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### Archive Fever, Archive Failure: Exploring the 'it' in Beckett's Theatre

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## Archive Fever, Archive Failure: Exploring the 'it' in Beckett's Theatre

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*Archive Fever*, Archive Failure:  
Exploring the “It” in Beckett’s Theatre

Katherine Weiss

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*Using Jacques Derrida’s 1995 study, Archive Fever, Weiss examines how Samuel Beckett’s Come and Go and Footfalls stage the failed acts of archiving. In both plays, memories are either unknown or not named. Either way, without being named they cannot be collected, catalogued or made public. Despite this, the women haunting his plays seem struck by archive fever. Ultimately, Beckett stages the tension between the desire to remain silent with the desire to archive.*



we may yet construct our future  
as we’ve reconstructed our past

—Paul Muldoon, “The Grand Conversation”

Scholars like Rob Reginio and Jonathan Boulter have discovered that Jacques Derrida’s examination of Sigmund Freud’s archive in *Archive Fever* (1995) lends itself to Beckett studies because of its investigation into remembering and forgetting, the past and the future, and secrecy and going public. Reginio, in his 2009 examination of *Waiting for Godot* and *Krapp’s Last Tape*, argues that Derrida reveals that in the act of collecting and subsequently taking from the archive to construct a narrative about the past, the archive shelters and effaces history. He continues, arguing that by deconstructing “acts of concealment implicit in the archive,” Beckett develops characters that are “beyond or in opposition to the ‘shelter’ of the archive’s structured embodiment of the past” (113). In the same collection of essays, Boulter points out that for Derrida the archive is “neither present nor

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absent" in time—a distinction that he connects to the "fleshiness" of Beckett's archive (132).<sup>1</sup> Boulter reads Beckett's *Winnie* (*Happy Days*), *Mouth* (*Not I*) and *May* (*Footfalls*) as representing an archive that is both "flesh and specter, body and ghost" (132).<sup>2</sup>

Derrida's *Archive Fever* has sparked new discussions of Beckett's works, yet these discussions, compared to explorations of Derrida's earlier writings as they pertain to Beckett studies, are few. These tensions can be placed under a broader tension in Beckett's work—that of history, memory, and trauma. In his theatre, Beckett is increasingly concerned with characters who struggle to speak of something unknown and perhaps unknowable. In their struggle to remember and to speak, many of Beckett's characters become involved in the process of archivation. Krapp is the most notable of Beckett's archivists. David Houston Jones's reassessment of *Krapp's Last Tape* as a play about archiving warrants pause. He notes that the play has been misread as a work primarily about failure—Krapp as the failed lover and the failed writer. Jones, instead, situates Krapp as an archivist who "creates a structure which is simply not susceptible to failure. . . . The archive, instead, creates a large textual network which precisely cannot be exhausted" (146).

One reading does not have to shut out the other. In my estimation, Krapp is a failed writer but a successful archivist. Krapp records memories of the past year on tape reels he keeps neatly stored in boxes. The contents of these tapes, furthermore, are compiled in a large ledger much like a catalog that accompanies a special collection. Yet, despite Krapp's desire to remember, he continually forgets. He is surprised by the entries in the ledger, the sound of his younger voice and the memories recorded on his tapes. As such, for Krapp and many of Beckett's subsequent characters, the past becomes a ghost haunting him as it escapes the recorder; Krapp's past haunts the present, and this specter of the past, consequently, defines the future. Derrida tells us that the desire to align the archive with remembering the past "takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory" (11). The archive, for Derrida, is then an attempt to reconstruct memory that has collapsed. Both its structure and its origin have broken down.<sup>3</sup> This breakdown and desire, too, appears in *Krapp's Last Tape*. We know, as does Krapp, that he is recording his last tape, and with his death his attempts to reconstruct his past have failed as have his attempts to become a writer. On this last tape, he bitterly records, "Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas. Getting known" (222).

Derrida concludes by wondering "what [Freud] may have kept of his unconditional right to secrecy, while at the same time burning with the desire to know, to make known, and to archive the very thing he concealed

forever.” Indeed, Derrida continues, we “will always wonder what, in this *mal d’archive*, he may have burned” (101). Derrida deconstructs the archive by using as his example Sigmund Freud who was invested in secrecy while simultaneously being a scientist whose career was built on making secrets public. Freud must have struggled between keeping secrets and going public, hiding away and making known. This struggle arises in Beckett’s theatre. My study will examine Derrida’s intriguing look at the archive in relation to two of Beckett’s short theatrical works—*Come and Go* (1965) and *Footfalls* (1975).

