to undress because it does not matter if her body is covered by clothes or not; the Animator only views her as an object of desire. After undressing, the Stenographer continues rereading the text and she does so in a neutral tone of voice rendering her lines devoid of any sexual connotations (Beckett "Rough for Radio"). In turn the Animator utters "Crabbed youth! No pity!" (117). The conscious self's attempt

at arousal has failed. However, the Animator continues to view the Stenographer as a sexual object and he again comments on her physical appearance; “Oh how bewitching you look when you show your teeth! Ah were I but...thirty years younger” (121). By doing this the Animator uses his power to demean the Stenographer. She, and her role in the interrogation team, is barely relevant. The self-conscious’s control over memory is powerful; it can strip memory of its relevance and attempt to erase it.

4. The Tortured Artist – A Parody of the Creative Act

Throughout “Rough for Radio II” are references that bring the attention to the characters as performing actors and their theatrical unreality, firmly placing the play within the metatheatrical tradition. Both the Animator and the Stenographer struggle with the perception of memory and time. This reveals “an accident in the machinery of the play” (Puchner 18) exposing the unreality of the characters and their existence as a piece of performance. Although the Animator declares “What a memory – mine!” (118) and once during the session corrects the Stenographer’s notes, his long term memory is nonexistent.

A: [*Sigh.*] Good. Where he left off. Once more.

S: ‘Oh but no, no-‘

A: *Ah* but no. No?

S: You are quite right, sir. ‘Ah but no, no-’ (121)

The Animator is unable to remember the events of yesterday; “Let us hear again the report on yesterday’s results, it has somewhat slipped my memory” (116). The Animator depends on the Stenographer to recollect what has occurred during the

previous sessions. He even refers to his own inability to remember previous events when the Stenographer asks him directly if he recollects Fox's previous weeping.

A: That tear, miss, do you remember?

S: Oh yes, sir, distinctly.

A: [*Faint hope.*] Not the first time by any chance?

S: Heavens no, sir, what an idea!

A: [*Disappointed.*] I might have known.

S: Last winter, now I come to think of it, he shed several, do you not remember?

A: Last winter! But, my dear child, I don't remember yesterday, it is down the hatch with love's young dream. Last winter! [*Pause. Low, with emotions.*] Miss. (123)

Since the Animator is only able to remember the present day his reality revolves around endless successions of present days; he only exists in the now, unable to evolve and move forward.

Aptly the Animator's time keeping is faulty and again he depends on the Stenographer who, as the record keeper, also monitors the time. At the beginning of the play the Animator refers to his team as "the same old team" (115) suggesting that they have been together for a long time. However, later on he states that he wishes he were "forty years younger" (117) and "thirty years younger" (121) making it seem that time is reversing and he is getting younger as the play progresses. However, the Stenographer's timekeeping seems to be in order as she alerts the Animator as the time passes forward.

S: It is past two, sir.

A: [*Roused from his prostration.*] It is what?

S: Past two, sir.

A: [*Roughly.*] Then what are you waiting for? ... (116)

The Animator's harsh answer implies that the Stenographer is waiting for him to admit defeat and surrender since his situation is hopeless; a man trapped in the present without a past and a future does not exist. Nevertheless, later on the Animator himself mocks his own situation by referring to father time's swift passage despite being forever situated in the present.

S: ... It is getting on for three, sir.

.....

S: Sir.

A: [*Impatiently.*] What is it, miss, can't you see that old time is aflying?
(118)

The Animator then gets excited about Fox mentioning the name Maud for the first time; "I may be quite wrong, but I somehow have the feeling this is the first time - oh I know it's a far call! - that he has actually...*named* anyone. No?" (120). As the Animator only exists in the present he is always hearing Fox speaking of Maud for the first time. Her name has been and will continue to imply to the Animator that the team is getting closer to the end; "Can it be we near our goal" (121). The Stenographer's reply indicates that she, as the record keeper, is aware of the lapses in time; "That may well be, sir. To make sure I would have to check through from the beginning. That would take time" (120). The Stenographer knows that she will not have to make sure; she and the Animator will continue to go through the same dialogue throughout infinite present days. While the Animator continues to relive today the Stenographer's position

is worse; she is trapped within the present with a nightmarish awareness of time passing.

