

## *Introduction: Miscellaneous Rubbish*

*Bags, Beds, Bicycles, Bowler Hats, Crutches, Feminine Hats, Greatcoats, Old Boots, Pockets, Rocking Chairs, Sticks, Stones, Wheelchairs, Widow's Weeds*

Over a fifty-year period, from 1938 when he first established a life in Paris until he moved to a nursing home in 1988, a year before his death, Samuel Beckett worked in only three different studies. He did most of his writing in these rooms, all of which have been described as austere and utilitarian, containing no more objects than were strictly necessary: a bare desk and basic chair, shelves with dictionaries and reference books and the all-important wastepaper bin.<sup>1</sup> In the main, the critical assessment of Beckett's writing sits comfortably with this impression of a series of sparse writing rooms, unfurnished as monastic cells, in which Beckett might escape all physical and material distractions and devote himself to a purely cerebral process of composition in order to create intellectually charged and largely abstract or conceptual works of art. In recent decades, however, there has been a turn in Beckett scholarship towards readings that are attuned to Beckett's place in the world and its impact on his writing.<sup>2</sup> These readings are engaged in dismantling the forbiddingly intellectual aura around Beckett and seek to present his work in less rarefied and more accessible ways.

In this book, I want to add my voice to these readings, as I examine Beckett's dependence upon a small group of material elements during fifty-five years of creative experimentation across a wide range of media. Beckett's attachment to objects is evident even in his writing studies that

<sup>1</sup> Beckett's biographer, James Knowlson, describes Beckett's studies in this manner. See descriptions in *DF of Rue des Favorites*, to which Beckett moved in 1938: pp. 289, 340, *Ussy-sur-Marne*, where Beckett wrote from 1953: p. 388, and *Boulevard Saint-Jacques*, to which he moved in 1960: p. 472.

<sup>2</sup> Such studies include production histories of Beckett's plays by Dougald McMillan, Martha Fehsenfeld and S.E. Gontarski; historicist studies by Seán Kennedy and others; and most importantly for my purposes, studies of Beckett's material imagination by Steven Connor.

have been described as ‘monk-like’ (*DF*, 472). Knowlson’s description of a photograph by John Minihan of Beckett’s Boulevard Saint-Jacques study in Paris indicates, however, that Beckett surrounded himself with small but telling decorative embellishments, from shells and pebbles collected on beaches to masks and sculptures:

Behind him, as he sat at his dark green desk, was a row of shelves holding a few mementoes: on one shelf there was a sandstone mask of a face with its tongue sticking out (sent to him by the poet, Nick Rawson) and a small, square, brass-framed clock; on another there was a small sculpted figure with its head bent down between its knees like Dante’s Belacqua; below that again was a very large watch, standing upright on a stand ... Outside, on a narrow balcony protected by a double metal rail, stood a sculpture sent to him as a gift by the Russian sculptor, Vadim Sidur (1924–86).<sup>3</sup>

Beckett drew on his own fondness for collecting small objects when he gave the following tender lines to the protagonist of *Malone Dies*, the middle novel in his so-called trilogy, written from 1947 to 1948.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps I thought it pretty, or felt for it that foul feeling of pity I have so often felt in the presence of things, especially little portable things in wood and stone, and which made me wish to have them about me and keep them always, so that I stooped and picked them up and put them in my pocket, often with tears, for I wept up to a great age, never having really evolved in the fields of affection and passion, in spite of my experiences. (*GII*, 240–41)

Further indication of the intimate relationship between Beckett’s play with small objects and his creative process is given in Knowlson’s account of how in 1960, during the composition of *Happy Days* in the Boulevard Saint-Jacques apartment, Beckett ‘acted out’ Winnie’s movements, ‘using his own spectacles and toothbrush and borrowing one of Suzanne’s bags, her lipstick and make-up mirror’ (*DF*, 476). This image of Beckett emptying the contents of his partner’s handbag onto his desk and lifting up the various objects in turn, miming different ways of brushing his hair, putting on lipstick or handling a mirror, stands in rather stark contrast to his austere stereotype. This serious and methodical play with the handbag, hairbrush, lipstick and mirror was necessary, of course, so that he could

<sup>3</sup> James Knowlson, ‘A Writer’s Homes – A Writer’s Life’, in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 13–22, pp. 14–15.

<sup>4</sup> Because this book is concerned with tracing Beckett’s evolving creative practice, the most germane date is that of a work’s composition, and not its publication in either French or English. Where the date of a play’s first production is relevant, I have noted it.

choreograph Winnie's gestures to his satisfaction, but it also indicates how much attention Beckett brought to bear on the material elements of his writing, and how those material elements were, for him, intimately involved in the act of imagining. In this respect, Beckett's creative process echoes that of many philosophers who, as Simon Glendinning has noted, when they conjure the external world, tend to 'populate it with small-to-medium-sized dry goods: chairs, pens, desks, sticks and so on'.<sup>5</sup>

In this book, I am concerned with the nature of Beckett's creativity, and with how his imagination is, in Steven Connor's words, 'matter-riddled'.<sup>6</sup> Beckett himself noted how his writing was engaged in a radical exploration of the relationship between form and imagination: 'We don't write novels any more, I don't like to talk about it, but it is an imaginative work, a work of imagination ... it is a question of imagination.'<sup>7</sup> Having been struck by the seeming anomaly of his severe restriction of the number and type of material elements in fifty-five years of work, characterised by unceasing aesthetic and formal experimentation, I decided to pay closer attention to these objects. Over four chapters, I explore how Beckett restricted himself to fourteen key objects throughout his writing, turning to this imaginary prop-box and wardrobe for the costumes, props and possessions of his characters. These objects are crucial elements in Beckett's evolving creative praxis. I propose that by tracing their use in Beckett's work, it will be clear that his writing can best be described as an art of salvage. I had originally intended to examine over thirty objects, but in the course of thinking about their function, impact and pattern of repetition in Beckett's writing, found myself whittling their number down to a final tally of fourteen, when I was pleased to discover that I had echoed Malone's description of his hoard of treasure in *Malone Dies*: 'all that is left to me of all I ever had, a good dozen objects at least' (*GII*, 241–42).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Simon Glendinning, *On Being with Others: Heidegger, Derrida, Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1998), p. 8. Unlike those objects seized upon by the philosophers as markers for the external world, the poor materials with which Beckett's imagination was engaged for half a century is not arbitrary, nor are the objects gratuitous, something that distinguishes Beckett from other modern writers. See Janell Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Connor, 'Beckett's Atmospheres', in *Beckett after Beckett*, eds. Anthony Uhlmann and S.E. Gontarski (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. 52–65.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Mundhenk, 'Samuel Beckett: The Dialectics of Hope and Despair', *College Literature*, 8.3, Samuel Beckett (Fall, 1981), 227–48, p. 227.

