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EPITAPHS FOR A DYING VOICE:
NEW BOOKS ON BECKETT

Samuel Beckett. By Andrew K. Kennedy. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pp. xiv + 175. \$34.50.

Why Beckett. By Enoch Brater. London: Thames and Hudson, 1989. Pp. 144. \$19.95.

Two Beckett books in the year when the sixty-year career of our most renowned author drew slowly to an end. Samuel Beckett died on December 22, 1989, three days short of Christmas, reversing the myth of his birth on Good Friday, April 13, 1906. Good Friday's promise, at odds with the bad luck of Friday the 13th, yields the tragicomic mixture characteristic of six decades of novels, plays, and poems. The time has come to place Beckett's achievement in perspective. These two books, published just before his death, begin the task.

Juvenilia aside, the story begins in 1929. Lecteur d'anglais at l'Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, Beckett met James Joyce and published a short story, "Assumption," in the avant-garde *transition* and a first, epigonic work of criticism, "Dante. . .Bruno. Vico. . .on Joyce," in Joyce's *Our Exagmination on his Work in Progress*. He won a prize offered by Nancy Cunard's Hours Press for the best work on the subject of "time," the poem on Descartes, "Whoroscope," and published a still valuable critical study, *Proust*, in 1930-31. His career faltered in the mid-thirties with the still unpublished *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, a richly erudite if often inaccessible novel, parts of which were salvaged in Beckett's version of *Dubliners*, a collection of short stories entitled *More Kicks than Pricks* (1934). Then came difficult poems collected in *Echo's Bones* (1935), still best explicated by Lawrence E. Harvey in *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (1970), and a work of real