

# The Listener as a Mediator in Beckett's *Embers*

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"[Sounds] occur," writes Roger Scruton, "but they stand alone, and can be identified without identifying any individual that emits them. [. . .] It is in some sense an accident if we can attribute a sound to a particular—to say that it is the sound *of* this thing, caused by changes *in* that thing, and so on" (61–2; original emphases). My analysis of an edition of the text and a recording of *Embers*, a play written by Samuel Beckett for radio, draws upon Scruton's definition of "sound," that it essentially "stand[s] alone." I will attempt to show that both the text and the recording experiment liberally with what Scruton calls the "true nature" (60) of sounds, which he describes as "information-bearing events that are organized aurally" (60). I shall also examine how verbally-described sounds in the text of *Embers* compare with physical sounds in the recording. All these will help elucidate how *Embers*' narrative-line is strung together by way of "sound" and "space"; that in turn will lead to our appreciation, for example, of how the play deals with the character Ada. The essay will conclude that sounds in *Embers*, despite their "nature" according to Scruton, are highly narrative-orientated—it is not where sounds come from but where the listener of the recording *believes* they come from that proves crucial when we interpret the play.<sup>1</sup>

## 1

The Grove edition of *Embers* begins with three lines of seemingly potent and yet rather abstract "stage" directions: "*Sea scarcely audible. / Henry's boots on shingle. He halts. / Sea a little louder*" (*Embers* 197). To whom is the sea "audible"? We assume that the character Henry is "hear[ing]" (*Embers* 197) the sound of the sea, the "real" sea in the world of time and space which the text of *Embers* has delineated for him. Indeed, the text makes it quite clear that Henry is highly conscious of that sound; we find Henry's first overt reference to the "audible" sea as early in the play as the beginning of his opening monologue, in which he addresses his conspicuously silent father:

[HENRY.] [. . .] Who is beside me now? (*Pause.*) An old man, blind and foolish.  
(*Pause.*) My father, back from the dead, to be with me. (*Pause.*) As if he hadn't

died. (*Pause.*) No, simply back from the dead, to be with me, in this strange place. (*Pause.*) Can he hear me? (*Pause.*) Yes, he must hear me. (*Pause.*) To answer me? (*Pause.*) No, he doesn't answer me. (*Pause.*) Just be with me. (*Pause.*) That sound you hear is the sea. (*Pause. Louder.*) I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. (*Pause.*) I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was. [. . .] (*Embers* 197)

Importantly, however, this portion of the monologue does not give us much information as to the kind of "sound" Henry is talking about; his assertion, "[t]hat sound you hear is the sea," is immediately counterbalanced by his rather mysterious admission, namely, the sound of the sea is "so strange" that it would be unrecognisable "if you didn't see what it was." In other words, there seems to be a discrepancy between what, to Henry, should be the sound of the sea and what, as far as he is concerned, the sea *sounds like at this very moment*. Nevertheless, that Henry does not go any further in detail as to the strangeness of the sound of the sea is also revealing to us: it leaves room for readers of the text to speculate that Henry may be voicing the psychological state he is in rather than referring to the sound of the sea per se. We recall that Marjorie Perloff in her analysis of *Embers* separates the "sound" of the sea from the "sea" itself (253); according to Perloff, "Henry's obsession is not with the sea as such but only with its *sound*, which he cannot escape, even when he tries to 'drown it out' by telling himself endless stories" (253; original emphasis).

Whereas the sea is "audible" from the very beginning of the play, which means that Henry talking about it gives us no surprise, other instances of sound effects in *Embers* tend to occur in reverse order, with Henry referring to them first and the "stage" directions that immediately follow Henry's lines confirming, and elaborating on, what he has said; for example,

[HENRY.] [. . .] (*Pause.*) Hooves! (*Pause. Louder.*) Hooves! (*Sound of hooves walking on hard road. They die rapidly away. Pause.*) Again! (*Hooves as before. Pause. Excitedly.*) Train it to mark time! Shoe it with steel and tie it up in the yard, have it stamp all day! (*Pause.*) [. . .] (*Embers* 197–98)

Similarly,

[HENRY.] [. . .] (*Pause.*) Close your eyes and listen to it, what would you think it was? (*Pause. Vehement.*) A drip! A drip! (*Sound of drip, rapidly amplified, suddenly cut off.*) Again! (*Drip again. Amplification begins.*) No! (*Drip cut off. Pause.*) [. . .] (*Embers* 200)

