

Beckettian motifs in 'From an abandoned work'

The following list of Beckettian motifs, from the Grove Press edition of 'From An Abandoned Work' (in *First love and other shorts*, 1974), has been compiled by the editorial board of *The index of Beckettian motifs*, an ongoing project for the indexing of recurring elements in the Beckett canon. We have selected those motifs which we consider to be distinctly Beckettian, and several assumptions are made in doing so. The motifs are clustered around general headings, such as perception, language, motion, etc., but will not be indexed more formally until several other short works have been annotated. The list is designed to build on; as other works are examined and other entries added, the list will expand and eventually divide into headings, subheadings, etc., according to accepted taxonomical procedures. We are concerned with *Beckettian* habits of mind, recurring features that identify the thematic and stylistic directions the work takes, and that clarify or exemplify the world view of Beckett's characters. No attempt has been made here to list every occurrence of every feature — that work belongs to a computerized concordance — nor do we concern ourselves with lists of proper names, medical references, anatomical references, or other such specialized compilations. We invite comment from readers, especially in the following categories.

- a) additional entries to already named categories;
 - b) additional categories the reader considers distinctly Beckettian;
 - c) comments on the validity of the term and the notion of 'Beckettian motif';
 - d) comments on the usefulness of the eventual projected index, as described above, in the preceding article, and in the Index notice published in the Summer, 1978 issue of *JOBS* (p.132);
 - e) interest in joining the project as editor or contributor.
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1. *ESSE EST PERCIPI* ('TO BE IS TO BE PERCEIVED')
49.26: '... fall and vanish from view, you could lie there for weeks and no one hear you, I often thought of that up in the mountains ...'
 2. UNRELIABILITY OF PERCEPTIONS
39.17: 'at a distance often they seemed still, then a moment later they were upon me'.
& 39.09, 40.5, 40.17, 41.1

3. DREAMING
45.25: 'Where did I get it, from a dream, or a book . . .'
& 42.26, 46.24
4. FIGURES BLURRED BY DISTANCE OR PROXIMITY
41.8: 'It crossed my path a long way off, then vanished, behind greenery I suppose, all I noticed was the sudden appearance of the horse, then disappearance.'
& 40.11, 40.29
5. SCRUTINY OF PHYSICAL OBJECTS
39.8: 'So back with bowed head on the look out for a snail, slug or worm.'
& 39.18
6. PERCEPTION OF WHITENESS
41.14: 'White I must say has always affected me strongly, all white things, sheets, walls and so on, even flowers, and then just white, the thought of white, without more.'
& 40.8, 40.13, 40.29, 41.2, 41.12, 42.28, 43.8, 46.1, 46.15
7. LOOKING AT SKY
47.17: ' . . . my eyes wide open straying over the sky.'
& 39.18, 43.17
8. FAINT SOUNDS
40.6: ' . . . I heard faintly her cries.'
9. ATTRITION AND LOSS OF SENSES
40.9: ' . . . piercing sight I had then . . .'
& 49.12
10. GOING ON, GETTING ON
45.1: ' . . . How shall I go on another day? and then, How did I ever go on another day?'
& 39.8, 40.24, 41.17, 42.11, 43.8, 44.8, 45.13, 45.18, 46.3, 47.3, 47.20, 47.27, 48.12, 48.26, 49.28
11. GOALLESS JOURNEY
39.25: ' . . . I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way.'
& 43.18
12. EXPULSION FROM HOME
43.18: ' . . . in the morning out from home . . .'
& 39.2
13. INABILITY TO STOP AND START: INERTIA
47.7: ' . . . then stand in the middle of the room unable to move . . .'
& 39.23, 40.22, 43.9, 48.13
14. PREFERENCE FOR STILLNESS
39.10: 'Great love in my heart too for all things still and rooted . . .'
15. BOODIES IN CLOSED PLACES
49.20: ' . . . I just sink down again and disappear in the ferns, up to my waist they were . . .'
16. ODD WALKS
42.5: 'Perhaps I should mention here I was a very slow walker, I didn't dally or loiter in any way, just walked very slowly, little short steps and the feet very slow through the air.'
17. ARTIFICIAL LIMBS: CANES, CRUTCHES, ETC.
47.1: 'My stick of course, by a merciful providence, I shall not say this again, when not mentioned my stick is in my hand, as I go along.'
& 49.18
18. FALLING, STUMBLING, TRIPPING
47.11: ' . . . I just sank to my knees to the ground and then forward on my face, a most extraordinary thing . . .'
& 39.15, 39.23, 45.13, 47.19, 49.25
19. CHANGE OF DIRECTION
44.8: ' . . . the slow turn, wheeling more and more to the one or other hand, till facing home . . .'
& 39.8, 39.25, 39.29, 40.20, 43.17
20. POSTURES AND POSITIONS
39.2: ' . . . mother hanging out of the window . . .'
& 39.8, 47.11, 49.26
21. POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGATIVE EVENTS
42.17: 'Fortunately my father died when I was a boy . . .'
& 44.11, 45.15
22. NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD NORMAL EVENTS
39.1: ' . . . I was young then, feeling awful . . .'
23. SOLACE IN ATTRITION
48.5: ' . . . All past and gone . . . so that I gather up my things and go back into my hole, so bygone they can be told.'
& 49.4
24. PAIN AS PROOF OF EXISTENCE
42.3: 'There was a time I tried to get relief by beating my head against something . . .'
25. BLEEDING, SIGNS OF INJURY, ETC.
39.17: ' . . . I have gone through great thickets, bleeding, and deep into bogs . . .'
& 46.15
26. LIVING A BOTHER
46.8: 'So on to this second day and get it over and out of the way . . .'
& 43.6, 46.12, 47.29

