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Guide to the Collection of Jean Genet Drafts and Proofs

GEN MSS 1739



Sandrine Guérin

September 2022

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 1739

CREATOR: Genet, Jean, 1910-1986, author

TITLE: Collection of Jean Genet Drafts and Proofs

DATES: 1952–1982

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.67 linear feet (5 boxes)

LANGUAGE: French

SUMMARY: The collection consists of manuscript drafts and corrected typescripts as well as galley and page proofs for works by Jean Genet, 1952-1982, including *Le Bagne*, *Le Balcon*, *Les Nègres*, and *Le Langage de la muraille: cent ans jour après jour*. It also contains manuscripts with sketches by the author and artworks on paper by others, including two hand-colored lithographs by Alberto Giacometti, created as a cover illustration for *Le Balcon*.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.genetjean>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.genetjean>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Librairie Benoit Forgeot on the Edwin J. Beinecke Book Fund, 2021.

Custodial History

The groups of materials for *Le Bagne*, *Le Balcon* and *Les Nègres* were part of the Barbezat Collection sold at auction at Drouot, Paris, France, on March 5, 1999 (Le Bagne Lot 39, Les Nègres Lot 41, Le Balcon Lot 42).

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Collection of Jean Genet Drafts and Proofs is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Collection of Jean Genet Drafts and Proofs. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

These materials have been arranged and described according to national and local standards. For more information, please refer to the Beinecke Manuscript Unit Processing Manual.

Related Materials

See also:

[Tonnerre de Brest, 1945 \(GEN MSS VOL 801\)](#). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

[Jean Genet page proof and first edition of *Journal du voleur*, circa 1947-1948 \(GEN MSS 1617\)](#). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

[Jean Genet and Paul Morihien papers relating to publishing, 1947 \(GEN MSS VOL 804\)](#). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Jean Genet (1910-1986)

Jean Genet (1910-1986) was a French novelist, poet, playwright, essayist, and political activist.

Jean Genet was born in Paris, France, to Camille Gabrielle Genet, a twenty-two years old, single, maidservant. Struggling to support herself, she turned her son over to social services when he was seven months old. In July 1911, Genet became a ward of the state and was sent to live with a foster family in Alligny-en-Morvan. He excelled at school, but also engaged in petty theft during his youth. In September

1926, after repeated criminal offenses, the state sent Genet to the Penitentiary Colony of Mettray. In March 1929 he enlisted in the French Army to gain an early release from Mettray. He served in Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, and deserted his army post in June 1936. Genet then traveled around Europe as a vagabond, petty thief, and prostitute—experiences he recounts in *Le Journal du voleur* (*The Thief's Journal*). He returned to France in July 1937 and spent the next several years in and out of prison. In 1938 he received a dishonorable discharge from the Army on grounds of indecency.

Genet began to write during these periods of incarceration. In 1942, he completed the poem *Un Condamné à Mort* (*The Man Sentenced to Death*) and his first novel *Notre Dame des Fleurs* (*Our Lady of the Flowers*), which was published anonymously in 1943. Between 1944 and 1949, Genet wrote four novels—*Miracle de la rose* (*Miracle of the Rose*), *Funeral Rites*, *Querelle de Brest*, and *Journal d'un voleur* (*A Thief's Journal*). In 1948, Genet faced a sentence of life imprisonment following ten convictions, until prominent literary figures including Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre appealed on his behalf and secured a presidential pardon.

In addition to his novels, Genet experimented with drama. He wrote *Haute Surveillance* (*Deathwatch*) in 1944, *Les Bonnes* in 1947 (*The Maids*), and *Splendid's* in 1948. Throughout the 1950s he devoted himself to theater, writing experimental and increasingly political plays: *Le Balcon* (*The Balcony*), *Les Nègres* (*The Blacks*), and *Elle* (*Her*) in 1955, and *Les Paravents* between 1956 and 1961 (*The Screens*), a play about the Algerian War of Independence.

