

Ideias e críticas

A Cabinet of Curiosities: Bad
Godots and Lucky's Brain Science¹

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Resumo

Um dos maiores especialistas em Samuel Beckett, professor Stanley Gontarski, da Florida State University, discute as relações entre arte e ciência a partir dos experimentos dramáticos de Beckett, especialmente Esperando Godot.

Palavras-chave: Arte, Ciência, Dramaturgia, Samuel Beckett.

Abstract

One of the leading experts on Samuel Beckett, Professor Stanley Gontarski, from Florida State University, discusses the relationship between art and science based on Beckett's dramatic experiments, especially Waiting for Godot.

Keywords: Art, Science, Dramaturgy, Samuel Beckett

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A Genealogy of Intervention

Samuel Beckett was something of an accidental dramatist, or at least his earliest completed plays were written as something of a sideline, a diversion, a respite from the long narrative flights he was developing in something of a white heat in the aftermath of the Second World War, the grouping of novels now loosely called *The Trilogy*. Theater, he would subsequently acknowledge, was “relaxing” because of its plasticity, its concreteness, particular people (more or less) in particular spaces (more or less).² He could not have anticipated how thoroughly these exercises in creative relaxation, his dabbling in the most public of the literary arts, something of a hybrid between a necessarily incomplete script

2 The University of Reading teaching module for the play notes the following under Module 1, “Staging Beckett, How did Godot Come About”: “Typically, Beckett viewed this productive period skeptically and said that he began writing *Godot* ‘as a relaxation from the awful prose [he] was writing at that time’ and to escape from ‘the wildness and rulelessness of the novels’ (Beckett in Cronin, 1997, 390). Beckett also said that he ‘needed a habitable place’ and claimed that he ‘found it on the stage.’ [. . .] It was written between 9 October 1948 and 29 January 1949’. <https://research.reading.ac.uk/staging-beckett/case-study-waiting-for-godot/module-1/> and <https://research.reading.ac.uk/staging-beckett/>

and its embodied, performative, commercial realization, between private labor and commodity economics, between, say, use-value and exchange-value, would violate his creative autonomy since theater's collaborative nature invites, indeed relies on, a complex division of labor, creative interventions, and more overt alliances with commerce than the narrative or lyrical arts—the path to realization suggesting, as well, theater's fragility and vulnerability as it enters the chain of exchange-value. Theater, something of an afterthought in the late 1940s, would subsequently come to dominate Beckett's creative labor.

When *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*), the second of these exercises in relaxation, premiered in Paris at the Théâtre de Babylon on 19 January, 1953, the forty-seven-year-old debut playwright had been a full-time writer and translator for some twenty-three years.³ He published his first freestanding work, the long poem, *Whoroscope*, in 1930, which he wrote in several hours on June 15 for a contest on the subject of time sponsored by Richard Aldington and Nancy Cunard. The poem ridiculed the personal peccadillos of philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) and, with its awkward, intrusive footnotes, laid waste to T. S. Eliot's landmark mosaic of Western decline, *The Waste Land*.⁴ It won first prize.

3 This essay cites multiple versions of *Godot*. They are referenced in the text as follows:
Grove: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954). A copy retranslated by Thornton Wilder in November–December 1955 (University of California San Diego Alan Schneider Papers, box 74, folder 14).
Faber 1956: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1956).
Faber 1959: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1959), “paper covered” reprint of Faber 1956 with minor corrections.
Faber 1965: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1965). French: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Samuel French Ltd., 1957).
LCP 1954/23: Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. (London: British Library, 1954), mimeograph copy number 23.
LCP 1964/51: Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. (London: British Library, 1964), mimeograph of uncensored text differing from LCP 154/23 but including copyright page from Faber 1959.
LCP 1965/47: Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. (London: British Library, 1965).
OSU: Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*, 1953 mimeograph differing from and preceding all other mimeographs (OSU SPEC RARE CMS 53 726).
Albery: Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*, 1954 mimeograph copy of LCP 1954/23, but with Albery revisions and numbered 25.
Snow: Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*, 1954 mimeographed copy of LCP 1954/23, but “Altered to Conform to American version” and numbered 15.
Schneider: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954) retyped as Prompt Book for Miami production with stage directions typed in red.
(University of California San Diego Special Collections, Alan Schneider Papers, MSS 0103, box 11).
TA: Samuel Beckett, “*Waiting for Godot*,” *Theatre Arts*, XL, no. 8 (August 1956): 36–61. Kronenberger: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, in *The Best Plays, 1955–56*, ed. Louis Kronenberger (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956), 295–317

4 Beckett would remark to his confidant, Thomas McGreevy, on January 9, 1937, in the midst of his German tour and as *Murphy* was making the rounds of publishers, that “T. Eliot is toilet spelt backwards.” *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 1, 1929–1940*, ed. ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 421. (LSB hereafter.)

Soon after *Godot's* modest Parisian success and its subsequent European tour, he began to translate the play into English in response to interest from both an American publisher and London producers. Despite his difficulties placing his early English fiction – *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written between 1928-30, published only in 1992), which he later transformed into *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), *Murphy* (1938) and *Watt* (1953) – with publishers (economic issues, mostly), and their subsequent banning in his native Ireland (political issues, mostly), Beckett seemed less than fully aware of the politics of art and the intersections between art and commerce than one might expect, especially since his initial full-length excursion into drama, unproduced to this day, *Eleutheria*, mocked what Adorno and Horkheimer would call *The Culture Industry*.⁵ *Eleutheria* makes a travesty of the conventions of commercial, boulevard entertainments with its overt commitment to bohemianism and decadence. Despite this theme, in his dealings with production Beckett seems not to have fully comprehended the move from creation as private labor to art as a product of social forces or, that is, the degree to which theater production entailed commodity production mediated by a market—art's exchange-value, say, although he was savvy enough to warn his French publisher of “this adaptation business” of theatrical production as requests for English language rights began to arrive in Paris in mid-1953.⁶ While the French staging of *Godot* was plagued by economic delays and Beckett's reluctance to release his product--or even to turn control over to others in a marketplace – the path to English production and subsequent publication was littered with loss of creative control as various curiosities emerged through the publishing and production process, including bad drafts, competing alternate translations, additional cultural censorship, various interventions, and other struggles for creative control that seem to have caught Beckett by surprise as he struggled to maintain some level of artistic integrity for this vision of humanity in decline—what we today might call dystopian modernism, here humanity in atavistic regression articulated (if that is the word) by the former intellectual, now menial artist-figure tied to economic forces and displayed as an object for sale, Lucky. Beckett's dealings with the insular coteries of the Paris avant garde, which were not without their own economic and political conflicts, were poor preparation for the businessmen of the Anglo-American theater, the producers of Broadway and the West End, namely Peter Glenville, Harold Orman (who dropped out early), Donald Albery, and American impresario, Michael Myerberg, even as a central feature of what would become Beckett's first produced play was the enslavement of an artist/intellectual/entertainer

5 Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry As Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136; and Adorno, Theodor W., “Culture Industry Reconsidered” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge; 2nd edition, 2001), 98-106.

6 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 2, 1941–1956*, ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 379. Cited also in Dirk Van Hulle and Pim Verhulst, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's “En attendant Godot”/“Waiting for Godot”* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 267.

by an overlord or owner who was taking his damaged goods to market for sale (“Guess who taught me all these beautiful things [...] My Lucky” (Grove, 22). Those producers of the Anglo-American theatrical world would reshape the work of a neophyte playwright to increase its appeal, its accessibility, and so its monetary exchange value, even as Beckett’s creative thrust continued toward a counter goal, development of what we might call his dystopian trilogy, *Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, something of a theatrical cluster to parallel his post-World War II narrative trilogy, the novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*.

But for all this exploitation, the process of theatrical production stands, as well, as testimony to Beckett’s artistic adaptability and durability. As he understood more fully the forces that constitute theater and commerce, or theater as commerce, as commodity, he would become his own interventionist, directing his own plays and, like other interventionists, rewriting or reshaping them in the process of their realization, validating the transformative process of theater by excising what now he deemed untheatrical clutter and thereby sharpening the outlines of his vision. Collectively, these economic, political, and aesthetic processes form their own archaeological mosaic, a set of often material curiosities that detail not only Beckett’s developing theatrical art but the process of art, particularly theatrical production, in a monetized culture often called late capitalism. T. S. Eliot would embrace such intervention in the rearrangement and reshaping of his poetic mosaic or collage, and he would credit the interventionist, Ezra Pound, as the better craftsman. Beckett, on the other hand, would resist such intervention as best he could, but was often overwhelmed by the machinery of art and the matrix of cultural forces that, finally, threw into question the integrity and autonomy of authorship as alterations were often made without authorial knowledge or approval. Commercial theater, Beckett found, was an economic machine through which private labor would be transformed and the author/laborer at times marginalized/alienated as additional labor entered the process of commodity production, the entire machine designed to generate surplus-value for investors even as art appeared to maintain its distance from the utilitarian and the material.

In this, Beckett’s experience mirrored Adorno’s theory of art as the “absolute commodity,” or more fully, “The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity.” Jensen Suther summarizes critic Stewart Martin on the issue: “For Martin, this striking claim is key to understanding Adorno’s theory of modernism, and explodes the antinomy between two contemporary, countervailing aesthetic theories, one that insists that the artwork, is, as a commodity, insuperably determined by capital, and one that claims that the artwork is autonomous and insulated from the process of exchange.”⁷ The curiosities in the publication

7 Jensen Suther, “Black as the New Dissonance: Heidegger, Adorno, and Truth in the Work of Art,” *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group* 31, no. 1 (2017): 104, mediationsjournal.org/articles/new-dissonance. See also Stewart Martin, “The absolute artwork meets the absolute commodity,” *Radical Philosophy* 146 (2007): 18, radicalphilosophy.com/article/the-absolute-artwork-meets-the-absolute-commodity.

and performance history of Beckett's English *Godots* detailed below offer an alternate genealogy of the "antimony" between art and commodity or at least detail their unstable alliance, as Martin outlines above, not only, that is, of a single work *per se* but of a cultural process, the machinery of commodity driven art production in competition in a marketplace with other commodities, and so they alter an artistic and critical landscape in terms of the interface of private labor, commodity economics and the generation of surplus-value, the artifacts detailed and displayed (below) in something of a cabinet of curiosities.

Wilderizing Beckett

On December 6, 1955, as *Waiting for Godot* was in rehearsals, and less than a month before its scheduled opening in Coral Gables, Florida, the play's American publisher, Barney Rosset, sounded an alarm to his new author, Samuel Beckett:

A moment ago a man walked in here [Grove Press' NY offices] who wants to put on a special showing of *Godot* for agents, actors, etc. This fellow informed me that he had seen a statement in the newspapers to the effect that Thornton Wilder was going to write an adaptation of your play and that would be the one to be put on Broadway... It certainly annoys hell out of me and my first reaction is to say—let Mr. Wilder write his own play, talented as he may be, and let yours go on a la Beckett.⁸

Tensions between publisher and producer ran high, and Rosset complained about financial arrangements (since both, finally, were part of the culture industry) the following day:⁹

Believe me, I want to do what you want, but why in God's name must it be you who has to guarantee me something, and not the people who take in the money at the boxoffice.¹⁰ If everybody agrees on

8 Rosset to Beckett, January 13, 1956, in Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: Letters from the Publisher, The Samuel Beckett File*, ed. Lois Oppenheim, curated by Astrid Myers Rosset (Tuxedo Park, NY: Opus, 2017), 98. Unpublished Rosset Beckett letters are available in Special Collections and Archives, Florida State University Stanley E. Gontarski Grove Press Research Materials, box 10, folder 1, MSS 2013-0516.

9 The first two American performances were produced by Michael Myerberg through Independent Plays Limited, whose only productions were the two Broadway stagings of *Waiting for Godot*, the American Broadway premier, which ran at the John Golden Theater from April 19 to June 9, 1956, and the less successful follow-up all African-American *Godot* at the Ethel Barrymore Theater which ran only from January 21–26, 1957, according to the *Internet Broadway Database*, "Independent Plays Limited," ibdb.com/broadway-organization/independent-plays-limited-91765.