With the concepts of memory and time blurred the characters and the events of the play become surreal “calling attention to the presentational aspects of theatre” (Davis 210). Both reader and listener are pulled away from the visual and aural experience and returned back to their own time, their own memories and their own bodies. The play becomes a completely separate entity and as such the experience is transformed. The reader and listener are now completely aware of the play as a collection of words.

As a yet another reminder of the fact that the play is a piece of performance both the Animator and the Stenographer mention the names of two real life authors, Sterne and Mauthner, and Dante’s Purgatory. The Animator asks “Are you familiar with the works of Sterne, miss?” and the Stenographer answers “Alas no, sir” (119). The exchange brings the focus on Sterne, who he was and why the Stenographer has not read his work. Including real-life works of literature and philosophy into the strange world of the Animator and his team calls attention to the play’s unreality.

A: ... Have you read the Purgatory, miss, of the divine Florentine?

S: Alas no, sir. I have merely flipped through the Inferno.

A: [*Incredulous.*] Not read the Purgatory?

S: Alas no, sir. (118)

By including Mauthner’s name in the exhortations and insinuating a tantalising answer Beckett continues to poke holes through the pages and allow reality to seep through.

S: ‘... The least word let fall in solitude and thereby in danger, as Mauthner has shown, of being no longer needed, *may be it*’ – three words underlined. ... (116)

In addition, Beckett brings Mauthner’s name into the play “to parody those ... who seek to reduce his work ... to any one adjective” (Ben-Zvi); Beckett’s influences cannot be traced back to one specific *it*.

In the play torture and suffering is displayed as an essential part of the creative process. The torturing of the captive Fox is truly tragicomic. The interrogation session begins innocently enough. The door to Fox’s chamber is opened and the Animator, the Stenographer and Dick enter the room, closing the doors behind them and settling down (Beckett, “Rough for Radio”). The Animator establishes himself as the man in charge by asking the female Stenographer if she prepared for the session ahead.

A: Ready, miss?

S: And waiting, sir.

A: Fresh pad, spare pencils?

S: The lot, sir.

A: Good shape?

S: Tiptop, sir. (115)

The formal use of *miss* and *sir* sets the tone and the pecking order has been established.

However, the pair’s polite banter is in stark contrast to the following exchange.

A: And you, Dick, on your toes? [*Swish of bull’s pizzle. Admiringly.*]

Wow! Let’s hear it land. [*Swish and formidable thud.*] Good. (115)

The shocking appearance of the whip wielding Dick after the Animator's and the Stenographer's seemingly normal everyday chat hints at even stranger, and painful, things ahead.

The interrogation team's "standing exhortations" (116) clearly state that Fox's cries of pain are of no importance and simply a mere nuisance; "Kindly to refrain from recording mere animal cries, they serve only to indispose us" (116). In addition, his complete incapacity is vital to the operation.

S: ... 3. Kindly to ensure full neutralization of the subject when not in session, especially with regard to the gag, its permanence and good repair. Thus rigid enforcement of the tubefeed, be it per buccam or be it on the other hand per rectum, is *absolutely* - one word underlined - 'essential. (116)

Fox's physical or mental well being is of no concern to anyone. The only thing that matters is that he is kept under control at all times and gagged when he is not being interrogated.

Due to Fox's captivity and torture his strength is low. He is barely able to react to Dick's whipping; Fox reacts with "a faint cry" (121). However, during the session the Animator orders Dick to use more force and while Fox's initial reaction is the same he also screams in desperation for release.

A: Just a shade lighter, Dick. [*Mild thud of pizzle.*] Ah no, you exaggerate, better than that. [*Swish and violent thud. Faint cry from FOX. Ruler.*] Ah but no, no no. On!

F: [*Scream.*] Let me out! Peter out in the stones! (121)

The Animator's is indifferent while the Stenographer expresses relief that Fox is physically restrained; "the pain of the subject is ... treated with indifference or even mockery (Knowlson and Pilling 232).

A: Ah dear! There he goes again. Peter out in the stones!

S: It's a mercy he's tied. (121)

When Fox is brought to tears during the session the Animator is confused as to how to react to it while the Stenographer muses about the tear being a sign of the "human trait" (119).

