

SHAKESPEARE IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the interplay of absence and presence that characterizes the work of William Shakespeare in the oeuvre of Irish-French author Samuel Beckett. Our purpose is, firstly, to assess how material traces can enrich our understanding of the author's relationship with Shakespeare as a creative source for his own writing. Secondly, we illustrate that researching authors' libraries involves a considerable degree of interpretation, even if the use of digital methods creates the misleading positivistic impression that source hunting of this kind will turn the study of how authors reuse external source material into a hard science. We explore a few reading strategies that encompass ancillary archival documents to highlight lacunae in Beckett's personal library and what these may signify. We proceed with: (1) a brief introduction to the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project and the Beckett Digital Library in the context of genetic criticism and intertextuality; (2) a description of the various books related to Shakespeare in Beckett's library; (3) Shakespeare in Beckett's reading and lecture notes; (4) Shakespeare in Beckett's drafts; and (5) Shakespeare in Beckett's published letters. As such, the article shows that genetic criticism is directly relevant to bibliography and vice versa.

* * *

At several moments in his career, the bilingual Irish-French author Samuel Beckett was asked which writers had influenced him the most. Unlike Dante, Chaucer, Proust, or Joyce, to name only a few, Shakespeare was curiously never mentioned. Beckett's first ever published essay, "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico.. Joyce" (1929), marks the only occasion where he invokes Shakespeare explicitly in his critical writings. Beckett uses the Ghost's line, "Duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed that rots in death on Lethe wharf" from *Hamlet* (1.5.33–34),¹ to argue that "Shakespeare uses fat, greasy words to express corruption" and thereby makes the form or the style of his language enact its content, instead of wielding words as "mere polite symbols" that simply denote

1 William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). All Shakespeare quotations are from this edition, with act, scene, and line numbers cited in text.

meaning.² Beckett's distortion of the line from "roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf" to "rots in death on Lethe wharf" seems to suggest that he did not look it up but was quoting from memory.³ Beckett's prose and drama, including media such as radio and television, do indeed brim with—at times distorted—references to Shakespeare, as critics have long observed. So far, the considerable amount of research into the Shakespeare–Beckett connection has been focused on verbal correspondences or "echoes" in the published works.⁴

The list of Shakespeare references in Beckett's works is long. But how does one determine what qualifies as a Shakespeare reference to

- 2 Samuel Beckett, "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983), 28.
- 3 The variant "in death" for "in ease" does not occur in any text of *Hamlet* and thus appears to be Beckett's invention. As the footnotes to the line in the *Norton Shakespeare* edition specify, the Folio text of *Hamlet* reads "rots itself," meaning "Decays under its own excessive growth," whereas the First and Second Quarto texts have "roots itself," which the editors suggest is "another possible reading" (*Norton Shakespeare*, 1712n2.) Beckett's misquotation is perhaps typical of the way in which authors use Shakespeare for their own creative purposes, in this case to argue how James Joyce takes the unity of form and content in his "Work in Progress"—later retitled *Finnegans Wake*—much further than any of his literary forebears.
- 4 In addition to the sources cited elsewhere in this article, other key studies on the subject include: John Russell Brown, "Mr. Beckett's Shakespeare," *Critical Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (December 1963): 310–26; J. D. Hainsworth, "Shakespeare, Son of Beckett?," *Modern Language Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (September 1964): 346–55; Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (London: Methuen, 1965); Normand Berlin, "Beckett and Shakespeare," *French Review* 40, no. 5 (April 1967): 647–51; Ruby Cohn, "Beckett and Shakespeare," *Modern Drama* 15, no. 3 (December 1972): 223–30; Anne-Marie Drew, ed., *Past Crimson, Past Woe: The Shakespeare–Beckett Connection* (New York: Garland, 1993); C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, eds., *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber, 2006); Caroline Patey, "Beckett's Shakespeare, or, Silencing the Bard," in *Will the Modernist: Shakespeare and the European Historical Avant-Garde*, ed. Giovanni Cianci and Caroline Patey (Oxford: Lang, 2014), 223–50; James Little, "Samuel Beckett's Remembrance of Texts Past: Shakespeare, Proust, and Joyce in *Not I* and *That Time*," *Litteraria Pragmensia* 31, no. 62 (December 2021): 78–104; Claudia Olk, *Shakespeare and Beckett: Restless Echoes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

begin with? One can easily read too much Shakespeare into Beckett. A possible solution is the genetic approach of searching for archival traces and analyzing the way they are processed in the preserved draft versions of the work. However, since not every Shakespeare reference has left a trace in the manuscripts or in the author's personal library, we need to be wary of lacunae while taking stock of the traces we do have. That is why we treat the notion of Beckett's library in a broad sense, as more than just what is left. The library, in this context, is a *pars pro toto* or synecdoche for his reading. Although we will probably never be able to reconstruct *all* of the books Beckett read, we can examine the reading of Shakespeare that can be inferred from circumstantial evidence such as notes and letters—contextual information that points to more than what is still left. The seeming omnipresence of Shakespeare in Beckett's published work contrasts with the relative paucity of Shakespeare books in Beckett's extant library, as well as with the scarcity of annotations in them compared to other volumes in the collection. Then again, Beckett's preserved manuscripts, notes of various kinds, and letters reveal an even greater familiarity with Shakespeare than what the published texts lead us to believe. His recently discovered "schoolboy" copy of *Macbeth*, exceptionally full of markings, appears to offer the missing link between the archive and the published work, as we will set out below, but it also raises many questions, more than it helps solve.

In this article, we aim to analyze the fascinating interplay of absence and presence that characterizes the work of Shakespeare in Beckett's oeuvre. Our purpose is, firstly, to assess how material traces can enrich our understanding of the author's relationship with Shakespeare as a creative source for his own writing. Secondly, we wish to illustrate that researching authors' libraries involves a considerable degree of interpretation, even if the use of digital methodologies may create the misleading positivistic impression that source hunting of this kind will transform the study of how authors reuse external source material into a hard science. In what follows, we will investigate Beckett's reading of Shakespeare, mostly to highlight how much is *not* in Beckett's library, and what this may signify. We will proceed as follows: (1) a brief introduction to the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project and the Beckett Digital Library in the context of genetic criticism and intertextuality; (2) a description of the Shakespeare books in Beckett's library; (3) Shakespeare in Beckett's notebooks; (4) Shakespeare in Beckett's drafts; and (5) Shakespeare in Beckett's published letters; ending with a conclusion on the use of writers' personal libraries as a reading strategy.

THE BECKETT DIGITAL LIBRARY, GENETIC
CRITICISM, AND INTERTEXTUALITY

The complex relationship between various works of literature—or other media, in the broad sense of the word—is often referred to as “intertextuality.” Julia Kristeva coined the term in 1966 to argue that “any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”⁵ However, she soon distanced herself from it again in her *La Révolution du langage poétique*, because the term had been employed too often in the “banal” sense of “critique des sources.”⁶ She may have found this form of source criticism banal, but other critics pointed out that her notion of intertextuality—that is, characterized by the metaphor of a mosaic of quotations inherent to virtually all texts⁷—was not without drawbacks either, one of them being its limited applicability in the concrete practice of literary studies. In *Palimpsestes*, Gérard Genette therefore consciously presented a much more “restrictive” interpretation of intertextuality,⁸ and Jessica Mason explicitly tried to make the concept practicable by distinguishing between “marked” intertextual references (which are objectively present) and “unmarked” ones (where the definitive presence or absences of intertextuality cannot always be established).⁹ Michael Riffaterre stressed the role of the reader, defining the concept as “the reader’s perception of links” between texts.¹⁰ Genetic critics, such as Daniel Ferrer, do not offer

- 5 Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” in *Desire and Language*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.
- 6 Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), 59–60.
- 7 Julia Kristeva, “Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman,” *Critique* 23, no. 239 (April 1967): 438–65.
- 8 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982). Genette introduced his version of intertextuality as only one of five types of “transtextuality” (inter-, para-, archi-, meta-, and hyper-textuality), each of which sees a text in relation to other texts.
- 9 Jessica Mason, *Intertextuality in Practice* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2019), 23.
- 10 Michael Riffaterre, “La Trace de l’intertexte,” *Pensée*, no. 215 (October 1980): 4: “la perception, par le lecteur, de rapports entre une oeuvre et d’autres, qui l’ont précédée ou suivie.”

any new definition but focus instead on the so-called “intertextual in operation,” stressing the way intertexts are processed in creative writing.¹¹ It is in this tradition of genetic criticism that we propose to examine intertextuality, on the basis of Beckett’s library and manuscripts.

