Introduction: Beckett's Tragicomedy

The premiere of *En attendant Godot* on 5 January 1953 at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris may, with hindsight, be said to have established Samuel Beckett's reputation as a major playwright. As James Knowlson notes, 'Godot changed everything for him' (1996, 387). But at that moment, he did not have much experience in the theatre. Gradually, he came to realize that he needed the practice of rehearsals to fine-tune his dramatic texts. To his German publisher, Siegfried Unseld (Suhrkamp), he wrote on 19 March 1964: 'I shall never give another theatre text, if there ever is another, to be published until I have worked on it in the theatre' (*LSB II* 598). But that was more than a decade after the premiere of *En attendant Godot*. What this book on the play's genesis shows above all is that Beckett seized many opportunities, especially *after* the first publication, to make his play more suitable for the stage.

For such a long and complex play, the genesis *stricto sensu* (before publication) is relatively uneventful compared to Beckett's other works: the only extant manuscript of the French original is contained in one notebook, held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Unless new evidence surfaces, this appears to be the first and only extant draft. That this important play was basically written in one go in just three months' time is in itself quite spectacular. So, if the genesis of *En attendant Godot* seems uneventful, it is spectactularly so.

On 21 September 1964, Colin Duckworth asked Beckett directly whether there were any preliminary sketches: 'Have you any plans, first drafts, first sketches, scenarios, etc., which will help me to show how the play was created?' Beckett replied on 7 October 1964: 'There were no preliminary drafts of GODOT. I still have the original MS which you are welcome to see' (IU, Colin Duckworth papers). This original manuscript will be analysed in detail in chapter 2. But the lack of preliminary drafts, notes or sketches does not mean that Beckett's most famous play came out of nowhere.

Dramatic Structure

One of Beckett's earliest and most profound theatrical influences was William Shakespeare. As Dan Gunn notes, '[h]is education, and the frequency of allusion to Shakespeare in his work, leave no doubt that Beckett was thoroughly familiar with Shakespeare's plays and verse' (2012, 149). James Knowlson has shown how central 'the Bard' was to Beckett's

university education (1996, 54), but his recently discovered 'schoolboy copy' of *Macbeth* reveals that he had already studied Shakespeare's work extensively at secondary school.

It dates back to 'September 1922', when Beckett was a sixteen-year-old pupil in the 'VIth form' at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen.[1] In addition to the many underlined passages, some annotated with the note 'learn by heart', the title page contains a 'Skeleton of Macbeth' that breaks it down into the familiar five-part structure of classical drama:

> a = exposition (method).
> (1) 1st stage of dramatic action.
> b = complication.
> c = climax
> (2) turning pt. or 2nd part of dramatic action.
> d = declining action
> (3) = 3rd stage of dramatic act. or final impulse given to action.
> (e) = Catastrophe. (see Fig. 1)

This presentation of the classic five-act structure is also known as 'Freytag's pyramid', named after the 19th-century German novelist and playwright Gustav Freytag, who divided tragedies into five main parts (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, dénouement). Beckett's drawing offers an interesting variation on the pyramidal image of Freytag's scheme in that it presents the climax not as the high point or pinnacle of the play, but as a flat section or 'anti-climax'. Beckett would apply this anti-climactic structure most clearly in the radio play *All That Fall* (see Van Hulle 2010), and one of his later plays is explicitly entitled *Catastrophe*, but its influence can already be detected in *En attendant Godot*. As the dramatic tension gradually builds up towards the arrival of Godot, it is each time replaced by the anti-climactic encounter with Pozzo and Lucky. As the 'action' declines or falls, the boy arrives to notify Didi and Gogo that Mr Godot will not be coming today, which is the 'Catastrophe' of the play. Beckett may be self-consciously alluding to this dramatic structure when Estragon briefly

1 This copy is still privately owned, but digital facsimiles are available in the *Beckett Digital Library* (see *BDL*, http://www.beckettarchive.org/library/SHA-MAC.html). We are grateful to Helena Walsh for sharing this book with us and to Breon Mitchell for bringing it to our attention.

