little-known documents

Inturned

SYLVIA BEACH

INTRODUCTION BY KERI WALSH

Introduction

SYLVIA BEACH (1887–1962) IS REMEMBERED PRIMARILY FOR THE TWO FEATS OF WHICH SHE WAS PROUDEST, PUBLISHING *ULYSSES* AND "STEERing a little bookshop for about twenty-two years between the two wars," as she puts it in the text reprinted here. Her "little bookshop," Shakespeare and Company, was for Ernest Hemingway "a warm, cheerful place with a big stove in winter, tables and shelves of books, new books in the window, and photographs on the wall of famous writers both dead and living" (35). In 1919, with support from Adrienne Monnier, the owner of a neighboring bookstore, Beach launched the Left Bank shop that would serve as a hub for French and expatriate writers.[1] In her 1959 memoir, *Shakespeare and Company*, Beach tells stories of her friends and patrons, who included F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, Thornton Wilder, Gertrude Stein, Walter Benjamin, Paul Valéry, Simone de Beauvoir, HD (Hilda Doolittle), Samuel Beckett, and many others. Beach also describes there her other great feat, the publication of *Ulysses*. When British and American printers were prevented from publishing Joyce's Dublin epic because it was considered too obscene, Beach stepped in. Her fortuitous situation as a seller of English-language books in Paris inspired her to risk bringing out *Ulysses* herself. In February 1922, after a legendary struggle, the first edition of *Ulysses* appeared under the imprint "Shakespeare and Company."

Despite the triumph of publishing *Ulysses*, Beach's bookstore later suffered during the Depression, though donations from Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman) helped to keep the store afloat. Also, friends came together to organize a series of benefit readings by famous writers. Although Shakespeare and Company never turned a great profit, the shop weathered the 1930s, and during the early days of German occupation it was a reliable enclave in Paris's contracting artistic scene. With the death of James Joyce in January 1941, Beach lost her most famous cause, and, at the end of that same year, she lost her bookstore. In December 1941, a German soldier demanded to buy Beach's final copy of *Finnegans Wake*, and, after Beach refused on the grounds that it was her personal copy, the soldier returned and threatened to impound her collection. Beach, with the help of Monnier, Monnier's assistant Maurice Saillet, and the building's concierge, immediately hid the entire stock of Shakespeare and

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Company in an apartment above the store. With the shop's sign hastily painted over and the bookshelves disassembled, Shakespeare and Company vanished from the landscape of occupied Paris (Fitch 405).

The following summer, Beach was taken into custody by the German army. In late August 1942, a German convoy appeared at her door, ordering her into a transport truck. Already in the vehicle was Beach's friend Katherine Dudley, who had also remained in Paris after the war broke out (most of the stragglers of the "lost generation" having by then gone home). Beach, Dudley, and the other American women were placed temporarily in the former zoo in the Bois de Boulogne and then transported by rail to an internment camp at Vittel, in Lorraine, close to the borders of Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg. German forces had seized the area's large hotels and used them to house prisoners. Beach was held at the Grand Hotel for just under seven months and was released in February 1943 through the Vichy connections of her former customer Jacques Benoist-Méchin.

In "Inturned," an uncorrected typescript held at Princeton University's Firestone Library, Beach reflects on the period of her confinement. She wrote the piece for a radio broadcast to be delivered alongside a narrative by Beach's co-detainee Katherine Dudley. Beach, who was in her mid-fifties during her internment, was approximately seventy years old when she recollected the event.[2] "Inturned" is one of the few surviving accounts of life in the internment camp at Vittel, at least two of which have been published. One of the published accounts is the diary of Mary Berg, an American Jewish teenager who was living in the Warsaw Ghetto when Poland was invaded. She was transported to Vittel and from there escaped to New York, her release from the camp made possible by her American passport.[3] Berg published her diary, *Warsaw Ghetto*, in New York in 1945. Another account of Vittel comes from the poet Yitzak Katznelson, who recorded his experiences of internment during the period he was composing the poem "The Song of the Murdered Jewish Nation," a manuscript buried in the hotel grounds and recovered only at the end of the war. Katznelson arrived at Vittel from Poland on 22 May 1943, bearing a forged South American passport. The 21 July 1943 entry in his *Vittel Diary* records the grim mood of the camp's Jewish inmates: "There is not a single Jew here who believes that he will be allowed to remain alive" (47). Expressing his grief for those still in Poland and his guilt over having left them behind, Katznelson concluded that "these two months here, are, in a sense, harder to endure than almost a whole year in Warsaw—in that valley of death" (48). Katznelson died in Auschwitz in 1944. His diary survived because Miriam Novitch, a friend and member of the Resistance, smuggled it out of the camp.

