When Samuel Beckett first came to international prominence with the success of *Waiting for Godot*, many critics believed the play was divorced from any recognisable context. The two tramps, and the master and servant they encounter, seemed to represent no one and everyone. Today, critics challenge the assumption that Beckett aimed to break definitively with context, highlighting images, allusions and motifs that tether Beckett’s writings to real people, places and issues in his life. This wide-ranging collection of essays from thirty-seven renowned Beckett scholars reveals how extensively Beckett entered into dialogue with important literary traditions and the realities of his time. Drawing on his major works, as well as on a range of letters and theoretical notebooks, the essays are designed to complement each other, building a broad overview that will allow students and scholars to come away with a better sense of Beckett’s life, writings and legacy.

Anthony Uhlmann is a Professor of Literature and the Director of the Writing and Society Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney. He is the author of a number of works on Samuel Beckett, including *Beckett and Poststructuralism* (1999) and *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (2006).
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### Abbreviations

**BECKETT**

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<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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Abbreviations

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

HRHRC  Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
TCD   Manuscript Department, Library, Trinity College Dublin
UoR Department of Special Collections, University of Reading (Beckett Archives).

OTHER

Chronology

1906  Samuel Barclay Beckett born to May and William Beckett in their house ‘Cooldrinagh’ in upper-middle-class Foxrock, south of Dublin, on Good Friday, 13 April. He has a brother (Frank) who is his elder by four years.

1911  Attends kindergarten at Elsner’s private academy (run by sisters Ida and Pauline Elsner) at nearby Leopardstown.

1913  Takes first communion at Tullow Church.

1915  Student at the Earlsfort House School in Dublin.

1920  Moves to Enniskillen in the north of Ireland to attend boarding school at the Portora Royal School.

1921  Is elected to the school’s Literary and Scientific Society.

1922  Is made a Junior Prefect.

1923  Returns to Dublin and enters Trinity College Dublin (TCD) as a fee-paying student. Begins attending plays at the Abbey Theatre and other theatres in Dublin. Attends silent movies.

1924  Studies English, French and Italian at TCD.

1925  Studies English, French and Italian at TCD. Wins prize for Composition at Lectures.

1926  Travels to France on a cycling tour of the Loire Valley. Moves to College rooms at 39 New Square Dublin. Here he meets Alfred Péron, an exchange lecteur from the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS).

1927  Selected as an exchange lecteur with the ENS. Travels to Italy. Awarded his BA, first in the First Class.

1928  Moves to Belfast to teach English and French at Campbell College in January, but leaves the position in July. Meets his cousin Peggy Sinclair in Dublin then travels to visit her in Kassel and then in Vienna in September. Takes up his post as lecteur at ENS in November. Meets his compatriot Thomas McGreevy’
and forms a strong and enduring friendship. McGreevy introduces him to James Joyce and his circle. Beckett also meets Jean Beaufret and Eugene Jolas at this time. Beckett helps Joyce with the proofs to ‘Work in Progress’ (later published as *Finnegans Wake*). In December, Joyce suggests to Beckett that he write an essay on Work in Progress and gives advice on the topic and reading matter for what will become ‘Dante…Bruno.Vico..Joyce’.

1929
Publishes both ‘Dante…Bruno.Vico..Joyce’ and his first short story, ‘Assumption’, in the journal *transition* with which he will be closely associated (as an occasional contributor and a regular, mostly uncredited, translator) both before and after World War Two. Publishes *Che Sciacigua* in *TCD* magazine.

1930
Begins work with Alfred Péron on a translation of the *Anna Livia Plurabelle* section of Joyce’s ‘Work in Progress’ into French. Submits his poem *Whoroscope* to the Hours Press, which offered a prize for a poem on time, and wins the prize. The poem is subsequently published with notes added at the request of the publishers. Begins writing his long essay *Proust*. Successfully applies for a lectureship in modern languages at TCD and returns to Dublin to take up the position in October, but confides to McGreevy from early on that he is not happy there. Corresponds with publisher on *Proust*, asking to add a chapter comparing the use of time in Bergson with that in Proust but finds himself too busy to add this chapter.

1931

1932
Visits his cousins and Peggy in Kassel. While there he sends a telegram submitting his resignation from TCD. Publishes ‘Sedendo et Quiescendo’ in *transition* and ‘Dante and the Lobster’ in *This Quarter*. Sends *Dream* to Charles Prentice at Chatto and Windus but it is rejected. It is subsequently rejected by Cape, Hogarth, Grayson and Grayson, Dent, Methuen and others. Has operation to remove a cyst on his neck.

