‘living flesh’: The Human-Nonhuman Proximity in Beckett’s Four Stories

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This essay examines the human-nonhuman proximity emerging from Beckett’s representation of a deconstructed human being and his encounters with nonhuman animals in the “The Expelled”, “The Calmative”, “The End” and “First Love”. With reference to Simone Weil’s categories from *The Need for Roots*, I show how Beckett’s narrator is lacking physical, psychological, socio-political and philosophical aspects associated with normative human being, which result in a precarious, imprecise identity. In light of this dehumanisation, I close read passages featuring nonhuman animals to argue that while they emphasise the narrator’s marginalisation from human community, they also reveal profound alienation from other animals too. The destabilisation of specific identity, I argue, initiates a reevaluation of the narrator’s place among living beings in general and prefigures the multispecies connectedness advocated in twenty-first century ecocritical reviews of the human-nonhuman divide, such as Donna Haraway’s ‘chthulucene’.

Discourses of the Human

Beckett wrote his four short stories in French in 1946, a year when the fragments of humanity in ruins were being shored up politically and philosophically, partly in response to the ‘crimes against humanity’ being heard in Nuremberg. Although the stories appeared in English later, between 1954 and 1973, they stem from a period in which Beckett returned to post-Liberation Paris from Dublin, via the devastated town of Saint-Lô, when he was surrounded by renewed thinking on human entitlements, welfare and agency. He could not fail to be aware of the human rights cohering after President Roosevelt’s ‘Four Freedoms’ speech in early 1941 (of speech and worship, from want and fear). By the end of 1945, the UNESCO charter aimed to further justice, rule of law, human rights and freedom, paving the way for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which asserted equality, dignity, reason, conscience and brotherhood. But, as Lyndsey Stonebridge argues, Beckett’s immediate post-war literature shows scepticism towards the conviction that rights were enforced for all people equally, owing to a “political and moral recognition that the discourses of humanity and human rights were a poor response to the radical rightlessness of the age” (13).

Beckett’s distrust in discourses of the human appear in an untransmitted radio report, “The Capital of the Ruins” (later published in *The Irish Times*, 24th June 1946), based on his experiences as a volunteer with the Irish Red Cross and the humanitarian effort to rebuild the hospital at Saint-Lô. He notes that it might give the Irish some “general satisfaction” to learn that the hospital will always be known as the “Irish Hospital”, associating Ireland with a place of aid (278). However, Julie Bénard suggests that, in the report, “Beckett shows differences between those who endured the war, the people of St-Lô, and those who did not, the people of Ireland, who remained neutral during the conflict. […] [G]iven Ireland’s isolationism during the

war, one is led to think that its broadcasting on the national Irish radio was aimed at setting the country's visibility on the political scene as an actor in Europe's recovery" (n.p.). Beckett is arguably clear-eyed about the nation-serving agendas motivating apparently disinterested aid projects, but his more expansive insight in the report concerns the contingency and vulnerability of the human. Beckett claims that Saint-Lô offered "a vision and sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again" (278). Beckett indicates that all visible signs of solidarity and regeneration are accompanied by the destruction of an established sense of humanity and the violent inhumanity of the scene itself. Any fellow feeling must be tempered by the experiences of "real devastation and misery [...]; people in desperate need of food and clothing, yet clinging desperately to life" (Knowlson, 350).

It is noticeable from the authors named in Beckett's letters from 1945-46 that he is also acutely conscious of the prominence of existential philosophy in post-war Paris, which was in the process of assimilating a form of humanism under the auspices of Jean-Paul Sartre. While Beckett refers to Camus' 1942 novel *L'Etranger* (2011, 33), corresponded with Simone DeBeauvoir (2011, 41) and wrote back to Percy Arland Ussher about "Postscript on Existentialism" (2011, 46), he mentions Sartre ("and his world") several times in his post-war letters, including in a letter to his cousin Morris Sinclair (21st October 1945) in the month Sartre gave the lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism". In the lecture, Sartre explains that "Man is […] a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower" and is therefore able to be self-surpassing or transcendent, with the aim of liberation or realisation "in which he can be truly human" (349). In co-opting humanism into his philosophy centred on existence, freedom and responsibility, Sartre had, as the French writer Michael Tournier puts it, "gone and fished up that worn-out old duffer Humanism, still stinking with sweat and 'inner life', from the trash heap where we had left him" (132).