Because the drafts of Beckett’s works are scattered across more than a dozen holding libraries on both sides of the Atlantic, the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (BDMP) was initiated in 2011 to digitally reunite all dispersed notes, manuscripts, typescripts, and proofs that are known to exist and continue to be discovered, while also offering transcriptions and facsimiles in addition to links between documents, a bilingual version comparison for every sentence, and a search engine.¹² As part of the project Creative Undoing and Textual Scholarship, funded by the European Research Council, the BDMP was further developed with the kind permission from the Estate of Samuel Beckett to include digital facsimiles of Beckett’s marginalia in the books that are still part of the library at his Paris apartment. This collection formed the basis for the Beckett Digital Library (BDL), a proof-of-concept project to digitize the 750 plus volumes that were preserved on his bookshelves, in archives (the Beckett International Foundation, the Lilly Library at Indiana University), and in private collections (the James and Elizabeth Knowlson Collection, as well as those of Anne Atik, Noga Arikha, Terence Killeen, Helena Walsh,

11 Daniel Ferrer, “Quelques remarques sur le couple intertextualité-genèse,” in *La Création en acte: Devenir de la critique génétique*, ed. Paul Gifford and Daniel Ferrer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 205. See also Scarlett Baron, *The Birth of Intertextuality: The Riddle of Creativity* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

12 Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project, <https://www.beckettarchive.org>. The project, co-directed by Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon as a collaboration between the universities of Antwerp, Reading, and Oxford, together with several holding libraries, was awarded the Prize for a Bibliography, Archive or Digital Project from the Modern Language Association in 2019. Available online at present are the editions of the stage plays *En attendant Godot / Waiting for Godot*, *Fin de partie / Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape / La Dernière Bande*, *Not I / Pas moi*, *That Time / Cette fois*, and *Footfalls / Pas*; the novels *Molloy*, *Malone meurt / Malone Dies*, and *L’Innommable / The Unnamable*; the short prose text *Stirrings Still / Soubresauts*; and the poem *Comment dire / What is the word*. The editorial work is still ongoing, currently under the support of an AHRC grant, “Editing Beckett: Towards a Bilingual Digital Genetic Edition of Samuel Beckett’s Works.”

etc.).¹³ Thanks to the hospitality and the generosity of collectors who sometimes make their prized possessions available for scanning (e.g., Killeen's two-volume edition of Beckett's *Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser) and to antiquarians' current practice of making available detailed scans of books on offer (such as Beckett's copy of Molière's *L'Avare* that was sold on the private market a few years ago) the library in Beckett's apartment has been extended with some of the many books that he disposed of during his lifetime. As a result, the extant, albeit dispersed, library now houses scans from 815 volumes.

This extant library facilitates analysis of the writer's interaction with external source texts, what Raymonde Debray-Genette has called "exogenesis" as opposed to the "inside" of the creative process or "endogenesis."¹⁴ But there is also a humbling aspect to this kind of research. What is left of Beckett's personal library is only a small fraction of all the volumes he once owned or used. In the early years of his career, he did not always have the funds to purchase books and traveled around much, so he often consulted them in libraries; or, when he was short of money, he would sometimes sell them. And, especially in the later stages of his career, he also gave away numerous books to friends. Obviously, this collection is not an exact replica of what Beckett actually read. On the one hand, several of the books are mere dedication copies, some of which Beckett cannot have perused entirely, since their pages have only partially been cut, or in some cases not at all. On the other hand, the extant library shows numerous gaps, for example when we know from Beckett's letters that he consulted this or that book in a reading room (e.g., Arnold Geulincx's *Ethica*) or borrowed it from a friend and later returned it. The books that are at present still kept in his apartment do give us a good impression of the kinds of reading that informed his writing,¹⁵ but the lacunae necessitate a reconstruction, as far as it

13 The Beckett Digital Library (BDL) is a proof-of-concept project that can be found at <https://www.beckettarchive.org/library/home/welcome>. The BDL is an ongoing project. During its development, access to the collection is limited to BDMP subscribers, although there is a free demo: <https://www.beckettarchive.org/demo/home/welcome>.

14 Raymonde Debray-Genette, "Génétique et poétique: Le cas Flaubert," in *Essais de critique génétique*, ed. Jean-Bellemin Noël (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 24.

15 See Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

is possible, of Beckett's "virtual" library, as we call this set of books that are no longer physically part of his collection.

The virtual library in the BDL already contains 247 entries for which no physical copy has yet been retrieved, a number that will undoubtedly increase. These are books that we know Beckett must have read, from material traces in his manuscripts and notebooks or information about his reading habits in correspondence or diaries. For example, the BDL offers a reconstruction of Beckett's student library (i.e., the books he is known to have read at university), which is also based on the "calendars" with the required reading for the years he was enrolled at Trinity College Dublin.¹⁶ In some cases, a virtual item can become part of the extant library again. For instance, in the diaries that Beckett kept while travelling through Germany in 1936–1937, he often mentions buying exhibition catalogs from the many museums he visited.¹⁷ Beckett sent most of these home in boxes ahead of his return to Ireland, and later to France, but for decades scholars assumed these had been lost, until recently they were found among uncataloged material at the Lilly Library of Indiana University. Beckett had given them to his artist friend Avigdor Arikha and his wife, Anne Atik, who sold them with their letters. They have now been incorporated into the BDL.

As the list keeps expanding, most of the books in the virtual library postdate Beckett's student years, though some, while rare, precede them. One such example is *Froggy's Little Brother* (1875), a popular Victorian children's book by Brenda (the pseudonym of Georgina Castle Smith), which Beckett alludes to in the manuscript of his play *That Time*.¹⁸ His cousin, Sheila Page, recalled Beckett's mother reading it to them.¹⁹ Next to nothing is known about Beckett's toddler or adolescent library, but his early biographer, Deirdre Bair, reports

16 We are grateful to Veronica Bălă for sharing with us the findings of her unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Samuel Beckett's Student Library and the Modern Novel" (University of Antwerp, December 2014).

17 See Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936–1937* (London: Continuum, 2011).

18 James Little, *The Making of Samuel Beckett's "Not I" / "Pas moi", "That Time" / "Cette fois" and "Footfalls" / "Pas"* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 318.

19 James Knowlson, *Beckett Remembering / Remembering Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 6.

that even though reading books was little encouraged at home, "by the time he was ready to leave for boarding school, he had amassed quite a few, as to his family's surprise, he had become an avid reader."²⁰ Whether these included books by Shakespeare is unknown, but, according to Bair, Beckett already admired his work at a young age: "Neatly placed on the shelf beside his books was a small bust of Shakespeare."²¹

The books in Beckett's library are marked by two types of reading traces that reveal the author in his capacity as respectively the "marginalist" and the "extractor."²² Whereas marginalists interact directly with the text and, to a large extent, respect the "contextual integrity" of the work they are engaging with, extractors remove excerpts from their original context and store them in a "transitional space" for future reference.²³ So, one could argue that by copying this information into a notebook, an author is already appropriating it. At first sight, marginalia may seem more straightforward than the extractor's notes, but the presence of marginalia may, in turn, give the misleading impression that the marked passages were all Beckett was interested in. Quite often, a book has several annotated pages, but eventually the author took a quote from another (unmarked) page and used it in their own work. Axel Gellhaus has called these kinds of unmarked passages "non-marginalia."²⁴ Dog-ears are another

20 Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 1990), 19. This impression of a young Beckett is confirmed by the author's later and official biographer: "He was very fond of being alone, at his happiest when he could curl up alone with, at first, a picture book or, later, a proper book to read. It did not matter whether this was in the house or in the garden. At times, to the consternation of his parents, from an early age he would wander much further afield into the nearby countryside to read, losing all sense of time as he devoured his stories. Beckett said that he read avidly (mostly rubbish, he conceded) until he was about seventeen, when he became far more critical and less easily absorbed in what he was reading." James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 26.

21 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, 19.

22 Daniel Ferrer, "Towards a Marginalist Economy of Textual Genesis," in *Reading Notes*, ed. Dirk Van Hulle and Wim Van Mierlo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 8.

