



## Martha Ann Dow Fehsenfeld

November 12, 1930 - November 12, 2024

Bath, ME - Martha Ann Dow Fehsenfeld , founding editor of "The Letters of Samuel Beckett," died in Hampton, New Hampshire on 8 November 2024. She is survived by her brothers Winthrop Griffin Dow and William Merrill Dow, Bill's wife Barbara Birt Dow, and five loving nieces and nephews and their families. Martha was born on November 12, 1930 in Cambridge, Massachusetts to Ann Merrill Dow and Winthrop Griffin Dow.

Commissioned by Samuel Beckett to edit his voluminous correspondence, Martha was a major force in illuminating and guiding Beckett studies. Her contributions encompassed academic study, theatrical production, and acting several of Beckett's roles for women. Edward Beckett wrote: "Samuel Beckett placed his confidence in Marty Fehsenfeld to edit his correspondence for publication. This trust was repaid in full by her dedication to that difficult task. I have the greatest admiration for what she achieved."

Martha studied at Bennington College (B.A.), the University of North Carolina (M.A.), and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Seeking an opportunity to learn more about Beckett's work, Martha joined a

course on Beckett in the Berkeley Summer School at Oxford University taught by Rosemary Pountney (1972). She became captivated by the archival record of Beckett's writing process.

Martha also came to know Beckett's plays from "the inside" by helping to produce them. In 1975, she assisted Alan Schneider, the American Director of Beckett's work, at a Beckett Workshop at Stanford University. She was a Production Assistant for Schneider at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. and at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York (1976). In 1981, she assisted Schneider with the world premiere of Beckett's play "Ohio Impromptu" at The Ohio State University and at the Centre de Georges Pompidou in Paris at a festival celebrating Beckett's 75th birthday.

From 1976 on, Martha chronicled Samuel Beckett as a director of his own plays, at London rehearsals of "Footfalls" (1976), "Happy Days" (1979), "Endgame" (1980) and "Waiting for Godot" (1984). She originated and co-directed an exhibition, "In the Company of Joyce and Beckett," for the James Joyce Centenary at University College, Dublin (1982). The outcome of observing Beckett at work was "Beckett in the Theatre:" "The Author as Practical Playwright and Director" (1988), co-authored with Dougald McMillan.

Martha was a collaborator. Beckett's radio plays had been written for and broadcast by the BBC in London and SDR in Stuttgart, but they were unavailable to American listeners. So Martha originated "The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays." "All That Fall" was the first broadcast on Beckett's 80th birthday in 1986. The complete Festival premiered on National Public Radio in April 1989.

When Samuel Beckett asked Martha to edit his letters in 1985, he wrote: "It will be a most difficult job, and I am relieved at the thought of it being in such devoted and capable hands as yours, you will get round to see these people, won't you?" The "people" were his correspondents and associates.

Many years would have her three nieces and her young friends latched on to her luggage and all found themselves pulled along to Ireland, England and Europe in happy pursuit of the treasure hunt.

Side tripping to discover undocumented burial sites thousands of years old to pubs in unnamed towns across the land. Thankfully, Martha was the bond that opened a lifelong connection with the Childers side of the Dow Family cousins in Dublin and Connemara.

In her mature lifelong editing of Samuel Beckett's letters, the editors discovered over 15,000 letters written by the playwright from 1929 to 1989. Transcribed, translated, researched, selected letters for publication and Cambridge University Press published "The Letters of Samuel Beckett" in four volumes (2009-2016). The edition has been translated into French (Gallimard), German (Suhrkamp), Italian (in process, Adelphi), and Chinese (in process, Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House). In April 2021, Trinity College Dublin (Beckett's alma mater ) awarded Martha Fehsenfeld an Honorary Doctor of Letters in recognition of her contributions to Beckett scholarship.

During this time, Martha also acted in Beckett's plays. She produced and played Winnie in Happy Days in 1983 at The Artschool Gallery Theatre (Carrboro, North Carolina), La Mama Experimental

Theatre (New York), and Agnes Scott College (Decatur, Georgia). She appeared in "Footfalls" with Theatre Emory's celebration of Beckett's 90th birthday (1996), and performed in "Rockaby," directed by Walter Asmus, at Seven Stages (Atlanta 2006).

When Martha moved from Chapel Hill to Bath, Maine in 2014, she found a welcoming community and made many new friends. Bath, Maine was her soul's home. Her house overlooked the Kennebec River, the view a daily joy for her. The town knew Martha by name and intellect, for her daily 2 mile walks through and about town.

In 2017 she performed with The Theatre Project in nearby Brunswick, playing a role not unlike herself, in a play where a young boy fights on behalf of others ("Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy" by Gary D. Schmidt). Here she reveled in the joy of working with young actors and with a script that resonated. A sold out performance for 11 days and standing ovations each evening in this black box theatre was a further testament to Martha's ageless passionate spirit.

To make a gift in Marty's memory: <https://bobsmemorystation.com/>