

London Beckett Seminar
Programme, Abstracts and Biographies
2023-24

Convenors:

Prof Derval Tubridy, Goldsmiths, University of London
Stefano Rosignoli, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

Contact:

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Friday, 29th September 2023, 18.00-19.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Dr Trish McTighe (Queen's University Belfast)
“Staging Place, Reconfiguring Time: Festivals & their Artists”

What is the relationship between arts festivals and artists? As the festival form has become a vital component in contemporary global arts ecologies, this question might be seen to take on a certain urgency. It is vital that we understand the role of festival funding and programming in elevating certain artists, building audiences for their art, and re-reading their work within and against new geographic and political contexts. The highly festivalised oeuvre of Samuel Beckett presents a historic and evolving case study for the exploration of the relationship between festivals and a specific body of artwork. Examining some of the ways that festivals have engaged with Beckett's work in the Irish context (north and south) prompts us to think more broadly about the roles that festivals play for their artists, as well as their limitations.

Drawing on my recently published monograph, *Carnivals of Ruin*, my presentation will highlight aspects of festivals as they pertain to Beckett's work, focusing on place and time. With reference to the work of Netia Jones for the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival, I will examine how the temporal structures of festivals afford certain artists opportunities for creative work that might not otherwise occur. I engage also with the idea that, as vehicles for art, festivals are also a means of showcasing certain places and locales. Following Marco d'Eramo's *The World in a Selfie* (Verso, 2021), I will look at how Beckett's work (and biography) has been used as a means of marketing, and indeed “staging”, place and so it has been subjected to the logics and imperatives of the tourism industry. The presentation will close with a consideration of the broader questions raised by interrogating Beckett's work through the lens of festival studies regarding the relationship between the arts and festivals.

TRISH MCTIGHE is Lecturer in Drama at Queen's University Belfast. Her first monograph, *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama* was published in 2013 with Palgrave, and in 2016 she co-edited (with David Tucker) the double volume *Staging Beckett* edited collections (Bloomsbury-Methuen). Her second monograph, *Carnivals of Ruin: Beckett, Ireland, and the Festival Form*, was published in 2023 in the “Cambridge Elements Series” (Cambridge University Press). She has published in the journals *Modern Drama*, *Samuel Beckett Today/ Ajourd'hui* and *Irish University Review*, among others. She is Performance Review Editor for the *Journal of Beckett Studies* and co-convenor (with Céline Thobois) of the Samuel Beckett Working Group at IFTR-International Federation for Theatre Research. She can be contacted at t.mctighe@qub.ac.uk.

Friday, 20th October 2023, 18.00-19.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Prof Lucas Margarit (University of Buenos Aires)
“Beckett’s Presence in the South: Notes from Buenos Aires”

The first Argentinian translation of a work by Samuel Beckett was *Esperando a Godot* [Waiting for Godot], translated by Pablo Palant, and it was published in Buenos Aires in 1954. The publication was followed by the translation of several other works—for instance *Malone muere* [Malone Dies], translated by the novelist José Bianco in 1958, or *Final de Partida* [Endgame], translated by the actor and stage director Francisco Javier in 1964, which demonstrate an early interest in Beckett’s work. Evidence of that interest was also given by the presence of Beckett’s plays in a few theatrical seasons in the city of Buenos Aires, from 1956, and then throughout the country, especially in the provinces of Córdoba and Santa Fe.

My presentation will focus on two subjects. On the one hand, on the first version of *Esperando a Godot*, which was premiered on stage two years later and which was the starting point of a developing interest in Beckett’s work among Argentinian audiences and readers. On the other hand, fast-forwarding to the end of that developing interest, the presentation will focus on the work *Los abetos* [The Firs], by Luciano Lamberti (2020): a novel featuring Samuel Beckett as its main character. In synthesis, I will offer a panoramic view of the fascination with Beckett’s work among Argentinian readers, writers and theatre audiences.

LUCAS MARGARIT is a poet, translator, and scholar. He is currently Professor of English Literature at the University of Buenos Aires, in Argentina. Beyond his numerous publications on Beckett, Lucas has written extensively on poetry and poetics in the early modern period. Together with María Inés Castagnino, he edits the journal *Beckettiana*, which is the only scholarly journal in Spanish devoted to the life and work of Samuel Beckett. He also hosted the last Annual Conference of the Samuel Beckett Society, in October 2022: the hugely successful “Beckett and Poetry/y la Poesía”, in Buenos Aires. His last book is *El monólogo mudo. En torno a la obra de Samuel Beckett* (Atuel, 2023) and, as a poet, *Telesio. Brevisimo tratado sobre el asombro* (Leteo, 2021) and *Vestigios de lo que se puede ver* (Insaciables, 2022).