Genet also authored several screenplays. In 1950, he wrote and directed the short film *Un Chant d'Amour*, depicting the fantasies of a gay male prisoner and his prison warden. Genet was also the author of the screenplay for *Le Bagne* (*The Penal Colony*) (1952-1954); *La Nuit venue/Le Bleu de L'oeil* (*The Night Has Come/The Blue of the Eye*) (1976-1978); *Divine*, an adaptation of his first novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, at the request of David Bowie during the 1970s; and *Le Langage de la muraille: cent ans jour après jour* (*The Language of the Walls: One Hundred Years Day after Day*), a TV series for Antenne 2 that was abandoned in 1982 before production.

In the late 1960s Genet became politically active. He participated in demonstrations that drew attention to the living conditions of immigrants in France, was involved with Michel Foucault's Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP), visited members of the Black Panther Party in the United States, and spent time in Palestinian refugee camps. He wrote articles and essays that spoke in solidarity with oppressed groups. In 1983, Genet began *Un captif amoureux* (*Prisoner of Love*), which recounts his experiences with Palestinian fighters and Black Panther Party members. He completed the book just before his death in Paris in April 1986.

Jean Genet Writing Process and Custodial Histories

Jean Genet's working method involved writing in school notebooks and giving in-progress manuscripts to a typist for transcription. He then corrected the typescript, annotating the typewritten pages with new passages, inserting autograph additions on loose sheets, or pasting autograph corrections onto the typed document – thereby generating a new manuscript. Genet then had a typist create another transcription, and that typescript was in turn corrected, enriched, and restructured. Moreover, Genet mixed autograph or typed sheets from earlier states of drafts during stages of rewriting, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the genesis of the works.

Drafts of Genet's works often appear in the personal papers of his friends and patrons (including Roland Dumas and Jacques Guérin), editors and publishers (including Paul Morihien, Marc Barbezat, and Monique Lange), his literary agent Bernard Frechtman, and others. Much of this material was later donated to repositories or sold at auction.

The group of material for *Le Bagne* in this collection illustrates Genet's writing process as well as the custodial history of one of his works. He wrote the screenplay between 1952 and 1954 and set it aside in 1956. Genet started writing the theatrical play version of *Le Bagne* in 1958 and destroyed his last version at the time of the suicide of his partner Abdallah Bentaga in March 1964. However, two sets of drafts of *Le Bagne* remained: one Genet gave to his publisher, Marc Barbezat in 1963, and another he gave to his

literary agent and American translator, Bernard Frechtman. In 1990 Barbezat acquired the copy owned by Frechtman at auction. Barbezat used both drafts to create a posthumous version of the theatrical play of *Le Bagne* published by L'Arbalète in 1994.

Content Description

The collection consists of manuscript drafts and corrected typescripts as well as galley and page proofs for works by Jean Genet, 1952-1982, including *Le Bagne*, *Le Balcon*, *Les Nègres*, and *Le Langage de la muraille: cent ans jour après jour*. It also contains manuscripts with sketches by the author and artworks on paper by others, including two hand-colored lithographs by Alberto Giacometti, created as a cover illustration for *Le Balcon*.

Material related to *Le Bagne* consists of a completed film screenplay, approximately 1952-1954, and fragments of a play script, between 1958 and 1963.

Material related to *Le Balcon* contains drafts, autograph manuscripts, typescripts, and corrected proofs, 1955-1956, for the first edition of *Le Balcon* published in 1956 by L'Arbalète and Marc Barbezat.

Material related to *Les Nègres* includes multiple drafts, an unpublished preface to the play, and galley proofs, 1955-1957.

Material related to *Le Langage de la muraille: cent ans jour après jour* includes preparatory documents, and manuscript and typescript drafts for the screenplay, approximately 1981-1982, bound in three volumes.

Collection Contents

Series I: *Le Bagne*

Le Bagne (*The Penal Colony*) is a script for a film and a play, set in a prison modeled after the penal colony of Cayenne in French Guiana. The story centers on carceral life and power relationships between the convicts. *Le Bagne* was posthumously published in 1994 by L'Arbalète, Marc Barbezat's publishing house.

