



Ill Seen Ill Said



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Samuel Barclay Beckett: Early Life

- Day of Birth: Arguably born on Good Friday. April 13, 1906. Beckett was raised in the middle class as a Protestant.
- Attended Portora Royal School
- Attended Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland from 1923-27. Earned a Master's degree in 1931.
- Beckett studied French and Italian literature. Beckett studied the French author Racine, Italian Dante, and German philosopher Schopenhauer.
- Beckett took a temporary teaching position in Paris, France at Ecole Normale Supérieure. Beckett's friend Thomas MacGreevy introduced him to James Joyce and Joyce's circle of literary friends.
- Beckett helped Joyce work what would later be called "Finnegan's Wake."
- His admiration of Joyce heavily influenced his writings.



Samuel Barclay Beckett: His Life

- Beckett returned to Ireland in 1930. He took a short-lived teaching position at Trinity College.
- Beckett traveled to Germany. He returned to Ireland in 1932.
- The death of his father in the summer of 1933 left Beckett severely depressed. He went to London to receive psychotherapy from Dr. Wilfred Bion for two years.
- Beckett permanently settled in Paris in 1937.
- His first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* was rejected by publishers.
- Stabbed by a panhandler in Paris in 1936. At a hospital he meets an acquaintance Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil

Samuel Barclay Beckett: His Life Continued

Beckett joined the French resistance in 1940.

- Samuel Beckett's mother died in August 25, 1950 after suffering from a long bout with Parkinson's Disease. It is thought her struggle with the disease influenced the old woman in *Ill Seen Ill Said*.
- Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot" earns him the first financial success and fame in his writing. This is the most famous of Beckett's plays.
- Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969
- In 1986 Beckett is diagnosed with emphysema, and moved into Le Tiers Temps nursing home.
- Beckett dies on December 22, 1989.



Published Works of Literature



- "Assumption" –published in 1929; this was the first short story Beckett wrote.
- *Echo's Bones and other Precipitates* (13 poems)- 1935
- "En Attendant Godot) aka "Waiting for Godot" -1952
- "Happy Days"-1961
- "Words and Music"-1962
- "Sans"-1969
- "Company"- 1980
- "Ill Seen Ill Said"-1981
- "Eleutheria"-1995

Beckett and France

- Moved to France in the 1930's and settled there permanently after WWII
 - Preferred “France at war to Ireland at peace”
- Beckett joins French resistance during WWII
 - Awarded Croix de guerre and the Médaille de la Résistance

Politics in France (1950's to Present)

- The Constitution of the Fifth Republic was adopted in 1958
 - Replaced a parliamentary system with a semi-presidential system
- In 1962 Charles de Gaulle, elected in 1958, proposes that the president should be entirely elected by the people of France
- The 50's and 60's were a tough period for France.
 - Colonies in Asia and Africa fought against France to claim their independence
 - Student revolts in 1968 and the fights against the colonies made the French system unpopular.
 - Led to the resignation of de Gaulle in 1969

Politics in France continued (Giscard and Mitterand)

- Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a right wing conservative, was elected in 1974
- He was an unpopular president despite economic growth and an ambitious Nuclear Energy Program
- “Within 26 months he lowered the French minimum voting age from 21 to 18, liberalized divorce laws and legalized abortion”
 - He received some support for this, but the economic issues clouded any good he tried to do
 - He was considered to be the Jimmy Carter of French politics by its people.
- The people saw him as an aristocrat despite initial efforts to humble his image.
 - The d'Estaing suffix was borrowed from an extinct noble line

Politics in France continued (election of 1981)


- When elected, unemployment rose from 441,000 in 1974 to 1.66 million under Giscard
- He was accused of running a monarchical-type government, which could be seen in the little power Parliament had while he was in office
- Giscard was originally seen as a “shoe in” until support rose for socialist, François Mitterrand
- When Mitterrand was elected in 1981, he abolished the death penalty, increased the minimum wage by 10%, enacted 5 weeks of holiday each year, increased social benefits, and extended workers rights through the Aurox Act.

