

**International Symposium
22-23 May 2025**

**What is the Word:
Late Beckett Throbbing Between Drama and Poetry**

Organised by Silvia Bigliazzi and Rosy Colombo
(With Emanuel Stelzer and Cristiano Ragni)

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



Centro di Ricerca Skenè
Ricerche interdisciplinari sul teatro

ROSY COLOMBO

The End is My Beginning. Causality in Late Beckett

My presentation aims to investigate Beckett's late writings as a challenge of the canonical, philosophical category of causality, structuring *What is the Word* – a text wavering between poetry and prose – but also hinting at the dramatic performance of *What Where* – as if it was the foundational assumption of his own aesthetics engaged in the “folly” to dismantle the language from the ‘chatter’ of middle-class culture obsessed with identity and meaning towards a new language of shades, silences, repetitions and fragments borrowed from the new media like radio, TV and cinema, and embodied in the peremptory word of poetry. A logocentric ‘folly’, more decisively tackled after the second WW from works such as *Saint-Lo* and *Play*, and the disintegration of genre and forms. In this respect the short poetic and dramatic works of late Beckett can also be read according to the dictum that “less is more” but also more compellingly in terms of musical grammar, as rigorous variations on given themes: specifically, death and the doom to fail yet to yield to the moral obligation of language to “fail better”.

Rosy Colombo, formerly Professor of English at Sapienza University of Rome and Director of the Graduate School in Literatures in English from 2003 to 2009. She was Visiting Professor at Columbia University in 1980 and at the University of Reading in 1998. She has been the general editor of *Memoria di Shakespeare* since 2008, and has dedicated herself to the authorship question (2012, with Daniela Guardamagna), to the philosophical issues in Shakespeare's plays (2014, with Nadia Fusini), to Shakespeare's biography (2015, with Gary Taylor), to *Antony and Cleopatra* (2017), as well as to the topic of *Vanitas* (2019, with Keir Elam). She also guest-edited two issues of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* (*Awry Crowns. Queenship and its Discontents*, 2020, and *Nutrix*, 2022). Besides Shakespeare, her research interests include eighteenth-century studies (on *The Spectator*, the rise of public opinion), women's poetry and fiction (Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen), Romantic closet drama (Wordsworth), and Samuel Beckett. Amongst her numerous contributions: W. Shakespeare, G. Strehler, A. Lombardo, *La Tempesta tradotta e messa in scena* (2007); *Beckett ultimo atto* (2009); a re-edition of Agostino Lombardo's *Lettura del Macbeth* (2010); “Fantasie e parodie del cibo nell'opera di Samuel Beckett” (with Davide Crosara, 2015); “Un play e due titoli. Una prospettiva shakespeariana”, in *Twelfth Night: dal testo alla scena* (2017); “La scommessa di Otello” and “Aspettando il peggio: lettura (quasi) beckettiana del *Re Lear*” (2017); “Agostino Lombardo: mediazioni transatlantiche” (2018); “*Hamlet*: Origin Displaced”, in *Transitions – For Alessandro Serpieri* (2018); “My Johnson Fantasy. Samuel Johnson nello specchio di Samuel Beckett” (2019).

DAVIDE CROSARA

'Tailpieces': Beckett's Corpus Through The Lens of the Poems

The aim of this paper is to reread Beckett's corpus through his poems. The poem that concludes *Watt's* Addenda, *Who may tell the tale*, was renamed *Tailpiece* in the Faber edition of Beckett's *Selected Poems* 1930-1988, and was significantly placed at the end of the volume. The poem acted not only as a commentary on Beckett's postwar novel, but also as a reflection on Beckett's oeuvre as whole. In a similar fashion, *Age is when to a man* (Song in the Faber edition)—the poem recited by the character of Words in *Words and Music* (1961)—appears in almost every collection of Beckett's poems, acting both as a commentary to the radioplay's essential movement—the contrast between embodiment and ineffability—and as an interrogation on the status of the image. The latter anticipates later plays for the stage and television, from *That Time* (1975) to *A Piece of Monologue* (1979). Similarly, the poem *Ceiling* (1981) doubles as a short prose piece by the same name, acting as an anticipation of enigmatic ‘closed space fictions’ such as *Company*, *Il Seen Il Said* and *Worstward Ho* (1980-1983). Finally, the play *Rockaby* (1980) appears as a poem in Einaudi's edition of Beckett's poems, *Le poesie* (2006), edited by Gabriele Frasca. This editorial choice, apparently freeing the character of corporeality given by a stage, rekindles the voice as the most enigmatic feature of Beckett's work.

