Beckett Centennial Celebration Continues at BC

An exhibit honoring the centennial of the birth of acclaimed Irish author Samuel Beckett, titled “...my monster is in safe keeping,” is on display at Boston College’s John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections through January 31, 2007.

The exclusive exhibit, which includes items never before displayed in the United States, is comprised of correspondence, manuscripts, posters, photographs, publications and other papers by and about Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 and noted for works that include “Waiting for Godot.”

The exhibit is drawn from Boston College’s celebrated Beckett Collection, considered to be one of the world’s finest, which contains more than 400 manuscripts and other pieces collected by the playwright’s friends Calvin and Joann Israel, as well as correspondence between Beckett and North American literary agent Barney Rosett, correspondence with director Alan Schneider, and correspondence in French between Beckett and Swiss-born French novelist and playwright Robert Pinget.

The exhibit is in celebration not only of the centennial of Beckett’s birth but also of a new Burns Library acquisition: The Judith Schmidt Douw Collection of Correspondence with Samuel Beckett, 1957-1984, which contains more than 130 letters from Beckett to Judith Schmidt (later Judith Schmidt Douw), secretary to Barney Rosett of Grove Press, Beckett’s American publisher.

“This exhibit gives Boston College an opportunity not only to celebrate the life of the great Irish playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett but also to showcase the University’s latest Beckett acquisition, the nearly 30-year correspondence between Samuel Beckett and Judith Schmidt Douw,” said BC’s Burns Librarian Robert O’Neill. “This collection significantly strengthens the American Beckett Collection, already well represented at Burns Library by the Israel, Schneider and Rosett collections.”

In addition to letters from the newly-acquired Schmidt Douw collection, the exhibit includes the rare Beckett manuscript “Suite” (later called “La Fin”) written in 1946, said exhibit curator Robert Bruns. “It was during the course of this manuscript that Beckett switched from writing in English to French, which may have marked the point at which he started writing extended prose works in French.”

Also on display are several of the letters from Beckett to Alan Schneider on how to direct his plays, Schneider’s letter to Thornton Wilder describing his first meeting with Beckett, and rare posters from openings of Beckett plays, including the original production of “En Attendant Godot” (“Waiting for Godot”) at the Theatre de Babylon in Paris.

In addition, the exhibit includes several examples of BC’s extensive collection of signed Beckett publications from the Israel Beckett collection, annotated typescripts of early versions of novels and plays, and a typescript of Beckett’s prize-winning 1930 poem, “Whoroscope.”

“...my monster is in safe keeping,” is free and open to the public. Hours are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment. For information call (617) 552-3282.