Elements of the gothic

- Disembodied eye
 - Not a person, yet personified.
- A haunted house
 - Even the furniture is surrounded in death.
- Landscape
 - "How come a cabin in such a place? How came? Careful. Before replying that in the far past at the time of its building there was clover growing to its very walls. Implying furthermore that it the culprit. And from it as from an evil core that the what is the wrong word the evil spread" (8–9).
 - Moonlit night scenes



Gothic elements

- Infection
 - Repeatedly, the idea that things are “ill seen” is presented, thus things are “ill said.”
 - “For Beckett, seeing, that is, recognizing, the ill around and within us requires and enables a mode of saying, or writing, that reflects the illness rather than pretending to be sane, undisturbed, and undisturbing” (Riquelme 587).
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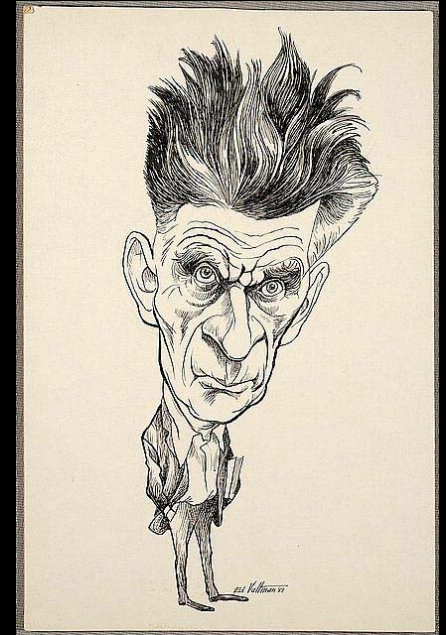
Ghosts

- The woman: a ghost with a haunting ritual.
 - She continually carries a wreath to a tomb.
 - She materializes at random.
 - Continually described as a part of the world and then as not.
 - Dead or not dead?
 - “No shock were she already dead. As of course she is. But in the meantime more convenient not” (Beckett 73).
- The eye itself is like a ghost that hunts and haunts.




The Horror

- “Beckett has always associated being seen with horror, as his motto for his film *Film 'esse est percipi'* ('to be is to be perceived') demonstrates” (Fraser 775).
 - “For Beckett, existence is horrific, and being apprehended in the gaze of the other—thus having one's existence confirmed—always induces a shiver of horror” (Fraser 775).





The Horror of being discovered

- “She raises her eyes and sees one. Turns away and sees another ... Are they always the same? Do they see her? Enough” (Beckett 52).
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Nohow On: The Non-Trilogy

Nohow On is comprised of three short novels written in the later period of Beckett's career: *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and *Worstward Ho*.

Ill Seen Ill Said is the only piece in the collection that was originally written in French then translated into English (by Beckett himself).

Beckett insisted on keeping the novels of *Nohow On* as separate entities in the same book, rather than collective trilogy.

- Felt that referring to *Nohow On* as a trilogy would influence readers' perception of the novels as interrelated.

The “Closed-Space” Tale

Beckett’s “closed space” tales mark a change in his writing style from motion to stillness.

- Narrator is a seeing and/or creating eye which is “saying the seeing”
 - “The eye rivets the bare window. Nothing in the sky will distract it from it more. While she from within looks her fill” (58).
- Language has a disintegrating quality; rather than creating images, the text seems to disassemble them.
 - “The hands. Seen from above. They rest on the pubis intertwined. Strident white. Their faintly leaden tinge killed by the black ground. Suspicion of lace at the wrists” (66).
- Reduces narrative time to points of space
 - “Incontinent the void. The zenith. Evening again. When not night it will be evening. Death again of deathless day. On the one hand embers. On the other ashes. Day without end won and lost. Unseen” (72).

On Things “Ill Seen” and “Ill Said”

In an interview once, Beckett said that James Joyce was “tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance.”

“The peculiar babble of Beckett's monologue, its consistent and abrupt dislocations and deflations reflect the speaking voice's repeated attempt-and repeated failure-to articulate what it perceives or imagines, to achieve coherence out of what is ill seen and can only be, at best, ill said” (Perloff, “Between Verse and Prose: Beckett and the New Poetry ”)

- In other words, the cyclical nature of the language reinforces the “impotence” that Beckett strives to achieve, which is the inability to accurately convey what is perceived by the narrator (the all-seeing eye).

Ill Seen Ill Said: Prose or Poetry?

Vignette

A brief verbal description of a person, place, etc.; a short descriptive or evocative episode in a play, etc. (*OED*)

“The long white hair stares in a fan. Above and about the impassive face. Stares as if shocked still by some ancient horror. Or by its continuance. Or by another. That leaves the face stonecold. Silence at the eye of the scream. Which say? I’ll say. Both. All three. Question answered” (Beckett 64).

Strophe

One of two or more metrically corresponding series of lines forming divisions of a lyric poem. (*OED*)

From where she lies
she sees Venus rise.

On.

From where she lies
when the skies are clear
she sees Venus rise
followed by the sun.

Then she rails at the source of all life.

On.

At evening when the skies are clear
she savors its star's revenge. (Perloff)

Of Note: There are no commas in *Ill Seen Ill Said*. There are also a lack of referents in each sentence. Is this just poetic license? Or is this an intentional means for the narrative to distort the concepts of time and identity?