<sup>8</sup> Amongst those objects jettisoned in successive drafts of the book were buttons, dressing gowns, glasses and spectacles, handkerchiefs, jars and urns, laces, pieces of string and elastic, trousers, books, keys, knives, lamps, locks, medicines and painkillers, mirrors, mysterious objects, pots, ropes, rubber balls, tins, travelling outfits, trays, umbrellas, parasols and watches.

By charting the functions and effects of these objects, chronologically, across generic boundaries and from fourteen different starting points, this book maps the pattern of Beckett's distinct authorial procedure. This aspect of the project, where Beckett's creative oeuvre is considered in its entirety, provides an integrated overview of a body of work that has often appeared daunting in its formal and generic range. Such an approach also avoids attributing to Beckett an overarching creative plan, a pre-defined and unchanging creative vision. This, to my mind, is the most serious weakness of responses to Beckett that derive from *a priori* theories, since they fail to allow for the central elements in every creative process of trial and error, experimentation and recycling: elements that are particularly in evidence in Beckett's prolific and extraordinarily varied oeuvre.

In the opening pages of *Molloy*, the first novel in the trilogy, written in 1947, the narrator speaks openly of the loneliness and desire for company that prompts him first to create a character and then to resolve to visit his mother. He does so by linking this narrative urge with the shabby raw materials used in these conjuring acts: 'Smoke, sticks, flesh, hair, at evening, afar, flung about the craving for a fellow. I know how to summon these rags to cover my shame' (*GII*, 11). This book explores the connections between Beckett's poor materials and his creative imagination. I have categorised these objects as 'miscellaneous rubbish', a phrase that recurs several times in Beckett's writing. Famously, the set for *Breath* – his play that premiered in 1969 and scandalously condenses life into half a minute, punctuated at its beginning and end by symmetrical cries – is described as a 'stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish'. The Gate production of *Breath* at the Barbican theatre in London in 1999 was directed by Robin Lefèvre and designed by Giles Cadie. John Haynes photographed the set (Figure 1) in which can be seen broken machines, a water bottle and a sombrero, among other assorted items.

Composition of the set for *Breath* has varied widely. Kenneth Tynan included writhing naked bodies in the premiere, something referenced by the artist Amanda Coogan in 2006 when she incorporated mannequin limbs in her production. Damien Hirst directed *Breath* for the Beckett on Film project in 2001 and filled the stage with the medical waste that had been a feature of his previous artworks. These various responses to Beckett's cue of 'miscellaneous rubbish' indicates, first of all, the enduring receptivity of artists and designers to Beckett's writing, but it also gestures to one of the arguments of this book: that through his use of the selected poor materials of his writing, Beckett was commenting on his



Figure 1 John Haynes, 'Breath' (1999).  
Courtesy of John Haynes and Lebrecht Music & Arts.

own contemporary period – the modern Ireland and Europe that vanished during his lifetime.<sup>9</sup>

The analogy in *Breath* between a rubbish dump and the world also features in *The Unnamable*, the final novel in the trilogy, written between 1949 and 1950: 'don't let us go just yet, not yet say goodbye once more for ever, to this heap of rubbish' (*GII*, 334), as it does in the late prose work *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1980–81): 'Sigh upon sigh till all sighed quite away. All the fond trash' (*GIV*, 469). Human and animal behaviour are equated in a further recurrence of the phrase in *Molloy*. Molloy discovers love in a rubbish dump and, several pages later, finds himself in a blind alley 'littered with miscellaneous rubbish and with excrements, of dogs and masters, some dry and odourless, others still moist' (*GII*, 55). In the 1956 radio play *All That Fall*, it is unclear whether Maddy Rooney is describing her life or mind as a dump: 'Then you might fall on your wound and I would

<sup>9</sup> In this, Beckett may be aligned with other modernist writers who employed the rubbish heap as a metaphor for both the world and their creative practice during the inter-war period, including T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Evelyn Waugh. However, Beckett's creative treatment and use of this trope is distinctly idiosyncratic. Where these other writers employ the metaphor in discrete works, Beckett restricts himself to his chosen poor materials for the entirety of his writing career.

have that on my manure-heap on top of everything else' (*GIII*, 177), while Molloy imagines that he must physically resemble discarded material thrown up on a beach:

It was a wild part of the coast. I don't remember having been seriously molested. The black speck I was, in the great pale stretch of sand, who could wish it harm? Some came near, to see what it was, whether it wasn't something of value from a wreck, washed up by the storm. But when they saw the old jetsam was alive, decently if wretchedly clothed, they turned away. (*GII*, 69)

Beckett's identification of miscellaneous rubbish with the world, minds and bodies of his characters indicates its importance in his writing. His characters treat their few shabby material possessions with a reverent attention uncommon in literature. Another writer whose characters are besotted by everyday things is the early-twentieth-century Swiss author Robert Walser. W.G. Sebald has identified in Walser's work an obsessive interest in objects, describing Walser's characters as those who, 'out of fear and poverty, cannot afford emotions' and who therefore 'have to try out their seemingly atrophied ability to love on inanimate substances and objects unheeded by anyone else – such as ash, a needle, a pencil, or a matchstick'.<sup>10</sup>