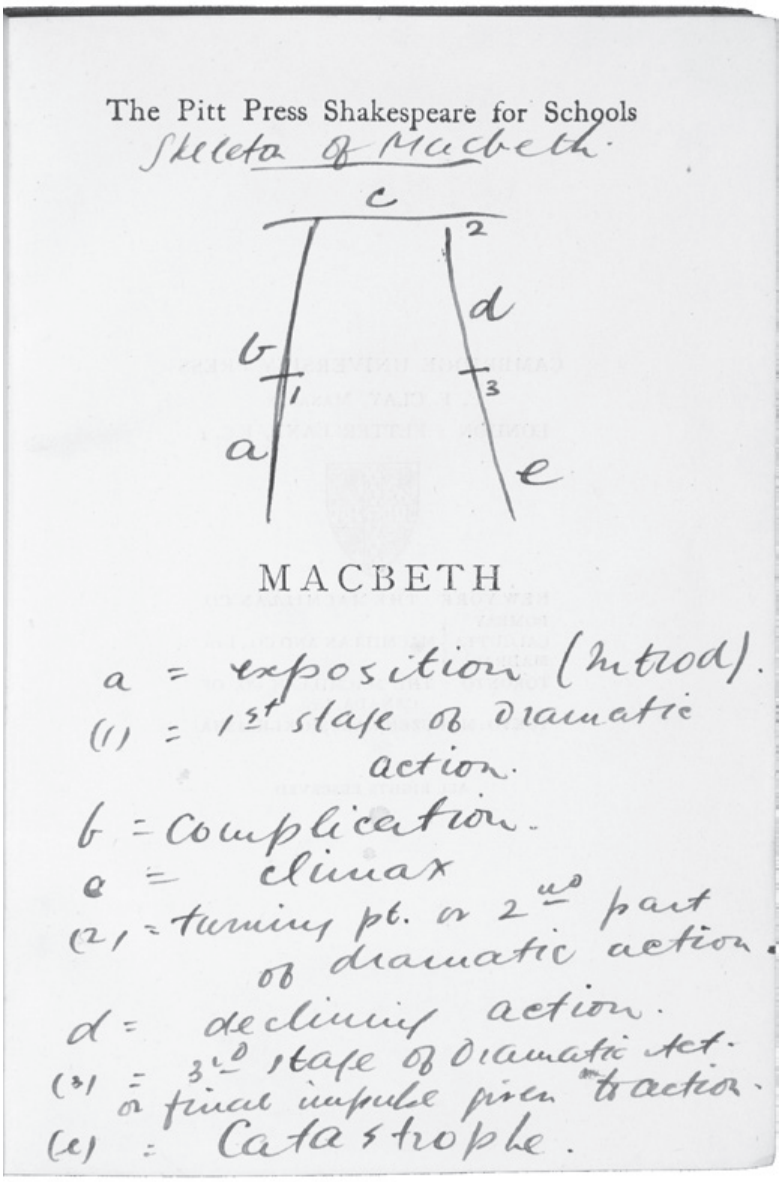


Fig. 1: Title page of Beckett's 'schoolboy copy' of *Macbeth*.

disappears and tells Vladimir, who wants to know where he went: 'Jusqu'au bord de la pente' (1952, 124; see part B.2 in chapter 2) ['to the edge of the hill'].[2] This line was originally dropped from the English translation, but it was included again for the 1984 San Quentin production, in which Estragon now goes 'To the foot of the rise' and Vladimir concludes: 'No doubt we are on a plateau. Served up on a plateau' (Duckworth 1987, 188). Being at the mercy of Godot's unlikely arrival, Didi and Gogo are indeed trapped at the top of the 'plateau' in Beckett's drawing of the five-part structure. By making the second act a repetition of the first, Beckett also turns the classical image of a (flattened) pyramid into a cyclical one, and because the second act is a worsened variation on the first, it rather becomes a 'vicious circle', possibly influenced by the circles of Dante's *Inferno*. This shows that, although Beckett is recycling elements from a long theatrical tradition in the play, he is not simply copying it.

On the contrary, he managed to innovate this tradition by infusing it with notions from quite different genres and disciplines. In his lectures at TCD, he connected Racine's tragedies to the modern novel, and in his essay *Proust*, he discussed the notion of tragedy, claiming it is 'not concerned with human justice': 'The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin [...], the sin of having been born' (*PTD* 67). And, indeed, in *En attendant Godot* Vladimir suggests: 'Si on se repentait' ['Suppose we repented'] – to which Estragon replies with the question: 'D'être né?' ['Our being born?'] But this tragic moment is immediately undermined by a comic counteraction: '*Vladimir part d'un bon rire qu'il réprime aussitôt, en portant sa main au pubis, le visage crispé*' (1952, 16). ['*Vladimir breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted*' (1954, 8; *WfG* 7)]. For this concept of the tragicomic Beckett not only drew on Ancient Greek tragedies and comedies, but also on Presocratic Greek philosophy.

2 In *All That Fall*, Beckett makes a similar self-conscious reference to one of the pyramid's parts. At the exact moment of the 'turning point', Dan suddenly asks Maddy: 'Shall we go on backwards now a little? [...] Or you forwards and I backwards. The perfect pair. Like Dante's damned, with their faces arsy-versy. Our tears will water our bottoms' (*ATF* 24).

Beckett's Notion of Tragicomedy

Beckett's concept of drama is just as much informed by philosophy as by theatrical traditions. The subtitle of *Waiting for Godot* is: 'A Tragicomedy in Two Acts'.[3] When, three decades later, Beckett was asked by Desmond Egan whether he thought more highly of tragedy or of comedy, he replied he could not help him with his problem, adding: 'Democritus laughed at Heraclitus weeping & H. wept at D. laughing. Pick yr. fancy' (Abbott 1990, 52). At the back of his production notebook for *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett noted: 'Hemocritus et Deraclitus, / philosophes muets' (*TN3* 247). By switching the initials of the laughing and the weeping philosophers around, Beckett once again suggested the interconnectedness of tragedy and comedy in his poetics. According to Beckett's philosophy notes, 'Heraclitus the dark, the obscure, the weeping philosopher' focuses on the 'ceaseless transformation of things', and according to this philosophy it is 'not possible to step down twice' in the same river (TCD MS 10967, 24-25). In the French manuscript of *Waiting for Godot*, the idea of the eternal flux of time is first translated as 'Tout coule' ['Everything flows'] (FN, 82r) and eventually as 'Tout suinte' (FP, 64r; 1952, 101) ['Everything oozes' (1954, 39; *WfG* 55)] (see chapter 2, part B.1). Against this relentless 'on' of Heraclitus's flux, Beckett placed the laughing philosopher Democritus's static, atomist view of life. The combination of Heraclitus's 'gress'[4] and Democritus's stasis is summarized in the combination of the road and the tree in the very first stage direction of *En attendant Godot*: '*Route à la campagne, avec arbre*' (1952, 11) ['*A country road. A tree*' (1954, 6; *WfG* 5)].

In his 'Whoroscope' Notebook, Beckett made six pages of notes on the history of Ancient Greek tragedies and comedies (UoR MS 3000,

3 The French text does not yet have this subtitle. It first occurs on the cover of the English playscript submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office (ETLC) and its two siblings (ET Albery and ET Snow; see chapter 1.2.2). It is safe to assume that Beckett already used it in the first draft of his translation of the play, on which these copies were based. All English and American editions of the text adopt the subtitle, but when Beckett made a fair copy of the American text in the late 1950s (see EFC-N1 in chapter 1.1.2), he called it a 'Play in 2 Acts' (01r) on the title page, no longer 'A Tragicomedy', so it is possible that he had changed his mind again by this time.

4 Instead of 'progress', Beckett preferred the word 'gress' or 'mere gress', because of its 'purity from destination and hence from schedule' (*LSB I* 186).