A: [*Discouraged.*] Ah dear.

S: He is weeping, sir, shall I note it?

A: I really do not know what to advise, miss.

S: Inasmuch as...how shall I say? ...human trait...can one say in English?

A: I have never come across it, miss, but no doubt. (119)

The Animator's confession to having "never come across" (119) the very thing that makes man human and the Stenographer's detached speculation about the words dehumanises them both. The pair's lack of empathy is tragic but since the situation the characters are in is simply absurd the audience can enjoy the play for the grotesque comedy it is.

The play's characters are flawed making it easier to sympathise with them; "one has to care about a character if his mishaps are to affect one seriously, and one cannot care in the same way about a character if one is to enjoy seeing him ridiculed" (Abel 171-172). As a tragicomedy, the play successfully manages to ensnare its character within a dreadful situation, and exposing how absurd their little world is. As a result, the

audience is able to be concerned about the characters and the events of the play while at the same time revelling in the absurd elements of the plot.

Fox's physical appearance has not been affected despite his captivity and suffering.

A: ... Off with his hood. [*Pause.*] Ravishing face, ravishing! Is it not, miss?

S: Too true, sir. We know it by heart and yet the pang is ever new. (115)

Both the Animator and the Stenographer are in agreement; Fox's striking countenance has not lost its appeal. When he smiles to the Stenographer she startles.

S: [*Aflutter.*] Oh!

A: What is it, miss? Vermin in the lingerie?

S: He smiled at me!

A: Good omen. [*Faint hope.*] Not the first time by any chance?

S: Heavens no, sir, what an idea!

A: [*Disappointed.*] I might have known. [*Pause.*] Yet it still affects you?

S: Why yes, sir, it is so sudden! So radiant! So fleeting! (115)

Like a light at the end of a tunnel Fox's smile brightens up the room. Although he has smiled at the Stenographer before its intensity and abrupt appearance shake her collected professional demeanour. A delightfully bizarre incident.

During the interrogation session the Animator, with support from the Stenographer, politely reasons with Fox.

A: [*Gently.*] Be reasonable, Fox. Stop - you may sit, Dick - stop jibbing.

It's hard on you, we know. It does not lie entirely with us, we know. You might prattle away to your latest breath sand still the one...thing remains

unsaid that can give you back your darling solitudes, we know. But this much is sure: the more you say the greater your chances. Is that not so, miss?

S: It stands to reason, sir. (121)

The Animator's logic is flawed; despite speaking nonstop Fox may not provide the correct answer. Nevertheless, if he cooperates and communicates the Animator claims that Fox has a better chance at freedom. However, as a prisoner subjected to torture Fox cannot believe anything the Animator says. When the Animator then admits that he has no idea what he is looking for it is clear that Fox's situation is hopeless.

A: No no, now I'll be all right. [*To FOX.*] Of course we do not know, any more than you, what exactly it is we are after, what sign or set of words. But since you have failed so far to let it escape you, it is not by harking on the same old themes that you are likely to succeed, that would astonish me. (122)

Despite the hopelessness of searching for the unknown the Animator has not given up. When Fox speaks of his brother and Maud the Animator believes that he is on to something; "And of a sudden, in the same sentence, a woman, with Christian name to boot, and a brother. I ask you!" (120). The excitement is palpable; the tantalising hope of the end to everyone's misery.

A: [*Low, with emotion.*] Miss.

S: Sir.

A: Can it be we near our goal. ... (121)

At the heart of the play are Fox's words; the treasure desperately sought, the means to an end. As desperate as the Animator is to inspire Fox to speak his behaviour

is contradictory. The Animator who is willing to use torture to get Fox to speak randomly decides to silence Fox in the middle of his monologue to reflect upon his words.

F: Ah yes, that for sure, live I did, no denying, all stones all sides -

A: One moment.

F: - walls no further -

A: [*Ruler.*] Silence! Dick! [*Silence. Musing.*] Live I did... [*Pause.*] Has he used that turn before, miss? (117)

In addition, the Animator's strange comments regarding Fox's monologue; the Animator sometimes interrupts Fox's monologue to ponder the words he has already spoken.