For about fifteen years, from 1949 to 1964, Genet wrote thousands of pages on the penal colony—a place with personal meaning that he explored in prose poem, film screenplay, and theatrical script. Genet wrote the screenplay for *Le Bagne* between 1952 and 1954 and set it aside in 1956. He started writing the theatrical play version of *Le Bagne* in 1958 and destroyed his last version at the time of the suicide of his partner Abdallah Bentaga in March 1964. However, two sets of drafts of *Le Bagne* remained: one Genet gave to his publisher, Marc Barbezat in 1963, and another he gave to his literary agent and American translator, Bernard Frechtman. In 1990 Barbezat acquired the copy owned by Frechtman at auction. Barbezat used both drafts to create a posthumous version of the theatrical play of *Le Bagne* published by L'Arbalète in 1994.

The series consists of a completed film screenplay, approximately 1952-1954, and fragments of a play script, between 1958-1963, for *Le Bagne*.

b. 1, f. 1	Typescript of screenplay Heavily corrected carbon copy	approximately 1952-1954
b. 1, f. 2	Autograph manuscript fragments of the theatrical play Written in blue and turquoise ink, black and blue ball-point pens, on at least six different papers; includes drawings published by L'Arbalète in its 1994 posthumous edition	approximately 1958-1963

Series II: *Le Balcon*

Le Balcon (*The Balcony*) is set in an unnamed city during a revolutionary uprising. The action takes place in a brothel that reflects the social order under threat outside it.

Le Balcon (*The Balcony*) exists in three distinct versions, published in French in 1956, 1960, and 1962. Genet wrote the first version of the play between January and September 1955, during which time he also wrote *Les Nègres* (*The Blacks*) and re-worked his screenplay *Le Bagne* (*The Penal Colony*).

The series contains drafts, autograph manuscripts, typescripts, and corrected proofs, 1955-1956, for the first edition of *Le Balcon* (June 1956), with substantive revisions and corrections by Genet. Also includes two hand-colored lithographs by Alberto Giacometti, created as a cover illustration for the book.

French titles transcribed from inscriptions on wrappers by Marc Barbezat.

1ère version, novembre 1955

First autograph manuscript of *Le Balcon*. In two notebooks with additional laid-in sheets

b. 2, f. 3	Manuscript draft Manuscript in Les Goélands notebook (a typical French student's cahier) and laid-in pages. Notebook pages numbered 1, 13-25, 39-86, and laid-in pages numbered 2-10 and 26-34	1955 November
b. 2, f. 4	Manuscript draft Manuscript in brick-colored notebook with pages numbered 1-24 (starting with "7e Tableau"), and additional laid-in pages numbered 25-40 (starting with "12e Tableau")	1955 November
b. 2, f. 5	Original wrapper Yellow wrapper inscribed by Marc Barbezat: "le Balcon. 1ère version. Manuscrit novembre 1955"	1955 November
<i>2ème version, décembre 1955, Blevio, Italie</i>		
Second version consisting of typescript with autograph corrections in green ink. On the folder cover, Genet's autograph accounting notes, with sums in French francs and in Italian lira		
b. 2, f. 6	Typescript with autograph corrections	1955 December
<i>3ème version, janvier 1956</i>		
Third version consisting of annotated typescript and autograph pages for typesetting		
b. 2, f. 7	Act I, typescript Annotated typescript, in green ink, pages numbered 1-97	1956 January
b. 2, f. 8	Act II, typescript Annotated typescript, in green ink, pages numbered 97-141	1956 January
b. 2, f. 9	Autograph additions Autograph additions of pages rewritten by the author, in green ink: "pages refaites, 3ème version," numbered 42-49, 54-57, 63-67, 73-77, 83-91	1956 January
b. 2, f. 10	Original wrapper	1956 January

4ème version sur épreuves à imprimerie, mars 1956

Fourth version consisting of galley proofs with autograph notes.