74r-76v; see chapter 3.2). In the same notebook, he also took notes on Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, notably on the Austro-Hungarian philosopher's belief that every form of thought takes shape in language ('weil alles Denken in den Worten der Sprache stattfindet'; 1923, vol. 3, 616; cf. UoR MS 3000, 47v). A dozen pages further in the third volume of Mauthner's *Beiträge*, Beckett read the same idea, this time applied to Grabbe's Mephistopheles, saying to Faust that he can only think what he can put into words ('Nur was Ihr in Worte könnt fassen, könnt Ihr denken'; 1923, vol. 3, 630), and Mauthner's subsequent analysis of the verb 'entsagen' ['to renounce, to abstain' – literally: 'un-say'], which he reads as a form of 'auf die Sprache verzichten' ['to do without language'] (1923, vol. 3, 631). One of Mauthner's examples of an 'Entsagender' is Agrippa von Nettesheim, whose work *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque artium* [*Of the Uncerteinty and Vanity of Arts and Sciences*] is preceded by a few lines in which he mentions, among others, the laughing and weeping philosophers: 'Inter philosophos ridet omnia Democritus. / Contra deflet cuncta Heraclitus.' ['Among the philosophers Democritus laughs at everything. / Heraclitus on the other hand sheds tears over everything.'] The appearance of Democritus and Heraclitus among these 'Entsagender' ['renouncers' or literally 'un-sayers'] explains to some degree why Beckett called them 'philosophes muets'. Mauthner continues by claiming that pure criticism is basically a form of laughter, and 'laughter is criticism, the best criticism'.[5] He then gives an example of a 'tragicomic' scene: a clown, climbing to the top of a freestanding ladder in the circus, then pulling it up to himself.[6] Whereas the ladder may have inspired Beckett for his novel *Watt*, the tragicomic circus

5 'Reine Kritik ist im Grunde nur ein artikuliertes Lachen. Jedes Lachen ist Kritik, die beste Kritik.' (Mauthner 1923, vol. 3, 632)

6 Similarly tragicomic, Mauthner suggests, is the situation of 'Sprachkünstler' [literally: 'language artists'] who climb their word ladders and believe they can disconnect the word from the ground – among whom he seems to be including himself, the author of the 'Sprachkritik', who uses language to critique it: 'Tragikomisch wäre der Clown, der im Zirkus bis zur Spitze einer freistehenden Leiter emporkletterte und dann versuchen wollte, seine Leiter zu sich emporzuziehen. Er würde das Schicksal der Philosophen teilen und herunterfallen. Wer die Naivität verloren hat, lacht auch den Clown nicht mehr aus. Wer sie behalten hat, der muss auch über die Sprachkünstler lachen, die auf Wortleitern in die Höhe klettern möchten und glauben, sie könnten während des Aufstiegs das Wort von der Erde lösen. […] Aber ganz unmöglich wäre es doch nicht, Kritik der Sprache sprechend zu üben.' (1923, vol. 3, 632)

was to find an echo in *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot*.[7] But at that point – when he was compiling the 'Whoroscope' Notebook – *En attendant Godot* was still a long way off.

Theatrical Precursors

En attendant Godot / *Waiting for Godot* was Beckett's first published and performed play, but it was not the first play he wrote. As Emilie Morin notes, Beckett reportedly gave his friend Mary Manning the idea for the silent character Horace Egosmith in her play *Youth's the Season…?*, which premiered at Dublin's Gate Theatre in 1931 (2017, 44). Egosmith, who regularly falls asleep and only laughs from time to time, acts as a 'shadow double' to the main character, Terence Killigrew, a failing poet. According to Morin, this silent character foreshadows Chimène, the character that Beckett contributed to *Le Kid* and 'whose only movement consisted of clasping and unclasping her hands under a black lace shawl' (44). In 1931, when he was a lecturer at Trinity College Dublin, Beckett took part in what Katherine Weiss calls 'his first real theatrical venture' (2013, 5). As James Knowlson notes, the Modern Languages staff and their students prepared a series of plays, 'one in Spanish; one an almost contemporary French play; and one a burlesque of Pierre Corneille's seventeenth-century four-act tragedy, *Le Cid*, called *Le Kid*' (1996, 123). According to John Pilling, much, if not most, of this parody seems to have been [Georges] Pelorson's' (Pilling 2006a, 29), but the latter did acknowledge that Beckett was the one who came up with the idea of calling the play *Le Kid* instead of *Le Cid*.

Apart from this burlesque, Weiss draws attention to two plays preceding *Godot*: 'Before he embarked on *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett tried without avail to write two plays, *Human Wishes* and *Eleutheria*, neither of which was performed during his lifetime' (2013, 6). But in addition to these two,

7 The earliest French versions featured the clowns Bim and Bom (FN, 42r; FP, 34r; 1952, 56); from the 1953 edition onward, Bim and Bom are removed, but Estragon keeps insisting on the word 'cirque' ['circus']: 'On se croirait au spectacle. / Au cirque. / Au music-hall. / Au cirque.' (1953, 56; see '*Music-hall*' in A.3 of chapter 2). This reference to the circus is retained in the English translation (see chapter 3.2). With regard to Vladimir's line 'Not really!' (1954, 33; *WfG* 47), Beckett also told British director Peter Hall that the vowels had to be long-drawn-out, imitating Grock's 'Sans blâââgue' (see *LSB II* 577), which is the original phrase in *En attendant Godot* (1952, 85)

there is at least a third theatrical fragment that should be mentioned: 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck' ['Medieval Triangle']. Ernest Wichner calls it 'das erste Theaterstück von Samuel Beckett' ['Samuel Beckett's first theatrical play'] (2006, 97). It is not a full play, only a fragment. Still, it may shed some light on Beckett's development as a playwright. In view of the basic situation in *Waiting for Godot* – two men whose dialogue is marked by an absent third – 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck' offers an insight into one of Beckett's favourite organizational structures. Admittedly, the early dramatic fragment does not yet feature the brilliant idea to leave out the third party completely. On the contrary, the initial situation could not be more banal: two knights (Ferraù and Rinaldo) fight for a lady (Angelica). But the lady does try very hard to be absent and in the middle of the fragment she makes herself scarce indeed: 'Angelica rasch ab' ['Exit Angelica in haste'] (UoR MS 5003, 09r). Later in his career, Beckett would return to this triangular organization, for instance in *Play* and especially in *Come and Go*, which reduces the entire plot to the triangular setup and particularly the tension of two people talking about a third in the latter's absence. This appears to have been a crucial element in Beckett's decision to single out this particular scene (Canto 1, stanza XIV-XXII) from Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (here followed by William Stewart Rose's translation), which starts as follows:

> Su la riviera Ferraù trovosse
> di sudor pieno e tutto polveroso.
> Da la battaglia dianzi lo rimosse
> un gran disio di bere e di riposo;
> e poi, mal grado suo, quivi fermosse,
> perché, de l'acqua ingordo e frettoloso,
> l'elmo nel fiume si lasciò cadere,
> né l'avea potuto anco riavere
>
> Here stood the fierce Ferraù in grisly plight,
> Begrimed with dust, and bathed with sweat and blood
> Who lately had withdrawn him from the fight,
> To rest and drink at that refreshing flood:
> But there had tarried in his own despite,
> Since bending from the bank, in hasty mood,
> He dropped his helmet in the crystal tide,

And vainly to regain the treasure tried. (Ariosto 1858, 4)

This is the starting point of Beckett's dramatic fragment (see Appendix I for a transcription of the German original and an English translation). The fragment opens with the cast and a stage direction, describing the setting, consisting of rocks, trees and a river (see Fig. 2):

> Ferraù, giant descending from Goliath, Saracen, in love with Angelica
> Rinaldo, knight in the Carolingian army, also in love with Angelica
> Angelica daughter of the Christian king Galafron, free of love
>
> Wild area with rocks and trees. Broad river.
> Dusk is falling, having no alternative.
>
> Ferraù on his own, kneeling on the waterfront. Behind him his horse.
>
> Ferraù Angelica, where are you? All night, I've been fighting, all day I've been looking for you. Both times in vain. From head to toe I'm covered in sour sweat, admittedly not in blood. [He drinks] Dusk is already falling, the sun will shortly be setting, [His helmet falls into the water], my only helmet in this damned river – [Groping in the water with both hands.] Tomorrow the sun will rise, but my helmet never again. The river is deep and of course Ferraù has never learnt how to swim. [He suddenly listens attentively]. Sweet Mohamed, that was my love's voice, unless I'm very mistaken.

At that moment, Angelica enters, looking pale and gasping for air. She is not happy to see Ferraù and laments: 'Am I fleeing from the arms of one rogue only to straight away bump into those of a scoundrel? Woe! There's progress for you! From god-fearing smoke to god-forsaken smother! What an advantage! Woe! [Wrings her hands]. Is there no refuge in the world where a rationalistic virgin can protect her rationalistic virginity, both from believers and from the superstitious?' While Ferraù is approaching, Rinaldo

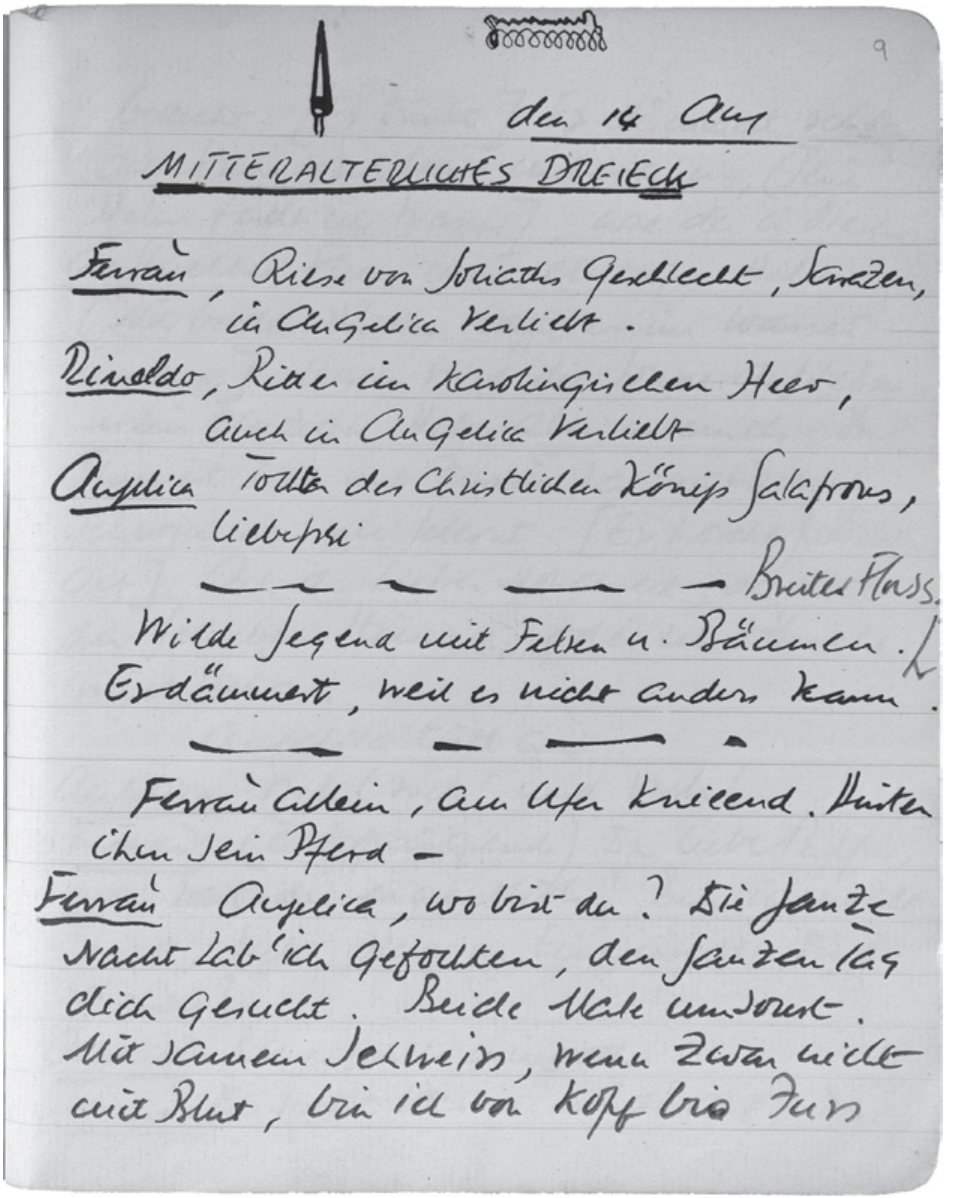


Fig. 2: The first page of Beckett's 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck' ('Medieval Triangle').

