“I OPEN”
Narration in Samuel Beckett’s *Cascando*

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This essay pursues a thorough analysis of the narrative elements contained in Samuel Beckett’s short radio play *Cascando* (1962) in order to support recent claims made by Brian Richardson, Monica Fludernik, Ansgar Nünning, Roy Sommer and Manfred Jahn concerning the narrativity of drama. Stating that *Cascando* is exemplary for the level of narrativity that can be found in dramatic texts, the essay aspires to be a first step in providing the practical research the recognition of drama as a narrative genre demands.

As might be expected, one of the most compelling dramatists to employ narration on stage is Samuel Beckett, especially in his later work, where dramatic narrators and monologists create the world around them as they name it.

Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices*

I open.
Opener, in Beckett, *Cascando*

In recent years, several narratologists have insisted on the recognition of drama as a narrative genre, going as far as to declare drama “the most important narrative genre whose narrativity needs to be documented” (Fludernik 1996, 348). Brian Richardson provides a good summary of the issue:

It is conventionally assumed that, because plays are non-narrative, the complex issues associated with theories of point of view can have nothing to do with the stage. Furthermore, major theorists of both narrative discourse and the semiotics of theater generally
agree that drama is exclusively a mimetic genre, while fiction combines *mimesis* and *diegesis*.

(1988, 193)

Recently, several scholars have objected to this dichotomy between narrative and drama, pointing out the presence of several diegetic elements in drama. Brian Richardson is widely considered the pioneer of research in this direction. His work adapts concepts like ‘narrative voice,’ ‘point of view’ and ‘narrative time,’ typically associated with fiction, to the world of theatre (see Richardson 1987, 1988 and 2001). Scholars such as Manfred Jahn, Ansgar Nünning and Roy Sommer and Monika Fludernik have followed in his footsteps. Their valuable contributions are a powerful plea to bridge the gap between drama and narrative, a plea that is best summarized in Richardson’s own words: “Narrative and performance are two of the most widespread and best appreciated cultural forms of our time: now, both seem to be everywhere. It is only appropriate that the site in which they are fused together is given the attention it deserves” (2001, 690).

Several of the aforementioned scholars have insisted on practical narratological research of drama. I have already quoted Fludernik’s request to document the narrativity of drama, which dates back to 1996. She recently repeated her plea, agreeing with Nünning and Sommer’s “proposal for a research programme that assesses the utility of narratological categories for the analysis of drama” (Fludernik 2008, 357). These two researchers further urge us to “explore the different ways in which novels and plays tend to use narratives” (Nünning and Sommer, 347). Therefore, it is striking how little actual textual research has been done on the subject. Although nearly all of the previously cited articles mention several plays and briefly indicate their narrative qualities, few contain exhaustive textual analysis. Their objectives are situated on the theoretical level, rather than the practical, to call attention to the possibilities of utilizing narratology in drama theory. The one exception I managed to find is again by Richardson, who wrote up an extensive analysis of narrativity in one of Harold Pinter’s plays in his 1991 article “Pinter’s Landscape and the Boundaries of Narrative.” Suggesting that the problems critics have had with Pinter may be owing to the revolutionary nature of his work, he explains the motivation behind the article as follows: