



Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist

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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