Unlike the sound of the sea, that of "hooves" is fleeting and ephemeral: it would never have been realised as anything "audible" if Henry had not called it up. Discussing the character Ada, about whom there will be more later, Graley Herren writes that she "is not real but is

instead a fictional construct conjured by Henry” (35); we might say that Henry the “conjurer” proves just as active when the “hooves” appear out of nowhere. The same is true with the sound of a “drip.” Alan W. Friedman points to “imperative” (155) as well as “descriptive” (155) aspects of what Henry utters, asserting that Henry is a “radio technician” (155) while being a character in the play (155). Friedman continues: “[S]ince the medium precludes the possibility that we *could* see what makes the sound, we cannot know whether to trust Henry when he insists that the noise we hear *is* external to him and natural, rather than internal—or just radio sound effects” (155; original emphases). The two portions of the text quoted above certainly show that there is a Brechtian side to the character Henry. The same quotations tell us, on the other hand, that Henry is not in total control of either the sound of “hooves” or that of a “drip.” According to the “stage” directions, “[*the hooves*] *die rapidly away*,” which suggests that, having been “conjured” up by Henry, the sound of “hooves” nevertheless disappears of its own accord; Henry’s “Again!” may therefore be interpreted as his plea for the sound of “hooves” to come back rather than his command as a “radio technician.” Likewise, the “stage” directions for the “drip” are countered by Henry’s “Again!” and “No!”

The text of *Embers* introduces and manipulates sounds in the manners which form two sides of the same coin: while the character Henry hears sounds *his* way in *his* possible world, even “conjuring” up some of them, the “audible” is not always in accordance with Henry’s wishes. In what follows the essay will discuss how *Embers* has materialised as a radio programme for the British Broadcasting Corporation. The BBC produced *Embers* in 1959; the piece was made commercially available in 2006 as part of a set of compact discs which the British Library released under the title *Samuel Beckett: Works for Radio*. All my discussion of sounds in the BBC *Embers* will be to this CD edition. I will show that, while verbal as well as non-verbal sounds in the BBC *Embers* attest to Scruton’s notion of “sounds,” that they “stand alone,” the sounds in the production at the same time direct the listener’s *spatial* attention in a manner which is strongly narrative-orientated.

## 2

In this section I will use the word “iconic” in the sense which Doris Mader proposes in her article on “audio-/radioliterature” (179). According to Mader, it is “the immediacy and iconicity of the ‘dramatic mode’” (195), in other words, “the congruence between story time and broadcast time” (195), that necessarily “reduce[s]” (195) sounds which are other than verbal “to the most typical ones that immediately allow us to identify the situation and its spatial setting” (195). As listeners of the BBC *Embers* we find that the sound of the sea is neither straightforwardly iconic nor totally symbolic. The sea in the production turns out to

be a blatant juxtaposition of two kinds of sound: we hear, on the one hand, what we can easily associate with the sounds of breaking waves; on the other, there is an “electronic drone” (Frost 365), a kind of artificial howling. The waves and the “drone” are heard concurrently.

If the waves and the “drone” overlap each other to let us the listeners of the piece detect some idiosyncrasy in what Henry calls the “sea,” there is evidence that the “sea” treads a fine line between the iconic and the symbolic. First of all, we note that the BBC production is quite faithful to the “stage” directions which appear at the beginning of Henry’s opening monologue in the text, “*Sea, still faint, audible throughout what follows whenever pause indicated*” (*Embers* 197): at every direction for a pause we find in the text, the waves and the “drone” are certainly “audible” to the listener of the BBC piece. Crucially in the production, the waves and the “drone” *more or less* keep to the rhythm which resembles the ebb and flow of the sea. To avoid creating too long a blank period between two pauses, which would be a serious deviation from the ebb and flow, the BBC piece even lets the listener hear the waves and the “drone” where there are no textual instructions for a pause. Nonetheless, as was emphasised above, the rhythm is only kept up *more or less*. Pauses in the text sometimes appear in quick succession, for example, “[. . .] no good. (*Pause.*) No good. (*Pause.*) Can’t do it! (*Pause.*) Listen to it! (*Pause.*) Father! (*Pause*)” (*Embers* 201), and the BBC production duly follows the instructions, making the waves and the “drone” fill in each of those pauses. To the contrary effect, there are also lengthy pauses in the text, each of which becomes a distinctly prolonged sound of the waves in the BBC production. The “*long pause*” in the following is a typical example: “[. . .] as the arm goes up to ring again recognizes . . . Holloway . . . (*long pause*) . . . yes, Holloway, recognizes Holloway, goes down and opens” (*Embers* 199).