23 Ferrer, "Marginalist Economy," 18.

24 Axel Gellhaus, "Marginalia: Paul Celan as Reader," in *Reading Notes*, ed. Dirk Van Hulle and Wim Van Mierlo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 218–19.

category that vaguely indicate an author's interest in the content of a page without, however, specifying any particular passage. And when these dog-ears have been folded up again, it is often difficult to tell which page the reading trace pertains to exactly.

SHAKESPEARE IN BECKETT'S PERSONAL LIBRARY

Complete Works Editions

Beckett's library contains two complete works editions of Shakespeare: one is a 1957 Oxford edition, with a bread wrapper inserted at the opening page of *Richard III* (596) and the book ribbon placed a little further on in the play (612) being the only reading traces of note; the other is an undated copy of the so-called "Universal Edition" published by Frederick Warne.²⁵ The latter also has a shopping list inserted at pages 946–47 (2.3–4) of *Romeo and Juliet*. The book was originally published in 1890, but Beckett's copy is probably a 1920s reprint. This is an example of a case where a volume without a publication date can be situated in time with the help of Beckett's published work. If this is the edition he used while still a student at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), his reading of it did not leave many traces. For instance, the only thing Beckett marked in the Sonnets section of the Warne edition is a typo ("And with old woes ne^ew wail my dear times' waste") in Sonnet 30 (1087)—a rather pedantic way of annotating, but typical of his student years. The edition also contains marginalia, such as a blue pencil marking next to Amiens's songs in *As You Like It* (225); this is one of the plays listed in the calendars with required reading for Michaelmas Term 1924, which further suggests that this may be the copy Beckett used back then.

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.

(2.7.174–76)

25 *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. W. J. Craig (1891; London: Oxford University Press, 1957); *The Works of William Shakspeare* (1890; London: Frederick Warne, n.d.).

The way “wind” is made to rhyme with “unkind” seems to have fascinated Beckett, for in his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written in 1931–1932, but not published until after the author’s death), the reader is urged to pronounce the word “wind” in Shakespearean fashion: “under the east wind, weind please.”²⁶ Moreover, in the first annotated typescript of the play *Krapp’s Last Tape*, the recorded voice is supposed to pronounce it in the same way, as Beckett’s stage direction indicates: “Thirty-seven today, sound apparently in wind (~~he~~ he rimes this word with mind) and limb.”²⁷ And in the unpublished drama fragment “The Gloaming,” as well as in its published reworking (*Rough for Theatre I*), the stage directions similarly stipulate the pronunciation of the character B’s words: “There croaking to the winter wind [*rime with unkind*].”²⁸ As these examples illustrate, the library can be of hermeneutic value in that it helps us identify forms of near-invisible intertextuality. Here, a series of passages in Beckett’s works that do not immediately strike one as “Shakespearean” turn out to be allusions.

The only other marginalia in the Warne edition occur in the text of *King Lear* and relate to Shakespeare’s use of the modal verb forms “shall” or “shalt,” which Beckett mentioned in a letter to Barbara Bray of April 1965, after a meeting with his friend John Kobler: “looking for him in Lear ‘I shall prevail’ and finding he meant and wanted ‘I will endure.’”²⁹ Indeed, the phrase is underlined in red ink and marked with a cross in Beckett’s copy, which confirms that he returned to this book in the later stages of his career.

26 Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. Eoin O’Brien and Edith Fournier (Dublin: Black Cat, 1992), 72.

27 BDMP3, MS-HRC-SB-4-2-1, ET1, fol. 1r. We follow the digital scholarly edition’s citation system: *Krapp’s Last Tape* is the third module of the Beckett Digital Manuscripts Project, and ET1 stands for the first English typescript (preserved, as noted in BDMP, as the first document in box 4, folder 2 at the Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin).

28 Samuel Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape and Other Shorter Plays* (London: Faber, 2009), 22. The archaic spelling of “rime” situates this further as a Shakespearean reference.

29 Van Hulle and Nixon, *Beckett’s Library*, 27.

Separate Volumes

In addition to these two complete works editions, Beckett's surviving library also contains a French double edition of *Le Roi Lear* with *Mesure pour mesure*, the translator Jean-Jacques Mayoux's *Comme il vous plaira*, and two volumes of *The Sonnets*, which Beckett mostly seems to have acquired later in his career, either by purchasing them or receiving them as gifts.³⁰ Mayoux was a close friend of his, and the edition of *Le Roi Lear* is significant in light of the many references to the play in his English texts, some of which are discussed below.

We see Beckett's fascination with the sonnets reflected in a short dramatic fragment contained in a late notebook that also holds the drafts of his penultimate prose text, *Stirrings Still*. In this dialogue, one of two interlocutors implores the other to "Come & read to me" a "~~Shakespeare~~ sonnet."³¹ Quite remarkable is that Shakespeare's name was first mentioned, but then crossed out to make the reference less obvious. The second interlocutor misremembers the first line when they suggest the sonnet "No longer weep . . ." (i.e., Sonnet 71: "No longer mourn for me when I am dead"), but it turns out that what the other had in mind is Sonnet 116, beginning with "Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments." In the first writing layer, the source is indicated by the initial four words "Let me not to —," but (after the name "Shakespeare" had been deleted) even the fourth word in this shortened line seems to have been too explicit for Beckett. He crossed it out, undoing the obvious reference to Shakespeare and reducing it to merely a possible allusion, according to his habitual strategy which, in a manuscript draft of the play *Happy Days*, he referred to as "vaguen[ing]."³² Anne Atik remembers that "Beckett liked to recite Shakespeare's sonnet 71" and that he would "pause after uttering 'Nay, if you read this line, remember not / The hand that writ it, for I love you so'"; he even "considered writing

30 William Shakespeare, *Le Roi Lear*, *Mesure pour mesure*, trans. Christine and René Lalou (Paris: Armand Colin, 1960); *Comme il vous plaira*, trans. Jean-Jacques Mayoux (1965; Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1976); *The Sonnets and The Lovers' Complaint*, ed. John Carrogan (1938; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986); *The Sonnets*, ed. M. R. Ridley (1938; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1988).

31 BDMP1, MS-UoR-2934, fol. 2r.

32 Rosemary Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956–1976* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), 149.

a play based upon it,"³³ but those plans never took shape, the drafts of *Stirrings Still* being a faint remnant of that abandoned project.

Arguably the single most striking Shakespeare volume in Beckett's entire library is a copy of *Macbeth* in the Pitt Press Shakespeare for Schools series.³⁴ As the inscriptions on both the front and the back flyleaf indicate, Beckett acquired it in "September 1922" when he was just sixteen years old and still a pupil in the "VIth form" at Portora Royal in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. The volume is a 1922 reprint of the 1901 edition, which has an introduction and a section with notes, a glossary, an appendix, hints on meter, and indexes at the back. Beckett's reading traces are all to be found on the title page and in the text itself—mostly taking the form of underlined passages, with occasional inline or marginal comments, for example the name "Macbeth" next to Ross's line, "Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapp'd in proof" (6; 1.2.54).³⁵ Occasionally, as he did when still a student at TCD, Beckett makes a textual correction, such as altering "utterance" to "uttermost" in Macbeth's "And champion me to the utterance" (38; 3.1.72). Several passages have one or more vertical bars next to them in the margins,³⁶ but the most extraordinary traces are four long sections highlighted with a cross or asterisk and marked with the words "Learn by heart," often concluding with underlined passages:

Macbeth. If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly [.]
.....]

- 33 Anne Atik, *How It Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber, 2005), 53.
- 34 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. A. W. Verity, Pitt Press Shakespeare for Schools (1901; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922). See <https://www.beckettarchive.org/demo/SHA-MAC.html>.
- 35 The underlining here, and in subsequent quotations, shows Beckett's underlines. Since the BDL facsimiles are navigated by page numbers, we provide those as well as line numbers in this section. All underlined passages can be found at <https://www.beckettarchive.org/demo/SHA-MAC.html> on the following pages: 6, 11, 12–13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26–27, 31, 34, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43, 46, 48, 51, 56, 57, 59, 60, 67, 68, 72, and 78.
- 36 Marked passages can be found in the BDL facsimiles on pages 9, 14, 15, 16, 21, 24, 27, 38, 46, 48, 51, 52, 57, and 60.

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.
 (19; 1.7.1–28)

Macbeth. Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,
 She strike upon the bell. [.]
]
I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.
 (23–24; 2.1.31–64)

Macbeth. To be thus is nothing;
 But to be safely thus. [.]
]
Rather than so, come, fate, into the list,
And champion me to the utterance! *Who's there?
 (37–38; 3.1.48–72)³⁷

Lennox. My former speeches have but hit your thoughts
 [.]
 I hear
 Macduff lives in disgrace: sir, can you tell
 Where he bestows himself?
 (52; 3.6.1–23)

This early encounter with *Macbeth* left a whole range of traces in Beckett's later work.³⁸ For instance, he marked Macbeth's line to Seyton, "my way of life / Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf" (78; 5.3.22–23), thematizing the falling action towards the play's catastrophe. Beckett later alludes to it in his own English translation of the *Textes pour rien*, but it was not yet in the original French version: "on s'est pris à aimer la nature, *sur le tard*, elle est à tout un chacun,

37 Beckett has inserted an asterisk following "utterance" to correct it in the left margin to "uttermost."

38 Pim Verhulst and Dirk Van Hulle, "'Learn by heart': Beckett's 'Schoolboy Copy' of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 31, no. 2 (September 2022): 135–50.

par endroits.”³⁹ Only when he translated this short prose piece in the early 1960s did he refer explicitly to Shakespeare, since in “Text for Nothing III,” the narrator states: “We spend our life, it’s ours, trying to bring together in the same instant a ray of sunshine and a free bench, in some oasis of public verdure, we’ve been seized by a love of nature, in *our sere and yellow*, it belongs to one and all.”⁴⁰ This example thus shows the close connection in Beckett’s bilingual oeuvre between Shakespearean allusion and his mother tongue, compared to his adopted language.

But the discovery of Beckett’s schoolboy copy of *Macbeth* is mostly significant because it corroborates what had so far only been assumed: one of the reasons why Shakespeare appears less prominently in Beckett’s library than we would expect is that the author’s first encounter with his work took place at a very young age, well before he enrolled at university, during his formal education in English, which again explains why references are so abundant in that language, more so than in French. As Dan Gunn surmised, “surely at Earlsfort House preparatory school, which he attended from 1915, aged nine, Beckett would have encountered Shakespeare’s work, and then more thoroughly when he joined, as a boarder, Portora Royal in County Fermanagh, which he attended until aged 17.”⁴¹ Thanks to Beckett’s resurfaced copy of *Macbeth*, we now know this to be a fact.

Many books from this formative period ended up in antiquarian bookshops. With the help of former Lilly Library director Breon Mitchell, it was possible to track down the copy’s owner, Helena Walsh, who is affiliated with the Jazz Studies Department of the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. About the provenance of the book she was able to recall the following information:

I bought the copy of *Macbeth* from a second-hand bookshop in Dublin when I was studying for my Leaving Certificate—the government examination for high school graduation. I had no idea who Beckett was—that was 1965. I attended an all-girls

39 Samuel Beckett, *Nouvelles et textes pour rien* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987), 133–34; emphasis added.

40 Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose, 1950–1976*, ed. Mark Nixon (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 13; emphasis added.

41 Dan Gunn, “Samuel Beckett,” in *Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Auden, Beckett*, Great Shakespeareans 12, ed. Adrian Poole (London: Continuum, 2012), 151.

boarding school in Dublin. Beckett attended an all-boys boarding school for his Leaving Certificate in 1922 and the *Macbeth* would have been what he was studying then. The only thing Beckett and I have in common is: we were both 16 at the time we were separately studying *Macbeth* in school and happened to use the same volume!⁴²

There is no mistaking it was his, since the back flyleaf and the back inside cover are riddled with his name, in his handwriting, in blue ink and gray pencil (some instances of which are crossed out, possibly by the book's new owner).

*Shakespeare Criticism, Miscellanea, and General
Introductions to English Literature*

In addition to books by Shakespeare, Beckett's library also contains critical studies on him and his work, for example W. W. Greg's *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*.⁴³ Greg's study does not feature any obvious signs of reading, but it is remarkable that Beckett had one of the landmark texts in editorial theory, reflecting his respect for scholarly editing and a growing awareness that his own texts were—as he put it himself—“in a terrible mess.”⁴⁴

There are also two works of Shakespeare criticism in French by Jean-Jacques Mayoux in Beckett's library, both entitled *Shakespeare*.⁴⁵ They contain dedications from Mayoux to Beckett, so they were probably gifts instead of purchases. The former seems unread, but the latter has a piece of cardboard paper at page 77, and the top corners of seventeen pages were once folded down but have in the meantime been turned back up, so the traces are, so to speak, half erased.⁴⁶ Largely ignoring the biographical section in the front, as

42 Email correspondence, July 8, 2015.

43 W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare* (1942; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

44 Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, “Editorial: The State of Beckett's Texts,” *Journal of Beckett Studies* 24, no. 1 (April 2015): v–xii.

45 Jean-Jacques Mayoux, *Shakespeare*, Théâtre de tous les temps (Paris: Seghers, 1966); *Shakespeare*, Homme de théâtre (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982).

46 The folded pages are 29, 61, 65, 67, 77, 85, 87, 91, 95, 111, 115, 119, 131, 139, 145, 147, and 149.

well as the critical dossiers and chronology in the back, Beckett appears to have shown interest in Mayoux's thematic discussion of Shakespeare's plays that make up the bulk of the middle section. It covers many different topics, but what exactly Beckett was drawn to is difficult to ascertain. Some passages on the pages with unfolded dog-ears do stand out, for example Mayoux's discussion of the famous line from *Richard III*, "Un cheval, un cheval, mon royaume pour un cheval!" which Beckett used—again in an idiosyncratic way—for his stage play *Fin de partie / Endgame*, where Hamm cries out, "Mon royaume pour un boueux!" / "My kingdom for a nightman!"⁴⁷ A sequence of pages with once folded-down corners also testifies to his preoccupation with *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear* in particular.⁴⁸ As this copy suggests, somewhat surprisingly, Beckett seems to have revived his interest in Shakespeare through French, even though he often omitted or suppressed references in that language.⁴⁹

Not unlike dog-ears, which are easy to miss and give only a vague indication of what Beckett was interested in, some allusions to Shakespeare are tucked away in works by other authors. One such example is the first volume of *Le Temps retrouvé*, the last instalment in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which Beckett read over a prolonged period of time in 1929 and 1930 for a book-length essay entitled *Proust* that he was commissioned to write by Chatto and Windus. With a vertical line in the margin and by underlining with pencil the words "roi Lear," Beckett marks the passage in which

47 Samuel Beckett, *Fin de partie* (Paris: Minuit, 2010), 36; *Endgame* (London: Faber, 2009), 17.

48 The unfolded dog-eared page discussing *Richard III* is 29; the sequence of pages is 131–49.

49 Additional texts in Beckett's library that touch on Shakespeare are: a 1980 typescript of "Operation Shakespeare: A Screenplay" by Franco Solinas and Barbara Bray, a former BBC employee and also a close friend of Beckett's; Ruby Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), with an inscription to Beckett; F. E. Halliday, *A Shakespeare Companion 1564–1964* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964); Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare: Essays and Notes*, ed. Walter Raleigh (1908; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957); and visual artist Louis Le Brocqy's catalog of *Studies Towards an Image of William Shakespeare* (Paris: Galerie Jeanne Bucher, 1982). None of these contain any reading traces, and their exact provenance is not always clear.

M. de Charlus, who recently suffered a temporary loss of sight as the result of a stroke, is now said to have fully recovered, his shiny, silvery, metallic hair and beard imposing on this deposed prince the Shakespearean majesty of a King Lear.⁵⁰ Although it is the Earl of Gloucester who loses the ability to see in the play, not Lear, the reading trace hints at a fascination with the thematic connection between blindness in Proust's novel and Shakespeare's tragedy, borne out by other Beckett works. Take, for instance, the scene in *King Lear* where Cornwall famously pulls out Gloucester's eye with the words "Out, vile jelly!" (3.7.81). This line is referred to in several of Beckett's works, such as the late prose text *Ill Seen Ill Said*: "Closed again to that end the vile jelly or opened again or left as it was however that was."⁵¹ And in the radio play *All That Fall*, Maddy Rooney exclaims, "How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again!," which is soon followed by the adjective when Connolly's van speeds by: "Let us halt a moment and let this vile dust fall back upon the viler worms."⁵² However, this passage is not marked in any of the Shakespeare editions that survive in Beckett's library, which again shows the relevance of "non-marginalia."

Some of Beckett's ability to read intertextually derives from a continued engagement with Shakespeare as an undergraduate student at his alma mater. The TCD calendars allow us to reconstruct with relative certainty what Beckett was assigned to read at university. While he majored in Italian and French, his honors course in modern languages, taken up between 1923 and 1925, also consisted of a primer on English literature, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. According to Bair, by this time Beckett had lost all interest in them:

50 Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu: Le Temps retrouvé* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1929), 15:227.

51 Samuel Beckett, "Ill Seen Ill Said," in *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, ed. Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber, 2009), 73.

52 Samuel Beckett, "All That Fall: A Play for Radio," in *All That Fall and Other Plays for Radio and Screen*, ed. Everett Frost (London: Faber, 2009), 5, 7.

He drifted from course to course, attending Professor Wilbraham Trench's lectures on Shakespeare; but instead of concentrating on the subtleties of *Macbeth*, he paid more attention to composing complicated, doodle-decorated lists of how many times Trench would say "all that" throughout each lecture.⁵³

Plays like *Macbeth*, as we have seen, were already quite familiar to Beckett, and if he used the surviving complete works editions in his student library for the other required reading, assuming he bothered to do it at all, these show very little signs of interaction with the texts.

In addition to these primary works, he also had to study the period in English literary history ranging from 1500 to Shakespeare and after in the first volume of A. J. Wyatt and W. H. Low's *Intermediate Text-Book of English*, in addition to selections from Alexander Hamilton Thompson's *A History of English Literature*.⁵⁴ While the Wyatt and Low volume only has pencil annotations in the prefatory chapter on Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Beckett did leave several traces in Thompson's chapter on "The Dawn of the Drama," notably the sections about Morality Plays and Christopher Marlowe, but also in the chapter on Shakespeare, where just a few statistics are singled out, and in the chapter on "The Later Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatists," particularly in the discussions of Ben Jonson and George Chapman.⁵⁵ From these markings it appears that Shakespeare was only of slight interest to Beckett at this point.

A similar book that survives in Beckett's library is a copy of *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* by Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian. However, this copy does not date back to his student days and it was previously owned by "I. Roustel," as per the inscription.⁵⁶

53 Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, 39.

54 A. J. Wyatt and W. H. Low, *Intermediate Text-Book of English*, part 1, 3rd ed. (1896; London: W. B. Clive and University Tutorial Press, 1920); Alexander Hamilton Thompson, *A History of English Literature, and of the Chief English Writers, Founded upon the Manual of Thomas B. Shaw*, 2nd ed. (1901; London: John Murray, 1914).

55 Thompson, *History of English Literature*, 149, 171, 192, 214, and 223.

56 Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 3rd ed. (1924; Paris: Hachette, 1929). It is unclear when exactly Beckett added the book to his shelves. Certainly between 1937 and 1952, as

There are two sets of reading traces: extensive underlining of passages in gray pencil, with notes in the margins, and shorter underlining in blue and red pencil. While the former most likely belong to Beckett, the latter may not.⁵⁷ Quite remarkably, the entire chapter on Shakespeare's theater is unmarked, potentially because Beckett was already so familiar with it. He appears to have read around Shakespeare, focusing on the "lesser gods" instead, the adjacent chapters sharpening the contours of the glaring absence in their middle. Most of Beckett's notes are found in book 4 ("L'épanouissement de la renaissance [1578–1625]"), which itself consists of multiple subsections. Here, Beckett shows very little interest in section 1 ("Caractères généraux de la grande époque"), although he does annotate the name Thomas North—responsible for the English translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*—with "Shak[espeare]," who drew from this source extensively for his Roman plays.⁵⁸ Still more reading traces occur in section 2 ("Lily, Sidney et Spenser"), but none in section 3 ("La poésie de 1590 à 1625"), 4 ("La prose de 1578 à 1635"), 5 ("Le théâtre jusqu'à Shakespeare, de 1580 à 1592")—except for the sections on Marlowe and Robert Greene—nor 6 ("Le théâtre de Shakespeare [1590–1616]"). Beckett's underlining resumes in section 7 ("Les contemporains et successeurs immédiats de Shakespeare"), where the majority of marginalia are located. About Chapman, for example, who was also a source of interest in Thompson, Beckett indicates that *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois* can be considered his *Hamlet*, which is just one example taken from a whole range of highlighted comparisons and analogies with Shakespeare, on nearly every other page.⁵⁹ By contrast, Beckett ignores the next chapter about "Les successeurs de Shakespeare: Le théâtre sous Charles 1er (1625–1642)," apparently caring little for

cont. references in his letters seem to indicate, but potentially as early as 1928–1930, when he worked as a "lecteur d'anglais" at the École normale supérieure in Paris and met Cazamian. Van Hulle and Nixon, *Beckett's Library*, 24–25.

57 Van Hulle and Nixon, *Beckett's Library*, 23.

58 Legouis and Cazamian, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 244.

59 Legouis and Cazamian, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 436. Other authors that Beckett annotates, according to the same pattern, are Ben Jonson, John Marston, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Middleton, Cyril Tourneur, John Webster, and John Fletcher.

his legacy, but clearly still showing an oblique interest in him through contemporary authors and their work.

SHAKESPEARE IN BECKETT'S READING NOTES AND LECTURE NOTES

In addition to the marginalia in his copy of *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, Beckett also took notes from an English version of Legouis and Cazamian when he was still a student at TCD. This leads us to another type of important reading trace supplementing his library, as they point to virtual books: Beckett's notes.

Beckett's copy of this volume itself has not survived, but his notes on it are at Trinity College Dublin.⁶⁰ Reproducing some of the most salient differences between the theater in France and England in the section on "Drama until Shakespeare 1580–1592," Beckett lists the names and principal works of John Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Kyd, Greene, and Marlowe, ticking the ones he had read and adding details on the authors as well as the period. Again, he seems keen to understand how these authors related to Shakespeare. For example, he records that Kyd also wrote a play on the subject of Hamlet (the lost and unconfirmed Ur-Hamlet) and that Greene foreshadowed Shakespeare in his predilection for the romantic. In the chapter on Shakespeare, Beckett again cold-shoulders the principal subject, except for his apocrypha. As in the annotated French version of Legouis and Cazamian, Shakespeare only figures indirectly in Beckett's notes: as part of Jonson's praise and Greene's criticism of him, his supposed involvement in Jonson's comedy *Every Man in His Humour*, his collaborations with John Fletcher on several plays, the rumor that William Davenant was his (god)child, and Thomas Heywood's reputation for being regarded as a prose Shakespeare, to

60 Samuel Beckett collection, Trinity College Dublin, TCD MS 10970. Beckett probably used Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature in Two Volumes*, vol. 1, *The Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, trans. Helen Douglas Irvine (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1926); Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature in Two Volumes*, vol. 2, *Modern Times*, trans. W. D. MacInnes and Louis Cazamian (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1927). See Everett Frost and Jane Maxwell, "TCD MS 10970: English Literature," *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 16 (2006): 105.

mention only a few.⁶¹ Why Beckett felt the need to own a French version of the book, having already taken copious notes from an English version that largely overlap with the passages he underlined, is unclear, although he may not have had his notes about him at the time. What had changed in the interval is the shift from Beckett being a student in the 1920s to being well on his way to becoming a writer by the 1930s. Aside from filling a gap in his knowledge, Beckett's sustained interest in Shakespeare's contemporaries coincides with his own struggle to escape the looming shadow of fellow Irish author James Joyce, who was also preoccupied with Shakespeare, as is shown, for example, by the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses*, set in the National Library of Ireland.

Beckett's continued interest in Shakespeare and his relationship to other authors is also reflected in the classes he taught during his stint as a French lecturer at TCD. Based on the notes of Aileen Conan, who was one of his undergraduate students, we know that Beckett taught a seminar entitled "Stendhal & Romantics" on February 5, 1931, in which he compared them to predecessors such as Shakespeare and Jean Racine.⁶² Conan notes that—much against the ruling intellectual climate of France at the time—Stendhal rejected Racine's venerated classicism in affirmation of Shakespeare's excesses and tried to claim both as romantics, and that he admired Shakespeare not for his inspiration but rather for his actuality. This strongly suggests that Beckett was, at least partially, basing his lecture on Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare*, which had just appeared in a new edition critically annotated by Henri Martineau.⁶³ The book is not present in Beckett's extant library, although he would have been able to access it in earlier editions at the TCD library. It has an important place in his rediscovery of Shakespeare through the French language that began sometime in the late 1920s and appears to have lasted for the remainder of his career. He would not quite

61 Other names that caught his interest include Thomas Nashe, Thomas Dekker, George Chapman, John Marston, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Middleton, Cyril Tournier, John Webster, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Philip Massinger, John Ford, James Shirley, John Day, Thomas Randolph, John Suckling, and William Davenant.

62 Samuel Beckett collection, Trinity College Dublin, TCD MS 11354/1.

63 Stendhal, *Racine et Shakespeare*, ed. Henri Martineau (Paris: Le Divan, 1928).

abandon Shakespeare in English, but the contact was mostly, and strikingly, of a second-hand and mediated kind.

Around the same time, Beckett was writing his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. In a separate notebook, he jotted down linguistic oddities in much the same way as Joyce did for "Work in Progress" in his *Finnegans Wake* notebooks. This so-called "Dream" Notebook contains a puzzling cluster of quotations from the plays *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, *Richard II*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, dating from around the same period.⁶⁴ John Pilling's critical edition of the notebook assumed that these excerpts derived directly from Shakespeare's own works, such as "my salad days" from *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1.5.74) or "angry wafture of your hand" from *Julius Caesar* (2.1.245). There are some indications, however, that suggest the notes may instead have been taken from a book of quotations such as Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*.⁶⁵ Beckett also possessed a copy of *A Hand-Book of Reference and Quotation: Mottoes & Aphorisms from Shakespeare* (which after his death was in the care of Edith Fournier and recently rejoined the rest of Beckett's personal library), along with Bartlett, *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, and *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations*.⁶⁶ The fact that Beckett did not always rely on the primary texts indicates how much of his erudition is based on secondary sources. Particularly illustrative examples are his reading of Immanuel Kant via Ernst Cassirer's

64 Samuel Beckett, *Beckett's "Dream" Notebook*, ed. John Pilling (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999), 35–36, items 246–54. The manuscript is now held by the Beckett Collection, Special Collections, University of Reading, MS 5000 (henceforth Reading).

65 In fact, all items from the cluster of Shakespeare quotations (DN 248, 249, 251, 253, 254), as well as the preceding eight notes, can be found in John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases, and Proverbs Traced to Their Sources in Ancient and Modern Literature*, 8th ed. (1855; Boston: Little Brown, 1885).

66 T. E. J., ed., *A Hand-Book of Reference and Quotation: Mottoes & Aphorisms from Shakespeare: Arranged Alphabetically, with a Copious Index of Words and Ideas* (London: James Hogg and Son, [1869]); J. M. Cohen and M. J. Cohen, eds., *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960); Cohen and Cohen, eds., *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations*, 2nd ed. (1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980). While some of the Shakespeare quotes in Beckett's "Dream" Notebook occur in the *Hand-Book*, others, such as the "wafture of your hand," do not, which makes it a less likely source.

introduction (“Kants Leben und Lehre”), which constitutes the last volume of Kant’s Complete Works⁶⁷ (present in Beckett’s personal library) or his autodidactic study of philosophy through introductions such as Wilhelm Windelband’s *History of Philosophy* (1893). Shakespeare is not the best example of this type of knowledge acquisition, since Beckett knew his work firsthand, but he did make use of secondhand sources in this case as well.

Beckett’s method of notetaking changed over the course of the 1930s. Whereas the “notesnatching” in the “Dream” Notebook was still heavily influenced by Joyce’s practice, as mentioned above, Beckett’s “Whoroscope” Notebook—named after the word written on its front cover, which in turn relates but is not confined to, Beckett’s poem “Whoroscope”—has more characteristics of a commonplace book.⁶⁸ Most of the references in this document appear to be taken not directly from Shakespeare’s work, but rather from encyclopedia entries and footnotes in secondary sources. For instance, the origin of a note referring to *King Lear* turns out to be the entry about astrology from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, where Chaucer is said to have written “a treatise on the astrolabe” and “Gloucester and Edmund represent respectively the old and the new faith” in Shakespeare’s play.⁶⁹ Some of these reading notes in the “Whoroscope” Notebook not only found their way into Beckett’s novels from the 1930s and 1940s, e.g., *Murphy* and *Watt*, but also into his plays for radio from the 1950s and 1960s, such as *All That Fall* and *Words and Music*.

For someone whose work is suffused with allusions to Shakespeare, it is surprising that Beckett made relatively few notes on him in his creative notebooks from the 1930s. This result may seem disappointing at first sight, but rather than indicating a lack of interest, it testifies to the opposite. Beckett had been steeped in Shakespeare to such an extent that, by the 1930s, he was far beyond the stage of studying his works. This he had already done so thoroughly before even going to university, and he had memorized so many passages that, not unlike the language of the King James Bible, the Shakespearean

67 Ernst Cassirer, “Kants Leben und Lehre,” in Ernst Cassirer, ed., *Immanuel Kants Werke*, vol. 11 (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1921).

68 Samuel Beckett, “Whoroscope” Notebook, Reading, MS 3000

69 Beckett, “Whoroscope” Notebook, fols. 6r–7r; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 2:800.

lexicon had become an integral part of his intertextual repertoire, vocabulary, and style—arguably to such an extent that it may have been one of the reasons for his decision to temporarily take a distance from his intertextually overloaded mother tongue and adopt French as a language of composition. In 1937, he wrote (this time in German) to his friend Axel Kaun that more and more his own language appeared to him like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the nothingness) behind it—a linguistic skepticism not so different from that which we encounter in Shakespeare's work.⁷⁰

Still, Beckett kept coming back to Shakespeare as part of the fabric of his language ("*Sprachgewebe*") that he tried to tear apart. Towards the end of his career, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Beckett made notes on *King Lear* in the so-called "Sottisier" Notebook.⁷¹ One line in particular served as a creative prompt: "The worst is not / So long as one can say, This is the worst" (4.1.28). Beckett copied these lines into his notebook, rather than marking them in his surviving copies of Shakespeare. A plausible reason for excerpting them is that they functioned as conceptual notes for his late prose text *Worstward Ho*. The theme was something of an "old chestnut" for Beckett. In his philosophy notes from the 1930s, he had already excerpted Gorgias's three notorious propositions: "1. Nothing exists. 2. If it did, it could not be known. 3. If it could be known, it could not be communicated."⁷² In his letter to A. J. Leventhal and Ethna MacCarthy of April 21, 1958, Beckett made an explicit link between the linguistic skepticism in the third proposition and another one of his favorite lines, this time from Petrarch: "Chi può dir com' egli arde é in picciol foco" (He who can say how he burns is in but a little fire).⁷³ In *Worstward Ho*,

70 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, 1929–1940, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 513–14: "Und immer mehr wie ein Schleier kommt mir meine Sprache vor, den man zerreißen muss, um an die hinterliegenden Dinge (oder das hinterliegende Nichts) zu kommen." See Dirk Van Hulle, "Beckett and Shakespeare on Nothing, Or, Whatever Lurks behind the Veil," *Limit(e) Beckett* 1 (2010): 123–36.

71 Samuel Beckett, "Sottisier" Notebook, Reading, MS 2901.

72 Samuel Beckett collection, Trinity College Dublin, TCD MS 10967; *Samuel Beckett's "Philosophy Notes,"* ed. Steven Matthews and Matthew Feldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 76.

73 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 3, 1957–1965, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 136.

Beckett takes this theme to its only logical conclusion: if the worst is the ineffable departure (death), and if the worst is not so long as one can still say “This is the worst,” then the greatest challenge for any writer is to say it anyway, writing towards the worst (or “worstward”), while wryly mocking the enthusiasm of Elizabethan and Victorian expansionism (as in Charles Kingsley’s historical novel *Westward Ho!*). In the same spirit, Beckett wrote to Avigdor Arikha on April 27, 1984, about his last prose work, *Stirrings Still*: “Ineffable departure. Nothing left but try & eff it.”⁷⁴

As these reading notes indicate, Beckett may not have been the most garrulous of “marginalists,” but as an “extractor” he did make quite a few notes on Shakespeare. Yet, even when combined, the categories of “marginalist” (as documented in his personal library) and “extractor” (as documented in his various reading notes) are insufficient, for we still lack a fair number of references. In order to grasp Beckett’s reading of Shakespeare more fully, we also need to include the “endogenesis” of his works, by studying their drafts.

SHAKESPEARE IN BECKETT’S DRAFTS

Beckett’s manuscripts contain numerous references to Shakespeare, many of which did not make it into the published texts. Sometimes a word seems like an allusion, but there is so little context that scholars may be wary of reading it as such for fear of overinterpreting. A good example is the notion of the “bell” in the play *Not I*: “. . . that April morning . . . she fixing with her eye . . . a distant bell . . . as she hastened towards it . . .”⁷⁵ Interpreting this passage as an intertextual reference to Ariel’s song in *The Tempest*—“Where the bee sucks, there suck I: / In a cowslip’s bell I lie; / There I couch when owls do cry” (5.1.87–90)—might easily be criticized for being too subjective or impressionistic. And yet, Shakespeare did play a role in the genesis of this passage.⁷⁶ In the first draft manuscript Beckett called it a “cowslip,” and in the third typescript he made a few revisions, hesitating between several alternatives and even adding the original passage in full: “. . .that April morning. . .she fixing with her eye. . .a distant

74 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 4, 1966–1989, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 639.

75 Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, 88.

76 Little, *Making of Samuel Beckett’s “Not I,”* 180–82.

~~cowslip~~ ~~flower bloom flow~~ bell (in a cowslip bell I lie) . . . as she hastened towards it. . .⁷⁷
 This explicit reference, underlined and placed in parentheses, was just a note to himself, for in the next versions Beckett omitted it and just used the word "bell." Only "a distant bell" is all that remains of this Shakespearean background. Beckett's writing practice was profoundly intertextual, but he tended to cover his tracks. In this movement towards less learning, it seems he paradoxically needed his erudition in order to be able to undo it.

That Beckett's removal of this parenthetical reference does not cancel the allusion to Shakespeare is clear from the fact that he identified it for his two German translators, Elmar Tophoven and Erika Tophoven, who wrote the reference down in red ballpoint on the first typescript of their translation, identifying the source, the act and the scene: "Tempest V, 1 / in a cowslips [sic] bell I lie"—adding an "s" but forgetting the apostrophe.⁷⁸ What is more, the Tophovens looked up the equivalent phrase in the German translation by August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, adding right underneath the English quote in gray pencil: "bette mich in Maiglöcklein Schlegel/Tie[c]k." Curiously, they ignored the reference in the next typescript version, opting instead for the open variants "~~ein fernes Lauten~~ eine ferne ~~Clocke/Klingel~~ Primel / Dolde / Blühe anstarre," mirroring Beckett's own uncertainty during the writing process and eventually muting the faint voice of Shakespeare in German as well.

On the same typescript of the German translation, in fact on the same page, another phrase from *Not I*—"sweet silent as the grave"⁷⁹—is annotated with "Shakesp. / Sonnet" in gray pencil, further specified on the third typescript as "Shakespeare Sonnet XXX." Indeed, on a separate sheet of handwritten notes that the author supplied his two translators with, he clarified the opening lines of "Sonnet 30" as "276 Shakespeare: sonnet commence: / 'When to the sessions of

77 BDMP10, MS-UoR-1227-7-12-4, ET3, fol. 2r. The textual variant (Beckett writes cowslip without the genitive *s*) suggests that this quotation, too, was recalled without an edition to hand. James Little has coined the term "memotext" for these kinds of intertexts drawn from memory rather than from a particular edition (Little, "Remembrance," 78).

78 The Beckett-Tophoven archive is a private collection currently under the care of Erika and Jonas Tophoven in Straelen, Germany. We are grateful for their kind permission to access and quote the material. The quoted passages can be found on fol. 11r of the typescript.

79 Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, 88.

sweet silent thought / I summon up remembrance of things past..” — which, incidentally, became the title of Proust’s *Recherche* in English translation. Shakespearean allusions like these may bubble to the surface during the writing process as a kind of Proustian involuntary memory, associated with seemingly ordinary, if slightly poetic, words, but they turn into voluntary memories because of their subsequent identification in the drafts. If Beckett looked them up in his copies of Shakespeare, they left no discernible traces there and would probably have remained mere “sweet silent thoughts” if not for his manuscripts.

Similarly, the word “chrysolite” in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, to describe the eyes of a “dark young beauty,” can be interpreted as an allusion to *Othello*.⁸⁰ In the top margin of Beckett’s annotated working copy for the 1973 London production of the play, he wrote out the relevant lines (5.2.151–53) from Shakespeare’s tragedy:

If heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite
I’d not have sold her for it.⁸¹

Beckett crucially leaves out the line “had she been true” that precedes the quotation, which is Othello’s justification to Emilia for killing his wife, Desdemona, whom he suspected of being unfaithful. In Beckett’s play, there is no talk of such intrigue, Krapp having chosen a (failed) career as a writer and the life of the mind over love. Still, Krapp uses the word “chrysolite” less as a reference to the content of *Othello* than as a vestige of his erudition—not unlike his use of the word “viduity,” whose meaning he turns out to have forgotten by the time he listens to his own tape again, thirty years after having recorded it.

Easier to identify are phrases consisting of more than one word, as in the following scene from Beckett’s radio play *Embers*:

Candle shaking and guttering all over the place, lower now,
old arm tired takes it in the other hand and holds it high again,
that’s it, that was always it, night, and the embers cold, and the

80 Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, 8.

81 Samuel Beckett, working copy of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, 1973, Reading, MS 1227/7/10/1, p. 15. For more on this production, see Dirk van Hulle, *The Making of Samuel Beckett’s “Krapp’s Last Tape”* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 120–21.

glim shaking in your old fist [. . .]. Holds it high again, naughty world, fixes Holloway, eyes drowned, won't ask again, just the look, Holloway covers his face, not a sound, white world, bitter cold, ghastly scene, old men, great trouble, no good.⁸²

On the English typescript that Beckett annotated for Robert Pinget's French translation of the radio play (*Cendres*), this passage is marked in gray pencil with "Shakespeare" and the word "mauvais" in the margin, although the title of the play is not identified.⁸³ It refers to Portia's lines in *The Merchant of Venice*: "How far that little candle throws his beams— / So shines a good deed in a naughty world" (5.1.89–90). More than just another verbal borrowing from Shakespeare, there is a thematic resonance in this scene as well. When Bolton holds up his candle in the dark, looking Holloway—a physician—in the eye, he begs him for an act of kindness, a painkiller, perhaps even a lethal injection, to end his suffering. In Pinget's three typescript versions, the phrase occurs as "monde mauvais,"⁸⁴ but Beckett left it out of the French text when he retyped and further revised the translation.⁸⁵ As this example shows, allusions to Shakespeare do not always carry across language borders in Beckett's bilingual oeuvre.

Occasionally, the opposite happens and such references are not introduced until the translation, be it almost exclusively in the English language. For instance, in *Fin de partie*, originally written in French, few readers would identify the phrase "Finie la rigolade"⁸⁶ as a reference to *The Tempest* (5.1.148). Beckett's own translation in *Endgame*—"Our revels now are ended"⁸⁷—turns it into a word-for-word quotation of Prospero's celebrated speech. When Beckett directed his own production of the German translation (*Endspiel*) in Berlin, he made sure to replicate the reference by borrowing, once more, from Schlegel's translation of *The Tempest* (*Der Sturm*), reporting to Barbara Bray on August 23, 1967: "I found German of Our

82 Beckett, *All That Fall*, 47.

83 BDMP11, ET5, fol. 14r.

84 BDMP11, FT1–3, fol. 18r.

85 BDMP11, FT4, fol. 13r.

86 Beckett, *Fin de partie*, 76.

87 Beckett, *Endgame*, 35.

revels etc (Das Fest ist jezt zu Ende) and put it in instead of Der Spass ist zu Ende.”⁸⁸ He did change it in the annotated copy of the German text, as well as record it in the notebook he used for this production,⁸⁹ and it was also altered in the later German editions of the play. However, when responding to his biographer James Knowlson about a potential reference to W. B. Yeats’s play *At the Hawk’s Well* in his own stage play *Happy Days* some ten years later, Beckett not only denied that it was an allusion, he also disavowed Prospero’s line, yet by seemingly first affirming it: “The ‘eye of the mind’ in H.D. does not refer to Yeats any more that [sic] the ‘revels. . .’ in Endgame to The Tempest, they are just bits of pipe I happen to have with me.”⁹⁰ Again, as in the case of the word “chrysolite,” Beckett does not appear to be making a link to the content of the works he refers to so much as indicating how his characters’ language is riddled with vestiges of erudition

SHAKESPEARE IN BECKETT’S LETTERS

As this last comment shows, even though Beckett’s extant library contains no reading traces for most of the more obvious word-for-word Shakespeare allusions in the published texts of his works, they are sometimes supported by other archival materials and letters, which often reveal a somewhat troubled self-consciousness about them. Beckett’s correspondence—the vast majority of which remains unpublished—contains many more such “bits of pipe,” as he called them, so we need to also take his letters into account as a final but important step to grasp the extent of Beckett’s familiarity with Shakespeare, beyond the material confines of his personal library and manuscripts.

