

MODERN CLASSICS



Read by
Sean Barrett

Samuel Beckett **The Unnamable**

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UNABRIDGED

| | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1 | Where now? Who now? When now? | 3:39 |
| 2 | Malone is there. | 3:40 |
| 3 | Let us try and see where these considerations lead. | 5:11 |
| 4 | That I am not stone deaf is shown... | 4:30 |
| 5 | Why did I have myself represented... | 3:13 |
| 6 | The other advances full upon me. | 3:31 |
| 7 | Perhaps it is time I paid a little attention... | 3:40 |
| 8 | How, in such conditions, can I write... | 3:30 |
| 9 | I hope this preamble will soon come to an end... | 4:53 |
| 10 | I, of whom I know nothing... | 3:22 |
| 11 | Can I keep nothing then... | 4:21 |
| 12 | I'll ask no more questions... | 3:54 |
| 13 | But this is thinking again. | 3:51 |
| 14 | But now, is it I now, I on me... | 3:57 |
| 15 | But let us first suppose... | 4:52 |
| 16 | Let the man explain himself... | 3:40 |
| 17 | Labyrinthine torment that can't be grasped... | 3:33 |
| 18 | And yet sometimes it seems... | 3:47 |
| 19 | But obstacles, it appears, can be removed... | 4:09 |
| 20 | In the evening, after supper... | 3:53 |
| 21 | This touching picture of my situation... | 3:48 |

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| 22 | From that moment on... | 5:02 |
| 23 | So let us consider now what really occurred. | 4:31 |
| 24 | What is strange is... | 4:02 |
| 25 | I might as well tell another of Mahood's stories... | 5:02 |
| 26 | I hope this gives a fair picture... | 5:11 |
| 27 | This story is no good... | 4:13 |
| 28 | Wrong again, wrong again... | 5:29 |
| 29 | The last step! | 5:10 |
| 30 | Yes, I feel the moment has come... | 4:17 |
| 31 | Two labours then... | 4:45 |
| 32 | On now to serious matters... | 4:15 |
| 33 | Worm, worm, it's between the three of us... | 4:26 |
| 34 | What is there to add, to these particulars? | 5:10 |
| 35 | But enough of this cursed first person... | 4:09 |
| 36 | I shall now sum up. | 1:51 |
| 37 | Hours have passed... | 4:32 |
| 38 | Others. One alone, then others. | 3:48 |
| 39 | Ah if only they could begin... | 3:34 |
| 40 | Where am I? | 4:51 |
| 41 | But one thing at a time. | 3:21 |
| 42 | Of what is it the time to speak? | 5:47 |

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| 43 | But let us close this parenthesis... | 4:10 |
| 44 | He's coming, that's the main thing. | 2:47 |
| 45 | They look, to see if he has stirred. | 4:03 |
| 46 | It is strange they do not go... | 3:26 |
| 47 | But the eye, let's leave him his eye... | 4:42 |
| 48 | But Worm suffers only from the noise... | 4:31 |
| 49 | Some simple thing, a box... | 3:54 |
| 50 | But what calm, apart from the discourse... | 4:10 |
| 51 | Is there then no hope? | 5:54 |
| 52 | Forward! | 4:22 |
| 53 | Perhaps they are somewhere there... | 3:03 |
| 54 | But a little animation now... | 5:05 |
| 55 | But this isn't Worm speaking. | 2:51 |
| 56 | But how can you think and speak... | 4:08 |
| 57 | This will never end... | 3:32 |
| 58 | Oh I know... | 5:41 |
| 59 | But come to think of it... | 4:50 |
| 60 | How all comes right in the end... | 3:22 |
| 61 | And now for the it, I prefer that... | 3:45 |
| 62 | Go mad, yes... | 2:43 |
| 63 | The fact is they no longer know... | 4:47 |

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| 64 | ...I hear them... | 4:11 |
| 65 | ...it's a lie, what would I understand with... | 5:21 |
| 66 | But I really mustn't ask... | 4:48 |
| 67 | Yes, but there it is... | 4:06 |
| 68 | No no, no head either... | 4:12 |
| 69 | Now, there is no one left. | 4:01 |
| 70 | And yet I have memories... | 4:00 |
| 71 | But it didn't happen like that... | 3:28 |
| 72 | But once again the fable... | 5:13 |
| 73 | I notice one thing... | 4:58 |
| 74 | Someone speaks, someone hears... | 4:03 |
| 75 | He must have travelled... | 5:14 |
| 76 | The silence, a word on the silence... | 3:44 |
| 77 | They love each other... | 2:19 |
| 78 | The silence... | 3:57 |
| 79 | But when it falters... | 4:21 |
| 80 | I know it well. | 3:34 |
| 81 | The place, I'll make it all the same... | 4:10 |
| 82 | ...I must be extremely old... | 6:42 |