We also note in the BBC piece that the waves and the “drone” fluctuate in quality and amplitude. While, on rare occasions, specific directions are given in the text, for example, “*He halts at water’s edge. Pause. Sea a little louder. Distant*” (*Embers* 205), the BBC production for the most part takes the liberty of changing the quality and/or the amplitude of the “drone” as well as the waves from one simple “pause” to the next. For example, the six pauses in the portion of the dialogue between Henry and Ada quoted below are turned into six fragments of the waves and the “drone,” with the final pause becoming what to the listener is the loudest and the most complex of the fragments:

ADA. I really could not tell you, Henry.

HENRY. It took us a long time to have her. (*Pause.*) Years we kept hammering away at it. (*Pause.*) But we did it in the end. (*Pause. Sigh.*) We had her in the end. (*Pause.*) Listen to it! (*Pause.*) It’s not so bad when you get out on it. (*Pause.*) Perhaps I should have gone into the merchant navy. (*Embers* 207)

This means that, even though Henry draws Ada’s attention to the sound of the sea

immediately before the fifth pause, the passage's sonic climax is reached not at the fifth but at the sixth pause.

All these examples indicate one particular principle which the BBC production has set up, and stuck to, in its interpretation of the "sound of the sea": clearly, elements of the iconic and the symbolic are intrinsic to the text itself; the production, on its part, has made certain that, while the sea should sound iconic enough, the symbolic will surface with just as strong an effect. As we have seen, the "drone" is added to the waves, the rhythm may quicken or be stretched out, and the sound quality and amplitude can vary.

The principle certainly applies to other kinds of non-verbal sound in the BBC piece, namely, the sound of "hooves," that of a "drip," that of a "door," and that of "stones." In terms of the rhythm it generates, the sound of "hooves" is fairly iconic in the BBC production; at the same time, and in terms of quality, the sound may strike the listener as being rather metallic and artificial, which points to the symbolic. The BBC piece emphasises the aspect of the symbolic more vigorously when it comes to the sound of a "drip." The sound reminds us more of some gigantic clock ticking than of any drop of liquid succumbing to gravitational force. As for the sound of a "door" and that of "stones," they are what human beings create: the "stage" directions in the text describe the former as a "[v]iolent slam of door" (*Embers* 201) and the latter as part of what Henry does, "He [. . .] catches up two big stones and starts dashing them together" (206). Interestingly enough, in the BBC piece both the "slamming" and the "dashing" are well-composed as sounds, by which I mean they are more systematically-created acoustic *effects* than what flaring human emotions may result in—again, this is in the direction of the symbolic.

It may at first glance be regarded that the sound of the character Addie practising a waltz on the piano is a clear anomaly, partly because it enjoys an unusually detailed description in the text (*Embers* 203–04) and partly, of course, because no other sequence in *Embers* features music. We might nevertheless argue that Addie's piano-practising sequence is yet another example of the iconic and the symbolic being embedded in the text. The sequence begins with the "stage" directions that say, "*Smart blow of cylindrical ruler on piano case. Unsteadily, ascending and descending, Addie plays scale of A Flat Major, hands first together, then reversed*" (*Embers* 203). Addie, we note, is less than perfect in playing the scale. She then sets off with a Chopin, or tries to:

[. . .] *Music Master beats two bars of waltz time with ruler on piano case. Addie plays opening bars of Chopin's 5th Waltz in A Flat Major, Music Master beating time lightly with ruler as she plays. In first chord of bass, bar 5, she plays E instead of F. Resounding blow of ruler on piano case. Addie stops playing.* (*Embers* 203–04)

[. . .] *Addie begins again, Music Master beating time lightly with ruler. When she comes to bar 5 she makes same mistake. Tremendous blow of ruler on piano case.*

