



Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist

By Anthony Cronin

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Intensely private, possibly saintly, but perhaps misanthropic, Samuel Beckett was the most legendary and enigmatic of writers. Anthony Cronin's biography is a revelation of this mythical figure as fully human and fallible, while confirming his enormous stature both as a man and a writer. Cronin explores how the sporty schoolboy of solid Protestant bourgeois stock became a prizewinning student at Trinity, flirted with scholarship, and, in Paris, found himself at the center of its literary avant-garde as an intimate friend of James Joyce. But he was a young man who struggled with complexities in his own nature as well as with problems of literary expression. In the small provincial city of Kassel, Germany, the cosmopolitan Beckett experienced a faltering entanglement with his cousin—one of the first in a series of problematic encounters with women. The war years, which he spent as a member of the Resistance and a refugee in the South of France, brought Beckett the self-probings and discoveries that led to the great works. Then, with his sudden and astonishing fame, the balloons of myth began to inflate and a stereotype was born—frozen in exile and enigma, solemnity and sanctity. Anthony Cronin bursts these balloons to see more clearly what lies behind. Without moralizing or psychologizing, without pretensions or piety, he uncovers the real Beckett, the way the life was lived, the way the art was made.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Samuel Beckett has always been something of an enigma. Born and raised in Ireland, he moved to France as a young man and remained there, risking his life during the war in his work with the French Resistance. Kind, generous, and often funny in real life, his plays and novels are implacably dark, filled with despair, need, and isolation. In *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, biographer Anthony Cronin limns a deft portrait of the great writer using Beckett's letters, early fiction, and Cronin's own acquaintance with both his subject and several of Beckett's friends in Dublin. Taken together, these sources reveal a multifaceted man.

Beckett passed through many phases on his way to greatness: a French teacher at Dublin College, a member of the Paris circle that formed around James Joyce in the late 1920s, and later an active participant in the French Resistance. The years following World War II proved a fertile time in Beckett's creative life, encompassing his transition from the autobiographical to the modernist impersonal--perhaps his greatest works. Anthony Cronin admirably balances his portrayal of the man and the artist, rendering the details of Beckett's uneventful life and his rich imagination in a way that fleshes out the man even as it celebrates the genius.

From Library Journal

Following close on the heels of James Knowlson's tremendous recent biography of Beckett, *Damned to Fame* (LJ 9/15/96), Irish poet and broadcaster Cronin's opus (published in England last year) is an altogether different effort. While both start and end at the same place and are similarly lengthy, Cronin's work arrives at the writing of *Waiting for Godot* (1948) almost two-thirds of the way into his work, concentrating on Beckett's early "modernist" years, with excellent coverage of Vichy France; in contrast, Knowlson offers intensive focus on the writing and production of Beckett's plays. Cronin is a fluid, witty writer who does not refrain from inserting his own editorial comments into Beckett's story; nor does he idolize his subject. Beckett's liaison with Barbara Bray, who is Cronin's friend, is fully fleshed here, to the exclusion of other romances, the details of which Knowlson has reliably supplied. While Knowlson cracked every safe to fill in his portrait, Cronin conjures the spirit of the man; well worth the purchase for diehard fans. Amy Boaz, "Library Journal"

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Review

Cronin's vigorous narrative, deft characterization and fine flashes of critical insight make Beckett more accessible to the general reader. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, Morris Dickstein

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Randall Yang:

Do you have favorite book? Should you have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to understand everything in the world. Each publication has different aim or even goal; it means that reserve has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their time to read a book. These are reading whatever they have because their hobby is usually reading a book. How about the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, particular person feel need book whenever they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will require this Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist.

James Helm:

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