



Samuel Beckett

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.

Samuel Beckett Details

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From Reader Review Samuel Beckett for online ebook

Margaret says

This book opened my mind up to Sarte and Schopenhauer and instilled further regret that I did not visit Beckett in Paris in 1986

MJ Nicholls says

Cronin's Flann O'Brien bio, *No Laughing Matter*, was a superlative work. This bio, if not reaching similar heights, is liable to remain one of the tippest toppest studies of the moodiest modernist around. From Sam's meandering beginnings, mooching around his mother's house, waiting for the Second World War to make a writer of him, to his sluggish slouch towards success and worldwide acclaim, this bio leaves no crevice unprobed. The finest stretch of the bio is Sam's earlier years, to which Cronin devotes the most time, exploring his strained maternal relationship, his painful sexless romantic affairs, his time hanging with the James Joyce circle in Paris, and his excruciating rich-kid loafage. The latter half fails to devote critical attention to Sam's short plays and prose, some of which constitute his finest writings, stampeding towards the tense change with rather too much impatience. Otherwise, a singular étude.

Helen Tally says

Ff

Claire says

This started out as a very readable biography; however, occasionally quite speculative. While I was drawn to the book for the potential discussion of modernism, I abandoned the book when Cronin began to use fiction to fill in details of life. Yes an author can base a character on someone s/he knows, but s/he will most likely tweak details. Therefore to trek to biography from fiction is fraught with errors.

David Markwell says

A well written biography of a fascinating man.

Christopher Brennan says

One imagines Beckett might have offered - as Cronin says he did in regards to Ellmann's Oscar Wilde - that the current work "too long and too detailed, as indeed most modern biographies are." I hope Cronin includes

this thought on page 587 for its ironic value.

Cronin's book IS thorough. He takes us with detail from cradle to grave with few excursions that don't shed light on Beckett's development as a man and as a writer. Certainly worth the investment of time for someone already interested in Beckett the first third was - for me - a bit of a slog. Important perhaps in understanding Beckett's psychological foundation but beyond exhaustive and merely exhausting. Once Cronin gets into the time period he actually experienced of Beckett however the book has more energy and the pacing picks up.

Mike Feher says

Cronin is to be commended for providing an unmaudlin look at an artist's life which by all accounts is anything but. Beckett's various pains in the world - whether psychosomatic or real - are well-accounted for, and one cannot help but think that the shy and bitter recluse of Beckett was indeed reaching for a world in which he imagined some form of happiness for himself, but could not articulate it. Cronin (blessed with an excellent vocabulary which he uses to great effect to support the book but not cudgel the reader with, and whose favorite word seems to be "advert") takes the reader through the entire life and times, baffling and depressing as they may be, of Beckett, and one is challenged to keep pace and follow his various locales (Ireland, France, Germany, and the United States) and the various characters who enter into Beckett's milieux. Of particular interest to this reader is Beckett's *entrée* into the circle of Joyce acolytes. While at times dry and abstract in a Schillervision sort of way (leaving the reader puzzling at the meaning of it all), the book is a hearty treatise on Beckett's life and works and I highly recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about the inscrutable expatriate author of books, plays, and other dramatic works often featuring abstractions such as people buried up to their necks or talking mouths.

A worthwhile read, now over, go on nohow to your next book.

James says

Beckett as a man, not Beckett the Nobel Prize Winning Writer... a in-depth and personal appraisal of Samuel Beckett's life and how it ultimately shaped his writings... covers aspects of Beckett glossed over or merely mentioned in other bios... almost a psychological/emotional evaluation and rendering of the man, with ample space utilized to chronicle his life choices and how they created the psyche that manifested itself in his writing and his writing style... at times awkward in what it tells, strange intimacies for such a private person, although it begs the question of which came first, Beckett the Writer (trumpets blaring, or bagpipes maybe?) or Beckett the Person, who then created the persona of the writer... regardless, his genius is evident, as is his breadth and understanding of scholarship as it applied to his craft... Cronin does well in bringing Beckett slightly more down to the rest of us, though Beckett still remains in some ways a mystery and an icon of literature...