Friday, 17th November 2023, 18.00-19.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Dr Lois More Overbeck (Emory University)
“Just a Little Correspondence... : Introducing *Chercher*”

Beckett graciously met persons who expressed interest in his work, but he steadfastly refused interviews. He felt he had nothing to say about his work, which he knew only “from the inside, the making relationship”. His “making” continued beyond the writing and publication, to translating and directing. Unaffected by the “critics”, he only performed that role with great reluctance. His public persona might well have been the mute Beckett, who refuses to answer questions, filmed by Swedish television in 1969 in the wake of the Nobel Prize.

But Beckett did write letters to friends, colleagues, publishers, strangers. And what letters they were! In preparation for *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, we consulted over 16,000 letters as editors of the project. When we met with Beckett, over small coffees at a small table in Paris, he had several requests. He asked that we not publish until after his death—which, considering the complexity of the project, was not a problem. He was concerned that the letters reflect his work, not personal affairs. Then he offered his most valuable suggestion: “You will get round and see these people, won’t you?”. We readily assented.

And so our effort to consult and edit Beckett’s letters was enriched by the willingness of many of his recipients to meet with us, to share their letters and their lives with us. Their high regard for Samuel Beckett, and his importance to them shone through. The stories live behind the footnotes and complete the human dimension that the letters bring to his work.

LOIS MORE OVERBECK has degrees from the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania, and is based at Emory University, in Atlanta. She served as Managing Editor of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, published in four volumes by Cambridge University Press (2009-16). The *Letters* have reached international audiences, with German, French, Italian and Chinese translations.

The print edition of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* selected and published only about 2,500 letters. To share the research of the edition more widely, Lois More Overbeck collaborated with the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship to develop a LOCATION REGISTER, which identified letters in public archives, and now CHERCHER, an interactive index to these letters. *Chercher* identifies persons, organisations, places, productions, publications, writing, reading, translating, music, works of art, and world events mentioned in Beckett’s letters in public archives. It offers a double chronology (“Beckett’s Life/Work” and “World Events”), as well as filmed interviews. The metadata is presented as an open access database using open source software, but without compromising the copyright and ownership rights of the letters. The research of the editors and over 350 Emory students who worked with the project, from 1990 to 2023, can be widely shared.

The intent of *Chercher* is to encourage Beckett readers and scholars to “discover” the threads of connection among those who constituted Beckett’s world between 1906 and 1989, his work, and the depth of his archives. *Chercher* will be maintained and updated as new letters enter public archives by an Administrative Board comprised of five to seven scholars at any given time, each of whom have worked with the project at Emory and abroad. The archives of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* Project will be placed in the Rose Library at Emory University, where transcriptions and research of the edition can be consulted. There it will join and enhance other modern literary archives, and make the archives a major node in twentieth-century literary scholarship.

Emory University, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* Project, *Location Register*: <https://beckett.library.emory.edu>.

Emory University, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* Project, *Chercher*: <https://chercherbeckettletters.emory.edu>.

Friday, 15th December 2023, 18.00-19.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Dr James Baxter (Trinity College Dublin)
**“fun, hats, sex, etc’’: Samuel Beckett, *New World Writing*
and the Institutional Avant-Garde”**

Although Beckett visited the United States only once, his reputation was reinforced by a sturdy network of cultural intermediaries. This presentation will position Beckett’s transactions with the American literary magazine *New World Writing* as a seldom explored early step in Beckett’s international reception. As a hybrid “little magazine” and mass-circulation paperback, with print runs topping 200,000 copies, *New World Writing* served as a major organ of “cold war modernism” in the Fifties, to use Greg Barnishel’s definition, and a somewhat hawkish exponent of American-led liberal internationalism. Released by mass-market publisher New American Library and coordinated by its senior editor Arabel J. Porter, the magazine was marketed as a prestige paperback, introducing major writers of the post-war period—such as Jack Kerouac, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Joseph Heller—to American readers. Beckett was featured twice during the series’ initial run of 15 issues (1952-59).

