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Proust

Samuel Beckett

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Proust

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Proust Samuel Beckett
Beckett wrote Proust in response to a commission precipitated by Thomas MacGreevy, Charles Prentice,& Richard Aldington. In retrospect, Beckett dismissed it as written in "cheap flashy philosophical jargon."The essay served double duty as its author's aesthetic and epistemological manifesto, proclaiming on behalf of its ostensible subject: "We cannot know and we cannot be known." In dense and allusive language, Beckett credited his current influences (notably Schopenhauer and Calderón) and forecast his future preoccupations, reading them into the prose of Marcel Proust: The laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit. Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness. Beckett went on to pinpoint his moral focus on the fundamental quandaries of human existence, disclaiming any involvement in social issues: Here, as always, Proust is completely detached from all moral considerations. There is no right and wrong in Proust nor in his world. (Except possibly in those passages dealing with the war, when for a space he ceases to be an artist and raises his voice with the plebs, mob, rabble, canaille.) Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organised by the knaves for the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'soci malorum,' the sin of having been born.

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