10 These economic issues were apparently in the process of being resolved as Rosset was writing. Beckett reviews these financial arrangements in a letter to Rosset of January 6, 1955 [for 1956], which follows up a letter from his London theatrical agent, Kitty Black of Curtis Brown, on Rosset's percentage of performance revenues (LSB 2, 592–93, 593n3).

everything, why cannot this [American producer Michael] Myerberg put something into writing. I am not a mad ogre waiting here to gobble him up. In fact the opposite has been true—I have tried to help him in any possible [way], and what is most important, I have been waiting for him to give me the go ahead signal on putting out the paperbound edition of *Godot*—at my expense, and he has not even come through on that. He said the new edition should have a new photo on the cover, using the American actors. That seemed perfectly reasonable to me, but no photograph has ever been forthcoming.¹¹

Myerberg disturbed me when he said that the English version of the play [revised by Beckett and in print with Grove since 1954] was not well translated, and that disturbance was heightened when I was told about the Wilder story in the paper (he to do an adaptation) but I infer from your cable that all is okay along those lines.¹²

On December 9, Rosset could offer Beckett some good news:

This morning two GOOD developments. First, I got sick of waiting for Myerberg to tell me that everything was really set and I gave the printer orders to proceed with a new edition of *Godot*, to sell at \$1.00. I hope this please [sic] you. If Myerberg does not come through with a new photograph I will simply use the existing jacket [with photos Beckett suggested] which I like anyway.

Secondly, yesterday's letter to Myerberg finally produced results. His attorney called my attorney this morning and apparently they had a long and agreeable conversation. It ended by Moselle's (Myerberg's atty.) saying that he would produce all the information we want by the end of next week, and it seems that after that we should be able to make an agreement. My fingers are crossed [. . .] I am only swearing at myself for delaying so long in activating the new edition of *Godot*.¹³

By the time of Rosset's writing, however, Beckett's script had already been fully re-rendered, according to Schneider's notes, between November and December of 1955; that is, at this point, Wilder had already completed a full redrafting of Beckett's translation, so presumably the *Godot* that audiences would view in Miami and subsequently in New York (if the original plan held) would be

11 That promised cover photo of the Miami production never arrived, presumably because of changes in cast and director before N. Y. Photos of a German production were included in the Grove Press hardcover printing, but eliminated from the paperback. One photo from the Broadway production would be used for the cover of Ruby Cohn's Grove Press anthology, *Casebook on "Waiting for Godot"* (1967).

12 Rosset to Beckett, January 13, 1956, in Rosset, Barney, *Dear Mr. Beckett*, 102.

13 Rosset to Beckett, January 13, 1956, in Rosset, Barney, *Dear Mr. Beckett*, 100.

considerably different—at least more Americanized in vocabulary and particularly in syntax—than the text that Beckett had revised for Rosset, which Grove Press had published, had been selling for a year, and would now reissue in paperback in conjunction with the planned New York opening. On January 13, 1956 Rosset wrote to Beckett yet again: “A newspaperman came in the other day and said he was writing a story on [Tom] Ewell [of the Miami cast, replaced by E. G. Marshall for Broadway] for a Kentucky newspaper and that he wanted a copy of *Godot*. He said that Myerberg’s office would not let him see it saying that it was going to be changed???????”¹⁴ Between January 13 and February 6, Beckett replied with some assurances, to which Rosset responded: “I am very happy that you wrote Albery to instruct Myerberg and tell him that there can be no unauthorized deviations from script. Myerberg once told me on the phone that he considered the translation to be a poor one and that he would very much like to have Thornton Wilder re-do it. I think it entirely possible that he may be messing around with it.”¹⁵ Neither knew at this point that the rumored interventions were more than “entirely possible”; the game, in fact, was over.

Would this “changed” script now need altered attribution? Would the play now be deemed coauthored? Or would at least a new or co-translator need to be cited if the Wilder revisions were staged? Would the New York program read something like, “Book by Thornton Wilder,” a practice not uncommon on the Broadway stage, or even simply, “Translated by Thornton Wilder”? Wilder had in fact been involved in *Godot*’s production longer than either Rosset or Beckett imagined. He had seen productions of the play in Paris and again in London and had strong views about it. He had in fact been commissioned early on to revise, or “doctor” in Broadway parlance, the Beckett translation since he was apparently dissatisfied with the version staged in London and with the Grove Press text he had read. He subsequently met extensively with the designated American director, Alan Schneider, on an Atlantic crossing, both sailing on the *Independence*—Wilder on his way to Rome, Schneider through Cannes on his way to Paris to meet with Beckett and thence to London to see Peter Hall’s *Godot*. Schneider was the newly appointed director of *Godot*—an appointment, it turns out, made on Wilder’s advice to Myerberg, who had produced the original 1942 Broadway production of Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth*, directed by Elia Kazan with Tallulah Bankhead and Frederic March, and which would win the Pulitzer Prize in 1943.¹⁶ Its title derives from scripture, Job 19:20: “My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth,” and some critics, particularly Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, saw

14 Rosset to Beckett, January 13, 1956, in Rosset, Barney, *Dear Mr. Beckett*, 109.

15 Rosset to Beckett, February 6, 1956, in Rosset, Barney, *Dear Mr. Beckett*, 112.

16 See Mel Gussow’s 1988 review of a Wilder revival in the *New York Times*. Gussow, “The Darker Shore of Thornton Wilder,” *New York Times* (December 11, 1988), [nytimes.com/1988/12/11/theater/theater-view-the-darker-shores-of-thornton-wilder.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/11/theater/theater-view-the-darker-shores-of-thornton-wilder.html).

the play as, if not derived from, at least indebted to James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.¹⁷ Schneider subsequently revived Wilder's atavistic comedy, with Helen Hayes and Mary Martin for star power, at the Sarah Bernhardt Theater in Paris in 1955, one of the American productions to take part in a "Salute to Paris" tribute. According to producer Robert Whitehead, it returned to the U.S. for limited runs in Washington, D. C., Chicago, and New York; Vincent J. Donehue helped Schneider adapt and direct the work for television in a two-hour, color production for NBC, aired on September 11, 1955.¹⁸ Myerberg and Wilder, then, had the credentials, reputation, connections, and theatrical savvy to bring Beckett's experimental "tragicomedy" to the Broadway stage, and Schneider was their up-and-coming director, but the danger was, as neither Beckett nor Rosset could at this point foresee, that *Waiting for Godot* would become a sequel to *The Skin of Our Teeth*—a pair, in a sense, of atavistic tragicomedies.¹⁹ The original plan was to have *Waiting for Godot* open at the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami Beach on January 3, 1956, which it did, then play Washington, D. C., Boston, and Philadelphia before opening at the Music Box Theater on Broadway on February 16, which it did not. The play closed in Miami Beach on January 14 and the director was summarily discharged.

Schneider had been set (or set up) to become part of Myerberg's Wilderization plan. The text that Schneider was working with in Miami was still a retyping of Beckett's text as published by Grove Press, the retyping apparently commissioned by Donald Albery since a handwritten note at the bottom of the typed title page bears Albery's London address.²⁰ In his autobiography, *Entrances*, the young director makes little mention of alterations to the text he was using in rehearsals that began on December 9, 1955, but he does write that the producer wanted him at least to see the successful London staging:

Myerberg insisted that I go to Paris to consult with the author and to London to see Peter Hall's production of *Godot*, which had recently opened at the Arts Theater. After repeated requests, or rather demands, from Myerberg to Beckett's agent in London, the playwright had

17 Job 19:20, King James Version.

18 Robert Whitehead, "From Stage to TV Screen," *Theater Arts* (October 1956): 69–70.

19 Some of Schneider's lack of professional standing at the time is indicated in the 1955 program by the size of the type naming him as director.

20 The Schneider Prompt Book and the bulk of his papers are available at the University of California San Diego Special Collections, Alan Schneider Papers, MSS 0103, box 11. See the Schneider collection finding aid at: https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf2489n8v3/entire_text/. Schneider's retyped Prompt Book copy differs considerably from the mimeographed text that Donald Albery submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office for approval and which Harold L. Oram earlier had retyped in New York for the optioned American production. Schneider's later retyping follows the Grove Press published text of 1954, at least for its base text, but it is substantially if not radically altered. My thanks to Heather Smedberg, Reference & Instruction Coordinator, Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library, Mandeville Special Collections/Scripps Archives.

reluctantly agreed to meet with “the New York director”—I don’t think Beckett knew my name—for half an hour. . . . Wilder had evidently informed Myerberg that he could clear up whatever difficulties I might have had in interpreting the script of *Godot*; in fact, he might be able to *improve* on Mr. Beckett’s own translation of his original French text into English, which Mr. Wilder did not particularly admire, although he considered *Godot* one of the two greatest modern plays.²¹

“We met regularly to go over the lines,” Schneider continues; “He started with suggestions for changing a few of them. By the time we got to Cannes, he had changed almost every single one, including the whole of Lucky’s speech.” In something of an understatement, Schneider went on: “So detailed and regular were our daily meetings that a rumor later circulated that Wilder had rewritten the play. Thornton may have been amused by that thought; Beckett was not”²²

It seems curious at least, if not evasive or even mendacious, for Schneider to refer to Wilder’s retranslation of the play as a “rumor,” since Wilder thoroughly reworked Schneider’s copy of the play--the hardback Grove Press edition that Wilder rewrote contains Schneider’s personal details, his and Beckett’s home addresses, Albery’s business address, and it is branded with Wilder’s initials, “TW,” under which is noted, “Working Copy / Nov.–Dec. 1955,” all jotted on the book’s endpapers. Designating this version his “Working Copy” suggests that Schneider would go ahead with or at least lean towards Wilder’s re-rendering. Moreover, the “TW” initials appear periodically in the text to suggest that Schneider had been functioning like something of a scribe for Wilder, although two distinct styles of handwriting appear in the revisions. Schneider’s copy contains the following note: “Thornton Wilder’s retranslation of *Godot* for AS, Nov-Dec, 1955,” which physical copy is now on deposit at the Schneider archive at the University of California, San Diego.²³

Surprisingly few critics have examined the details of the Miami *Godot* production even as the available archival and published material is copious. One who did is Natka Bianchini in her monograph *The Legacy of Alan Schneider as Beckett’s American Director*, especially in her opening chapter, “The Laugh Sensation of Two Continents!”²⁴ or as Schneider remembers, “Bert Lahr, star of ‘Harvey,’ and Tom Ewell, star of ‘The Seven Year Itch,’ in the Laugh Sensation of Two Continents, ‘Waiting for *Godot*.’”²⁵ Overall, she and her Tufts University thesis director cite such

21 Schneider, Alan, *Entrances: An American Director’s Journey*. New York: Viking Press, 1986, 222.

22 Schneider, Alan, *Entrances*, 223.

23 UCSD Alan Schneider Papers, box 74, folder 14. UCSD Special Collections describes the item as follows, “WAITING FOR GODOT. Grove Press, New York. Title page inscribed Thornton Wilder’s retranslation of *Godot* for Alan Schneider, 1955.” This is the 1954 Grove Press edition as revised by Wilder in dictation to Schneider, cited as “Grove” passim.

24 Natka Bianchini, *Samuel Beckett’s Theatre in America: The Legacy of Alan Schneider as Beckett American Director* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

25 Schneider, Alan (1971), ‘No More Waiting’, *New York Times*, January 31, Section D, p. 1. <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/01/31/archives/no-more-waiting-no-more-waiting.html>

a study as a means of redressing a perceived “omission in Beckett scholarship” (xiii) and, further, that the Beckett-Schneider “artistic collaboration has never been critically studied as a partnership that has profoundly influenced American theater in the mid- to late twentieth century” (1). Any number of critics have applauded that achievement, which, on the whole, Bianchini accomplishes deftly. Our purposes here are more narrowly conceived, however, focusing on Schneider’s initial approach to a theatrical text that baffled him. Bianchini does a thorough job detailing the Schneider-Myerberg correspondence held at the University of California, San Diego, and she provides a full account of the last-minute decision to open the play near Miami, Florida, in Coral Gables, and not, as originally planned, in Washington, D. C., an economically driven decision based on monetary incentives generated by the two stars involved in the production, Lahr and Ewell, or as Schneider put it, “at a handsome guarantee-against-loss for the producer” (Schneider 1971, 1). Myerberg’s desire to please his star actors, she notes, “meant running roughshod over Beckett’s text” (26). And she applauds Schneider’s struggles to keep the set as unlocalized and unspecified as possible, “Schneider discovered that Myerberg had also interfered with the production’s scenic design” (24). But she too easily accepts and repeats what has become the received wisdom of Schneider’s directorial ethos: “As a director, Schneider’s calling card was fidelity to the text of the author” (5).

