Highlights from the Reviews of

The Letters of Samuel Beckett

Volume I: 1929–1940

“The most bracing read [of 2009] was The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume I: 1929–1940, a portrait of the Dubliner as a young European with a hard gemlike gift for language, learning and mockery … Constantly Beckett is veering between certainty about his need to write and doubt about the results, all expressed in prose that is undoubting, delighted and demanding.” Seamus Heaney, “Books of the year 2009,” The Times Literary Supplement

“This edition of letters has been annotated with knowledge and care, using vast research. It will, for the most part, please admirers of Beckett’s art and satisfy those who respect his wishes that only letters which have bearing on his work should appear.” Colm Toibín, The London Review of Books

“The editorial work behind this project has been immense in scale. Every book that Beckett mentions, every painting, every piece of music is tracked down and accounted for. His movements are traced from week to week. Everyone he alludes to is identified; his principal contacts earn potted biographies. When he writes in a foreign language, we are given both the original and an English translation … The standard of the commentary is of the highest … The Letters of Samuel Beckett is a model edition.” J. M. Coetzee, The New York Review of Books

“One of the highlights of the year was the publication of The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume I: 1929–1940 … Every page is a hoot. Beckett comes across as even smarter, and more smarting, than one already knew.” Paul Muldoon in “Books of the Year 2009,” The Times Literary Supplement

“Imagination Dead Imagine is the title of one of his late pieces, but the point is that the Beckettian imagination continued lively to the very end. In that letter to Axel Kaun he placed himself on ‘the road toward this, for me, very desirable literature of the non-word,’ but a few lines later he states his program with a contrary succinctness: ‘Word-storming in the name of beauty.’ The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume I: 1929–1940 is a preliminary record of that storm.” John Banville, The New Republic
“Can a writer’s letters – occasional and ephemeral as these tend to be – really qualify as great literature? In Beckett’s case, yes. For here is the most reticent of twentieth-century writers, one who refused to explain his plays and fictions, wrote almost no formal literary criticism, and refused to attend his own Nobel Prize ceremony – revealing himself in letter after letter as warm, playful, unfailingly polite even at his most vituperative and scatological, irreverent but never cynical, and, above all, a brilliant stylist whose learning is without the slightest pretension or preciousness.” Marjorie Perloff, Bookforum

“This edition … is a triumph. The introductory and supplementary material is well judged and helpful, the annotations and identifications are tirelessly thorough. The later Beckett declared that ‘every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness,’ but these letters are packed with wonderfully necessary words.” Stefan Collini, “Books of the Year 2009,” The Times Literary Supplement

“The editorial labor in this first volume is immensely impressive.” Denis Donoghue, The New Criterion

“The first volume of Beckett’s letters, The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume 1: 1929–1940 (Cambridge), was the funniest, most intelligent and most poignant book I read this year, and since three more volumes are promised by Cambridge University Press we should be moved and entertained for some years to come.” Gabriel Josipovici in “Books of the Year 2009,” The Times Literary Supplement

“This first of a promised four volumes (to include 2,500 out of a total 15,000 items of correspondence) represents already a heroic achievement by the editors who embarked on the project nearly a quarter of a century ago … Each letter has demanded a dense undergrowth of notes in minuscule print, providing information on every allusion, every reference, even acknowledging where such information has been sought but not found … The editorial team deserves all our thanks for their patience, their stamina and their scholarly rigour.” Nicholas Grene, The Irish Times

“An elating cultural moment is upon us. It is also a slightly surprising moment. Beckett, in his published output and authorial persona, was rigorously spare and self-effacing. Who knew that in his private writing he would be so humanly forthcoming? We always knew he was brilliant – but this brilliant? … The knowledge of what lay ahead for Beckett – the writing of the plays and the great prose fiction – makes one very impatient for the further volumes of letters, almost as if Beckett were in actual correspondence with oneself.” Joseph O’Neill, The New York Times Sunday Book Review and The International Herald Tribune
“Admirers of Samuel Beckett, arguably the greatest writer in English of the second half of the twentieth century, have grown used to waiting for Godot, who will surely come tomorrow or, just possibly, the day after. In the meantime, these similarly anticipated letters have quite definitely arrived, and in an edition more sumptuous than one ever imagined. Has any modern author been better served by his editors than Beckett?” Michael Dirda, The Washington Post

“An extraordinary work of scholarship . . . a revelatory triumph.” Tim Rutter, The Los Angeles Times

“Since Samuel Beckett was incapable of writing a duff sentence, the first volume of his letters, 25 years in the making, has been awaited with high anticipation.” Jonathan Bate, The Sunday Telegraph

“Judging by this exemplary inaugural selection, the overall enterprise promises to be an extraordinary commitment, not only to the scholarly virtues of patience, concentration and scrupulousness but to a deep sense of the cultural value of the writer as a twentieth-century avatar. . . . As Beckett himself said, in Proust: ‘We cannot know and we cannot be known.’ Even so, we must be grateful for the opportunity this magnificent work of scholarship provides to reflect on what there is to be known, and the conflicts and crises its subject underwent in his fidelity to the strange, demanding and all too human need to speak his mind.” George O’Brien, The Dublin Review of Books

“. . . the editorial team, with their astonishingly detailed annotations, are to be congratulated for making the life work of this heroically perverse illuminist a lot clearer.” Hugh Haughton, The Literary Review

“If volume one is any indication of the whole, we can expect three more thoroughly researched and professionally documented volumes, arranged yearly with handy chronologies, useful indexes, intelligent translations, clear introductions, large print, and helpful profiles of the main characters.” James McNaughton, Modernism/Modernity

“Compulsively readable, these letters from Samuel Beckett’s most prolific decade show up all the Irish master’s literary virtuosity and playfulness.” “Books of the Year,” The Economist

“I find it more & more difficult to write, even letters to my friends,’ Beckett wrote in 1936, midway through this volume. You would never know it from the natural grace and ease of these missives, which more than validate the editors’ statement in the introduction to this volume that Beckett ‘was one of the great literary correspondents of the twentieth century, perhaps of any century.’ His editors have done him justice by providing the fullest context imaginable, backed up by their impressive scholarship.” Martin Rubin, The Washington Times
“Here is the authentic early Beckettian tang, straight from the source, unmediated by artifice … Beckett’s strong language is one of the things that give the letters their pungency and drive; it is a testament also to the suppleness, rigour and strength of his writing that they don’t seem in any way dated, unless a wide frame of cultural reference is these days in itself passé … There are treasures upon treasures here.” Nicholas Lezard, The Guardian

“Anyone who knows a lot about Beckett will be thrilled to discover a great deal more from these pages. Readers who know little or nothing will get an incomparably in-depth introduction to his literary beginnings … The cornucopia of letters to come in the remaining three volumes, reflecting the mind behind the cornucopia of his major works over the subsequent five decades, should prove as well worth having waited for as the non-arrival of that enigmatic Monsieur Godot.” Michael Horovitz, The Times

“For Beckett enthusiasts, these letters are crammed with unexpected treasures … There will be three more volumes in this admirable series; the next will cover 1945 to 1956 (the year Waiting for Godot was first produced in Britain, and the unknown author suddenly became world-famous). Like Vladimir and Estragon, we fans will find it hard to wait.” Kevin Jackson, The Sunday Times
THE LETTERS OF SAMUEL BECKETT

Volume I The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1929–1940
Letter from Samuel Beckett to Georges Duthuit,
Wednesday 28 October [1948].
Duthuit collection.
THE LETTERS OF
SAMUEL BECKETT
Volume II: 1941–1956

George Craig, Editor and French Translator
Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Founding Editor
Dan Gunn, Editor
Lois More Overbeck, General Editor
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

If Volume I of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* began to give evidence to substantiate the editors’ claim that Samuel Beckett was one of the great literary correspondents of the twentieth century, Volume II, which is concerned with the period 1941–1956, is destined to render the claim irrefutable. For although there are few letters for the period 1941–1944, and not a single letter about the work, owing to Beckett’s circumstances during the War, the lack is more than compensated for by what follows. The post-War period is probably the richest in Beckett’s literary life, seeing him write, in a remarkably short time, much of the work for which he is most celebrated – *En attendant Godot*, *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L’Innommable*, as well as *Fin de partie*, and many shorter pieces (all those named being subsequently translated by him – either alone or with others – into English). Yet the intensity of Beckett’s literary production is practically matched by his letter-writing. While it might be imagined that the flurry of texts produced by Beckett in these years would leave little time or inclination for writing to friends and acquaintances, the exact opposite proves to be the case; almost as if the very withdrawal required for the writing of fiction and drama called for a supplement in the more immediately relational writing that is correspondence, directed as that is toward a single individual. For, surprising though it may seem in retrospect, it is the case that, through the first decade covered here, Beckett remained a writer largely unknown, unpublished, and un-produced. Indeed, one of the many fascinating insights offered by these letters is into a Beckett who must learn for the first time, in his late forties, to react to a large and increasingly enthusiastic public; into a Beckett for whom letters will therefore no longer be his only immediate way of connecting to others through written words.

The final letter of Volume I of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* was dated 10 June 1940, and was written from Paris only two days before Beckett chose to leave the city, four days before the German army entered and occupied it.¹ The four and a half years between this letter and the first letter presented in the body of the present volume, dated 17 January 1945, mark a major interruption in Beckett’s sixty years of epistolary writing. The reason for the hiatus will be obvious to a reading public aware as it now is that Beckett
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worked with the French Resistance, and had to go into hiding to save his life. However, the way in which Beckett’s wartime years came to bear on his letter-writing is likely to be one of the many things that readers of the current volume will speculate on, if only perhaps to wonder how far the range and urgency of his correspondence after the War was related to its dearth during it.

THE WAR YEARS

The editors, whose primary concern is the letters, clearly cannot ignore this long interruption. But the intricacies of Beckett’s movements during these years, and of the changing political scene, are such as to warrant a full historical account. As this is a general introduction to a volume of letters, mention will be made principally of individuals and events which affected Beckett the letter-writer either directly or indirectly through his friends and associates.

This period was one of many, often abrupt, moves for Beckett. He and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil left Paris on 12 June 1940, heading first to Vichy where they met James Joyce, as Beckett later recalled in a letter to Patricia Hutchins: “In 1940 I was for a few days with the Joyces at their hotel in Vichy and saw them leave for St. Gérard. It was the last time I saw him.” Through Joyce, Beckett arranged to borrow money from Valery Larbaud, before making his way with Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil to Toulouse, then on to Arcachon, where Mary Reynolds and Marcel Duchamp helped them settle for the summer. They returned to Paris in early September 1940.

The Occupation caused extensive disruption in public administration: there was no direct postal service between France and Britain or Ireland, and money transfers were restricted. Even postal deliveries within France, between the Occupied and the Unoccupied Zones, were far from reliable or easy, something apparent from Beckett’s last letter to James Joyce.

It is a pre-printed postcard which presents prefabricated phrases, allowing the sender to strike out phrases that were inappropriate. Only family news could be transmitted, and even this was subject to censorship. Beckett sent his missive on 12 January 1941, addressing it to Joyce at the Hôtel du Commerce, Saint-Gérand-le-Puy, Allier, unaware that the Joyces had left there for Switzerland on 14 December 1940. Beckett’s letter was forwarded to Joyce at the Pension Delphin in Zurich on 17 January, but Joyce never saw it. He had died on 13 January, the day after the letter was written.
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(a)

(b)

1. Lettercard from Samuel Beckett to James Joyce, 12 January 1941
On 18 January 1941, Beckett's brother Frank, answering a letter from Tom McGreevy, wrote: "We are not in communication with Sam nor have we been for some time. The last we heard of him was that he was back in Paris & I am able to get him some dough now & again so it might be worse. I suppose you saw that J. Joyce died in Zurich." Communication with Ireland was possible only through diplomatic channels, as is clear from the letter that Beckett wrote to Count Gerald O’Kelly at the Irish Legation on 4 June 1941, requesting that the following message be sent to his family, in reply to their message: "‘Monsieur Beckett est en excellente santé et ne manque de rien.’"

Under the Occupation, Jews, Communists, and other “undesirables” were rounded up and sent to internment camps. Among the victims was Joyce’s friend and assistant Paul Léon, arrested on 21 August 1941. Of the ten surviving letters from Beckett to Lucie Léon, Paul’s wife, only a few have dates or postmarked envelopes (these range from 17 July 1941 to 10 February 1942). Many offer his assistance in her Red Cross work, for example in procuring chocolates for distribution to internees. Others are expressions of anxiety over the fate of her husband Paul, or of Beckett’s eagerness for news, since, as he says, "I don’t know what’s happening anywhere." During the Occupation, Beckett occasionally helped André Salzman, husband of Ruth Salzman, a friend of Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, by acting as courier (“agent de liaison”). Salzman’s Resistance activities involved securing money for clandestine publications. As an Irish passport holder, Beckett did not need special permission to move about at night in Paris, hence he could safely deliver documents and money with discretion.

On 1 September 1941, Beckett formally joined the French Resistance réseau “Gloria SMH,” by that time “part of the British SOE (Special Operations Executive).” Less than one year later, the réseau was broken, and more than fifty of its members were arrested. One of these was Alfred Péron, who had recruited Beckett to the Resistance, and whom Beckett had known since their days at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. His wife Mania sent a telegram to Beckett and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil with a coded warning: "Alfred arrêté par Gestapo. Prière faire nécessaire pour corriger l’erreur." The two immediately warned others and took flight. In late September, they were helped by a “passeur” into the Unoccupied Zone, reaching Vichy on the 29th.

Unsurprisingly, there are few letters from this period. There is, however, one puzzle in this connection, from an unexpected source. Francis Stuart, an Irish writer resident in Berlin throughout the War, claimed in his published journal, and in an interview later with the editors, that, having written to Beckett, he received on 9 August 1942, “A letter from Sam
Beckett in Paris which I was glad to get.” Stuart went on: “He seems to be living there even more cut off from Ireland and isolated than am I. One of the small number of those from days of peace with whom I had something in common.” Although Stuart claimed the letter was subsequently lost, he recalled that Beckett had written that he had “nearly finished a novel,” that is, he had done the first chapter.” The novel was Watt; the letter from Beckett arrived in Berlin just days after Stuart had given his first radio talk from Germany to Ireland, on 5 August, and days before Beckett was compelled to leave Paris.

Through the Irish Legation in Vichy in October 1942, Beckett renewed his Irish passport. He and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil “received a provisional safe-conduct pass which allowed them two days to travel to Avignon. There they reported to the central police station”; then, as “a special favour,” they were given until 6 October to leave Avignon.” On Sunday, 11 October, Beckett writes from “Les Roches Rouges,’ Roussillon, par/ Cavaillon, Vaucluse” to inform Cornelius Cremin, the First Secretary of the Irish Legation then in Vichy, that he has found a place to live:

The above is my address henceforward. A little bled in the hills about 30 miles from Avignon, landscape all that could be desired, food all that could not. The worst drought for years, historic famine, etc. No one knows where the winter food is coming from, I less than the next.

... Have had prolonged interviews with the local Gendarmes, in their barracks 6 miles from here. My history almost day by day from my first setting foot in France. They can’t believe that I can be called Samuel and am not a Jew. Yesterday they took away my identity card I suppose to see if it had not been tampered with. My movements are restricted in the extreme, radius of ten kilometres about.

... Can you suggest what I should do, or what could be done, to have my tether lengthened. I suppose you could support any application I might make in that sense, but I doubt if that is enough. For the moment I do not intend to try and go home.”

Informed that a “permis de circuler” for travel within the Department is “almost impossible to obtain and that even a safe-conduct” pass to travel to the nearby town of Apt would require reasons “of the utmost gravity, such as illness,” Beckett writes on 27 October to Cremin:
If this is indeed the extent of my rights, in what exactly do the advantages of Irish nationality consist? Might I not as well be a Pole? This view as put forward by me having met with no success up to the present, I think perhaps it is time for the Legation to put it forward for me, with particular enquiry as to why I cannot move about freely in “free France”, as I should have to do if... I decided to take the necessary steps preparatory to going home, and as to what I have done to deserve incarceration in the Commune of Roussillon. May I count on the Legation for a little representation in this sense?

On 24 June of the following year, Beckett was summoned to appear “without delay” before “prefectorial authorities of Vaucluse, Service des Etrangers” for yet another “examination of my situation.” On 30 June, the day he received the summons, Beckett writes to Seán Murphy, Irish Minister to France (then in Vichy), expressing frustration with the continued restrictions on his movement and repeated interrogations:

But with regard to this constant prying into my identity, my past movements, my present movements, my means of existence, my mode of existence, why I am called Samuel, etc., etc., when all my papers are perfectly in order, when since arriving in the “free zone” I have neglected none of the formalities of declaration, registration, etc., imposed on foreigners in this country, when my only offence, I mean that of having clandestinely crossed the line of demarcation, has been judged in the police-court of Apt and presumably purged by the payment of a fine of 400 francs, and when all this has been made clear time and again and apparently accepted as satisfactory in the course of repeated interrogations, I feel obliged to appeal to you to intervene. Would a Swiss citizen be baited in this manner, or a Swedish? Or is an Irishman less entitled than they to the common courtesies and privileges extended to non-belligerents?

I do not know what you can do, or if you can do anything, to have an end put, once and for all, to this inquisition. If I might, without impertinence, venture a suggestion, it would be that you telephone before Tuesday next to the Préfecture of Vaucluse, Service des Étrangers, to find out if possible for what reason I am thus badgered and to assure them at least that I am known to you. You might even mention, if you could be so kind, that you believe me to be inoffensive.
Finally the results Beckett sought were forthcoming, at least in part because a recently passed law had addressed the broader issue of displaced foreigners in France: on 17 July, Beckett could report to Seán Murphy:

The “examination of my situation” at the préfecture of Vaucluse differed in no way from those with which I am familiar. My identity card was briefly inspected and the hope expressed that I continued to receive a subsidy from the Swiss Legation.

I am happy to be able to inform you that I was successful, on this occasion, in establishing my right, in virtue of the Decree of May 20th last, published in the J.O. of June 3rd last, to travel freely in France, without other papers than my passport and identity card, and without other territorial restrictions than those now in vigour for travellers generally.  

From Roussillon in Unoccupied France Beckett’s communication with his family continued to be directed through the Irish Legation in Vichy, by telegram to and from Ireland. One such – “ALL WELL LETTER DATED FIFTH APRIL RECEIVED LOVE SAM” – was sent on 31 May 1943. Funds could now be transferred, the transfer confirmed and receipt acknowledged, all by telegram.

The Liberation of Paris took place on 25 August 1944. Beckett and Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil had returned to the flat at 6 Rue des Favorites by 12 October, the date on which Beckett wrote to the Irish Legation in Vichy to indicate his change of address. He asked that his subsidy and its arrears be sent to him there, and noted: “I expected to find the Legation back in Paris, but was informed to-day, Rue de Villejust, that you are not expected before the end of the month.” By 20 September, his brother Frank was trying to contact him. Only on 9 November 1944 did Frank report that Beckett had sent the message to his family via the Irish Legation: “Back in Paris. All well. Impossible move at present. Love to you all.”

Not until April 1945 could Beckett make his way from France to England, where the manuscript of Watt was confiscated and inspected for “code,” and on to Ireland for a family visit. Several years later, in a letter to George Reavey, he remarked that Watt was “written in dribs and drabs, first on the run, then of an evening after the clodhopping, during the occupation.” The Watt notebooks confirm that the novel was begun before Beckett left Paris, and that he continued writing even when in hiding. To Gottfried Böttner, Beckett wrote: “It was written as it came, without preestablished plan”; and to George Reavey: “It is an unsatisfactory book […] But it has its
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place in the series, as will perhaps appear in time." Later still, Beckett claimed that he had written it “to keep himself sane.” Two points are worth noticing here. One is that incomparably laconic “clodhopping,” catching up Beckett’s months of rural drudgery. The other is the fact, so different from what was very soon to come, that Watt was written in English.

Given the exceptional fact of the gap in Beckett’s letters, it was the editors’ original intention to signal it by entitling the present volume 1945–1956. Yet the War years were decisive and formative, and the editors had no wish to diminish, still less elide, their significance. After much deliberation, it was decided that the helpfulness of identifying the gap in Beckett’s correspondence was less important than establishing the continuity of the period and of the edition; hence the title 1941–1956.

RESEARCH FOR VOLUME II

The nature of the research carried out in preparation of the edition has been fully described in the Introduction to Volume I. There is one important shift which should be noted here. Many of the people addressed or referred to in the post-War period were still alive when, decades later, the edition was being prepared. In the case of those who had died, it was possible to interview their colleagues and members of their families. Some of the major collections from which the letters published here are drawn remain in private hands. One example is the letters written to Georges Duthuit and held by his son Claude Duthuit, who with great generosity not only released the letters but provided abundant background information.

In those rare instances where Beckett himself had kept letters containing requests and drafts of his responses to these, the editors followed the trail to the individuals who had sent them, in order to track down Beckett’s reply. Sometimes, luck joined intuition, as in seeking one Desmond Smith, who had written to Beckett from Toronto in 1956 to pose questions about Waiting for Godot. Forty-five years later, the editors tried every Desmond Smith in the Toronto telephone directory – and found the man in question, who indeed remembered having written to Beckett. He was engaged in packing up his affairs before a move, but promised to look for his letter from Beckett. Some weeks later, he faxed a copy of this letter; it had been found lying in a box of old newspapers, ready for discarding. Then the letters to Edouard Coester: these were among papers that Beckett had kept, but locating Coester was a challenge of both name and address, for he had composed music under one name and practiced law under another. An inquiry at Coester’s last known
address in a small village was forwarded to his daughter. She reported that, while her father was unable to reply to the inquiry, he had indeed been a musicologist and composer as well as a magistrate. When sent a copy of the letter, she confirmed that the handwriting in the letter that Beckett had kept was that of her father. For members of Coester’s family, the discovery brought forward a story none of them had known; for readers of Volume II, the letters give clear evidence of Beckett’s strong views on the relation of words and music.

For Beckett, the gap between completion of a work and its publication gradually narrows as Les Editions de Minuit, Fischer Verlag, Suhrkamp Verlag, Faber and Faber, John Calder, and Grove Press establish themselves as his publishers in France, Germany, England, and the United States. From the archives of publishers and agents it became evident that Beckett grew to depend upon his representatives – in publishing, in licensing productions, and in granting permissions. In some instances Beckett’s desire to be amenable led to conflicts of interest: if permissions were not granted in a regularized way, contracts could be compromised. By following requests for permissions, the editors were led to discovery of publications and productions of Beckett’s work, and to persons responsible for these, that would not otherwise have come to light.

Beckett’s exchanges with his BBC producers document the evolution of the texts for radio drama and readings of his work, as well as the arrangements for recorded performance. The BBC Written Archive as well as its Sound Archive provided valuable contextual information on production, casting, broadcast schedules, and audience response.

The records of theatre productions and scripts, production photos, reviews, and memoirs helped the editors to fill out the account. Issues of contract, licensing, and censorship that arose in producing Waiting for Godot in London’s West End affected both the Dublin Pike Theatre and New York productions. Newspaper reports, now more readily available thanks to the internet, provide one index of public response, while the records of censorship of the London production by the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, now in the public domain, offer a view of what was happening, literally, behind the scenes. Not all publicity was favorable, as was seen when the opening of Godot in Miami was unhelpfully billed as “the laugh sensation of two continents,” and its socialite audiences walked out in droves.30

In the years covered by this volume, Beckett, scrupulous as ever, answered virtually all his own mail. The exceptions were letters to publishers about matters of contract; some of these were dealt with, first, by Jacoba van Velde, then by Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil who represented
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Beckett’s interests in early negotiations with Editions de Minuit, and later by Beckett’s French publisher Jérôme Lindon, Director of Editions de Minuit, who drafted letters concerning legal or business matters for Beckett to sign. Examples of letters drafted for Beckett’s signature are included in the notes as cross-reference when they provide context for a letter by Beckett himself.

Selection, presentation, and annotation

When Beckett resumed his life in Paris after the War, it was to find a city much changed – and not, in his view, for the better. And of course it was as a man himself much changed that he returned, in ways that he hardly ever evokes directly, but which will be reflected in the tone of the post-War letters, and in his choice of language. One half of the pages of letters presented in the present volume were written by Beckett in French – written in French both for practical reasons and because Beckett wanted it so. As his desire to write in French grew stronger, and his circle of acquaint ance widened, so the number of letters he wrote increased. Volume I printed approximately 60 percent of the total corpus for the years 1929–1940, whereas in the present volume closer to 40 percent of the letters consulted are published. Beckett had more correspondents in the post-War period and more of his letters were kept; this is due partly to his increased productivity, partly to the critical success of his fiction in France, partly to the response to productions of En attendant Godot in Paris, of Warten auf Godot in Germany, and of Waiting for Godot in London and New York.

The principles guiding the editors’ selection have been set out in full in Volume I. The founding principle has been that laid down by Beckett himself: that the choice should be of letters “having bearing on my work.” Given that there was so little published work to go on, the preparation of Volume I was fraught for the editors with difficulties of interpretation. For the present volume, selection has been more straightforward, even though the number of letters has increased. A first reason for this is that there is much more work produced in these years, and that Beckett is concerned in his letters with little else; even by the strictest standards of acceptability, there is an abundance of work-related letters. A second reason is offered by the shift in tone mentioned earlier. Beckett is no longer just a young writer making his way, impatient of others’ failure to give him recognition, irritated by the success of authors of whom he is contemptuous.

Beckett’s own experience of the War years, and his awareness of the experiences of his friends, had a profound effect on him – something of
which we are aware not from things he says, but, paradoxically, from the
fact that he will not speak of them; a phenomenon dismally familiar from
survivors of the camps. The occasional petulance to be found in the early
letters, the occasional harsh word for this person or that: these are hardly
ever to be seen. In Volume II, with the exception of unresponsive or unreas-
sonable publishers, Beckett complains of no one but himself and of little but
what he sees as his own inadequacies.

The letters presented here are addressed to a much wider range of friends
and acquaintances than before, as well as to strangers – an Italian translator,
a South American publisher, a Canadian journalist. The proportion of let-
ters included varies widely depending upon the recipient. Thus nearly all of
the letters to Georges Duthuit have been included, while those to Thomas
MacGreevy, which formed the backbone of Volume I, are far fewer during
this period, and from this a smaller proportion is published. Beckett’s
relationship with MacGreevy was not as close as formerly; as their common
Irishness came to matter less, and as they were occupied with professional
endeavors, their letters tended more toward the familial or personal than
toward exchanges about their writing.

The other shift is of language. There are letters in French in Volume I, but
nothing to compare, in number or in length, with what is in the present
volume. Editorial policy is unchanged: letters are presented in their original
language, with a translation immediately following, and notes (which refer
to both original and translation) following that. The higher proportion of
letters in French has inevitably led to a reduction in the number of letters
that can be included since the translations take space; but that has been
judged by the editors to be a price worth paying, since it makes Beckett’s
originals available to the reader, as well as conveying their sense and some-
thing of their tone to the reader without French. The implications of
Beckett’s move to French are discussed in the “French translator’s preface”
and in the “Introduction to Volume II.” Editorial policy has been to publish
certain letters that have been previously published, including many to
Barney Rosset, to Alan Schneider, and to Maurice Nadeau, since they are
too important to be ignored, and since here the context, being that of the
œuvre rather than that of an individual correspondent, opens up something
of the singularity of Beckett’s response to each.

Of the principles guiding the presentation of the letters (explained in full
in Volume I), it need only be said that the letters are presented as they were
written, preserving Beckett’s habits, idiosyncrasies, and lapses. They appear
as clear copy, reflecting the changes that Beckett made as or after he wrote –
that is, the letter as it was received by the addressee. Where a correction
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made by Beckett is deemed of particular significance, it is referred to in a note. Wherever possible the editors have tried to avoid interrupting the flow of the letters. Where that is not possible, editorial emendations are presented within square brackets (preceded by a question mark if a reading is doubtful) to signal that these are not Beckett’s words. Exception to this principle is made in the case of letters by writers other than Beckett, where trivial errors (typos, accidental omissions, etc.) have been silently corrected.

Each letter is prefaced by the name of the recipient and the place to which the letter was sent, when that is known, since Beckett rarely included the recipient’s name and address in the body of his letters. The date and place of writing are given as written, as is Beckett’s signature. Postscripts are placed following the signature, and their placement in the original is noted if it differs. The bibliographical note following each letter presents a description of the document and of its location. This information is followed by an indication of previous publication and a discussion of dating where these are relevant. The letters of this volume have offered some difficult challenges of dating, often because the letters in question contain no references to people, places, or events in the outside world. Beckett’s letters are often undated owing to the possibility of rapid exchange permitted by multiple mail deliveries in a single day, and in Paris by the existence of the pneumatique. Dating supplied by the editors is given within square brackets, with doubtful dating noted. Occasionally it is impossible to propose anything more precise than a date range.

A full account of the principles chosen for annotating the letters is given in Volume I. What requires mention here is a shift in emphasis from the earlier volume. In the years – more than the editors like to remember – since research was first carried out on background to the letters, the research climate has changed in unforeseeable ways. Volume I of the edition bore something of the traces of its own research history, for there, while the editors tried to restrict the notes to what was essential to an understanding of the letter, the assumption was that readers would have access to only basic research tools. Here, with Volume II, the situation has changed. First, the period covered by the present volume is less distant from present-day readers, hence more ground may be common. Second, and crucially, the editors can now assume that most readers will have access to the vast resources of the internet, offering research tools of a sophistication and range literally unimaginable only twenty years ago. Hence, for example, where policy was to give some indication of the reasons for individuals’ notoriety (“Florentine painter,” “German composer”) and their life dates,
policy now is to give brief identifications and dates only to less well-known individuals. Where persons, often themselves recipients of letters, had a particular and enduring connection to Beckett, their brief biographies are given in the “Profiles” appendix in the volume where they first substantively appear. The same applies to significant publications, institutions, and organizations. Fuller detail concerning editorial practice, including abbreviations, notations, and idiosyncrasies in Beckett’s usage, as well as a discussion of the approach to translation, are presented later in the introductory materials to this volume; a chronology precedes each year of letters and provides an overview of events.

In Volume I, numerous passages were elided from the letters at the request of the Samuel Beckett Estate. In Volume II there have been far fewer such elisions. There has been close, easy, and fruitful collaboration between the editors and the Estate, and there remain only a very few letters which the editors would have included but which were not approved.

The editors have decided that certain letters by Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil should be presented within the body of the text of Beckett’s letters. For several months during the years 1949–1951 she acted at Beckett’s request and on his behalf in negotiations with publishers. Without these letters, it is not possible to trace the steps by which Beckett came to be published by Editions de Minuit. This exceptional case is signaled by the typographical particularity of these letters being presented in italics.

LACUNAE

There were times, during the War especially, when Beckett and his correspondents were moving frequently between cities or countries, carrying little more than what a suitcase could hold: non-essential papers were often jettisoned. Places changed, of course, over time: certain buildings no longer exist; streets, even whole countries, were redrawn. Paris itself underwent huge changes. The editors have tried to signal such changes where relevant.

Letters from this period that are known to exist but which have not been consulted are relatively few. One major collection relevant to the corpus of this volume has eluded the editors: the letters sent by Beckett to friends he made while in hiding in Roussillon, Josette and Henri Hayden. The person who purchased the collection when it was sold by auction at Sotheby’s in 2008 has not permitted access, despite the repeated requests of the editors, supported as these were by the Estate of Samuel Beckett. When Beckett mentions writing letters which the editors have not been able to trace, this
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has been signaled in the notes. Letters which are discovered after publication of the relevant volume will be published, following the principles of selection adopted hitherto, as supplementary material in Volume IV.

Many readers have speculated as to why, in Volume I, certain crucial figures in Beckett’s life were not represented by letters addressed to them: his mother, his father, his brother, Peggy Sinclair, Lucia Joyce, Peggy Guggenheim, to name but a few. The reason for this is simple and prosaic: to the best of the editors’ knowledge, no letters from Beckett to these individuals have survived. Readers of the present volume may wonder why none of Beckett’s letters to his brother or to his companion Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil is included. The explanation is equally simple: despite the full cooperation and the best endeavors of the Beckett family and heirs, the editors have found no evidence that any such letters survive.

The editors readily recognize that there are gaps in their knowledge, and have not hesitated to report the limits of what they have been able to discover: indicating, for example, when handwriting is illegible, when a reference is unclear, when evidence is insufficient, or when the relevant information or document has simply not been found.

NOTES

1 SB to Marthe Arnaud, 10 June 1940.
3 SB to Patricia Hutchins, TCD, MS 4098/8.
4 A report, “Irish Legation in France, 1941,” issued in February 1942, indicated that communication “between Ireland and the occupied zone” was impossible, and that facilitating inquiries “from relatives in Ireland and from residents in the occupied zone” imposed new burdens on the Legation, as did facilitating “payments to nationals and other persons and bodies entitled to money from Irish sources” (NAI, Irish Legation Vichy, Schedules including situation reports and transmitted messages to individuals).
5 Zurich James Joyce Foundation, Hans E. Jahnke Bequest.
7 Frank Beckett to Thomas McGreevy, 18 January 1941, TCD, MS 10402/170.
8 Knowlson, Damned to Fame, 279.
9 (Mr Beckett is in excellent health and wants for nothing.) SB to Count Gerald O’Kelly, Ministre Plénipotentiaire Conseiller Spécial, 4 June 1941. A telegram relaying this information was sent by the Irish Legation through Swiss radio to Dublin on 13 June 1941 (NAI, DFA Paris 29/40).
10 Interviews with Claude Salzman (16 March 1996; 9 October 2009).
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12 For a fuller discussion of Beckett’s involvement in the Resistance, see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 278–298.
13 (Alfred arrested by Gestapo. Pray take all steps to have error corrected.) Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 287–288.
14 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 292–293.
15 Stuart said he had obtained Beckett’s Paris address from the Irish Consul in Berlin, William Warnock (1911–1986), who had contacted the Paris Legation (then in Vichy). Cornelius Cremin, First Secretary of the Irish Legation there (1939–1943), knew Beckett. In the typed manuscript of the journal, the date for the entry is given as “AUGUST Sunday,” and it is preceded by an entry dated 6 August and followed by one dated 10 August; 8 August was on Sunday in 1942 (ICSo, Collection 167. Geoffrey Elborn Collection of Francis Stuart Box 1/ F. 15). When published as “Selections from a Berlin Diary 1942,” the date “August 9” is supplied (Francis Stuart, *The Journal of Irish Literature*, 5.1 [January 1976] 88); when published in The *Irish Times*, the date for the entry is given as 5 August 1942 [Francis Stuart, *Extracts from a Berlin Diary Kept Intermittently between 1940 and 1944*, The *Irish Times*, 29 January 1976: 10).
16 Interview with Francis Stuart, 8 September 1993.
17 NAI, DFA Paris 202/166A; DFA France 49/34.
18 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 293.
20 SB to Cornelius Cremin, 11 October [1942], NAI DFA Paris Embassy 49/17 (Crowe et al., eds., *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, 251–252). The words “tether lengthened” are supplied from transcription of the original.
21 SB to Seán Murphy, 30 June 1943, NAI DFA Paris Embassy 49/17. In the original, Beckett writes “identity-card,” “20[2]” and “3[3]” and underscores “Swiss”; SB’s Gallicism is noted in this publication: “Beckett appears to have been translating directly from the French ‘en vig[u]eur’, meaning ‘in force’” (Crowe et al., eds., *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, 319). A draft of this letter is in notebook 3 of *Watt* (TxU, Samuel Beckett collection, Works I, folder 3). SB refers to “Décret n° 1505 du 20 mai 1943 réglementant le séjour et la circulation des étrangers en France” (governing the duration of stay and movements of foreigners within France), *Journal Officiel de la République Française* 75.132 (3 June 1943) 1514–1515.
22 SB to Seán Murphy, 17 July 1943, NAI DFA Paris Embassy 49/17. In the original, Beckett writes “identity-card,” “20[2],” and “3[3],” and underscores “Swiss”; SB’s Gallicism is noted in this publication: “Beckett appears to have been translating directly from the French ‘en vig[u]eur’, meaning ‘in force’” (Crowe et al., eds., *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, 319).
23 NAI, DFA Paris 207/316/43.
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25 NAI, DFA 106, Samuel Beckett; on 9 November 1944, Frank Beckett replied to this message via the Irish Legation.