My comparison of Beckett with Walser is an associative strategy employed throughout the book. I have tried wherever possible to discover apt points of comparison between Beckett's use of objects and that of other writers and, occasionally, painters. My extensive use of such comparisons identifies points where Beckett's work approaches or diverges from that of other writers and visual artists, and helps to define more precisely the nature of his distinct creative practice. The very singularity of Beckett's work and the increasingly specialist nature of scholarship devoted to him has tended to isolate him from the wider world of creativity which he shares. Anthony Cronin's 1996 biographical study of Beckett is subtitled 'The Last Modernist', a formulation that has found wide acceptance in analysis of Beckett's legacy.<sup>11</sup> However, one of the consequences

<sup>10</sup> W.G. Sebald, 'Le Promeneur Solitaire: A Remembrance of Robert Walser', in *A Place in the Country*, trans. Jo Catling (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013), p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Boxall has challenged the scholarly enthusiasm for this formulation, given the number of contemporary writers, dramatists, artists, film-makers and theorists (not to mention academics) who have discovered in Beckett's writing a 'fertile breeding ground' of new ideas. Boxall is certainly right to make this point, but I am concerned here with the ways in which Beckett's work draws upon and is engaged with a certain European intellectual and cultural tradition, something not necessarily true of those inspired by Beckett. See Boxall, "'There's No Lack of Void': Waste

of viewing Beckett's writing as a cultural endpoint has been the scholarly identification of Beckett as a unique case, and his isolation from the literature and wider European culture out of which his writing arose. The associative correspondences in this book reorient Beckett's writing within an expanded field of writers and artists. The comparisons made in the book span works of fiction, drama, poetry, painting and philosophy from the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries; from Austria and the Austro-Hungarian empire, Belgium, Britain, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland. The book also features brief reference to works of literature from Ancient Rome, the Soviet Union and North and South America.

Beckett's miscellaneous objects are of various types and sizes, from large examples of domestic furniture to more portable aids to movement, small pocket-held objects and items of clothing. This latter category has a particularly intimate resonance and imaginative potential, as scholars within material studies including the anthropologist Daniel Miller have established: 'The sensual and aesthetic – what cloth feels and looks like – is the source of its capacity to objectify myth, cosmology and also morality, power and values.'<sup>12</sup> These qualities were exploited in eighteenth-century it-narratives, popular fictional accounts by everyday objects of their journeys and adventures. Objects were chosen according to their ability to pass regularly and unobtrusively from house to house, or person to person, and because the tendency at that time was to throw very little away, such objects could conceivably migrate from one owner to several others, and thereby relate many different experiences.<sup>13</sup> An it-narrative logic applies to the clothes and small objects that feature in Beckett's writing, which circulate between texts and media over a cycle of many years, their material condition declining as they pass from one character to another, participating in the intimate experiences of those characters and assisting the production of a range of narratives. It is notable that Beckett made a point of registering, in each appearance of items of clothing, the deterioration

and Abundance in Beckett and DeLillo', *SubStance*, 37.2 (2008), 56–70, p. 63 and *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (London: Continuum, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Miller, 'Introduction', in *Clothing as Material Culture*, ed. Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2005), pp. 1–20, p. 1. See also *Cloth and Human Experience*, eds. Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the 1760 text *The Adventures of a Black Coat*, in *British It-Narratives, 1750–1830*, 4 vols., general ed. Mark Blackwell, volume eds. Mark Blackwell, Liz Bellamy, Christina Lupton and Heather Keenleyside (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), Volume 3: *Clothes and Transportation*, ed. Christina Lupton.

caused by wear and tear by previous characters. In this way, Beckett draws a line of material continuity through many of his works, but also applies an odd, doll-like logic to the dress of his characters.

This book is concerned with ‘rubbish’, a category of material that has long proved inspirational, from the eighteenth-century German poet Friedrich Schiller who stored rotten apples in a drawer of his writing desk and ‘opened the drawer when he needed inspiration, so that he could look on their brownness, inhale the breath of over-ripeness’, to the recent interest in material studies and philosophy in waste as a material that is good to think with.<sup>14</sup> In *Culture and Waste* (2003), Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke describe waste as having ‘a complex role in formations of value’.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in *Making Waste* (2010), Sophie Gee proposes that the waste she examines in eighteenth-century texts ‘are signs of the peculiar transformations that take place in literary texts; perversely, they show us that meaning has been made’.<sup>16</sup> William Viney, similarly, examines in *Waste* (2014), ‘how philosophical ideas can be formed in relation to how matter acts’, and argues for a ‘philosophy of things’ focused on ‘thought as it emerges from life in a material world’.<sup>17</sup> Such attentiveness to the ontology of waste has informed this study, but the ‘miscellaneous rubbish’ of Beckett’s writing cannot be contained within the larger category of waste, for it is neither undifferentiated matter nor used up beyond further utility. Most importantly, Beckett’s rubbish has acquired familiarity from the personal or familial use it has served, which sees it hoarded and granted a pivotal role by Beckett’s characters and narratives alike. In *Rubbish Theory* (1979), the social scientist Michael Thompson notes that ‘Apart from tramps, most people choose not to carry all their possessions around with them and really rich people would be physically incapable of doing so even if they wanted to.’<sup>18</sup> Beckett’s decision to make tramps of many of his characters means that, of necessity, they must hold on their person

<sup>14</sup> On Schiller’s rotten apples, see Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (London: Canongate, 2006), p. 484. For the discovery of meaning in waste within recent material studies, see: Michael Shanks, David Platt and William L. Rathje, ‘The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 11.1 (2004), 61–83; Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); *Trash*, ed. John Knechtel (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke (eds.), ‘Introduction: Cultural Economies of Waste’, in *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. x.