It is feasible that the pervasion of the human in political, ethical and intellectual discourse is proportional to its severe mid-century destabilisation. Beckett implies as much in a piece of art criticism from 1946 called "The Painting of van Velde, or the World and Pants". He writes that the human "is the word, and probably concept too, that is reserved for the times of the great massacres" and one "we are renovating today with a rage never equalled" (1983: 131, my translation). He continues: "It's raining on artistic circles with a very special abundance. It's a shame. Because art does not seem to need the cataclysm, to be able to practice. With 'it's not human', everything is said. In the garbage" (131). Beckett observes that it takes a crisis, when the vulnerability and transience of the human is exposed, for the idea of a collective or essential humanity to be reasserted. As if compensating for the level of threat, though, it is ultimately overused. The word and concept seem to burst through thought like "dum-dum" bullets (131). Art is particularly riddled, according to Beckett, with a fixation on the human being leading to a surfeit of anthropomorphic and anthropocentric works. In *Think, Pig!*, Jean-Michel Rabaté argues that Beckett's weariness with discourses of the human means he is a writer of "the limits of the human", performing a "critique of humanism" among other figures of "postwar antihumanism" (14, 17, 18). Referring to another text from 1946, *Mercier et Camier*, Rabaté picks out the neologism "anthropopseudomorphe" (186) to exemplify Beckett's sense that "A lie (pseudos) is wedged in the middle of the main symptom of

humanism: the projection of the human everywhere" (20). The prevalence of the human is a key factor in Beckett's impression of its falsity, with its distorting lens and semantic satiation effect. It acts as a placeholder, a required but rather indistinct word and concept.

To navigate the limits of the human is to traverse the multiplicity of less-than and other-than human life forms that float the ideal construct of the human. In *Misanthropy*, Andrew Gibson reminds us of Beckett's "recurrent concern with the figure of the tramp, the outcast, the abject victim, a figure brought low" (140), as James Knowlson did earlier when describing Beckett's "sympathy for the underdog: the failure, the invalid, the prisoner, the beggar, the tramp, even the rogue" (566). Beckett pays attention to peripheral and precarious beings, evoking a spectrum of humanity that, at its far end, inspires the prefixes 'de-', 'un-', 'in-', and 'non-' to name the removals, absences, privations and otherness of his creatures. Although these terms still conjure the human, as an implied model of completeness, normativity and propriety, Beckett's dehumanisation tests the elasticity and impermeability of the human, distressing the human being until its discreteness comes into question.

Dehumanisation and Weil's Roots

Dehumanisation denotes a departure from the human, moving 'off' or 'from' an established identity and status. "Standard definitions of dehumanization", writes Sophie Oliver, "define the concept in terms of a negation of such positive 'human' qualities as individuality, autonomy, personality, civility, and dignity" (85). For David Livingston Smith, the perceived loss of positive human qualities activates a comparison with the nonhuman animal as both different and inferior. In *Less Than Human*, Smith argues that dehumanized people "are imagined as subhuman animals, because they are conceived as having subhuman essence. […]. They are imagined to have the essence of creatures that elicit negative responses such as disgust, fear, hatred, and contempt, and are usually thought as predators, unclean animals or prey" (264). To be dehumanised is, frequently, to be subject to a form of animalisation and approximated with nonhuman animals. Nick Haslam refers to this relationship as "animalistic metaphor", which is "a process of dehumanization whereby people perceived to be lacking in uniquely human characteristics such as rationality, civility, refinement, and moral sensibility are 'seen implicitly or explicitly to be animal-like'" (257). In relation to dehumanised forms in Beckett specifically, Shane Weller also employs a negative framework that invokes the animalistic to recognise Beckett's creatures as "un-beings" subject to "animalisation". He argues that this transformation "both disintegrates the human/animal distinction and takes the form of a radical deterioration of being. What results from this process is a form of weakness, which is to say a negatively determined being (or 'un'-being) that is neither a properly human nor a properly nonhuman animal, and that is defined principally by its inabilities (in motion and speech), its suffering and its status as an object of revulsion" (20). Weller points out that although animalisation suggests proximity with the animal, the transformation actually results in something other, characterised by deficit and resistant to the human-nonhuman animal binary.

