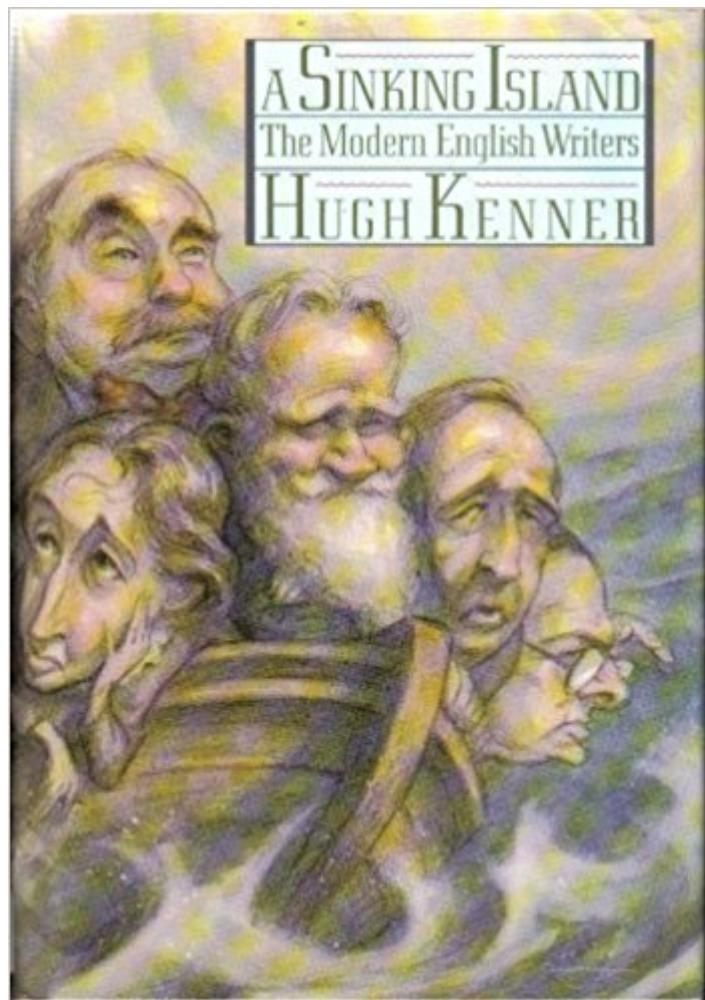


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A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers



Synopsis

Kenner's judgment is often harsh--he argues that in the last quarter of the twentieth century 'there's no longer an English literature'--but his book is a pure delight in its pungent, lively, and thoughtful amalgam of anecdote and critical analysis, detective work and celebration. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

Kenner rounds out the series of *Homemade World* and *Colder Eye* here by adding modern literature of England to his treatments of the period in the U.S. and Ireland. Of half a shelf of excellent, readable books (my favorite is *The Counterfeitors*, but a sentimental favorite is the wonderful chapbook on Chuck Jones), this one can hold its head up. It may be less interesting because it focuses on writers justly forgotten or marginalized... which is part of his point, that England has ceased to be the anchor point of "literature in English." What Kenner does here, lacing together appreciations of writers who perhaps should not be forgotten (Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis, Arnold Bennett, Basil Bunting) or should be re-assessed (He makes the case for *The Time Machine* as a errant masterpiece, demolishes the Woolf Cult, and skewers Lawrence's rampant sadofascism... the latter perhaps to be recalled by the feminists fulminating over the penultimate), is to analyze how the very idea of literature has been transformed in the last century. The connective in his fabric is an analysis of the conversion of literature into a commodity... symbolized neatly by *Everyman's Library*, which began as a get-rich-quick scheme, not a humanitarian service. What he

decries is not the democratization of literature, but the failure to recognize that reading is more than a motor skill. Those of us who cannot comprehend the folks who read a book "to see how it turns out" (and cannot be comprehended by the folks who can't imagine reading a book "again") will enjoy learning how we came to this pass... which is now closed by a landslide of mediocrity. Kenner was, for my taste, the great critic of my lifetime. Exasperatingly well-read, brilliantly intuitive, a master of exposition, he writes better, in some ways, than his subjects. And his polymath grasp of conjunctions is breathtaking. The Counterfeitors demolishes the claims of Cartesian logic using, among other things, lucid discussions of Buster Keaton. The Sinking Island is not the place to begin appreciating Kenner (and, with him, literature). But when you get there, you will be glad.

No, A Sinking Island is not Hugh Kenner's best book--that would be his seminal work on Ol' Ezra, The Pound Era. But what is not Kenner's best is still leagues better than the contemporary critical drivel which inspires the sort of screed condemned by "Old School" Borkland in his accompanying review. To which I say, not a bit bashfully, "me too."

A really interesting, well-written book about the early part of the 20th century and poets like Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Spender, Larkin. A joy to read, makes me want to read more of the famous Mr. Kenner, one of the truly great literary minds of our time.

Despite, elsewhere, the fulminating, froth-mouthed dismissal by some dear-but-overwrought little Brooklyn girl, "A Sinking Island" concerns, not Ginny Wolfe alone, but all of the major and plenty of minor British writers and literary figures in the lead up to, and subsequent drastic decline of English prose fiction since, the heyday of 20th century International Modernism. If you like Hugh Kenner's work -- he is himself, in prose style and attitude, by way of being the last great Modernist -- this is as cock-sure, meticulously knowledgeable, and scintillating as ever.

I'm a longtime Kenner fan who picked up this title at an Arizona book sale. Perfect condition, hardcover, with DJ and all vintage Kenner. I read it in two or three sittings by the pool. Naturally, it includes a number of his bang-on insights, while focusing on a few writers that surprise. I always enjoy HK's views on Eliot and FM Ford, tho I'm still not convinced that Charles Tomlinson was/is the heir apparent to the crown of modern poetry. Kenner wasn't a major fan of Virginia Woolf or WH Auden and it's hard to disagree with him there. OTOH, he champions Basil Bunting and that is only fitting. I now want to find a copy of Briggflats. Good old Hugh, RIP. Yes, Pound Era is better but

read this too. . .

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