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LIT 522.B01: Seminar on Comparative Literature - Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett

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LIT 522.01: Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett

Fall 2020 Robert Baker (543-4135 / robert.baker@mso.umt.edu)
T 3:00 – 5:50 Office Hours: T 1:00 – 2:30, W 12:00 – 3:00,
Room LA 338 / Outdoors R 1:00 – 2:30, or by appointment (LA 219)

This course is a study of four novels and a book-length essay by Virginia Woolf and four novels and a play by Samuel Beckett. We will read Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*, and *The Waves*. All these works, written between 1921 and 1931, are shadowed by WWI. (We may read, too, the posthumously published "A Sketch of the Past," written in 1939.) We will read Beckett's *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, and *Endgame*. All these works, written between 1941 and 1957, are shadowed by WWII. Near the end of the course, in order to approach from different angles certain questions we will have discussed along the way, we may read two novels by a couple of contemporary novelists, Marilynne Robinson and Roberto Bolaño. We will see if there is time.

What do Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) have to do with each other? A good question. They are both highly eccentric individuals. They are both writers of great power, able to draw their readers into a sort of trance. They are both modernist writers, writers who significantly bend the conventions of nineteenth-century realism, seeking to disclose dimensions of life they feel cannot be disclosed through the usual techniques of the tradition in which they work. They are both, in very different ways, fine satirists, gifted lyricists, and acute psychologists. They are as different as could be in important respects. Woolf is a romantic, a clairvoyant, a secular mystic, a Proustian poet of lost time and depths of memory. Beckett is a stoic, an absurdist philosopher, a wayward pilgrim of *la via negativa*, a tragic humorist akin to Kafka in his scrutiny of the impenetrable and the hopeless. Above all Woolf and Beckett are elegists. One might even call them visionary elegists. Woolf writes of the vanishing of presences, hopes, and lives. Beckett writes of the vanishing of the human itself, or of what we might have thought to be the human.

Course Requirements:

- Reading of all assigned texts
- Regular attendance
- One short discussion paper (5-7 pages)
- One long final paper (20 pages)

Required Texts:

Virginia Woolf	Samuel Beckett
<i>Jacob's Room</i>	<i>Murphy</i> (optional)
<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	<i>Watt</i>
<i>To the Lighthouse</i>	<i>Molloy</i>
<i>A Room of One's Own</i>	<i>Malone Dies</i>
<i>The Waves</i>	<i>The Unnamable</i>
<i>Moments of Being</i>	<i>Endgame</i>
Marilynne Robinson	Roberto Bolaño
<i>Housekeeping</i>	<i>By Night in Chile</i>

Map of Course

T Aug 18

Ghost Class: please do the reading for the first day of class

T Aug 25

Introduction

Apollinaire, "Zone," translated by Beckett

Woolf, "A Haunted House," "Monday or Tuesday," "Moments of Being"

Christopher Butler, "Dynamics of Change" in *Early Modernism*

John Berger, "The Moment of Cubism"

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T Sept 1

Woolf, *Jacob's Room*

Woolf, "How It Strikes a Contemporary"

T Sept 8

Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"

Hermione Lee, "*Mrs. Dalloway*"Eileen Barrett, "Unmasking Lesbian Passion: The Inverted World of *Mrs. Dalloway*"

T Sept 15

Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Woolf, "Professions for Women"

Erich Auerbach, "The Brown Stocking"

T Spt 22 Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*Toril Moi, "Introduction" to *Sexual/Textual Politics*

Christopher Reed, "Bloomsbury as Queer Subculture"

Optional: T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

T Sept 29 Woolf, *The Waves*J. W. Graham, "Point of View in *The Waves*"T Oct 6 Woolf, *The Waves*Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past" in *Moments of Being*

Optional: Woolf, "Phases of Fiction"

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T Oct 13 Beckett, *Watt*

Hugh Kenner, chapter on *Watt* from *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*
 Ruby Cohn, "*Watt* in the Light of *The Castle*"

T Oct 20

Beckett, *Molloy*
 Edith Kern, essay on *Molloy*
 Georges Bataille, essay on *Molloy*
 Optional: Beckett, "The Calmative" or "The End"

T Oct 27

Beckett, *Malone Dies*
 Germaine Brée, essay on *Malone Dies*
 Richard Begam, essay on *Malone Dies*

T Nov 3

Beckett, *The Unnamable*
 Maurice Blanchot, essay on *The Unnamable*
 Martha Nussbaum, essay on the trilogy
 Beckett, "Three Dialogues"

T Nov 10

Beckett, *Endgame*
 Theodor Adorno, essay on *Endgame*

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T Nov 17

Roberto Bolaño, *By Night in Chile* — or — Marilynne Robinson *Housekeeping*

T Nov 24

Review

***** Final Paper Due on Wednesday Nov 25 by 5:00 p.m. *****