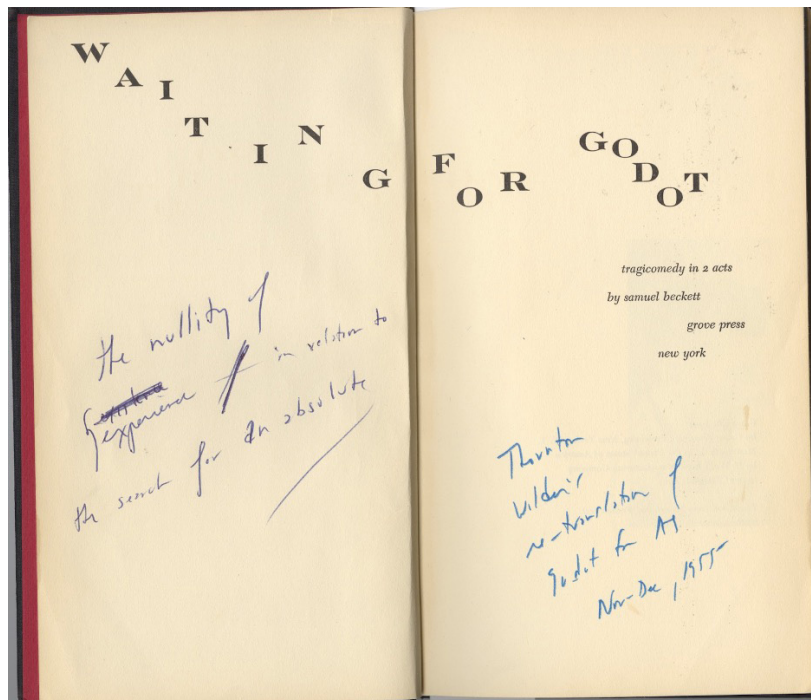


Fig. 1: Alan Schneider’s note in his published copy of *Waiting for Godot*.

Alan Schneider Papers. MSS 103. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library.
Published with permission from Edward Beckett on behalf of the Samuel Beckett Estate.

That would indeed eventually become the case, but it was not so in 1955-6. For one, Bianchini, stops short of examining the full *textual* evidence available in the Schneider archive so she can accept Schneider's version of Wilder's relationship to the Miami production, that recounted in Schneider's autobiography: "The two spent so much time together that after the [transatlantic] trip a rumor emerged, completely erroneous, that Wilder had 'rewritten' Beckett's script" (158n39, emphasis added). At best, she admits that "It was likely he was influenced by Thornton Wilder, his traveling companion on the ocean liner from New York to France before his first meeting with Beckett" (28). The implication is that after Schneider's meetings with Beckett, the director would follow the author's leads. As we contend here, however, the archived texts and Wilder's selected letters tell quite a different story. She cites Schneider's Existentialist preoccupations (27-8), which Beckett finally rejected out of hand at their Paris and London meetings, but she stops short of attributing such views to Wilder (Schneider's note is as follows, "TW [. . .] 4. Explain Existentialism: lecture'), and Schneider's comment, "Avoidance of night," which for Schneider meant death, is followed below by "Comments on being and doing" with an arrow leading directly to "Act of will with the day=Exist [Existentialist] thing," the latter comment attributed to 'TW' (Grove 41).

Schneider is fully in the Existentialist camp here despite Beckett's dismissal. Bianchini draws her principal conclusions from Schneider's "director's notebook" (25, 27): "a small spiral bound steno pad filled with handwritten notes" (27), some of which he forwarded to Beckett (29-30). She cites Schneider's "promptbooks" (25), at least in name, but does not mention what amounts to the director's textual assault therein (see Schneider). Those notes on changes that Schneider sent to Beckett, at least those he was willing to admit to, appear neither in Harmon nor in the LSB, 2011, but Beckett did respond to them on 27 December 1955, a week before the Miami opening. He queried the set, for one, which tended to follow the London production: "Why the platform? Is it just rising ground?" and he acknowledges gracefully other changes Schneider made, "Good of you to send me a list of your changes. If I has not met you I'd be on a hot griddle!"²⁶ Beckett raises the issue of Wilder's rumoured interventions, as well, but Schneider makes no mention of Wilder, as Bianchini never references the fully Wilderized text; that is, she does not even acknowledge the existence of the completely redrafted version of the play that Wilder dictated to the director during their Atlantic crossing.

26 Harmon, Maurice, *'No Author Better Served': The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, 6-7; LSB 2011, 586-87.

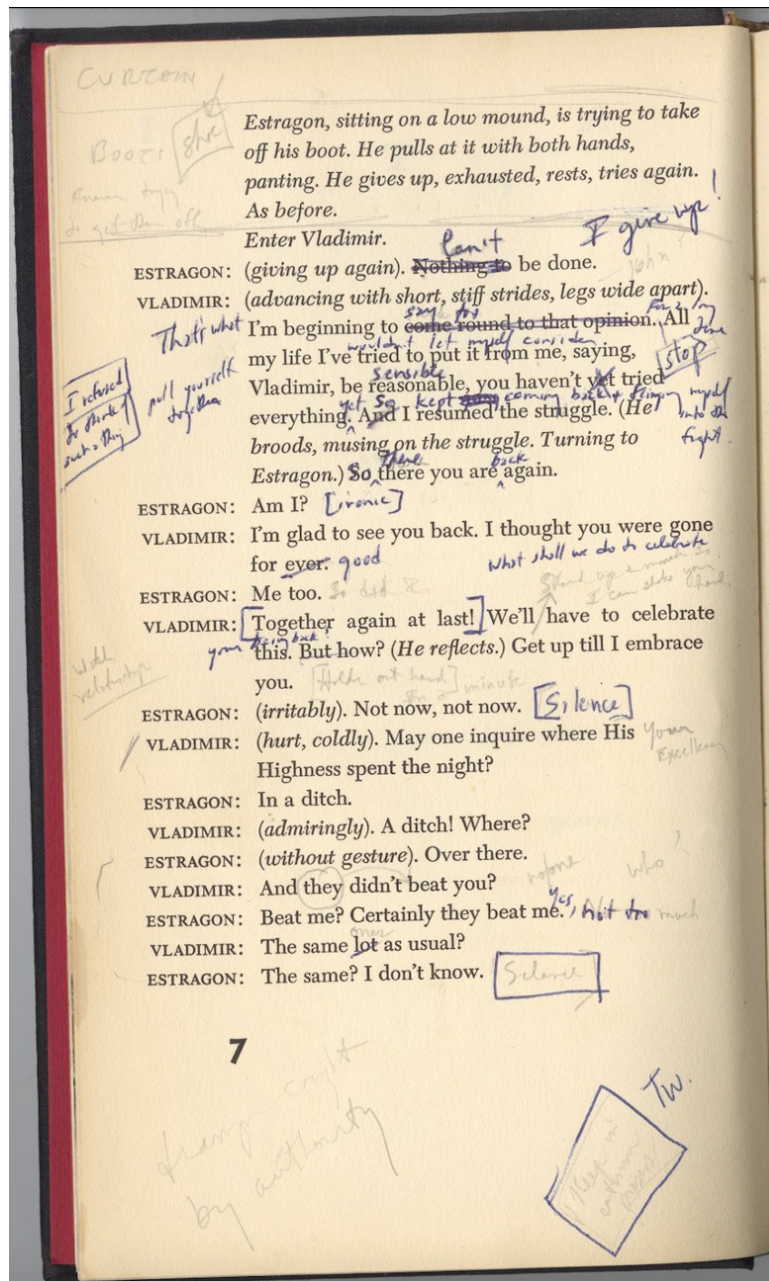


Fig. 2: Heavily revised first page of Alan Schneider’s published copy of *Waiting for Godot*. Alan Schneider Papers. MSS 103. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library. Published with permission from Edward Beckett on behalf of the Samuel Beckett Estate.

In fact, this Schneider/Wilder copy suggests that their meetings began in New York before their Atlantic crossing and carried over some into Cannes. Schneider’s understanding of, and thus his staging of the play in Miami, was not only deeply informed by Wilder’s re-rendering, it grew to become a significantly Wilderized version of Beckett’s play, although the thorough re-rendering of Lucky’s speech Schneider refers to above is nowhere evident in Wilder’s rewrites, nor in

Schneider's subsequent retyped promptbook. When Myerberg spoke about the production after its failure in Miami, however, he tended to sound like its director: "I accented the wrong things in trying to illuminate corners of the text that remained in the shadows in the London production."²⁷ Although Levy announces at the opening of his essay that the New York production of the play would finally open "On April 19—with new cast, new staging but the identical script" (33),²⁸ he is contradicted by Myerberg, who admits to having made changes to the Miami text, but who will now return to the text as written: "when I do it again I'm not going to change the script. Every revision we tried proved to be false" (35).²⁹ Myerberg's admission represents a stunning reversal of policy as he essentially changes allegiances from Wilder to Beckett—he fires his Wilderizing Miami director and returns to the text of the play that Beckett wrote.

New York Times critic Mel Gussow opens his review of a revival of Wilder's *Our Town* by recounting Wilder and Schneider's relationship with Beckett:

Wilder . . . felt he knew exactly what the play [*Waiting for Godot*] was about and proceeded to give Mr. Schneider a line-by-line analysis. At Wilder's recommendation, Mr. Schneider had just been hired to direct the first American production of *Godot*, and he listened intently, as Wilder told him that the play was an existential work about "the nullity of experience in relation to the search for an absolute."³⁰ The director eventually realized that Wilder, acting as an irrepressible scholar, was in effect rewriting "Godot" and re-envisioning it as if it were a work of his own. (Gussow, "The Darker Shore of Thornton Wilder")

What neither Gussow fully discerns nor Schneider acknowledges is how deeply Wilder's summary and textual revisions influenced the director's conception of the play.

Beckett's American Collaborators

What Wilder saw in both London and Paris and what he read in the Grove Press edition (the former perhaps coloring the latter) were considerably, even substantially different texts, the differences part of the machinery of theater whereby a number

27 Levy, Alan, "The long wait for godot" (sic), *Theatre Arts* 40, no. 8, August 1956: 35.

28 Levy, Alan, 33.

29 Levy, Alan, 35. Levy also cites the date of the Paris production he saw as "one winter evening in 1952" (33); actually, it opened January 5, 1953, per the British Library. See "Production photographs of *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (1953 premiere at the Théâtre de Babylone, Paris)," British Library, 55756332, 55756330, 55756659, and 56228009, bl.uk/collection-items/photographs-of-waiting-for-godot-by-samuel-beckett-1953.

30 This is the exact phrase of Wilder's that was noted *and revised* on the endpapers of Schneider's Grove Press hardback copy of the play on which Wilder worked.

of different English language versions were in simultaneous circulation among producers and actors, reproduced by different typing, stenographic, and transcription services, with many versions containing fingerprints other than Beckett's. British director Peter Hall worked originally from mimeographed copies of Beckett's early (1953) translation since no published text was available in Britain for the duration of *Godot's* London run. Schneider also worked with a professionally retyped version of the play (the pages with holes for brass fasteners), its stage directions typed in red to visually separate them from the dialogue, the text of which he then altered significantly following Wilder's lead. The actors for the Miami production also worked with copies of this typescript. Schneider's copy included significant changes to Beckett's dialogue and includes his blocking notes for the ill-fated 1956 opening. Schneider then used this retyping (UCSD, MS 103, Box 11, Folder 6, hereafter Schneider followed by Act and page number) even though the Grove Press edition was readily available from 1954 and that published text was revised by Schneider and Wilder on their Atlantic crossing (UCSD, MS 103, Box 74, Folder 14, hereafter Grove). Schneider subsequently took many liberties with the version of the play as officially published, intervening freely, often following Wilder's lead to introduce changes, at very least Americanizing the text. Beckett's branding of Pozzo's pipe as a "Kapp and Peterson," for instance, becomes a "Kaywoodie" in Miami (Schneider 1-47), Wilder for a time proposing an "old corn cob" in pencil, a "Dunhill" in ink and later a "Meerschaum," again in pencil. Beckett's "ten Francs" remains in published versions (Faber, 39; Grove, 26) but is transposed to "a shilling," reduced to "six pence" in the Albery mimeograph (Albery 11-35). That monetary request is altered to "a dime (quarter)" by Schneider, as Wilder originally suggested first, "I wouldn't mind a gold piece," followed by a reduction in the request to "a silver piece" (Grove, 26); "a queer thing" becomes "a strange thing" (Schneider 2-3) with Schneider. On Pozzo's lost watch at the end of Act 1, Beckett's "Perhaps it's in your fob" becomes with Schneider, "Perhaps it's in your watch pocket" (Schneider, 1-64). Schneider seems puzzled in production about how to eliminate the watch: "How to lose it off chain," Beckett's "Tick-tick" (Grove, 30b) becoming Schneider's "ticking" (Schneider, 1-64; Samuel French cuts these details, 32). Some of Schneider's alterations might be deemed "improvements," as "Show" becomes "Let me see" (Schneider 1-43), and "There you are again" becomes, "Here you are again." Beckett's "Would that be a help?" becomes, "Would that help you?" (Grove 24); Pozzo's "stool" becomes a "folding chair" (Grove 24); "The Macon country" becomes "The Garden of Eden" (Grove 39b). To Estragon's enigmatic to someone being killed, "The best thing would be to kill me, like the other" (Grove 40), Schneider adds Beckett's initials, "SB," then rewrites the line into a syntactical contortion, "It's best that I were put an end to like the other fella." He then adds "fella" to Vladimir's repeated response, "What other fella." Schneider also includes an ominous note to himself as he reshapes the text, "Cut here and there" (Grove 23b). Such changes are pervasive and deviate significantly from the revised American text already in print by Grove Press as Schneider's alterations follow the spirit and often the letter of Wilder's retranslation and his thematic existentialist emphasis.