In both *Come and Go* and *Footfalls*, secrets are kept from the audience and from the characters. In *Come and Go*, Beckett depicts three elderly women sitting on a bench. During this play of less than ten minutes in length, Ru, Vi and Flo whisper to one another about whichever one of them has left the stage. But these secrets are never shared amongst all three of them nor are they shared amongst the audience. Rather they remain unknown as the content of *Come and Go* does not give the audience much to go on. Similarly, in *Footfalls*, an elderly woman by the name of May paces the stage and has a conversation with her mother who is merely present in the form of a voice off-stage. During this play of roughly half an hour in length, the audience discovers that something plagues May, but what that “it” she refers to remains hidden, perhaps repressed. She keeps pacing the floor, and keeps revolving “it all” in her mind. Both these plays deal with memories that are locked away; these memories both constitute an urge to archive and thus to transform the body into an archive as well as the failure to archive. Because the memories are not named, they cannot be collected, catalogued and made public; their bodies struggle to keep the memories out of public view. There is, according to Derrida, “no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression” (19). It is the very knowledge of the failure to remember and the inevitable forgetting, or silencing (as with repression), of the past that potentially drives Beckett’s characters to repeat the past and to record those repetitions whether it be on tape or the struggle to leave behind footprints that inscribe existence. The desire to archive is the desire to leave a *trace* of the past—a trace that will speak to the future.

Beckett’s characters in *Come and Go* and *Footfalls* are haunted by memories which they struggle to make public while the pain of the past keeps them from voicing those memories fully. The whispered secrets of Ru, Vi, and Flo, albeit never heard, provoke the “(*Appalled.*) Oh!” (194, 195) from each character. Despite being made public to one another (sometimes actors whisper nonsensical words, sometimes they make up secrets), this archivization fails as the secrets are not moved into public domain and thus do not satisfy the audience’s desire to know. Drawing on his knowl-

edge of the manuscripts, James Knowlson in *Frescoes of the Skull* reveals that in early drafts the secrets concerned “the imminent death of the friend who has just left them” (121). Death would no doubt threaten the memory they share.<sup>4</sup> While Flo, Ru and Vi’s whispers remain unheard by an audience who has not seen the manuscript drafts, the memory they share is made public, at least in part. The memory, however, appears in fragments scattered throughout this dramaticule, the term Beckett coined to describe his minuscule play. And, indeed, not until I directed the play at East Tennessee State University in 2010, did I recognize that these shattered bits fit together although not without cracks showing.<sup>5</sup> These fragments read as follows:

FLO. Just sit together as we used to, in the playground, at Miss Wade’s.

RU. On the log. (194)

...

RU. Holding hands . . . that way.

FLO. Dreaming of . . . love. (195)

This memory of love is reminiscent of Krapp’s memory of his decision to break off a romance with a woman he loved.<sup>6</sup> The ledger entry of Krapp’s breakup is called “Farewell to—(*he turns the page*)—love” (217), echoing the structure of *Come and Go*’s “Dreaming of . . . love.” Krapp’s turning of the page creates a pause similar to that of the ellipses in *Come and Go*. Indeed, Beckett’s plays are littered with characters sitting on stones, on logs, in fields, dreaming of love. In *That Time* (1974), for example, one of the memories the protagonist listens to is that of sitting “on the stone together in the sun on the stone at the edge of the little wood and as far as eye could see the wheat turning yellow vowing every now and then you loved each other” (387). On the one hand, Beckett creates nostalgic plays—plays that recall and are often melancholic about the past. On the other hand, Beckett speaks to nostalgia through the estrangement of nostalgia. Nostalgia, in Beckett, goes beyond the mere reminiscing of the past; it is often aligned with wishing to fix (in both senses of the word) the past. Nostalgia is the desire to reconstruct and archive the past. The memory of sitting on a log in a playground together, dreaming of the love they one day may have, suggests that they never experienced romantic love. *Come and Go* revolves around the tension of the absence of love, or that of never being loved. As such, they cannot make public a confession of love. And, if making public is an archival desire as Derrida argues, then these women

cannot “archive”; they cannot compile and store memories and tokens of love.

