



# Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity

*Richard Begam*

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This study explores the relation between Samuel Beckett's five major novels *Murphy*, *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* and the phenomenon that Lyotard, Habermas, and Vattimo have described as the end of modernity. Through close readings of Beckett's pentalogy, the author shows how these novels, written between 1935 and 1950, strikingly anticipate many of the defining themes and ideas of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida from madness and the cogito to the death of the author and the end of the book, from difference and unnamability to the end of man and the beginning of writing. The book begins by situating Beckett in relation to a postmodern philosophical tradition, largely defined by Nietzsche and Heidegger, and a modern literary tradition, most notably represented by Proust and Joyce. The author argues against the tendency to treat the postmodern as the negation of Enlightenment thinking, a form of overcoming in which the modern is replaced by the anti-modern. In the place of this antithetical postmodernism, the author proposes a differential postmodernism. Especially important in this regard is Derrida's claim that there is never any question of choosing between modernity (what he calls Western metaphysics) and some term of opposition (the overcoming of metaphysics). Rather, Derrida recommends practicing a new writing which simultaneously brings together two kinds of deconstruction one that works critically within the tradition and one that projects itself imaginatively beyond the tradition.

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