*Addie stops playing, [ . . . ]. (Embers 204)*

If a smooth playing of the beginning of the waltz were called, for the sake of argument, an ideal musical fragment, what we have here is Addie messing up the fragment, as it were, and the piano teacher cutting into the fragment by making a series of non-musical sounds with a “ruler.” It is when we listen to the sequence in the BBC production that the genius of the play’s choice of music comes to the fore. In his discussion of the use of classical music in film, Royal Brown reminds us of “the tendency of classical music toward a greater degree of complexity than one generally finds in other types of music” (168), drawing our attention to the fact that, “paradoxically, this complexity allows for an easier breaking down of music’s larger, more longly [sic] elaborated structures into smaller units of affective meaning than is often possible with popular music” (168). To the listener of the BBC production, Addie playing the “opening bars” of the A-flat major waltz is quite instantly iconic, with the waltz being one of the best known of all the works for the piano written by Chopin; at the same time, the iconic is clearly overlaid with sounds which do not belong either to this particular waltz or the piano as a musical instrument, and that, we might assert, points to the symbolic. Addie’s “unstead[y]” technique is far more pronounced in the BBC production than has been implied in the text: to the listener’s ear, Addie’s A-flat major scale is very wobbly with a few notes being missed, her trills in the “opening bars” of the waltz are hesitant and much too slow, and her E in what was supposed to be the “first chord” is executed with some strange confidence. In the same vein, the piano teacher’s ruler “beating time” is more pronounced in the BBC piece than has been indicated by the word “lightly” in the text: for what they are worth, the beats sound harsh. Altogether, the A-flat major waltz does not sound the way the listener under other and more normal circumstances would expect it to sound. The piano-practising sequence in the BBC piece is fittingly analogous to other non-verbal sounds in the production.

What Scruton means by “sounds” being “information-bearing events,” which I referred to very briefly at the beginning of the essay, becomes much clearer if we look at an example:

When I hear a car passing, what I hear is the *sound* of a car passing, an event caused by the car’s passing but distinct from any event involving the car. The sound of the car is not an event in the car or a change in which the car participates. It is an event in itself. (Scruton 57; original emphasis)

While the non-verbal sounds in the BBC *Embers* may be an epitome of Scruton’s definition of “information-bearing events,” those sounds still hark back to their alleged sources; even the sounds of a “drip,” a “door,” and “stones,” which are by themselves hardly iconic in the BBC production, all make sense in the context that Henry lays out verbally. There is an iconic/symbolic link which connects the “events” together. With that in mind, we will now turn our attention to verbal sounds and sonic “space” in the BBC *Embers*.

In her book *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933*, Emily Thompson looks back on the fact that a proliferation of “electrically reproduced sound” (233) resulted in some fundamental change in people’s attitude to sound:

Radios, electrically amplified phonographs, public address systems, and sound motion pictures transformed the soundscape by introducing auditors not only to electrically reproduced sound but also to new ways of listening. [. . .] Indeed, the sound of space was effectively eliminated from the new modern sound as reverberation came to be considered an impediment, a noise that only interfered with the successful transmission and reception of the desired sound signal. (233–34)

I will in what follows use Thompson’s expression, the “eliminat[ion]” of the “sound of space,” not in the context of “architectural acoustics” in the first three decades of the twentieth century or, for that matter, in relation to the “culture of listening in America” but simply so that our discussion of sound in the BBC *Embers* shall have a conceptual reference point. Equally important to our discussion is the word “reverberation”:

As sound engineers grew adept in the new techniques of electrical recording, they learned to employ those techniques to create artificially the sound of space that had been banished from the studio itself. The “virtual space” (as we might call it today) that they created was not, however, associated with the real architecture of studio or theater, but instead represented the fictional space inhabited by the characters in the program being broadcast or filmed. (234)

Again, the word will not be used in the context of the time and place which Thompson focuses on in her book; I will not attempt to delve into any of the technical aspects of “reverberation,” either, for example, to what extent and in what ways “reverberation” was practicable in studio recordings in the late 1950s, when the BBC *Embers* was made. Throughout our discussion, the word “reverberation” shall simply mean the kind of sound that foregrounds the sense of “space.” What strikes the listener of the BBC *Embers* is the fact that the sound in it spans a wide range of “space”: at one end, the “sound of space” is almost totally “eliminated”; at the other end, “reverberation” is rampant. All these lead to the question which centres around the “fictional space,” as Thompson calls it, of *Embers*: How does the listener discern the play’s narrative-line?