enters. Angelica introduces the two rivals to each other, Ferraù as a pagan rascal and Rinaldo as a Christian rogue. She begs of them: 'save me from each other'. While they eagerly start fighting, she absconds.

We thus witness an evolution in Beckett's early dramatic writing from silent characters (Egosmith/Chimène), by way of a character that disappears (Angelica), to Godot, who never shows up at all. The moon also rises as quickly as it does in *Waiting for Godot*: 'They fight. Exit Angelica in haste. They keep fencing. The moon rises over the forest. They are still fighting. Neither of them is able to win the slightest advantage over the other. They are wounded, tired & bored to exactly the same extent.' (UoR MS 5003, 09r) They stop fencing and start fighting with words instead, wondering what they are quarreling over in the first place:

> Rinaldo It really makes no sense to continue this bloody business. What is actually at stake?
>
> Ferraù [without conviction] Faith.
>
> Rinaldo Bullshit!
>
> Ferraù Well, the war that is being waged between your & my people.
>
> Rinaldo For Christ's sake!
>
> Ferraù But mainly the holy Angelica, Galafron's daughter, fairest of all virgins.
>
> Rinaldo If only the bitch really is a virgin.
>
> Ferraù How could she not?
>
> Rinaldo [dully] There are several ways.
>
> Ferraù Virgin or not, it's all the same.

Beckett's German text is not perfect, but it does contain several puns. Thus, for instance, the two knights are characterized as two 'Nebenbuhler' ['competitors'] in the purest sense of the word ('Da wir im reinsten Sinn des Worts Nebenbuhler sind'), and Beckett then makes Rinaldo take the word apart: 'Ich buhle um sie, du buhlst um sie, um sie buhlen wir nebeneinander.' [which could be translated as 'For we are competitors in the purest sense. I pete for her, you pete for her, for her it is we compete.'] Eventually, Ferraù makes the chivalrous suggestion to postpone their little fight. He even invites Rinaldo, who has lost his horse, to join him on his own horse's back. Thus the two rivals become a horseriding pseudo-couple thanks to the absence of Angelica:

> Ferraù Feel free to make use of my horse's back.
>
> Rinaldo [Reaching out his hand] I haven't encountered such fair play in a long time.
>
> Ferraù [Taking his hand] You're welcome. We're mates for the time being to become all the fiercer opponents when the time comes.
>
> [They straighten up. Exit the horse with speed, driven by four spurs.[8]] (UoR MS 5003, 05r-11r)

As Ernest Wichner points out (2006, 97), the link with Beckett's contemporary writings is evident in the description of the setting, 'Es dämmert, weil es nicht anders kann' ['Dusk is falling, having no alternative'] (UoR MS 5003, 05r), echoing 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new' (*Mu* 3), the opening sentence of *Murphy*.

But perhaps the most remarkable facet of this dramatic fragment is that it is written in German. Beckett became famous in 1953 as an Irish playwright who chose to write in another language than his mother tongue, but this choice appears to have been a remarkably gradual process. By talking about

8 The four spurs correspond with the last lines of Canto I, XXII in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*: 'Da quattro sproni il destrier punto arriva / ove una strada in due si dipartiva.' ['Them, while four spurs infest his foaming sides, / Their courser brings to where the way divides.']

a 'revelation' at the end of the Second World War (Knowlson 1996, 351), which at first sight seemed to coincide more or less with the composition of his major prose fiction in French (357), Beckett may have helped create the image of a sudden realization that he needed to write in French in order to find his own voice. And if we were to take only *Human Wishes* and *Eleutheria* into account as the dramatic precursors of *En attendant Godot*, this might seem to confirm the image of a clear break between pre-war works in English and post-war works in French. In his biography *Damned to Fame*, James Knowlson already nuanced this image by drawing attention to Beckett's early attempts at writing poetry in French in 1938-39 (1996, 293). Chronologically, these attempts to write poetry in French follow after the German letter to Axel Kaun (July 1937), in which he formulated his developing poetics in terms of a logoclastic literature of the unword (*LSB I* 512-21). But *before* the early attempts at writing in French, Beckett had already tried to translate one of his English poems ('Cascando') into German ('Mancando') (UoR MS 5003, 13v-16r), following immediately after 'Mittelalterliches Dreieck' in the 'Clare Street' Notebook.[9] Beckett wrote the dramatic fragment in the summer of 1936, shortly before he went to Germany. It thus precedes the important aesthetic statement in his German letter to Kaun by a year.