It is possible to extend and refine the negatively determined being in Beckett by generating an inventory of dehumanisation through a comparison with a

contemporaneous positive version of what human being should entail. Simone Weil's *The Need for Roots*, written in London in 1943, identifies the human's fundamental material, socio-political and spiritual needs in a remarkably direct list, which can be applied to Beckett's literature to illuminate the ways his creatures are physically, psychological, socially and philosophically lacking. Beckett and Weil are linked in only coincidental ways. Both were at École Normale Supérieure at the same time between 1928 and 1930, for instance. Nevertheless, Weil's book, *The Need for Roots*, is a product of a time, place and circumstances close to Beckett. Beginning as a report for Charles de Gaulle and the Free France movement, Weil responds to the experiences of displaced people in the occupied and south zones of France. In contrast to the politico-juridical human 'rights' percolating at the time, Weil concentrates on 'obligations' to emphasise how thriving human being is an ethical and social responsibility, and not based on individual entitlements solely in relation to the nation, state or law. Without certain material and immaterial needs being met, humans are at risk of "a purely vegetative existence", antithetical to their potential. After basic physical needs, Weil writes:

> There are others which have no connexion with the physical side of life, but are concerned with its moral side. […]. They form, like our physical needs, a necessary condition of our life on this earth. Which means to say that if they are not satisfied, we fall little by little into a state more or less resembling death, more or less akin to a purely vegetative existence. (6)

The satisfaction of these needs amounts to vital "roots" through the "real, active and natural participation in the life of a community" (40). Weil's book is an instructive document when applied to Beckett's four stories and cross-referenced with a heuristic impression of Beckett's narrator as a form of weakness, subject to a series of privations. It helps to reveal his lack of multiple existential roots to pinpoint the extent to which they deconstruct a human paradigm.

The physical aspects Beckett's narrator lacks are in motion, bodily functions, appearance, shelter and subsistence. He is, at points, a homeless beggar, suffering from an awkward gait that is "not like a man" (6), skin ailments, incontinence, chronic pain, and a face he describes as a "mask of dirty old hairy leather" (48). The psychological aspects lacking are in memory, reason, biographical narrative and communication. The narrator is prone to invention and contradiction, experiences a loss of faith in the powers of description and narration, finds logic unproductive, and proves to be unintelligible to others and himself. These aspects limit the narrator's access to what Weil would call "liberty" (the ability to choose (11)) and "truth" (the protection against suggestion and falsehood (38)). The severity and abundance of the narrator's impairments result in a state of being and interactions with others that infringe on the types of positive human qualities identified in definitions of dehumanisation.

The dehumanising aspects of his socio-political treatment are in aversion and repulsion, social exclusion, indignity and non-utility. The narrator is expelled, gravitates to the margins of society (to fields, caves and sheds) and exists in a "dispeopled kingdom" (66). He is perceived as a delinquent, a problem for authority figures and a useless burden to society, which means he recedes from a validating, reciprocal form of life among fellow human beings. These aspects impact what Weil calls "equality" (the basic respect due to humans (15)); "honour" (sharing in noble

traditions (18)); "access to private and public property" (the shared ownership of the places and practices of civic life, and objects that are an extension of oneself (33-34)); and "responsibility" (being of use to society (14)). Finally, the unorthodox philosophical aspects of Beckett's narrator are his misanthropy and lack of will to live. He repeatedly expresses a desire to be violent towards people, young and old, men and women alike, and describes the possibility of a long life as "unduly pessimistic" (11). These aspects affect his sense of what Weil calls "obedience" (to established rules and leaders (12)), "hierarchism" (veneration for symbols of superiority (17-18)) and "order" (the compulsion to satisfy imperative obligations (9)). The accumulated losses of Beckett's narrator ensures he drifts towards Weil's impression of a deathly, bare existence – a state Hannah Arendt would later describe as the human without reciprocity: "a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him like a man" (1973, 300). Without the social verification of his humanity, the narrator is excluded from the dignity, safety and liberty nominally entitled to every human being.