Total time: 5:45:19

Samuel Beckett

The Unnamable

The Unnamable is the final part and, in the opinion of most of Samuel Beckett's admirers, the crown of what has become known as *The Beckett Trilogy*. The first two novels, *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, are very different from each other, and differ from *The Unnamable* as well, both in style and content of storyline, but they are nevertheless all connected by intertextual references and by the Beckettian view of the world, of human destiny and of the nature of humanity, coloured above all by his wartime experiences. Seen as a whole *The Beckett Trilogy* is possibly the greatest work of literary fiction of the twentieth century, rivalled only by James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Proust's great autobiographical novel *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

The trilogy was written concurrently with other major Beckett works, most notably his most famous play *Waiting For Godot*, during the two-year span 1947-1949 when the author believed that a tumour in his cheek was probably cancerous and would soon end his life, although in the end it turned out to be benign. A member of the French

Resistance during the war and wanted by the Gestapo, he had escaped from Paris to a little hilltop village, Roussillon in the Vaucluse, where he hid, worked for a local farmer, took part in guerrilla activities with the Maquis and had time to reflect and write until liberation came. His wartime experiences and his observation of how people behaved, some with servility, a few heroically, under the German occupation, were crucial in transforming the clever young pre-war Irish writer, well-versed in European literature and enthusiastically devoted to Joyce, into the most devastatingly original and significant writing artist of his time, able to show his readers the harsh realities of the world we have made for ourselves and what it is like to live and die in it.

A moral and compassionate message is always implicit in Beckett's work, while the power and the beauty of the language that he forged to carry that message was unlike anything written before. Many books are pouring out of the academic world that studies his work, and they demonstrate how

many levels can be found in it. But reading Beckett (and, where this recording is concerned, hearing him) does not need outside help: often it discourages the reader or listener from simply enjoying the work for what it is. The work is straightforward enough to entertain the average intelligent person who does not need to follow the often arcane references and unusual words. There is a reason for all these to be there but investigation by further reading is only necessary for those interested enough to delve below the surface for deeper meanings or to read what others have discovered when writing their commentaries. Beckett did not write to be studied, but simply to set down what he knew from experience, what human life is and how to cope with it. In spite of the underlying seriousness of his work, Beckett is a very entertaining writer, often highly comic, and his humour works in the same way as Shakespeare's, the writer to whom he is increasingly compared. Both bring high comedy into even their most tragic works because humour is cathartic, giving relief from something terrible while paradoxically deepening our understanding. The humour adds to the richness, which can be appreciated on many levels. Looking for

deeper meanings is unnecessary for enjoyment, but those who do look will find much additional reward.

Beckett studied Dante's *Divine Comedy* at Dublin's Trinity College with great intensity and the three volumes of the trilogy in many ways mirror that work. The characters move from the living world we know to a state of waiting to die and then into an afterworld that has elements of Limbo and Purgatory with suggestions of Hell, but hardly Heaven, which would require a benevolent God, which the author could nowhere perceive. In *Molloy* we are given a story about two quests, that of a lost vagrant trying to find his way home to the maternal home and, one might assume, to the security and innocence of a remembered comfortable childhood; and secondly of an incompetent detective who looks for Molloy on the orders of a never visible superior, who might well be the God of the Old and New Testaments.

Malone Dies describes a man waiting to die, telling himself stories to pass the time, and the stories end with macabre murders committed by a character who seems to have come straight from Hell.

The tone of the trilogy's narrative is very different when we come to *The Unnamable*.

Like the first two novels it is told in the first person. The narrator is not sure where he is, who he is or why he is. He might have just died and found himself in another world – the most common assumption – but it hardly matters. He might be in a dream state, but gradually he gets used to it, asking questions, recognising others, not only from earlier parts of the trilogy but from Beckett's earlier novels as well, all passing each other as if in a fog. The narrator finds himself going through his speculations under a gradual metamorphosis, changing names himself and calling others by different names, imagining episodes, remembering past events, speculating about the future, about a possible judgment day, about the presence of God, but mostly about his own future. It might almost have been written to be read aloud, catching the nuances of the thinking mind and the change of tone from random speculation to storytelling to desperate panic. It is a compulsive voice, asking questions, seeking answers without expecting to find them, always a little surprised at its own ability to reason and to keep going.

The Unnamable has an ending that suggests two things. The voice is degenerating into desperation, trying to

keep out an encroaching silence, desperate to continue. But, in spite of the panic and all the doubts about what is coming next, there is a note of hope. It is as if the novel were circular and would end where it began, and if the thinking, questioning voice was about to enter a new existence, like a reincarnation. Certainly there is no resignation, no acceptance that the end has come at last. The key word in so many of Beckett's texts is 'ON'. It is the last word in this novel and it occurs in each of the last three sentences.