What the Critics Say

“*Ill Seen Ill Said* is one of the greatest prose works of this century, a heartbreakingly beautiful meditation on an old woman living out her last days alone in an isolated cottage, watched over by twelve mysterious sentinels who at a fixed distance ring the cottage.” (John Banville 1996)

“This brief... late work is one of Beckett's finest achievements, a beautiful, lucent and moving meditation on old age and death.” (John Banville 1998)

“...written in short declarative bursts, with few sudden jumps in time or place. [The subjects in *Ill Seen Ill Said*] are universal: sickness, decrepitude, death...composed in a deliberate, testamentary style.” (Ben Sonnenberg, 1996)

A Little Bit More from the Critics

“the prose of Beckett's final years has a texture all its own. Cool, remote and without a word wasted, this is language working as hard as it can to play out its own downfall. Texts such as...Ill Seen Ill Said... represent some of the most adventurous writing in English of the modern era, as words ebb out in sentences of lunar beauty and self-confounding poise.” (Tim Martin 2009)

“In works such as Ill Seen Ill Said, the supposed desire for purity of utterance led Beckett to cultivate a bare, haunting and haunted style, in which language is pitilessly starved of prolixity and adornment but obstinately refuses to die.” (Tim Martin 2010)

Beckett Today

- Commonly brought up in discussions about minimalism
- The Beckett on Film Project (2001): all 19 of his plays filmed starring such actors as Julianne Moore and Jeremy Irons.



The comprehensive cinematic interpretation of Beckett's plays.

BECKETT ON FILM
19 FILMS X 19 DIRECTORS

DVD VIDEO

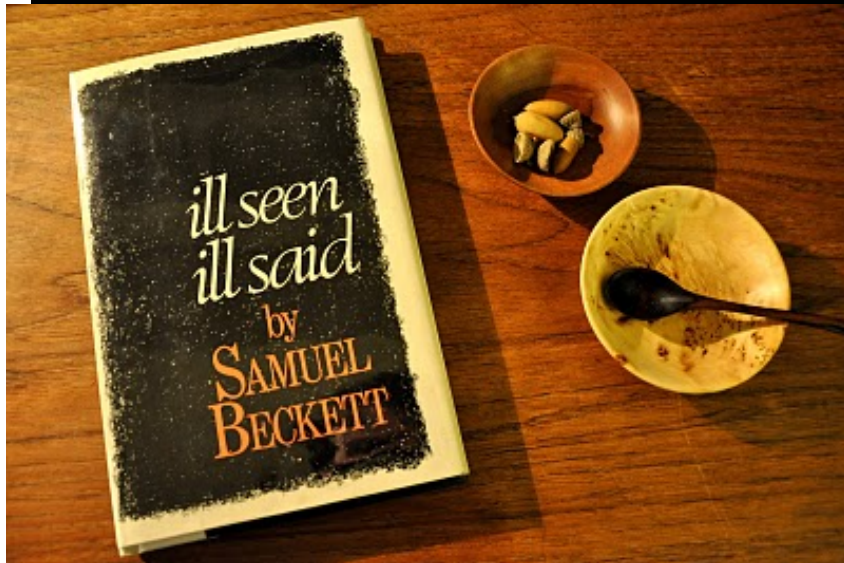
The DVD cover features a grid of 19 small film stills, each representing a different play by Samuel Beckett. The stills are arranged in a 4x5 grid, with the bottom-right cell empty. The plays shown are: Waiting for Godot, Not I, Rough for Theatre I, Ohio Impromptu, Documentary, Krapp's Last Tape, What Where, Footfalls, Come and Go, Act Without Words I, Happy Days, Catastrophe, Rough for Theatre II, Breath, That Time, Endgame, Act Without Words II, A Piece of Monologue, Play, and Rockaby. The cover also includes the DVD Video logo, the title 'BECKETT ON FILM', and the subtitle '19 FILMS X 19 DIRECTORS'.

More Beckett Today

- April 13, 2006: Ireland mints its first gold coin to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth.



- Samuel Beckett Bridge was commissioned in 1998 and opened to the public December 10, 2009. It is shaped like the Irish harp.



- Blog was started in March 2007
- Authored by Jane Flanagan
- Born and raised Dublin, Ireland

- “When I started blogging I didn't want to write long meandering posts and only wanted to include what would be deeply expressive. But no matter how hard I try, I always have a feeling of inadequacy when it comes to expressing myself. I'm compelled to give utterance to thoughts and feelings and at the same time words and pictures - even at their most beautiful - seem like such an anemic representation of our inner world. Hence, Ill Seen, Ill Said.” -Jane Flanagan

Dårligt set dårligt
sagt -- Hammerdrone