Cover inscription: "Tirade des putains dans le livre jaune, scène du juge, discours des jeunes gens, acceptation de Madame Irma, Entre le plombier et Chantal, dès le début, la scène d'amour qui se continue en 2e partie" [translation: Tirade of whores in the yellow book, scene of the judge, speech of young people, acceptance of Madame Irma, Between the plumber and Chantal, from the beginning, the love scene which continues in part 2] as well as autograph additions and corrections on loose, numbered pages

b. 2, f. 11	Galley proofs Corrected galley proofs	1956 March
b. 2, f. 12	Galley proofs with extensive autograph corrections Autograph additions and corrections on stage directions	1956 March

5ème version

Fifth and final version to the edition of *Le Balcon* published in June 1956 by L'Arbalète. Blue-grey wrapper inscribed by Barbezat, who indicates the 5th version contains final proofs and original lithographs by Giacometti, colored in pencil by the artist.

Wrapper signed by Jean Genet and inscribed with "bon à tirer"

b. 2, f. 13	Final proof Final corrected proofs. Includes two original lithographs with color pencil drawings by Alberto Giacometti, printed by Atelier Mourlot, Paris. One lithograph was used for the book cover, the other is a variant Names: Giacometti, Alberto, 1901-1966	1956 April
b. 2, f. 14	Advertising for upcoming releases Advertising and subscription forms for publications by Jean Genet	1956 April

Series III: *Les Nègres*

Les Nègres (*The Blacks*) is a theatrical play that explores racial prejudice and stereotypes, designed to be played by black actors donning white masks. Romain Rouleau commissioned the work in the fall 1954, with the first edition printed in January 1958 by l'Arbalète. The first theatrical production was directed by Roger Blin and premiered on October 18, 1959, at the Théâtre de Lutèce, Paris, with black actors from "Les Griots" theater company, including Robert Liensol, Lydia Ewande, Toto Bissainthe, Bachir Touré, Darling Légitimus, Mamadou Condé, Gérard Lemoine, Dia Fara, Judith Aucagos, Gisèle Baka, Edée Fortin, Georges Hilarion, and Théo Légitimus, with scenography and costumes by André Acquart.

A revised edition of *Les Nègres* published in 1960 by l'Arbalète included 33 photographs by Ernst Scheidegger, taken during the rehearsals of the play at the Théâtre de Lutèce in 1959.

The series includes drafts of *Les Nègres*, 1955-1957.

b. 3, f. 15	<i>Les Nègres</i> , manuscript Second autograph manuscript of the play, written in Venice, Italy, in discrete green and red notebooks, signed and dated March 1955	1955 March
b. 3, f. 16	<i>Foot-Ball</i> , typescript with autograph additions Typescript with autograph additions, re-titled "Foot-Ball." The wrapper is inscribed by Barbezat: "Foot-Ball. Manuscrit 2ème version. Mai 1956." The typescript corresponds to the third version of the play written by Genet	1956 May
<i>Les Nègres</i> , preface, manuscript and typescript		
b. 3, f. 17	Unpublished preface Two copies including one with autograph corrections	1955 December
b. 3, f. 18	Manuscript and typescript Autograph manuscript on lined paper	1956 Summer
b. 3, f. 19	Typescript Signed and inscribed by Genet: "Bon pour la composition" [ready for typesetting]	1956 October
b. 4, f. 20	Proofs on grey paper Proof pages numbered 1-94 on grey paper with autograph pages inserted at pages 76 and 84	approximately 1956-1957
b. 4, f. 21	Galley proofs with corrected pages, "6ème version sur mise en page..." Galley proofs and copies of pages 72-76, with autograph corrections. Signed by Genet on the front page, also inscribed by Marc Barbezat: "6ème version sur mise en page et corrections pour ultimes versions"	approximately 1956-1957
b. 4, f. 22	Galley proofs, "avant dernier jeu d'épreuves" Galley proofs with minimal autograph corrections in pencil. Wrapper in Kraft paper inscribed by Genet: "Avant dernier jeu d'épreuves. Les Nègres"	1957 June
b. 4, f. 23	Galley proofs, "dernière version" Galley proofs in hard cover wrapper inscribed by Genet: "Les Nègres. Bon à tirer". Additional page numbered 88 with autograph corrections	1957 December

Series IV: *Le Langage de la muraille*

Le Langage de la muraille: cent ans jour après jour is the television script for a series featuring the Mettray penal colony in France, where Genet was detained from 1926 to 1929. National television channel Antenne 2 commissioned the series in 1981, with director Bertrand Tavernier. Genet called off the project before completion in 1982. The historical drama spans 100 years of La Colonie Agricole et Pénitentiaire de Mettray and features its founder and director, Frédéric-Auguste Demetz. Scenes depict social control at the penal institution, national and international historical events, and colonial exploitation and rule in French territories.

