



Cymorth chwilio | Finding Aid - Vernon Watkins letters to Francis Dufau-Labeyrie (NLW MS 24198i-iiD.)

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Language of description: English

Iaith y disgrifiad: Saesnesg

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Vernon Watkins letters to Francis Dufau-Labeyrie

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Crynodeb o wybodaeth | Summary of information

Lleoliad Repository:	Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru = The National Library of Wales
Teitl Title:	Vernon Watkins letters to Francis Dufau-Labeyrie
Cod cyfeirnod Reference code:	NLW MS 24198i-iiD.
Alma system control number [alternative]:	994410794302419
Dyddiad Date:	1937-1967, [?1970s] (dyddiad creu date of creation)
Disgrifiad ffisegol Physical description:	ii, 211 ff. Placed in melinex sleeves within two ringed boxes at NLW.
Lleoliad ffisegol Physical location:	ARCH/MSS (GB0210)
Iaith Language:	English
Iaith Language:	French
Dyddiadau creu, golygu a dileu Dates of creation, revision and deletion:	January 2024.
Nodyn Note [generalNote]:	Title based on contents.

Hanes gweinyddol / Braslun bywgraffyddol | Administrative history | Biographical sketch

Nodyn | Note

Vernon Watkins (1906-1967), poet, was the second of three children of William and Sarah Watkins. He was born in Maesteg, Glamorgan, on 27 June 1906 but grew up in Swansea, Glamorgan, and on the Gower. He attended Repton School, Derbyshire, 1920-1924, then (for one year) studied modern languages at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He was briefly a clerk at Lloyds Bank in Cardiff but after a breakdown he returned home to Swansea and moved to the Lloyds Bank branch in St Helens. He served with RAF Police and Intelligence, 1941-1946, but otherwise remained with Lloyds for the remainder of his working life. In 1941 he published his first collection of poems, *Ballad of the Mari Lwyd* (London, 1941), followed by *The Lamp and the Veil* (London, 1945), *Selected Poems* (Norfolk, Conn., 1948), *The Lady with the Unicorn* (London, 1948), *The Death Bell* (London, 1954), *Cypress and Acacia* (London, 1959), *Affinities* (London, 1962), and *Fidelities* (London, 1968) which appeared posthumously. As a

poet he was scrupulous, working through numerous drafts to reach a final version and often undertaking further revision after publication. In addition to original poetry he translated European verse into English, including Heine's *The North Sea* (London, 1955), and wrote essays on other poets. He corresponded widely with literary figures and became friends with the likes of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Philip Larkin and, in particular, Dylan Thomas. In 1944 he married Gwendoline (Gwen) Mary Davies (b. 1923), a colleague at RAF Intelligence, and they had five children. Following his retirement in 1966 he lectured at the University College of Swansea. He was then appointed Visiting Professor of Poetry at the University of Washington but died on 8 October 1967, shortly after arriving in Seattle to take up his post. Some of his previously unpublished and uncollected works appeared in *Uncollected Poems* (London, 1969), *Selected Verse Translations*, ed. by Ruth Pryor (London, 1977), *The Breaking of the Wave* (Ipswich, 1979), and *Ballad of the Outer Dark*, ed. by Ruth Pryor (London, 1979).

Hanes gweinyddol / Braslun bywgraffyddol | Administrative history | Biographical sketch

Nodyn | Note

Francis Dufau-Labeyrie (1916-1992) was born in Dax, France. As part of his studies at the Sorbonne he worked as an assistant lecturer in Swansea, 1936-1937, Bristol, 1937-1938, and Beckenham, 1938-1939. He returned to Paris to complete his studies and taught there until 1947, when he moved to Montreal, Quebec, to work for the International Civil Aviation Organization, being head of the language department from 1952 to his retirement in 1976.

While at Swansea he was introduced to Dylan Thomas and Vernon Watkins, becoming friends with both; he accompanied Watkins on a visit to Dublin to meet W. B. Yeats in 1938. He translated into French Thomas's 'A Prospect of the Sea' (*L'Arche*, 1946) and 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog' (as *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune chien* (1947)); his translations of several of Watkins's poems were published in 1949.