After this dramatic fragment, Beckett elaborated on an idea for a play about another triangle, the love triangle of Samuel Johnson, Henry Thrale

9 The 'Clare Street' Notebook (MS 5003) is inscribed '13/7/36'. It was 'kept with the distinct aim to record all things German, and is exclusively written in that language' (Nixon 2011, 106). Apart from the dramatic fragment and the poem 'Mancando' (13r-16r), it also contains short prose fragments, such as those beginning: 'Wie durchsichtig klar kommt mir dieser Mechanismus heute vor, dessen Prinzip heisst: Lieber um Etwas Angst haben, als um Nichts' (03r-04r) ['How translucent this mechanism seems to me now, the principle of which is: better to be afraid of *something* than of *nothing* (Nixon 2011, 46-7)]; 'Es gibt Augenblicke, wo der Hoffnungsschleier endgültig weggerissen wird' (17r-18r) ['There are moments when the veil of hope is finally torn apart' (Nixon 2011, 170)]; 'Die Hoffnung ist die erste Lebensbedingung, der Instinkt dem es zu verdanken ist, dass das Menschengeschlecht nicht schon seit langem Zugrunde gegangen ist. […] So wie es dir bisher gegangen ist, so wird es auch ferner hin gehen, bis dein Ich in die dir so bekannten Bestandteile zersetzt worden ist' (18r). ['Hope is the elementary condition of life, the instinct that the human race has to thank for not dying out long ago. […] As you have been previously is how you will always be, until your self has been decomposed into the parts that are so familiar to you' (Nixon 2011, 171)].

and his wife Hester Thrale. On 13 December 1936, he already mentions this idea in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy: 'I also am very interested in the Johnson-Thrale-Piozzi arrangement, and often thought what a good subject was there, perhaps only one long act. What interested me especially was the breakdown of Johnson as soon as Thrale disappeared' (*LSB I* 396). Although, this time, Beckett's play was not based on pre-existing dramatic material, he did fill three notebooks with copious excerpts and jottings from various sources on Samuel Johnson and his entourage (Knowlson 1996, 270). This amount of preparation is striking, considering that the actual dramatic fragment entitled *Human Wishes* (after Johnson's poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes*) is only twelve pages long, as it was published in *Disjecta* by Ruby Cohn (*Dis* 155-66).

For Beckett's next dramatic venture, we go from 'A room in Bolt Court' (*Dis* 155) to a 'room in the home of the Kraps' (*El* 45), so *Eleutheria* inherits the interior setting of *Human Wishes*. It was written ten years later, very swiftly and without preparation, between January and February 1947 – after the novel *Mercier et Camier* and the four *Nouvelles* ('La Fin', 'L'Expulsé', 'Premier amour' and 'Le Calmant'), but before the first two parts of the 'trilogy' – *Molloy* and *Malone meurt* – and *En attendant Godot*. Beckett showed it to potential producers and its publication was announced in 1950, but it soon became apparent that the play was too difficult and costly to stage, because of the many actors and props it required (see Knowlson 1996, 366 and Tucker 2011). Beckett never again granted permission for its performance or publication, explaining his reasons to the Danish translator Christian Ludvigsen on 23 April 1956: 'Since Eleuthéria was announced as due for publication I have changed my mind and decided it can neither be produced nor published as it stands. I may try to revise it some day, but I think this is unlikely' (*LSB II* 616).

Enter *Godot*

Having learnt from this experience, Beckett reduced the cast of his next play to only a handful of players, and the setting to just *a* tree and *a* stone – no longer the multiple 'rocks' and 'trees' of his 'Medieval Triangle' – recalling the tree and the stone in the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' chapter (Book I, chapter 8) of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. During the writing process of *En attendant Godot*, and the early search for a producer and theatre, Beckett made two

insightful comments to Georges Duthuit about how he envisaged the staging of the play. The first occurs in his letter of 28 October 1948:

> It did me good to talk about my play, in my stammering way. I have really taken in what you say about stage props. It will help me, it has already helped me. I see them as having a larger-than-life-size iniquity, in the derisory shade of a tree you could not even hang yourself on. (*LSB II* 108)

His second letter, written much later (3 January 1951), reveals just how much his vision had crystallized now that the play was finished and he had started thinking about staging it in more practical terms. According to Beckett, it was wrong to look at the set 'with a painter's eye':

> For me, that is aestheticism. They have turned ballet and theatre sets into a branch of painting, and done them a great deal of harm, I think. It is Wagnerism. I do not believe in collaboration between the arts, I want a theatre reduced to its own means, speech and acting, without painting, without music, without embellishments. That is Protestantism if you like, we are what we are. The setting has to come out of the text, without adding to it. As for the visual convenience of the audience, you can guess where I put that. Do you really think that one could hear anything, faced with a set by Bram, or see anything other than him? In *Godot* it is a sky that is sky only in name, a tree that makes them wonder whether it is one, tiny and shrivelled. I should like to see it set up any old how, sordidly abstract as nature is, for the Estragons and Vladimirs, a place of suffering, sweaty and fishy, where sometimes a turnip grows, or a ditch opens up. Nothing, it expresses nothing, it is an opaque no one bothers to question anymore. Any formal specificity becomes impossible. If it really is essential to know where they are (and in my view the text makes it clear enough), let the words look after that, that too, by means of labels, or better still (though Blin seems to be against) by announcements:

> 'Well, it seems this is the sky, all this, and that thing over there is a tree, apparently.' Indigence, we can never say it often enough, and, decidedly, painting is incapable of that. (*LSB II* 218-9)

This was still two years before the first actual staging of the play. Its first performance was a reading of selected scenes from Act 1 in the studio of the Club d'Essai de la Radio, broadcast by RTF (Radiodiffusion-Télévision française) on 17 February 1952 (Knowlson 1996, 386). Roger Blin remembers that Beckett was not yet so punctilious with regard to the staging when they first performed *En attendant Godot*: 'He did not yet have the fussy desire for precision he has acquired since and while following the rehearsals actively, he left the director his share of freedom, as long as he did not impose on him anything he did not approve' (Blin qtd. in McMillan and Fehsenfeld 1988, 68). One thing Beckett disliked was that Estragon's trousers did not fall down to his ankles at the end of the play, but were held up halfway, so he wrote an angry letter about it to Blin. For Beckett, this gesture epitomized precisely his idea of tragicomedy: 'The spirit of the play, in so far as it has one, is that nothing is more grotesque than the tragic, and that must be put across right to the end, and particularly in the end' (see *LSB II* 349-50). This and other experiences during the process of rehearsal made him realize the importance of staging, which is reflected notably in the revision phase.

