Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) was born in Dublin (of Protestant middle-class parents), but lived for much of his life in France, including the years of the Second World War, the German occupation, and the collaborationist Vichy Government. He knew some of the twentieth century’s nastiness from within. Firmly a member of the inter- and post-war avant-garde, Beckett lived in obscure self-imposed exile in Paris until the success of his plays *Waiting for Godot* (1952/1954) and *Endgame* (1957/1958) won him international fame. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. Beckett’s work is unusual in that he wrote both in French and English. The French versions of most of his fiction pre-date the English ones, and often there are noticeable and meaning-filled differences between the two. Beckett published his first piece of short fiction, “Assumption,” in 1929, and he continued to work in the short form until shortly before his death. The three stories in *Stirrings Still* were published in 1988. His most celebrated pieces of short fiction include the *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (published in 1955, although several stories date from earlier), “Ping” (1966), “Lessness” (1969), and *Fizzles* (1973–1975).

Beckett’s work is ferociously difficult. The conventional elements of the short story, setting, character, and action, are attenuated and obscure, in a way that makes very considerable demands on the reader. In “Lessness,” the substance of the text is determined by a mathematical exercise. His texts are usually the voices of lonely and isolated figures, themselves not entirely sure who or where (or when) they are. Beckett’s prose is often marked by deviant punctuation, word order, and ellipses. It is often also remarkably beautiful. The language (full of phonological, lexical, and syntactic parallelisms and repetitions) offers a faint glimmer of hope in a desolate world of exile, abandonment, uncertainty (Beckett’s readers are at a loss as much as his characters), inertia, and physical desolation. Beckett’s and J. G. Ballard’s characters often inhabit similar spoiled and abandoned worlds.