Despite being so much about a past that amounts to no/thing, and specifically of love that is never consummated, *Come and Go* concludes with gapping openness. Ambiguity surfaces. When nearing the end of the play, Vi says, “May we not speak of the old days? (*Silence.*) Of what came after? (*Silence.*) Shall we hold hands in the old way?” (195). In the first question Vi poses, she attempts to silence the memory of “the old days.” However, the figures have already begun to speak of the past and the audience has begun to speculate on their nostalgia. Thus, Vi, indeed, may be using the question rhetorically: *we shall speak of the past and we shall hold hands as we once did*. Her second utterance is a silencing of *what came after* the past; she asks that they *do not speak of what came after the old days*. The question leaves us to ponder whether there was some shattering event, some catastrophe that cannot be spoken of and that perhaps kept love at bay. What these women do have in their specter world is one another. When Vi asks if they shall hold hands, she reaches out for love, albeit not romantic love. Her wish is granted as Ru and Flo slowly join hands with her in a strange web connecting each to one another.

The concluding line, “I can feel the rings” (195), which is spoken by Flo, is perhaps the most puzzling. It is tempting to visualize rings on their fingers and indeed, John Crowley’s production for *Beckett on Film* did so in its close-up, showing Flo feeling Vi and Ru’s ringless fingers. The suggestion is that the rings refer to marriage rings.<sup>7</sup> This line sparked much conversation when I directed the play. My actresses understood that this line is multifaceted. The rings are the “ohs” of Ru, Flo and Vi’s few colorful responses, and the very movement they have been going through on stage; it “becomes an emblem of [the play’s] own theatrical and semantic ‘aboutness,’” according to Keir Elam (148). It was decided, moreover, that the rings could reflect the rings of the log they sat on as girls. The rings thus reflect the past, history, and the desire to record memories as one did in the past on records by creating *rings*, or grooves, on the plate or with tape reels as seen in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. But again, to stop there does the play disservice. The rings further represent the way Ru, Vi and Flo hold hands, creating “the pattern of an unbroken change, an emblem that, traditionally, has been used to symbolize eternity,” as Knowlson suggests (*Frescoes* 122) and an emblematic spiral “ceaselessly spinning [a] central consciousness, made available to us in words of unerring simplicity and humanity,” as Xerxes Mehta argues (386). Indeed, the archive functions as a cycle, spinning in a cyclical fashion and reconstructing the past to speak to the future. In *Come and Go*, the rings ensures that these women remain in our memories, sharing similar dreams and urges. Yet simultaneously,

they are paralyzed in an archive that fails because they fail to voice the secrets beyond unheard whispers. These secrets have fragmented the unity they perhaps once had and thus they are paralyzed because they desire to silence their past.

*Footfalls*, like *Come and Go*, revolves around the tension between remembering and forgetting, telling and silencing, archiving and destroying the ineffable. Unlike *Come and Go*, however, this later play explores trauma to a greater extent. Trauma is closely linked to the archive and archive failure. It is, as Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth theorize, an involuntary *acting out* of the past that has been unsuccessfully integrated into one's history. Those suffering from trauma, LaCapra explains, are "performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop" (21). While repetition is both a characteristic of trauma and the archive, in trauma the repressed resurface, haunting the individual. Whereas Derrida tells us that "*a technique of repetition*" (11, Derrida's emphasis) is necessary for the archive, Caruth and LaCapra reveal that repetition without intentional technique is a sign of trauma. Technique involves the process of reproduction and reconstruction. In trauma, repetition is not productive; it does not reconstruct the past for the public's eye, but rather festers in the private, interior walls of the mind, haunting and slowly destroying the person who houses the traumatic past. Beckett's *Footfalls* is a complex exploration of the archive and May's failure to make her past move into the present to shape her future.

May's pacing is a compulsive revolving of the past in her mind. Knowlson reveals that in the early drafts of the play, two titles, *It All* and *Footfalls*, were used alternatively. Beckett abandoned the title *It All* because he "insist[ed] that the image of the woman pacing relentlessly up and down is central to the play" (*Frescoes* 221). Even when she stands still, May continues to revolve the memory in her mind as she "Tries to tell how it was" when "she fancies none can hear" (241). That is, she attempts to inscribe her past in the present. However, she only speaks of the past when she believes she is alone, and only does so in fragments leaving much unknown. Thus, while there is repetition as seen in her pacing, there is no "outside"; May does not externalize her traumatic past other than to the audience who she does not acknowledge.

