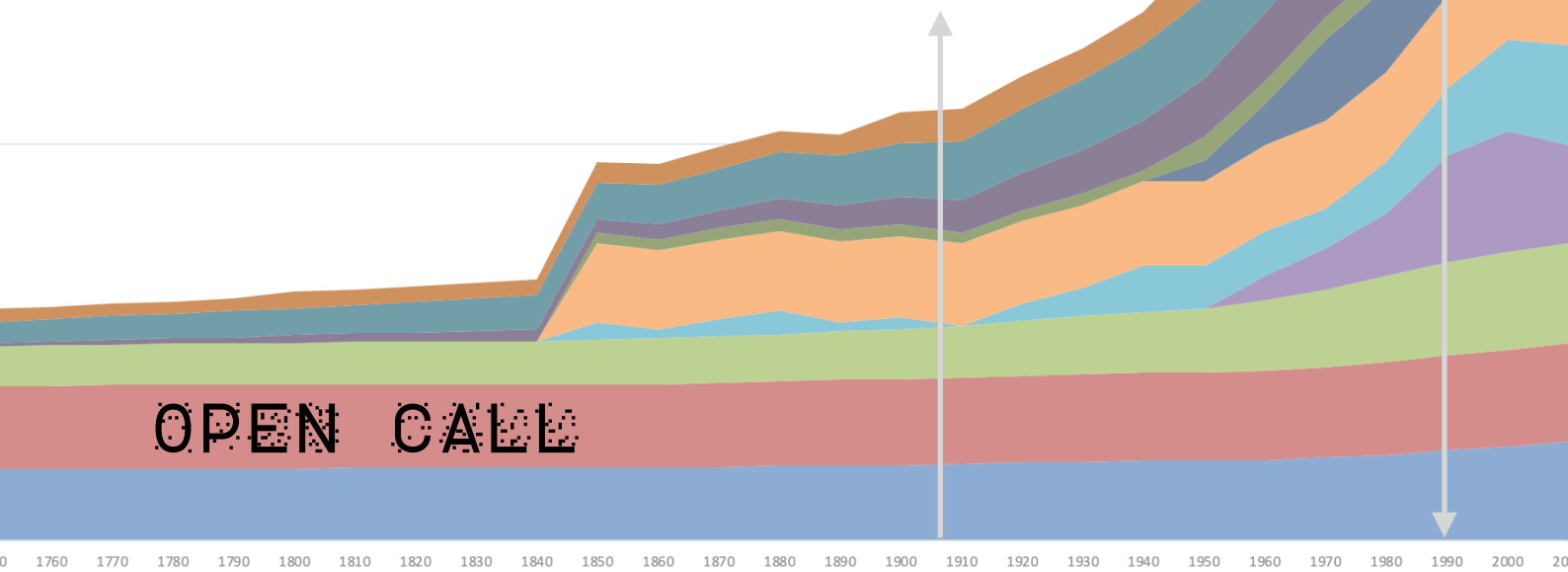


# SAMUEL BECKETT AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

4 & 5 December 2020  
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

[THE FIRST BECKETT CONFERENCE  
TO BE HELD WHOLLY ONLINE.]



'Corpsed.'

Is there a better word to describe our experience of the Anthropocene – how our actions have forced 'Nature' to fall out of character? As evocative as the image may be, the ambiguity at play in Clov's depiction of the world in Endgame leaves the audience at a loss; is 'corpsed' being used as an adjective or a verb? This semantic uncertainty points to how difficult it can be to conceptualise anthropogenic impact on climate and biodiversity, leaving many people overwhelmed and at a loss for how to proceed; it is hard to fathom precisely what we are responding to. What is the threat and where does it come from? Beckett's striking composite images of the human and its physical environment – heads potted in urns, bodies embedded in earth or crawling through mud – raise questions about the rapport and responsibility of the human vis-à-vis its environment and its nonhuman neighbours, as critics interested in animals and ecology in Beckett's work have shown. Questions about the viability of an anthropocentric worldview are central to the work of Samuel Beckett, which suggests an urgency in returning to his work now, at this indefinable moment, as we are facing the crisis of the Anthropocene.

