

The Ultimate Cell in Samuel Beckett

Seminar: 28/11/2026

Abstract Deadline: 25/07/2026

- 'I woke up in a bed, in my skin' (Beckett 39).

2026 marks the 120th birthday of the creative cartographer of confinement—Samuel Beckett. Influenced by his own prenatal memories, Beckett's oeuvre presents every wall—whether biological or architectural—as a structural echo of the uterine wall. The third instalment of the online Beckett seminar series, 'Grey Pluralities,' takes the epithelial turn and explores the characters' experience of the skin as the ultimate cell. From Estragon's bleeding leg to Belacqua's cyst and Molloy's queer-smelling perspiration, Beckett's characters endure an inescapable visceral, epidermal entrapment defined by pain and trauma. Subjected to this intimate scale of confinement, the skin's pores emerge as vital sites of biological ventilation, agency, and respite for the characters. The skin of Beckettian characters is caressed, kissed, washed, bruised, bandaged, surgically operated, mired in mud, hurt by boots, etc., thereby manifesting it as a somatic palimpsest, an enveloping boundary where the inscriptions of trauma, traces of tenderness, and gestures of care converge in a layered narrative of survival. This epidermal confinement, epitomised in the epigraph from *Molloy* (2015), captures the eponymous protagonist's visceral experience transitioning from the macro-enclosure of Lousse's room to the intimate cell of his own epidermis.

The third segment of the seminar seeks to synthesise discourses within Beckett Studies, fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue that sits at the intersection of carceral scholarship, haptic phenomenology, affect of shame, and epithelial theory. The growing academic rigour on confinement in Beckett—including James Little's *Samuel Beckett in Confinement* (2020), Michael Coffey's *Samuel Beckett is Closed* (2018), Emilie Morin's *Beckett's Political Imagination* (2017), Saba Ahmed's "'in that black or luminous square": Windows as Sites of Imagination in the Writings of Proust and Beckett' (2015), and Rosalin Maprayil's Ph.D. thesis, *Staging Vestigial Domesticity: A Scenographic and Phenomenological Investigation into Manifestations of Home in Beckett's Plays for Theatre* (2024)—analyses the material and metaphoric aspects of carceral structures and the respite that the apertures facilitate therein. Trish McTighe (2013) extends the carceral logic from the architectural to the biological, building on the work of Sigmund Freud (1927), Didier Anzieu (1989), Steve Connor (2003), and Jean-Luc Nancy (2008), eventually shifting her focus from dermatological entrapment to skin as a site of interaction. Similarly, Rick de Villiers (2021) investigates how the ineluctable encasement of skin embarrasses Beckettian characters, making affect as the fulcrum of his study.

Drawing on the present critical corpus, this seminar invites contributions that examine skin as both the final frontier of detention and the primary site of a fractured, materialist witness.

Following are some of the suggestive themes that investigate grey zones of epidermal confinement in Beckett's works:

- 1) Biopolitics of scars and wounds
- 2) Skin as a bio-witness
- 3) Clinical inscriptions on the skin
- 4) Skin as an elderly storyteller
- 5) Secretion of fluids as epidermal dialogue
- 6) Skin as a performative space
- 7) Textiles as extension of epithelium
- 8) Epithelial ossuary
- 9) Cicatrization–rejuvenation of epithelial walls
- 10) Skin tribology and carceral humility

Please submit a 200-word abstract and a 100-word bionote on maislenuage@gmail.com by 25th July 2026. The online seminar is scheduled for 28th November 2026.

Bibliography

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