Because May is unable to tell with clarity what "it" was that set her pacing, the audience is left in the dark. "In *Footfalls*," Steven Connor insightfully argues, "we are never sure what it is we are being asked to watch so intently, never left secure in our position as spectators, because of the movement in the different narratives between spectatorship and spectacle" (202). For Connor, this and other plays by Beckett featuring



female leads display “representation as power” (202). Beckett was deeply aware that women are often the object of the gaze. We gaze at May and thus are guilty of leaving her powerless. Yet, the audience, too, is left powerless when they are unable to make sense of what they are bearing witness to. In essence, we cannot read May because she locks herself in, perhaps like O in *Film* (1963), to flee our hungry eyes and intellects. May believes she is far from voyeuristic eyes. Her mother tells us that

She has not been out since girlhood. (*Pause.*) Not out since girlhood. (*Pause.*) Where is she, it may be asked. (*Pause.*) Why, in the old home, the same where she—(*Pause.*) The same where she began. (*Pause.*) Where it began. (*Pause.*) It all began. (*Pause.*) (241)

May has remained a prisoner to her trauma, turning it over in her “poor mind” (240) since she was a child. She has remained both physically and mentally locked in. Beckett’s initial decision was to light the set with only a dim strip of light “strongest at floor level, less on body, least on head” (239) which fades out between each episode. However, when directing the play at the Schiller Theatre in 1976, he included “a vertical accent to the horizontal light on the strip which would remain lit after each part” (Asmus) to avoid the confusion that the play was over when the lights faded out. The decision to include this “vertical accent” is intriguing as it is reminiscent of light coming in through a door which is cracked open, as Asmus observed, reinforcing that May is, indeed, inside. As the door is open, May is figuratively locked in—a prisoner of her trauma.

Interesting shifts, moreover, occur in the mother’s monologue. When she tells her listeners that May is in the old home, she stops herself from using the word *born*. Instead, she replaces it with the awkward *began*. James Knowlson, in his authorized biography of Beckett, recalls that Beckett was haunted by a concept which he heard Carl Jung mention while giving a lecture in London in 1935 (*Damned* 544). Yet, what this concept means to Beckett is difficult to say. As in *Not I* we are left to wonder if birth is the trauma that May has experienced or if there is some other experience that leads May to reject being born. For Mouth, birth is being cast “. . . out into this . . . before her time . . . godforsaken hole called . . . called . . . no matter . . . parents unknown. . .” (376). Her lonely and loveless existence results in her literal disintegration; she is a mouth, voicing a story that she refuses is her own. Likewise, May in *Footfalls* refuses to accept her life stories. As a result of the shifts in language in *Footfalls* and Knowlson’s insight, we are invited to ponder in the pause provided, *where she began what? Life?* The mother continues with changing *she* to *it* (whereas in *Not I*, the shift is from *it* to *she*). But again, the “it” is an

unknown; the pronoun has transformed, no longer signifying May. We are left with the question, *where what began* in the old home.

When the mother and then later May, speaking as her mother, ask, "Will you never have done? (*Pause.*) Will you never have done . . . revolving it all," May halts her pacing and responds with the question, "It?" (240, 243). The audience is left with a mystery, one of Beckett's many teasers<sup>8</sup> as to what that "it," which May is unable to archive, is. We are left wondering whether May herself knows. Perhaps this memory is so horrific she cannot face the past trauma. In May's attempt to archive the wound, she fails to make the "it" knowable. Elaine Scarry, in her seminal work *The Body in Pain*, theorizes that extreme pain results in a destruction of language; pain leaves us with the inability to express with words, to rationalize what has happened. She writes that "physical pain does not simply resist language, but actively destroys it" (4). Beckett goes further than Scarry does, suggesting that mental pain, too, destroys language. The mental anguish that May suffers from has rendered her unable to face her past even though facing the trauma (that which has resulted in her being a recluse who cannot express the wound with words of logic) would perhaps release her from her pacing. May has not worked through her trauma, that is, she has not made it public; she has not exteriorized it. Perhaps, she has lost the ability to do so.