La Colonie Agricole et Pénitentiaire de Mettray was a juvenile detention center founded in 1839 by magistrate Frédéric-Auguste Demetz (1796–1873) and local landowner Hermann Brétignières de Courteilles (1797–1852). La Société Paternelle, a private company set up by Demetz, controlled the penal colony. The institution's official mission sought to rehabilitate young delinquents through vocational training but the reformatory restricted access to learning, used physical punishment as a means of control, and exploited the labor of inmates. The reformatory was endorsed by the French state, which sent youth to Mettray and recruited inmates to serve in colonial wars. It closed in 1939.

The series includes manuscript and typescript drafts for *Le Langage de la muraille: cent ans jour après jour*, approximately 1981-1982.

Drafts are bound with tabs in three separate volumes, in black half-morocco leather with patterned paper-covered boards with matching slipcases.

The manuscript is in volume 3. The typescript is in volumes 1 and 2.

b. 5, f. 24

Manuscript

1981–1982

Preparatory documents and early draft bound in one volume.

The autograph manuscript is an early version of the script. The first two-thirds of the manuscript contain scenes that do not appear in the accompanying script. Scenes between 1905 and 1936, correspond to the end of the script. The last eight pages recount events from the closure of Mettray until 1940 at the arrival of German troops and were not retained in the typescript volumes.

Includes a two-page preamble: "Pourquoi Mettray?", with the autograph mention "Retourner à Jean Genet"; preparatory notes: the list of work consulted including books about Mettray (one and half page), and a timeline of events from 1815 to the reign of Louis-Philippe Ier, King of the French from 1830 to 1848, with crossed out text or pages containing only a date or brief autograph note.

- b. 5, f. 25-26 Typescript of television script, volume I and volume II 1981-1982
- Two bound typescript volumes that include autograph additions and corrections. The volumes are photocopies of a typescript renumbered 5-261, annotated by Genet.
- The typescript is a work in progress and an early draft of the script, as suggest notes within the script: "encore quelques renseignements et les descriptions des scènes viendront, c'est sûr" [gathering information and scene descriptions will come later" (p. 29), "Me renseigner mieux" [will get additional information] (p. 200).
- Volume 1 includes an undated original pencil drawing of the author (19 x 27.7 cm).
- First page contains autograph title "Le langage de la muraille. Scénario définitif. Cent ans jour pour jour." Pages numbered 5-85.
- Title page "Le Langage de la muraille. 2ème cahier. Le retour en arrière, ou le pourquoi de la situation" precedes page 66.
- Volume 2 contains autograph title "Seconde Partie, de 1848-1940", pages numbered 86-261.
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Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Occupations

Authors -- France -- 20th Century

Subjects

Authors, French
French drama -- 20th Century
French literature -- 20th Century
Imperialism
Juvenile detention homes -- France
LGBTQ resource
Male homosexuality in literature
Paternalism
Penal colonies
Penal colonies in literature
Political activists -- France
Prisoners -- Fiction
Prison industries -- France
Race relations in literature
Reformatories -- France
Social change
Social control in literature
Social norms
Social norms in literature

Geographic Names

France -- Colonies
France -- Politics and government
France -- Politics and government -- 1870-1940

Genres / Formats

Drawings (visual works)
Lithographs
Page proofs
Plays (performed works)
Television scripts

Names

Barbezat, Marc
Demetz, M. (Frédéric-Auguste), 1796-1873
Giacometti, Alberto, 1901-1966
Tavernier, Bertrand

Corporate Bodies

Colonie agricole et pénitentiaire de Mettray
Société nationale de télévision en couleur
"Antenne 2"

Acquired From

Librairie Benoit Forgeot, bookseller