



Beckett's Art of Mismaking

Leland de la Durantaye

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Readers have long responded to Samuel Beckett's novels and plays with wonder or bafflement. They portray blind, lame, maimed creatures cracking whips and wielding can openers who are funny when they should be chilling, cruel when they should be tender, warm when most wounded. His works seem less to conclude than to stop dead. And so readers quite naturally ask: what might all this be meant to mean?

In a lively and enlivening study of a singular creative nature, Leland de la Durantaye helps us better understand Beckett's strangeness and the notorious difficulties it presents. He argues that Beckett's lifelong campaign was to mismake on purpose?not to denigrate himself, or his audience, nor even to reconnect with the child or the savage within, but because he believed that such mismaking is in the interest of art and will shape its future. Whether called "creative willed mismaking," "logoclasm," or "word-storming in the name of beauty," Beckett meant by these terms an art that attacks language and reason, unity and continuity, art and life, with wit and venom.

Beckett's Art of Mismaking explains Beckett's views on language, the relation between work and world, and the interactions between stage and page, as well as the motives guiding his sixty-year-long career?his strange decision to adopt French as his literary language, swerve from the complex novels to the minimalist plays, determination to "fail better," and principled refusal to follow any easy path to originality.

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