When May attempts to "tell how it was," she is only able to give "The semblance" (242) of the past trauma. Here, May announces twice that she can only show herself the barest trace of how it was, this "Faint, though by no means invisible" (242) memory. What she reveals is this:

At nightfall. (*Pause.*) Slip out at nightfall and into the little church by the north door always locked at that hour, and walk, up and down, up and down, his poor arm. (*Pause.*) Some nights she would halt, as one frozen by some shudder of the mind, and stand stark still till she could move again. But many also were the nights when she paced without pause, up and down, up and down, before vanishing the way she came. (242)

May's reference to herself in this monologue as "she" is reminiscent of *Not I*. "Repetition and (self-)denial," Elam reveals in his study of the dramaticules, "converge" (157). Here, as in Beckett's *Not I*, a female narrator/character attempts to tell her story while at the same time disavowing her story and thus her history. The past is both made public, or as Boulter argues, made flesh, in addition to being a specter, or ghostly.<sup>9</sup> Unable to recollect and reconstruct this past as her own, May remains stuck in the past. She is not quite able to reconstruct this past into a tool for the future or for the public.

The other curious shift in her monologue is the change from "his poor arm" to "that poor arm."

Soon then after she was gone, as though never there, began to walk, up and down, up and down, that poor arm. (*Pause.*) At nightfall. (*Pause.*) That is to say, at certain seasons of the year, during Vespers. (242)

As May revolves this memory in her mind, she erases the pronouns, the details that may one day release her from her purgatorial pacing. When I directed *Footfalls* at ETSU this third section was the most difficult to work with. My actress wondered who the man was that May clings to when pacing up and down the aisle of the church and why she pushes him out of this faint memory. The pronoun is lower case indicating he is not divine. Reluctant to admit her thoughts on the play, my actress divulged that the memory is reminiscent of marriage, or a wish for marriage. Though the pacing, the mother tells us, began when May was a girl, we wondered if this is yet another image of wishing to be loved. Additionally, the image is one of being led, or guided, by some male figure, perhaps a father.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, there are several references to sons and fathers in Beckett's landscapes. In *Nohow On*, for example, the image that haunts the pages is of two individuals, an old man and presumably his son, plodding on, hand in hand. Moreover, Seán Kennedy insightfully argues that "Beckett's memories of the father are sustained by memories of the landscape, just as memories of the landscape are inseparable from memories of the father" (15). While the memory of the father in Beckett is linked to land (the exterior), memories of the mother which appear in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Rockaby*, among other plays, are always interior. *Footfalls* is puzzling because in it memories of the mother and perhaps the father (in the reference to the arm) are interior; they are connected to a home and church. Yet only the mother is linked to the old home. The mysterious man, who May alludes to, was one who perhaps attempted to guide May out of the darkness; however, she "vanishe[d] the way she came." As such, this father-figure who tried to help and possibly offered May guidance, sadly fails like the figure in *Not I* whose "gestures of helpless compassion" (375) lessens after each of Mouth's denials that the traumatic telling of her story is, indeed, hers.

The second story May tells is of a dialogue between a mother and daughter, perhaps her mother and herself at an earlier time. In May's telling of the exchange between Mrs. Winter and Amy, we learn that the mother is troubled by a peculiar feeling she had in church. When asking her daughter whether she "observe[d] anything . . . strange at Evensong" (243), she receives an odd response. Amy claims not to have been sitting beside her mother when, according to the mother, she was present:

MRS. W: But I heard you respond. (*Pause.*) I heard you say Amen.  
 (*Pause.*) How could you have responded if you were not there?

(Pause.) How could you possibly have said Amen if, as you claim, you were not there? (243)

The immediate connection here is to May's never having been *born* and her need to "hear the feet, however faint they fall" (241). Sitting in church, where she is still and quiet, she cannot be assured that she exists. Perhaps, here, Beckett draws on the seventeenth-century Bishop George Berkeley's *esse est percipi* as he does in *Film*; even in church Amy/May is not assured that she is seen by a divine being. And, ultimately, that which does not exist cannot be archived. Since she is not convinced of her existence, May cannot make her life public; she cannot archive her experiences in photographs and journals—ways that most of us archive our lives.

Likewise, May exhibits the tension between expressing and pushing away her past when she begins to tell of the conversation that arose between Mrs. Winter and Amy after the evening service.

Old Mrs. Winter, whom the reader will remember, old Mrs. Winter one late autumn Sunday evening, on sitting down to supper. . . .  
(242)

. . . .

But finally, raising her head and fixing Amy—the daughter's given name, as the reader will remember—raising her head and fixing Amy full in the eye she said— (243)

Here, it is as though May both murmurs, *this did not happen to me*, and recognizes that the experience is important to record. The repetition of "the reader will remember" suggests that a text is being written and read much like the one read in *Ohio Impromptu* (1981). In transforming her experiences into a narrative about another mother and daughter, May attempts to archive the experience. Consequently, May transforms the audience into readers, but readers with faulty memories. We do not remember Amy and Mrs. Winter although we speculate that May's narrative is a record of her past. However, her inability to acknowledge the narrative as her own past—that is, her refusal to say "I"—results in her failure to archive this memory. What is more, this failure to archive cancels out her future; May is paralyzed in an internal cycle of revolving.