In multiple ways, then, Beckett's narrator falls outside the framework of human value and meaning proposed in Weil's categorical needs. It is my contention here that Beckett's narrator's encounters with other living beings, particularly nonhuman animals, take on increased significance in light of his dehumanisation, primarily because the narrator's otherness instigates a reevaluation of his place among other life forms. Indeed, his relative loss of humanity instigates a turn to the nonhuman, because "to turn toward the nonhuman is not only to confront the nonhuman but to lose the traditional way of the human, to move aside so that other nonhumans–animate and less animate–can make their way, turn toward movement themselves" (Grusin, xxi). As Beckett's narrator "loses the traditional way of the human", he drifts towards a confused, inessential existence in which it is possible to open up increasingly non-anthropocentric perspectives that foreground how Beckett's work is alive to life forms more generally, beyond the thrall of the human. Even so, dehumanisation does not result in easy identification with the nonhuman animal for Beckett's narrator, despite the animal being part of the ideological strategy to create and maintain dehumanised subjects.

Encounters with Nonhuman Animals

Animals feature frequently in Beckett's writing from 1946 and their translations. As Mary Bryden points out in her essay, "The Beckettian Bestiary", references to at least 25 animals pepper the pages of *Mercier and Camier* (46). Similarly, the four short stories include an array of over a dozen animals (including horses, pony, ox, rats, owl, bats, gulls, goat, rabbit, pig, ass, ants and dogs). Ruby Cohn suggests: "it is as though the narrator sets out to include in his fiction–'*mon mythe*'–whatever is usually elided in more conventional stories" (130). As Beckett's narrator is alienated from human society, he finds himself having to try to occupy spaces for or proximal to animals. One might assume that his gravitation to these spaces evidences how dehumanisation leaves behind an animalised identity. The tendency to see either duality or continuity between humans and animals (humans as either not-animal or another-animal) means that the loss of human exceptionalism can break the duality and accentuate 'human animality', the human's animal base, which would result in a stronger impression of the continuity that exists between human and nonhuman animals. However, while there is a literal proximity to animals in the narrator's encounters, there are few examples comparing him directly to animals or showing him belonging with animals.

Crucially, his dehumanisation (as the removal or reduction of human characteristics) does not necessarily result in the nonhuman exactly, just as the animalised subject is not precisely a nonhuman animal. Blunt continuism would be a rather specious conclusion, as Florence Burgat contends: "to strike a blow against the singularity of man, *le proper de l'homme*, it can find no better weapon than lowering humans to the same level as animals. This proposition is underpinned by the notion that 'animality' is a sort of tabula rasa where everything is equalized; it denies the very idea of specificity" (53). Still, Beckett's negations of the human do open up ontological dimensions in which the neatness of human-nonhuman identification is disturbed, not by dissolving humans into their latent animality, inasmuch as a subsisting existence, or living flesh.

The narrator's evictions from lodgings in "The Expelled" and "The End" indicate a shift to primitive dwellings on the periphery of civic life, and yet he is unable to co-exist or identify with nonhuman animals. Since street and monument names escape him, he requests a cabman to take him to the city Zoo, for "it is rare for a capital to be without a Zoo" (9). His sudden abandonment of this journey replicates the sense that while exclusion from human society might encourage identification with nonhuman animals, in this case there is no secure affinity with either. Later, when sharing the cab-horse's stable, he finds the horse a disconcerting presence, inducing self-consciousness and an awareness of the horse as a working animal, belonging in the stable and having utility to society, in contrast to his own incongruity in the idle cab: "Now that it was unharnessed it must have been puzzled by my presence in the cab" (15). Out of place, the narrator soon finds himself with the urge to "extricate" himself (15), to escape this subtly condemning or shaming presence. This alienation from nonhuman animals reoccurs when the narrator lives briefly in a cave by the sea with a man and his ass. The caveman's ancient form of habitation and lifestyle secure his status as "a proper man": "it is easy for a man, a proper man, to live in a cave, far from everybody" (47). It is clear the narrator is not of the same kind. He cannot settle there and does not share a connection with the ass, as the animal seems to have an aversion to him as an unknown entity: "What's wrong with your ass, I said. Don't mind him, he said, he doesn't know you" (46).