Characterizing the production soon after its Miami closing, Schneider seems to echo Wilder (by way of Camus, perhaps): “Godot means certainty. Night means death. It shows the nullity of life and it means nothing. In the awareness that there is no meaning to life, there is meaning.”³¹ The comment Schneider scribbles onto the title page of the hardback Grove Press, Wilderized copy of *Godot*—taking Wilder’s direct dictation—is as follows: “The nullity of existence experience ____/____ in relation to the search for an absolute” (Grove).

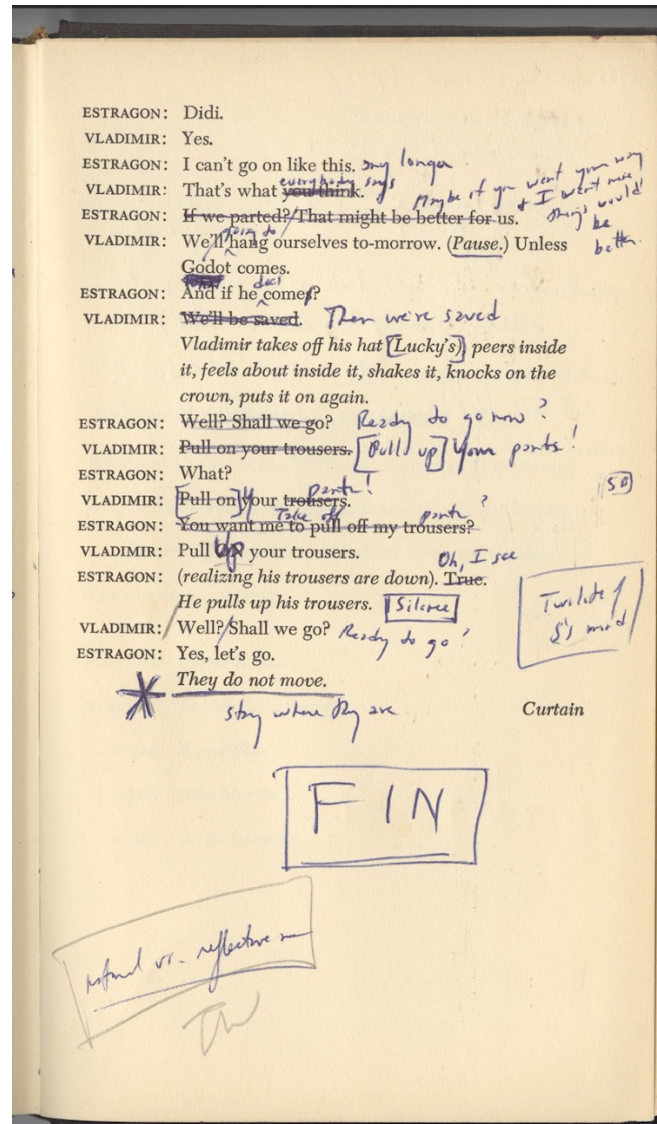


Fig. 3: Heavily revised final page of Alan Schneider’s published copy of *Waiting for Godot*. Alan Schneider Papers. MSS 103. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego Library. Published with permission from Edward Beckett on behalf of the Samuel Beckett Estate.

31 Levy, Alan, 35.

Schneider's post-production interview talking points reprise the notes he made in pencil on his own typed prompt book: "Man searching for some kind of certainty—ALS"; "The human predicament"; "Reaching for an absolute impossible to comprehend." Schneider's "ALS" notation, however, might more accurately have been rendered "TW" (Schneider NP). That is, most of Schneider's notes not only echo Wilder, they seem directly opposed to what he professed to have learned from his forthright discussions with Beckett. "According to him," Schneider notes, "Godot had 'no meaning' and 'no symbolism.' There was no 'general point of view involved,' but it was certainly 'not existentialist.' Nothing in it meant anything other than what it was on the surface. 'It's just about two people who are like that.' That was all he would say."³² The one note that Schneider identifies in his prompt book as coming directly from Beckett is penciled onto the opening page, amid a welter of Wilder quotes. It is a comment that Beckett will reprise with any number of other directors, or at least he would offer variations on the metaphor to characterize the play: "A sea of Time surrounds the boat of this play, / & leaks into it—S. B." On the following page, Schneider begins trying to specify something of this "sea of Time" with the rubric "Take time": "Est. [symbol for Estragon] seated / off C [center] in relation / to tree"; "Struggle how on going on"; "to get / boot (shoe) / off." And a page later he notes, "They've been waiting always and forever" (Schneider, NP). In the opening sequence of the Wilder-dictated retranslation of the play, however, Schneider notes and highlights Wilder's observation on time, which seems to run counter to Beckett's: "Keep in continuous present." The comment is enclosed in a drawn black box for emphasis and is marked with the initials "TW" (Grove 7). The absence of "A sea of Time," or at least the absence of leakage, in Wilder's view, may have helped Schneider account for the characters' having such difficulty with day-to-day memory. In response to Pozzo's preoccupation with his watch, Vladimir opines, "Time has stopped" (Grove 24b), suggesting a continuous, changeless present, the felt experience of waiting, their waiting, as Schneider notes, "always and forever." Even as Schneider professed guidance from Beckett, as he worked through the functioning of time in the play, he apparently decided to join the Wilder/Myerberg/Vladimir team.

On Pozzo and Lucky's departure, Didi and Gogo discuss whether or not they know or have previously encountered this traveling couple who interrupt their day. Schneider alters Estragon's comment on recognition, "Very Likely," to "Probably" or "Very Probably" and so has to eliminate Vladimir's rejoinder, "Likely!" (Schneider I-68). Not many other changes affect the overall impact of the play significantly and some are doubtless part of the standard rehearsal protocol of acceding to the suggestions of actors who may find certain patterns of phrasing and syntax more natural to them than others, particularly those of Beckett's Hiberno-Franco-inflected English. Schneider simply cuts Beckett's mention of Irish sports, "conating and ca-

32 Schneider, Alan, *Entrances*, 224.

mogie,” for example (Schneider, I-61). Moreover, since this text is essentially Schneider’s notebook, marked “director’s copy,” it is not always clear which penciled changes are simply contemplated alternatives and which are changes made for performance. Some notes are marginal, in both senses of that term: “Don’t you think they have?” is posited as a potential replacement for Vladimir’s “Haven’t they?”; or again “I guess I did” for Estragon’s “I suppose I did.” Vladimir’s “That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them. And then nobody ever recognizes us” is adapted by Schneider to: “That doesn’t mean anything. I too pretended I didn’t recognize them. And anyway nobody ever recognizes us” (Schneider I-68). The Samuel French edition further improves Beckett’s punctuation as found in Schneider, Grove, and Faber 1956 by setting the adverb “too” off with commas (French, 34). As Estragon returns to the pain in his foot his line, “Didi! It’s the other foot!” is amplified by Schneider in a marginal note, the alternative, “It’s the other foot that’s hurting, not the one I thought” (Schneider I-69). The “Boy” sleeps not in Beckett’s “loft” but in Schneider’s “barn” (Schneider I-75), and in Miami shoes were substituted for boots as props, the dialogue adjusted accordingly (Schneider I-76). “Pity we don’t have a bit of rope” becomes “Shame we don’t have a bit of rope” (Schneider I-77). Beckett’s “How long have we been together all the time now?” becomes the more tortured, “How long is it now that you and I have been going around together all the time?” as Schneider didn’t seem to like the placement of “all the time” (Schneider I-77). The Miami set design, moreover, seems to have had some sort of raised platform for Lucky’s speech as Schneider notes to himself, “(Lucky advances) L or R ? or on to PLAT” (Schneider I-59), the stage directions reversed a short time later, “R or L or on to PLAT.” Such a “PLAT” would seem to have been suggested by or designed to echo the Peter Hall/Peter Snow London production with its “rostrum C,” where the tree stands (French, 1).

Schneider’s promptbook contains hundreds of such changes, some gratuitous, others perceived as improvements, some contemplated replacements, others apparently retranslations of Beckett’s English into American slang. Taken individually each might seem minor. Collectively, however, they change the distinct tenor of the text, the character of the dialogue or the dialogue of the characters. More significant than any individual alterations, however, is Schneider’s overall relationship to the text. Following Wilder’s and perhaps Myerberg’s lead, the director sees Beckett’s English wanting and so feels free to alter the script without regard to anything like authorial integrity or consent. In general, the value of and respect for authorial guidance are simply not part of the equation for Anglo-American commercial theater, especially for neophyte playwrights.

Beckett’s British Collaborators

On the other side of the Atlantic, Beckett’s theatrical experience had borne striking similarities to that in the States, but British theatre folk worked without

a published text. The London production of *Waiting for Godot* ran its course (The Arts Theatre try out opened August 3, 1955, five months before the Miami opening) before Faber published its censored text of 1956, so Hall's cast and crew worked with mimeographed duplicates—a copy of which was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office and is now held in the British Library (LCP/1954, also online as part of the BDMP).³³ The L. C.'s office then examined a retyped mimeograph made from Beckett's original translation, which he later revised for publication with Grove Press, and this British unrevised translation was the one used for the entire London run. An unannotated, mimeographed copy of the U.S. version is also on deposit at The Ohio State University, one not attributable to any production-related figure. This American mimeograph was created for an American production and was in circulation before Beckett revised what he called his "definitive" version for Grove Press. That published version was available in the US, after some printing delays, by September of 1954, and it was the base text used for Wilder's retranslation.

Beckett himself admittedly deemed his early translations insufficient, and he initially denigrated this "first version of *Godot*" to his American publisher: "This translation has been rushed, so that [original producer] Mr [Harold] Oram may have something to work on as soon as possible, but I do not think the final version will differ from it very much. I should like to know what date roughly you have in view for publication" (LSB 2, 384–85). The intermediary between Beckett and Oram was one Pamela Mitchell, who, in September 1953, acting as a representative of Harold Oram, Incorporated, met with Beckett in Paris to negotiate the rights for the American premiere of *Waiting for Godot*. On September 1, 1953, Beckett wrote to Rosset that his translation "was done in great haste to facilitate the negotiations of Mr. Oram and I do not myself regard it as very satisfactory. [. . .] (The copy made by the services of Mr Oram [sic] contains a number of mistakes)" (LSB 2, 397). Myerberg may have taken his cue to make changes to the play from Beckett's own denigration of his translation. Van Hulle and Verhulst confirm that "neither Beckett's holograph, nor his original typescript of this first draft [the unsatisfactory translation] has been found," it was quickly reproduced as above, however, and widely circulated in both the U.S. and the U.K. in mimeographed format (Van Hulle and Verhulst, 269). Since no published version was available for producers in the U. K., directors and actors worked with mimeographs as consultations and casting began. Schneider's prompt book copy is yet another retyping but of the Grove Press text, which Schneider, in turn, "improved" following Wilder's and Myerber's lead.

That is, after the French production had closed at the end of October and the play was still unpublished in English, Beckett was set to "improved" his

33 See also "Lord Chamberlain's Plays: Correspondence file for *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (1954)," British Library, LCP Corr 1954 No.6597, bl.uk/collection-items/lord-chamberlains-report-and-correspondence-about-waiting-for-godot.

translation, asking his American publisher on December 14, 1953, to delay publication in favor of what was sure to be a better translation: “Could you possibly postpone setting the galleys until 1st week in January [1954], by which time you will have received the definitive text. I have made a fair number of changes, particularly in Lucky’s tirade [see below], and a lot of correcting would be avoided if you could delay things for a few weeks” (LSB 2, 432). Grove agreed, and it would subsequently be this revised Grove Press text of 1954 that Beckett would subsequently recommend to other publishers, to German publisher Siegfried Unseld on June 4, 1962, and to English publisher Charles Monteith on January 13, 1964. His 1962 letter to Unseld noted that the English could not stage the uncut text “without running into trouble with the censors [. . .] they could not stage the uncut text as published by Grove Press, without once again submitting it for the Lord Chamberlain’s approval. It is of course the Grove Press text which should have appeared in your [*Dramatische Dichtungen 1*] edition” (LSB 3, 581n2); and in 1964 to Monteith:

The final Godot [sic] text I propose is the Grove Press text as corrected by me (black corrections, ignore red) with spelling anglicized as necessary.