27. AGEING, BEING OLD
43.12: 'Now I am old and weak . . .'
& 44.22, 48.2
28. LONGING FOR REST
48.26: 'But let us get on and leave these old scenes and come to these, and my reward'.
& 39.9, 40.1, 40.3, 40.13, 42.21, 43.6, 45.10, 48.9, 49.15
29. DEATH
40.1: 'And that is perhaps how I shall die at last if they don't catch me, I mean drowned, or in fire, yes, perhaps that is how I shall do it at last, walking furious headlong into fire and dying burnt to bits'.
& 43.10, 44.21, 45.2, 45.20, 46.15, 48.1, 49.1
30. SUDDEN MOOD CHANGES
41.19: ' . . . suddenly I flew into a most savage rage . . .'
31. SANITY QUESTIONED
39.12: ' . . . not for the world when in my right senses would I ever touch one . . .'
& 44.18, 44.27
32. DUALITIES
44.29: 'In twos often they came, one hard on the other . . .'
& 48.3
33. THINKING AN EFFORT
42.19: 'A very fair scholar I was too, no thought, but a great memory'.
& 41.29
34. CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS REDUCED OR FUTILE
41.29: ' . . . there's no accounting for it, there's no accounting for anything . . .'
& 41.7
35. POOR MEMORY
47.17: 'Now was this my first experience of this kind . . .'
36. REFLECTIONS ON GUILTY PAST
44.21: 'My father, did I kill him too as well as my mother . . .'
& 43.13
37. DISTASTE FOR PROLIFERATION
39.10: ' . . . bushes, boulders and the like, too numerous to mention . . .'
38. DITCHES, FURROWS, HOLES, BOGS, MUD
48.21: ' . . . the ragged old brute bent double down in the ditch . . .'
& 39.28, 49.24
39. SLUGS, SNAILS, WORMS, ETC.
39.15: ' . . . a slug now, getting under my feet, no, no mercy'.
& 39.8, 45.23
40. SEAS, BEACHES, STRANDS, ETC.
39.28: ' . . . water too, even the sea in some moods . . .'
41. WEATHER
39.4: 'The sky would soon darken and rain fall and go on falling
42. ETERNAL PRESENT TIME
47.25: 'So in some way even olden things each time are first things, no two breaths the same, all a going over and over and all once and never more'.
43. IMPERFECT COMMUNICATION, INABILITY TO EXPRESS
43.27: 'My mother was the same, never talked, never answered
& 40.15, 41.22, 41.25, 42.27, 43.24, 43.26
44. SELF-CONSCIOUS NARRATOR
46.2: ' . . . please read again my descriptions of these . . .'
& 40.24, 41.17, 42.2, 43.8, 44.22, 45.10, 46.18, 47.2, 47.27, 48.26, 49.25
45. DISEMBODED VOICE
49.7: ' . . . the voice that once was in your mouth'.
& 43.13, 43.20
46. FAILURE OF SEMIOTIC GESTURE
40.5: ' . . . my mother still in the window waving, waving me back or on I don't know, or just waving, in sad helpless love . . .'
47. REVERSAL OF READER EXPECTATION
39.3: 'Nice fresh morning, bright too early as so often. Feeling really awful, very violent'.
& 39.2, 42.17, 44.10, 45.15
48. ARBITRARY SELECTION OF EVENTS
40.25: ' . . . the day I have hit on to begin with, any other would have done as well . . .'
& 46.25, 47.22
49. VAGUE ANTECEDENT
40.1: 'And that is perhaps how I shall die at last if they don't catch me . . .'
& 39.13, 43.15
50. GRAMMATICAL ELISIONS
40.27: 'Well then for a time all well, no trouble, no birds at me . . .'
& 39.6, 39.9, 41.17, 42.23, 43.15, 43.24, 44.7, 45.3, 46.23, 49.22

