

**Beckett's Threshold: Salvation and Horror**  
**Edward Bizub**

Proust and the *cogito*; Geulincx and Golgotha: these are some of the parameters by which we can “measure” Beckett’s threshold, a liminal space which seems to have found reverberations in World Literature, and yet the source of these reverberations is probably unknown to his admirers. Take *Godot* for instance. How many people would be surprised to find the seminal moment of Cartesian philosophy written into the scene at the end of the play? Who recognizes a famous scene in Proust’s novel rewritten in Beckettian fashion? And how can we guess that that very scene is likewise a commentary on Geulincx’s famous maxim as well as on the drama of Golgotha, all tied to the mystery of a shoe and the movement of a foot?

To explain Beckett’s wide appeal, this intricately crafted threshold, with its emphasis on paralysis and impotence, can be seen as resonating with the modernist movement as well as with the premises of postcolonial criticism under different auspices. The subversion of traditional texts may be interpreted as a reaction not only to realism but to a hostile world as well: the “inward turn”, Stephen Dedalus’s vision of history as a nightmare. Salvation and horror become intermingled in the aftermath of colonialism: Kurtz’s pursuit of “progress” in *The Heart of Darkness*; Adela Quested’s experience of the cave in *A Passage to India*; and Chinua Achebe’s depiction of cultural destruction in *Things Fall Apart*.

The aim of this paper would be to show how one can marry a micro-textual analysis with a broader investigation. In the case of *Godot*, the play’s reception reveals the hidden potentiality of a dynamic piece of writing. Analysis and reception: the one legitimizes the other.

**Short Bio:**

Edward Bizub has taught Comparative Literature at the University of Geneva and the University of Lausanne. He is the author of the following books: *La Venise intérieure. Proust et la poétique de la traduction*, Neuchâtel, La Baconnière, 1991; *Proust et le moi divisé. La Recherche: creuset de la psychologie expérimentale (1874-1914)*, Genève, Droz, 2006; *Beckett et Descartes dans l’œuf. Aux sources de l’œuvre beckettienne: de Whoroscope à Godot*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2012.