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Book Review: Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett

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duce signs. Yet, since every representation is already an interpretation, Being ultimately emerges as the limit of all hermeneutic activity.

An engaging and informative book, Caesar's *Umberto Eco: Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction* provides a valuable introduction to the work of Eco but is compelling enough to engage the attention of seasoned scholars.

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Daniel Katz. *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999. vii + 220 pp.

Since the 1950s scholarship on Samuel Beckett's work has attempted to account for negation, especially philosophical negation, in Beckett's texts. In many respects, Daniel Katz's text, *Saying I No More*, is a recent offering of a long line of offerings that tries to account for, and even affirm, the negativity in Beckett's texts. Early studies in the Humanist tradition typically take Beckett's negativity and turn it into an Idealistic or Universalized life affirming statement: Beckett's characters bravely go on (in postwar Europe) in spite of the fact that they are completely devoid of hope and have no way to go on. More recently, so-called poststructuralist readings ride the wave of Beckett's negativity *with* Beckett as they interpret his negativity as a negativity directed *against* the very Humanist tradition the former critics were espousing. Overall, this two-sided critical situation has worked to construct a rather ironic binary among Beckett scholars: an us versus them situation. It is unfortunate that this binary exists at all, of course, but the line has been drawn in the sand (and as Beckett would say, "Nothing to be done"), with the Humanists, many of whom actually knew Mr. Beckett, fiercely guarding their version of Beckett, while the theory-informed poststructuralists, brazenly (so it seems to the former camp) play the new-kids-on-the-block with readings that demolish, or worse, pay no heed to earlier Beckett interpretations.

Oddly, while Katz's text definitely claims a place in the poststructuralist camp, its subject matter still has one foot firmly in the

Humanist camp. This situation comes about because Katz's text takes on topics that presume a Humanist, subjective "I" and a consciousness instead of the postmodern or postructuralist complete disavowal of subjectivity or consciousness in favor of, at best, a constructed "I" which has limited agency. Also, in terms of fiction, the idea of character has been replaced by the poststructuralist text. Is Beckett's power from the subjectivized "no" or is it from the complete departure, the complete abandonment of the subjectivized "I," which in turn puts into question all subjectivized readings of Beckett's prose? For example, Katz devotes two of six chapters to the trilogy of novels, including one chapter to *The Unnamable*. In his discussion of the narrator's subjectivity in *The Unnamable* Katz fails to acknowledge a sense of irony or parody in relation to the text. This lack, in turn, is itself ironic because Katz's interpretation is theoretically informed by Derrida who, one would imagine, would be the first to treat the narrator as a *text*. The fact that Derrida informs a thesis that attempts to overwrite a Cartesian reading of Beckett speaks to Katz's theoretical belatedness. This belatedness may be due, in part, to the fact that *Saying I No More* was originally Katz's 1994 Ph.D. dissertation. Late 1980s buzz words such as "origin" ("it might be wise to look at how the trilogy discusses origins and destinations, especially as the characters in the trilogy tend to depict the destinations of their journeys as an arrival at some sort of origin for themselves—is the origin something Beckett's texts allow us to arrive at?"), "logocentric" and "signature" ("Beckett's first-person texts never support the logocentric claims above, but while rejecting the transcendental pretensions of the authority of the signature, they also reject the dodging of the issue of the origin-effect that a recourse to third person narration sometimes implies") belie its 1999 publication date. The fact that this text was originally a dissertation shows up, too, in the prose which tends to summarize (without proper citation) a string of critical arguments which sometimes have little to do with the discussion at hand, adds example upon example without any real sense of goal or endpoint, and then digresses into James Joyce's texts and his influence upon Beckett's texts. The latter tendency, again, is rather unDerridean and is only helpful for those interested in source studies in relation to that old carrot Joyce and Beckett. Despite Katz's claim to build on Thomas Trezise's Derridean reading by turning to literary precedents for the Derridean and Beckettian readings of con-

sciousness, in particular, Joyce, the Joyce examples seem to appear from nowhere and the connections are not always convincing. For instance, Katz's last chapter is devoted to a reading of Beckett's late prose and in the middle of a discussion of *Company* he inserts a passage from *Ulysses* which seems quite random and serves only to derail his discussion of *Company*. There is nothing wrong with publishing a dissertation as a book, but there should be a commitment to update and edit the text into a book in line with contemporary academic standards.

While I am in favor of opening up as many insightful readings of Beckett's texts as possible, I do find it frustrating that many texts cannot find a theoretical strategy that actually offers the field something fresh and engaging. Katz's book *potentially* offers Beckett scholarship some interesting insights into Beckett's prose, but the theoretical confusion and work-in-progress style of Katz's prose is a liability when time to devote to reading new critical texts is limited for most academics.

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Paul John Eakin. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999. xii + 207 pp.

In this intriguing book, Paul John Eakin problematizes the notion of autobiography as "the story of the self" and argues that in the act of narration one is engaged in a process of *making* a self. "Self and self-experience [. . .] are not given, monolithic, and invariant, but dynamic, changing, and plural." The traditional model of "life writing," Eakin claims, assumed a self-determined, autonomous self. Now, under the influence of cognitive and social psychologists, clinicians, and others, this model is slowly fading. Much contemporary biography and autobiography reflects a more flexible conception of self.

Eakin puts a fair amount of emphasis throughout the book on the physiological dimensions of selfhood. To this end he examines a number of accounts of individuals afflicted with brain disorders or pathologies of one sort or another, almost as though an understanding of normative