The Lord Chamberlain’s objections, as well as I can remember, were to button up, pubis, erection, clap, arse, piss, balloked and farted, pp. 8, 12, 15, 21, 38, 50 and 52 respectively of Grove edition.³⁴

Beckett’s suggestion, if accepted by Monteith, would have avoided the current disparities between English language versions of *Godot*. Throughout the process of performance-driven revision and translation, Beckett maintained differences between the French and English texts, beginning with their titles, of course, but also between what became, finally, separately revised texts for his English language publishers. One fully revised version, then, was finally published by Grove Press in September of 1954, in advance of any other English-language production. At about the time of the recast Broadway opening at the John Golden Theater on April 19, 1956, a revival in producer Myerberg’s legal strategy, two years after the play’s publication by Grove Press and not long after the Faber edition of 1956 finally appeared, the textual issues surrounding Beckett’s first produced play were, to say the least, confused: eight decidedly different

34 Toby Faber, *Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber, 2019), 279. See also the “Mimeography” of this essay and the British Library’s characterization of the deletions in Andrew Dickson, “Your Godot was our Godot: Beckett’s global journeys,” British Library, Sept. 17, 2017, bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/your-godot-was-our-godot-becketts-global-journeys. This crucial letter is not included in *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, but the publication of the Grove Press text by Faber is proposed in Beckett’s letter to Monteith of November 15, 1963. See *Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 3, 1957–1965*, ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn, and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2014), 580.

English-language versions of *Godot* were in circulation and thus in or available for performance. Many of these bore fingerprints other than those of the author:

- 1) Beckett's original (hasty) Glenville/Oram translation, ms. May–June 1953, ts. acknowledged to Rosset July 5, 1953;
- 2) Mimeograph of #1 retyped in U.S. by Harold Oram, sole known copy now at The Ohio State University (OSU);
- 3) Mimeographed reproductions of 1953 made from but with alterations to one; one of two Donald Albery copies in Texas, one hand-numbered "25," suggesting at least that number of duplicates;
- 4) Beckett's revisions of #1 for the Grove Press edition of 1954, deemed "definitive" by the author;
- 5) Alan Schneider's retyping of #4; used as his prompt book of 1955 into which he added his substantial emendations, the text used in Miami;
- 6) A textually scrambled (essentially a cut-up) reprint of #4 in *Theatre Arts*, March 8, 1956 (see appendix);
- 7) The Faber edition, pre-censored by Albery or the author's agent, Rosica Colin, which version Faber would finally publish in February 1956, adding a second printing in March, *after which* the British publisher would purchase publication rights to #4 for \$150 by April 12, 1956; and, finally, and in many ways the most egregious;
- 8) In competition with #1–7, a "Samuel French Acting Edition" appeared in 1957, which cites the 1954 uncensored Grove Press, not the 1956 Faber edition, as its authority and so is presumably published under the Grove Press performance rights. Grove's rights outside of North America covered all performances in English. The designation of "Acting Edition" by Samuel French allowed it to be sold in competition with Grove Press in the States and with Faber in the U.K. It also cites a 1955 text crediting Beckett's copyright and deemed "unpub. [unpublished] 41144," a date acknowledged separately in all Faber editions (7): "This play is copyright in 1955," but that copyright is not by Faber, which did not then have the rights to the play. The substantially modified Samuel French edition reflects the extensive rewritings by unknown hands made for both London productions, and this edition was sold throughout the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Canada, as noted on the copyright page. This collaborative text was finally replaced by the 1964 Faber revised and uncensored text only in 2004.

To be clear, despite its stated copyrights, this Samuel French text is not the Grove Press text of 1954, but a substantially altered or rewritten Peter Hall text bearing very little resemblance to the American edition, which designer Peter Snow references on his mimeograph duplicate. Nor is it the equivalent of the Faber text of 1956, although they both adhere to the Lord Chamberlain's mandated cuts. The Samuel French edition cites the second London production which was the West End Criterion version censored to comply with the Lord

Chamberlain's objections, and it follows not only the Lord Chamberlain's deletions but includes Peter Hall's refinements—interventions and rewriting of the script to reflect both Arts and Criterion stagings. The first Faber edition of 1956 was the bowdlerized version that Beckett would finally call "mutilated" and Charles Monteith would deem "timid" (#7 above). Faber's note to its first edition announced that "When *Waiting for Godot* was transferred from the Arts Theatre to the Criterion Theatre, a small number of textual deletions were [sic] made to satisfy the requirements of the Lord Chamberlain. The text printed here is that used in the Criterion Theatre production." The acknowledgment of such revisions was something of an afterthought at first, as it is tipped in (see fig. 3 above). The Samuel French edition offers no such caveat.

With Schneider in tow, Beckett went on to see the Hall production at the Criterion Theater for six consecutive nights. Schneider notes Beckett's displeasure with the production but offers few details in *Entrances*, but in his subsequent exchange of letters, Beckett sent Schneider a copy of the recommendations for changes that he sent to Peter Hall after he and Schneider had viewed five performances of the Hall production. In the letter of December 14, 1955 accompanying the notes to Hall, Beckett made clear to Schneider, and surely not for the first time in this visit, his position on textual alterations, that after their friendly visit, "I feel my monster is in safe keeping." But he insisted, "All I ask of you is not to make any changes in the text without letting me know. If their way of speaking is not the American way, it simply cannot be helped. Not, as you know, that I am intransigent about changing an odd word here or there or making the odd cut. But do please let me have the opportunity of protesting or approving" (LSB 2, 574). Even as those Paris and London meetings with Beckett were under way, however, Schneider already had a completely redrafted text of the play in his satchel, and, as matters would play out, he would pay little heed to Beckett's desiderata above. Beckett did, moreover, send both Hall and Schneider some four pages of notes on the same day, correcting, among other things, the London lighting changes, which includes "unvarying evening light up to boy's exit" (complete notes in LSB 2, 575-78). Very few of Beckett's comments, however, involved textual liberties, variations or omissions even as he took comprehensive notes during the productions. He did, however, object to, "What is your name—Adam? Why omitted?" (Faber, 37; Grove, 25; the cut made in Albery, I-33 and in French, 24). What Beckett does not mention, however, is the omission of the previous whip-cracking incident that startles the other participants, and its related dialogue, as Estragon "sits on the barrel," not part of Beckett's set (Faber, 37; Grove, 25; French, 24). The scene is lined out in pen in the Albery mimeograph, through the "What is your name?" query, the answer to which in Albery is "Catullus" and so published in Faber 1956 (I-33). This seems to have been the most substantial cut in the London productions. For Hall, Beckett did note, "Not 'Well, that's what I think' but 'Well, that's that, I think.'" Faber and Grove omitting the second comma, while Samuel French omits that comma and

the following “I think” (Faber, 31; Grove, 21b; French, 20—dialogue quotation marks added to Beckett here). He also corrected the boy’s address from plural to singular, “Sirs” to “Sir,” but he may have misheard since no text prints the plural form of address. Most of Beckett’s comments involved stage directions, voice inflections, intensity, and pattern of movement. But he makes no mention of “stooge” being substituted for “knook,” as in “so I took a knook [stooge],” “stooge” penciled into Albery (Faber, 33; Grove, 22b; French, 21; Albery, 1-29), or that “Dunhill” replaced “Kapp and Peterson” as Pozzo’s pipe brand (French, 23; Grove, 23b; Faber, 35). Pozzo’s comment on his sight is revised in pen from “Yes, wonderfully good” (Albery, 2-36) to that published, “Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful sight!” (Faber, 86; Grove, 55b). Vladimir’s interrogation of the Boy in Act 2 is rearranged in Albery so that the question “What does he do, Mr. Godot?” is moved forward before “How is your brother,” and dialogue about Godot’s beard is added (Albery, 2-43) to conform with Beckett’s revision for Grove Press, and they appear in all English-language published texts (Faber, 91-92; Grove, 59; SF, 68). With these visits to the London production, furthermore, Beckett seems further on his way to thinking as a director. The issues with Hall’s production were profound. In fact, Beckett seems to have suggested that the play needed significant new direction, but in the summary notes he sent Schneider he acknowledged, “It was finally decided in London that a new production during performance was not feasible” (LSB 2, 574). Such “a new production” is exactly what would occur after the Miami failure with Schneider’s ouster and a recasting of the play for New York, save Lahr.

Even as a theatrical neophyte with limited production input, Beckett was deeply involved in what seemed intractable negotiations with the Lord Chamberlain’s office concerning the play’s move from the Arts Theatre to the West End, and that West End production teetered on the brink of failure until last minute compromises were finally reached with the Lord Chamberlain’s office. He turned his attention to the New York production, responding to Rosset’s alarm of potential rewriting, in February of 1956, after the failure of Schneider’s altered *Waiting for Godot* in its Miami tryout on January 3 and after the censored British production opened successfully at London’s Criterion Theatre on August 25, 1955, but before the play’s Broadway premiere with its new director, Herbert Berghof, on April 23, 1956:

I am naturally disturbed by the thought of a new director of production. And still more disturbed by the menace hinted at in one of your letters, of unauthorized deviations from the script. This we cannot have at any price and I am asking [London producer Donald] Albery to write [New York producer Michael] Myerberg to that effect. I am not intransigent, as the [bowdlerized] Criterion production shows, about minor changes, if I feel they are necessary, but I refuse to be improved by a professional rewriter. Perhaps it is a false alarm. I do hope so. (LSB 2, 600-1)

It was not. Beckett seems not to have realized that he had already been “improved by a professional rewriter” and a pair of theatrical directors by February 1956, and, in fact, that was accomplished even as he was meeting with Schneider in Paris and London and watching with him an altered version of his play in London. Such “improvements,” moreover, were routinely made for “theatrical,” that is, commercial reasons, and especially to the work of neophyte playwrights. It was the bowdlerized version of *Godot* to which Beckett alluded above that Faber finally published in 1956, to his displeasure, even as the dossier of Lord Chamberlain’s office was restricted to public performance and so had little control over publication per se.³⁵ Writing to Beckett on January 29, 1957, Charles Monteith tried to offer Beckett some consolation: “I would like to say, too, how unhappy I feel, in retrospect, about our decision last year to print the Lord Chamberlain’s version of *Godot* rather than the full one,” which decision he called “perhaps an extreme and undue timidity.” He further offered “a faint plea in mitigation. I would like to assure you, though, of our very sincere regrets that it should ever have happened” (Faber, *Faber & Faber*, 243–44). But, in fact, Faber repeated its “timidity” when it apparently prepared an uncensored version of *Waiting for Godot* for publication with a copyright date of 1959 (“First published in this edition MCMLIX”), but demurred yet again.³⁶ That version is also cited as being “[r]eprinted mcmlxii,” that is, 1962. These dates refer to the “paper covered” edition which reprints the censored 1956 text. Neither the uncensored 1959 edition, nor its supposed reprint in 1962 were the text as written. Faber apparently planned to issue the uncensored text in anticipation of The English Stage Company’s proposed staging of the uncut version in the U.K., and the theater company apparently created its own hybrid text, the most current Faber copyright page included in a new mimeograph retyping of the uncensored text. The only known record of such preparations for performance and publication is in the Lord Chamberlain’s files for the play now in the British Library (LCP 1964/51). That unpublished complete version of the play was duplicated by the English Stage Company not in the Faber format but in its own theatrical house style, and that version complete with the Faber copyright information included was sent to the Lord Chamberlain’s office on December 1, 1964 in anticipation of an uncensored performance at the Royal Court Theatre, which would have been followed by an uncensored Faber edition of the play.³⁷ The Lord Chamberlain’s blue pencil, however, reinstated the Criterion cuts of

35 The bowdlerized initial publication of *Godot* would not be the final instance of such. See also S. E. Gontarski, “Bowdlerizing Beckett: The BBC *Embers*,” *Journal of Beckett Studies* 9, no. 1 (1999): 127–32.

36 The Monteith letter of 29 January 1957 cited above appears in excerpt in *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (London: Faber, 2019), 243–4, but Monteith’s second round of timidity with the 1959 “paper covered” edition remains an “untold story,” at least in that volume.

37 This mimeograph version, as all mimeographs except that at Ohio State University, is paginated 1-2–1-54; 2-2–2-46; 1-1 and 2-1 unpaginated.

1954/5, missing, however, “The mother had the clap” (LCP 1964/51, I-18) and marking for deletion the “Hard Stool” that was not questioned in the 1954/5 deletion requests (LCP 1964/51, I-40). Such mitigation at which Monteith hinted in 1957 and which seem to have led to some preparations to issue an uncensored text in 1959, and again in 1962, would not formally emerge in print until 1964.

