LANGUAGE AND NEGATIVITY IN EUROPEAN MODERNISM

This book charts the history of a distinct strain of European literary modernism that emerged out of a radical reengagement with late nineteenth-century language skepticism. Focusing first on the literary and philosophical strands of this language-skeptical tradition, the book proceeds to trace the various forms of linguistic negativism deployed by European writers in the interwar and postwar years, including Franz Kafka, Georges Bataille, Samuel Beckett, Maurice Blanchot, Paul Celan, and W. G. Sebald. Through close analyses of these and other writers’ attempts to capture an “unspeakable” experience, Language and Negativity in European Modernism explores the remarkable literary attempt to deploy the negative potentialities of language to articulate an experience of what, shortly after World War II, Beckett described as a vision of “humanity in ruins.”

Shane Weller is Professor of Comparative Literature and Co-Director of the Centre for Modern European Literature at the University of Kent. His publications include A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism (2005), Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity (2006), Literature, Philosophy, Nihilism: The Uncanniest of Guests (2008), and Modernism and Nihilism (2011). He is also the co-author (with Dirk Van Hulle) of two volumes in the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project series: The Making of Samuel Beckett’s ‘L’Innommable’/‘The Unnamable’ (2014) and The Making of Samuel Beckett’s ‘Fin de partie’/‘Endgame’ (2018).
LANGUAGE AND NEGATIVITY IN EUROPEAN MODERNISM

_Toward a Literature of the Unword_

SHANE WELLER

University of Kent
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