Davide Crosara is a Research Fellow in English Literature at ‘Sapienza’ University of Rome. His main fields of interest are Modernism, Genetic Studies, and Ecocriticism. He has published books and essays on Samuel Beckett and Romantic closet drama, on the relationship between Beckett and Primo Levi, and on the works of W. B. Yeats and James Joyce. He has also written articles on Shakespeare's *King Lear* (2010) and *Twelfth Night* (2021), on plague narratives in Manzoni and Defoe (2022) and on Kae Tempest's ‘Urban Ecologies’ (2024). He has co-edited two volumes on Samuel Beckett; *Samuel Beckett's Italian Modernisms: Tradition, Texts, Performance* (Routledge:2025) and *Samuel Beckett and the Arts. Italian Negotiations* (Anthem: 2024), in which he penned an article on Samuel Beckett and Gastone Novelli. A contribution on Beckett and Sade will appear in the next issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare*.

STEFANO GENETTI

« Avec quel chic » « le demi-tour puis les pas » : lectures chorégraphiques du Beckett tardif

Dès la fin des années 60, un grand nombre de chorégraphes et performers se sont inspirés de l'univers beckettien selon diverses modalités : hommages, transpositions, citations. De même que les spectacles renvoyant aux proses, aux poèmes, au théâtre, les études se multiplient, portant sur les traces de danse et sur les tracés chorégraphiques inscrits dans l'œuvre de Beckett écrivain, dramaturge et metteur en scène. Suivant une approche attentive aux spécificités intermédiaires de l'art beckettien, on se penchera à cette occasion sur la proximité avec le chorégraphique d'œuvres postérieures au début des années 70, lorsque l'auteur revient à l'écriture en vers. Formant une galerie de tableaux vivants fantomatiques, ce corpus, animé par les tensions mouvement/immobilité, voix/corps, visible/invisible, est caractérisé par les reprises et variations, entre *rimaille* et *dramaticules*, de motifs et rythmes, silhouettes et postures. Si *Quad* est souvent revisité en danse, d'autres pièces de théâtre et pour la télévision, dont *Pas*, *Ohio Impromptu* et *Nacht und Träume*, font l'objet d'interprétations chorégraphiques au sein des études beckettiennes et sur le plateau. Se situant parfois aux frontières du spectacle vivant et des arts visuels, de nombreuses ré-actions dansées au dernier Beckett seront passées en revue afin de dégager quelques dominantes et en convoquant plusieurs textes, depuis *Neither* jusqu'à *What Is The Word*, en passant par *Berceuse* et *Catastrophe*. Incorporant l'échec réitéré et relançant la question du comment dire, des artistes provenant d'horizons culturels et esthétiques variés tels François Raffinot, Virgilio Sieni, Katsura Kan et Jirí Kylián nous donnent à voir, à ressentir et à penser la poésie performative du Beckett tardif en termes proprioceptifs et kinesthésiques, de valeur sensori-motrice des mots et de formalisation réflexive du geste, d'épuisement des combinaisons et d'évanescence des images.

