BRITISH AND IRISH AUTHORS

Introductory critical studies

SAMUEL BECKETT

While providing a critical introduction for the student of Samuel Beckett’s work, and for other readers and theatre-goers who have been influenced by it, this study also presents an original perspective on one of the century’s greatest writers of prose fiction and drama. Andrew Kennedy links Beckett’s vision of a diminished humanity with his art of formally and verbally diminished resources, and traces the fundamental simplicity – and coherence – of Beckett’s work beneath its complex textures. In a section on the plays, Dr Kennedy stresses the humour and tragicomic humanism alongside the theatrical effectiveness; and in a discussion of the fiction (the celebrated trilogy of novels) he relates the relentless diminution of the ‘story’ to the diminishing selfhood of the narrator. An introduction outlines the personal, cultural and specifically literary contexts of Beckett’s writing, while a concluding chapter offers up-to-date reflections on his œuvre, from the point of view of the themes highlighted throughout the book.

This study, complete with a chronological table and a guide to further reading, will prove stimulating for both beginners and advanced students of Beckett.
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Introductory critical studies

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For Ruby Cohn
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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities for a grant that enabled me to complete this study at Clare Hall, Cambridge – that ideal working place – in the spring and summer of 1987.
Chronology

The following is a selective chronology of Beckett’s life with the dates of publication or first performance of principal works. For fuller details of the works discussed at length in this book, see the Select bibliography on p. 166.

1906  Born at Foxrock, near Dublin, allegedly on Good Friday, 13 April
1920–3  Portora Royal School, Ulster
1923–7  Trinity College, Dublin. Read Modern languages (English, French and Italian)
1927–8  Taught for two terms at Campbell College, Belfast
1928  Began two-year exchange fellowship at l’Ecole Normale Supérieure as Lecteur d’anglais. Met Joyce
1930  Published Whoroscope (poem on Descartes), which won a £10 prize from Hours Press
1931  Published Proust in London (criticism). MA Trinity College, Dublin, and resigned from post of Assistant in French there
1932  After six months in Kassel began a period of wanderings in Germany, France, England and Ireland. Began Dream of Fair to Middling Women, which draws on these journeys
1933  Father died, leaving Beckett a £200 annuity. Lived for about two years in Chelsea, London, supplementing his annuity by reviewing and translation
1934  Published More Pricks than Kicks (short stories). Began analysis at Tavistock Clinic
1935  Published Echo’s Bones (collection of thirteen poems)
1937  Settled in Paris
1938  Published Murphy in London (a novel in English,
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begun in 1934 – rejected by forty-two publishers before acceptance by Routledge

Stabbed in a Paris street, 7 January. Visited in hospital by pianist Suzanne Dumesnil, who later became his wife

1939 Returned to Paris, from a visit to Dublin, at the outbreak of the Second World War

1941–2 Worked in the French Resistance with his friend Alfred Péron

1942 The Gestapo arrested Péron; Beckett and Suzanne Dumesnil fled from Paris to Roussillon in unoccupied France. Began writing Watt

1945 Worked for Irish Red Cross in Normandy. Received Croix de Guerre and Médaille de la Résistance for his service in war-time France. Visited Ireland, and finished Watt in Dublin

1946 Began his most creative period, writing in French, with Mercier et Camier (novel) and Nouvelles (‘La Fin’, ‘L’Expulsé’, ‘Le Calmant’ and ‘Premier Amour’ – stories)

1947 Completed Molloy and Eleuthéria (unpublished play)

1948 Completed Malone Meurt

1949 Completed En attendant Godot – in January Published Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit in transition

1950 Completed L’Innommable. The trilogy of novels was accepted for publication by Editions de Minuit in November. Beckett returned to Dublin before his mother’s death in August

1952 En attendant Godot published in Paris

1953 En attendant Godot first performed at the Théâtre de Babylone, Paris.

1955 Waiting for Godot produced in London. Began Fin de Partie (Endgame)

1956 Waiting for Godot published in London

1957 All that Fall broadcast by BBC Third Programme. World première of Fin de Partie (in French) in London

1958 World première of Krapp’s Last Tape in London

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1961  World première of *Happy Days* in New York.
      *Comment c’est (How It Is)* published in Paris

1963  World première of *Play* (in German) in Ulm

1969  Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, 23 October.
      Accepted the award but did not attend the prize-
      giving ceremony in Stockholm

1970  *Lessness* published in London

1972  World première of *Not I* in New York

1976  *That Time and Footfalls* première at the Royal Court
      Theatre to celebrate Beckett’s seventieth birthday

1977  *Ghost Trio* and . . . but the clouds broadcast on BBC
      Television

1981  *Ill Seen Ill Said* published in *New Yorker*. World
      première of *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu* in Buffalo and
      at Ohio State Beckett Symposium respectively

1982  World première of *Catastrophe* at Avignon Festival

1984  *Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett* published in
      London

1986  Beckett’s eightieth birthday celebrated with con-
      ferences in Paris, New York, and Stirling, unattended
      by Beckett
Note on texts

References to Beckett’s texts are to the following single-title editions:

*Endgame*, Faber, London, 1958
*Knapp’s Last Tape*, Faber, London, 1959
*Happy Days*, Faber, London, 1963
*Play*, Faber, London, 1964