Especially in letters to translators of his work into languages that he did not master, Beckett would occasionally identify and explain a Shakespeare phrase in his texts. Danish translator Christian Ludvigsen queried him about the scene in the radio play *All That Fall* where the station master, Mr. Barrel, tries to explain to Miss Fitt that

88 Beckett, *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, 4:79.

89 Samuel Beckett, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett: “Endgame,”* ed. S. E. Gontarski (London: Faber, 1992), 62.

90 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 2, 1941–1956, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 291.

the train carrying her mother has not yet arrived, by pointing his finger at the signal: "Look [MISS FITT *looks.*] No, up the line. [MISS FITT *looks. Patiently.*] No, Miss Fitt, follow the direction of my index. [MISS FITT *looks.*] There. You see now. The signal. At the bawdy hour of nine. [*In rueful afterthought.*] Or three alas!"⁹¹ Beckett elucidated the reference as follows: "Bawdy hour etc'—obscure obscene joke. Cf. Shakespeare's 'bawdy hour of noon.' Image of erection on the way up (hour hand at nine) and on way down (hour hand at three)."⁹² That he is again quoting from memory rather than from a book in his library is suggested by the fact that Mercutio's original line from *Romeo and Juliet* reads "the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon" (2.3.99–100). In a similar manner, he pointed out to the Swedish translator Magnus Hedlund on June 15, 1972, that the word "Ethiope" in the story "Druff" from *More Pricks Than Kicks* means "Black" and comes from *Romeo and Juliet* (1.5.42–43), even providing him with the full quotation: "Black: 'It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night / Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear' (*Romeo & Juliet*)."⁹³

Equally punctilious was his letter to American director Alan Schneider of August 17, 1961, in which he glossed the phrase "Ensign crimson. [. . .] Pale flag," spoken by a middle-aged Winnie when she puts down her lipstick and her mirror in *Happy Days*,⁹⁴ as an ironic nod to *Romeo and Juliet*: "Juliet's lips, Act III I think, I'll let you have exact reference when I get back to Paris."⁹⁵ As Beckett's follow-up letter of August 25 reveals, when he sent Schneider the entire quotation, he would occasionally dip into his library to look up a passage, sometimes proving his original guess about its provenance wrong: "Beauty's ensign yet / Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks, / And death's pale flag is not advanced there" (5.3.94–96).⁹⁶ If Beckett did not have direct access to his

91 Beckett, *All That Fall*, 17.

92 *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, 2:59.

93 *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, 3:297.

94 Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (London: Faber, 2010), 9.

95 *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, 3:429.

96 In the same letter to Schneider, Beckett also wrote out the full details for Shakespeare references in the play to *Hamlet* ("O woe is me" [3.1.159]; "The bird of dawning singeth all night long" [1.1.141]), *Cymbeline* ("Fear no more the heat o' the sun" [4.2.259]) and *Twelfth Night* ("Feed on her damask cheek" [2.4.111]). Maurice Harmon, ed., *No Author Better Served*:

library, for example when he was abroad, he would occasionally call on friends for help. While directing the German translation of *Endgame* at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin, he wrote to Barbara Bray on September 4, 1967, asking her to look up a phrase he could only partially recollect: "Can you get me: 'the gods, like wanton boys with flies. . .? for their sport'—complete quotation and reference. Sorry to be a nuisance. Simply cannot remember. Forget about it if too much of a nuisance." As Beckett's postscript at the bottom of his card shows, he did eventually recall the full quotation—more or less—but not its exact source: "as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods / they kill ? us for their sport ?? Wo?"⁹⁷ The right answer would have been *King Lear* (4.1.37–38). It is not clear if Bray eventually provided Beckett with the correct information, or why he needed it in the first place, but such examples consolidate *Endgame* as a play riddled with Shakespearean associations, even in German.

The difficulty of translating Shakespeare is also a recurrent theme in Beckett's letters. When he was helping actor-director Jean-Louis Barrault with an adaptation of *2 Henry VI*, Beckett complained, again to Bray, on October 2, 1966: "Hard to try and find this day of rest such things as 'The pretty vaulting sea refused to drown me' and 'Even as a splitted bark, so sunder we. / This way fall I to death. / This way for me.' / Exeunt severally !!!" (3.2.49, 413–15).⁹⁸ He repeated the same comment in a letter to Jocelyn Herbert, sent on the same day, challenging her: "French me that."⁹⁹ The notorious difficulty of translating Shakespeare may explain why references to his work are almost exclusively confined to Beckett's texts in English, or crop up when he is translating from the French language into his native tongue. In the other direction, they usually disappear, although occasionally Beckett replaces them with an equivalent from a French author. A case in point is "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" (4.2.259) from *Cymbeline* in *Happy Days*, substituted for "Qu'ils pleurent, oh mon Dieu, qu'ils frémissent

cont. *The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 95–98.

97 *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, 4:85.

98 *Letters of Sameul Beckett*, 4:46.

99 Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 544.

de crainte" from Jean Racine's *Athalie*¹⁰⁰ in *Oh les beaux jours*, which Beckett further distorts to "frémissent de honte."¹⁰¹ In addition to emphasizing the crumbling erudition of Winnie's words in both English and French, be it through different canonical authors in those languages, Beckett's pairing of Racine with Shakespeare also stands out because it evokes Stendhal's eponymous essay that he lectured on at TCD some thirty-five years earlier.

Last but not least, Beckett's correspondence contains valuable information about his reading habits or the books in his library. As mentioned before, all the surviving copies of the *Sonnets* date from the 1980s, but he must have owned others, since he alludes to them much earlier in his writing. In a letter of May 8, 1951, to Jean Wahl (Professor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1936 to 1967), he states: "I remember perfectly well our few meetings in 1942. [. . .] I gave you Shakespeare's sonnets."¹⁰² Though it is not entirely clear, Beckett's comment leaves open the possibility that some of his own earlier acquired copies may have been gifted to friends and are now part of their personal libraries. Some of those stray volumes eventually turn up again, Beckett's "schoolboy copy" of *Macbeth* being the most spectacular find so far, but in all likelihood it will not be the last.

CONCLUSION

Given the abundance of Shakespeare references in Beckett's work, the former's relative absence from the latter's personal library—even when supplemented with reading notes, manuscripts and letters—is surprising. However, we should be careful not to let the materiality of the writer's library—even of the expanded archive, for that matter—blind us to its many lacunae (all the books that Beckett may have read in public libraries, given to friends or simply sold, as well as missing drafts and correspondence). And even if a particular volume is still present and annotated, it often so happens that *unmarked* passages made more of an impression than marked ones. A reading experience that had a lasting effect on a writer's career can also precede that career

100 Jean Racine, *Athalie: A Tragedy by J. Racine*, ed. Edward S. Joynes, 2nd ed. (1871; New York: Henry Holt, 1930), 2.9.827.

101 Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. James Knowlson (London: Faber, 1978), 138.

102 *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, 3:252.

by many years. Thanks to the serendipitous discovery of Beckett's *Macbeth* copy, it is clear that the institutionally ingrained pedagogical habit of learning by heart selected canonical works of Western literature contributed in no small way to Beckett's English—his command of the language, but also what that language consisted of for him creatively. It therefore seems useful, in this type of research, to bear in mind that the beginnings of a writer's personal library are not always well documented, and that many of the most impactful readings may have taken place before the author even had the money to purchase any books. Research into writers' personal libraries can thus certainly be useful as a reading strategy if it situates the reading notes in the context of the *entire oeuvre* in the sense of not just the "complete works" (i.e., as published) but the complete writings, including notes, drafts, and letters. In this sense, as we hope to have illustrated, genetic criticism can be directly relevant to bibliography, and vice versa.