Guide to the Samuel Beckett Papers

Processed by Edward C. Fields
Department of Special Collections
Davidson Library
University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA 93106
Phone: (805) 893-3062
Fax: (805) 893-5749
Email: special@library.ucsb.edu
URL: http://www.library.ucsb.edu/speccoll/speccoll.html
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Note
Arts and Humanities--Literature--Literature General>
Guide to the Samuel Beckett Papers, ca. 1959-1973

Collection number: Mss 5

Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara

Contact Information:
Department of Special Collections
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University of California, Santa Barbara
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Phone: (805) 893-3062
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Processed by:
Edward C. Fields
Date Completed:
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Encoded by:
David C. Gartrell

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Samuel Beckett Papers,
Date (inclusive): ca. 1959-1973
Collection Number: Mss 5
Creator: Beckett, Samuel, 1906-
Extent: 0.4 linear feet (1 document box)
Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library. Department of Special Collections
Santa Barbara, California 93106-9010
Physical Location: Vault
Language: English.
Access Restrictions
None.
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Preferred Citation
Samuel Beckett Papers. Mss 5. Department of Special Collections, Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.
Acquisition Information
Undetermined, ca. 1959.
Biography
(The following is drawn from online sources including those of the University of New Mexico and the Moonstruck Drama Bookstore.)
One of the most unique and powerful voices of the Twentieth Century, Samuel Beckett was born in Foxrock, Ireland, in 1906, and suffered, as he claimed, an eventless childhood. He attended Trinity College in Dublin, and left for Paris when he was twenty-two (he would later call this city home). In Paris he fell in with a group of avant-garde artists, including James
Joyce, who was to become a life-long friend. Although he continued to write in both English and French throughout his life, most of his major works were written in French between 1946 and 1950. Beckett was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1969. He died in Paris in 1989.

Beckett’s bizarre world is explored in novels, short stories, poetry, and scripts for radio, television, and film. But he is best known for his work in the theatre. Samuel Beckett’s first play, Eleuthéria, mirrors his own search for freedom, revolving around a young man’s efforts to cut himself loose from his family and social obligations. His first real triumph, however, came on January 5, 1953, when Waiting for Godot premiered at the Théâtre de Babylone. In spite of some expectations to the contrary, the strange little play in which “nothing happens” became an instant success, running for four hundred performances at the Théâtre de Babylone and enjoying the critical praise of dramatists as diverse as Tennessee Williams, Jean Anouilh, Thornton Wilder, and William Saroyan. The strange atmosphere of Godot, in which two tramps wait on what appears to be a desolate road for a man who never arrives, conditioned audiences to following works like Endgame, Happy Days, and Krapp’s Last Tape.

Beckett’s drama is most closely associated with the Theatre of the Absurd. He employs a minimalistic approach, stripping the stage of unnecessary spectacle and characters. Tragedy and comedy collide in a bleak illustration of the human condition and the absurdity of existence. In this way, each work, from the lengthy productions (Godot, Endgame) to the very brief (Ohio Impromptu, Catastrophe) to the despairing mologues (Rockaby, A Piece of Monologue), serves as a metaphor for existence and an entertaining philosophical discussion. Although Beckett dissociated himself from the post World War II French existentialists, his works cover much of the same ground and ask similar questions.

Scope and Content of Collection
The collection contains photocopies of what were three unpublished works by Samuel Beckett and correspondence with Beckett and UCSB Library staff regarding permission to supply photocopies to researchers.

The Department of Special Collections has an extensive collection of Beckett’s published works including the three titles in this collection and a number of other first editions.

Related Sources
The Samuel Beckett Endpage, UCSB, Department of English: http://beckett.english.ucsb.edu/home.htm
The Samuel Beckett On-Line Resources and Links Pages (Contains extensive reviews, biographies, essays and links to other resources): http://home.sprintmail.com/~lifeform/Beck_Links.html

Series 1. Correspondence
Box 1: 1
Abstract: [Two envelopes enclosed.]

Box 1: 1
1 note (ANS), Sept. 6, 1970, Samuel Beckett to Christian Brun, authorizing a photocopy to be made of Eleuthéria, 1970

Series 2. Copies of manuscript works
Box 1: 2
Eleuthéria-1 typescript document, (in portfolio) undated, 133 continuously paginated pages, with an unnumbered title page; 1 thermofax reproduction; 3 photocopies, unmarked

Box 1: 3
Mercier et Camier-1 typescript document (in portfolio), undated, 150 continuously paginated pages; 1 thermofax reproduction; 2 photocopies, unmarked

Box 1: 4
Premier Amour-1 typescript document (in portfolio), undated, 32 continuously paginated pages; (thermofax reproduction with annotations in an unknown autograph), 2 photocopies