Other Mysterious Interventions

For an author so reputedly meticulous, scrupulous, and even obsessive about the publication and performance of his work, Beckett would be subject to any number of clandestine “improvements” and non-authorial interventions into his playscripts, the three words that producer Kenneth Tynan introduced into Beckett’s minimalist playlet called “Breath” in 1969 perhaps the most notorious. To Beckett’s “Stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish,” Tynan would add a simple participial phrase, “including naked bodies.” Leading off with Beckett’s “Breath,” Tynan’s sextravaganza, *Oh! Calcutta!*, would première at the Eden Theater in New York City on June 17, 1969, and Tynan’s intervention would contribute to what became Beckett’s greatest theatrical success. After a cautious opening with thirty-nine previews, *Oh! Calcutta!* moved to the Belasco Theater on Broadway on February 26, 1971, where it ran, and ran, and ran, with only slight interruption, until August 6, 1989. Finally, 85 million people saw 1,314 performances, making it, uncontestedly, the most viewed Beckett play ever, a record unlikely to be broken.³⁸

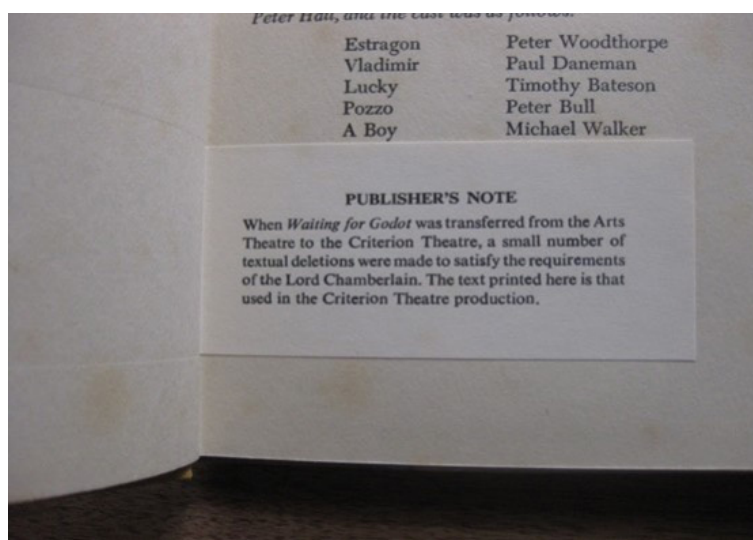


Fig. 4: The title page of the first printing of the Faber and Faber edition of *Waiting for Godot*, showing last minute decision about the altered text.

38 See “Oh! Calcutta!,” *Broadway Musical Home*, broadwaymusicalhome.com/shows/ohcalcutta.htm.

Such drastic interventions were considerably more common than one might expect given Beckett's reputation for oversight and fastidiousness, but few were as egregious as those surrounding his first performed play in English, *Waiting for Godot*. Most obvious, since publicly acknowledged and oft cited in contemporary discourse, is the intervention by a team of rewriters in the Lord Chamberlain's office whose task was to sanitize those features of any public dramatic performance that might offend the most sensitive members of the British audience. A less obvious and all but unacknowledged culprit was chance, or rather the fumbings of inept, ill-trained, inattentive editors or other publishing functionaries. After the publication of *Waiting for Godot* in the United States, Grove Press sanctioned a reprint of the play by the major theater journal of its day, *Theatre Arts*, successor to *Theatre Arts Monthly*, which routinely published playscripts of works performed on Broadway, especially those of American theatrical luminaries like Tennessee Williams, William Inge, and Arthur Miller. American publisher Barney Rosset wrote to Beckett on March 8, 1956 that *Theatre Arts* requested to "reprint the whole thing," the request coming before the Broadway opening but after the play's publication. Beckett's handwritten addendum in his response to Rosset of March 15 was less than supportive: "I am not sure that an integral publication in *Theatre Arts Magazine* would help your sales. But I leave it to you to do what you judge best" (LSB 2, 608, 609n10). *Godot* finally appeared in the August 1956 issue, after the Broadway production had closed, the show running only some fifty-six performances between April 19 and June 9. Of the publication, the annotators of the Beckett letters comment, almost offhandedly, certainly incompletely that "although consecutively numbered, the order of the pages is incorrect in this publication" (LSB 2, 609). In fact, the *Theatre Arts* version was a publishing travesty. Its copy was set from the published Grove text and not from the many reproduced versions from duplicating services in circulation. In New York, for example, Beckett's early translation of the play was reproduced by Hart Stenographic Bureau, a service, like the more famous Studio Duplicating Services, also of New York, used for legal depositions but also by many Broadway producers for typing and duplicating playscripts.³⁹ The New York mimeographed version is identical to the text submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office for approval, but its pagination differs from the mimeographed copies reproduced in London confirming the fact that it is an American retyping, and this American mimeograph also varies substantially from the subsequently revised and published Grove Press edition. *The Theatre Arts* text was apparently yet another retyping, a resetting by the

39 A copy of this American duplicated script is held at The Ohio State University Rare Books and Special Collections library but not in nor cross referenced to the University's Beckett collection. My thanks to Prof. Jennifer A. Buckley of the University of Iowa for calling my attention to this item and to Rebecca Jewett, Coordinator of Public Services & Operations, University Libraries, Thompson Library Special Collections, The Ohio State University for making it available, with the permission of Edward Beckett, whom I, likewise, thank.

magazine into its own format, with some twelve production photographs from both British and American productions interwoven, but this retyping at one point lacked pagination since final pagination would need to await its positioning in the sequence for this particular issue. Somewhere in that resetting process of magazine publication, some functionary at the magazine must have dropped the loose sheets of unpaginated typescript since the pages got scrambled, badly, and apparently no one thought to recheck the magazine text against the published book, which was readily available at the time (published in the fall of 1954). This accidentally reshuffled or cut-up version of the play was that which was finally printed. It was very widely read, and the play script was accompanied by an Alan Levy essay that included interviews with producer Meyerberg and director Schneider, “The LONG wait for godot” (*sic.*, 20-35, 96).

The *Theatre Arts* version follows the Grove text until page 45 (TA, 37–45), then jumps to the ending of act 1 (TA, 46; Grove, 35). Act 1 has no Boy at all, but he appears twice in Act 2 (TA 49, 61), as do Pozzo and Lucky. Lucky’s tirade is now early in Act 2 (TA 47-8), when in Beckett’s version Pozzo is blind and Lucky dumb and thereby censored. Here they are sighted and loquacious, respectively, in something of, presumably, a medical miracle. Moreover, page 46 ends with Vladimir lines cut in mid-sentence, “But it’s the way of doing it that counts, the”; page 47 picks up with Estragon’s “I couldn’t accept less” (Grove, 26). No one at the magazine apparently thought that such a curious inconsistency between pages 46 and 47 was odd, or perhaps no more odd than a rambling, loquacious Lucky going dumb mid-act, the mysterious, unacknowledged affliction affecting a sighted Pozzo who suddenly goes blind before our eyes. If anyone actually read proof after the shuffling, the reader doubtless thought these irregularities no more odd or irrational than other presumed non-sequiturs in the play (full details in appendix A). Notably, if not equally astonishingly, none of the magazine’s readers commented on the confusions in the “Letters” section of subsequent issues. Beckett certainly did not read proofs for this publication, nor, presumably, did anyone knowledgeable at Grove Press. The result is a wildly aberrant text, but one presumably read by more magazine subscribers than customers reading the official Grove Press edition on sale at the theater or in the few bookstores that carried the play at the time. The *Theatre Arts* version, then, is something of a cut-up re-rendering of *Waiting for Godot*, something of a *Godot for Waiting*, and, as such, it may unintentionally mimic Lucky’s cut-up discourse. It is, amid its aleatory esthetics, something of a new text.

A second curiosity was also part of the American economically-driven promotional machinery, an edited and so cut-up summarized version of the play published in the *Best Plays* series edited by Louis Kronenberger, *Waiting for Godot* appearing among the “Ten Best” plays of 1955–56.⁴⁰ Kronenberger

40 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, in *The Best Plays, 1955–56*, ed. Louis Kronenberger (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956), 295–317.

dubbed it “a kind of philosophical quiz show” that offers “storytelling without story,” noting further that Beckett “exhibits a genuine but essentially minor talent” (Kronenberger, 13). In this version, the play is again cut up with snippets of Beckett’s dialogue intercut with summaries by another’s hand, creating essentially another coauthored version, which snippets at times include rephrased bits of dialogue (Kronenberger, 295–317). Summaries are not neutral, of course, and here there are some twenty-three of them, some short, some quite extended and interspersed with dialogue. They shape our relation to, in this case, Beckett’s text: “While Estragon continues his struggle with his boot, Vladimir riles him by asking if it hurts. Howls of anger at this lack of sympathy are met with equal anger on Vladimir’s part that his own suffering is never taken into account” (Kronenberger, 296), and later “Vladimir is in a rage to leave” (Kronenberger, 301). Lucky is called a “creature of sorts,” and we are told that “Lucky responds like a tired old trained dog” (Kronenberger, 300). Needless to say, such phrasings as “[h]owls of anger” and “Vladimir . . . in a rage” is not Beckett’s. One attraction of this curious edition is the two-page cartoon by noted Broadway caricaturist Al Hirschfeld, in which Bert Lahr’s Estragon looks, well, quite Lahrish, but E. G. Marshall’s Vladimir is rendered as a very recognizable Stan Laurel (Kronenberger, 306–7). As interesting is Hirschfeld’s casting of Lucky as a messianic figure on a distant hill declaiming something of a Sermon on the Mount, but the performance, in this case, is into the wilderness, without audience as his back is turned to the play’s principals (Kronenberger, 306–7). That image offers a pithy interpretation of the play with Lucky’s screed, his prophetic warnings, as the central feature of the play, the dramatic climax of Act I. We might expect Act II to build on that moment in something of a traditional dramatic structure. Instead, his return in Act II turns out to be anti-climactic, deflationary, even and so a confirmation of Lucky’s Act I decree that humanity “wastes and pines.” Such an image also belies some of the most common readings of the play, that nothing happens. Hirschfeld’s image alone, with its hidden inscriptions of his daughter Nina’s name (in Pozzo’s trouser cuffs), is worth the price of the book on the aftermarket,

Cerebral Physiology

The “fair number of changes” that Beckett made to his initial Godot translation, “particularly in Lucky’s tirade,” as he noted to publisher Rosset on December 14, 1953 to produce “the definitive text,” (*LSB* 2, 432), are detailed in Peter Snow’s mimeograph copy of the British retyping, which is numbered 15 and which Snow designated “Altered to conform to American edition. These are strikingly revealing revisions as certain specifics are altered and a thematic thread clarified. The revisions affect the overall quality of the English translation little, but the

changes sharpen some of the monologue as Lucky's celebrated speech grows to be a warning, using the brain science of the day, to suggest human degeneration, a slide towards the dystopian as his speech outlines a theory of not only human stagnation but of regression, a slide toward atavism, a Darwinism in reverse, such reversion or degeneration evident in physiology, in anatomic anomalies, in distortions of skulls, faces, and bodily asymmetries. Van Hulle and Verhulst characterize this shift broadly: "The English translation also carries a greater sense of decay" (Van Hulle and Verhulst, 295). Much of that "decay" inculcates the mid-nineteenth-century focus on phrenology, a neuroscience based on anatomical deviations and physical stigmata. Lucky, himself now a slave or menial, "Up, pig!" or "Up scum!" in Pozzo's words (Grove, 30), refers to primitive forms of humanity, like Caliban, humanized, perhaps, to the extent that he was in *The Tempest*, by the "divine Miranda," who may herself have suffered as she performed that missionary or imperialist duty (see Kipling's *Kim* and other writings on imperial India, for instance). In fact, Pozzo is on his way to market to sell his menial for "a good price" (Grove 21b). That is, the intellectual, artistic Lucky is being monetized, but the product is damaged. The suffering Lucky himself appears to be part of human degeneration into madness scientifically determined by shrinking skull size (measured by craniometry, in the science of his day—and ours, we might add), diminishing brain size, and nonnormative posture, the loss not particular to him but universal, that is, "loss per capitem" as Beckett's Lucky simultaneously details and exemplifies that loss of "one inch four ounces per capitem" in the early and subsequent translations of *Waiting for Godot*, the earlier of which we might deem bad quartos or bad codices—but such bad codices can be useful in compiling a work's genealogy.

