



# Samuel Beckett (Critical Lives)

*Andrew Gibson*

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The life of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) has been the subject of exhaustive scholarship, yet by contrast Beckett himself was a spare, minimalist writer who deeply distrusted the techniques of biography. In this new, concise, critical account of Beckett's life and work, Andrew Gibson seeks to remain faithful to the writer's artistic aims, staying close to Beckett's style of thought and work in his analysis of this supremely modern figure. Beckett's *Rockaby* ends with a resounding 'fuck life': Samuel Beckett takes as its touchstone the formidable Beckettian drive to give up on the world. Gibson locates the logic of Beckett's drive through an analysis of his responses to modern history, showing how Beckett came to have an unusually profound feeling for the *Zeitgeist*, and a power of conveying it unrivalled by any other contemporary artist. This book tracks Beckett's painful progress through the historical situations that defined his experience: Ireland after independence, Paris and the *École Normale Supérieure* in the late twenties, London in the thirties, Nazi Germany, Vichy France, the early years of the Fourth Republic, the Cold War and the triumph of Capital in the 1980s. It also analyses the (often muted and oblique) traces of and responses to these situations in a range of Beckett's works. As Gibson cogently argues, Beckett was devastated by modern history without being finally completely overpowered by it. He shows that Beckett espoused an extreme version of the Romantic doctrine that art is a criticism of historical forms of life, but also that Beckett's version is wryly ironical and perverse, for it stubbornly refuses to assume that life can ever say its final word.

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