Beckett continued revising *Godot* from its inception in the late 1940s to the late 1980s. It is thus the one play that not only accumulates his early experiences with theatre, but also his later evolution as a playwright and director of his own plays. It is therefore a unique work in Beckett's oeuvre. For the present analysis of *En attendant Godot* / *Waiting for Godot*, we have made a distinction between 'textual variants' and 'performance variants'. Textual variants are changes that Beckett made either in draft documents leading to a published text or in revised editions. Performance variants are changes that Beckett made for a particular production of the play, for example in a theatrical notebook, a playscript or an edition specifically annotated for this purpose. Because the performance variants of *Godot* have already been studied by Dougald McMillan and James Knowlson in vol. 1 of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett* (1993b), we focus on textual variants in this genetic analysis of the play. We only make exceptions when a playscript or an annotated copy has been used for a revised edition, such as the French playscript, Beckett's 'prompt copy' for the Paris premiere, Roger

Blin's acting copy for this same production ('Blin a.c.') and the annotated copy that was used for a revival of *En attendant Godot* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1961 ('Odéon a.c.'). The main French, American and British editions that will be discussed in this study are Minuit 1952, 1953, 1970 and 1971; Grove Press 1954; Faber and Faber 1956 and 1965. From this extended process of revision, several patterns emerge.

Patterns of Revision

The bilingual writing process of *En attendant Godot* / *Waiting for Godot* is characterized by several patterns of revision: a striving for lexical precision and more negativity on the level of *language*; an increasing sensitivity to the importance of *stage directing*; a process of 'vaguening' the *setting*; growing subtlety in *characterization* and more tension between the characters; increasing attention to *repetitive structures*; and a complex process of *textual undoing*.

Language: The French genesis is marked by a focus on lexical precision: often the dialogues and the sentence structure remain intact, but the search for the right word or 'mot juste' results in a substitution of a particular term by a synonym. The effort to achieve more lexical and stylistic precision is notable, for instance, in the second act, when Vladimir is said to walk up and down ('sillonner'). This verb is changed into '**arpenter**' ['to roam, to stride'] in the playscript and the published versions. Estragon, in his turn, says he went to the top of 'la côte' (FN, 106r) ['to the top of the slope'], which becomes '**pente**' in the revision, creating an internal rhyme between Vladimir's 'arpenter' and Estragon's 'pente' (see B.2 in chapter 2). This search for *le mot juste* is also thematized at a few instances in the play, when Estragon is very specific about his choice of words, for instance when Vladimir says 'On se croirait au spectacle', Estragon twice insists 'Au cirque' ['At the circus']. Or in relation to the dead voices, he keeps insisting that they 'murmur' ('murmurent') and make a noise like leaves ('de feuilles'). Especially in the English versions, another linguistic pattern emerges, showing a tendency towards more negativity (see chapter 3.2).

Stage directing: Apart from these linguistic issues, Beckett also had to master another type of new language: the language of stage directing. In the manuscript, the stage directions appear to have been originally addressed to an audience of readers rather than of actors and directors.

Françoise Rullier-Theuret has termed this phenomenon 'l'inflation didascalique', suggesting that the stage directions or 'didascalies' are mainly meant as 'jeux textuels' ['textual games'] (2009, 90; see A.3 and A.4 in chapter 2). But in the broader perspective of the revision and publication history, it becomes clear that what Rullier-Theuret calls 'inflation didascalique' is actually a stage in a process, a process from a text-oriented to a more stage-oriented approach. Compared to Beckett's later plays, this stage-oriented approach is still very modest, but it is possible to discern an evolution in the genetic process. Even though, especially in the French versions, the stage directions often seem to be written for readers in the first place, rather than for actors and directors, Beckett does give consideration to the theatrical effects of staging and increasingly so in the English versions (see chapter 3.2). Thus, for instance, at the beginning of the second act, he stipulates that the stage should be empty for quite a while, just a bit longer than what is sufferable: 'La scène rest vide un bon moment, un peu au delà de ce qui est supportable' (FN, 77r).

Setting: The striving for lexical and stylistic precision is sometimes linked to a tendency towards a more abstract vocabulary and a more universal setting. For instance, the expression 'aveugle comme **une taupe**' ['blind as a bat', literally: as a mole] in the manuscript (FN, 136r) is replaced by 'aveugle comme **le destin**' ['blind as destiny'] (see B.3 in chapter 2). Or the expression '**ce n'est pas sûr**' ['it's not certain'] is generalized to '**rien n'est sûr**' ['nothing is certain'] (see A.6 in chapter 2). In the manuscript, the original name '**Lévy**' suggested a realistic setting, which has been connected to the horror of the concentration camps, notably Mauthausen, where Beckett's friend Alfred Péron had been imprisoned during the Second World War. The suggestion of this realistic setting was 'vaguened' when Beckett changed Lévy's name to '**Estragon**' at the start of the second act. But the 'vaguening', generalizing and/or universalizing tendency is not general and should be nuanced, for there are also instances where the opposite occurs. For instance, Beckett asked his publisher Jérôme Lindon on 2 March 1952 to replace the generic term '**maison de correction**' ['borstal'] by a more specific reference (*LSB II* 325-6). Thus it became '**la Roquette**'. For the English translation, Beckett removed the name again, universalizing the setting in other passages as well, but never cutting the ties with history and reality completely (see chapter 3.2).