Stefano Genetti teaches French literature at the University of Verona and is a member of the board of the journal *Studi francesi*. His research interests include the aphoristic tradition, 20th and 21st-century prose and theatre, genetic criticism, gender studies, and the interplay between literature and dance, especially concerning Pascal Quignard's choreographic collaborations. Following his thesis entitled *Les figures du temps dans l'œuvre de Samuel Beckett*, he has contributed to the *Dictionnaire Beckett* edited by Marie-Claude Hubert and has published articles on Beckett's creative bilingualism and on his translations of Chamfort, on his early prose in French, on some references to Dante's *Inferno*, on the *Acts Without Words* and on *Quad*, as well as on several dance performances inspired by his work, from *Happy Days* (Filiations chorégraphiques: Winnie selon Béjart et chez les Dupuy, *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 2011) to *Play* (Coup de projecteur entre deux scènes: *Foulplay* de Roberto Zappalà, Comédie de Beckett en danse, *Mise an Abyme*, 2015-2016) and from *Texts for Nothing* (De voix en gestes: Textes pour Rien de Beckett à portée de souffle, in *Gestualités/textualités en danse contemporaine*, Paris, Hermann, 2018) to *Worstward Ho* (*Vu autrement*. Images de Cap au pire de Samuel Beckett par Maguy Marin et Peter Welz, *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 2022).

S. E. GONTARSKI

Who Wrote Godot?, or Beckett's Bad Quartos

The fact that Samuel Beckett's work was subject to any number of rewrites early in his dramatic career may shock those readers and audience members familiar with his fastidious attitude toward his texts. Those alterations were extensive enough that some of his early theatrical collaborators might accurately be deemed co-authors, especially those whose textual alterations found their way into print -- under Beckett's name. In Beckett's case one might well ask, who, finally, wrote the script for the *Waiting for Godot* we are reading, or who 'authored' the performances we watch? The answer may depend on what one means by such a question, which edition one is holding, say, or how much attention the producer and director (at least) have paid to the script they at least began with before other theatrical collaborators -- producers, directors, actors, and investors -- entered the process. Even if they are corrupt, moreover, overtly re-written texts are seldom withdrawn from the market and so remain in circulation for resale and so for study and production.

S. E. Gontarski, Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of English, Ph.D., Ohio State (1974): writer, director and filmmaker who specializes in twentieth-century Irish Studies, in British, U.S., and European Modernism, performance theory, History of Text Technologies and Modern(ist) book history. He has been awarded four National Endowment for the Humanities research grants, has twice been awarded Fulbright Professorships, has been Guest Editor of the following: *American Book Review*, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, *Modern Fiction Studies* and *Drammaturgia*. He edited the *Journal of Beckett Studies* from 1989-2008, and serves as Co-Editor with its publication by Edinburgh University Press.

CARLA LOCATELLI

Loosing Linearity and Bargaining the Breach: on (some) Beckett's Poetry and Plays

The task of connecting Beckett's poetry to his dramatic works is fascinating. The reminders Prof. Rosy Colombo sent for this conference indicate quite a vast possibility of investigation. For my part I would like to investigate the significant continuities as effects of signification, as a particular economy of textual articulation. Stylistic and prosodic elements are obviously very important and should be taken into consideration. At the same time, because of the Beckettian imperative to return to the basics of language, style is not enough. So I believe that it is at the level of a basic linguistic articulation, close to the inescapability of logocentrism, that we can find Beckett's unusual continuity. Beckett's rhapsodic and dramatic continuity plays with, and resists, and deconstructs linearity, at the level of narration and cognition.

Carla Locatelli is Professor Emerita of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature and has worked at the Universities of Bologna, Milan IULM, and Trento. She was Visiting Adjunct Professor at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA.) in the English Department till 2013 when she became Senior Lecturer in Romance Languages. Her areas of research include literary theory, hermeneutics, semiotics, gender studies, postcolonial theory, and comparative literature (in particular Italian, English, American, French, and Filipino). She is a member of the Editorial Board of these journals: *The Humanities Bulletin* London Academic Publishing; *Testuale*; *The European Journal of Women's Studies* and *Limite(e) Beckett*. She is a member of the International Advisory Board of *The Philippine Humanities Review*, and of the *Global Business Review Journal* (Burapha University, Thailand).

MARKUS OPHAELDERS

Think, pig! (Pause ...)