A similar inability to settle occurs earlier in "The End" when the narrator is evicted from his basement to make room for a pig, which is "catching cold in the cart before the door" (44). The narrator's own personal space, health and status are in competition with a nonhuman animal, and, to add insult to injury, he is displaced for a pig in particular, a species often associated with derogatory characteristics, such as greed and dirt. The pig episode exposes the politeness and hypocrisy of the man who orders the narrator to move. The narrator is convinced that the man is being "most correct", "most patient" and only "requesting" his leave (44), as though the man is a model citizen, acting with respect and fairness. When the man tells the narrator to "get a grip on yourself, be a man, get up" (44), it is apparent that it is actually the man's treatment of the narrator that dehumanises him and makes him less than animal. While being responsible for the degrading process of displacing the narrator for a pig, the man also insists the narrator have some masculine resilience about the situation and act like a dignified human being. The episode is further complicated by the fact that pigs have increased importance in the context of Irish cultural identity and economy, giving rise to the phrases "as Irish as Paddy's pig" or "as Irish as the pigs of Doherty" (referring to the clan from County Donegal). In austere living conditions, a pig is a prized asset as consumable or sellable meat that holds more

immediate value than a man, hence the idiom, "the gentleman that pays the bills". The pig appears as a benefactor from the noble class in this reference, which implies that the human-nonhuman animal hierarchy should not always be presumed and that the narrator's degradation would not naturally equate him with nonhuman animals, particularly when those animals are of use or valuable.

Beckett's narrator's encounters with nonhuman animals show that he is also unable to assimilate with other animals and yet he cannot bolster his humanity through the well-established function of the nonhuman animal's difference. The epistemological process whereby it takes the constructed identity of the animal as a foil, a counterpart, to reveal what it means to be human has become commonplace in twenty-first century animal studies. Expressing the modern function of the animal, Carrie Rohman argues that "the autonomy of the human subject, the sovereignty of humanness, is dependent upon our difference from animal, our disavowal of them, and the material reinstantiation of that exclusion through various practices such as meat-eating, hunting, and medical experimentation" (16). With "instantiation of the human through the exclusion of the animal' in mind, Beckett's narrator's encounters show that profound differences from nonhuman animals do not necessarily mean an assertion of human identity. There is instead a kind of double poverty at play, as Beckett's creatures fail to fall neatly into human or animal being.

Traces of common ground return subtly when the narrator moves to the mountain shed in "The End". This former sanctuary for humans in the wild is now in a state of ruin: transformed by bestial acts, tenanted by animals and reclaimed by nature. A cow enters and after an unsuccessful attempt to feed from her, she kicks the narrator. He remarks: "I didn't know our cows too could be so inhuman" (48). As a nonhuman animal, the cow's lack of human qualities might be taken as granted, but not here. The implicit idea is: 'I thought our cows were more compassionate and merciful'. This perceived lack of humanity or humaneness in the cow suggests the narrator recognises these as qualities not exclusive to humans, but possible in nonhuman animals too. In "our cows", the word 'our' functions as a vestigial sign of the narrator's identification with other humans, a kind of habitual collectivisation, that affiliates him with people, particularly those that have historically domesticated, owned and used cows. The "Cow" notes that Beckett took in the 1930s and consist of "a list of jokes, puns, citations about the cattle trade and cattle rearing, and jottings about medieval legends including *Táin Bó Cúailnge*" (Morin, 51), add a further layer to the possession of cows, reinforcing their deep association with Irish culture as symbols of violent power struggles. Yet the dual sense of 'belonging' in "our cows" as an imagined community with other humans and possession of animals seems unwarranted in the narrator's case. This incongruity is reinforced through the word 'too', because it reveals that the narrator perceives the cow's inhuman behaviour in addition to either his own or other people's inhumanness, thereby forging a link between human inhumanity and animal inhumanity. A mutual status emerges here, not in humanity or animality, but in a negative category, inhumanity.