Characterization: the manuscript shows a tendency to gradually undo the slightly too caricatural exaggerations of the characters. This earliest

version sometimes overemphasizes certain traits of the characters, such as Vladimir's pedantry and sententiousness, which are later toned down somewhat. As to the characterization of Pozzo and Lucky, Colin Duckworth asked Beckett directly: 'Did you think of the two "mobile" characters before you began writing, or did they materialize out of the process of creation during writing?' (21 June 1965; IU, Colin Duckworth papers). Beckett replied with a handwritten addition in the right margin: 'During writing'. This reply corresponds with the general pattern in the geneses of the other works that originated in the creatively productive five-year period after the Second World War, which are all marked by what Louis Hay has dubbed 'écriture à processus' ['processual writing'] – as opposed to 'écriture à programme' ['writing according to a programme or plan'] (Hay 1986–87). During the revision phase Beckett kept balancing out tragedy with comedy, for instance by making Vladimir give an excessively grave speech for quite a while and then letting Estragon say inattentively: 'Forgive me, I wasn't listening' (see B.4 in chapter 2). The characterization of the pairs (especially Vladimir and Estragon) appears to be based on the principle of 'Hemocritus et Deraclitus', weeping and laughing, tragedy and comedy containing each other's capital, initial impetus. Especially in the English versions, the tension between the characters is heightened and a pattern of increasingly violent interaction emerges (see chapter 3.2).

Repetitive structures: During the revision process, Beckett also introduced patterns of repetition. One of the most notable ones is the late addition of the mantra 'Allons-nous-en. / On ne peut pas. / Pourquoi? / On attend Godot'. ['Let's go. / We can't. / Why not? / We're waiting for Godot']. How consciously and carefully Beckett constructed these patterns of repetition becomes clear in some of the notes that he made at the back of the French manuscript notebook while writing the first draft, or in the revisions he made for the playscript and the various Minuit editions – influenced by the productions he had supervised. This pattern persists in the English translation, where Beckett not only creates new repetitions but also makes sure that certain words or phrases appear identically throughout the text, even on the level of the stage directions (see chapter 3.2).

Textual undoing: Here and there, Beckett 'bores holes' in the veil of language – to use the metaphor he employed in his July 1937 letter to Axel Kaun (*LSB I* 512-21) – for instance by replacing a word by an ellipsis, as in '**aussi pauvre que moi**', which becomes '**aussi … aussi … que moi**'

(see A.6 in chapter 2); by means of aposiopesis (introducing unfinished sentences; see B.2 in chapter 2); or by replacing a term by the word 'vide' ['void'] as in 'parler dans **le désert**' ['talking in the desert'] which becomes 'parler dans **le vide**' ['talking in a vacuum' (see A.4 in chapter 2)] or 'Ce n'est pas **l'espace** qui manque' which becomes 'Ce n'est pas **le vide** qui manque' ['There's no lack of void' (see B.2 in chapter 2)]. The manuscript of the French version is marked by one substantial cut: a seven-page slapstick scene (FN, 109r-115r) relating to the question '**Est-ce que c'est la peine?**' ['Is it worthwhile?']. The possible relationship with the opening paragraph of Albert Camus' essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is examined and discussed in chapter 2 (see B.2), and throughout the chapter we pay special attention to the frequent recurrence of the word 'peine'. Apart from this one scene, the cuts in the manuscript are usually evened out by additions. In that sense, the 'intent of undoing' (Gontarski 1985) is not (yet) a general pattern in the early stages of *En attendant Godot*. In the later revision stages, especially for the Minuit editions of 1953, 1970 and 1971, a significant number of passages was cut, notably in the scenes with Pozzo and Lucky. These had already been omitted in the first performance of January 1953, and when Beckett started translating his play into English a few months later, he seized the opportunity to conduct the first major revision of it in print (see chapter 3.2).

Documents and Genesis

The best way to follow the genetic history of *En attendant Godot* / *Waiting for Godot* is to use the online digital genetic edition of the play (www.beckettarchive.org) in combination with this 'Making of' volume in the BDMP series. In chapter 1 ('Documents') we discuss the manuscripts, typescripts, editions, annotated copies, playscripts and theatrical notebooks relating to *Godot*'s genesis and epigenesis – i.e. the continuation of the writing process after publication (Van Hulle 2014, 214).

Chapter 2 analyses the genesis of the French version, for which we follow the chronology of the manuscript and Beckett's own structural breakdown of the play for later productions. As in the case of the preceding two novels, *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, the writing is marked by what H. Porter Abbott has dubbed 'autography' and defined as a 'mode of action taken in the moment of writing' (1996, x). In the case of *En attendant Godot*, the autograph manuscript is integral to this 'autography': the play's cyclical structure is

reflected in the physical space of the manuscript. As noted above, the draft is written in one notebook according to Beckett's habitual way of writing on the recto pages, leaving the versos blank and reserving them for additions and notes. When Beckett reached the end of the notebook, he started at the beginning again, this time filling the blank versos. Due to this material coincidence, the repeated conversation about the tree's genus in Act I and in Act II happens to be written on the recto (Act I) and the verso (Act I) of the same folio (FN, 08r-08v). The autograph thus closes in on itself and reflects the circular structure thematized in the play, notably at the start of Act II, when Vladimir sings the dog song.

In chapter 3 we analyse the English translation, which can be regarded as a continuation of the French writing process, marked by many of the same patterns, but also by an increased sense of negativity or failure and more substantial cuts. The original manuscript of the translation has not been found, but newly discovered typescripts, both early and later versions, allow for a more complete reconstruction and study of the translation process than has been possible to undertake thus far. As Hersh Zeifman already noted in 1977, there are 'literally hundreds of variations' between the first American and British editions of the play, published by Grove Press and Faber and Faber in 1954 and 1956, and later supplemented with Faber's so-called 'definitive' edition of 1965 (Zeifman 1977, 80). While 'none of them is, in itself, particularly earth-shattering', Zeifman concedes, 'there is a kind of cumulative effect', which leads to the question 'which version is preferable' (79-80). This volume in the 'Making-of' series of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project investigates the problem signalled by Zeifman and tries to find the reason *why* there are hundreds of variants between the first American and British editions, revealing that the first Faber edition was actually based on an older version of Beckett's translation, preserved in the Lord Chamberlain papers at the British Library (see chapter 1.2.2). We establish the chronology of the English *Godot*, disentangle its publication process and bring to light new playscripts and annotated copies that were prepared by Beckett for productions of the play, but which have not been included in the *Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*. As the following chapters and the Conclusion will show, the increasing multiplicity of versions, often very different from each other, suggests that a 'definitive' text of the play may be as elusive as its protagonist.