In No. 5 (April 1954), the magazine published the opening of Beckett’s *Molloy* alongside architect, poet and literary critic Niall Montgomery’s playful essay “No Symbols Where None Intended”, which was the first work of Beckett criticism published in the United States, written with Beckett’s permission and oversight. In a letter to Montgomery of 12 December 1953, Beckett wryly referred to the essay arguing that “I emerge more organised than I am”. Strikingly, the issue preceded the publication of *Waiting for Godot*, by Barney Rosset’s Grove Press, and was tirelessly promoted as the first “real introduction” of Beckett to the American public, as the *New World Writing* Papers at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library reveal. This presentation will draw on archival research at Yale University, exploring the packaging and promotion of Beckett’s work in *New World Writing*, which influenced later experiments in magazine production, most notably Grove’s own literary quarterly *Evergreen Review*.

JAMES BAXTER is an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow based at Trinity College Dublin, where he is undertaking a two-year project titled “Big-Time Little Magazines: Mass-Market Modernism in America”. He holds a PhD in English Literature from the University of Reading, where he studied the legacies of Samuel Beckett in post-war American literature. He is the author of *Samuel Beckett’s Legacies in American Fiction: Problems in Postmodernism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and has published his work in academic journals such as *Textual Practice* and *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd’hui*. He is a ghostwriter and an editor with the American arts magazine *Hypocrite Reader*.

Friday, 26th January 2024, 18.00-19.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Prof Elizabeth Barry (University of Warwick)
“The Salvation Army is no better’: Beckett and the Ethics of Social Need”

At a time of indisputable crisis with regard to social need, this paper will consider Beckett’s mid-period writing in relation to timely questions about older age, disability, welfare and the provision of social care. Beckett’s novels *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, together with the short story “The End”, foreground state and charitable support in relation to Beckett’s indigent characters, nodding to the debates about the welfare state emerging in mid-century. The conception of benefit on the basis of need was seen even in the mid-twentieth century as a “profoundly anti-capitalist” idea, according to an article by Dorothy Thompson titled “The Welfare State” and published in *The New Reasoner* in 1958, and Beckett’s writing can help to revive such moral arguments and positions, occluded as they are in the current public discourse.

There is, of course, a religious cast to the discourse of welfare and need in Beckett’s time and in his work. The conception of charity is also still overwhelmingly harnessed in the period to religious institutions that deliver moral guidance as well as physical sustenance, and Beckett’s critique of the religious underpinning of the Irish state also extends to the charitable institutions in the UK that emphasise spiritual salvation over bodily care. His writing also advances larger questions, however, about the moral philosophy and politics of need, as well as the locus of social responsibility—questions with particular salience at the present time.

I will consider the ambivalent presentation of welfare and charity in Beckett’s works, in the context of other writings authored by Beckett’s Anglo-Irish contemporaries addressing the same concepts, and in relation to moral and political philosophy contemporary to Beckett and of our own time. Likely reference points include Schopenhauer, G.E. Anscombe, James Joyce and George Bernard Shaw.

LIZ BARRY is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of Warwick and Vice-President of the Samuel Beckett Society. Her first monograph was entitled *Samuel Beckett and Authority: The Uses of Cliché* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and she has published widely on Beckett’s writing, including work on Beckett and Romanticism, translation, medicine and older age. Her recent work is in literary age studies and includes articles in *Textual Practice* and *Poetics Today*, and a monograph on time and ageing to appear with Bloomsbury in 2025.

Friday, 23rd February 2024, 18.00-19.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Prof Patrick Bixby (Arizona State University)
“Beckett, Lefebvre and the Everyday”

“In this play”, Beckett once said of *Happy Days* (1961), “you have a combination of the strange and the practical, the mysterious and the factual”, identifying a theatrical admixture that highlights the elusive quality of the everyday. Staged in an unusual and unsettling environment, the play is nonetheless concerned with daily rituals, idle chatter and habits of consumption, which make the quotidian vivid in a way that direct perception seldom, if ever, does. It is in this regard that Beckett can be considered as a writer of the quotidian. Henri Lefebvre, undoubtedly the most influential theorist of everyday life in the last century, identifies the quotidian as a largely marginalised and misconstrued facet of modernity, due both to its elusiveness and its pervasiveness. In his massive three-volume *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947, 1961, 1981), he attempts to come to terms with this pervasiveness not by reducing it to a particular set of private or public practices, but by registering the repetitive daily rhythms that generally escape our attention and by charting the spaces in which our fragmented daily activities take place. Although it has escaped critical attention, Lefebvre’s persistent Marxist materialism and Beckett’s provisional Schopenhauerian idealism travel different paths through a remarkably similar terrain, as they reflect on the significance of habitual behaviour and its role in the constitution of both subject and object. The common ground of their thought is Proust’s oeuvre, which helped each writer to shape his understanding of time, one based on repetition and recollection, the reiteration of quotidian tasks as well as the routinisation of compensatory pleasures that make up everyday experience. In dialogue with Lefebvre’s work (and derived from my book-in-progress, *Quotidian Beckett*), this presentation will trace Beckett’s concern with the quotidian from his study of Proust, through his early fiction and into his mature drama, concluding with an extended reflection on the everyday “terrorisms” on display in *Happy Days*.