<sup>16</sup> Sophie Gee, *Making Waste: Leftovers and the Eighteenth-Century Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> William Viney, *Waste: A Philosophy of Things* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 1.



those things of most value to them. Without homes, jobs, families or other social connections, the imaginative turning out of their pockets and inventorying of their shabby possessions therefore establishes the world of these characters. This 'rubbish' of hand-me-downs, cast-offs and detritus had already been discarded and fallen out of circulation before being salvaged by Beckett's characters. This has profound implications for the agency of these objects.

Within material studies, it is generally presumed that once an object has been discarded or become rubbish, it no longer has any agency.<sup>19</sup> So it is with Beckett's poor materials: the objects under study seep agency along with their other defining characteristics from their first appearance to their last. These items of costumes, accessories and furniture were already worn-out when Beckett first introduced them and become ever more so in their subsequent use by a series of characters. Each chapter in this book follows the progress of a group of objects through Beckett's writing. This approach reveals a pattern where most of the differentiating and ludic aspects of the objects have been lost by the time they appear in the latest works. In their final appearances, their colours faded and bleached and the descriptive passages attenuated, these objects that were once so vivid seem strangely to have lost their distinguishing features, as though they had been submerged in water. Beckett's fidelity to his poor materials, their consistent presence from one genre or medium to another throughout ongoing and radical formal experimentation, indicates their importance in his creative process and their unique position in his writing. These objects serve a distinct function in Beckett's writing that they do not in the work of other writers. As a result, the existing critical models for an

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius Holtorf draws on studies by archaeologists and anthropologists including Schiffer, Kopytoff, Strathern, Latour, Tilley and Thomas, and identifies their shared focus: '[these] life history studies ... share the assumption that the life of a thing started at the time of its manufacture and ended at the time of its deposition in the ground. Discarded things are of course subjected to all sorts of natural processes, but their lives are over: they become rubbish, ruins, mummies.' See Holtorf, 'Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd,' *JMC* (March 2002), 7-1, 49-71, p. 54. See Michael Schiffer 'Archaeological Context and Systemic Context', *American Antiquity* 37 (1972), 156-65; Vincent LaMotta and Michael Schiffer, 'Behavioural Archaeology: Toward a New Synthesis', in *Archaeological Theory Today*, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp. 14-64; Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64-91; Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Bruno Latour, *Science in Action. How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987); Christopher Tilley, *An Ethnography of the Neolithic: Early Prehistoric Societies in Southern Scandinavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Julian Thomas, *Time, Culture and Identity: An Interpretive Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

analysis of the material elements of literature are not always applicable in Beckett's case.<sup>20</sup>

This book adopts a broadly phenomenological approach. The philosopher Edward Casey has defined this method of inquiry as 'an enterprise devoted to discerning and thematising that which is indistinct or overlooked in everyday experience'.<sup>21</sup> The form of attention paid to material elements of everyday experience in phenomenology is frequently complicated by the distinction drawn by the philosopher Martin Heidegger between objects and things, a distinction that has been clearly defined by the literary critic Steven Connor: 'objects are what we know, objects are things that know their place, and whose place we know. Things arise when objects down tools and refuse to cooperate with us, break down, or have their functions mysteriously interrupted'.<sup>22</sup> If Beckett's miscellaneous rubbish is well-worn and lacking in agency to begin with, and further diminished by a series of characters, it cannot accurately be classified as a 'thing,' in the sense in which Heidegger uses this term.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the distinct form of Beckett's material imagination prevents these objects from ever becoming imbued with the semiotic potential of things. I have described the material elements under study as objects to emphasise their brute, inert quality. Although Beckett's lonely characters lavish many of these objects with affectionate attention, none of them acquire the valorized status of a symbol with which they might transcend their material condition. They are made of matter and subject to decay, a condition that Beckett is at pains to illustrate for his material canon as much as for his characters. In *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett describes things as 'vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics'.<sup>24</sup> Beckett's objects, by contrast, never disassociate themselves entirely from the human subjectivity

<sup>20</sup> The literary and cultural critic Bill Brown has undertaken extremely interesting studies of things in literature, but his focus is on the ways in which literature can provide access to social history, and literary analysis can approach the status of a historiographical operation. The divergence in our respective approaches means that I do not draw in this book on the influential ideas elaborated in his 'Thing Theory.' See *Critical Inquiry*, 28. 1 (Autumn, 2001), 1–22 and *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Edward Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), xxi.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Connor, 'Thinking Things', *Essays at Cultural Phenomenology* (2009), [www.stevenc Connor.com/thinkingthings/thinkingthings.pdf](http://www.stevenc Connor.com/thinkingthings/thinkingthings.pdf) [accessed 3 April 2012].

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996) and 'The Thing', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 5.

that projects meanings onto them, as is apparent in the paternal heirloom of the greatcoat, the functional crutch or stick, and most acutely in the case of the desperately needed contents of the pocket and bag.

The fourteen objects under study are interesting precisely because they are utterly reducible to their context, which is to prop up the narratives and characters that have been left with precious little fictional or dramatic support by Beckett – and in so doing, they give us a new and fuller perspective on the operation of Beckett's creativity. Beckett's canon of material elements more closely resembles the objects Bruno Latour identifies as existing only for archaeologists before they are unearthed, analysed, displayed and recovered once again for society and culture: for Latour, an object is only such when 'it is still under the ground, unknown, thrown away, subjected, covered, ignored, invisible, in itself. In other words there are no visible objects and there never have been. The only objects are invisible and fossilised ones'.<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, Latour has described an object as a 'matter of concern'.<sup>26</sup> Both definitions are helpful in seeking to classify the materials that Beckett selected to serve as items of furniture, costume and props in his writing. These objects are emphatically not symbols, and neither are they part of a project in which Beckett deliberately seeks to comment upon his personal life or social history, although I will argue in the first two chapters of the book that this is the cumulative effect of the repeated appearance of certain objects in his work. Instead, what these objects evoke is the strangeness of Beckett's decision to restrict himself to their limited resources throughout his writing.