That the “space” in which Ada *exists* may be out of Henry’s reach is subtly indicated in the text, namely, in the “stage” directions which introduce Ada to us for the first time:

[HENRY.] [. . .] Father! (*Pause.*) Tired of talking to you. (*Pause.*) That was always

the way, walk all over the mountains with you talking and talking and then suddenly mum and home in misery and not a word to a soul for weeks, sulky little bastard, better off dead. (*Long pause.*) Ada. (*Pause. Louder.*) Ada!

ADA. (*low remote voice throughout*) Yes.

HENRY. Have you been there long?

ADA. Some little time. (*Pause.*) [. . .] (*Embers* 201–02)

In contrast to Henry's father never responding in any way to his son, Ada accommodates Henry's wishes by making a verbal appearance. Henry, however, has to call upon her twice, the second time in a "louder" voice, which implies that, as characters, Ada and Henry are not in close proximity with each other. This assumption is supported by the directions that follow, according to which Ada's voice should be "low" and "remote." The fact that Henry in his first question to Ada uses the deictic word "there" backs up what the "stage" directions have suggested to us the readers: we do not know where exactly Ada is, but she is definitely not *here* with her husband. It turns out that the BBC production "eliminates" the "sound of space" for both Ada and Henry; nevertheless, we also find that Ada's voice is diametrically opposed to Henry's voice when it comes to the acoustic impression each gives to the listener. If Ada's voice strikes the listener as being quite "dead" in terms of acoustic resonance, that is hardly the case with Henry and his voice. The difference seems to lie in the diction: whereas the diction adopted by Jack MacGowran, the actor who plays the role of Henry, is quite rich in quality, pitch, loudness, and intonation, the actress who plays the role of Ada, Kathleen Michael, controls her diction in such a manner that Ada sounds more like a voice of a machine than that of a human being. It is the actress's extremely flat diction that makes the above-defined "elimination" doubly effective—the manner in which she utters words, phrases, and sentences quaintly befits the *dead* "sound of space."

Ulrika Maude, among others, highlights the question of "space" in *Embers* by comparing the play with another of Beckett's plays for radio, *All That Fall*: "[T]he different sounds in [*Embers*] function precisely as equivocal structuring devices that, more audaciously than in *All That Fall*, serve to complicate notions of spatial configuration" (58). As far as Ada's voice and Henry's voice in the BBC production are concerned, they certainly do not outdo each other: instead, as we have seen, the voices give the listener the impression that there is some kind of distance between the two characters. Drawing upon what Herren writes, "[E]ven if Ada exists only in Henry's mind, our all-access pass to his mind allows us to hear her clearly all the same" (35), we might assert the following: If Henry is free to place Ada's voice wherever he sees fit, which is another way of saying that the reader of the text has very little information regarding the whereabouts of Ada, the same kind of freedom will apply to any producer, engineer (or "radio technician"), actor, or actress who transforms the words on the page into a succession of sounds. In short, anyone involved in a production of *Embers*

is fully expected to take advantage of what the text does not specify. It so happens that the BBC production puts both Henry and Ada in an acoustically dead “space”—the listener nonetheless is under the impression that the two characters are spatially apart, which we attribute to the way Ada speaks. Other productions may explore other spatial possibilities. For example, we can easily imagine a production in which Ada finds herself in an acoustically dead “space” while Henry is put in a “space” that “reverberates.”

We must also remember that it is not even mandatory for any production of *Embers* to demonstrate a spatial distance between Ada and Henry. After all, can we not *feel*, by simply listening to their dialogue, what we have called “distance” between the two characters? For a case in point, I will briefly turn to the 1976 University of London Audio-Visual Centre production of *Embers*, which the Sound Archive at the British Library keeps in digital format. This particular production, unlike the BBC rendition of the play, was recorded in stereo, which makes the “sea” sound naturalistic as well as dynamic. Interestingly, though, the University of London production chooses not to emphasise the stereo effect when it comes to the dialogue between Ada and Henry: the two characters pretty much share “space,” in which neither of their voices “reverberates.” Moreover, Elvi Hale, the actress who plays Ada in the University of London production, adopts the kind of diction that perfectly matches the way Patrick Magee, the actor who plays Henry, speaks. In contrast to the emotionally-opaque and nearly unaccented Ada in the BBC piece, Ada in the University of London production sounds not only confident but even playful at times, has an Irish accent, and, whenever required, laughs heartily. Henry and Ada are, as it were, on the same wavelength in this production; any indication of “distance” between the two characters has to come from the lines they utter—as shown above, Ada being “distant” from Henry is embedded in the text itself.