An irony is that this term is just as ambiguous as the situation it purports to name: for some (Paul Crutzen), Anthropocene refers to the 'Great Acceleration' of humanity's negative influence on nature after World War II; for others (Fredric Jameson) it refers to the geological and atmospheric consequences of the Industrial Revolution; some claim that the Anthropocene is essentially related to the worldview of the Enlightenment (Timothy Morton); or, more concretely, it is the self-destructive effect of the neoliberal model of Disaster Capitalism (Slavoj Žižek). There is one thing, however, that has become undeniably clear: we are the threat. And not simply to ourselves. Like Clov and his corpsed world, we are becoming aware of our true 'character' through witnessing a dying planet.

And yet all is not 'zero.' Awareness of the climate crisis calls for action in the here and now. On the one hand, taking full responsibility for this daunting situation may be 'too much for one man.' 'On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now', Vladimir powerfully reminds us in Waiting for Godot. In Happy Days, Winnie – under the blazing light and in the midst of scorched grass – feels that 'the heat is much greater' and she is amazed at 'the way man adapts himself. [...] To changing conditions.' In Beckett's world there are tomorrows, and characters can even imagine 'the far future'; there is hope, perhaps, that reassessing the 'the species' will modify relationships between the human and the nonhuman environment. Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin argue that 'acknowledging the Anthropocene forces us to think about the long-term impacts of the globally interconnected mega-civilisation we have created, and what kind of world we will bequeath to future generations. Perhaps it can also help us change that future to one more aligned with the name we give ourselves: Homo sapiens, the wise humans. This might be possible, since the Anthropocene may become one of the few scientific discoveries that fundamentally alters our perception of ourselves.'

This conference will explore how Beckett's work challenges the 'narratives' of the Anthropocene (Maike Weißflug) and how its perspectives may help us reconsider what it means to be a living, embodied being on Earth in the twenty-first century. Our first aim is to investigate how Beckett's oeuvre may inform contemporary scientific, political, philosophical, and ethical debates raised by the rhetoric of the Anthropocene and the assumed dominance of one species over others and the environment. Our second aim is to examine how Beckett Studies can contribute to redefining the Arts and the Humanities in the Anthropocene: how can education help shape a society capable of facing the current ontological, environmental, philosophical, and societal challenges? Our goal is to think our way to the Anthropocene through Beckett in order generate an engaged, meaningful response to global change.

In keeping with climate responsibility, and in an effort to stimulate a truly global conversation while minimising our carbon footprint, this conference will take place virtually, with a design optimised for the opportunities and limitations associated with this form. We encourage proposals for slightly shorter (10-minute) papers, which will be pre-circulated to designated respondents, leaving time for both dialogue and further discussion. We are also soliciting respondents to papers, so please let us know if you would prefer to facilitate/chair and respond to the work of others. We encourage proposals pertaining to the following topics:

- **Debating the Anthropocene as a useful theoretical term**
- **Survival, home, and belonging**
- **Semiosis of life and death**
- **Eco-criticism, Eco-phenomenology, Eco-deconstruction**
- **Performing Beckett in the Anthropocene**
- **Education and the (post-) humanities in the twenty-first century**

} **TOPICS &  
ISSUES**

**KEYNOTE  
SPEAKERS**

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Professor [Anna McMullan](#), University of Reading  
Professor [Laura Salisbury](#), University of Exeter

**The Role of the Humanities in the Anthropocene**

Professor [Julie Bates](#), Trinity College Dublin

Ms. Lucia Pietroiusti, Curator of [General Ecology at the Serpentine Galleries](#), London

Mrs. [Jessica Sweidan](#), Founder of [Synchronicity Earth](#), London

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**DISCUSSION PANEL**

< **REGISTER HERE** >

Anyone interested in participating, presenting, responding, or simply attending should submit online via the following form:

<https://forms.gle/vqAWZoTByexx73Kv9>

The above link will accept responses until 31 August 2020. For further information or queries, contact us at [SBAnthropocene@gmail.com](mailto:SBAnthropocene@gmail.com).

THIS CONFERENCE IS A FREE EVENT.

ORGANISING  
COMMITTEE

{ Douglas Atkinson (douglas.atkinson@vub.be)  
Amanda Dennis (adennis@aup.edu)  
Nicholas Johnson (johnson@tcd.ie)  
Céline Thobois (cthobois@tcd.ie)

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{ THE CONFERENCE IMAGE has been adapted from [this graph](#) of the Earth System Trends of the Great Acceleration of the Anthropocene from 1750 to 2010. The original is by user [bryanmackinnon](#) and is licensed here under [Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike 4.0 International](#).

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ANTHROPOCENE