

FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ENGLISH 609.58-01

Fall 2013

COURSE TITLE: Historicizing Samuel Beckett

Instructor: Harry Vandervlist

Office: SS 1032

Phone: 403 220 5477

E-mail: h.vandervlist@ucalgary.ca

Office hours: Friday 12 to 1 p.m.

Homepage/course website: available via Blackboard/Desire2Learn

Course description: “All too often,” writes Beckett scholar Sean Kennedy, “Beckett is read as an artist from nowhere, one whose imagination functioned outside history.” This is understandable, as studies of Beckett’s revisions to his work demonstrate his deliberate efforts to “[situate] himself obliquely in relation to his own personal and cultural history.”¹ However, an oblique relation is quite different from no relation at all. This course will undertake the interpretive work required to situate selected works by Beckett (from the 1930s through the 1950s) within relevant historical and cultural contexts. A wealth of recent biographical and archival scholarship now makes it more feasible to do this productively than ever before. Readings will include selected fiction by Beckett along with several of his well-known early critical statements. The course will also draw upon recently published letters and diaries, along with recent scholarship relating Beckett to developments in Irish and French political and cultural history.

Samuel Beckett famously warned against the temptation of overly “neat” explanations in historical criticism (in “Dante...Bruno. Vico..Joyce”). Such readings of any author’s work face various risks: they may be reductive, overly deterministic, or inadequately supported. Part of this course will consist of discussions on how best to mitigate these risks. Our class meetings will begin with a consideration of pitfalls and parameters worth reflecting on when undertaking historical criticism. **Before the first class**, please read Hume, Robert D. “The Aims and Limits of Historical Scholarship.” *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language*, vol. 53, no. 211, pp. 399-422 (available through the U of C Library: search the MLA Bibliography).

Most meetings will revolve around student seminars, which present a key issue, useful historical/biographical resources, and important questions arising from them (in relation to one or more of the Beckett texts). These seminars are meant to be exploratory. They may lead into your term paper, if the explorations go well.

¹ Kennedy, Sean. “Introduction.” In Buning, Marius, Matthijs Engelberts, Sief Houppermans, Dirk van Hulle, Daniele de Ruyter, editors. *Historicising Beckett / Issues of Performance - Beckett Dans L'histoire / En Jouant Beckett*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005.

Texts and readings: Primary texts:

The following titles have been ordered by the Bookstore. I would suggest reading one of the longer texts (*Murphy*, *Watt* or *Molloy*) before the start of the term. You may wish to wait until after the first class to decide which other texts you purchase; all works by Beckett are in the Grove Press editions).

Beckett, Samuel, *Murphy*.

_____, *Watt*.
_____, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable*.
_____, *First Love and Other Shorts*.
_____, *Stories and Texts for Nothing*.
_____, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*.

Fehsenfeld, Martha Dow, editor. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 2, 1941-1956*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Theory and Criticism:

The following books have been placed on reserve at the TFDL:

Beckett, Samuel. *The letters of Samuel Beckett*. Vol. 1, 1929-1940. PR6003 .E282 Z48

Cronin, Anthony. *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*.

PR6003 .E243 Z587

Kennedy, Sean, editor. *Beckett and Ireland*.

PR6003 .E282 Z56945

Kennedy, Sean, and Katherine Weiss. *Samuel Beckett: History, Memory, Archive*.

PR6003 .E282 Z8177

Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*. PQ2603 .E378 Z77

Nixon, Mark, editor. *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937*.

PR6003 .E282 Z46

Other suggested readings:

Useful general resources, at the TFDL:

Pilling, John, editor. *The Cambridge companion to Beckett*. Cambridge, England : Cambridge University Press, 1993.

O'Brien, Eoin. *The Beckett country : Samuel Beckett's Ireland*. Dublin : Black Cat Press, 1986.

An indispensable guide for readers of *Murphy* (sadly unavailable at the TFDL, though I have a copy I can lend, and you can of course request I.L.L.):

Ackerley, C. J.; Gontarski, S. E. *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy*. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1-2, pp. 1-255, 1997.

An interesting electronic resource, available through our library catalogue:

Feldman, Matthew. *Beckett's books : a cultural history of Samuel Beckett's interwar notes*. New York : Continuum, 2006.

Assignments and Evaluation:

Short Review of a critical article or chapter 20%

Seminar Presentation 20%

(written version due one week after class presentation)

Term Paper proposal 15%

Essay 45%

*Note: Please make all efforts to take assignments directly to the instructor. If it is not possible to do so, take your assignment to SS1152 and put it in the dropbox, where your assignment will be date-stamped and placed in the instructor's mailbox. Please keep a copy of your assignment in case of loss by any cause. **Assignments cannot be returned by staff in the Department office.***

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized with the loss of a third of a grade (an A- to B+) for each business day [not class] that the assignment is overdue.