The narratives May tells, like the creature we see pacing the stage, is "Tattered," "a tangle of tatters" (242). The London debut in 1976 (as well as the ETSU production in 2010) left audiences "baffled by this elusive little play" (*Frescoes* 221). In not being able to comprehend what "it all" means, the audience pays more attention to the visual image of the play. The image of a skeletal woman, in a gray tattered gown and disheveled gray hair, pacing in what is obviously an uncomfortable hunched position speaks volumes. Her existence and her past, Beckett suggests, is beyond recon-

struction. Despite her many attempts at correcting her narratives to make them more exact or for that matter more obscure—a characteristic that appears throughout Beckett's plays as early as *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *Endgame* (1957)—reveals that May is unable to tell her story right. She can never fix her past, and, thus, she can never archive it. Her trauma has resulted in this “tangle of tatters” never to be untangled, never to be sewn together. Despite her attempts to express how *it* was, May cannot work through her trauma. May is utterly unlike Winnie in *Happy Days*, who has a bag holding remnants of her past (an archive of sorts). Winnie is, as Beckett put it, an “organized mess” (qtd. Gontarski 74). May, like Mouth in *Not I*, is a helpless mess.

Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* provides new insights for the reader and viewer of Samuel Beckett's *Come and Go* and *Footfalls*. Derrida's deconstruction of Sigmund Freud's archive to explore the pull between hiding and making known, furthermore, enriches trauma studies as used in Beckett scholarship. Beckett's *Come and Go* and *Footfalls*, ultimately, depict the internal struggles between keeping secrets and making public, or, as Derrida outlines, the struggle to archive life experiences. It is evident that the elderly characters in these two one-acts suffer from trauma. However, what that trauma is—that “it” which May refers to—is not confronted and thus keeps them locked in, haunted by the very trauma they attempt to push away. Whether it is being born or being unloved, Beckett's women remain haunted by the past, unable to store it on tape reels, as Krapp is able to. Their struggle and failure to archive leaves the audience and readers with only helpless compassion to offer. □

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Here Boulter echoes S. E. Gontarski, who in 1985 wrote that *Footfalls* depicts “an absent presence, or a present absence” (166). Gontarski's observation was drawn from the play's genesis (manuscript studies) and Beckett's comments to Billie Whitelaw during the rehearsals of the world premiere of the play.

<sup>2</sup>His 2008 book, *Beckett: A Guide for the Perplexed*, provides a broader reading of the importance of Derrida in Beckett.

<sup>3</sup>Derrida's use of the word (at least in translation) “breakdown” allows for an understanding of this as more than merely a failing to bring back the moment; it can also be a malfunction and a destruction.

<sup>4</sup>Derrida theorizes that the death drive, which Freud argued was a drive towards death, destruction and the return to the inorganic, also destroys the desire to archive.

<sup>5</sup>Beckett may be challenging his audience to piece the story of these women together as he does in *Not I* and *That Time*. For a discussion of how Beckett invites his audience to do this, see Weiss 187–95.

<sup>6</sup>James Knowlson suggests that this and other episodes of breaking off love are traces of Beckett's relationship with his cousin, Peggy Sinclair and another young love of his, Ethna MacCarthy. For more on a biographical reading of *Krapp's Last Tape*, see *Damned* 397–99.

<sup>7</sup>Keir Elam asserts that a possible reading of “rings” is “a sign, perhaps, that they are all married or engaged,” but admits that the image is “also a possible pun, as if to say that they have formed analogous and still-remembered rings in the past” (148).

<sup>8</sup>Knowlson tell us that “Beckett insisted to Dr. Müller-Freienfels [who served as the artistic director of Germany's broadcasting system SDR] that ‘the sex of the hands [in the television play *Nacht und Traume*] must remain uncertain. One of our numerous teasers’” (*Damned* 600).

<sup>9</sup>Others, too, have imagined May as dead, a ghost haunting the old home or church. See, for example, Connor 170–71.

<sup>10</sup>For a discussion of Beckett, Freud and the father, see Kennedy 11–29.

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