51. ODD NEGATIONS
 49.27: . . . I often thought of that up in the mountains, no, that is a foolish thing to say . . .
 & 41.25, 44.25, 46.6, 49.17, 49.20
52. ODD VOCABULARY
 42.15: . . . vent the pent, that was one of those things I used to say . . .
 & 43.4, 43.23, 46.11, 47.25
53. RHYMING, ALLITERATION, ASSONANCE
 45.25: . . . or a book read in a nook when a boy . . .
 & 42.15, 39.11
54. OTHER LANGUAGES
 41.2: . . . the only completely white horse I remember, what I believe the Germans call a Schimmel . . .
 & 48.13

The following scholars contributed directly to this compilation:

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Four saints in two acts: a note on the Saints Macarius and the canonization of Gogo and Didi

Lois Friedberg-Dobry

There are some obvious explanations (in Beckett's terms, that is), for the choice of St Macarius' Day as the starting point of Mercier and Camier's journey — 'Macarius' begins with Beckett's favorite letter, 'M' (or, for that matter, with 'Mac' to give it a proper Irish flavour), and its meaning — 'happy' in Greek — is an ironic comment on the condition of Mercier and Camier. The outlook of St Macarius the Elder would certainly appeal to Beckett, for the saint taught that we must not be moved by reproach or praise. Beckett's work, of course, is full of such obscure, erudite references. In the main, they are specific, ironic comments on the distance between the unnameable situation of his characters and the world of 'ivory tower' knowledge. There are, however, some references, such as those to Descartes and Gaullinck, which have wide reverberations in his work. It seems reasonable to ask, therefore, if there are any further ironic resonances and parallels in Beckett's writing to the lives of the five saints named Macarius, who are listed in *Butler's lives of the Saints*.

We know from Camier's notebook that his appointment with Mercier was on Monday 15, St Macarius.¹ St Marcarus the Elder is the only one of the five whose Day falls on the fifteenth of a month (January), and he is the most important of these saints. St Macarius the Elder once made a journey with St Macarius the Younger, and, since they were contemporaries who led very similar lives, they would seem a likely pair to be contrasted with Mercier and Camier. These two happy saints present ironic parallels to many of Beckett's faltering pairs as well — they were silent for long periods of time (an approximation, at least, to the ultimate goal of Beckett's work), rather than trying to overcome silence; they performed miracles of abstinence, rather than being forever waylaid by the need for food and drink; they prayed constantly to God for help, rather than denying the possibility of help. Since happiness is the distinguishing characteristic of the two saints, there may be a closer parallel to Gogo and Didi — who are similar to Mercier and Camier in so many ways. For Godot is punctuated by discussions of whether or not Gogo and Didi are happy, while Mercier and Camier seem to have relegated happiness to the past. Gogo's disgust with his enforced abstinence is an ironic parallel to the saints' willing austerities, and the

1. *Mercier and Camier*, New York, Grove Press, 1974, p.13.