Grading system:

Assignments will be given letter grades. Percentages corresponding to the letter grades as follows will be used to calculate the final overall course grade. Grade points will not be used in the calculation of grades, but will appear on transcripts. Although the A+ is solely an honorific that entails no additional points in the 4-point system, the course instructor will employ this mark to distinguish superlative work that exceeds expectations in style, correctness, intellectual depth and breadth, sophistication, and originality.

Grades are calculated according to the 4 point scale used in the *Graduate Calendar*:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/grad/current/gs-e-1.html>

Grade	Grade Point Value	Graduate Description
A+	4.00	Outstanding
A	4.00	Excellent-superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter
A-	3.70	Very good performance
B+	3.30	Good performance
B	3.00	Satisfactory performance
B-	2.70	Minimum pass for students in Faculty of Graduate Studies
C+	2.30	All grades below B- are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted towards Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements.
C	2.00	
C-	1.70	
D+	1.30	
D	1.00	
F	0.00	

Please note that, according to the University Calendar (F.1), instructors may use their discretion when rounding upwards or downwards when the average of term work and exams is between two letter grades.

Plagiarism:

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Please refer to the following information and make sure you are familiar with the statement below on plagiarism.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-1.html>

English Department Website:

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English, please go to our website at <http://english.ucalgary.ca/graduate>. Please note that the course outlines posted on the English Department website constitute the official course outline for purposes of appeals. Students should verify any hard copies against this posted version. For courses which employ numerical grades, the official departmental percentage to letter grade conversion scale is also posted on the department website.

Writing support:

The Student Success Centre offers both online and workshop writing support for U of C students.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Follow the Department of English on Facebook & Twitter:**Academic regulations and schedules:**

Consult the Department of English's graduate website for courses, departmental deadlines, and other related program information at <http://english.ucalgary.ca/node/245>. Consult the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar for university and faculty regulations, dates, deadline, fees, and schedules, student, faculty and university rights and responsibilities. The homepage for the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar is <http://grad.ucalgary.ca>.

For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Barbara Howe at 403 220 5484 or visit her in Social Sciences Tower 1148 in the first instance.

For program planning and advice, contact Barbara Howe at howe@ucalgary.ca to make an appointment with Dr. Jacqueline Jenkins, Graduate Program Director.

Guidelines on e-mail Etiquette:

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/it/help/articles/email/etiquette>

Grade appeals:

Consult the following University Calendar link and request advice from the English Department office, SS 1152. Please note that "mere dissatisfaction with a decision is not sufficient grounds for the appeal of a grade or other academic decision."

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html>

Deferral of term work and final examinations:

Should you require an extension for completion of term papers or assignments beyond the deadline of five days after the end of lectures, an Application of Deferment of Term Work form must be completed. The University also has regulations governing the deferral of final examinations. See Calendar:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html>,

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html>.

Academic Accommodation:

It is the students' responsibility to request academic accommodations. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodations and have not registered with Student Accessibility Services, please contact them at 403-220-6019. Students who have not registered with Student Accessibility Services are not eligible for formal academic accommodations. More information about academic accommodations can be found at www.ucalgary.ca/access.

Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>;

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip/>

“Safewalk” Program:

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night: call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot pay booths.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/safewalk/>

Contact for the Graduate Student Association: <http://gsa.ucalgary.ca/>

Contact for Students Ombudsman's Office: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds>

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is an extremely serious offence. Please read the following information carefully. The penalty routinely recommended by the English Department for documented plagiarism is failure of the course in which the offence occurred; academic probation is also routinely applied at the Faculty level. Suspension or expulsion can result from severe or repeated plagiarism.

The University Calendar states:

1. Plagiarism - Essentially plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not. Most commonly plagiarism exists when:

- (a) the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test),
- (b) parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author,
- (c) the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source, and/or,
- (d) a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted.

Plagiarism occurs when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, or when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. Citing your sources in a bibliography is not enough, because a bibliography does not establish which parts of a student's work are taken from other sources. MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose. Advice on adequate documentation can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STATEMENT ON PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT

According to the University Calendar, (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/j.html>) "The University of Calgary community has undertaken to be guided by the following statements of purpose and values: to promote free inquiry and debate, to act as a community of scholars, ..., to respect, appreciate, and encourage diversity, [and] to display care and concern for community". The Department of English, like the university as a whole, is committed to a "positive and productive learning and working environment." This environment is characterized by appreciation and encouragement of diversity and respect for the dignity of all persons: students, support staff, and faculty. The department will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour, such as threatening gestures, threatening or abusive verbal or written communication (including e-mails), or any conduct that "seriously disrupts the lawful education and related activities of students and/or university staff". Any cases of such misconduct should be reported immediately to the department Head, who, depending on the nature and severity of the incident, may then take further appropriate action.