In contrast to these two urgent, present-tense accounts, Beach's "Inturned" was written nearly twenty years after its author was held at Vittel. Perhaps for that reason, and because Beach could not have experienced anything close to what Berg and Katznelson did, "Inturned" reads as much like an episodic, stylized memoir as it does a documentary narrative of internment under German occupation. But what Beach does recall is vividly depicted, and her engaging writing is all the more remarkable since she is rarely thought of as a writer. She has more often been considered culturally and historically important because of the patient support she provided to prominent male modernists: she supplied and published experimental texts, arranged meetings between authors, received mail on behalf of American writers abroad, and presided over a modernist salon.[4] In "Inturned," we hear Beach's own voice, which reveals her ambivalence about the lifestyle of interwar expatriate Americans. Her capture and incarceration forced her to revisit a formerly luxurious expatriate setting, and she exposes its devastation, writing on several levels—as historical witness, memoirist, and critic.

Notes

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1. Shakespeare and Company opened for business on 17 November 1919, at 8 rue Dupuytren. In 1921, Beach moved her shop to 12 rue de l'Odéon, across the street from Monnier's Maison des Amis des Livres and around the corner from the place de l'Odéon (Fitch 91). For details of Beach's life and career I am indebted to Noel Riley Fitch's *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation*.

2. "Inturned" was written between 1959 and 1962.

3. Berg's and Beach's time at Vittel would have overlapped from mid-January to February 1943.

4. Among the feminist scholars to challenge the view of Beach as modernism's secretary are Noel Riley Fitch, Brenda Maddox, Shari Benstock, Bonnie Kime Scott, and Carol Loeb Shloss.

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Inturned

At the end of the story of my bookshop, Shakespeare and Company, in Paris, is mentioned the capture of the proprietress by the Germans. I have done no more than mention this episode of my life as I think of it as too trivial an adventure after that of the publishing of "Ulysses" and steering a little bookshop for about twenty-two years between the two wars. In fact, an internment is something of a come-down for any of its inmates. Then I do not feel I know anything about the subject as I spent only seven months as a prisoner, while my friend Katherine Dudley remained a prisoner for a much longer time:[1] till everybody was released by the arrival of our army.[2]

So Katherine must come to my rescue to liven our tale and take it out of the rut it is apt to fall into when I get involved in the internment episode. Thus I hope to satisfy those who seem to be waiting for what they call "all about life in the internment camp."

After escaping from what I feared more than emprisonment; the confiscation of the Shakespeare and Company library, hiding the books in an empty apartment, under the unsuspected protection of my absent proprietor, and the Joyce manuscripts and a few of the rarest items in the apartment of Adrienne Monnier, I settled down in the little rooms above my former bookshop to wait for whatever might happen.

I shared the strange occupied life of my French friends, without heat and food dwindling. Electricity was limited "we gave up any ration of coal for a little gas" an hour at noon, finally none at all as we combined rations with whoever cooked a meal at noon. I took my lunch at Adrienne's. I had a quarter of a litre of milk daily as I didn't eat meat, and extra macaroni. Of course we had no butter, nor sugar, nor salt, nor coffee nor tea nor tobacco. Nor chocolate, nor of course cigarettes if you were a female. Luckily, the black market was

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perfecting its services, if you could afford them, and a great deal of our time was spent running after butter and biscuits and things, whatever we could find. But I found Adrienne in tears one day because she had no fat to cook with.

All this is to explain why I was out when the Germans came for me one day. We had heard that there was some honey at a place near the Madeleine. You had to be there before 8 and queue up for an hour or two, and perhaps come away without filling your can, but we were inured to that sort of thing.

So off I went one morning on my bicycle to get some honey. Two hours later, on my return to the rue de l'Odeon, my concierge was waiting for me, weeping, with the news that "they" had come for me and I was to get ready at once. I had hardly time to put away the honey when "they" came for me with their truck: I must pack up only what I could carry. I thought as winter was coming and we might be taken to a cold German camp, woolies were the best: and flustered, with the soldier with a kind of dinnerplate hanging from his neck watching me as I dressed and hurrying me (schnell machen), I put into my rucksack the woolies and by mistake two bibles and 2 complete Shakespeares as the most condensed portable reading.

Adrienne saw me off, the concierge still crying, and the neighbors, specially the coal man opposate who was for some reason in tears as well, gathered as close as possible around the truck that I climbed into. There to my joy was my dear old friend Katherine Dudley, dressed as though for a vernissage very smart, and in her usual good spirits. We stopped at places around town where Americans resided the soldiers went in to fetch more of us, often came out shaking their heads, meaning: not to be found, whereupon those of us in the truck cheered loudly.

After they had rounded up any American women to be found, we went on a long truckride but shut in as we were couldn't see where on earth they were to deliver us. We stopped at a place we knew in better days as the Zoo, in the Bois de Boulogne: Jardin d'Acclimation, and mounted the steps to a large hall to the monkey house as we called it: we were the only monkeys. Rows of cots with a gallery above from which dozens of American women and more arriving every minute were observed by sentries.

I found Miss Sarah Watson, Directrice of the Students Hostel busy trying to make us all as comfortable as though in her pleasant hostel, which was difficult with only these cots around the walls, close together, and as we discovered soon when it rained, water dripping from a leak in the roof on our faces. But she did her best to look after a group of us including Stan, our lovely Dru Tartiere (later Mrs. Geoffrey Parsons), Miss Mary Dickson another directress of the students' home Katherine Dudley and myself. At first, I didn't see Mabel Gardner, our genius sculptress, but were soon to perceive her in a long cloak her golden hair like the angels in the Italian pictures.[3]

We were fed very well on rations of the German soldiers at their canteen downstairs, and very soon received parcels of clothing and goods from our friends: every day we were called up to a table where the parcels were piled and our names called to claim what belonged to each of us.

There were five hundred American nuns, picked up in convents all over France: some of these peeled potatoes. There were Americans coming from every kind of milieu—a number of artists as it was Paris, a number of French war-brides of American soldiers from world war I: some teachers, some whores, some dancers, a milliner or two, a poet or two, a lady who lived at the Ritz, the wife of Bedaux the spy and quite a few crazy women whose case was not improved by capture.[4]

We were allowed to walk in a minute garden where, over the distant hedge we could see any friends who cared to come and have a try at making themselves heard and at hear-

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ing our voices in unison calling loudly for that something in the top bureau drawer etc.

This life abruptly ended when one morning at dawn we were ordered to get up, and were driven away to a remote railway station where a train of miserable third class cars were awaiting us. Our destination was not mentioned. The cars were sealed up, we started on a journey lasting all day and into the middle of the night. Our seats the lady from the Ritz said, were "stuffed with donkey's feathers" we were shunted on side tracks at some place in the early morning heard cattle mooing in cars alongside of ours: stopped finally at a watering place called Vittel, and marched with our bundles to the camp. This camp was already occupied by six thousand English prisoners: they cheered us from their windows as we arrived. We were to join them in what, thanks to their genius for colonizing, was a model internment camp.

My doctor Bertrand-Fontaine had provided me with a medical certificate, which helped the French doctor who knew her: who didn't? and indeed I needed medical attention, suffering terribly with the usual migraine headache. They took me to the hospital run by English nuns, and there I spent the first few months of my internment very comfortably and happily, considering one was in prison.

Miss Sarah Watson soon came to join me at the hospital and I fixed up a kind of supper for us both on an electric plate and got our breakfast.

Those of the Americans who were ablebodied rounded into the Grand Hotel with the English prisoners, who reluctantly put up with them. We were told that a hotel of our own was being prepared to receive us. From what I heard of this hotel, I hoped to stay in hospital as long as possible. I liked the English nuns, and volunteered to go down to the kitchen at seven or so and bring up the breakfast to the patients. They included two charwomen who were very pleased having their breakfast in bed, no doubt for the first time in their lives: the lady from the Ritz, the tallest woman in the camp, "the Giraff" she was called, whose name was the same as mine, and who had brought all her jewels: (I had to fasten her pearl necklace when I brought up her breakfast:) she had dainty nightgowns, so sheer that the German doctor was shocked to see her so plainly through them: and to the rest I took up their breakfasts and found it quite amusing.

The English nuns were very much in the resistance and organized escapes with their agents outside. One of them had a whole grocery in her room and swapped cans for other cans.

Suddenly, on Christmas Eve, we were told that all Americans were to move to the hotel reserved for us. Vittel is this watering place with hotels around a park. Ours was carefully picked as very rundown; through it had been good in its days, apparently. It was a shabby, dirty old building, with plumbing out of order: the room I was to share with the other Sylvia, the "Giraff" had dirty water over the floor which one of my fellow prisoners, the Princess Murat was mopping up into a gold-edged chamber pot with "Grand Hotel" emblazoned on it. In the middle of the room, a large rathole. The kind of room in which my librarian friend said "you slit your wrists". Luckily, the other Sylvia, from the Ritz, whose husband was a Colonel I believe was released before our transfer to this hotel. The bathroom I discovered, had no water, and the tub was for some reason full of mud.