F: That for sure, no denying, no further, down in Spring, up in Fall, or inverse, such summer missed, such winters. [*Pause.*]

A: Nice! Nicely put! Such summer missed. So sibilant! Don't you agree, miss? (119)

Fox's subject matter is excavation. He returns within as "The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent" (Beckett, "Proust" 65-66). Fox's words are hidden within him and he has to go back to the beginning, like a child returning to the womb, to find them. To symbolise this Fox selects a burrowing rodent; a mole whom he "put[s] ... back in his chamber with his weight of grubs" (117). The mole, one of "Those fodient rodents!" (122), is returned back to its home in the earth where it can dig even deeper into the soil. The imagery of a blind mole running around tunnels in the ground, the hard little worker digging deeper and deeper, going further down into the ground is both captivating and comic.

F: That for sure, no further, and there gaze, all the way up, all the way down, slow gaze, age upon age, up again, down again, little lichens of my own span, living dead in the stones, and there took to the tunnels. [Silence. Ruler.] Oceans too, that too, no denying, I drew near down the tunnels, blue above, blue ahead, that for sure, and there too, no further, ways end, all ends and farewell, farewell and fall, farewell seasons, till I fare again. [Silence. Ruler.] Farewell. [Silence. Ruler.] (119)

In a first person narrative the story takes a sinister turn. Fox speaks of his brother within; “my brother inside me, my old twin, ah to be he and he - but no, no no” (119). Maud recommends an operation; “Have yourself opened, Maud would say, opened up, it’s nothing. I’ll give him suck if he’s still alive, ah but no, no no (119). Fox refuses the idea; he wants to keep his brother hidden within him. This story of Fox carrying his own twin within himself, a phantom pregnancy, is very peculiar. Fox’s words have been turned into a replica of himself. This mirror image is hidden away within Fox and he does not want to give it up. He is essentially protecting his twin by keeping him in Fox’s own desired situation; “back in the caul, on ... [his] back in the dark for ever” (Beckett, “More” 29). However, by speaking about his twin Fox has exposed him to the interrogation team who are now hoping to extract him. Fox’s twin represents the undisclosed words within him that hold the key to his release from captivity. Since Fox does not want to part with them he will never be free; the artist who struggles constantly with his creative output will never be prolific. The Animator and the Stenographer can only understand the literal meaning of Fox’s twin. The Stenographer is outraged.

S: That twin, sir...

A: I know, not very convincing.

S: [*Scandalized.*] But it's quite impossible! Inside him! *Him!* (120)

However, the Animator is capable of admitting the possibility of the idea because "such things happen, such things happen. Nature, you know... [*Faint laugh.*] Fortunately. A world without monsters, just imagine! [*Pause for imagining.*] No, that is not what troubles me" (120). The Animator is well aware of the existence of monsters, being one of them himself as an interrogator and a torturer.

The Animator takes matter into his own hands when he begins discussing new ideas for Fox to use in his story. Although Fox has "gone off" (122) as the Stenographer repeatedly tells the Animator he continues to talk.

A: [*Warming to his point.*] Someone, perhaps that is what is wanting, someone who once saw you...[*Abating.*]...go by. I may be quite wrong, but try, at least, what do you stand to lose? [*Beside himself.*] Even though it is not true! (122)

That the Animator dares to suggest that Fox lie is outrageous to the Stenographer. She is the record keeper and such tampering with the written word is unthinkable; "Oh sir!" (122). But the Animator is not done yet. He wants a story about someone who once saw Fox and thus validated his existence. Stories about a blind mole digging are not exciting enough. The Animator wants better characters and some actions in Fox's stories.

A: A father, a mother, a friend, a...Beatrice - no, that is asking too much. Simply someone, anyone, who once saw you...go by. [*Pause.*] That woman...what's the name?

S: Maud, sir.

A: That Maud, for example, perhaps you once brushed against each other. Think hard! (122)

Having instructed the unconscious Fox what to do next and then adding “Think hard!” (122) at the end is comic indeed. The Animator is basically feeding Fox information to get his version of the story then generously asks him to think about it.