PATRICK BIXBY is Professor of English at Arizona State University and sitting President of the Samuel Beckett Society. He has written extensively on the Irish writer, for instance in his book *Samuel Beckett and the Postcolonial Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). His recent books, which range across the fields of mobility studies, modernist studies, and Irish studies, include: *License to Travel: A Cultural History of the Passport* (University of California Press, 2022), *Nietzsche and Irish Modernism* (Manchester University Press, 2022), *Unaccompanied Traveler: The Writings of Kathleen M. Murphy* (Syracuse University Press, 2022) and, with Gregory Castle, *A History of Irish Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Friday, 22nd March 2024, 14.00-15.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Olwen Fouéré (Independent)
“On the 2015 Staging of Samuel Beckett’s ‘Lessness’ at the Barbican”

The online seminar session will be dedicated to a conversation with celebrated actress Olwen Fouéré, concerning her staging and performance of Samuel Beckett’s prose piece “Lessness” at the Barbican Centre, London, in 2015.

OLWEN FOUÉRE, born in Ireland of Breton French parents, is one of Ireland’s leading contemporary theatre and performance artists in theatre, film, the visual arts and music. Her acclaimed adaptation and performance of the voice of the river in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake—riverrun*—received numerous awards and toured to the UK, US and Australia. Her performance and staging of Beckett’s prose piece “Lessness” premiered at the Barbican International Beckett Season, 2015, and was subsequently performed at the Galway International Arts Festival and the Project Arts Centre, Dublin. Olwen’s most recent stage appearance was her solo performance of Marina Carr’s *iGirl*, directed by Caitríona McLaughlin at the Abbey Theatre (Dublin Theatre Festival, 2021). Recent visual art/film collaborations include: *Tremble, Tremble* (representing Ireland at the Venice Biennale, 2018) and *The Tower* by Jesse Jones (Rua Red, Dublin, and Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh), as well as *Two Minutes to Midnight* and *The Undertaker*, by Yael Bartana. Upcoming films include: *The Watchers*, adapted and directed by Ishana Night Shyamalan; *The Actor*, directed by Duke Johnson; *Horrorscope*, adapted and directed by Anna Halberg and Spenser Cohen. Previous film appearances include: *Mandy*, by Panos Cosmatos; *The Survivalist*, by Stephen Fingleton; the role of Sally Hardesty, in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2022); *The Northman*, by Robert Eggers; *This must be the Place*, by Paolo Sorrentino. She recently co-created a short film, *Far Calls*, which was awarded the Grand Prize in the Experimental Film category of the Rhode Island International Film Festival 2023 and she is attached to direct a feature film adaptation of a Booker-nominated novel in the near future.

Friday, 19th April 2024, 18.00-19.00
Zoom Meeting
Free event, but registration required
(link to be circulated prior to the online session)

Dr Nicholas Taylor-Collins (Cardiff Metropolitan University)
“Samuel Beckett’s Theatrical Prose Bodies”

Whilst great attention has (rightly) been paid to the intertextual references between Samuel Beckett’s drama and Shakespeare’s, relatively few analyses have examined how Beckett’s prose also talks with Shakespeare’s drama. This paper examines how the male bodies of Beckett’s *Three Novels* (1951-53) suffer from physical problems, but in the cases of Malone and the Unnamable they find ways to endure their pain—ways that are tried and tested in William Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* and Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*. Coriolanus’ body is a treacherous object for him, betraying his commitment to Rome and gifting the plebeians a focus of their ire. He wishes to “play / The man I am” (III.ii.15-16), invoking a theatrical metaphor that leads me to consider the (anti)theatrical strain in the play.