Kind(ness): Identity After Alienation

As a result of the negative determination and radical rootlessness of Beckett's narrator, there remains some minimal identification with earthly others beyond human or nonhuman animal identity – a sort of identity after alienation. That is, a return to a higher order or lower-resolution identity occurs when more specific determinants are inapplicable. Beckett draws attention to the persistent pressures of identifying with others, on human, nonhuman animal and nonhuman levels, as his narrator navigates

the world in terms of kindness or unkindness, which Russell Smith calls "the language of sensibility", referring to "acuteness of apprehension or feeling"; "readiness to feel compassion for suffering" (70). When the narrator learns of the cab-horse potentially suffering from the "kind hearts of the passers-by" (14) (colic from charity) or speculates that the policeman "didn't dare arrest me. Or perhaps he had a kind heart" (43), the word 'kindness' means 'friendly, generous, considerate'. In further instances, 'kindness' also connotes the language and practices of identification, in which 'kindness' relates to 'kin', 'kinship', 'kindred' and 'kind', meaning family or species relations, shared characteristics and likenesses. For instance, in "The Calmative", when the narrator meets a man who inquires about his life story, the man says, "you know, that kind of" but struggles to "think of what life could well said to be a kind" (29). As an avid reader of Shakespeare, Beckett would have been attuned to further wordplay here, particularly Hamlet's aside to Claudius, "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (1:2 267), in which 'kind' has the added meaning of 'natural', and Antony's description of Brutus' stabbing of Caesar as "the most unkindest cut of all" (3:2 183), which suggests 'unnatural' and 'inhumane'.

The cab-horse as a potential victim of charity in "The Expelled" foreshadows the Marxist orator's description of the narrator in "The End" as a "down and out", "left-over" and "living corpse" produced by the "crime" of charity (52). Kindness, it appears, is often to satisfy the conscience of the charitable – the giver's needs – without genuine concern for the receiver. Likewise, when the pig man says, "Don't think I'm being unkind" (44), he is at once concerned not to appear uncompassionate while in the act of demeaning the narrator, rendering him sub-nonhuman and expressly not the same kind. In kindness, then, there is a concurrence of inhuman and humane behaviour, captured in the collocation "cruelty, the kind that smiles" (20), which jumbles the "be cruel only to be kind" phrase that also appears in *Hamlet* (3.4 178). By the time the caveman receives him, the narrator insists, "He was kind. Unfortunately I did not need kindness" (47). When Smith argues that Beckett's narrator is in fact "dependent on the kindness of strangers" (72), the assumption is that acts of kindness are invariably well intentioned and beneficial. Yet, because Beckett alludes to the practices of identification in 'kindness', in which apparently inclusive acts of kindness, such as politeness, help and affection, can be freighted with selfish agendas and exclusionary or hierarchical identity politics, we must be wary of the extent to which seeming humaneness actually acknowledges the subject as an equal. Indeed, the 'kindness of strangers' is an apposite phrase in relation to Beckett, if taken as some vague likeness to what is at the same time alien, which is precisely the larger point I would like to make. To repurpose Smith's use of the phrase, Beckett evokes the 'kindness of strangers' in the way the narrator experiences difference from other living creatures on one level, and affinity with them on another. Beckett's narrator is recurrently encountering other beings that are and are not 'kind'.