1933
Peggy Sinclair dies of tuberculosis in May. In June his father dies of a heart attack. Abandons attempt to publish *Dream* and instead takes sections from it to add to his collection of short stories *More Pricks than Kicks*. Sends *MPTK* to Chatto and Windus who accept it for publication.
Chronology

1934 Moves to London in January. Soon after begins psychoanalytic treatment (after a near breakdown he attributes to his response to the deaths that occurred in 1933) with Wilfred Bion. MPTK published by Chatto and Windus in May (the book sells poorly). In October it is banned in Ireland.


1936 Reads Geulincx in TCD library while finishing Murphy. Writes to the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein and offers to work for him. Finishes Murphy and begins to send it to publishers (it is rejected by a number of publishers, including Chatto and Windus, Heinemann, Constable and Lovat Dickson). Leaves for an extended tour of Germany in September.

1937 Returns to Foxrock in April. Begins work on an ultimately unfinished play about Samuel Johnson called ‘Human Wishes’. Moves back to Paris in October. Murphy is accepted for publication in December.


1939 Last copies of MPTK pulped. Travels to Ireland briefly but returns to Paris the day after France declares war on Germany on 4 September.

1940 Finishes translating Murphy into French (which he worked on to begin with Alfred Péron). Germans break French lines in June and the French government and two million refugees leave Paris (among them Beckett and Suzanne). Beckett and Suzanne return to occupied Paris in September. Nazis require all Jews to register and carry identification papers.

In March Beckett’s friend Paul Léon is transported to Auschwitz where he dies in April. Jews in Paris required to wear yellow Star of David on their outer clothing. From July the registered Jews in Paris begin to be deported en masse to Nazi extermination camps. On 16 August, Alfred Péron is arrested after ‘Gloria SMH’ is betrayed. Informed by Péron’s wife, Beckett and Suzanne immediately flee their flat. Over two months they slowly make their way to Roussillon in the Vaucluse, which is outside the German occupied zone in ‘Vichy’ France. In November, Vichy France too is occupied by German troops.

Beckett works on a farm for the Aude family. Murphy goes out of print having sold 600 copies. Beckett continues work on Watt.


Beckett is awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French government in March. Makes his way to Dublin via London. War in Europe ends on 8 May. Finishes Watt and begins to send it to publishers. Experiences the ‘vision’ described in Krapp’s Last Tape, which he tells Knowlson took place in his mother’s room in Foxrock, through which he comes to understand how he should write from now on. Works at Saint-Lô in France as a volunteer with the Irish Red Cross. Beckett signs a contract with Bordas for the French Murphy and all subsequent work.

Ends work at Saint-Lô and returns to Paris. Begins writing short story Suite et Fin first in English but then continues it in French. Suite is in part published by the Jean-Paul Sartre Simone De Beauvoir journal Les Temps modernes in July. Writes The Capital of the Ruins. Starts work on Mercier et Camier in July and completes it in October. Writes the short stories ‘L’expulsé’ and ‘Premier amour’ and begins ‘Le Calmant’.

Begins writing (in French) his first full-length play, Eleutheria, in January and completes it in February. The French Murphy is published in April. Begins Molloy in May and finishes it on 1 November. George Reavey unable to find a publisher for Watt. Reluctantly Beckett takes up an offer to work as a translator for the journal Transition, which has been revived under the stewardship of Georges Duthuit with whom Beckett discusses his aesthetic ideas in an important series of letters (see L2).

Chronology


1950 Finishes first version of *L’innommable* on 21 January but revises it later in the year. Returns to Ireland in June due to his mother’s ill health. May Beckett dies on 25 August. Suzanne, who has taken over as Beckett’s French agent, has *Molloy, Malone meurt* and *L’innommable* accepted by Les Editions de Minuit (who will subsequently publish all Beckett’s work in French). Publishes English extracts of *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* in Transition in October.

1951 Begins *Textes pour rien* in February and completes them all on 20 December. *Molloy* is published by Minuit in March. Roger Blin begins to try and stage *En attendant Godot* from April. Minuit publishes *Malone meurt* in November. From December he begins but abandons a number of works, with the extraordinarily productive period, which he called the ’siege in a room’ (from 1946–51) coming to an end.

1952 Purchases land in Ussy sur Marne, where he will from now on spend a good deal of time, and which becomes a writing retreat from Paris. *En attendant Godot* is published by Minuit in September. Rehearsals for Blin’s production of *Godot* begin in November.

1953 Rehearsals of *Godot* attended by critics, including Ruby Cohn, on 3 and 4 January, with official opening on 5 January. Finishes building a house at Ussy. *L’innommable* is published by Minuit in June. Publishers of erotic fiction Merlin agree to publish *Watt* and it appears under the ‘Olympia Press’ imprint in August. Beckett works on an English version of *Molloy* with Patrick Bowles and a German translation with Erich Franzen. Works on a French translation of *Watt* with Daniel Mauroc. Barney Rosset of Grove Press, New York, asks to see translations of *Molloy* and *Godot*, which are subsequently accepted. Minuit buy the rights to the French *Murphy* from Bordas.