One of the internees was suffering with a skin disease: she hadn't brought a dressing gown: the giraffe had brought two satin ones a pink and a blue: she insisted on the sick internee borrowing one of the dressinggowns: When this person was released for medical reasons the dressing gown she had worn was disinfected in the rumbling little disinfecting machine in the courtyard of the hospital: I saw it when it emerged from this process: we all saw it, one of the events of our prisoner's life: it had been an ample wadded garment,

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was now a little piece of toasted rag in a ball the size of a golfball. The Giraff took this disappointment with her usual good humor.

I was by the time Christmas had come and gone living in my luxurious room at our hotel. In all the rooms along my corridor were the nervous internees, or alcoholic, like the one nextdoor to me. The door between us didn't close: one day, as I lay on my bed I opened my eyes, saw my neighbor crawling on her knees through the door: she paused, said: oh! I thought you were out.

We had a stove in our rooms, brought up logs in our blankets from the cellar, and kindling. One morning towards 3 oclock I heard cries from my neighbor's room: help! fire! I hurried over to her, taking a saucepan of soup—we had no running water—and with the soup and the blankets on her bed put out the fire that was burning in the straw strewn over the floor. She had tried to make a fire in her stove, I imagine. I believe she had managed to procure drinks through black market smuggling from outside.

Another of my neighbors called me to complain that she had found three Germans in her valise.

We were fond of the president of our camp, Mrs. Southwork and her daughter Elsie, an artist. Mrs. Southwork was not afraid to stand up for us with our gaolers. But hearing she had expressed anti-semitic views, some of us went in a delegation to protest vehemently against this attitude ill-befitting citizens of our nation thrown with the Nazis. We heard no more of these curious prejudices.[5]

A job that fell to me was that of our postman. Every day I went over to the Grand Hotel where the mail was deposited, and brought ours in a pouch to the hotel where we lived. Some of the internees were rather unreasonable and when I was unable to produce a letter for them accused me of keeping it back. There were arguments sometimes, but it was always with those poor things that complained of persecution of every sort.

One of the internees was a young, pretty woman with high heels and a long cigarette holder: to my surprize, she took hold of the kitchen problem which was serious when we were suddenly installed in our hotel. There were no utensils to cook our miserable soup in nor to make our acorn coffee in, and she was faced with that when told to go to work and prepare our food. There were no dishes, we had only our tin cups—those of us who had one—and tin cans—if any. This blond girl made such a row that the articles we needed were finally provided. Every day at noon we filed up for the soup—hot water with a hint of potatoes, cabbage and little else in it—and the bowls were to contain enough for supper as well as lunch. It sufficed, as the smell of that soup took away all desire for more of it.

After a week of some deprivation, we received parcels from the Red Cross and fattened up considerably on their contents: in fact we were far better off than were our friends at home who were continuing to do without condensed milk, sugar, coffee, prunes, chocolate and cigarettes, which we endulged in at our camp.

The only one of us who scorned the food parcels was Mabel Gardner. She was contented with the prison fare, her only indulgence, cigarettes which she received in parcels from friends in Paris. Mabel had brought her tools and in her "studio" as she called the pinetree in which she did herself to work, she carved beautiful statues in the logs provided for our stoves.

We American internees were not much respected by our Gaolers. They were accustomed to the English women who were serious people and not frivolous and lighthearted as most of us were. They had established themselves in the Grand Hotel, where they worked on their tea in a spirit of cooperation and discipline, keeping the Germans busy with their demands. The big stove in the cellar was roaring and two of the internees volunteering kitchen service was constantly on

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duty, supervising the frying of potatoes and preparation of dishes made with the contents of the parcels. The stove was covered with individual orders, each with the name of the internee and the hour it was to be cooked and when to be taken off the stove. But it was at teatime that you had to see the cooking brigade in full activity. The lift going up and down full of women with trays with teapots and bread and butter and cakes: murmurs in sweet English voices "*have* you had your tea? *are* you going to have your tea? . . ." They were all provided with teapots and cups and saucers whatever else might be lacking in camp.

These English women were admirable, and made themselves thoroughly feared and respected by our Gaolers: gave orders and had things done. I used to visit them in their kitchen, had a friend in it Miss Topalian, of Armenian origin, who worked for hours in the cellar of the Grand Hotel, attending to all those teas and hundreds of individual little dishes.