Philosophy on Beckett's Stage

The talk will try to investigate the role (if it has any role) of philosophy in Beckett's theatrical pieces. The hypothesis is that Beckett's theatre is, at the same time, the most philosophical one and the most hermetically closed against any philosophical concept.

Markus Ophälders was born in Poughkeepsie (N.Y., USA) to German parents. He studied philosophy, psychology, and German studies in Berlin, Milan, and Bologna. Since 2011, after teaching Aesthetics at the University of Milan, he has been teaching Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art and Music at the University of Verona, where he also directs the ORFEO Research Centre – Sound Image Writing. His research focuses primarily on issues of aesthetic theory, the philosophy of history and politics, as well as the philosophy of music in German philosophical thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He has published numerous essays on German Romanticism and Idealism, as well as on the Frankfurt School and specific issues related to modern and contemporary literature and music. Among his most recent publications are: *Konstruktion von Erfahrung. Versuch über Walter Benjamin* (Traugott Bautz, 2015) and *Dialettica dell'ironia romantica* (second revised and expanded edition, Mimesis, 2016).

NICOLA PASQUALICCHIO

Dead of night. The nocturnal setting in Beckett's later dramas and poetry

The nighttime setting becomes more frequent and explicit in Beckett's later plays compared to his earlier works. Previously, the stage was often dominated by twilight settings, temporally indeterminate grey light, or even full, dazzling brightness. However, in many of his final short dramas, protagonists appear encapsulated within a cell of nocturnal space and time, where the silence reverberates with ghost-like voices of regret, guilt, and past obsessions. This period marks a convergence between Beckett's theatrical works and his poetry, which had been revitalized after a long hiatus and also contained references to the night that resonate with those in his plays. The aim of this paper is to identify and analyze the poetic and theatrical recurrences and variations of the nocturnal theme and setting in Beckett's late works.

Nicola Pasqualicchio is Associate Professor of Performing Arts at the University of Verona. His main research interests have focussed on European Theatre of the XIX and XX centuries from different points of view: play analysis; study of theatre theories (Artaud, Craig); acting (one-man-show performers; opera singers); opera dramaturgy and staging; puppets theatre. In the last years he has mainly devoted himself to the study of the fantastic mode in performing arts. He is founder and director of *Limen*, International Research Centre on the Fantastic in Performing Arts. He is member of the editorial board of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*.

DIRK VAN HULLE

How Beckett Wrote ‘what is the word’ and Other Late Afflatulence

In the manuscript of *Murphy*, the notion of ‘afflatus’ or divine creative inspiration is changed into the pun ‘afflatulence’ when, after the chess game against Mr Endon, Murphy feels the urge to say that he is a speck in Mr Endon’s unseen. ‘In the beginning was the pun’, undermining the divine dimension. Still, the phenomenon of the creative impulse kept fascinating Beckett until the very end of his career. This paper examines the genesis – often crossing the border of genres – of Beckett’s late works and his persistent search for the ‘missing word’, involving (the showing and hiding of) intertextual sources such as Dante, Shakespeare and other faint voices ‘from deep within’.

Dirk Van Hulle is Professor of Bibliography and Modern Book History at the University of Oxford, chair of the Oxford Centre for Textual Editing and Theory (OCTET) and director of the Centre for Manuscript Genetics at the University of Antwerp. With Mark Nixon, he is co-director of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (www.beckettarchive.org), series editor of the Cambridge UP series *Elements in Beckett Studies* and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Beckett Studies*. His publications include *Textual Awareness* (2004), *Modern Manuscripts* (2014), *Samuel Beckett’s Library* (2013, with Mark Nixon), *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett* (2015), *James Joyce’s Work in Progress* (2016), the Beckett Digital Library and a number of volumes in the ‘Making of’ series (Bloomsbury) and genetic editions in the *Beckett Digital Manuscript Project*, which won the 2019 Prize for a Bibliography, Archive or Digital Project of the Modern Language Association (MLA).