1954 Tentatively begins work on *Fin de Partie*. Returns to writing in English ‘From an Abandoned Work’ in an effort to overcome writer’s block. Grove Press publishes *Waiting for Godot* in September. Beckett’s brother Frank dies the same month. Revises Bowles’ translation of *Molloy*.

1955 Olympia Press publishes *Molloy* in English in Paris March and Grove publishes it in New York in August. Works, with difficulty
on *Fin de partie*. The first English production of *Godot*, directed by Peter Hall, is staged at the Arts Theatre in London beginning in August. It premieres in Dublin in October. *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien* is published by Minuit in November.

1956 *Godot* premieres in Miami in the United States in January and moves to New York in April. Faber publishes *Waiting for Godot* in London in February. Beckett sends *Mime du rêveur* to Minuit. Beckett works on *Fin de partie* and, having been asked by Martin Esslin at the BBC, for a radio play, begins work on *All That Fall*, which he finishes in September and sends to the BBC. Finishes *Fin de partie* about the same time. Grove publishes *Malone Dies* in October.

1957 *All That Fall* is broadcast by the BBC. Minuit publish *Fin de partie, suivi de Acte sans paroles*. The world premieres of these plays (in French) take place in London in April before moving to Paris. Finishes translation of *Endgame* in June. In August, Faber publishes *All That Fall* and a French translation prepared with Robert Pinget appears with Minuit in October. In November in San Francisco the San Francisco Actor’s Workshop, directed by Herbert Blau, stages a famous production of *Waiting for Godot* in San Quentin Prison.


1960 Minuit publishes *La dernière bande, suivi de Cendres*. *Krapp* premieres in America in January and *La dernière bande* premieres in France in March. Calder publishes *Molloy, Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* in a single edition. *The Old Tune*, an adaptation by Beckett of Robert Pinget’s radio play *La manivelle*, is broadcast on the BBC. Both texts are published by Minuit in
September. Begins work on *Happy Days* in October. Finally finishes *Comment c’est*.

1961

*Comment c’est* published by Minuit in January. Marries Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil in March. Begins translating *Comment c’est* into English. Finishes *Happy Days* in May, which premieres in New York in September and is published by Grove the same month. *Poems in English* is published by Calder in London. Begins writing *Cascando* in December.

1962


1963

Minuit publishes Beckett’s translation of *Happy Days, Oh les beaux jours* in February. *Play* finished in March. Writes outline of *Film*, which he sends to Grove. Attends rehearsals of *Spiel* in Ulm, the German version of *Play*, which is also the world premiere of the play. Calder publishes *Murphy* and *Watt* in October.

1964


1965

Begins writing *Eh Joe* in April and finishes it in May. *Film* shown at the New York Film Festival. Begins work on *Assez*. *Imagination morte imaginez* is published by Minuit in October and *Imagination Dead Imagine* is published in the *Sunday Times*. Begins work on *Le Dépeupleur*. Works with director Jean-Marie Serreau on film version of *Comédie*.

1966

Minuit publishes *Comédie et actes diverses* in January; *Come and Go* premieres in its German version in Berlin the same month. Begins *Bing* in June, which he finishes in September. It is published by Minuit in October. *Eh Joe* is broadcast by the BBC in July.

1967

Minuit publishes *D’un ouvrage abandonné*, and *Têtes-mortes* in February. Thomas McGreevy dies in March. *Eh Joe and Other Writings* published by Faber in March. Beckett directs his own production of *Endspiel (Endgame)* from August to September in Berlin. *No’s Knife: Collected Shorter Prose* is published by Calder.
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in November and as Stories and Texts for Nothing by Grove in December.

1968

1969
Beckett wins the Nobel Prize for Literature in October, while he is in Tunisia.

1970

1971

1972

1973
Not I premières in London and is published by Faber in January. Works on translations of short prose works: He is bareheaded, Horn came always, I gave up before birth. First Love is published by Calder in July.

1974
Begins writing That Time. Attends rehearsals for London production of Happy Days in October and in December works on the Schiller Theater production of Godot.

1975

1976
Begins work on the TV play Ghost Trio. Pour finir encore published by Minuit in February. Works with Billie Whitelaw on a production of Footfalls and a production of That Time, which premières in May. Meets composer Morton Feldman and sends him the short work neither. Begins the TV play ... but the clouds... which he sends to the BBC in November and works on at the BBC in December. Begins writing the short poems in French he calls the mirlitonnades. James Knowlson and John Pilling found the Journal of Beckett Studies at Reading University.