Hanes Gwarchodol | Custodial history

The papers were given to the donor by his mother, Danièle (b. 1940), who was Watkins' goddaughter.

Natur a chynnwys | Scope and content

One hundred and seven letters, 1937-1940 and 1944-1967, from Vernon Watkins, mainly at Pennard and Swansea, to his friend and occasional translator, Francis Dufau-Labeyrie, containing personal and family news, and discussing his poetry and other literary output, his and Francis's poetry translations and other poets and their work, notably their mutual friend Dylan Thomas and W. B. Yeats (ff. 1-9, 13-40, 43-121, 125-133, 137-148, 151-158, 161-164, 166-196, 199-211).

Also included are typescript transcripts, [c.1970s], of eight of the letters (ff. 10-12, 41-42, 122-124, 134-136, 149-150, 159-160, 165, 197-198, inserted after the originals). The letters occasionally contain poetry by Watkins, including parts of 'After Sunset' (f. 15), an attempt at a poem about Francis (f. 32 verso, in French), the first two verses of 'the Wine Ballad' ['Ballad of the Two Tapsters'] (f. 38), a limerick [by VW] (f. 40), a verse (f. 46), a verse from 'the Broken Net ballad' ['Ballad of Dundrum Bay'] (f. 50

verso), the end of 'Portrait of a Friend' (f. 75 verso) and the sonnet 'The Conception' (f. 147); there are also transcripts of poems by Yeats (ff. 68, 88 verso, 109 verso) and other miscellaneous poems in English (ff. 46, 76 verso, 119 verso, 190) and French (ff. 17, 82 verso, 86, 128). A few rough ink sketches are on ff. 2, 19, 46, 103, 109 verso, 117 verso. The letters contain annotations and markings in the hand of Francis Dufau-Labeyrie, including attempts at dating and ordering. The letters were mostly sent to Francis while he was living in Bristol, 1937-1938, Beckenham, 1938-1939, Paris, 1939-1947, and thereafter Montreal, Quebec, the later correspondence being mostly by air letter. For extracts from sixteen of the letters, 1937-1946, see 'Vernon Watkins: Selected quotations from his letters to Francis Dufau-Labeyrie', *Temenos*, 8 (1987), 146-155.

Nodiadau | Notes

Nodiadau teitl | Title notes

Ffynhonnell | Immediate source of acquisition

Dr Xavier Gélinas, grandson of Francis Dufau-Labeyrie; Gatineau, Quebec; Donation; November 2022; 994410794302419.

Trefniant | Arrangement

Arranged chronologically at NLW, with some dates suggested by Francis Dufau-Labeyrie or surmised from internal evidence.

Ffurf arall ar gael | Alternative form available

Photocopies of the letters relating to Dylan Thomas are included in NLW, Jeff Towns (Dylan Thomas) Collection B1/5.

Cyfyngiadau ar fynediad | Restrictions on access

Readers consulting modern papers in the National Library of Wales are required to abide by the conditions set out in information provided when applying for their Readers' Tickets, whereby the reader shall become responsible for compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 in relation to any processing by them of personal data obtained from modern records held at the Library.

Amodau rheoli defnydd | Conditions governing use

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Disgrifiadau deunydd | Related material

For letters of Francis Dufau-Labeyrie to Gwen Watkins, 1979-1983, see NLW, Jeff Towns (Dylan Thomas) Collection B1/5.

Nodiadau eraill | Other notes

Pwyntiau mynediad | Access points

- Watkins, Vernon Phillips, 1906-1967 -- Correspondence (pwnc) | (subject)
- Dufau-Labeyrie, Francis, 1916-1992 -- Correspondence (pwnc) | (subject)
- Thomas, Dylan, 1914-1953 (pwnc) | (subject)
- Yeats, W. B. (William Butler), 1865-1939 (pwnc) | (subject)
- English poetry -- Welsh authors (pwnc) | (subject)
- English poetry -- 20th century (pwnc) | (subject)

Llyfryddiaeth | Bibliography

Gwen Watkins, Portrait of a Friend (Llandysul, 1983)

Llyfryddiaeth | Bibliography

Francis Dufau-Laberie, 'Notes in Memory of the Dublin Visit', Poetry Wales, 12.4 (Spring 1977), 78-83.