26 SB to George Reavey, 14 May 1947.

27 The Watt notebooks (TxU, Samuel Beckett collection, Works, Box 6, folders 5–7, Box 7, folders 1–4). The first notebook was begun on 11 February 1941; the second notebook is dated 3 December 1941, and on page 39 includes the reference “Vanves 4 Sept. 42”; the third notebook is dated 5 May 1942; the fourth bears the date of 4 October 1943; the fifth contains various texts as well as a continuation of Watt (to page 99, with a note to see “the end” in notebook 6) and includes a date of 18 February 1945; in notebook 6 Beckett wrote: “Dec 28th 1944/ End.” (Carlton Lake et al., No Symbols Where None Intended: A Catalogue of Books, Manuscripts, and Other Material Relating to Samuel Beckett in the Collections of the Humanities Research Center [Austin: Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, 1984] 75–76; Samuel Beckett, Watt, ed. Chris Ackerley [London: Faber and Faber, 2009] viii.)


29 Knowlson, Damned to Fame, 323.

FRENCH TRANSLATOR’S PREFACE

Translation is inseparable from all but the earliest of Beckett’s writing: as idea (necessity, challenge, burden), and as activity (practice, result). It is not the only way in which we are made aware of Beckett the linguist: the letters show continual recourse to Latin, French, Italian, and German. Both his translating and his letter-writing raise, directly or indirectly, the question of competence: how good are Beckett’s French, Italian, etc.? His decision to write for publication in French – and later to conceive and compose a particular work in that language, in the awareness that he will at some later point translate it into English – makes the question inescapable. Can the letters help us to answer it?

In the imposed silence of the War years we have only a very few letters, messages of reassurance for his family sent to the Irish Legation. Beckett goes on living. More than that: he goes on living in France, and a very different France from the one that he has known, which could be summed up crudely as Paris and a few trips outside. But the difference is not only one of location. In these years he is no longer surrounded exclusively by writers, painters, publishers, art historians, professionals of all kinds: he is living in the country, in Roussillon-sur-Apt in the Vaucluse – part of what Nationalists used to call “la France réelle.” This brings in a crucial new factor. The French that he, gifted linguist that he is, has absorbed over thirty-odd years – in school, at university, in the circle of his acquaintance – is not the French of rural and southern France, of what dismissive Parisians refer to generically as “Trou-en-Brie.” These years – and the farm-work he shares in to ensure his own survival – more than make up for that, while the fact that throughout this time he is living with Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil (who spoke almost no English) ensures regular contact with standard French.1

This is far from being a simple matter, a mere adding on of new sounds, new words, new constructions. Still less is it an index of some slide into regionalism. What matters is a (wholly justified) strengthening of his confidence: a sense of being in touch with the full range of “French.”

This is not something that can be documented: Beckett does not keep that kind of diary. It is, precisely, the letters that he goes on to write

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after the War which allow us to glimpse the change. For it is one thing to send a typescript in French to a publisher (a person with whom dealings are seldom intimate), quite another to send an important and deeply felt letter in French to someone whom one knows and respects. From the end of the War, Beckett is writing in French. It is at this point that he meets the art critic Georges Duthuit. At the heart of this second volume of his letters is the extraordinary sequence that he writes to Duthuit between 1948 and 1952: letters in which he finds himself reaching for the finest possible delineation of his views on art and artists. But if these offer the most detailed evidence of his range and characteristic style, they are not the only letters illustrating the new confidence. It is in these years that dealings with publishers move from the minimal–businesslike to the personal, as he begins his long association with Jérôme Lindon and the Editions de Minuit. Then there is his correspondence with Jacoba van Velde, sister of the painters Bram and Geer, for a time his agent for France and later his translator into Dutch. This too starts out as a matter of arrangements and gradually shifts to the ground of friendship and, on Beckett’s side, concern. And there are the letters to Mania Péron, whose husband Alfred, a friend whom he had known in Trinity College Dublin and later at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, had died during his return from Mauthausen Concentration Camp. Beckett can help her as teacher of English and writer; she can help him with everything from everyday matters to questions of grammar and style. In short, there is nothing now that cannot be expressed in a letter. That is not to say that his French is indistinguishable from that of a native speaker. There will be occasional oddities of tone: writing to Mania Péron he can say “J’entreprends après-demain une randonnée de 60 kilomètres à bicyclette” (Tomorrow I am undertaking a 60-kilometre bicycle ride). The solemn “j’entreprends” contrasts almost comically with what Beckett is planning. And there are occasional lapses, as when, writing to Helmut Castagne at Fischer Verlag, he uses the phrase “lui accorder les facilités dont il a besoin.” The French “facilités” will not do where what is meant is “equipment” or “available services,” or simply “helpfulness.” Such instances are few. At the same time, it is important not to dismiss them out of hand, for Beckett himself is a severe critic of lapses, and will take great pains, particularly in his exchanges with Mania Péron, to avoid or correct textual imperfections. His general ease of movement, however, is never in doubt. And these immediate post-War years lead into the time when Beckett will need to be able to represent in the