

Posthuman Beckett  
English 9169B  
Winter 2019

The course analyzes the short prose that Samuel Beckett produced prior to and after his monumental *The Unnamable* (1953), a text that initiated Beckett's deconstruction of the human subject: *The Unnamable* is narrated by a subject without a fully-realized body, who inhabits no identifiable space or time, who is, perhaps, dead. In his short prose Beckett continues his exploration of the idea of the *posthuman subject*: the subject who is beyond the category of the human (the human understood as embodied, as historically and spatially located, as possessing some degree of subjective continuity). What we find in the short prose (our analysis begins with three stories Beckett produced in 1945-6: "The Expelled," "The Calmative," "The End") is Beckett's sustained fascination with the idea of the possibility of being *beyond* the human: we will encounter characters who can claim to be dead ("The Calmative," *Texts for Nothing* [1950-52]); who inhabit uncanny, perhaps even post-apocalyptic spaces ("All Strange Away" [1963-64], "Imagination Dead Imagine" [1965], *Lessness* [1969], *Fizzles* [1973-75]); who are unaccountably trapped in what appears to be some kind of afterlife ("The Lost Ones" [1966; 1970]); who, in fact, may even defy even the philosophical category of the *posthuman* (*Ill Seen Ill Said* [1981], *Worstward Ho* [1983]). And yet despite the radical dismantling of the idea of the human, as such, the being that emerges in these texts is still, perhaps even insistently, spatially, geographically, even ecologically, located. This course which finds its philosophical inspiration in the work of Martin Heidegger, especially his critical analysis of the relation between *being* and *world*, and attempts to come to some understanding of what it means for the posthuman to *be* in the world. We also will be guided by crucial moments in Beckett's own work, as for instance, in *Texts for Nothing* 4, where the speaker, one who admits to have "given myself up for dead all over the place" (103), offers the following: "what counts is to be in the world, the posture is immaterial, so long as one is on earth" (116). For the Beckettian posthuman subject, *to be* means to be located, to be on earth, to exist (if this is indeed the term) within an ecological network of connections to spectral, perhaps post-apocalyptic spaces, spaces that uncannily and impossibly, maintain the discontinuous traces of what may, or may not be, life. Our goal here is quite simple: we wish to understand the relation between space and consciousness in Beckett's short prose, to understand what Beckett's speaker means, in a fundamental sense, when he says "what counts is to be in the world."

Jonathan Boulter  
University College 3420  
Office Hours: Tuesday: 10:30-12:00; Thursday: 11:00-12:00  
E-mail: [jboulte@uwo.ca](mailto:jboulte@uwo.ca)

Required Texts:

Beckett, Samuel. *The Complete Short Prose. 1929-1989*. Ed. Stanley Gontarski. New York: Grove, 1995.

“All Strange Away”

*Fizzles*

“Imagination Dead Imagine”

“Lessness”

“Ping”

“The Lost Ones”

*Texts for Nothing*

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Schedule:

January

10 Introduction

17 *Texts for Nothing*

24 *Texts for Nothing*

31 *All Strange Away/Imagination Dead Imagine*

February

7 *Ping/Lessness*

14 *The Lost Ones*

28 *Fizzles*

March

7 *Fizzles*

14 *Ill Seen Ill Said*

21 *Ill Seen Ill Said*

28 *Worstward Ho*

April

4 *Worstward Ho*

Assignments:

Essay: 25 pages. Due April, 2018: 40%

Seminar: 35%

Class Participation: 25%

Essays: All sources must be documented according to the MLA Handbook. Students are assumed to be familiar with the department's policy on plagiarism. Essays will be submitted in class.

Extensions and Late Penalties: Extensions will not be granted. Late essays will be penalized 2% per day including weekends. After seven days the essay will be given a grade of zero.

## **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

The full policy is set out here:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)