Having spent the war years in Roussillon, Beckett spoke only French during that time and, being already fluent since his university days, he began to write in French after more or less finishing his philosophical comic novel *Watt* in English. *Watt* was the end of the early period of his career, set in Ireland, beholden to Joyce, a jumble of styles and false starts, hilarious in its absurdities, full of caustic comment, but highly readable with tragedy always just behind the comedy. The publication of *Watt* came after the trilogy, set aside while he pursued a new vision and a new style during the concentrated two years when he thought he had cancer. During those two years he not only created the masterpieces for which he is best

known, but developed what is almost a new language. When during the next decade he translated the novels and plays written in the late forties into English, he transformed that language as he had the French, describing both human life, seen absurdly as tragi-comedy and as a dreamlike state of being, in flowing monologues with little punctuation, that are based on the way the mind thinks, constantly diverted into different directions by a stream-of-consciousness technique that other writers had used before him, but never so effectively.

The Unnamable can hardly be described, it is so unlike any other work of fiction. The main character seems to be The Unnamable himself, but also not to be; certainly he is not God, although another 'Unnamable' may be. Not only does he meet others, but he turns into them and he names and renames those he meets so that the fluidity of the thinking mind is mirrored in the fluidity of personages that merge and separate. What the reader and listener will find most enjoyable, however, is not trying to identify the characters, but, in digesting the episodes that, in spite of their way of melting into other episodes, are complete enough in themselves to be relished as

serious or comic or philosophical or fanciful stories. Each explores a concept, a dilemma, an anecdote or an impulse. Everyday things are seen in a new light, often with brilliant insight, and some are very funny. It is the flow of the unending voice that is important, not knowing what it is, but at least existing and wanting to continue to do so. *The Unnamable* can be read in episodes, chuckled over, returned to at intervals and one will never tire of it. It can change its voice, its tone, its subject matter, leave questions in the reader's mind, many or most of them unanswerable, but interesting nonetheless. Hearing the experienced voice of Sean Barrett reading, brings the text dramatically to life, for Beckett works superbly when spoken aloud, and Barrett is one of the most experienced and potent of the many actors who have performed or recorded Beckett's writings.

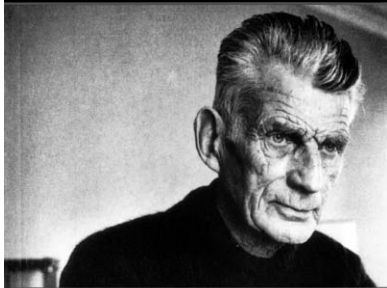
Some may complain that they cannot understand *The Unnamable*, but they should ask themselves how well they understand not only their own lives, but what they see when they look out at the world; how they interpret what they see, little of which could be understood anyway; and especially how they think themselves, what makes them think, what they think about and why; and

how they separate what they know from everyday events, from what they know from dreams. We all receive information which we might believe or not. We remember some things and forget others and seldom know why.

In writing this book, not knowing if it would ever be published, and totally ignoring every norm of literary creation, Samuel Beckett accomplished a work of intellectual heroism to match his physical bravery during the war years when, a citizen of a neutral country that avoided the war, he threw in his lot with his artistic French friends to fight the tyranny of the Nazis and everything they stood for. The more *The Unnamable* is explored the more can be found in it, and the more we wonder at its success in overcoming every hurdle it encountered before it was recognised as the extraordinary masterpiece it is. It has been successfully performed by leading actors as a monologue on stage. Now it can be heard in the home as well.

Notes by John Calder

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SAMUEL BECKETT



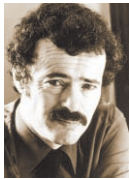
JOHN CALDER

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Samuel Beckett

The Unnamable

The Unnamable is the final part and, in the words of his friend and publisher John Calder, the crown of what has become known as 'The Beckett Trilogy'. The narrator is not sure where he is, who he is or why he is. He might have just died and found himself in another world, but it hardly matters. He changes his name, calls others by different names, imagines episodes, remembers events, speculates about the future. The tone changes from storytelling to desperate panic. It is one of the most compulsive voices in literature – brought to life here in extraordinary fashion by Sean Barrett.



Sean Barrett started acting as a boy on BBC children's television in the days before colour, when it went out live. He grew up through *Z Cars*, *Armchair Theatre*, *Minder* and *Father Ted*. His theatre credits include *Peter Pan* at the old Scala Theatre and Noël Coward's *Suite in 3 Keys* in the West End. Films include *War & Peace*, *Dunkirk* and *A Cry from the Streets*. He was a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company. He also features in *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Voice of the Buddha* and *Canterbury Tales III* for Naxos AudioBooks.

Praise for *Molloy* (read by Dermot Crowley and Sean Barrett)
and *Malone Dies* (read by Sean Barrett):

'These novels cry out to be heard, not read' *Sue Arnold, The Guardian*
'Anyone approaching Beckett's fiction for the first time can do no better than
to get hold of these superb recordings' *John Banville, Irish Times*

THE UNNAMABLE was written as a separate novel, but is often regarded as the
third part of **The Beckett Trilogy**, preceded by **MOLLOY** and **MALONE DIES**.

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