The 'kindness of strangers' in Beckett, or contradictory likeness with the other, is noticeable as the narrator is immersed into an increasingly un-moded being. At the beginning of *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues: "the human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms" (2). This plane of 'life itself' that relates the mere life of the human to other living organisms is evoked in the term "living flesh" in Beckett. In "The End", the narrator recognises himself as "still living flesh" as he is surrounded by rats. In his makeshift coffin, he observes: "The rats had difficulty getting at me, because of the bulge of the hull. And yet they longed to. Just think of it, living flesh, for in spite of

everything I was still living flesh" (53). The phrase "in spite of everything" reappears, echoing the narrator's obligations to mix from "The Expelled": "in spite of everything, I was still obliged to mix, occasionally" (5). The mixing implied in "living flesh" is not with human society, but with a broader collective; a basic, organic group. The narrator perceives himself simply as living flesh, in a macabre situation in which his body is not repugnant, but valuable as meat, in a red-in-tooth-and-claw existence.

Situating Beckett's narrator in the wide bracket of 'flesh', then, consigns him to the intensified biological and ontological vulnerability associated with bare life – akin to the basic physical existence that Weil begins with as the most corporal need. A line from "First Love" captures this predicament also: "I didn't understand women at that period. I still don't for that matter. Nor men either. Nor animals either. What I understand best, which is not saying much, are my pains" (67-8). Although the narrator is unable to identify with human or nonhuman animals exactly, his comprehension of physical pains points to a substrate of being based on sentience and senescence that enfolds all living beings. In this respect, it is significant that in "The End", Beckett's narrator remembers the young boy and goat, human and animal, mixed together: "Soon they were no more than a single blur which if I hadn't known I might have taken for a young centaur" (25). It indicates that this brief but tender exchange with the boy was not with either human or animal as discrete categories, but with an imprecise, non-specific life form. Like the phrase 'living flesh', the centaur, as a hybrid being, evokes the collapse of discrete ontologies (anthropological and zoological) and raises a more biocentric vision in which the dehumanised narrator might make more sense.

Thinking Forward: Ecological Implications

The assemblage of "living flesh" is a surprisingly prescient dimension of Beckett's stories that, coincidentally, speaks to a contemporary non-anthropocentric approach to human-nonhuman relations in what is increasingly known as 'The Anthropocene', 'the Human Age', or the 'Capitalocene', the 'Age of Capitalism'. In the chapter "Tentacular Thinking" from *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway makes the case for an alternative name for the current geological epoch characterized by anthropogenic climate change, or rather, a name that enfolds a working solution to it: the Chthulucene. What emerges in Haraway's troubling of the existing labels is a focus on alternatives to ecological narratives that focus on humans as the sole actors. More than ever, this era encourages recognition of humanity's being-with and making-with other living creatures. Haraway writes: "We are at stake to each other. Unlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the Earth" (55). Similarly, Timothy Morton has articulated the need for the reconfiguration of human-nonhuman relations in *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, in which he draws attention to the pervasive anthropocentric influence on thought and experience brought about by the Marxist "Severing" of culture from nature: "Like a gigantic, very heavy object such as a black hole, the Severing distorts all the decisions and affinities that humans make" (15). On the contrary, by accepting that nonhuman being, environments and systems have shaped the human, to the extent that the nonhuman is immanent to the human, a revised sense of the nonhuman could be realised, in which "Kindness means being kinda-sorta, because one is permeated with other beings, physically and experientially and

everything else" (145).

Haraway's term, the Chthulucene, emphasises the web, the network, the tentacular connections between "other terrans" (100), other inhabitants of the Earth. Morton's use of terms like "Kindness" and "Acknowledgement" conveys the coexistence, interaction and mutuality between symbiotic parts of the biosphere. While remaining mindful of overstating the ecological value of Beckett's literature, what is particularly pertinent in Haraway's and Morton's descriptions of the entangled relationships between various beings is that the tendrils of identity appear to touch down lightly and widely across a vast ontological terrain, tying together living beings into a common dimension. As Beckett's narrator in the four stories from 1946 is left ontologically precarious, as an outlier in human and nonhuman animal categories, his identification as 'living flesh' grounds him in a similarly expansive and inclusive way. Beckett's anti-humanist negation of the idea of the human suggests a mode of thinking that anticipates the review of the human-nonhuman divide and introduction of alternatives focused on connectedness in recent reflections on the human's ecological place.

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