In *The Social Life of Things* (1986), a collection of essays by anthropologists and historians that examines the role of material culture in social life, the anthropologist Igor Kopytoff suggests that 'biographies of things' might be written and that such an approach could 'make salient what might otherwise remain obscure'.<sup>27</sup> For Kopytoff, the questions to be asked of a thing in such a study are the same as those one would ask in undertaking the biography of a person:

Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognised 'ages' or periods in the thing's 'life', and what are

<sup>25</sup> Bruno Latour, 'The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things,' in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, ed. P.M. Graves-Brown (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 10–21, p.11.

<sup>26</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things,' p. 67.

the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?<sup>28</sup>

These questions have certainly informed my approach to the four objects in the canon that have notable social histories: bowler hats, greatcoats, widow's weeds and bicycles. Kopytoff's approach, however, has strong Marxist implications, and his particular focus is on the social processes involved in the circulation of goods, rather than on the objects themselves. This emphasis on commodification and exchange is evidently not relevant for the cast-offs and hand-me-downs, the overlooked and abandoned objects that make up Beckett's canon, non-commodities all for which Kopytoff provides an interesting gloss: 'To be a non-commodity is to be "priceless" in the full possible sense of the term, ranging from the uniquely valuable to the uniquely worthless.'<sup>29</sup> The poor materials hoarded by Beckett's characters are priceless in both senses of the term. This goes some way toward explaining the appeal for the reader or audience of the obsessive relationship Beckett's characters have with such objects.

To date, few existing studies have been completed of a group of objects in the work of a single artist or writer.<sup>30</sup> The most pertinent literary analysis of material elements thus far is Francesco Orlando's *Obsolete Objects in the Literary Imagination: Ruins, Relics, Rarities, Rubbish, Uninhabited Places, and Hidden Treasures* (2006). Orlando's lengthy title reflects one of his suggestions about the relationship between writers and physical decay: that such material prompts the form of the list. While Beckett's miscellaneous rubbish does not fit into any of the twelve complex categories of decrepit objects identified by Orlando, his conception of the relationship between time, decay and value is central to my own approach.

Time uses up and destroys things, breaks them and reduces them to uselessness, renders them unfashionable and makes people abandon

<sup>28</sup> Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things,' pp. 66–67. Kopytoff's concept has been influential in material studies and refined by Karin Dannehl as requiring 'a tightly defined, definite time frame, the focus on the subject against a context, and the express purpose of highlighting exceptional or unusual features'. See 'Object Biographies: From Production to Consumption,' in *History and Material Culture*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 123–38, p. 124.

<sup>29</sup> Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things,' p. 75. Similarly, Neil Cummings suggests that 'an object's real life begins' when it is moved from person to person, bought, thrown out, collected, displayed, broken, sold, recollected and re-displayed. Something closer to the flea-market economy.' See Neil Cummings, 'Reading Things: The Alibi of Use', in *Reading Things*, ed. Neil Cummings (London: Chance Books, 1993), pp. 12–29, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> See Thomas Baldwin, *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust* (Bern, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), and the unpublished doctoral dissertation by Margaret Quinn, *Objects in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett: Their Function and Significance as Components of his Theatrical Language*, McMaster University, 1975.

them; time makes things become cherished by force of habit and ease of handling, endows them with tenderness as memories and with authority as models, marks them with the virtue of rarity and the prestige of age. The scale that weighs a positive quality here and a negative one there is unstable and unpredictable, and it also shifts according to what one might call quantitative doses. Time wears things out *or* lends them dignity; it wears things out *and* lends them dignity. And in fact a thing may be either *too* worn-out, or *not* worn-out *enough* by time, to be dignified by it.<sup>31</sup>

In this passage, Orlando articulates the ambiguous and formative relationship between things and time that makes worn-out objects so attractive for literary exploration. The process by which we identify both physically and psychologically with the passage of time registered by the patina of age of well-worn, loyally serving objects is evident in the elevation of banal objects to the status of relics, or of worn functional materials to that of antiques, as it is for the tenderness of Beckett's characters for their few possessions. Uniquely, however, the recurring material elements of Beckett's writing are not merely a source of fascination, as are the many categories of object studied by Orlando in other literary works, but contribute profoundly to Beckett's distinctive aesthetic. Salvage implies familiarity with the myriad ways in which time devours matter and reduces everything to poor materials. This idea informs Beckett's writing on many levels. It is notable, in this respect, that Beckett made use of cheap, common notebooks and paper for the composition of his works, including school copybooks the pages of which are already poorly deteriorated, long after he could afford writing materials of better quality. This decision is oddly characteristic: a manifestation of his asceticism, but also perhaps an acknowledgement of the material contingency of the words on which he laboured.<sup>32</sup>

A number of studies have already examined objects in Beckett's work. In a 2013 article in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Georgina Nugent-Folan compares the indeterminacy of certain of Beckett's descriptions of objects with the distinctive approach of Gertrude Stein, while in a 2014 article in the same journal, Alexander Price applies a reading through the lens

<sup>31</sup> Francesco Orlando, *Obsolete Objects in the Literary Imagination: Ruins, Relics, Rarities, Rubbish, Uninhabited Places, and Hidden Treasures*, trans. Gabriel Pihás, Daniel Seidel and Alessandra Grego (London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 11–12.