We were allowed a visitor once a month: Adrienne Monnier came with Maurice Saillet:[6] I heard by chance of their visit, by loudspeaker in the park—if you happened to be there when it was announced. I was escorted by a soldier to a small office where one received ones visitors—in the presence of a German officer. Adrienne was wearing a wide, long cape, her customary costume, and she stowed under it a lot of the contents of my parcels which had been put aside for her. A can of condensed milk rolled on the floor—right under the table at which the officer was seated: I must say, he showed no sign of having noticed it as I picked it up.

The Germans respected immensely any unmarried expectant mothers among us. They were specially priviledged, and efforts were made to fetch the man who was responsible, and to marry him to the girl at the chapel in the camp. Resistance was overcome and weddings with the bride in white veil and orange blossoms almost like in peace time. The brides were pale as they had suffered considerably with nausea, such as the poor thing in the room next to mine at the hospital.

When we had time from our tasks of queuing up for the weekly round black loaf of bread, for the parcels, for parcels received in the post, and the many chores of the boy scout life of the camp, we thought of nothing but the hope of being released. Various friends at home who were on sufficiently good terms with the Enemy were continually working on our problem. After about seven months of captivity, some of these friends succeeded in getting my release fixed up. I heard of it when someone heard it announced on the loudspeaker: the time given me to prepare for my departure was nearly over when I started getting ready: Mabel Gardner helped me to stuff my camp clothing and the food supplies saved from the parcels for our starving friends at home into my rucksack and done up in queer bundles: I went to the little office of the Commandatur to get my release papers. The Officer threw them away when I said I had no money to pay for my ticket back to Paris. Miss Dickson was waiting to see me go, and promptly lent me the money for my ticket, the officer fumbled around in the wastepaper basket, found my papers, and saying it was now too late, called the soldier to escort me out of the camp all the same. My emotions had been indescribible. And what if my dear dear friends left behind in the camp were not released? This thought spoiled all the pleasure of release for me.

Editor's Notes

I have preserved Beach's spelling, grammar, and punctuation throughout.

1. "Katherine Dudley . . . has so much charm and wit, [is] a friend of Picasso, [and is] herself a painter of great talent," wrote Adrienne Monnier in her essay "Americans in Paris" (413). Dudley (b. 1884) was an expatriate American artist from Chicago. She and her sisters Helen, Caroline, and Dorothy were well connected in modernist circles. Helen was a lover of Bertrand Russell, Caroline was influential in

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bringing the Revue Nègre to Paris, and Dorothy published an essay on the sculptor Brancusi in the *Dial* in 1927.

2. American forces liberated Vittel on 12 September 1944, approximately three weeks after the liberation of Paris.

3. Monnier lists some of Beach's American friends held prisoner at Vittel and praises their fortitude: "Besides Sylvia there was Sarah Watson, the directrice of the International Students' Hostel. There was a magnificent type of American woman, a true spiritual daughter of Benjamin Franklin. It should be told in full how she and her assistant, Marcelle Fournier . . . succeeded, as a result of firmness and cleverness, in saving the house from the Germans who wanted to seize it; how, in spite of all kinds of difficulties, they made sure that there would be meals every day for their little group; how, without neglecting the international equity that is the rule of the hostel, they were able to establish an active center of resistance where I do not know how many patriots, French and foreign (Czechs in particular), found help and friendship. . . . The angelic Mabel Gardner who sculpts graceful figures in wood. Dru Tartière, beautiful and brave, who hid five American aviators in her house in Barbizon—and that is only the most obvious of her exploits. Camilla Steinbrugge, who is one of the most accomplished women I know. Mary Dixon [spelled "Dickson" by Beach], the daughter of a famous evangelist preacher, as keen and sensitive as a heroine of Hawthorne" (413).

4. Charles Eugène Bedaux (1887–1944) was a French-born United States citizen arrested by Allied forces in North Africa in 1944 on charges of treason. Suspected of being a German spy, he committed suicide before his trial.

5. During the thirties and into the years of occupation, Beach and Monnier came to the assistance of Jewish friends. They helped the photographer Gisèle Freund when she arrived as a refugee from Berlin and had difficulty garnering the legal right to stay in France (Fitch 356–57). Arthur Koestler hid in Monnier's apartment for several days before fleeing Paris (Fitch 398).

6. Saillet (1914–1990) was an employee at Monnier's bookstore and a writer and editor.

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