The Animator has his hopes up; “Well...you know...I may be wrong...I wouldn’t like to...I hardly dare say it...but it seems to me that...here...possibly...we have something at last” (123). The dialogue following focuses on Maud en her pregnancy; the Animator and the Stenographer discuss the implications of the pregnancy. To them the pregnancy is a deliciously scandalous event.

S: And the milk, sir, don’t forget the milk.

A: The breast! One can almost see it!

S: Who got her in that condition, there’s another question for us.

A: What condition, miss, I fail to follow you.

S: Someone has fecundated her. [*Pause. Impatient.*] If she is in milk someone must have fecundated her.

A: To be sure!

S: Who?

A: [*Very excited.*] You mean...

S: I ask myself. (123-124)

Despite the Animator’s efforts to influence Fox and the appearance of the intriguing Maud, Fox is still not delivering the desired results. The Animator, having already showed his desperation by trying to place words in Fox’s mouth, exerts his

power over the Stenographer and forces her to insert the words “between two kisses” into Fox’s monologue.

S: ‘Have yourself opened, Maud would say, opened -’

A: Don’t skip, miss, the text in its entirety if you please.

S: I skip nothing sir. [*Pause.*] What have I skipped, sir?

A: [*Empathically.*] ‘...between two kisses...’ [*Sarcastic.*] That mere trifle!

[*Angry.*] How can we ever hope to get anywhere if you suppress gems of that magnitude? (124)

By declaring that the Stenographer is the one who is making a mistake and betraying the team the Animator manages to shake the Stenographer to the core. She tries to protests but is easily overpowered.

S: But, sir, he never said anything of the kind.

A: [*Angry.*] ‘...Maud would say, *between two kisses*, etc.’ Amend.

S. But, sir, I-

A: What the devil are you deriding, miss? My hearing? My memory? My good faith? [*Thunderous.*] Amend!

S: [*Feebly.*] As you will, sir. (124)

The Animator’s betrayal brings the Stenographer to tears. Her position has been undermined; she has been stripped of her identity and importance in the creative process. The Animator’s addition has changed the meaning of Fox’s story. Now it has been given an unexpected sex appeal; a cheap trick to try to change the value of the story. The Animator is hoping that this will placate his supervisor and result in a favourable report.

A: Let us hear how it runs now.

S: [*Tremulous.*] ‘Have yourself opened, Maud would say, between two kisses, opened up, it’s nothing, I’ll give him suck if he’s still alive, ah but no, no no.’ [*Faint pencil.*] ‘No no.’ [*Silence.*]

A: Don’t cry, miss, dry your pretty eyes and smile at me. Tomorrow, who knows, we may be free. (124)

The Animator is desperate for freedom. He is imprisoned in this hopeless situation and experiences psychological torture due to the lack of results. The Animator is as much a victim as Fox. Since he will not cooperate the Animator takes what he believes to be the only option available. The interrogation sessions need to finish for everyone involved so to the Animator the end justifies the means.

5. Conclusion

As a monodrama the play’s conflict is staged within the artist’s mind. The four characters each represent a part of it and each is involved in the creative process, Beckett then proceeds to caricature each part and its function. Fox, the subconscious, is physically restrained and subjected to sensory deprivation, and tortured into speaking. The Animator, the self conscious, is a lewd man drunk on his own power who lords over his subordinates; The Stenographer, the memory, the only female in the play is used and abused by her superior, leaving her standing undressed and stripped of her power by the play’s end. Dick, the torturer, is the Animator’s puppet and tortures Fox according to the Animator’s orders. The interrogation team struggles to deliver the desired results to their unknown higher-ups as Fox’s monologues continue to fail to deliver the unknown *it*. When the Animator’s proves yet again unable to extract from Fox an interesting story, he becomes desperate attempts to exert control over Fox’s

words instead. The Animator abuses his position of power and forces the Stenographer to insert his own words in between Fox's, changing the transcribed record and turning it into a cheap erotic thrill. The creative process, and each characters involvement in it, is parodied and the tragicomedy of the situation and events happening within the artist's mind is truly absurd. Underlying is the creative artist's fear that he will lose the ability to produce his works of art. Yet, still have the compulsion to be creative and productive. The play highlights the difficulties facing the artist while at the same time mocking his inner turmoil and fears.

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