<sup>32</sup> I am indebted for this observation about the poor quality of Beckett's writing materials to an exchange with Jane Maxwell, the Principal Curator at the Manuscripts and Archives Research Library in Trinity College, while viewing some of Beckett's manuscripts in January 2016.

of ‘thing theory’, concentrating on Beckett’s depictions of bedrooms.<sup>33</sup> In ‘An Umbrella, a Pair of Boots, and a “Spacious Nothing”: McGahern and Beckett’, a 2014 article in the *Irish University Review*, Richard Robinson compares the function of the comic umbrella and tragic boots in the works of Beckett and John McGahern, concluding that they act as surrogates or extensions of character’s bodies, with ‘the adjacency of the object to the body’ offering only ‘cold comfort’.<sup>34</sup> These readings are necessarily limited to the scope of a journal article. More extended analyses include Paul Davies’s chapter in *The Ideal Real* (1994), when he proposes that ‘In the pretrilogy prose, things or objects are an attribute of habit, in the sense in which it is outlined in Beckett’s *Proust*: objects are mediums of constancy in the environment, and a change in them, their appearance or arrangement, brings about suffering in the self or subject.’<sup>35</sup> Liesl Olson concludes *Modernism and the Ordinary* (2009) by contrasting Beckett with Proust. Like Davies, Olson does not explore the function or impact of any particular object in Beckett’s writing. Instead, Olson identifies in Beckett’s work an overall ‘disdain for the everyday’ but suggests that, like Proust, he seeks to ‘embody the everyday, especially its temporal dimension’ through distinct ‘stylistic practices’.<sup>36</sup> In his introduction to *Paraphernalia* (2011), Steven Connor suggests that ‘as the use of any object becomes habitual, it starts to approach the condition of something we wear, or have about our persons (a habit is, after all, an item of clothing, as well as a form of behaviour)’.<sup>37</sup> This well summarises the attitude of Beckett’s narrators and characters to these recurring material elements. The magical things of Connor’s study, however, all exceed their inanimate condition. Beckett’s objects, by contrast, are useful and important for him precisely because they lack any inherent quality that might be considered magical. The resonance of objects in Beckett’s work is, paradoxically, due to their abject material condition. It is their very ordinariness

<sup>33</sup> Georgina Nugent-Folan, ‘Ill buttoned’: Comparing the Representation of Objects in Samuel Beckett’s *Ill Seen Ill Said* and Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, *JOBS*, 22.1 (2013), 54–82; Alexander Price, ‘Beckett’s Bedrooms: On Dirty Things and Thing Theory’, *JOBS*, 23.2 (2014), 155–77.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Robinson, ‘An Umbrella, a Pair of Boots, and a “Spacious Nothing”: McGahern and Beckett’, *Irish University Review*, 44.2 (2014), 323–340, p. 332.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Davies, *The Ideal Real: Beckett’s Fiction and Imagination* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), pp. 27–42, p. 30. See also Naho Washizuka, ‘Pity and Objects: Samuel Beckett’s “Dante and the Lobster”’, *Journal of Irish Studies*, 24 (2009), 75–83, which aligns itself with Davies’s approach.

<sup>36</sup> Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 10–11.

<sup>37</sup> Steven Connor, *Paraphernalia: The Curious Lives of Magical Things* (London: Profile Books, 2011), p. 11.

and banal utility which gives them such potential in Beckett's and his characters' hands.

One of the most crucial secondary resources for this book has been *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* (2004) by C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski. Ackerley and Gontarski call Beckett's imaginary world the 'Beckett Country', in a nod to Eoin O'Brien's influential 1986 study of the features of the Irish landscape in Beckett's work. In their introduction, Ackerley and Gontarski identify what they consider the typical features of this singular imaginative space:

It is a premodern world where bicycles out-number motorcars, where theatres are lit by footlights, where clothes are fastened by buttonhooks, where parents still pass on family greatcoats and bowler hats to their offspring, hats tethered to coats – a world of chamber pots, which put humanity in greater proximity to evacuation, and oil lamps. Beckett's roots reside firmly in turn-of-the-century turf, amid the Anglo-Irish bourgeoisie. It is a propertied world, where possession assured not only propriety but existence as well, a world whose dictum may have been, 'I own, therefore I am.' The residue of that tradition remains traceable in Beckett's work, the Ascendancy Big House having become Gothic in *Watt* and *Footfalls*. Beckett's creatures retain a curious, antibourgeois relationship to possessions or property, of course. They simultaneously seem obsessed by and strangely negligent of them or it. (*GC*, x–xi)

This passage well identifies how certain recurring objects establish within Beckett's writing an evocative past, a dynamic that is explored more fully in the first chapter, 'Relics'.

'Relics' focuses on the objects used to cap and shoe most of Beckett's characters: bowler hats and old boots. As early as 1984, J.C.C. Mays made the comprehensive observation that 'Beckett understands his career, in an important sense, as an escape from what he inherited'. Ireland, in Mays's evaluation, 'is most important to Beckett as an inheritance to deny, or a set of appearances to go behind, or a range of authorities to disagree with'.<sup>38</sup> While Beckett's writing may at times seem to be the product of an isolated interiority, it is not in fact rootless, but rather uprooted. Vestigial traces of Beckett's rejected roots linger on, and bowler hats and old boots are two such traces. It will be seen that the pattern of Beckett's use of bowler hats satisfies Mays's identification of an antagonistic relation between Beckett's upbringing and his writing.

<sup>38</sup> J.C.C. Mays, 'Young Beckett's Irish Roots', *Irish University Review*, 14.1 (Spring, 1984), 18–33, pp. 26, 21.

In the case of old boots, however, Beckett extends the possibilities and implications of uprooting oneself to come up with a form of writing that seeks to rid itself of such ties to a far greater degree, encompassing the disorientation and homelessness that followed the violent upheavals of twentieth-century Europe. In Chapter 1, I examine Beckett's creation of fugitive writing, a literary form that evacuated certainty and stability from itself to become disoriented, ephemeral, impotent, vagabond and centrally preoccupied with exile. The relics of bowler hats and old boots are salvaged objects that conjure up the vanished worlds of middle-class Protestant Ireland and the larger world of Europe before it was shattered in the twentieth century.