Ultimately, Coriolanus avoids the amnesia associated (by antitheatricalists) with plays and playgoing by becoming a better actor. He could have taken a lesson from Volpone, whose proclivity to acting underpins his entire deception. In *Volpone*, Jonson mocks playgoers and antitheatricalists alike as he takes the mimetic logic to a comic extreme. These two early modern characters and their theatrical strategies provide blueprints for Malone and the Unnamable. Malone invents memories to circumvent amnesia and lethargy (also a failure of memory) and the Unnamable commits to the alienating and disembodying vocation of acting.

I extend this discussion to address, briefly, the legacies of this theatricality in other Irish prose literature, such as Edna O’Brien’s *Night* (1972) and John Banville’s *The Infinities* (2009) and *The Singularities* (2022). The very problems posed, and opportunities leveraged, by the material theatricality of the body remain in Irish literature, but are first invited in this way by Beckett’s troublesome characters.

NICHOLAS TAYLOR-COLLINS is Senior Lecturer in English at Cardiff Metropolitan University. He has published on the connection between Shakespeare and modern Ireland in the monograph *Shakespeare, Memory, and Modern Irish Literature* (Manchester University Press, 2022), in articles published in *Modern Language Review*, *Irish Studies Review*, and in book chapters about John McGahern and Eavan Boland. He has also written a guidebook for undergraduates and book-club readers: *Judge for Yourself: Reading Hyper-Contemporary Literature and Book Prize Shortlists* (Routledge, 2020). He is now researching a monograph entitled *Guardian of Death: John Banville’s Affirmation of Life* and is co-editing *John Banville in Context* for Cambridge University Press (forthcoming, 2025).

The Seminar

The LONDON BECKETT SEMINAR brings together national and international scholars, researchers, postgraduate students and the general public to discuss issues arising from the prose, theatre and poetry of Samuel Beckett that pertain to aspects of literary, philosophical and historical analysis, with particular emphasis on translation studies, performance and practice, digital humanities and visual cultures. Inherently interdisciplinary in approach, the seminar has established a vibrant research network for postgraduate students, early-career researchers and established academics on a national and international level.

Established by Prof Steven Connor, in 1998, and then convened by Prof Laura Salisbury (both at Birkbeck, University of London, at the time) the London Beckett Seminar has been co-convened by Prof Derval Tubridy (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Stefano Rosignoli (Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin) since 2015. In recent years, the seminar has received the support of the Department of English and Creative Writing, at Goldsmiths, and of the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London. The seminar currently operates online as a carbon-neutral and cost-neutral seminar series with eight sessions each year. All queries can be sent to londonbeckettseminar@gmail.com.

The Organisers

Prof Derval Tubridy, Goldsmiths, University of London

DERVAL TUBRIDY is Professor of Literature and Visual Culture at Goldsmiths, University of London, and former Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Pro-Warden for Research and Enterprise. She is Co-Director of the London Beckett Seminar and Vice-Chair of the British Association of Irish Studies. She works on modern and contemporary literature, philosophy, performance and the visual arts with a particular focus on the intersections between language, materiality and process. Author of *Samuel Beckett and the Language of Subjectivity* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and *Thomas Kinsella: The Peppercanister Poems* (University College Dublin Press, 2001), she has published widely on Modernism and Irish Studies. Her work has been funded by the Fulbright Commission, the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. She can be contacted at d.tubridy@gold.ac.uk.

Stefano Rosignoli, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

STEFANO ROSIGNOLI received an MA in Modern Literature (2006) and an MPhil in Publishing Studies (2008) from the University of Bologna. From 2008 to 2015 he focused on trade publishing in Italy and the UK while taking the first steps towards his PhD in English, which he is completing at Trinity College Dublin. Stefano's academic education is grounded in textual studies at large, from philology to genetic criticism, balanced by formalism, structuralism and the semiotics of texts, and his research examines the philosophical exogenesis of Irish literature in English. He has recent or forthcoming publications on Samuel Beckett, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce; he teaches modern literature and theory at Trinity College and University College, in Dublin; and serves as Review Editor for *Variants: The Journal of the European Society for Textual Scholarship*. In 2018, he has been a James Joyce Visiting Fellow and J-1 Short-Term Scholar at the Humanities Institute, State University of New York at Buffalo, and a visiting research scholar at Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Cornell University. He can be contacted at rosignos@tcd.ie.