Lucky outlines a humanity that "wastes and pines," Beckett pluralizing his original "loss per capitem" (Albery, I-41; French, 30) to "loss per capita" for publication in Faber 1956 (43) and to its translation, "loss per head," in Beckett's separate revision for Grove Press (Grove, 29), Faber finally settling on a corrupted version, "per caput" (Faber 1964, 44). These are primitive creatures: "You can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them," a chilling reference to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century eugenics and its extremity, the "Final Solution," perhaps, but a phrase Estragon echoes in Act 2: "The best thing would be to kill me [. . .] Like the other," that is, Lucky, perhaps (Grove, 40; Faber 1956, 62). In Lucky's cut-up summary of research, such creatures reside in exotic, primitive locales like (originally) "Alabama," where we find "figures stark naked in the stockinged feet," the stockings a token of civilizing influence, perhaps (Albery I-41; OSU I-52). The change to "Connemara" is made only in a penciled revision to Albery along with other changes to Lucky's speech, although Samuel Johnson is retained in the Albery (I-41), in Faber 1956 (43, revised to "Bishop Berkeley" in the "Paper covered" edition of 1959, 44) and in Samuel French "Acting Edition" (French, 30).

POZZO Be careful! He's wicked.
 (VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON turn towards Pozzo)
 With strangers.

ESTRAGON (Undertone) Is that him?
 VLADIMIR Who?
 ESTRAGON (Trying to remember the name) Er...
 VLADIMIR Godot?
 ESTRAGON Yes.
 POZZO I present myself: Pozzo.
 VLADIMIR (To Estragon) Not at all!
 ESTRAGON He said Godot.
 VLADIMIR Not at all!
 ESTRAGON (Timidly, to Pozzo) You're not Mr. Godot, Sir?
 POZZO (Terrifying voice) I am Pozzo! (silence) Does that name mean nothing to you? (silence) I say does that name mean nothing to you?
 (VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON look at each other questioningly)

ESTRAGON (Pretending to search) Bozzo...Bozzo...
 VLADIMIR (Ditto) Pozzo...
 POZZO PPPOZZO!
 ESTRAGON Ah! Pozzo...let me see...Pozzo...
 VLADIMIR Is it Pozzo or Bozzo?
 ESTRAGON Pozzo...no...I'm afraid I...no...I don't seem to...
 (POZZO advances threateningly)

VLADIMIR (Conciliating) I once knew a family called Gozzo. The mother embroidered doilies.
 ESTRAGON (Hastily) We're not from these parts, Sir.
 POZZO (Halting) You are human beings nevertheless. (he puts on his spectacles) As far as one can see. (he takes off his spectacles) Of the same species

Fig. 5: Page from Albery mimeograph with comment on the Gozzo mother "who embroidered doilies." Published with permission from the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.



Fig. 6: Peter Snow's original maquette for the London premiere of *Waiting for Godot*.
Published with permission from Edward Beckett on behalf of the Samuel Beckett Estate.

Such findings are, in Lucky's summary, "what many deny," and derive from the "Acacacademy of Anthropopometry of Essy-in-Possy [a variant of the Latin "to be able" and so "the abilities"] of Testew and Conard [revised to Cunard] it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that [a typo in Faber 1956, 43 and Grove, 28b, since "that that" appears in four mimeographed texts, copied, apparently, from a common source: Albery I-40; OSU I-51 which clings to the labours of men that as a result of the labours left unfinished unfinished of Testew [i.e., "testes"] and Conard [in French and English mimeographs, revised to Cunard in Grove and Faber 1956 revision, both allusions to female sex organs, i.e., "con"] it is established that hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattmann it is established as clearly so clearly that in the view of the labours of Fartov and Belcher unfinished for reasons unknown of Testew and Conard unfinished it is established what many deny that man in Possy of Testew and Conard that man in short [and getting shorter, apparently] that man in brief in spite of the progress of alimentation and defecation [improvements of food supply and evacuation hygien, say, "that man" still] wastes and pines wastes and pines" (Albery I-41; OSU I-52).

"Anthropopometry" is not nonsense nor merely a childish scatological reference, but a specialized science. Anthropometry (from Greek *ἄνθρωπος*

anthropos, “human,” and μέτρον *metron*, “measure”), as any number of critics have noted, is the science of human measurement (or as Lucky notes, “to the nearest decimal good measure”) still in use today, but for purposes of understanding human evolution and responses to environment rather than as the measurement of human degeneration, that is, changes from higher to lower forms that alarmed eugenicists, such changes used for a time to identify criminal types.⁴¹ Lucky’s alarming message of degeneration, and he certainly signals alarm as he “shouts his text,” (Grove 28b) may be why, finally, he is, effectively, stifled, silenced, or censored in Act 1 and physically altered, mute in Act 2.

Such human decline occurs despite “the advances in physical culture,” in medicine (“penicilline [*sic*, Beckett’s unaccented French spelling of *pénicilline*] and succedanea” [Grove 29]), and in food supply, particularly the human ingestion, digestion, and evacuation process (“alimentation and defecation”). The dates of such a decline are clearly marked at first by the death of Samuel Johnson (Faber, 43), then a bit earlier with Bishop Berkeley (Grove, 29; Faber 1959 and 1965, 44), the revision part of Beckett’s sharpened Irish critique as he changed the noted philosopher from English to Irish and the geography of atavistic or undeveloped humanity from the southern United States (birthplace of American slavery) to the west of Ireland, Connemara.⁴² To be obvious, the revisions were not meant to flatter or bolster the homeland with its rural and religious preoccupations, its conservative politics, and its Celtic-driven literary revival which Beckett had castigated in the past (LCP 1964/51, 1-18). Without detailing the particulars of Lucky’s speech and misleadingly declaring that “‘Waiting for Godot’ is an allegory written in a heartless modern tone,” *New York Times* theater critic Brooks Atkinson further noted in his 1956 review of the New York production that “Mr. Beckett is no charlatan. He has strong feelings about the degradation of mankind, and he has given vent to them copiously.”⁴³ Wrong about so much, Atkinson here is dead on.

Furthermore, Lucky’s hunched posture may be a physical indicator of degeneracy. While that posture seems the result of the burdens of his responsibilities, it may also suggest spinal deformity often associated, in the

41 Recently a feature in the NOVA documentary “The Violence Paradox” aired on American PBS stations and detailed the scientific community’s continuing interest in such evolutionary traits of cranial physiognomy:

NARRATOR: The new shape of the skull appears to go along with decreased aggression. Over several generations, the foxes became domesticated. Is it possible that over a much longer timeframe something like this has happened to humans, too? A kind of “self-domestication?” [. . .] These skull measurements are tightly linked to levels of a hormone known to facilitate violence, testosterone.” The show’s entire fascinating transcript is available on line: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/the-violence-paradox/>

42 See also Flann O’Brien’s *The Poor Mouth* in *The Complete Novels* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2007), 407-490, written originally in Irish as *An Béal Bocht*, for such a devastating critique of Ireland as well, O’Brien even more trenchantly satiric than Beckett.

43 Brooks Atkinson, “Beckett’s ‘Waiting for Godot,’” *New York Times*, April 20, 1956, [archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/reviews/beckett-godot.html?module=inline](https://www.nytimes.com/1956/04/20/archives/beckett-godot.html?module=inline).

nineteenth century at least, with degeneracy, moral as well as physical. The most overt literary association of such can be found in Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, in particular the image called "Salomé at Toilette, I." Although Salomé herself appears to be masturbating, the more controversial figure was the boy in the lower left, also in the midst, apparently, of self-satisfaction. More interesting than his autoeroticism, for our purposes at least, is his anatomy: the curvature of his spine, which in the nomenclature of his day would be read as an infallible indication of moral degeneracy if not outright depravity. How well Beckett knew Wilde's controversial aestheticist drama is open to question.

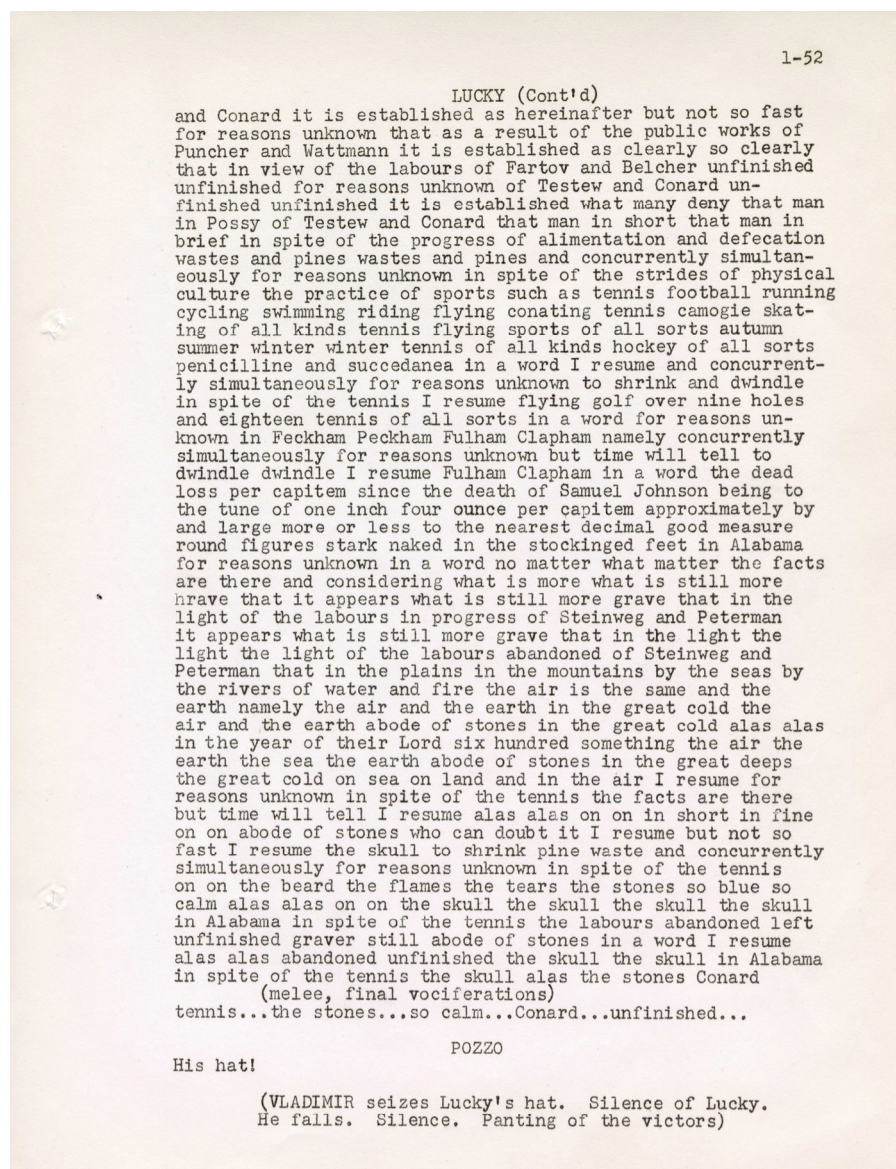


Fig. 7: Ohio State mimeograph with Lucky's reference to "Alabama." Published with permission from Edward Beckett on behalf of the Samuel Beckett Estate.

Some of the attraction for Beckett may have been that it was written in French. The catalogue of books in his library at the time of his death includes several works by Wilde, but not *Salomé*, which reference is cited here as a more general indicator of the typology of moral degeneracy manifest in physical characteristics than as an assertion of direct influence.⁴⁴ We do know, however, that James Joyce knew *Salomé* intimately. Stanley Weintraub's Beardsley biography, *Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse*, confirms that Joyce's extended description of Cranly's priest-like face in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* could only have come from Beardsley's *Salomé* illustrations: "the face of a severed head or death-mask, crowned on the brows by its stiff black upright hair" (Weintraub, Penn State U P, 1976, 263; Joyce, *Portrait*, Huebsch, 1916, 215). Beckett, in turn, would draw on severed head imagery for the stage image of his play *Not I*. While Beckett has acknowledged imagery for the play related to Caravaggio's *The Decollation of St. John*, with its stunning chiaroscuro, that he knew from repeated visits to London's National Gallery,⁴⁵ the Beardsley image of Salomé nose to nose with John's severed head surely remained in his memory bank as well, if only through Joyce. The image under consideration here, however, is "Salomé at Toilette, I," which includes books beneath Salomé's dressing table and draws us closer to Beckett's general interest in works deemed decadent and so immoral at the time and thus offers further examples of works once banned but now classics of decadence and hence degeneracy: Emile Zola's *La Terre*, in the first version of the print but its title changed to *Nana* in the second, to which Beardsley added Paul Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes*, the Roman novel *The Golden Ass* (also known as *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*), and particularly some of the writings of the Marquis de Sade prominent in both first and second versions of the print,⁴⁶ Sade in particular an

44 Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 286. See the fuller description of this image and commentary on it on the Victoria and Albert's web page: "it is clear that the entire image is full of other, more coded references to depravity, any of which might, however, have proved all too easy for a nineteenth-century audience to read. These included not just the facial and physical looks and gestures of the other attendants, but also subtle details such as the bent spine (thought by most moral Victorian observers to be an inevitable outcome and overt evidence of solitary vice) exhibited by the sexually ambiguous – and also masturbating – creature seated in the foreground on a fashionable Moorish stool." The analysis is drawn from Calloway, Stephen. *Aubrey Beardsley*. London: V & A Publications, 1998. The image itself is "The Toilette of Salome I," plate XIII from "A Portfolio of Aubrey Beardsley's drawings illustrating 'Salome' by Oscar Wilde," published by John Lane, London, 1907. See: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O186116/the-toilette-of-salome-i-print-beardsley-aubrey-vincent/>. (See also note 55.)

