

Crossing the Border between Archive and Edition: The Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Chronology

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Current DH scholarship into the genesis of literary texts often distinguishes between digital archives and digital scholarly editions. While the consensus now seems to be that they are not mutually exclusive, both orientations have different rationales. To study authors' 'complete works' as the creative ecologies they represent, including both published and unpublished materials, it is necessary to cross the border or bridge the gap between archives and editions. In this paper, we will showcase a work-in-progress digital manuscript chronology of Samuel Beckett's works as one means to achieve that goal.

This Digital Manuscript Chronology is part of the award-winning Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (BDMP; www.beckettarchive.org) and connects drafts to correspondence. To reconstruct the chronology of a writing process, it is necessary to combine information from multiple sources, especially when an author's manuscripts are not or only partly dated. In addition to data based on Beckett's published letters (Harvard University Press, 1998; Cambridge University Press, 2009–2016), the tool also includes information drawn from unpublished correspondence. In so doing, it aims to offer a digital expansion of John Pilling's *A Samuel Beckett Chronology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) or Ruby Cohn's *A Beckett Canon* (University of Michigan Press, 2001). Since these initiatives are bound to the print medium in which they appeared, it may be useful to design a chronology that fully exploits the potential of computational methods.

The Digital Manuscript Chronology lists all the dated manuscripts chronologically and enables users to filter the material that they consider relevant depending on their research needs. For instance, since many of Beckett's manuscripts are undated, it may be desirable to include those documents with 'uncertain' or 'inferred' dates, derived from ancillary archival materials. The entries for letters briefly summarize the statements Beckett makes in correspondence that could be related to his creative process, such as those referring to a text he is writing, a work he is translating, or a book he is reading. The incorporation of these references results in a much more detailed picture of Beckett's work schedule. Users can also sort the data by decade, year, or work, and clicking the facsimiles they wish to analyse more closely will take them to the corresponding genetic module in the BDMP. When dated letters refer to books, a link will point to the relevant copy in the Beckett Digital Library (BDL), whether it be an extant or a virtual entry.

The Digital Manuscript Chronology hopes to introduce a new way of representing the processual nature of writing. The benefit of a tool of this kind is that it visualizes the different geneses of Beckett's works within the same environment, which could offer an illuminating way of showcasing the fluid nature of some writing processes. A writer like Beckett often worked on multiple projects at once. As a result, several yet-to-be-completed manuscripts occupied his desk for months or even years, often resulting in cross-fertilizations. For example, the manuscript of Beckett's first published novel, *Murphy* (1938), written between

August 1935 and June 1936, contains an exceptional 145 dates. During the writing process, Beckett also wrote letters to his friend Thomas MacGreevy, which allow us to track his progress and reconstruct his day-to-day life more accurately. Combining these archival documents reveals that during the early stages of writing *Murphy*, Beckett was also revising his collection of poems *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*, to be published by The Europa Press in November 1935, in addition to reading eclectically in a variety of books and taking notes from them in the later stages of the novel's genesis. Thanks to the Beckett chronology, such instances of overlapping writing projects and related activities can be more finely traced and studied.

The versatility of such digital tools becomes even more apparent when more than two writing projects overlap across different genres or art forms. After expanding his repertoire of poems and novels with stories and plays in the 1940s, Beckett embraced various technological media in the 1950s and 1960s. By zooming in on a selection of case studies from this period, including, theatre (*Krapp's Last Tape, Play*), radio drama (*Embers, Words and Music, Cascando*) and novels (*The Unnamable*), as well as activities (translation, directing) or events (adaptations, performances), we will demonstrate a digital manuscript chronology's potential to cross the border between archive and edition, and to facilitate the study of phenomena such as 'intermediality' and 'creative concurrence'.