Back to the BBC *Embers*, we find that one portion of the verbal exchange between Ada and Henry takes exception to what we would otherwise have regarded as a rule set specifically by the production, namely, those two characters would always be found where the “sound of space” was “eliminated.” That particular portion coincides with the moment when both Ada and Henry are suddenly thrown back “twenty years” (*Embers* 205), to what we may interpret as their first sexual encounter:

*(Sea suddenly rough.)*

ADA. *(twenty years earlier, imploring)* Don’t! Don’t!

HENRY. *(ditto, urging)* Darling!

ADA. *(ditto, more feebly)* Don’t!

HENRY. *(ditto, exultantly)* Darling!

*(Rough sea. Ada cries out. Cry and sea amplified, cut off. End of evocation.*

*Pause. Sea calm. [. . .]) (Embers 205)*

The listener of the BBC production will note that Ada's voice has suddenly acquired some youthful lustre; even more importantly, each of Ada's "Don't!"s is quite naturalistically intoned, because of which the young Ada strikes the listener as a full-blown human being, a woman brimming with emotion. Henry, too, sounds much younger. What proves most relevant to our discussion, however, is the fact that Ada's and Henry's voices "reverberate," with a cavernous and echoing effect, for the duration of this particular "evocation." We might, on the one hand, be led to say that the "reverberation" adds nothing to the "evocation" other than some rather cheap sentimentality. On the other hand, we can see that Ada and Henry have travelled the whole span of sonic "space" at a lightning speed, from the spot where the "sound of space" was "eliminated" to the spot where verbal sound is awash with acoustic resonance; at the end of the "evocation," the two characters will travel just as quickly back to the world of "dead" acoustics. All those make sense when we realise that the BBC production also gives the "sound of space" to the play's other "evocati[ve]" moments, none of which involves Ada's voice: when Henry remembers Addie as a small child refusing to "look at the lambs" (*Embers* 201), the girl's "loud wail" (201) is accompanied by an echoing effect; the piano-practising sequence, which we have discussed, is in its entirety enwrapped in a kind of roomy acoustics, complete with Addie's echoing wail (204); the sequence in which Addie has a riding lesson (204) comprises the sound of "galloping hooves" (204) that gets increasingly rich in "reverberation," the riding master's verbal instructions that also accumulate acoustic resonance, and Addie's echoing wail; and when, as we have seen, Henry "dash[es] [two big stones] together," his voice and the sound of the "stones" accumulate an echoing effect (206). In the previous section, I referred to an iconic/symbolic link which connects non-verbal sounds in the BBC *Embers* together. Thinking in terms of "space," we may now assert that the link extends to the realm of verbal sounds in the production.

The BBC *Embers* has proven to be a highly sophisticated experiment on what a collection of verbal and non-verbal sounds might achieve in the domain of auditory "space." If, as Maude in discussing the "sound" and "space" of *Embers* points out, "[t]he appearance within one scene of sounds that identify another sound space [. . .] serves to complicate notions of *the origin of the various sounds* in the play" (58; my emphasis), our analysis of the text and the BBC production of *Embers* seems to explain the mechanism of the "complication": the narrative-line of *Embers* can be strung together only when the concept of "sound" and its applications intertwine with that of "space" and its applications. Despite Scruton, it is the listener's theoretical as well as visceral quest for the "origin" of each sound that will culminate in what she or he would call the "narrative-line" of *Embers*. The listener is a mediator between a production of *Embers* and its narrative-line. Depending on where the listener *believes* each sound comes from, *Embers* as a play may change the course of its narrative; in that respect, the listener is a logical extension of the character Henry, which

brings us back to the first section of the essay. There is one kind of non-verbal sound in *Embers* that we have not discussed—"Henry's boots on shingle." While it reads rather unromantically descriptively on the page, the sound of a pair of boots pressing against pebbles points to Henry's physical weight in a production. It is not as if any production of *Embers* will encourage the listener to keep the protagonist of the play completely afloat.

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