45 Howard, Patricia. "NOT MERCIÉS / 'NOT I'" (sic), *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, 2 (1993): 311–20. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25781180>. Accessed 3 Sep. 2022.

46 Owens, Susan, "The Satirical Agenda of Aubrey Beardsley's Enter Herodias," *Visual Culture in Britain*, 2:3 (2002): 99. See also

Primorac, Yelena, "The Toilette of Salome I and II" in "Illustrating Wilde: An Examination of Aubrey Beardsley's Illustrations of Salome," *The Victorian Web*, 27 (April 2009). <https://victorianweb.org/art/illustration/beardsley/primorac.html>

author with whom Beckett was preoccupied for decades, including during the writing of *Waiting for Godot*.⁴⁷ The one slight reference to this decadent, aestheticist period in *Godot* and to what may be the science of that period is Vladimir's lightly glossed but pivotal temporal reference to the '90s, when the two tramps appeared respectable, but poets, nonetheless; *Salomé* was first published in 1891.

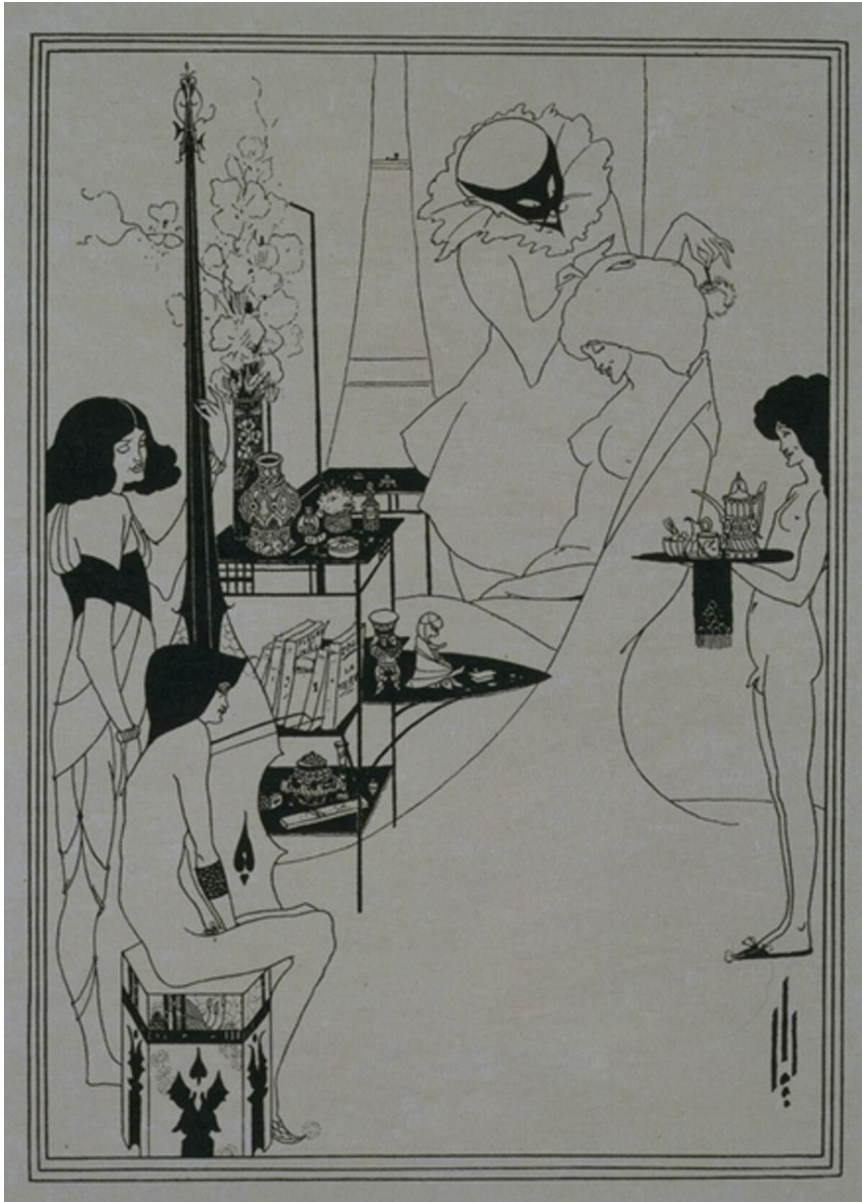


Fig. 8: "Salomé at Toilet, II." Print by Aubrey Beardsley, published by John Lane, 1907.
Held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington.

47 For further details regarding Beckett's preoccupation with the Marquis de Sade see Gontarski, S. E., *Revisioning Beckett: Samuel Beckett's Decadent Turn* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

Lucky, then, diminished as he is, socially, physically and mentally, is what remains of deteriorating humanity, its traditions of intellectual inquiry and its now diminishing cultural memory, and lucky he is to have some memory remain, since Didi and Gogo have next to none, neither cultural nor personal, and Pozzo's has disintegrated in a single day, presumably, or at least between the acts, as he cannot recall in Act 2 having met the tramps on what was, presumably, the previous day. The Boy as well may or may not remember his previous encounter with our two waiters, an encounter that Vladimir, too, seems to misremember. Such a world in decline is not only that of the individual but "per capitem," species-wide, beyond the capacities of the principals, beyond the question of Godot's arrival or non-arrival, even as that hope triggers and drives what passes for action in the play. Conditions would (could) hardly improve in an Act 3 or 4. Godot's appearance is at least inessential if not irrelevant, a red herring to such a process of decline that is built into a system, mythical or real, rife with the inconsistencies that Lucky outlines and ridicules at the opening of his tirade (and these lines at first fell afoul of the Lord Chamberlain's office, but on which charge of blasphemy it finally relented). Mr. Godot is in no hurry to keep his appointment since it is at best casual rather than firmly set, essentially irrelevant to our waiters and what is glibly called the human condition: "He didn't say for sure he'd come" (Grove 10). Simply put, the play is not about Godot, or about God, or some other coded metaphor, as Wilder thought. It is about waiting, as Beckett had always insisted, through which process something beyond their control takes its course as humanity "wastes and pines." Lucky, as Beckett's set punctuates visually, is in mid-path, while the others appear to be static, rooted. If Pozzo moves, he is led. Claire Parnet, or rather the assemblage of Parnet/Deleuze, put the philosophical implications of such images succinctly, "Beckett's characters are in a perpetual involution, always in the middle of a path, already *en route*. [. . .] the path has no beginning or end, that it is in its nature to keep its beginning and end hidden, because it cannot do otherwise. If not, it would no longer be a path, it only exists as a path [or a road] in the middle."⁴⁸ Pozzo apparently had a clear destination in Act I, but that, too, seems to have been lost between the Acts, and so Pozzo may have further devolved having lost his place on the road. Such an atavistic, involutory thread of dystopian modernism, say, can then be followed through Beckett's next play, *Fin de partie* (*Endgame*). In rehearsals, Beckett told Jean Martin, the original Clov, that "you must realize that Hamm and Clov are Didi and Gogo at a later date, at the end of their lives," and Clov reminds us overtly that "something is taking its course."⁴⁹ The thread continues at least through *Happy Days* where Willie lives his Caliban

48 Deleuze Gilles, Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia UP, 2007), 30.

49 McMillan, Dougald and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theater: The Author as Practical Playwright and Director* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1988), 163

existence until he emerges in a parody of (British?) civilization, something of a “drag king,” say, a visual emblem of a culture in its last gasp.

Amid Beckett’s *Wunderkammern*, then, this rag bag of scraps, remnants, oddments, and curiosities that are part of the natural history of his art, textual and performative, we find objects and threads of ideas often considered detritus, bric-a-brac, dead ends—the shards, fragments, and dislocations of modernism, the emblem for which may be Lucky’s cut-up screed. The archaeology of research draws us to such rejectamenta for objects and ideas in and of themselves, of course, but also as formative for how they might forensically fit a larger textual, conceptual, and cultural motley, a reconstruction that we might call modernist art. Lucky’s intellectual collage is suppressed by his immediate audience for both its technique and episteme. Beckett would continue to work with variations on such a technique of broken traditions and intellectual residue for most of his creative life as he would continue to jot ideas and poems—like those for his *mirlitonades*, for example—on just such detritus, fragments, remnants, and rejectamenta, such scraps and shards, emblems of modernism most evident in the visual art of Picasso, Braque, Ernst, Schwitters, et al.; in the slashed canvases of Lucio Fontana (one of which is entitled “Waiting”); and in the cut-up novels, films, audiotapes, photo collages and shotgun paintings of William S. Burroughs.⁵⁰ The curiosities detailed above further highlight the social and economic intersections of art and commerce in the commodity-driven, monetized culture of late capitalism, art inevitably subject to the crosscurrents of cultural, economic, political, and even aesthetic forces that Adorno and Horkheimer dubbed *The Culture Industry* and of which Beckett became part – theater particularly, or more generally the performing arts, the most public, exposed, and vulnerable of the arts. Beckett seems to have been surprised by his intersections with a world dominated by such ineluctable, uncontrollable forces, some designed to silence him, some to reshape him into something more palatable and commercially competitive, but, finally, he seems to have, hesitatingly, even reluctantly, come to terms with them to become his own interventionist as a theater director.⁵¹ That is, he went, as Pozzo drives Lucky with his final word, “On,” as a speechless Lucky leads a sightless Pozzo to other becomings, always in the midst of a journey (Grove, 57b).

Appendix A

Waiting for Godot. *Theatre Arts* 40, no. 8 (1956): 36–61 (collation).

50 Dirk Van Hulle, “Beckett’s Art of the Commonplace: The ‘Sottisier’ Notebook and *mirlitonades* Drafts,” *The Journal of Beckett Studies* 28, no. 1 (2019): 67–89.

51 Beckett’s self-interventions are detailed in four volumes of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and New York: Grove Press, 1992–99).

[In Theatre Arts 40, no. 8, the twelve photos are a mix of American and English productions.]

<p><i>Waiting for Godot. Theatre Arts</i> 40, no. 8 (1956): 36–61.</p> <p>Act 1 37–45. [Note on 45: “All four wear bowlers.”]⁵²</p> <p>46 Estragon: (<i>looking at the tree</i>). Pity. . . [i.e., all with Boy missing from Act 1]</p> <p>Act 2 46 47–50 47 Estragon: “I couldn’t accept less” [Grove, 26–35] to 50, “<i>They Halt</i>.”</p> <p>48 Lucky’s “Bishop Berkeley” 50 “<i>then resists. They Halt</i>,” now in Act 2. [Grove, 35; Lucky’s speech now in Act 2, 47–48.]</p> <p>51 Estragon: “Here we go” to “That’s enough.” [After Boy appears, 49, exits 50. Pozzo reappears!] 52–61 (“way of doing it, if you want to go on living.”) to end, 61 Boy reappears and exits, 61.</p>	<p><i>Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts.</i> New York, Grove Press, 1954.</p> <p>Act 1 7–35b 7–24b (“I fancy so.”) (cf. TA, 45.) “All four wear bowlers,” 22b.</p> <p>35 Estragon: (<i>looking at the tree</i>). Pity. . .</p> <p>24b–35 (cut from TA, Act 1 and moved to Act 2) 37–38b (“the way of doing it that counts, the”)</p> <p>26–35 of Act 1, “I couldn’t accept less” to “<i>then resists. They Halt</i>,” now in Act 2</p> <p>29 “Bishop Berkeley”</p> <p>24b–26 (“Here we go’ to (“That’s enough.”) Boy appears 32b, exits 34.</p> <p>38b (“way of doing it, if you want to go on living”) to end, 60b Boy appears in act 2, 58b, exits 59.</p>
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52 In a letter to Monteith of Faber, Beckett wrote on November 15, 1963, “I alone am responsible for the bowlers and the note on them” (LSB 3, 580, 581n1). That note on bowler hats is retained in the *Theatre Arts* publication of the play (see appendix A), in the Schneider prompt book retyping (Schneider 1–4), and in the Grove Press edition (Grove, 22b). Curiously, what should be a footnote appears mid-page in the second mimeograph retyping, Albery, Snow and LCP 1954/23, the Lord Chamberlain mimeographs, I-30.