'Heirlooms' (Chapter 2) explores Beckett's use of personal memory, a matter that has been much analysed by his biographers and critics.<sup>39</sup> The most compelling and influential studies of Beckett's use of autobiographical material to date have been S.E. Gontarski's *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (1985) and H. Porter Abbott's *Beckett Writing Beckett* (1996). Gontarski's argument centres on his examination of the process of 'vaguening' by which Beckett transforms life into art, while Abbott finds in this art an 'autograph,' or signature of self.<sup>40</sup> 'Heirlooms' proposes a new way of reading the personal origins of recurring objects in Beckett's work and is organised around a group of objects with strong biographical resonances: greatcoats, ladies' hats, widow's weeds, maternal beds and rocking chairs. The type of salvage here is the process by which traces of parental memory are embedded and preserved in this set of objects. By examining this process, it is possible to evaluate the impact exerted on the form of Beckett's writing by these memories. 'Heirlooms' demonstrates that the parental memories at the heart of many of Beckett's works are not vestiges of a deep autobiographical or autographical project that he built up and then sought to erase, as Gontarski has suggested, but are established piecemeal in his writing by an obsessive use of objects with parental associations. By tracing Beckett's use of a set of recurring objects that draw upon the wardrobes and personalities of his own parents, I suggest that these parental

<sup>39</sup> As Peter Boxall has observed, 'The autobiographical status of Beckett's fiction, at least from *Watt* onwards, is always subject to narrative uncertainty, but that the remembered selves and objects that people the majority of his landscapes have some autobiographical content is beyond serious doubt.' See 'The Existence I Ascribe: Memory, Invention and Autobiography in Beckett's Fiction,' *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 30 (2000), 137–52, p. 138.

<sup>40</sup> S.E. Gontarski, *Beckett's Happy Days: A Manuscript Study* (Ohio: Ohio State University Libraries, 1977), pp. 33–46.



heirlooms create 'sites of memory' in his writing that greatly alter its register and form.<sup>41</sup>

In order to limit the extent to which the argument of this book is contingent on drawing a correlation between Beckett's life and his writing, Chapters 3 and 4 are not concerned with the means by which Beckett may have been inspired by social or personal matters external to his work, and instead explore the echoes and patterns he developed across many media and decades of writing. 'Props' (Chapter 3) focuses on those objects that help Beckett's characters to get around: bicycles, wheelchairs, sticks and crutches. The host of limping, maimed characters in Beckett's work have most often been assimilated into philosophical or psychological symbolism, and I hope to challenge this critical tendency.<sup>42</sup> This chapter also asserts the pivotal importance of movement in Beckett's writing, which has often been described as a fictional and dramatic space characterised by paralysis, inertia or stasis. This chapter provides attentive consideration to the weak, sick and deteriorating bodies in Beckett in order to establish the implications of his emphasis on the need to keep moving, no matter the impediment. In 'Props', I consider how bicycles, wheelchairs, sticks and crutches serve Beckett as literary prosthetics. Embodying his creative imperative in a host of crippled characters who desperately struggle on despite their wish for rest, Beckett dramatises the imperfect but irresistible nature of his own impulse to write and salvages from this cruel and ungainly authorial need the singular dynamic of his characters' frustrated but determined movement in his novels, stories, poems and plays.

'Treasure', the book's final chapter, explores the contents of Winnie's bag in the 1960 play *Happy Days* and of Malone's pocket in *Malone Dies*.

<sup>41</sup> The 'sites of memory' in Beckett's writing are not intended to recall Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, which are concerned with manifestations of the past on a national, rather than a personal level, and with the conscious shaping of national identity through symbolic history. Beckett, by contrast, depicts the chance possession or retention by his characters of objects evocative of a personal and social past that has vanished and will neither be recovered, nor used to create or stabilise the identities of those characters possessed of 'heirlooms'. See Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,' *Representations* No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989), 7–24.

<sup>42</sup> There have been many studies of the fragmented body in Beckett's theatre and fiction, most of which use a philosophical or psychoanalytic approach. See Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Not I: Through a Tube Starkly', in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. Jennifer Birkett and Kate Ince (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 259–65; Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama* (London: Routledge, 1993); Katherine Weiss, 'Bits and Pieces: The Fragmented Body in *Not I* and *That Time*', in *Other Becketts*, ed. Daniela Caselli, Steven Connor and Laura Salisbury (Tallahassee: JOBS Books, 2002), pp. 187–95; and '... Humanity in Ruins ...': The Historical Body in Samuel Beckett's Fiction', in *Samuel Beckett: History, Memory, Archive*, ed. Seán Kennedy and Katherine Weiss (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 151–68.

While other chapters acknowledge Beckett's critically neglected polyvocal status as novelist, playwright and poet, the scope of this chapter is deliberately reduced in order to identify how the central situation of *Happy Days* constitutes a variation on Malone's predicament in the earlier novel. This chapter also considers how each work stands as a turning point in Beckett's body of work, in terms of the way objects are used to support, and indeed to create, his fictional and dramatic narratives. While the objects that feature in earlier chapters are resonant, useful or ludic, it is no exaggeration to describe the last remaining possessions of Malone and Winnie as treasure: a store, stock or accumulation of anything valuable. 'Treasure' explores the salvage involved in the grapple to hold onto these last objects, which provide the means for isolated characters to continue telling themselves stories about their worlds and themselves. There has been surprisingly little analysis to date of the extreme privation and isolation of Beckett's characters, and this chapter proposes that these facets of Beckett's writing reveal much about his singular formulation of the ethics of literary invention.

Beckett conveys the central place of objects in his writing in a pair of single, dismissive, but enormously telling lines in the trilogy. In *Molloy*, Moran declares: 'There are men and there are things, to hell with animals. And with God,' while the narrator of *The Unnamable* insists: 'People with things, people without things, things without people, what does it matter' (*GII*, 159, 286). His unease with objects attaining the status of symbols is indicated by a comment about Yeats's 1926 poem 'Sailing to Byzantium':

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress<sup>43</sup>

Beckett praised the first lines that equate an old man with a scarecrow and convey the fragility of all living things, the inevitability and inherent grotesqueness of age and decay, but rather drily expressed his disapproval of the miraculous transformation in the subsequent couplet. The comment was recalled by his friend, the playwright Israel Horowitz, who visited Beckett in the nursing home where he spent his last months a fortnight

<sup>43</sup> W.B. Yeats, *W.B. Yeats: The Major Works*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 95.

before his death. Horovitz described seeing Beckett 'dressed in a tattered old robe, working with pen and ink at a bridge table.'

I stopped and stared a while, for some reason remembering Beckett's shock, twenty-two years before, at discovering that I didn't know Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium.' Before I left the table that night, Yeats's poem had passed from Mr Beckett's memory to my memory, along with Sam's small scholarly note of caution: 'I don't totally approve of that "Soul clap its hands" part!'<sup>44</sup>

This brings us to the question, did Beckett consciously decide to rely on the fourteen objects examined in this book as the primary material elements in his writing? From the very beginning, Beckett's characters were anachronistic. I believe that they may have first been introduced to signal the social alienation and contemptuous attitude of his early fictional characters by dressing and 'arming' them with outmoded and odd clothes and props. These material elements were then transposed to later works, Beckett having come to accept them as the markers of the imaginative world he had established, by which means this material canon became his wardrobe and prop-box for fifty-five years of experimental writing. When Beckett died, John Banville published an astute tribute in the *Observer* in which he identified several of my concerns in this book:

A large part of Beckett's inspiration was a certain set of technical problems, one of which was how to get the maximum effect from a minimum of means. This is not as simple an ambition as it may appear ... This is Beckett's greatness as an artist, that out of a search for solutions to Modernist, or post-Modernist, dilemmas he could produce work so moving, funny and vividly real. Real, yes, for he *was* a realist. Now that the Fifties murk has lifted, and the labels – Absurdist, Existentialist, what-not – have fallen into disuse, we can see how firmly his writings are rooted in the solid, the commonplace. He tried to rid his fiction and drama of nineteenth-century clutter not out of contempt for the world but, on the contrary, out of regard, out of, one might even say, reverence. In his work the thing shines. All is immanence, thereness. The *moment* in Beckett, carries an extraordinary weight ... And as always, it is the humble things that attract the greatest attention: a knife-rest, the belly-band of a horse, pencil stubs, ear-wax, odds and ends. I picture an old one, a stravager of the roads, clutching a little hoard of valuables polished by age and use: so Beckett with his wordhoard. 'I love the word, words have been my only love / not many.'<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Israel Horovitz, 'A Remembrance of Samuel Beckett', *Paris Review*, 142 (Spring 1997), 189–193, p. 192.

<sup>45</sup> John Banville, 'Waiting for the Last Word', *The Observer*, 31 December, 1989, p. 36.

I want to propose that the ‘little hoard of valuables polished by age and use’ identified in this passage by Banville served Beckett as a creative lumber room. This type of room, put aside for the storage of useless or disused odds and ends, features as a setting in a range of literary works, from Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) to Saki’s ‘The Lumber Room’ (1914) and Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965). Most pertinent for a comparison with Beckett, however, is the lumber room that Gregor Samsa inhabits in Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915).

His family had gotten into the habit of putting in this room things for which they could not find any other place ... many things had become superfluous, and though they certainly weren’t salable, on the other hand they could not just be thrown out. All these things migrated into Gregor’s room.<sup>46</sup>

The banishment of a son rejected by his family to a room full of clutter that could neither be sold nor discarded may have been a powerful literary premise to Kafka, whose parents kept a small shop selling umbrellas and other ‘fancy goods’.<sup>47</sup> In an indication of Beckett’s material anachronism, the contents of his imaginative lumber room are directly comparable to the clothes and objects that feature in the work of Kafka, who was acutely interested in current fashions.<sup>48</sup> Mark Blackwell concludes his survey of literary lumber rooms by suggesting that ‘overlooked things sometimes have a crucial place in literary history’.<sup>49</sup> This astute comment applies even more so to Beckett, whose oeuvre of half a century in diverse media constitutes the creation of an imaginative world using ‘overlooked’ objects and uncertain states of consciousness. One of the most important features of a lumber room is that its contents have been removed from circulation and are no longer either in trade or use. This state of gathering dust, caught in some form of shabby perpetuity, might equally describe the ontological quality of Beckett’s narratives, as well as the material belongings of his characters. By paying close attention to those material elements, this book will provide a new perspective on the evolving yet consistent creative

<sup>46</sup> Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, trans. and ed. S. Corngold (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 33. See also Kafka’s designation of a pigeonhole on his writing-desk as a lumber room, in a mediation on the ‘wretched’ disorder of his desk that recalls George Perec: 24 and 26 December 1910, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910–1923*, ed. Max Brod (Minerva, 1992), p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> See Mark M. Anderson, *Kafka’s Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>49</sup> *British It-Narratives, 1750–1830*, gen. ed. Mark Blackwell, 4 vols, *Volume 4: Toys, Trifles and Portable Furniture*, vol. ed., Mark Blackwell (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), xvii.

practice that finds expression in Beckett's works. His material imagination is a lumber room in which the remnants of European culture have been dumped, and by limiting his imagined world to these scraps, Beckett creates a stark, uncompromising literary realisation of the end of this culture. In Beckett's writing, we see six hundred years of Europe boiled down to the odds and ends of a bourgeois household and music-hall wardrobe. I believe that Cronin was correct in identifying Beckett as 'The Last Modernist', as it is unlikely that Europe will again produce a writer as immersed in its heritage as Beckett, whose cultural inheritance spanned its intellectual and creative achievements. The fourteen recurring objects in Beckett's writing are hoarded by his characters, together with their anachronistically refined turns of phrase, because they constitute the remaining scraps of a shattered world.